

British Designer Fashion in the Late 1990s

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the Second Millennium, the creative talent of British fashion designer 'stars' was considered so outstanding that they were frequently poached by leading European fashion houses; Dior, Givenchy, and Chloe, bastions of the French couture establishment were all headed by British designers. However, according to Kurt Salmon Associates (1991), there existed a paradox in that the British fashion designer sector was a 'cottage industry' characterised by poor commercial performance.

Preliminary investigation revealed very little theory or scholarly research about the sector or its designer 'stars', and whilst there were some commercial consultancy reports, these appeared to be methodologically flawed. A need was therefore identified to explore contemporary practice in designer fashion houses, visit major promotional events such as fashion shows and exhibitions, and explore the designer's perspective.

The methodological approach developed in this thesis has subsequently been endorsed by the Getty Conservation Institute of California (1999), which recommended the simultaneous analysis of 'creative' and cultural industries in terms of both their artistic and market dimensions, to explore positive associations between the two. This study applied a multi-stranded research strategy, which subscribed to phenomenological assumptions and adopted a range of research techniques from the traditions of anthropological fieldwork. These included an exploratory survey, participant observation, observation, in-depth elite interviews, and document analysis.

It also draws upon developments in interpretative anthropology and includes experiments with the construction and presentation of text. These include the juxtaposition of commercial and art history discourses, numeric data with narrative, and popular with scholarly texts. This is sought to invite the reader to enter into a negotiation of new meaning, incorporating previously disparate discourses about designer fashion phenomena.

The conclusions of this research were that the term 'cottage industry' was not an appropriate descriptor for the British fashion designer sector in the late 1990s. The industry had attained a positive international profile and London Fashion Week was a major international media event. However, the sector could be better supported as a national asset, in particular by establishing a permanent national exhibition in London to promote British fashion in a sustained and coherent manner.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

'Design lies between the worlds of culture and commerce, between passion and profit. (Cooper and Press, 1995, p.4.)'

1.1 Broad Problem Area

The research reported in this thesis investigated the British Designer Fashion Sector in the late 1990s. In this chapter the research problem is considered in the context of recent developments in areas which formed the background to the research: 1) newspapers and media commentary about contemporary designer fashion; 2) policy developments in relation to the creative industries; 3) policy changes in higher education during the 1990s which impacted upon all art and design disciplines including fashion.

At the time the research was initiated this review of background sources enabled me to make a *preliminary* statement about the research problem, identify potential research questions and propose a tentative outline for the whole; however it was necessary to locate the issues in relevant specialist fashion literature before a definitive statement of the research problem and questions could be made. Following a review of this literature in Chapters 2 and 3 these are stated at the beginning of chapter four.

A strong autobiographical element inspired my interest in conducting research into the phenomenon of designer fashion since I had worked as a designer in the fashion industry for ten years. In order to move beyond initial curiosity and personal experience, it was necessary to delineate other potential audiences who might share my interest in the conclusions of such research,

although not necessarily for the same reasons. I hypothesized that the research would be of particular interest to the following: 1) the designer fashion sector, 2) trade associations, professional organisations and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), and 3) an academic community, within higher education, especially those concerned with the 'design programmes' of which fashion is a sub-set.

This research began in the middle of 1995, and throughout the 1990s developments recurred which impacted upon all three of these spheres, which provided a topical context for the formulation of the research problem and questions. Table 1 provides a chronological overview of these developments in relation to 1) the designer fashion sector, 2) policy with respect to the 'creative industries' and 3) the higher education context.

1.2 The British Fashion Designer Sector

In the press, throughout the 1990s, British fashion designers were frequently commended for their outstanding creative talent yet condemned for their poor commercial success (Tyte, 1991; Woods, 1991). Those who succeeded commercially often did so with foreign financial backing, or via collaboration with overseas fashion houses. For example, John Galliano was poached by Dior, the bastion of the French couture establishment.

Surely the world has gone topsy-turvy, when the British are running couture houses. (Rapley, 1997, p16).

Table 1: Chronological Overview of Developments in the Designer Fashion Sector, Policy and HE

Year	The Design Fashion Sector	'Creative' Industries Policy	Higher Education
1990	Kurt Salmon's Designer Industry Survey (1991)		
1991			
1992			Further and Higher Education Act (1992) ends bursary divide in HE
1993			DMU enters first art/design RAE
1994		Design Council restructures	
1995			
1996			DMU enters second art/design RAE
1997	Caroline Coates Designer Fact file. Cheshire's British Fashion Designer Report (both launched Nov. 1998)	Election Labour Government 'Create the Future' (1997) CITF Mapping Document (Nov. 1998)	
1998			
1999			

Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney followed in quick succession to the French couture houses of Givenchy and Chloe respectively (Theobald, 1997). Why were there so few examples of commercial success amongst British fashion designers, especially those who remained in the United Kingdom?

At the time the research began in 1995 the relationship of the designer fashion sector to the British clothing industry as a whole was difficult to quantify

accurately in terms of size and value. In spite of the considerable volume of official statistical literature on clothing manufacturing and distribution in the economy, hard data on the designer sector were scarce. Published Government statistics, collected on the basis of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), were defined in terms of sex (male/female), age (adult/child) and basic function (outerwear versus underwear).

All SIC categories were capable of incorporating designer fashion elements, however it was difficult to extrapolate specific information about the designer sector from figures relating to the clothing industry as a whole. A key issue was therefore what useful information related to this sector could be gained from the SIC data source, and what information was missing?

SIC data were representative of the whole clothing industry, of which the designer sector was a sub-set. In the 1990s the designer sector formed an estimated 2 to 3 per cent of the total clothing industry. If designer firms were similar to the typical clothing manufacturing enterprise, then the expectation was that they would exhibit clear characteristics typical of the industry as a whole, but did they? In 1995 there was an absence of focused data on this sector and it was not possible to develop a reliable profile of it for several reasons.

The first and only quantitative analysis of designer fashion in Britain, which was undertaken by management consultants, suffered from methodological flaws, and concluded that the sector was a 'cottage industry', despite outstanding design talent (Kurt Salmon Associates, 1991). It noted however that in 1991 the British clothing industry was the fourth largest industrial sector with an established turnover of £5-6 billion per year, but the average

turnover of the so-called designer 'stars' was between £1 million and £2 million a year.

My previous MA study (Tyte, 1991), which had focused upon qualitative case study material from eight designer houses, confirmed Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA) view that the sector was emergent, at least as far as the enterprises it included were concerned. The conclusion was that the design function was strong, but the manufacturing and marketing functions were weak. A clear disparity was identified between the creative potential and commercial performance of some of the most prestigious British designer houses.

A designer 'star' was understood to be someone who contributed an individual image - usually including his/her name to a range of fashion products. (KSA 1991, Tyte, 1991). To understand the designer fashion sector it seemed appropriate to research designer 'stars' because in the process of becoming a 'star' the designer: 1) becomes sufficiently well known to show his/her garments regularly at major international design shows and exhibitions; 2) designer companies become 'brands' closely associated with the designer's name and 'handwriting' (house style); 3) the best designers become household names through extensive media interest, and increasingly public interest through television programmes such as 'The Clothes Show', 4) the designer fashion industry exerts a powerful influence (although unquantified in money terms) upon related industries such as hairdressing, cosmetics and textiles.

Table 2 shows the core activities of the designer fashion sector, together with related industries and sectors. Indeed, the way in which designers and couturiers have opportunities to enhance their revenue is through diffusion ranges, at a lower price point from the main collection, and franchise

agreements often associated with a wider product range such as perfumes, cosmetics or bed linen.

In the British fashion designer sector, tension seemed to exist between creative talent and commercial success, although according to KSA (1991) this was not so in France, Italy, Germany and the USA (see Table 3). At this early stage I wanted to know what was the commercial profile of the sector in the late 1990s; was it still a 'cottage' industry and, if so, what were the underlying reasons for this profile?

During recent decades, various theories of fashion had been developed by scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. To what extent did these theories explicate the phenomenon of contemporary designer fashion; what role did the designers play in shaping the profile of the industry as 'a cottage' sector? Since the designer fashion industry is led by the 'designer stars', I identified their role as potentially central to understanding the apparent creative and commercial anomalies in the contemporary British designer sector. At this stage I wanted to know how the designers perceived their role and the various controversies in which the sector was frequently enveloped.

Table 2: The Designer Fashion Industry and Related Sectors

	<p>Related Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fashion photography - Hair care and cosmetics - Accessories - Perfumes - Modelling 	
	<p>CORE ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clothing design - Manufacture of clothes for exhibition - Consultancy and diffusion lines 	
<p>Related Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Magazine publishing - Design education - Graphic design - Product design 		<p>Related Industries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Textiles - Clothing manufacturing - High street clothes retailing

Source: Adapted from Labour Party (1997)

Table 3: Money Value of the International Fashion Designer Industries

<i>£ million</i>	USA	UK	ITALY	GERMANY	FRANCE
1. Direct Income	200	60	550	50	200
2. Licensed Income	60	15	50	10	30
Diffusion Industry Value					
1. Direct Income	300	20	400	400	200
2. Licensed Income	200	5	40	30	75

Source: Kurt Salmon Associates, 1991

1.3 Recent Government Policy and the 'Creative' Industries

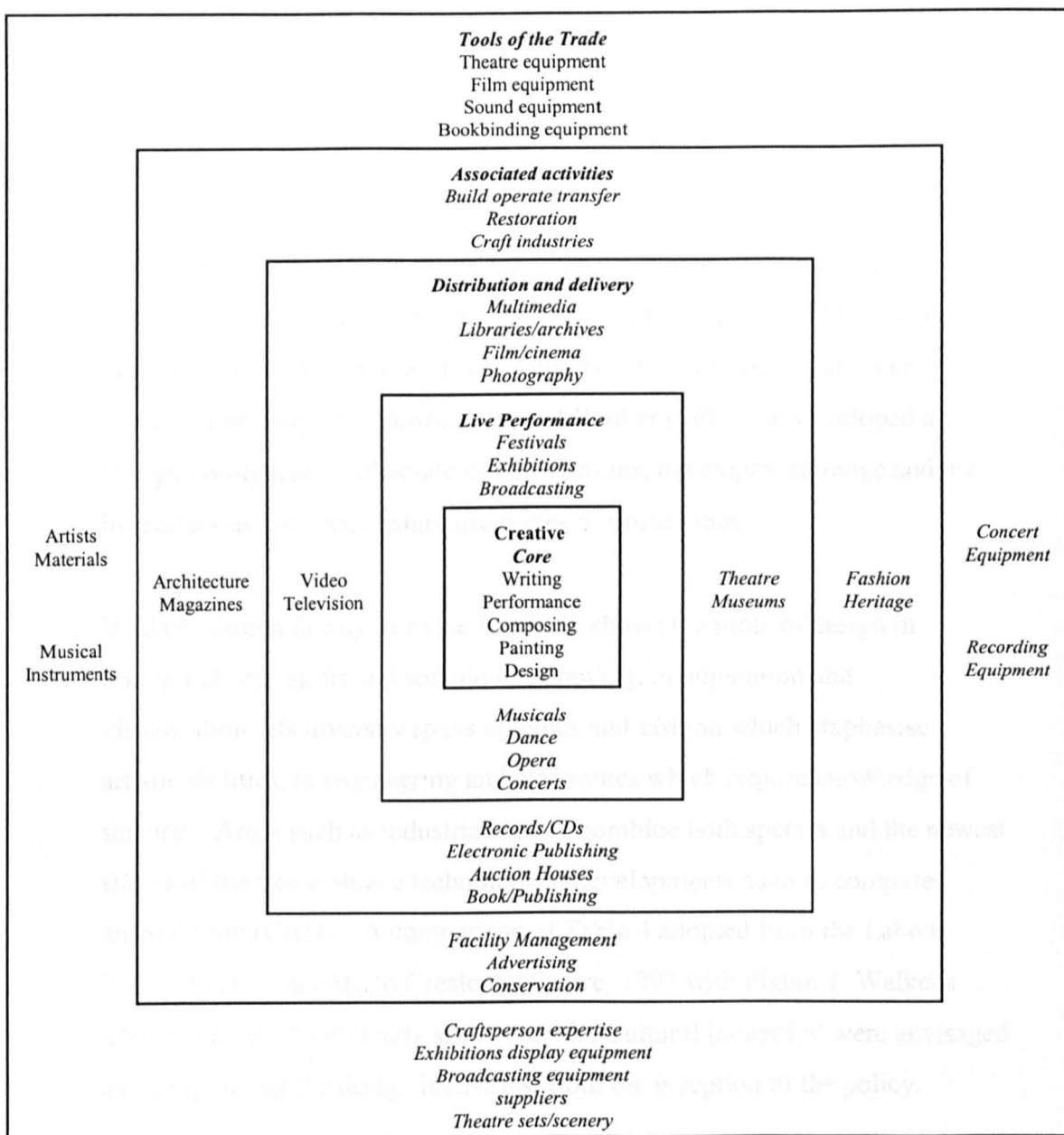
When this research commenced in 1995, no Government policy existed specifically targeted to promote the designer fashion sector or the other 'creative' industries. However, that changed during the course of this research, and for this reason I have explored the policy context in this introduction.

The election, on 1st May 1997, of a Labour Government in the UK ushered in a new vision of the practical economic benefits to be gained from the nation's 'creative' and cultural industries (Creigh-Tyte, forthcoming 2002).

Symbolically the Government department sponsoring the creative sector was renamed 'Department for Culture, Media and Sport' (DCMS), which was held to be more "forward looking" than the title 'Department of National Heritage' established by the previous Conservative Government in 1992 (Chris Smith, 1998). One of the first announcements by the new DCMS was that it was setting up an Inter-Departmental Task Force with representatives of the Government and the private sector (see Appendix 1), to report upon current status of the "Creative Industries" including designer fashion, and to drive forward policy to promote these industries.

The term creativity is a notoriously slippery one to define. For operational purposes, I have defined the creative industries in this research as those goods and services in the cultural sector, including the arts, media, heritage, sport, publishing, design and fashion design, with a potential for wealth and job creation (Creigh-Tyte, forthcoming 2002). An example of how widely such a net could be cast was to be found in the mandala at the end of the Labour Party's election strategy document Create the Future, 1997 (see Table 4). Around a cultural "creative core" of writing, performing, composing and

Table 4: The ‘Creative’ Industries



Source: Adapted from Labour Party (1997)

designing, revolved a series of wider activities ranging from live performance and the distribution and delivery systems, to associated activities focused upon creating the necessary "tools of the trade", including skills and training.

The new Labour Government's policy targeted the design industries as a subset of the creative industries, although it was not the first administration to seek to promote 'design' in all its diversity. According to Cooper and Press (1995) design has many elements: design as art, design as problem solving, design as a creative act, design as a family of professions, design as an industry and design as a process! David Walker (1989) has developed a 'design family tree' to illustrate design's origins, development, range and the interrelations between design disciplines or professions.

Walker's design family tree (see Figure 1) shows the roots of design in traditional craft skills and techniques, drawing, manipulation and visualisation. Its diversity spans graphics and fashion which emphasise artistic abilities, to engineering and electronics which require knowledge of science. Areas such as industrial design combine both spectra and the newest shoots of the tree embrace technological developments such as computer aided design (CAD). A comparison of Table 4 adopted from the Labour Party's election manifesto Create the Future, 1997 with Figure 1, Walker's 'Design Family Tree' clearly shows that the 'cultural industries' were envisaged as incorporating the design industries, from the inception of the policy.

The first historically significant report to draw the competitive economic potential of design to the attention of policy makers had been published circa two decades earlier (Corfield, 1979). Throughout the 1980s this report was followed by many others which focused upon analysing the role of design in specific industrial sectors, or through case studies of individual firms. Three reports focused upon design in the textile sector, either exclusively (Cotton Allied Textiles - EDC, 1984, NEDO Garment and Textile Sector Group 1993), or in comparison with other industries such as ceramics and furniture (The Design Council, 1983). These reports were all commissioned by agencies subsidised by Government funding; none focused directly upon the designer fashion industry.

However, it was the involvement of Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, which popularised the economic cause for good design during the 1980s. According to Thatcher (1984), our technological advances could have been exploited commercially much more effectively if senior management had paid similar attention to design. During the same period the Design Council, funded through the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the Government's national advisory body on design issues, billed designers in promotional materials as 'The New Alchemists - adding the business ingredient that sends sales soaring.' These were appropriate sentiments for the policies of free market economics which prospered in the 1980s under the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

When design reappeared on the agenda of the new Labour Government, in 1997, it was in my view under a new and more imaginative guise. Policy now emphasised the importance of 'culture', including design, for the quality

of life as well as the potential for wealth creation. In the new Government's strategy, creativity for competitiveness was inextricably linked to creativity for democracy and access, which moved away from a narrow 'high' definition of the cultural sector to an embracing broad-based populist approach. For example, sponsorship of the music sector was now intended to include popular music. Moreover, in the policy document *Create the Future* (1997), creativity was linked to the Government's social agenda to rebuild communities, so that the same quality of cultural opportunity could be enjoyed everywhere in the UK. This was to be promoted by a educational system, especially within schools, which enabled widespread participation in the nation's cultural heritage.

Almost by definition, the creative spirit cannot be pinned down into bureaucratic formats. Creativity, after all, is about adding the deepest value to human life (Chris Smith, Secretary of State, 1998, p1).

Design was being promoted in this context not in isolation, but in concert with other 'creative endeavours' to achieve outcomes of commercial and cultural worth.

Design is woven into the basic fabric of human society..... It will be no surprise then if I tell you that this Government takes design seriously (Chris Smith, 1998, p111).

Moreover, art and science were described as the dual sides of the 'coin' of creativity,

We are now beginning to witness a breaking-down of the artificial barriers which have separated science and the arts over the last 200 years (Chris Smith, 1998, p111).

According to the rhetoric, art and science were reunited in a new twentieth century renaissance and the role of the artist and the designer were closely aligned, if indeed they were not viewed as interchangeable. The new Secretary for Culture, Chris Smith, stated ,

Good design is not just about making an object of use but an object of beauty..... The creative vision and imagination of the artist can help to improve what technology makes possible (Chris Smith,1998, p112).

The branches of the design family tree were deemed equally interchangeable:

Most people don't understand that the car industry is in fact a fashion business. It starts with design, not with engineering (Chris Smith, 1998, p113).

More pragmatically it was claimed that the creative industries grouped together generated revenues approaching £60 billion a year. They contributed over 4% to the domestic economy and employed circa one and a half million people. Apparently the sector was growing faster than, almost twice as fast as, the economy as a whole! However, a key concern for all creative sectors was a need for better data and the identification of key issues which would ensure their future health. (DCMS, 1998).

By the time that new Labour's creative industries policy was first announced following the May 1997 election, this research upon the British designer fashion sector was already well underway, although not completed. Moreover, the British designer fashion industry was enjoying more international acclaim than it had ever done in many years. Indeed, Government policy was even accused of 'riding the crest of the wave', at least as far as designer fashion was concerned. Inevitably the policy had its critics, for example Professor Sir Alan Peacock (1998) complained:

He (Chris Smith) produces a long list of most extraordinary disparate industries which, it would be, I think, very difficult to describe some of them as creative. The first thing on the list is advertising.

Representatives of the creative industries themselves emphasised the need for action rather than rhetoric from policy makers. Since the Government's 'Creative Industries Task Force' had included such high profile media figures

as Richard Branson of the Virgin Group Plc, and Paul Smith of Paul Smith Limited on behalf of the fashion industry, it appeared likely that these public figures would expect the Government to provide the industry with effective support, not simply words. Moreover, their public and media profile could be utilised to provide powerful criticism of the Government's policies, if members of the Task Force were disappointed.

Despite the criticisms the policy debate proved valuable in clarifying some of the issues embedded in this research related to practice, policy and theory. First, it provided a valuable indicator of national perceptions about the sector, particularly as held by the instruments of Government bureaucracy. Secondly it underlined the need for reliable data about current industry practice. Thirdly, in stating 'Design, therefore, stands at the cross-roads of art and science (Chris Smith, 1998, p117)', questioned the identity of design as an academic discipline and in consequence I queried the kinds of theory and research methods which were appropriate for the field?

Finally, the new Government's creative industries policy provided an impetus for Government and trade associations, including those associated with the fashion sector, to examine available data on these sectors including its strengths and weaknesses. This resulted in a series of reports towards the end of 1998; most notably the Government's Creative Industries Task Force Mapping Document (1998) but also Cheshire's British Fashion Designers Report (1998), both of which underlined the need for reliable data.

1.4 The Higher Education Context

On 27 August 1997, the Utrecht University published a report entitled The European University in 2010 using as a basis for its conclusions information derived from a survey of Rectors, Vice Chancellors, Presidents and members of Boards of Governors throughout Europe. The survey revealed that the educational values most shared in higher education throughout Europe are:

- a) freedom of research and teaching as a fundamental principle of University life;
- b) the University's contribution to the sustainable development of society, as a prominent element in a University's mission;
- c) research and teaching remaining inseparable at all levels of University education; and
- d) national Government bearing as much responsibility for higher education in 2010 as it does today.

The third statement which proposed that teaching was inseparable from research was important for this investigation, because higher education in fashion had not yet developed a tradition of academic research. In the United Kingdom higher education in fashion was subject to the same vicissitudes of Government policy during the 1990s as was higher education more generally. These have included a massive overall expansion especially at undergraduate level (see Appendix 2), the introduction of a unitary framework covering over 100 higher education institutions, together with a drive towards strengthening market forces. (Department of Employment, 1991a, 1991b, and 1992).

In higher education, the major change implemented by Government in the 1990s was to end what had become an increasingly artificial distinction

between the universities on the one hand, and polytechnics and the colleges on the other. The Further and Higher Education Act (1992), removed the earlier barriers between "academic" and "vocational" streams in higher education, and the consequent implication in the former polytechnics that they were primarily teaching and professional training institutions, whilst the traditional universities had a remit for both teaching and research. Henceforth, around 100 universities and former polytechnics were given the same status as 'universities', this had significant implications for all those involved in higher education, involving staff teaching all design disciplines including fashion.

The new arrangements had implications for the development of this research. The quality of research in British universities had achieved world-wide recognition and the Government remained committed to maintaining an internationally competitive research base (Department of Employment, 1991a, 1991b and 1992). However, under the former arrangements the polytechnics, and hence vocationally orientated programmes in applied subjects such as design and fashion, were considerably disadvantaged in terms of funding made available for research.

Nonetheless, enrolments in these subjects were buoyant at undergraduate and postgraduate level and continued to rise throughout the 1990s (see Table 5). Before the 1992 Act universities, former polytechnics and colleges were funded with respect to three different research categories: 1) basic research which was concerned with the advancement of knowledge; 2) strategic research which was speculative but with a clear potential for application; and 3) applied research directed primarily towards practical aims and objectives (Department of Employment, 1991).

Table 5: Full-time Students in Higher Education by Subject: 1989/90 and 1995/96

United Kingdom	Percentages			
	Undergraduates		Postgraduates	
	1988/89	1995/96	1988/89	1995/96
Medicine and dentistry	4.2	2.5	3.9	3.2
Subjects allied to medicine	3.2	6.2	2.7	3
Biological sciences	4.1	5.2	6.4	6.1
Agriculture and related subjects	1.3	1.3	2.2	1.7
Physical sciences	5.1	5	9.9	8
Mathematical sciences	6.5	6.2	6.7	6.1
Engineering and technology	12.2	9.5	12.1	11
Architecture, building and planning	3.2	2.8	3	3.5
Social, economic and political sciences	12.5	10.8	12.2	15.8
of which Law	-	3.2	-	5.5
Business and financial studies	12.4	12.3	8.6	9.7
Documentation	0.8	1.2	1.6	1.7
Languages	6.7	5.9	4.6	4.3
Humanities	3.4	3.2	3.5	3.7
Creative art and design	7.2	6.9	3.4	3.2
Education	4.6	5.4	17.6	17.2
Combined general	12.7	11.3	1.6	1.8
All full-time students ² (=100%)(thousands)	571	1047	73	135

1 Includes sandwich students and in 1995/96 Open University courses

2 Includes higher education in further education institutions in England for which a subject breakdown is not available

Source: Department for Education and Employment; Welsh Office; The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department; Department of Education Northern Ireland. Estimates provided in private communications.

The 'traditional' or old universities had a broad mission statement which embraced 'basic', 'strategic' and 'applied' research. By contrast the research mission of the old polytechnics and colleges was, for the most part, applied and related strategic research, which reflected the vocational orientation of their teaching programmes. This research was expected to be essentially self-financing, although polytechnics and colleges were able to bid for Research Council funds and some did so with notable success.

Whilst the post-1992 environment, in which this research was commenced, had created a more level playing field in terms of funding between institutions, inequalities remained between disciplines, even though the same expectations were placed on all subjects, including fashion design, to develop research to inform teaching. HEFC and the higher education community were aware of inequalities between subjects or disciplines and sought new research funding formulae based upon the 'national interest' and international standing of disciplines (Swain, 1998). According to Swanick (1994), this was important because:

Such activity (research) enhances the subject discipline and enriches the teaching programmes for students at all levels, whilst allowing staff the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their chosen subject, at the highest level.

A lack of designated funding was only one element which had held back the development of research in the design subjects, including fashion. Another was that most of the existing taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level were directed towards preparing students for professional practice in industry, or related work place activities. Thus quite logically most of the activity of the academic staff had been directed towards teaching to this end. Some staff had been engaged in design research but the numbers were small.

Design practitioners undertook research 'explorations' as a part of the process of developing new products but they had tended not to document their investigations in any traditional scholarly or academic way. As Press (1995, p34) observed:

In our educational culture, documentation of the creative process of design at best comprises some usually re-worked and heavily edited sketchbooks. Documentation is somehow felt to undermine its 'magic and mystery'.

Nonetheless the new post 1992 academic climate in HE placed pressure upon all academic staff to become research active, and according to Cook (1998, p6),

research and consultancy became drivers for academics adding other burdens to the increasingly complex situation, and in order to progress academics had to have a research track record.

In addition to the lack of funding and experienced research staff, the lack of scholarly refereed journals was another limiting factor (Bethel, 1995). Whilst Creigh-Tyte (1998) identified 22 refereed design journals, only two included textile design and none were related to fashion or clothing design as such. In 1998 however, 'Fashion Theory; the Journal of Dress, Body and Culture,' emerged from the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. In the initial review of the journal, Tarlo (1998, p26) observed:

Any academic journal with the word 'fashion' in its title must be prepared to face a double edged resistance. In most intellectual circles the word still carries a bundle of associations - fake, frivolous, femininity - which send serious minded academics flying.

The first edition of Fashion Theory was wide ranging in that it carried articles about foot-binding in China and fashion and politics in Nazi Germany and, whilst it contributed to the range of publication outlets for design research, it also added to the existing range of questions about what research might

comprise in design fields of study with a strong professional or vocational focus. Moreover, if 'research-led' teaching were to become the norm in subjects such as fashion, which lacked a significant research tradition, what were the implications for the fashion curricula of the future and what types of research would support its development?

These issues influenced my thinking as I began to formulate this research project in 1994; what kinds of fashion research could be valuable and what type of methods and theory would be appropriate? Did existing theories of fashion adequately explain the paradoxes associated with British designer fashion and, if not, why not?

It was clear that there was much to be gained from critical comparisons with other disciplines, although Stanley (1994) warned designers against the too ready admission of academic interlopers from other subject areas who may seek to define research on their behalf. By implication, he suggested caution was necessary before design researchers poached research methods from other disciplines which might be inappropriate. For Press (1995, p34) lack of differentiation between subjects was problematic,

...how the creativity of design differs from the creativity of science, political economy or other disciplines is not rationalised.

1.5 Preliminary Statement of Research Problem

As noted above, the first serious quantitative analysis of designer fashion in Britain concluded that the sector was a 'cottage industry' despite outstanding design talent (Kurt Salmon Associates, 1991). The British clothing industry was the fourth largest industrial sector with an established turnover of £5 billion a year, but the average turnover of the so-called designer 'stars' was

between £1 million and £2 million a year. Why was this so? There was no research that had established the reasons for this and commercial consultancy reports were few in number and methodologically flawed. Since the creative talent of British fashion designers was repeatedly poached by overseas fashion houses, there appeared to exist an anomaly between their creative ability and commercial performance. To what extent did theories of fashion illuminate this paradox, and what kind of Government policy was appropriate to support the industry?

1.6 Preliminary Research Questions

1. Was the British designer sector a 'cottage industry' in the late 1990s?
2. What role do the designers play in shaping the profile of the industry and how do they perceive the creative and commercial aspects of their work?
3. Has sufficient evidence been accumulated which has the potential for theorising and, if so, what kind of theoretical models may be appropriate?
4. Has sufficient evidence been accumulated to make any policy recommendations and, if so, what are they?

1.7 Preliminary Objectives of the Research

1. To overview the circumstances in which the research problem arose and provide a preliminary explanation of the purpose and scope of the research, identifying key research questions.
2. To review background literature about the theory of fashion (and dress) and the implications of existing theory for research into the

phenomenon of designer fashion.

3. To review such data as Government statistics, commercial/consultancy reports and any other forms of evidence which delineate the designer fashion sector in relation to the clothing industry and overview its commercial status.
4. To refine the focus of the problem statement and research questions following these literature reviews, and to outline the research strategy and procedures to be adopted. To develop an action plan for the research process, and explain the choice of research instruments to be adopted.
5. To conduct exploratory interviews to map the commercial profile of the designer fashion sector, by aggregating information from a sample of enterprises.
6. To observe, describe and report the main events of London Fashion Week, which includes exhibitions and fashion shows. (London Fashion Week is the main promotional event for British designer fashion and a key event in the international fashion calendar).
7. To conduct face to face interviews with designers to explore their perceptions of the contemporary British sector.
8. To overview the scope and significance of the evidence and data in relation to the research questions posed, and the implications of findings for theory, practice and policy formation.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL LITERATURE IN FASHION STUDIES

‘Most people don’t understand that the car industry is in fact a fashion business. It starts with design, not with engineering (Chris Smith, 1998, p.113).’

2.1 Background

The review of literature in this chapter explored which theories of fashion, if any, adequately explained contemporary British designer fashion. Literature about the history of fashion and various theories which purport to explain fashion was found to date back approximately one hundred years. Although these texts are many in number, the academic ‘discipline’ of fashion studies as such was found to be embryonic, especially in relation to the development and application of theory. In the literature there existed many examples of theories poached from other disciplines such as psychology, or economics, and haphazardly applied to fashion phenomena. The result was a plethora of what at best can be described as ‘quasi-theoretical’ and often inter-disciplinary viewpoints which can be thought provoking, but are nonetheless unsystematic and lacking in cohesion.

According to Breward (1995) the specialist literature such as it is has its origins in three sources; 1) ‘art/historical studies’, 2) design history, and more recently 3) cultural studies. Research into historical costume was initially

applied to art history, since the dating of clothes in paintings was a valuable instrument in the process of dating, authentication and connoisseurship of paintings. In consequence, there was a tendency in the earlier histories of fashion to produce what are known as 'hemline histories' which neglected considerations of meaning or context. However, these texts do trace a history of cut and decoration in dress, through empirical and descriptive analysis against which theory could be applied.

Rees and Borzello (1986) stated that 'a new art history' evolved in the late 1970s which prioritised the importance of economic, social and political contexts in relation to the interpretation of paintings; and challenged the old assumptions which previously influenced the direction of traditional fashion history. Whereas these developments in art influenced the newly emergent history of design in taking into account the relationship between production and consumption and the designed object, the study of fashion remained marginal to the wider changes in design history, and indeed to design history generally.

Breward, a male writing in 1995 noted that the Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century Design and Designers (1993 edition) made no significant reference to fashion or fashion designers. He concluded that,

design history as originally taught in art and design colleges has tended to prioritise production in the professional 'masculine' spheres, re-inforcing notions of a subordinate 'feminine' area of interest into which fashion is generally relegated. (Breward, 1995, p3)

Cultural studies and media studies were also identified by Breward (1995) as having contributed to the existing fashion literature. Surprisingly, he did not specifically acknowledge the contributions from other more established social science disciplines such as psychology, economics, anthropology and sociology, although he did state that the tools of social anthropology and semiotics have potential for application in cultural and media studies. I can think of two possible reasons for Breward's omission; perhaps he assumed that these established and respected social science disciplines could be subsumed under the general heading of 'cultural studies' or he viewed the application of these theories to fashion in general as very unsatisfactory. This may possibly be because many fashion texts are authored by either a social scientist who does not understand fashion, or a fashion specialist who does not comprehend social theory.

In the following discussion of the literature the texts have been broadly grouped into categories related to the main theory which is expounded by the various authors to explicate the phenomena of fashion. Therefore, the material has been organised under the following broad headings: social stratification and change; language/linguistics; psychoanalytical perspectives; art/history; and designer 'centred'. However, it must be remembered that many authors draw on several theories. Moreover, some have written more than one relevant text which shows their views have sometimes changed over time. In this way, comments from one fashion theorist may appear in more than one grouping. The summary attempts to critique the literature as a whole, particularly in relation to the focus of this investigation.

2.2 Method

The manual and automated literature sources which were interrogated in the course of undertaking the literature searches for Chapters 2 and 3 are reported and listed in detail in Appendix 3. These sources yielded many texts which could be broadly described as “about fashion”. However, it was necessary to delineate the range of literature to be incorporated in this review to those texts with potential to illuminate the focus of this investigation. Distinctions were made therefore between 1) clothes and fashion 2) couturiers and designers and 3) ‘coffee table’ fashion texts for the general reader and academically orientated texts for fashion specialists:

A distinction was adopted between clothing as "things worn to cover the body" and (generic) fashion, "to make, shape, style or manner whatever is in accord for the time being" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1988 edition) because theories which seek to explain why humans clothe themselves do not necessarily seek to explain ‘fashion’. Similarly, focus was placed upon those theories which sought to explain ‘female fashion’ since female designer fashion was the predominant subject of this enquiry.

The reason for differentiating between ‘couturiers’ and ‘designers’ was because in Britain the term couturier is less commonly used within the sector. The term “designer” was popularised in the sixties. However, the couturier was a precursor of the contemporary designer and since there existed some texts about British couturiers, this literature source was perused at least initially to assess whether the information was relevant to contemporary

British fashion designers.

It was also necessary to distinguish between fashion texts of a superficial kind targeted at the general reader and academically orientated material aimed at fashion specialists. To do this I visited the libraries of three higher education fashion departments with a pre-eminent reputation in undergraduate and postgraduate fashion higher education; St. Martin's School of Art, the Royal College of Art and the London College of Fashion. The library holdings in these three institutions were also quite large but it was feasible to 1) make a preliminary examination of the texts and 2) compare sources across the three colleges to ascertain the common and key entries. Bearing in mind the definitions above, which defined the parameters of this investigation, the review of literature below is a *selective* one.

2.3 Social Stratification and Change

Discussions of the role of fashion in terms of social stratification have the longest history of any of the theories of fashion, stretching from Veblen's work published one hundred years ago up to the current decade. More recent contributions in this section emphasise the role of fashion in relation to social change.

As early as 1899, Thorstein Veblen variously described as an economist or sociologist wrote about "Dress, as an Expression of Pecuniary Culture" in his book entitled The Theory of the Leisure Class. He argued that historic civilisation was motivated by three related things; conspicuous consumption,

conspicuous leisure and conspicuous wealth. Dress had an advantage over other methods of expenditure, because apparel is always in evidence and gives an immediate indication of the financial status of the wearer to other observers.

According to Veblen, the principle of novelty, which is so evident in fashion phenomena is another corollary under the laws of conspicuous waste; if each garment is intended only for a short term, and if none of last season's garments are carried over in to the next, the capacity for wasteful expenditure is greatly increased. Veblen argued that the financial capacity to engage in such conspicuous waste is a status symbol of the leisured classes.

Veblen's theory focused upon the motivational forces underlying fashion rather than the creators of fashion, but fashion in the 1990s clearly *does* represent a powerful display of conspicuous wealth which is internationally recognisable as such. There even exists brand differentiation between expensive designer labels, which is recognisable on the wearer because the "handwriting" of high profile designers has become easily identifiable. The modern designer seeks to make a differentiated 'fashion' statement which is none the less a conspicuous display of wealth.

Veblen (1899) and Georg Simmel (1904) were early proponents of the 'trickle-down' theory of fashion's transmission, although neither actually used the term. According to the theory, through time, fashions created by social elites are adopted by groups lower down the social and economic hierarchy. Relatively recent supporters of the trickle-down theory include Robinson

(1961), although as King (1981) points out, the approach is modified by noting that within social strata the diffusion of new fashion is likely to be horizontal rather than vertical.

In the 1990s Colin McDowell argued in Dressed to Kill - Sex, Power and Clothes (1992) that the predominant message of fashion is one of power, whether it be economic, military or sexual. In his view, the designer labels which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, sold an *illusion* of status and quality, but designers were “confidence tricksters”. According to McDowell, during the 1970s and 1980s when designer labels proliferated:

The skill of the informed fashion aficionado, provided in the character of Cedric in Nancy Mitford's *Love in a Cold Climate* was missing. "Ah, so now we dress at Schiaparelli, I see! Whatever next?" "Cedric, how can you tell?" "My dear, one can always tell. Things have a signature .. I can tell at a glance, literally at a glance" (McDowell, 1992, p.124).

For McDowell, the designer label became a way of identifying "quality" garments and promoting conspicuous consumption. Labels worn on the outside of a garment and logos associated with expensive products are the equivalent of wearing a price ticket because the customer lacked the knowledge to discern the quality of the product in any other way:

Logos added the touch of class. Not only did they tend towards the unity that makes for conformity, confidence and assurance; for people who knew nothing about fashion and had not bothered to develop their taste, they also carried fashion authority (McDowell, 1992, p.125).

In The Face of Fashion, written in 1994, Jennifer Craik questioned whether fashion is really dictated by elite designers. She argued that there was much more to fashion than the narrow market of wealthy women who patronise the

top designers, and that designers *themselves* are influenced by the trickle-up effect of ideas from sub-cultures, mass consumer behaviour and everyday fashion items. Craik stated that she had used an interdisciplinary perspective, to arrive at these conclusions drawing on "cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, art history and social history".

In Fashion, Culture and Identity, written in 1992, Fred Davis argued that much of what we assume to be a matter of individual taste and preference reflects deep cultural and social forces. Modern life has become exceedingly complex and ambivalent because it is characterised by conflict and tension, especially insofar as gender roles, social status and sexuality are concerned. Clothes reflect these tensions and according to Davis, personal appearance is an unpredictable balance between the private self and the public person.

Davis also espouses a version of the trickle down theory, especially in terms of women's fashion, in which the 'fashion cycle' or 'fashion process' consists of a distinct centre whose fashion innovations radiate outwards towards the periphery, for example through 'pret a porter' or diffusion ranges. Davis draws on both historical and secondary source information about leading contemporary designers like Miyake and Versace to support his view that an innovative core remains a key element within the 'fashion system', in spite of the growing emphasis on polycentrism in fashion which has developed since the 1960s.

In their book Fashion and Anti-Fashion, written in 1978, Ted Polhemus and Lynn Proctor have argued that different people will have different attitudes to

change, which is made explicit through dress. To substantiate this claim, they compared the Queen's coronation dress in 1947 with the "New Look" created by Dior in the artificial modish early fifties. The first example is described as a traditional, fixed anti-fashion statement and the second as a symbol "of change, progress and movement through time (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978, p.12)."

For Polhemus and Proctor, these two systems of dress are based upon alternative concepts of time, and it is entirely appropriate that the Queen should choose a gown that symbolises changelessness and continuity, since she has little personal interest in seeing the status quo change. A social climber, however, would select a different type of dress. According to Polhemus and Proctor, fashion and anti-fashion are: "Based upon and project alternative concepts and models of time (1978, p.13)" and so:

His or her fashionable attire constitutes an advertisement for socio-temporal mobility and will remain so as long as he or she stands to benefit from social change rather than the social status quo (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978, p.13).

In his more recent book Streetstyle published to coincide with the 'streetstyle' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1994-1995, Polhemus boldly asserted that, "high culture has given way to popular culture. (Polhemus, 1994, p6)." While Dior's 'new look' of 1947 is said to typify the 'trickle down' process in the dissemination of fashion trends, Polhemus cites the 'Perfecto' motorcycle jacket of the late 1940s and early 1950s as an example of the countervailing 'bubble-up' process.

According to Polhemus, a 'supermarket of style' has been created on the sidewalk, with some 44 groupings identified in Polhemus's flowchart stretching from the 1940s to the (early) 1990s (see Polhemus, 1994, p136-137). Moreover, those who frequent the 'supermarket of style',

... display... a stylistic promiscuity which is breathtaking in its casualness. 'Punks' one day, 'Hippies' the next, the fleeting leap across decades and ideological divides - conveying the history of streetstyle into a vast theme park. (Polhemus, 1994, p131)

While observers like Polhemus (1994) and academics like Wolf (1990) have argued that fashion pluralism and polycentrism are *now* the key drivers in fashion development, a *robust theoretical* alternative to the trickle-down view is illusive.

The (late) sociologist, Herbert Blumer, attempted to develop an alternative theoretical approach to the trickle-down model in the 1960s. His theory is one of 'collective selection'. While fashion may serve the role of class differentiation, in Blumer's view, this is of limited importance in fashion's overall sweep. Rather fashion, and women's clothing in particular, are a generic process permeating many areas of social life, and closely allied with modernity. Moreover, fashion fulfils useful social roles (its 'societal role'), although he does not attribute direct causality to fashion's function.

Thus Blumer argues:

The efforts of an elite class to set itself apart in appearance takes place inside of the movement of fashion instead of being its cause. The prestige of elite groups, in place of setting the direction of the fashion movement, is effective only to the extent to which they are recognised as representing and portraying the movement. The people in other

classes who consciously follow the movement do so because it is the fashion and not because of the separate prestige of the elite group. The fashion dies not because it has been discarded by the elite group but because it gives way to a new model more consonant with developing taste. *The fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has goodstanding, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world.* (Blumer, 1969, p.281).

Surprisingly in view of its 30 year history, Blumer's collective selection theory remains vague and unsatisfactory. Stages in the development of the fashion process are not identified or differentiated from each other. The key actors in the process are never clearly described. In short, the theory remains underdeveloped perhaps because it is untested empirically.

2.4 Language and Linguistics

The view that fashion should be analysed primarily as language also stretches back to the First World War. Saussure, a Swiss linguist, explained language as a coded system of signs because messages must be expressed in forms that can be useful when analysing non-verbal communication such as clothing and decoration. This theory is the antecedent, acknowledged or not, of subsequent theses which emphasize fashion as a system of communication.

According to Saussure in Cours de Linguistique (1916), a sign is made up of two parts, the message bearing physical form, and the message itself. Words, letters and sounds are signs which can be perceived but which represent something else, the message. Communication, whether through words or

clothes, is only possible through a system of signs when a given community understands and shares the same meaning. The perceptible element of the sign conveys different meanings to different cultural groups. Moreover, signs operate not as isolated units, but as parts of sets. Clothing is a sign or set of signs and so is designer fashion, which may be interpreted so rapidly that the process is unconscious.

A valuable theoretical contribution to the linguistic theory of fashion was made by the anthropologist Leach, who in Culture and Communication (1976) set out to analyse *how* culture was communicated. His views are particularly useful in explaining non-verbal aspects of communication such as clothing and body decoration.

Leach argued that three aspects can be distinguished in human behaviour: biological activities of the body, such as breathing and heart beat; technical actions, which affect the material world outside oneself, such as digging a hole or boiling an egg; and 'expressive actions' which say something about the world and thus 'communicate'.

In his definition of 'expressive actions', Leach included not only verbal utterances and gestures, but also behaviour such as putting on jewellery or a uniform. He argued that these three kinds of actions are never wholly separable; in that the action of breathing 'says' that 'I am alive'. Thus the action of wearing clothes, which for Malinowski was a protective biological action, in Leach's view was also expressive behaviour.

Leach proposed that the non-verbal aspects of culture such as clothing are organised in a way that is comparable to language, and that rules exist which govern the wearing of clothes in the same way that grammatical rules govern speech. However, he noted some important differences. In particular the fact that non-verbal communication is more limited and its structures simpler than spoken language:

The grammatical rules which govern speech utterances are such that anyone with a fluent command of language can generate spontaneously entirely new sentences with the confident expectation that he will be understood by his audience. This is *not* the case with most forms of non-verbal communication. Customary conventions can only be understood if they are familiar ... a newly invented "symbolic statement" of a non-verbal kind will fail to convey information to others until it has been explained by other means (Leach, 1976, p.11).

In The Language of Clothes (1981) Lurie attempted to develop a 'Vocabulary of Fashion' in which she compared archaic words, foreign words, slang or vulgar words, adjectives and adverbs, changes in vocabulary, eccentric and conventional speech, eloquence and bad taste, lies, magical invocations, neurotic and free speech with items of clothing and styles of dress. She was apparently unaware of her debt to Saussure and Leach, since neither are quoted by name in her sources. Although Lurie asserted that the language of clothes has a structure in its grammar, she simply equated words with garments.

Lurie claimed clothing signs can communicate meanings about sex, occupation, age, social groups, ethnic origin, peer groups, religious groups, political groups, role, status, political leadership and the occasion or time of day. Thus:

Members of any group are expected to look like members by their fellows and by outsiders except in very special circumstances. In some cases the group imposes or generates a style of dress which signifies membership; in others the group is formed by selecting people whose appearance already suggests they are "one of us" or "our kind of people" (Lurie, 1981, p.37).

Lurie also attempted to theorise about the relationship of clothing as an expressive sign to the needs of individuals. In Western culture she said there has been, and continues to be, a highly developed sense of individualism which operates in the context of individual freedom, and dress is an important aspect of individual expression. Some sociologists have argued that the self is continuously created and re-created in each social situation. For example, Bergler has claimed that:

The person's biography appears to us an uninterrupted sequence of stage performances; played to different audiences, sometimes involving drastic changes of costume, always demanding that the actor be what he is playing (Bergler, 1953, p.121).

Lurie suggested that people use clothing to create different impressions of themselves in different situations and that creating a favourable impression can, in turn, increase their own self esteem.

However, as Polhemus and Proctor have pointed out in their social stratification orientated work Fashion and Anti-Fashion, while fashion is "a language system", it is a less than developed one and, "A full grasp of the structure - grammatical rules - of the fashion language is not yet possible. (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978, p19)."

Modern structuralists like Barthes have readily assimilated clothing communication into the linguistic model of Saussure. Moreover, Barthes

(1983) has argued that all fashion, irrespective of its symbolic content, gravitates towards 'designification' or the destruction of meaning. Fashion has the ability to induce others to follow it, and thus soon sterilizes whatever significance its signifiers had before becoming objects of fashion. From this viewpoint sheer display displaces significance. Barthes's individualistic perspective presents a considerable challenge to the prevailing view that coherent symbolic communication processes are at work in fashion and culture.

2.5 Psycho-Analytical Perspectives

Psycho-analytically based theories of fashion date back to the 1930s, and this area remains one of the most active with several important contributions, primarily focussed on the erotic impact of fashion, being made by Valerie Steele in the 1980s and 1990s.

Flugel's The Psychology of Clothes (1930) is widely regarded as a 'classic' text and frequently referred to by other subsequent authors. While acknowledging that clothes were worn for protection and modesty as well as decoration, Flugel argued that the interrelationship between these motives was vital and decoration and modesty were in some ways opposed. Moreover, this binary opposition implied that our attitude to clothes was ambivalent. Clothes were a compromise and the conflict was central to understanding the psychology of clothes, which, for example both cover the body and enhance the body's beauty.

Whilst adjustments and disturbances between the competing tendencies to modesty and exhibitionism were represented in successive fashions, Flugel argued the motivating force for all fashion was natural, sexual and social competitive tendencies:

There can be little doubt that the ultimate and essential cause of fashion lies in competition: competition of a social and sexual kind, in which the social elements are more obvious and manifest and the sexual elements more indirect, concealed and unavowed... (Flugel, 1930, p.138)

A key element in Flugel's theory of fashion is that decoration has both a sexual and social value. Thus whilst accepting that clothes may enhance the sexual attractiveness of the wearer, he claims that many decorative features of clothing were originally connected with wearing trophies, inspiring awe, displaying rank or wealth. It is natural, argued Flugel, for one class to aspire to the position of the class above, in the first instance by copying their clothing, "the paradox of fashion is that everyone is trying to be like and unlike his fellow man" (Flugel, 1930, p.140).

According to Flugel, if and when new ideas are taken up, they become 'fashion' because they express certain ideals of the time, although (as with other symbols) this recognition is not necessarily conscious. In this way, fashion links with and expresses group as well as individual psychology, in much the same way as architecture or interior design. Unfortunately, Flugel does not explore the tension or ambiguity which can emerge between individual and group psychologies. However, he provides examples of the way in which new fashions may represent the ideals of a given time. For example, Dior's 'New Look' replaced the austerity of the war years with full

skirted femininity in the 1950s.

Flugel argued that the phenomena of fashion as such began with the discovery that clothes could be used as a compromise between exhibitionism and modesty. Successive changes in fashion emphasise different parts of the female anatomy. However, the influence of the fashion innovator is effective only when his or her ideals resonate with the wearer:

In the language of psycho-analysis, they must project their own super-ego out to the person who exercises the suggestive influence. The use of suggestion, in the launching of a fashion, as in any other case, depends partly upon the intrinsic prestige of the suggester and partly upon the alternative value of what he suggests. (Flugel, 1930, p.152).

In his Modesty in Dress (1969), James Laver presented an alternative theory arguing that the primary function of clothes for males was to attribute status and for females to emphasise sexual allure. Laver identified these theories as 'the Hierarchical Principle' and 'the Seduction Principle'. According to Laver, in patriarchal society, the differentiated role of the sexes used to be reflected in dress, but female emancipation has blurred social, political and economic differences between the sexes, such that differences in dress have been modified.

Laver arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that the primary reason for wearing clothes was not modesty but the opposite, self-aggrandisement, which takes a different form for males and females. Throughout history, men have chosen their partners in life by their attractiveness as women. Women have chosen men for their capacity to maintain and protect them. Hence women's clothes have been governed by what he calls the Seduction Principle, and are

“sex conscious” clothes. Men’s clothes, on the other hand, are governed by the Hierarchical Principle and are “class conscious”. “Modesty is an inhibitory impulse ... it is the enemy of Swagger and Seduction (Laver, 1969, p.13).”

Laver discussed the rise of the couturier in the eighteenth century, who was the forerunner of the designer milieu. The first male couturier, Worth, was an Englishman who established a business in France and became a "dictator of fashion" to society women. A ‘business’ innovation was that unlike earlier dressmakers, he did not deign to visit his clients but had sufficient social prestige to insist that they called upon him. The collection of his prints and drawings held at the Victoria and Albert Museum shows Worth to have been an originator. The success of Worth encouraged others to follow suit and by the end of the eighteenth century there were 1,500 couturiers in Paris.

Laver described the clients who patronised Worth, such as the Empress Eugéne and the "grandes cocottes" as the aristocracy. To be dressed by Worth was very expensive and rich aristocratic husbands or lovers paid the bills. The couturier and his clientele were thus part of an economic and social elite and the conspicuous consumption of the males was displaced upon the females, whether wives or mistresses. He concluded that,

there is something in the story of the clothes we wear which is beyond our comprehension and certainly beyond the control of our conscious minds. This is the reason of its importance and the secret of its perennial fascination. (Laver, 1969, p.43).

The feminist perspective adds another dimension to psycho-analytically orientated theories of fashion. Two feminist authors, Evans and Thornton,

writing in the late 1980s provide an invaluable survey of feminism's *rejection* of fashion in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was only with the invention of punk in 1976 that the debate about fashion (and dress) in feminism was re-opened:

Punk women were both highly conflicted and yet outside cultural norms. If fashion is one of the many costumes of the masquerade of femininity, then those costumes can be worn on the street as semiotic battledress. (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p14).

Wilson (1985) has noted, there is ambivalence about fashion within feminism, which may, ultimately be an appropriate response:

This ambivalence is that of contradictory and irreconcilable desires... Fashion - a performance art - acts as a vehicle for this ambivalence; the daring of fashion speaks dread as well as desire; the shell of chic, the aura of glamour, always hides a wound. (Wilson, 1985, p246)
Such ambivalence has also been noted by those theorists who hold a social stratification perspective, such as Davies (1992) discussed earlier in this chapter.

The erotic messages and meaning communicated in and through fashion have been emphasised increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus Valerie Steele has stressed: "At the deepest level, the meaning of clothes in general and fashion in particular is also erotic. (Steele, 1985a, p5)" and "I have found the psychological theory of human sexuality to be particularly helpful. (Steele, 1985a, p8)."

While art theorists have stressed that "any article that shocks our sensibilities can be a fetish" (Apter and Pietz, 1993, cover), until the 1990s no scholar with

an in-depth knowledge of fashion had studied actual clothing fetishes themselves. Thus, as a cultural historian specialising in fashion, Valerie Steele is interested in “exploring fashion as a symbolic system linked to the expression of sexuality - both sexual behaviour (including erotic attraction) and gender identity. (Steele, 1996, p4)”

Steele argued that, among the elements of fantasy often exhibited by fashion, “sexual themes, in particular, have become increasingly noticeable. (Steele, 1996, p4)”, although she offers no evidence to support this theory. She notes that contemporary designers frequently copy the style, if not the spirit of fetishism and so “... to understand contemporary fashion, it is crucial to explore fetishism. (Steele, 1996, p5)”. While the concept of erotic fetishism was originated in the late nineteenth century by scholars studying sexual deviation, Steele stresses that fetishism “... is not only ‘about’ sexuality; it is also very much about power and perception. (Steele, 1996, p5)”.

In her analysis of fashion, sexuality and fetishism, Steele focuses on four items of clothing: corsets; shoes/boots; underwear; and materials such as fur, PVC and leather, noting both the change and continuity present in fetish fashion, for example, the continued interest in corsets long after their disappearance from mainstream fashion, if not the avant garde (see Steele, 1996, p6). The argument that “Fetish fashion draws attention to the sexual aspects of the body, while simultaneously restricting access to them. (Steele, 1996, p193)” adds yet another dimension to Davis’s (1992) argument on the essential cultural ambivalence surrounding fashion’s messages.

However, Steele's analysis is less convincing on another level. If, as she claims,

... the attraction that many women have for fashion - and fetish fashion, in particular - may be related to their desire to assert themselves as independent sexual beings. (Steele, 1996, p164), it seems strange that, the overwhelming majority of fetishists are men. Most women who wear fetish costumes seem to do so either for direct economic reasons (i.e. they are professional sex workers) or to please their husbands or boyfriends. (Steele, 1996, p171)

2.6 Fashion and Art

Ribeiro, an art historian, has emphasised the relationship between dress - "the most fleeting of arts (Ribeiro, 1995, p3)" - and art, if only, ultimately because "both communicate by sight. Ribeiro (1995), p236." Thus, especially in portraiture, the focus for Ribeiro's study, the finished work "... represents the joint contribution of artist, sitter and costume. (Ribeiro, 1995, p236)".

As noted earlier, the cultural historian Breward (1995) is (rightly) critical of the way in which traditional art history has influenced much fashion writing, because it has resulted in what has come to be known as "hemline histories", and stresses the potential impact of the "new art history" tradition (which has developed since the late 1970s) which emphasise social and political contexts.

The focus of "hemline" historians on historical trends is perhaps most readily illustrated in a book by Cremer-van der Does (1980), who devotes only seven pages out of a total of one hundred and twenty eight to the fashion period since 1945. Likewise, the social and economic environment's impact on fashion is well illustrated by Cremer-van der Does:

French fashion magazines featured seductive pictures of 'trench-wear': soft woollen dressing gowns which one could put on hastily in the case of an air-raid... For a slender 'line' this was an advantageous time due to the wartime rationing of food. (Cremer-van der Does, 1980, p121)

However, Cremer-van der Does has also argued the status symbol role of fashion has developed in the 1990s:

The time when fashion served to indicate rank and social positions is past: democracy no longer desires it, and furthermore the news media see to it that everyone knows when X or Y has reached a higher rung on the social ladder. They no longer need to demonstrate this through ample, costly garments and plumed hats. (Cremer-van der Does, 1980, p.124)

Whilst it may be true that today fashion is not the sole barometer of rank amongst political social and media elites, nonetheless the news media provide an ideal vehicle for celebrity figures to flaunt designer fashions.

Ribeiro's historical research on fashion and art in England and France from 1750 to 1820 applies principles from the new art history, drawing examples from portraiture during what was the most dramatic period of political and social change seen in Europe (prior to the twentieth century). These changes led "to a new emphasis on the individual (Ribeiro, 1995, p.29)."

Ribeiro (1986) theorizes about art historian's view on the development of social customs and taboos including clothing, and, in particular the impact of notions of what is immoral, defined as "clothing that is sexually disturbing. (Ribeiro, 1986, p.12)". He claims that men's dress has been subject to relatively minor changes, although the wearing of bathing trunks (slips) in mixed bathing areas was not accepted until the 1930s. However, although the last really fierce religiously inspired attack on the morality of women's

clothing styles was in 1931, Ribeiro stresses the continuing reflection of sexual morality in (women's) clothing.

Thus, in spite of the 'anything goes' cry of (excessive?) individualism, Ribeiro argues that,

... there is still a surprising consensus of what 'decency' in dress means, that there are limits to the display of the primary sexual organs. While we are still bound by our Judaeo-Christian heritage in this respect, one cannot see much radical change in our attitudes, although we may talk incessantly about a Brave New World in which considerations of sex, class and age cannot be distinguished by clothing. Nor is it possible to dispense as easily as we might like with our accumulated traditions and assumptions regarding dress as an indication of morality. (Ribeiro, 1986, p.171).

In Breward's view the new cultural history "presents a more questioning framework... allowing explanations which are multi-layered and open-ended" and avoiding "reductive connections" between social influences and fashionable appearance, (1995, p4). However, even he draws a sharp distinction between discussion of the cultural and social significance of fashion concepts and the design and production of fashion goods. Indeed, "A description of the construction and production of dress and textiles is generally left to others (Breward, 1995, p.5)", presumably non art-historians?

2.7 The Designer's Role

As noted earlier, the emergence of the term fashion "designer" (as opposed to couturier) in the 1960s and the proliferation of designer labels in the 1970s and 1980s, led McDowell (1992) to speculate that their social role is that of

“confidence tricksters”. However, there is little supporting evidence for this claim in terms of empirical data on the attitude, skills, training or policies of individual designers even in McDowell’s provocative framework.

In their book, Evans and Thornton (1989) have carried out a feminist analysis of the various fashion ‘images’ which have emerged since the appearance of punk, but in the final two chapters their focus shifts dramatically towards the work of individual (named) women designers.

In particular they examine the lives and work of three Paris based designers who worked in haute couture in the 1920s and 1930s. These are Madeleine Vionnet, who established her own firm in 1912 and shut down forever in 1939, Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel who opened her first shop in 1913 and whose career spanned half a century before her death in 1971, and Elsa Schiaparelli who was born in Italy in 1883, settled in Paris in the 1920s, spent the war in the USA, but reopened her couture house from 1945 to 1954 before dying in 1973.

Although Evans and Thornton provide a fascinating and descriptive account of the work of these three great couturiers, their material is necessarily drawn from secondary sources. More surprisingly in view of their earlier discussion of (feminist) theory, there is little attempt to relate the discussion of the couturiers’ work to feminist theory. When theorists are quoted in the text, their statements are set out in general terms so that their application to the work of Vionnet or Schiaparelli is reliant on the authors’ interpretation.

Thus, for instance, the reader is told that Schiaparelli's sense of fashion was derived from her understanding of clothes as costume, and as performance. The concept of 'theatricality' is used to argue that a woman can disguise herself by flaunting herself, thus putting a distance between herself and her observers. Evans and Thornton then quote Mary Ann Doane as pointing out that, "... the masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. (Doane, 1982, p.81)" in support of their view that the theory explains Schiaparelli's 'theatrical' styling, although the focus of Doane's analysis is the film sector *not fashion*.

Only in their final chapter do Evans and Thornton turn their undivided attention to living contemporary women designers, with a discussion of the work of Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo (of Comme des Garçons). Unfortunately this is one of the less satisfactory elements in their work because the fashion analysis offered is tantalising but given to generalisations. Thus Evans and Thornton's readers are told that: "... Westwood is clearly attracted to any form of dress that is 'outcast' (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p.148)"; while Kawakubo's work may be read as a meditation on 'sexiness' and what it is about (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p.159).

In Seeing Through Clothes (1975) Anne Hollander noted that the French invented the concept of a dress designer:

In the middle of the nineteenth century the French invented, fostered, and spread the idea of a dress designer as an original genius, like a painter - someone totally responsible for his creations. Then, custom-designed clothes were more like paintings, elaborate, full of tiny detail, and were bought by the same clientele. (Hollander, 1975, p351)

However, Hollander noted that there are always uncertainties which surround the modern designer's role (in the literature):

It has been thought that designers dictate to a gullible public. But many expensive and pretentious designers fail where one succeeds, and successful designers also perpetually risk failure in their attempts to seize and direct even a small portion of public taste in personal looks. The truly successful designer has an instinct for visualising sharply what is perhaps nebulously and unconsciously desired. Designers, it must be remembered, exist and work at all levels, not just at the top under the limelight. Most cheap blouses and shirts have been specially designed for the main market, not copied from high-priced versions. Designers of such goods, most of them unknown to the public by name, are the real successes in fashion... (Hollander, 1975, p.351).

Polhemus and Proctor however appeared to believe that fashion was a self-sustaining process, which even the designers cannot control:

The introduction of any fashion innovation must respect and relate to the fashion changes which have come before. In this sense, neither designers nor the fashionable are in charge and in control of fashion change. Fashion is to a large extent running its own show, and one can only choose to get on or get off the fashion merry-go-round - if, indeed, even this is really a matter of personal choice. (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978, p.16).

Similarly in 1980 Cremer-van der Does felt compelled to ask questions about the phenomena of fashion which cannot be explained purely by reference to designers:

... why do people in Moscow and in New York simultaneously insist on a specific pair of fashionable spectacle frames? Why do men in Norway and in Argentina get excited about a jacket with *narrow* lapels at the same time, and why are those jackets in demand again a few years later all over the world? (i.e. in those parts of the world where Western clothes are worn). Why do women in Mexico suddenly want skirts with pleats or godets, and why do those in Australia and Spain

want exactly the same thing? Is it because the news media make rapid communications so easy? Indeed not. It has always been so. Around 1910 all the women in the Western world bent forward simultaneously and pulled their back muscles together in order to achieve the *droit devant* figure. This book offers no solution to this puzzle. (Cremer-van der Does, 1980, p.128).

Anne Hollander also noted that: "Apparently fashion is in its nature able to change by itself. What, then, actually creates the changes? (Hollander, 1975, p.350)." More recently, Valerie Steele conceded:

I realise that it remains somewhat unsatisfactory to say that 'fashion did it', but I am reluctant to engage in extended speculation about the reasons for the relative autonomy of fashion. (Steele, 1985a, p.5).

Why a given "line" succeeds at one time remains obscure. Thus:

After 1945... the 'New Look' arrived. Yards and yards of fabric from circular skirts suddenly swing around us. Dior had tried in vain to introduce that silhouette in 1938, but he succeeded the second time around. (Cremer-van der Does, 1980, p.122).

Some prominent British designers in the twentieth century, notably Zandra Rhodes since the 1960s and Vivienne Westwood since the 1970s have borrowed from and inspired street fashion (in the latter designer's case, contributing to both the 'punk' and 'new romantics' themes). However, Davies for one argued that the undeniable economic power of the international fashion conglomerates with their multi-billion dollar annual revenues, "... make it nearly impossible for students to dispense with the fashion system model in anything like its entirety. (Davis, 1992, p.205)."

In Dressed to Kill, McDowell (1992) noted that not all designers become "big names" with their own labels and that many industrial designers work anonymously in "high street" fashion houses with brand labels. However, the

popular view held that designer fashion provided elite fashion, with an elite clientele of wealthy women. These fashion designers were viewed as uniquely equipped to interpret the ambiguities, conflicts and fantasies of their following of wealthy international women.

As Davis points out:

although one can locate hundreds of scholarly articles and books on fashion, one almost never comes upon, for example, an ethnographic, or other sort of close-in study of a fashion house, a fashion publication, store buyers, or a retail establishment where new fashions are sold. Some noteworthy exceptions are provided by (Edith) Kovats (1987), who published some material from her field research on a Paris fashion house, and (Kevin) Peretz (1989), who has reported on the selling of fashionable wear in Paris retail establishments. (Davis, 1992, p.115 footnote 11).

What Davis fails to add is that both these Paris based studies have only appeared in French.

A few authorised and unauthorised biographies of individual British designers have been published, e.g. on Vivienne Westwood, and, perhaps at the other stylistic extreme, Anne Sebba (1990) on the interior design of Laura Ashley (her other subjects have included Margot Fonteyn and Mother Theresa of Calcutta). However, material written by or quoted directly from designers themselves is neither common nor comprehensive.

As well as the sources listed in Appendix 3, Martin (1995) was consulted for publications by the 80 British and 3 Irish designers listed. Excluding corporate entries, like Aquascutum and Burberrys, only 16 designers were found who had published material *under their own authorship*, i.e. in which they spoke for themselves rather than being the subject of a publication.

Six of these designers had written articles (in Vivienne Westwood's case, five), but these were overwhelmingly short press or magazine pieces. Only ten designers had book authorship credits. Moreover, in many cases these were commercially focused spin-offs promoting their designs or related products. For example, Mary Quant (1984 and 1986) on colours and make-up and Sally Tuffin (1978, jointly with Anne Ladbury) on children's clothes, or simply 'life-style' pieces, and milliner and designer David Shilling's (1986) guide to 'luxury living'.

Considered *autobiographical or stylistic volumes* by designers appeared to be rare, and excluding royal couturiers like Hardy Amies (1954 and 1984) and Norman Hartnell (1955 and 1971), such studies by *contemporary* British designers are *very scarce indeed*. They consist of Mary Quant's autobiography dates from 1966, Jean Muir's from 1981, Zandra Rhodes's (jointly authored) review of her own art from 1984 and Bruce Oldfield's (joint) account of a season from 1987.

2.8 Summary of Findings

Over the last 100 years, theories of fashion (many of which are rooted in the history of fashion) have developed in terms of complexity and scope. In general terms, the importance of shelter, modesty and protection have been downplayed, while the roles of fashion in decoration, expression, communication/language, sexuality and social competition have been emphasised. For the purposes of this investigation about contemporary British designer fashion, it was necessary to distinguish between clothing as

‘things worn to cover the body’ and fashion “to make, shape, style or manner whatever is in accord for the time being. (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1988).”

With a very few, recent, exceptions, the relevant theory of literature takes only limited account of the distinction between the apparel sector generally and fashion, let alone the various distinct sub-groups within the fashion sector of which designer fashion is only one. It identifies in most cases a single, or at least primary, motivating factor which “explains” fashion (e.g. sexual attractiveness/competition). The theories are seldom (if ever) *tested* using objective data or contemporary evidence. The focus is on the underlying motivations of the consumers, either individually, in groups or across society generally. Essentially, therefore the emphasis is on the psychological and social factors underpinning the *demand* for fashion goods from consumers whilst issues related to the supply side were remarkably neglected.

CHAPTER 3

COMMERCIAL STATUS OF THE DESIGNER SECTOR

‘Culture and creativity are vital to our national life. We have long seen the value which creative people bring to our lives, through the employment of their skill and the exercise of their imagination. (Chris Smith, 1998, p.002)’

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the available published statistical evidence and reports on the clothing and designer sectors, in order to complement the literature on the theory of fashion reviewed in Chapter 2. Its purpose was to set the designer sector in the broader clothing industry context and identify the weaknesses in currently available quantitative information on the designer sector. As such it forms the broad base of a conceptual "pyramid" leading - at its "apex" - to the contemporary designer sector described and discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter ends with a summary of key findings from the literature which explored the commercial status of the sector in this research.

Some of the data and reports reviewed below were available before this investigation was designed and developed in 1995. Others only become available when the analysis was nearing completion in early 1999.

3.2 Method

The manual and automatic literature searches undertaken for this chapter and chapter 2 are listed in Appendix 3. The starting point for any industrial sector analysis is inevitably the published official (government) statistics. Relevant sources were identified from the 1996 and 1998 editions of the comprehensive Guide to Official Statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics, in Sheffield University Library, Sheffield, South Yorkshire. This is the main substantive published volume covering *all* official UK statistics.

The industrial statistics are collected on the basis of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC, first promulgated in post-war form in 1948 and revised periodically since to reflect changes in technology and the economic importance of sectors). The SIC draws a distinction between manufacturing/production sectors and distribution and other service activities, with separate census (complete count) publications covering enterprises in production (Census of Production) and distribution (Census of Distribution)

In 1992 a new version of the Standard Industrial Classification was introduced superceding the 1980 SIC which provided the basis for data over the period 1980 to 1992 inclusive. As well as breaking the historical data set, the new SIC's introduction has delayed somewhat the publication of official statistics so that those published in 1996 only related to 1993. Inspection of the Guide, a literature review at the Department of Trade and Industry Library in London, telephone calls to the Business Statistics Office in Newport, Gwent and visits to the Office for National Statistics library in London also revealed other

official statistical sources.

These data, notably from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Small Firms Statistics Unit in Sheffield, relate to small enterprises (and are thus of particular significance for the clothing sector), international trade flows and textiles and clothing (the Bulletin of Textile and Clothing Statistics, published until 1991). These were supplemented by more up to date data extracted from more general statistical publications, notably the (annual) Family Expenditure Survey, in order to gain a better insight into the clothing sector's market.

Previous research (Tyte, 1991) had revealed the existence of only a single quantitative survey based study of the British designer sector - the Kurt Salmon study published in 1991. Towards the end of this research additional reports became available which focused on designer fashion, rather than clothing or fashion more generally; Coates (1997), DCMS (1998) and Cheshire (1998).

3.3 Statistical Overview of the Clothing Industry

Statistical information on production industries (the Census of Production) is collected by the Business Statistics Office/Central Statistical Office/Office for National Statistics. Between 1980 and 1992 this was on the basis of the 1980 version of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). However, from 1993 onwards the Census of Production used the new 1992 SIC. These data can be used to define the clothing industry and gain an overview of its size.

Businesses are allocated according to the *main activity* in which they are engaged, with more digits giving more detailed sub-groupings. Under the 1980 SIC the main Footwear and Clothing Industries Classification (SIC 45) two digit Group, included a 3 digit category (SIC 453), covering 'clothing, hats and gloves'. This in turn was sub-divided into some 9 activity headings (at 4 digit levels). The 1992 SIC category 18 covering "manufacture of wearing apparel" also covered nine sub headings.

There is overlap between the two SIC categories. Essentially the 1992 SIC grouped clothing activities into outerwear and underwear and categorised men's and women's wear separately. Most of the categories were previously within the 1980 clothing manufacturing sub-groups (4531 to 4539). However, some minor categories from knitted textiles and fur have been added under the new unified men's or women's categories. The manufacturing base of the statistics is illustrated by the way in which retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking and workrooms attached to retail shops are *excluded* from the 1980 SIC Group 453 and classified as part of 645 ie retail distribution of clothing.

The size distribution of enterprises in 1992 SIC Division 18 'Manufacture of Wearing Apparel, Dressing and Dyeing of Fur' in 1996, the last year for which full Census of Production data are available, is summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Size of Enterprises in 18 "Manufacture of Wearing Apparel; Dressing and Dyeing of Fur" 1996

Number of Employees	Number of Employers (%)	Gross Output (£ million) (%)	Employment (000s) (%)
1-99	8,186 (97.7)	2,946 (47.7)	85 (52.3)
100-199	89	446 (7.2)	13 (8.0)
200-499	62	753 (12.2)	18 (11.3)
500-999	26	902 (14.6)	18 (11.0)
1,000 or more	16	1,126 (18.2)	29 (17.8)
Total	8377	6173	162

Source: ONS (1998) PA1002

Overall clothing manufacturing was made up of almost 8,400 enterprises employing some 162,000 people and producing output worth some £6,200 million. As in most UK industries, the overwhelming proportion of enterprises were small (1-99 employees) - 97%. Such small enterprises accounted for significant proportions of the industry's total output (48%) and employment (53%).

In 1996, the average clothing enterprise employed 19 people and had an annual gross output of £737,000. Only 42 enterprises were "large" (with 500 or more employees using the European Union's definition), but these accounted for one third of the industry's output and 29% of total employment. On average, such

large firms employed 1,120 people and produced output worth over £48 million.

As Table 7 shows, according to the Census of Production in 1996, the largest single activity section within Division 18 was 18.22/2, the manufacture of "other women's outerwear". Some 3,052 enterprises with 50,000 employees (31% of the overall total for clothing as a whole) produced output worth £1.6 billion (26% of the industry's total output).

Activity 18.22/1, the manufacture of "other men's outerwear" ranked second in importance to women's outerwear in terms of output (with £1.4 billion or 23% of the Division 18 total), whereas category 18.24/2 "manufacture of other wearing apparel" ranked second in terms of enterprise numbers, with 2,450 enterprises.

As stated earlier, the latest comprehensive Census of Production data available at the time of writing cover 1996. For the "core" clothing production sector - Sub-Division 18.2 "Manufacture of other wearing Apparel and Accessories" - the size distribution of enterprises is summarised in Table 8 this "core" sector comprised over 8,100 enterprises employing 161,000 people and producing total output worth over £6.1 billion. Over 98% of the industry's enterprises employed fewer than 100 people (and would be therefore regarded as "small" in European Union statistical terms). Such small enterprises accounted for 30% of overall output and 41% of employment. In 1996, enterprises in the 18.2 "core" clothing sub-division on average employed just under 20 people and produced output worth £753,000.

Table 7: Clothing Industries 1996

SIC Industry	No. Enterprise Groups	No. Enterprises	Gross Output £m	Employees 000s
18.1 Manufacture of Leather Clothes	205	205	25	0.9
18.2 Manufacture of Other Wearing Apparel and Accessories	8018	8119	6113	161
18.2/10 Manufacture of Workwear	477	481	460	13
18.22/1 Manufacture of Other Men's Outerwear	903	910	1390	31
18.22/2 Manufacture of Other Women's Outerwear	3025	3052	1608	50
18.23/1 Manufacture of Men's Underwear	158	162	513	13
18.23/2 Manufacture of Women's Underwear	912	923	1047	27
18.24/1 Manufacture of Hats	141	141	135	3
18.24/2 Manufacture of Other Wearing Apparel and Accessories	2442	2450	961	25
3.3 Dressing and Dyeing of Fur, Manufacture of Articles of Fur	53	53	35	0.6

Source: ONS (1998) PA 1002

3.4 The Designer Sector in the British Clothing Industry Context

In the United Kingdom, a “designer” is more usually understood as someone who contributes an individual image, usually including his/her name, to a range of fashion products; in the process the designer becomes sufficiently well known to show his garments regularly at design shows and exhibitions (KSA, 1991). "British" is here defined as any designer company which is registered

in the United Kingdom, and may therefore include Scottish, Irish and Welsh firms, although it is recognised that the sampling, production and showing of collections may take place elsewhere in Europe.

Table 8: Size of Enterprises in 18.2 "Manufacture of Other Wearing Apparel and Accessories" 1996

Number of Employees	Number of Enterprise Groups (%)	Number of Enterprises (%)	Gross Output (£ million) (%)	Employment (000s) (%)
1-99	7,886 (98.3)	7,908 (97.4)	2,190 (35.8)	66 (41.3)
100-199	85	90	432 (7.1)	12 (7.3)
200-499	57	59	662 (10.8)	17 (10.6)
500-999	35	43	1,287 (21.0)	27 (16.8)
1,000 or more	12	19	1,543 (25.2)	39 (24.3)
Total	8018	8119	6113	161

Source: ONS PACSTAT (1998)

The designer industry clearly forms a part of the British clothing industry, albeit a very small part estimated at between 2 and 3 per cent of the whole industry. The clothing sector as a whole manufactures and markets many apparel items which are not fashion items, e.g. uniforms.

The 1980 SIC sub-divides “clothing, hats and gloves” manufacturing into nine categories, which distinguish between men’s and women’s wear, waterproof outerwear, tailored and light outerwear, etc. However, fashion item production cannot be readily delineated within this scheme which provides only a basic division by gender, age and purpose e.g. outerwear versus underwear. No distinction is made between fashion and clothing garments let alone between the various categories within fashion, such as basic fashion, fashion, high fashion and designer fashion.

Dress codes in the United Kingdom and elsewhere have altered enormously in the past fifty years and continue to do so, making even the SIC’s revised industrial categories increasingly out of touch, and blurring the boundaries between sectors. The tendency towards unisex dressing, particularly in so far as separates are concerned, makes arbitrary distinctions between “men’s” and “women’s” clothing meaningless. Similarly, sportswear is increasingly used for casual or leisure wear instead of more conventional clothing items and there is the difficulty of deciding whether modern corporate uniforms worn by non-manual staff should be classified under “work clothing and jeans” or as “tailored outerwear”.

Within the bounds of the 1980 SIC, clothing manufacturers are classified according to their *principal product type*. Thus, the Jaeger factory in Ipswich, which was closed down in February 1991, would have been duly classified as a manufacturer of the women’s light outerwear which formed the factory’s staple product until the economic downturn of 1990. However, in the face of adverse trading conditions, the plant actually turned to manufacturing men’s military

uniforms for use in the Gulf War, whose speedy end was reflected in the plant's prompt closure. It seems probable that many manufacturers may have diversified their production in recent times to ensure their survival and that the same enterprise may produce various types of garments straddling the SIC "industries". Figures which neatly pigeon hole X manufacturers as producing mainly Y product in year Z must be viewed with caution.

The distinction between clothing manufacturing and retailing/distribution activities may also become unclear, especially in the designer sector. In a footnote to its clothing manufacturing industry analyses, the BSO noted that retail bespoke tailoring, dressmaking and workrooms attached to retail shops are explicitly *excluded* from the clothing manufacturing industry and are instead classified as part of retail distribution (of clothing). Thus many small designers working "behind the shop" or in bespoke tailoring and dressmaking are not regarded as part of clothing manufacturing (or indeed manufacturing at all) for official statistical purposes. Instead, they would come within the scope of the biennial retail statistics exercises. Clearly great care must be taken in calculating the "worth" of the British designer sector, which has been characterised as a "cottage industry" because of the predominance of small firms (KSA, 1991), relative to official statistics on clothing manufacturing as a whole.

A number of commercially produced reports are available, for example those produced by the Textile Marketing Survey Partnership, which present empirical information on one or all of the fashion sectors within the clothing industry. However, these reports are often based upon the official statistical

data manipulated for specific purposes. Therefore they share the limitations of the official data discussed above. The Textile Marketing Survey Partnership (TMS) are research specialists in the clothing and textiles field. The organisation has an extensive database of primary source material developed by interviewing 11,000 adult consumers every four weeks. TMS can provide information about the purchaser (age, socio-economic group), the product purchased, (item, cost) and the occasion of the purchase (eg wedding suit from Jaeger concession in a department store) see TMS (1991).

Official government statistics do not form a part of the TMS database, although it draws on them (eg Department of Trade and Industry trade and export studies) to provide a context for their own analyses. However, as the following quotation shows, TMS are only too well aware of the problems involved in looking at the designer industry in a quantitative way.

We could not provide information about the designer sector from our own database because you are talking about a small but complicated and specialist product sector — it would mean nothing to just pull out 2 per cent of our total. And the information certainly cannot be taken from the government statistics — the result wouldn't be at all reliable, nor I think even relevant. To get good quantitative and empirical information about this sector would mean commissioning a special study. Cherry McCloud, Account Manager, TMS, 1991

3.4.1 Characteristics of the Designer Sector

Whereas all of the sub-categories of the Clothing SIC are capable of producing designer fashion, the focus of this study is upon the key women's wear elements. Designer or couture fashion is a business like any other and it is appropriate for business enterprises to seek to maximise their profits. This can

be achieved in various ways. Firstly by extending the product life cycle through diffusion ranges and secondly by diversification into a wide range of luxury goods such as perfume, hosiery and leather goods which are branded with the designer's name. It is convenient and customary in the fashion business to divide designer or couturier enterprise into three areas of activity: 1) main label collections; 2) diffusion ranges; and 3) franchising and licensing.

3.4.2 Main Label Collections

The main label collection is the 'signature range' of garments which show the most extravagant styling and costly use of fabric and technique. Very often the cost of this collection forms the main part of an advertising budget and its primary role is high level promotion. If the "maison" is a couture house with Ready to Wear interests, the main collection is likely to be a couture collection. Some designers consciously use the main label collection to introduce innovative ideas and gauge their probable success. If the outcome is good then ideas will be re-introduced into diffusion ranges with a lower price and market image in subsequent seasons.

In Italy, designers work in this way in association with the large conglomerates who now manufacture a number of ranges (Tyte, 1991). Until the later 1990s very few British designers had launched diffusion ranges and so their main label or main collection was likely to be the only collection.

3.4.3 Diffusion Ranges (known as Bridge Ranges in the USA)

Diffusion ranges are relatively new to the UK compared with other European countries and they are a way in which designer labels can reach the more budget conscious buyer, since price and market image are pitched at a lower point than that of the signature range. According to a survey conducted by Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana in 1989, organisers of the women's and men's wear ready to wear shows, the prices of the main label collections had increased by 20% in the previous year. This survey was conducted with the cooperation of the country's leading designer names and concluded that a diffusion range allowed the consumer to continue to purchase a garment with designer cachet, but at a lower price.

The transition from main label to diffusion ranges is not always easy and requires a careful balance of the right pricing with sufficiently strong styling which maintains the 'house' image. The venture requires financial backing to promote the range through high-profile marketing and possibly distribute to a range of retail outlets diffusion range may be likened to the signature range as is eau de toilette to perfume; diffusion garments are a diluted form of the original label but produced in greater quantity and at less cost. Although there are signs that British designers are becoming more market orientated, in general we lag behind the rest of Europe (Kurt Salmon Associates, 1991).

3.4.4 Licensing and Franchise

Another way in which designers have extended their business interests is by attaching their brand label to a wide range of goods, not necessarily clothing, which may include hosiery, perfume, accessories and bed linen. These products are usually manufactured by a specialist organisation under license or franchise from the "maison". This arrangement can also be extended to authorise businesses to manufacture and/or sell the designer's fashion range in a particular area. The key to the success of this arrangement is strict quality control, since inferior goods will rapidly devalue the cachet of the designer label.

The licensing of the designer's name and the use of his or her designs has been commonplace since Coco Chanel began with scents. She was persuaded by the French scent industry to lend her name to the use of synthetic materials (instead of expensive pure flower essences) which were introduced immediately after the war. The story of Chanel No. 5 has been one of the outstanding successes in the perfume industry. Unlike the French fashion industry, the British industry has never been supported by sales of perfume. Although during the 1970s Hardy Amies began his first licensed range which progressed from men's suits, shirts and ties, to cuff links, leather wallets, and luggage and household goods such as bed linen.

3.5 The Kurt Salmon Report

There is very little quantitative data available about the exact nature and size of the British designer enterprise, which means that much of the critical comment which envelopes the sector, particularly from the fashion press, is based upon hearsay. The British Designer Industry Survey by Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA, 1991) was a pioneering study of the sector but inconsistencies within the document and methodological issues brought the credibility of the conclusions into question (Creigh-Tyte, 1991). However, the material is discussed briefly below as the first quantitative secondary source of information about this sector.

According to KSA, the UK designer sector's total money income stood at £100 million in 1989 compared to some £1 billion in Italy. Direct income from main ranges was estimated at £60 million in the UK against £550 million in Italy, which had the world's largest designer fashion sector. The UK industry's diffusion sector was, if anything, even smaller relative to its major international rivals and its diffusion income was estimated to be only just over one twentieth that of Italy.

The UK designer fashion industry's overall size, combined with the finding that the average designer enterprise in 1989 had under 20 employees and an annual turnover of £1 million to £2 million, led KSA to characterise designer fashion as a "cottage" industry. KSA estimated that womenswear was the largest single merchandise category accounting for up to 40% of the designer sector's output. Overall designer fashion was estimated to account for less

than 3% of the UK clothing manufacturing industry's total output (in 1989).

Nevertheless, KSA acknowledged that the UK designer fashion sector was able to successfully export much of its production. The primary sources of fabrics, trims, etc.. were domestic and garment production was concentrated in the UK. However, about two thirds of the total sales by UK designer fashion enterprises were exports. Direct main label export sales were almost equally divided between the European Community and other markets. Japan was estimated to be the largest single national export market, taking 16% of UK designer fashion's exports, followed by Italy (14%) and the USA (12% of exports).

3.6 The "Creative Industries" and Designer Fashion

Following Labour's General Election success on 1 May 1997, the incoming Secretary of State of the newly created Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) established the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) in June 1997. CITF is chaired by DCMS's Secretary of State. It includes Ministerial and civil service representation from Other Government Departments and a group of "industry advisers" drawn from across the diverse creative industries, including Paul Smith, principal of Paul Smith Ltd. A full list of CITF members is set out in Appendix 1.

CITF's stated aim was to provide a forum in which Government Ministers can come together with a few selected senior industry figures to assess the value of 'the creative industries', analyse their needs in terms of Government policies

and identify ways of maximising their economic impact. The Task Force adopted the following definition of these creative industries, those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

These have been taken to include the following key sectors: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, *designer fashion*, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software, and television and radio. (my emphasis)

The Task Force also noted the close economic inter-relationship with other sectors, including tourism, hospitality, museums and galleries, and the heritage sector.

The Task Force adopted the following remit. To recommend steps to maximise the economic impact of the UK creative industries at home and abroad. (DCMS, 1998, p.003)

Within that broad remit, the Task Force established five specific objectives to:

- (a) map activity in the UK creative industries and assess their economic value in all parts of the UK,
- (b) promote a wider appreciation of that value,
- (c) consider how current Government policies influence activity in the creative industries and what further steps Government might take to promote such activity in different parts of the UK,
- (d) look for threats to the continuing growth of the creative industries

within the UK and opportunities for increasing the wealth-creating potential of those industries, and

- (e) make recommendations to Government, industry and others (see DCMS, 1998, p.003).

In November 1998, CITF produced its first major report, a Mapping Exercise across the whole of the CITF sectors and their 13 sub-sectors. (DCMS, 1998)

3.6.1 The Designer Fact File

Designer fashion was prominent within the CITF remit, and partly in support of the new inter-departmental CITF initiative and partly following longer standing attempts to develop a more active sponsorship and support role for one of its prominent sectors, during 1997 the DTI launched two initiatives designed to help quantify and promote designer fashion.

DTI, the British Fashion Council and five other sponsors funded the production of the Designer Fact File (DFF) aimed at advising *new* designer businesses how to survive and prosper. The DFF's role was an advisory one, so this was never intended as a research study. However, the data collected for the DFF resulted from face to face interviews with designers conducted by Caroline Coates, from December 1996 to May 1997. In the subsequent publication, comprising 23 chapters, Coates (1997) provided customised advice on planning, setting up and developing a designer fashion enterprise, as well as listing sources of help and information for members of the fashion

industry.

In the DFF project, questionnaires were despatched to designers, manufacturers, retailers, PR consultants, journalists and individuals described as having a "with a wealth of relevant experience." (Coates, 1997, p.142). Between December 1996 and April 1997, they were sent to the majority of the active categories and these data were later supplemented by personal interviews with designers. However, the DFF did *not* report upon detailed aggregated information about the sector, nor did it explain the questions which were addressed.

3.6.2 The British Fashion Designer Report

Nonetheless, quantitative results from the DFF project were the key input to another DTI publication written by Suzi Cheshire and edited by a DTI representative and Augusta Barnes of Emap Fashion consultancy. This British Fashion Designer Report (BFDR) and the Designer Fact File were *both* launched at the DTI, British Fashion Council and Emap Fashion seminar on 25 November 1998. The CITF's 1998 Mapping Document published in November 1998 included at Section 06 an overview of Designer Fashion. However, the reader is simply told that "all figures derive from ad hoc DTI research based on industry interviews." (DCMS, 1998, footnote, p.044)

It seems likely that the data from interviews conducted by Caroline Coates for the DFF in 1997 were used together with other unpublished estimates by Spectrum Research and possibly KSA (1991) data to derive some

approximations for CITF purposes, although the sources have not been established. It is noteworthy that the Secretary of State, Chris Smith, in his Foreword to the report underlined "the need for better data to be collected in the future." (DCMS, 1998, p.002). However, Cheshire (1998) confirmed she draws on the Coates (1997) DFF interviews for her BFDR work.

3.6.3 Size of Designer Sector

According to the DFF/BFDR, the total value of the UK designer industry in 1996 was £600 million of manufacturers' sales. (Cheshire, 1998, p.3). The CITF's Mapping Document gave the same figure for the combined wholesale sales revenue of the UK in 1997 (DCMS, 1998, p.044). DFF/BFDR noted that neither France, Italy nor the USA have as yet analysed their designer sector, although a French report is expected to be issued in the near future.

Nevertheless, DFF/BFDR sought to place the UK in comparative perspective by using industry source data, e.g. from the Council of Fashion Designers of America in New York to provide a "ballpark figure" (see Cheshire, 1998, p.5).

The sources of the DFF/BFDR's estimate for sales in the UK in 1990 are not quoted, but "The 1990 report estimated the value of the designer industry in 1990 at £185 million", according to Cheshire (1998, p.5). DFF /BFDR also concluded that in 1990, 80% of UK designer fashion companies had turnovers of less than £1 million (see Cheshire, 1998, p.3).

The only possible source for the 1989 data is KSA (1991), but the estimates of "money value of the Designer Industry" contained therein were only £100 million in income for the UK. KSA estimated designer sales value (direct and

licensed) at £185 million and increased to £265 million if diffusion sales value (of £80 million) was added. Moreover, the *relative* rankings of the other nations covered in KSA (1991) differed noticeably from that presented in DFF/BFDR.

3.6.4 Designer Sector Characteristics

In 1997 DFF/BFDR stated that some 36% of designers firms had a turnover of under £100,000, 23% had a turnover of £100,000 to £400,000, 21% of £400,000 to £1 million, 11% of £1 million to £3 million turnover and 4% turnover of £4 million to £10 million. Finally, 5% of firms had a turnover of over £10 million. Thus, three quarters of UK designer firms had annual turnover of under £1 million in 1995.

Every company named in the DFF/BFDR survey with a turnover of over £3 million had been running for over 10 years, as had the majority of companies with turnovers of £1 million to £3 million (Cheshire, 1998, p.3). On the other hand, one third of designers already had their own shop even when their turnover was only £400,000 (Cheshire, 1998, p.9). According to the CITF study, some 63% of designer firms were limited companies, 22% sole traders and 15% partnerships (DCMS, 1998, p.045).

3.7 Summary of Findings

In spite of the considerable volume of published official statistical information on the clothing manufacturing and distribution in the economy, hard data on

the designer sector are scarce. The relevant categories in the official SIC (in both the 1980 and 1992 versions) are defined in terms of gender (male/female), age (adult/child) and basic function (outerwear versus underwear). All the SIC categories are capable of incorporating fashion elements (whether basic fashion, fashion, high fashion and designer fashion). Nevertheless, if designer fashion firms are similar to the typical clothing manufacturing enterprises they should exhibit certain clear characteristics, as documented for example in the (latest) 1996 Census of Production.

The 8,100 enterprises in the "core" "manufacture of other wearing apparel and accessories" category (SIC18.2) together employed 161,000 and produced gross output approaching £6.1 billion in valued in 1996. Thus the mean enterprise employed under 20 people and produced just over £750,000 worth of output. Small enterprises are defined in European Union statistics as those with under 100 employees. Such enterprises were dominant in clothing with 98% having under 100 employees and accounting for 41% of total employment and almost 36% of output.

Women's wear manufacturing dominated the clothing sector. Thus in 1996 women's outerwear manufacturing (SIC18.22/2) was responsible for almost 26% of clothing output with a further 17% accounted for by women's underwear manufacturing (SIC18.23/2). If anything enterprises in the women's outerwear wear sector (SIC18.22/2) were smaller on average than for clothing generally, with women's outerwear enterprises employing 16 on average against 29 on average for women's underwear manufacturing (SIC18.23/2) and 20 for clothing as a whole. Likewise in 1996 average enterprise turnover in

"manufacture of other women's outerwear" (SIC18.22/2) was just under £527,000 against over £750,000 for clothing generally.

The Kurt Salmon Associates British Designer Industry Survey commissioned by the British Fashion Council and published in 1991 represented the first attempt to assess the British designer sector in quantitative terms and place it in an international perspective. This study was marred by inconsistencies, and methodological issues which bring its credibility into question (see Tyte, 1991). The KSA report advanced the view that the UK's designer sector at the beginning of the 1990s was very much a "cottage" industry with income of around £100 million. Designer fashion comprised only some 2% to 3% of that of the UK clothing manufacturing sector as a whole. The UK sector had £60 million in direct income, £15 million licensed income and the rest from diffusion activities, compared to over £1,000 million in income in the leading designer industry nation, which is Italy.

Subsequent reports, notably Coates (1997) and Cheshire (1998) draw upon the same data source, although the first publication was intended as a 'self help' manual for members of the industry and not a research report as such. It seems likely that the second report, Cheshire (1998), draws upon data from KSA (1991) as well as Coates (1997). In consequence Cheshire's conclusions must be viewed with some degree of caution.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN OF RESEARCH

'Science and the arts coming together, of course in good design, were jointly civilising forces. Design, therefore, stands at the crossroads of art and science. (Chris Smith, 1998, p.112)'

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters 2 and 3 the research problem was explored through reviews of theoretical and statistical literature sources in fashion studies. These showed 1) theory is embryonic, 2) statistical data are neither transparent nor robust, 3) there has been little attempt to link theory with reliable evidence and 4) to a certain extent this explains why the two literature sources were disparate and unrelated.

As explained in Chapter 1, art and design research is in its infancy, and thus fashion had no established traditions to draw upon; the reviews of literature indicated this was particularly the case in fashion studies. Therefore in the process of designing this research it was necessary to consider alternative scholarly traditions and explore their underlying philosophical, theoretical and practical assumptions, to illuminate the focus of this research.

This chapter explored literature related to research methodology across a range of disciplines, including science, education, art, design and anthropology. The resulting overview is selective and does not, however, purport to be a

comprehensive analysis of methodological developments in all of these disciplines. The chapter began by highlighting the debate as to what constituted research in art and design, following the impact of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and the end of the binary divide, and considered the implications of this for the development of a research methodology for fashion.

It continued with a brief discussion of positivism and phenomenism as a precursor to stating why a phenomenological approach was adopted for this research. Next it explored how the objectives of the project were linked to a particular research strategy and the data collection techniques. From the research strategy an action plan was evolved. Finally attention is given to ethics and the trustworthiness of the research.

4.2 Re-Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Following the review of literature in Chapters 2 and 3 the research problem and questions were refined. Since the design of the research was linked epistemologically to the research problem and questions, they are restated below.

The problem this research sought to investigate was that in the 1990s, the creative talent of the British designer 'stars' was so outstanding that they were frequently poached by leading European fashion houses; Dior, Givenchy and Chloe, bastions of the French couture establishment were all headed by British designers. However, according to Kurt Salmon Associates (1991), there existed a paradox in that the British fashion designer sector was 'a cottage

industry' characterised by small firms with an average turnover of between £1 million to £2 million per year. Preliminary investigation revealed very little theory or scholarly research about the sector or its designer 'stars', and whilst there were some commercial consultancy reports, these appeared to be methodologically flawed. A need was identified therefore to investigate the situation by updating and analysing data about the commercial profile of the sector, complemented by an exploration of the designer's point of view, to explicate the underlying reasons for the sector's profile.

They key research questions were reformulated after the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3:

- Is the British designer sector still a cottage industry in the late 1990s?
- Which theories of fashion, if any, best help to explain the phenomenon of contemporary British designer fashion?
- What is the role of the designers in shaping the profile of the sector?
- What is needed to promote the future growth of the sector?

4.3 Issues in the Debate About Research in Art and Design

4.3.1 Academic and Funding Issues

The definition and recognition of art and design research was the subject of protracted debate throughout the 1990s. This controversy, arose principally because research in the field was described as falling outside the accepted traditions of research in the sciences or social sciences. (Swanick 1994). According to some commentators, the fault lay firmly within the art and design community;

design research is an infant - immature and finding it difficult to speak for itself. When it does speak it is not always intelligible - charmingly attracted to long words. (Walker, 1995, p.1)

Likewise, Whitwam (1993, p.2) has argued that it is the inability or unwillingness of designers to articulate what it is they do that has led to marginalisation of the subject in the academic research world,

it is the designers and artists unwillingness to explain complex issues in ways in which other subject disciplines can easily understand, that results in the continued downgrading of innovative achievement, in contrast to the elevation of much traditional research, which often requires little more than limited knowledge applied with mind-numbing repetitiveness to restricted fields of study.

Whitwam's view is echoed in a recent report called Design Skills for Work which stated 'There is almost a level of deliberate obfuscation on the part of tutors (Goldsmith,1999, p.16)' in explaining to students on design courses what they are learning and why. A consequence is that students are not necessarily conscious of the skills they have developed or able to articulate what they are.

Design Skills for Work highlighted the debilitating result of this upon students when they enter the labour market. Not all of them are likely to become designers and those who seek employment in other spheres should be able to identify the transferable skills they have acquired in their training.

Ironically, the Goldsmith's report concluded that 'research' is a skill at which design students are accomplished unknowingly, because design projects involve sourcing information, retrieval skills and creative problem solving. However, students in this study did not consider themselves 'qualified' to apply for research posts (Goldsmiths, 1999). The inadequate pedagogy responsible for this situation has implications for the future development of research in design because it is difficult for students to progress from particular project based experience to conceptualise and theorise; students cannot theorise about what they do in practice.

Until the results of the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) were known, little thought was given to these issues, except amongst a small group of committed academics who had pioneered the development of research in art and design for its own sake. According to Stanley (1994) the (results of this) exercise did not seem rational to the subject specialists concerned. For Cooper (1995) the thrust to promote art and design research that followed was inspired by a predominantly managerial impetus to gain research funding, not by an academic impetus to improve the quality of teaching and research in the field.

The confusion between managerial issues related to the funding for art and design research, and the academic issues related to the choice of appropriate research methodologies for design, caused Walker (1995, p.1) to remark:

For healthy growth to adulthood there is an intellectual component to be settled and a political component to be settled. What do we want to be? and, what support can we find?

However, according to Frayling (1993) the legitimisation of definitions of research in an academic context may very well be a political question, with a small 'p', and the two issues are inter-woven.

4.3.2 Academic Issues

The spotlight which was placed upon art and design research as a result of the RAE exercise, also highlighted academic issues, such as what constitutes legitimate research in art and design? The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines research as:

Careful search or enquiry after or for or into; endeavour to discover new or collate old facts etc by scientific study of a subject, course or critical investigation.

With respect to art and design research Swanick (1994, p.4.) stated,

at the risk of over-simplification, whilst it has been argued that all creative work, such as fine art and musical composition, may be considered to be unique and original in the general sense, the originality of a piece of work or its conceptual underpinnings may be seen to be a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition to merit the process, which results in that production of an original work, being described as research. In research produced for a research degree, a distinction can be made between *process*, that is the programme of research and the research methods followed, and the *product*, that is the outcome of the research, although it is recognised that the product is a significant indicator of the process.

It is the distinction between the process and the product of research which is at the centre of the art and design debate, as to what can be legitimised as academic research in the field. It has been argued that the products of various art forms namely: fine art, music, drama or choreography de facto embody a research process. The difficulty arises in that this process is implicit rather than explicit, and therefore not necessarily systematic or transferable. In this respect, Frayling (1993, p.2) considered it valuable to distinguish between work conducted in cognitive idiom and expressive idioms.

The artist, by definition, is someone who works in an expressive idiom, rather than a cognitive one, and for whom the great project is an extension of personal development.

Despite the obvious difference between the artist and designer is that the latter usually works to a market brief in developing a product which is functional as well as aesthetic, although many designers also work in an autobiographical or expressive idiom. For Whitwam (1993, p.1) the key differences in relation to research are,

... related to the design process are aims and objectives within a given or developed 'product' brief. Thus assessment can be made against those stated aims and objectives, as with any form of academic research.

Whitwam argued that there is no reason why the whole process of designing should not be accounted for, systematically explained or empirically assessed. Frayling (1995) agreed,

except that most designers and craftspersons work autobiographically and unconsciously, a potter fires a pot and the results are great but he has no idea why, because he is not a chemist.

The problem with an 'autobiographical' approach is that, whilst an image library of the products of creative enterprise can be recorded for posterity, the implicit knowledge used in the process remains tacit, and therefore it is difficult for the subject base of the discipline to evolve. In the course of researching the design processes which led to the Spitfire's elliptical wing, Kenneth Agnew (1993) concluded that the documentation of the design process was so inadequate that key design decisions could not be identified and described. He argued that the effect of the undocumented tradition (in design) was to leave the discipline in the 'stone age'.

In 1995 Press, formerly a design research consultant with a business studies background, argued the case for developing a research identity for design which is located within the tradition of the crafts and creativity.

A designed artefact is a researched proposition then for changing reality. Too often we see the designed object as the end of the design process but in fact it is more at the stage of the hypothesis in the scientific method: a well researched, reasoned and creative proposition. (1995, p.37).

According to Press, design practice typically fails to embrace the next stage of research which is to test the proposition with appropriate methods of criticism and assessment which go beyond whether the product sells, and to assess its cultural or innovative impact.

Press (1995) also stated that design research is 'different' in three ways from other types of academic research: first, it is driven by human values not a search for objective truth; second, design solutions are open ended and third, the tools of design research are sometimes words, or mathematics, but more

often line, shape, form or texture. He suggested, along with others, that research in creative and craft based disciplines should legitimately include written and visual documentation of the creative process.

Whilst Press identified key differences in the design and scientific traditions, and called for 'human centred' design research, he did not refer to the many research traditions within the social sciences, which could contribute to such developments. Nor did he fully delineate the ways in which designers and crafts persons are different; in particular the way in which different modes of production may impact upon different working methods, and the propensity to record information.

By contrast, Davies Cooper (1995, p15), originally a graphic designer, has argued that design research and the managerial disciplines have much in common.

Research in the field of design is of course linked with research in the field of art. However, I would suggest it worthwhile comparing design research against other relatively new social science disciplines such as management.

According to Davies Cooper, both fields have a multi-disciplinary background, but management in HE institutions have succeeded in establishing the academic credibility of their discipline from 'Cinderella' beginnings. Cooper did not prescribe a method or focus that the development of design research should take, but argued that it was a matter for each higher education institution to determine this.

However, for Clipson (1995) there are inherent dangers in identifying design research too closely with management disciplines, insofar as business schools would begin to lead the way in design management research and practice, especially where evidence became available that design makes enterprises more competitive.

For Walker (1995) it is the lack of theory in design which impedes the development of research in design, since there are currently no design theories or figures of the stature of Marx, Keynes, Friedman or Freud in the social sciences. In this situation Walker (1995, p.33) argued, 'the empirical case study is the only way forward that has real credibility'. For Walker, the benefits of the case study in design research are: its close proximity to actual practices; the observation of real life which can lead to the development of concepts and, in due course, to the development of principles which could be aggregated into theory.

Although Walker did not refer to the development of 'grounded theory' from case study research it may be inferred that this is what he suggested. Although he underlines the lack of theory as a handicap to the development of design research per se, he also identified the lack of knowledge about design practice as problematic and, for Walker, these two gaps are clearly perceived as interrelated.

Billet (1995, p.43) referred to University Funding Council (UFC) documentation and the subsequent Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) in identifying four elements which must be present to justify the application of

the term 'research'. These are:

- mastery of an area or subject matter;
- an original element in the work;
- exposure to peer review through publication (or exhibition);
- contribution to human knowledge through clarification and explication of ideas.

Insofar as HEFC is concerned, Billet pointed out that the last criterion is essential, because this body wishes to use its research funding to support areas which contribute to human knowledge.

Within this framework, Billet argued that Seurat's pointillism and Monet's impressionism advanced human knowledge such that subsequent groups of artists could share in an artistic development. As such these artists fulfilled all four criteria. Whereas the artist Picasso preferred to work intuitively rather than in an analytical or reflective mode, but in his work there exists mastery, originality and publication although others must extrapolate the knowledge which they may find useful and valuable.

For Billet confusion about art and design research has arisen because there is a stage in any professional endeavour which involves preliminary analysis and planning which may be generally termed 'research', but which is not activity which can be expected to be funded publicly as such. Billet has argued that it makes no matter whether the published material takes the form of a paper or sketches; the important element is whether or not colleagues in the same field can understand it as a contribution to knowledge.

Archer has argued that all research has its origins in science and, like Billet, suggested that if design wishes to join the research 'club' it must follow the established rules. Archer stated (1995, p.13):

practitioners' activity can count as research if, and only if, it accords with the criteria of research. It must be knowledge directed, systematically conducted, unambiguously expressed. Its data and methods must be transparent and its knowledge and outcome transmissible.

Archer likened practitioner action, to action research in education and the social sciences in that it is likely to be subjective and situation specific.

Action research may employ a variety of research methods, either quantitative or qualitative but the identifying characteristic is that findings from the project are enacted from action as the research is in progress.

According to Frayling (1993, p.5) there are three broad categories in the field of art and design research:

- Research into art and design
- Research through art and design
- Research for art and design

Frayling identified research *into* art and design as the most common category. It includes historical research, aesthetic or perceptual research and research into a variety of theoretical perspectives on art and design, social, economic, political or cultural. Research *through* art and design on the other hand includes materials research whereby specific aesthetic results may be effected, developmental work such as customising a piece of technology for a scientific purpose and action research whereby a research diary records step by step developments in the studio.

It is the last category 'research *for* art and design' which Frayling perceived as the most complex, commenting that, 'it really is the big black hole in art and design research (Frayling, 1995).' This is the kind of research where the thinking is embodied in an artefact and in which growth of a cognitive tradition, to accompany the expressive idiom, could be extremely valuable. However, he is dismissive of "models or art and design research which prescribe the way artists and designers *ought* to think, rather than understanding how they actually think (Frayling, 1995)."

All these authors identify common themes which make research in the art and design disciplines problematic: 1) it falls outside the accepted traditions of research in the sciences or social sciences (Swanick, 1998) and is frequently inter-disciplinary (Davies Cooper, 1995); 2) it lacks theory and methodological traditions (Walker, 1995); 3) the distinction between the product and the process is unclear (Frayling 1993, Swanick 1994); 4) there is insufficient articulation or documentation of the design process (Whitwam 1993, Agnew 1993, Goldsmiths 1999) which prevents a contribution to knowledge which is transferable (Billet 1995); 4) the research is typically human centred (Press, 1995) and 5) the RAE has created a somewhat fevered context in which these academic issues must be resolved (Stanley 1994, Davies Cooper 1995, Press 1995).

These gaps which make art and design research generally embryonic are even more marked in fashion studies, as the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3 have shown. The implications must be therefore that artists and designers view their work and the world somewhat differently from scientists. In consequence

it was valuable to explore the philosophical assumptions which underpin different kinds of research and the implications for the conduct of this research.

4.4 Background: Positivism and Phenomenalism

According to Press, during the 1990s many artists and designers adhered to a stereotyped view of research, associated with white coats, laboratories and specialised libraries (Press, 1995). It had little appeal, especially for those who were primarily concerned with the creative practice of art and design, albeit in a higher education context. According to Mason (1991, p.261), art teachers also exhibit, 'extreme antipathy towards the positivistic enterprise that has tended to dominate (educational) research.'. However, as Archer has stated: 'There is more than one way of defining research and there are several traditions of how research should be carried out (Archer, 1995, p.6).'

Allison (1993b) identified two major philosophical traditions of academic research namely: *positivism* and *phenomenalism*. He underlined the important link between research methodology and its philosophical under-pinnings, and stated that it follows from the latter that there exist different forms of research, which in turn reflect different assumptions about the world. In this connection Mason (1991, p.264) observed that in education,

positivistic assumptions about knowledge - for example, the belief that its generation depends on bias-free observations of measurable events which are detached from the subjective values of teacher practitioners; and that this requires mastery of special methods and techniques of enquiring which are different from natural ways in which teachers process information about their practices - have been challenged and found wanting.

According to Gray and Malins (1993) positivism and the so-called 'scientific method', which has its origins in Newtonian physics and assumes a mechanistic view of the universe as a multitude of discrete objects assembled in a huge clockwork machine, is likely to be the least suitable research method for art and design. Denscombe (1983) has also argued that the premises of the 'scientific method' are at variance with some of the basic assumptions about knowledge characteristically held by art and design practitioners in the classroom.

The phenomenological research paradigm variously termed as naturalistic, qualitative, interpretative, existential or hermeneutic, has a number of strands. Whilst acknowledging the range and diversity of qualitative research traditions, Marshall and Rossman (1995) argued that there exists (what may be termed) a 'main stream' qualitative tradition which subscribes to the following:

- 1 Seeks to discover and values the participants' perspectives of their world
- 2 Places emphasis upon the everyday context of the participant's activity
- 3 Views the investigation as interactive between the participant and the researcher.
- 4 Is descriptive and analytical
- 5 Relies upon the participants' views and observable behaviour as a primary information source. (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p4)

In consequence, Swanick (1994) suggested that, whilst all research methods which subscribe to the scientific method may be applicable to art and design research, the qualitative research paradigm may be more appropriate. He

confirmed the need for written documentary underpinning, however minimal, when research is conducted in non-verbal creative spheres.

4.5 Choosing a Phenomenological Approach

This section of the chapter presents a rationale for the adoption of an interpretative approach for this research, particularly in relation to: the contextualisation of the phenomenon of designer fashion in London during the late 1990s; the need to select a flexible research strategy in a sector which can be fickle and subject to relentless and rapid change; my inter-subjectivity as a researcher with a personal history in the fashion industry; and the proposed focus upon the fashion designers.

Wilson (1997) argued that human behaviour is significantly influenced by the context in which it occurs. He considered it could not be understood without detailed analysis of the context in which humans interpret their feelings and thoughts. Therefore the accepted understanding of norms, traditions, roles and values are the critical contextual variables which cannot be put aside. In fact, coding and standardising data, according to Wilson, may even destroy valuable data by imposing constraints upon it.

Therefore the first reason an interpretative strategy was chosen was because the approach assumed the value of *context* and setting to the research problem, which was likely to be of particular importance in an exploratory investigation of creative and commercial tensions in the contemporary British designer fashion sector. The phenomenological approach which was adopted, assumed

that no two situations were the same but rather that a complex set of variables such as location and culture interact with the individuals who were the subjects of the research, at any given time, to provide data which are unique (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

By implication no two circumstances in the fashion industry can be considered identical. Designer fashion is a time-bound phenomena; the collections produced in successive seasons are delineated by their evolution and difference. This is so even when the designer has been inspired by a former era, because fabrics, techniques and technology have moved on. The events of London Fashion Week in 1997, for example, were time bound and in consequence the words and actions of individuals and events only make sense within a specific context. This emphasis upon *context* was the first reason why a phenomenological approach was selected.

The second reason the approach was considered appropriate was because phenomenological research is emergent in design. Unlike positivism this research paradigm does not begin with a hypothesis or a predetermined set of questions, rather it allows questions to *emerge* or be reformulated following familiarisation with, and examination of, the context. In this connection, Guba and Lincoln (1981) referred to the need to maintain flexibility in the research methodology, so that the research can unfold, cascade, roll, and emerge.

Flexibility was considered to be of particular value to research into a sector where the existing information was limited but the range of likely influences

were numerous. The phenomenon of designer fashion is a complex mixture of commercial and creative strands, with many key players. It was considered important therefore to design a methodology which could include a range of information sources which could be combined. An emergent approach was selected that would facilitate changes of focus and emphasis between various research strands as the research developed.

Thirdly, a phenomenological, unlike a positivistic approach, does not locate the researcher outside the research as an objective observer. His or her subjectivity is acknowledged from the start, both in terms of the choice of the phenomenon to be observed, and consequent impact upon the events under investigation. Allison (1993) acknowledged that phenomenological research is 'essentially inter-subjective' and that sometimes involves a deliberate attempt to capitalise upon this, within the tradition of 'interpretative participant observation'.

According to Rossman and Marshall (1995, p.36) 'a strong autobiographical element often drives scholarly interest.' However, in the design of this research overall a decision was made to actively utilise my professional insights and biases both as a former fashion designer and undergraduate who had studied anthropology. This influenced the choice of topic; the definition of the problem statement in relation to issues within the sector; knowledge of secondary and primary source material including libraries in higher education; and access to personnel and designers. The subjectivity of the researcher was therefore acknowledged and utilised both in the selection and delineation of the project, the design of the research methodology and the implementation of the

research; in summary, it was integral to the investigation.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) have distinguished between 'participant observation' and 'non-participant observation', and both approaches were included in the emergent methodology to some degree. These approaches acknowledge the researcher's subjectivity in guiding decisions and directions within an investigation. Although they are subjective, such decisions can be based upon critical analysis, synthesis, evaluation, the application of contextual knowledge and conceptual frame building. In 'participant observation' the enquirer plays two roles simultaneously, firstly, he or she is an observer responsible to persons external to the activity under observation. Secondly, he or she is a participant and has a genuine interest in the outcomes of the group activity he or she is observing and interpreting. A non-participant observer remains wholly outside the activity he or she is investigating. For an outline of the origins of 'participant observation' as a research method see Appendix 4. In this enquiry I assumed different roles at different stages of the research; these issues are discussed more fully in the subsequent sections.

Fourthly, a phenomenological stance was adopted because it is concerned with the participants' viewpoints as a key source of information. For this reason Marshall and Rossman (1995) argued the suitability of the phenomenological paradigm for research, 'which seeks a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences of phenomena'.

Geertz (1993) commented that the problem of seeing things from the native's point of view has dominated methodological discussion in anthropology for the

last twenty to twenty-five years:

In all three of the societies I have studied intensively, Javanese, Balinese and Moroccan, I have been concerned amongst other things with attempting to determine how people who live there define themselves as persons, what goes into the idea they have (but, as I say, only half-realistic they have) of what a self, Javanese, Balinese or Moroccan style, is (Geertz, 1993, p.58).

The research method of 'participant observation', particularly as it has developed in anthropology in which a researcher actually lives with the observed, closely observing and penetrating their world view, has led to classic closely observed studies of exotic societies and later to increasingly detailed investigations into the social phenomena of the industrialised world.

(O'Sullivan 1993). Studies which have evolved from this research method are characterised by a proximity to the informant's point of view and perceptions.

Unfortunately, at the beginning of the research, it seemed unlikely that I would gain the necessary access to designer fashion houses for a sufficiently long enough period to undertake 'classic' ethnographic type research by closely observing the designers and penetrating their world view. There existed understandable concerns about confidentiality which have traditionally characterised elite fashion houses. However, the development of research methods in anthropology were a source of inspiration, and resulted in investigation of ways in which I could adapt these techniques to meet the requirements of this research in a commercial sector.

4.6 Developing a Research Strategy

In recent times changing political circumstances in the 'first' and 'third' worlds have had an impact on the development of research methods within anthropology (Clammer, 1983). Many 'first world' anthropologists now undertake fieldwork in their own cultures, which raises challenges as to how traditional styles of fieldwork can be applied in an urban setting. On the other hand 'third world' anthropologists, often trained in 'first world' universities, undertake fieldwork at home. These developments which have led to investigations in towns in Africa or the USA, termed 'urban ethnography', have challenged the traditional assumptions of individual face-to-face fieldwork conducted in small-scale communities.

These innovations have led to the mixing of traditional style 'participant observation' fieldwork with quantitative type methods (Pons, 1969). In a contemporary urban setting, an ethnographer may work in a team context, which may be interdisciplinary, rather than operating alone in an isolated community. According to Mitchell, quantitative-type methods thus augment face-to-face fieldwork, rather than replace or conflict with 'participant observation' style enquiry (Mitchell, 1967).

The spectra between qualitative and quantitative-type approaches was perceived as complementary in this research. Indeed, without facts as referents, particularly within phenomenological approaches, which abandon any attempt at objectivity or neutrality in favour of a mystical empathy between the fieldworker and the subject, there is a danger of a researcher 'going native'.

Whilst the sensitive and effective researcher needs to be empathetic towards informants, rarely, according to Clammer (1983), do they become one of the informants. How can the researcher know if she has empathised well, or indeed at all, without external referents? How can the researcher or his audience know if the resulting conclusions are illusory (Casteneda, 1970, 1971, 1973).

As early as 1900, Rivers advocated the study of 'abstract problems... by the means of concrete facts (Rivers, 1900, p82)'. Even Malinowski, usually closely associated with the field method of 'participant observation', described the goals of ethnographic research under three headings. First, he referred to the outline of native customs through direct interviewing and the collection of genealogies, details about technology, local census and statistical documentation by concrete evidence. (Malinowski, 1922, p.17). Secondly he added living with the natives which he described as, 'the collection of the imponderabilia of actual life and typical behaviour. (Malinowski, 1922, p.20)'. Thirdly, he included learning the local language, and *together* he stated these methods enabled the anthropologist to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world. (Malinowski, 1922, p.25).

This research strategy utilised different research instruments for different strands of the investigation. The research was divided into exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and predictive phases, which was related to specific research questions, and linked to the selection of research tactics, methods or techniques. The data collection methods included interviewing of

marketing/finance and design personnel in the sector, both at the preliminary and penultimate stages of the research, 'participant observation', and analysis of documents by the researcher. Interviews were in all cases planned as face-to-face exchanges of information between individuals.

The implementation of the various strands of research is described in detail at the start of the relevant chapter. This describes the research instruments, data collection methods, analyses the data and summarizes the results. This sequential approach to reporting the findings of each research strand was adopted to facilitate the emergent approach of the qualitative strategy; it meant that the research strategy could be modified at any stage, to facilitate a change of direction necessitated by new data from strand one.

4.7 The Action Plan

Table 9 provides a schematic illustration of the overall action plan and the associated time-scale for the implementation of the research. An action plan had to be developed that would encapsulate the phases of the designer fashion calendar. The concept of fashion 'seasons' and the preparation of garment collections for the international designer shows, which take place in London, Paris, Milan and New York, are an integral part of the industry. The research timetable was therefore planned to use this calendar cycle to the fullest advantage.

Table 9: Action Plan for the Research

Year	Design of the Research	Implementation of the Research	Formative and Summative Conclusions of Research
	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
1994	Background reading:		Formative Overview of Literature
	– Broad Problem Area		– Broad Problem Area
1995	– Theoretical Literature in Fashion Studies		– Theoretical Literature in Fashion Studies
	– Statistical Literature on Designer Fashion Sector		– Statistical Literature
1996	– Literature related to Research Methods	Visit London Fashion Week	– Research Methods in Relation to Art and Design Research
1997	Design of Research	Visit Museum Exhibitions	Overview (drafts):
	Design of Exploratory Interviews	Pilot/Conduct Exploratory Interviews	– London Fashion Week
1998	Design of In-Depth Interviews	Pilot/Conduct In-Depth Interviews	– Museum Exhibitions
			– Exploratory Interviews
1999			– In-Depth Interviews
			Synthesis and Conclusions

Accordingly, the establishment and the development of contact with these designer houses was also scheduled as a phased operation to utilise, in the research, the cycle or events which were central to the industry. Although the research was focused upon the British designer fashion sector, which is predominantly, but not exclusively, based in London, the designer sector is nonetheless a part of a global industry. Some of these fashion designers also show or exhibit their garments in Paris, New York and Milan. The timing of these commitments was therefore also incorporated into the planning of the research.

4.7.1 Research Strand One: Review of Literature

Following the literature reviews reported in Chapters 2 and 3, the research questions became more refined and focused as a precursor to the conduct of the research subsequent strands.

4.7.2 Research Strand Two: Exploratory Interviews

The exploratory interviews in strand two were intended as a mapping exercise. The first empirical study of the designer sector reported previously by Kurt Salmon Associates in 1991, and which concluded that this was a 'cottage industry' had methodological flaws. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain what were the key variables in shaping the current commercial profile of the sector. They were conducted 'face to face' with key marketing, manufacturing or business personnel from a sample of designer enterprises at multi-site locations. The aim was to collect factual data about the profile and nature of the firms which comprise the sector. To cite Rivers again (1900, p.82) to explore 'abstract problems... by means of concrete facts.'

Initially they were termed 'quantitative interviews' but the descriptor was subsequently set aside in favour of 'exploratory interviews'. The term quantitative was considered to be potentially misleading because it is frequently associated with the positivistic research paradigm. The contextual mapping exercise planned as a component of this overall research strategy did not seek to test any pre-existing theory or hypothesis, but rather to explore the phenomenon under enquiry, in an open ended manner with the aim of identifying potentially significant variables in the designer enterprises.

4.7.3 Research Strand Three: Mobile and Static Exhibitions

Observation of significant fashion events was included to yield data of an expressive kind termed 'thick description'. As Geertz (1993) has stated, in this type of ethnographic research method, which has its roots in anthropology, observation is carried out not only for the purpose of collecting and recording data; but also the interpretation of data, which involves the construction of text. Whilst the exploratory interviews sought out data of a factual and numeric nature about fashion designer firms, it was envisaged that 'observation' and 'participant observation' of both mobile "runway" and static museum exhibitions would yield descriptive data about events, garments and participants which are central to the fashion milieu. Marshall and Rossman (1995, p78) have noted: 'participation is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data gathering method. 'Participant observation' is, to some extent, an essential element of all qualitative studies'.

In this strand of the research I visited and participated in the events of London Fashion Week, 23-28 February 1997, to view the commercial exhibitions and associated fashion shows which are attended by press and buyers from all over the world. In 1997 a number of museum exhibitions about fashion were also scheduled in London at the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Imperial War Museum, the Museum of London, and the Design Museum.

The phenomenological paradigm enabled me to incorporate visits to these exhibitions to compare and contrast different approaches to interpretation of

fashion by the exhibition organisers. The purpose of this research strand was to investigate any theoretical concepts which underpinned these exhibitions, and to see whether these might inform the development of an in-depth interview schedule to be conducted with fashion designers in the final research phase.

Data obtained from visits to the shows and exhibitions was supplemented by documentary analysis of the contents of related publicity materials, catalogues and exhibition information. This method was non-reactive, and also unobtrusive, moreover, it was possible to collect exhibition catalogues over a period of several years, retrospectively by way of background. A full description of this strand of the research, including the role adopted by myself, which was to entail a degree of 'participation' as well as 'observation', is outlined in subsequent chapters.

4.7.4 Strand Four: In-Depth Interviews

The previous phases of the research functioned as the precursor to in-depth interviews in Strand Four with fashion designers representing the different categories of designer fashion nominated under the British Fashion Awards.

The sample interviewees, as nominees or winners for one or other category of these BFC awards, had been judged to be of exceptional creative standing and talent by peers. They, therefore, comprised a 'creative elite'. If they had been drawn from the designer sector at random the sample might have included individuals whose creativity was less proven. The purpose of the scheduled

interviews was to elicit illustrative case studies of the ways that fashion designers drawn from various sector categories think about designer fashion as a creative phenomena, and to investigate differences and similarities in their views. It was therefore important that the creativity of the individual respondent designers had been 'recognised' within the sector, and the BFC awards provided the external point of reference for establishing this. In-depth interviewing is a data collection method which has been described as: 'a conversation with a purpose (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, p149)'.

4.8 Range of Methodologies and Implications for the Style of Presentation

All the strands subscribed to the assumptions of the phenomenological research paradigm and in particular, a number of methodologies were adopted from the traditions of anthropological fieldwork.

In particular, recent developments in interpretative anthropology influenced my attitude to the conduct of this research, and the subsequent construction of text reporting the data and findings. Interpretative insight has shown that complete objectivity is impossible for anthropologists because they must interact with the people and the community which is being investigated. Moreover, the anthropologist arrives in that community, situated in their own previous experience, obtained from their own cultural roots.

In consequence, anthropologists have had to learn to be reflexive, to ask themselves how their past experiences are influencing their interpretation of the events under investigation; and how their presence is subjectively

interpreted by others. Reflexivity has led to a new form of anthropological discourse whereby it has become acceptable for anthropologist to describe their anxieties in the field and present debates with informants who are transformed from objects of the research, into active participants (Rabinov, 1997).

According to Geertz (1988) ethnographies are exercises in literary talent, rather than the presentation of data which is verifiable. Geertz subjected the writings of major anthropologists such as Levi Strauss, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski and Benedict to literary criticism and concluded, 'the question here is not the truth of such statements (Geertz, 1980, p.63)' but 'how are they made believable (Geertz, 1988, p64)'. Geertz sought to deconstruct the texts of these anthropologists to explore the relationship between the author's inner world and the data reported.

These developments influenced the report of data and findings in this thesis, which sought to include experiments in the construction of text. A finding from the review of literature was that the commercial and theoretical discourses about the phenomena of designer fashion were wholly disparate. The report of findings in the subsequent chapters sought to explore whether a novel and more appropriate means could be found to communicate the range of sometimes dissonant notes which constitute debate about fashion phenomena. The subsequent texts in this thesis were experimental and may be judged to have succeeded to a greater or lesser degree.

In chapter 5, which reported data and findings from the survey interviews, numeric data is juxtaposed with my own narrative. The language of the

computer is included in the text, describing computer variables and how they were labelled in the process of analysing the data. The text sought to replicate the difference between numeric data as analysed by the computer, statements about the facts and a summary of the facts by myself.

In chapters 6 and 7 the reports of findings included the juxtaposition of popular and scholarly texts, together with my own narrative. Journalistic accounts of fashion phenomena are given a credence equal to that of the texts of scholarly curators because journalists are key players in the contemporary designer fashion industry. The would be ethnographer in the contemporary fashion field is not operating in isolation in a remote jungle without the modern means of communication. On the contrary, fashion parades are major media events. Whilst the commentary of museum curators is valuable, it was considered inappropriate that they should not monopolise dialogue about the nature of fashion phenomena. In this report, the narrative by me included references to my own previous experiences, the remembrance of which come to the fore as I participated in the events of the British fashion calendar, for example, visiting an Arab bazaar.

4.9 Ethics and Trustworthiness of the Research

In qualitative research a researcher enters the participants' lives for a brief or protracted period of time. According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993) this entails a range of strategic, personal and ethical issues not encountered in quantitative methodologies. Tone Bringa, who conducted ethnographic research amongst the Bosnian Moslems, understood part of her research role as

providing a voice for the marginalised and dispossessed. She noted that:

Trust is a prerequisite to an anthropologist. It gave me access to people who are rarely seen or heard, who are presented only in terms of what they have lost. (Bringa, 1993, p44).

At the start of this research key persons in related trade and Government organisations were notified as a courtesy, only since it was not reliant upon their assistance or endorsement. I had already established a wide network of contacts in the fashion industry through previous employment in the sector and earlier research. Independence from policy matters was likely to be an advantage in the subsequent conduct of this research because it would enable informants to speak with me more freely. The variation of emphasis placed upon different aspects of my role as a researcher in the various strands is discussed in more detail in the conclusions to Chapter 8.

The collection and management of data which informants regarded as sensitive or confidential was another ethical issue. Previous research in this industry enabled me to anticipate some of the hurdles that needed to be crossed. Past experience had indicated that any material considered to be commercially sensitive was likely to be particularly difficult to access, and that concerns about confidentiality could even prevent informants talking to me at all. This flagship sector of the fashion industry has a long history of protecting the secrets of 'house handwriting'; which may include information on a spectra from special techniques for hemming chiffon to detailed financial planning. Past experience suggested that specific information which contributed to competitive advantage, would be very difficult to access.

The Office for National Statistics, which in the case of the Census of Production can enforce the co-operation of respondents, adopts a number of approaches to protect informants, some of which were adapted for this research. Firstly respondents were assured the data would be anonymised. However, where the size or reputation of an enterprise makes it likely that a firm or individuals can be identified, despite anonymity, the Office for National Statistics retains the material as confidential for a limited period of time and it is designated 'withheld due to disclosure'. The designer fashion sector is a small population. Moreover, many of the firms are very prominent. Taken together these two considerations meant that there existed a possibility that company profiles and individuals could be identified from the thesis despite anonymity. For this reason the thesis was designated by the University Research Degree Committee as 'confidential' for a period of two years after completion, when the commercially sensitive material would be less current. This assurance facilitated the cooperation of the participants.

However, it was envisaged the informants would receive a separate workshop summary of the results which they could comment upon, and with their consent it might be feasible to make some aspects of the research more widely available at a later date. Thus, I hoped these dual strategies enabled me to explicate the industry as fully as possible for academic purposes, whilst protecting the informant's livelihood to the best of my ability.

4.10 Summary of Findings

In sum a qualitative approach was selected for this research investigation because of its emphasis upon the context of the phenomenon being investigated and understanding of the actor's point of view. The subjectivity of the researcher with a professional background in the field and the emergent design methodology, were found to be particularly valuable in research which was exploratory. There existed a number of paradigms of qualitative research, but the anthropological paradigm was explored as a source of reference and inspiration for all the research strands. In part this was because of the researcher's undergraduate studies in anthropology.

The methodology was multi-stranded and necessitated design of research instruments including exploratory interviews, participant observation, observation, unobtrusive methods (such as document analysis), and in-depth interviewing together with the opportunity for photographic analysis by the informants. A literature review of theory pertaining to fashion and of 'hot' sources, newspapers, periodicals and reports, was ongoing throughout the study. It was acknowledged that qualitative research generally, and this investigation specifically, can be difficult to replicate in the same way as positivistic research because it is time bound.

Therefore, an attempt was made to explicate as fully as possible the decisions and rationales behind all the different phases of the research (Marshall, 1990). Since an emergent approach was adopted, the methodology was to be reviewed as each part was implemented. A check list for the reliability of qualitative

research outlined by Marshall (1990, pp146-148), was adopted as the terms of reference whereby the research was assessed for trustworthiness. A post facto reflection upon the methodology, is contained in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS

‘There must be few ethnographic field enquirers that have not included a numerical survey of some kind at some stage - whether to map the factual universe prior to analysing uses and interpretations of that universe, or to verify typicality and correlations of items reported or observed in the course of participant observation. (Ellen, 1984, p.257).’

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 found that it was very difficult to extrapolate focussed data on the designer sector from official published sources. Moreover, empirical studies of the sector undertaken by Kurt Salmon Associates (1991), Coates (1997), DCMS (1998) and Cheshire (1998) were based upon inconsistent definitions of fashion designer enterprises, the industry and its population. Nor were any of these reports written with a common aim. Taken together these factors meant that there was no reliable base upon which the present investigation might build.

As noted, one of the main and controversial conclusions of the first Kurt Salmon investigation of the designer sector was that, “the UK designer industry is a cottage industry. (KSA, 1991, p 4).” This strand of the present research sought to identify the key variables which contribute to its current commercial status.

5.2 Method

The data collection method was a survey utilising multi-site exploratory interviews administered by me to a sample of designer enterprises by face to face interviews, ideally with key manufacturing or marketing personnel, or other persons knowledgeable about the business aspects of the sector. The research instrument was an interview schedule developed in questionnaire form to address specific commercial issues, for example, whether the company had a flexible or structured organisation. However, the questions were not closed in the sense that additional information provided by the respondents was also noted and reported. Respondents were also given the option of “pass” if they were uncomfortable with any question.

5.2.1 Target Population

In order to select the enterprises for exploratory interviews, a list of exhibiting designers at London Fashion Week was obtained from the organisers at the British Fashion Council for the preceding seasons. Whilst these comprised circa 170 names and addresses, it was apparent that many of the firms listed were not well known and did not conform to the definition of designer fashion which had been adopted. For the purposes of this analysis designer was defined as someone who contributes an individual image, usually including his or her name to a range of fashion products and in the process becomes sufficiently well known to show garments regularly at design shows and exhibitions, and sell garments at up-market retail outlets. Moreover, since this definition was focussed on the British sector, it was considered necessary that

the designer be British and/or that the design studio/office of the company be located in the United Kingdom.

The initial list was cross-referenced with entries in the fashion press in the 1990s such as Vogue, Draper's Record, The Fashion Weekly and others, to derive a list of prominent United Kingdom Designers. Prominent fashion journalists were also consulted as to additional recommendations, particularly with respect to talented newcomers so that the sample would not be unduly biased in favour long established enterprises and designers. This resulted in a compiled list of 96 enterprises.

5.2.2 Intention of the Survey and Objectives of the Questions

The purpose of the survey was to obtain concrete facts and figures about designer enterprises as reported by respondents which would provide contextual information for the subsequent research, but not to undertake a census of the sector, nor to attempt to value the sector in money terms (as other studies have attempted to do). According to Mitchell (1966) in settings about which there is no pre-existing record of demographic or economic parameters it may be impossible to proceed to other ethnographic methods without a survey.

The data provided by the survey was a count of 'facts' about designer enterprises, as reported by the respondents, and subsequently tallied by me. It was not intended to survey respondents' opinions about the facts, although some offered those anyway.

The aim of the survey was to remedy the lack of reliable empirical data about the factual nature of designer enterprises and to provide data to explore the sector's performance within the structure, conduct and performance framework often utilised by industrial analysts for analysing manufacturing industries. (Jones and Cocherill, 1984).

Although these interviews were structured they were termed 'exploratory' since this strand of the research was viewed as a mapping exercise of the designer sector, and a 'lead-in' to the subsequent observation and interviews with the designers. An interview schedule was developed which reflected the principles of enterprise management common to design-led firms (Cooper and Press 1995), and was consistent with known organizational practice in designer fashion houses identified in a previous investigation (Tyte, 1991).

In industrial sectors other than designer fashion, the 'design function' may be termed research and development, product development or product innovation. Whilst all these activities are linked to developing new prototypes and are often deemed creative, according to Roy and Wield (1986), there are also points of difference, and they should not be used interchangeably too readily.

Traditionally the design, production and marketing phases in the development of any product in the fashion industry have taken place sequentially. Whilst according to Hollins (1995) there has been a recent upsurge of interest in the implications of 'concurrent design and engineering' for British industry more generally, British designer fashion enterprises have traditionally been too small

to benefit from this approach. It was therefore assumed in the preparation of the interview schedule that in the British sector, unlike France or Italy (see Tyte, 1991), the design, production and marketing processes continue to take place sequentially.

The interview guide built upon earlier research (Tyte, 1991) which had confirmed that typically the life of the fashion garment commenced in the design studio where the designer sketched a prototype which subsequently progressed to a sample pattern and then a sample garment, usually with the assistance of a pattern maker and a sample machinist. Sample fabrics for the season from textile houses usually, although not always, provide an important source and starting point for the designer's inspiration. In some cases where a designer had established a professional collaboration with a textile house, fabric might be produced to specification for a particular design idea. Moreover, designs were not produced in isolation but planned as a coordinated range with an appropriate proportion of day wear, evening wear etc, according to the requirements of the individual fashion house and its customers. Selection of colours, fabrics and trims is typically part of early planning and decision making processes.

The objectives of the questions were to obtain factual data across a sample of designer enterprises, comparing and contrasting workroom practice in design studios and sample rooms, and as it were, to identify variations on the theme described above. The focus of the questions about business organisation is reported together with the responses in the text below.

The findings of the 1991 investigation (Tyte) informed the development and grouping of questions for the exploratory interviews in this study. The target population were senior representatives of the designer enterprises, who would ideally be knowledgeable about the business aspects of the designer fashion sector. The questionnaire was designed to elicit numerical and unitary responses, in the form of 'yes' or 'no' replies together with softer data. The intention was to generate a range of data for both computer and manual analysis which would complement and inform other strands of the research.

As noted above, no agreed definition of a designer fashion enterprise existed at the time, nor was there a reliable profile of the designer fashion population. For this reason, it was neither possible to accurately quantify the size of the designer population at the onset of the investigation, nor to ascertain whether the sample of respondents was representative. Two questions included in the schedule were intended to elicit information on these issues for subsequent or 'post hoc' analysis of the sample.

Faced with a lack of reliable data on the statistical profile of an industry, Britton et al (1992a and b) advocated a 'closed loop' method for identifying all the firms in the industry. Their own research has been on the service industries, because while firms can be grouped according to similarities in products, inputs, buyers or sellers:

This grouping is problematic for manufacturing but much more so for services given the characteristics of heterogeneity and intangibility. (Britton et al, 1992a, p.37).

While the designer fashion sector is conventionally viewed as a sub-set of clothing manufacture, official data do not identify the sector (see Chapter 3). Moreover, some designer enterprises own retail outlets (Tyte, 1991) and are thus engaged in retail distribution, which is officially measured as a service sector activity. The 'closed loop' method is operationalised by considering the degree to which products are close substitutes for each other, as for example with butter and margarine. These interview respondents were asked to list their competitors and previously unidentified firms are then approached in turn, and asked to list *their* competitors. This process is repeated until no new competitors are found. Such a method is believed to be applicable where, the industry is fairly small and where firms will therefore have an awareness of the competitors. (Britton et al,1992a, p38).

5.2.3 Sample and Pilot Interviews

The list of 96 designer enterprises was then arranged in alphabetical order and a random sample of 32 firms were selected by printing the names and addresses on self- adhesive labels which were selected from a bag by an impartial third party. A final list was generated as the labels for the designer names were stuck down onto a clean sheet of paper in the order they were selected. An alternative approach would have been the use of a random number table.

Representatives of the randomly selected enterprises were approached to request an interview. In the first instance, respondents were asked to agree to a face-to-face interview, or failing this, a telephone discussion, if this was not successful they offered an opportunity to participate by telephone or in

writing.. In several cases respondents offered, following interview, introductions to other designer enterprises personally known to them, whom I wished to interview. In one case, I found myself sitting next to a potential interviewee at the hairdressers, and I requested an interview while we were both being shampooed.

Only one respondent, out of the 32 potential interviewees who were approached, refused to be interviewed. This represents a very high response rate. However, whilst the majority of the potential interviewees responded positively to the initial request to participate, the practicalities of scheduling a time to meet were more complex.

Private industry is notoriously short term in its objectives. Many of the firms involved operated in a highly competitive commercial environment, and were naturally more concerned about their immediate economic survival than providing information for research purposes. However, it was explained that the facts and figures about the industry that resulted could contribute to a better understanding of the importance of the sector. The interviewees were offered the opportunity to comment upon the conclusions and confidentiality was assured as an incentive to participate.

Many of these companies are inundated with requests for information for various “research” projects, many of which are set by schools. A number of organisations expressed resentment about the volume of such enquiries, which frequently requested basic information which could be obtained elsewhere. Pilot interviews were conducted with seven firms.

5.2.4 Questionnaire Coding and Analysis

Both manual and computer analysis of the resulting interview data was envisaged, the latter using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which has been developed for use with so-termed 'soft- data'. It was planned from the onset that manual analysis of the data, particularly in relation to the respondents' comments, would augment computerised findings. The data analysis software package used was SPSS, Version 6.1 for personal computers. SPSS is perhaps the most common statistical analysis package used in the social sciences and business studies, and has existed in various versions for over 20 years, having originally been developed in the US for military purposes (see SPSS UK Ltd, 1998). The data analysis was undertaken on a DELL 486 Personal Computer.

5.2.5 Responses and Respondents

The questions were intended for respondents with general oversight of the designer enterprise's operations, organisation and activities, ideally the most suitable respondent was the principal director responsible for marketing or finance. Where the text below refers to a respondent, it should be noted that an individual represented the enterprise and responded on behalf of the firm and established practice within it. Across all the 31 completed interviews some 14 of the respondents were identified as the principal responsible for marketing and /or finance. A further 9 were the principal designer of the enterprise. The remaining 8 were equally divided between people who described themselves as holding 'other senior management' positions (4) and those in other positions

(4) e.g. ' Personal Assistant'.

5.2.6 Trustworthiness of Results

As noted in Chapter 3, there are no official statistics on the designer fashion sector and earlier on-off studies all suffer from limitations and are, to various degrees, contradictory. In short, there is *no* agreed estimate of the overall size or composition of the UK's designer fashion sector.

The data were however, checked for internal consistency across questions and through cross tabulations. Verifiable information, such as named retail outlets, ownership of shops in London and so forth were checked and found to be accurate. Whilst there exists no *absolute* means of verifying respondents truthfulness, interviewees were selected who held a position of responsibility. Moreover, given that respondents had the opportunity to decline interview and in accepting to participate spent time exploring the issues with me, it is difficult to ascertain the reasons for dishonesty, if any.

Marshall (1990) has identified reciprocity as one means of ascertaining the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Reciprocity according to Marshall, means that respondents benefit in some way from the research and accepts the researcher as a "participant observer" or a friend. A number of respondents confided their particular hopes for the future of their enterprise, and sought information that might assist them, for example, information related to trade missions, or potential overseas retail outlets. Others invited follow up contact, either at future fashion shows (where tickets are coveted) or,

in one instance, at a one-to-one lunch. These examples may be considered as indices that a mutual rapport was established, such that sensitive information could be openly and honestly shared.

5.3 The Designer Enterprises

Only 3 of the respondents regarded their enterprise as 'a subsidiary of a larger company'. This variable was named 'subsidiary' and labelled 'whether subsidiary'. Thus just over 90% were independent concerns. In response to a question about organisational structure, only 4 respondents identified their organisation as 'structured', while 27 described it as 'flexible'.

5.4 The Design Function

Respondents were asked how the design function was organised within the company (variable 'desfun' labelled 'design function'). In some 16 cases the principal alone was responsible. A further 4 enterprises, indicated joint principals were responsible. Thus single or joint principles take responsibility for organising the design function in almost two thirds of cases.

When asked who makes the final decision on ranges, 19 respondents indicated the principal, and a further 4 that the joint principal made decisions. Thus the principal or joint principals took the final decision in almost three quarters of enterprises.

5.5 Planning the Range

Across the 31 respondents the number of ranges produced per calendar year varied from 1 to 8, with a mean of 2.6 ranges (median and mode of 2 ranges). Only one respondent produced a single range while 22 produced two ranges, meaning that almost three quarters of the enterprises produced 2 ranges or less per year. Six respondents produced 3 or 4 ranges per year, one produced 6 and one other enterprise exceptionally produced 8 ranges.

5.6 Sourcing Fabric

Respondents were asked if their enterprise cooperated with a particular fabric supplier (variable 'partfab' labelled 'particular fabric supplier') and whether their enterprise worked with a particular supplier for other materials (variable 'partsup' labelled 'work with a particular supplier'). There were 30 responses to these questions. In both cases a small majority of respondents indicated that their enterprise used a particular fabric supplier (17 enterprises) and a particular materials supplier (16).

From the cross-tabulation it was clear that those enterprises which used a particular fabric supplier also used one particular supplier for other materials (with a single exception). A majority of respondents, some 16 respondents, used particular suppliers whereas 13 did not utilise particular suppliers either for fabric or for other materials.

Respondents were asked if anyone in the design team had a fabric /textile background or training (variable 'desqual' labelled 'fabric textile qualifications'). This professional background was considered useful and relevant to collaboration with textile houses. Of the 30 respondents from whom this question elicited a response, almost two thirds (19) had at least one person with a fabric/textile background in the design team.

Respondents were asked if they collaborated with a fabric supplier to produce fabric that was exclusive to that enterprise (variable 'fabsup' labelled 'exclusive fabric production'). There were 30 responses although 3 responses indicated that the question was not applicable to their business. Of the remaining 27, 19 respondents reported exclusive fabric production and one other mentioned exclusive production for specified parts of the garment, such as embroidered inserts, giving a total of 20. Thus almost three quarters of enterprises covered did have some form of exclusive fabric production at some time and in some form.

Respondents were asked whether the designer/design team visited fabric fairs (variable 'desosff' labelled 'design team visits of fabric fairs') and, if so, which ones (variable 'whosff' labelled 'os fabric fairs'). There were 28 responses. 25 respondents indicated that overseas fabric fairs were attended. Of these 25, 17 responses (over two thirds) had attended Premier Vision in Paris and the remaining 8 respondents named several fabric fairs. 3 respondents stated the question was not applicable and 2 did not answer the question.

Respondents were asked whether their enterprise employed their own pattern makers and graders (variable 'pmemp' labelled 'pattern employed'). There were 30 responses, one nil response and 3 respondents indicated the question was not applicable to their enterprise. Nineteen enterprises employed pattern cutters and graders and a further 3 used freelance pattern makers or graders. Only 5 respondents mentioned no pattern cutting or grading provision. The employment of pattern cutters and graders was therefore more widespread across this group of enterprises than in-house production facilities and some respondents commented that pattern construction was perceived as integral to the design of the garment.

5.7 Marketing

Respondents were asked if their company employed personnel with named responsibility in marketing (variable 'markp' labelled 'employ marketing'); public relations (variable 'prp' labelled 'employ in pr'); and promotions and advertising (variable 'pap' labelled 'employ promotion and advertising'). Respondents were also asked to provide the numbers of personnel with named responsibility in the same areas. Respectively this comprised variable 'masn' labelled 'number employed in marketing' ; variable 'prpno' labelled ' number employed in pr' ; and variable 'papno' labelled ' number employed in promotion and advertising'.

Preliminary analysis of the responses showed that enterprises often had a single person responsible for several or all of the three marketing activities. The data must be treated with caution. It certainly does not indicate that the enterprises

concerned had even one full time person employed solely on any or all of these tasks. Indeed, some respondents explicitly stated that the person responsible for these functions was also simultaneously responsible for design or production functions.

When asked whether any marketing, public relations and promotions /advertising functions were performed by external agencies, 10 respondents out of the total of 31 enterprises indicated that they were (this was variable 'exag' labelled 'any function by agencies'). Seven enterprises were reported to use agencies for press/public relations purposes; two enterprises used agencies for 'other ' purposes and only one used them for all 3 stated purposes.

5.8 Sales and Distribution

When respondents were asked how the sales function was organised in their company (variable 'salesf' labelled 'sales function organisation'), there were 12 diverse responses which were allocated to an 'other' code. In 5 enterprises the principal led the sales function, with the same number of respondents mentioning a sales director and a sales team. In the 3 remaining cases, the joint principal led the sales function.

Respondents were asked who were their main competitors at question 15 (variable 'mcom' labelled 'main competitors'). There were 29 responses. The answers highlighted the practical problems involved in applying the 'closed loop' method to the designer fashion sector. Of these the largest single group, 15 of the 29, stated that their products were *unique* and by implication they

had *no competitors*.

7 respondents named overseas competitors, in some cases in addition to UK competition, indicating that some 22 enterprises (over three quarters) had either no competitors at all or at least some overseas based competitors. In total, 10 enterprises named specific UK competitors and in half these cases (5) *in addition* named overseas based competitors. Of the more specific responses, 5 respondents named one UK competitor; 4 named two such competitors; and a single respondent named 4 UK competitors. Two further respondents simply stated they had several UK competitors without numbering or naming these specific enterprises.

Of the total of 29 respondents in the sample, 17 UK competitors were named, one of which was named by two interview respondents. Of the 16 individual enterprises cited, 4 were included in the interview sample. Thus the questionnaires yielded only 12 distinct home based competitors *not* already included in the *sample*. However, none of these were firms which had not already been identified as members of the sector or population, prior to the random selection of respondents for the interviews. Half of these enterprises (2) were named by 3 respondents and six more respondents named a single competitor each.

From the perspective of further defining the British designer fashion sector and its population therefore the 'closed loop' approach did not yield new enterprises or data, especially given that over three quarters of the sample either had no competitors (*in their view*) or named foreign based competitors.

However, the question did elicit revealing responses about the respondents *perceptions* of their own products and industry. The data indicated a very wide spectrum of views stating that products were either so unique that there existed no competitors and were thus not part of an industry, or that competitors were international.

In the last question, respondents were asked into which LDS category they believed their enterprise fitted (variable 'categ' labelled 'lds category'). Just under half of them (15 of the 31) indicated their product fitted into 'contemporary collections' category. Four respondents each placed their enterprises in the 'accessories' and 'glamour' categories. Three respondents identified 'street' style' and 'new generation' categories, and a further 2 stated that their enterprises could be fitted into two categories. It is worth noting that these results identified the respondents own personal description and perceptions of their products. Some respondents stated that their own description was at variance with the way in which their garments had been categorised by others.

5.9 Summary of Findings

To recapitulate, the 31 achieved exploratory interviews provided a valuable and unique insight into both the creative and business characteristics of the designer fashion sector. One respondent was not available for face-to-face discussion and provided information in writing.

The term 'cottage industry' has pejorative connotations and implies a sector which is not properly part of an industrial economy. It is therefore important to recall that small firms are the dominant means of economic organisation across most of the British economy, and indeed most advanced economies. Thus the latest Department of Trade and Industry data for the start of 1998 showed that the entire business population was 3.7 million enterprises (of which 1.3 million had employees). Of those with employees, 97% had under 50 workers. Only 25,000 had between 50 and 249 employees, and under 7000 had 250 or more employees. (See DTI, 1999).

A vast literature exists on the character, efficiency and growth patterns of small enterprises within the emerging field of 'enterprise' studies. Detailed consideration of this literature is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that small business is often seen as a major source of economic dynamism, innovation and growth, especially employment growth. Storey (1994) provides an overview of the field drawing upon the results of a major four year Economic and Social Research Council initiative.

The characteristics exhibited by the designer fashion enterprises which responded to this investigation showed, very clearly, why at first sight this sector might be dubbed a 'cottage industry', although the term is rejected here as misleading. Size of the enterprise is clearly a likely key factor in a sector where organizational and employment flexibility is high (87% of respondents described their organization as 'flexible') and particularly so since less than 10 % of respondents were a subsidiary of a larger enterprise.

5.9.1 The Structure of the Designer Sector

The structure conduct performance (SCP) approach to commercial analysis was first developed by Mason (1939), refined by Bain (1968) and used by Jones and Cockerill (1984) provides a durable framework for analysing manufacturing industries, although Britton, Clark and Ball (1992a and 1992b) discuss the method's extension to the service sector and apply it to the executive search and selection sector.

In its simplest form, the SCP approach argues that market structure affects the conduct of firms in the industry and this in turn affects performance. At first glance designer fashion is a manufacturing activity, but, in practice, many of these fashion enterprises owned their own shops. Moreover, in any case the designer fashion sector's activities are closely associated with a variety of service sector areas ranging across the press, the wider media, photography, popular music etc.

In terms of market structure the following characteristics are usually considered: 1) number of firms in the industry; 2) proportion of production concentrated in each firm; 3) the degree of substitutability of products; and 4) barriers to entering the sector. The size of the designer sector in terms of the number of firms in the population has been discussed above. Various measures of the market dominance of producers are available, but perhaps the most commonly used are *the 3 and 5 firm concentration ratios*. These ratios show the share of a total industry market variable (e.g. turnover or employment) accounted for by the largest 3 or 5 enterprises. In the absence of

official statistical data on the designer fashion sector as a whole, and the variety of non-official estimates on the sector's size, calculation of robust concentration ratios is problematic because further research is needed. However, while the representativeness of the 31 enterprises covered in the preliminary interviews cannot be assessed, the data do allow *concentration within the sample* to be estimated. Turnover concentration was quite marked, if measured on a range turnover basis, although more research is needed.

A conclusion must be that the designer fashion sector exhibits characteristics of intangibility and heterogeneity. These factors underline the importance of attempting to develop and maintain a reputation, differentiating one's firm's products from that of competitors. Moreover, some enterprises consciously design garments for a specific customer type which further differentiates the product and contributes to the brand image. These products are clearly prestige goods with a high value added component, variously described by some respondents as 'unique' goods.

For designers who first set up business at home, as some do, there are few barriers to entry due to the need to acquire specific physical assets. Basic equipment is widely used across clothing manufacturing and start up involves only low initial capital costs. Nor are there prohibitive scale barriers meaning that newly established firms must produce a large share of the industry's output in order to survive. Moreover, the flexible character of employment within the fashion sector may preclude the necessity to take on full-time employees, as well as reliable estimation of employment in individual firms or the sector as a whole. Unlike some professional service areas, designer fashion has no strong

regulatory body or professional organisation setting educational or vocational qualification barriers to entry.

On the other hand, according to the British Fashion Council sources, designers who wish to establish themselves from the onset at a prestigious central London showroom, which is a great advantage insofar as promotion is concerned, probably will need an estimated capital start up sum of £150,000. Additional costs will include exhibiting and showing garments at London Fashion Week. In particular, the need to produce garments ahead of the season when they are sold in shops creates cash-flow problems for a beginner without start-up capital.

5.9.2 Conduct of the Designer Sector

While detailed information was not collected on the *pricing policies* of respondents, the low barriers of entry and heterogenous products imply variable prices set in a competitive environment. The high degree of range turnover concentration within the sample, might, if reflected across the designer sector as a whole, be an indicator of some market power among the largest firms. However, the UK domestic fashion market is subject to severe competitive pressure from overseas based enterprises, many of which are far larger than the largest UK enterprises.

Diffusion ranges and exports are the obvious routes to market extension if these firms wish to grow; there will exist a limited market for expensive prestige products in any one location. While a small majority of respondents

said their enterprises had a named person responsible for marketing, public relations and promotions and advertising, in one third of cases, the person's key responsibilities were in other fields.

5.9.3 Performance of the Designer Sector

In the original SCP approach, performance is indicated by efficiency, profitability, productivity and growth is the 'outcome' of structure and conduct. The exploratory interviews were not intended to provide detailed quantitative information on the sector's business performance, and in any case such data, especially on profits, are difficult to collect in face to face interviews where the respondent's participation is purely voluntary.

In the absence of specific research about the consumers of designer products, it is not feasible to comment upon whether successful sellers are meeting consumer requirements, which would give another index of overall performance. Without specific data which identifies consumers' requirements when purchasing designer products, conclusions can only be speculative.

CHAPTER 6

FASHION EXHIBITIONS IN THE MUSEUM CONTEXT

‘Participant observation is an oxymoron, a form of paradox which generates meanings as well as permitting different - indeed contradictory - interpretations. (Ellen, 1984, p.216).’

6.1 Introduction

During 1997 there were a number of major museum exhibitions in London, also focused upon various fashion themes. Visits to these exhibitions were incorporated into the emergent research methodology with a view to identifying, comparing and contrasting the range and scope of underlying theories. The aim was to identify and explore implicit theories of fashion underpinning these events which might explain the inherent contradictions of contemporary British designer fashion and complement the literature review in chapter 2.

In doing so I sought to explicate the underlying assumptions or conceptual framework upon which these exhibitions and shows were based. According to McDonald and Fyfe (1996, p14-15), ‘Any museum or exhibition is, in effect, a statement of position. It is a theory, a suggested way of seeing the world.’ The description which follows below is of events which are time bound and have subsequently become ‘frozen in time.’

Four of the five museums in London staging the exhibitions covered are

classified as “national” museums with collections of national significance which are self-governing Non-Departmental Public Bodies receiving sponsorship and significant amounts of public subsidy from central government (the Museum of London is also part supported by the Corporation of the City of London). They are all in their particular fields, repositories of specialist knowledge and curatorial expertise. The Design is a more recently established privately developed museum, which has nevertheless established a significant reputation for innovative display techniques.

As well as displaying their permanent collections with displays being rotated since inevitably their whole collections far exceed the public display space available, all museums of the status and scale of the five bodies covered here regularly mount temporary, time limited, themed special exhibitions. These typically incorporate not only material from the permanent collection of the host museum, but also objects on temporary loan from other museums, private collections and owners. Entry to such exhibitions is typically charged for separately, even in national museums like the National Portrait Gallery where general entry to the museum is free. Such charges are intended to at least partly cover the additional costs inevitably involved in staging, curating, documenting and marketing temporary exhibition events.

6.2 Method

The research approach adopted in this chapter sought to adapt the method of “participant observation” in viewing a number of museum exhibitions about fashion phenomena. However, as a member of the viewing public my role was

more concerned with observation than interaction with individuals. My narrative, initially documented in field notes, was cross-referenced with museum signage, pamphlets, and texts which accompanied the exhibition.

Texts are identified as data consisting of words and images which have become recorded. In this sense, an exhibition is also a “text” which in this case has already been constructed in the museum context, by a curator. To recapitulate, any museum or exhibition is, in effect, a statement of a position. It is a theory, a suggested way of seeing the world. The texts associated with museum exhibitions are usually described as scholarly texts.

6.3 Five Museum Exhibitions

During 1997, there were five exhibitions of fashion at major British museums. These included: the Cutting Edge: 50 years of British Fashion 1947 to 1997, at the Vitoria and Albert Museum, London from 6 March to 27 July, 1997; Forties Fashion and the New Look, at the Imperial War Museum, 12 February to 31 August, 1997; the Pursuit of Beauty, at the National Portrait Gallery, 30 May to 26 October, 1997; In Royal Fashion, 1796 to 1901, at the London Museum, 20 May to 23 November, 1997; and the Power of Erotic Design, at the Design Museum, 1 May to 12 October, 1997.

I visited these ‘cultural’ exhibitions about fashion phenomena to compare and contrast the approach of the exhibition organisers with that of London Fashion Week, reviewed in chapter 7. This strand of the research included document analysis of exhibition catalogues and books, together with observation of the

exhibits.

6.3.1 The Cutting Edge

The Victoria and Albert Museum is the National Museum of Art and Design. Its decision to mount the "first ever" major exhibition of its kind showing garments created by British fashion designers over the past fifty years, from 1947 to 1997, was an important public acknowledgment of the cultural cachet of the sector.

The exhibition signage began with the opening statement that "high fashion has become one of Britain's most successful *art forms* in the post war period." However, describing Britain's high fashion *industry*, the exhibition went on to acknowledge, the British fashion industry has been supported only minimally by Government and business. As a result it is much smaller than in countries where substantial investment has enabled the development of lucrative licensing and retail opportunities (De la Haye, 1997).

The commercial dimension of designer fashion as a "successful art form" was therefore tacitly acknowledged by the exhibition organisers. However, the timing of The Cutting Edge (on 6 March, 1997), after London Fashion Week (on 23-28 February, 1997), meant that the many international visitors to the first exhibition had no opportunity to view the second. The artefacts on display at both exhibitions were created by the same group of designers but the stated context of The Cutting Edge was cultural and the stated context of "London Fashion Week" was commercial.

Apparently it did not occur to the exhibition organisers at the Victoria and Albert Museum that those who are currently employed in the sector, and purchasing garments created by British designers in the spring of 1997, might have more than a passing interest in the industry's antecedents? Whatever the reason for the separate timing of the two exhibitions, The Cutting Edge provided an important seal of approval from the cultural establishment for British designer fashion.

6.3.2 The Cutting Edge: British Art Schools

Tracing the history of high fashion from the austere post-war, period to the present day, the Cutting Edge exhibition spanned the shift from haute couture to ready-to-wear. It explored the "Britishness" of British fashion described as a fascinating tension between tradition and innovation, respectability and iconoclasm (De la Haye, 1997). In doing so, it paid tribute to the "unique training" provided by British art schools in shaping the nation's fashion identity. Traditionally, dressmaking or tailoring skills were acquired through an apprenticeship or attending art or trade schools. However, these routes all gave priority to technical rather than creative skills.

According to the text which accompanied the exhibition, in the late 1930s Muriel Pemberton, an influential figure at St Martins School of Art, instigated evening classes to develop creative skills. These classes combined the study of art with the history of dress. By the late 1940s, the expansion in higher education, the widespread accessibility of grants after the second world war and the establishment of full-time fashion courses had made art school

education in dress more widely available. By the 1960s, art school trained designers were making an innovative and often radical contribution to the industry. The young designers co-existed with the traditional British couture houses such as Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies, and together they contributed to the diverse identity of British high fashion.

The 250 garments exhibited in The Cutting Edge were drawn from a "unique" and extensive collection of holdings in the Department of Textiles and Dress, entitled the Twentieth Century Dress Collection. These items had been donated by British fashion designers, manufacturers, tailors and their clients. The Curator, Amy de la Haye, sought to build this exhibition around the garments as the central exhibits, rather than the personality of the designers or a chronological sequence approach.

Inside the exhibition hall the lighting was low, to protect the garments from deterioration. Soft piano music was playing in the background, which was especially composed for the exhibition by James Croft. This was developed from "period style imagery"; and included noises made by "sewing machines, scissors cutting and handbags snapping shut." The garments were displayed on headless dummies, arranged simply on wooden platforms with muslin curtains providing a backdrop. No doubt this was an important part of the philosophy of allowing the garments to speak for themselves. The result was garments curiously lacking in animation, devoid of wearer, context or the other cultural messages which usually convey their place in time and space.

The exhibition publication, a book entitled De La Haye (1996) unusually

included brief interviews with some of the designers. These questions explored commercial rather than creative issues, which was somewhat at variance with the cultural aim of the exhibition, to analyse fashion as art. The designers' responses to questions were included at the end of the book, almost as an appendix. No attempt was made to link them to the main thesis, which was that there exists four recurring themes in British designer fashion; the content of the designers' replies do not suggest that the designer's views had been used to generate themes or hypotheses. Indeed, the origin of these four themes is not identified by the author/curator. The resulting themes identified by Amy De la Haye (1996) to explain British fashion were Romantic, Tailored, Bohemian and Country. The exhibition organisers stated that these are the specialisms in which British fashion designers excel.

6.3.3 The Cutting Edge: Romantic Fashion

The exhibition began with Romantic garments; wedding dresses and romantic evening wear with tight bodices and full skirts which exemplify the genre. A small child next to me, observing the detail of a state gown designed by Norman Hartnell, "Flowers of France" 1957 (Figure 2), worn and owned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, asked his mother, "Is the music coming from the dress?"

Figure 2: Romantic Fashion; Flowers of France Created by Norman Hartnell for Her Majesty the Queen, 1957



According to De La Haye (1996), following the second world war, London's couture houses continued to provide clothes for the aristocracy, who had increasingly merged with industry and business magnates to form the top echelon of British society. The couture houses provided garments to meet the requirements of the social season and related elite social events. It was even necessary to be formally introduced to the couture salon by other clients. Evening wear for women in the period following the war was loosely divided into three categories: formal and ornate dresses worn by mature women; delicate, full skirted ingénue styles in sugar almond colours worn by débutantes; and short evening and cocktail wear, worn by younger women (De La Haye, 1996).

By the 1950s the social season was in decline and many established British couturiers had gone out of business. Moreover, there were new competitors emerging in the fashion trade. These were a generation of designers who had begun to make ready-to-wear garments. Full length evening dresses again became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s the Princess of Wales had a major influence on the resurgence of a romantic look and popularised British fashion designers, who gained her patronage. Figure 3 shows an early prototype of her wedding dress, created by David and Elizabeth Emanuel. It was developed from the same tight bodiced but full-skirted silhouette which Norman Hartnell had created for Queen Elizabeth!

Figure 3: Romantic Fashion; An Early Prototype of Princess Diana's Wedding Dress Created by David and Elizabeth Emanuel, 1979



6.3.4 The Cutting Edge: Bohemian Fashion

This descriptor referred to a group of garments of artistic or 'individualistic' styling, which was developed from historical or ethnic influences; According to Cecil Beaton, "At its truest the attire exhibited by the English woman has a certain "literary" quality: almost, one might say, a Virginia Woolf appreciation for clothes that possess the association of ideas... old things have a certain romantic charm about them, and English women of sensibility appreciate this. Far from preferring a trim, neat look, they incline more towards the picturesque (De la Haye, 1997, p.5)."

In the early 1900s, Roger Fry, the Quaker, painter and art critic wore brightly coloured shantung silk ties, open sandals and broad brimmed hats. Lady Ottoline Morrell, the Bloomsbury hostess dyed her hair purple and wore Turkish robes; there were other often literary or artistic figures for whom dress also signalled non-conformism. Sometimes politics, or aesthetics inspired an unconventional statement made through dress. The exhibition organisers identified this stance as "peculiarly British."

More recently the phrase "Bohemian Fashion" has been used to describe the work of British designers who purposefully draw upon ethnic or historical sources of inspiration. Once created these "fashions" often obscure seasonal style changes. Many such garments are loosely cut or draped and based upon a simple t-shape, often full-length which was both comfortable to wear and flattering to a range of figure types and age groups (Figure 4).

International and ethnic influences upon fashion began in the 1960s when designers first began to adopt the silhouettes and fabrics of non-Western clothing traditions. Moreover, whilst British society was becoming increasingly multicultural at home, travel to foreign and exotic destinations became more widespread for larger sections of the population. These influences affected designers and society as a whole and continue to do so. Women became more willing to accept exotic foreign influences in their own dress, valuing a combination of natural fibres and decorative hand work in comfortable and flowing clothing.

6.3.5 The Cutting Edge: Country Fashion

"The deep and abiding affection for the countryside is reflected in British literature, music and painting; landscapes by Constable and Stubbs' equine portraits continue to be national favourites. The land provides a reassuring haven, especially in times of crisis - during both world wars political propaganda truly exploited this. In the post-war period, fashion was among the many media to have reflected and reinforced this special relationship between the British and the countryside (De la Haye, 1997, p117)."

According to Lurie, country garments are inspired by an idealised vision of English aristocratic country life and may represent an escapism from the modern demands of urban life. "When they are worn in town the message is 'I don't really belong here, behind this desk or in this flat; my rightful place is in the garden of a rather large country house' (Lurie, 1981, p.104)."

Figure 4: Bohemian Fashion Created by Charles and Patricia Lester, 1994



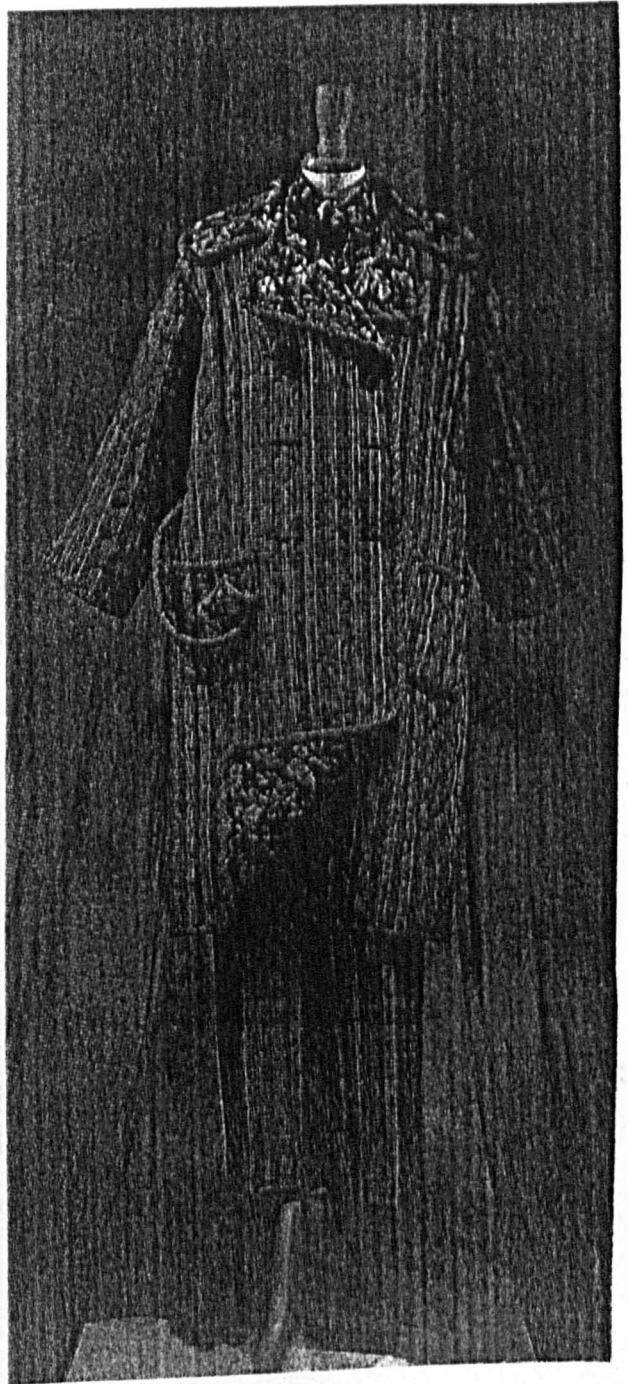
Nostalgia for the country was successfully exploited by Laura Ashley. It has also been explored by many other British designers who have used the styles and materials associated with upper-class country clothes as a basis for their collections (Figure 5) to create modern witty interpretations of the theme. The country theme has also been appropriated by international designers such as Ralph Lauren to create a glossy Americanised vision of British country life. In this sense, British designers may have inspired a nostalgic longing for an idealised past when men lived in accord with nature, which is truly ecological in spirit.

The exhibition identified knitwear as having a special place in country fashion since Aran, Guernsey, Fair Isle and Argyle originated in rural and fishing communities. Since the 1960s domestic knitting machines have been available which has enabled the establishment of small businesses creating limited editions of designer knitwear. British knitwear is recognised throughout the world for its quality, colour, texture and pattern.

6.3.6 The Cutting Edge: Tailored Fashion

According to De La Haye (1996), women originally wore tailored garments as sporting or walking dress. The Utility suit (Figure 6) featured in the exhibition and created during the last war with a prescribed number of buttons and trims, limited in the light of economy, was the precursor of today's executive woman's suit. By the 1950s a smart tailored suit, now using more fabric and following the shapely silhouette created by Dior's New Look was an essential item for the office, shopping and lunching. Trousers were added to the ensemble in the 1960s, and have been in and out of fashion since that time.

Figure 5: Sally Tuffin's Interpretation of the Country Theme, 1960s and 1970s



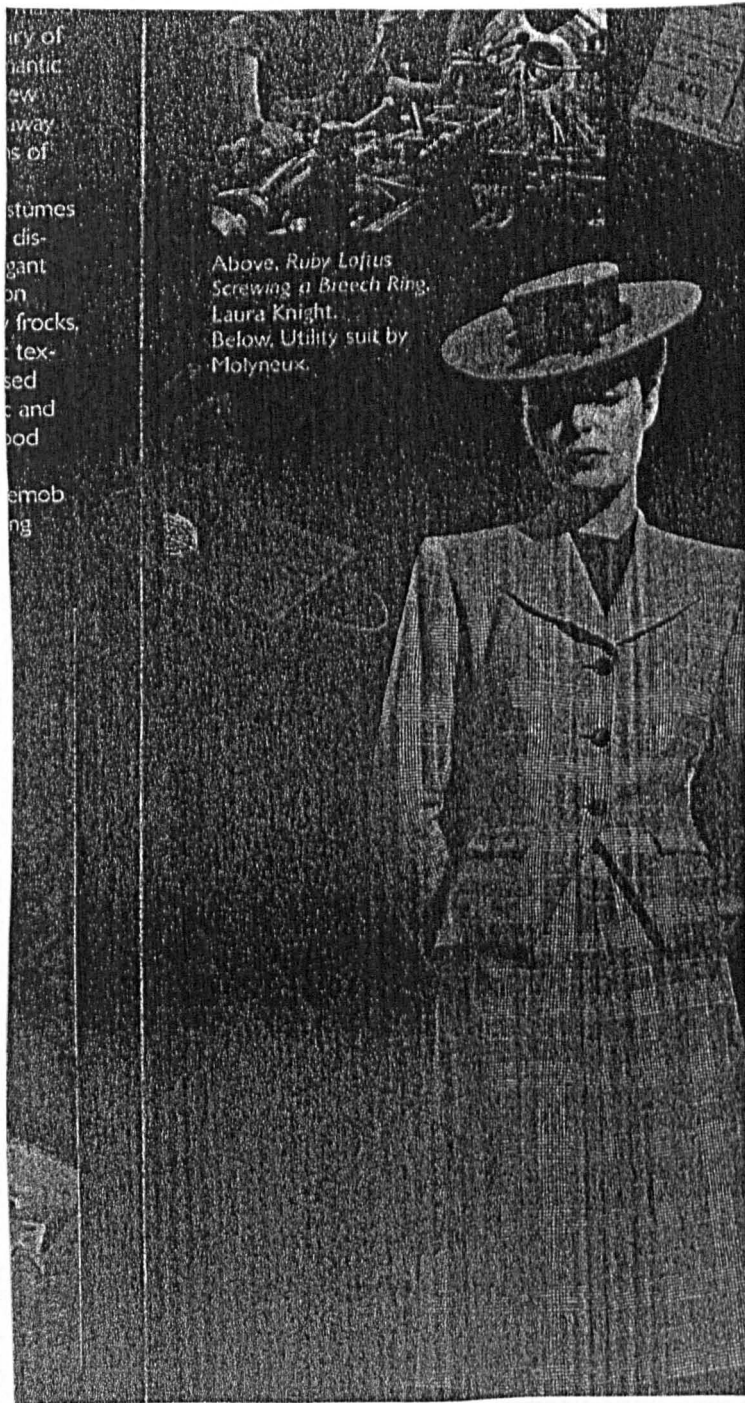
By the early 1980s suits had developed a hard square shouldered masculine appearance. The unisex dimension of the "suit" which has clear similarities with its masculine counterpart, reflected the increasing participation of women in the work force since the second world war. (In the later 1980s Italian designer Armani began to create a looser and less structured jacket worn with rolled up cuffs, which created a softer although still smart silhouette on the female figure).

The exhibition showed that in Britain the suit has often been adapted imaginatively and inventively by designers such as Vivienne Westwood (Figure 7) and John Galiano. Conventional British fabrics such as tweeds, tartan and herringbone are being used in new ways in the 1990s to create an unconventional interpretation of this classic British ensemble (De la Haye,1997).

6.4 Forties Fashion and the New Look

This exhibition proved to be so popular with the general public that it was extended until 2 November, 1997. It spanned the war years and included one hundred costumes ranging from uniforms to Christian Dior's new look launched in 1947. In this exhibition the inter-relationship between fashion and war, with its incumbent realities such as the black out, rationing, air raid shelters and bombs was explored.

Figure 6: British Wartime Tailoring by Digby Morton, 1942



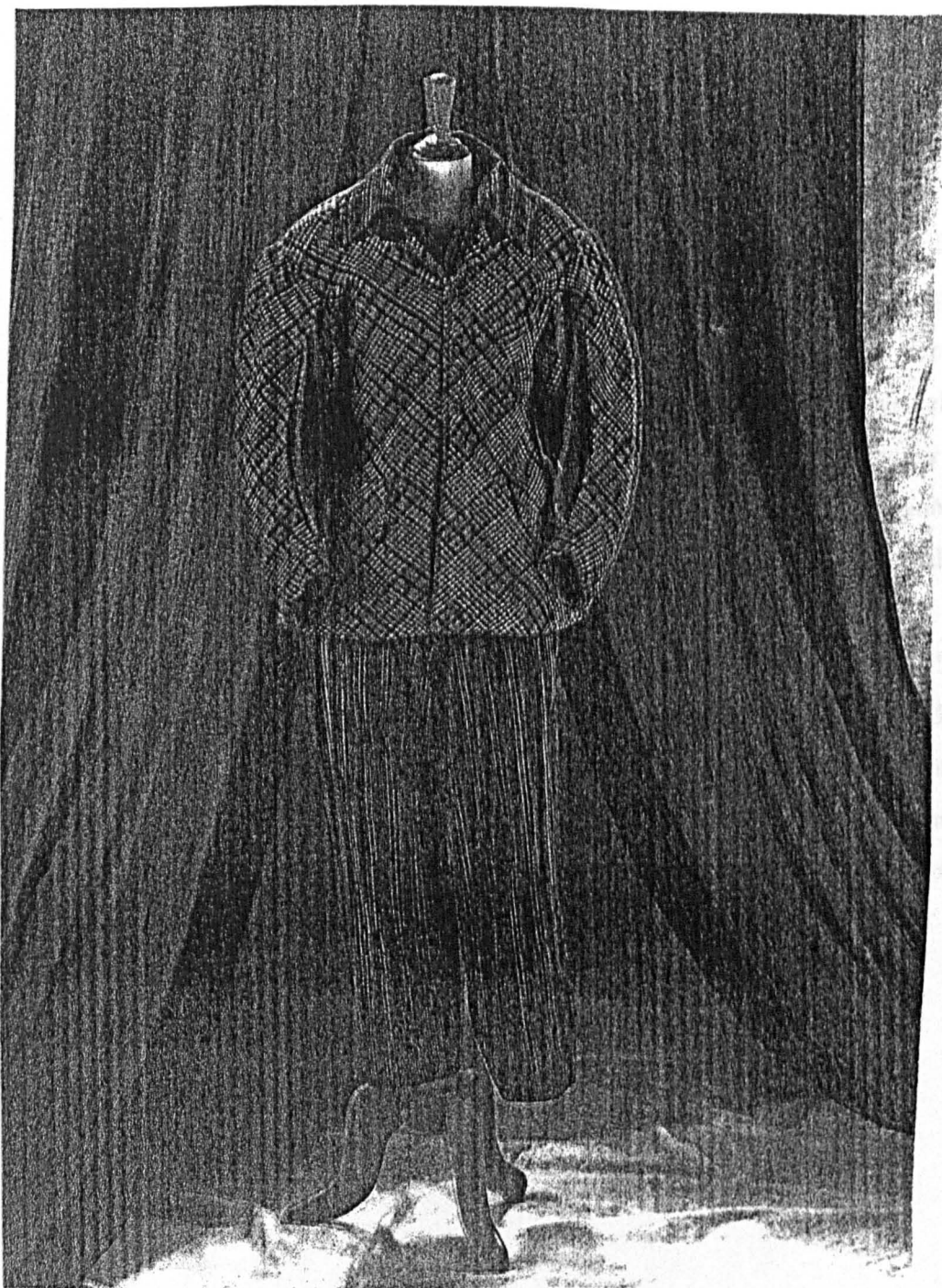
For the exhibition, the Imperial War Museum had been constructed as an Alladin's cave of dark corridors, barely lit in order to recreate the atmosphere of the "black out". In the first room there was an elegant display of evening gowns created by Chanel, Schiaparelli and Hartnell set against a back drop of chandeliers and mirrors. Presumably the aim was to recreate an elegant mood at the outset of the second world war.

The start of the war was signalled by the display of a gas mask and period posters illustrating "bogus fashions" which were featured in magazines in the early days of the war. How does one carry a gas mask and look fashionable? What colour lipstick looks good with khaki? A little further along the exhibition rooms a bride's trousseau was displayed for the "Winter War Time Bride" (Figure 8).

The exhibition moved on sequentially in time to display period posters from the "war-time proper" asking the "Women of Britain to Come into the Factory" or "Join the Women's Land Army (Figure 9)." There were displays of uniforms, "Fashion on the Ration", "Liberty Haircuts" and fabric printed with RAF wings. According to exhibition signage, cosmetics during the war were in short supply because manufacturers such as Cyclax made sun-screen for the soldiers in North Africa, and aircraft parts. However, a small display of cosmetics from the period included boot polish which doubled as mascara.

Throughout the war years the cinema and American films were very popular and they created an opportunity for escapism. The screen fashions associated with 'Gone with the Wind', the padded shoulders of Joan Crawford's costumes

Figure 7: British Tailoring; Vivienne Westwood's Pirate Collection (1981)



or the shapely sweaters worn by Lana Turner were included in the display providing an image of female elegance which most women could only dream of at the time (McDowell,1997).

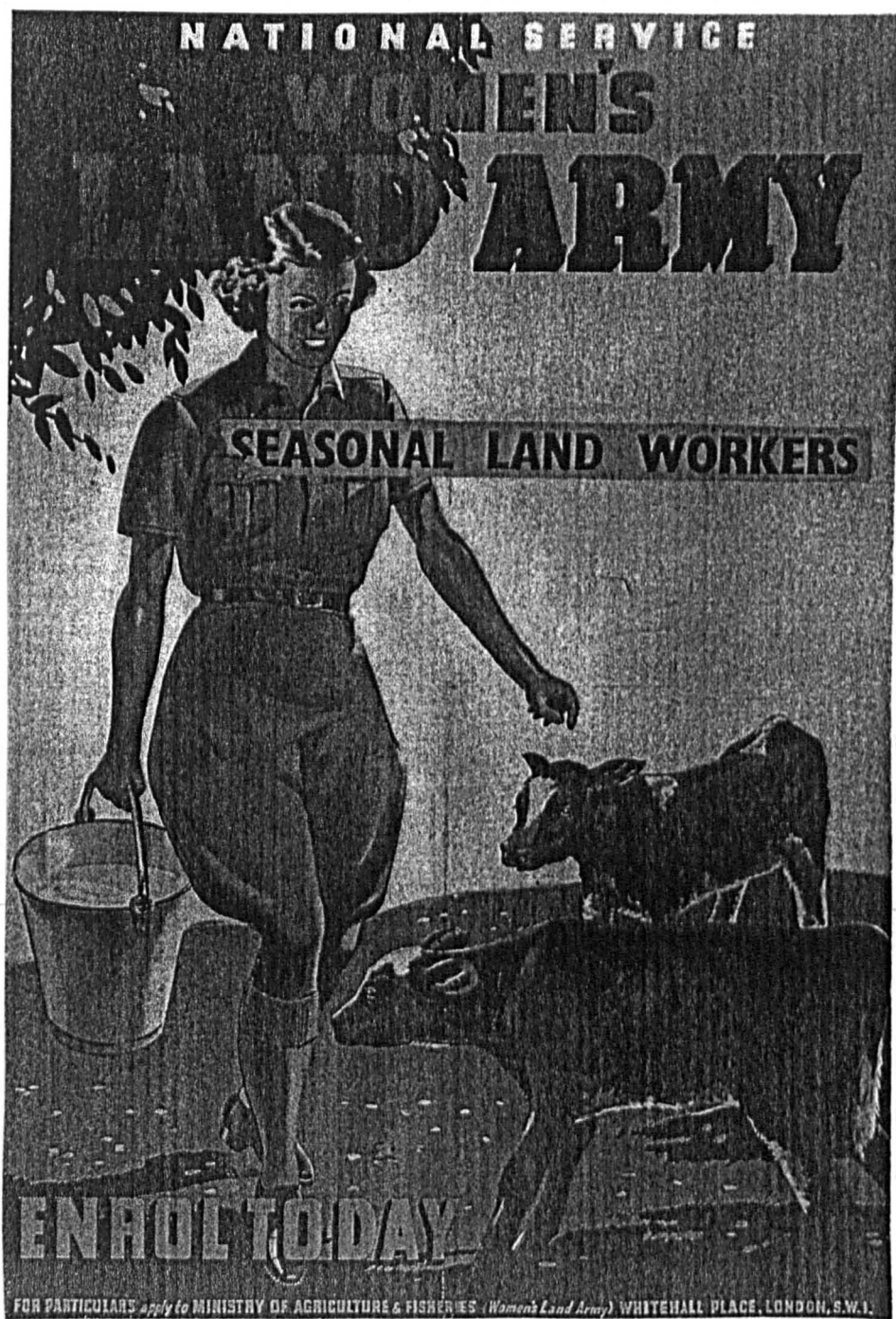
The exhibition displayed the realities of the war years which included "Make Do and Mend" or "Utility Fashions" created by designers of the stature of Molyneaux, Hardy Amies, Digby Morton, Hartnell and Stickel. These garments were designed and manufactured according to the strict specifications of the Board of Trade, with restrictions on the numbers of buttons and pockets which made them suitable for mass-production. In addition to costume, the exhibition included music from the period, British and French newsreel, cinema clips and wooden mannequins dressed by French couturiers for the 'Theatre de la Mode' in 1945. This was exhibited in London to demonstrate that despite the austerities of war the French couture industry remained alive.

The exhibition concluded with garments shown by Christian Dior in 1947 which had created a "New Look", and were exemplified by soft shoulders, tiny waists, and full skirts just above the ankle. In December 1946, as a result of the war and wearing uniforms, women still looked and dressed like Amazons, but Dior designed clothes for flowerlike women with rounded shoulders, full feminine busts and hand-spun waists, and these were displayed at the exhibition.

Figure 8: Trousseau for a War Bride



Figure 9: Women's Land Army



6.5 **The Pursuit of Beauty: National Portrait Gallery, 30 May - 26 October, 1997**

The exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, The Pursuit of Beauty, explored the phenomena of fashion as a beautifier through the centuries, including the role of fashion in portraiture. However, the emphasis in this exhibition was upon fashion as an agent of change and the human subject of adornment, rather than upon fashion items as such. The catalogue included the statement, "Throughout human history, across all times and cultures, men and women have adorned their bodies in the pursuit of beauty. They have exposed or concealed different amounts of themselves, extended, reduced or reshaped their body parts and coloured their skin and hair, either temporarily or permanently. (National Portrait Gallery, 1997, p.1)".

The organisers of the exhibition stated that many aspects of "beauty" which might be considered objective, were in fact highly subjective. Appearance needed to be analysed for its symbolic meaning and changes in ideals of beauty may derive from changes in perception about gender or status. Changes in economics, technological or medical advances, including nutrition and health care have also impacted upon ideals of beauty. Only in the twentieth century do teeth begin to appear in portraits, although good even teeth have been considered desirable through the centuries.

The fact that the appearance of male clothes has changed less throughout the centuries than those of the female was explained as reflecting the primarily sexual nature of body adornment. It was noted that personal appearance has

consistently played a more central role in characterising femininity than masculinity. There were portraits in the exhibition which had been selected for wide-ranging reasons. Some sitters had helped to determine fashionable appearance during their day. Others, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who introduced inoculation against smallpox, shaped future ideals of beauty since this development had reduced the necessity for women to cover scars with heavy make-up.

An early example of the influence of a prominent individual upon current ideals of beauty included in the exhibition was Elizabeth I. A natural red-head, in her later years the Queen wore a red wig; many of the ladies of the court were thus influenced to dye their hair red. Previously ladies at court had covered their hair. Elizabeth's reign was also a period when women experimented with cosmetics; they whitened their faces and painted in veins to suggest translucent skin. White make-up identified women of status and position from those who worked outside and acquired a sun-tan. Female dress was grand, rigid and impractical. Farthingales or huge hooped cages placed underneath skirts widened women's hips therefore emphasizing their child-bearing capacity.

A much later and familiar example of the influence of an individual upon fashion included in the exhibition was that of Diana, Princess of Wales. In the later part of the twentieth century there has been a blurring of distinctions between the social classes and the sexes. Consequently, childbearing hips are no longer fashionable and instead a slim boyish figure became the ideal for women, often achieved through dieting rather than corsets. Although Diana,

Figure 10: Modern Ideas of Fashion: Diana, Princess of Wales



like Elizabeth, was an establishment figure she had a powerful effect upon the way all women wished to dress, and on modern ideals of fashion in the latter part of the twentieth century (Figure 10).

An unusual and innovative aspect of this exhibition was the opportunity for visitors to try on wigs, masks, corsets and crinolines and thus to alter the appearance of their own bodies. Large mirrors were interspersed between the portraits for this purpose. The opportunity proved to be especially popular with children, and together with wall mounted punch cartoons, contributed to an intimate, chatty and humorous atmosphere. The exhibition was appropriately staged in the small Studio Gallery which is also an Education Centre.

6.6 In Royal Fashion, 1796 - 1901: The London Museum, 20 May to 23 November, 1997

This exhibition focused on the role of two royal ladies, Princess Charlotte of Wales and Queen Victoria, in establishing historical court and society fashions. The collection included wedding dresses, coronation robes, informal dresses, dressing gowns, parasols, bonnets, gloves and shoes rarely displayed before. There were examples of how Princess Charlotte of Wales and Queen Victoria approached fashionable dressing in both their public and private lives. Figure 11 shows an example of a gown worn by Queen Victoria.

Figure 11: Dress Worn by Queen Victoria on Her First Day as Queen 20 June, 1837



One of the most disconcerting aspects of the research underpinning the exhibition "In Royal Fashion" was the problem of attribution which arose as each garment was subjected to scrutiny. Many of the items were rarely supported by documentary evidence when they entered the Museum's collection and therefore the traditional associations were unknown. This was frequently the case with royal loans or donations according to exhibition organisers, whilst material handed down within families is similarly the subject of heresay as to its origins. Nonetheless, the exhibition provided a significant historical contribution in showing how prominent ladies influenced fashion trends of their day.

6.7 The Power of Erotic Design: Design Museum, 1 May - 12 October, 1997

This exhibition sought to define the erotic in design from 1900 to the 1990s and was concerned with the cultural impact of the erotic domain, charged as it is with complex associations, emotions, norms and values. These associations were not understood as constant, but changing according to culture, class, age, race, gender and sexuality. The subject matter of erotic design was perceived as complex. The question was posed, "Why do designers invest everyday objects like chairs, motorcycles or bridges with an erotic charge? Has the designer intended the work to be erotic or is eroticism solely in the eye of the beholder? (Design Museum, 1997, p.3)".

According to the exhibition, the 1900s heralded a major change in attitude towards sexuality. Both Freud and Havelock Ellis wrote influential books upon the subject including the dangers of repression. In art, design and

literature, the defining works were the output of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Aubrey Beardsley, Alphonse Mucha, Antonio Gaudi and Henry van de Velde. Art Nouveau, through its exploration of the human body and particularly the idea of the femme fatale, inevitably had a highly charged erotic component (Design Museum, 1997).

It was in this questioning context that the exhibition, The Power of Erotic Design, displayed a wide range of "erotic" or "erotically inspired" artefacts including fashion items. The range included: Art Nouveau posters by Beardsley, phallic amulets, perfume bottles by Schiaparelli and Dali, a telephone receiver, furniture, cars, motorcycles, posters, advertisements, film, music, fashion parades, and items of erotic dress.

Erotic dress covered two categories, those garments designed to be worn privately for seduction purposes and erotically inspired fashion garments (Figure 12). Tribute in the latter respect was paid to Jean Paul Gaultier and particularly his Bondage 'n Body and Trompe l'oeil collections in 1989 and 1992 respectively. His garments refine notions of gender through clothes, for example, suits for women and skirts for men and incorporated erotically charged detail, i.e. suspenders on outerwear. He has also drawn famously upon sado masochistic and fetish themes to inspire high fashion garments such as rubber opera gloves and cod pieces.

Figure 12: Photograph by Helmut Newton, 1996



The work of British designer Vivienne Westwood was also exhibited including penis jewellery and curvaceous shoes. Vivienne Westwood was acknowledged by the Design Museum's exhibition signage as defining fashion as the process of altering the shape of the human body, through clothes, to create sexual allure. Through her creative work with fabric she has re-examined the bustle, the bustier, the stiletto and erogenous zones of the female body.

6.8 Summary of Findings

The research reported in this chapter explored the phenomenon of fashion in a museum context together with tacit theories underpinning the exhibition displays. I visited each exhibition as a "participant observer", and the resulting description and analysis was augmented with reference to exhibition catalogues, signage and texts.

The historical data in the exhibition catalogues and signage recalled that the British fashion designer sector began to develop its profile as the "enfant terrible" of the fashion capitals in the 1960s when British fashion designers such as Quant were acknowledged internationally for innovative design influenced by Punk, the New Romanticism and Art School Radicalism.

However, the museum exhibitions were rather like much of the theoretical literature in chapter 2, characterized by the predominance of monolithic theories that interpreted fashion as a phenomenon and were predominantly retrospective. Fashion was interpreted as high culture and an art form, a response to economic reality and escapism, as a beautifier and a proponent of

sexuality and gender. The Cutting Edge exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, had the most contemporary exhibits. It also attempted to interpret them in relation to four underlying themes, the origin of which was not explained. Moreover, the interpretation of fashion across the museum exhibition appeared restrictive, artificial and sterile. This was disappointing since in the new museology it is argued:

Exhibitions, like monographs, have been given over to the representation of multiple perspectives, to voices of the previously spoken for or 'ignored', to the acknowledgment of ambivalence. (McDonald and Fyfe, 1996, p14-15).

Moreover, it is important to point out that these museum exhibitions were not as is generally assumed, purely 'cultural' events. They too had a commercial subtext in that various products associated with the exhibitions were sold in the museum shops. The launch of each "cultural" exhibition necessitated a major public relations exercise incorporating the design of posters, publicity, signage, books and related products. The curator of a fashion exhibition in the contemporary context is surely "de facto" also a design practitioner.

CHAPTER 7

LONDON FASHION WEEK AND THE DESIGNERS

‘The basic tool any fieldworker uses to discover what is going on and the meaning it has for those studies is speech. And like any conversation back home with the family or in the local ‘pub’, little may be revealed and much may be concealed. (Ellen, 1984, p.229).’

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, which reviewed literature on theory of fashion studies, it was shown that although many theories have emphasized that fashion is a preoccupation of social and economic elites, remarkably little of it has focused on contemporary designer fashion as such. The research reported in chapter 5 provided analysis of commercial aspects of the sector. However, this research strand was intended to explore the creative dimension of designer fashion by attending the exhibitions and fashion shows of London Fashion Week 1997 to observe, describe and interpret the main biannual seasonal event of the British designer fashion calendar.

London Fashion Week is organised by the British Fashion Council (BFC) which was established in 1982. The Council of the BFC is comprised of representatives from manufacturing enterprises, exhibition organisers, public relations companies, trade press and designers. An aim of the BFC is to develop a cooperative approach towards the promotion of British fashion. This

also includes presentation of the annual British Fashion Awards in the following categories; Accessory Design, New Generation Fashion, Glamour, Classic Design, Contemporary Collections, Street Style, and British Designer of the Year.

The BFC, which is a trade association, is funded through its members subscriptions and the British Clothing Industry Association Ltd (BCIA). The BFC receives no government support and in consequence has a limited budget and a small team of full-time support staff. The BCIA, which provides some funds, is the representative body of the British clothing manufacturing industry. Its activities include industrial relations, wage negotiations, international relations and liaison with government organisations.

London Fashion Week incorporates an exhibition and numerous fashion parades staged by the most prominent designers in the contemporary British designer fashion. However, since the first exhibition was held in 1991, then termed the London Designer Show, the exhibition has had problems with financial backing. LFW is privately organised and in recent years, has sought sponsorship from private industry. There have been various prominent individual sponsors.

The commercial dimension of London Fashion Week is an extremely important component of this major event in the British fashion designer calendar. The dramatis personae of LFW all have a key economic as well as creative role to play. These personnel include the exhibition organisers, lighting and sound engineers, models, make-up artists, hair stylists, dressers,

security officers, and catering specialists. Events of such organisational complexity as fashion shows and exhibitions requires the application of extensive and synchronised experience, knowledge and skills. LFW is a major commercial event. However, this research focused upon its creative component.

In this strand of the research the focus was also turned upon designers. The aim was to explore the role they play in shaping the profile of the designer sector. This interview data was intended to complement and enlarge on the data reported in Chapter 5 and the observation at London Fashion Week reported below, in providing a comprehensive profile of the contemporary sector.

7.2 Method

The research approach adopted in this chapter was concerned with the nature of the designer fashion phenomena rather than the industry per se. The aim of research in Chapters 6 and 7 was to counterbalance numeric data and seek to understand why or how things are as they are. These three approaches used in combination were considered necessary to comprehend designer fashion phenomena in a holistic way.

This strand of the research methodology involved establishing my credentials to access London Fashion Week in order to select data, interpret events and describe them. This required viewing London Fashion Week as an assemblage of complex events to be interpreted; establishing my credentials and "rapport",

observing, selecting informants, transcribing notes, keeping a log of events and examining related texts such as promotional literature from the exhibition organisers, exhibitors, newspaper and television reportage. These texts are described as popular.

Geertz (1973) has stated, of the kind of intellectual effort which translates the resulting information into descriptive text, or so termed 'thick description':

right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating and worse, explicating explications (Geertz, p.9, 1973).

According to Clifford (1988), 'textualisation' is the process by which events, unwritten behaviour or traditions become a stable corpus of knowledge "typical" of a segment of behaviour of the surrounding culture. For example, Geertz's description of the Balinese cock fight becomes a locus for Balinese culture (Geertz, 1973). Thus an underlying assumption of this strand of the research was that London Fashion Week, the main event of the British designer sector is a significant locus for all the contradictions inherent in the sector and would therefore provide valuable insights for the research as a whole.

Accessing the exhibitions and shows of London Fashion Week was not easy. Entry to the exhibition was achieved through industry associates and explaining that I wished to conduct academic research. This entailed the use of my former role as an 'industry employee/participant' and my new academic role as a 'researcher/observer.' However, once inside the exhibition site, I relied primarily, although not exclusively, upon non-obtrusive and non-reactive data collection techniques such as observation, note-taking, informal

conversation, and document analysis. Documentary evidence is a data source often used in qualitative research to provide additional information or as an external referent against which information may be checked.(Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Catalogues and promotional literature was collected and analysed during the exhibition of London Fashion Week.

Access to the shows given by some, not all, fashion designers is more complex since this requires a personal invitation. This was facilitated in part by a friend I accompanied who is a journalist and was visiting the collections professionally. However, more invitations were facilitated by a South American television crew seeking "local" information. I was invited to accompany their team and provide background information on British fashion sector, and in doing so I became their 'local informant' as well as accessing additional shows as reported in this chapter.

However, it must be stated that even with support of various kinds and a ticket, accessing many of the shows was so chaotic that the experience was akin to that of a rugby scrum. In any case it was clear that many tickets had been issued for which there were no corresponding seats. By contrast, accessing museum exhibitions, also reviewed in the last chapter, was straight forward. I simply bought a ticket and entered as a viewing member of the public.

Fashion and business press reports were also reviewed during London Fashion Week and contributed to this strand of the research report. This information provided a counterpoise to, and a complemented my own descriptions. Taken together, observation, informal conversation, exhibition literature and

newspaper reviews contributed to this descriptive phase of the research. Observation was accompanied by some degree of participation in the events, for example, the receptions linked to the shows required informal conversation and mingling.

Interviews with designers completed this research strand. Interviewees were randomly selected from winners or nominees over the past four years for the British Fashion Awards coordinated by the British Fashion Council, or from the New Generation Award sponsored by a major chain-store with multinational outlets. Their categories represented specialisms across the designer sector, including; Accessory Design, New Generation Fashion, Glamour, Classic Design, Contemporary Collections, Street Style and British Designer of the Year. The last category is awarded annually to the leading designers of couture, ready to wear, knitwear or accessories who have directed the shape of British fashion both in the UK and internationally. In other words, interviewees were selected because their creativity was considered 'proven' by peers. As such this strand of the research included interviews with a 'creative elite' of the fashion industry combined with the opportunity for photo analysis by them.

Questions for the interview were devised to explore themes derived and adopted from the preceding analysis of existing theories of fashion (Chapter 2), and tacit theories of fashion arising from visits to the museum exhibitions (Chapter 6). The target population for the interviews formed a 'creative elite'. The problems associated with interviewing elites are identified as containing their responses within the interview schedule because they are unusually

competent and well informed (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In this case this was not a problem because the interview was designed to act as a prompt for open ended discussion and was not intended to be prescriptive or restrictive.

7.3 Designer Interviewees and Confidentiality

To present a full profile of the designers it would have been preferable to introduce the interviewees in this text with a description of their professional background, before the report of interview data and findings. The requirements of confidentiality prevented the inclusion of descriptive background information which would identify them to readers. Moreover, experience of being misquoted in the press made interviewees cautious. In the report of the interview findings that follows below the designers have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Pseudonyms have also been adopted where there exists reference to well known companies in the fashion industry.

7.4 London Fashion Week: Exhibition

7.4.1 Entree

As a Londoner, I was not entirely clear as to how to interpret the television news reports that US Newsweek and Vanity Fair had pronounced London ‘the coolest city on the planet’. This statement which heralded the start of London Fashion Week, a twice-yearly event at which leading British Fashion designers show and exhibit their collections, was probably intended as complimentary,

an inducement to attract international buyers and journalists to the event.

British designer fashion has had a chequered history. But in 1997 it had once again become fashionable to talk about the 'vibrancy' of London. The phenomenon was not new; London was swinging in the 1960s when British designers such as Quant, Foale and Tuffin, and Clark created clothes that were considered affordable and sexy for the new consumer who was young and independent. It was at this time that London began to establish itself as a centre for creative but unofficial fashion, the 'enfants terrible' of the four international fashion capitals, Paris, London, Milan and New York.

The fashion ideas at this time, which were generated from what is known as street fashion, punk, the new Romanticism and art school radicalism had a large influence and won international acclaim for their inventiveness. This whimsical and idiosyncratic image of the British designer sector, together with its limited commercial success, reports of late deliveries and poor quality goods has bedeviled the sector since the 1960s.

And so, on the week beginning the 23rd February 1997, as I approached the marquee erected especially for London Fashion Week in the grounds of the Natural History Museum, I wondered what form this "renaissance" of British designer fashion might take? Nearby, at the Victoria and Albert Museum an exhibition entitled, The Cutting Edge - 50 Years of British Fashion 1947 to 1997 was scheduled to open on the 6th March, a proximate and timely link between the catwalk garments exhibited this season and their historic ancestors.

The history of British designer fashion was inextricably linked with my own professional history since I too had once made my living in the sector, and had visited innumerable fashion shows in Paris, Milan and London in that capacity. My present visit to the collections was however different as an observer who would not observe and document in sketch form as a competitor, but as an academic with the aim of explication.

All activities within the exhibition compound are subsequently closely monitored by security guards. The large white PVC marquee in the grounds of the Natural History Museum was draped inside with cream fabric and the beige carpeting which covered the walls and floor creating a warm intimate effect, akin I imagined to being inside a sheikh's large tent.

Everywhere security guards busied themselves checking the authenticity of the personalised admission cards, frequently not clipped to lapels as intended but inside handbags, with a computerised reading. Any unauthorised interloper who had succeeded in getting into the exhibition marquee would have certainly been unable to move within it without such an authorised identity card.

Occasionally there was the flash of camera bulbs but the only photographs permitted were those taken by the official photographers. The ever present security men, 'hail fellow - well met' in their approach, but vigilant and constantly communicating with each other on the 'walkie talkies' made any breach of the rules impossible. In the background music was played, curiously both pulsating and nondescript, creating an atmosphere something akin to an airport or hotel lounge in the reception tent. The music was periodically

interspersed with loudspeaker announcements calling ticket holders to the catwalk collections.

There were cafés on both floors of the exhibition tents. Large notices proclaimed Moët and Chandon to be ‘the Champagne of London Fashion Week’, whilst the cuisine was created by the well known caterers, Leith. Interior colouring in the cafés graduated from cream and peach, to burnt orange and burgundy but in that part of the exhibition colour was permissible because it did not conflict with the impact of exhibited garments. The cafés were ‘a buzz’ with conversations taking place on mobile ‘phones.

7.4.2 Walkabout

Once officially admitted, I set about a reconnaissance of the exhibition space which encompassed two floors and was separated from the East and West tents where the majority of catwalk exhibitions took place. The exhibition stands comprised a number of screened off compartments within the two floors of the central marquee. Each compartment was lighted from within with ceiling and wall lighting brackets; each was supplied with coathangers, and tables and chairs for discussion with journalists or buyers.

The imagined effect of the unadorned marquee (which could now only be imagined because the designer enterprises were all encamped with their wares, brightly coloured dresses, shoes, hats and jewellery), must have been like that of a large cream and bare canvas. However, with each firm now established into its allotted space, it was now like a large kasbah awash with a multiplicity

of sellers and buyers haggling over rare and exotic goods from faraway places, or at least faraway imaginations. It is precisely the imaginative capability of British fashion designers which has positively distinguished them internationally.

7.4.3 Sellers

These screened off exhibition stands were personalised by each exhibitor using literature, press releases, and photographic spreads from former successful collections for fashion magazines such as Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, Elle or Marie Claire. These are the preeminent British fashion magazines with great credibility in the sector. These photographic "spreads" were displayed around each exhibition stand, rather like a sportsman's trophies or medical practitioner's qualifying certificates in a doctor's waiting room. If the designer's name were a lesser known one these photographs might attract a buyer's attention before the new season's collection hanging on the rails, and encourage him or her to pause and make a closer inspection.

Like a Moroccan souq, the exhibition was more than just a market, it was a thriving community of traders and craftsmen many of whom knew each other personally. Exclamations of recognition, such as 'darling', and exaggerated theatrical embraces contributed to an atmosphere of serious partying. Each exhibitor had on standby supplies of champagne, coffee or tea, smoked salmon, chocolate cake and the like. Buyers and the press alike were welcomed as family members or dear, long-standing friends; they may well have been neither, or both, but they were offered refreshment, the tokens of hospitality

rather like mint-tea in an Arab bazaar. Business here took the form of a highly personalised exchange between buyer and seller.

Prices were not displayed because the final details of any sale must be negotiated; for example, a change in fabric or colours for the USA, or a higher neckline for the Arab market. A serious buyer might well sit within a exhibition compound for many hours negotiating details with company representatives; such as how many garments, when and in what colour will they be delivered? The designer him or herself may be present, together with the live 'house' model, usually hired for the occasion to provide an impromptu 'parade' in a rapid succession of garments.

7.4.4 Buyers and Press

The visitors to London Fashion Week were a distinct milieu when observed amongst other passengers waiting for tube trains on the platform of the South Kensington Underground Station. What made them distinctive; the slash of blood red or deep brown lipstick across pale faces, or was it much more? Languages and accents were clearly international; French, Italian, German, Japanese, Chinese, American and Australian. Yet despite the far-flung origin of their wearers, the wardrobes of the fashion cognoscenti were remarkably uniform. It was perhaps their uniformity which made them distinctive as a group.

The widespread popularity of separates created an impression of an international uniform more stylish and elegant however, than Burberry classics,

which typify the traditional British style of tweeds and twinsets. The uniform was elegant but workmanlike, international, comfortable and suitable for variations in temperature. Jackets were long in black/brown/navy or grey. Skirts in the same colours or similar tones were either very short or long, and trousers were equally popular. There was little to embellish the austerity of the uniform; jewellery was scant except for earrings, shoes were flat, trainers or loafers or the occasional Cuban heel and glasses were the accessory which added seriousness. Shoulder bags or little 'designer duffel bags' exquisitely crafted in leather, were worn across the back, to free hands for note taking.

The fashion cognoscentis moved rapidly, taking notes or talking on mobile 'phones (sketching was forbidden inside the exhibition and was therefore undertaken furtively in the lavatories or small cafés outside the exhibition). The only allowed variation to the monochrome dress code was texture (black leather jacket, chiffon skirt, black opaque tights, black patent shoes), and the result was at once curiously earnest and idiosyncratic. The only colourful accessory was a scarf or shawl in velvet or silk. This was a fashion palette which did not conflict with the peacock colours of the display stands or shows, and could not be readily identified with any one designer.

Exhibition organisers reported the total attendance at London Fashion Week in 1997 was as near as 2,500, which was a 24 per cent increase on the Autumn/Winter season in 1996. The foreign press contingent numbered 252, against 66 the previous year. Their numbers were swelled by more than 100 television crews and 627 members of the international press. The buying teams came from major international department stores.

7.5 London Fashion Week: The Shows

London Fashion Week acted as a magnet for the international fashion elite, designers, models, buyers and journalists who descended upon the capital for six days of parading, posing and partying. The week was one of the major 'events' in the international fashion calendar and a paramount objective of all the "beautiful" people was not only to see, but to be seen. The industry constantly seeks publicity and before the week began there was a carefully managed public relations controversy when Vivienne Westwood, one of Britain's most acclaimed fashion designers who has won many international awards, announced that she was planning to use 13-year-old models in her show. Carlo D'Amario, Westwood's business partner, was said to be 'jubilant at the prospect of unleashing a band of untried innocents on the catwalk'. (Mollard, 1997).

The Westwood Show was scheduled to start at 15:00 on Sunday at the Dorchester Hotel. It was, stated Westwood. 'a great honour to be asked to go first. It represents the triumph of British creativity, which is now the focus of fashion, over market driven clothes.' The Dorchester was packed with people sitting two to a chair, reading a letter to a mythical niece, Rosie, signed 'Your loving Auntie Vivienne', in which Westwood promoted The New Non-Scruffy Rebellion, 'The clothes are ladylike, exquisitely so.'

This was Westwood's first show in London in eight years, during which time she has shown her garments at shows abroad, predominantly Paris, due to her disenchantment with the reportedly chaotic arrangements of London Fashion

Week. The first show was watched by an audience peppered with celebrities. Mick Jagger, a pop musician, arrived wearing sunglasses despite the dimmed lighting of the Dorchester and he was accompanied by his wife, Jerry Hall, a model, who was said to be wearing a plaid Westwood suit. My companion to this show, a journalist from an upmarket women's magazine was clearly practiced at adopting the right theatrical pose that such events require, and she smiled charmingly into the air. Shortly after the arrival of Mick Jagger the paparazzi descended upon a new group. My host pointed out to me that these were the stars of 'Eastenders', which is a British television 'soap' show.

Jerry Hall was probably one of several customers given free clothes by the House of Westwood in the hope that she would be photographed wearing them by the press, a common practice among fashion designers who consider it to be a useful form of advertising. So useful, in fact, that certain women are actually paid to wear the designers' clothes. Any socialite or celebrity who attracts a lot of attention as a fashion plate almost never has a disinterested relationship with the designer of the clothes she is wearing.

Celebrities were typically seated in the front row presumably so that they can be seen by the paparazzi. The pecking order for seating along the front row gives preference to royalty, celebrities and movie stars, who almost always arrive late so that everyone will take notice of them, or even stand up and stare. Prominent fashion editors, and buyers from major international department stores will also be seated in the front row.

A loud blast of music rattled the chandeliers and launched the models onto the catwalk. Vivienne Westwood, the high priestess of anarchy and rebellion, launched a collection for youngsters which turned the models into daughters of the manor, circa 1955. The collection featured traditional British fabrics and tailoring in nostalgic antique shades. Westwood defended her use of young models by stating the collection was launched for her new Red label, less expensive and aimed at the young market. Despite the earlier press excitement everyone agreed the thirteen-year-old models were not exploited and that they looked delightful.

On Sunday evening Miu Miu, an Italian fashion house, threw a public relations party which was tipped to be the event of London Fashion Week. The host, Italian designer Miucila Prada, once a member of the Italian Communist Party, is reported by some to be fashion's 'intellectual'. She is renowned for leading the move away from status symbols, such as gold chained Chanel handbags to 'toned-down' accessories such as her own black nylon bags, discernible by a discrete triangular logo.

Her party for 1000 was held at the In and Out Club (The Naval and Military Club in Piccadilly). The theme was a debutante's first party and to create the right ambience, antique furniture had been flown in from New York. The ambience created in the club was similar to that of a Noel Coward stage set. The party's theme followed on from the collection launched by Westwood very well. However, Westwood's use of a thirteen-year-old model had cleverly robbed Miucila Prada of her publicity and at a fraction of the cost.

The guests at the Miu Miu party included large numbers of people from the Italian fashion industry. Conversation was facilitated by a generous supply of alcohol, champagne, gin and bourbon. Upstairs there was a cocktail bar, manned by Eugene who it was rumoured had been flown from New York to produce vodka-charged strawberry cocktails. Contrary to my expectations I was informed by a journalist that one does not wear a Miu Miu dress to the Miu Miu party, unless it is main label. There were many anonymous grey, black and brown slip dresses whose origins were unclear. There was a strong contingent from the Italian fashion industry typically fluent in all the main European languages.

Tomasz Starzewski presented a collection based upon his design ethos, 'glamour, pure glamour' featuring cocktail wear, evening wear and bridalwear. Starzewski has Shirley Bassey, Cosima van Bulow and Sophie Rhys-Jones among his clients. Several evening dresses were worn with a fur trimmed stole and the collection concluded with a luxurious hooded wedding dress in satin and fur. Was this another bid at controversy to claim publicity and column inches? Some of the models reportedly balked at the inclusion of fur.

John Hurt read a poem to introduce the Irish Knitwear designer, Lainey Keogh, who showed in London for the first time. All her pieces were hand-knitted from luxurious fibres and she has been hailed within the industry as the Irish answer to Missoni, with clients such as Demi Moore, Isabella Rossellini, Elizabeth Taylor and Jamie Lee Curtis. Her spider's webs of cashmere and silk were for me the most sensual items of knitwear shown during London Fashion Week.

Nicole Farhi showed at the Natural History Museum. Twice the winner of the Contemporary Collections award at the British Fashion Awards, Farhi is the champion of the modern women's wardrobe, 'real clothes for real women' ethic. Her clothes reflect a clean visual sense, attention to detail, exquisite tailoring and beautiful fabrics. I had a seat in a back row and only just caught sight of the arrival of Suzy Menkes, of the International Herald Tribune, who naturally had a prime ring side seat.

The seating plan was very significant to fashion editors because it indicated their current standing within the industry. The unspoken rules are that glossy magazines, broadsheet newspapers and the celebrities go to the front whilst down-market tabloids, regional journalists, trade papers and stray academics go to the back. Writing a damning piece about the designer in the last season, may mean no invitation at all. Although getting a seat at all at some shows was a triumph because the arrangements were chaotic.

The show of Antonio Beradi, another leading British designer, was held at the Roundhouse, Chalk Farm. Beradi has been dubbed within fashion circles as a 'Razor-Tailor' who scissors sharp silhouettes into everything from shiny brocade to leather and lace. Prince, the popstar arrived and a journalist from the Daily Telegraph tried to engage him in conversation, alas to no avail. Prince remained silent and got up to leave, before the catwalk collection began.

In the East Tent of the Natural History Museum, Princess Anne took her seat to watch the Copperwheat Blundell show, which featured transparent dresses and men's furry suits. The princess, present in her capacity as the President of the

British Knitting and Clothing Export Council, wore an executive suit which unfortunately matched clothes shown in the collection on the models, including the red knickers under transparent dresses. After the show she was taken on a tour of the exhibitors' stands and with apparently no attempt to pre-select those designers which might be closer to her style. She enthusiastically made conversation about 'neo-punk' garments of torn goat fur and frayed denim.

The Alexander McQueen show had also been much awaited. McQueen, described as the designer who 'was born to break rules' by the Fashion Editor of the New York Times, Amy Spindler, staged his show in the dreary Borough Market, South London where the atmosphere was pungent with a smell of rotting vegetables. The show was intended to create a vision of urban chaos, and in fact this impression was created both on and off the catwalk.

Afterwards Clinton Silver, Chairman of the British Fashion Council, which organises London Fashion Week, appealed to those who exhibit outside the official catwalks at the Natural History Museum to show more responsibility.

It was subsequently reported that outside the show, burly bodyguards struggled to fight back hundreds of gatecrashers trying to break through steel barricades, whilst inside several international fashion editors had to fight their way through crowds of fashion students unable to obtain their seats. Some VIP's remained out in the cold; Andre Leon Tatley, European Editor of Vanity Fair and Michel Roberts, Fashion Director of the New Yorker. A prominent hairdresser who sponsors London Fashion Week at a cost of £100,000 per season was admitted only when one of McQueen's staff recognised him and persuaded the security guards that he ought to be allowed to see the show.

(Alexander, 1997b).

Meanwhile, inside, security guards had to use fire extinguishers when a flaming pyre, part of the ghetto stageset got out of control. Stella Tennant, the new Lagerfeld muse with cat like eyes opened the show in a black leather dress slashed at the shoulders to reflect the theme of city devastation. An old red Ford Escort with yellow stripes was parked on the set. This presentation was the opportunity for 27-year-old McQueen who has recently moved to the House of Givenchy, Paris to show his own label collection which was described as 'neo-punk'. McQueen decided to use politically incorrect furs; ripped animal hides, goat fur and pony skin. A crocodile's head emerged from the back of a man's coat and two reptilian tails protruded from the shoulders of a woman's jacket.

These surreal garments were interspersed with sharply tailored trouser suits, maxicoats and skin-tight punctured leather jackets and pencil skirts. There were some anarchic combinations of fabric. For example, Prince of Wales check finished with pony skin, and black leather with Chinese flowers. The models wore the highest stilettos, dramatic cats-eye make-up, Kruger style fingernail extensions and elaborately teased bouffant hair. Devotees around me described the McQueen show as truly exhilarating and apocalyptic.

International talent-spotters hoping to select the design stars of the next decade always attend the graduate show at Central St Martins, since this is where so many of the current designer stars like Galliano and McQueen were trained. In a Fashion Week famous for producing the most creative designers, the Central

St Martins show was expected to out distance the lot. There were no disappointments. A strong surreal influence was at work. Several collections featured jackets which bound the models' arms to their bodies, acres of bare flesh were on display and Andrew Groves adorned his garments with fierce-looking pins which created a body armour effect. Appropriately, London Fashion Week concluded on a note which pointed the way for the future of the British designer sector, focused on the collections of St. Martin's newest graduates.

7.6 The Fashion Reporters

Fashion journalists have the task of observing changes in fashion style and explicating or interpreting those changes for the general reader. The generous space made available for them in magazines has meant that they have traditionally been best placed to suggest, lead and inspire new trends with extensive photographic spreads. Increasingly, many newspapers have attempted to operate in the same way, reserving considerable space for fashion items with supporting photographs. In consequence fashion journalists and the media, including photographers play a powerful role in both presenting and interpreting designer garments to the general public. Below I have reported the multiple viewpoints of the fashion journalists about London Fashion Week 1997.

Vogue has traditionally been the leader in glossy magazine fashion commentary. Melissa Mortyn noted that this season all designers, whether British or European, were united in 'looking east' for inspiration. Dragons were embroidered or embossed over Alexander McQueen's shiny transparent

fabrics, whilst whimsical and ethereal Rajasthan dresses from Red or Dead were inspired by Southall, West London. Wayne Hemingway of Red or Dead explained to Mostyn, 'New socialism was in vogue last year, so what could be better this season than to have a show that celebrated British multi-cultural youth?' Mostyn's explanation was more pragmatic, 'after a few seasons of ugly styling and cheap-looking nylon fabrics, a little prettiness and luxury brings light relief (Mostyn, 1997)'

In the following issue (April 1997), Vogue devoted space to a photographic spread entitled, 'Hot Couture' and a leading article headed, 'The Couture Kid: Alexander McQueen'. Reviewing McQueen's first couture collection for Givenchy, as distinct from McQueen's own main label collection, Vogue pondered the big question: does McQueen, famed for his skilful tailoring and his power to shock, have the capacity to reconcile his anarchic aesthetic with the concept of couture and the House of Givenchy, a house fossilized in the ladylike elegance of the 1950s? Vogue concluded that London (McQueen's main label) was about 'our times' and Paris (McQueen's collection for Givenchy couture) was about 'allure'. McQueen himself stated, 'Fashion shows are theatre and they should take you away from the miseries of life.' (Sykes, 1997).

Colin McDowell, author of the Guardian special supplement about London Fashion Week, pondered some of the ironies which surrounded British designer industry. He argued that the British as a nation are clothes, but not fashion, conscious. This, he stated, was because Britain has a class conscious culture which is based to some degree upon appearance. 'Only in Britain can

the wrong wellies, the incorrect waxed coat or an ill-judged piece of jewellery spell real social disaster (McDowell, 1997).' The difficulty is that the upper classes, traditionally the leaders of fashionable dress in most Western societies, often show themselves disinterested and on a plane above fashion.

McDowell attributed the British lack of interest in Fashion to a puritanical ethic and suggested that designer fashion which has survived the last fifty years might be a reaction to this 'kill joy' attitude, rather like street culture and music. British designer fashion, he argued, is essentially frivolous but always creative but it is this image of ongoing carnival which has been so damaging to the commercial success of the sector.

Grace Bradbury of the Times argued that there could only be one true barometer of 'London's cool' - the parties. She noted that the dress code for the Vogue party held at The Metropolitan on Old Park Lane was 'glamorous' and concluded that the real purpose of the British Fashion industry was to provide dresses that have no place in any other walk of life (Bradbury, 1997b).

Julia Robson of the Daily Telegraph summarised the role of British designer fashion as that of producing 'revolutionary' looks for the catwalk. It was, in her view precisely this 'different' quality that set British designers apart from their more classically and commercially minded international counterparts. A week before London Fashion Week she hunted down 10 of the lesser known but most promising young designers and categorised their work as 'classical', 'ethereal' or 'new punk' (Robson, 1997). Meanwhile Susannah Frankel of the Guardian described the British collections as 'otherworldly' (Frankel, 1997)'.

In the Daily Mail, Hilary Burden, now of Femail Forum but formerly deputy editor of Cosmopolitan, was highly critical of Westwood's use of 13-year-old models. She questioned why the fashion industry will not allow women to grow up and become real women? However, Susannah Barron of The Guardian managed to find something for the 'real woman' at the shows of Nicole Farhi and Betty Jackson, both of whom she hailed for interpreting new trends for women not under 25 and size 10. Both designers she noted have worked in the sector for more than 15 years and have gone from 'strength to strength (Barron, 1997'.

7.7 Designer Viewpoints

A summary prompt card was developed prior to interview and was available to interviewees who were asked to discuss a variety of concepts which theorists have stated explain fashion in relation to one particular garment they had designed. They were encouraged to relate their responses to a photograph or a sketch of one of their creations, if they wished to do so.

When asked to interpret the key characteristics of their own work, Alice explicitly stated that the fashion press had *wrongly* interpreted one of her designs as being about sexual expression, whilst Belinda stressed the complexity of fashion, stating that context can give a garment various meanings and can influence the wearer's selection of a dress for a particular occasion. Diana and Cary stated that their garments were about 'art' and 'commerce' respectively.

Felicity and Ella stated that they were inspired by their clients' demand for 'wearable fashion' to suit their 'lifestyles'. However, whilst they recognised the importance of having a business-like approach to the client's requirements, they appeared to be equally enthusiastic about the lifestyle of contemporary women per se, and not simply the opportunity to sell their products. Hector acknowledged the role of 'intangible', influences upon his designs

When asked about the person who had most influenced the designer, and how, once again, a very wide spectrum of influences was mentioned. These included parents, teachers, peers, international couturiers, past couturiers, fabrics, travel, foreign culture, the individual's interpretation of a fashion item/garment when worn, and the lifestyle of contemporary women, including the interviewees' clients.

Individuals whether parents, teachers, peers, international couturiers, past and present, or clients were mentioned by all of the six interviewees. International designers with established reputations were particularly important to them, as stated by Cary and Ella. Nonetheless, it was difficult to see any direct influence or relation between this interviewee's stated homage to St Laurent's 'sharp tailoring', and his own 'whimsical evening wear'. More credible was Ella's acknowledgment of Elsa Schiaparelli's influence upon her own work and career. For both Ella and Diana, their client's needs, and the lifestyle choices available to contemporary women were the most important influences. They both underlined the importance of 'context', although in different ways. Felicity emphasised the influence of a contemporary social and political context both in relation to designing and wearing designer fashion. Diana

underlined the importance of cross-cultural influences and globalisation upon fashion.

On the other hand, Alice and Diana, who were graduates of the RCA and St Martin's School of Art respectively, spoke passionately about the importance of art in their lives and creative work. Diana, the youngest interviewee, who had graduated from art school only eighteen months previously, held similar views. Whilst acknowledging the importance of art, Belinda and Cary included a range of art forms as sources of influence.

With regard to professional relationships, the importance of teamwork and cooperation within the company, especially during the process of developing a new collection when wide ranging skills and expertise may be needed, was highlighted by three designers. However, two respondents acknowledged that conflicts arose when teamwork did not run smoothly, as was sometimes the case during very busy periods immediately before the launch of a new collection, or immediately afterwards when buyers were placing orders.

For this reason, Belinda and Diana had given considerable thought to the values and attitudes which make teamwork a constructive and enjoyable professional experience. Their responses were focussed upon these underlying issues rather than the functional benefits of teamwork in bringing together a range of expertise. However, only two of the seven interviewees mentioned the importance of relationships with other professionals external to their organization; both considered good rapport with their buyers to be very important. They believed that they had succeeded in establishing a strong

relationship with their buyers and/or stockists.

In this penultimate section of the interview, interviewees were asked to recommend any books, articles or exhibitions about them, their work, or the sector which they considered might inform this research. The question was posed because the work and lives of many designers is often subject to sensationalist publicity, so as to identify any sources which the designers themselves believed would increase an understanding of their work.

Ella suggested an article about herself, and another designer recommended the Designer Fact File (see Chapter 3) although not specifically in relation to herself or her work, but as a general 'self help compendium'. On the other hand, four designers clearly stated that there were no texts they wished to commend, either because those that existed were inaccurate or superficial, or in one case because an exhibition and related text had been very disappointing. Alice was one of a number of designers whose garments had been included in the V&A's exhibition the Cutting Edge described in Chapter 6, which she had found disappointing.

Belinda, who had earlier stated that too much sensationalist copy, particularly in newspapers or the fashion pages of glossy journals, was damaging to beginning designers, added that her well established company had sought to avoid this trap. Two designers stated simply that there was nothing, without further elaboration, representing rather neatly the overall disenchantment amongst designers with biographical texts.

The final question gave the designers an opportunity to fill in any gaps, and comment upon the interview from their point of view. Ella stated she had enjoyed it but another designer felt that the role of technology and new materials were underplayed and she wished to rectify that.

7.8 Summary of Findings

In 1997, the image the British designer fashion sector promoted at London Fashion Week retained the legacy of radicalism and it seemed the sector consciously sought to exploit this. The fashion shows were theatrical occasions, promoted by carefully staged and provocative public relations events, such as the use of fur or 13 year old models. The parallels with show business were underlined by the patronage and association with celebrities from the popular music industries. The aim was to attract publicity from the paparazzi and fashion press by dressing models and celebrities in dramatic, creative and rule breaking garments. In this way the industry was also linked to celebrity status.

According to the fashion journalists' reports each of the designers' in London Fashion Week collections could be interpreted with reference to a specific and somewhat simplistic theme. For example, Starzewski emphasized glamour, Keogh craftsmanship and individuality, Farhi "real clothes for real women", and Coperwheat Blundell, "breaking rules and street style." Martyn, a Vogue journalist, emphasised the global and multi-cultural influence upon fashion today; Robson, of the Daily Telegraph, identified the main theme as "revolutionary" whilst Frankel, of The Guardian, proposed an 'otherworldly'

dimension. A conclusion must be that British designer fashion today is characterized by a multiplicity of themes and can perhaps only be fully explicated with reference to pluralistic theories and concepts.

This strand of the research enabled me to appreciate the creativity and 'theatre' of British fashion in a manner which would not have been feasible through interviews alone. In this, the final strand of the research the spotlight was also trained on the designers, so that they could extend and inform the data from the previous strands of the research with their first hand authority and insight.

In discussion of various themes such as sex, art, politics or commerce which scholars claim explicates fashion phenomena, the interviewees demonstrated a more pluralistic approach than the theorists, especially in relating themes on the to their own work. One designer clearly stated that a monolithic explanation which described one of her garments as being about sex was wrong.

All the designers had been socialised into their profession by key individuals whose influence was either real or imagined; parents, teachers, peers, international designers and couturiers, either past or present. There existed amongst these designers a clear sense of a designer subculture, a sense of kinship and connectedness to other fashion designers, irrespective of boundaries of geography or time.

Two designers who had studied at art school mentioned the influence of painting upon their work and whilst sculpture was not specifically identified

the human form was stated to be an important formative influence by some designers in an earlier question. Being taught composition by painters was stated by two designers as a reason why painting was influential. The arts in general were mentioned as more broadly influential; ballet, theatre, dance and film. The design 'disciplines' such as architecture, graphics or industrial design did not warrant a mention at all, notwithstanding that the fashion designers who had been educated at art school would probably have studied in close proximity with other designers rather than artists. These findings showed that there appeared to exist a professional affinity with art and the arts, rather than design as such.

In professional relationships, the need for 'teamwork not hierarchy' was emphasised by the interviewees, some of whom had given thought to the underlying values which support teamwork. These included 'mutual respect', willingness to 'share' and 'democracy' in the workplace. The reference to teamwork and esprit de corps is a finding which is perhaps at variance with the egotistical attitude usually associated with the designer 'decade' and designer 'mega stars'! However, there was an underlying realism in acknowledging that teamwork can also bring about conflict.

Some respondents interpreted issues related to 'teamwork' purely in relation to the design team, whilst others focused upon professional relationships across the company, such as between the production and marketing departments. Others again referred to the 'teamwork concept' as extending to professionals beyond the company such as buyers or stockists.

Whilst all the respondents had at one time or another been the subject of newspaper, television or magazine reports, only two designers stated that there were written materials about themselves and the sector which they would wish to *recommend*. One designer suggested a glossy journal article about herself, and another the Designer Fact File (see Chapter 3) as a 'how to do' source of information. Four interviewees stated that there was 'nothing' that they could commend, either due to inaccurate or sensationalist copy. One designer stated that she, along with other designers, included in the V&A exhibition, was very disappointed by the way in which the curators displayed the garments, although she did not comment upon the accompanying catalogue.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

‘When art historians, after some wrangling, have identified an old cupboard as being from a famous nineteenth-century carpenter shop, expect its ‘objective’ exchange value to shoot up. (Getty Institute, 1999, p.46).’

8.1 Introduction

The end of each chapter included a summary of the findings for that strand of the research. This chapter draws together conclusions for the research as a whole, it includes a critical reflection upon the research methods and suggests possible areas where further research would be valuable. It also considers the contribution this investigation has made to understanding contemporary designer fashion, and fashion studies more generally.

8.2 Conclusions

8.2.1 The British Designer Sector in the Late 1990s

The first conclusion was that the term “cottage industry” is an inappropriate and inaccurate description of the British designer sector in the late 1990s. KSA (1991) offered no definition of the term 'cottage industry' nor is it included in the standard economic and business texts. The characteristics exhibited by the designer fashion enterprises in this research showed, very

clearly, why at first sight this sector might be dubbed a “cottage industry” although the term is rejected here as misleading. Size of the enterprise is a clearly likely key factor in a sector where organisational and employment flexibility is described as high and only a few respondents were a subsidiary of a larger enterprise. However, size is not necessarily a reliable indicator of business success. Across the entire business population, 97% of firms with employees had less than 50 workers (see DTI, 1998).

A conclusion must be that the designer fashion sector exhibits characteristics of intangibility and heterogeneity. These factors underline the importance of attempting to develop and maintain a reputation, differentiating one’s firm’s products from that of competitors. Moreover, some enterprises consciously design garments for a specific customer type which further differentiates the product and contributes to the brand image. These products are clearly prestige goods with a high value added component, variously described by some respondents as ‘unique’ goods.

For designers who first set up business at home, as some do, there are few barriers to entry due to the need to acquire specific physical assets. Basic equipment is widely used across clothing manufacturing and start up involves only low initial capital costs. Nor are there prohibitive scale barriers meaning that newly established firms must produce a large share of the industry’s output in order to survive. Moreover, the flexible character of employment within the fashion sector may preclude the necessity to take on full-time employees, as well as reliable estimation of employment in individual firms or the sector as a whole. Unlike some professional service areas, designer fashion has no strong regulatory body or professional organisation setting educational or vocational

qualification barriers to entry.

A conclusion was that British designer fashion has at the present time a positive media image which could indicate a positive future for the sector, London being amongst the major fashion capitals of the world. Findings show London Fashion Week is a major international media event which takes place biannually, and brings together a prominent international fashion 'establishment'. This includes international journalists, television crews and buyers who in turn report to large international audiences through television and print media. This can create something of a local/global dichotomy but once again underlines the "cottage industry" descriptor was inaccurate in the later 1990s.

By contrast, the five temporary exhibitions of fashion sponsored by national and elite museums authenticated fashion as cultural heritage. Unlike LFW, these exhibitions were not supported by patrons from the creative industries but the subsidised cultural establishment. Since 1960, British designer fashion has undergone something of an identity change from its roots in popular culture and music (Creigh-Tyte, 1991) through the designer decade of the 1980s (Coleridge, 1989) to be deemed 'high culture' in the 1990s (De la Haye, 1997). All of which underlines the creative and cultural, as well as the commercial importance of designer fashion at the time this research was undertaken.

8.2.2 Theories Which Explain Contemporary British Designer Fashion

Having undertaken the literature review in Chapter 2, it was concluded that

existing theories of fashion do not adequately explain contemporary designer fashion in Britain or elsewhere. First, most of the existing theories explain fashion from a 'demand' rather than a 'supply' side perspective; such theories are focused upon individual or societal demand for fashion products but not the designer enterprises which produce fashion items or the designer's point of view.

A conclusion was that existing theories are not empirically based, and rely upon secondary sources only to support the thesis being promulgated. In consequence, it was concluded that they are overly simplistic, populist and monolithic and moreover they do not make predictions nor explicate reality in relation to key questions or anomalies about fashion raised by a number of authors:

Why do people in Moscow and in New York simultaneously insist on a specific pair of fashionable spectacle frames? ... This book offers no solution to the puzzle. (Cremer-van der Does, 1980, p128)

One reason for this may be that many of the theorists have either a specialist knowledge of fashion or social theory, but not both. Most of the designers interviewed in this research claimed that there is "nothing" in print which they could endorse. They observed that, where the designer viewpoint does get mentioned, quotes are taken out of context and applied indiscriminately to support a particular perspective. Perhaps because of this many of the designers in this research had a negative view of fashion 'theory' and resented its perceived inaccuracies. Dissatisfaction was also expressed with the presentation of fashion garments at a major national exhibition.

8.2.3 The Role of Designers in Shaping the Profile of the Sector

This research concluded that the designers do play a key role in shaping the profile of the designer fashion sector. The data collected during the exploratory interviews demonstrated that, in these enterprises, the firm's business principal is frequently also the designer. These are designer-led enterprises producing designer-led products. This conclusion is consistent with, and confirms what might reasonably be expected of, a sample of enterprises selected from a population of designer fashion enterprises!

In consequence, the designer frequently not only leads all decision making about the creative process but becomes involved in business decisions as well. This is typically the case where there exists no in-house business specialist at a commensurate organisational level. In this research, typically the smaller firms in the sample were the ones where the designer found themselves making decisions for which they had limited formal preparation.

With regard to professional relationships, the designers in this research had given considered thought to the skills and attitudes which were required in the workplace. They emphasised the importance of teamwork and cooperation which underlines the professional common sense of creative designers, rather than the "confidence trickster" image promulgated by theorists such as McDowell (1992).

In the light of Coleridge's (1989) remarks about a 'fashion conspiracy' there was surprisingly no mention by these designers of the influence of creative or commercial incentives such as fashion awards, press reviews, financial

inducements, advertising, key exhibitions and so forth. Is the egotistical designer of the 'designer decade' a public relations construct?

Some designers stated that they were inspired by the creative work of other designers. However, other than enigmatic references to the generalised 'contemporary woman', individual muses such as members of the royal family, film stars, pop stars, other exponents of 'street style', or models were not mentioned individually as a source of inspiration. These findings give little credence to 'trickle down' or 'trickle up' theories of fashion transmission (see Chapter 2), at least amongst these elite designers.

8.2.4 Promoting the Future Growth of the Sector

A conclusion of this research drawing upon data from all the strands was that the designer fashion sector could be better promoted as a national asset in the following ways: a permanent national exhibition in London; government support either advisory or financial, which is targeted to meet the specific needs of sub-groups within the sector; improved information flow to the sector, and about the sector.

The suggestion is that support for the designer sector as a whole should be targeted on the main promotional event, of London Fashion Week. The creation of a permanent national exhibition would be able to promote the industry in a sustained and coherent manner. It could provide a venue for London Fashion Week as well as space for temporary thematic exhibitions including a display case for the work of beginning designers. Such a venue could be an adjunct of the existing facilities managed by a national museum

under the direction of a specialist board with fashion expertise, including fashion designers. Such a board would be eligible at the present time to apply for funding from the National Lottery. Alternatively, responsibility for the new facility could be shared by the V&A and the Design Museum, and include private and public sources of sponsorship.

There is also a need to improve the flow of information to the designer sector, for example, about DTI trade missions. There exists a parallel need to improve the flow of information *about* the sector. Researchers have a propensity to recommend more research, but there is clearly a dearth of empirical information about the sector upon which policy proposals can be reliably based. A practical way forward would be to update and improve the categories upon which official statistics are based to delineate fashion products within the activities of the clothing and textiles industries. In sum, to promote the future growth of the sector it is necessary to increase the quality and flow of information both to the sector and from the sector.

8.3 Further Research

8.3.1 The Case for Dialogue Between Economists and Culturalists

Multi-stranded research has the advantage of viewing a problem from a range of viewpoints but this is also its weakness. The design of this research enabled triangulation from commercial, cultural and designer orientated perspectives but it also prevented the pursuit of any one route to its most logical conclusion. This was frustrating at times.

According to Smith (1998) fashion like other 'creative industries' has a commercial and cultural dimension. The Getty Institute (1999) has recently reported projects which sought to investigate the concepts that have traditionally separated economic and cultural conservation discourses and ways of joining them. Culturalists, as compared to economists, are people who come to the heritage area from fields such as art, design, history, museology, anthropology, sociology, history and archaeology. The Getty Institute (1999) proposes the application of research methodologies from economic and culturalist disciplines to analyse the creative and cultural industries.

This Institute has argued that valuation (the economic process) interacts with valorization (the cultural process) and that the two are complementary. Thus, to take a hypothetical example:

Think of a cupboard that is old, decrepit, and dysfunctional, and that stands in the way. You, the owner, are about to throw it out when an acquaintance walks in who happens to be an antique dealer. This acquaintance identifies the style of the cupboard, surmises that it is from a well-known nineteenth-century carpenter shop (how the fame of the shop survived over time must be a story in itself), and estimates the market price in the cupboard's current state to be around \$7,000. Suddenly the worthless cupboard has become valuable, and it becomes so in many different ways...

The sequence also works in the opposite direction: When art historians, after some wrangling, have identified an old cupboard as being from a famous nineteenth-century carpenter shop, expect its "objective" exchange value to shoot up. (Getty Institute, 1999, p.46)

According to Feldman (1992) it would be appropriate to speak of Leonardo and Michelangelo as industrial designers because the artistic achievements of the Renaissance were inexplicably linked to mercantile prosperity and

commerce. On the other hand, according to Getty (1999), economists have been preoccupied with one part of the valuing process, with *valuation* which involves the assessment of existing values people actually attach to cultural goods: *valorization* is the addition of value by the appraisal of cultural goods through deliberations, pleas by art historians, media campaigns and so on. Valorization is predominantly the sphere in which “culturalists” operate.

8.3.2 Implications for Research in Fashion Studies

A conclusion is that this discourse may be as relevant to the commercial ‘creative industries’ as to the subsidised ‘cultural sector’, that is museums, art galleries, and heritage sites. It may also have implications for the furtherance of research in the designer fashion industry as well as museum collections of fashion artefacts:

The Powerhouse Museum (Sydney) last night outbid seven international and local prospective buyers to pay \$7,130 for a rare circa-1935 evening dress designed by Schiaparelli. (Sexton, 1999).

The lack of coordination in timing two exhibitions, The Cutting Edge and London Fashion Week both focused on the same industry, exemplifies a gulf between the commercial and cultural discourses about fashion phenomena, as did the disparate sources of literature, reviewed in chapters 2 and 3. The consequence is that designer fashion sector is undervalued as a national asset. Monolithic and simplistic theories of fashion do nothing to explicate the complexity of creative and commercial pressures upon the sector.

Both the creative and commercial dimensions of the contemporary British designer fashion sector require further multi-stranded research; and one

possible solution to the frustrations inherent in this kind of research is cross-disciplinary collaboration. Multi-disciplinary teamwork could be especially valuable in future projects which seek to investigate artistic and commercial processes. On the other hand, whilst this initial investigation into designer fashion phenomena was broadly conceived due to the lack of previous work, subsequent research by individuals could be more narrowly focussed.

As this research has shown, confidentiality is a sensitive issue in the designer sector and its importance in any consideration of further research cannot be overstated. In this research, assurances from me that the data would be treated as confidential and not used for commercial purposes were essential in garnering support. All the interviewees elected to remain anonymous. The promise of feedback from the research and the opportunity for the participants to comment upon the results was however well received. Further research would need to adopt a similarly sensitive approach, and repeat similar assurances.

The official Census of Production and Census of Distribution are based upon data collected under the Statistics of Trade Act which requires (by law) that enterprises cooperate in the provision of information which is all the more reason why the categories ascribed to data collection should be accurate. Academic researchers cannot enforce such cooperation, but well planned and sensitively managed research which is perceived as relevant to its future *can* achieve a very high level of (indeed, almost universal) cooperation. However, in this sensitive industry, one badly managed or exploitative research project might prevent further cooperation.

8.4 Reflection Upon Method

To recapitulate, the research included multiple strands to elucidate different kinds of phenomena that impact upon the creative and commercial performance of the British designer sector. It sought to explore these issues from various viewpoints, commercial, 'cultural' and designer centred.

I wish to preface my reflection on method by noting that a problem statement and research questions are to a certain extent an artificial construct. The delineation of the problem into manageable questions brings with it the potential for assigning more weighting to certain aspects of the problem than others. This is particularly so if certain strands of the research are easier to progress or yielded richer or more abundant data. However, my view remains that all strands of this research were complementary in addressing the research problem.

The first strand of the research was a mapping exercise which sought to investigate the status of British designer sector in the late 1990s, through exploratory interviews with key marketing or manufacturing personnel at multi-site locations. The overall design of the research method subscribed to the underlying principles of qualitative research identified by Marshall and Rossman (1995); therefore the term 'quantitative' was set aside as a description of the interviews in favour of 'exploratory' because the former is usually associated with the positivistic research paradigm. However, the use of the latter term does not imply that these interviews were less important than other strands of the research.

The exploratory interviews were essential to appraise the commercial features of the sector and to collect the factual information about enterprises which provided a framework for the interpretation of other research strands. The method was structured face to face interviews with respondents although many interviewees offered to provide additional information. I was particularly appreciative of the frankness of those who spoke about their business affairs because these comments provided insights into the lives beyond the figures. Sole traders were invariably the most financially exposed; one interviewee explained that her small exhibition stand at London Fashion Week had been secured by a loan on her home.

The range of information provided in these interviews, together with the depth and richness, confirmed my assessment that they were both a precursor and complement to the subsequent strands of the research, and an integral component of the overall qualitative strategy. This strand was reminiscent of Malinowski's first principal of ethnographic research 'statistical documentation by concrete evidence (1992, p17),' which he described as direct interviewing and the collection of genealogies, details about technology and local census.

The application of the "closed loop" method in this research strand showed it can also be applied to yield information of a qualitative nature. In this investigation the approach highlighted the spectrum of views among respondents concerning their own products and their relationship to a wider designer fashion sector. Over half of these believed their products were unique or that no competitors existed and effectively they were stating that they were not part of an "industry" at all. Applied in this way, the closed loop method

yielded data of a perceptual, rather than a factual, nature.

The next strand of the research sought to review museum exhibitions which were informed by different theoretical constructs and concepts. Five contemporary exhibitions of fashion phenomena staged at museums during 1997. It included observation and analysis of London Fashion Week during February 1997. This is the major British biannual international event to promote the sector.

In these strands the data was collected through 'observation' which had some characteristics of 'participant observation', together with informal conversation and unobtrusive methods such as analysis of catalogues and exhibition signage. As discussed in Chapter 4, 'participant observation' is a research method classically associated with anthropological fieldwork. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995, p.78), the technique is likely to be integral to all qualitative studies, although the kind of participatory role the researcher adopts may vary; my role did indeed change during different parts of this research strand.

However, Holy (1984) noted that it is important to differentiate between the researcher's involvement, however short lived, in the lives of the informants and the *purpose* for that involvement which is first and foremost to observe and collect information. Firth's impression, from talking to Malinowski about his fieldwork, was that "participation was almost always *secondary* to his observation. (1981, p124)", a view somewhat at variance with the description which Malinowski painted of himself conducting fieldwork! According to Geertz (1988, p83), Malinowski raised to fever pitch "the archetypal moments

in ethnographical experience, soaking it up and writing it down.” The real issue, states Geertz, is not at all one of research method, balancing ‘participation’ and ‘observation’ but “a literary dilemma”, because ‘I’ is harder to write than to read.

Participation in the events of LFW required my first hand involvement and interaction in the worlds of the informants to enable me to hear, see and experience reality in the same way as the subjects of the research, at least for a short while. However, the use of these methods in an applied research context differed from their original application in anthropological fieldwork because I did not live with my informants, and in consequence my impact upon the events underway was minimal. By contrast, viewing fashion shows and museum exhibitions required less participation, and did not intrude upon the events underway. However, it was participatory in the sense that other ‘bona fide’ participants at these exhibitions were also present primarily to *observe*.

The design of the research in this strand consciously used my experiential insights, biases, skills and aptitudes as a former industry ‘insider’. This use of myself as a research instrument resulted in a narrative of the data which is descriptive. In consequence, it was more difficult for me to separate facts and value judgements. The events being described and interpreted were multi-layered and complex, and included ‘multiple voices’; those of the artists/designers, curators, other participants, fashion journalists as well as my own as an observer. Whilst the method of “participant observation” was developed in the isolated circumstances of anthropological field work, it was here being applied in the context of a major international media event. By contrast, the display of fashion artefacts in the museum exhibitions seemed

narrow and artificial, although the latter enabled me to appreciate the cultural dimension of the phenomenon in question.

It was only through ‘participation’ in a collective experience and explication of secondary sources that I could understand and interpret the *shared* meanings of London Fashion Week. In this respect there is a real sense in which any individual viewpoint becomes subsumed into the whole, except perhaps that the author always has the last word, because s/he is editing the text. In this sense, the subdued authoritative “I” may simply be illusory.

The last strand of the research focussed upon the designers’ viewpoint. Two issues of method arose in relation to the celebrity of the interviewees. First, response data was sought at interview which penetrated beyond public relations utterances. The approach I adopted as interviewer was to explain briefly at the start of interview my own background as a designer, and my particular interest on the viewpoint of designers as the *creative professionals* within the industry. I consciously used my experiential background at the outset.

The second issue is one of reporting. Whereas what Geertz calls ‘thick description’ may elucidate the subject of an enquiry in some research contexts, in this particular investigation in-depth background description had the propensity to distract attention away from the designer viewpoint, and focus upon a public relations image. Moreover, it might identify interviewees who wished to remain anonymous. A compromise approach to the subsequent construction of text was adopted whereby I *restrained description* and this was inevitably frustrating. The method used in this research strand however,

enabled me to gain some understanding of designers as the individuals who play a key leadership role in a sector with creative and commercial objectives.

It is appropriate to reflect on the overall trustworthiness and reliability of the empirical strand of the research. As noted in Chapter 3, there is *no* agreed estimate of the overall size or composition of the UK's designer fashion sector. This meant that there was no established sampling frame from which potential interviewees could be chosen. Instead, the names of exhibitors at London Fashion Week were cross checked against entries in the fashion press and recommendations from prominent fashion journalists to identify a list of 96 prominent UK designers. The absence of an overall estimate of the designer sector's population and characteristics prior to the conduct of interviews meant that stratified sampling was not practicable.

A random sample of one in three (32 designers) was drawn with an achieved response rate of 97% comprising 30 completed face to face interviews and one extended telephone interview. Because of this, the representativeness of the achieved sample of 31 respondents as discussed in this chapter cannot be absolutely verified. However, post-hoc inspection of the sample indicates that it included enterprises across the key sub-sectors of the industry as represented by the various LDS categories, as well as principal designers of both sexes.

Where possible, information derived from interview was checked to verify its accuracy. Information provided in relation to public companies, for example, turnover was cross checked at Companies House, although even these records are not necessarily up to date. A number of the firms represented in the sample were either private companies or "sole traders", and there were no publicly

available records against which data can be cross checked for accuracy.

The data were also checked for internal consistency across questions and through cross tabulations . Verifiable information, such as named retail outlets, ownership of shops in London and so forth were checked and found to be accurate. Whilst there exists no *absolute* means of verifying the data, interviewees who were selected all held a position of responsibility. Moreover, they had the opportunity to decline the interview and so it is difficult to ascertain the reasons for dishonesty, if any.

Across the enterprises included in the interviews the “closed loop” method revealed that only twelve UK designer enterprises outside the sample were identified by respondents as competitors. *All* of these competitors had already been identified and included in the original target population of 96 prominent UK designers, from which the sample was selected, adding weight to the view that this overall listing was a valid and comprehensive one. It would be necessary to apply the “closed loop” method to the total population of the designer sector to confirm this absolutely.

Although the accuracy of factual information and data is important in all forms of academic research, Marshall (1990) identifies additional criteria whereby the trustworthiness of qualitative research may be assessed. Not all criteria are relevant to this research, but she has emphasized that method always needs to be explicated as fully as possible. In this report, I have also explicitly stated my experiences, background and biases and identified ways in which these were consciously utilised in the conduct of the design research.

In accordance with other criteria identified by Marshall (1990), an attempt was made to report the research in a manner which makes it accessible to a wide range of readers. In addition, observations were made from a range of vantage points, to enable triangulation of the data and re-analysis to take place.

Marshall states 'reciprocity' is especially important in qualitative investigations since it indicates that rapport has been established between a researcher and informants. A number of respondents confided their particular hopes for the future of their enterprise, and sought information from me to assist them; during the interviews, for example, in relation to trade missions, or potential overseas retail outlets. Other respondents invited follow up contact, either at future fashion shows (where tickets are coveted) or in one instance, at a one-to-one lunch. These examples suggest that a "mutual rapport" was established such that sensitive information could be openly and honestly shared.

However, the understanding which can be derived from interviews, albeit open-ended ones, is limited. Discussion with these designers whetted my appetite to pursue a more protracted ethnographic-type exploration, which incorporates an extended opportunity to observe designers at work in their studios. One of the designers interviewed for this research indicated her willingness to collaborate with me in this way in the future.

8.5 Contribution to Knowledge

Francis (1976) and Philips (1997) have both observed that an original contribution to knowledge can be made in a number of ways and can be

incremental. This research makes an original contribution to knowledge about contemporary British designer fashion in the following ways.

This research builds upon an original piece of work undertaken by myself for an MA degree (Tyte, 1991), which explored practice in British designer fashion houses with regard to Britain's imminent entry into the Single European Market. The research reported in this thesis progresses earlier work in a number of ways: 1) it locates the MA studies in a context of relevant literature both theoretical and empirical; 2) it seeks to explore the sector's current status using a range of research techniques and data sources from an entirely new sample of informants (selected at random); and 3) it used the findings from the MA studies to inform the development of the questions used in Chapter 5 of this research.

It coordinated for the first time a review of all secondary British literature sources of relevant official statistical and published reports outlining evidence on the current commercial status of the designer sector. These are assembled in a coherent and integrated way beginning at base with a review of literature on the clothing industry as a whole, and progressing to a systematic overview of reports about the designer fashion sub-group, identifying common sources of data in the literature.

This review of empirical studies has a pyramid structure, and marshals previous research from disparate statistical sources to demonstrate the inadequacy of existing data in relation to the designer fashion sector. It shows that the way in which official government statistics are currently compiled, on the basis of both the 1980 and 1992 versions of the Standard Industrial

Classification, cannot be used to analyse the designer fashion sub-group. Elements of the designer sector are spread across principal product type groups within the official statistics, which conventionally divide the industry according to gender, raw materials (leather, clothing, fur) or basic function (e.g. work wear, outerwear, underwear).

The research problem was also located in a theoretical literature related to fashion studies. This second review explored the development of theories in fashion studies over the past 100 years, many of which adapt theories of psychology, sociology or economics to explicate fashion. The review found that, in relation to contemporary British designer fashion, these theories were lacking; with relatively few exceptions they neglect the supply side factors in fashion. The theories are based on secondary rather than primary data sources, and the former are often used in an unsystematic and ad hoc manner.

Overall, the investigation applied multi-stranded research methodologies to explore both the commercial and creative strands of the sector, though both an exploratory survey and designer interviews. This approach is novel in fashion studies, and the creative and cultural sectors generally where it has the potential for further application to bring fresh evidence to old problems (see Getty, 1999).

The investigation carried out qualitative research in the field for the first time. The thesis included a descriptive analysis of the events of London Fashion Week, and five fashion-related museum exhibitions being mounted during the same year. The description is a record of unique historical events and phenomena, since the events and exhibitions all took place in 1997.

Another new contribution of this research was the comparison of LFW with museum exhibitions of fashion concluding that it is a microcosm of the sector as a whole, incorporating multiple players and integrating complex social, commercial and creative events. By contrast, museum exhibitions of fashion which deprive garments of context, were found to be the visual equivalent of simplistic, monolithic theories, sometimes described as ‘hemline histories’.

Interviews systematically conducted across a sample of designers selected across a representative spectra of creative specialisms within designer fashion is also original. Representation of the designer viewpoint in existing theoretical literature is typically reliant upon a few secondary data sources, and taken out of context to support a particular argument. To the best of my knowledge this is the first systematic attempt in the English language to place the British designer viewpoint within research about the sector.

In sum, the investigation adds knowledge to the understanding of contemporary British designer fashion in a manner that has not previously been attempted in this particular field. An attempt has been made to undertake a systematic, transparent, and multi-dimensional enquiry in which some if not all strands of the research are replicable. Moreover, it places designers and those who make their living in the sector at the heart of enquiry. This has implications for the development of research in fashion studies. This is particularly important in relation to contemporary fashion studies, where the integration of theory and practice is under developed, especially in the higher education context where knowledge is often encapsulated in practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: CITF Membership

MEMBERSHIP

Rt Hon Chris Smith MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Chair)
Ministerial and official representatives of:
The Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
The Department of Trade and Industry
HM Treasury
The Department for Education and Employment
The Minister for Women
The Scottish Office
The Welsh Office
The Northern Ireland Office
The British Council
The Office of Science and Technology
No 10 Policy Unit
DCMS officials
Industry advisers:
Lord Alli - Planet 24
Richard Branson - Virgin Group Plc
Robert Devereux - Virgin Publishing
Janice Hughes - Spetrum Strategy Consultants
Alan McGee - Creation Records
Gail Rebuck - Random House UK Ltd
Eric Salama - WPP Group Plc
Paul Smith - Paul Smith Ltd
Lord Puttnam (until July 1998)

Source: CITF (1998)

Appendix 2: Student Enrolments in the 1990s

Another encouraging indicator for the future of the design disciplines such as fashion was in its buoyant student enrolments. 'Official' statistics provided by HEIs themselves and the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) allow for insights into levels and patterns of Higher Education within design and related areas. Unfortunately, the subject definitions used by Higher Education statisticians have changed with alarming and confusing frequency over recent years (for a full discussion of the issues see Creigh-Tyte, 1995). However, a pattern of growth was discernible in fashion, which emerged most notably at undergraduate level, but also to a lesser extent at postgraduate level. Furthermore, many students whose primary field was not Creative Arts and Design also studied elements of design as subsidiary or ancillary subjects, for example for engineering and education degrees, which considerably swelled the total student numbers studying art and design generally.

One in three young people entered higher education in 1995/96 against one in six as recently as the late 1980s (see Table 5 in Chapter 1). Particularly rapid growth occurred in the 1990s with a 62% increase in enrolments between 1990/91 and 1995/96, that is from 1.2 million to 1.9 million students. Postgraduate enrolments grew even more rapidly, by 90% between 1990/91 and 1995/96. Another significant factor was the growth in female student numbers. By the mid 1990s female students outnumbered males whereas in 1970/71 there were twice as many male students.

HE expansion has not been uniform across all subjects. Within the standard 16

subject groupings used by HE statisticians, fashion is included within the 'Creative Arts and Design' group. Full-time student numbers grew slightly less rapidly than overall numbers between 1988/89 and 1995/96. Nevertheless, by the latter academic year, 'Creative Art and Design' accounted for 6.9% of full-time undergraduates and 3.2% of post graduates. This 'Creative Arts and Design' category was predominantly female, with 57% of full-time undergraduates in 1995/1996 being women. Further, if more modest growth was expected in HE during the late 1990s. Between 1995/96 and 1998/99 total (home and overseas) student registrations were expected to rise by 4%. In 1996/97 some 17,000 home first degree students graduated in 'Creative Arts', which was 7.4% of the overall total of 232,000 new home first degree graduates.

Appendix 3: Literature Search Sources

Manual and automatic literature searches

These were undertaken using the following "key word" groupings:

1. FASHION DESIGN/THEORY
2. FASHION DESIGN/PSYCHOLOGY
3. FASHION DESIGN/SOCIOLOGY
4. FASHION DESIGN/ECONOMICS
5. FASHION DESIGN/HISTORY
6. FASHION DESIGN/BIOGRAPHY

The objective was to identify relevant material, primarily concerning British designer fashion for women. A range of sources and services were used in order to minimise the possibility that relevant material was not identified. Where necessary, automated searches were complemented with manual searches of hard copy material and microfiches. Promising material was then extracted in the fullest form possible from the automated system and the original materials pursued as necessary.

The following sources were interrogated:

Access Personnel Management; Book Bank; Book Find; British Library
Conference Proceedings; CRIB (Current Research in Britain);
Dissertation Abstracts; EBSCO Serials; Economist FT Profile; ERIC
(Education Resources Information Centre); Financial Times; Institute

of Management International Databases Plus; National Audit Office Reports; UKOP (UK Official Publications); STAR (University of Sheffield On-Line Catalogue); SULOS (Sheffield Union List of Serials); and Westminster Reference Library Catalogue.

- (a) Access Personnel Management is a quarterly issue of consolidated information on books, journal articles and company documents from the Institute of Personnel and Development's library and information services. It contains 27,000 entries and 2,500 thesaurus terms. The version used was published by IP&D Mansell in October 1994 version (believed to have ceased publication April 1995). This was consulted as a CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (b) Book Bank provides 2 million book titles and publication details for books in print from over 70 countries including UK, US, Australia and New Zealand publishers. The search on UK in print titles was made using the Global Bookbank Finder Service published by Whitaker/Bourker (updated monthly). This was consulted as a CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (c) Book Find includes all major English language trade and academic publishers and provides listings of academic and professional book titles, publication details, summaries and contents. The publisher and distributor is Data Base Ltd Software (updated monthly). This sources was consulted as a CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (d) British Library Conference Proceedings records published proceedings of conferences since 1803, so that relevant texts can be ordered through BL inter-library loans service. This source was consulted on CD Rom via BLAISE (British Library Automated Information Service) at the DfEE library, Moorfoot, Sheffield and Sheffield University Main Library, Sheffield.
- (e) CRIB (Current Research in Britain) gives access to information on over 60,000 research projects in progress within the Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Education in the UK. It was consulted using the CD ROM Network at Warwick University Library, and DTI Library, London.
- (f) Dissertation Abstracts lists and abstracts theses accepted at most North American Universities since 1980. It was consulted using the CD Rom Network at Warwick University Library, Coventry.
- (g) EBSCO Serials provides information on over 126,000 serial titles. This index provides details of periodicals on a particular subject, and publications in which a particular periodical is indexed. It was consulted through the CD Rom Network at Warwick University, Coventry.
- (h) The Economist FT Profile database gives access to the text of The Economist weekly back to 1987 and is updated daily in on-line form. It was consulted using the FT Profile on-line service.

- (i) ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) gives details from over 750 journals in education. A US based updated system which is updated quarterly. It includes Current Index of Journals in Education (CIJE) and Resources in Education (RIE) and is accompanied by Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors, 12th Edition 1990. Separate CD Roms covering 1982-1991 and 1992 - March 1995 were published by Silverplatter Information and the source was consulted at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (j) Financial Times database provides full text of Financial Times articles, excluding advertisements, pictures, charts, stock market prices etc., and minor insignificant articles. It is updated every 4 months with disks approximately 3 months out of date on arrival. Either headlines or full-text can be extracted. This source was consulted using CD Roms for 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 at Sheffield University Main Library, Sheffield.

- (k) The Institute of Management International Databases Plus is the database of the former British Institute of Management and includes the Institute of Management Foundation's Language of Management Thesaurus. Management Information Centre listings cover journals, books, company practice, short courses, audio-visual material and training materials across a wide range of management issues. The database was published in 1995 by Bowker Saur. It was consulted by CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (l) National Audit Office reports from Britain's public spending auditor from 1969 are updated on a six monthly basis. These were consulted by CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (m) UKOP (UK Official Publications) lists UK official publications published since 1980 including European Community, Council of Europe publications and many United Nations publications for which HMSO acts as a Sales Agent. It includes both the HMSO publications catalogue and the Chadwyck-Healey's Catalogue of British Publications not published by HMSO. This was consulted by CD Rom at the DfEE Library, Moorfoot, Sheffield.

- (n) STAR - University of Sheffield On-Line Catalogue contains records of all material acquired since 1978 in the Main Library plus some earlier items and covers all material in two sub-branch libraries. It was consulted through the STAR terminals, Sheffield University Main Library, Sheffield.

- (o) SULOS - Sheffield Union List of Serials covers periodicals across South Yorkshire libraries including the collections at University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield Public Libraries. It was checked using the STAR terminals, Sheffield University Main Library, Sheffield.

- (p) The Westminster Reference Library Catalogue at Westminster Reference Library, St Martin's Lane, London was searched using library information terminals and the card catalogue.

Library Resources

As with any search for literature sources which was title dependent and focused upon certain key words, this search did not preclude the possibility of missing a relevant volume entitled (hypothetically) "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds". This was especially a concern in the field so diverse as fashion, where texts may variously be classed under psychology, economics, sociology and anthropology.

Therefore it was necessary to support the initial searches with cross-checking in specialist libraries. In these specialist collections many of the key texts were held as reference copies and therefore it was possible to scan the text at an earlier stage to ascertain its relevance. Specialist collections of the following libraries were especially valuable:

The London College of Fashion (The London Institute)

St Martin's School of Art (The London Institute)

The Royal College of Art

A further means of identifying "classic" texts in the field was undertaken during the reading process itself when particular attention was paid to sources and references of the identified key authors. These were subsequently followed up

and systematically scanned to ascertain their relevance to this investigation.

Contemporary Sources

A comprehensive manual scan of contemporary sources such as magazines, journals, newspaper articles and conference papers was started at the beginning of the investigation. This has been conducted on a regular basis throughout the study, and included the following fashion and business press:

Vogue

Harpers Bazaar

The Draper's Record

The Fashion Weekly

The Times and The Sunday Times

The Independent and The Independent on Sunday

The Guardian

The Observer

The International Herald Tribune

Appendix 4: Research Method and Anthropology

This section explores some of the developments within the tradition of anthropological and ethnographic fieldwork. My reason for doing this is to present a rationale for the application and adaptation of some related research methods in this enquiry. Clifford (1988) has suggested that the 'participant observation' method is a particularly useful approach to take in investigations which seek to explore the actor's point of view, even though, in recent decades, the notion of ethnographic or anthropological authority has been criticised.

The origins of this research approach in professional anthropology are typically traced back to Malinowski and his classic study of the Trobriand Islanders in 1914. Feyerabend (1975) has stated that the method of yielding data through 'participant observation' is probably unique to anthropology, although it has subsequently been adopted by other social scientists. There were individuals before Malinowski who wrote first hand experiential accounts of other cultures, such as missionaries or doctors, but it was at the turn of the century that the concept of 'anthropological authority' was established, based upon a blend of personal experience which was scientifically validated (Clifford (1988).

Kaplan (1964) noted that observations by 'participant observers' in the field are not randomly collected data, but are the product of an active choice and selection process by the researcher. The observer begins with a point of view, questions to be addressed in the field, or a hypothesis to be tested. However, Holy (1984) has conceded that, even though the anthropologists' field

observations are guided by a particular stance, they nonetheless have a strong open ended component. The method is holistic so that what happens in addition to that which is of particular interest at the start of the investigation, may also be observed and recorded. Thus, typically, 'participant observation' yields additional or surplus information, which may or may not make sense in the light of the theories of the time (Kaplan, 1964).

Whilst the theoretical orientation of anthropology has changed throughout time, 'participant observation', which may involve a combination of more than one research instruments has continued to evolve. According to Holy (1984), this is because of the increased sophistication of data collection technology such as the use of tape-recorder, cine cameras and video tapes, and new developments in methods for analysing data such as sampling techniques and application of statistical theory.

Participant Observation and Positivism

Oxford University first appointed a reader in anthropology in 1883, called E B Taylor, who was proactive in resourcing a committee to investigate the North Western Tribes of Canada. The committee's first 'field' operative was a former missionary who was subsequently replaced by Boas a professional ethnographer, who had trained as a physicist. According to Stocking (1983) the replacement of Wilson by Boas marked a critical turning point in the development of British ethnography.

This turning point comprised the formulation of anthropological theory and the collection of information in the field by academics who were natural scientists, who described their work as anthropology. Other natural scientists who later became 'field workers' at that time were A C Haddon and B Spencer. In 1899 an expedition to the Torres Straits established a new style which was differentiated as 'professional' in contrast to the 'amateur' contribution of earlier 'missionary ethnographers'.

The contribution of the 'intermediate generation' as Stocking calls them, was that of natural scientists who presented empirical data, 'objectively' collected. Typically this generation did not live in a location for an extended period but remained cultural outsiders. Hinsley (1983) has argued that one exception was Cushing who, in the course of studying the Zunis, became so absorbed by their way of life as to raise 'questions' about the scientific credibility of his study!

It was Malinowski, with the publication of Argonauts (1922) and to a lesser extent Radcliffe Brown with the publication of the Andaman Islander (1922), who established the new paradigm of anthropological research based upon scientific 'participant observation' in an *intensive field context*. (Clifford 1988). This was characterised by the researcher's physical and psychological proximity to the subjects of the enquiry, which required a personal learning experience, which has been compared to an 'initiation' (Epstein 1967).

In the introduction to the Argonauts, Malinowski was well aware that, although anthropologists' immersed themselves in the circumstances of the 'field',

the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information - as it is presented to the student in his own observations, in native statement, in the kaleidoscope of tribal life - and the final authoritative presentation of the results (Malinowski 1922, pp 3-4).

Clifford (1988) has argued that the Argonauts is the example *par excellence* of ethnography by the generation who succeeded in establishing the scientific validity of 'participant observation'. For Clifford states that this genre was characterised by the following assumptions:

- 1 Validation of the persona of the field worker, both professionally and publicly. Malinowski and Mead communicated an image of the anthropologist as both scholarly and 'heroic'.
- 2 The new anthropologist, who was intensively immersed in the field for a *sufficient* although *unspecified* length of time could *use* if not *master* local languages. Moreover, scientifically valid and authoritative accounts of another culture could be written on such a basis. Malinowski even wrote such accounts in English which was not *his* native tongue.
- 3 Primary importance was given to the powers of observation and visual analysis by the researcher as a field method. This was based upon a reflection by Malinowski that 'privileged informants' were less objective and disinterested, when providing interpretation and information. Ellen (1984) has linked the aim of giving anthropology full scientific status with the need for anthropologists, like scientists, to collect their own data, and to ensure its credibility.

- 4 The range of necessary contextual knowledge could be conveniently short circuited by focus upon key systems such as kinship or the social structure.
- 5 Parts of a culture were interpreted to be microcosms of the whole, such as a ceremony or categories of behaviour whether religious, cultural or political.
- 6 The 'wholes' presented tended to be the result of short term, if intensive, immersion in the field, which precluded analysis of long - term historical dimensions.

This implied that two activities were central to the method of 'participant observation', participation and observation. According to Holy (1984) the aim of participation as part of anthropological field work was to make it possible for the researcher to carry out the work at all, but in the pre-industrial contexts the term 'researcher' is meaningless to those who are under investigation. Only by a certain willingness on the part of the observer to 'mix in', can a researcher access and record a range of behaviour and events which might otherwise remain unavailable to her/him.

In this kind of research context, the researcher aims to become accepted either as a 'friend', a 'harmless foreigner' or 'our European', to observe and collect data. In essence there is little option but to adopt some degree of interaction or participation because, as Wax (1971, p.87) has stated:

respondents, or potential respondents, are judging him by what he *is*

and what he *does*, and not by what he says he is, or says he will do.

Research, using the same methodological paradigm in an industrial context, presents different issues. In this context, the role of the researcher is generally understood but as Wax (1971) stated, there exist clear expectations about what a researcher does, and the would be 'participant observer' may be perceived as an 'extra' lounging around 'on the set'. Such a researcher may be pressured to undertake formal research activities, such as distributing questionnaires to avert the suspicion of the informants. Holy (1984) noted that it is important to differentiate between the researcher's involvement in the lives of the informants and the real *purpose* for that involvement, which is to observe and collect information.

Within the positivistic tradition of anthropology, the direct method of data collection by observation recorded by the researcher, give rise to a dichotomy. Participation, in order to record objective information was problematic from the scientific perspective and violated the separation of the observed phenomena from the observer, which was contrary to the principles of research in the natural sciences.

Participant Observation and the Interpretative Paradigm

Some philosophers of science have stated that progress in any discipline does not evolve from the development of new research techniques or new data but from looking at existing information from a new perspective (Polanyi 1958, Feyerabend, 1975). According to Holy (1984), such thinking has led to a

critique of the positivistic paradigm in anthropology in several ways. First, theory about social phenomena has moved from an emphasis upon social facts as *things*, to social facts as *constructions*. This view underlines that 'a fact' is always subject to interpretation. Secondly, parallels between the natural and the social sciences are no longer considered useful because of *the particular subjective nature of all social phenomena*. Thirdly, there has been a distinct movement from observation, as the primary methodological aspect of data collection, to an emphasis upon *observation*, in concert with *interpretation*.

The importance of interpretation is emphasised in the new paradigm because the social world does not exist independently from the meaning which its members attribute to it. According to Dilthey (1914), an individuals' understanding of others evolves from co-existence in a shared world. Whilst the physical action of others can be *observed* by a researcher, he/she cannot *observe* the meaning the actor attributes to their actions. It may be assumed, because each individual operates not in isolation but through interaction with others, that there exists a shared understanding about the meaning of actions. The anthropologist, through participation, can also participate in the shared meaning of the events he/she observes.

In the previous paradigm the 'experience' of the researchers was pre-eminent and first-hand accounts which arose from research in the field, were the legitimising voice or authority. This claim to authority was centred very much upon the fact that the anthropologist was there, and s/he saw X and Y with his/her own eyes (Malinowski 1922, Mead 1965, Turnbull 1962). Within the new paradigm 'participant observation' acquires a new emphasis, and

experience and interpretation has been reconsidered in reaction to claims of 'anthropological authority'.

More recently the interpretative paradigm, modelled on a philological understanding of textual reading has emerged to challenge the experiential, 'I was there', claim to authority (Geertz 1973, 1976, Rabinov and Sullivan 1979, Sperber 1981). According to Clifford interpretative anthropology seeks to explicate naive practice in relation to the construction of text, ethnographic narrative, schema and descriptions (Clifford 1988). Essentially the approach involves understanding a culture as an assemblage of texts which exist to be 'read' or 'interpreted'.

However, Geertz concludes that, 'Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete (Geertz, 1973, p.29)'; moreover, he clearly delineates the role of the new ethnographic hero:

The claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places to reduce the puzzlement - what manner of men are these? (Geertz, 1973, p.16).

Clifford (1988) observed however, that in Geertz's classic portrayal of the Balinese cock fight (Geertz, 1973 pp 412-453), which becomes a significant focus for Balinese culture more generally, the author establishes via the account of the police raid, his acceptance by, and connectedness to, the Balinese. This enables him explicate their world, through his ethnographic authority:

The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong (Geertz, 1973, p.452).