

The Logo as Design Motif and Marketing Concept:  
A Case Study of Handbags and Hand Luggage

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
(Human Ecology: Design Studies)

at the  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN--MADISON

2013

Date of final oral examination: 4/16/12

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## Abstract

There were three research questions that framed this study. What was the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage between 1969 and 2009? What does the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage reveal about the world of postmodern fashion? How do we define fashion in the modern marketplace? The goal of this study was to reveal the historical development of this specific type of accessory in tandem with the cultural and business phenomena that were the necessary and sufficient conditions to make this type of design relevant and successful for both producers and consumers. This analysis provided evidence that contemporary fashion is fragmented into two worlds and this necessitates the redefinition of fashion.

Through the content analysis of catalogs, advertisements and fashion editorials, I developed a timeline of the introduction and proliferation of handbags and hand luggage with the designer logo as an external motif. I developed a context of historical and cultural variables that account for the success of these products. I used perspectives and theories generated by the fields of consumer science, consumer psychology, postmodern theory, and fashion theory as well as anecdotal evidence from interviews with consumers to make assertions about why these products have found such lasting traction. Through an examination of the logoed handbag and various forms of hand luggage as a case study, I explored fundamental changes that have occurred within the fashion industry in the last forty-one years in terms of aesthetics, business practices, and the very nature of what constitutes fashion.

This study will make a significant contribution to the study of modern and contemporary fashion design by its detailed documentation and analysis of design aesthetics in conjunction with changing business practices. The profound change in aesthetic ideology that is demonstrated by the movement of the designer label from the interior of an object to a dominant place on the exterior is an important shift in design that had yet to be documented. A detailed examination of the development of this phenomenon both revealed and contextualized the profound changes that have occurred in the fashion system in a forty-one-year span.

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## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the tireless support of my advisor Professor Beverly Gordon. I have remarked time and again to friends and family, “I don’t know how I got so lucky.” Professor Gordon’s unflagging energy and amazing attentiveness to me made it possible to be constantly moving forward with strong direction. You are now among the most important people to have touched my life. I will be forever thankful.

In addition I would also like to pay special thanks to Professor Cynthia Jasper for her amazing stewardship and attention to detail especially in the final stages of this project. Thank you also to committee members Professor Nancy Wong and Professor Terry Boyd for your time, your support, and your input. I am very grateful for every moment of your time and energy.

I am also thankful for the tireless and always cheerful efforts of the library staff that assisted me. At the New York Public Library, Steven A. Schwarzman branch the staff in the Rose Reading Room retrieved hundreds of heavy volumes of *Vogue* and *Seventeen Magazine* for me and always made me feel at home. Thank you also to the staff in the Manuscript and Archives division for their kind assistance. A special thanks is also necessary for the staff at the periodicals desk at the Fashion Institute of Technology, Gladys Marcus Library who also retrieved endless stacks of publications, who offered me such wonderful encouragement, and who always made me feel welcome.

A special thanks is due to my wonderful father-in-law Professor Charles O’Reilly whose support and encouragement has been invaluable.



Thank you to the scores of students in my *History of Costume* and *Sociology of Dress* courses who have provided me with so much insight. Thank you for your willingness to talk about logos, status, personal identity and taste. Thank you for sharing your thoughts on brands and brand identity. Your input has been so helpful and has helped me shape many of the ideas in this text.

Finally, thanks are due to my perfect husband Jason Moore who is my rock and who makes me laugh hard every single day. Your encouragement, your help, your humor, and your love are the most important things in my life. You were usually able to make the stress of balancing work, family, and study easy and when it wasn't easy you made me run. I am so thankful.

## Chapter 1: Introductory Material

### **Rationale for This Study**

This study documents changes in logoed handbags in detail over the course of a forty-one year period, adding to the many volumes of fashion history that catalog fashion phenomena in a far more cursory manner. The subject of logos in fashion has not previously been dealt with by any other fashion study—a fact that seems to indicate a gap in the literature given their ubiquity. Additionally the appeal of logos to consumers and their ability to communicate on behalf of them is contemplated in this study and thereby expands and extends the existing body of literature related to consumer behavior and decision making as well as the literature related to symbolic properties of possessions in general and dress in particular. Finally, this study grapples with the multiple meanings of “fashion” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This last task is being dealt with rather indirectly by writers about fashion who see change, who often lament the modulation and fragmentation in the industry, but who largely seek to write about modern fashion in light of the past, failing to see that fashion has changed in some fundamental ways. Fashion has become more complex as the industry has become larger, more diverse, and fragmented. In light of this complexity old terms need to be refined and new terminology needs to be crafted.

Two provocative books inspired this study of the development of the fashion logo as an external motif on handbags and hand luggage: *The End of Fashion* (1999) by Teri Agins and *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster* (2007) by Dana Thomas. Each text was

written by a fashion journalist whose literary output documents the day-to-day modulations of the industry and appeals to a popular audience. Each of these texts pointed to fundamental shifts that occurred in the fashion industry in the last thirty years or so and thereby raised issues pertaining to both the structure of the fashion industry and the changing nature of consumers. I was inspired by these books but have also come to see where their arguments leave room for expansion and refinement. This study is in part an effort to address the gaps and oversights I perceived in these works of popular literature and to extend the discourse at a scholarly level, thereby to elevating it to a higher level of sophistication.

My motivation to explore the logo developed from an intersection of ideas surrounding fashion design and the business of fashion. In Teri Agins' book she makes the argument that marketing now dominates the world of fashion to the preclusion of creative and innovative design—a shift that led to the “end of fashion.” This is a provocative statement. She argues it is primarily the decreased importance of design innovation that is the crux of the problem, the cause of fashion's death.<sup>1</sup> Agins laments the change she sees occurring and since the change charts a course away from practices of the past, she is quick to cry out that fashion is “dead.” Ultimately Agins' hyperbole

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<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines design in part as follows: “The art of drawing or sketching; (hence) the process, practice, or art of devising, planning, or constructing something (as a work of art, structure, device, etc.) according to aesthetic or functional criteria” (7c). The references to conception and aesthetics seem to be fundamental to what Agins is critiquing. She laments the passing of fashion as creative innovation. In the text that follows I will use the terms “design” and “fashion design” to refer to apparel created and constructed with an aesthetic vision, that manifests innovation. The term design will be used in opposition to “commodity,” something simply made.

gave me pause. Clearly a multi-billion dollar global fashion industry thrives to this day. I wondered how to reconcile her assertion with the vast evidence of a burgeoning global fashion industry that any issue of *Women's Wear Daily* could provide.

Many of Agins' observations were stimuli for this research project. Agins notes the diminished power of *couturiers* and *haute couture* clothes—the end of their influence as style setters. She attributes their diminished importance in part to their expense and in part to the impracticality that many highly constructed couture designs impart to the wearer. Additionally Agins critiques the reliance that top ready-to-wear designers place on “classics” and “staples,” and argues that what often is presented as a seasonal collection is merely a minor variation on an extant form or idea—the end of innovation. She makes the case that most designers do not really need to make fashion (timely, innovative, ephemeral designs) in an age in which revenue can so readily be reaped through the sale of cosmetics and fragrance. She believes that if a designer is a “brand” then he or she can have a viable fashion business. Agins also blames consumer culture for the end of fashion. She asserts that most consumers have become accustomed to comfortable clothes and low prices-- attributes that have not traditionally been part and parcel of high-style dressing.<sup>2</sup> She asserts that consumers are beholden to brands and infrequently assert aesthetic judgment when faced with apparel purchasing decisions.

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<sup>2</sup> Although some curators and authors from the late 1980s onward have made room in the scholarly literature for discussion of “fashion” that is not related to high-style, there continues to be a bias in the discourse in favor of a top-down view of the world of fashion whereby fashion is the domain of *couturiers* and elite ready-to-wear designers. Fashions that develop outside of these domains are often treated as exceptions. For example, in the

The observations that Agins marshaled in support of her assertion that fashion had died make for a vigorous argument. Each individual fact on its own was largely verifiable yet her conclusions seemed to be an overstatement of the truth and seemed to be tinged with a sense of personal regret at the state of fashion. As I pondered her work and struggled to pinpoint where the leap in logic lay, I came to realize that she was writing about fashion and consumers of the late 1990s but was critiquing them using standards that were more appropriate to the 1950s. Her nostalgia for design practices, dress practices, and shopping practices of a bygone era were coloring her perception of the present. As a result, Agins was dealing with the tangible observable things that had changed but failed to uncover fundamental issues behind the modulation. This oversight on her part opened the door to part of my inquiry.

The second text that facilitated my research questions was the critique of the luxury industry written by *Newsweek* reporter Dana Thomas. Thomas argues that mass marketing and the desire to reach consumers *en masse* changed the luxury industry (which includes apparel and accessories makers) in the past thirty years or so. She argues that the luxury business was once defined by design innovation, craftsmanship, connoisseurship, and uniqueness, but this is no longer true. She points out that many luxury brands that are today global brands and household names have long histories as

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introduction to a Victoria and Albert Museum publication entitled *400 Years of Fashion*, the curators note that the collection had recently “acknowledged certain youthful fashion constants” such as Levis 501 jeans and Nike trainers (Rothstein, 1). The text and illustrations of this tome, however, do not acknowledge these youth fashions.

small, family-owned businesses within which the craftspeople largely knew their clientele and the clientele were often involved in design decisions. Thomas argues that the acquisition of these small family businesses by large, powerful multi-national companies changed the very definition of luxury by replacing an emphasis on craftsmanship and design with an emphasis on the power of the brand name communicated through mass marketing. Like Agins, Thomas observes real change, laments the change she sees occurring, and since the change charts a course away from practices of the past, is quick to cry out that luxury has “lost its luster.” The continuous global expansion of luxury brands (in terms of reach and revenue) is clear testimony to the fact that the luxury industry most assuredly appeals to a great many consumers. One could argue that the luxury industry has become more lustrous as its appeal has broadened. While Thomas makes no effort to disguise her dismay at the mass marketing of the luxury industry, I came to realize that she, like Agins, was dealing clearly and critically with the observable data but failed to see the more important issues beneath the surface.

In both of these texts the authors make compelling arguments that pin the downfall of fashion in general and luxury goods in particular on shifts away from design innovation and toward marketing. They both tie the increased importance of branding to the stagnation of design while critiquing mass market consumers. These arguments became the basis for my research interests as I pondered whether or not I agreed with

their conclusions and while I considered the ultimate goal of these works of popular literature, which relied substantially on their impassioned tone for their rhetorical impact.

These texts helped me identify a gap in scholarly work related to fashion. Neither author provided extensive or detailed accounts of any specific category of design or element of fashionable dress that had been directly and specifically impacted by the powerful marketing divisions that they discussed. This seemed a lamentable shortcoming. If marketing has changed the world of fashion (which the authors consider a monolithic entity), then the fashions themselves should be explored in detail. Additionally, I began to suspect that the authors had simplified the changes they perceived in the fashion marketplace. I perceived they had employed a subjective lens to draw their ultimate conclusions and I came to understand they had not given consumers a full look. Their arguments for the death of fashion design and the degradation of luxury cast the development of fashion marketing and branding as wholly negative, without modulation over time, and capable of completely negating design innovation. Over time I realized that a guiding premise in their negative assessments of modern fashion was a bias against mass fashion. I began to wonder if different types of fashion should have different labels and different standards of assessment.

As I began to evaluate and to question the severity of Agins' and Thomas' points of view, I began to wonder about the state of fashion design in the early twenty-first century. I asked myself whether or not I truly believed fashion design to be dead and

marketing to have taken over in full in its stead. I could point to several contemporary fashion innovators who undercut this wholesale pessimism. Alexander McQueen, who was still alive when I began this project, was producing work defined by innovation in silhouette and ingenious textile design. The aesthetic vision of Issey Miyake, a designer whose career has been defined by technological innovation and aesthetic iconoclasm, also lived on. Rick Owens continued to push design forward with fabric treatments, construction techniques, and a vision for framing the body that is forward thinking and responsive to the ever-changing visions of femininity. I was sure that fashion design was not dead, but I knew that Agins and Thomas had pinpointed loci of real and important change.

One object in particular got me thinking about the collision of fashion design, marketing, branding, and big business. Many years ago Mr. McQueen had designed a clutch handbag that was and still is retailed under the style name “Demanta,” a reference to the manta ray that inspired its unique shape (Figure 1.1).<sup>3</sup> The clutch is often executed in interesting graphic textile designs, for which McQueen was known, and which the company still develops. Many fashion-minded individuals would readily be able to identify the bag as a McQueen design based upon the aesthetics alone, yet on the back of the bag there is a leather tag that is embossed with his logo, an interlocked C and Q.<sup>4</sup> This little bit of branding seemed wholly unnecessary to me. In a sense I felt that it

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<sup>3</sup> This style was first introduced in the Spring 2010 collection entitled *Plato's Atlantis*.

<sup>4</sup> As of Fall/Winter 2012 the tag now states “Alexander McQueen” in full and has dispensed with the less obvious interlocked initials.



marred the design. That logo led me to wonder if the logo itself might be a way to explore the changing state of the fashion industry, to unpack the relationship between the business of fashion (including marketing and branding) and the state of fashion design. Furthermore that logo provoked me to think about consumers. I wondered who the logo was there for and what it could communicate.

Using the logoed handbag as a case study, this dissertation ultimately accomplishes two things. First, it documents the evolution of the fashion logo as an aesthetic motif and places that development in the context of the industry and consumers. This has not been documented before. Second, it furthers the argument about the state of the modern fashion industry developed in part by Agins and Thomas. Rather than lamenting the death of fashion, however, it seeks to make sense of the competing impulses within the industry and thereby redefine what is meant by the term “fashion.” Ultimately I find a great deal of complexity in the interrelationship between the business side and the design side of the fashion industry. Using the logo as a lever, I reveal that the fashion marketplace is fragmented, defined by competing and contradictory impulses, and impervious to a singular definition of fashion.

The fashion logo is the logical choice for a study concerned with the fragmentation and consequent redefinition of fashion resulting from the critical intersection of fashion design and the business of fashion. This is the case as the logo is both an object of design and a bit of marketing, all in one. Still, one might ask why an

investigation of the logo is important. What is at stake? Can such an investigation make an argument for a larger and more encompassing point? I believe it can. This research uses the logo as the basis for arguing that the very definition of fashion has been revised in the last forty years or so, such that it is no longer monolithic. As I see it, it is not that fashion is dead. Rather, a schism has occurred such that there are now two conceptually different yet interrelated worlds of fashion. I distinguish these as the world of *fashion design* and the world of the *fashion-branded commodity*. Positing two distinct yet often codependent worlds of fashion is not a construct that has been utilized before by any fashion scholar or commentator. Most certainly the fashion press, which is intimately involved with big fashion brands and is complicit in promoting fashionable objects in editorials that also appear in advertising campaigns, has made no effort to highlight the idea that not all fashion is fashion design; much of the product in the fashion marketplace would be better described as a fashion-branded commodity. The text that follows is an introductory discussion of the two worlds of fashion and their key components. This conceptual framework will be employed throughout this dissertation as a way of understanding the handbags and hand luggage that were documented in the case study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that follows was engendered as a result of my extensive consideration of logos and the historical context in which they emerged. This framework

represents a new and unique perspective on the state of modern fashion and its industry. The framework is the result of observation of complex phenomena. Its utility however, is that it can be used to categorize and conceptualize the competing yet interpenetrating impulses that are part and parcel of fashion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The first world of fashion that I posit is the world of traditional fashion design and its associated industry-- the industry that produces seasonal, constantly evolving designs primarily for affluent clients, fashion devotees, and fashion cognoscenti. The world of traditional fashion design includes designer “original” apparel and accessories, which have been largely characterized by limited production, high prices, and limited distribution. The designs produced by this arm of the fashion industry have in turn typically been interpreted and produced by manufacturers across the globe (legally and illegally) for the masses. The traditional world of fashion therefore caters to the masses only indirectly through the trickle-down effect, whereby high-style is diffused to the general population through mass production. It is this arm of the fashion industry that has historically been the sole purview of the fashion press, which reports on the “must have” elements of the new season and the designers/arbiters of taste who create the fashions *du jour*. Among the elements of the fashions that are likely to be changed are skirt, jacket, or pant lengths; sleeve or waist position; colors; fabrics; and trims. This type of fashion is characterized by constant change. Without dramatic and continual change, participants in fashion could simply modify an old garment to bring it up to date

(by shortening a hem or sleeve or padding a shoulder or hip).<sup>5</sup> Dramatic change requires innovation, which, on its best day, is a reflection of the culture in which it is created and an expression of its time, which is fleeting. In the world of traditional fashion design, diversity in the marketplace results from the myriad ways in which designers reflect upon and interpret the spirit of the time, tap technological innovation, and address specific demographics.

It is imperative to note that when scholars and curators speak and write about fashion, they are largely referring to this traditional world. Writing the introduction to a 1977 text, fashion editor Diane Vreeland notes that fashion is a “mercurial social history [characterized by] never ceasing change of silhouette and appearance” (Carter, I). In *Establishing Dress History*, Lou Taylor notes that museum collections of fashionable Western dress have largely been based on garments donated by designers, elite manufacturers (such as the Lyon silk mills), and society mavens. Folk dress and other examples of dress of the people have been relegated to other kinds of collections. In the introduction to *Fifty Years of Fashion* Valerie Steele cautions the reader that it is a common misconception among people that “fashion” refers only to “high fashion.” Her more inclusive definition includes only the following: haute couture, designer ready-to-wear, and subcultural style. The canon of fashion history is restricted in its scope and I

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<sup>5</sup> Some couture garments in museum collections provide evidence that even the most well-heeled clients sometimes update and rework their apparel through alterations and additions, but such renovations cannot be done indefinitely if a fashionable wardrobe is considered important. Some updates may be precluded by the nature of the original garment. See Alexandra Palmer’s *Couture and Commerce* (2001) for a fine discussion of this point.

believe this view of what constitutes fashion has influenced how contemporary commentators think about fashion across the board. Contemporary writers such as Thomas and Agins, drawing from this intellectual milieu, are drafting incomplete or incorrect conclusions about the state of modern fashion.

The second world of fashion that I posit is a new one that emerged in the late 1960s into the early 1970s. It is a world that produces fashions that are best defined as *fashion branded commodities*. This world of fashion branded commodities produces products that are designed around various permutations of a marketed brand identity. Fashion branded commodities may be produced seasonally, but do not typically evidence dramatic change. Rather, they typically rely on a theme and variation approach to design. A fixed aesthetic program (often built around the logo or some other “classic” or “iconic” trope) is subjected to minor modifications each season. Such modifications are enough to make the product appear novel in the marketplace (thereby attracting the consumer), but the modifications do not represent major design innovation. Furthermore, they do not generally reflect the culture from which they are generated and are not an expression of place or time unless that “culture” (such as the surf culture commodified by Hollister) is part of the branding. The reliance upon old, established standards as the basis of design—design that reflects and revisits the past—is a key characteristic of postmodern art and design as it has been elucidated by Frederic Jameson in “Postmodern Consumer Society,” a text I will return to in due course and in greater detail. Modifications of fashion branded commodities are arbitrary except that they are geared toward generating

desire for new purchases. Additionally, some fashion branded commodities may be produced for years and years with virtually no modification whatsoever, a further indication of a fundamental difference relative to traditional fashion design.

Although the apparel marketplace considered as a whole sells many products that change little over time (tube socks, undershirts, bedroom slippers, bib overalls), these fashion branded commodities are special because they are marketed as *fashion*. Notably the appeal of these products is heavily reliant on the name of a designer or brand but they are frequently not the actual design work of the namesake.<sup>6</sup> Rather than expressing the vision of a specific designer, they simply trade on his or her good name. This last fact about fashion branded commodities speaks to the larger issue. Their appeal as fashion may have less to do with timeliness, innovation, and aesthetics and more to do with intangible yet powerful psycho-social motivations on the part of the consumer that can be satisfied via identification with a brand identity.

This new world of fashion, the world of fashion branded commodities, is far more egalitarian than the traditional world of fashion design, and this puts it in marked contrast to the traditional realm. For example, product lines found in this world are typically offered at a more consumer-friendly price point. Additionally, many products generated in this world can be produced in large quantities and are therefore more accessible to the masses via wide distribution. Adding complexity to the division, however, is the fact that many fashion branded commodities are made by companies that also produce traditional,

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<sup>6</sup> A detailed discussion of licensing is part of the argument I will be making.

seasonal fashion. Additionally, the fashion branded commodities produced by traditional fashion designers may serve as inspiration for lesser mass-market producers who seek inspiration in the marketplace and produce copies and interpretations for an even broader mass market. Thus, a second tier of products (typically offered at a still lower cost) are ostensibly available to an even broader demographic via the trickle-down effect. It is the blossoming of this second world of fashion branded commodities that upends long-held definitions of “fashion” and thereby necessitates a refinement in the discourse about what fashion is. Notably the new world overlaps and interpenetrates the traditional world of fashion design.

Attributes of the two worlds of fashion can be organized into three oppositional yet interpenetrating pairings, which I have developed based upon my observations, and which underscore the complexity that exists in the modern fashion marketplace. I utilize these pairings as part of the framework of this dissertation. The pairings are: design and branding, class and mass, and ephemerality and permanence. First I will show that there remains a thriving world of innovative fashion design which sometimes exists independently and which sometimes shares an intricate, even parasitic relationship with fashion that is heavily reliant on branding. Second, a new mass market has developed that is conceptually different although often directly attached to the traditional “class” market. I will show that the class market is often dependent upon the mass market in a way it was not in the recent past. Finally, some fashion continues to be defined by the essential element of ephemerality, whereas there are now many products that are defined

as fashion which utilize fixed, virtually permanent design elements. The fracturing of the fashion marketplace into conceptually opposite yet codependent entities is a profound change that merits exploration, as I believe it points to a redefinition of fashion that has slowly evolved over the past forty years. When people speak of fashion today, they are speaking of a range of fundamentally different products. Depending on the consumer's point of reference she or he may be speaking of traditional fashion or of fashion branded commodities. Some consumers may discern (to varying degrees) between the two and others may not.

The first oppositional pairing, fashion rooted in design opposed to fashion based upon branding, speaks to the manifold nature of fashion from the late twentieth century onward and is the essential element that separates the two worlds of fashion. As I have noted, traditionally fashion could be defined in terms of seasonal variation and a constant cycle of change. This traditional fashion cycle does still exist and is abided by to varying degrees depending upon the consumer's needs, means, and desires. In marked contrast to the traditional world of fashion design, some apparel and accessories that are widely regarded as fashion by the press and general public are not subject to the traditional aesthetic modulations to which I just referred. A case can be made for the presence of external branding supplanting all other elements of design as THE standard *par excellence* of some fashionable dress. This is true for a large and economically powerful contingent of producers and their consumers. A T-shirt labeled Abercrombie and Fitch isn't just a T-shirt, it's "fashion." A pair of sweatpants with "Juicy" emblazoned across



the seat isn't just a pair of sweatpants, it's Juicy Couture, and in the minds of some advertisers, editors and consumers, a person may be fashionably dressed in standard, non-designer jeans and a Hanes undershirt as long as there is a Louis Vuitton bag (or some other pricey high fashion bag) in hand.

A word of caution is necessary in the wake of asserting this pairing. One can readily be overwhelmed by the vast array of products that are not designed in the traditional sense and thereby leap, as Teri Agins did, to the conclusion that the world of traditional fashion is dead. My exploration of the fashion branded commodity reveals that design can take place even within this realm. Additionally, I argue in this study that the sale of highly lucrative logoed products often facilitates the design of other fashionable products that enable the movement of the traditional fashion cycle. Furthermore, the two world construct facilitates consideration of the fashion branded commodity as a separate kind of fashion and discourages lamentations, wringing of hands, and declarations that fashion is finished. These seemingly divergent categories share an important interplay and are not wholly separate.

The second pairing that can help to reveal the two worlds of fashion explores the evolving exchange between the mass market and the traditional class market. A new kind of interpenetration between the two spheres is perhaps the most revolutionary and the most complex aspect of the reconfiguring of fashion. On one level the traditional class market continues to exist largely for the privileged classes, producing haute couture,

designer collections, limited editions, and bespoke creations. As noted, the mass market often relies on the class market for receipt of the trickle-down effect. However, it is critical to emphasize there are competing and contrasting sources of fashion inspiration in the modern marketplace and trickle-down from high style is only one of many influences that impacts the mass market.

I believe trickle-down is not the most crucial aspect of the relationship between class and mass markets. What is decisive to highlight about the class market from the late twentieth century onward is that it is bifurcated in a way that it was not in the first half of the twentieth century. The class market can now be understood both in terms of design and production of traditional and exclusive products *and* in terms of mass marketing of the *class brand* and production of fashion branded commodities. Notably the fact that both spheres exist in the luxury goods sector is a point that Thomas failed to see. This is perhaps because the dominant impulse in the marketplace is of class carefully packaged to appeal to the masses. As such, I will argue the class market is much more intimately related with the mass market than it was prior to the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

The class market that exists primarily for consumers who purchase and wear expensive, seasonally designed clothes and accessories, exists in a world that is barely seen by the masses—it is glimpsed by most only through fashion editorials, society

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<sup>7</sup> Although French couturiers began to dabble in accessories and fragrance prior to World War One and ready-to-wear as early as 1916, it must be understood that such products would still have been out of reach of most consumers. Ready-made and mass produced fashions do not share a one-to-one correspondence.

pages, fashion blogs, celebrity appearances, and advertisements. The number of individuals who consume fashion at this level is small relative to the size of the global fashion marketplace, yet their role is a very powerful one.<sup>8</sup> The consumption of designer goods by the privileged few is often linked to the marketing of the designer brand and ostensibly this has become the more important and widespread manifestation of fashion as a class endeavor.

The illusion of upper class patronage and the ability to convey that appeal to the masses is used to market a wide variety of products. Notably many of those products are fashion branded commodities. The connection of a company or product to the traditional class market can be made part of the designer brand identity and thereafter used as a marketing ploy. Incorporating class appeal into brand identity and using it as a marketing technique is part of the reconfiguration of the class and mass markets. In the modern marketplace many “class market” producers create products in large numbers that are then sold to mainstream, mass market consumers. Logoed products in particular play upon the ability of class and mass fashions to intersect. I will show that the development of logoed products is coeval with the widespread marketing of traditional “class” brands.

Further evidence of the change that has occurred in the class market relates to the design of fashionable apparel. A market for mass produced fashionable clothes and

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<sup>8</sup> Estimates for the number of couture customers varies yearly based on the economy. Nicholas Coleridge (*The Fashion Conspiracy*, 1986) set the number at 4,000-- based in part on the economic prosperity in the Asian market. Joan DeJean put the number at 100 in her 2006 book *The Essence of Style*. Both figures represent a miniscule market share.

accessories has existed on a small scale since the middle of the nineteenth century, but blossomed in the early twentieth century as manufacturing techniques and technology improved.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, top designers kept their hands clean of the general population, allowing the trickle-down effect to run its course through mass manufacturers that offered copies of couture designs to the many women who did not have access to the elite originals. Copies varied depending upon whether they were line-for-line legal copies for which the designer had been paid a fee (and for which consumers paid a premium), or loose interpretations that differed substantially from the original in terms of both design and price. While a mass market of interpretations of designer apparel and accessories continues to exist, the concrete link between the designer original and the mass market interpretation is now almost always lost. Gone are the days when department stores and manufacturers purchased the rights to make copies of designer (couture) originals. Now when interpretations are done, they are typically sold without reference to the original garment and maker.<sup>10</sup> The contemporary marketplace is oriented so that manufacturers

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<sup>9</sup> Only with the rise of mass manufacturing in the wake of Singer's sewing machine (patented 1851) did the masses have access to affordable, fashionable clothes in great quantities. Indeed the first mass produced ready-to-wear was not fashionable. Early ready-to-wear was known as "slops," and was a category of ill-fitting garments largely worn by laborers. In 1916 French couturier Paul Poiret offered limited quantities of "authentic reproductions" of his designs made ready-to-wear under license by an American factory exclusively for American clientele. By the beginning of the twentieth century mass retailers such as Sears were offering mass produced interpretations of fashions from Paris. See the literature review for a more thorough discussion of consumers and fashion.

<sup>10</sup> Dressmaking company ABS is a strong example of this phenomenon. Their stock-in-trade is copying red carpet designer gowns, but they never make any reference at all to the originals. In contrast, Alexandra Palmer's 2009 text *Dior: A New Look, A New Enterprise* documents in fine detail the ways in which a couture dress used to be copied and attributed to the designer in the 1940s and 1950s.

do not tap the cachet of the designer's design and consumers largely do not know if their clothes are inspired by a particular person's design innovation. Another way of putting this is to say that the mass market is less geared to design authority and more oriented to brand name authority. There has been a widespread reorientation towards what is important in the realm of fashionable dress.

Inside of this new orientation the fashion marketplace has changed. Many top designers openly engage the mass market by branding mass produced products with their names. This is done most clearly via diffusion lines and capsule collections for mass retailers like Target or H&M, which generally offer basic pieces of apparel with little reference to the designer's design aesthetic, but which bear the designer's name and label and/or logo (handbags of this kind will be explored in detail in chapter six). The *new* mass market of fashion branded commodities relies on permutations of the designer as brand, the brand as design and the cachet of the brand manifested in the form of the logo. The logo, an emblem of fashion authority, is often used as the basis for the product's aesthetic. This is a new concept of fashion and is in marked contrast to the fashion design of old. The need to keep a distance from the masses is no longer deemed important on all fronts. Thus the new mass market is different both in terms of the designs it produces and the way in which the business is structured.

The final pairing I use to structure my discussion of logos and the changing nature of fashion contrasts the traditional notion of the ephemerality of fashion to the relative

permanence of a wide variety of products in the modern fashion marketplace. These divergent impulses exist across categories. On the one hand the glorious throes of ephemerality and constant change do still captivate both fashion designers and fashion consumers. The desire for constant change and continuous consumption of clothing and accessories is carefully orchestrated by a confluence of forces including designers, advertisers, merchandisers, and the fashion press. Conversely, there exists a wide range of products that are posited as fashion (often as high fashion) that do not change or change only in modest ways. Products such as Kate Spade handbags, Ralph Lauren polo shirts, and Burberry plaid scarves are presented as fashion through carefully orchestrated advertising and marketing. Notably, the ability to position an unchanging product as fashion, a concept traditionally defined by constant, quick-paced change, marks a shift in our understanding and application of the term. Additionally the widespread acceptance of such items as fashion alludes to some kind of change in terms of consumers and the context in which they consume.

I will show that the aforementioned pairings are fundamental to the definitions of fashion that exist in the modern, global fashion marketplace, yet their imperfections as perfect, tidy categories and their ability to permeate each other conceptually allude to greater cultural shifts that are in play. The complexity, the mutability of meaning, and the defiance of compartmentalization that emerge in an attempt to define fashion from the latter twentieth century onward, I will argue, is part and parcel of the postmodern context within which logos developed. I will draw upon the theoretical construct of

postmodernism to further explicate fashion branded commodities in the form of logoed handbags and the consumers who use them.

Employing the term postmodern requires much in the way of explanation as its meaning and utility as a descriptor and as a periodizing concept are widely interpreted and disputed. I will offer a few introductory comments here, so that the basic tenets of my application and interpretation may be known. A more in-depth discussion of the components of postmodernism that I wish to explore and apply will be more fully and critically surveyed in the literature review and throughout the remainder of this text.

The postmodern period or condition is typically identified by writers with wide-ranging interests as emerging from about 1970 onward. Coincidentally, this is the same moment at which the logo phenomenon emerged. It was the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard who in 1979 published *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and therein summarized the fundamental shift he observed in culture as the end of a “meta-narrative.” Lyotard discussed what he called changes of the “game rules,” arguing that the way postmodern men and women view and speak about art, science, and literature, and the way in which we communicate and consider knowledge is fundamentally different from our forefathers and foremothers. He noted a general lack of coherence, an interchangeability of meaning, disunity, contradictoriness, and a collapse of specific distinctions.

These points are crucial in that they mirror the conceptual shift in fashion that I see. I will show that so much about the “game” of fashion has changed with regards to large segments of fashion design and consumption that the rules and ideas that were once used to structure discourse on the topic do not always apply or may apply in a new or nuanced way. The pairings I discussed point to the overlapping, interpenetrating concepts that make compartmentalization and discreet distinctions difficult. Postmodern theory helps to contextualize slippery concepts, ideas requiring redefinition, and imperfect categories. It makes sense to tap into this canon of literature where so much intellectual heavy lifting has already been done.

One may question whether the application of a complex, long-lived (and therefore voluminous), and sometimes dis-unified body of theory will help make sense of a fashion phenomenon. As I have already noted in my three pairings, the changes I perceive are part of an overall fragmentation of the industry. There are multiple realities that exist at once but which impact and disturb one another. I believe postmodern theory is a useful tool for navigating the overlapping and contradictory aspects of the fashion realms that have emerged. I will show that postmodern theory provides a crucial conceptual frame with which to handle the logoed product and its multivalent nature.

I will argue that logoed products mean different things to different individuals, and that postmodern theory allows for this idea. David Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), noted that a long line of philosophers including Ludwig



Wittgenstein and Lyotard have theorized the breakdown of the signifier/signified relationship and have made room for unstable and multivalent communication that is dependent upon context and audience (46,49). Postmodern theory also makes room for interpreting difference in meaning vis-à-vis fashion designers and their customers. As Harvey put it, "...the cultural producer merely creates raw materials (fragments and elements), leaving it open to consumers to recombine those elements in any way they wish. The effect is to break (deconstruct) the power of the author to impose meanings or offer a continuous narrative" (51). I will explore the meaning and use of the logo but will necessarily abstain from making universalizing assertions about the meaning of these fashions. My understanding of the two worlds of fashion, variability of consumers, and the postmodern refusal of a meaningful meta-narrative within culture requires this stance. Making allowances for the interchangeability of meaning in dress practices and perception thereof is yet another difference between the state of fashion in the last forty years and fashion as we have understood it in eras predating the 1970s.

The pairings and the theoretical constructs I am introducing here point to the fact that an exploration of the logo is both an end in itself and a vehicle for answering greater questions about the state of fashion design, its industry, and its consumers. By meticulously documenting the emergence of a new and conceptually complex aesthetic concept (the logo) I am creating a window for exploring the heterogeneous culture that made it possible. A journey through its evolution and an evaluation of its development

along the way can reveal a great deal about design, the business of fashion, and the modern consumer.

### **Rationale for Selection of Handbags and Hand Luggage as the Case Study Subject**

The handbag is used as a case study in order to narrow the scope of this project, as the proliferation of logoed goods from the 1970s onwards makes the study of all types of products untenable. It makes sense to study handbags as opposed to scarves, wallets, or belts, since they were more often the focus of fashion editorials and fashion advertising (though all these products were introduced at roughly the same moment) and therefore provide richer source material than the other types of accessories.

The study of a category of accessories rather than a category of apparel makes sense in order to control the size of the study and in order to maintain continuity. To study all types of apparel would be far too vast, whereas the study of specific types of apparel such as baseball jackets, rugby shirts, or hooded sweatshirts would reveal gaps in the chronology due to trends in dress styles. While the aforementioned types of apparel are ubiquitous, their inclusion in trendsetting fashionable apparel is cyclical. Thus there would be extended periods of this study during which such products would not appear in advertisements or editorials even though the phenomenon of logos was proliferating.

Handbags and hand luggage also serve as a representative case for the larger phenomenon of logo proliferation because many of their formal properties and their mode of design and production have strong similarities to the apparel industry at large. Handbags and hand luggage are varied in shape, size, materials, and intended use. This suggests there would be sufficient diversity within this sample that would not be found in

a study restricted to watches or scarves, wherein the shape, size, and materials are largely predetermined, and the way in which a logo can be wrought (in terms of size, shape, and fabrication) is likewise limited. Additionally, handbags and hand luggage are designed and produced both in-house and through licensing agreements. Other accessories such as sunglasses are exclusively produced through licensing agreements. Thus, handbags and hand luggage are representative of fashionable goods in general and offer a wide range of variables, yet also comprise a manageable sample group.

A second part of the rationale for selecting handbags and hand luggage as a case study is that the importance of the handbag to producers and consumers of fashionable accessories is rich, multi-dimensional and inextricably intertwined. Their importance is as critical to revenue streams for companies big and small as it is essential to consumers who strive to create a sense of personal style and communicate fashion savvy. These aspects of the modern handbag further justify the selection of this species of accessory as the case study for this larger phenomenon. In 2006 it was estimated that Americans spent \$30 billion on accessories, with most of that expenditure allocated to handbags and hand luggage (Jenkins 52). Such a substantial figure is a clear indication of the commercial importance of the handbag to the fashion industry at large. Additionally, handbags have become one of the most important products in a woman's wardrobe. Writing in the late 1950s, style maven Doris Shackell noted, "Not so long ago, it was considered adequate to possess only one good leather handbag...But ideas have changed" (12). In 2012 it is most certainly common practice for fashionable consumers to purchase wardrobes of handbags to suit various occasions, to accommodate a range of needs, and to fulfill various whims of taste or mood. Fashion historian Caroline Cox recently noted that over

the last two decades, designer handbags have become “a license for labels to print money” (154). This statement is further affirmation that consumers are generally amenable to purchasing handbags in quantity and/or at a high price point and that this benefits fashion companies. *Newsweek* reporter Thomas similarly noted that, “through calculated marketing strategies and with the support of fashion magazines, luxury companies in the last ten years have created the phenomenon of the handbag of the season” (4). It is clear that these products have increasingly become the cornerstone of a woman’s fashionable wardrobe, a brand’s advertising campaign, and a company’s revenue stream.

Handbags have also become important indicators of fashionableness for modern consumers, Winifred Gallagher, author of *Its in the Bag: What Purses Reveal and Conceal* (2006), noted that, “A bag or a pair of shoes is a good way to identify yourself stylistically” (25). The notion here is that these accessories are likely to exhibit stronger defining characteristics (in terms of design and/or branding) than the vast majority of ready-to-wear products. Additionally, a fine handbag has the ability to accentuate and even elevate the overall impact of one’s assemblage of ready-to-wear. Uniformity in the apparel marketplace coupled with widespread lack of connoisseurship about high-style apparel may both serve as motivators for consumers to lavish their fashion budgets on recognizable statement and status objects in the form of handbags. The swelling waistlines of many Americans, a fact that makes the adoption of fashion-forward apparel increasingly difficult, has also been cited as a factor leading to the increased importance of accessories. Indeed, not all women are willing to make a bold fashion statement with a head-to-toe look, but are comfortable making a fashion statement with a purse.

The concept of the “it bag” (a “must have” or status item) in and of itself is testimony to the importance of handbags in the modern marketplace. An “it” shoe, coat, blouse, or hat is virtually unheard of. The paramount importance of the bag is, no doubt, partially an outgrowth of the increased status, power, and income levels of modern women, who are increasingly active and mobile. Such women, unlike their nineteenth century counterparts, require luggage to transport an array of personal property. However, this study will show that there can be no doubt that the fashion industry itself, seeking new growth sectors, has also nurtured the “need” and has encouraged the trend cycle.

The ability of highly recognizable, branded handbags to make pecuniary and status claims—a layer of semiotic power rarely glimpsed in the category of handbags prior to the 1960s-- also marks them as an important and rich aspect of dress. In addition to outright status claims, handbags may also satisfy other species of psychological need for consumers. Psychoanalyst Rhoda Krawitz argued that “it” bags enable some to “enhance their sense of self with logos” and “join the sorority of the haves” (Gallagher 75). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, an age characterized by fragmented communities, globalization, and anonymity, consumers seek products to bolster their self-concept and help them make connections to others. It will be argued that the cooption of aspects of brand identity to augment personal identity is a feasible move in the postmodern context.<sup>11</sup>

In summation, through this detailed investigation of handbags and hand luggage that feature designer logos as a motif on the exterior of the object, I explore how new

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<sup>11</sup> This point is developed both in the literature review and in later chapters.

design and production practices developed in tandem with the splintering of fashion into two distinct yet entangled worlds. Understanding when and why this new category of fashion, the fashion branded commodity, has been developed and then adopted by a burgeoning consumer demographic in a changing marketplace will provide the basis for modifying the extant working definition of fashion.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because it develops an historical chronology that has not yet been documented. In addition, it tracks changing practices within the fashion industry by examining the relationship between the proliferation of logoed handbags and the reconfiguration of the world of fashion design, production, and marketing. Additionally it theorizes who the consumers of logoed handbags are and why the logoed product is desirable in the modern fashion environment. Finally it seeks to expand the working definition of fashion to accommodate the fragmentation in the modern marketplace.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were written in response to the ideas raised by the aforementioned books by Agins and Thomas. They were refined over the course of the study as I became increasingly aware of the larger issues that my study of the logo revealed.

1. What was the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage between 1969 and 2009?

- a. Who are the designers/design companies that produce these logoed products?
  - b. How did the physical and aesthetic appearance of logoed handbags and hand luggage change over time?
  - c. What are the factors (i.e. historical, economic, social, commercial) that were concurrent with the introduction, development, and proliferation of logoed handbags?
2. What does the development of logoed handbags reveal about the world of postmodern fashion?
  - a. How and why did the response of the market (fashion editors, buyers, retailers) to logoed handbags changed from 1969 to 2009?
  - b. How can the myriad perspectives and theories about consumers (generated by consumer science, consumer psychology, postmodern theory and fashion theory- including perspectives on fashion leadership and collective selection) contribute to our understanding of the widespread adoption of logoed handbags and hand luggage?
3. How do we define fashion in the modern marketplace?

### **Working Propositions, Definitions, and Delimitations**

#### *Working Propositions*

The following working propositions are the outgrowth of the body of knowledge I have amassed as a result of researching and teaching the history of fashion over the last ten

years. As such they may be considered well informed conjecture; propositions which I had strong belief in but which I could not assert (at the outset) as certain fact.

1. Proliferation of logoed products is partly due to licensing agreements and partly due to the formation of large conglomerates that seek the middle market for revenue.
2. Logoed products are lucrative for designers/design companies and are easily created.
3. The proliferation of logoed handbags is related to the changing structure of the business side of the fashion industry, including the decreased importance of haute couture, the rapid reproduction of high-style designs by mass-producers, the changing target markets, the development of conglomerates, and the increased importance of branding.
4. The perception of logoed products by consumers and fashion-insiders has changed over time. Perception is not monolithic.
5. Teen fashion is largely derivative of fashionable trends in general.
6. There is not a single reality as it pertains to perception and meaning of visual culture.
7. The worldview espoused by any single publication is neither comprehensive nor all-inclusive, but rather is one slice of reality.

### *Definitions*

The following terms are used throughout the text and are defined here to provide the reader with a reference tool.



**Brand:** the name or symbol (often a registered trademark) of a merchant or manufacturer used to identify and distinguish the goods they produce; a product or line of products associated with the name or symbol of a merchant or manufacturer.

**Brand dilution:** the degradation of brand value or meaning resulting from overexposure or problems with product quality.

**Brand identity:** The outward expression of a brand that reflects how the brand owner wants the brand to be perceived by the consumer; a set of characteristics associated with a brand that are understood in terms of human characteristics such as gender, age, and behavioral attributes (i.e. sexuality, strength, intelligence) or lifestyle characteristics (income, education, occupation).

**Boutique:** a small store selling fashionable clothes or accessories to a specialized clientele.

**Capsule collection:** traditionally a collection consisting of a few representative or important items; also used to refer to small mass produced collections made for a short time period.

**Conglomerate:** a company comprised of a grouping of several other companies.

**Couture:** the shorthand term for *haute couture* (literally fine sewing). The term refers to one-of-a-kind, hand-made clothes made by firms recognized by the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*.

**Couturier/couturiere:** a male or female maker of one-of-a-kind, hand made clothes who works for a firm recognized by the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*.

**Diffusion line:** a secondary collection offered by a designer at a lower price point than the primary collection.

**Fashion editorial:** content (typically found in a fashion magazine) that consists of an image and/or text that may or may not be part of an article.

**Handbag:** a small bag, with or without handles or straps used to carry small personal articles; typically carried by women.

**Hand luggage:** a broad category that includes a variety of portable containers to be carried by hand ranging from coin purses to suitcases; may be carried by men or women.

**Heritage label:** a label that has actual and mythical history that provides brand identity and value.

**High-end:** describes products or services targeted at high-income consumers; typically characterized by high quality construction and fine materials.

**High-style:** elite, fashion-forward, designer fashions; runway collections.

**“It” bag:** a term used to refer to a highly recognizable and highly desirable handbag from a given season. A bag that is often linked with notions of status or prestige.

**Knock-off:** an imitation that is not a line-for-line copy; an imitation that is not a forgery.

**Licensing agreement:** a financial and legal agreement between a designer, company, or brand and an outside party whereby permission is given to that party to produce merchandise bearing the name of the designer, company or brand.

**Lifestyle:** a typical way of living that is largely demonstrated through consumption patterns; a style of living identified by an individual, group, or culture.

**Logo:** a trademarked visual symbol, monogram, emblem, or other graphic device used to indicate a brand or company.

**Open stock:** a product that remains in constant production and is therefore continuously available to a manufacturer or a consumer.

**Postmodern fashion:** a general characterization of the type of fashion dominant since about 1970 defined by eclectic reference to both present and past; fashion that relies on quotation and juxtaposition as well as emphasis on previously de-emphasized elements; additionally, an attitude toward fashion that rejects or reworks the established history, identity, and/or language of fashion.

**Prestige pricing:** an exceptionally high price assigned to a product in order to develop the allure of exclusivity.

**Ready-to-wear:** a term used to refer to clothing produced without a specific client in mind and according to standardized sizing.

**Social class:** a social group sharing common attributes, especially economic and social position; rank in society determined by financial, social, and cultural capital.

**Social status:** rights and obligations that govern behavior, establish social distinction, and lifestyle; demonstrated through consumption (see Goffman, 1951).

**Tastemaker:** one who develops and maintains the status machinery (e.g. fashion experts, designers).

### *Delimitations*

This study focuses only on designers/labels/companies working in the United States of America and in Europe. Content analysis is restricted to the American version of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears Catalog. Content analysis is restricted to the years January 1969 to December 2009. Additional source material includes *Accessories Magazine* (and its related titles) and *W Magazine*. All of these publications, excepting the Sears Catalog, are devoted solely to women's fashions. This research primarily

focuses on women's fashions and female consumers. *Vogue* is a source that represents the high-style marketplace, *Seventeen* is a source that represents the teen marketplace, and the Sears Catalog is utilized to represent the mass market in general. The additional sources including *Accessories Magazine* and *W Magazine* provide perspectives from inside the industry.

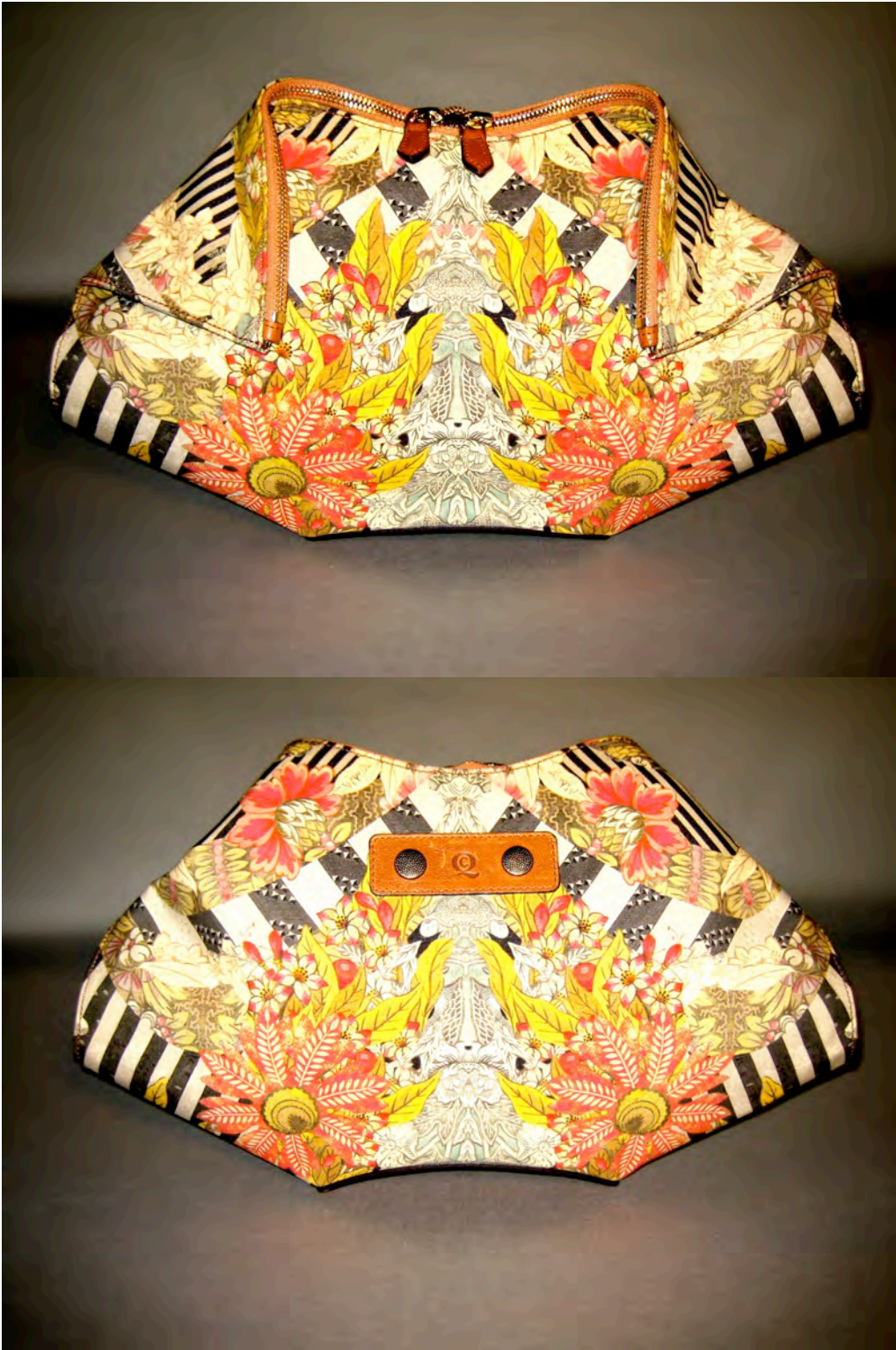


Figure 1.1 The Demanta clutch by Alexander Mc Queen (Folklore print S/S 2011). Clutch in the collection of the author. Photograph by Jason Moore.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The review of literature that follows reflects the multiple objectives of this study, and the fact that it develops an area of fashion history that is lacking in scholarly texts.

Additionally, drawing upon a diverse body of literature reflects my understanding that fashion is an important manifestation of culture, a creative endeavor, a vehicle for expression of consumer needs and desires, and a commercial enterprise.

#### *Handbags and Their Role in Fashionable Dress*

One objective of this research is to document a category of fashionable dress in detail and thereafter to put it into a context that is both historical and sociological. A review of the literature that documents handbags and their role in the construction of fashionable dress reveals that there are major gaps in terms of both documentation and interpretation.

Texts by fashion historians such as Claire Wilcox (1999), Anna Johnson (2002) or Caroline Cox (2007) provide basic historical and cultural information about handbags, as well as illustrations of historically noteworthy objects, but mass produced objects are notably absent in their works. These texts, suited to a general audience, present well documented, albeit limited, historical information about the development of this category of accessory. Notably the chronology each author presents is incomplete and might be considered a “best-of” or “highlights” type of approach. Additionally, while both Cox and Johnson provide a fundamental cultural context for the use and meaning of the handbag, the contexts they develop are far from all-inclusive in scope. Thus, such texts provide a foundation but are not comprehensive.

An additional shortcoming of these texts is that they do not thoroughly document any specific type of handbag. The category of handbags is treated as a monolithic thing. As a result these authors do not document the stylistic development of any particular kind of object or critically evaluate why an evolution occurred. Admittedly fashion accessories do have qualities of eternal appeal to the masses, but I believe they also merit consideration as part of the history of fashion, the history of the business of fashion, and the evolving needs and nature of the consumer. Additionally, while manifest meaning may be considered for some select objects, latent meaning, brought to bear by users, is seldom entertained. My research into the specific category of logoed handbags and hand luggage demonstrates an approach that is far more limited in its breadth (across categories and time) but much more detailed in its consideration of the wide variety of related topics and themes, thus creating a deeper, more integrated historical frame.

Among the aspects of texts written by authors such as Wilcox, Johnson, or Cox that are helpful and informative are elements of the research technique. For example, Cox's work in particular reflects primary source research that is presented in a synthesized form. She notes that, "The fashion tip of the 1950s, endlessly repeated by fashion editors in incessant advice columns, was to invest as much money as one could in a bag, as it would then last a long time and detract attention away from clothes that were perhaps a little less exclusive" (76). Capturing this type of anecdotal information helps a reader to understand why the aesthetics of the handbags of that period were fairly subdued, were subject to only infrequent change, and were not the primary focus of fashion commentators.

Popular dress manuals and etiquette books provide insight into the use and perception of fashionable accessories over time and help substantiate their increasing importance as a *featured* component of fashionable dress. They provide an authoritative fashion perspective and a voice from the past. They indicate changing consumer needs and desires as they were shaped by a fashion authority.

Instructional texts for the general population, written at mid-century by stylish ladies such as Mildred Ryan (1937), guided women with regards to the suitability of their accessories and cautioned them to avoid conspicuous and ornate choices that might destroy the harmony of their overall appearance. Doris Shackell (1957), Ginette Spanier (1959), and Joyce McKinnell (1964) instructed women as to the quality and, more importantly, the *diversity* of handbags that should be included in their wardrobes. The increasing importance of hand luggage and handbags is made evident in these texts, and is an important indicator of a shift in attitude away from strict utilitarianism toward expression of style and taste. Shackell noted, “the front we each present to the world is governed quite as much by our accessories as by our bigger items of dress. Sometimes even more” (1). She went on to describe accessories as contributing “zest” to an outfit and being a mode of self-expression. Discerning how women in a given period thought (or were told to think) about the use, meaning, and communicative power of their dress is fundamental to understanding aspects of the logoed handbag phenomenon. While etiquette books and dress guides are examples of popular literature they are also primary source material in that they give a voice to tastemakers of the past. Incorporating these voices into the discussion of the chronology of logo development therefore provides a



voice from the past that offers a perspective on meaning and use. When properly contextualized popular manuals can serve as important historical documents.

*The Ideology of Consumption: Consumers and Their Goods*

Consumption is an act that is rich in meaning for both the consumer herself and for the group with which she associates or hopes to associate. Consumer products have meaning to the owner and are read by myriad strangers and passersby. Consumer goods are multivalent, often personally meaningful, and they help individuals navigate the social milieu to which they belong and the milieu to which they might aspire. The symbolic and communicative complexity with which consumption and consumer goods are imbued suggests the literature dedicated to this topic is robust. The following literature review provides a chronological presentation of the most influential and relevant works that develop notions about consumers. The sample that follows was selected on the basis of its pertinence and applicability to a discussion of fashion branded commodities and with an eye towards a well-dispersed chronology. The fashion branded commodity, a commodity with diverse and vibrant communicative power, merits discussion vis-à-vis its meaning in the act of consumption and in relation to a consumer.

Although the specific relationship between a particular consumer and his or her particular goods is completely context dependent, there is a large body of literature related to consumer utilization of fashionable goods and the meanings that goods can have for their users. Numerous disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and semiology, have explored consumer goods as a mode of communication. The point of view expressed by various authors can often be evaluated by reference to the time period

in which they were writing. Some of their statements may have been all-encompassing when they were written, but now more likely express only a part of the story, in part because the postmodern condition is increasingly defined by fragmentation and in part because the field of scholars concerned with consumers and their goods has largely adopted a view that situates the consumer in context.

There is a long history of literature extolling the importance of objects in human lives. William James, writing in 1890, may have been the first psychologist to note that, “We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves” (291). This observation, echoed by legions of later thinkers, gets to the heart of the essential argument I will make, namely that the selection of an object with a logo is often meant to express something personal: an aspect of self concept, an aspiration, an affinity with a brand identity, and the like. The literature review indicates some of the specific arguments that have been made with regards to what a product may express. In later chapters I will evaluate these points in light of the logo and the postmodern consumer.

It has been argued that one way in which goods may extend or express the self is through an effort to display status; a motivation for display that both affiliates and differentiates. Commentary that posits fashionable dress as a method for differentiating one’s self, competing with others, or showing affiliation with a group or lifestyle extends back to the end of the nineteenth century. An examination of this literature provides additional structure for an examination of logos, which clearly relates to all three of the aforementioned motivations. Thorstein Veblen, writing in 1899, developed the seminal perspective on the conspicuous consumption of fashionable goods as a means of showing

social status and leisure. Veblen believed that fashion serves as a form of visual and social communication among classes and that reputability could be conferred through evidence of pecuniary might. For Veblen, writing in a time when class hierarchy was far more defined and rigid, the expense of clothing could be read as a relatively clear sign. He argued that the lower classes held the social and financial elite in the highest regard and therefore sought, to the best of their ability, to emulate them. According to Veblen, the reputability associated with the pecuniary strength of the elite had the ability to shape canons of taste for culture at large.

Inscription and emulation of social status through the display of consumer goods, especially objects for adornment of the body, was specifically addressed by Veblen. Although the structure of society has changed in the more than one hundred years since Veblen wrote his treatise, and arguably comparison to the most elite members of society is more varied (there is more than one group that merits envy and emulation), the idea that objects on the body confer prestige is no doubt still true. While logoed products did not exist in Veblen's time, he understood that the status of one's goods needed to be instantly recognizable in order to confer merit. He wrote, "In order to inspire these transient observers, (i.e. people on the street) and to retain one's self complacency under their observation, the *signature* of one's pecuniary strength should be written in characters which he who runs may read" (72). In Veblen's day that signature would have been the hallmarks of good taste, fine quality, and proper comportment. In our more fragmented modern culture, a shortcut to making one's status legible may be found in a brand logo---often a clear statement of both pecuniary means and taste sensibilities.

Philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead gave lectures at Harvard University that were transcribed, in conjunction with lecture notes and unpublished papers and conjoined into seminal texts in the field of social psychology, behaviorism, and symbolic interaction. In *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) Mead argues that the constitution of the human mind (the nexus of the self) results from social interaction. It is only through social acts (gestures) exchanged between people that symbols and thereafter meanings are created. Thus it is the relations between individuals in a society that constitutes meaning. Mead stated, “the social environment is endowed with meaning in terms of the process of social activity” (130). The notion that the self-concept and the meaning of symbols in the form of consumer goods are socially constructed is an idea that is echoed throughout consumer science (which often considers consumer behavior in light of reference groups) and is interpreted in postmodern theory, though in that context social interaction and meaning construction is considered in light of cultural fragmentation and is therefore problematic. Considered in light of fashion branded commodities, the notion of socially constructing meaning serves as a counterpoint to the position that consumers accept marketized product meanings (to varying degrees). Mead’s perspective provides a positive way of considering how product meaning is constructed and used as a part of self-completion.

The ability of consumer goods to augment a consumer’s self-concept is multidimensional. In 1930 J.C. Flugel first published *The Psychology of Clothes*, and in it he elaborates upon Veblen’s notion that the display of wealth is a matter of pride, respect and differentiation used by individuals with social standing sufficient to merit distinguishing. He notes that clothes can function as an extension of the bodily self,

capable of signaling myriad social aspects (such as wealth, rank, or occupation). Flugel also vividly understands the diminishing rigidity of the rankings within society, which he attributes to increased mass production and the proliferation of advertising—observations that echo those made by postmodern theorists decades later. The increasing fluidity of society may have occasioned Flugel to predict “in the further course of evolution, some particular decorative feature of dress may come to be associated with almost any separate body of individuals bound together by certain common interests” (31-32). Essentially Flugel is predicting the use of dress in the construction of social affinities. This is an important extension of the argument that dress extends the self as it pushes beyond social communication, jockeying and competition. This observation may be construed as a prediction of style tribes or lifestyle groups that are often identified or unified by their utilization and frequent comportment of specific brands and their logos.

Sociologist Georg Simmel, like Veblen, based his perspective of fashion on the existence of a class system governed by an elite social group, and he argued in 1957 that fashion served as a system of designation which lower classes sought to emulate so as to elevate themselves. Simmel saw this phenomenon as the primary catalyst for the fashion cycle. Simmel believed in the power of fashion to enable social positioning and envisioned fashion as a unifying force that signifies group membership. While mimicry of the elite and jockeying for an elevated social position may be part of the adoption of the logos of some brands, this theoretical position is neither all encompassing nor universally true.

The affinitive power of consumer goods was later developed by social theorist and historian Daniel J. Boorstin. In his 1963 text, *The Decline of Radicalism: Reflections*

on *America Today*, Boorstin argues that American culture has shifted away from communities based on neighborhoods, churches, communal meeting places, and other, perhaps less tangible unifying factors, and has been replaced by communities created by advertisers and products- what Boorstin calls “consumption communities.” Consumption communities are groups of people who, for the purchase price of any given product, may be unified by a way of life embodied in a product or a group of products. Boorstin argues that such communities have characterized American culture from the late nineteenth century through the time he was writing in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Although Boorstin’s text does not address consumption communities built around brand identity, his analysis does address the department store as an institution that created a cult of confidence and which was deemed (especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) a beacon of taste around which consumers flocked. Certainly the notion of a community of consumers gathered around a brand identity can be extrapolated from the notion of a consumption community. Boorstin argues that membership in a consumption community can be rapidly achieved (via a purchase) and has the ability to offer a new and improved identity for the purchaser. The theorization of consumption communities formed around brands, especially those that utilize prominent logos, seems to be the next logical iteration of Boorstin’s point of view and, notably, one that he could not have readily identified in 1963 when the phenomenon of prominent logos was in its nascent state. While none of the authors reviewed thus far mention branding or logos, their positions which posit that goods can confer status, persona, identity, pride, and even community can be related to the benefits derived from brand identity as it is expressed through a logo. This study seeks to apply these important

perspectives to an understanding of the modern consumer of logoed handbags and hand luggage—why and how she might use them and what they might signal.

In recent decades, scholarship related to consumers and their goods has begun to posit the modern consumer as an egocentric individual in a fragmented social context. As a result, the focus has turned from the use of goods to navigate the social world to the use of goods for identity creation. Echoes of postmodern theory are evident in the writings of some authors writing about consumers and their goods. Sociologist Fred Davis argued in a 1989 text that clothing does have the ability to locate people in a universe of status claims and lifestyle attachments, but that clothing functions as a “quasi-code” that is forever shifting because it is context dependent. This is especially clear, he states, when clothes are considered in light of social strata and taste groupings. He claims that fashion is a less powerful sign code than other systems because of the context dependency of the signifier-signified relationship, but he cautions that some fashionable objects, such as tennis outfits, do have fixed meanings. Arguably at least one aspect of the logo as signifier is fixed-- that which refers to the company-- but the social context in which any given logo is used is highly variable and so therefore is the interpretation of it.

Psychologist Kurt Back (1989) also believes that cultural communication is reliant upon cultural context. He argued that fashionable display is a combination of self-expression, norms, and dominant values which are expressed through cultural products. Back specifically noted that labels are recognized not for what they say about an individual but for what they say about the brand. Back seems to accord an unwarranted amount of power to labels as he appears to argue they are not susceptible to context. This

is an important point of contention vis-à-vis Davis. However, both Davis and Back provide important points of view for considering what a logo may communicate.

These social and psychological perspectives on the consumer may be used to shed light on the motivation to consume products with blatant forms of identification, i.e. fashion branded commodities. Philip Cushman (1990) describes the post-World War II consumer as the “empty self,” a person who can only be fulfilled by becoming filled with food, consumer products, and images of celebrities. He argues that the absence of shared meaning and community compels people to consume as a means of compensation for interior emptiness. Cushman’s position lends itself to an analysis of consumer products that have built into them a sense of shared meaning and group membership, which is of course implied by the display of a logoed product. .

Giles Lipovetsky (1994), a modern French social philosopher, argues that the practice of fashioning one’s appearance with modern consumer goods has the ability to democratize society. However, he also notes that novelty and competition drive fashion, and that fashion is a continual game of one-upmanship. Lipovetsky engages Veblen’s text and agrees that fashion *was* once disseminated by mimicry of the upper classes but in the modern era it has provided a climate for the dissolution of perceptible boundaries. According to Lipovetsky, fashion is an instrument for equalizing society, especially through the use of “flashy displays of the emblems of hierarchy” (31). Lipovetsky relates part of the democratization of fashion to the production of designer ready-to-wear. He writes, “Industrial mass production emerged from anonymity; it became personalized as it won brand name recognition, with names henceforth widely displayed on advertising billboards, in fashion magazines, in shop windows, and on articles of clothing



themselves” (96). Lipovetsky goes as far as to coin a phrase for this change: the “democratic pluralism of labels” (97), which he equates with conferring the celebrity status of the designers onto the masses. Lipovetsky believes that the personal motivation for psychological gratification is what creates the desire for designer labels. Thus, Lipovetsky offers yet another interpretation for the relationship between a consumer and his or her possession.

Although the notion of class status as the sole *modus operandi* for adopting certain types of fashions may be dated, recent consumer behavior research continues to assert that conspicuous goods including “prestige brands” play an important role in asserting individual identity. Dozens of relevant studies pertaining to this matter have been written and have been reviewed. Two examples may suffice for the purpose of this discussion. Dubois and Duquesne (1993) note that whether the (luxury) brand differentiates or affiliates the user, it serves to “enhance their self-concept” (37). This point of view is echoed by Vigneron and Johnson (1999) who argue, “The consumption of prestige brands appears to have a strong social function, and therefore, interpersonal effects may be significantly affecting the propensity to purchase or consume” (7). What is clear is that goods have the ability to extend and develop the social being in important ways. I will show that this is readily the case with logoed products.

In modern theory drawn from a wide range of disciplines there is a profusion of perspectives related to the meaning of fashionable apparel for the consumer. Eicher, et al., writing in 2000, noted that while material culture, such as fashion, is an expression of culture, culture is not monolithic. There are many distinct cultural groups within a large-scale society, each with its own ideas and beliefs. Additionally, they note that in large-

scale societies dress is suited to express wealth and status and that the dress worn by the powerful affirms a distinction. While social position may encourage conformity with that social group, in an industrial postmodern society individuals may attempt to dress in any given manner as long as they have the means to acquire the material objects. Arguably logos function as a modern means of showing wealth and status. Regardless of background or position, individuals may utilize either real or counterfeited examples of logoed products in order to assert a group affiliation. Thus logoed products may be used to explore the concept of fashion as cultural expression.

Fashion theorist Yuniya Kawamura (2005) furthers the argument that goods extend the self by delving into the intricacies of the modern marketplace. She argues that fashion is a modern phenomenon tied to industrial capitalism and that fashion is used to show subtle differences and to blur class boundaries. Furthermore, she argues that what we consider capable of making class statements is so only because of the value added to it by the fashion system that turns apparel into fashion by systematically legitimating it through its many components including advertising, public relations, and journalism. Kawamura's position is that "fashion" is the intangible aspect of a product. It is what drives the desire to consume, and in the postmodern era, the intangible prestige is developed through branding and the cultivation of brand identity. The logoed product in general is a good example of a product that may get at least some of its value from the machinations of branding and advertising. While neither consumer science studies nor fashion theory tend to focus specifically on logoed goods, the emphasis on consumer products used to create and convey identity in a pluralistic, democratic culture in which individuals still strive to make public assertions of their beliefs, social position, or group

affiliation lends itself to a theoretical interpretation for the widespread adoption of logoed products.

History Professor Frank Trentmann, former head of the Cultures of Consumption Research Program at the University of London, noted in “Knowing Consumers-Histories, Identities, Practices” (2006) that consumers have diverse social and ideological roots and as such are “bounded” by their personal ideologies, their place in the social order, and their consuming practices. According to Trentmann, being bounded implies “uneven access to expertise, authority, and power” (14). This in turn implies that consumers establish norms of use and meaning and analyze product value, brand identity, and the like as a result of the collective activity of interacting within their social milieu. Trentmann is in league with postmodern philosophers in arguing that reading the meaning of goods as instrumental to the goods themselves is flawed. He maintains we must look at human interactions in order to understand what they represent (15). What Trentmann’s argument makes way for is caution. The understanding that the masses have more and more access to fashion as we approach recent histories might lead some to assume that access is more or less equal across demographics on all accounts, but Trentmann cautions scholars against this. He notes that making comparisons between contemporary mass consumption and consumptions in the past is potentially flawed as past contexts had “different social formations, sensibilities, and discourses” (5). Understanding that consumers’ identities are socially constructed within the social context provides a rationale for understanding the manifold meanings consumers give to their choices from the marketplace.

Writers in the field of consumer behavior and consumption generally agree that consumption practices are shaped by context, including one's social environment. The degree to which context is considered to be a determining factor is a point of conflict among scholars. James Carrier, professor at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, has made strong statements about consumers and consumption practices. Writing as a sociologist who is influenced by economic theory, he creates a very deterministic picture. Carrier (2006) sees consumption "less as an individual choice framed by meaning and more as a collective consequence, itself consequential, of political-economic forces." He views consumers "less as choosers to be understood in terms of structures of meaning and more as people whose acts can constrain them to choose in certain ways and whose choices can constrain those innocent bystanders and their actions" (275).

Other scholars interested in consumers caution against this kind of generalization situated in a deterministic point of view. Ben Fine (2006), professor of economics at the University of London, says the culture of consumption is "contextual, construed, chaotic, constructed, contradictory, and conflictual" (293). Fine argues the multiplicity of factors that create the context in which the meaning of consumption is created is profoundly variegated and "the meaning of consumption is not necessarily coherent, as different meanings are articulated together" (294). For Fine, the consumer is impacted by the context in which she or he operates, but is not determined in the strict sense of Carrier's economics-based view, though he or she is certainly influenced. Fine notes, "The consumer is far from a passive recipient of the meaning of objects of consumption and is active in creating that meaning. But the consumer is not liable to be able to command a

monopoly in doing so” (293). Fine’s more tempered point of view opens the door for asserting the meaning of consumption for a given demographic based upon prevailing cultural currents, though arguably any such assertion must be done with great care.

The literature reviewed here all points to the notion that consumers use goods in a symbolic way. Although the logo itself may be fashioned with the intention of communicating a singular message, once that logoed object is put into use, the message is modified by the consumer’s needs and worldview and can be modified in an infinite number of ways by both consumers and perceivers of consumers. Thus, it is clear from the outset that no solitary deduction will be made with regards to the motivations among consumers that have led to the widespread adoption of logoed products. Rather, the methodology presented in the next chapter was devised to apply this theory to a concrete, contemporary phenomenon in an effort to inform our understanding of its many meanings.

### *The Business of Fashion*

The modern global apparel and accessories marketplace is highly contrived and the various arms of the industry are complexly intertwined. Reviewing relevant literature pertaining to this topic is difficult because notably there is little extant scholarly work that documents the business of fashion in the period under review in this study. Texts on this subject written for an academic audience are few. Most of them have been published only in the last ten years-- an indication that this aspect of fashion history is only now emerging as an area of scholarly focus. Two sources written by academics are reviewed here because they provide some relevant content, but more importantly they provide a

scholarly model. Next a small sample of literature from periodicals is presented using similar guidelines—the sample demonstrates the type of content that is available and its general utility to a study of this kind. Finally a brief selection of popular literature is presented. The paucity of relevant scholarly texts once again necessitates recourse to this genre.

One scholarly article that provides both relevant content and a model for grappling with fashion design in conjunction with the business of fashion is “The Hilfiger Factor and the Flexible Commercial World of Couture,” (2000) by Lou Taylor, a professor of dress and textile history. In the article the author reveals how the reputation or perception of a designer or label is utilized to sell a wide range of products. Taylor posits the designer logo as a “symbol of global sophistication” that has enabled designers at both ends of the price-point continuum to reap massive profits from logo emblazoned products. Taylor’s most poignant assertion is that the current motive force behind the creation of couture is brand identity building, which is ultimately tied to revenue generation. Taylor’s analysis of the relationship between couture and commerce provides a model for understanding the proliferation of the fashion branded commodity throughout the fashion industry. My research extends Taylor’s argument to encompass a broad array of designers, a multitude of products, and numerous ways in which brand identity can be asserted (i.e. outside of the bounds of couture).

A second scholarly text that provides a model for integrating a discussion of fashion design and the business of fashion into a cohesive narrative is a recent text by artist, designer, and dress historian Karl Aspelund. *Fashioning Society* (2009) documents the trajectory of six designers, beginning with Charles Frederick Worth, continuing with

Paul Poiret, Gabrielle Chanel, and Elsa Schiapparelli, and culminating in the intertwined careers of Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. The author is able to highlight the aspects of the fashion industry (beyond design) that evolved as a unified, centralized industry gave way to fragmentation in an age dominated by mass production. Of particular relevance to this study is Aspelund's linkage of a designer's talent or "genius" with the ability to produce designer objects. He argues that the designer himself/herself essentially becomes a commodity as the products of the designer become reified. Ultimately, Aspelund argues the label itself became valued over the product. Interestingly, he traced this phenomenon back to Paul Poiret's 1924 sale of his name to a group of investors; this was a watershed moment in which a designer name was fully commodified.

Aspelund's work successfully links the world of design with the world of business. However it is notable that Aspelund has a strong traditional bias. He is interested in the world of couture, and like Agins, is deeply invested in what he perceives as its gradual demise. What Aspelund considers the death of couture clouds the lens through which he reads fashion history. My research, which explores a large body of designers and design companies working at a wide range of price points, expands upon some of the themes explored in Aspelund's text. My effort to connect business to design, revealing the complexity of the relationship, adds breadth and depth to our understanding of the genesis of modern design trends.

Periodical literature from publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, and *Forbes* is also a useful source for documenting changing trends and contemporary opinions about fashion phenomena in light of business practices and the

financial bottom line. While the breadth of this literature is too vast to review in its entirety, a representative sample can be considered to illustrate its importance to this study. For example, Nancy Rotenier, a reporter at *Forbes*, documented the launch of the iconic Prada nylon backpack in 1995. Her article captured the public response to this understated logo, mounted on inexpensive materials (ripstop nylon), priced at \$450. This “anitstatus” [*sic*] status backpack set trends for years to come. The next year, Agins documented a contradictory trend, the expansion of logos to grand proportions. Her article, written for the general readership of *The Wall Street Journal*, noted that logos enable producers and marketers to offer inexpensive products such as t-shirts at a premium price. Although Agins offered this revelatory critique, it is clear that logos retained their power and allure for a large population of consumers as they continue to be produced. Digging deeper into periodical literature reveals counterpoints such as those offered by reporter Robert Barker who soon thereafter reported on a backlash against the unbridled corporate promotion of itself through product. Barker railed against the idea of “Human-As-Walking-Billboard” in his 1997 editorial for *Business Week*. In summary, periodical literature provides an invaluable tool for understanding consumer perception and market response to the introduction of specific lines.

Articles written coincident with the emergence of a particular product line or with the adoption of a fashionable trend are an invaluable source that can provide historical and business-specific context as well as a personal perspective of that moment-- a point of view that is difficult to otherwise recall given the passage of time. The changing aesthetics of logos can also be found in periodical articles written by reporters such as Agins, who documented the trend of imbedding graphic patterns of interlocking initials



into textiles in 2001. This subtler but still recognizable use of logos presented a new vision of branding at that time. *Business Week* writer Gail Edmondson offered insight into the machinations of conglomerates with her report on the makeover of Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) by the Gucci Group. In a 2002 article she discussed the negative impacts of over-licensing and how the restructuring program headed by Gucci Group was focused on changing the image of YSL in order to generate sales in “high-margin” accessories. It is clear that journalistic writing can be used to establish historical facts as well as historical/social context.

The business of fashion can also be understood through secondary source historical accounts. These are generally published for a popular audience. Texts of this kind (in particular the ones I have considered) are written by authors who had access to company archives, company employees, and other relevant primary sources. Authors with access to designers, key staff, and archival materials--such as Sara Forden who investigated the House of Gucci (2001) and Alicia Drake who documented the careers of Yves Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld (2006)-- provide both chronological data as well as insight into design decisions. Contemporary accounts of specific fashion designers in monthly periodicals can also be invaluable sources. A case in point is Jonathan VanMeter’s 1996 article in *Vogue*, which provided a critical look at Tommy Hilfiger’s logo-driven business. Understanding when and why logoed product lines were introduced is essential to understanding their historical significance. I utilize small quantities of anecdotal information drawn from sources of this kind.

### *Postmodernism and Fashion*

This investigation of the phenomenon of the logoed product reveals a mass of interpenetrating contradictions, categories that defy perfect generalizations, and definitions that are mutable. The inability to set fixed, definitive categories and to make generalizations is ultimately philosophically and intellectually unsatisfying. Revising longstanding definitions may cause consternation. Structure is required in order to successfully navigate these contradictions and potential controversies. Fortunately a unifying thread can be provided through application of postmodern discourse.

As indicated in the introduction, postmodernism is a body of theory about the nature of contemporary society that seeks to revise commonly held perceptions about reality, freedom, culture, and communication. The term postmodern is used to modify terms such as mindset and condition, as well as the myriad forms of cultural production including art, literature, and design. The term is now applied to culture at large and forms of cultural production of the 1950s onward, though the philosophical discourse described as postmodernism emerged some twenty years later. Notably, some authors who are categorized as “postmodern” thinkers are disinclined toward the label. Writers, working both before and after the coining of the term have been pulled into the canon based upon the ideas they put into text, rather than through a concerted effort to work within this philosophical construct.

The following review of literature represents only a small fraction of the many texts devoted to defining postmodernism and applying its theoretical constructs. The texts reviewed here are organized both thematically and chronologically within each theme. Logically the first texts represent seminal authors and present key tenets that will

prove relevant to this study and emerge in later works. Next I turn to texts that consider postmodern culture itself (the causes and characteristics thereof). This portion of the review provides a logical point of segue into a discussion of attributes of postmodern design, a tangible manifestation of culture. Finally I will turn to literature that provides a theoretical consideration of postmodern consumers. In this final portion of the review, I consider authors who were primarily interested in the state and nature of consumers.

One of the basic and widely agreed-upon tenets of the postmodern worldview, which originated in Martin Heidegger's *On The Essence of Truth* (1930), is a revision of the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy. The position proffered in this seminal work poses a challenge to the concept of history, the possibility of scientific rationality, and the historical notion of progress. In essence the work of Heidegger and the generations of theorists who have followed him, challenges the ability to make universalizing statements and allows for unbridled subjectivity. What this philosophical point of view essentially permits is the contemplation of multiple realities or multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon. When I turn to the issue of meaning of logos it will become useful and meaningful to consider the flexibility of meaning in light of this theoretical construct that seeks to make sense of the human condition in the late twentieth century.

A second widely manipulated tenet of postmodernism is a challenge to the concept of freedom and the possibility of unbridled rationality. The work of Michel Foucault, including *Discipline and Punish* (1975), is seminal in its critical exploration of hegemonic social practices functioning as a co-determinant in social interactions and thought. Foucault's insight into hidden power sources and how they impact knowledge and discourse spanned topics as diverse as prisons, psychiatry, and sexuality. My

exploration of the role of the fashion press, working in league with global conglomerates to promote fashion trends like the logo, follows his model. I argue for a type of cultural hegemony (stemming from the power of global conglomerates and the powerful fashion press) that I suggest has the ability to impact consumer interactions with and thoughts about logoed products.

A third key postmodern thinker is Jean Baudrillard. His work has been widely applied and interpreted by writers of texts devoted to postmodernism, as he explored the interchangeability of signs and their failure to communicate real content. He argued in *The System of Objects* (1968) that the meaning of an object (what a sign signifies) is dependent upon the complex context of use. Baudrillard, like his mentor Pierre Bourdieu, believed that objects have the ability to say something about a user, and to convey social significance. However, Baudrillard's belief that meaning is context-dependent problematizes that communication. Baudrillard shied away from the label "postmodernism," but the power of context to shape meaning which he discussed is an essential element of the theoretical construct of postmodernism as it has been developed by other authors. Importantly, the context-dependency of meaning is a facet of the postmodern condition that problematizes human communication. Baudrillard went on to argue in *The Intelligence of Evil* (2005) that imprecise communication as a facet of life in the late twentieth century led to both instability and insecurity in culture. I will show that multivalent communication is a hallmark of the fashion logo, though the inability to communicate a fixed and meaningful content is in direct contradiction to the logo's intended use. The application of theory of this kind reveals that the logo, an object and

symbol that is so simple and clear on the surface, is riddled with conceptual intricacies when it is placed into a context of consumption and communication.

The postmodern context or condition, it is argued, is the result of a phenomenal shift that occurred in the wake of World War II. Writers, drawing on the arguments of Karl Marx have argued that the shifts in culture are intimately tied to changes in capitalism in the 1950s (the term late capitalism is generally used to talk about this time period and the culture thereof). Harvard University Professor Emeritus Daniel Bell, writing in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1978) provides an early analysis of the cultural shift presented through the lens of a postmodern theorist. Bell argues that the modernist impulses to overthrow extant notions of art, design, and literature (in short the modernist *avant garde*) have been exterminated under the aegis of post-war capitalism, which institutionalized creativity and cultural rebellion in an effort to produce cultural commodities for the masses. Bell argues that mass media and mass cultural products for a mass audience led to the degeneration of innovative, iconoclastic, or “high-brow” culture. For Bell it is indisputably the rise of large profit-driven corporations that harness legions of human workers (not creators), paying them a pittance for their services, that is the locus of widespread cultural change. This point of view is in line with my assertion that fashion design has changed in light of the emergence of the global fashion conglomerate and its appeal to the mass market. However, whereas Bell unabashedly asserts that culture has been degraded by this shift, I will search for a more nuanced understanding of postmodern cultural products.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1991) David Harvey discusses the nature of culture in the late capitalist period. Although Harvey is unsure about the application of

the term postmodern (he sees both continuity and crisis regarding our relationship with the past), and is unsure if there is truly a coherent system that has replaced the modern period, he sees some of the same attributes that Bell highlighted in his analysis and develops them in greater detail. For Harvey, postmodernism “signals nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural products” (62). In particular he sees the shift to mass production (which changed the relationship between maker and product) as a fundamental part of this new condition wherein the person doing work no longer has full knowledge of the work, control or decision-making (123). Thus making and creating are utterly separate entities—this in turn impacts the nature of the commodity that is made. Furthermore, with the rise of mass production, Harvey points out there has come a revolution in the perception of classes (128) as large groups of people have access to great quantities of mass produced goods. For Harvey mass production has a hegemonic quality, as large corporations control the marketplace and steer consumer needs and desires (134). In essence Harvey sees the entire phenomenon of mass production as a catalyst for profound cultural change stemming from production and consumption, and by extension redefining the nature of makers and consumers. In my discussion of the fashion branded commodity, clear parallels will emerge between Harvey’s depiction of the marketplace in general and my discussion of the fashion marketplace in particular. I will show that mass production in the fashion industry has changed the aesthetics of products (i.e. logos emerged and fashion branded commodities developed) and I will suggest that the prevalence of fashion branded commodities across price points and product types has steered consumer needs and tastes. Furthermore, given the large number of fashion branded commodities that are created by

pedigreed companies that thereby have the ability to link status claims to their brands, the logoed handbags under consideration are also potentially linked to the issue of blurring social class boundaries through commodities.

In Harvey's view, the late capitalist structure and all that it entails with regards to production "has been accompanied on the consumption side by a much greater attention to quick changing fashions and the mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that it implies" (156). The need of large companies to accelerate consumption, Harvey argues, has changed the focus of production from goods to events or spectacles—by spectacles he means things that constantly change for the sake of change (157). A parallel example may be made here. Large portions of the fashion industry have shifted from making fashion designs to making fashion branded commodities that rely on the spectacle of the brand (which I show later may be subject to continual revision) for the relevance and desirability. Control of information (vested in the hands of large corporations is also of interest to Harvey as he sees the control as fundamental to shaping culture and popular tastes (160). Again the cultural critique that this author mounts on a macro level can be applied to a discussion of fashion branded commodities that rely on control of information by both producers of fashionable products and producers of information (the press).

While some postmodern theory deals with the economic and social underpinnings of culture in general, there is a body of theory that looks specifically at the nature of cultural production, cultural products, and their utilization by consumers. Postmodern theorists with an interest in this arena strive to explain how and why cultural production (i.e. art and design) is different in the past forty years or so. The initial texts in the

selection that follows were selected from this large body of literature because they present widely acknowledged and referenced views of postmodern cultural production in general. Following those seminal texts I review a series of articles that address properties of design and fashion in particular.

In Duke University Professor Fredric Jameson's text "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1988), which was originally an address given at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1982, he argues that the distinction between high culture and mass culture has eroded. Jameson believes that academia has traditionally been the caretaker charged with upholding the distinction between "a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism, of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, and in transmitting difficult and complex skills of listening and seeing to its initiates" (111). With the blurring of the lines between popular and elite culture, Jameson finds that academia is no longer able to uphold these standards. The breakdown of authority and the blurring of lines between high and low culture, traditional and popular art and design are concepts that I will explore in my discussion of the fashion branded commodity.

With regards to the aesthetic nature of art, design, mass media and literature Jameson is clear about what he sees as the defining feature—pastiche. Jameson defines pastiche as a "blank parody" (113). For Jameson pastiche is imitation that mocks without the intention to do so. It is nostalgic repetition of an old theme that reiterates the past without paying either true homage or making a meaningful interpretation. While seeking to revisit the past it inadvertently trivializes it. Pastiche is neither purely imitative (as in the making of a perfect copy) nor innovative. For Jameson pastiche is evidence of the



death of the individual subject—a subject who has been crushed under the weight of corporate capitalism and who flounders in the absence of class hegemony, which Jameson believes has all but disappeared (114). Jameson laments the fading power of the elites (aristocrats) because he views them as drivers of high culture. The loss of unique selves directly impacts the ability to create and shape culture. Innovation becomes impossible in the wake of this loss and according to Jameson “the essential message” of postmodern design will be “the failure of art and aesthetics, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past” (114). Jameson, a literary critic and Marxist, clearly interprets the changes in artistic production in a negative light—viewing capitalism as the yoke that leads the worker rather than as the presence that entices him to pull. My consideration of the fashion branded commodity, a type of fashion design that is notably different from traditional fashion design (and which blurs the boundary between high and low/ mass and class) must grapple with this interpretation and determine whether or not aesthetic condemnation is required.

Articles targeted at a fashion-oriented academic audience have dealt specifically with aspects of postmodern design aesthetics in the realm of fashion. As I seek to categorize the fashion branded commodity as a species of postmodern fashion, it makes sense to make note of the characteristics that have been identified by these scholars. A widely acknowledged tenet of postmodern expression is that it relies largely upon de-contextualized quotation and the juxtaposition of incongruous elements. According to Susan Kaiser in a 1990 article entitled “Fashion as Popular Culture: The Postmodern Self in the Global Fashion Marketplace,” these component parts may come from “different social, cultural, and historical contexts” (522). This has the effect of making meaning

unstable, and often results in highlighting elements of cultural products that were previously concealed. An example of an incongruous juxtaposition would be a Chanel handbag, priced in the thousands of dollars, its logo (presumably) a signifier of high style and high class, made of distressed denim, a fabric implying simple utilitarian origins. Alternatively, one might consider a Juicy Couture canvas or velour satchel decorated with crowns and flourishes reminiscent of the royal seal of Great Britain, and bearing line names such as “Blueblood” and “Now Power Tote.”<sup>1</sup> Such contemporary accessory designs should be considered expressions of the postmodern point of view and conceptualized within the wider framework of its theories. Fashionable objects may be considered concrete effects of these complex relationships. As I review the products revealed in the content analysis, this aspect of postmodern design will be considered in greater detail.

Professor of Cultural Studies Elizabeth Wilson noted in 1992 that the postmodern cultural products can be utterly agnostic and may be described as promoting a “glittering, depthless polish” and a “world of denuded feeling” (4). Yet the emptiness of the postmodern condition is not to be confused with a void. The postmodern view “is a distorted, or thwarted utopian impulse, which twists the problem-- of alienation at the polluting ugly underside of consumer culture-- into a kind of solution” (4). By this she means the hollowness, fragmentation, emphasis on surface, and disconnectedness from a shared narrative are all channeled in the postmodern world into cultural product. The aforementioned may characterize the form and content of objects of design. In a sense the essence of postmodern culture and cultural products is the absence of a true

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<sup>1</sup> These specific lines were available Spring/Summer 2010.

constitution. When this understanding of postmodernism is applied to the objects that exist within the postmodern world, we may come to a new understanding of them. A product such as a logoed handbag, for example, may seem to assuage alienation, emptiness, and disconnectedness as it may appear to link its owner with a world constructed around a brand. Surface detail may be construed as true narrative. Surface luster may be conceived as depth. In this sense, postmodern theory facilitates a new understanding of our relationships with the things we use to make meaning.

An additional aspect of postmodern theory that will prove relevant to a meaningful investigation of the phenomenon of logoed handbags and hand luggage is the concept of fragmentation as it applies to both meaning and identity. Wilson has written that fragmentation of meaning is a condition in which an individual is bombarded by a multiplicity of cultural influences resulting in the impossibility of making meaning. As the concept pertains to personal identity, Wilson goes on to iterate that in the postmodern condition personal identity may be viewed as a sort of fiction that results in a loss of feeling or a split between thought and feeling (7). Writing about the loss of personal identity, she states, “We become actors, inventing our costumes for each successive appearance, disguising the recalcitrant body we can never entirely transform. Perhaps style becomes a substitute for identity” (9). The fragmentation of personal identity and the perception that identity is mutable may explain the motivations voiced by postmodern consumers who purchase and connect with logoed handbags and hand luggage, objects that at least appear to have a fixed meaning inscribed upon their surfaces and which are marketed as products that may assist with self-completion.

In “Coming to Terms with *Postmodern*: Theories and Concepts of Contemporary Culture and Their Implications for Apparel Scholars” (1996) Marcia Morgado synthesizes and then applies many of the basic tenets of postmodernism to a general discussion of fashion. She begins by noting, “In postmodern culture fashion is explained in terms of changes of a superficial nature...change merely for the sake of change or, less benignly, as change solely for the sake of commerce” (44). This assertion upends the long-lived notion that cultural or political currents, or some other deeply entrenched and shared sensibility is at the root of fashion change. However, I will argue that this understanding should not lead to the assertion that postmodern fashion is without expression, even if the expression is superficial. On the contrary, the postmodern condition is full of powerful impulses that express themselves in cultural production. The impulse to attain constant superficial change may be construed at least as an expression of the commodity culture that has emerged.

An important tenet of postmodern design that Morgado highlights is “decentering,” defined as a shift of focus to highlight what has been devalued. Morgado writes, “the collapse of distinctions between elite, mass, and street fashions” and “an emphasis on ornaments and decoration” (as opposed to design principles) and “concern for image and superficial appearance for its own sake” are all expressions of these overarching manifestations of postmodernism (43, 46). I will show that the movement of the logo from the interior of a fashionable object to its exterior is undoubtedly an important example of decentering. This concept provides yet another conceptual way of understanding the nature of fashion branded commodities and how they function as an expression of postmodern culture.

A final aspect of the postmodern condition that impacts design is ephemerality. Morgado notes, “Insistence on novelty, replacement, and transformation are paramount and infiltrate every sphere of social life” (44). The emergence of the seasonal “it bag,” the proliferation of branding in general, and the shift from two design “seasons” per year to ongoing design and production models, producing in excess of ten lines per year, may all be considered manifestations of the ephemerality posited in the postmodern condition. I will show however, that concept of ephemerality of design has changed as the speed of the fashion cycle has escalated and this may be linked to the predictability of contemporary fashions as well as the constant use of “theme and variation” (modes of design wherein a basic motif is worked and reworked over and over again throughout the seasons) which compromises the traditional notion of ephemerality in fashion whereby design change was both conceptual and stylistic and markedly more substantial. Consumer fatigue and boredom necessitates constant renewal, though the renewal in some postmodern fashion may not meet the high standard required for the accolade of design innovation. Nowhere is the tactic of predictable theme and variation design more obvious than in the realm of logoed products wherein color, texture, scale and materials can be endlessly reworked around a basic and fundamental aspect of a company’s design message.

Baudrillard offered one additional theoretical point that can be used as a tool for understanding the repetition (one might even argue recidivism) of design in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Baudrillard argued in “The Illusion of the End” (2005) that the pace of society has quickened to an extreme extent. He said technology and high-tech communication capabilities are such that they caused the

collapse of the façade of history. With the notion of history in doubt and the creation of new histories in jeopardy, he argued, “The end of history is, alas, also the end of the dustbins of history. There are no longer any dustbins for disposing of old ideologies, old regimes, old values” (*Selected Writings* 263). Baudrillard’s observation provides a lens through which to consider the consistent pattern of repetition, sampling, re-working, and re-issuing of fashion designs. As I have argued there is a world of fashion design that continues to be innovative and ephemeral while there is also a world of fashion branded commodities, that is operating at a quicker pace and is more heavily reliant on the myriad technologies that drive global business, which makes the cast-offs of history fuel for “new” design. Baudrillard’s insight may be useful in coming to terms with this matter.

The nature of design in the postmodern era, which is an expression of the general cultural milieu of late capitalism, is also an expression of the state of the individual--a reflection of the consumer. The complexity of the postmodern cultural context makes problematic understanding definitively the relationship between consumers and their goods. The theoretical constructs presented in the following paragraphs will be used to help navigate the discussion of this relationship.

In “The Object as Image: The Italian Scooter” (1988) Dick Hebdige argues that reading commodities necessitates understanding geographical, temporal and a wide range of cultural variables (as a start) and furthermore the reading is dependent upon whether the commodity is considered in production, in the process of mediation (as it is communicated through things like advertising), or in the midst of consumption. Hebdige cautions that we must take into account “a maze of independent but interlocking frames—drawing each back at every point to consider the structures in which each

individual frame is housed” (129). The variability of signification is, Hebdige notes, endemic to late twentieth century culture. He cautions that as one works through interpretations one may hear “echoes” (i.e. repetition of ideas or themes) but one should not as a result allow those echoes to be “closed off, summed up, reduced to a silence or amplified into a thunderous conclusion” (131). In essence Hebdige asserts the cautionary reminder that writers working with postmodern theory often require (the lure of the meta narrative is so strong)—no matter how tempting broad conclusions may be, the state of culture is too complex to permit them. In my considerations of consumers of postmodern design in a postmodern context I must heed the caution that Hebdige’s article provides.

Mike Featherstone, a professor of sociology and communications argued in his text *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991, 2007) that late capitalist (postmodern) consumers are less concerned with the use-value of the commodities they buy than they are with the exchange value or symbolism. According to Featherstone, the declassification of society (i.e. the break down of class structure or what he refers to as the deregulation of social life) has made consumers so strongly oriented to exchange value of goods that the memory of the original use value is sometimes virtually “obliterated” (14). Problematizing consumer orientation towards the symbolic properties of goods is the rapidity with which goods are produced, the quantity of goods in the marketplace, and the overall “cultural disorder” that makes the signs very difficult to read (19).

Amidst the surfeit of choices, according to Featherstone, consumers are also troubled (confused) by the blurring of the high-low, mass-class boundaries (96). Importantly Featherstone suggests that individuals or groups that have knowledge or

cultural capital are able to discern quality (17) and that knowledge is the key to keeping the appearance of social distance (18-19). For the average, mass consumer, however, Featherstone's view is fairly bleak. He posits mass consumers as inordinately concerned with lifestyle and the aestheticization of daily life. He believes that mass consumers taken as a whole are immersed in an unreality that is crafted by hegemonic capitalist forces such as advertising (84). Featherstone's work provides a touchstone for my discussion of consumers (which are not considered a monolithic entity) and their relationship to fashion branded commodities.

The complexity of the relationship between consumers and products is also explored in "Making Do: Uses and Tactics" (2007)<sup>2</sup> by Michel de Certeau, Jesuit scholastic and philosopher. He argues that postmodern consumers are able to enact oppositional and resistive acts of consumption in which they evade and subvert dominant "texts" (interpretations, symbolic associations) with consumer products. De Certeau believes that individuals can insinuate into a system that has been imposed upon them and therein superimpose their own ideas onto an extant system, thereby creating a "unique space" in which to operate (163). For de Certeau consumption is characterized by "ruses," "fragmentation," and "poaching," and is often "clandestine" (164). Of course the way in which a product is consumed is highly varied. De Certeau seems to make room for the notion that some consumers may operate solely (or almost solely) within the constraining order and proffered sets of meanings. He notes, "between the person (who uses the product) and these products (indexes of the 'order' which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the uses he makes of them" (165).

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<sup>2</sup> This text is an excerpt from his 1984 book (translated into English) *The Practices of Everyday Life*.



Notably scholars working in both consumer science and anthropology have reached similar conclusions about the relationship between late twentieth century consumers and their goods, though they have reached these conclusions through vehicles such as case studies and surveys. Finding parallel assertions across disciplines and methodologies bolsters the potentially unsettling position that I will make, namely that one cannot pinpoint definitively what a fashion branded commodity means to a consumer or what function it performs in her life.

### *Branding and Brand Identity*

The development of goods with dominant logos is intimately related to the relatively recent marketing practices of branding and brand identity development. The logoed product is one that places the brand on equal footing with the design of the object. It elevates the importance of the brand and makes the brand visible and tangible. A review of some literature that has investigated brands, brand identity, and the importance of brands to highly diverse consumers is therefore useful in terms of developing an understanding of what brands are, how they are intended to function, and how they have developed over time. Based on the understanding that the fashion branded commodity is a product that puts the brand on par with the design, this chronological review of literature is crucial.

A 1967 article by Grubb and Grathwohl presented an instrumental idea which reshaped notions about how and why consumers interact with commodities. In “Consumer Self-Concept, Symbolism and Market Behavior: A Theoretical Approach” the authors upend the notion that a consumer’s personality is what links him or her to a

product choice (i.e. people with certain kinds of personalities buy certain kinds of products) and move the discussion to link the psychological construct of self-concept with the symbolic value of goods. This move helps to cement the link between goods and symbolic meaning on the part of the consumer. By extension their approach helps open the door for a reconsideration of the importance of brands in the lives of consumers who strive to represent and complete themselves through the acquisition of goods. This notion is fundamental to this study, as fashion branded commodities manifest symbolism in the form of a logo. That symbolism can thereby be incorporated (in varying degrees and ways) into a consumer's self-concept.

Research from the field of consumer science demonstrates that not all consumers think about and use brands in the same way. A 1981 article by Munson and Spivey entitled "Product and Brand User Stereotypes Among Social Classes" found that differences generally exist between the social classes with regards to product and brand use. This research in essence sought to overturn a 1969 study by Bleda and Kassarian ("An Overview of Market Segmentation") that had argued product preferences across social classes had disappeared due to the influence of mass media. Munson and Spivey found that there were strong differences in perception of brands that are highly value-expressive (i.e status items like cars) but there was minimal difference with regards to utilitarian brands such as washing machines. Writing and speaking about class difference in America is nothing short of a taboo, articles like this provide evidence and make room for asserting that there are distinctions to be made. Fashion, which is highly value-expressive and can be related to status and group claims requires consideration of consumer difference based on class.

Value-expressive brands, by implication, are related to making claims about the self or (by some interpretations) completing the self. Michael Solomon argued in “The Role of Products as Social Stimuli” that product symbolism (i.e. brand identity) is consumed in order to define and clarify behavior in a social context. He argued that consumers rely on products to shape self-image and to maximize role performance. Building on the theoretical work of Wicklund and Gollwitzer--*Symbolic Self-Completion* (1982)—Solomon offered a series of propositions. He proposed that symbolic properties are context dependent, that the symbolism of products can drive behavior and facilitate performance, and that self-appraisal and self-definition are facilitated by a consumer’s relation to product identity. As I consider the powerful allure of fashion branded commodities to highly diversified consumers, I will argue that some consumers use these branded products to bolster self-image and to help them navigate social situations.

The power and importance of branding has also been explored in detail by professionals from the world of marketing. Stanford University professor of marketing Jennifer Aaker, writing in 1997, notes that brand personality often takes on characteristics similar to a human personality; it is complex and multifaceted. Brand personalities serve both symbolic and expressive functions for the consumers who adopt them and incorporate them into their self-concept. The traits associated with a brand are developed “through product related attributes, product category associations, brand name, symbol or logo, advertising, style, price, and distribution channel” (348). Understanding the power of brand personalities (brand identities) offers another way to understand how and why consumers are drawn to products and offers a way of explaining how consumers use brands symbolically to augment, bolster, or complete their self-concept. Of course any

discussion that argues for consumer adoption of brand personality must do so with careful attention paid to the diversity that exists among consumers and their motivations.

The literature from the world of marketing can also help us think about specific kinds of consumer motivations. Boston University professor of management Susan Fournier (1998) argues that just as personal relationships give us self-esteem and add meaning to our lives by impacting our psychological, socio-cultural and relational selves, so too can a relationship with a brand that has been masterfully positioned to provide a relationship with the consumer (345-346). Once again, this kind of thinking about brand use and meaning by consumers is helpful in navigating the relationships between consumers and their uses of fashion branded commodities, but must be considered only one of many angles by which to approach the complex and varied motivations of consumers in general.

It has been argued that brands simplify consumer decisions and offer them a sort of assurance. At the same time, they may also create pleasure or suggest identity. Brand design agency executive, writer, and lecturer Jerry Kathman noted in an article in *Design Issues* (2002) that we have entered a new era defined in part by a marketplace characterized by globalization and global brands, niche brands, and brands with short life-cycles. Kathman claims that the importance of branding, and the designer's role in branding, cannot be underestimated. He believes the designer is a key player in creating brand equity as he or she designs iconic imagery, logos, typography, and color schemes in a variety of media. Kathman's point that modern designers manifest their personal identity, their clout in the industry, and their lifestyle vision in their branding and logos is key. It speaks to the fact that designers today lavish extraordinary energies in this

realm—energies that were traditionally relegated to other kinds of design. Kathman's point supports my assertion that fashion branded commodities reflect a new kind of design that is relevant in postmodern culture.

Consumer understanding of a brand is based in part in the marketed brand identity but is also shaped by reference groups, argue Jennifer Edson Escalas and James R. Bettman (2003). These authors assert that when consumers appropriate brand associations it is related to the usage of the brand by a reference group. That group may be one in which the consumer is a member or it may be a group to which a consumer aspires to belong. They argue that consumer connections to a brand and its meaning is more than just the packaged brand identity. They assert that “brand meaning is most often dependent on the entire constellation or gestalt or the set of brand associations” (340). This position has the ability to both complicate and nuance any argument that posits a symbolic connection between consumers and brands for the way in which a consumer views a brand and thinks about using a brand is shaped by the myriad factors that make a reference group unique. Furthermore, the characteristics of the consumer (his or her self-concept) will also shape the way and degree to which she responds to brand associations. This implies that while one can make a case for consumers being drawn to a brand based on the brand identity and using the brand for its symbolic properties, the specifics of both the consumer's unique understanding and his or her use are highly varied.

James Twitchell (2004), an English professor at the University of Florida, argues that contemporary culture tells its story through branding, and that the brand itself is a story attached to a manufactured product. As individuals engage with brands, he

maintains, the stories become participatory or dialogic. Thus, one doesn't buy just a product or a design, one buys into a rich and meaningful narrative—one buys into the equity that Kathman mentioned. This point of view suggests yet another way of interpreting consumer motivation for the purchase and use of logoed.

This study does grapple with fashion branded commodities that are targeted at a youth market, therefore it is important to consider how young age and lower level of social development impact a consumer's relationship to a brand. Nguyen's and John's 2005 article entitled "The Development of Self-Brand Connections in Children and Adolescents" provides insight into when and to what degree children form relationships with brands. The authors found that self-brand connections develop between middle childhood and early adolescence (roughly ages seven to thirteen) and that connections to brands and use of brands to bolster self-concept increase as the child ages. The authors argue that this is related to psychological and social development but likely also influenced by socialization and exposure to brands over time. Thinking about the ways in which young people view and use brands (to symbolize group membership, sophistication, knowledge) in ways that are both similar and different to their adult counterparts will add nuance to my discussion of the young consumer's use of fashion branded commodities.

Business strategy and management consultant and professor at the Rennes School of Business in France Dr. Uche Onkonkwo (2007) noted that luxury brands are highly consumer-centered and that the purchase of luxury goods relates to fulfillment that is scarcely based in the product itself. Literature related to luxury branding is important to this study because of the complex network of psycho-social messages and promises to

fulfill emotional needs, desires, and fantasies that are imbedded in the marketing of luxury goods and products such as handbags with logos.

Onkonkwo provides a detailed examination of the “added value” that luxury goods provide to the consumer and argues that luxury goods are part of not only one’s personal and social identity, but also contribute to one’s lived experience. A brand, including its signs and symbols, “is the reason that consumers associate themselves with a luxury company. It is what creates and sustains the attraction and desire for products. ...Brands are complete packages that provide a source of identity for products. ...This is what draws consumers to luxury brands and remains their source of satisfaction” (4). According to Onkonkwo, the most visible aspect of a brand is its name, which is reflected in its logo (107). The logo itself plays a key role in the recognition of a product by consumers. Although Onkonkwo connects only luxury brands to issues of a consumer’s psychological and emotional fulfillment and does not engage mainstream products, her work provides a lens through which to view a consumer’s use of luxury brand logoed handbags and hand luggage. Such objects comprise a substantial portion of the handbags and hand luggage revealed by my content analysis.

Marcel Danesi (2008), professor of anthropology and communications, explores the power of advertising to influence collective perceptions and generate meaning. More importantly, he addresses the connection of logos to the transfer of meaning from a product to a consumer. Although branding had begun to assert its authority in the post-war period, Danesi notes that since the middle of the 1980s, “Brands are no longer perceived to be just things for consumption; they are seen mainly as the means for securing a better job, protecting oneself against the hazards of old age and illness,

attaining popularity and personal prestige, obtaining praise from others, increasing pleasure, advancing socially, having fun, and maintaining health” (139). His text presents concepts related to the symbolic, emotional, and psychological appeals of advertising, brand names, and logos, providing an informative and authoritative overview. Danesi’s insight into the power and authority of branding can be used as a lever for unpacking and explaining the widespread adoption of logoed products by consumers.

Whether or not brand personalities “rub off” on consumers is a question that was asked by Park and John in “Got to Get You Into My Life: Do Brand Personalities Rub Off on Consumers?” (2010). In this study the researchers found that only certain types of consumers are likely to view brands as opportunities to develop their own self concept. In particular, consumers who endorse “incremental theory” (a belief that their personal qualities are malleable) (656) are prone to use brands for personal enhancement or self-improvement. This research expands the ways in which I can differentiate among consumers and their relationships to brands, adding points of consideration to arguments presented by authors like Munson.

Preference related to the conspicuousness of branding is a final issue that is most certainly relevant to this study and which has been explored by researchers in the fields of consumer science and consumer psychology. Berger and Ward (2010) found that while less explicit branding generally leads to an increased likelihood of misidentification of the branded product among the masses, that people with greater cultural capital tend to prefer these more subtle signals. What they determined is that signaling was achieved within their reference group (among others who have similar domain-specific knowledge)



and therefore facilitated social interaction with others “in the know” (2). The specificity of their conclusions with regards to a demographic and preferences for product identification (either an explicit logo or subtle design feature) is informative and can help to shape discussion of the variety of fashionable products in the marketplace (fashion designs and fashion branded commodities) as well as the variety of logos (in terms of shape and size) at any given time.

What all of these texts--written across several decades and derived from a variety of disciplines--reveal is that brands are powerful, provocative, valuable entities for both producers and consumers of products. A deftly conceived brand identity can have a broad reach across demographics and may retain a firm grasp of multitudes of consumers if it is nurtured, protected, and developed. In this exploration of logoed products—products that put the brand on par with the design—revisiting ideas discussed by branding experts will be a key to understanding their success.

### *A History of Fashion Before Mass Consumption*

This study is concerned with a fashion phenomenon that is new in terms of both its design concept and in terms of its positioning towards the mass market and mainstream (i.e. non-elite) consumers. Understanding that fashion for the masses is a relatively new and continuously developing concept is crucial to much of the argument that follows. The literature reviewed in this section follows the historical chronology of fashion from medieval times to the present.

There is debate among scholars regarding the point at which the *majority* of consumers (i.e. not just the elite) began to participate in fashion. Understanding the basic

trajectory of fashion history as it pertains to adoption of fashionable dress by the masses merits review as the ability for a large and diverse demographic of consumers to participate in fashion is fundamental to the analysis of the adoption of logoed products. Additionally part of the argument of this research hinges on the idea that the very nature of fashion has changed and therefore merits redefinition in light of the development of the fashion branded commodity. The following texts provide both essential historical context for my study while many also raise the issue of what it means to participate in fashion.

Texts devoted to the early history of fashion such as Herbert Norris' *Medieval Costume and Fashion*, first published in 1927 posit that the fashion cycle emerged in the twelfth century among the aristocratic elite. It is widely argued that fashionable styles emerged and changed in part due to emulation of the elite by the under classes. What is unclear, and what is utterly crucial, is the extent to which the upper classes were copied. Evidence of the quality of interpretations, the number of people able to follow the fashionable trend, and the length of the delay between style introduction, style emulation, and style change are largely unknown quantities. It is also known that the aristocratic elite provided the working class with livery, beautiful clothes that were gifted so that the worker might represent the privileged lords and ladies in style. Once again, the evidence is spotty with regards to how closely the livery followed the fashionable trends and how often the livery was modified.<sup>3</sup> Although tangible indications are often lacking, the

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<sup>3</sup> See John Styles, *The Dress of Everyday People: Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, Chapter 1 for a brilliant discussion of the evidentiary problems that surround reconstructing the history of fashion for the under classes prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Among the points he makes is that distinctions of quality, color, fabric choice, and overall comportment are often not documented or might be lost on a modern

general notion that scholars accept is that the under classes participated in fashion through emulation (to the best of their ability) of the design of clothes. The notion that being “in fashion” is related to keeping up with high style dress styles is a theme that courses throughout fashion texts and is applied consistently to every era through the end of the 1960s. Notably this study marks a break with the trajectory of the past in that it reveals fashions targeted at the masses that were not defined by major stylistic change over time.

The degree (quality and quantity) to which the masses were able to participate in fashion is a matter that John Styles engages in *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England* (2007). He notes that from 1750 to 1850 “working people’s disposable incomes were low, and their real wages rose only very slowly. The vast majority of earnings were spent on foodstuffs” (5). The notion implicit here is that any involvement in the purchase of fashionable goods would have necessarily been on a small scale. Styles argues that consumers of fashion at the lowest socioeconomic levels could participate in small ways. He notes the low cost of a yard of ribbon, a handkerchief, or a pair of silver plated buckles as examples of fashionable items that could be purchased on a small budget (8). Styles goes on to argue that fashion, especially in the eighteenth century, was about overall presentation. One’s full state of dress in addition to manners and movement marked one as being in or out of fashion. As such, Styles believes that “The more optimistic readings of eighteenth-century fashion in dress that present it as a site of unprecedented, radical democratization, with all kinds of

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historian. Additionally, there are great differences among the working class (i.e. the lifestyle of a cordwainer or mantua maker as opposed to a field hand or street seller). Understanding the evidentiary problems with early fashion history puts into context any assertion about the lower classes “participating in fashion.”

potential for unbridled emulation, are, therefore, misplaced” (12). Clearly I am in agreement with Styles. My review of his text and the other texts in this portion of the review all are meant to build the case, carefully and with historical detail that in the late twentieth century the nature of fashion changed both with regards to aesthetics and with regards to consumption.

Also making a strong argument for restraint in ascribing participation in fashion to the under classes of the eighteenth century is Daniel Roche. In *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime* (1994), Roche argues that there are problems in terms of reconstructing the fashion system of a bygone era in which documentation is incomplete. He argues that the way clothing functions is a matter of which pieces are put together, the overall dynamic they attain, and their consequent function or significance. As such, pictorial sources (which typically document the under classes in a derogatory and indeed incomplete manner) fail to give a complete picture (34). Roche also argues that in an age of relatively primitive travel and communication, rates of transmission and acquisition varied greatly from place to place and according to sex, precise social position, and age. Thus any generalizations about the under classes participating in fashion are likely to be overstated.

Both Roche and Styles explore the issue of participation in fashion in an era that was defined by profound changes in terms of production of material goods. Revolutionary inventions facilitated mass production of consumer goods, thereby making it possible for consumers across the classes to purchase more frequently and more often. What makes Roche and Styles so provocative is the fact that they question the relationship between consumption and fashionableness-- an issue that is not questioned

often enough in literature that documents later eras for which a greater range of data is available. This research also explores the relationship between fashion consumption and fashionableness as I examine the goings on within the two worlds of fashion.

Evidence of mass participation in fashion becomes more copious and varied as we draw closer to the present. Primary source materials, including newspaper advertisements, dry goods store and department store ephemera, mail order catalogs, and photographs of all kinds (posed, snap-shots, professional and amateur) all provide evidence that from the later half of the nineteenth century onwards, with the ongoing development and refinement of the ready-to-wear industry, the masses had increased access to fashionable clothes. The source material from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century indicates silhouette similarity between society maven and schoolgirls. Comparison between the Sears catalog and the Parisian couture of the early twentieth century, for example, shows quick and literal interpretation and dissemination of fashion from the high end to the mass market. In general, texts that document the history of fashion rely heavily on this kind of evidence to argue for the power of the trickle-down effect but fail to consider the presence of the fashion branded commodity in the mix of products from the 1970s onward. They fail to consider how the presence of such items has changed our conception of what constitutes fashion and fashionableness. This research augments the history of fashion by considering both of these issues.

### Chapter 3: Historical Background of the Fashion Industry

The splintering of fashion into two worlds will be explored through the detailed investigation of the logo in chapters five and six. The discussion that follows sets up the complex historical context that developed commencing in the first decades of the twentieth century. This brief and selective historical background provides additional contextualization and explanation for my theoretical construction of the two worlds of fashion.

#### *The Business of Fashion*

The way the business of fashion is run today is markedly different from how it was run forty years ago. The change in the structure of the fashion industry, from a community of individual, independent designers whose boutique businesses set fashionable trends to a highly organized and interwoven network of mass producers implementing complex business agreements, is directly related to the emergence of the logo as a fashion phenomenon and the development of the world of the fashion branded commodity. Therefore the trajectory of the industry through this period of change merits some review. Understanding the history of the business of fashion design can help the reader come to terms with fashion designs that are intrinsically tied to business stratagem and that diverge in important ways from traditional notions of fashion design.

Prior to the 1960s, design and production of fashionable apparel was centralized and was unique to a few geographical locations. Designers created and innovated with elite target clients in mind, and the masses sought copies of these chic seasonal looks

from manufacturers large and small. The genius of each individual designer was lauded by the press and, in turn, largely believed by the public.

Prior to the 1960s fashion designers were kings and queens of small domains that were largely filled with intimate associates and customers. The great majority of known designers were French couturiers, while a few American designers (many of whom were foreign born and/or trained abroad) were also accorded this lofty status by the middle of the twentieth century. Designers were an elite group, standing in stark opposition to the great many manufacturers who supplied the mass market with goods of varying quality, ranging from very fine to rather rough. This is an important point. The average consumer did not have access to designer merchandise of any kind. Twitchell pointedly noted that “the fabricators [of high-end fashion] stayed in guarded isolation until the 1970s, when a new generation of executives swept into several of the industry’s top companies and set them on an ambitious new course. These modern managers focused on ‘distribution strategies,’ ‘emerging markets,’ and ‘brand creation.’ Those were foreign concepts in the luxury goods business” (2002 126-127). Twitchell’s observation is fundamental to this study—design as big business required a new kind of design for the masses. The altered situation in which the designers existed as a result of their domain being infiltrated by corporate strategy makers is fundamental to the shifts that came both in terms of design and in terms of the conceptualization of fashion itself.

Long the setters of trends for the rest of the fashion industry, the coterie of elite designers found themselves having to change their mode of operation in the 1970s--having to follow directives from managers who were not a part of the intimate circle, and having to pay close attention to the financial bottom line. With increased attention to

fiscal responsibility, designer collections began to demonstrate a move from seasonal design and innovation to long-term marketability. Recognizable and reliable designs came to define the product lines of trendsetters and, in turn, all sectors of the fashion industry. Thomas noted, “Corporate tycoons and financiers saw the potential. They bought--or took over-- luxury companies from elderly founders or incompetent heirs, turned the houses into brands, and homogenized everything” (9). Homogeneity and emphasis on branding, it will be shown, are part and parcel of the logo phenomenon.

The emergence of fashion conglomerates is undoubtedly linked to the profound changes in fashion that have taken place in the last three to four decades. LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey), formed in 1987, led the way by amassing a stable of heritage labels, including the prestigious brands that name the conglomerate, and design houses such as Dior and Fendi. Changes came *en masse* in the early 1990s with the development of conglomerates such as PPR (Pinault Printemps Redoute)<sup>1</sup>, which presently includes brands such as Gucci, YSL Rive Gauche, Balenciaga, and Bottega Venetta; and Richemont, a Swiss holding company that includes Cartier, Montblanc, and Chloe. The impact of the corporate structure has been profound. According to a recent article on the market for luxury goods, “In 1977, Vuitton was merely a small family business with sales under \$20 million. Fifteen years later, the \$1 billion mark was attained” (Dubois 36). The massive change in profitability has a great deal to do with marketing, which had been modest or non-existent when the companies were still family owned and run. New ownership has impacted formerly small and exclusive design houses on many levels including design, production, distribution, and advertising. Many formerly exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> This company was founded in 1963 but entered the luxury goods sector in the late 1980s.



companies now produce their wares internationally and make them available for purchase at retailers around the globe.

As a result of this fundamental shift in the business structure that defined the leaders of the industry, the messages that fashionable dress may convey and the types of products that are designed and sold have undergone profound changes. A shift from the importance of design innovation to the importance of the designer and his or her brand was first glimpsed in the 1920s, escalated in the late 1940s, and reached critical mass in the 1970s. Sociology professor Diana Crane noted in a text from 2000,

The major source of income for prewar firms that survived and new firms that entered the market after the war [WWII] became the royalties obtained from licensing a great many types of products ranging from clothing to household goods. By the 1970s, product licensing and perfumes were the major sources of profits for these firms. Clothing styles, including both haute couture and ready-to-wear, were secondary revenue sources that were often primarily used to create a prestigious image for the company thus enhancing the salability of other products. (142)

This study shows that many of these “other products” were accessories, including handbags and hand luggage that were (by the 1970s) characterized by dominant logos. But what is ultimately more important is the wider phenomenon that ensued as a result of clothing design becoming secondary to many designers, and reliable, often logoed, products taking pride of place (at least in terms of revenue reports). What ultimately happened is a skewing of the very notion of what fashion is. The ability of the designer brand to serve as full surrogate for design innovation in the minds of many consumers

has led to widespread talking at cross-purposes about “fashion.” Ultimately much of what passes as fashion among consumers, in the images of advertising campaigns, and in the verbiage of fashion magazines, does not live up to the traditional definition of innovation and ephemerality nor the original *raison d’être* of the designers whose brands still exist today. Marking the difference between fashion design and fashion branded commodities is an important step that needs to be made in the writing of fashion history and will be accomplished through the ensuing exploration of the logoed handbag.

### *The Designer and the Consumer*

In order to understand the profundity of the shift that occurred beginning in the late 1960s into the early 1970s, it is necessary to have a fundamental understanding of the trajectory of the role of the fashion designer in relation to his or her consumer. Most fashion historians concur that the fashion industry as we conceive it today was born in 1858 when Charles Frederick Worth, the “father of haute couture,” first opened the doors to his atelier. Prior to Worth, dress styles emerged (typically a specific origin is unknown) and were slavishly copied to varying degrees (of skill and cost) by a culture at large. Worth changed the garment-making industry by wresting creative control out of the hands of the consumer and consequently putting it into his own.

Design innovation and exertion of a specific taste level and point of view were fundamental to the move from garment maker to fashion designer—the move that Worth pioneered. Equally important, however, was the fact that Worth’s *name* became synonymous with good taste and an enlightened sense of fashion. In the ensuing decades, Worth commanded a large retinue of prestigious clients who were lured to his atelier by

virtue of his streamlined system of production (that manufactured garments much more rapidly than other ateliers), his evolving styles, but also, undeniably, by the innate value of his name. The Worth label was elite, and the cachet associated with having Monsieur Worth create a garment on one's behalf was enviable and evocative of a high level of status, taste, and social capital. Legions of other designers sprouted up in the wake of this seachange. A thriving couture industry was in evidence by the end of the nineteenth century. The evidence shows that design innovation and designer "genius" came to define fashion.

By the turn of the twentieth century the authority of the individual designer was such that not only did a vast field of individuals find substantial enough client bases to thrive, but more importantly, unique and conflicting design visions existed coevally. The aesthetic agendas of designers as diverse as Mariano Fortuny, Paul Poiret, and Gabrielle Chanel commandeered legions of followers whose sensibilities could be met and identities proclaimed through their designer of choice. The desire for fashionable apparel, the economic means to purchase it, and lifestyle with sufficient time to afford the numerous fittings that couture garments required, coexisted in harmonious accord for a population large enough to sustain the system. World War I altered that balance permanently and consequently designers would, out of necessity, begin their quests for revenue streams outside of the production of garments. Although the cultural and economic impact of World War I was the undeniable catalyst for widespread change, the diversification of product offerings and the capitalization on name recognition was in evidence in the years shortly before World War I. A brief examination of the trajectory of a single designer's career provides a clear picture of the changes that were afoot.

Paul Poiret was the first designer to offer a line of fragrances and cosmetics marketed under the company name *Les Parfums de Rosine* (named for one of his daughters). He began producing fragrances around 1911. Poiret was in a unique position to diversify his offerings, which included objects for the home, because he had developed a marketing strategy that called for promoting his dresses and other fashionable products as works of art, while presenting himself as an inspired artist (Troy “Introduction” 17). A signature fragrance named *Chez Poiret* may be considered testimony to the cachet associated with the designer himself, (Silver 47) while the fragrance *La Chemise de Rosine*, which was also a nightgown designed and sold by Poiret, is evidence of his keen business acumen—a product “tie in” long before the concept was articulated (Mackrell 81). Additionally, Poiret traded on his good name by inking a deal with American manufacturer, the Max Grad Fashion Company, to produce garments with the Paul Poiret label (Troy, *Couture Culture* 259). A 1917 licensing deal for stockings, handbags, and gloves, struck in the midst of post-war financial hardship, provided additional proliferation of the Poiret brand as well as an additional source of revenue for the designer (Silver 82).

While Poiret’s designs had cultural currency into the early 1920s, that capital was soon depleted. After World War I, the fashionableness of Orientalism, which continued to exercise a powerful influence over Poiret’s designs, had been largely overshadowed by modernism and its quest for utility, function, and rationality. Luxury, ornament, and sensuality were thereby redefined (Koda 14). A victim of his own exotic aesthetic vision, Poiret failed to keep current with post-war attitudes and was in financial straits by 1924 when he sold his name to a group of investors. A failure on the part of the investors to

successfully bring the good name of Paul Poiret in line with current trends led to the abandonment of his business venture in 1929.

What the trajectory of Poiret's career demonstrates is that already by the first decades of the twentieth century a shift was underway whereby the practicality and relevance of the couture industry was waning, and the perceived importance of the designer and all of his or her "creative genius" was waxing. The launch of Chanel's #5 perfume in 1921, Elsa Schiaparelli's sale of scarves and other small accessories in the 1930s, and Christian Dior's landmark licensing deal with an American hosiery maker in 1949 (which heralded the era of mass-produced, internationally distributed licensed products) were all small departures from the initial paradigm within which the *design* of apparel, and its constant modification throughout the seasons, was the center of the fashion universe and the primary revenue winner.

While couture designers rebounded in the years following World War I, the economic challenges of the Great Depression and World War II functioned as additional nails in the coffin of couture. In addition to the financial perils that beset most Europeans and the fabric shortages that curtailed the production of fine garments during the war years and beyond, there was another factor, one that the passage of time and the return of prosperity would not eliminate. The complexities of culture, commerce, changing gender roles, and the growth of the American ready-to-wear industry, with its fashionable and affordable sportswear, were all factors that influenced how people chose to purchase and wear their apparel. By and large, consumers increasingly desired to make apparel purchases with a minimal time investment (i.e. without the numerous fittings required by couture). Additionally the widespread deprivation of the Great Depression and World

War II had impacted the culture of consumption (at least in the short term), whereby purse strings were more likely to be tightened on even the fattest purse.

Perhaps most importantly, the ability of mass manufacturers to produce apparel and accessories of increasingly good quality and at comparatively meager prices presented a temptation to female consumers of custom made clothes whose lives were often more complex than they had been at the advent of the century. Additionally the possibilities of ready-to wear presented temptation to the designers. As Richard Morais noted, “By the early 1960s only some 3000 ultra-wealthy women could afford the trips to Paris, and the number of women paying their bills on a timely basis was a fraction of that. Poor cash-flow was instant death in a seasonal business where hundreds of thousands of francs were tied up in bloated inventories of fabric” (87). Ready-to-wear design, unsaddled by the overhead and time expenditure that characterize couture work, was far lower risk and offered the possibility of greater financial reward.

Additional aspects of the abounding phenomenal changes included the fact that beginning in the late 1950s in both Europe and America, more and more young people were earning enough to enjoy readily expendable income. Their purchasing power was great and exceeded the value of the sales of haute couture (deMarly 208). If their purchasing power could be harnessed by the couturiers, it would prove a great boon to their businesses. Equally important was the fact that the needs and desires of a burgeoning middle class were a powerful economic force that dramatically outweighed the purchasing power of the elite (Aspelund 81). Additionally, after the Second World War, the media modified the middle class consumer’s attitude toward fashion, until there was a sense that everyone had a “right to fashion.” This attitude quickly gained a real

foothold in the mass market (Lipovetsky 63). The spending power of the masses was outpacing that of the upper classes and, importantly, the needs, desires, and habits of this large and powerful consumer base were different than those of the fashion consumers that their pecuniary might replaced.

Christian Dior and his premier collection, the Corolle Line (later dubbed “The New Look”), is often held up as the example *par excellence* of the importance of Parisian couture in the post-War years, but Dior’s own account of the early days of his business demonstrates that in 1947 he understood that couture needed the financial support of other product lines that could be purchased by a different clientele. He wrote in his autobiography, “The boutique opened at the same time as my first collection. At first it only offered a choice of trinkets, such as jewels, flowers, and scarves, but it was not long before more ambitious projects were undertaken” (149). Dior went on to write that a “boutique collection” of handmade ready-to-wear was offered beginning in 1948. These less elaborate garments were inspired by the couture collection but required simplified manufacturing techniques. They were so successful and brought in so many customers that the boutique quickly expanded to include gloves, perfumes, stockings, and ties as well as small novelties, gifts, and home furnishings. Dior wrote, the boutique “soon had its own *clientele*, quite separate from the *clientele* above its head” (149). Had Dior lived longer he would have witnessed first hand the evolution of the fashion business from bespoke to ready-made. He would have seen that this new clientele ultimately grew to become *the* clientele in terms of revenue production.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Dior died suddenly of a heart attack in 1957, ten short years after his illustrious, eponymous fashion house opened.

By the late 1950s, offering ready-made products was common practice among a multitude of couture design houses, most of which were still owned and run by their founders or by relatives of the company's namesake. Additionally, new high-end, high style companies selling ready-to-wear garments, such as Chloe, opened their doors in this decade. The stage was thus fully set for couture designers to produce ready-to-wear on a massive scale, as a complement to their couture businesses, in order to augment their customer base. Among the first couturiers to foray into this sector was Pierre Cardin, who offered ready-to-wear at Printemps department store in Paris in 1959. Seven years later Yves Saint Laurent (also a couturier) made fashion headlines with the opening of his first Saint Laurent Rive Gauche boutique on September 26, 1966 (*Yves Saint Laurent* 37). Although the shift down market was undertaken with careful measure at first, scores of designers soon realized the financial necessity of the move.

The transition of the intimate, elite, and illustrious world of couture to a broader and more diverse market had been gradual and largely without controversy.<sup>3</sup> The financial decline of the haute couture sector of the fashion industry was an issue barely glimpsed in the mainstream fashion press. On the contrary, the fashion press strove to make designer prestige desirable to its aspiring readers, continually applauding the genius of the grand Parisians. The design authority of the couturiers was applauded, and their work was proclaimed the height of fashion, though only a miniscule number of women were actually wearing those fashions in their original form.

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Cardin was "kicked out" of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Parisienne in 1959. Presumably this was because of his foray into ready-to-wear. He was quickly reinstated. See Richard Morais' *Cardin: The Man Who Became a Label* for a complete discussion of this controversy.



In the United States, where haute couture had always been influential but where a fashion system based on mass produced garments, especially sportswear, had developed in the early twentieth century, the role of the designer and his/her name was also changing. In *The Fashion Makers*, a 1978 text about forty-nine American designers, the chapter on Bill Blass relates how in the 1950s the designer was an anonymous back office person, while the manufacturer's name was the company and was on the label of the garment. Blass noted that, "In the 1970s, the designer became a brand name. His name on the product gave it validity. This helps establish design standards and, on the whole, is a good thing, provided it is not abused" (Waltz 47).

The transformation of the designer into a celebrity and brand name was a crucial step leading to the introduction of logos. The authors of *The Fashion Makers*, who noted that Halston had a "host" of products, "some thirty in all" that included make-up and relatively inexpensive shirts, skirts, and raincoats (Waltz 90), also make clear that they were engrossed by the glamorous public personae of the designers they reviewed. This ostensibly implied the impetus for making a purchase of one or many such products. The author noted,

I found magic in the designers I photographed. They were devoted artists, creating exciting things each season for their customers. I also became aware that the public was reacting to them on a new level-- they had become celebrities. Halston was designing sheets and towels, and so were Calvin [Klein] and Oscar [de la Renta]; Geoffrey [Beene] was starting a new perfume, and Bill [Blass] was even designing the interiors of cars. One evening over dinner, Carol Horn told me that a firm had expressed interest in designer pots and pans and she was even

considering doing them. Designers were in magazines, on the radio and in television commercials, and were making not only clothes but sunglasses, umbrellas, luggage, shoes, jewelry, and cosmetics. (9)

It is clear that the new approach to consumers—to the masses-- included making the authority and fame of the designer instantly visible. Adding a logo, which was easy to understand and guaranteed to remain relevant for more than one season, was a savvy strategy for designers to take. They turned to the mass market to sustain their businesses and arguably their relevance and they succeeded. Logoed products were and are the incarnation of trade on a good name and celebrity status and therefore can be understood as emblematic of how the role of the designer has changed. Many logoed products rely upon simplified design and production techniques and have the ability to appeal to large and diverse customer cross-sections, while being made with low overhead and in great numbers, and can therefore be understood as emblematic of how the definition of fashion has changed since their introduction.

### *Summation and Transition*

Scattered evidence of change within the fashion industry already exists within the historical record. The preceding overview culls some of that data and offers a sketch of the landscape. The overview suggests the general phenomena that were in play and helps to set the stage for this study. The study that follows moves the investigation to the level of the specific, chronological, and comprehensive by documenting the phenomenon of the logoed handbag in detail and demonstrating how specific objects exemplify changes in working notions of what fashion is.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and Pilot Study

### **Method**

#### *Research Design Overview*

This study of the development of logos on handbags and hand luggage relied primarily on qualitative analysis, using an inductive methodology. A diverse range of sources was employed to explain the long-lived fashion phenomenon of the logo in its context and in light of prevailing notions of traditional fashion design. The methods included a content analysis of fashion periodicals and mail order catalogs, historical and secondary source research, and interviews with a small convenience sample of consumers.

The content analysis of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine* and the Sears Catalog was used to track the emergence and development of handbags and hand luggage with logos as an external motif. *Vogue* and *Seventeen Magazine* were also used to ascertain the perspectives of fashion editors with regards to these products. Historical research included a survey of *Accessories Magazine* (and its related titles), *W Magazine* and *Women's Wear Daily*. All of these publications capture contemporary accounts of the accessories business in particular and the fashion industry in general. The archives of the Fashion Group International (FGI) were also utilized as source material to build a fashion industry specific context for the emergence of these products. Other secondary source resources, including historical texts, biographies, and autobiographies were examined. Lastly, the consumer perspective of the phenomenon of logoed handbags and hand luggage was obtained through one-on-one interviews. Consumer perspectives were considered as a counterpoint to and confirmation of contemporary fashion theory, consumer psychology, postmodern theory, and consumer science research.

I postponed the reduction of data until the data collection process was complete. This was readily facilitated in part because of my technique and the use of relatively new technology, a hand-held scanner by VuPoint called the Magic Wand. Using this technology I created a digital image archive of every handbag or piece of hand luggage that appeared in the publications under review for the content analysis. The scans included the picture of the object and the accompanying text. Each scan was filed in a digital folder named according to the publication and year, and was given a numerical file name of the month, year, and page number. This coding of the images enabled me to go back to the source if, for example, I thought it might be relevant to see what else was in a given editorial. Being able to review the visual evidence time and again was extremely valuable as it enabled me to form judgments, revisit those judgments in the face of the evidence, and potentially revise my point of view. Written records cannot always fully capture visual data.

Given that my study included exhaustive surveys of key sources, there were two reasons for postponing the reduction of data and for capturing both a visual and written record. First, the duration of time spent reviewing my key sources was such that a substantial amount of time passed from the beginning to the end of the task (about one year). As such my memory of precisely what I had seen at the beginning of the research was compromised by the passing of time. Although I was also keeping written records of what I had seen, I came to realize that some of the nuances were not captured by those records that documented things such as size of the logo and number of logos per object (see Appendices for these worksheets). Over the course of my research I found it

enormously helpful to be able to go back and look at the images of what I had seen. I used both printed pages and digital jpeg files as a way to review the objects.

The second reason for capturing the visual images was that it made some aspects of the study reproducible. Based on the assumption that “bracketing” of researcher intuitions and point of view is impossible, transparency was sought at every step leading to the drawing of conclusions. Both convergence and divergence of data were taken into consideration and data was triangulated whenever possible. In addition, the meticulous documentation of the source material could afford someone else the opportunity to evaluate the content and draw his or her own conclusions.

There were times during the data collection process when I questioned whether this technique was necessary (it was quite time consuming, the wand picked up dust and jammed, and I often attracted the attention of fellow researchers who wanted to talk about my Magic Wand), but in the end I am very pleased with the results. Not only did the archive enable me to draw more interesting conclusions, but I now have a digital resource that I can use as a teaching tool. Additionally I had an enormous pool of options from which to draw my illustrations.

### *Grounded Theory Approach*

I utilized a grounded theory approach to guide the gathering and utilization of data. This approach, which allows for the collection of a body of data in advance of projecting a conclusion, provided me with the flexibility that is necessary for exploring fashion phenomena. Such phenomena are by nature multidimensional as they interpenetrate the boundaries of culture, design and commerce. I operated under the notion presented by

sociologist Barney Glaser that “all is data.” Such an open and expansive attitude towards information necessitated diverse methods of data collection and utilization. I constructed concepts from the universe of observations that I derived from the visual and textual evidence and I ultimately used them to explain the significance of logoed handbags and hand luggage within the world of postmodern fashion. Additionally I formed conclusions about the state of the fashion industry today, including a revised definition of fashion itself. Sources as diverse as theoretical writings, marketing, branding, and consumer science research, historical research and other secondary data formed one part of the universe of information that was brought to this task. By applying and conceptualizing these sources in conjunction with the evidence provided by content analysis (a distinctly different source of *visual* data), I developed an understanding of and explanations for the development of an important fashion phenomenon.

### *Content Analysis*

A methodical content analysis of three publications was conducted in order to answer Research Question One (Parts A and B) as well as Research Question Two (Part A). The questions are restated here:

1. What was the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage between 1969 and 2009?
  - a. Who were the designers/design companies that produce these logoed products?
  - b. How did the physical and aesthetic appearance of logoed handbags and hand luggage change over time?
2. What does the development of logoed handbags reveal about the world of postmodern fashion?
  - a. How and why has the response by the market (fashion editors, buyers, retailers) to logoed handbags changed from 1969 to 2009?

First, I completed an exhaustive search of *Vogue*. From 1969 to the end of 1972 *Vogue* was a bimonthly magazine. From 1973 through 2009 *Vogue* published only one issue per month. Therefore, the total number of issues I reviewed in this exhaustive survey was 540. According to the *Standard Periodical Directory* of 1970, a source that publishes circulation and revenue statistics, the circulation of *Vogue* in 1969 was 445,000 whereas the circulation of *Harper's Bazaar* (its closest competitor) was 435,000 (185a).

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), an independent auditor of circulation figures, the total paid and verified circulation for *Vogue* in the year ending December 2009 was 1,240,800, whereas for *Harper's Bazaar* it was 711,483.<sup>1</sup> The superior volume of *Vogue* readership, especially at the latter end of this survey, implies its superior consumer impact. This was one factor that affirmed *Vogue* as the optimum source for an exhaustive search.

Using *Vogue* for the pilot study and executing an exhaustive survey of its pages was well justified for other reasons as well. Writing in 2004, former Virginia Commonwealth University professor Daniel Delis Hill, stated, "By the time *Vogue* celebrated a century of fashion and style in America in 1992, it was widely regarded as the preeminent fashion authority by journalists, clothing makers, advertisers, and most especially its readers-- a status it holds still in the new millennium" (13). This publication represents a widely read and an eminently creditable reflection of the market throughout the span of this study.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures represent circulation averages per month.

*Vogue* is currently a publication that documents the proliferation of fashions, proffers opinions about fashions, and presents them to a broad public. This was not always the case. When Condé Nast first took over *Vogue* in 1909 he envisioned it as a “class publication” devoted to the elite. At the outset he stated, “*Vogue* is the technical advisor-- the consulting specialist-- to the woman of fashion in the matter of her clothes and personal adornment” (Angeletti 15). At the time of Nast’s comment, *Vogue* had a circulation of about 400 readers, but as time went on its readership expanded and *Vogue* became a “fundamental factor in the lives of women of all social classes” (Angeletti 92). Hill similarly noted that *Vogue*, by virtue of its standard of excellence in fashion journalism, “appealed to a broad audience” (13). A 1915 brochure sent by mail to procure subscriptions to *Vogue* makes plain that from very early on the publishers had sought to influence those who were not extremely wealthy. Part of the text notes, “Distinction in dress is, as you know, far more a matter of information than of income” (see Figure 4.1). Additional evidence of the mass appeal of *Vogue* may be derived by referencing evidence from the *Vogue* pattern service.<sup>2</sup> A free brochure that would have been available in J.N. Adam & Co. Department Store in Buffalo, New York in 1944 includes images and descriptions of couturier patterns. Text within advises women that they can “Achieve that seen-in-*Vogue* look” (see Figure 4.2). Clearly consumers could do this at a fraction of the cost of purchasing at the couture.

In actuality it is virtually impossible to ascertain precisely who was reading the magazine (in terms of age, socioeconomic profile, and race) at any given moment, but

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<sup>2</sup> The pattern service was launched in 1899, prior to Nast’s purchase of the publication. In 1914 Nast formed the Vogue Pattern Company and thereafter expanded the business, moving it from a product solely available by mail order to a product that could be purchased in department stores.



market factors and editorial stewardship can be analyzed in an attempt to reveal who the *intended* reader was at any given time. As media historians John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman noted in 1994, *Vogue* was the leader in fashion journalism in the late 1980s, but its status was challenged by the introduction of the more youthful American version of *Elle*. As a result, Editor in Chief Anna Wintour modified the magazine to appeal more strongly to that demographic (275). Similar data could be uncovered to help delineate the probable public in any given era. However, the changing face of the readership of *Vogue* in part substantiates it as a good source for content review. Equally important, however, is its impact as a tastemaker. Tebbel and Zuckerman maintain, “More than merely a symbol of glamour and frivolity, *Vogue* became a publishing icon with a lasting impact on journalism and on culture in general. *Vogue* made and makes history” (2).

While the editorials found in *Vogue* can be linked to a powerful heritage of trendsetting, the advertisements-- indeed advertisements in general-- are similarly powerful cultural forces and therefore can serve as substantial source of historical information. McCracken noted,

Advertising is a conduit through which meaning constantly pours from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods. Through advertising, old and new goods continually give up old meanings and take on new ones. As active participants in this process, the viewer/reader is kept informed of the present state and stock of cultural meaning that exists in consumer goods. To this extent, advertising serves as a lexicon of current cultural meanings. (“Culture and Consumption” 76)

Analysis of these specific conduits of culture and meaning served to reveal some aspects of the meaning of logoed consumer products at the time of their introduction. They expressed how the producers desired their products to be viewed. This was evidenced through both text and image. Viewed as a powerful reflection of culture and shaper of culture, advertisements can therefore be considered indicative of sentiments that were in play in consumer psyches of the day.

*Seventeen Magazine* provided data related to a different target age group and thereby augments the data provided by *Vogue*. *Seventeen Magazine* is a monthly publication that targets an audience of readers aged twelve to seventeen. Circulation data supports the notion that it is the most widely read publication targeted at the young, female demographic. According to the *Standard Periodical Directory* of 1970, the circulation of *Seventeen* in 1969 was 1,321,506 (185b). According to the *Seventeen Media Kit*, an online resource, in 2009 *Seventeen* was the premier magazine subscribed to by college freshmen (whereas *Vogue* ranked fifth). According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), the total paid and verified circulation for *Seventeen* in the year ending December 2009 was 2,071,398. Historically *Seventeen Magazine* has not had a direct competitor for its demographic. It was only in 2003 that *Teen Vogue* launched, therefore it was not a suitable source for this longitudinal study. Additionally, according to ABC, it has less than half of *Seventeen's* circulation (1,019,487 on average per month).

A partial sample of *Seventeen Magazine* was undertaken based on the premise that teen fashion is largely derivative of mainstream fashion trends. The total number of issues of *Seventeen Magazine* published between 1969 and 2009 was 492. From this set a sample of 164 issues was selected at a rate of 4 per year. The issues I reviewed for each

year were February, March, September, and October. These issues correspond to the months in which collections are launched (February and September) and the subsequent month. The September issue is also important as it charts back-to-school trends. Fashion magazines published for these months tend to cover upcoming trends and have more advertising pages than other months.

The Sears Catalog, a publication of Sears, Roebuck and Company, was selected as a means of ascertaining the impact of the phenomenon of logoed handbags and hand luggage on the middle class. Sears is an excellent choice given the power of its retail empire and the reach of its mail order (and later Internet) service. Sears was founded in 1886 by Richard Sears and originally sold gold-filled pocket watches, but the company vision grew as railroad lines led to westward expansion and a scattered but burgeoning populace developed that was reliant upon the mail for consumer goods. By 1913 Sears had grown into a “catalog empire” that had a reach as far as the arm of the United States Postal Service and a complement of merchandise as diverse as American manufacturing. By 1928, Sears had 27 stores and by the close of 1929 that number had blossomed to 324 (Katz 10). By 1949 it is estimated that five out of every 100 dollars spent in the United States on merchandise was spent at Sears (Katz 12). “By the mid-1960s, Sears, Roebuck was a superpower, as invincible a business as the nation it served. ...Journalists invariably digressed in order to express Sears’ sales as a percentage of the Gross National Product. One in five Americans shopped the company with regularity” (Katz 15). Although the popularity of the company has waxed and waned, Sears is clearly a company that offers products that find their way into a great multitude of American (and Canadian) homes.

According to the 2008 Sears Annual Report, the company continued to grow and thrive in the new millennium, even as it competed with a broader field of retailers that include JC Penney, Target, Kohl's, and Wal-Mart (6). As of early 2012 the company was downsizing and restructuring its business. Like any business, Sears has been subject to the ebbs and flows of the marketplace. The early 1970s in particular saw a decline in Sears' revenues. The victim of internal growth coupled with outmoded technology, Sears struggled to stay efficient and modern. Although the 1970s reduced Sears' merchandising might, it retained standing as one of the "most trusted American corporations," according to the 1980 *Roper Report*—a consumer intelligence and attitude survey (Katz 238). Sears' ongoing effort to position itself as a merchant that offers high quality, fair prices, diverse product offerings, and convenience for every American has served to maintain its relevance and commercial strength. According to the Sears Holding Company Annual Report, in the fiscal year ending January 31, 2009, Sears had 856 full line stores located in the 50 United States and Puerto Rico and an additional 122 full line stores in Canada (2).

The frequency with which the Sears Catalog has been published has varied in the past several decades. From 1969 to 1983 Sears consistently published a Spring/Summer, Fall/Winter, and Wish (Christmas) catalog. Product lines represented in catalogs from this period could vary slightly based on the region for which the catalog was published (Northeast, Southwest, etc.). In the early 1980s Sears underwent comprehensive restructuring that impacted the publication and distribution of catalogs. For example, in May of 1981 they boldly experimented with a videodisk catalog (Katz 252). The general catalog was abandoned and an abridged version was later reinstated. Specialty catalogs

that marketed only tools or home products were introduced in the early 1980s in response to improved collection and use of demographic information and client data. Essentially specific catalogs were sent to specific customers based on information gathered about each individual.

Mail order catalogs may be considered ephemera. Their intended use is short-lived, as catalogs always have expiration dates. An exhaustive survey of every catalog produced by Sears between 1969 and 2009 was not tenable, as I could not locate an archive (or group of archives) that had each and every catalog. The sampling technique used was necessarily a convenience sample wherein the availability of resources determined which catalogs were reviewed. Using the library at the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Trenton Public Library, and by purchasing old catalogs I was able to review at least two catalogs for thirty-two of the forty-one years in the sample. For eight of the years (after 1994) I was only able to review one catalog. I was unable to locate any catalogs for the year 1994, the year that Sears ceased publication of the Big Book. Appendix 4 contains a complete listing of the catalogs that I reviewed.

*Vogue* was the primary source of content while *Seventeen Magazine* and the Sears Catalog functioned as supplements that represent a more youthful and less affluent demographic, respectively. Winters and Goodman (1984), former advertising and communications professors from the Fashion Institute of Technology, noted that for manufacturers of fashionable apparel, creditable fashion magazines are the most favored medium for advertising. Two of the five most important magazines mentioned by these authors were *Vogue* and *Seventeen*. The authors went on to note, “The greater the credibility of the magazine’s editorial pages, the higher the credibility of the advertising it

carries” (189). The prominence of these publications within the purview of both the market and the general public was good justification for selecting them.

The content analysis of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears Catalog provided data that enabled me to generate descriptive statistics showing the frequency whereby advertisements and editorials occurred, the names of brands advertising logoed handbags and hand luggage, the aesthetics of the objects, and the language used in fashion editorials and advertisements. This data enabled me to make inferences about the ways in which the product and the market were changing during the span of this study. Documenting the frequency whereby logoed handbags and hand luggage appeared in these sources helped to establish the production and proliferation of such products and also showed the names of specific designers and companies involved in their production. The aesthetics of the objects, including the size of the logo and the costliness of the materials from which the bag was made, were also considered to deduce stylistic development, target demographic, and contemporary tastes. The language used in fashion editorials and advertisements was analyzed in order to draw conclusions about the disposition of the market and overarching notions of fashionableness.

### *Presentation and Analysis of Findings of Pilot Study*

#### Procedures

I completed a pilot for the content analysis portion of this study in order to gain information about the advent of this phenomenon, thereby allowing me to refine my questions and ascertain the breadth of my search for background information. Additionally, the data generated by the pilot was sufficient to develop content analysis

worksheets (see Appendices 1-3). Based on a citation in Forden's book *The House of Gucci*, I believed that logoed Jacquard bags were introduced for the middle market in 1969 and that the introduction of logoed bags made of cloth was a novelty. My search of the 1969 issues of *Vogue* did reveal both the Jacquard bags and a dress of the same fabric (Figure 4.3). I conducted an exhaustive search of *Vogue* for the years 1967 and 1968 and found no images or editorial mentions of logoed handbags or hand luggage. Therefore I determined that 1969 should be the year from which my survey of the aforementioned publications should commence.

Once I had established 1969 as the beginning date for my content review, I continued my exhaustive search for editorial mentions and advertising events in *Vogue* through December 1979. For each editorial mention or advertising occurrence that included a logoed handbag or piece of hand luggage, a digital scan was made of the event and the date of the issue, page number, and a brief description of the event (aesthetics, materials, key text) were logged into a spreadsheet. Content analysis worksheets were also completed.

Once I had collected the data for the period of January 1969 to December 1979, I generated descriptive statistics to show the frequency whereby advertisements and editorials occurred, the diversification of logoed products over time, and the names of brands advertising logoed handbags and hand luggage. I completed content analysis in relation to the fashion editorials and explored the specific types of objects being reviewed, including the commentary attached to the objects and the prevailing point of view expressed by the fashion editors.

### Pilot Study Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the preliminary exhaustive survey showed that logoed apparel appeared before logoed handbags and hand luggage, which were introduced in 1969--in the same year as logoed scarves for women and neckties for men. Over the years, the range of products diversified to include products such as linens, shoes, hosiery, sunglasses, and watches. Initially the quantity of editorials largely outnumbered the quantity of advertisements (editorials preceded advertisements by three years). In the early 1970s, commentary was brief, descriptive, and laudatory. Figure 4.3 is a very early example of a fashion editorial that includes both apparel and hand luggage. The brief text emphasizes the logo and the brand several times while also emphasizing the wearer's membership in the "club" marked by her Gucci "badges," indications that she is a fashion "aficionado." The findings showed that the introduction of logoed handbags and hand luggage in 1969 was earlier than is typically stated by fashion commentators and historians who usually assert the late 1970s as its point of genesis. The findings also showed that the editorial attention to the phenomenon was relatively small in the 1970s, garnering only a few mentions per year after 1969, though the phenomenon was growing.

### *The Full Study*

I used the same methodology and gathered the same type of data in the larger study that I used in the pilot. The end date for the full content analysis survey was set at December 2009, allowing the documentation of this phenomenon to be as current as possible. The raw data derived from these publications was analyzed in several ways. Descriptive



statistics were used to ascertain change in frequency of advertisements and editorials over time. In part, this was considered an indication of the importance of logoed handbags and hand luggage to businesses, which in turn was related to an upswing in the attention granted to them by fashion editors, who in turn influenced consumers (the target of the advertisements and the editorials). Editorials were evaluated in order to document the types of logoed handbags reviewed by the editors of these magazines and the language used to discuss the objects.

I knew before completing the full content analysis that the data would show fluctuation in product aesthetics as well as advertising and editorial interest. For example during the early part of the study's range, emphasis was on low price point products made of materials such as canvas with a woven or printed logo. Later there was also a period during which a profusion of logoed handbags and hand luggage was available in luxurious materials such as python skin. The change in materials is one way to ascertain target demographics (since materials relate to price point). Editorial attention to low price point rather than high price point items may be interpreted as an indication of editorial opinion as well as the fashion cognoscenti's understanding of the marketplace at a given point in time. Editorial attention to mass market products versus more rarefied designs is also potentially indicative of manifold conceptions of what is fashionable. The content analysis data was considered in light of historical research in the form of coeval accounts of business practices of relevant fashion designers/brands/companies found in secondary sources including journals covering the business of fashion.

By looking at primary source material and by making the analysis of that data transparent and reproducible, the content analysis portion of the study should meet

challenges of reliability. While access to company archives would have been the ideal mode for obtaining some of this data, an exhaustive search of the archives of all the relevant companies was untenable given the number of companies and their far-ranging geographic locations. By accessing the primary outlets through which the purveyors of logoed handbags and hand luggage would have introduced these new products to the public, I was able to create a reliable timeline, as advertising either precedes or quickly follows the launch of a product. Using multiple sources for the collection of primary source data provided for a comprehensive catalog of the range of products that proliferated and the opinions of them that were proffered.

### *Historical Research*

Part of this study was comprised of historical research. This research was conducted in order to answer Research Question One (Part C) and Research Question Two (Part A).

1. What was the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage between 1969 and 2009?
  - c. What were the factors (i.e. historical, economic, social, commercial) that were concurrent with the introduction, development, and proliferation of logoed handbags?
2. What does the development of logoed handbags reveal about the world of postmodern fashion?
  - a. How and why has the response by the market (fashion editors, buyers, retailers) to logoed handbags changed from 1969 to 2009?

This research involved investigating the business practices (licensing, franchising, integration into conglomerates) of relevant design companies. Some historical research was achieved by searching for contemporary accounts in business periodicals such as (but not limited to) *The Wall Street Journal* (indexed from 1984), *Business Week*, and *Forbes*.

In addition to general business periodicals, historical research was performed using trade-specific publications. *Accessories Magazine* has been published since 1908

under multiple titles including *Handbags and Accessories* (1949-1976), *Fashion Accessories Magazine* (1976-1994), and *Accessories Magazine* (1994 to the present).

This editorial magazine, targeted to the trade, has been a leading publication for the industry. It has absorbed competing publications including *Accessories Market Guide*. According to the *Accessories Magazine* “Mission Statement,” the purpose of the publication is to act as a “conduit between the retailer and the manufacturer--giving both the information they need to successfully run their business and understand the changing consumer.”

*Accessories Magazine* (and its related titles) charts trends, examines phenomena in popular culture, details licensing agreements, conducts and publishes consumer surveys, and monitors the events that shape the accessories market. According to the *Accessories Magazine* “Reader Profile,” more than 75% of the readership of this publication is made up of retailers. The magazine is published eleven times per year. It is not indexed. At present *Accessories Magazine* publishes about 600 pages annually and the volume of editorial content in 2009 is far more robust than it was in previous decades. My exhaustive review of the estimated 451 issues was a manageable endeavor that provided rich source material.

*W Magazine* and *Women’s Wear Daily* were used in tandem to glean additional historical information. *Women’s Wear Daily* is a five day-per-week fashion industry trade journal that is referred to by many as the “bible of the fashion industry.” The journal, published since 1910 by Fairchild Publications Inc., reports on all manner of fashionable trends as well as all aspects of the business of fashion. This comprehensive

resource unfortunately presented logistical difficulties for this researcher as it is not indexed and is available only on microfilm prior to 2003.

An alternative strategy was implemented. *W Magazine* is a monthly publication that has been in print since 1972. It is also a Fairchild publication but it is geared toward the general public and contains advertisements as well as fashion editorials. Additionally, each issue published after August 1993 includes a two to three page section entitled “The Month in Fashion,” which summarizes many of the top stories covered by *Women’s Wear Daily* in the preceding month. The business of fashion, including IPOs, hiring and firing of employees, manufacturing agreements, distribution issues, and consumer spending reports are reviewed, as are fashion trends. This summary, which usually runs from one to three pages in length, was used as a tool for a targeted review of *Women’s Wear Daily*.

Reviewing all years and all issues of *W Magazine* from 1972-2009 entailed surveying 456 issues. Surveying these issues led me to review specific days, weeks, or months of *Women’s Wear Daily* articles published between 1972 and 2009. For the years 1969-1971 I performed an exhaustive survey of *Women’s Wear Daily* for the months February, March, September, and October. Again, these months correspond to times during which collections are launched (February and September) and the subsequent month. Fashion reporting for these months tends to be the most robust as it is a period of concentrated activity.

An additional source for my historical research was the Fashion Group International (FGI) Archive at the New York Public Library (Stephen A. Schwarzman Research Library). The Fashion Group International is a global organization that

represents all areas of fashion and its related industries. Its more than 6,000 members represent all aspects of design, retailing, manufacturing, merchandising, and journalism. A mission of FGI is to provide a forum for the discussion of issues of contemporary importance to fashion design and the business of fashion, including global trends. The archive includes relevant records from 1969 to 1997. Of paramount importance and interest within the holdings were speeches and transcripts of FGI events that documented economic, political and business trends of relevance to the fashion industry. An FGI newsletter complemented many of these transcripts.

*Theory Application and Development: The Logoed Product in Context*

One final objective of my study was to inform our understanding of why logoed products including handbags and hand luggage have undergone such widespread adoption over a relatively lengthy period of time. Additionally, this study sought to probe the very definition of fashion as design innovation and thereby to determine whether traditional conceptualizations of fashion sufficiently address the modern marketplace. This portion of the methodology was designed to address Research Question Two (Parts B and C).

2. What does the development of logoed handbags reveal about the world of postmodern fashion?

b. How can the myriad perspectives and theories about consumers (generated by consumer science, consumer psychology, postmodern theory and fashion theory-including perspectives on fashion leadership and collective selection) contribute to our understanding of the widespread adoption of logoed handbags and hand luggage?

c. How do we define fashion in the modern marketplace?

The first thing I did to get at this information was to continue to perform an in-depth exploration of the literature (presented in the literature review) that has been generated by the fields of consumer science, consumer psychology, postmodern theory, fashion

history, and fashion theory. All of these fields have sought, in general terms, to explain the nature of fashion and/or consumer motivations for the adoption of fashionable trends.

The second step in this portion of the methodology involved interviewing a small number of consumers. I did this in order to provide a complement and counterpoint to the theories and themes that were revealed in the aforementioned body of literature. Themes included the acquisition of fashionable goods as a means for showing status, gaining membership in a “brand community,” and gaining a sense of personal fulfillment. Thus the purpose of interviewing consumers was to provide supporting evidence for Research Question Two (Part B).

I queried a small convenience sample of a diverse group of consumers about their ideas and feelings pertaining to owning and using logoed handbags or hand luggage. The fifteen consumers ranged in age from eighteen to sixty-six years. I was able to obtain a diverse sample of interviewees in terms of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, although they all resided at the time in New York City. I selected interviewees primarily based upon their interest in logoed handbags and hand luggage. Interview questions (Appendix 5) were open-ended and were designed to encourage the interviewee to follow her own train of thought, select descriptive terms, and reveal themes with little prompting.

Interviewing consumers provided content to compare with the theory and generalizations that I was considering. As Davis noted in *Fashion Culture and Identity* (1992), the code communicated by fashion is subject to both temporal constraints and differentiation according to taste culture, social identity, and access to symbolic “wares” (9). He wrote, “The very same apparel ensemble that ‘said’ one thing last year will ‘say’

something quite different today and yet another thing next year” (6). Davis went on to note, “While the signifiers constituting a style, an appearance, or a certain fashion trend can in a material sense be thought of as the same for everyone, what is signified is initially, at least, strikingly different for different publics, audiences, and social groupings” (8). Consumer interviews had the potential to show convergence or divergence in terms of perception and valuation of logo meaning based on their access to fashion, exposure to fashion over time, and the myriad factors that form a person’s preferences for dress.

This component of the research was not intended to assert comprehensive conclusions about consumer perceptions of this phenomenon. In addition, this was exploratory rather than compendious, as a thorough investigation of the meaning of logoed handbags among consumers would prove to be an enormous undertaking, one that might be considered upon the completion of this project. This component of the research facilitated thoughtful consideration and application of extant theory and enabled the integration of observations and assertions made by consumers who were considering this fashion phenomenon in particular. Interviewing consumers helped to inform my understanding of why there has been widespread adoption of logoed handbags and hand luggage.

**Vogue Suggests:**

that before you spend a single penny on new clothes, before you even plan your Winter wardrobe — you consult its great Autumn Fashion numbers, beginning with the famous

**Forecast of Autumn Fashions**  
Number

The greatest of all Vogue's claims to distinction is, perhaps, its ability—universally recognized—to forecast the fashions. In every issue appear not the styles of Yesterday, or even of To-day, but accurate presentations of the styles of To-morrow.

With its resident correspondents in Paris and in other European capitals, with its splendidly selected staff of editors in New York, with the patronage of the prominent women in every city of America, Vogue's fashion pronouncements are authority itself!

And every resource that skill and experience can suggest is being turned to account, to make Vogue for the coming year more complete, more authoritative than ever before.

In the next few months—during the very period in which Vogue's special Fashion numbers appear—you will be selecting your entire wardrobe for the coming Winter and paying out hundreds of dollars for the suits, hat, gowns, and so forth that you select.

Consider, then, that for \$2—a tiny fraction of your loss on a single ill-chosen hat or gown—not only may you have before you at this important season these great special Fashion numbers, but all through the Winter and the coming Spring the numbers that follow them. (See list on last page.)



© Vogue

Skirts are still very short and require many yards of material to accomplish their width. The circular is a popular cut; the waist-line is about normal. In this Jenny model note the new "hitched together" treatment of skirt and bodice.



© Vogue

Velvet and velvety fabrics are leading the mode. In this velvet frock Paquin has the skirt full, the short bodice close, the shoulder-seams dropped, and the sleeves showing a tendency to fullness.

**Distinction in Dress**

is, as you know, far more a matter of information than of income. And the woman whose taste is above the commonplace will find always in her Vogue not simply timely style news, but what is far more important, just that nice touch of individuality that always distinguishes the faultlessly gowned.

**\*\$2 invested in Vogue**  
\* A tiny fraction of your

The gown you buy and never wear. The gloves, boots, hats, that just miss the ones that cost more than you.

Why take chances again this year? Buy a single ill-chosen hat or gown and at your convenience pay for it on a single ill-chosen hat or gown. Your whole Winter and next Spring will be a reminder of your mistake.

*The Vogue Gowned Woman Never*

Figure 4.1 This brochure from 1915, published to encourage annual subscriptions, promises the reader of *Vogue* “distinction in dress,” and asserts that fashionable dressing is “more a matter of information than of income. This assertion is a clear solicitation of the middle class reader. This evidence provides justification for using *Vogue* as a publication that was and is targeted at a wide audience. Pamphlet in the collection of the author.

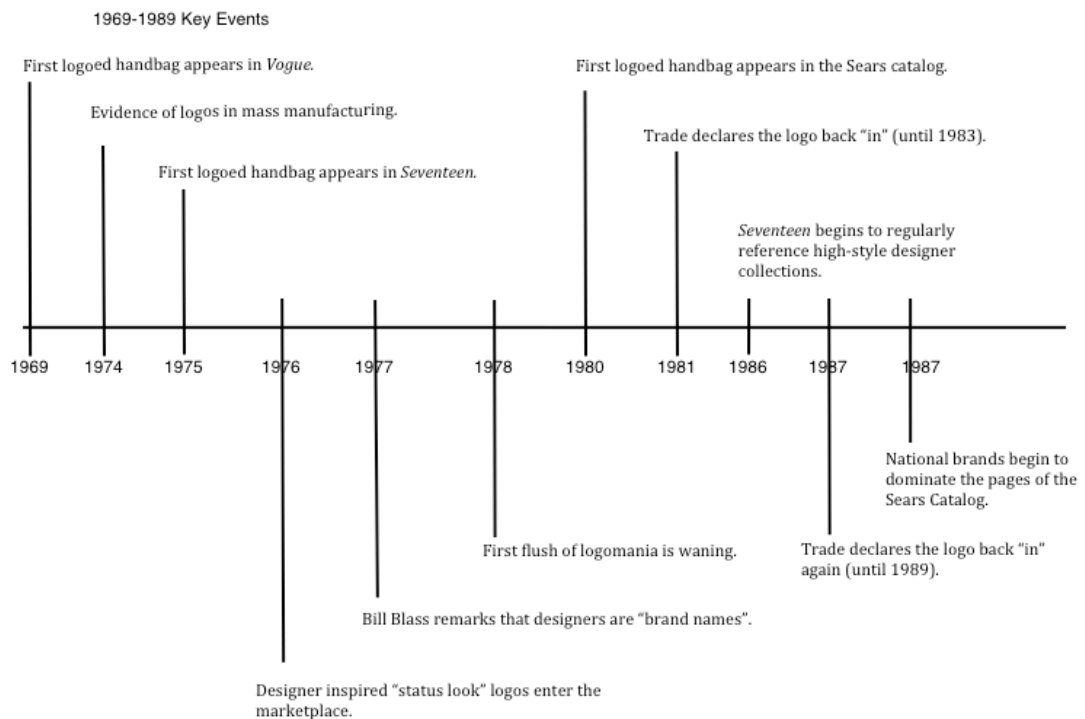




Figure 4.2 This *Vogue* Patterns brochure (interior leaf and cover) from June 1, 1944 was available countertop at major department stores like J.N. Adam in Buffalo, NY. It advised women of the new patterns that were available from the service. Many patterns were based on couture designs. The interior leaf at left instructs consumers that they can “Achieve that seen-in-*Vogue* look” through home sewing. Such a service was likely targeted at fashion-minded middle class consumers. This provides evidence that the middle class woman of the 1940s was being encouraged to follow high-style fashion design trends. Pamphlet in the collection of the author.



Figure 4.3 This is the first editorial that showed logoed handbags and hand luggage. It appeared in *Vogue* April 15, 1969 on page 269. The text states, "Let the world know—that you are a member of the club, that you are a Gucci aficionado too. Mme. Philippe Leroy, wife of the French actor, lets Rome know she's a Gucci girl because she wears the newest Gucci "badges"—a leather-bound shirtwaist dress, of beige duck interwoven all over with the Gucci insignie [sic] GG...It matches a raft of new luggage all made of the same fabric...GG-Gucci—it's great..."



## Chapter 5 : Logo Development 1969-1989: Mark of Status, Identity and Maker

### **Overview**

My review of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears Catalog shows that external logos first appeared on handbags made by high-style designers, but the phenomenon ultimately arrived in the youth and mass markets. The photographic record provided the identity of the designers and manufacturers who were making logoed products, and showed that two categories of logoed products exist: fashion branded commodities and products that simply have a brand name upon them. While the development of the former is the primary concern of this study, the later will be reviewed as well.

I defined the fashion branded commodity as a product that is designed around various permutations of a marketed brand identity, which may be produced seasonally, but does not typically evidence dramatic change. Generally a fixed aesthetic program (often built around the logo or some other “classic” or “iconic” trope) is subjected to minor modifications each season. Most importantly fashion branded commodities are marketed as fashion. Products that are simply branded have a logo that marks the maker who is not positioned in the marketplace as a purveyor of fashion. These logos function as labels that recommend a product in a crowded marketplace, setting it apart from similar, competing products but they are neither the primary allure of the product nor is the logo integral to the product’s design.

Chapters five and six trace the development of the logo itself. These chapters consider the types of logos being used, the number applied to each object, and the materials from which they were made. This documentary portion of the study considers both fashion branded commodities and branded products. I demonstrate that the aesthetics of the logo can be used as a point of entry for considering the purposes and meanings of logos. However, additional evidence must be considered in order to ascertain if a product is a fashion branded commodity. Advertising text, visual constructions of brand identity in the form of advertising images, brand history, and editorial commentary all reveal perspectives on brands from within the industry, ultimately providing further rationale for why the logos were used and what they mean. In that this study reveals a fashion phenomenon that is essentially linked to the intangible—a brand identity—it makes sense that the visual evidence alone cannot substantiate the fashion phenomenon. The amalgam of visual and textual evidence

facilitates my analysis of the working definition of fashion in this period and shows the emergence of a new kind of fashion in the form of the fashion branded commodity.

### **Emergence of Logos on High-Style and Mass Produced Handbags**

A logoed product is a fashion branded commodity. A logoed product is essentially a product that places the brand or the designer on equal footing with the product itself. The maker and the object become inextricably bound when the logo is an external motif.

Luxury goods makers had for centuries marked their precious, handcrafted products with an insignia discreetly placed in the interior. The hallmark was ostensibly the final word regarding the quality of the object, seen last, only after the entire exterior had been appraised and appreciated. Moving the logo to the exterior ensured more immediate and widespread recognition; quality and craftsmanship need not be understood when they are declared in the simple, literal terms of the logo. One need not be a member of the fashion cognoscenti to “get” the importance or desirability of the object—thus logoed products were ideally suited for the mass market.

European couturiers, well-established luxury goods makers, and living celebrity designers (both American and European) were clearly the vanguard of this seachange, which was not only stylistic but also conceptual and deeply rooted in an interest in expanding the customer base beyond the elite. Logoed handbags and hand luggage, specific kinds of fashion branded commodities represented a new kind of fashion from traditional fashion designers. European companies at the leading edge of this phenomenon included the couture house of Dior, luxury furrier Fendi, elite jeweler Cartier, and luxury leather goods makers Gucci and Hermès. Living designers with

celebrity status were also at the forefront of this trend. They included Halston (Roy Frowick), Ted Lapidus, Pierre Cardin, Anne Klein, Bill Blass, and Lou Taylor.

As noted in chapter three, fashion designers from the early twentieth century onwards had been coming to an understanding that their *names* were in essence a stamp of approval in matters of taste and that their names could be used as a marketing tool. In 1977, Bill Blass noted, “Designers are now brand names, so it is natural for us to go into accessories” (“Bill’s Bags” 21). The notion of designer as brand and branding as design concept in the accessories category and elsewhere flowed logically from this understanding and served as the impetus for turning the fashion name brand into the fashion branded commodity. Designer prestige and brand prestige simply writ could appeal to the masses who were increasingly becoming aware of designer celebrity through various forms of mass media. Though the masses might not have the ability or inclination to judge the fine nuances of some luxury goods or keep up with constantly changing fashion trends, they could identify and appreciate the essential value of these famous names, hence the allure of the logo as status symbol, marker of quality, taste and fashionableness.

Although the phenomenon of the external logo began with high-style status products (fashion branded commodities) in the late 1960s, the pages of *Vogue* from the last two years of 1970s provide evidence that the phenomenon of the logo was already spreading to mass manufacturing. For example wallet maker Buxton began to mark its products with a double-B (conceptually similar to Gucci’s double-G, while the luggage manufacturer Hartmann began to mark its suitcases with a prominent lower-case “h.” Given *Vogue*’s editorial mission in the 1970s and 1980s to set and communicate high-

style fashionable trends, it is not surprising that there was only a small emphasis on mass produced products.<sup>1</sup> In fact all of the mass produced logoed handbags that are in evidence in *Vogue* in these decades appear in advertisements. They were not being presented by *Vogue* as fashion—they were just paying advertisers. Nothing in their advertising copy posits them as fashion products either, so while they are logoed, they are not fashion branded commodities. However, a perusal of trade publication *Handbags and Accessories* corroborates the observation that mass producers were following in the footsteps of luxury leaders by utilizing an external logo in an effort to elevate a basic commodity to the level of fashion. A 1975 article noted that handbags made of signature fabrics were important at Philippe, whereas signature linings and cast gold-colored “m” ornaments were key elements on all the bags at Leather by Michael (“Retailers Playing it Safe” 24). Philippe and Leather by Michael can readily be classified as catering to the mass market. Their use of logo techniques adopted from high-style is a clear effort to elevate their mass produced commodities.

The movement of the logo phenomenon from high-end elite companies seems, at first blush, to be a straightforward example of the trickle-down effect. However, given the historical impetus for fashion designers to introduce logos as an external motif (i.e. cashing in on designer status and reaching a larger market with a new kind of fashion product), the appearance of logos on mass manufactured goods raises the issue of logo meaning. Quickly we see that the logo must be considered in terms of its aesthetics and in terms of what it is trying to communicate. Only when both are taken into account can

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<sup>1</sup> From the 1990s onward, *Vogue* became increasingly more receptive to mass fashion. Mass retailers and fast fashion companies advertised more regularly and their products were frequently mixed into editorials alongside high-style pieces.

one determine if a product is a fashion branded commodity or simply a branded product. For example, a Hartmann 'h' has little to commend itself as a symbol of fashionableness as Hartmann has little in the way of a fashion pedigree. The company is neither elite nor known for its artistry. A Hartmann logoed bag is therefore not a fashion branded commodity. The use of the logo by mass producers like Hartmann is primarily to differentiate their goods from other mass-produced lines with similar on-trend aesthetics. The availability of consumer products of all kinds was booming in the 1970s; they were flooding into Europe and North America from across the globe and presenting consumers with a wealth of options—options so plentiful as to create confusion in the marketplace. Notably it is the use of the logo to facilitate differentiation that has seen the greatest proliferation in the mass marketplace from the 1970s to today. In the case of Leather by Michael and Philippe the introduction of logos does indicate receipt of the trickle-down effect and an effort to provide on-trend products for the masses that are fashion branded commodities. This is true despite the fact that the meaning (of status, luxury, or designer pedigree) behind the marking of the logo might be lacking. Both the aesthetics of the logos and their intended purpose (to elevate these products to the level of fashion, to make them special in the eyes of some consumers, and to command a higher price point as a result) facilitates an understanding of these bags as fashion branded commodities though their names and their logos may not have made any lasting impression in the history of fashion.



### **Summary of Data: Logo Aesthetics in the 1970s**

Understanding the aesthetics of logos is fundamental to understanding whether that were essential to creating a fashion branded commodity or if they were functioning as a brand label. The aesthetic analysis, which discusses logo size, materials, and number of repetitions provides the basis for discerning the difference. The pages of *Vogue* indicate that in the 1970s there was considerable diversity in terms of the type of logo used to mark handbags and hand luggage. Figure 5.1 provides examples of each type of logo described in the following discussion. Stylized initials accounted for the majority of logos on fashion branded commodities and appeared on products by Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Ted Lapidus, and Pierre Cardin. A full name in simple typeface was the second most common logo type and appeared regularly on branded commodities, though fashion designers such as Halston (producing under license) used them to. Simple initials were also frequently used, as were graphic icons such as Anne Klein's lion head and Ralph Lauren's polo player on horseback. Icons seem to have been used exclusively by fashion brands at this point. It was rare to find the full name of a company executed in a stylized manner, although in 1970 Dior did introduce its logo Jacquard with this type of motif, which the house continues to use to the present day (see Figure 5.2). Also rare was the use of the name of a designer or company presented in conjunction with an icon. Only one instance of this was recorded in the survey of the 1970s. A 1977 advertisement for perfumer Giorgio of Beverly Hills offered a "couture" cotton tote, which could be obtained for eleven dollars by mail order. Over time, this latter type of logo would become increasingly popular on mass produced branded products. Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3, located at the end of this chapter, provide a complete breakdown of the types of

logos being used on products shown in *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, and the Sears Catalog in the 1970s and 1980s.

The manner in which a logo was executed was also highly diversified from the very beginning of the phenomenon. The earliest examples of logoed products were made of woven or printed fabric that was typically decorated with a continuous repeat of a logo. Logo Jacquard fabric was used exclusively by makers creating fashion branded commodities. Figure 5.3 depicts an array of these products. This method for executing a logo seems to have been used almost exclusively until 1973, when the use of single logos came into evidence. Of the objects documented in the pages of *Vogue* between 1969 and 1979, 42% were covered in a continuous repeat. Tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 provide a complete breakdown of methods used for logo execution in the high-style, teen, and mass markets during the first two decades covered by this study.

The pages of *Vogue* provide evidence of the waxing and waning popularity of specific logo trends. For example, after 1974 there is evidence that objects made in a continuous repeat could also include a second logoed element such as a decorative plaque, cast ornament, or zipper pull—evidence of minor modification to revise and refresh a commodity that was relying on a fixed design program. What the pages of *Vogue* do not reveal, yet can be gleaned from other sources, is that some logo lines remained in production for extended periods, though it goes without saying they would not be editorialized for the duration of the production run. A case in point can be built around logo Jacquard handbags and hand luggage. After 1975, objects made of a fabric with a continuous repeat were not frequently featured in *Vogue*, although there is evidence that they continued to be made and sold. For example, an article from 1976

noted that the Roman house of Aldo Navarro had developed an “insignia collection” of matched handbags and hand luggage. The text noted, “The material remains ‘open stock’ while the styles are updated by fashion. Thus the ‘collection concept’ proves sound merchandising, for once a customer is ‘hooked’ she has an investment to protect by staying with the same design, and both manufacturers and retailers benefit” (“The Concept of a Collection” 79). This is but one clear indication that some logoed products enjoyed long lives, remaining in production for years on end, posing a challenge to the concept of ephemerality as a marker of fashion.

Toward the end of the decade, the number of logos found on a fashion branded commodity was often restricted to a single example on new designs. The solitary logo was typically executed as a cast ornament that was attached to the body of the bag, or was embossed directly onto the body of the bag, or was attached to the strap as a hang-tag—simple, inexpensive means for marking the brand or elevating the commodity. The preponderance of objects with a single logo in the fashionable pages of *Vogue* is supported by an observation made by a writer at *Fashion Accessories Magazine*. Linda Kundell noted, “Designer treatments are taking on a new subtlety. At Princess Gardner, the Pierre Cardin Jacquard is giving way to tiny plaques bearing the Cardin signature, or simply nothing more than inside identification” (85). Here we have an indication that fashion branded commodities are subject to change, but it is change in the form of variation on a theme, not radical design innovation. Figure 5.4 is an advertisement for Pierre Cardin wallets that illustrates this “new subtlety” on most of the products, but also shows a logo Jacquard wallet as an option. This is an additional indication that while from the very beginning fashion arbiters periodically declared ostentatious logos to be

“out,” and then later called them back “in,” production of heavily logoed goods never fully ceased. Fashion trends and consumer desire, fashion arbiters and fashion producers, do not necessarily share a one-to-one correspondence. Tables 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9 present data related to the number of logos used per object in the 1970s and 1980s.

By the mid-1970s there existed a multiplicity of techniques for executing logos on fashion branded commodities. This is clearly demonstrated by the photographs in *Vogue* and is also echoed in observations made by writers at *Fashion Accessories Magazine*. Gloria Hoffman Rice noted, “Status-conscious women have made the signature bag an outstanding item and the monogram plaque, initials, and zipper pulls announce her designer’s name to all. The findings people have found added business turning out Gs, PCs, Ds, and CCs, etc” (64). Rice’s observation helps us to understand that the logo business was big business for the designers and for the suppliers of handbag components.

The visual evidence gleaned from the pages of *Vogue* shows that in some cases the logo functioned as the heart of the design concept and was the essence of the commodity. This was especially evident with regards to handbags made of a signature fabric. Such handbags were visually dominated by logos. Single logos could also be executed so that they coordinated, complemented, or highlighted other aspects of the handbag’s design. In contrast, some logos were aesthetic outliers. Their content, design and execution failed to contribute to the aesthetic program of the handbag. In such cases, the logo served only as a branding device—a tool to mark the object.

However, closer examination of the logoed findings reveals that not all of them were part of a fashion branded commodity. The diversity that is evident with regards to the number of logos used on a single object, the aesthetics of the logo, and the techniques

used to execute it are all indications that not all logos are the same in their nature, nor in their purpose. What a logo was meant to signify can partially be understood based on the way the logo was incorporated into the overall design of the handbag. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 are indications of the contrasting reasons why logos were and are employed by designers and manufacturers. The advertisement for couturier Ted Lapidus' logoed handbags depicts a handbag that was associated with status. It is a true fashion branded commodity. The bags in this line were made in vinyl embossed with a continuous repeat of three-dimensional interlocking TL logos. Additionally the bags featured a logoed patch and logoed hardware. The simple design program of these bags is thoroughly based on the logo. The logo *is* the aesthetic program and this featured icon performs a crucial link to the elite world of couture. The text in the advertisement provides a concrete rationale for selecting the Lapidus bag over any other bag in the marketplace. It notes that the wearing of a Lapidus is the mark of a "connoisseur." Advertisements for designer or luxury branded logoed goods generally utilize the language of status, taste, club membership and exclusivity. The logo was and often still is the external and concrete marker of these ideas. The logo commodifies the couturier.

Figure 5.6 is an advertisement for Bosca, an American wallet maker based in Springfield, Ohio. Each Bosca wallet in the illustration is adorned with a single cast ornament in the form of a pair of diverging Bs. The logo dominates the flap of the wallet but is not present anywhere else in the design. The text of the advertisement provides the rationale for selecting a Bosca. It is stylish and handcrafted of excellent materials. There are allusions to the elegance and luxury of the leather, but the prevailing message is not about status or exclusivity, but rather about quality and good craftsmanship. Here the

logo serves as a mark of assurance and helps to mark it as different from wallets of similar design. The purchaser of a Bosca is buying a wallet that will bring lasting satisfaction. The logo is the mark of quality associated with the brand rather than the motivating factor for buying the wallet.

### **High-Style Trends in the 1980s**

The pages of *Vogue* reveal that the types of logos used in high-style fashion on fashion branded commodities in the 1980s continued trends developed in the 1970s—innovation and change were minimal. The three most common types of logos were stylized initials, the full name executed in simple typeface, and the name or initials along with an icon in a single field. The latter format increased in popularity after 1985, whereas the use of the name alone, simply executed waned on fashion branded commodities as it came to be the dominant mode on regular mass produced branded goods. Use of a lone icon remained fairly uncommon, as did the use of simply executed initials. The presence of signature or monogram handbags and hand luggage was strong throughout much of the decade, but frequently they included an additional piece of logoed hardware. This was a new, albeit simplistic stylistic innovation. The tendency to place an additional logo on top of signature fabric became increasingly common after 1986. However, most handbags and hand luggage (70%) in the pages of *Vogue* in the 1980s featured only a single logo. A burgeoning innovation of the 1980s (glimpsed on a small scale in the 1970s) was the use of multiple logos, in various positions such as a plaque and a zipper pull.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The number of objects with multiple logos is probably greater than what I was able to count using only printed evidence. Material evidence that I have collected shows that

The popularity of logoed handbags (in the eyes of the fashion press) waxed and waned in the 1980s and increase in purported fashionableness seems to have coincided with stylistic innovations. The uptick in the number of objects featuring multiple logos or signature fabric with additional logos was contemporary with the increased concentration of editorials and advertisements that contained logoed bags. This period of saturation occurred between the years 1981-1983 and 1987-1989. The ebbing and flowing appearance of this type of fashion branded commodity in the pages of *Vogue* is corroborated by journalists analyzing the trade. For example, the surge in examples of logoed bags in 1987 was predicted by a *Fashion Accessories Magazine* trend forecaster who in 1986 noted, “Status is showing up again in fabrics and vinyl’s [sic]” (“Handbags and Footwear” 84). The attention granted to logoed bags by fashion editors and trend forecasters is at least partially attributable to the fact that designers and manufacturers were making these minor stylistic innovations. Additionally it is noteworthy that such items were being promoted as fresh new fashions. Some companies were updating lines and offering something revised, if not completely novel, to the consuming public. Thus the appearance of fashion innovation was perpetuated by mass manufacturing and the fashion press. This is evidence that the very nature of fashion was being reengineered by these powerful entities. Notably this kind of cultural engineering was considered in Harvey’s treatise on postmodernism.

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logos on small pieces of hardware, buckles, and zipper pulls were sometimes not visible in photographs.

### **Summary of Data: Logo Aesthetics in the 1980s**

The ways in which a logo could be executed remained diverse, and continued to build upon techniques that were introduced in the previous decade, an indication that fashion branded commodities were not evolving stylistically. Logically manufacturers using logos as simple brand markers did not modify or evolve the logo either. Logos printed on fabric or woven into fabric were the most common method of executing a logo and largely corresponded to the strong presence of signature fabrics that were represented in advertisements and editorials, although inexpensive cotton or nylon bags made for the mass market might also be marked using this technique. Additionally, patches of leather or vinyl, cast ornaments, and engraved plaques featuring designer names, initials or icons, continued to be used. Leather and vinyl patches were common on mass produced branded goods and less common on fashion branded commodities. The fact that stylistically the logo itself had largely stagnated may have contributed to the periodic dips in the trendiness or fashion-forwardness of the logoed bag. The periodic waning of the fashionableness of logoed bags, it will be shown, was remedied with myriad approaches in the 1990s and 2000s when logos were reworked, redesigned, and reinterpreted with great diversity in terms of tastes and target demographics.

### **The Logo Arrives in Teen Fashions**

An emphasis on branding of clothes and accessories, appeared in the teen market about a decade after emerging in high-style fashion, though a connection to adult high-fashion brands was evident prior to that time. The survey of *Seventeen Magazine* from 1969 to 1979 revealed an interesting assortment of fashion influences being presented to the teen



market. At one end of the spectrum, *Seventeen*'s advertisers included Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Lanvin, Nina Ricci and Dior, all of which advertised fragrances or cosmetics to the young reader but seldom advertised apparel or accessories. For the most part teen fashions represented in *Seventeen* were unbranded, were produced by large manufacturers, and were available at major retailers.

Handbags in *Seventeen* in the early 1970s were generally brightly colored and made of canvas, patent plastic, and leather. Brands were not mentioned frequently and when they were noted, it was typically not a focal point. In fact, branded fashion merchandise of any kind was rare until the last few years of the 1970s when youth-market fashion brands such as Hang Ten, Chic, and Candies began to advertise. *Seventeen*'s editorial work in the 1970s relied on product assortments derived from mass-market producers and retailers. In terms of editorial focus, self-expression and do-it-yourself were dominant themes. Iron-on and embroidered initials could also be found on all kinds of products including hats, bags, and apparel, but logoed products were very rare.

Brand names were increasingly emphasized in the closing years of the decade. An early example appeared in an October 1970 advertisement for Princess Gardiner wallets, which were not logoed, but noted, "When a girl's savvy to Sassoon, Shakespeare, and the Stones, you can't con her about leather." The earliest examples of logoed products would best be described as branded with a logo as opposed to being a fashion branded commodity. The first example of a logoed piece of hand luggage appeared in a 1975 advertisement for Buxton leather wallets that were adorned with a small cast ornament in the form of a stylized "B."

Handbags branded with a logo appeared occasionally in advertisements in the final years of the 1970s. In 1977 Frye, a maker of sturdy, traditional leather goods, ran an advertisement in *Seventeen* that included logoed handbags. Shoulder bags with Frye embossed in the leather were photographed along with boots and jeans. In this advertisement, the logo was barely visible on the bag itself but was printed elsewhere in the advertisement. Another example of a product branded with a logo was included in a 1979 advertisement for Avon that offered the gift of a backpack embroidered with the fragrance brand name Sweet Honesty with the purchase of the Sweet Honesty scent. A 1979 advertisement for Candies showed both leather shoes and a small leather shoulder bag, both of which were embossed with the full name of the brand. Notably, this same advertisement also ran in *Vogue* in February of 1979. None of these products utilized the logo in the manner a fashion branded commodity does (making it central to the design concept) nor do these companies position themselves in the marketplace as fashion brands with an identity upon which to trade. Rather they used the logo only as a brand marker, a feature that was becoming increasingly common in the teen market.

The first editorial mention of a logoed handbag that occurred in my survey of *Seventeen Magazine* appeared in October of 1979 in an editorial entitled “Paris: French Teens with an Eye for Fashion.” The article, which documented “hot Parisian trends,” included a picture of a cotton canvas Dorothée Bis tote bag emblazoned with the designer’s name in very large script across the full width of the tote. This is an early example of a fashion branded commodity for the teen market. The name was essentially the only design element on the simple black cotton bag. Notably the name is of a French apparel designer, therefore the name had the requisite cache to elevate it to the status of a

fashion branded commodity. Interestingly, the text noted that this bag was a “status symbol,” an early indication of the belief that a bit of branding had the ability to elevate the mundane to the level of the exceptional.

From 1981 to 1989 there was an increase in the number of logoed handbags (both fashion branded commodities and objects with simple branding) depicted in *Seventeen*, with the majority of occurrences happening after 1985.<sup>3</sup> Notably by the early 1980s there was a wide range of logoed items available in the apparel marketplace. Hang Ten shorts, Calvin Klein and Zena jeans, Sassoon belts, sweatshirts and T-shirts by Esprit, Gitano and LA Gear all proliferated the pages of *Seventeen* and were joined by legions of others as the decade progressed. Branded handbags by Coach and LeSportsac (which would both later position themselves as fashion brands) were visible in the pages of *Seventeen* but these might be categorized as “crossover” brands that targeted both teens and an older demographic (their advertisements could be found in *Vogue* in this same period). Importantly, it was during the 1980s that fashion branded commodities targeted specifically at the youth market also began to offer logoed handbags and hand luggage. Among the youth brands were Ciao!, Esprit, and Ocean Pacific. Athletic brands with distinctive brand identities (that were rising to the level of fashion in part because of the popularity of Hip Hop culture) such as Puma and Body Glove also entered the teen handbag market in the 1980s. Fashion branded commodities offered by these companies used logos that often captured specific aspects of the brand identity in addition to the name. For example O.P. (Ocean Pacific) would incorporate surfboards and palm trees. The diversity of brand identities representing themselves with logoed products may be

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<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that in the first half of the decade it was actually quite rare for a stylist to include a handbag of any kind, logoed or not, in a fashion editorial.

read as an indication that the teen market was receptive to such products and that a profit could be made from them. The record shows that logoed apparel blazed the fashion branded commodities trail and handbags were an additional logoed product line offered by manufacturers in the wake of their success.

### **Logo Aesthetics in the 1980s Teen Market**

During the 1980s there were strong trends in the manner a logo was wrought on a handbag or piece of hand luggage targeted at the teen market. Notably the types of logos used were similar to those depicted in *Vogue* but there was less diversity and less expensive treatments were favored—additional evidence that fashion branded commodities are typically reliant on standard design elements. Logos were generally simpler, more explicit, and less stylized. Of the logos counted, 68% consisted solely of the designer or company name. Companies producing both branded products (Coach, Eddie Bauer) and fashion branded commodities (Esprit, Swatch, Body Glove, and Crayons) both used clear, un-stylized typeface to execute logos. The primary aesthetic difference between the two types of logoed products was in terms of the size of the logo and its overall incorporation into a design program (color, texture, typeface). Logos ranged in size from about an inch to more than six inches across (dominating the width of an entire bag). Only 26% of the logos represented in *Seventeen* in this period consisted of the name and an icon presented together. For example, the Jordache horse head was typically presented with the company name directly beneath it, thereby augmenting the legibility of the brand icon. A very small number of brands represented in this sample utilized only an icon, eschewing both initials and the full brand name. Kangaroo Joey

often marked its products with a lone kangaroo, however some products from this brand were marked with the icon in conjunction with the name brand. Additionally, there was little diversity in terms of the number of logos used on a single object during this period. Of the objects counted, 95% utilized a single logo. Brands such as LeSportsac, which typically uses a tape with a woven repeat of its brand as a trim was an exception as was the somewhat anomalous appearance of the monogrammed Louis Vuitton handbag that appeared in a Giorgio fragrance advertisement. The primary aesthetic differences between the logos on fashion branded commodities and the logos on branded products can be reduced to two observations. Fashion branded commodities exclusively used extra-large logos (three inches across or bigger) and used icons such as kangaroos and palm trees. Icons were not used on branded commodities lacking the fashion pedigree.

### **Designer Authority Asserts Itself in the Teen Market**

In conjunction with the increased presence of fashion branded commodities throughout the advertisements and editorials in *Seventeen* in the 1980s, there was also the advent of the designer phenomenon as a topic of interest. For the first time *Seventeen* writers called specific attention to the special talents of designers both inside and beyond the teen market. For example, a 1986 article entitled “Fashion Flash” covered the haute couture shows of Dorothée Bis, Kenzo, and Jean Paul Gaultier. Such coverage was ostensibly not geared toward inspiring purchases of couture by teenagers, but was more likely intended to induct new protégées into the cult of the designer. A 1988 article entitled “The Designer Image” provides further evidence of the promotion of the designer mystique. The article, which featured companies such as Benetton and Esprit, described

the companies as innovative creators and trendsetters who were “boldly going where no designer has sewn before” (174). Curiously, the article also posited these companies in contrast to status brands by noting, “We’re not talking about snobby logos or status labels here” (178). Given the omnipresent use of bold, oversized logos by both of the aforementioned companies on both apparel and accessories, this last assertion seems aimed at appealing to teenage desires for self-expression and individualistic self-concept rather than exploring the truth about these designer lines. Additional evidence of the gradual gravitation towards high-style designer brands comes from a fashion editorial entitled “Trends,” which showed mass-market accessories inspired by Chanel. The inexpensive interpretations were part of a photo-collage that included images of the Chanel runway. The notion of “status” accessories seems to have been both a taboo and ripe for development in the teen market.

### **Logo Meaning in the Teen Market: Identifying the Fashion Branded Commodities**

The meaning of the logo in the teen market is more difficult to ascertain than the meanings proffered for fashion branded commodities and branded mass-produced goods discussed in relation to the high-style pages of *Vogue*, therefore it is sometimes more difficult to determine if a product is a fashion branded commodity. I have asserted that determining whether a logoed item is branded or whether it is a fashion branded commodity results from both visual evidence and evidence related to the brand identity (i.e. whether it has fashionable connotations). As noted, the concept of status was seldom raised on the pages of *Seventeen* and the notion of high-style designer prestige was only emerging as the decade of the 1980s drew to a close. Clearly logos on many handbags

and pieces of hand luggage for the teen market, were often simple acts of branding. For example, the Eastpack logo that is traditionally embroidered on their backpacks is a sign of quality and an indication to expect durability from a bag used to haul countless schoolbooks. The visual and textual evidence suggests that some logos on teen products were functioning as the logo of a fashion branded commodity. However in some cases the specific meaning of a brand and certain kinds of logos vis-à-vis the teen user is more difficult to identify than it is for the meaning of a known designer's fashion branded commodity.

Complicating interpretation of the meaning of an object that appears to be a fashion branded commodity is the fact that many teen brands have not endured over the years. Popularity may have been fleeting and the marketed brand identity may not be completely known. Without knowing the brand identity that was projected by a given brand (i.e. if it was fashionable) and, more importantly how the brand identity was received and re-shaped by the adolescent consumer, it is difficult to ascribe specific meaning to the wearing of the logo (whether or not it was important). Further clouding interpretation is the understanding that the desirability and meaning of consumer goods among adolescents is heavily informed by peer influence. Researchers have interviewed adolescents about the reasons they select and value objects and by and large have learned that, "In addition to enjoyment, the social ties associated with these objects and the aspects of self they expressed emerged as the most common reason" (Gunter and Furnham in *Children As Consumers* 37). Augmenting self-concept and expressing personality traits (I will argue in chapter eight) are reasons people utilize fashion branded commodities. Therefore, the teen consumer might select a logoed handbag because it

expresses something of her taste and character and thereby allows her to make appropriate social connections with a specific reference group. The problem resides with ascertaining which brands arose to that level.

With the difficulty of interpretation stipulated, it is still worth noting that in the late 1980s the pages of *Seventeen* show a strong sample of bags that appear to be fashion branded commodities, many of which have oversized logos that dominate the expanse of the bag. While these oversized logos do not coordinate with a design program in the way that the designer status bags used multiple logos or logos coordinated with color and texture, they essentially *are* the design program. They are what make the bag desirable as a fashionable object and therefore they should be regarded as fashion branded commodities for the sheer fact that brand is so dominant. Visual dominance of a logo should generally be interpreted as its salient and therefore selling feature. Figure 5.7 is an example of a logoed shoulder bag produced for the teen market by Color Gear. The name of the brand dominates the entire side of the bag and the letters of the brand name have been designed so that negative space is filled with texture and portions of the letters are transformed into graphic elements. Though little is known of this Hallmark brand's identity, its positioning within the advertisement in conjunction with its aesthetics suggests that it is not simply a branded product.

### **The Logo Infiltrates the Mass Market**

The Sears Catalog provides a snapshot of merchandise targeted to a mass market that countless consumers relied upon for quality contemporary merchandise. Remarkably, the presence of logos of any kind on handbags and hand luggage was evident in the Sears



Catalog only by the 1980s. Their emergence in the catalog lagged behind the fashion-forward pages of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine* and trade publications by more than a decade. The survey of the Sears Catalog from 1969-1979 revealed a mix of classic core products peppered with a few fashion. This merchandise mix of contemporary, entirely un-branded products was evident until the close of 1979.

Throughout the 1970s handbags were advertised in light of traditional fashion concepts. Bags were discussed in terms of their design features including shape, color and materials and they typically coordinated with offerings in the shoe line. Handbag materials were highly varied and included vinyl, leather, viscose, rayon, synthetic straw, jute, and polyurethane in a variety of looks including matte, patent, and crinkle texture. The types of finishes were the most fashion-driven element of the merchandise mix. Vinyl was by far the most typical material available for the consumer and the use of synthetics was likely married to the emphasis on affordable pricing that was noted in the text of the catalog. Similarly, throughout the 1970s, luggage was advertised in terms of brand, type of bag (pullman, garment bag, train case, etc), construction (hard or soft side), color, and sometimes the gender of the user. The weight of the bag and an assessment of its performance and durability frequently figured in the description of the luggage. The luxury of travel, especially the glamour associated with travel to Europe, frequently figured in the text associated with several luggage lines including the Courier brand that was cast in the Spring/Summer 1971 catalog as “Sears [sic] most luxurious luggage [that] satisfies your instinct for quality.” A few years later, in the Fall/Winter catalog of 1975, Featherlite brand was described as having “casual European style.”

The 1974 Christmas Wish book gave the first hint that the merchandisers at Sears were becoming keyed in to the rising importance of *designer* handbags that were developing outside of the mass market. This catalog included what might be considered a Gucci “lookalike,” a beige handbag that the text noted was “highlighted by a distinctive red and green webbed cotton stripe” (137). The appearance of this item may be an indication that manufacturers and merchandisers were becoming aware of the visual branding of designer lines, however it was not until a full five years later that the Fall/Winter catalog of 1979 included a second hint of the designer sphere. A leather bag with a gold ornament resembling the Gucci horse-bit was available for purchase in that catalog. Anonymous merchandise branded with an illegible logo finally appeared in the Spring/Summer 1979 catalog. Nylon handbags were featured that included a red and blue tag resembling the logos used by LeSportsac. However, the tag cannot be decoded and the brand name is not mentioned in text.

Finally, in the 1980 Fall/Winter catalog a single named and logoed item was offered. The Le Tote brand tote of rayon canvas with vinyl trim was advertised for \$4.99. The first line of text accompanying the photograph read “LeTote label on outside quilted pocket.” This seems to be a clear effort on the part of the catalog writer to emphasize the prominent label as a selling point, though there is no connection to a brand identity or fashionableness and therefore the bag should be considered a simple branded commodity. It was not until 1981 that Sears finally fully committed itself to the aesthetics of the fashion branded commodity. It was in this year that two private label bags with “designer look” status prints and ornaments were offered for the first time.

The Spring/Summer 1981 catalog presented the LAGO collection. This line of polyurethane handbags was described as having “the feel of fine leather.” The design of the bag featured a stylized metal LAGO ornament that was attached to the body of the bag. Depending on the style of the handbag, the ornament could be either cast or engraved. The text of the catalog entry made mention of the “full fabric lining printed with our exclusive LAGO design.” Priced at seventeen dollars, the LAGO line was slightly more expensive than other polyurethane bags on offer in that edition of the catalog. It would seem that the air of exclusivity as well as the intimation that this bag was of higher quality were designed to substantiate the price, although the brand name itself could not have had any recognizable cachet as it was being debuted in this catalog. All other handbags were advertised solely in terms of the material, shape, color, low price, and durability.

The 1981 Fall/Winter catalog presented a second private label collection that would continue to be a Sears mainstay for years to come (Figure 5.8). The Carriage Court Collection of leather handbags was advertised as one of “Sears Best.” Available in five shades of aniline-dyed leather, they were described as being made of “soft, supple leather” and having a “luxuriously smooth finish.” This emphasis on the beauty of the materials and their tactile pleasure cannot be found elsewhere in the Sears Catalog’s descriptions of its handbag offerings. The catalog entry went on to mention that the “superbly crafted” bags were “lined with a designer-look status print” (125). The handbags also featured a cast metal ornament that was attached to the body of the bag. The design of the Carriage Court logo is a pair of confronted C’s, the inverse of the Chanel logo. Designs from the Carriage Court collection, offered in later seasons,

continued to utilize the “status print lining” and the metal ornament, but also frequently included leather hang-tags embossed in gold with “Carriage Court.” Some models featured the name Carriage Court embossed into the body of the bag in lieu of the cast metal ornament—an indication that the designers were playing with conventions used elsewhere in the marketplace. It should be noted that the lengthy text that accompanied the introduction of this line of handbags also emphasized the roominess of their interiors, the durability of the nylon zippers, the finishing of interior seams, and the fact that straps were either adjustable or “easy-to-carry.” In other words, while these logoed handbags were being presented as fashion-forward status bags, their utilitarian features and value for the dollar were also emphasized. This may be interpreted as the writers of the catalog understanding their target demographic. Though the Sears customer of 1981 may have been intrigued by the designer status phenomenon, may have wanted a fashion branded commodity, she may have been equally concerned about getting value for her hard-earned pay. The Carriage Court bags, priced at \$25.00, were almost \$10.00 more expensive than other leather bags of similar size and shape. A double page spread in the Spring/Summer 1982 catalog offered both leather and fabric Carriage Court handbags in a variety of shapes and sizes. The text of the descriptions shows the clear effort to marry fashion and practicality in a single sales pitch. The double-handle “Career Bag” was described as a “Designer look bag...sized larger than usual to ‘hold everything’ fashionably” (90).

The Carriage Court and LAGO collections were a mainstay of the Sears Catalog’s handbag offerings for several years. Carriage Court was heavily advertised as a “bag of distinction” and the language of status was consistently used to describe the bag itself, its

lining, and even the matching keychain. Both lines employed the logo on the lining and in the form of a cast or engraved metal ornament attached to the body of the bag. Additionally, a leather hangtag embossed with the brand name was also sometimes included. The metal ornament utilized a stylized emblem, whereas the hangtag spelled out the brand name completely. The multiplicity of logos on a single object is nowhere more evident than on the Carriage Court rayon Jacquard handbags that were offered beginning in the Fall/Winter catalog of 1983. These were constructed of a fabric patterned in a repeat of the double-C insignia (Figure 5.9). Additionally they were lined with the signature fabric, they included a leather hangtag, and had a leather patch embossed with the logo stitched to the body of the bag. Although Sears lagged far behind high-style fashion in terms of beginning to offer a product line with logo and the characteristics of a fashion branded commodity, the stylistic attributes of the bags, namely the use of Jacquard fabric and multiple logos, were in line with contemporary high-style trends.

During the first five years of the 1980s, the Sears Catalog consistently presented a wide array of handbags that included an assortment of logoed lines with strong similarities to high-style fashion branded commodities, many of which were private label. In addition to LAGO and Carriage Court, other brands on offer that included logos and were marketed with text that built a fashionable brand identity were Lucci (marketed for its “European styling”), Braggin’ Dragon (a Lacoste look-alike), as well as the national brands Sassoon and Sergio Valente. Whereas Carriage Court, and to a lesser degree LAGO, were truly marketed as “status” or designer-inspired handbags, most logoed handbags were presented simply as branded goods. Among the products on offer were a

collection of cotton poplin bags which included an embossed leather medallion bearing the name “Fairfield Park.” Bold Spirit was a line of polyurethane bags that were clearly marked with a metal plaque engraved with the full name of the brand. Notably, each of these logoed brands was not connected to a distinct taste, or lifestyle or fashion sensibility.

In 1987 a new private label collection marketed as the Stefanie line was introduced. These leather bags were marked with a stylized “S” logo executed in a cast ornament. Described as “elegant leathers” with “fresh new looks,” the Stefanie collection, which also included apparel, continued to be offered for years to come. The introduction of a new designer-inspired collection no doubt was informed by industry and consumer analysis. A 1986 article in *Fashion Accessories Magazine* that documented top sellers noted, “Overall, the better handbag business has been described as ‘difficult.’ However, status bags have been reordering” (“Handbags and Footwear” 86). Interestingly, the designers, manufacturers and merchandisers alike, while understanding the importance of fashion branded commodities to their bottom line, were also beginning to understand by the mid-1980s that consumer perception of these looks was not monolithic. Bud Ganson, of mass merchandiser Ganson, which had introduced a line covered with a subtle “g”-repeat noted, “Not everyone equates logo bags with status. ...I don’t think it’s so much the logo, but rather the look and the price point” (“Status...Still!” 16). The same article in *Fashion Accessories Magazine*, which detailed the persistence of status bags in the marketplace, went on to note that “A Federated program on logo handbags (described as a ‘generic geometric pattern which resembles Liz [Claiborne] using squares and dots instead of triangles’) has been extremely successful” (16). The

presence of these designer look-alike products indicates that consumers were, in some cases, interested in fashion branded commodities (status bags) at a reasonable price, but, in other instances, were simply interested in bags that reflected contemporary stylistic trends.

At first glance, it may appear that Sears was lagging far behind the signature handbag trend, but contemporary sources suggest that Sears was developing their private label “designer-like” products at about the same time as other mass retailers. Additionally, Donald Katz, writer of *The Big Store*, noted that Joe Moran, head of buying at Sears in the late 1970s and 1980s, philosophized that the company was on its own “style clock,” one which put Sear’s involvement with a fashionable trend at “a bit past the hour of high style” (308). It seems that the trend for “designer” logoed bags took six to seven years to begin to proliferate within the mass market, but truly a solid ten years for it to become a widespread phenomenon. In the 1970s and 1980s the trickle-down effect was still quite slow.

Logoed national brand items, only some of which can be categorized as fashion branded commodities, first became available in the Spring/Summer 1984 catalog. Nylon luggage by Levis included a small red tag with the Levis name embroidered upon it. In the last years of the decade Pierre Cardin, Bonjour, Pan Am, and Samsonite were available for purchase, as were products by Spalding, the athletic goods company, and Coca Cola, whose line of accessories and apparel was very successful in the late 1980s. Ricardo of Beverly Hills, a mass-market brand that was widely available at moderately priced retailers, was another brand name maker that utilized logos on its products.

Each national brand bag was clearly marked with the brand name and sometimes with an icon as well. Companies such as Sassoon sometimes included a handprint logo along with the brand name. Similarly, Sergio Valente often included its bold bull's skull symbol between the first and last name of the brand. The logos applied to these national brand items were universally modest in size (estimated to be less than three inches across) and did not coordinate in any important way to the overall design program of the bag. Small, simple, understated logos have the ability to motivate and influence a consumer, but it is less likely that they are the primary lure to or allure of a product. Essentially the logos on most national brand items function as a branding device, a mark that sets one piece of merchandise apart from the many objects for sale in the marketplace.

The meaning of the logo on a simply branded commodity is especially apparent in the context of Sears' luggage offerings. The text accompanying the logoed luggage reveals the appeal being made to potential customers: the functionality and reliability of the branded objects. Details relating to straps, wheels, zippers, and compartments were virtually standard and an emphasis on lightness of weight, durability, capacity, and overall quality were consistently emphasized. Additionally, the meaning of the brand name and the brand identity was often subtly employed. For example, the description of a Sassoon nylon piece of luggage was described as having the "style and quality of Sassoon," whereas a "nylon look" vinyl suitcase from Jordache was described as "A smart look from Jordache for the choosy traveler." Stylishness was sometimes emphasized in the descriptions of logoed luggage. Text noted that lightweight Jordache suitcases had the ability to "take the lug out of luggage," whereas the text accompanying



the Pierre Cardin line attempted to kindle images of glamour by stating, “Whether it’s a world tour or a quick trip, make sure you go in style.” It is apparent that brand identity was being employed in the marketing of national brand luggage, however the aspects of brand identity that were utilized were far more varied compared with the aspects of brand identity used to promote designer bags.

### **The Logo in the Postmodern Marketplace: 1969-1989**

The emergence of logoed handbags and hand luggage in high-style fashion, teen fashion, and the mass market is an aesthetic phenomenon that demonstrates general characteristics of both producers and consumers in a postmodern context. The quick transmission of both fashion branded commodities and branded commodities suggests that the general concept of labeling was ripe for development—that there was a need or a desire or, as Harvey argued, corporations had steered consumer needs and desires. It is noteworthy fashion branded commodities emerged at the same time as the burgeoning importance of accessories in general and handbags in particular was noted by industry insiders including the association of professionals in the Fashion Group International in New York. A 1978 address referred to the accessories market as “the billion dollar baby” and noted that the handbag market in particular was experiencing exponential growth in the late 1970s (“The Billion Dollar Baby”). Working women, they argued, needed accessories to express their emerging status and make claims about their individuality.

The motivation to place a logo on simple commodities was clearly motivated by the demands of the marketplace. Some industry insiders cautioned consumers that the sheer volume of accessories in the retail marketplace might be both a blessing and a

curse—a sea of choices in which a consumer might float adrift. Logos of all kinds (fashion oriented and brand oriented) could help in the navigation of this sea. The author of a 1970 article entitled “Harnessing Identity Power to Reach the Sophisticated Consumer of the 70s” noted the influx of initials and stylized graphics and argued they were being used “in the name of better communication with the consumer” (Diefenback 23). According to the author, mass media had made the consumer more savvy and critical. Marking objects was ostensibly a way to assuage their skepticism. The fast pace of culture in the late twentieth century, the flooding of the marketplace with consumer goods from worldwide sources, and the persuasive, yet sometimes contradictory, messages of media sources were colliding to create confusion and indecision. The logo as the marker of a brand had the ability to ameliorate consumer angst.

Proliferation of fashion branded commodities seems to have been largely motivated by production concerns. Fashion branded commodities were “safe” from a design perspective and profitable. The “Handbag Market Report,” a monthly article in *Handbags and Accessories*, frequently noted that signature collections were selling well and there was industry-wide acknowledgement that a substantial mark-up could be levied on handbags that were marked with a designer name. A January 1975 “Handbag Market Report” noted that the Pierre Cardin designer series cost two times the price of other Princess Gardner products and went on to note that there was “no customer resistance to the higher prices” (68). A trade publication advertisement for Cardin products by Princess Gardner described seven models “offered in a host of high fashion motifs, highlighted with the Cardin symbol of excellence,” and set the mark-up at a “big 55%” (60). In 1976, an article in *Fashion Accessories Magazine* noted, “More and more

designers are adding their names to plg [personal leather goods] collections. The signature customer looking for quality is often willing to spend more money for the styling and design of a respected name” (“A Natural High” 10). Culture had created consumers with a taste for fashion branded commodities and they were profitable. It stands to reason that the trend would proliferate.

From the late 1970s onward there is evidence that consumer research was influencing the design of logoed products. Specifically, items with the aesthetics of fashion branded commodities were being produced in response to consumer desire. A column in *Handbags and Accessories* entitled “Look It’s New,” which was devoted to depicting and describing new product lines, presented a collection of vinyl bags emblazoned with a continuous repeat of interlocking LPs by Lady’s Pride. Described as “Low price in a signature design,” the bags fetched a mere two to six dollars at cost (“Look It’s New” 10). The visual impact of the bags bore a strong resemblance to the signature fabrics of top design companies, but at a fraction of the price. Two years later, trade reporter Linda Kundell advised her readers to “look for the debut of top of the line designer-like series in popular priced lines along with the popularization of certain formerly exclusive designer names.” She went on to note, “An awareness that Middle America is looking for styling at lower price points is growing” (53). With that growing awareness came the development of lines poised to meet the needs of consumers across demographics.

There is evidence that Sears was developing the consumer research arm of its business in the middle of the 1970s. Donald Katz noted that the research department at Sears was moved from the Chairman’s division to the buying department in 1976 with

the result that the division was turned into “a mammoth polling agency” that made thousands of calls a day using the data it had from its 60 million customers (35). The net result of this deep awareness of consumer desires, Katz noted, was that “Sears buyers were like hunters” who were known for “brilliantly conceived buys” based on studying the industry, culture, and consumers (24).

The Carriage Court and Lago collections at Sears were conceivably responses to emerging data about consumer desire for fashion branded commodities. Writing about late 1970s industry, culture, and consumer taste, Kundell noted, “Princess Gardner’s expanded Pierre Cardin line, the introduction of Baronet’s Designer Studio series, and the new Gani line all attest to this awareness [of consumer tastes]” (57). Kundell’s examples allude to the myriad ways that status could be interpreted in the mass market. Each of the aforementioned lines was logoed. The Cardin line was built on the cachet of an actual couturier, while the Baronet line simply played off the notion of prestige. The Gani line merely aped the aesthetics of existing status bags. An example that is parallel to the Gani line was depicted in a 1979 advertisement for Raffael that shows how closely related the design aesthetics of mass-market bags could be to high style examples. The Raffael pattern has a very strong resemblance to the interlocking Fendi Fs, which had been developed by Karl Lagerfeld in the late 1960s (Figure 5.10) however the brand identity and brand history of Raffael is essentially an empty set. A logo of this kind recalls Wilson’s critique that postmodern design is exclusively about surface and is characterized by a “depthless polish.”

### **The Two Worlds of Fashion Emerge**

The survey of the first two decades of the phenomenon of logoed handbags and hand luggage reveals that the new world of the fashion branded commodity was in its nascent state and that it was often reliant upon the traditional world of fashion design for its genesis, while the traditional world of fashion frequently depended on its fledgling for its livelihood. In the beginning the new world of the fashion branded commodity was small and undiversified. It had a limited range of aesthetic tropes and was not conceptually complex.

The world of the fashion branded commodity was a new concept of fashion. It emerged at the high end of the market, in the designer sphere. This new concept materialized in a way that is analogous to a magnifying glass being left unattended atop a paper on a bright, sunny day. The magnifying glass is still and barely noticeable. Its transparent lens set in a slender frame channels the light of the sun, focusing it into a powerful beam so concentrated that its energy can singe objects in its path. The new world of the fashion branded commodity put a frame around brand identity (a concept that had been slowly emerging through the historical trajectory of the fashion designer) and channeled all of the power of the designer or storied house through its lens. What came out the other side was brilliant and powerful, and had the ability to alter sensibilities about fashion that had existed for more than one hundred years. The new world of the fashion branded commodity exists because it reframes previously held notions thereby giving them new power and meaning. The new world of fashion succeeds when the brilliance it creates through this transformation blinds consumers to the ways in which objects made in the new world, the world of the brand, are departures from the way

fashion was designed in the traditional sense. The lens of brand identity changes our perception of mass and class, design and branding, ephemerality and permanence.

## **The Complexities of the Two Worlds of Fashion**

### *Mass and Class*

With the introduction of logoed products such as handbags and hand luggage, many luxury and couture companies entered the mass market for the first time (or in the case of Dior, extended their reach deeper into the mass market). As I have noted, direct engagement with the mass market had occurred with items like hosiery and perfume, but mass produced articles of major dress components like handbags were uncharted territory. Accessorizing the masses required that the mass market and the class market live harmoniously together, with the frame of brand identity channeling the desirable aspects of traditional class fashion.

Traditional class oriented fashion was and is expensive. Fashion branded commodities strive to embrace the allure of prestige pricing while setting price points that the masses can afford. A few sources can be considered to demonstrate how price has become a pivotal issue that enables the fashion branded commodity to straddle the two worlds. Brian Blake, former president of Gucci, noted that in the 1970s and 1980s the interlocking G canvas products “were very inexpensive to produce and had very low price points” (Thomas 58). His perspective of price, it should be noted, is likely informed by his understanding of the pricing of other items available for purchase at Gucci at that time. Additional evidence is therefore necessary to make a case about the affordability of this line and comparable collections. A 1970 “Vogue’s Own Boutique

Editorial” featured a model seated amidst a pile of Valentino luggage with an all-over logo motif. The text indicated that the luggage started at sixty dollars per piece. The average suitcase of similar size and construction featured in the Sears catalog that same year cost about twenty-three dollars, less than half of the price of designer logoed bag. A 1974 advertisement that included a Gucci clutch of logo Jacquard with a leather flap was priced at thirty-five dollars. On average, a leather clutch found in the pages of the Sears catalog that same year cost about eighteen dollars, or roughly half the price of the status bag.

Knowing that a logoed designer bag cost about twice as much as a basic mass market bag is informative, but it is still difficult to ascertain the accessibility of these designer products to the middle class or teen consumer. An etiquette guide published for the young female sheds some light on the subject. *The Cosmo Girl's Guide to the New Etiquette*, published in 1971, included a chapter on dress practices that was structured as a series of questions and answers. One exchange reads as follows:

Q: Is it better to put all my money into one status Gucci handbag or buy half a dozen other bags for different occasions?

A: A recognizably fine bag has great impact and lasts for ages (19).

What this exchange suggests is that a logoed designer bag was within reach of a young consumer, though it was likely a stretch of the pocketbook and it was likely at the far end of the spectrum of affordability. Sufficient to say the purchase of such an item would have represented a *luxury* purchase for the average young or middle class consumer. Thus it would seem that luxury and designer brands were carefully riding the line between mass and class when it came to pricing some items. Making the fashion branded

commodities too affordable would impact consumer perception of the exclusivity of the brand, while pricing the items high enough to make their acquisition a reach marked them as class objects.

The issue of accessibility--where the items were retailed--is also relevant to understanding the foray of designer brands into the mass market. Advertisements in *Vogue* in the 1970s and 1980s show that logoed handbags and hand luggage were retailed in the boutiques of the designer and in major department stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Bergdorf Goodman. All of these may be considered “class” retailers. They had relatively few locations in the 1970s and 1980s and sell (both then and now) primarily high-end merchandise. However, there is some evidence to support the suggestion that these retailers made these products as accessible to the masses as possible. For example, Tomoko Okawa noted in “Licensing Practices at Maison Christian Dior” that Saks Fifth Avenue placed the Dior logo Jacquard bags in the Fifth Avenue window display (97), a technique that is typically employed to lure the average passerby into a retail establishment. Distribution through reputable class retailers may be read as an effort to retain brand identity and the allure of luxury. However, the retailers may have been making efforts to appeal to a new (middle class) clientele.

Advertising of fashion branded commodities is also an indication of an effort to retail to a larger population. Prior to the late 1960s, advertising of fashionable apparel and accessories by the designer himself/herself was uncommon. Advertising was typically done by the retailer or by a textile manufacturer. Additionally the imagery in advertising campaigns was typically very staid and formal. On the other hand, advertising imagery used for the presentation of fashion branded commodities was often



far more casual and approachable. For example, a Gucci advertisement from 1974 depicts a happy couple casually strolling with their Gucci accessories, Roberta Camerino advertisements for logoed products simply show an array of objects, and a 1973 advertisement for Saks Fifth Avenue shows a smiling and approachable woman in a car with a stack of Louis Vuitton bags (Figure 5.11). Notably, while these advertisements may have wide appeal, there is nothing demonstrably mass market or down-market about them.

There is also evidence, however, that by the end of the 1970s, when the market had become saturated with fashion branded commodities, items were retailed down-market. For example, items in the Gucci Accessories Collection, which utilized various iterations of the GG Jacquard were sold in perfumeries and drug stores starting in 1979. Forden noted this line was “Cheaper to produce than Gucci’s handcrafted leather bags and accessories” and “the Gucci Accessories Collection was designed to bring the Gucci name to a wider range of consumers” (70). Though the products were originally well received, retailing at locations that were too populist did ultimately negatively impact the brand identity and therefore the price point, and thereafter the illusion of luxury that was imperative to maintaining sales of these logoed goods. For example, Forden noted that by 1989 “The Gucci name had been cheapened. The canvas handbags with in the interlocking Gs were everywhere. By the late 1980s Gucci sneakers became a status symbol for drug dealers” (156). Without the illusion of class and the connection to that market logoed goods were (and are) inclined to fall out of favor with consumers. Without the allure of class, the fashion branded commodities lose their luster.

Mass production is also evidence of the change that was afoot as the mass and class markets became intertwined in new and complex ways. Designer products in the world of fashion branded commodities were being made in large numbers at locations around the globe—a dramatic departure from the traditional world of fashion wherein manufacture was kept close to home base. The Dior Jacquard wallet depicted in Figure 5.12 was manufactured in Gloversville, NY at the St. Thomas factory. I interviewed a former factory employee who had worked as a cutter there from 1974 to 1988. During that time she recalled cutting products for both Gucci and Dior. She also shared with me that the adjacent town of Johnstown, NY had had a mill that produced Dior shirts and towels. While the quality of the St. Thomas wallet is good, there is evidence to suggest that the quality of licensed products (many of which were logoed) often suffered. For example, Dior also produced bags in the Far East in the 1980s, and its leather was often of low quality, “not worthy of the Dior label” (Forrestier 29). When quality suffered, the connection to the class market and to the traditional world of fashion suffered, and consequently the brand identity was diminished.

Summing up the relationship between mass and class markets in the 1970s and 1980s is difficult. Sufficient to say, it required a careful balancing act whereby class markets reached the mass market, hopefully without damaging the cachet of exclusivity that enabled them to trade on their good name in the first place. It would seem that successful forays into the mass market required prices of logoed designer products to be high, but not out of reach. Pricing helps to preserve brand identity and prevents brand dilution. Retailing needed to be varied and to tend toward greater exclusivity. However advertising and visual display interceded to lure the sheepish middle class customer.

Manufacturing had to become decentralized from the original design centers, therefore many logoed products were made under license and in great numbers. However, the successful high-style designer needed to make sure that manufacture under license was hidden from the consuming public so as to maintain the illusion that the designer of record had made the product at hand.<sup>4</sup>

In summation, the successful class object for the mass market had to be carefully positioned. But this did not always happen. Licensing often led to a loss of control on the part of the designer. As a result the quality of the merchandise slipped, leading to retailing at lower-end establishments, and lower prices as well. Over-expansion could lead to brand dilution as top designers revealed their hand, so to speak, making it apparent to consumers that the product was indeed mass produced (see Figure 5.13 for an example of this phenomenon). One's good name could readily be destroyed by unbridled play in the mass marketplace. Pierre Cardin, Oleg Cassini, Dior, and Gucci, to name a few, all fell victim to over-licensing and brand dilution. Fashion branded commodities require the class connection in order for sales to be maintained. Thus a new kind of dependency between the mass market and the class market had emerged.

### *Design and Branding*

With regards to the 1970s, in the first flush of the logoed handbag phenomenon, one can analyze the aesthetics of the bags and speak of design in the traditional sense. In the 1970s logos were developed, manipulated and modified. Designers experimented with

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the Dior wallet in Figure 5.12 is marked Christian Dior, Paris-New York. It does not say Gloversville, New York nor does it have any marking from St. Thomas. To the general consuming public this logoed designer goods would have appeared as a high-style luxury items made by the house of Dior.

techniques for execution, expanded the range of materials used to make logoed goods, and worked with a set of ideas in order to create combinations of effects. New logoed lines were introduced periodically that used a theme and variation approach, but which also introduced new concepts. As the analysis early in this chapter showed, there was a development of logo aesthetics. However, the design and execution of the logo stagnated as a motif by the end of the decade. What transpired from that point forward were seemingly endless variations and reiterations of extant design ideas.<sup>5</sup>

With regards to the sector of the mass market that produces handbags and hand luggage not defined as fashion branded commodities (items such as American Tourister or Samsonite luggage), wherein the bag design and the logo design change little over extended periods of time, there is little need to levy a critique of logo stagnation. These types of items fall within the purview of this study, as they appeared in *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine* and the Sears catalog, but they are not truly fashion items. They show evidence of external branding, but the logo is just that—a marker of brand. The logo that is adhered to a suitcase, or a teen's backpack, as in the case of Eastpack, does not evolve because it is not part of the design program. Such logos are labels. Just as one would not expect the label on a can of tomato soup to change in profound and daring ways from year to year, the same expectation should also apply to logoed/labeled handbags and hand luggage of this kind.

Where the stagnation of the logo as design motif does merit consideration is within the realm of products positioned as fashionable goods. When fashion brands such

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<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that there was not significant development in the shape or size of the handbag or hand luggage form in this period. However, making this the focus of the argument would be unfair as significant developments in terms of new forms, shapes, and sizes are few and far between across the history of fashion.

as Gucci and Dior introduced logoed lines in 1969 and 1970 respectively and continued to make and sell them as fashionable goods for the next two decades and beyond, this raises the question of how we are construing the term fashion. When fashion design innovators such as Diane von Furstenberg, Bill Blass, Yves Saint Laurent and Andre Courreges sign their names over and over again to basic objects that fail to show innovation of even the logo design, that necessitates consideration of the essence of fashion design.

In these cases whereupon the branding device lacks any substantial indication of design innovation, evidence emerges to show how the working definition of fashion has been modified. Figure 5.14 is an example of a Diane von Furstenberg clutch that provides little in the way of design in the traditional sense. It is a basic shape, it is monochromatic, and it relies on a single variation of texture to create visual complexity. The desirability of this clutch in the marketplace was likely largely based upon the embroidered branding device- the DVF logo. The advertisement's presence in the pages of *Vogue*, however, has the ability to inadvertently skew the extant understanding of fashion as the authority of *Vogue* presents it as such. In addition, the authority of Diane von Furstenberg (creator of a new and modern style, the wrap dress) who had moved fashion forward, whose work reflected the culture of the 1970s, and who was considered a traditional fashion designer positions this clutch as fashion design in the traditional sense.

This clutch however is neither particularly reflective of the time period nor is it an innovative design. If one evaluates this clutch as an example of traditional fashion it becomes clear that it evidences none of the necessary hallmarks. Therefore it seems to

upend the very definition of fashion. With Agins and Thomas, critique of objects of this kind has taken the form of condemnation and lamentation, but such exertions do not move the conversation about fashion forward in a meaningful way. What is important to understand is that with the promotion of the DVF clutch (and the legions of similar objects in the marketplace) by *Vogue*, the definition of fashion was ultimately impacted in the minds of consumers. *Vogue*, the arbiter of taste and the authority in matters of distinction in dress, was presenting advertisements and editorials that included fashion branded commodities and did not (nor does it now) distinguish them as a new kind of fashion. This presentation ultimately canonized the logoed design as fashion, though it fails to withstand the ultimate tests of fashion: exclusivity, ephemerality, design and craftsmanship. If one appreciates that this is a different kind of fashionable object—a fashion branded commodity—the working definition of fashion design may remain in tact and unblemished and the clutch may be considered as a different kind of fashionable object in its own right.

### *Ephemerality and Permanence*

Promotion by the fashion press of logoed handbags, hand luggage and other products with virtually unchanging aesthetics, has also changed the very definition of fashion by implying that it need not be fleeting. The “classic,” “timeless,” “investment” object was in its nascent state as the logoed object staked its position in the pages of *Vogue* and later in *Seventeen*. The category of fashion “staple” was directly attached to logoed products both in advertising campaigns and in editorials. For example, an October 1973 “Vogue’s Boutique” referred to an Hermès shoulder bag with a large H buckle as a “classic.” A

January 1975 article tellingly called “Collectibles” featured Fendi clutches with double F cast ornaments. In 1980 and 1981 Phillippe ran ads that utilized the tag lines “another Phillippe Classic” and “Phillippe...timeless.” In 1986 Givenchy used a similar tag line, “timeless fashion,” in advertising campaigns for its logoed handbags. Additionally Borelli titled its advertisements, “style that makes a lasting statement” in 1981.

The notion of fashion being bound to the ephemeral, the cutting edge, that which is markedly different from last season was being chipped away at with the proliferation of these types of products and the verbiage associated with them. Although the notion of an “investment bag” was not articulated in the publications under review in this period, it is implicit in the campaigns and editorials. Given that logoed handbags and hand luggage often cost more than their un-logoed counterparts, assuring the consumer that she could get more than one season out of the item made sense. The move towards classic and timeless permanent fashions was slowly being introduced, but it was working its way through the circuitry of the shared fashion consciousness, changing conceptions in a profound and lasting way.

### **Summation**

The phenomenon of fashion branded commodity began as an effort on the part of designers to build revenue streams and expand their customer bases. Their success provided motivation to maintain product offerings in this category. Variations were developed throughout the 1970s, but stagnated in the 1980s. Some companies were able to keep the brand identity alive and continued to thrive in this category, while other companies tarnished their good name and impacted sales volume and price point. The

continued success of many logoed lines, however, is testimony to the fact that consumers bought into this new kind of fashion. Fashion branded commodities come with status and fashion know-how *en suite*. They enable middle class consumers to buy into a brand that has previously been out of reach. They permit the indefinite extension of the fashion cycle-- staying in the loop even if other items in a wardrobe had to be put to rest. Thus fashion branded commodities are part and parcel of major changes in terms of the way fashion is conceived. Through the powers exerted by big business, the demands of capitalism, and the power of the press to shape consumer knowledge, the definition of fashion has gradually changed. It began in the 1970s with the development of fashion branded commodities such as logoed handbags. In the ensuing decades logoed products including handbags and hand luggage continued to evolve, and with them evolved concepts of fashionable dress.



Figure 5.1 Examples of Types of Logos

1. Icon- Lacoste



2. Stylized initials - Roca Wear

3. Initials in simple typeface - Donna  
Karen New York

**DKNY**

4. Stylized Name - Christian Dior

5. Full name in simple typeface - Anne  
Klein

ANNE KLEIN

6. Name or initials with icon in a single  
field - Versace



Figure 5.2 These two Dior bags are both executed in the Dior Jacquard fabric and are adorned with CD hardware. Both are shoulder bags with flap closures and two interior pockets. The bag at left dates to 2006. The bag at right dates to circa 1970. The newer bag does have an additional piece of CD hardware on the shoulder strap. Both bags are in the author's collection. Photograph by Jason Moore.



Figure 5.3 These handbags all feature continuous repeats of logos. Fabrics are both woven and printed. Some feature additional logos in the form of decorative or functional hardware. Back row (L-R) Valentino, Pierre Cardin. Front row: (L-R) Givenchy, Dior, Pierre Cardin. Photograph by Jason Moore of objects in the writer's collection.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Pierre Cardin Leather Accessories, from \$17.50 to \$30.00.

NOW YOU KNOW

The French Purses shown above, represent the different Pierre Cardin Collections available. Each includes a full range of fine matching accessories in a choice of elegant colors. Prince Gardner, A Division of SWANK, INC., is the sole distributor of Pierre Cardin Personal Leather Goods for women in the U.S.A. You'll find them at the finest stores.

**Pierre Cardin**  
Leather Accessories.

Figure 5.4. This advertisement appeared in *Vogue* in December 1978 (page 56). All of the wallets have an external logo(s). They vary in degree of subtlety. Some logos are embossed in the leather, some utilize a cast ornament as a logo, one is made of jacquard with a continuous repeat, one has an ovoid plaque with Cardin's signature engraved upon it. Each logo is stylistically integrated and each product represents an entire coordinating collection that a customer could collect over time.



Figure 5.5. This is a 1974 advertisement that ran in *Vogue* in December (page 98). It depicts handbags by couturier Ted Lapidus that are embossed with interlocking TLs over the entire body of each bag. This pattern is complemented with an additional TL plaque attached to the center of the side panel. A similar handbag in the author's collection also has a TL zipper pull, TL signature lining, and an internal logo plaque.





**BOSCA**

The Bench Made Collection: distinctive, handcrafted leather purse accessories to keep you organized in style. The design, elegant and timeless. The smooth-textured leather, irresistibly soft to the touch. In luxurious mahogany. At only the finest stores.

A beautiful Bosca tradition of design excellence.

Checkabout Clutch \$35.00. Card Case \$13.50. French Purse \$28.50.

Hugo Bosca Company, Inc. 350 Fifth Avenue  
Springfield, Ohio 45501 New York, N.Y. 10001

Figure 5.6. This is a 1979 advertisement for Bosca wallets that ran in *Vogue* (December, page 91). Here the stylized converging Bs are the lone ornament and the solitary logo. They function as an indication of the brand as opposed to a portion of a comprehensive design program.

Hallmark introduces **COLOR GEAR**



*I*t's back to school...  
 (did we hear a groan?).  
 Another year...  
 (was that a moan?).  
 Seems to us  
 You need some cheer,  
 So here we come with  
 Color Gear.

Color Gear is sweat shirts. Those splashy socks. Sunglasses, too. And things for carrying other things in. And — no surprise — it's lots of school supplies. All this (and even more) is waiting for you at selected stores that feature Hallmark products.

  
 Hallmark

Figure 5.7. This advertisement for Color Gear apparel and accessories ran in *Seventeen Magazine* in September of 1987 (page 109). The tote in the background is dominated by a Color Gear logo. This is more than simple branding, but is probably not a status statement in the traditional sense either.



**The REAL VALUE SEARS**

These Carriage Court Handbags feature a soft, supple leather with a luxuriously smooth finish . . . lined with a designer-look status print



**SHOP AND COMPARE FEATURES AND PRICE**  
See for yourself what value at Sears really means  
*Carriage Court Handbags*

- Superbly crafted of fine quality cowhide leather
- Roomy interiors with designer-look status print
- Matching leather change purse has attached key-chain
- Fine workmanship includes durable nylon zippers; turned-in edges throughout; die-cast molded ornaments

Only **\$25<sup>00</sup>**

Now, as always . . . you can count on Sears

(1 thru 5) LEATHER: Top grain cowhide. Aniline finish brings out the smooth, rich-looking texture. Light taupe woven nylon lining printed with "Carriage Court" motif. DETAILING: Designer-look handbags with topstitching trim. Roomy interiors have handy slip-in compartment; zip-closure wall pocket. Imported.

(1) **Shoulder Bag with Front slip-in pocket**  
Top zipper closure. Shoulder strap adjusts. Measures about 10x2½x7½ inches high.

(2) **Hobo Shoulder Bag**  
Top zipper closure. Shoulder strap adjusts. Measures about 10½x2x7¼ in. high.

(3) **Double handle Tote Bag**  
Top zipper closure. Outside has slip-in compartment with concealed snap closure. Soft, easy-to-carry handles. Measures about 11½x2½x9 inches high.

(4) **Camera case Shoulder Bag**  
Double compartment bag . . . both compartments have top zipper closure. Shoulder strap adjusts. Measures about 10x3¼x7 inches high.

(5) **Envelope Shoulder Bag**  
Snap closure under flap. Shoulder strap adjusts. About 11¼x3x8 inches high.

**COLORS AND ORDERING INFORMATION:**

Color	(1) Front pocket Bag	(2) Hobo Bag	(3) Double handle tote Bag	(4) Camera case Bag	(5) Envelope Bag
Burgundy . . .	88 G 3034	88 G 3024	88 G 3044	88 G 3029	88 G 3039
Black . . . . .	88 G 3035	88 G 3025	88 G 3045	88 G 3030	88 G 3040
Tan . . . . .	88 G 3033	88 G 3023	88 G 3043	88 G 3028	88 G 3038
Dk. Brown . . .	88 G 3036	88 G 3026	88 G 3046	88 G 3031	88 G 3041
Taupe . . . . .	88 G 3032	88 G 3022	88 G 3042	88 G 3027	88 G 3037
Shpg. wt. . . .	15 oz.	13 oz.	14 oz.	1 lb. 1 oz.	12 oz.
Price . . . . .	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00

ALL SEARS 125

Figure 5.8 The introduction of private label "status" handbags into the Sears Catalog took place in 1981. Carriage Court handbags were marked with cast metal ornaments of converging Cs and with the full name embossed into the leather. The lining fabric features both the double-C logo as well as the full brand name in continuous repeat. This page is from the Fall/Winter Catalog, 1981.





Figure 5.9 This is an example of a bag in the Carriage Court signature Jacquard. The textile was always wrought in beige tones and features a diamond grid with converging double-Cs interspersed throughout. This example also has a pair of converging Cs embossed in the leather panel below the zipper. The hang-tag is printed with text that reads “Carriage Court” and notes that this is from the “fine leather collection.” Many Carriage Court bags made primarily of fabric were trimmed in vinyl. Handbag in the collection of the author. Photograph by Jason Moore.



A new Jacquard fabric with leather trim and glass finish.  
\$15.00 to \$45.00 cost.

**RAFFAEL**

Circle No. 62 on Reader Service Card

The advertisement features three handbags with a jacquard pattern and leather trim. The bags are displayed on a dark background. The text 'A new Jacquard fabric with leather trim and glass finish. \$15.00 to \$45.00 cost.' is in the top left. The brand name 'RAFFAEL' is written vertically on the right. At the bottom, it says 'Circle No. 62 on Reader Service Card'.

Figure 5.10. An advertisement for mass manufacturer Raffael ran in *Fashion Accessories Magazine* in November of 1979. The advertisement was connected to the reader services section, ostensibly an opportunity to connect buyers or retailers with the manufacturer. The logo jacquard fabric has a strong resemblance to the double-F signature fabric that was first introduced by Fendi in the 1960s.





Louis Vuitton®  
His unmistakable LV's and  
fleurons on all sizes and shapes  
of portables, because a girl  
just can't have too many.

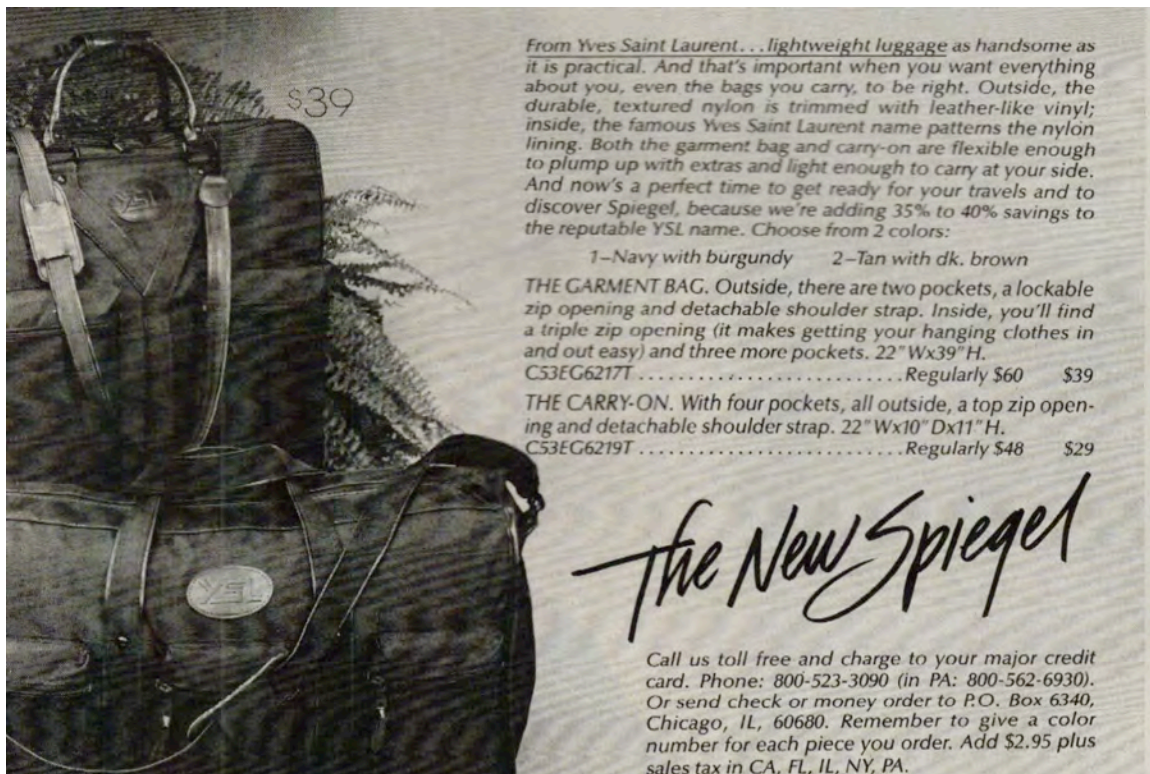
VERY  
*Saks Fifth Avenue*

Figure 5.11 This advertisement for Louis Vuitton at Saks Fifth Avenue ran in *Vogue* in May 1973 (page 14). The smiling woman and casual (albeit luxurious) setting may have appealed to a broad demographic of consumers.



Figure 5.12 This Dior wallet is marked Christian Dior Paris-New York. It's provenance as an object manufactured by St. Thomas in Gloversville, NY is based on the assertion of the previous owner who worked in the factory and produced products in this line. The fact that this was made under license is not indicated on the object. Wallet in the collection of the author. Photograph by Jason Moore.





From Yves Saint Laurent... lightweight luggage as handsome as it is practical. And that's important when you want everything about you, even the bags you carry, to be right. Outside, the durable, textured nylon is trimmed with leather-like vinyl; inside, the famous Yves Saint Laurent name patterns the nylon lining. Both the garment bag and carry-on are flexible enough to plump up with extras and light enough to carry at your side. And now's a perfect time to get ready for your travels and to discover Spiegel, because we're adding 35% to 40% savings to the reputable YSL name. Choose from 2 colors:

1-Navy with burgundy    2-Tan with dk. brown

**THE GARMENT BAG.** Outside, there are two pockets, a lockable zip opening and detachable shoulder strap. Inside, you'll find a triple zip opening (it makes getting your hanging clothes in and out easy) and three more pockets. 22" Wx39" H.  
C53EG6217T ..... Regularly \$60    \$39

**THE CARRY-ON.** With four pockets, all outside, a top zip opening and detachable shoulder strap. 22" Wx10" Dx11" H.  
C53EG6219T ..... Regularly \$48    \$29

*The New Spiegel*

Call us toll free and charge to your major credit card. Phone: 800-523-3090 (in PA: 800-562-6930). Or send check or money order to P.O. Box 6340, Chicago, IL, 60680. Remember to give a color number for each piece you order. Add \$2.95 plus sales tax in CA, FL, IL, NY, PA.

Figure 5.13 This is an advertisement for Yves Saint Laurent Luggage, available through the Spiegel catalog. The advertisement was a half page that ran in *Vogue* in September of 1981 (Page 337). The text notes that the nylon bags trimmed with “leather-like vinyl” bags have been deeply discounted. The logos embossed on the vinyl patches are not the correct typeface nor the correct orientation (i.e. they are not the standard YSL logo). A misrepresentation of the logo was a common problem when designers used a great many licensees who were stationed around the globe.

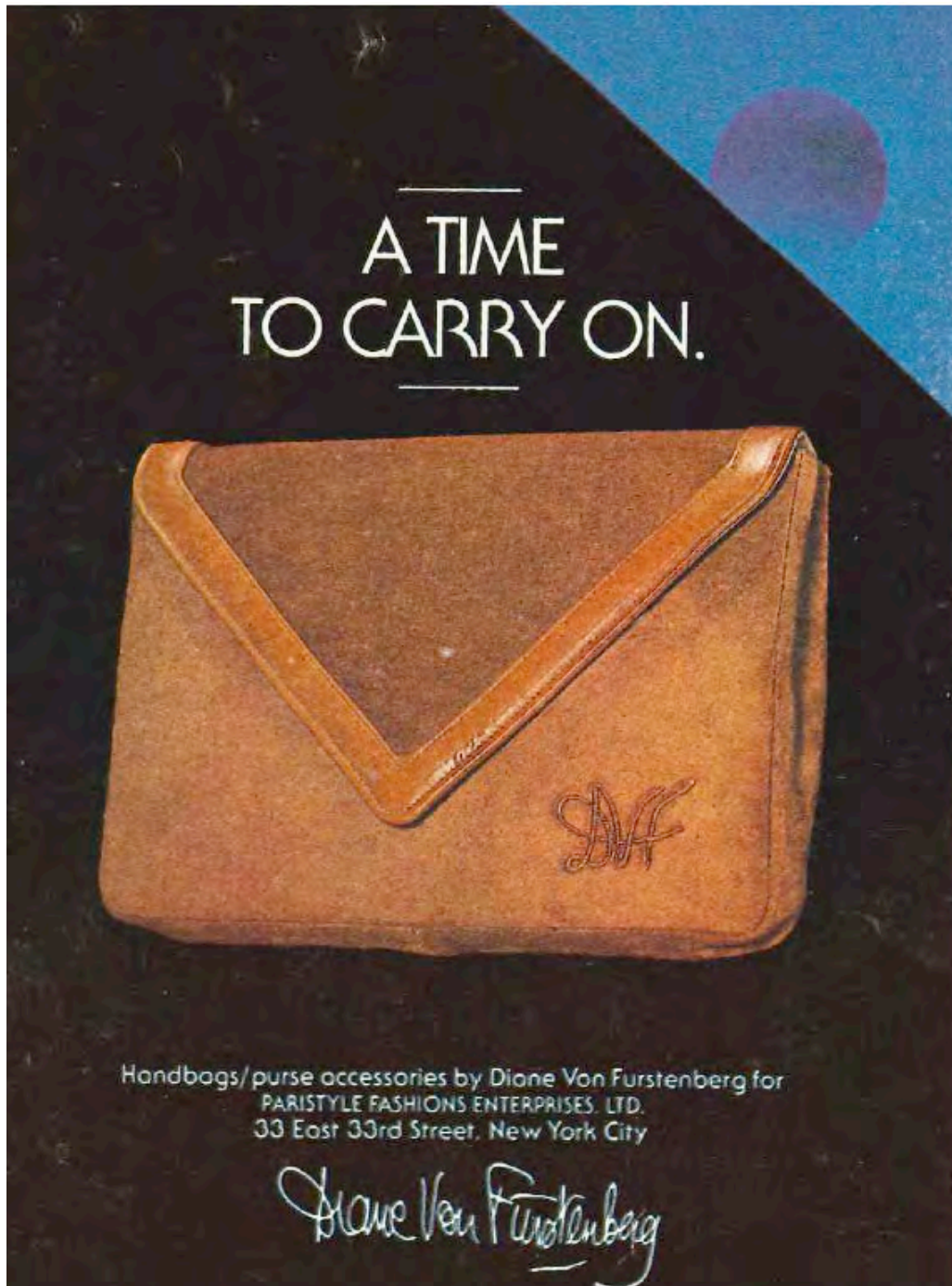
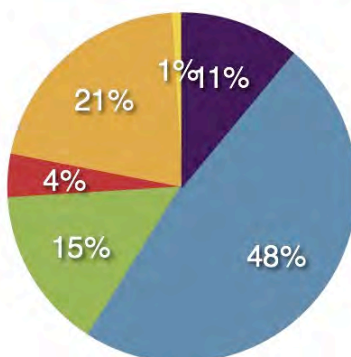


Figure 5.14 This advertisement for a Diane von Furstenberg clutch (made under license by Paristyle) ran in *Vogue* in December 1976 (page 88). This very basic clutch does not evidence any design innovation and lacks substantial use of the basic elements of design (color, texture, space). The logo is the essential design element. It is highly probable that the retail price of this clutch exceeded the price of comparable clutches without a logo by about 50%.

Table 5.1

## Logo type (Vogue): 1969-1979

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



## Logo type (Vogue): 1980-1989

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

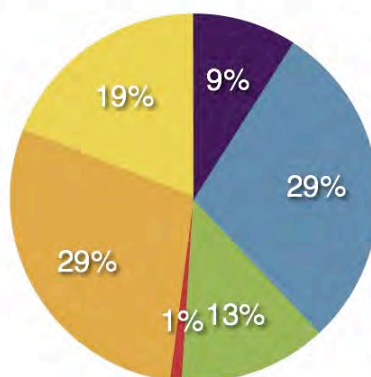
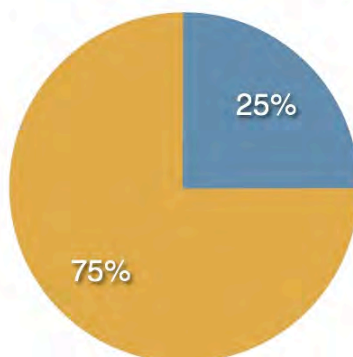


Table 5.2

Logo type (Seventeen Magazine): 1969-1979

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



Logo type (Seventeen Magazine): 1980-1989

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

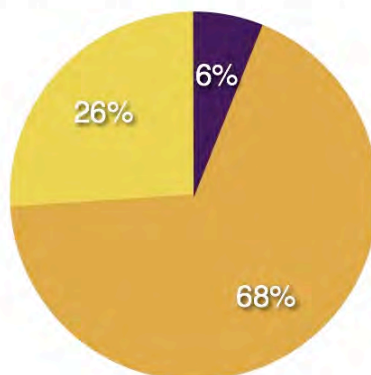
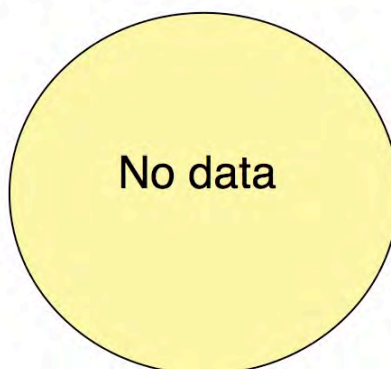




Table 5.3

Logo type (Sears Catalog): 1969-1979

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



Logo type (Sears Catalog): 1980-1989

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

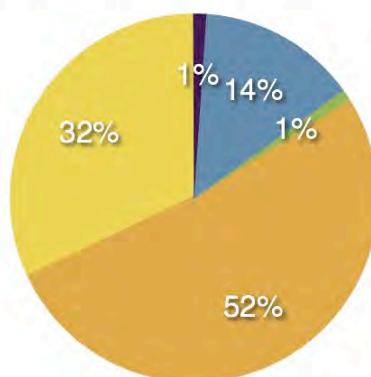
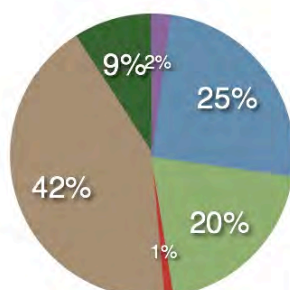


Table 5.4

## Method of logo execution (Vogue): 1969-1979

- Engraved plaque
- Embossed on body
- Embroidered on body
- Engraved in hardware
- Hang tag
- Cast ornament
- Embossed on patch
- Embroidered on patch
- Woven/printed on material



## Method of logo execution (Vogue): 1980-1989

- Engraved plaque
- Embossed on body
- Embroidered on body
- Engraved in hardware
- Hang tag
- Cast ornament
- Embossed on patch
- Embroidered on patch
- Woven/printed on material

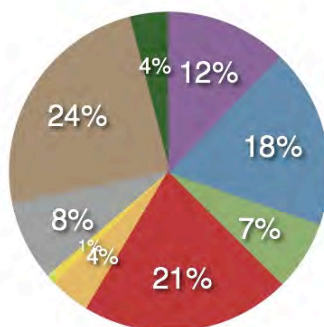
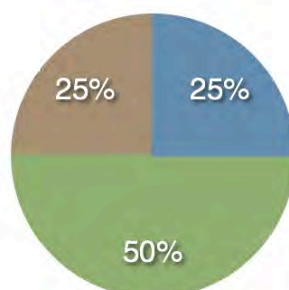


Table 5.5

## Method of logo execution (Seventeen Magazine): 1969-1979

- Engraved plaque
- Embossed on body
- Embroidered on body
- Engraved in hardware
- Hang tag
- Cast ornament
- Embossed on patch
- Embroidered on patch
- Woven/printed on material



## Method of logo execution (Seventeen Magazine): 1980-1989

- Engraved plaque
- Embossed on body
- Embroidered on body
- Engraved in hardware
- Hang tag
- Cast ornament
- Embossed on patch
- Embroidered on patch
- Woven/printed on material

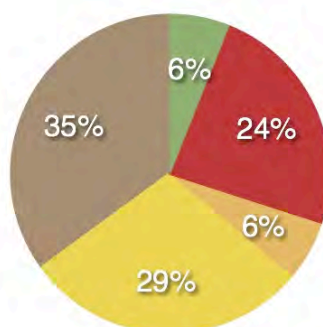
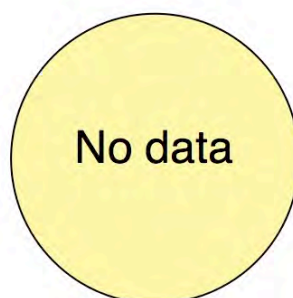


Table 5.6

Method of logo execution (Sears Catalog): 1969-1979

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ● Engraved plaque      | ● Cast ornament             |
| ● Embossed on body     | ● Embossed on patch         |
| ● Embroidered on body  | ● Embroidered on patch      |
| ● Engraved in hardware | ● Woven/printed on material |
| ● Hang tag             |                             |



Method of logo execution (Sears Catalog): 1980-1989

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ● Engraved plaque      | ● Cast ornament             |
| ● Embossed on body     | ● Embossed on patch         |
| ● Embroidered on body  | ● Embroidered on patch      |
| ● Engraved in hardware | ● Woven/printed on material |
| ● Hang tag             |                             |

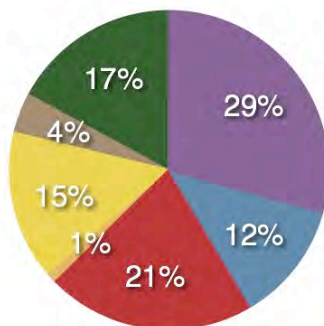
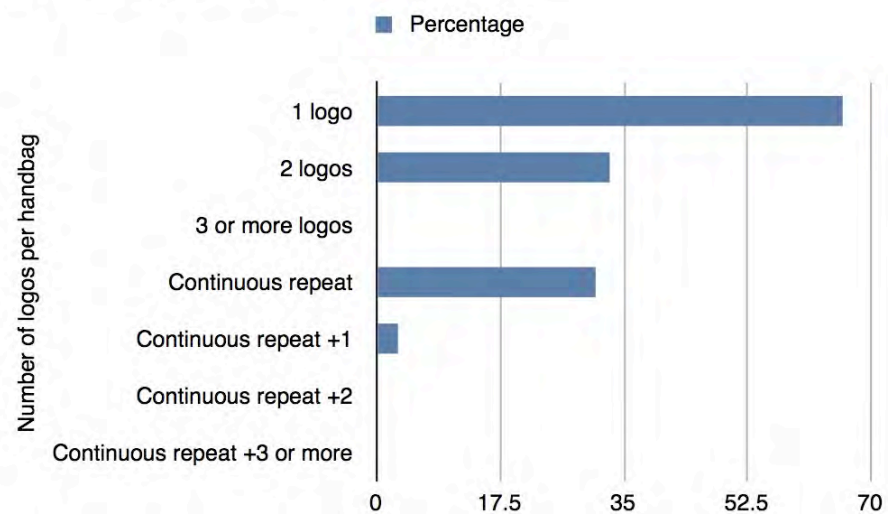


Table 5.7

Logo count (Vogue): 1969-1979



Logo count (Vogue): 1980-1989

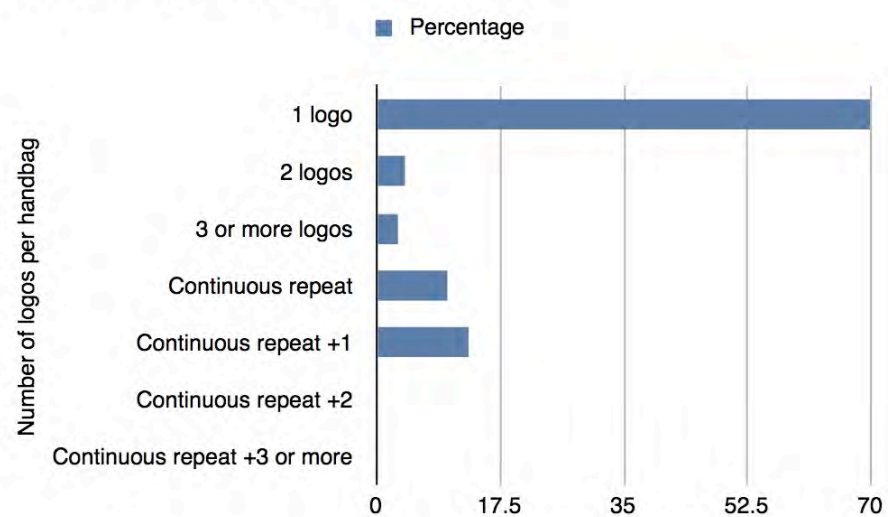
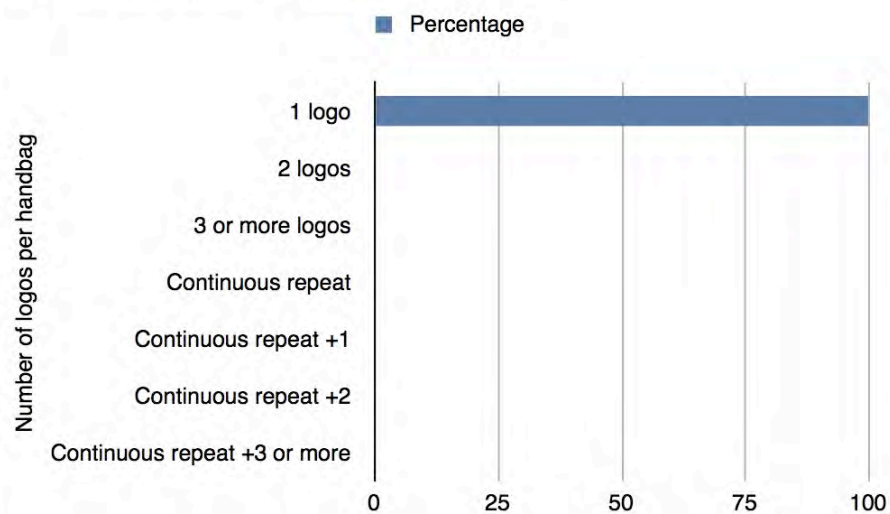


Table 5.8

Logo count (Seventeen Magazine): 1969-1979



Logo count (Seventeen Magazine): 1980-1989

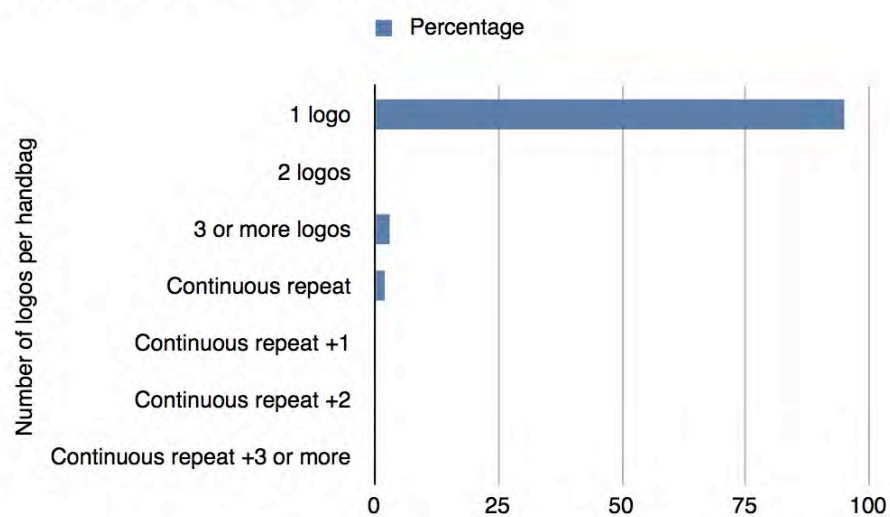
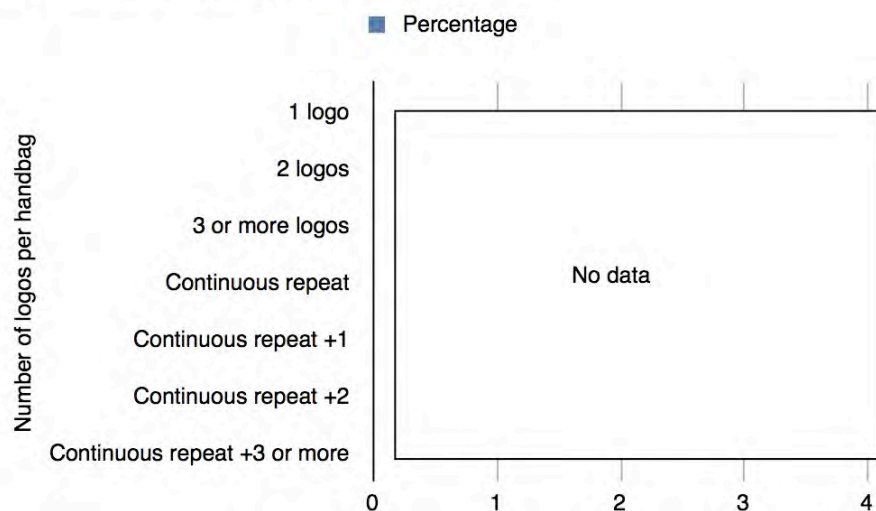
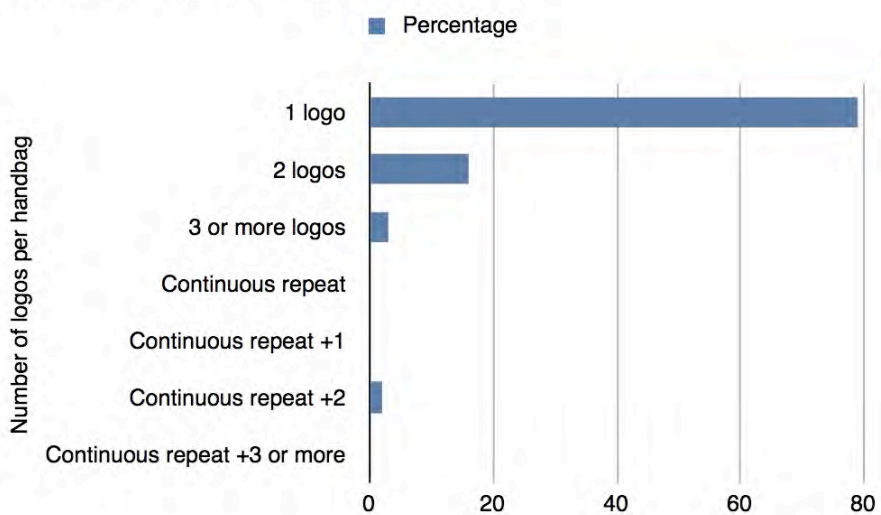


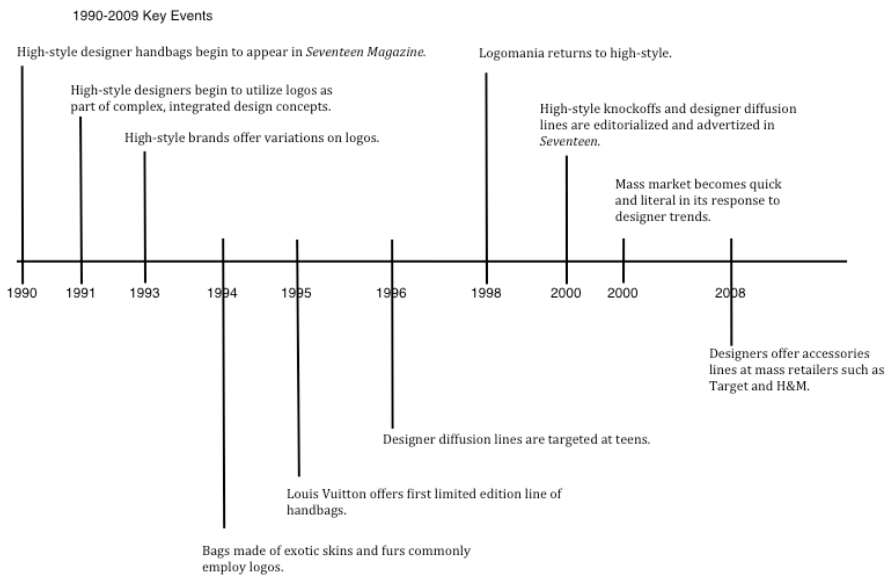
Table 5.9

Logo count (Sears Catalog): 1969-1979



Logo count (Sears Catalog): 1980-1989





## Chapter 6: The Logo Evolves: 1990-2009

By the close of the 1980s, the custom of placing a logo on the exterior of a handbag had become an industry-wide practice, evident on all types of handbags and hand luggage across price points, and on objects designed for virtually every taste and lifestyle. In the course of becoming a standard element in the composition of a bag, the logos themselves had, in the majority of cases, become quite standardized too. In many instances of fashion branded commodities logos were more akin to labels than to design elements; the logo was typically a solitary element that was not integrated stylistically into a cohesive design program.

In the 1990s the fashion branded commodity experienced a revival and the logo was reborn as a fully integrated, complex, and often lavish design motif, often around which the rest of the handbag's design concept revolved in an intricate manner. Logos became focal points across the bodies of bags. They were present on numerous pieces of



hardware, and became bigger, more elaborate, more varied, and, at the high end, often quite luxurious. Additionally, beginning in the 1990s it became common practice for many companies to offer multiple lines of logoed handbags, with each line based upon a variation of the logo. These diversified lines included limited editions and editions by guest designers. Throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, the youth and mass markets drew closer to the high fashion designers for inspiration. In some cases interpretations became increasingly similar to the original and in general, interpretations came more quickly upon the heels of the high-style original. With regards to commodities branded with a logo, they continued to be industry standards. However, since the dimensions of this type of logoed product have already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter they will be referenced only as necessary here.

### **The Logo in High-Style 1990s Fashion**

The raw data derived from *Vogue*, which measures the types of logos being used, does not fully capture the important changes that were taking place. The types of logos most commonly used in the 1990s were essentially the same as in the 1980s. (See Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 located at the end of this chapter for a complete breakdown of the types of logos that were in use.) To summarize, the most common was the use of the full name of the brand or designer, executed in a simple typeface. The use of stylized initials or the name of the brand/designer, along with initials or an icon contained in a single field, were also popular. It became somewhat less common to use an icon in isolation.

What this data fails to reveal is the way in which the logos were integrated into the overall design of fashion branded commodities. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 are strong

examples of how the logo was changing stylistically in the early 1990s. Figure 6.1 is an advertisement for a Versace handbag. The solid black fabric is adorned with a large Medusa head surrounded by a Greek meander that is wrought in crystals. On this handbag the Medusa logo in its Greco-Roman frame sets the design concept for the rest of the satchel. The meander, which frames the icon, is repeated in the four corners of the handbag and forms a portion of the handbag's strap. Figure 6.2 shows a Chanel tote, the body of which is covered with large letters that spell out CHANEL. The interlocking double-C motif is also an important part of the decoration. The typeface is unmatched and uneven, a choice that is conceptually in line with the patchwork construction and folk art-inspired decorative program. While patchwork is often associated with inexpensive, homespun designs, the Chanel logos elevate this simple tote to the echelon of high style. So, although these handbags are, in one sense, employing standard logo techniques that were developed in the 1970s and 1980s (using the name of the designer or an icon), it is clear that the overall impact of these logos in the 1990s could be quite different.

The logo as a design concept seems to have begun its evolution in 1991. It was in that year that there were a large number of handbags that made the logo a central, complex, and fully integrated focus of the overall design concept. Brands such as Escada, Fendi, and Chanel used a variety of techniques including printing, quilting, and applying three-dimensional ornaments to execute their icons, initials, and brand names. In light of the innovative themes and variations that were being played out with logos, it is perhaps not too surprising that in the 1990s the pages of *Vogue* showed fewer handbags made solely of a signature fabric. Of all the logoed bags depicted in *Vogue*, only 17% were made of a material that had a continuously repeating logo. However, of the

signature bags that were depicted, an increasing number had one or more additional logos in the form of a charm, plaque, or zipper pull. Additionally, signature fabric was sometimes combined with other materials, thereby breathing new life into an old aesthetic (see Figure 6.3) and showing that a modicum of design innovation was taking place. Tables 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6 provide a complete breakdown of the techniques that were commonly used in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s.

In the 1990s, once again, the use of a single logo was the most common way in which a bag was marked (see Tables 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9). Notably, these solitary logos were often large and the bags themselves were frequently made of varied and increasingly more luxurious materials. Most handbags were made of leather, but there were also logoed bags made of plastic, rubber, wood and straw. Bags made of exotic skins or fur also included logos in ways they never had before (see Figure 6.4). Prior to the 1990s, handbags made of luxurious materials such as mink, shagreen (shark or ray skin), alligator, or python were almost exclusively designed without a logo of any kind, large or small. Arguably, the luxuriousness of the materials was essentially being allowed to speak for itself. As I have suggested, there was a time when the quality of materials and manufacture were legible signifiers of good design, taste, and status. In a world paced slow enough for individuals passing on the street to read one another, a logo would not be a necessary indicator of exclusivity on a material that is intrinsically related to prestige. However, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one might assert, as Jameson did, that aesthetic sensibilities were waning (in part because of the loss of aesthetic authority), that the pace of culture was quickening, class divisions were blurring, and as a result the logo was increasingly becoming shorthand (though often writ large) for quality and taste.

On fashion branded commodities bags with more than one logo became progressively evident in the 1990s. Of all bags reviewed, 7% had two visible logos, and an additional 7% had three or more logos. The fact that more and more logos could be found on a single object is partially tied to the upswing in the engraving of functional hardware such as buckles, loops, and studs. Although engraved or cast hardware existed in the 1980s, it was far more rare, probably due to production costs and product pricing. In the 1990s, bag prices in the realm of fashion branded commodities were on the rise and engraved functional hardware accounted for 19% of all the logos tabulated. Although these logos were often quite small, their presence indicates how deeply entrenched the idea of marking a handbag had become. Cast ornaments continued to be used, though they were often much larger than in the previous decades. Engraved plaques, logos embossed directly onto the body of the bag, and logos woven or printed on material were all regularly used as were hanging tags or charms. The reliance of handbag and hand luggage manufacturers upon these standard elements suggests a revised conception of the necessity of innovation in work deemed fashion "design."

The placement of logos and the manner of execution seems to have reflected both a trickle-down effect from high style to mass market and a trickle-up effect from mass market to high style. This may be construed as evidence of the blurring of the boundaries between the two. For example, Guess, a mass producer of fashionable goods targeted at a youthful demographic, took a cue from the high end and began to diversify its logos in the 1990s. Traditional totes and satchels were likely to include a simple brand name logo of small to medium size on an embossed piece of vinyl or an engraved piece of metal. These traditional logos did not coordinate with the overall design aesthetic in any

important way, however they functioned as a way of elevating a simple object to the realm of fashion-- the essence of a fashion branded commodity. Advertising campaigns that depict these basic bags on the arms of voluptuous models provide some evidence of how the simple logo tag was able to accomplish this feat. Alternatively, some bag styles, such as the backpack depicted in Figure 6.5, were designed with dominant logos that coordinated with the overall aesthetic of the object. In the case of the backpack, the bold white text on the black ground of the flap coordinates with the black and white stripes of the body of the bag. Additionally, the brand name Guess is underscored by a line inset with text that reads “classic.” Additional text reads “National Championship League.” The text taken together seems to be an effort to position this particular item in a category of athletics-inspired fashions, marking the backpack as different from most of the products in the Guess line that are traditionally ultra-feminine and ultra-sexy. The evidence found in *Vogue* indicates that the utilization of the logo as a dominant aspect of the overall design emerged at the level of high-style designers, but trickled-down to mass-producers within a matter of a few years. Notably Guess also utilized a logo that strongly resembled the Prada triangular metal plaque. Both companies utilized a plaque in this shape and each included both the brand name and insignia within that frame. The flexibility of Guess’s brand identity coupled with the sampling from Prada’s brand iconography are both evidence of aspects of postmodern design that Kaiser noted, namely the instability of meaning (evidenced in Guess’s slippery brand identity) and the use of de-contextualized quotation (evidenced in borrowing Prada’s logo almost in its entirety). Incidentally, this logo was in use from at least 1993 onward, evidence that symbols and their meanings can be remade.

There is also evidence to suggest that high-style designers were actively seeking new ways to execute logos, with the ultimate goal of creating cohesion between the logo and the overall design aesthetic while expanding product lines through revisiting old tropes. Inspiration, it seems, could be found in the mass-market, especially in accessories made for the active wear and athletic apparel market. There is visual evidence in the pages of *Vogue* that makers of athletic bags (gym bags, tennis racket carriers, etc.) such as Fila and Adidas, and sporty nylon everyday bags such as LeSportsac and Mandarin Duck were weaving their logos into the nylon or cotton mesh strapping beginning in the early 1980s. Figure 6.6 shows an advertisement for Fendi in which the coated canvas shoulder bags in shades of brown and black feature woven strapping with the word Fendi in repeat. The strapping, in brown with tan lettering, coordinates with the base color of the bag and adds some color contrast with the lighter-hued lettering. A piece of that strapping is also appliquéd onto the body of the bag in an effort to further integrate the logo into the design aesthetic of the bag. Interestingly the sporty aspect of the bag realigns the brand identity, moving the aesthetics away from associations with a luxury furrier by adopting this technique. Kaiser's assertion that incongruous juxtapositions make meaning unstable in postmodern design aligns with this particular example.

The importance of the logo as a design element is further demonstrated by the diversity of logos offered by a single brand. For example, in 1993 Fendi ran advertisements in *Vogue* that showed five distinct lines of canvas bags, each logoed in a unique way. Depending on the aesthetic of the line, the logo could be the full name or the double-F insignia. In some cases the logo was embossed, in others it was woven or printed. The size of the logo and the number of repeats also differed depending on the

line. Notably, many of the product lines depicted in those advertisements are still in production today. The diversity of logos and lines may be interpreted as an effort to appeal to a large and diverse demographic, the driving impulse behind the innovation of the fashion branded commodity.

The diversity of logos offered by a single brand also began to manifest itself in the 1990s in the form of new product lines, limited editions, guest designer editions, and seasonal launches of new lines. For example, in 1990 Louis Vuitton launched a new product line in deeply grained leather known as Epi leather. These handbags feature a lone LV insignia embossed in the bag and subtly logoed hardware. In 1993 a line with similar aesthetics called the Taiga line was launched, and was largely targeted at men, though the advertisements did run in *Vogue*. In 1995 Louis Vuitton produced a special edition series of numbered red canvas bags decorated with pennants and small LVs. The series marked Vuittons's involvement with a sailing competition called the Louis Vuitton Cup.

In 1996 Vuitton once again launched a limited edition series; this time the concept was guest-designed bags. Figure 6.7 is an advertisement that shows the Azzedine Alaia bag. Helmut Lang, Vivienne Westwood, Manolo Blahnik and Sybilla also designed bags that were advertised in *Vogue* throughout the spring of 1996. Most of these designs did not alter or add to the traditional monogram. For example, Helmut Lang designed a record carrying case whereas Manolo Blahnik designed a shoe carrying case, both featuring the standard monogram canvas. An additional limited edition was offered by Vuitton in 1997; a line was produced to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Neiman Marcus.

By autumn of 1996 Louis Vuitton had moved on to the promotion of another signature line. Beginning in October, advertisements were exclusively devoted to the re-launch of the Damier checkerboard pattern, the original logo design that was first introduced by Monsieur Vuitton in 1888. While the original design included only a single small logo that read “Marque L. Vuitton déposée” in one box of the checkerboard pattern, the updated canvas is marked “Louis Vuitton Paris” every ten squares. This particular fashion branded commodity challenges the definition of fashion head on with its very literal reinterpretation of a design from the past presented as something new to the consuming public. It’s only innovation seems to be in the repetition of the company name.

The seminal moment in the diversification of the lines at Vuitton came finally in March of 1998 when Marc Jacobs, the new creative director, launched a line that had been designed under his direction. A limited supply of handbags of baby blue or tan patent leather embossed with a continuous repeat of the traditional LV monogram caused a sensation and set a new standard for the fashion-forwardness of the logo, especially of a signature material. The bags were frequently featured in *Vogue* editorials and were heavily advertised in a high fashion, highly sensuous campaign that was photographed by Bruno Dayan. The advertising campaign helped to reshape the Vuitton brand identity, moving it from storied, elite, but somewhat fusty, to fresh, fashion forward, and youthful. Figure 6.8 is an image from that campaign. Over the course of the ensuing years, additional colors, including a candy-apple red, and numerous shapes were added to the line, which continues to be made today under the name Monogram Vernis.



The resurgence of the popularity of signature materials at the end of the 1990s may in part be attributed to the variety of lines with all-over repeats that Louis Vuitton launched in the latter half of the 1990s. The fanfare surrounding Marc Jacobs' debut at Vuitton, coupled with the limited release of the Vernis line, extensive advertising, and the consequent "shortages" that ensued, conspired to create widespread desire for products with a logoed repeat and the updated look of the materials made the old logo seem new. While the machinations of global conglomerate LVMH are not fully known, one can't help but think of Harvey's assertion that capitalist enterprises shape consumer needs and desires by manipulating the marketplace, flooding it with as many spectacles as commodities. However, the impact of the revised and renewed Louis Vuitton is clear. In the last years of the 1990s "logomania" swept the fashion world anew, first among high-style designers, and shortly thereafter in the mass-marketplace. Chanel, Fendi, Gucci, Prada, Celine, and Isaac Mizrahi were among the companies that introduced updated signature lines (Figure 6.9).

#### Context for Logo Development in the High-Style Sector: 1990s

The fact that the logo itself was being reestablished as the focal design element may be indicative of a new understanding that was developing within the design houses in the 1990s. A 1991 *Vogue* article entitled "The Chanel Obsession" noted, "Chanel is not about couture...It is about the name and image that comes from couture that sells the perfume, and makeup, and accessories" (515). The full acknowledgement that fashion had evolved past the point at which the potency and beauty of design work were of paramount importance for a preponderance of consumers, arriving at a place where the

name had significance in itself, may be part of the reason why fashion branded commodities were taking on newfound significance. In the 1990s the importance of developing brand identity seems to have been on par with the importance of developing an actual design. In the same *Vogue* article, Karl Lagerfeld was quoted as follows: “Respect is not creative. Chanel is an institution, and you have to treat an institution like a whore—and then you get something out of her” (515). The analogy of a fashion institution to a whore may be an allusion to the ability of someone like Lagerfeld to extract something wanted or needed at will. In this view, Chanel exists to serve the whim of its director, not to fulfill a creative legacy or aesthetic vision. Lagerfeld made this comment at the leading edge of a new phenomenon in fashion design-- mining the archives of storied fashion houses and trading on their good name became common practice by the close of the decade. Taking at will from an institution with an illustrious legacy and commoditizing that story in large part through fashion branded commodities and reliance on old tropes became *de rigueur*. The approaches to recycling the past included (and still include) use of archival material, reworking old patterns, and recycling brand-specific hallmarks and insignia including logos. On the one hand the mining technique maintains continuity with the heritage of the company. Conversely it undermines a key tenet of fashion—continual change. An aesthetic and conceptual critique of this kind of design work also raises the potential specter of what Jameson referred to as pastiche—blank parody that is nostalgic and therefore dated (i.e. not new).

An understanding of consumer desires was also likely a motivational force steering the development of logos in the 1990s. An article in *Accessories* entitled “The Name Game” noted that in 1994 consumers had become more critical of designer

branded products such that an interest in quality generally prevailed over an interest in a designer name. However, the article went on to note, “there are certain accessories categories—sunglasses, handbags, and watches—where retailers say designer names are critical” (Morgan 86). A few years later in an *Accessories Magazine* interview, Cezar Mizrahi, president of Perlina handbags, was quoted as saying, “We never liked the idea of putting the name all over the bag, but the more we did that, the more the bags sold” (“Roundtable: High on Handbags” 40). In an age in which consumer desire was increasingly surveyed and translated into commodities, one may assume that Mizrahi was not alone in accessing data about the desirability of logos for large segments of the consumer population. Nor was he likely alone in his efforts to fulfill those desires in the marketplace. Market research pioneer Charles Coolidge Parlin noted in the early twentieth century, “The consumer is king. His preference is law and his whim makes and unmakes merchants, jobbers, and manufacturers” (Agins *The End of Fashion* 162). The truth of Parlin’s prophesy was in full force by the close of the century. Many consumers desired logos and manufacturers and designers responded in kind.

### **Logos in the 1990s Teen Market**

In *Seventeen Magazine* in the early 1990s most logos on fashion branded commodities and branded goods were simple in design concept. The logos themselves largely consisted of the full name of the designer or maker. Logos consisting of the full name (typically with little stylization) accounted for 50% of the logos, and were used by fashion companies such as DKNY, Old Navy, Esprit, and Gitano. The next largest category of logo consisted of the full name or the initials of the company accompanied by

an icon in a single field. Logos of this kind were utilized by popular designers and brands Anna Sui, Manhattan Portage, Guess, Polo Sport, and Tommy Hilfiger, among others, and accounted for 34% of the logos reviewed. During this period there was an upswing in the number of companies that used only an icon. Companies included Kipling (which used a gorilla as its icon) and Tommy Hilfiger (which used a red, white and blue flag). Icons appearing in isolation accounted for only 10% of the logos. Regardless of the design of the logo, it was most common in the 1990s for a single logo to appear on the handbag or piece of hand luggage. Single logos ranged in size from about an inch in width to more than six inches across and accounted for 90% of the logos reviewed. Of the remaining 10% of the objects viewed in the pages of *Seventeen*, no more than four logos were ever wrought on a single object. In marked contrast to the trends that were emerging in *Vogue*, logos found on fashion branded commodities in *Seventeen* continued to be largely un-integrated into the overall design concept of the bag. Tables 6.2, 6.5, and 6.8 provide a complete breakdown of the data related to logo type, execution and number in the 1990s and 2000s in the teen marketplace.

These un-integrated logos continued to be executed in ways that had been used since the 1970s. The majority of logos were executed as embroidery on a patch or tag, whereas the next most common mode of execution was to embroider or print the logo directly onto the surface of the object. The media used to execute the logos is undoubtedly linked to the materials being used to construct the handbags and hand luggage. Of the objects surveyed, 83% were made of either a natural or synthetic woven fabric. A cloth body is well suited to adornment by an embroidered patch or embroidery executed directly onto the bag's body. Vinyl handbags accounted for 14% of the objects

that were reviewed. The low price point that is generally associated with vinyl bags makes vinyl a logical choice given the youthful demographic at which *Seventeen* is targeted. Vinyl bags often had embossed vinyl patches or engraved metal plaques as logos.

#### Context for Logo Development in the Teen Market: 1990s

The pages of *Seventeen* indicate an up-tick in designer importance and emphasis commencing at the start of the 1990s. As a result far more fashion branded commodities are represented in image and text. Trends from the runways of Paris, Milan and New York were reviewed in their own right in some instances, and in others were shown as inspiration sources for affordable looks. Chanel was featured frequently beginning in 1990, as was the Pucci print craze, and the minimalist aesthetic. Make-up trends from the collections of Isaac Mizrahi, Michael Kors, and DKNY were presented as sources of inspiration in the September 1994 issue. A February 1995 article entitled “Runway Redo” presented affordable interpretations of the collections of Issey Miyake, Blumarine, Dolce and Gabbana, Rifat Ozbek, and Martine Sitbon. Fragrance advertisements from Chanel, Liz Claiborne, and Calvin Klein, as well as other high-style designers were common by 1993.

The proliferation of high-style fashion branded commodities within the teen market at this time may relate to an effort on the part of design houses to expand and develop their customer base in the wake of the economic recession (that was precipitated by the stock market crash of 1987). Speaking in 1995, Gianfranco Ferre, then the creative director for Dior, noted that the Lady Dior handbag had been created for a

“younger, hipper client” (“A Star is Born” 36). Mass media was also complicit in developing a taste for designer brands among the young. The 1995 film *Clueless* was essentially a ninety minute advertisement for branded luxury goods. A *W Magazine* columnist noted in “The Month in Fashion,” “the hit film *Clueless* seems to have helped usher in a new dress code for the young—one that is making kids dump their grunge and rave fashions in favor of Gucci, Fendi, Hermès, and even Dolce and Gabbana” (1995 50). The 2001 launch of Burberry Barbie, who for eighty dollars came dressed in a plaid trench coat and scarf and carried a branded messenger bag, is further evidence of specific and concerted efforts on the part of marketers and merchandisers to bring a taste for designer brands to increasingly more youthful demographics.

The targeting of high-style designer brands towards teens was in evidence across product categories from the beginning of the decade and was evident in the category of handbags by mid-decade. By 1996 there was significant evidence that designer labels were seeking the teen demographic with reasonably priced items that featured logos. Among the designer brands (particularly brands with a strong consumer following outside of the teen demographic) that became evident in *Seventeen Magazine* in this period were Tommy Hilfiger (primary collection and Tommy line), Donna Karan (DKNY line), Anna Sui, and Japanese avant-garde designer Yohji Yamamoto (Y-3). Notably, Tommy, DKNY, and Y-3 are all diffusion lines.

Although products were being marketed to the youth market by top-tier, high style designers, in the 1990s most of their logos did not reflect the high-style tendencies of fashion branded commodities that were developing. Fashion branded commodities generally utilized large logos that dominated the entire face of an object , but the single

oversized logo tended to coincide with a larger design agenda only in terms of color story (Figure 6.10). The simplicity of the logo may be reflective of two motivating forces. First, the need to control price point is fundamental to the youth market. Second, simplicity of communication is fundamental in discourse with the mass market, of which the teen market is a subset.

### **The Mass Market in the 1990s**

The Sears Catalog may not provide a comprehensive picture of the mass market from the middle of the 1990s onward. In the 1990s the Sears Catalog was undergoing changes in terms of frequency of publication, content, and organization. The bi-annual catalog known as the “Big Book” ceased publication in 1993. In the latter half of the 1990s there was a mix of Annual catalogs, “Style” catalogs, Christmas Wish catalogs, and seasonal apparel catalogs. Numerous catalogs published in the 1990s failed to include any handbags, logoed or not. Although luggage had been a mainstay of the traditional Sears Catalog it also was minimized at times in the 1990s—given limited space, showcasing only a few brands.

The Sears Catalog shows the importance of branding to mass-market consumers but has little evidence of fashion branded commodities. The vast majority of logoed handbags that appeared in the Sears Catalog in the 1990s were either widely advertised national brands such as Capezio, Mundi, Buxton, and Rochelier or lesser-known, but widely distributed products from major manufacturers. Products sold under the names Stone Mountain, Sage, and Rosetti might have been recognized by consumers given their distribution at other major retailers, though these manufacturer’s brands do not have

brand identity in the sense that an advertised national brand or fashion label does. Private label handbag lines, represented as fashion-forward yet cost-conscious solutions to the designer or status trends, were nonexistent in the catalog in the 1990s. Lines such as Carriage Court and LAGO, whose brand identities were limited to the realm of Sears and its catalog, were eliminated. References to status and “designer” inspiration were few in the 1990s. Cost consciousness over quality continued to be the equation used in the computation of Sears’ merchandise assortment. Luggage offerings in the Sears Catalog throughout the 1990s consisted largely of national brands such as American Tourister, Lancaster, Samsonite, and Globetrotter. The brands are all known for high quality and durability. A small percentage of the offerings were manufacturer’s brands or were items that were marked with illegible logos and advertised without mention of the maker.

Of all the logoed handbags offered in the Sears Catalog in the 1990s, Capezio comes closest to passing as a true fashion brand. Capezio advertised regularly in *Vogue* during this time period and used top model Linda Evangelista as the face of the brand. However, the Sears presentation of Capezio to the consumer was very straightforward, including descriptions of compartments and closures. By and large the marketers of Sears handbags and hand luggage steered clear of the rhetoric of fashion. A copywriter for the Fall/Winter 1999 catalog referred to the Stone Mountain line, produced by a major Chinese manufacturer, as a “supermodel” (306). This may have been a coy way of linking the bag with the then current and noteworthy trend of Supermodels, the likes of which included Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer, and Linda Evangelista. Such references to the world of high fashion were rare. Fashion branded commodities were also rare in this decade.



The value of the brand name was undeniably evident in the Sears Catalog's luggage listings and that value seems to have had everything to do with quality, dependability, and functionality. Among the features that were highlighted were bag weight, the quality of the fabric, the types of zippers and wheels, internal features such as hanger brackets, internal structures such as steel frames, and warranties. Styling was occasionally mentioned. Lancaster luggage was described as "tastefully styled" (Fall/Winter 1991 207) whereas the Oscar de la Renta line was described as being made of "elegant tapestry weave" (Christmas 1998 451). Companies with multiple lines in production often employed stylish and elegant names to differentiate their offerings. For example, American Tourister offered their "Ambassador Collection" alongside their "Cellini Collection." Names such as these give a hint of making a connection between the luggage and stylishness, but it is clearly a secondary consideration. In summation, the Sears Catalog primarily used brand names to differentiate products rather than to create a spectacle in place of the product itself.

The importance of the brand in the 1990s was also evidenced by the product mix offered in the Sear's Catalog. Private label accounted for a minority of logoed handbags and hand luggage (10%) whereas national brands accounted for the majority (56%). The remaining objects were either marked with a manufacturer's brand (24%) or were marked but the brand was illegible and not mentioned in the text (10%). The logos themselves were executed in manners that harkened back to the 1970s and 1980s, with the vast majority consisting of simple, engraved metal plaques, an indication that the logo was not a featured design element. Of all the logos, 82% were exclusively text that stated the name of the maker. The other 18% consisted of either a symbol or a symbol and the

brand name, the latter being the more typical scenario. In essence most logos were very straightforward in their approach. They labeled the brand and distinguished the product. The preponderance of simply branded products in the Sears Catalog is evidence of diversity in the marketplace, and by extraction diversity among consumers. Though fashion branded commodities proliferated in the high style sector and among many mass producers, it seems that large segments of the marketplace were keen to avoid the fray. A detailed analysis of the types of logos commonly being used, their method of execution, and the number of logos found on each object can be found in Tables 6.3, 6.6, and 6.9, located at the end of this chapter.

In essence what the Sears Catalog shows is that while logos were developing in the high-style sector of the fashion industry as fashionable elements on fashion branded commodities, in much of the mass market they continued to function as they had in the 1980s, as a label that connected the product to the claims and qualities of the brand. The exterior logo marked the brand and thereby distinguished the product with regards to the brand identity. In some cases the name may have had a brand identity that resonated favorably with the consumer (intoning stylishness, ruggedness, or youthfulness). In other instances the logo may have acted as an assurance of quality. It suffices to say the logos in the Sears catalog performed important functions but seemed not to have related to status or fashion trends. Sears was either lagging behind the high-style trends of the day or purposefully working outside of the realm of fickle fashion.

### High-Style Logos in the New Millennium

Logos on fashion branded commodities continued to evolve in the first decade of the new millennium, however the raw data derived from review of *Vogue*, *Seventeen* and the Sears Catalog once again does not provide the entire picture. In *Vogue* the use of the full name of a designer or a brand was the most common type of logo, accounting for 43% of all the logos reviewed. Stylized initials made up an additional 29% of the logos, whereas the name or initials of the company in a single field with an icon accounted for 14%. Signature fabrics accounted for 22% of the logoed products that were counted, almost half of which contained one or more additional logoed elements in conjunction with the continuous repeat of the textile. Use of a single logo was found on 63% of the handbags and pieces of hand luggage that were reviewed. An additional 37% of the objects included two or more logos. Following the trend established in the 1990s, the manner in which the logo could be executed was diversified in terms of materials and techniques.

What sets the fashion branded commodities in the form of logoed handbags and hand luggage of the new millennium apart from the designs of the previous decades can be summarized as follows: logos relied extensively on characteristics of postmodern design. Random sampling, reversion to historical design elements, juxtapositions that defied rules and categories of fashion, extrapolation of design elements from disparate sources, and denuding signifiers of their ability to signify were all characteristics of logos that emerged in 2001 and which continued to be explored throughout most of the decade. Once again these trends emerged at the high end. Key players included Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Dior. Notably, copycats became increasingly literal and quicker on the draw. A few key examples of the aforementioned phenomena are worth exploring.

The blurring of the line between high style and street style was evident especially in some of the lines offered by Louis Vuitton and Dior. Vuitton seems to have led the way with its graffitied bags (designed by Stephen Sprouse) that were first offered in 2001. The design of the bags featured the juxtaposition of the traditional Louis Vuitton monogram canvas against the full name of the company superimposed in large, scrawling, neon, graffiti-style text. This line, when it was initially presented, upended the imagery that had traditionally been associated with Vuitton: luxurious, timeless, and steeped in the heritage of aristocratic clients. The design of the handbag and hand luggage line was part and parcel of a re-design of the brand identity. The audaciousness of the line was a commercial and critical hit, so it is not surprising that the House of Dior offered graffitied bags later in 2001 and again in 2004. The juxtaposition of street art and high-style was bold and unexpected and ostensibly served to refashion their brand identity and open the brand to new demographics, while breathing new life into an old, time-worn logo. The old class brand was being carefully repositioned to a new mass market eager of status goods.

In marked contrast to the edgy, urban-inspired graffiti bags, Vuitton also began partnerships with well-known fine artists beginning in 2002. Partnerships with Julie Verhoeven, Takashi Murakami, and Richard Prince yielded lines that blurred the line between commercial design and fine art. Verhoeven's child-like illustrations, Murakami's bold colors and anime-inspired graphics, and Prince's old and bad jokes (Figure 6.11) were featured in conjunction with the traditional monogram canvas. These designs married fine art and fashion, though it is noteworthy that the fine artists themselves were interpreting mass (even crass) culture. Blurring of high and low culture,

a hallmark of postmodern design, once again added a level of semiotic ambiguity to the designs. Notably, with the exception of the Murakami Monogram Multicolore line, these collections were limited editions. Additionally, all were priced significantly higher than the traditional Vuitton monograms, marking them as exclusive, high fashion, and highly desirable. These last two points imply an effort to preserve the image of exclusivity at the same time the brand was being heavily promoted to a mass audience through advertising and editorial coverage.

Diffusion lines also blurred the boundaries between high style designer collections and the mass-market in the new millennium. Although top designers had been doing diffusion lines and capsule collections of apparel for major retailers such as Kohls, Target, and H&M since the 1990s,<sup>1</sup> it was in the early 2000s that accessories lines began to appear. Anya Hindmarch, known for limited editions and “bespoke” detailing, did a line for Target (2008), as did craftsman of exotic skins Carlos Falchi (2009). Jimmy Choo, known primarily for very high-end shoes, did a line of accessories and apparel for H&M (2009). In each case the bags retailed between fifty and one hundred dollars and included a logo that had the designer’s name and the name of the retailer. The labeling of these products in this manner blurs the meaning of the designer’s name. A fashion designer’s name has historically been an indication of creativity, quality, and exclusivity. If the mass-merchant’s name is also attached then the latter two characteristics are undoubtedly diluted if not entirely stripped away. Thus the wearing of the designer name in this context has a muddled meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> There had been some diffusion lines for mass retailers in the 1980s, such as Halston for JC Penney.

A unique but nonetheless interesting case of a logo with blurred meaning is the logo Jacquard bag by designer Michael Kors. Kors developed his logo in 1999 based on doodles he did as a child (“Vogue View” 186). When Kors first advertised this line of bags in March of 2001, the sleek advertisement in grisaille tones clearly noted that the MK logo bag was part of the Michael Kors line. Some three years later in September of 2004 an updated MK logo handbag had been relegated to the down-market MICHAEL Michael Kors diffusion line. The difference between the Michael Kors collection and his diffusion line is vast in terms of aesthetic, target market, brand identity and price point. Therefore the communicative power of the logo, as it moved from one line to another, was robbed of its ability to convey a fixed meaning. The seeming flexibility and mutability of the signifier/signified relationship in the new millennium ostensibly gave designers and brands the ability to rework and reinvent logos without concern about customer confusion and thereby enabled the targeting of a variety of demographics.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of the logo in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was also impacted by the way in which the logo was designed. Stylistic modifications and manipulation of the logo’s content impacted the legibility and meaning of logos, while at the same time allowing brands to diversify their offerings. For example, Versace, a brand known for its strong stylistic links to Greco-Roman heritage and its iconic Medusa logo, introduced a new logo in January of 2000 that featured a Buddha head. The relationship between the symbol and the brand is unclear, therefore the meaning of the logo is enigmatic. Also in

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<sup>2</sup> Moving a logo from one brand to another is quite rare, but one other instance is noteworthy. The brand MCM, which is known for its logo canvas bags, changed the literal meaning of MCM. In an October 1983 advertisement that ran in *Vogue* the text noted that MCM was short for Moderne Creation München. By October of 1986, and in all future advertisements that ran in *Vogue*, the text noted the following: “MCM. The Roman numerals symbolizing the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The era of nobility.”

2000, Chanel offered boots, handbags and hosiery covered in a continuous repeat of interlocked CCs, which were attenuated to the point where they were barely recognizable as the Chanel logo.<sup>3</sup> The illegibility of these logos raises the question of their purpose and meaning. Perhaps they were meant to be more elite by being obscure, or perhaps they were meant to appeal to a different demographic. An additional and more overt example of the legibility of a logo being impacted by modifications on the design was evident in 2004 when Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel offered handbags with oversized interlocking Cs, which were cropped (Figure 6.12). They appeared as though they were running over the edge of the bag, as though there was not enough room to execute the entire symbol. The physical cropping of the logo is also a disruption of the signifier's relationship with its meaning. By expanding the stylistic possibilities of the logo the designer could imperil its ability to communicate.

Imperiling the ability of the logo to communicate for the sake of design diversity was evident across brands in the first decade of the new millennium. In 2001 the house of Dior offered automobile-inspired handbags with a prominent logo fashioned to look like a license plate. The license plate itself read "Montaigne, Chris, 1947, JC, JG" (Figure 6.13). The meaning of this logo is convoluted at best. The Avenue Montaigne is the street on which the couture atelier for the House of Dior is located. Chris is probably short for Christian and 1947 is the year Christian Dior showed his first collection (though it is not the year the house was founded). The initials JG may be the initials for John Galliano who was at that time the creative director for Dior, but the initials JC are a puzzle. In the end, the bag is clearly a product of the house of Dior, but the marking is

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<sup>3</sup> I showed this logo to a random sample of 35 fashion design students aged 18-25. 64% of the students failed to interpret the repeat of the attenuated CCs as the Chanel logo.

very confusing. Indeed the entire car reference seems quite out of touch with the heritage and brand identity of the House.<sup>4</sup>

Eclecticism was also evident in the new millennium in the materials that were used and the shapes that were created by top design houses. Materials ranged from the most common to the most exotic. Precious and mundane could be mixed in a single object, and treatments of traditional monogrammed fabrics became increasingly complex, relying on curious juxtapositions of fabrics. At the top end of the price point spectrum, logos in the 2000s could be worked into the most precious materials. Figure 6.14 shows a Louis Vuitton shagreen handbag from 2005, priced at \$21,000. The tried and true monogram executed upon the richly textured skin transports the commonplace logo to the realm of the extraordinary. At the opposite end of the spectrum, in 2002 Vuitton applied their signature monogram to PVC, fashioning totes for their resort collection. The transparent sepia-toned vinyl sides of the bags were set in leather borders studded with brass hardware (traditional Louis Vuitton construction). The juxtaposition of old and new, expensive and cheap, high and low were evident in this design. A 2002 editorial in *Vogue* entitled “Twisted Classics” noted how classic handbags were being remade in modern, industrial fabrics. One featured bag was made by Chanel. The text accompanying the black nylon bag noted, “Big enough for a weekend away, so slim it can barely hold a lipstick- the formerly ladylike chain-strapped bag goes to extremes” (644). The text describes a bag with strange proportions—measuring about 24 inches in length and no more than an inch in width. The proportions call into question its utility.

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<sup>4</sup> I discussed the matter of the “JC” marking with curatorial staff at the Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art. No one had a logical argument for the JC initials. It was asserted that perhaps the license plate shows “JG” twice.



The extreme variety of logos and materials, shapes, sizes, and forms lacking function made for a chaotic marketplace in which options abounded. Brands were positioning themselves with manifold aesthetic identities and thus were able to reach an increasingly diverse audience. With each tweak of the logo seemed to come a modification of the brand identity. Though sometimes subtle, and often ephemeral, the reworking of the brand identity in conjunction with these products is indicative of a new kind of *design* work that was in play. Great strides of creativity and innovation may not have been part and parcel of each logo iteration; however, fundamental and important changes were often in evidence with each momentary brand identity reboot. To put this another way, while the fashion design itself remained committed to an extant design program, the spectacle of the brand was in constant flux-- the beneficiary of extraordinary creative energies.

Historical sampling, perhaps first glimpsed with Lagerfeld in the late 1990s, was strongly in evidence in the first decade of the 2000s. Notably these types of logoed designs are directly linked to the practice of continuous rebranding. Logos that had been retrieved from archives and given a cursory makeover abounded. Celine produced both apparel and accessories made in fabrics with a continuous repeat of its logo for its Winter 2000 collection. *Vogue* "Index Scoop" noted that the logo was designed in the 1960s and, "Michael Kors himself gleaned it from the company archives" (442). Contemporary colors and fabrics made the old insignia look fresh, youthful, and current. Also in 2000, Dior gave a new face to its logo Jacquard by using the fabric in the construction of new, modern, untraditional shapes. In 2001 LeSportsac, in an effort to position its products to

a younger demographic, moved its logo from the decorative tape it had adorned in repeat for decades to the body of the bag, where it was given room to multiply.

New and never-before-seen logos were also launched in the early 2000s. The launch of these product lines represented new merchandise but sometimes perpetuated a new take on their respective brands. Most surprising was the launch of the BV logo by Bottega Venetta. Designed in 1976 but shelved until Fall 2000, the launch of a logoed capsule collection was a marked break from company tradition and extant brand identity. For years, beginning in fall 1977 (the height of the first logo craze), Bottega Venetta had used the tag line “When Your Own Initials are Enough” in its advertising campaigns. Apparently by the 2000s, consumer desire had the ability to trump company tradition. Other companies entering the realm of fashion branded commodities included luxury jeweler Bulgari, which introduced its “Logomania Collection” in 2001. The staid and elite jeweler ostensibly appealed to a younger and less affluent market with its jewel-toned fabric bags covered with a continuous repeat of the company name writ large. In 2003 Tod’s (also a conservative and traditional brand) launched a line of twill bags with large Ts in continuous repeat.

Some new logos expanded and diversified the fashion branded commodity offerings at houses that already had logoed products. In 2004 Tommy Hilfiger entered the better bag market and in so doing introduced a streamlined H logo, which was executed in a continuous repeat on fabric as well as on hardware. Cole Hahn Collection, a higher-end line than its standard stable of products, similarly utilized a Cole Hahn logo that was new and different from the logo used elsewhere. Kathy van Zeeland, who had worked as a retailer at Saks, a wholesaler for Nine West, and a product developer for Ann

Taylor, launched her own handbag line in 2004. Asked by *Accessories* reporter Irenka Jakubiak if she had developed a signature style or material, Van Zeeland responded, “My handbag icon is incorporated throughout. It is embossed on the bottom of the handbags, woven into a signature jacquard fabric and printed on PVC—the reaction has been fantastic. The handbag icon will constantly evolve as a logo. As long as the brand exists, my signature icon will be there” (“Flying Solo” 28). Clearly the logo upon the fashion branded commodity it adorned was experiencing popularity and growth in the new millennium. Developing or expanding logoed product lines enabled companies to reach out to new customer demographics with products that were likely to be well-received as they combined both novelty and familiarity in their design concept, while diversity among logoed lines offered a version or vision of the brand that could appeal to specific target audiences.

#### Context for Logo Development in the High-Style Market: 2000s

As part of the rationale for selecting handbags as the case study for this research I noted their importance to the financial bottom line of fashion companies. In the first decade of the 2000s the power of the handbag reached a new level of strength as a revenue generator. In a *Financial Times* article entitled “Beyond the In-Vogue Handbag. Amid Tremendous Fanfare, the Big Names Have Launched Logo-Bedecked Handbags,” the chief luxury goods analyst at Bear Stearns noted, “Handbags have become key to building the lifestyle of a brand” (Friedman 9). What this statement points to is an understanding that a strong and desirable lifestyle association may lead to stronger sales. Handbags with strong logo concepts develop and reinforce brand recognition and may

consequently develop a broad customer base. A case-in-point for brand building via a logoed product line can be developed with reference to the Coach logo Jacquard collection. The line won its designer, Reed Krackoff, critical acclaim and also successfully increased the Coach customer base by positioning Coach as a fashion brand. Speaking of the new Coach collection, Krackoff, noted, “Across every category, the signature logo collection has been the most successful launch in our history” (“Winning Ways” 30). Indeed the launch of that collection is commensurate with the rebranding of Coach as a young, fresh fashion brand as opposed to a traditional, reliable maker of quality leather goods.

The prevalence of the trickle-down effect in the new millennium also reinforces the assertion that handbags were powerful and important product lines. The pages of *Vogue* show that copycat logoed handbags became increasingly prevalent in the late 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium and they quickly appeared in response to trends set by high-end designers. Additionally, a single brand could offer interpretations of handbags in logoed materials that reflected numerous brands. Perhaps the strongest example of this phenomenon was found in the lines produced by Dooney and Bourke. Beginning in 2001 the company began to advertise a logoed Jacquard featuring an interlocked DB in continuous repeat. The interlocked/overlapped initials are reminiscent of the composition of the Louis Vuitton LV. A March 2001 advertisement shows brown initials on a darker brown background. The bag is trimmed in tan leather. These features are reminiscent of the Vuitton signature canvas. By November an alternate canvas fabric was featured in advertisements. This time the pattern included a continuous repeat of DBs framed in small handbags. The overall effect is reminiscent of

the logo used by MCM. A June 2002 advertisement featured a logo Jacquard in blue and white. This time the shape of the handbag and the styling of the photograph both conjured visual connections to Gucci. In October 2003 Dooney and Bourke offered an “It Bag” featuring the interlocked/overlapped DB pattern, now executed in multi-colors. Reminiscent of the blockbuster Louis Vuitton bags by Takashi Murakami, it is notable that the Dooney and Bourke line was offered as a limited edition, a move that was in keeping with trends set at the high-end (Figure 6.15). The evidence provided by Dooney and Bourke is indicative that copycats in the marketplace had developed an understanding that diversification within the brand, including its fashion branded commodities, could serve as a useful tactic for appealing to a larger population—a notion already received and processed by designers at the high end of the fashion marketplace.

The Dooney and Bourke designs also provide a snapshot of a phenomenon that was becoming increasingly widespread. Close inspection of offerings by companies such as Guess, Bebe, Rocawear, and Baby Phat reveal that their handbag designs were strongly inspired by Dior, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Coach. Their Jacquard fabrics, logo plaques, charms, construction, and decorative techniques can readily be aligned with one or more high-end bags that had been introduced in a previous season. Reed Krakoff, of Coach, once remarked that part of the inspiration for introducing their signature fabric was to “create material we could copyright.” Although a logo can be copyrighted and copyrights for logos can be enforced, interpretations of logos and other design features have proved themselves to be lucrative and legal means for doing an end-run around intellectual property laws. The Dooney and Bourke “It Bag” drew the attention of LVMH lawyers who did file suit in United States District Court. A four-year battle

ensued and ultimately Dooney and Bourke was vindicated. The crux of the decision seems to have hinged on the fact that although the designs were remarkably similar, a consumer would be unlikely to confuse one design with the other.

### **The Teen Market in the Early 2000s**

Logos were increasingly important to teen fashion in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An editorial from the year 2000 entitled “The Name Game” boasted, “Leggo my logo! Work your own signature style with a monogrammed ensemble” (210). Editorials were frequently devoted to fashion trends in which the logoed accessories were part of a fashion-forward look that could also include logoed apparel. Additionally there were editorials related to shopping, back-to-school, and specific accessories trends. Accessories included in these editorials were frequently logoed. Logoed handbags and hand luggage also appeared in editorials related to travel, street fashions, and celebrity style.

The type of logo most commonly used continued to be the full name of the designer or brand, written clearly in type that was often a standard typeface (see Table 6.2). Such logos accounted for 54% of those that were reviewed. An additional 16% of the logos included the full name of the designer or brand along with an icon (such as the Quiksilver wave, Puma puma, or Manhattan Portage skyline) in a single field. A mere 12% utilized an icon alone. Brands such as Baby Phat (Siamese cat) and Anya Hindmarch (bow) sometimes used the icon alone; however, their icons could also be used in conjunction with the brand name in full. Initials, either stylized or in simple type accounted for 14% of the logos, with almost twice as many of this category being

executed in simple, un-stylized type. Brands such as RocaWear, Guess and Marc by Marc Jacobs often used their initials. Legibility of the brand continued to be important. This may be construed as an effort to communicate quickly and clearly within the context of a fast paced and chaotic culture in which meanings are constantly in flux.

The use of a single logo on a handbag or piece of hand luggage was the most common manner in which an object was marked. A single logo was utilized on 66% of the objects that were reviewed. Objects with two or more logos were rare; however, 15% of the objects reviewed were made of a fabric that consisted of an allover logo pattern. Companies such as Tommy Hilfiger, Baby Phat, Roca Wear, XOXO, L.A.M.B., (and the lesser priced line from the same designer) Harajuku Lovers, and retailer Express all produced handbags made of fabric with a continuous repeat, thereby revisiting the basic aesthetic concept of the fashion branded commodity initiated some thirty years prior. Of the objects that were made of this type of fabric, half included at least one additional logo in the form of a piece of hardware or hang tag. Up to four additional logos were seen on handbags made of this kind of fabric. Logos executed as a continuous repeat finally proliferated within the teen marketplace in the first decade of the 2000s.

Trends related to the manner of execution of the logo were largely in line with previous findings, including a lack of design innovation of the logo itself. Embroidering the logo onto a patch accounted for the largest proportion of the logos, followed by embroidering directly onto the body. Logos woven into the fabric or printed directly onto the bag became more common and were directly related to an upswing in the number of bags that were decorated with a continuous repeat. Engraved plaques, cast ornaments, and embossed patches, the industry standards in the mass market, were increasingly

evident in the teen market during this time period. Additionally, there was an upswing in the use of hang tags and charms, a trend that was in line with industry-wide trends reported by *Accessories Magazine*.

What is perhaps most notable about logos in the pages of *Seventeen* in the first decade of the new millennium is the emphasis on high-style designer fashion branded commodities and the knock-offs thereof. For example, an editorial called “Star Style” featured MTV personality Amanda Lewis and showed a Rampage bag that was a clear knockoff of a Fendi sequined bag. The small pouch with a large buckle that was aesthetically very similar to the classic double-F motif, cost a mere twenty-five dollars (148). Similarly, an untitled and anonymous editorial in the same issue featured “baguette” bags (a Fendi best-seller at the time) created by several companies. The editorial made a direct comparison to Fendi and noted that Fendi’s prices started at over three hundred dollars but the bags in the editorial were all under fifty dollars. The writer noted, “You can find that Euro-chic style for a lot less” (119). Knockoffs of best-selling designer bags populated the pages of *Seventeen* throughout the decade and included an interpretation of the Dior saddlebag in 2001, and the Fendi B-Bag in 2007. The promotion of high-style knockoffs is evidence that teens either had interest in these types of fashion or were being encouraged to develop interest by market forces including the editors at *Seventeen*.

The pages of *Seventeen* in the new millennium reinforced observations made elsewhere about consumers at the mass level. An article in *Accessories* called “Mass Hysteria” noted the increased spending power of mass market middle class consumers in conjunction with their shopping priorities: brand names, fashion trends, low prices.



Additionally, the article noted, “More and more mass market consumers are noticing trends adapted from the designer level” (Groce 72). Ballard Gioe of La Rue (a major manufacturer) noted that various contemporary high fashion styles “hit the market incredibly fast, and there’s virtually no look that can’t be interpreted for the mass market” (Groce 72). Although specific logos cannot (by law) be copied by mass producers, interpretations of designer bags and Jacquard fabrics with strong similarities to designer textiles became increasingly common as the legal standard for prosecuting design infringement remains very hard to substantiate in court.<sup>5</sup>

Although there was evidence that fashion forwardness was becoming increasingly important to the mass market in the 2000s, that didn’t imply that *anything* that was high fashion would be delivered to the masses. Abe Dwek, president of Accessory Exchange noted, “At the mass level, anything that’s too sophisticated will not sell. The customer wants to see an element of a trend without going overboard. And while mass customers have become more fashion-conscious than ever, they are still concerned as much with function--and especially price” (Groce 72). Taste and price preferences at the mass level were the key factors that determined the selection of high-style trends, therefore elements that were costly to produce, unconventional, or aesthetically challenging were unlikely to trickle down.

In addition to knock-offs of top designer styles, *Seventeen* in the first decade of the 2000’s increasingly showed images of lower-priced designer bags. Designer logoed bags, created as part of diffusion lines and capsule collections, were routinely targeted at

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<sup>5</sup> Proposed legislation (the Innovative Design Protection Act of 2012) would require that a design is “substantially identical” in order for legal action to be successfully pursued against a manufacturer offering a copy of a fashion design.

teens. For example, an editorial from October 2000 featured a Tommy (by Tommy Hilfiger) handbag made of a Jacquard fabric with repeating initials. A September 2001 “Editorial Scoop” featured a cloth satchel dominated by large gothic text reading “Galliano’s Girl,” a new line offered by couturier John Galliano. An editorial called “Style Awards” featured Gwen Stefani and a satchel of her design that was covered by the repeating text, “Harajuku Lovers.” It was noted that this bag, which retailed for seventy-eight dollars, cost less than bags in her L.A.M.B. line (“Style Awards” 48), an indication of the diversification that a single designer could offer in order to reach demographics differentiated by disposable income. In September 2007, an editorial entitled “Seventeen’s Ultimate Shopping List” featured a Marc by Marc Jacobs bag with his brand name continuously repeated over the entirety of the printed fabric and augmented with a leather patch that provided additional evidence of the brand name. From 2006 onwards, a great many capsule collections for retailers such as Target, Kohls, and H&M were also indicative of designer logoed handbags targeted at the mass and youth markets. This phenomenon was coeval with an increased overall emphasis on designers and high-style runway collections, which were featured in the pages of *Seventeen* in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is additional evidence that the teen market was increasingly subjected to and influenced by brands in general and designer brands in particular and that they were being groomed by high-style designers as a market to be tapped both in the present and for higher-priced purchases in the future.

The presence of high-end designer fashion branded commodities in the pages of *Seventeen* in the early 2000s is somewhat alarming given the price point at which some items were retailed. For example, a 2004 editorial called “Fall Shopping Guide” depicted

a Louis Vuitton satchel that retailed for more than five thousand dollars (110). A fashion trend editorial from 2007 entitled “Spring Must-Haves” featured a limited-run, oversize tote, also from Louis Vuitton (limited edition items are generally priced above the thousand dollar mark). A March 2009 *Seventeen Magazine* promotion, “Win the Ultimate Gossip Girl Shopping Spree,” depicted a Louis Vuitton “Speedy” monogram satchel as an example of the goods that could be acquired as a part of the prize (these retail for upwards of seven hundred dollars). The up-selling of the teen demographic, which had begun in the early 1990s, was reaching astonishing new levels in the new millennium, an indication that the class market was once again staking new ground.

### **The Mass Market in the New Millennium**

In the 2000s, the overwhelming majority of logoed products found in the pages of the Sears Catalog were national brands (86%), whereas private label merchandise or merchandise labeled with a manufacturer’s brand accounted for 7% of the products. The remaining 7% of the merchandise had a visible logo that was illegible and was not mentioned in the text. A 1996 *Accessories* article quoted an unspecified retailer as follows: “Designer and brand names increase the value cachet, and even more moderate stores are adding to their current brand-name lines. Designer labels—anything with a name on it sells” (“Quality Conscious” 48). It is clear from a review of the merchandise mix that by the advent of the new millennium the buyers at Sears, who had historically lagged behind the curve, had fully come to terms with this realization.

The means by which a logo was executed did not evolve in the mass market. The vast majority of the logos were executed on a metal engraved plaque though other

techniques introduced in the 1970s continued to be used. Engraved functional hardware could be found, but was uncommon, and was typically not the only visible sign of the brand. Of all the logos, 72% consisted exclusively of text that stated the name of the maker. The other 28% consisted of either a symbol or a symbol and the brand name, the latter being the more typical scenario. The ability to clearly communicate the brand continued to be important. The stylistic and conceptual innovations that logos underwent in the high-style sector on fashion branded commodities were totally unrepresented in the pages of the Sears Catalog.

Among the high-end fashion trends that did not translate to the mass market were cropped logos, unexpected juxtapositions of stylistic elements, and logo modification that dramatically altered the appearance of the logo. In the mass marketplace the communicative power of the logo remained fundamental, as it served to distinguish the product from its many competitors; being recognizable was paramount. The use of luxe materials in the execution of logos and sampling from high culture (such as fine art) also did not translate to the mass market. These omissions are clearly the result of price considerations that are endemic to mass production and the mass consumer's budgetary constraints.

Among the innovations of the new millennium that did translate to mass fashion were trends that did not impact the legibility of the branding. Multiple logo variations could be used by a single brand, either in isolation or in combination on a single object. Additionally, the physical appearance of engraved logo plaques reflected aesthetics found in high-style designs, the use of dangling charms with logoed elements were often

incorporated, and color stories found on fashion-forward, high-style bags also were transmitted by the trickle-down effect.

Canadian brand Roots was a catalog standard from 2002 through the end of the survey. Roots made fashion branded commodities available to the Sears consumer that shared stylistic links to trends that had been available in high-fashion for some time. The company has a design concept built around the use of its name, the Canadian maple leaf, and the iconic Canadian flat-tailed beaver, and it produced a wide variety of handbag shapes with diverse logos. Logos were frequently embroidered and often consisted of just the word “Roots,” which was often executed in a color scheme that complemented the bag itself. The logo could also include one of the aforementioned symbols. Vinyl bags were likely to have the logo embossed into the fabric of the body, whereas some embroidery was executed on a patch as opposed to being wrought on the bag itself. Roots logos were frequently quite large, ranging from approximately three to six inches in width and were always fully legible (Figure 6.16). As producers for the masses, clear communication of information that does not require an insider understanding to be decoded is crucial.

Other major national brands with boldly logoed products included Frankie and Johnnie and Hush Puppies; the former typically embroidered its full name across the entire body of the bag, whereas the latter experimented with the complete brand name, a stylized “HP” that was used in a Jacquard repeat fabric, and their iconic Basset Hound. These three motifs were used in various combinations and sizes. Mudd, a youth brand, and RocaWear, an urban brand, also utilized large, prominent embroidered logos in their assortment of fashion branded commodities. Notably the descriptions that accompanied

the photos of all of these heavily branded items contain no references to the brand identity or ideas associated with the brand. Descriptions focused strictly on the utilitarian aspects of the objects: zippers, pockets, and machine-wash-ability. Given that the products found in the pages of the Sears Catalog are national brands, one might conclude that the advertising and brand identity building for these labels was done elsewhere and was not the purview of the Sears Catalog writers.

Fashion identity, designer cachet, and status acquisition were seldom alluded to in the Sears Catalog in the early 2000s. Nygard Collection was the only exception to the strict emphasis on utilitarianism. Fashion brand Nygard was represented with two lines in the Fall/Winter 2008 catalog: a “crocodile look” line and a logoed Jacquard with repeating “NC” and Nygard running both forward and backward throughout the textile (Figure 6.17). The accompanying text made references to trendiness and classical stylishness. Interestingly, no utilitarian details were given other than the basic measurements of the bags. The Nygard name, while perhaps not as widely recognized as Tommy Hilfiger or DKNY, is an internationally distributed fashion brand with a variety of accessories licenses.

The ultimate conclusions that can be drawn from considering Sears as a snapshot of the mass market is that some companies within the mass market continued to be influenced by high-style fashion trends, continued to produce fashion branded commodities, and in the early 2000s they shared a much timelier relationship with them than ever before (though aesthetics could still often lag behind the times). The prominent national brands that were featured in the catalog that may be considered fashion brands (such as RocaWear and Roots) were reinterpreting design elements that were developed

at the high-end. The vast majority of logoed products, however, were not logoed in a manner that was fashion oriented. Most logos continued to essentially be labels that marked the name of the maker. The logo was a standard element, as it was also in the realm of high-fashion, but it was not typically a marker of status, or fashionableness. Brand identity, quality, and reliability were more likely to be communicated by a logo in the mass market.

### **The Changing State of Fashion: 1990-2009**

The logoed handbags and hand luggage that appeared in the pages of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears catalog reveal not only aesthetic development during this twenty year period, but they also are indicative of the modification of a wide range of issues related to fashion design, fashion consumption, and fundamental ideas that have defined fashion itself.

#### *The Mass Market and the Class Market—Divisions Blur*

From the 1990s onward the designer products proffered to the masses have increasingly resembled products proffered to the traditional class market such that some members of the mass market may actually believe that they are the class market. The pricing of logoed handbags and hand luggage can once again help to illustrate the changing relationship with the mass market that was being developed by the class market. Prestige pricing was an important part of this phenomenon. A look at the house of Chanel can illustrate how prestige pricing serves to blur this boundary.

Chanel serves as a good example of prestige pricing since Chanel is a brand that did not venture into extensive licensing nor did it suffer drastic brand dilution in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the company and its designs may have been considered a tad fusty and outdated, it never went down market the way that Gucci did.<sup>6</sup> Chanel pricing therefore provides an interesting snapshot of what has been happening in the marketplace. Chanel in the new millennium is a widely available brand with hundreds of stand-alone retail locations and distribution in hundreds of major department stores worldwide. Hence the products are generally available to whoever has the desire and means to pay. Given widespread availability it is important for the Chanel to protect the illusion of exclusivity and this can be done through pricing. Over time the pricing has become increasingly exorbitant. A Chanel leather shoulder bag with a chain strap retailed for four hundred and sixty dollars in 1988. A comparable bag retailed for eight hundred and forty dollars in 1990. By 1996 the cost of this type of bag was almost fifteen hundred dollars, and would currently retail for over three thousand (a 20% price increase was implemented in November of 2011).<sup>7</sup> What these prices alone indicate is that Chanel has increasingly been pricing their handbags to create the perception that they are elite and out of reach. Finding the exact comparison for each year would be difficult, but the most recent figure is at least ten times the price of a good quality leather bag without the designer connection.

Chanel is not alone in its efforts to implement prestige pricing. A Louis Vuitton Keepall (duffle bag) cost one hundred and thirty dollars in 1973. By 1982 it retailed for

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<sup>6</sup> Chanel perfumes were retailed in drugstores in the 1970s and 1980s, but the perfume business is run by a separate company.

<sup>7</sup> These prices were noted in *Vogue* editorials.



four hundred. By 1997 it cost six hundred and fifty dollars and by 2005 it was over twelve hundred. The price increases evidenced by both Chanel and Louis Vuitton are indicative of far more than increased cost of labor or materials. The increase in pricing has a great deal to do with augmenting the brand identity that was crafted by company leaders. Clearly there are a great many consumers who cannot afford to spend a minimum of ten times the price of a utilitarian bag on a designer bag. But what is apparent is that there are many middle class consumers who are willing and able (perhaps by using consumer credit) to make such an extravagant purchase. The positioning of some fashion branded commodities as status objects and objects of desire has been very successful. Arguably the spending threshold for some middle class consumers has been raised considerably. A peek into the window of virtually any designer boutique will provide the evidence of a very mixed demographic with many stretching their financial limits to make the coveted purchase. Text references also provide evidence that the mass market had essentially been taught that they *are* the class market, or at least that they have just as much right to participate in it, even if it causes financial strain.

A text entitled *A Guide to Quality, Taste & Style* (2007) gives an indication that luxury goods are being consumed by a demographic that is not likely to be financially secure. In the chapter entitled “Accessories: Say No to the ‘It Bag’” author and *Project Runway* mentor Tim Gunn relates a tale of a fictional girl home from college and dressing in order to meet a high school nemesis. The girl dresses in sweats and a t-shirt and grabs her Louis Vuitton Speedy (153) before heading off to Starbucks. While the moral of Gunn’s story is not about conspicuous consumption among the young (he is concerned with the utilization of flashy accessories to “elevate” a mundane look), it is

clear that Gunn is basing his scenario on real life observation.<sup>8</sup> In the new millennium, some teens carry bags priced at eight hundred dollars or more. *The Lucky Guide to Mastering Any Style* (2008) also provides evidence that expensive fashion branded commodities are being promoted by the mainstream media to a broad demographic. Among the “essential accessories” featured in this dress guide were a Louis Vuitton Keepall and a quilted leather Chanel shoulder bag, both of which are items that well-exceed one thousand dollars apiece.

The efforts to blur the boundaries between mass and class in the minds of middle class consumers is perhaps the greatest work of advertising and marketing that has ever been accomplished. Many luxury goods companies have crafted brand identities powerful enough to create desire in consumers across multiple demographics. Once the desire has been engendered, the prices have slowly been elevated, keeping the items always just barely within reach. The illusion of inaccessibility masks the fact that the products are made around the globe (not in some small atelier in France), they are widely retailed, and they are acquired by substantial numbers of people—not just the elite. Louis Vuitton, a twenty-six billion dollar company as of 2012, is the perfect example of this sleight of hand. In New York City alone there are five retail locations, with additional stores located on Long Island, north of the city in White Plains, and across the river in New Jersey. Many Louis Vuitton products purchased in American retailers are marked “Made in USA” as opposed to “Made in France.”

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<sup>8</sup> Gunn is clearly not a fan of conspicuous accessories. He suggests, “Why not just carry a plastic bag from the supermarket and simply tape your credit card statement to it?” (153).

A final note must be made with regards to the argument that the distinction between mass and class has been blurred. I must emphasize that my observation is that the division is blurred in the minds and eyes of the masses. There are, of course, insiders, connoisseurs, and true elites who are not enticed by fashion branded commodities, who take issue with a class brand becoming so widely available, and who seek little-known products made by true artisans on a small scale. As Han, Nunes and Drezè (2007) noted there are class variations in terms of opinions about conspicuous consumption (and by extension conspicuous fashion branded commodities). They argued that tastes and needs to signal vary depending on social position. Their conclusion that the most elite (the patricians) are concerned largely with horizontal signaling, (17) communicating with others in their own group, suggests that the most elite and the fashion cognoscenti would be less inclined to be influenced by fashion brands peddling flashy status goods.

### *Design and Branding*

The period of logo stagnation as a design element and concept came to an end in the 1990s and some trendsetting design work was accomplished in fashion branded commodity lines. The discussion of logo development in the high-style arena has already provided evidence that the lowly marker of brand can be manipulated in creative and interesting ways. A logo can function as a design motif and design concept in the best and most traditional sense of the word *design*. Although profoundly innovative design work based on the logo may not represent the lion's share of all logoed products it did and still does exist as a vein in which very talented designers do work.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the changing appearances of logoed products in this period (whether they were profoundly innovative or better described as a copycat) is the relationship between product design and the “designing” (crafting, modifying, manipulating) of the brand identities of a great many brands within the marketplace. The creative and constructive work done with brand identity (whereby a brand is traditional and storied in one collection and hip or *avant garde* in the next) has already been alluded to in the discussion of graffiti bags, artist collections, and the like, but deserves a few concluding remarks here.

The logoed product is essentially the brand identity concretized in wearable form. Such a product may enjoy mass appeal but will always be limited to a certain degree, as it would seem that a single brand could not be all things to all people. However, with careful manipulation of product design, in conjunction with advertising campaigns that carefully select their visual language (including the spokes model), thoughtful brand design may actually be able to accomplish the task of widespread appeal across a diverse demographic. A Stephen Sprouse graffiti bag may appeal to fashion insiders, arty types, and individuals who favor urban style. A Chanel bag may have just as much traction with the ladies who lunch as with the hipsters in their skinny jeans and slouchy caps. A quilted Marc Jacobs satchel might be coveted by mother and daughter alike. Designing a world for a brand in which a product can move through space and be envisioned on various types of bodies is, on the one hand, a creative endeavor of the highest order. Considered from a more pessimistic point of view, the extraordinary efforts lavished on the design and redesign of brand identity is indicative of extraordinary human effort being channeled to create the “depthless polish” that Wilson described in her assessment

of postmodern design. One can argue a brand identity is a fiction without any real cultural value and that the only true role of brand identity is pecuniary. Following this argument, the design of brand identity is the design of a guise-- it is purely superficial. It is a sign that points to nothing of substance. One could argue that the extraordinary efforts lavished on brand identity design are indicative of the postmodern condition *vis-à-vis* cultural production as it has been critiqued by Bell and Harvey who see the cause of capitalist enterprise degrading culture, shifting focus to surface value rather than focusing on use value. Whether one reads the shift of emphasis as positive or negative is not a conclusion that I wish to draw here. What is essential at this phase is the recognition that brand design is a critical and powerful aspect of design in general from the late twentieth century onward.

### *Ephemerality and Permanence*

Traditional ephemeral fashion design was a part of the design of some logoed handbags and hand luggage in this period. Some logoed lines did come and go, lasting for a season or two. Thus some logoed lines played by the rules of the traditional world of fashion. Interestingly, the concept of ephemerality was also used as part of the marketing of some fashion branded commodities. The limited edition handbag is perhaps the best example of using the notion of ephemerality to create desire and media buzz. The notion of ephemerality inherent in the marketing of such products is, "If you don't buy now, it will be gone forever!" Curiously, some limited editions have gone into "re-issue" after a span of a few years, thereby turning the application of the term limited edition into a label wherefore the meaning is context dependent (i.e. it is a limited edition in 2001 and again

in 2011). It is important to note that while ephemerality could be used to promote a quick trip to the shops, the very same design could also be described as “collectible” or “a classic.” The notion that a limited edition fashion branded commodity might have lasting traction in one’s wardrobe was verbiage that was frequently employed by fashion editors. The notion that a fashion branded commodity needed to be acquired with great speed yet worn indefinitely, without fear of fading fashionableness places such objects precariously between the two worlds of fashion. Thus these worlds intersect and disturb each other as extant notions of fashion collide and conflict.

Ephemerality was also a relevant concept in this era with regards to brand identity. As noted, some fashion houses moved through advertising campaigns with profoundly diverse messages in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium with as much creative energy as fashion houses moved through fashion design trends in a bygone era. Constant reinvention of brand identity had the net result of keeping the brand fresh and evolving its appeal across demographics. The chameleon-like nature of brand identity could have the net result of giving the product offerings a luster and allure that might otherwise have been absent. Figures 6.18 and 6.19 show a pair of Dior advertisements that ran a year apart. In the first image from 2004 the tone is sexy, and edgy with a rock-and-roll vibe. The second campaign from 2005 is sweet and feminine and very delicate. Teri Agins once described fashion as a “moving target,” but here it is clear that the brand identity is what is on the move. Notably the design in the second campaign is a re-boot of the logo Jacquard from 1970. In this iteration it is beige and has an embroidered floral motif—this could fairly be described as a nice variation on a very old theme.

## Summation

Although the logo underwent a great deal of change and development during the forty year period during which it evolved on the faces of handbags and hand luggage, at a fundamental level it stayed true to its simple roots as a marker of difference in a sea of sameness. The difference it marks could be related to a variety of concepts, some of which interpenetrate each other. For a simple branded commodity logos mark the brand, sometimes thereby making an assertion about quality or dependability. Logos on fashion branded commodities draw upon rich legends attached to the fashion brands and thereby may engender notions of prestige, status, fashionableness, hipness, and connoisseurship. The logo, whether large or small, plain or complex is a powerful tool in the modern fashion industry and a powerful communicator for both producers and consumers.

As an object of fashion *design* and an object that relates very specifically to the modern, corporate, marketplace of fashion branded commodities, the logoed handbag is revelatory. It reveals changing notions about what constitutes fashion. It indicates that both traditional and new notions about fashion coexist, interpenetrate and upset each other. In so doing it reveals itself as a fashion phenomenon that is particularly postmodern. The traditional and the new worlds often share a relationship that is symbiotic-- for the world of fashion branded commodities often relies heavily on the storied traditional world for its credibility. The new world of fashion branded commodities relies on reinventing longstanding aspects of fashion: as a class endeavor, as an artistic endeavor of design innovation, as an ephemeral phantasm. As the new world of fashion branded commodities continuously reworks these traditional ideas new facets

of fashion such as branding gain prominence and the nature of design and the discourse about it change and evolve.





Figure 6.1. This Versace advertisement ran in *Vogue* in January of 1992 (page 46). The logo sets the design concept for the rest of the handbag. The hardware that attaches the strap to the bag and the decorative elements in the four corners of the bag reflect the Greek meander that surrounds the Versace icon.



Figure 6.2. A beauty editorial that ran in *Vogue* in March of 1993 (page 306). The logo is the design of the handbag.





Figure 6.3. The design of this Fendi handbag demonstrates a new way to utilize an old logo concept. Here the signature fabric has been executed in velvet and the color story changed from shades of brown to black and white accented with red. The signature fabric is tempered by the use of a zebra print and brilliant red snakeskin. This image was part of a Fendi advertisement that ran in *Vogue* in August of 1997 (page 98).





Figure 6.4. A Chanel handbag that was photographed for an editorial in September 1994 (page 519). The application of a logo to a handbag made of fur or exotic skins was a new innovation of the 1990s. Extra-large logos existed as early as the 1970s but were common and popular in the mid-1990s.



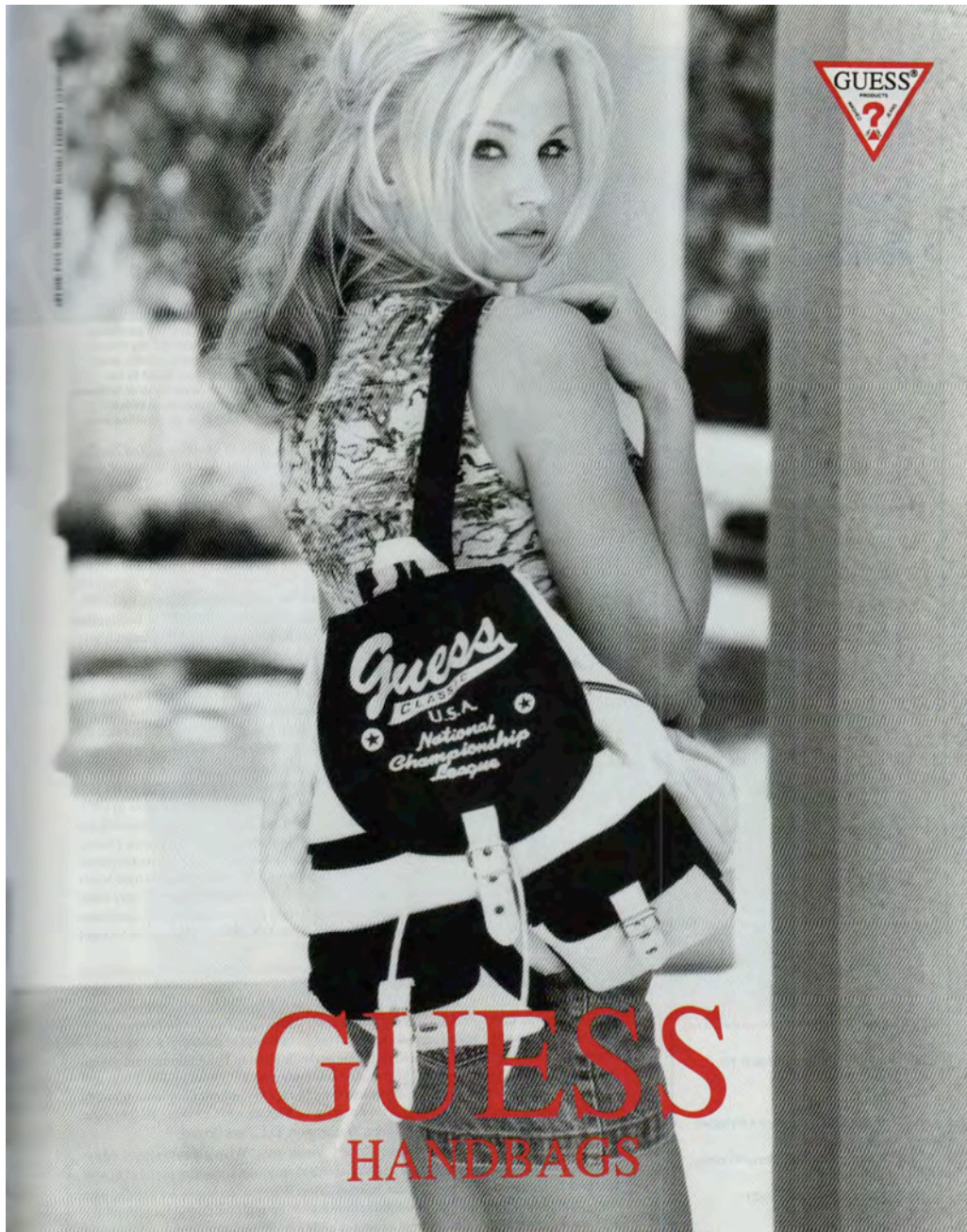


Figure 6.5. A Guess advertisement that ran in *Vogue* in November 1993 (page 203). Guess is a mass-market fashion brand. Here the logo is the focal design element.



Figure 6.6. A Fendi advertisement that ran in *Vogue* in May of 1997 (page 5) hints at the cross-pollination that was happening between high-end designers and the mass market. Here the logoed straps are similar to those traditionally used by athletics goods makers.





Figure 6.7 An example of an Louis Vuitton special edition/limited edition. This concept was part of the revamping of Vuitton that was taking place in the 1990s. *Vogue*, April 1996 (page 78).

Louis Vuitton. Monogram Vernis.



Available exclusively in Louis Vuitton shops and select Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Marshall Field's, Dayton's, Holt Renfrew & Ogilvy stores.  
For information: 1.800.458.7935

LOUIS VUITTON

Figure 6.8 This advertising campaign, which was photographed by fashion photographer Bruno Dayan, presented Marc Jacobs' new and innovative take on the Louis Vuitton monogram pattern and also helped to recast the Louis Vuitton brand identity. This advertisement first ran in *Vogue* in November of 1998 (pages 50-51).





Figure 6.9. An editorial that ran in *Vogue* in July 1998 (page 164) shows new products with continuous repeats of updated logos. All of the logos, except Isaac Mizrahi's, were designed in the 1960s or earlier.





Figure 6.10 This editorial from *Seventeen* (October 1996, page 187) shows a variety of messenger bags, all of which have a legible logo. In some cases the logo functions mainly as a label. Where the logo is large and is clearly the focal point, it is not integrated into a more complex design scheme.





Figure 6.11 “The Graduate,” a handbag from the Richard Prince collection for Louis Vuitton (Fall/Winter 2008). The text on the handbag recycles jokes told by “Borscht Belt” comedians who performed at Catskill Mountain resorts at mid-century. Similar text appears in Prince’s paintings. The joke at center reads, “What a fight. When the bell rang, I came out of my corner and threw six straight punches in a row. Then the other guy came out of his corner.” Handbag in the author’s collection. Photograph by Jason Moore.



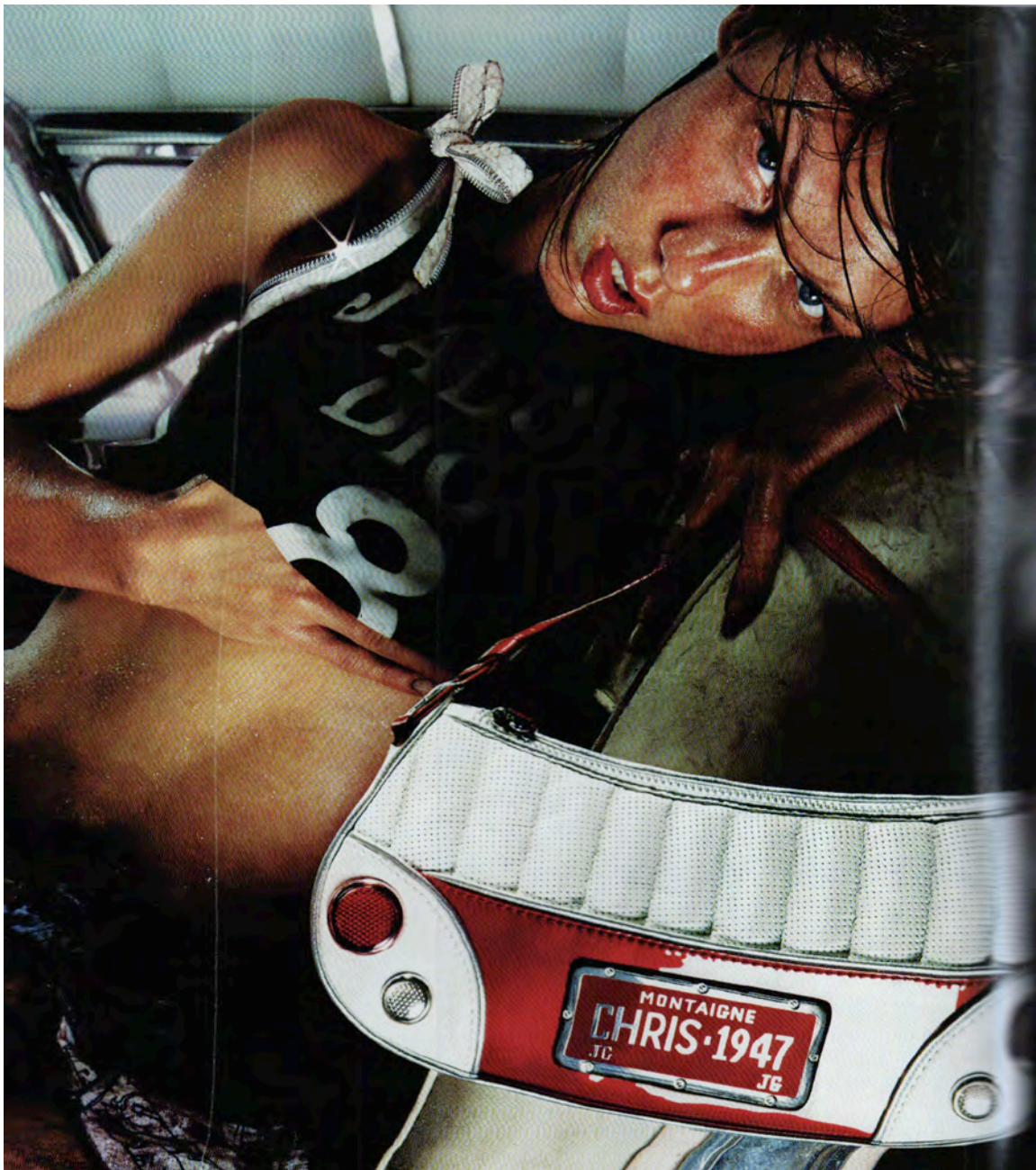


Figure 6.13 An advertisement for Dior that ran in *Vogue* in February of 2001 (page 1). The license plate logo is peculiar and somewhat enigmatic.



Figure 6.12 This advertisement ran in *Vogue* in August 2004 (page 123). The large appliquéd Chanel logo is cropped, thereby impacting its legibility.





Figure 6.14 In March 2005 *Vogue* illustrated this super-luxe Louis Vuitton shoulder bag as its “Last Look” (page 608). The traditional monogram takes on a whole new look, feel, and meaning when applied to the richly textured shagreen skin.

**The It Bag.**

Modeled here by actress  
Mischa Barton, star of the  
new Fox series "The O.C."



VI03  
Photos: Thomas C. Cord

**DOONEY & BOURKE**

Limited edition. 800.774.5921 [www.dooney.com](http://www.dooney.com)

NEW YORK DALLAS LAS VEGAS CENTURY CITY SOUTH BEACH

Figure 6.15 This advertisement for Dooney and Bourke features a handbag that is similar to the Takashi Murakami Multicolore handbags. This design became the grounds for a copyright infringement lawsuit filed by LVMH in United States District Court in 2004. LVMH ultimately lost the case. This advertisement appeared in *Vogue* in October 2003 (page 21).





Figure 6.16 Handbags made by Roots demonstrated evidence of the trickle-down effect from high fashion, though the trends adopted from on high were readily digestible and retained the legibility of the brand. This image appeared in the Sears catalog in the Winter 2004 edition (page 343).



Figure 6.17 The Nygård Collection that was showcased in the Fall 2008 catalog is a rare example of a logood “fashion” brand (page 11b).





Figure 6.18 This “hardcore” Dior advertisement appeared in *Vogue* in April 2004 (page 99). The aesthetic of the advertisement and the brand identity it portrays are very different from the campaign that preceded it in December 2003 (the advertisement featured a sea of the logo Jacquard bags in pink, pink Jacquard teddy bears, and a cute young brunette in a pink Jacquard bikini) and the campaign that followed it (Figure 6.19).



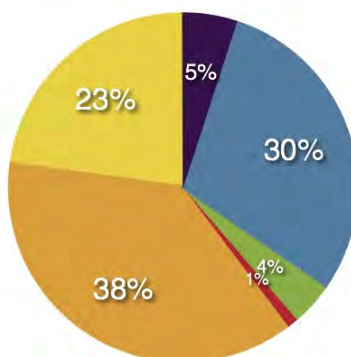


Figure 6.19 This advertisement appeared in *Vogue* in March 2005 (page 16). It presents an image of a brand that is soft, feminine, and sensual. None of the brashness of the previous campaign is in evidence. It portrays a very different brand identity.

Table 6.1

Logo type (Vogue): 1990-1999

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



Logo type (Vogue): 2000-2009

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

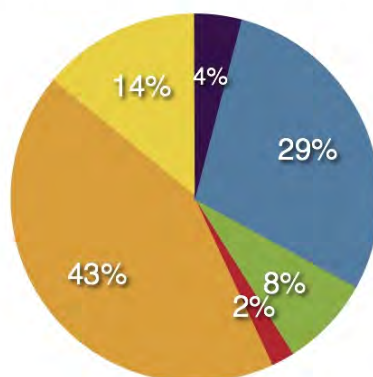
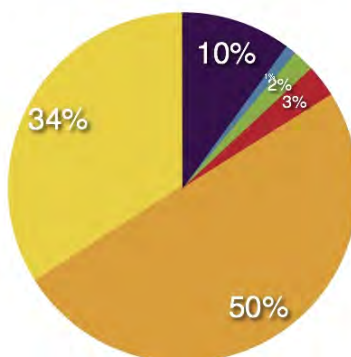


Table 6.2

Logo type (Seventeen Magazine): 1990-1999

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



Logo type (Seventeen Magazine): 2000-2009

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

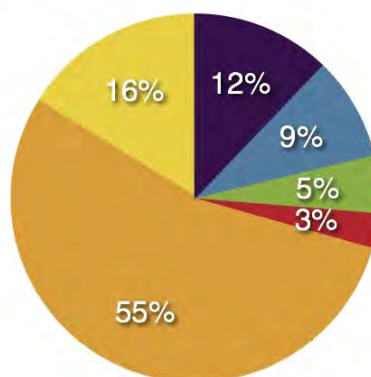
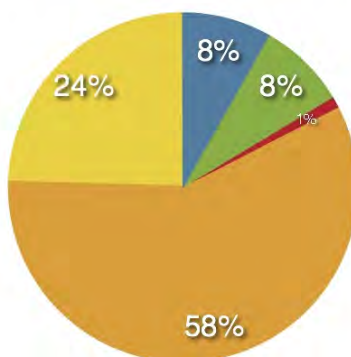


Table 6.3

Logo type (Sears Catalog): 1990-1999

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field



Logo type (Sears Catalog): 2000-2009

- Icon
- Initials
- Full name, simple typeface
- Stylized initials
- Full name, stylized
- Name or initials with icon, single field

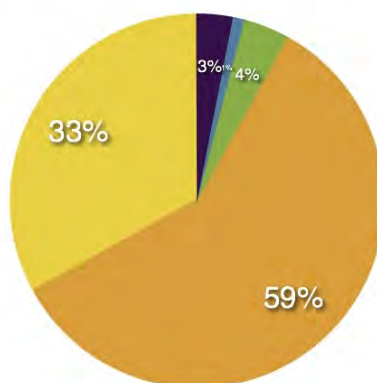
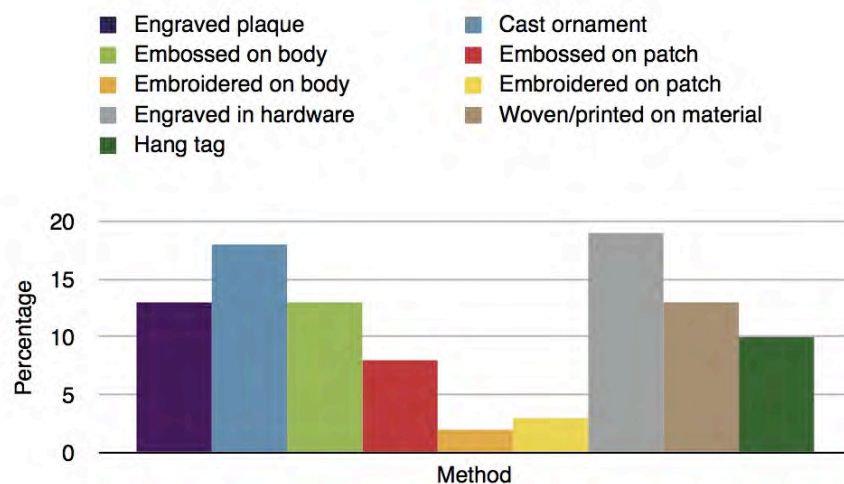




Table 6.4

Method of logo execution (Vogue): 1990-1999



Method of logo execution (Vogue): 2000-2009

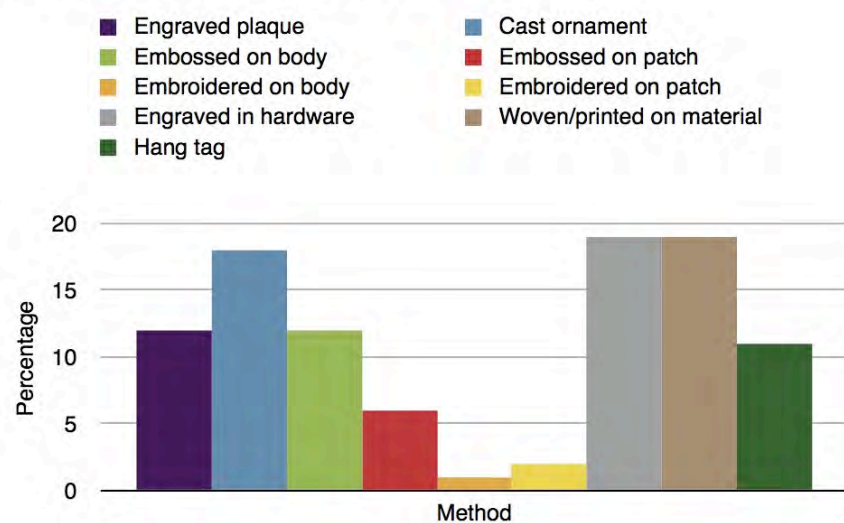
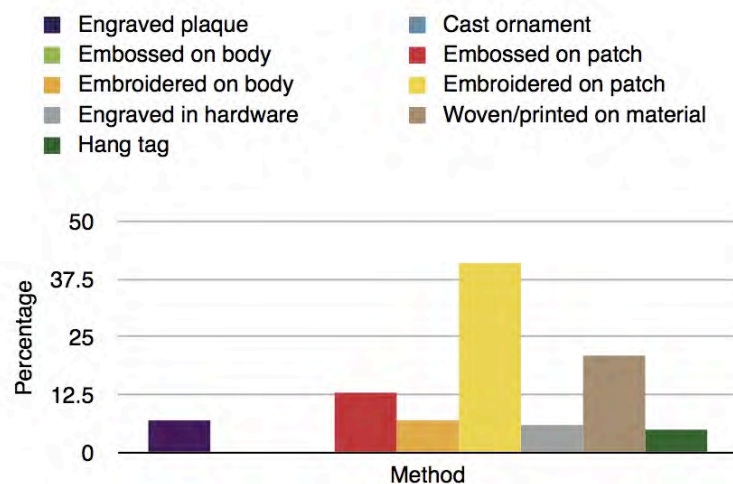


Table 6.5

Method of logo execution (Seventeen Magazine): 1990-1999



Method of logo execution (Seventeen Magazine): 2000-2009

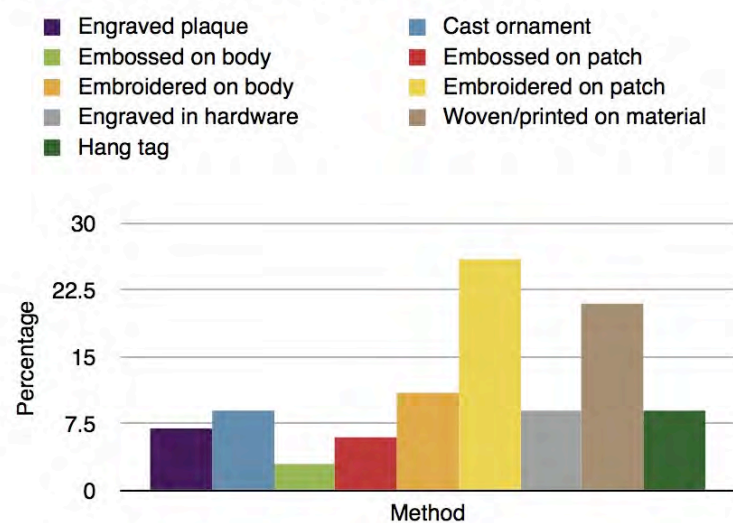
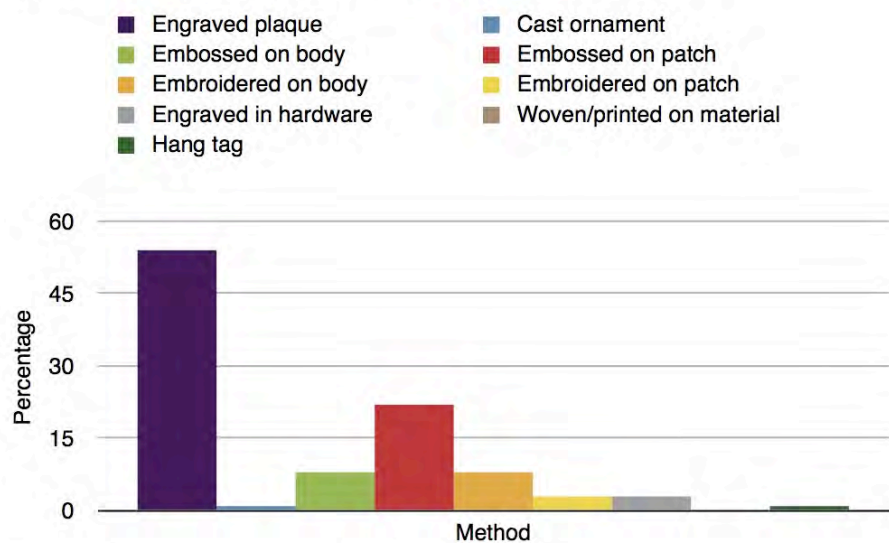


Table 6.6

Method of logo execution (Sears Catalog): 1990-1999



Method of logo execution (Sears Catalog): 2000-2009

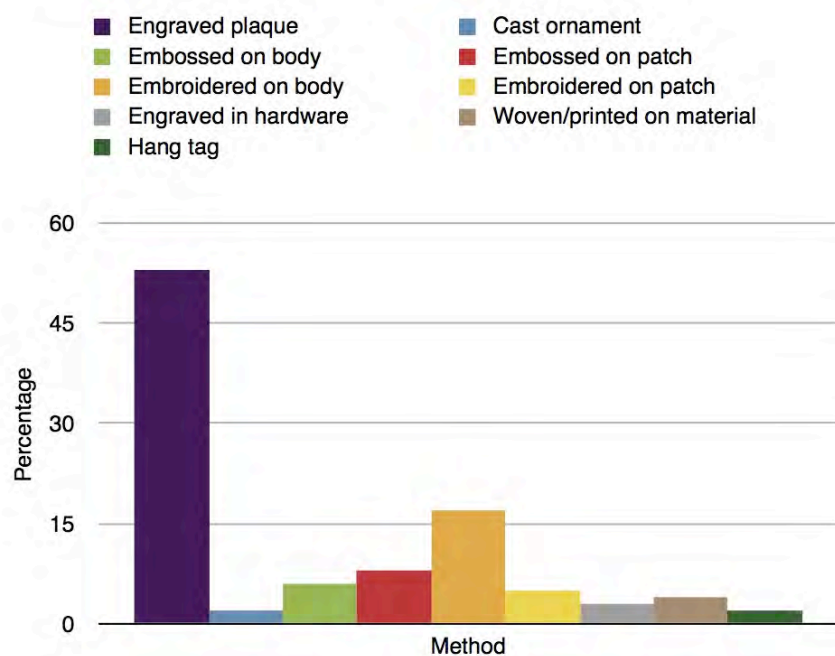
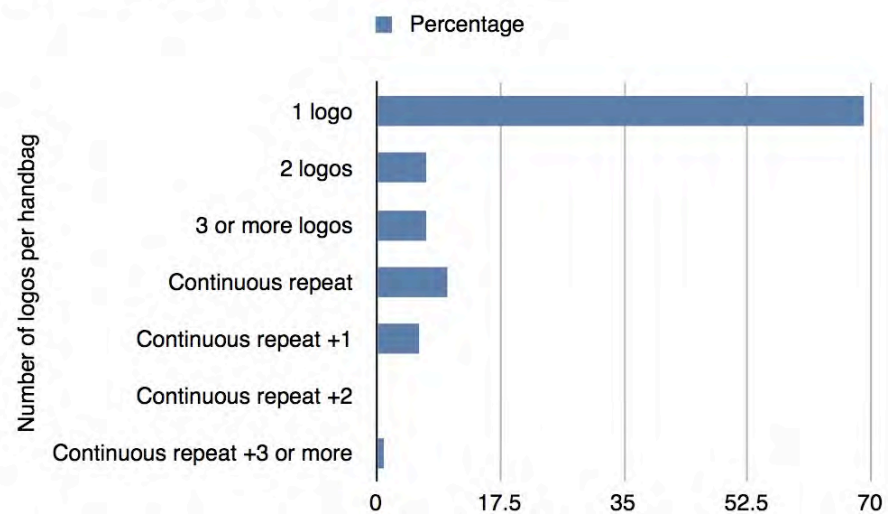




Table 6.7

Logo count (Vogue): 1990-1999



Logo count (Vogue): 2000-2009

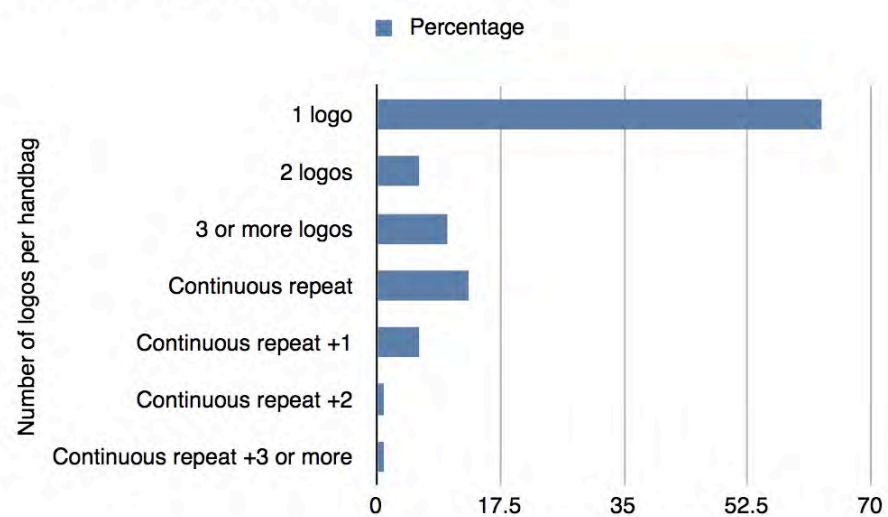
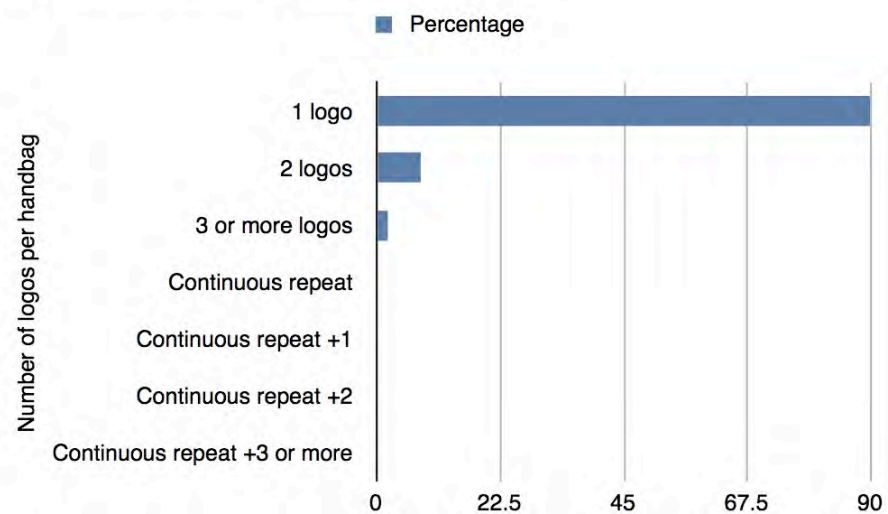


Table 6.8

Logo count (Seventeen Magazine): 1990-1999



Logo count (Seventeen Magazine): 2000-2009

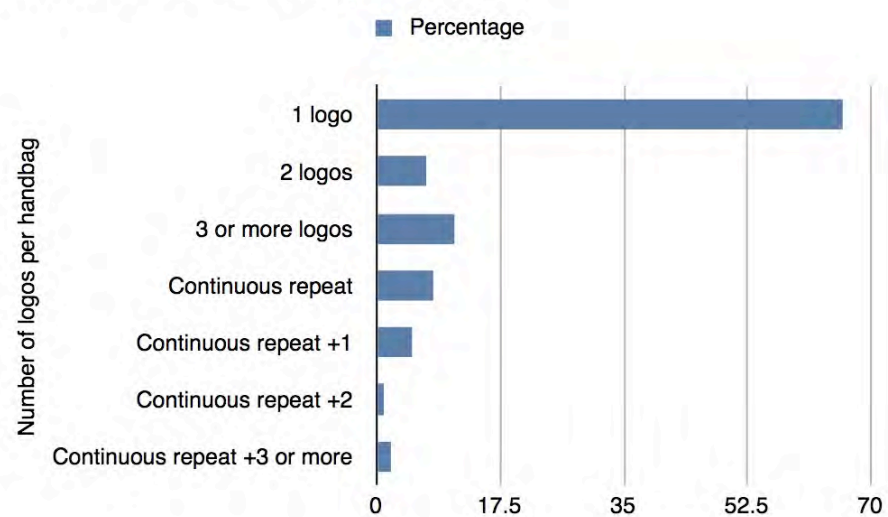
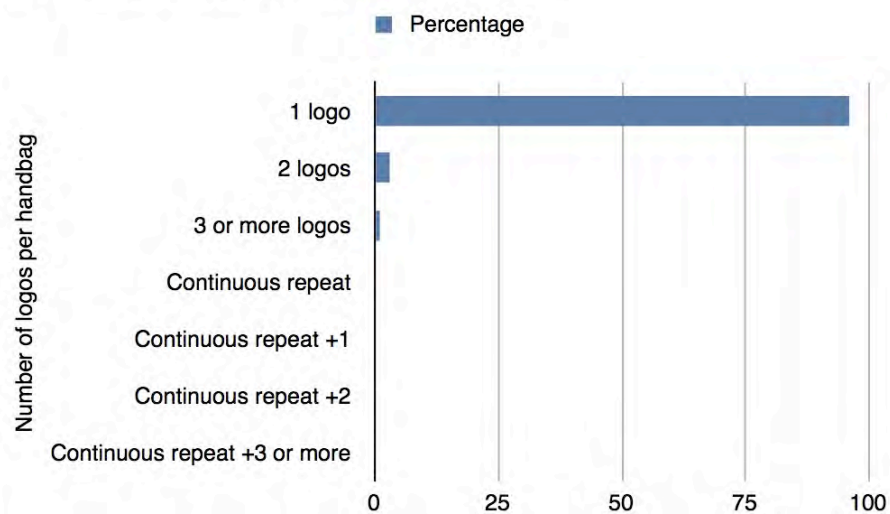
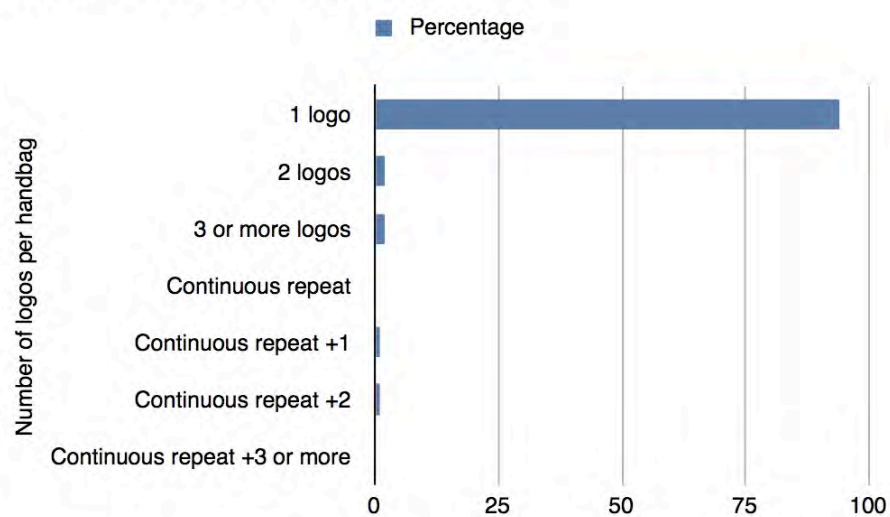


Table 6.9

Logo count (Sears Catalog): 1990-1999



Logo count (Sears Catalog): 2000-2009



## Chapter 7: Making, Marketing, Retailing: Logoed Handbags and Hand Luggage in the Global Marketplace

This chapter explores in detail the converging arms of the fashion system—design, manufacture, advertising, retailing, and editorializing—that facilitated the success of logoed handbags and hand luggage. The content of this chapter serves as additional context or explanation for much that was revealed in the content analysis of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears Catalog. Some of the themes discussed in detail in this chapter have been referenced in chapters five and six but merit a deeper discussion and more specific detail from the historical record. Furthermore, the content of this chapter connects these changes on the business side of fashion to the larger and more provocative issue of how fashion has changed conceptually.

### **Design and Manufacturing**

The introduction of logoed handbags was partially due to the changing demands of manufacturing. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the handbag industry in Europe and North America was often described as being a “cottage industry,” comprised of many small businesses that were often family-owned and largely antiquated in terms of their approaches to work flow, costing, and distribution. Factories in Asia, on the other hand, were capable of volume production-- production that could undercut the wholesale prices of European and North American competitors. By 1971 industry insiders were advocating more sophisticated production and costing strategies, intelligent forecasting and marketing, and the design of simple style lines to facilitate rapid production (“The

Need for Volume Production” 13). Notably rapid production and production on a large scale are inextricably linked objectives. In the 1970s many companies were oriented towards the goal of producing for large numbers of customers who were ostensibly located throughout the world.

The content and aesthetic analyses revealed that many logoed handbag lines are made using open stock materials and standardized pieces of hardware that can be applied to virtually any kind of handbag or piece of hand luggage. Many of the figures included in this document indicate that early logoed handbags were often executed in simple, standard shapes that could be speedily manufactured using one or more of the aforementioned logoed materials. This last point is directly related to a company’s bottom line. In a 1976 article, a journalist at *Fashion Accessories Magazine* concretized this point by stating, “In order to keep prices down and volume sustained, production is concentrated on basic, time-tested styles, for which each firm is known” (“The Evolution of a Handbag” 32). In essence this is an admission that design evolution and the requirement that fashion be ephemeral might be compromised for the sake of cost effectiveness.

Another noteworthy manufacturing issue that contributed to the widespread production of logoed handbags related to the availability of raw materials. The handbag market itself was suffering in the 1970s due to leather shortages (caused by the closure of several key leather processing factories) and consequent high prices for the raw material. Speaking in 1989, Nina McLemore, president of Liz Claiborne Accessories noted,

The major issue is that even five years ago you couldn’t make a good quality leather handbag with value: good skins, lining, hardware. This realization

brought us, with a fairly small handbag business in 1982, to the decision to go with the Liz Claiborne (mostly vinyl) logo bag. It was either this or lesser quality leather. For the then \$30 to \$65 price tag, the logo bag exploded and gave the customer quality, fashion, and function at a price she could afford. (“What’s Wrong With This Picture?” 68)

Vinyl, the second-class surrogate for leather, could be elevated to the realm of the fashionable and desirable by the addition of the logo. A mass-produced, inexpensive surrogate for leather was re-imagined as high fashion through the addition of the external branding. This is in essence the core value of the fashion branded commodity—making fashion from a simple product. The utilization of humble materials on a grand scale also points to a modification of the mass/class distinction in that a mass market, mass produced material could seemingly be elevated to the realm of high class fashion simply by marking it with the name of the designer.

### **The Fashion Press: Editorials and Advertising**

The importance of the handbag to the changing global fashion marketplace and to the fashionable consumer can be ascertained by noting the increased inclusion of handbags in editorials in the pages of *Vogue*. From 1969-1979 there was evidence of logoed handbags in a total of 16 editorials. From 1980-1989 there were 46 editorials that included handbags or hand luggage with a logo in evidence. In the 1990s the number of editorials ballooned to 187 only to be surpassed in the first decade of the 2000s with a tally of 377 editorials. These figures reflect the number of editorials that included handbags with logos but may be extrapolated to reflect an overall interest on the part of

the editorial staff at *Vogue* to show their readership handbags in general. Similarly, the number of advertisements that included handbags with logos also increased steadily over the decades with only 57 examples appearing between 1969-1979, an almost five-fold increase to 301 advertisements in the 1980s, 559 advertisements in the 1990s, and 1109 examples appearing between 2000 and 2009. The ballooning presence of this particular category of accessory in the pages of *Vogue* must be understood as evidence that companies desired to promote these items to fashion-minded consumers. The evidence must also be interpreted as influential to the readership of *Vogue*. Arguably a reader perusing the pages of these magazines would be impressed by the quantity and diversity of the handbags depicted and would take note of the aesthetics, including the logos. All of these observations would thereby influence her personal conception of fashionableness. Certainly if *Vogue*, the arbiter of taste and fashion authority, depicted bags made of the Dior Jacquard or Louis Vuitton monogram, the images would influence many consumers and change their personal requirement that fashion must necessarily be ephemeral. Additionally it would have the ability to change a consumer's eye about the desirability of external branding. It is also possible that long-term exposure to increasingly high price points would, over time, rationalize the prices in the mind of the mass consumer.

It is not accidental that the increase in advertising coincided with an up-tick in the number of editorials. Notably there was often profound overlap between the brands and types of bags shown in the advertisements and the brands and types of bags shown in the editorials. Journalist Mark Tungate, author of *Fashion Brands: Branding Style From Armani to Zara*, interviewed Masoud Golsorkhi, founder and editor of independent style

magazine *Tank*. Golsorkhi noted, “Most fashion magazines are an extension of the marketing departments of large companies” (130). Similarly, fashion designer Isabel Marant crystallized this point when she noted, “To be well known in fashion today, you have to appear in the women’s press. But without buying advertising, it’s almost impossible. The relationship within the fashion business is one of give and give: ‘You pay and I’ll give you some editorial’” (Tungate 132). Undoubtedly advertising dollars earn companies the attention and the good graces of the fashion editors who style photo-editorials, document trends, and make proclamations about what is hot and what is not. This complicity is yet another way in which the fashion system has sought to promote the increased importance of accessories in general and logoed handbags and hand luggage in particular. Understanding the role of the press provides additional explanatory evidence to help develop the context for the success of logoed products while it also points to the hidden power structure that is at work promoting fashion trends. Figure 7.1 exemplifies an editorial and an advertising campaign that feature the same products. The figure represents one instance of this phenomenon selected from scores of examples and points to the fact that fashion editors do not proffer praise based solely on their opinions and expertise; rather, their blessings may be motivated by a connection to advertising dollars.

There is also evidence that financial motivation on the part of fashion editors also influenced editorial content. In the historical background presented early in this document it was briefly noted that many fashion designers were acquiring notoriety and becoming household names from the late 1960s onward. Clarifying that the phenomenon of the celebrity designer was and still is largely engendered by the powerful and influential fashion press merits mention, as the valuable commodity of notoriety is the



essence of designer logoed products. Understanding that the fashion press is involved not just in simply reporting facts and observations, but rather is intimately involved in crafting a reality that can be made to serve pecuniary means, casts the celebrity of the designer in a different light.

Oleg Cassini, who designed for Jacqueline Kennedy during the Kennedy administration (1961-1963), was a vanguard of this phenomenon during his tenure with the First Lady. He noted,

When I entered the White House through the front door and not the servant's entrance, the status and image of the American fashion designer changed, not only in America but throughout the world. It became more glamorous. ... This was noted in the press; my name became recognized, and a valuable commodity. (Years later the polls would still show that Dior and I were the two best-known designers in America.) Thus began the celebritization of fashion, a trend that eventually assumed major proportions; but make no mistake, the notion that a designer's very name might be so recognizable as to be marketable began right then and there. (Cassini 318)

Notably Cassini profited handsomely from his celebrity status—it enabled him to produce a wide variety of lines for locations around the globe. Celebrity status gave a great many designers the ability and opportunity to trade upon their names and the buying public responded. In the second half of the twentieth century, media-saturated consumers were drawn to the warm glow of celebrity and images of the good life—images that did not necessarily have substance to support them. Logoed products provided a shiny sliver

of that world, although the logo itself potentially functioned as an allegory for the emptiness of the sign/signifier relationship.

The shift in focus to the designer himself/herself as opposed to focus primarily on the design innovation of apparel and accessories is part and parcel of the changing definition of fashion. It is essential to the shift in focus from fashion based in design to fashion based in branding. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries it is fair to argue that many designers, working in league with the press, create and nurture a public persona in order to garner a following. Designers cultivate unique personal style, they write books, they star on television shows, make cameo film appearances, and they attend red carpet events on the arms of starlets from around the globe. All of these things make them a part of the public spectacle. These things bring a certain kind of allure to the brand, and they ultimately create allure around whatever kind of product the design house ultimately makes.

### **Licensing, Oversaturation of the Market, and the Healing Powers of the Global Conglomerate**

I have already argued that the ability to trade on the power of one's name was a critical part of the impetus for widespread licensing in the fashion industry. However, the attitude towards licensing, and transparency about its use has changed over time. This point, touched upon briefly in chapter five, merits some additional consideration as it reveals changing attitudes about fashion branded commodities and is intimately related to the restructuring of the business of fashion.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s some advertisements for logoed handbags and hand luggage that ran in *Vogue* and *Seventeen* clearly indicated that the product was made under license. The name of the licensee would be included in the text of the advertisement. For example, Pierre Cardin products were made first by Princess Gardner and then by Beta after 1984. Anne Klein products were made by St. Thomas. Diane Von Furstenberg handbags were made by Paristyle Fashions, whereas her luggage was produced by the M.M. Vera Luggage Company; Paloma Picasso advertisements showed that the handbags were made by Lopez Cambil, Ltd. After 1997, advertisements did not include information about the licensee. This change must be at least in part a response to negative consumer perceptions about logoed and licensed products, which as I have noted, frequently suffered from quality control and oversaturation issues. Conceivably while consumers may have been drawn to products because of celebrity and status, their willingness to stay with a brand would have required that the consumer felt she was getting value for her money. Writing about the house of Dior, Okawa noted, “Once this model [of licensing] was adopted by many designers, licensed lines began to lose their cultural cachet” (107).

Figure 7.2 illustrates a Gucci cosmetics pouch (probably from the early 1980s) that was clearly made under license by the Sun Motoyama Company and was distributed in Japan. The bag itself is well constructed, but the extensive use of vinyl raises some concerns given that this is a product from a luxury brand. Notably the packaging and the bag itself are also marked to indicate that their pedigree is separate from the main Gucci line. Parfums Gucci was a subsidiary of Gucci devoted to making moderately priced items including wallets, belts, simple handbags, and perfumes. Often products in this line

were wrought in the logo Jacquard fabric. The division was ultimately shuttered due to quality control issues and oversaturation of the market with undesirable products.

Concealing the role of the licensee may be read in a variety of ways. It may be viewed as an effort on the part of designers to shore up their authority by preserving the illusion that the logoeed product was in fact an object of their own design. To put it another way, concealing the role of the licensed manufacturer helps to maintain the blurred boundary between fashion designs and fashion branded commodities.

Concealing the fact that a product was made under license also helps to link the object to the designer's city of origin or workplace--Paris, Milan, London, or New York—places that have far more cultural cachet than Gloversville or Johnstown, New York.

Concealing the relationship to the licensee may also mask the fact that an item was mass produced—a notion that a savvy consumer might read into the name of a manufacturer like Paristyle, St. Thomas, or Beta.

Licensing and logos are clearly alive and well in the contemporary world of fashion. This is due largely to the restructuring and rebranding of design companies through their incorporation into large, multi-national conglomerates. Just as changes in the apparel marketplace, including high operating costs and changing shopping patterns, have led designers through the boom and bust of licensing, the same species of financial turmoil led couturiers and top designers into the fold of conglomerates who have deep pockets, savvy (if not savage) business tactics, and large marketing arms among their many assets.

There is evidence in trade publications dating to the early 1970s that some small design houses and manufacturers were integrated into conglomerates as a means of

staying afloat financially. A 1970 article entitled “The Age of Aquarius and/or the Age of the Conglomerate Giant” noted that, “Because of the pressures of imports, automation, rising costs of materials and labor, many [manufacturers] found it necessary to be acquired by or merged with other companies in the same field” (12). The article went on to predict that, “If the success pattern continues in an industry as viable as fashion, it is almost a sure thing that the formula will be copied and a whole new era in fashion, manufacturing, and merchandising may be dawning” (38). The veracity of this prediction was evident and had taken hold of high profile, high-style companies by the next decade.

Especially from the mid-1980s onward, large conglomerates such as Bernard Arnault’s LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) began buying up dusty old couturiers and staid family-owned luxury brands, many of which had passed through the cycle of diminishing clientele precipitating licensing/logomania, and the subsequent passage into the realm of the cheap and passé. The individuals who spearheaded these acquisitions had the vision, the resources, and the business acumen to revitalize brands that had fallen on hard times. Once companies such as Dior and Gucci (the latter owned by Francois Pinault’s conglomerate now known as PPR—Pinault Printemps Redoute) were acquired, the licensed and logoed products were largely eliminated—for a time. *Vogue* journalist Mimi Spencer noted, “In 1994 and 1995, Dior raked back its licensed products and the quality of logo-bearing goods was improved dramatically. ...Tom Ford did something similar at Gucci in the late 1980s. To save the mark, 15,000 Gucci product lines were jettisoned; logos were bumped off the front of products” (245). Few companies were immune to this phenomenon. Yves Saint Laurent, which was acquired by PPR in 1999, had licenses for a plethora of items including plastic logoed shoes. At YSL, licenses for

products of this caliber were eliminated beginning in 2000 with the appointment of new management by PPR (“The Month in Fashion” 2001 152).

Most reputations sullied in the 1980s and early 1990s are no longer damaged today. Conglomerates, which are information driven, globally minded, and interested in mass appeal, have the ability to revive and re-brand companies that have suffered from brand dilution. They have the ability to revive the polish and allure that captivates consumers in droves. It is not so much that the modern incarnations of Dior, Gucci, or Louis Vuitton offer products that are profoundly different in design or concept from the product lines offered in darker days; it is largely that the products have been presented in a new light—in the halo effect cast by carefully crafted brand identities steeped in exclusivity, glamour, and visions of the good life. Another way of saying this is that conglomerates have lavished great energies on redesigning the brand, but continue to rely heavily on fashion branded commodities that were created decades ago.

Redesigning brand identity clearly relates to updating and modernizing an identity for contemporary consumers so that it has widespread appeal (i.e the goal is to captivate the mass market). Jean Jacques Picart, Bernard Arnault’s personal communications director, noted that Arnault’s genius was “to bring marketing techniques to a world that had previously had no use for them,” and to create accessible luxury brands (Tungate 21). Arnault’s stable of luxury brands (including Celine, Fendi, and Givenchy) have been able to market products to the masses (products that are mass produced), while still maintaining the air of exclusivity that design houses lost when they employed similar tactics in the 1970s and early 1980s. Achieving such a delicate balance in conjunction with such a robust market share is an undeniable stroke of genius, though it points to the

philosophical quandaries that are the framework of this dissertation. The relationship between mass and class is the topic that I turn to in the next section.

### **Merchandising the Mass Market and the Class Market: An Evolving Approach**

The historical context provided in chapter three revealed that the business of fashion in the twentieth century could not be sustained by the purchasing power of the elite alone. The initial response to the need for expanding the customer base was to offer fashion branded commodities that were very different in quality and aesthetics when compared to the other items in a designer's line. Such commodities have aptly been described as "consolation prizes" by *Wall Street Journal* writer (and fashion insider) Christina Binkley (9). An example of a logoed consolation prize is the Judith Leiber logo Jacquard line that was available in the late 1980s as an alternative to her handcrafted, crystal-encrusted minaudieres. Figure 7.3 shows the contrast between the two lines. The logoed example is a simple, basic shape made of a mass produced fabric and decorated with mass produced metal findings. The latter is hand-worked and features finely crafted details. The logo Jacquard bags, which feature a continuous repeated of Js, Ls, and little handbags, started (in the 1980s) at the sixty dollar price point, whereas the minaudieres retailed (and still do retail) for several hundred dollars at the low-end and can fetch several thousand dollars for large or complex pieces. In a 1987 *Accessories Magazine* article entitled "Status...Still," Judith Leiber, referring to her logoed Jacquard bags made plain what one might readily deduce, "We're hoping to attract a new customer and then trade her up to the rest of the line" (16).

The notion of entry-level products was and still is industry wide, and many of them are logoed. Key rings, passport holders, belts, and sunglasses, as well as small handbags or wallets are all examples of entry-level products which *Accessories Magazine* writer Nancy Wolfson noted are targeted at young and first-time customers. She noted that even elite companies such as Hermès and Chanel offer such products as a means to “expand their customer base by broadening their product range. Read: offering lower-priced options” (103). In the past twenty years, however, the positioning of the lower priced items has changed in important ways—ways that further blur the boundary between fashion design and fashion branded commodity.

As noted in chapter six, the art of making price a distinction is part of the evolution of marketing that has enabled targeting both the masses and the classes. Revitalizing the ability of design companies to reach a broad market while keeping their brand identities untarnished is fundamental to the mission of the global conglomerate, which by virtue of its size and scope is keenly interested in developing the designer customer at virtually all price points. The global worldview of the conglomerate necessitates the design, production, and advertising of smaller and lower priced items, but the consolation prize is anathema. Once again, bags made of fabric with an overall repeat of a logo were fundamental to this mission of expanding the customer base. The difference in the 1990s and 2000s was that the logoed repeats could also exist in variations at a much higher price point. They were targeted simultaneously to disparate clientele, they were not overtly licensed, and they were retailed alongside higher-priced products.



Figure 7.4 is an advertisement for Louis Vuitton that features a small handbag known as a pochette. It was originally designed to be hooked inside the larger and more expensive line of tote bags. The notion behind its design was that the owner of a fleet of large Vuitton pieces could put small necessities in the pochette, leaving the more cumbersome objects behind while she ran a quick errand or the like. In the late 1990s, this handbag, which had a relatively low price point, was commonly used as a diminutive shoulder bag—often by customers who did not own its larger counterpart. Priced at \$130 in 1999, it was within reach of many consumers. Figure 7.5 shows a variation on the pochette that was offered in 2004. Draped panels of green leather distinguish it. The price of this seasonal, limited-run fashion bag was \$4760. It was made in the same popular and functional shape but had the added cachet of exclusivity as it was only made for a season and cost a great deal more. Notably traditional fashion of the ephemeral kind fetches a higher price than does a similar design that is available year after year.

Creating product lines and advertising campaigns that have the potential to appeal to the mass market and the elite consumer simultaneously is no small feat. The widespread success of this phenomenon is clearly attributable to the finely tuned machines that are the modern luxury conglomerates. Yves Carcelle, president of Louis Vuitton Malletier, once noted, “I see that more and more people, not just the elite, want to add the dimension of pleasure to every aspect of their life [sic]” (Slowey 234). By creating products at attainable price points but advertising them in the same way as their more expensive counterparts, Louis Vuitton, other luxury brands in the LVMH portfolio, and design houses industry-wide were and are able to put fashion and luxury within reach of many consumers. The average consumer wishing to showcase her slice of the good

life would be best served by a product bearing an external mark of the maker. At the same time, these companies offer parallel products, with minor modifications (that often include hand-crafting or luxurious materials) and price them out of reach of the masses. In doing this, the design houses retain their exclusivity even while courting the mass audience. Additionally, in tandem with the courtship of the more elite customer through exclusive designs companies developed the phenomenon of the seasonal luxury item—the luxury item of the moment. Transitioning the luxury goods sector from a sector that produced items to be cherished for a lifetime (Louis Vuitton luggage if cared for properly will last for decades) to an industry that produced goods to be flaunted for a moment was in many ways a stroke of genius on the part of company executives. These seasonal items have the ability to simultaneously stoke the flames of desire of the mass audience and the elite consumer, inspiring both to shop at the price point that is within reach. The inclusion of seasonal, ephemeral designs also maintains a key aspect of the traditional world of fashion. It is part and parcel of keeping the brand allure that is so critical to the success of a big business.

An additional point must necessarily be made with regards to the class audience of luxury brands and the products made for that target market. In addition to limited or special edition products of similar design to items targeted to the masses, luxury makers also cater to the true class market with custom made or modified objects that are not the subject of advertising campaigns. Additionally, luxury makers like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel and Hermès make products that are either very subtly marked or are distinguishable based on their design features alone. The approaches of these companies reflects the understanding that individuals with high economic and social capital often

prefer products (including luxury goods) that are less conspicuous than those desired by the large middle class (see Han, Nunes, and Drezè 2010 for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon). The fact that these objects are not the subject of advertising, rarely the subject of fashion editorials, and typically not logoed (not fashion branded commodities) accounts for the fact that these items largely fell outside of the purview of this study.

### **Advertising the Brand**

The content of the advertising campaigns used to address both the mass and class audiences merits consideration, though the research questions that provided the outline for this study did not make room for a comprehensive investigation. A few comments will hopefully make the connection between the renewed success of logoed products in the marketplace in the last twenty years within a broad social milieu, and the advertising campaigns that have been created to facilitate their success.

I have demonstrated that a well-tuned brand is a powerful engine in the modern marketplace. It has the ability to confer cachet onto even the most basic product, the ability to set expectations about desirability, and the ability to set a price point that is not necessarily commensurate with actual value. The big budgets that conglomerates can bestow upon insightful, young, and aggressive creative directors, top-tier marketing think-tanks, and the lavish advertising campaigns that bring the behind-the-scenes efforts to the masses could not be accomplished by small upstarts, even those with the greatest talents to offer. Joseph Velosa, who runs the business for British designer Matthew Williamson, cynically stated, “Sooner or later you realize that, like any other industry, fashion is controlled by money. If you have money, you have advertising muscle, so you

can control your editorial presence, which then effects [sic] how the consumer perceives you, which in turn maintains the buyer's interest in your label" (Tungate 65-66).

Velosa's comment returns us to the idea of a hidden power structure suggested by Foucault. Here the power structure is embedded within the press and has a profound ability to influence consumer perception (and consequently purchasing) and is therefore directly tied to financial concerns. That which is promoted in the press and in advertising is not necessarily evidence of the finest and most forward-thinking design innovation.

In chapter six the Louis Vuitton campaign by Bruno Dayan was proffered as an example of a salacious campaign that had the ability to rebrand the company while showcasing products that are a variation on an old theme. It is important to note that the technique found in that campaign is widely used. For example, the house of Dior, also part of the LVMH stable of brands, was able to flex a massive advertising muscle in the early 2000s with the net result of recasting the identity of the brand and reviving its presence in the marketplace. Figure 7.6 is a sexually provocative Dior advertisement that successfully repositioned the Dior logo Jacquard in particular and the brand in general. The models create a sultry world into which the voyeur may slip for a moment. The world is one of forbidden pleasure and beauty. It is perhaps a bit risqué, but everything is glossy and glamorous. So engrossing is this scandalous imagery that inspection of the aesthetics of the handbag becomes a secondary or even tertiary interest. The timeworn logo Jacquard (or virtually any basic product that could be inserted in its place) may now seem new and fashion-forward to many mass market consumers in light of this provocative scene. Notably while fashion insiders and individuals with superior cultural capital might be immune to the spectacle presented in advertisements of this kind, the

cognoscenti are not the likely target of this image. The spectacle that is orchestrated by the global conglomerate is meant to appeal to the lucrative mass market.

In contrast to advertising campaigns featuring provocative imagery, some campaigns created narratives by utilizing celebrity spokesmodels as a way of appealing to customers with products that appeared innovative and accessible. Across the fashion industry from the late 1990s onward, such advertising images reshaped how many people thought about designers and design houses with sullied or stymied brand identities. They also had the ability to reshape perception of brands that may have seemed out of reach and too elite for the average consumer. The use of celebrity spokespeople was an especially common technique used to elevate a brand and link that brand to a world beyond the basic product itself. Notably that world had characteristics that were both glamorous and luxurious yet, given the characteristics of the person depicted, had qualities of mass appeal. For example, beginning in 1997 Eastpak began to run print advertisements that featured sexy and famous backs of people such as actress Jennifer Love Hewitt (1997), Sugar Ray singer Mark McGrath (1999-2000), and Blink 182 drummer Travis Barker—all individuals who had appeal to the youth market. Similarly Dooney and Bourke, conceivably seeking to make their products seem younger and hipper, featured Mischa Barton, star of the popular soap opera *The OC* (2003) and bad-girl actress Lindsay Lohan (2004). At the high end, companies like Louis Vuitton also used this technique. Jennifer Lopez starred in their advertisements in 2003 (Figure 7.7) as did Pharrell Williams in 2006. Notably both of these celebrities have connections to urban culture and minority groups, while they are also extraordinarily successful,

affluent, and widely considered to be attractive. Lopez and Williams may symbolize both aspiration and accessibility. They are rich and famous now, but they had to work to get where they are today. Arguably the narratives attached to these celebrities are communicated through their images and impacts perception of the brand.

Selecting performers as spokesmodels was in line with an emerging understanding of the power of the celebrity in late twentieth century culture. Celebrities are both beyond our reach and elite while simultaneously in our lives as they appear in magazines and in our homes on television, in film, and in music videos. A 1997 article that ran in *Vogue* entitled “Screen Icons” discussed the emerging trend of product placement in TV and film and noted that a media star photographed wearing a fashionable item was likely to boost its sales (Sullivan 100). In the late 1990s it became increasingly common for fashion houses to provide style setters and screen stars with free products in the hopes that they would wear them and be photographed. Even when the celebrity in question was not given the item as a marketing technique, celebrity product use could have that very effect. For example, in 1996 Bernadette Chirac, wife of the French president, gave Princess Diana a Dior handbag. She was photographed with the small quilted satchel (replete with dangling Dior logo charm) on several occasions. Demand for the bag skyrocketed to about 10,000 pieces priced at over a thousand dollars each (“A Star is Born” 155). Such sales statistics affirm the power of celebrity style and imply that it was not only the wealthy elite that was purchasing celebrity promoted products.

In addition to celebrity endorsements promoting products to a broad demographic and straddling the line between mass and class, advertisements using celebrity are

connected to the up-selling of the general public. In an *Accessories Magazine* interview, Deborah Rudinsky of trend forecasting and merchandising agency Henry Doneger Associates summed it up, “Consumers who own an ‘It’ bag feel like celebrities—and celebrities themselves are driving the popularity of coveted handbags” (Groce “Trading Up” 22). Through images of the beautiful body, a body leading a life of fame and fortune, some consumers may be transported and may consequently emotionally identify the product with that lifestyle. This has proven to be a powerful tool for tapping consumer desire, helping consumers create personal identity, and fueling sales of items priced far above their material value. Arguably it is also indicative of the importance of the brand and the image associated with a product having more importance than the design of the product itself. In the 2000s Uma Thurman was a face for Louis Vuitton, Madonna appeared for Versace, and Gwyneth Paltrow for Dior. The glamour and fame associated with these women certainly had the power to mediate or augment the actual design aesthetic of the product with which each posed. Therefore this type of advertising provides additional evidence of how the shift from the traditional world of fashion design to the new world of fashion branded commodities has been successfully executed by making brand identity of paramount importance.

## **Retailing**

The increased importance of fashion branded commodities can also be traced to the realm of retail. From the 1970s onward there were rumblings in that realm—change was occurring in terms of fashion design, fashion production and in terms of consumer behavior. These seemingly disparate factors had the net result of impacting the actions of

buyers and the retail outlets for which they worked. Writing in 1971, a journalist at *Handbags and Accessories* reflected on new buying standards and their impact on production and noted, “The traditional January, June, August, and November market ‘weeks’ are melting one into the other. ... This has necessitated manufacturers continually augmenting their lines with new styles so that in as short a time as six weeks, except for staples, a line can be completely changed” (“Handbags and Accessories: 1971 Annual Industry Survey” 22). What this statement alludes to is manifold. First, wholesale buys were now taking place on an almost continuous basis, an indication that retailers were less inclined to commit to a look for a full quarter and an indication of the increasingly fickle (or particular, or unpredictable) nature of the consumer. Additionally, as wholesale buys were taking place more frequently, the window for turnaround from order placement to order delivery was shrinking, necessitating streamlining of production on the manufacturing end—a concept that has already been visited in light of cutting costs. Renee Brown, Editor of *Fashion Accessories Magazine*, observed, “The handbag buying trend of recent markets is to delay commitments until zero hour, ordering very close to desired delivery. In an attempt to meet these demands, manufacturers are forced to speed production” (“A Threat to Quality” 25). Although an entire line *can* be changed in six weeks, the visual evidence supports the notion that the need for quick turnaround led to an increasing reliance on staple pieces including logoed lines and the application of logoed elements onto standard shapes rather than innovation in terms of silhouette and decoration, the hallmarks of traditional fashion.



A 1972 *Handbags and Accessories* interview with buyer Jack Oppenheim provides insight into yet another aspect of the retail world that may have contributed to the success of logoed handbags and hand luggage. Oppenheim commented,

It takes great talent to be a handbag buyer. It was once explained to me by the owner of a retail empire that handbags and ready-to-wear are the most volatile things to merchandise—they are the ultimate of fashion. ...Chains and department stores no longer want to buy or pay for talent. Instead it suddenly became the vogue to buy people as well as merchandise at wholesale prices.

(“The Fittest Will Survive” 24)

Inexperienced or otherwise unsophisticated buyers, buyers lacking real insight into creating a suitable merchandise mix, would be more inclined to rely upon branded merchandise to shape their buying decisions. Brands provide authority in the absence of other substantial knowledge and they have a built in marketing point. In a sense a fashion branded commodity has already been marketed to the customer and one could argue that makes the buy less risky. The presence of branding on the exterior of handbags and hand luggage coincided in time with the industry-wide overhaul in buying and retailing. If the relationship was not causal it was most certainly a convenient coincidence.

As buyers and retailers at the mass level continue to strive to satisfy increasingly large and broad customer bases, it may also be the case that creating a fashion-forward merchandise mix that is concerned with subtle elements of design and quality raises logistical and conceptual problems. In a market that is so diverse, making fine distinctions of taste is problematic if reaching this large population is the goal. Players in

these key sectors of the fashion industry may need to rely on something more concrete and universal. Fashion branded commodities that do not change dramatically or that rely on elements that have been generally accepted by the buying public also provide security for the buyer and the retailer.

Brand names for the modern mass market consumer encapsulate a wide range of qualities that are fundamental to making a purchasing decision. At an accessories summit in 2001 a panelist noted, “A brand is a guarantee of consistency of quality, taste level, pricing, and positioning that clearly connects emotionally on some level with the consumer” (Drotman 68). Although the precise nature of the connection (i.e how the brand is perceived and interpreted by a specific consumer) varies depending on an individual’s demographic characteristics and reference groups, consumers do have powerful associations and disassociations with brands. They have become the method by which a product is typically chosen or left to languish on a shelf. Branding an item permanently on its exterior with a logo is just one more way in which the branding can be introduced to the prospective consumer. So important is brand identity today, that upstart designers who lack brand identity, regardless of their quality, their ingenuity, or the timeliness of their work have difficulty finding retail venues. *Women’s Wear Daily* journalist Caroline Tell noted in 2008 that major retailers are unlikely to pick up new designers with limited brand identity and even small boutiques are increasingly reticent to take on a designer who does not have an established name (1). As I have argued, the design of brand identity from the 1990s onward is at least on par with product design in terms of importance to both producers and consumers.

The move to virtual shopping, which began in the early 1990s with the launch of television shopping channel QVC, is undoubtedly also linked to the increasing importance of fashion branded commodities. As more and more people make purchasing decisions based upon a digital image without interacting bodily with the product, a surrogate for tactile understanding of quality and craftsmanship is helpful. A brand can function as a guarantee of quality for many consumers as it simultaneously makes assertions about taste and style. Similarly, Internet shopping has impacted the criteria people use to make selections. Writing for *Accessories Magazine*, Glen Beres noted, “Brands in particular fare well online; after all they already have a built-in reputation of exclusivity and quality that puts the customer at ease about making a purchase of a high-ticket item they can’t touch or try on” (33). As e-commerce continues to expand across product categories, it seems likely that brands will retain their prominence and that external logos will continue to be an important way in which the pedigree of an item is marked.

It must be noted that the changes in retailing as they relate to logoed products are connected to fundamental aspects of postmodernity. The retail landscape as it is depicted in trade journals indicates a quick-paced, anonymous, mass market defined by rapid decision making and homogeneous product offerings. The evidence from trade journals indicates a move on the part of retailers to deal with larger customer bases, thereby making the emphasis on the faceless masses, not on a known clientele—a depiction of the marketplace echoed in Harvey. The quickness of the pace that is described—the unrelenting pulse of the modern marketplace that does not make room to pause and reflect, to weigh options and make informed decisions—also relates to descriptions of the

postmodern condition. Within this context, the sign, in the form of the logo, is likely to be embraced as a touchstone of meaning, although (as discussed by Baudrillard and others) the sign may lack true signification.

### **In and Out: The Press**

One final factor that has contributed to the longevity of the fashion branded commodity in the form of the logoed handbag and which has impacted the very definition of fashion is the press. The fact that the press has called the fashion branded commodity “in” then “out” then back “in,” and so forth, has kept the logoed product in the consumer’s sights, while periodically marking it as current and important. Additionally, positioning the logoed handbag on the continuous loop of the fashion cycle has had the overall effect of making the logoed handbag seem ephemeral—here today and gone tomorrow. This has happened more times than most followers of fashion would be willing or able to count, as the status of the logo has varied depending on the year, the market sector (high style or mass fashion), and the readership of whichever publication is reviewing the phenomenon.

From the beginning of the logo craze, industry insiders consistently queried whether the logo would “die.” Reference to a selection of articles and poignant quotes makes this point. Speaking in 1977, Bill Blass recognized a key component of the logoed handbag’s success when he noted, “I don’t see them dying—it gives added incentive to the customer to purchase when a name is security to her” (“Bill’s Bags 21). By 1979 a *Fashion Accessories Magazine* article noted that designer labeled products were “stronger than ever” (“Fall Leathergoods: A Strong Statement” 95). Almost a decade later articles in *Fashion Accessories Magazine* indicated that opinion was divided within

the industry as to whether the success of the logo/status segment would continue. However a 1987 article noted “Signature handbags, especially those with a logo imprinted in the fabric of the bag have been an up-trending category in conventional stores recently. One market rep called them the biggest trending category in years, generating triple-digit increases in many stores” (“Status...Still” 16). Although some industry professionals were leery of the logo’s ability to retain popularity, sales figures proved their suspicions unfounded, and while the logo’s periodic “death” may have been proclaimed by the fashion press, it is evident that unlike traditional fashion, fashion branded commodities such as logoed handbags have never been declared completely and universally passé. This phenomenon is very likely connected to the fact that fashion branded commodities are varied in design (some are ostentatiously branded other are subtle) and are positioned towards a highly diversified audience in which different groups have different tastes. For example Charles and Roussanov (2009) found that Blacks and Hispanics are about 30% more likely to purchase highly visible goods than their White counterparts.

It is clear from industry publications that by the last years of the 1980s sales of logo-signature-status looks had leveled off, though they had not disappeared from the marketplace. As a result, two things happened: companies began re-tooling their lines, and the press got involved in an interesting way. A continuous loop of sorts was formulated by writers commenting on status goods whereby roughly every six to nine months the trend was revisited. For example, Suzy Menkes of the *International Herald Tribune* noted in January of 1994 that, “the tastemakers have moved on” to status bags that were unmarked. She noted among the key pieces the Hermès Bugatti handbag and

bags by Harry Kisselstein Cord (9). Nine months later *W Magazine* noted in its “Month in Fashion” column, “Just when it seemed a stake had been driven through the heart of tasteless excess, guess what’s back. Logos. And they’re not simply sneaking in here and there either. They’re loud as they please and all over the place” (1994 30). The cycle was evident again in 1996. An article in *Accessories Magazine* entitled “Luxe in Flux” noted, “Success in the politically correct ‘90s appears to have less to do with emblazoned logos than with perceived value. Gone are the Gucci goods with coupled G’s and the F-infested Fendi’s” (Wolfson 102). Yet in December of that same year, *W Magazine* once again reported, “It’s logo time again in accessory land. And the hottest spot is bags” (“The Month in Fashion” 1996 38).

Countless examples of this back and forth on the issue of the logo’s fashionability provide the foundation for a few broad assertions about the response to logos by the press. First, the response is not monolithic. Although companies across the industry generally design and manufacture goods in accordance with trends that emerge through the contrivances of the fashion system, the use of logos ebbs and flows at individual companies at varying rates. Second, the target consumer of the logoed product is not a singular entity. The tastes of the tastemaker and the tastes of the masses are unlikely to be in perfect synch. Therefore, the market that a publication is targeting would shape the content of the commentary. Third, the essence of traditional fashion is change. Change in the modern fashion marketplace is the product of designers, manufacturers, retailers and the press. Even if change is minor, even if the trend of the moment is but a subtle variation on a long-extant theme, it is the job of the modern fashion press to create the illusion of revolution so that consumers will cast off the wares they have and replace

them anew. It seems that the authoritative voice of the press, which exerts its power in pervasive and subtle ways, succeeds in blurring the boundaries between permanent staple commodities and ephemeral fashion concepts, thereby also blurring the boundaries between traditional fashion design and fashion branded commodities.

### **Summation**

The various arms of the fashion marketplace continue to design, produce, promote and sell fashion branded commodities. Undoubtedly this is because consumers, diverse though they may be, continue to buy them. Although the popularity of fashion branded commodities in the high-fashion press has ebbed and flowed and the size and prominence of logos has waxed and waned, designers, manufacturers, advertisers, retailers, and the press all seem to be of one mindset where the logo is concerned. In the global fashion marketplace the most flexible, saleable, profitable, and long-lasting fashion trend is the logoed product in the form of a fashion branded commodity.

This discussion reinforces the idea that the logo is an ideal site from which to consider the widespread changes that have been taking place in the fashion industry. A consideration of the separate entities of retailing and advertising both show how critically important the brand and brand identity have become to the promotion and sale of fashion branded commodities. Consideration of the role of conglomerates and the content of advertising campaigns reveal how fashion branded commodities have been marketed to the masses while maintaining class appeal. The historical record pertaining to both manufacturing and buying for retail both provide evidence of the need to streamline and therefore to curtail design innovation, thereby providing yet another rationale for the

modulation that has taken place within the fashion industry regarding design innovation and providing yet another bit of evidence that explains the emergence of the world of fashion branded commodities.

The elements presented in this chapter intersect and overlap. Some themes emerge more than once but do so out of different contexts. What this demonstrates is that the promotion and adoption of the fashion branded commodity arose from a multitude of impulses. Similarly, the reworking of the very definition of fashion and the widespread acceptance of the fashion branded commodity was the result of disparate yet interrelated phenomena. The complexity and diversity of the evidence surrounding the development of the logo reaffirms its significance as a barometer of fashion from the late twentieth century onward.





Figure 7.1 This logoed Celine ensemble appeared first in January 2000 in the editorial *Vogue View* (page 116) and then was featured in an advertisement in March (page 47). It is notable that the looks and the styling of the model are identical. This is evidence of the connection and even complicity between advertisements and editorials.



Figure 7.2 This Gucci cosmetics pouch is clearly marked as being produced by an Asian licensee (the Sun Motoyama Co., Ltd). This is credited on the left hand side of the small booklet that accompanies the pouch. Additionally, both the box and the interior of the bag are marked “Parfums Gucci,” a subsidiary of Gucci. The practice of clearly marking a product as made under license waned as the 1980s came to a close. These items are in the author’s collection. Photographed by Jason Moore.





Figure 7.6 This advertisement first appeared in *Vogue* in March of 2000 (page 299). The logo jacquard fabric featured on the handbag had been utilized on myriad inexpensive licensed products in previous decades. This sexually charged advertising campaign, which was photographed by Nick Knight and which features Giselle Bündchen and Rhea Durham, helped re-shape consumer perceptions of Dior and the logo jacquard. Notably, bags of this kind also appeared in eLuxury ads in 2001. The price for the smallest version was an attainable \$150.



Figure 7.3 The difference in design aesthetic and in price point is dramatic in the case of these two Judith Leiber handbags. The logoed line is considered by some to be a sort of “consolation prize.” These handbags are in the author’s collection. Photographed by Jason Moore.





Figure 7.5 This advertisement ran in *Vogue* in August 2004 (page 21). The “pochette” handbag is an entry-level product that is made in the Vuitton monogram canvas line. The model is wearing a dress from the Louis Vuitton ready-to-wear collection which helps to put this basic object into a high-fashion context.



Figure 7.6 This image is from an editorial entitled “Hot Rocks” that appeared in *Vogue* in March of 2004 (page 501). This small pochette has a draped element and was part of a limited run that was available for a single season. The retail price was \$4760.





Figure 7.7 This advertisement featuring pop singer Jennifer Lopez ran in *Vogue* in November 2003 (p260). The selection of a pop star who is also Latina and who hails from the Bronx, NY conceivably appealed to a demographic not traditionally associated with the brand. Lopez appeared in several different photographs holding various handbags all of which were heavily promoted in editorial content. This handbag appeared in *Vogue View* in June (p120) and in *Vogue's Last Look* in August (p 318).

### Chapter 8: The Logo *in Situ*—the Postmodern Consumer

In order for fashions to be widely adopted they must appeal to consumers—their aesthetic sensibilities, their personal needs, their aspirations. Each day when we dress we adorn ourselves in an assemblage of expressions, declaring things such as gender, class and profession. For many that expression includes one or more branded items. Of course it was not always the case that consumers would use their bodies as a canvas for the advertisement of brand identities—it is a phenomenon of the late twentieth century onward.

This chapter posits a series of rationales that contextualize consumer use of fashion branded commodities and characteristics of the consumer who would want or need the branded product. Given the diversity of consumers it is logical that fashion branded commodities would be used and interpreted in a variety of ways encompassing both the practical to the symbolic. Using postmodern theory as a guiding premise I present historical and theoretical evidence to support a discussion of the consumer of fashion branded commodities, while consumer science studies are raised as examples to support the discussion. I suggest that the consumer of fashion branded commodities (and simple logoed goods) has practical concerns for selecting them, but may also rely upon logoed goods because she is alone in the marketplace, adrift in society, living in a culture characterized by anonymity and flexibility of meaning, and is attracted to the idea of self-completion through commodities. As such, the logoed product may be used as part of identity declaration and formation, which in the postmodern condition is a flexible yet fragile construct.



### **The Postmodern Consumer in the Marketplace**

The historical record indicates that from the late twentieth century most consumers were becoming increasingly alone in the marketplace and therefore needed brands and logos as a tool to guide consumption. The intimate relationships with designers and dressmakers that existed in the first decades of the twentieth century disappeared in the post-World War II period. Such relationships, which had helped to form ideas about good taste and encouraged fleeting fashionable trends, vanished for all except the most elite who were privileged enough to be dressed by designers or stylists or who continued to have their clothes custom made. One-on-one conferencing with a top couturier was never the experience of the masses, but in the early twentieth century mass market consumers could have relied upon the good advice of their local retailer. This source of influence was also waning in the latter half of the twentieth century. The diminished influence of retailers and the shift to self-selection of merchandise was virtually coeval with the advent of logos as an external motif. Thus one aspect of the fashion branded commodity (as well as the simply logoed/branded product) is utilitarian. It has the ability to help a consumer make a decision.

A 1969 article in *Handbags and Accessories* provides a specific historical detail related to this phenomenon. The author noted, "Quite often the front counter will be eliminated to allow the customer more direct access to the merchandise since self-selection is so important in choosing handbags" (Mayer 16). Implicit in the removal of the counter is also the removal of the counter attendant whose job is to assist and guide the customer in her selection. In previous decades the sales clerk stationed behind a glass display case had physically provided merchandise to customers while offering insight and

advice to facilitate selection. Removing the counter and clerk left the customer to make a decision on her own. The consumer's domain specific knowledge related to the purchase at hand would therefore determine the difficulty of making an unaided decision.

Retailers assert less authority than they did fifty years ago. Not only has sales help become increasingly less interactive, but a strong case can also be made for the notion that selling in department stores or boutiques is less of a true profession than it once was. With few exceptions, sales clerks are typically hourly help that do not necessarily have interest or expertise in the product line they represent.<sup>1</sup> Merchandise that is overtly branded enables the wandering sales clerk to assist the customer based on widely known and understood information about the brand. The logoed product comes with a sales pitch built in as the logo recommends a range of attributes that have been developed as part of the brand's identity.

In actuality the average postmodern consumer may not be interested in having a conversation with an experienced sales representative. Many consumers are pressed for time and wants to be able to make a decision that is both quick and informed. In such circumstance, the brand becomes indispensable. A 1986 article in *Fashion Accessories Magazine* interviewed Rich Goldinger of handbag company Philippe who noted,

Product identity is extremely important at the consumer level. Consumers have changed: they don't have a lot of time to shop; they like the security of a brand or designer name. So branded lines today are far more important than they were four or five years ago. You also once had sales people on the floor who could

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<sup>1</sup> This assertion is based on personal observation, personal experience, and interaction with hundreds of college-age students who routinely work for retailers as low-wage hourly employees. They are almost universally untrained with regards to cut, fit, fabrication, coordination, and other fundamental aspects of fashionable dress.

answer questions: this no longer exists so customers tend to grab the names they know. (“New Ways to Compete” 19)

Some twenty years later this point was once again iterated by *Accessories Magazine* editor Irenka Jakubiak who noted, “Shopping was once defined as a leisurely activity (hard to believe), and browsing was considered a pleasant part of the shopping experience. Today it’s about mission shopping—getting it done fast and hassle-free. ...Consumers are drawn to merchandise presented with a strong point of view” ( “Time Starved” 8). The need to “mission shop” is likely related to the multiplicity of roles that modern female consumers have adopted, especially from the late twentieth century onward. Women are mothers, professionals, life partners, scholars, and maids all at once. Their time is stretched thin and their identities are fragmented. Retailers have responded to the needs and constraints of their partitioned patrons. In the modern marketplace, retailers typically utilize brand name and/or logo placards atop racks and display cases as well as branded shops in shops to direct customers to merchandise, enabling them to make quick decisions informed greatly by their understanding of the brand. They utilize the power of the brand and its identity to guide the consumer’s decision-making process. Consumers often make their buying decisions based on their own knowledge and interpretation of the brand rather than based upon the advice of a retail professional.

The harried and fragmented consumer may also be confounded by the abundance of the marketplace, which has grown in volume over the last five decades, creating a shopping environment that is overwhelming in its mass but often lacking in diversity. With so many astoundingly similar products in the marketplace (a phenomenon noted in the content analysis of chapter five), decision-making becomes exponentially more

difficult. Figure 8.1, a page from the Sears catalog, illustrates the type of homogeneity that can exist in a product category. For a consumer lacking time to research products, or even time to interact bodily with a product before making a purchasing decision, the label may act as a surrogate for the detailed investigation of quality or the evaluation of fashion-forwardness. The logo can expedite and insure the customer's choice.

Consumers are generally thoughtful and logical, but in the wake of any lapse of critical consideration (perhaps resulting from a lack of domain specific knowledge or personal interest) the logoed commodity provided assistance—a shortcut to making a decision.

Industry professionals argue that the logo can do even more than simply assert positive attributes of the brand and offer reprieve from the homogeneity of the marketplace. Peter Arnel, creative director of brand-marketing company The Arnel Group, referred to the logo as “The key to fashion success,” and noted it is a, “promise mark.” According to Arnel, “A logo energizes [products] by setting a fashion company apart in a sea of seeming sameness.” He went on to assert, “A logo can also serve to energize the designer, or at least transmit the designer's inspiration and enthusiasm for the clothes being logoized” (Sullivan 262, 268). The idea that the essence of a designer can be transmitted through his or her mark was and still is fundamental to the success of many fashion branded commodities as the logo elevates and individualizes a product, giving it buoyancy in the minds of consumers as it rides the currents in the “sea of sameness” with a fleet of competing products. Without the brand and the logo a consumer may stand in the center of a retail department and be at a loss for how to proceed. The essence of a fashion branded commodity is that it has a special story to commend it. The brand provides added value (either for symbolic self-completion or

assurance of quality). A strong brand can “seal the deal” by giving a consumer the something extra that is needed to make a choice.

The need that many postmodern consumers have to make a speedy assessment of a product is not solely a mass-market phenomenon as one might expect. Brand recognition via the logo facilitates decision-making (albeit to varying degrees) and may have the potential to function as a surrogate for the powers of discrimination across product categories and price points. Even the elite consumer who is spending handsome sums for her fashion purchases is pressed for time and may not have domain specific knowledge (i.e. the *nouveau riche*). Notably, the ability to discriminate quality, good taste, fashion-forwardness, and the like *takes time*. The author of a 1991 *Vogue* article summed up the phenomenon by referencing Karl Lagerfeld’s reliance on well-known symbols (including the CC logo) and tropes (such as the camellia and gold chain) derived from the Chanel oeuvre. The author noted,

The look was a blessing for women who were not yet up to assessing say, the handwork in a pricey seam but who could easily spot a Chanel jacket across a restaurant table, and even a Chanel button—at least if the button was big and the C’s were on it. It said, I am safe, I am quality, I have not made a mistake, I am in good taste because I am in Chanel. (“The Chanel Obsession” 517)

Of course consumers are diverse and not all consumers are reflected by an assessment of this kind. Surely there are plenty of women who can afford Chanel and are able to judge a good seam or finely executed embroidery. However, in a world in which class boundaries are blurred, credit is available to legions of consumers, and all kinds of people (who may not have honed special powers of discrimination) are drawn to products

(partially as a result of mass media) like Chanel suits and Cristal champagne the logo and the brand name are invaluable.

Some designers have noted that the presence or absence of a logo or a label can make the difference between an item selling and an item languishing in a display. In a 1995 article for *Vogue*, Arthur Elgort interviewed several top designers about the importance of the logo and the label. Karl Lagerfeld stated, “Very often you show an item with no label to somebody, they don’t know what they want. You show the same thing with a label, and they adore it. Even if they put the label inside, they like the idea of having the label there.” Jean Paul Gaultier made similar observations when he stated, “I think that a label can help because it can make people feel secure. Even if they think it is all right themselves, they are sure after that” (135). For many postmodern consumers the security and affirmation that a brand provides is a commodity well-worth the mark-up that many brands merit. As a result it is exceedingly rare to find a product that is not at least marked on its interior. For the postmodern consumer who is also interested in loudly proclaiming her purchasing and fashion savvy to the public at large, the external logo is *de rigueur*. Notably, not all consumers are drawn to the “loud” fashion branded commodity. Berger and Ward (2010) found a major difference between “regular” consumers and consumers with high cultural capital or domain specific capital. The latter group tended towards more subtle goods that were only recognizable to insiders. The aforementioned article by Young, Nunes, and Drezè also found that the desire to show a prominent brand differed based on the characteristics of a consumer. Essentially the very rich and the very poor were not inclined to use prominent goods to signal whereas the more socially mobile groups in between were.

### **Consumer Reliance on the Logo as an Expression of the Postmodern Condition**

The preceding discussion has made plain that some consumers may rely on the logo for a variety of reasons. It can help them make purchasing decisions, it can help them navigate the retail landscape, it may even serve as a surrogate for interaction with a knowledgeable professional, and it may make a consumer feel more confident in the act of shopping and in the aftermath of a purchase. On the surface all of these functions performed by the logo are beneficial.

A theoretical counterpoint, based upon tenets of postmodern theory can be proffered. Theorists such as Harvey argue that products made by large capitalist companies (brands) are part of a large commodity discourse that has shaped consumer perception such that the omnipresence of corporate (brand) advice may have the ability to short circuit informed, unfettered decision-making. The tremendous power of advertising and branding is such that it is barely attended to and therefore not perceived. When power is not perceived, Foucault would argue, it is at its most powerful.

If one accepts the premises that power impacts knowledge and the power of brand identity is robust, then one must follow the logical course and question whether consumers who are exposed to this power can make evaluative decisions based on observations rather than decisions based on knowledge provided through advertising. The pessimist, who is often also the postmodern theorist, would likely argue that true objectivity is inaccessible and therefore the consumer cannot see beyond the knowledge that is provided to her. Therefore her decisions will never be informed by rational questioning and probing. She will merely access the knowledge provided to her by the power structure that is part and parcel of the commoditized world. Viewed through this

lens the brand with the logo as shorthand for all that it stands for have the ability to sap a consumer's power in the marketplace. It seems that more nuance is required here. While some consumers may be inclined to swallow information whole, other consumers are critical of marketed meaning and skeptical of advertising. Furthermore there is evidence to suggest that consumers refashion meaning within their social groups. While deCerteau proffered this notion in a theoretical discussion, consumer research done by Berger and Heath (2007) found that brand meaning is not fixed as consumers of brands and observers of consumers of brand construct meaning in the marketplace.

### **The Logo as Proxy for Status, Taste, and Fashion Savvy**

Postmodern theory makes room for exploring human social behavior in a context that is flexible and multivalent. In that postmodern theory posits fragmented individuals in a reality that is socially constructed (as opposed to objectively real), it facilitates multiple interpretations of human behaviors, multiple meanings for objects, and interpretations that are context dependent. Sufficient to say, the lack of objectivity provides for a rich spectrum of interpretations, none of which can necessarily be granted any more traction than another. With regards to how and why consumers use logos (in addition to the practical reasons already discussed), a few options can be entertained: status, taste and fashion savvy. Each of these has deep roots in social theory stemming back a hundred years or more. Exploring these consumer motivations through the logo, in light of postmodern theory, can cast some light on their lasting appeal.



### *Status*

I have already asserted that Thorstein Veblen developed the seminal perspective on the symbolic potential of fashionable goods used for showing social status. Veblen believed that fashion served as a form of visual and social communication among classes and that reputability could be conferred through evidence of pecuniary means. He specifically addressed dress as a way of inscribing and emulating social status. He wrote of personal ornaments that, “Their chief purpose is to lend *éclat* to the person of the wearer (or owner) by comparison with other persons who are compelled to do without” (96).

Having beautiful, tasteful dress, in particular dress that was more beautiful and more tasteful by comparison, was a clear indicator of social position according to Veblen.

Undoubtedly dress is still an indicator of a person’s social standing, though it is certainly a less precise indicator than it was in Veblen’s day.

Communication of status in Veblen’s day was simpler. He lived in a time when branding was far less prominent than it is today. Veblen posited that the status of one’s goods needed to be instantly recognizable in order to confer distinction. Importantly he did not need to indicate by whom they would need to be recognized (i.e. by other elites, by the thronging masses) as the culture of the late nineteenth century was much more clearly stratified and consumer access to fashionable goods was far more restricted. In an era predating easy and copious consumer credit, pecuniary strength writ upon the body could more readily have been understood at face value. Additionally, the elite would have had far more exclusive access to knowledge of status items and high taste culture. Furthermore, manners, movement, and implementation of etiquette would have further

highlighted the status of a person and her goods.<sup>2</sup> The democratization of fashion, that is part and parcel of the phenomenon of the fashion branded commodity, and the fragmentation of the social order, which is endemic of the postmodern condition, both work to complicate the matter of status.

Although individuals had used fashion as a way of social climbing since the dawn of the fashion cycle in the middle ages, boundaries were largely maintained and access to the most exclusive products was constrained until the mid-twentieth century. Former editor of *Vogue*, Grace Mirabella noted in her autobiography that it was not until after World War II that there was real fashion equality across demographics. She wrote,

The 1950s in American fashion were about breaking down barriers, about mobility, about bridging the gap between the hundred or so women who could afford to buy at the couture and the vast numbers who had no access to high quality design at all. Through mass production, ready-to-wear democratized access. (Mirabella 4)

Mirabella's nod to mass production as the great equalizer in fashion highlights the changing nature of inscription of status in dress. As more people participate in status dressing with more kinds of products, decoding status becomes increasingly context dependent. Here we have a specific manifestation of a problem of postmodernity that was raised by Baudrillard.

Readily legible and instantly recognizable fashion branded commodities are generally available on a mass scale. One could argue that these logoed products have democratized status in the eyes of some consumers. Advertising and other forms of

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon in the eighteenth century see Alicia M. Annas "The Elegant Art of Movement."

media including fashion editorials have crafted a universe of knowledge around these types of products such that they are perceived by many as having the ability to confer status, though there is no objective reality to that claim. Status objects are no longer commodities that are available only to the privileged few, a fact that undercuts the exclusivity that has traditionally been part and parcel of status. If one accepts that status items are readily available, one must consequently consider the nature of status in the open market and in a society. If anyone can get a “status” object can it really convey status?

Postmodern theory would seem to allow for status to be relative to a person’s own socially constructed reality and interpretation of an object. The fact that objects like Gucci logo Jacquard bags are advertised as status objects provides a bit of knowledge that can then be manipulated, modified, and interpreted. Within a given social circle the bag may be accorded great merit regardless of the specifics of use (how, when, and where it is worn), whereas in a different social circle the rules of engagement with the item might be far more stringent in order for the item to rise to the level of status object. The relativism that postmodern theory permits is echoed in findings in consumer science. The aforementioned article by Berger and Heath supports this point—consumers diverge in their interpretations of brands and brand use by one type of consumer may attract some and deflect others. Brand meaning in the marketplace is very much context dependent.

Since Veblen’s seminal commentary there has been an ongoing discussion amongst scholars regarding status. In order to develop a counterpoint to the theoretical and consumer science-based discourse (which has not addressed my topic specifically) I interviewed a small sample of consumers about their thoughts on logos. Fifteen female

consumers, who ranged in age from eighteen to sixty-six, provided their thoughts on the power, meaning, and utility of logos. The population was mixed in terms of racial/ethnic background, education, and income. Notably none of my respondents can be categorized as a top-tier earner or a social elite. The aforementioned research by Berger and Ward and Young, et al suggests that if such individuals had been interviewed that divergence would have occurred. Given the participants in my small sample, I quickly found a great deal of convergence in terms of their thoughts on logoed handbags and hand luggage, hence the small size of the sample.

My interviews revealed that status is an important aspect of identity that fashion branded commodities are sometimes used to represent. Regardless of demographic characteristics and regardless of whether or not the interviewee actually owned a “status-conferring” handbag, the belief that certain fashion branded commodities confer prestige was a recurring theme. The words “status” and “prestige” were frequently used by consumers both young and old. Similarly, individuals spoke of logoed handbags having the ability to highlight the “importance” of the wearer. Some noted that a logoed handbag can “make people think you have money.” Additionally there was remarkable convergence across demographics in terms of the brands most frequently discussed in connection to status. Louis Vuitton was mentioned almost three times as often as its nearest rivals Gucci, Chanel, and Michael Kors. The quick convergence across groups might raise some question regarding how or why ideas might be shared so consistently. There is ample evidence to explain the convergence.

*A Closer Look at Promoting Status to the Masses*

I have already alluded to the fact that some consumers make a connection between fashion branded commodities and status and that this is not mere happenstance. I have indicated that the fashion press has been inculcating this notion especially among mass market consumers from the advent of the logoed-accessories phenomenon in the late 1960s. For example, an image of logo-covered luggage by Grand Prix that ran in *Vogue* in February 1973 was declared the new “status bag” and was compared to luggage by Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Similarly an article written for the trade and published in *Handbags and Accessories* in April, 1974 included an entire subcategory labeled “Handbags as Status Symbols.” Advertisements that ran early in the lifespan of logoed handbags and hand luggage also included references to status. An advertisement for Philadelphia department store Nan Duskin, which ran in *Vogue* in November 1974, included an image of a Gucci clutch made of the GG Jacquard fabric and referred to the thirty-five dollar item as an “Italian status symbol” (see Figure 8.2). All of these examples provide insight into the concerted machinations of producers, advertisers, and retailers to position these products to the general public as items that are exclusive and prestigious. This should be understood as a type of power being exerted upon consumers—power that shapes their knowledge and understanding of this particular part of the socially constructed world.

There is also evidence to support the assertion that retail professionals were being trained to promote status acquisitions. A full-page advertorial with no attribution that ran in *Accessories Magazine* in May of 1996 makes the point. The text summed up the broad reach of status conferring accessories when it stated,

“Status. It’s what we all crave while pretending not to. It’s respect, acceptance, admiration, combined with a touch of wonder. It’s material things mixed with spiritual power. It’s fortune, fame, and fantasy. It’s confidence, control and destiny. It’s snob appeal. It’s sex appeal. It’s what we’d all have if we could.”(22)

The purpose of this advertisement targeted at the trade was likely to arouse interest in status products and provide professionals with context for positioning them to consumers eager to augment their self concept. The text would be read by buyers, retailers, display designers, and sales professionals. All of these professionals would have had a hand in moving these items from warehouse to shopping bag. Although status objects mean different things to different people, and there certainly are individuals who are immune to the dynamism of material things, status is undoubtedly a powerful and alluring phenomenon that many individuals reach for through their actions and their objects. The role of fashion industry professionals is to highlight the allure and position the objects within easy reach of consumers, thereby functioning as a critical bridge between desire and fulfillment.

Status is largely a matter of perception and perception of fashionable objects is largely a matter of marketed meaning and social milieu. Objects for which innate status could be accorded (gold snuff boxes, diamond tiaras, crocodile satchels with jewel-encrusted clasps) represent a small portion of the products that are potentially purchased for status and they most certainly are not what advertisers and fashion editors promote to the masses as status acquisitions. Most status objects that exist in the modern marketplace lack substantial material value. Louis Vuitton canvas luggage is a prime

example of a status item that fits this critique. Similarly, branded handbags from urban labels such as Roca Wear and Baby Phat are able to command high mark-ups—well beyond the material value of vinyl and nylon adorned with bits of machine cast ornament or automated embroidery. This is again because of a perception among the target consumers that the items have status value, as they link the wearer to the cool world of urban chic, though the material and monetary value may be quite small.

*Status for All: It's A Matter of Perception*

The fashion branded commodity phenomenon is evidence that the nature of status has become reference group dependent. Consumer scientist Douglas Holt has argued in his paper “Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?” that consumers with low cultural capital (which is often linked to low economic capital) are more likely to accept the “marketized meanings of branded products” (21). Similarly, Alissa Quart concluded in *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* that affluent, attractive, popular teens were less likely to be branded and be concerned with brand identity than “second tier” teens who were less attractive, less popular, etc. (23). Hence, if something is presented as conveying status, some consumers (i.e. those with low cultural capital) are more likely to accept some quantity or degree of that marketing. I would extend this argument and suggest that early adopters of fashion trends are by definition exposed to less advertising and “marketized meaning” than late adopters. Their understanding of the fashion is likely to be more synthetic and evaluative than the adopter who has been inundated with promotional imagery and text for an extended period of time.

Undoubtedly the perception of a status product is determined by a convergence of demographic characteristics, knowledge sources, and the passage of time. As a result, status objects find traction across different social groups across time. There is strong evidence to suggest that by the middle of the 1980s heavily logoed status bags had proliferated throughout demographic groups, gaining popularity with some while waning in desirability among others.<sup>3</sup> A 1986 article in *Accessories Magazine* entitled “Status Seekers” noted, “For a strong contingent of American consumers, status goods have become *de rigueur*.” However the writer went on to note, “The proliferation of licensing deals, in which designers put their names on everything from home furnishings to chocolates without ample regard for quality, left many a wary consumer” (Brill 132). This suggests that consumers with a greater and more diversified amount of knowledge about these status products may have moved on to the next trend while consumers with less knowledge might constitute the late adopters.

As I have shown in the content analysis, the presence of fashion branded commodities in the form of logoed handbags and hand luggage has been continuous. Their continued success (evidenced by continuous production and high price point) is partially because they are marketed as fashionable status items and there has consistently been a consumer whose characteristics make that status imagery desirable. There is additional evidence to suggest that status is presented by the mass media as a flexible, socially constructed concept. Two articles that ran in *Vogue* in 1995 make the point that

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<sup>3</sup> The contrasting positions presented by Horyn and Tannen in the text that follows indicates that the move would be from the elite who have both economic capital and high cultural capital (the cultural capital would be specific knowledge of the fashion marketplace and sensitivity to trends and timeliness) to those with new economic capital but less knowledge.



status is relative to a demographic. In “The Rules of Attraction” that ran in the March issue, the author noted that shoppers from abroad (namely the Middle East, South America and Eastern Europe) shop for “accessories, shoes ties, bags, all clearly marked with the double C’s, COCO, or CHANEL, certified totems from the bastion of Western wealth and chic” (Tannen 202). A few months later, journalist Cathy Horyn noted in the same publication, “Status symbols used to be as plain as the *G* on your Gucci bag, but now subtlety is overtaking shine.” According to Horyn, “For a status object to have any power today it has to be intelligible only to those attuned to the same frequency” (146-147). What these contrasting statements imply is that status is a matter of perception, and as long as there is diversity among consumers there will be diversity in the realm of status objects.

There is also evidence to suggest that a single status object may be adopted by different demographics for its status-conferring capabilities, though the precise nature of status may be nuanced. Jonathan van Meter writing for *Vogue* stated, “Once the urban, black audience buys into a status symbol of the American dream, the white suburban kids then buy it and wear it for exactly the opposite reason—to be alternative, to be counter culture, to be cool and *raggedy*” (308). The net result is that status goods end up in great numbers on all kinds of bodies. Marketing professor Craig Thompson summed up the phenomenon succinctly when he wrote that individuals “use fashion styles to metonymically represent specific social types and to forge a sense of affiliation or dissociation with these constructions” (23). What one is attempting to associate or dissociate with through a logo is dependent upon the context of use and the meaning that

is associated with the brand. Further complicating matters, however, is pinpointing the nature or content of the metonymy that the consumer intends to construct through use.

Figure 8.3 is an image of Lil'Kim that appeared in *Vogue*. It is a candid photograph--presumably taken on the street--and therefore it very likely captures the rapper's personal apparel and accessories selections. She is wearing numerous branded Chanel items all at once: a scarf, a belt, and two personal leather goods. The text accompanying the image refers to Lil' Kim as a "one woman assault on subtle good taste." The image and text raise the issue of what the use of these products communicates. While we cannot know Lil' Kim's intentions, it seems unlikely (even though she is something of an iconoclast) that she purposefully dressed herself in expensive designer items so as to open herself to ridicule. Lil' Kim has often dressed to garner attention (typically adopting the apparel of street walkers and pole dancers) but this seems different. This assemblage seems like an effort to show her wealth, status, and taste. Within her social milieu she may have accomplished this, but the writers at *Vogue* saw it differently. This is evidence of a difference in perception resulting from variables such as race, class, domain specific knowledge, and social reference groups. A 2004 photograph of Lil' Kim by David LaChapelle features a nude Lil' Kim with the LV monogram painted all over her body. Once again, the context of use changes the meaning of the logo and the nature of the metonymy is called into question. In some contexts the photograph might communicate fashion savvy, prestige, and sex appeal, while in others it could be read as a crass effort to co-opt the identity of a luxury brand.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This image can be found at <http://www.lachapellestudio.com/portraits/lil-kim/>.

### *Taste*

Consumer motivation for adopting a specific piece of apparel or a particular accessory may pertain to her desire to express a specific aspect of her real or desired character—her taste. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* Bourdieu explored the ability of traditional elite goods, signifiers of good taste (such as works of fine art), to confer distinction, in the form of symbolic capital, upon their owners. At the time Bourdieu was writing in the late 1970s, he theorized that expressions of good taste were achieved by implementing both educational and economic capital. Bourdieu argued that the predilection for tasteful objects, which have the ability to confer symbolic capital, was developed only through the accretion of a lifetime of academic and domestic training.

I have already discussed the idea that in contemporary culture, many elite goods widely considered to be symbols of good taste and social status are the products of widely known, extensively marketed luxury brands that posit their goods as the refined trappings of “high-culture.” Educational capital and domestic training are no longer necessary for the selection of such objects. Mass media, which reaches audiences with highly varied cultural capital, spreads ideas about branded goods. For example, popular music touts the prestige of brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, BMW, and Cristal. Fan magazines like *In Touch* and *Us Weekly* depict images of celebrities wearing designer items. Televised red carpet events function as protracted exercises in brand name-dropping. All of these outlets bring elite goods and elite brands into the purview of everyday lower and middle class consumers who need not be schooled in aesthetics, but only in brand identity in order to make a choice. Additionally, consumer credit makes it

possible for these “signifiers of good taste” to be purchased by diverse demographics. Thus economic capital is not necessarily an impediment to their consumption either.

Just as advertisements made appeals to consumer desire for status, so too have they addressed the issue of good taste. A few early advertisements can be used as a sample. A 1975 advertisement for Pierre Cardin products used the terms “distinguished” and “elegant,” whereas advertisements for Rolfs wallets that ran in 1976 specifically referred to the monogram as a “distinctive mark of elegance.” In 1977 Bergdorf Goodman ran an advertisement for Fendi logoed canvas bags and that noted the company is “famous among the cognoscenti,” (Figure 8.4) while Loewe advertisements referred to their insignia-embossed bags as “the symbol of a noble tradition.” Additionally, a 1979 advertisement for Halston luggage made under license by Hartmann included text that read, “All Hartmann in Ultrasuede is Halston by design. Together they make a declaration of good taste and good sense wherever you go.” Whether or not each of these products would withstand the scrutiny of an arbiter of taste is open to debate. The research of Berger and Ward (2010) Young et al (2010) would seem to support the notion that the true elite would not be readily persuaded by these kinds of advertisements and the products they promote. What is clear is that the advertisers were boldly making these assertions and striving to implant into the minds of mass market consumers the belief that fashion branded commodities were in good taste.

The consumers I interviewed (who can readily be described as mass market consumers, not insiders or elites) regularly echoed the sentiments perpetuated by these advertisements. When consumers were asked what they thought a logo (that they had a favorable opinion of) indicated, many stated it expressed “their taste” or even “their good

taste.” When asked to clarify what an expression of taste meant, answers from the younger respondents (under 35) included their “sensibility,” “preference,” and notion of “style.” Older respondents were more inclined to link the use of the word “taste” to some preexisting standard, nebulous though it might be. It is not entirely clear what this difference in interpretation points to. It may be that developing the sense that standards of taste exist is acquired through education gained over the course of many years. This hypothesis is in line with Pierre Bourdieu’s point of view. The difference may also be the result of changing notions about fashion authority. This last assertion is based on ten years of teaching fashion history to students in their late teens and early twenties. A recurring theme has been that individual interpretations and self-definition have paramount authority in terms of determining what is fashionable or in good taste. The prevailing attitude is not so much nonconformist as it is dismissive of standards, definitions, and the like.

Definitions of taste and standards of good taste are most certainly malleable on both an individual and a group level and they clearly differ between reference groups and social strata. In a 1998 article entitled “Rumbling in the Ranks,” journalist Katherine Betts argued that the wake caused by the newly established corporate culture in fashion in the early 1990s had upended long-held notions of taste—an assertion that mistakenly implies there had been a singular notion of “good” taste. She stated, “The establishment as it had once existed—predicated on the notion of high and low aesthetics, those decrees from Paris—was increasingly irrelevant. Information—even taste—was democratized.” Betts’ critique of slipping taste standards seems to be in line with the shift in focus from the traditional world of fashion design to an emphasis on the new world of fashion

branded commodities. It is also in line with the postmodern critique levied by both Bell and Jameson.

Democratization, the key to Bett's critique, implies an emphasis on branding, volume production and a shift in interest toward the mass market-- standards that were changing across the board in fashion and which are particularly evident in fashion branded commodities. The change in emphasis has clearly impacted the very definition of fashion but also of good taste. One may construe the change (as Betts has) as slipping standards or (as I have been suggesting) as the result of fragmentation within fashion. Betts went on to argue, "Taste has come off its high horse, and designers have had to respond. To keep up with the global market of products and brands and product extensions, the fashion establishment has had to roll up its sleeves and get a little dirt under its nails. Instead of competing with one another, super-established names like Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Calvin Klein and Miuccia Prada compete with the logos that dominate the mass market" (321-322). Betts was arguing that the move to the mass market had compromised the ineffable standard of good taste. What she failed to appreciate was designers and their advertisements and the fashion press had all been working in concert to create the effect she perceived. Additionally Betts critique rests largely on the misperception that one unassailable standard of taste has ever existed without variation. Like Agins and Thomas, Betts' lamentations reflect her loyalty to the traditional world of fashion and the standards of design authority and exclusivity that define it.

*Fashion Savvy: Quality and Fashion Sense*

The mass market perception that the external logo functions as an assurance in the fashion marketplace is undoubtedly the result of advertising. Advertisements for logoed handbags and hand luggage that ran throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s often made reference or allusion to the quality of the product. For example, a 1974 advertisement for Hermès showed the bag with its large metal H buckle being hand-stitched (Figure 8.5). A 1977 advertisement for Anne Klein wallets noted that they were “superbly handcrafted,” while a 1979 advertisement for Bosca wallets described them as “bench made.” Handcrafting could also be connected to the couture tradition. A 1979 advertisement for Paristyle licensed products called the products a “collection of haute couture handbags and accessories” and noted Lanvin “is a name synonymous with European quality and prestige.” The tendency to mention the quality of the leather, the hand-wrought nature of the stitching, and the connection to a longstanding house were all strong tendencies throughout these three decades. Coach, Louis Vuitton, Dooney and Bourke, Loewe, and MCM all used this tactic at the same time they offered products with prominent external logos. A 1982 advertising campaign for Louis Vuitton included the text, “His signature has become the standard of excellence.” The notion implicit in all of these advertisements is that the mark is a promise that a sound choice will be made. If one has knowledge of the logo, one need know little else. In turn, by wearing such logos the customer is able to communicate her understanding of quality and traditional craftsmanship to people who pass her by.

Consumers I spoke with echoed the language of advertising when they talked about logoed goods. Consumers in my sample noted that logos were capable of showing

that they know what is “good,” “fashionable,” “in,” and “desirable.” They mentioned that brands have reputations for both quality and fashion-forwardness. Notably, products may be advertised as being high quality or fashion forward, but may not empirically be so. This notion was raised by consumers especially when the discussion of logoed products turned to those for which the consumer felt some distaste. In such instances interviewees made remarks indicating they would never wear a certain brand because it was not worth the money or was in some way unsophisticated or unfashionable. Overall there seemed to be a lack of awareness that advertising in general, and fashion advertising to an extreme degree, creates perception and belief within consumers about quality and fashion-forwardness that is as powerful as empirical truth. There was no evidence to indicate that the consumers in my sample could be duped by the power of a brand name alone, but the overwhelming sentiment was that brands help them to make choices in the marketplace.

While I have argued that branding and the use of logos was developed by companies in order to distinguish their products within the mass market, there is also evidence to suggest that external branding on fashion branded commodities is also a response to needs on the part of consumers. The need for assurance of quality and craftsmanship may once again be a sign of the postmodern condition of consumers living in what Douglas Kellner referred to as a “fragmented, disjointed and discontinuous mode of experience” (144). Lacking community and interpersonal connections, the postmodern consumer may not have an interpersonal network to help her make a purchasing decision. Lacking this network means that the experiences and opinions of others cannot be tapped. It means a purchasing decision must be made in concert with the virtual partner that is the



brand. The brand and its concretization through the logo act as conversant entities in the act of purchasing as the brand communicates a wide variety of qualities to the consumer. The notion that brand identity can fill the void left by the dissolution of human networks that are part and parcel of the postmodern condition is echoed in the work of Boorstin and Cushman. This notion is also found in the consumer research of Solomon (1983) who found that product symbolism is consumed in order to define and clarify behavior in a social context, shape self-image, and maximize role performance (320). He found that a consumer's real or imagined appraisal by others (based on product use) is used in the construction of self-identity and enables role performance (322, 324). The intersection of postmodern theory and consumer research with regards to their overarching findings and their applicability to the fashion branded commodity provides powerful support for the assertion that the fashion branded commodity is an important manifestation of fashion and of postmodern consumerism.

### **Identity Creation: Freedom and Confusion in Postmodern Fashion**

Consumer motivations connected to the use of fashion branded commodities vary in terms of intention, both realized and subconscious. However diverse they may be, it is evident that fashion branded commodities fulfill essential needs for many consumers living in a postmodern world. The fragmentation, isolation, and ambivalence that are endemic to postmodern culture may cause identity crises for some consumers. As Kaiser noted in "Identity, Postmodernity, and the Global Apparel Marketplace," consumers who seek to establish their identity (at least in part) through dress, may experience confusion when faced with the wealth of choices that are characteristic of the marketplace in the

twenty-first century, while the complexity and contradictoriness of culture may also create opportunities for experimentation.

I have already established that personal identity is expressed in part through a person's physical appearance and that all aspects of dress have the ability to convey deeply personal perceptions. I have noted that the wealth of products in the marketplace, many of which come with a rich brand identity, can be used to facilitate identity creation and experimentation and the logo serves as shorthand for the adoption of brand attributes on the part of the consumer. What has not yet been visited is the question of why such alignments sometimes occur and to what degree they are apt to be made, with which type of consumer.

There is evidence to suggest that American consumers were primed in the 1970s to receive a new type of product that could aid in the formation of personal identity. In a 1976 address to the Fashion Group International entitled "Changing American Values...About Clothes," speaker Estelle Hamburger outlined eight points of change surrounding consumers. Among the aspects impacting the changing consumer that she noted was the anonymity of the age and its impact on self-image and identity construction. Her first point was entitled "Who are you? What's Your Name?" She stated:

You may no longer have a name that you were named: single, marital, or nick. You are numbered with numbers: charge account numbers, bank account numbers, state and city tax numbers, insurance policy numbers, license numbers and a social security number. You are so digitalized, computerized, and depersonalized by numbers that you may not remember

your name. Never mind. You can have the name of a designer, which you are not allowed to forget. You can WEAR your designer's name, initials, symbol or label: BB, GB, GG, CD, D von F. This began innocently with a bag, an LV bag, something carried to carry things. It has grown to a power. You can now wear your designer's name on or in all your separates, together, overs, unders and layers; on your sweaters, blouses, shoes, hosiery, scarves, jewelry, perfume and make up. You can then go home, take a shower, and dry yourself with your designer's towels. At day's end a sleeper, a lounge, and finally to bed, between your designer's sheets, presumably to dream that you ARE your favorite designer.

(unpaginated address)

On one level, Hamburger's observations give insight into a new and bleak assessment of the individual's lonely state within American culture in the late twentieth century and also help us understand how the culture was being prepared for the adoption of designer logoed products as a means to construct self-image and personal identity. In keeping with the stated mission of the FGI, Hamburger's role in addressing its professional members was manifold. She was citing a trend and providing a context for its relevance but she was also stirring up excitement and chatter about an emerging fashion phenomenon. Hamburger's depiction of American culture is on the one hand quite grim, but is conversely peppered with the suggestion that any Orwellian grayness can be eradicated with a swift swipe of the credit card as long as the purchase is branded designer goods. She provides an early explanation for why fashion branded commodities were appealing to consumers in the 1970s.

Writing ten years later, *Vogue* columnist G.Y. Dryansky echoed Hamburger's assertion that the emptiness and loneliness of modern life could be remedied via specific forms of consumption. He noted, "In a century that began by pushing people toward anonymity, people have indeed responded by seeking a specific identity in the esthetic allegiance of style" (293). Although Dryansky's assertion that individuals find meaning in "style" is far more encompassing than just fashion branded commodities (potentially including subcultural styles as well as allegiance to designer or brand aesthetics), it makes sense that his statement should also make room for asserting "style" allegiances through the common and readily available, and readily legible logoed products. Writing in 2005, *Financial Times* Journalist Vanessa Friedman noted that fashion was increasingly becoming an international language, what she termed a form of "tribal identification" that crossed borders and classes. She argued that the "totems" of fashion were taking on an increased importance, and chief among those totems were bags and wallets that "worked as entry points to membership in the group" (9). Belk, whose research has focused on how possessions facilitate interpersonal interaction, expressed this idea aptly when he wrote, "Just as clothing, accent, grooming, and jewelry can distinguish an individual from others and express an individual sense of being, they can also indicate group identity and express belonging to a group" (153). In an age in which scores of individuals are rapidly moving through busy, anonymous landscapes, the logoed handbag functions in a similar way that coats of arms did hundreds of years ago. With a ballooning, increasingly global population conducting more and more of its affairs "virtually," personal interaction and authentic self-image construction continue to suffer. For individuals of all walks of life consumption and dress practices serve as a means by

which identity and affiliation may be constructed in a culture characterized by loneliness and anonymity. Using a symbol with widely recognized and understood qualities may serve as a way to bridge some of the interpersonal gaps that are characteristic of postmodern culture. Thus we have a second rationale for why fashion branded commodities found large and long-lived audiences.

Historical evidence providing a rationale for consumer adoption of fashion brand identity may also be derived by examining a broad range of media influences coeval with the introduction of fashion branded commodities. There is evidence to suggest that the fashion branded commodity trend began at the same time that an interest in the self (satisfaction, aggrandizement, and perfection) was on the rise. Published texts of note from this period include self-help books *I'm Ok You're OK* (1972), *The Joy of Sex* (1979), countless diet manuals including *Dr. Atkins Diet Revolution* (1972) and exercise manuals including *The Complete Book of Running* (1978). By the late 1970s industry insiders noted change in terms of American values. In a 1979 address to the FGI, Estelle Ellis, President of Business Image, Inc., noted that increased interest in fashion was “directly related to the lowering of guilt about self in American society.” She went on to argue that marketers should take notice of the new priorities. She instructed the businesswomen in the audience, “Identify people’s priorities today and you’ve defined the best selling fashion in the business. ...Start with the priority word ‘me’ ...and you’re tuning in on the greatest motivation for the purchase of fashion—ego gratification and self-fulfillment” (Ellis).

Popular television shows of the period also provide a window into the cultural *zeitgeist*. *Dallas* (1978-1991) and *Dynasty* (1981-1989), both nighttime soap operas that

revolved around the machinations of the wealthy families of oil tycoons, provided Technicolor images of glorious excess. Although the Ewings and Carringtons may not have been role models in the traditional sense, they provided a model that was inspirational and aspirational. One could argue that the first wave of “me” generations began in the 1970s and has continued to spawn successive generations in its wake. Bill Cunningham noted in an untitled document in the FGI archive that Americans in 1985 were “tossing aside puritan morality about conspicuous consumption being obscene” (Cunningham). Although tastes related to conspicuousness have ebbed and flowed, finding some form of personal fulfillment through the purchase of fashion is a longstanding trend.

Postmodern theorist Kellner has argued that postmodern personal identity is an artificial construct that is shaped by mass media imagery (153). In Kellner’s view postmodern men and women are highly susceptible to the barrage of images and texts that are produced through various forms of mass media including, film, television, and advertising. His musings on postmodernity and identity provide a theoretical basis for asserting the power of mass media and celebrity to influence consumer decisions. Commodities produced as a tie-in to *Dynasty* also provide affirmation of that particular program’s influence. *Dynasty* inspired a fashion collection in 1986 that was designed by the show’s costume designer Nolan Miller (Figure 8.6). Sheets, towels, carpeting, and fragrance also enabled consumers to furnish their surroundings and potentially construct their identities in accordance with images presented on TV (Schemering 80-81). The products in this collection would have facilitated personal connections between the consumer and the identity associated with the drama and glamour of the show. The

“brand identity” of the *Dynasty* narrative would have had much of the same luster and the brand identity of a storied fashion house and therefore provides a parallel example of how consumers are drawn to media imagery. The wide variety of celebrity “designed” or endorsed fashion brands (the vast majority of which utilize the logo regularly) is testimony to the continued power of mass media and celebrity culture to inspire consumers.

The aforementioned historical and theoretical evidence suggests rationales for why many consumers are drawn to fashion branded commodities—products with strong brand identities—but does not suggest the degree or extent to which brand identity might be usurped or the variables that might determine the degree to which a consumer aligns with a brand. The field of consumer research has explored this issue and thereby provides a necessary counterpoint.

There is research that suggests age plays a pivotal role in the nature and degree of any connection made between a person and a brand identity. The Chaplin and John (2005) study previously cited posited the age of brand understanding at middle to late childhood but went on to suggest that as consumers have more and more experience and knowledge of brands, their likelihood to connect with them increases. It therefore follows that as a person ages past childhood the likelihood that they will subsume aspects of brand identity into self-concept also increases.

The notion that brand preference, perception, and conspicuous use of branded goods are connected to class (socioeconomic group) and race has already been reviewed in connection to the work of Munson and Spivey and Han et al but can be used to support the idea at hand. If individuals differ in their notions of brand in general then they are

likely to differ in similar ways with regards to how they interpret and apply that understanding to self-concept.

While there is some research to suggest that individuals adopt material symbols in correlation with personal insecurity (Ottman and Wicklund 1989) it seems more likely given the diversity of consumers that the reasons for adopting and the degree to which brand identity is undertaken are highly variable. Escalas and Bettman (2003) in their examination of how brand identities are interpreted and adopted argued that reference groups are important with regards to mediating the meaning of the brand, but more importantly they argued that precisely what is appropriated is dependent upon the individual. So while there may be myriad factors that increase or decrease the likelihood that an individual will usurp or interpret a brand identity, in terms of a general discussion one can only make a generalization based upon factors known to have a correlation.

### **Summation**

Consumers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are more aware of fashion than any previous generation. Television shows document the process of design, streaming video offers of-the-moment images of the most current collections, and blogs offer a wide array of opinions on all kinds of fashion—from couture to goth to hipster. Celebrity designers like Kanye West, Jessica Simpson, and J Lo have the ability to make the world of fashion seem more accessible. They democratize fashion while still maintaining an illusion of exclusivity through their celebrity. As a result of these many sources of information, postmodern consumers are *sure* of far less than consumers of fifty years ago—diversity and democracy in fashion therefore are both a blessing and a curse.



The postmodern condition is characterized by fragmentation and a breakdown of objectivity. As a result fashion is more dangerous than ever before. There is no single style to emulate and belief in authority is not what it was in bygone eras. Modern consumers have been raised to believe in personal style—a code for dressing that is fraught with pitfalls. In the absence of rules and authority, living in a culture that acknowledges relativism as a philosophical standpoint, the postmodern consumer uses brands to provide some assurance that she has gotten it right. Brands provide security in a realm with few rules to recommend themselves. Fashion branded commodities enable many consumers to feel that they are showing attributes such as status, quality, and taste.

The general conclusion to be drawn about the postmodern consumer is that she may lack critical knowledge to make decisions about fashion. Most consumers are neither insiders nor the elite. What she has is the more accessible brand knowledge. Although huge numbers of consumers with highly varied economic, social, or educational capital are able to participate in fashion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, not all have the skills or resources to do so with the confidence that a honed ability or reliance on a revered authority would provide. However, consumers can learn about brands, can develop an opinion about brand identity and quality, and can thereby establish brand allegiances.

The postmodern consumer may search for personal identity through commodities. Branded commodities with desirable brand identities function as an effective means by which to create or bolster personal identity. Decision-making and identity creation are expedited by brand names when they are manifested as an external logo. However, using fashion to make a statement of status, taste, fashionableness, or personal identity has

become increasingly fraught with ambiguities as the postmodern world of fashion has on the one hand become more democratized and on the other has become increasingly fragmented.

The postmodern consumer may seek a touchstone of meaning in the logo, but may find that the passage of time or shifting social contexts denudes the logo of its original intent. The logoed product is inserted into the culture as a signifier of a canon of ideas in the form of brand identity, however, brand identity is essentially a myth constructed by marketers.<sup>5</sup> The purchase of logoed goods appears at first blush to be the purchase of a product with substance, associations, heritage, and the like, but this is only an illusion created by the fashion system—advertisers, fashion editors, merchandisers. The poverty of the signifier-signified relationship further complicates the use of the logo in personal identity creation.

For the consumer, the logo may be either the locus of power that aids in decision-making or the great facilitator that enables passive consumption. It is not that the postmodern consumer is incapable of making informed decisions about fashion; rather, it is simply the case that the logo makes it unnecessary to gather information beyond that which is provided by the marking of the brand. As such, the logo is symbolic of the dearth of information and consumer goods that have been available from the late twentieth century onwards at the same time it may be considered emblematic of ambivalence that is characteristic of the postmodern condition.

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<sup>5</sup> Marcia Morgado argued that in postmodern culture signifiers “refer only to themselves.” They are “signs without substance” (49).

**A thru E.** Contemporary styling in Sergio Valente™ softside luggage. Nylon bags are lightweight with genuine leather trim. All pieces except pullman (B) have an adjustable, removable shoulder strap. Garment bag (A) has full-width outside pocket, 2 gusset pockets and 2 hangers. Pullman (B) has 2 full-width outside pockets. Carry-on (C) has top zipper pocket and 3 outside zipper pockets. Duffel (D) has a top zipper pocket and outside zipper pocket. Tote bag (E) has top zipper pocket and 2 front zipper pockets. Imported.

State color number: 5-navy 14-gray

Item	Approx. WxHxD (in.)	Catalog Number	Wt. ea. lbs. oz.	Price for 1	Price for 2 or more
A. Garment bag...	23x46x3	14 E 4119CH	5 2	\$79.99	Ea. \$39.99
B. 24-in. Pullman...	25x15x8	14 E 4118CH	3 1	\$9.99	Ea. 29.99
C. 18-in. Carry-on...	18x11x6	14 E 4117H	2 1	\$9.99	Ea. 24.99
D. Duffel...	20x10x10	14 E 4116H	1 9	\$3.99	Ea. 16.99
E. Tote bag...	13x9x6	14 E 4115H	1 2	\$5.99	Ea. 12.99

**F thru J.** Stylish yet durable nylon-look vinyl softside luggage. All pullmans have 2-way edge zippers, full width outside and inside pockets. Larger pullmans have wheels. Boarding bag (G) has zip top center compartment, front zip pocket and outside gusset pocket. Removable shoulder strap and carrying handles. Tote bag (H) has top and front zip pocket with adjustable shoulder strap. Garment bag (I) has full width outside pockets, removable shoulder strap and a separate carrying handle. All pieces are imported.

State color number: 14-gray 5-navy

Item	WxHxD (in.)	Catalog Number	Wt. ea. lbs. oz.	Price for 1	Price for 2 or more
F. 27-in. Pullman w/wheels...	27x18x8	14 E 9227CH	12 ...	\$69.99	Ea. \$34.99
G. 25-in. Pullman w/wheels...	25x16x8	14 E 9225CH	9 9	\$59.99	Ea. 29.99
H. 24-in. Pullman w/wheels...	24x14x9	14 E 9224CH	13 ...	\$79.99	Ea. 39.99
I. 20-in. Pullman w/wheels...	20x13x7	14 E 9220H	5 5	\$39.99	Ea. 18.99
J. Boarding bag...	15x11x5	14 E 9221H	4 ...	\$4.99	Ea. 16.99
K. Tote bag...	22x46x3	14 E 9220H	7 ...	\$69.99	Ea. 34.99

**K thru S.** A smart look from Jordache® for the choosy traveler. Nylon-look vinyl softside pieces. All pullmans (K thru N) have front zippered pouch pockets and inside lid pocket with snap closure. Larger pullmans (K thru M) have wheels. Boarding bag (P) has loop handles and detachable shoulder strap. Shoulder tote (R) has two top zip compartments, front zip pocket and adjustable shoulder strap. Garment bag (S) has detachable shoulder strap, separate carrying handle and 2 front zipper pockets, two shoe pockets and two hangers. Imported.

State color number: 2-black with tan

Item	WxHxD (in.)	Catalog Number	Wt. ea. lbs. oz.	Price for 1	Price for 2 or more
K. 30-in. Pullman w/wheels...	30x22x9	14 E 9280CH	12 ...	\$79.99	Ea. \$39.99
L. 28-in. Pullman w/wheels...	28x20x8	14 E 9278CH	11 ...	\$69.99	Ea. 34.99
M. 26-in. Pullman w/wheels...	26x18x8	14 E 9276CH	9 5	\$59.99	Ea. 29.99
N. 24-in. Pullman...	24x16x7	14 E 9274CH	8 ...	\$49.99	Ea. 24.99
P. Boarding bag...	20x13x7	14 E 9272H	3 5	\$43.99	Ea. 21.99
R. Tote...	16x12x6	14 E 9271H	2 5	\$29.99	Ea. 14.99
S. Garment bag...	23x45x3	14 E 9270H	4 ...	\$69.99	Ea. 34.99

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Figure 8.1 This page from the Sears Catalog (Fall/Winter 1985, page 227) illustrates how much similarity can exist in a single product category. Without the brand name and logo there is little to distinguish the Sergio Valente Bags from the Jordache bags from the unbranded bags offered as items F through G.

**We have  
a world of wonders  
and whimsies  
for holiday gifting**



The world's most remarkable folding handbag: a trim shoulder bag, 11" x 3 1/2" x 7" that opens up to a capacious traveling size of 36" x 14" x 7"—and even has extra side zip pockets. Navy, black or tan. Ours alone. \$40.\*



Hostess gift par excellence: leather-bound, gilt-edged, watered silk-lined party planner with pages noting table plans, dates, guest lists, menus, wines, decor. Pages are also gilt-edged. 8 1/2" x 7". Black or red. \$25.\* (Refills, \$6.\*)



Italian status symbol: a trim little clutch accented with a gilt-colored GG snap. The famous GG fabric is in red, combined with red calf; in beige, with brown calf; in blue, with blue calf. \$35.\*



Help him hold on to his money with this sporty clip. Choose from anchor or golf club motifs. \$20.\*



The greeting card of good taste: one pound of pure chocolate with a scrumptious European taste, decorated with "Happy Holidays" plus the name of your choice. Ours alone. \$10.

\*Penna. residents add 6% sales tax. Mail and phone orders carefully filled.

# NAN DUSKIN

1729 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Penna. 19103 • (215) LOcust 7-1700

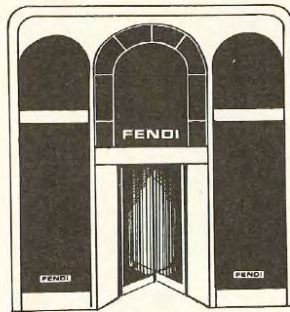


Figure 8.2 Status items are often made using a theme and variation approach and may show similarities over time. The advertisement for Nan Duskin, which features a Gucci "status symbol" ran in *Vogue* in November 1974 (page 16) and the Gucci bag below retailed in Spring/Summer 2012.





Figure 8.3 This image of Lil' Kim appeared in *Vogue* in January 1998. The singer wears a heavily logoed Chanel scarf and a logoed Chanel belt. Slung across her body is a Chanel cell phone case with a logo clasp and in her hand is a Chanel handbag that probably had a clasp of the same kind. The text appearing next to the image described Lil' Kim as a "one woman assault on subtle good taste" but went on to call her "*fierce*." (page 84).

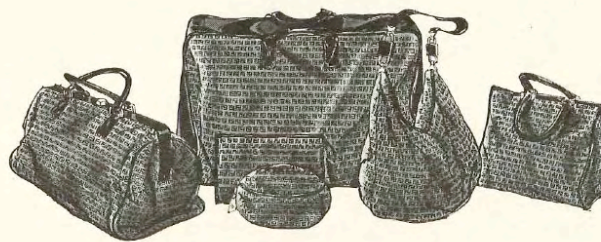


#### FENDI AT BERGDORF'S

In a chic little  
enclave of shops  
on Via Borgognona  
in Rome,  
in an elegant spot  
on Fifth Avenue . . .

Fendi! . . .  
famous among  
the conosciuti  
for superb handbags,  
trend-setting furs,  
easy luggage,  
contemporary ready-to-wear.

Come visit  
our extraordinary shop  
with the same ambiente as  
Via Borgognona  
because we have  
the only complete  
Fendi collection  
outside of Rome.  
Fendi at Bergdorf's



On The Plaza in New York and White Plains.

**BERGDORF GOODMAN**

VOGUE, April, 1977

1

Figure 8.4 This advertisement for Bergdorf Goodman posits the Fendi product as a signifier of good taste as it notes they are a Favorite among “fashion cognoscenti.” This advertisement ran in *Vogue* in April of 1977 (page 1).





**HERMÈS**  
PARIS  
*Since 1837*

*Silks. Saddlery. Leathergoods. Couture. Fragrances.*

New York 8 E. 57th Street at Bonwit Teller—Beverly Hills 343 North Rodeo Drive

Figure 8.5 This advertisement ran in *Vogue* in December 1974 (page 16). The implication of this image and text is that Hermès products are handmade and that this is part of a longstanding tradition-- since 1837.



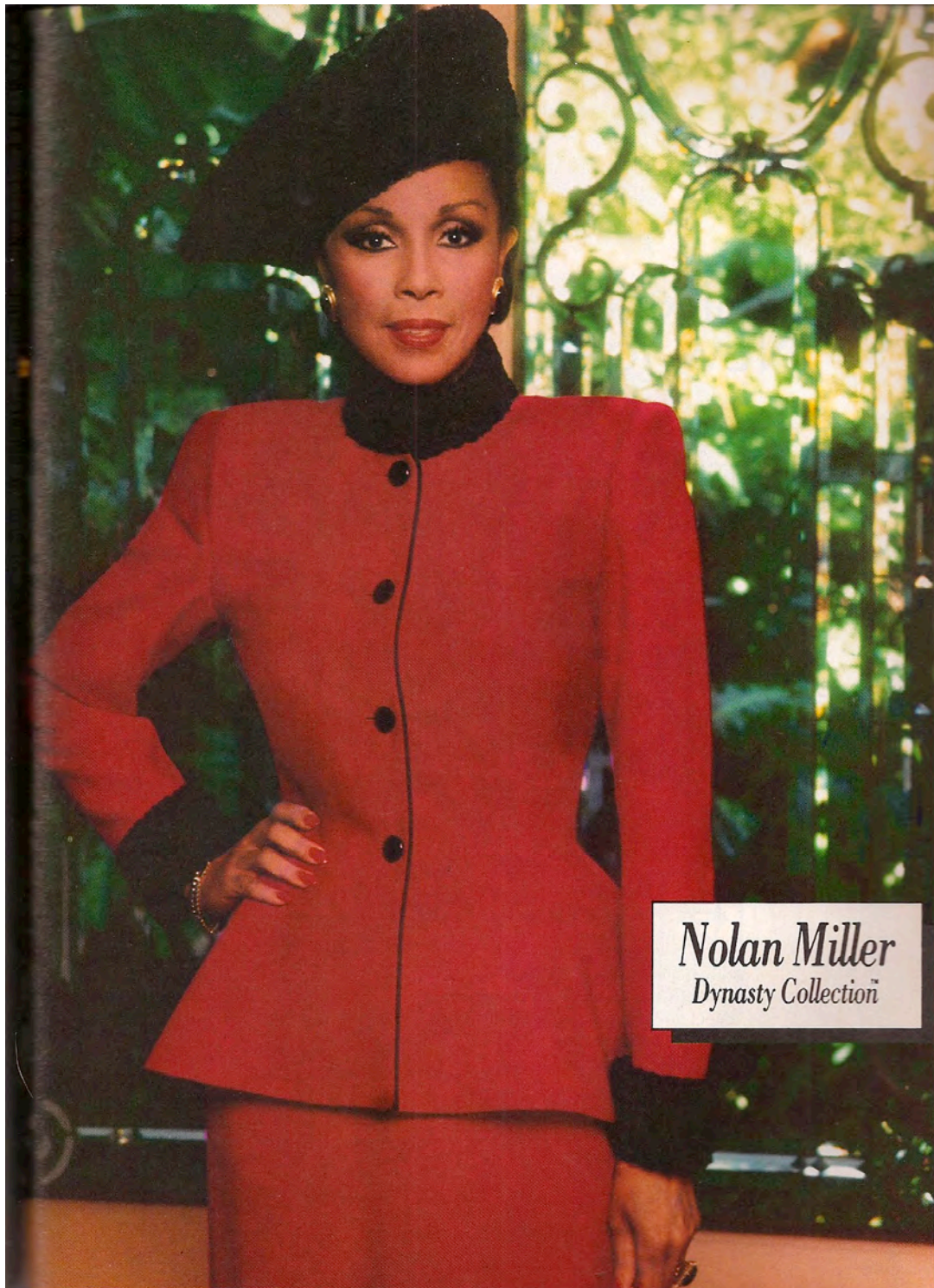


Figure 8.6 This is an advertisement for the Dynasty Collection, designed by the costumer for the *Dynasty* television series, Nolan Miller. It is testimony to the influence of mass media that designers and manufacturers produced apparel and accessories reflecting the aesthetics of a series and its characters. This advertisement ran in *Vogue* September 1986 (page 221).



## Chapter 9: Conclusions

The research questions that framed this study were designed in order to accomplish three tasks. The first was to track the development of logoed handbags and hand luggage between 1969 and 2009. I designed this part of the research in order to document a fashion phenomenon in a methodical way. I systematically recorded aesthetics and linked product development with the historical context. This I deemed necessary given the paucity of substantial historical texts related to fashion accessories. The second task was to explore what the logoed handbag could reveal about fashion in a postmodern context. Given the longevity of the phenomenon and the widespread use of these kinds of objects, I believed it was necessary to provide reasons that explain why this is the case. I accomplished this through both historical findings and theoretical musings about producers and consumers. Finally, and most importantly, I undertook the charge to critically evaluate and ultimately define fashion in the modern marketplace. It was clear to me before I began this project that the world of fashion has changed and I developed the construct of the two worlds of fashion—that of traditional design and the new world of the fashion branded commodity—to help structure what I have observed. Using the development of the logo as a lens through which to view the world of fashion, I sought to pinpoint precise ways in which fashion has changed in the last forty years or so. While conclusions have been presented throughout this text, what follows are closing arguments as well as some suggestions for extending this research.

## **Review of Working Propositions and Delimitations**

### *Working Propositions*

The working propositions that were posited at the beginning of this study were largely shown to be accurate. Looking back on my initial notions, I am able to make some refinements. I proposed at the outset that the proliferation of logoed products was partly due to licensing agreements and partly due to the formation of large conglomerates that were seeking the middle market for revenue. Advertisements that showed the name of the licensee as well as articles written for the trade bore this out. I found that over time the relationship between designer and licensee has become less transparent. Ostensibly, this is because some consumers grew disenchanted with the dilution of designer identity via licensing of a broad array of products, but disenchantment could also have arisen from diminished product quality, which was a plague that beset the licensing of designer names in the 1970s and 1980s. The diversity of opinions on designer products and/or licensed products at any given moment supports my assumption that perception of logoed products by consumers and fashion-insiders has changed over time, and that consumer perception is not monolithic. My research provided concrete evidence to support my propositions.

My working proposition about conglomerates was incomplete. I correctly proposed that conglomerates were and are seeking the middle market, but failed to appreciate their ability to simultaneously address more elite customers. I learned that these corporations strategically build fashion brands so that they have wide appeal across income groups and around the world. My research revealed that the strategies employed

by conglomerates enable them to reach across demographics in order to reap the massive financial rewards they seek.

I posited at the outset that logoed products were and are lucrative for designers/design companies because they are easily created. There was ample visual and textual evidence to support this proposition. Many logoed handbags and pieces of hand luggage are executed in simple styles and the styles may be made year after year with either minor modifications or without any updating whatsoever. Designers and manufacturers rely on a theme and variation approach that may minimize design and production costs. I also asserted that the proliferation of logoed handbags is related to the business side of the decreased importance of haute couture, the rapid reproduction of high-style designs and the increased importance of branding. I would modify this proposition to state that the success of logoed products, including logoed handbags and hand luggage, is linked to the decreased importance of fashionable garments in general. The profound prevalence of fashion branded commodities in the marketplace and the decreased evidence of interpretations of high style designs suggests that overall there is greater interest in fashion brands than there is interest in fashion design. Additionally, contemporary consumers use handbags to elevate a simple look. They prefer investing in accessories rather than apparel because accessories can be worn more often and potentially for a longer period of time. Furthermore, they are deemed less risky and do not have the same kinds of restrictions that apparel does in terms of fit and flattery of the figure. Finally, I would add that logoed products have the potential to secure revenue for mass market manufacturers by setting their products apart in the crowded global

marketplace. My initial considerations entirely overlooked this manifestation of the utilization of logos by the mass market.

Before beginning my research I proposed that teen fashion is largely derivative of fashionable trends in general. Implicit in this statement is the notion that fashionable trends are created by designers who cater to an adult market. Within the confines of the formal fashion system, the lion's share of designers do make their presentations with adult consumers in mind. Indeed many trends do trickle down to the teen market, whereby they are adopted, interpreted, and knocked-off. What I failed to grasp was that teens may adopt things from adult or high-style fashion for reasons other than pure mimicry. The needs and aspirations of teens may not be the same as those of their adult counterparts. I posited that there is not a single reality as it pertains to perception and meaning of visual culture but I failed to fully grasp all the implications of that assumption. Ideas about status and group membership in the realm of teens do not share a one-to-one correspondence with the adult realm and may be very context dependent. The teen market is more nuanced and complex than I had assumed.

I made the observation and offered as a working proposition the idea that the worldview espoused by any single publication is neither comprehensive nor all-inclusive, but rather is one slice of reality. When I wrote this I was thinking simply of the fact that different magazines cater to different audiences, that each publication has a taste culture at best or a bias at worst. I do still believe that publications have specific worldviews, audiences, and taste cultures. However, coming to the understanding that the fashion press has become just an appendage of large and powerful international conglomerates marked a fundamental change in my understanding of the industry at large.

### *Delimitations*

The delimitations of this study stipulated that it focused only on designers/labels/companies working in the United States of America and in Europe and it restricted the content analysis to the American version of *Vogue*, *Seventeen Magazine*, and the Sears Catalog published between January 1969 and December 2009. Additional source material included *Accessories Magazine* (and its related titles), *W Magazine*, and the archive of the Fashion Group International. All of these publications, excepting the Sears Catalog, are devoted almost exclusively to women's fashions. Additionally these publications deal almost exclusively with legal, original designs. The phenomenon of counterfeiting was occasionally the subject of an article in these publications, but it was certainly not a primary point of focused interest. The delimitations make clear two areas of research that could build from this investigation.

### **Final Thoughts**

#### *What Would it Take to Eradicate the Logo?*

More than four decades have passed since logos came to decorate the exterior of fashionable objects. The longevity of their dominance begs the question, what would it take for a major and permanent change to occur? I believe three major shifts would be required. First, there would need to be major changes in the nature of consumers, including their personal needs (such as using apparel to make identity or status claims) and the ways in which they are educated about the marketplace (more consumers would have to learn about quality, craftsmanship, etc.). Second, there would need to be changes in the way consumers interact with products. Advertising would have to revert to an

emphasis on commodity rather than brand and the way in which people shop would similarly have to realign. Essentially branding would have to diminish in importance. Finally, the fashion press would have to change. It would have to become less intertwined with designers and their advertising revenue. Bloggers who do not accept advertising dollars represent this possibility, but for the most part their reputability is far from established and one may wonder if reputability can be gained in the fashion industry without the power of the mighty dollar.

It is extraordinarily unlikely that there will be realignment in advertising and branding. Shopping is becoming increasingly quick and virtual. Our tactile interaction with products, including things with which we dress ourselves, is often postponed until after purchase, making the brand an important component in the decision-making process of many consumers. Additionally the fashion markets continue to expand and in so doing continue to meet increasingly global and diverse consumers. The breadth of the consumer base that global companies attempt to address makes comprehensibility mandatory in term of product design. The logo makes products easy to select.

Contemporary fashion in general is very brand name driven. In some cases a strong brand is a surrogate for style—eventually the brand becomes the style. Additionally, consumers of all walks of life have been trained over the past forty or more years to believe that fashion is for everyone. Nowhere in the cultural discourse that democratized fashion has there been any indication that fashion sense requires training and there is little evidence to suggest that the discourse is being expanded to include this notion. Therefore it seems likely that branding will remain an important part of the world of fashion that operates internationally and that caters to the masses.

### *Can the Logo Evolve?*

If one accepts that the logo is here to stay for the foreseeable future, one might ask whether it can continue to evolve as a stylistic feature. There is already a great deal of overlap between logos in high style and mass markets and recycling of old logos from defunct labels by newer brands. Borelli, Balenciaga, Bosca, and Bill Blass have all used a pair of diverging Bs. Ted Lapidus and Lambertson Truex have used virtually identical logos composed of an interlocked TL. Cartier, Chanel, and Coblentz have all used interlocked double Cs, while Oleg Cassini used an interlocked O and C as his logo that is visually very similar to the aforementioned. All of these logos have very similar aesthetics. Figure 9.2 provides a pair of examples that illustrate the visual similarity that is fairly common. In some cases logo similarity may relate to an intentional desire to mimic an established brand. In other cases the similarity may be the result of the limited constraints of logo design. It remains to be seen how branding experts and graphic designers will continue to evolve the logo itself, taking it to a new conceptual and stylistic levels, but evolving this aspect of the fashion branded commodity is fundamental to fostering an optimistic view of the place of the fashion branded commodity in the overall history of fashion.

Hopefully the fashion branded commodity can evolve. Fashion design programs do not generally train aspiring young designers to create fashion branded commodities but studio instructors may emphasize the constraints of mass production and the need to meet a mass market. Students generally graduate with a desire to create and to leave a mark on the history of fashion. So, perhaps the legions of young designers who enter the workforce with great aspirations to make memorable and influential designs and with a

passion to shape culture will, if tasked with designing a commercial collection for a large corporate entity, find ways to innovate in the category of the fashion branded commodity. Glimmers of powerful, innovative, provocative, and even humorous design were glimpsed in the content analysis, so there is hope for the future of the fashion branded commodity. I personally remain optimistic that the history of fashion will continue to reveal increasingly interesting, complex, and innovative fashion branded commodities.

### **Summative Argument**

Fashion has changed in many ways. It has changed in terms of how it looks, how it is made, and in terms of who it reaches and how quickly. In order to understand and critically evaluate how fashion has changed it is important that we define it in a new way. Some fashion can still be defined in the traditional sense—elite, ephemeral, and design-innovation driven. Some fashion is made for the mass market, using mass market techniques, is driven by branding, and remains available to consumers for extended periods of time. And some fashion rides the line between both worlds. Thus fashion is more varied than it used to be and as a result confusion arises.

This study was concerned with aesthetic change in fashion surrounding the development of the logo. Changes in aesthetics (and therefore aesthetic ideals) often bring anger, sadness and confusion in their wakes. Aesthetic representations are important to cultures and those who pause to ponder their evolution will rightfully feel alarm or dismay when change is perceived in their midst. Agins and Thomas seem to have experienced these kinds of emotions as they responded to the changes in aesthetics



and business practices in the fashion industry. Part of my conclusions is to put their responses into context.

Upheaval in the fine art world provides a parallel example of what has been happening in fashion in roughly the same span of time. In the 1960s, Pop Art caused dismay among dealers, curators, and art critics as well as the general public. Pop Art, which borrows heavily from mass and popular culture posed a threat to traditional art of the academy and accepted forms of modernism. Borrowing from the visual aesthetics of mass culture, utilizing mass production techniques, and in many cases such as Roy Lichtenstein's *Stepping Out*, 1978 (Figure 9.1) directly challenging the definition of fine art all led to lamentations, wringing of hands, vows that pictures of this kind would never hang in esteemed institutions. Pop Art was viewed by many as the antithesis of art and a threat to the realm of fine art.

Over time perspectives on Pop Art (and other maligned forms of late twentieth century fine art) have changed. What was once viewed as counter to the establishment, base in light of established standards, and generally threatening to extant notions of fine art, good taste and the like is now part of the canon—a respected page in the story of Western art history. Though there are certainly still individuals who malign Pop and its contemporaries, it is generally understood for its contributions. We can see how Pop has moved the overall dialogue in fine art forward. It has paved the way for other innovations, and for many it is now a movement that is beloved for its iconoclasm, its whimsicality, its irreverence. Pop art was moved into the canon as a result of a confluence of factors including art historians and critics, curators and collectors. It did not happen overnight or out of thin air.

Redefining fashion in terms of two worlds is the first step on the way to placing the fashion branded commodity within the larger story of fashion history. It is the first step towards creating a more unified narrative that integrates mass and class markets, designed and branded products, long-lived and ephemeral phenomena rather than the more disjointed perspective that currently exists which either ignores fashion branded commodities entirely or views them as simply the end, death, or degradation of fashion. Understanding the fashion branded commodity in context, in light of who it was designed for and why, and thereafter seeing the aesthetic and conceptual contributions that have resulted from its development all serve to move the narrative of fashion history forward rather than declaring the narrative finished.

How the fashion branded commodity will ultimately fit into the history of fashion remains, to a certain extent, to be seen. Two factors will determine its place. First the concerted effort of fashion historians, curators, and collectors will be instrumental in shaping opinions about fashion branded commodities. Just as important however will be the historical trajectory that the fashion branded commodity will ultimately take—whether it will develop or stagnate, whether it will be viewed as contributing to the development of fashion or functioning as a parasite. In the history of art, fashion, and design the passage of time and the writing of the next chapter is sometimes required in order to declare the winners and losers, heroes and villains of a period of the recent past. Perhaps we can envision a rewriting of art history whereby Pop heralded the death of fine art. As such, I offer both a pessimistic and an optimistic reading of where the fashion branded commodity may ultimately be positioned in the grander narrative.

The pessimist reading of the fashion branded commodity that I offer is one that posits it as an omnipresent, stagnant fashion entity that doesn't evolve and that dominates the mass market while increasingly chipping away at the boundaries between the two worlds of fashion. The pessimist could point to other art forms as evidence of the bleak creative culture that abounds. In contemporary fine art there continues to be young up-and-coming Abstract Expressionists and Minimalists (to name but two movements that were profoundly reflective of the culture of the 1950s and 1960s respectively but which are rehashed endlessly in the contemporary marketplace). In the world of haute couture and high-end ready-to-wear designers mine archives and present decades-old designs with minor modifications. Hollywood filmmakers offer remakes of "classics," remakes of blockbusters of just a few years ago, prequels, sequels, reboots (such as the superhero films), and franchise films wherein the installments span decades. Television shows often remake programs that were either done abroad such as *The Office* (first done in the United Kingdom) or done a decade ago such as *Beverly Hills 90210*. All of these examples point to stagnation and recycling not innovation and creative risk-taking.

What the recycling, reworking, and rehashing all point to is the culture that is endemic to late capitalism. Herein the culture industry is big business, there is a need to assuage a global appetite, the financial bottom line drives creative decision-making, and cultural hegemony leads to homogenization. In essence culture is under pressure from capitalist interests and has the potential to become unassailably low-brow, digestible, and predictable. While I have tried to make room for the fashion branded commodity as an important component of the fashion industry that needs to be understood and appreciated for what it is, if I engage the pessimistic point of view I become concerned that fashion

branded commodities are not being given sufficient room to grow conceptually or stylistically. Therefore there is a potential that a large portion of the marketplace could be occupied with goods that are stale and hackneyed. I fear endless reboots, recycling, and reworking of extant themes will be unlikely to produce much more in the way of noteworthy, whimsical, smart, or interesting design (words I have used to describe some of the fashion branded commodities that were part of the case study).

In an effort to complete the pessimistic view of the fashion branded commodity's potential role in shaping the trajectory of fashion's grander narrative, let's return to the hypothetical scenario wherein Pop Art negatively impacted the trajectory of Western fine art. As noted, Pop was controversial at first but later embraced because it made a critique and a contribution to the grand narrative of fine art. Notably, Pop was also commercially successful-- gallerists and collectors embraced the form as it was being made—even as it was maligned by some. Despite the fact that Pop Art became both commercially and critically successful over time, most artists moved on to new concepts and aesthetics. This is the important point. The continuation of artistic evolution both conceptually and stylistically is instrumental to insuring a discreet place for Pop within the narrative arc of art history. Had the majority of artists not moved on, had the majority of up-and-coming young artists continued to pursue this style and this conceptual movement to the exclusion of all else I believe our perception of Pop's contributions would be markedly different. The omnipresence of the aesthetics and the erosion of the conceptual grit that engendered the movement would ultimately transform Pop Art into pure commodity, surface without substance.

The fashion branded commodity could follow the same trajectory. As it stands, logoed goods of this kind were introduced for a specific purpose—to bolster the revenue streams of couturiers and designers who wished to survive and thrive in a changing marketplace. Consequently the phenomenon spread as other players in the industry sought to capitalize on the new phenomenon thereby expanding and developing product lines for large portions of the marketplace. In the first forty years of the fashion branded commodity there have been both stylistic and conceptual contributions resulting from the development of fashion branded commodities. They are part of the overall arc of the history of fashion. They serve as an anchor that lets us look carefully at what has been happening in the more traditional world of fashion. They are an important contribution on many levels. But if fashion branded commodities become *the* face of fashion, if designers abandon the elite and the fashion cognoscenti in pursuit of more lucrative larger audiences and thereby abandon more traditional fashion design I believe we would have to reconsider the place of the fashion branded commodity in the grander narrative. Claims that the fashion branded commodity “killed” fashion would have to be entertained.

The more optimistic view of the grander narrative of fashion history and of the place of fashion branded commodities within it requires that logoed goods remain only a part of the larger picture. It is important for the traditional world of fashion to survive and evolve for the same reasons it is important for the world of fine art to survive and evolve. These creative forms are expressive of culture and are therefore important. Dress in particular is an important facet of human interaction and communication and traditional fashionable dress plays a role in that kind of interaction. Fashion branded

commodities also have the ability to express creative energy and to facilitate human interaction, but in their present state they do so with a more limited scope than their traditional counterpart.

The ability of a fashion branded commodity to function as an important intermediary in human life supports the argument that fashion branded commodities must continue to evolve stylistically and evolve in response to consumer needs. Designers of fashion branded commodities will no doubt continue to be mass market and profit driven but this should not preclude receptivity of the cultural zeitgeist, response to technological innovations, and reflection of changing tastes and moods. While designers of fashion branded commodities may continue to work within the constraints created by engendering mass appeal, facilitating mass production, and keeping production costs low innovation can still take place. Mass production technologies continue to evolve and improve, making increasingly complex and sophisticated manufacturing possible while keeping price points in control.

The optimistic view of the future trajectory of the fashion branded commodity also repositions it in the minds of consumers (as well as in the minds of fashion historians). I believe it is important that the marketplace in general becomes educated about how the fashion branded commodity functions as fashion and how it is different from traditional fashion. This distinction is important so that consumers can enjoy both traditional designs and logoed goods but distinguish between the two. The distinction would highlight the importance of traditional fashion as a creative endeavor and make the consumer more knowledgeable of how she is participating in fashion as a consumer. In addition making the distinction important but not a source of condemnation would also

elevate the standing of the fashion branded commodity within the greater narrative of fashion.

Returning to the role of fashion historians, curators, collectors and their role in positioning fashion branded commodities within the greater narrative of fashion history, it will be important for these and other interested parties to develop the context around the products. We cannot deny that there are new standards by which to judge fashionable dress. Implementing a wholesale bias against mass production and the mass market (as I believe Agins and Thomas did) is a gross misstep that will make for provocative argument but will not enhance the history of fashion. The divisions that exist must be modified and old expectations about how and why fashion evolves must be considered in light of historical context. Historians must stop voicing surprise and dismay over the demise of couture and put their energies into exploring the dynamic nature of fashion as an evolving art form.

I have concluded that the two primary contexts that have to be explored in order to properly understand the fashion branded commodity are the broad contexts of producers and consumers. Producers are varied within the fashion industry. Makers big and small exist. However, the vast majority of producers who captivate public attention via their product offerings in stores, their designs depicted in mass media (both print and moving picture), and those who are commented upon by fashion historians and journalists are big businesses. Big businesses are profoundly different than small ateliers and we should have different expectations as a result. To condemn a big business for trying to cater to a large number of consumers is foolish. To expect that a big business will make everything by hand is to impose a Sisyphean standard.

This study revealed that the growth of the fashion industry in the late twentieth century brought with it widespread change on the business side. The development of conglomerates in the 1980s and 1990s, made fashion global business and global businesses strive to meet the needs and desires of large, diverse audiences. In order to adequately evaluate the state of contemporary fashion commentators must appreciate that changes in the structure of businesses are a reflection of a broader change in the structure of culture, and where both of those ideas intersect it makes sense that we would observe changes in the nature of the commodities produced. Changes in the aesthetics of products and the advertising and distribution thereof can most certainly be interpreted as sign of degradation of culture at large, but the case has to be made with relevant facts, not by comparison to bygone standards.

In the marketplace of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries producers and consumers are linked in a symbiotic way. Change in one entity is linked to change in the other. At the beginning of this project I was strongly inspired especially by Agins' book and I am sure I initially nodded in agreement with her as she pinned the downfall of high-style fashion on lazy, sloppy, brand-oriented consumers whose love of Nike sneakers and the Gap had caused the closing of esteemed boutiques and the bankruptcy of beloved designers. Now however, I see that her treatment of consumers (both mass market and the class market ladies who abandoned the Park Avenue retailers whose loss she bemoaned) are moving in a direction that traditional fashion often won't readily take them. Consumers across the board are (by comparison to their 1950s counterparts who predate the fashion branded commodity phenomenon) active, pressed for time, saturated with media, more anonymous and more fragmented (no doubt among other things). If the



characteristics of the postmodern consumer are considered in conjunction with the products (including fashion branded commodities) that are on offer, then the products become less susceptible to blanket condemnations. No doubt Lycra spandex is a condemnable fabric (a fabric with legions of “lazy” devotees who may not wish to bother with trying on garments or visiting tailors or possibly gymnasias as well. But commentators on fashion understand these factors and thereby accept Lycra spandex as a consumer-friendly fabric and a fabric that has facilitated fashion innovation. To this point, fashion branded commodities have not fared as well. Putting them in the context of consumer need to communicate to the masses, to make quick decisions, to participate in fashion at a price that is within reach all serve to explain the importance of the fashion branded commodities to the consumer and therefore help to explain why they deserve to be considered integral to the overall telling of the history of fashion.

Exploring fashion branded commodities has changed my understanding of them. The most important thing that I have taken away and that I hope readers of this study will take away as well is that while fashion branded commodities are in many ways attached to the traditional world of fashion they must be *evaluated* based on criteria that are appropriate. The key factors are their place in the historical trajectory, their aesthetic contributions, their reflections of the changing nature of production, and their symbiotic relationship with consumers. Considered in light of the appropriate variables I hope that fashion historians and fashion devotees alike will give these important items their due respect and consideration.

## Implications for Future Research

### *The Male Consumer*

This document has consistently referred to female consumers. This is because most of the editorials, advertisements, and products that were reviewed were specifically targeted at women. Some examples of unisex products and products designed for men did appear in the content analysis. The ways in which those men's and unisex products were marked with logos was in line with the larger sample of women's products under review.

However, some caution must be exercised before concluding that there is a perfect correspondence between men's and women's logoed products, as the products I considered that could have been used by men were mostly mass produced products, not high-style fashion.

There are assuredly parallels between what I have discovered in the realm of women's accessories and what exists in the realm of accessories designed for men. Some of the heavily logoed high fashion lines discussed in this text do make products specifically targeted at men. For example, Louis Vuitton offers a line called *Damier graphite*, which reworks the traditional logoed checkerboard pattern in shades of gray.<sup>1</sup> Gucci offers shoes, belts, wallets and luggage for men. These items are always available in the traditional GG Jacquard. Prada briefcases and wallets are marked with the same enameled shield that adorns women's handbags. Men's labels that do not have a women's counterpart also utilize logos in manners identical to the way they are utilized in the world of women's accessories. Bags and briefcases and luggage designed for men typically include a logoed tag or plaque. Findings such as zipper pulls, metal studs, and

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<sup>1</sup> The *Damier* pattern is technically unisex, but it is extensively used in the execution of women's handbags.

closures also often are marked with the name of the designer or brand by casting, engraving, or embossing the name or icon. John Varvatos and Ben Sherman luggage and cases provide simple examples of the implementation of logo as label.

I believe that the conclusions made about female consumers can also be applied to male consumers, though I would leave room for modifications and additions. Male consumers are equal participants in the postmodern condition—unsure and searching for identity. Male consumers are no less susceptible to the lure of status goods and men's publications such as *GQ* nurture ideas about good taste and connoisseurship in every single issue. Fashion is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Consumers and their dress practices exist only within a society. It stands to reason that both sexes would be susceptible to similar fashion phenomena and would likewise be impacted by socio-cultural pressures and impulses that, if not identical, are at least akin.

A deeper and broader examination of the branded male consumer might reveal that some aspects of logo use are stronger or more meaningful among male consumers. For example, a consideration of sports team logos and athletic brands might reveal strong links to group identity. Interviews with male consumers might also reveal different ways of thinking about logos and their use. As such, I believe there is room to extend this study by turning to the male demographic.

### *Counterfeiting*

The topic of counterfeiting was excluded from this discussion by virtue of the delimitations. Since counterfeiters of handbags seek to accurately duplicate the designs they forge, it is unlikely that any major design innovations would be attributable to

counterfeiters and their craft. A parallel study could be crafted that explores the topic of counterfeited logoed handbags. A research method could be constructed that surveys the designers and handbag models that have been counterfeited. This could include a time line that shows the growth of this black market industry in terms of its monetary value and its expansion to include a wide variety of brands. An interesting topic (albeit one that would likely prove difficult to thoroughly document) would be the inadvertent variations on logos that have developed as a result of sloppy counterfeiting. With regards to the style of counterfeit handbags, one could also survey how counterfeiters streamline and simplify designs in order to cut costs.

Interviews of consumers who use counterfeited logoed handbags would also provide an interesting counterpoint to this research. Discerning the meaning of forged logoed handbags, especially of status bags, to consumers might reveal additional layers of the nature and meaning of status to postmodern consumers. Interviewing consumers of counterfeited logoed handbags might also reveal a different or nuanced use of these objects vis-à-vis social positioning and identity creation.

### *Knock-offs*

Knock-offs, defined as legal interpretations of designs, were not excluded from this study by the delimitations, but they were inadvertently marginalized as result of the publications that were used for the content analysis. Knock-offs could prove to be an interesting topic, but different source material would be required. Retailers such as Macy's, K-mart and Wal-Mart frequently carry knock-offs. The challenge would be to find documentation showing what these retailers carried. At the outset of this project I

found it challenging to locate a suitable document of mass market fashion and learned that retailers like Macy's do not currently keep a record of their catalogs and sales flyers. One challenge would be to find a trove of the necessary ephemera.

*The Press: Journalism or Marketing?*

Coming to the understanding that the fashion press has in the last 20 years or so become an appendage of large and powerful international conglomerates (and as an appendage does not function as an independent journalistic source) is a provocative topic. I believe an investigation of the history of this relationship could be a very interesting study in itself. Research in this sphere could lead to conclusions about invisible power structures and cultural hegemony, expanding the vein of thought Foucault developed.



Figure 9.1 Roy Lichtenstein, *Stepping Out* (1978), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Illustration found at <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/210002332>. In this image Lichtenstein challenges the definition of fine art by depicting figures that reference the work of Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger while using the visual language of mass produced visual imagery- namely the aesthetics of comic books and replication of dot-matrix printing (Benday dots).



Figure 9.2 The similarity of logos is sometimes quite astounding. The photograph depicts a Louis Feraud bag at left. Its inverted F and L are very similar to the inverted pair of Fendi Fs shown in the black-line illustration below it. At right is an Oleg Cassini handbag. The interlocking O and C are similar to the double-C insignia used by Chanel, which is depicted below the bag. Photograph by Jason Moore of handbags in the author's collection.

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## Appendices

**Appendix 1: Aesthetic Analysis Worksheet**  
*Vogue, Seventeen Magazine, and the Sears Catalog*

**Type of bag**

Backpack \_\_\_\_\_

Satchel \_\_\_\_\_

Suitcase (hard/soft) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone case \_\_\_\_\_

Minaudiere \_\_\_\_\_

Clutch \_\_\_\_\_

Shoulder bag \_\_\_\_\_

Wallet \_\_\_\_\_

Key case \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials (body)**

Leather (plain) \_\_\_\_\_

Leather (embossed) \_\_\_\_\_

Canvas \_\_\_\_\_

Fabric \_\_\_\_\_

Plastic/rubber \_\_\_\_\_

Exotic skin \_\_\_\_\_

Faux skin (i.e. vinyl) \_\_\_\_\_

Metal \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials (logo)**

Leather (plain) \_\_\_\_\_

Leather (embossed) \_\_\_\_\_

Canvas \_\_\_\_\_

Fabric \_\_\_\_\_

Plastic/rubber \_\_\_\_\_

Exotic skin \_\_\_\_\_

Faux skin (i.e. vinyl) \_\_\_\_\_

Metal \_\_\_\_\_

**Technique for execution of logo**

Appliqué (textile) \_\_\_\_\_

Topstitching \_\_\_\_\_

Printed/screened \_\_\_\_\_

Appliqué (metal/plastic) \_\_\_\_\_

Woven \_\_\_\_\_

Embossed \_\_\_\_\_

**Logo size (indicate number or allover):**

S \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ XL \_\_\_\_\_  
 (>1 in.) (>3in. & <1in.) (>6in.) & <3in.) (<6in.)

**Location of the logo**

Zipper pull \_\_\_\_\_ Closure \_\_\_\_\_  
 Decorative plaque \_\_\_\_\_ Decorative charm \_\_\_\_\_  
 Buckle \_\_\_\_\_ Body/all over \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Brand Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Publication** \_\_\_\_\_

**Month** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes**

## Appendix 2: Advertisement Analysis Worksheet

Brand/designer: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication/date/page: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of products shown: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of handbags shown: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of mentions of designer name/brand name: \_\_\_\_\_

Retail location is given: \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

Number of retailers given: \_\_\_\_\_

Price is given: \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

Price: \$\_\_\_\_\_

Designer is depicted: \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

Designer's/brand's boutique is depicted: \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

Product is clearly licensed \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

(Ex. Anne Klein for Brand X)

Key descriptors of:

Bag: \_\_\_\_\_

Target customer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3: Editorial Analysis Worksheet**

Brand/designer: \_\_\_\_\_

Article title: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication/date/page: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of mentions of:

Brand name/designer name: \_\_\_\_\_

Logo: \_\_\_\_\_

Price given: \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Key descriptors of:

Bag: \_\_\_\_\_

Target customer: \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix 4: Sears Catalogs Used in Content Analysis

Year	S/S	I/W	Wish	Notes	Total = Reviewed
1969	X	X			2
1970	X	X			2
1971	X	X			2
1972	X	X			2
1973	X	X	X		3
1974	X	X	X		3
1975		X	X		2
1976	X		X		2
1977		X	X		2
1978	X		X		2
1979	X	X	X		3
1980	X	X			2
1981	X	X			2
1982	X	X			2
1983		X	X		2
1984	X	X			2
1985	X	X	X		3
1986	X		X		2
1987	X	X	X		3
1988	X	X	X		3
1989				Reviewed 6 "Style" catalogs	6
1990				Reviewed 6 "Style" catalogs	6
1991	X	X			3
1992			X	Reviewed Annual Catalog	1
1993	X	X		Reviewed Annual Catalog	3
1994				Big Book discontinued end of 1993	0
1995	X	X			2
1996			X		1
1997			X		1
1998		X	X		2
1999	X	X			2
2000	X		X		2
2001			X		1
2002			X		1
2003			X	Reviewed 50th Anniversary catalog	1
2004			X		1
2005		X	X		2
2006	X				1
2007			X		1
2008		X			1
2009	X				1

## **Appendix 5: Interview Questions**

Questions for all respondents:

1. What qualities do you look for when selecting a logoed handbag for purchase?
2. Why do you find logoed handbags/ hand luggage appealing?
3. What draws you to a particular brand or logo?
4. How do you think people on the street perceive your handbag?
5. Why do you like using your handbag?
6. What do you think your handbag communicates about you?
7. Would you feel differently about your handbag if it were a counterfeit?

Questions for older respondents:

1. How have your tastes in handbags changed over time?
2. How do you think your tastes differ from those of your daughter's/  
granddaughter's age?

Questions for younger respondents:

1. How do you think your tastes differ from those of your mother/grandmother?