

The Heritage-Creativity Interplay. How Fashion Designers are Reinventing Heritage as Modern Design: The French Case

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Abstract

In recent years, several historical fashion houses have been relaunched with great success often getting a completely new spin in the process. Drawing inspiration from their own history, while looking at the future, these companies have turned their heritage (archives, ateliers, values and imaginaries) into a competitive tool for brand identity, capital to spend in the highly competitive context of the global fashion industry. At the core of the process, the heritage and creativity interplay is strategic. It operates at all levels and involves all components of the chain, integrating creation, design, production and communication. It sparkles the sartorial imagination to write new stories and visions. Fashion designers are reinventing sartorial archetypes along with aesthetic canons, values and brand imaginaries. They are proposing new visions and meanings, experiencing new processes and approaches, putting social, political, and cultural issues into design's philosophy, injecting new *savoir-faire* into the design process. In doing so, they reinvent heritage as modern design. The purpose of the article is to profile and analyze this heritage and creativity interplay in the French fashion houses of Christian Dior — designed by Raf Simons, Saint Laurent Paris — designed by Hedi Slimane, and Balenciaga — designed by Demna Gvasalia.

Keywords: Heritage; Creativity; Fashion Design; Sartorial Imagination.

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In recent years, several French historical fashion houses from the first half of the 20th century have been relaunched with great success, often getting a completely new spin in the process. Drawing inspiration from their own history, while looking at the future, these companies have turned their cultural heritage (archives, ateliers, *savoir-faire*, values and imaginaries) into a competitive tool for brand identity, a cultural capital to spend into the highly competitive context of the global fashion and luxury industry.

At the core of the process, the heritage-creativity interplay is strategic. It operates at all levels and involves all the components of the production chain, integrating creation, design, production and communication. It works by creating a synergy between product creativity, of artistic type, and managerial creativity. It sparkles the sartorial imagination to write new stories and visions.

Fashion designers are reinventing the brand's sartorial archetypes along with their aesthetic canons, values, and imaginaries, by rethinking them in a current, concrete, and actual way. They are proposing new visions and meanings, experiencing original processes and approaches, putting social, political, and cultural issues into design's philosophy, injecting new *savoir-faire* into design process, or even bringing music and youthful culture into the brand's legacy. In doing so, they reinvent heritage as modern design.

The purpose of the article is to profile and analyze the relationship between fashion and cultural heritage in action in some of the most prestigious and well-established French fashion houses. Adopting a case study approach, the study focuses on Christian Dior — designed by Raf Simons; Saint Laurent Paris — designed by Hedi Slimane; and Balenciaga — designed by Demna Gvasalia. The highly competitive context of contemporary global fashion and luxury industry sets the background to understand creative practices and processes.

As the relationship between heritage and creativity is not merely semiotic but it is institutional and material as well, the Bourdieu's notion of "field", together with the concept of "transubstantiation", and that of "symbolic production of fashion", will provide the theoretical and conceptual framework to question this complex relationship as a concrete anthropological object of study. As the heritage-creativity interplay will be discussed as a field of cultural production, creativity will be seen as a cooperative and systemic creativity, integrating creation, design, production, distribution and communication.

The heritage foundation of creativity in fashion

Fashion is a hybrid cultural industry,¹ which produces material goods whose economic value is determined by immaterial factors, that are the material, cultural, and symbolic embedded in them. The dynamic of fashion and that of French fashion, in particular, is profoundly determined by the existence of a heritage. This derives from the fact that fashion is a field of production of creative, original, new, non-reproducible goods, and therefore, for many of them, preserved and included in the heritage, used in their turn as sources of creativity. Therefore, established through the time, during years and years, crossing generations, fashion heritage constitutes a strong and specific asset for engendering creativity.²

This legacy of physical artefacts, knowledge, expertise, but also that of tastes and preferences, experience and passion, grounds and deeply nourishes fashion. Creativity embodied in models and designs thus constitutes a heritage of creative products both material and immaterial (drawings, models, styles, expertise, etc.), the value of which does not decline but, conversely, may grow.

Then, fashion heritage is simultaneously a physical stock of designs and models and the cultural heritage of a style (e.g. the Chanel style). It is highly valuable because designers can rethink past collections and styles and rewrite them as modern design. In its evolution, fashion develops a dynamic of change and permanence, which makes of fashion good a creative as well as patrimonial good. At the base of this dynamic,

1. Giannino Malossi, "Essere creativi nella moda" in M. Pedroni e P. Volontè (ed.), *La creatività nelle professioni* (Bozen-Bolzano: Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2008).
2. Christian Barrère and Walter Santagata, *La mode. Une économie de la créativité et du patrimoine, à l'heure du marché*. Ministère de la Culture – DEPS, « Questions de culture », 2005.

there is a field of creativity made up of sedimented patrimonies that are, in their turn, as many sources of creativity to draw from. In this way, fashion is an economy of creativity and heritage.³

This dynamic highlights the role of culture in fashion by involving it in the heritage-creativity interplay. Heritage as a stored culture, creativity as a new culture, a kind of cultural flow⁴ operating as a oneiric thread linking the past with the present and future.

France has historically organized fashion around the construction of a patrimony of fashion, and of its use. The advantage represented by the existence of such heritage — forged by the advance taken by the Haute Couture — allowed French fashion to dominate the world market until the years 1970–1980. The patrimony of Haute Couture is the source of the French fashion heritage, expanded today into a heritage of luxury. Thus, the historical and actual expansion of French fashion does not refer to a single factor but expresses a particular configuration of favourable elements based on the existence of a French fashion heritage. The shift during the two last decades from the family-owned businesses to the constitution of the large industry conglomerates such as LVMH, Kering and Richemont, marks the evolution of the luxury industry. Today, great financial groups invest in luxury, and luxury has become a veritable industry. Luxury companies manage complex value chains that combine production, logistics and distribution. The supply chain goes from raw materials to finished products.⁵ The entry of international financial groups into the luxury segment has led, on one hand, to a better use of the fashion heritage, which was previously underestimated and, on the other hand, it has led to investments in research and marketing in order to contrast the volatility of demand and share out the entrepreneurial risk.⁶

The heritage-creativity interplay as a field of cultural production

Fashion heritage must be understood not only as a descriptive category destined to recognize a certain number of objects, practices, and values but also as an anthropological analytical category in the broader sense of a historically established set of social processes, cultural practices, and imaginaries. As an ensemble built up over history, composed of meanings, agents, practices and processes, and tangible and intangible assets selected and transmitted by the past, fashion heritage has to be seen as a social context, an anthropological field of action. According to Bourdieu's theory of social fields, a field⁷ is a space of relations between agents and institutions in competition for the same goal. A social microcosm structured by power relations (the power to consecrate, the power to sanction, the power to change the table of values, etc.). There, agents' and institutions' positions are dependent on and determined by the other positions constituting the field. In fields, then, meanings and values are inherent not in things but they are relational. In this way, it becomes possible to recognize the “properly magical logic of the production, of the producer, and of the product as fetishes.”⁸

The heritage-creativity interplay as a field of cultural production is a historically established set of social achievements transmitted from the past. As a legacy of the past, it represents the crystallization of elements resulting from a historical and intergenerational process of selection. As an element of the present, it plays a vital role in the organization, management, and development of the sector. As argued by Barrère and Santagata (2005), it specifies behaviors, habits, conventions, and representations. At the deepest level, fashion heritage is a legacy of expertise and creation that of luxury artisanship. It is a source of comparative advantages leading to competitiveness. Heritage consolidates the artisanship practices (*métiers d'art*)

3. Barrère and Santagata.

4. Christian Barrère, “Les industries du luxe: des industries de patrimoines?” in *Economie Appliquée*, numéro spécial L'économie du patrimoine, 2007/3.

5. Dominique Jacomet and Franck Delpal, “Luxury: An Industry Between Heritage and Modernity.” in *Le luxe. Essais sur la fabrique de l'ostentation*. IFM Research report, n°16. Six-monthly publication (June 2011).

6. Barrère and Santagata, *La mode. Une économie de la créativité et du patrimoine, à l'heure du marché*.

7. Pierre Bourdieu, (1984) *Questions de Sociologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002).

8. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'Art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

but also the conditions of their transmission, reproduction, and use. Heritage is a patrimony of creation. Heritage is a work tool, a source of creativity for designers for the production of the new goods. The heritage-creativity interplay is thus the medium by which it is possible to create and renew patterns by revisiting a brands' legacy. Heritage is a patrimony of preferences and tastes, a common fund of references, values, and imaginaries shared by a community who reads them in a homogeneous way, giving the same meaning to the signs conveyed by these semiotic goods. In the realm of the symbolic production of fashion, this shared imaginary facilitates the meeting of demand-offer and the legibility of fashion. Finally, French fashion heritage is an institutional heritage that consolidates all these meanings, agents, practices and processes. The *Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode*, the governing body for the French fashion and luxury industry and heritage, expresses a strategic, economic, technological, cultural and even political vision of fashion and creation, and actively takes part in the expansion of the French fashion ecosystem. It provides members of the Federation with the entire spectrum of business functions as a whole. All these factors and components are at the origin of a virtuous heritage-creativity circle.

The contemporary global fashion landscape is a fragmented, complex ecosystem. Global disruptions caused by political conflicts, terrorism, and financial crises have made the world more volatile and uncertain. The fashion and luxury industry has been shocked by tremors in the global macroeconomic and geopolitical sphere (across all market segments, product categories, and geographies), by the large-scale shifts in consumer behavior, and by the intensifying business pressures to produce more for less — less time, less money, and less effort.⁹ In this context, that is uncertain, changing, and challenging, the fashion and luxury companies are responding by undergoing a process of redefinition of their competitive plans. The protection and enhancement of their cultural heritage seem to be one of the most profitable strategies.

Playing with archetypes and codes

German creative director, artist, and photographer Karl Lagerfeld has been the first to understand the potentiality of a creativity-heritage interplay. He does not only save the House of Chanel from oblivion but also turns it into a global contemporary fashion and luxury brand. In doing that, he defines the growth pattern of other historical brands for years to come. Joined Chanel's headquarters in 1983, Lagerfeld starts to restructure the legacy of the house. He defines distinct archetypes and precise codes to strictly follow in each collection, as the suit, the little black dress, the tweed jacket, the Chanel 2.55 bag, the bicolour ballerina shoes, the massive gold fashion jewellery, the large pearls, the Camellia flower, the tweed, the gold, the beige, the pink, the black, etc. Playing with Chanel's archetypes and codes, while paying homage to Coco herself, Lagerfeld subverts her ideals with his own modern take, and shapes a constantly renewed and relevant aesthetic. If today it seems common taking care of own brand's DNA, keep working with recognizable archetypal items, Karl Lagerfeld was the first to understand its creative and business potentiality.

Louis Vuitton follows the same business model. The whole business is about giving the designers complete freedom to invent without limits. With the US designer Marc Jacobs, the Louis Vuitton's monogram becomes a rough urban graffiti. The visual imaginary of the underground cultural scene of New York in the Eighties hybridizes the aristocratic codes of exclusivity of one of the most ancient and prestigious French luxury house. The result is surprising. Without renouncing the roots of the brand, multiplying references to its heritage, Jacobs gives it a new breath and puts the LV into a new era. In a few seasons, he reinterprets the codes bringing them into a contemporary global dimension, and connects them to the world of fashion. In doing that, Marc Jacobs has changed the way we look at these old fashion houses, together with the idea of what luxury is.

9. McKinsey & Company, *The State of fashion 2017* (London: BoF and McKinsey & Company, 2016). URL: <https://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/The%20state%20of%20fashion/The-state-of-fashion-2017-McK-BoF-report.ashx/>

Christian Dior by Raf Simons

Nominated artistic director of Christian Dior for Women's Haute Couture, Ready-to-Wear and accessory collections, the Belgian designer Raf Simons presented his first Haute Couture collection in July 2012. He had no experience in Haute Couture. He does not speak French. For his debut show, he had only eight weeks to prepare. Moreover, Simons succeeded to John Galliano.¹⁰

Raf Simons is self-taught. He studies industrial and furniture design in Genk.¹¹ He is visual. He did not sketch. Only dossiers.¹² He is considered as one of the most influential designers of his generation firstly as the creative mind behind his own label for men, Raf Simons, then as creative director at Jil Sander, Christian Dior, and now as the chief creative officer of Calvin Klein.¹³

He founded his own menswear line in 1995 without ever having studied fashion.¹⁴ His brand is a cult. Many people collect his garments. Some of them — the rarest and most sought-after — reached extremely high quotations on the market. Fusing the energy and singularity of teenage subcultures with the sharpness and precision of classical sartorial craft, Simons shapes a radically different image of masculinity. Music, art, performance, images and words and, overall the attitudes, the mood and the statements about individuality and independence, have a substantial role in the whole package.¹⁵ The key elements: modern proportions, a constant research for fabrics and textures and, above all, the interplay of pure construction and new shapes with the body and psyche of the contemporary man.¹⁶

Raf Simons is a deep connoisseur of streetwear. He operates with an intellectual and sophisticated approach: the graffiti and skate culture (the *Sea of Desires* and *Inverse Future* collections 1995), the Gabber¹⁷ and the MENSA students (the *Summa Cum Laude* SS00 collection), the Kraftwerk (the *Radioactivity* collection 1998), the New Order and Joy Division (the *Closer* collection f/w 2003), the rebellion of non-conformist youth with the *Riot Riot Riot* Collection a/w 2001, and the *Woe on those who spit on the fear generation* collection s/s2002 collection, and so on.

Raf Simons works along with a modernist line. In describing the design philosophy and approach for Dior, he uses the rhetorical figure of the oxymoron evoking a “radical quiet approach”, an “opulent austerity”, a “kind of Romeo Gigli on acid.”¹⁸ His creative process starts with a vision and several images. He works as a visual curator creating thick folders with images that the creative team develop into a coherent story.¹⁹ That is, *chez* Dior, he infuses his own vision and values to modernize the codes and the archetypes through several formal, procedural and technical innovations. The design philosophy involves a redesign of proportions, a redistribution of volumes, and a lightning and redefinition of the silhouette. Palettes of

10. John Galliano has been a luminous singularity in the history of Dior. He revitalizes the brand, reignites sales and press interest, and helps propel it into its current position. The dynamism instilled by Galliano is a real renaissance for the brand wiped off the dusted image as old-fashioned *Maison*, which becomes under his tenure so contemporary and glamorous. Dior finds with John Galliano a good financial health. The revenues at Dior rose from €127m in 1994, when Galliano became head designer, to €1000m in 2011 (the year of the scandal). The scandal not affected Dior's financial performance. Amounts rounded to the nearest digit. Source: <http://www.dior-finance.com>.

11. Raf Simons <https://rafsimons.com/>.

12. Frédéric Tcheng, *Dior and I*. Documentary film, 2012.

13. In this role, Simons leads the creative strategy of the Calvin Klein brand globally across the designer, contemporary, bridge, jeans, underwear and home categories in addition to overseeing all aspects of Global Marketing and Communications, Visual Creative Services and Store Design.

14. “I didn't know you could study fashion. I also did not know you could study painting or sculpture. Nobody ever told me. My mom and dad, they were completely in another world.” Bob Colacello, “How Raf Simons Captured the Calvin Klein Empire.” *Vanity Fair* (September 2017). URL: <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/07/raf-simons-calvin-klein/>

15. Rouse Visiting Artist Lecture: Raf Simons and Sterling Ruby with Jessica Morgan (April 25, 2018), by Harvard GSD. URL: <https://rafsimons.com/interview>

16. Raf Simons <https://rafsimons.com/>.

17. Hardcore Techno music.

18. Tcheng, *Dior and I*.

19. Tcheng.

bold color, as fuchsia and orange, cobalt blue, and grass green, for example, to emphasize the new shapes and lines. Sometimes a flurry of color and embellishment comes in unexpected combinations, sometimes as mixing clashing hues, sometimes as a strong bold shape, as with an astrakhan coat coming in bubblegum pink (Fall 2014 Ready-to-Wear Collection). Procedural and technical innovation comes together with innovative fabrics and materials as with the traditional technique called *'imprimé chaîne'* (warp printing) utilized to re-create the work of Californian contemporary artist Sterling Ruby into a strapless cocktail dress, meticulously reproducing the artist's spray-painted imagery (Fall 2012 Haute Couture Collection). Formal, procedural and technical innovations nourish the imaginary of the House, the hallmarks of the brand remain in place with continuous references to codes and archetypes, but the perspective is completely different, linked to a modernist attitude. Simons does not break the rules. He simply makes his own.

Links and nods to Dior's heritage. Christian Dior | Haute Couture f/w 2012. For this debut's collection, Raf Simons experiments with the emblem of Dior's iconography — the Bar Jacket — by borrowing the form and then applying it to other garments. He reduces the New Look's silhouette to its stylized hourglass base structure. In this way, it becomes a suit jacket, a sleeveless day jacket, a coat, a mini bustier evening gown embellished with floral embroidery with a balloon skirt worn over straight tailored trousers. He shortens the ball gowns covered with embroidery into little bustier tops with mini balloon skirts worn over stark black trousers as if to confront the couture dream with the reality a modern femininity. Knitted day dresses consisting of a structured bustier and built-in bra. Jackets and wallet skirts in Astrakhan and mink. Large trapezium coats in duchess satin with shaded prints. Bustier dress with an apron with multi-colored embroidery. Evening dress in black tulle, with embroidery in blue velvet, inspired by the "Esther" dress from the Christian Dior Haute Couture collection of 1952. Colors: very black, white, grey combined with floral shades of pink, fuchsia, red, yellow, coral, electric blue and night blue. Materials: cashmere, tweed wool crepe, knitted flannel, gazar, mink, duchess satin with shaded prints, overlapping mesh fabrics, embroidery, chiffon *ombré*, floral embroidery, white organza embroidered with bands of feathers *ombré*. Accessories: wide gold-colored metal belts; maxi pearl earrings; cuff style cuff and round neck structure. The catwalk soundscape: Biosphere – *Chukbung* (1996). Aphex Twin – *Windowlicker* (1999). Aphex Twin – *Pulsewidth* (1992). Aphex Twin – *Nannou* (2002). The Orb – *A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain That Rules From The Centre Of The Ultraworld* (1991).

Injection of Simons' codes into the Dior House. Christian Dior | Haute Couture f/w 2015–16 Collection. The dream of the Haute Couture vibrates together with a modern femininity. Distortions. From the "flower woman", the delicate term used by *Monsieur* Dior to refer to the silhouette of the New Look to the "animal woman" — the new woman imagined by Simons. The evolution of a new species celebrated with a modernist sense of elegance and innovation. Colors: Black, White, Blue, Pink, Dark Green, Navy. Shapes: Short, thin or tapered silhouette. Men's oversized suits and oversized coats are worn on stretched printed coveralls with abstract patterns. Materials: Tweed, jacquard knit, wool felt, nappa, patent leather, organza, and fox. Accessories: Boots-socking and patent leather booties with Plexiglas heel. The catwalk soundscape: Throbbing Gristle – *Hot on the Heels of Love* (1979).

Simons' injection of his own cultural heritage into Dior's House. Christian Dior | Ready-to-wear s/s 2014, Collection Trans Dior. A tribe of sophisticated wild women. Simons pushes the accelerator, distorting the historical DNA of the House, distorting the 'New Look' silhouette, distorting the floral patterns that here become acidic, almost toxic. Shapes: it is all about volumes and silhouette. The Bar Jacket has cuts on the sides, the coat is deconstructed, the pleated skirts become asymmetric shorts, the black bustier dresses reveal floral patterns, the jackets are worn under transparent organza *longuette*, and the men's shirts become dresses and leave the back bare. Unexpected cut out on the hips, on the shoulder blades. Details: badges and insignia — the emblems of clubs, gangs, tribes, youth cults (a Simons' obsession). An embroidered slogan on dresses (another Simons' obsession) printed with hyper-real iterations of classic Dior flora. Colors: black, blue, pink, light blue, orange, white, navy blue, brown, yellow and light floral patterns. Materials: cotton, jersey, tulle, brocade, wool, sequins, crystals, silk, knit, jacquard and organza. Accessories: pointed shoes with strap. *Décolleté* in satin with stiletto heel. Handbags in leather. The press narratives together with the visual imaginary of the advertising campaigns enhance the idea of a 21st-century modernism.



Figure 1 – Raf Simons' updated version of the Dior Bar Jacket for 'Dior: New Couture'.

Saint Laurent Paris by Hedi Slimane

On the ysl.com website, a b/w video features a young Yves Saint Laurent interviewed by Pierre Bergé. It emotionally sounds as if the mood, the style, the codes, the allure, the teen spirit, all the Yves' world is still here among us, reverberating through the work of Hedi Slimane. In three and a half years of tenure at Saint Laurent, Hedi Slimane has successfully revamped the brand and shaken up the fashionscape. A complete success in terms of sales, influence, and acclaim. A given perspective of the couture to come and a certitude, the street always informs and shapes fashion.

Hedi Slimane²⁰ is a French photographer and fashion designer, born in Paris in 1968. He studied Art History at *Ecole du Louvre* in Paris.²¹ He is considered one of the most influential designers of the 21st century. Slimane redefined the menswear in late 90s and early 2000s, creating new aesthetic codes at YSL (Rive Gauche Homme) and Dior (Dior Homme), where he received immediate success, changing the landscape of menswear with his adoption of the skinny silhouette.

Slimane transforms YSL into an icon of our times. The formula: No copy, no re-make, but a real vision and imaginary.²² The Hedi Slimane's version of YSL starts from researching into the archives, especially the period between the 60s and 70s. Since his debut collections, the s/s 2013 and the f/w 2013–14, the Saint Laurent basics are present, reinterpreted by Slimane's sharp cutting, and incorporated in a new poetics. They include the iconic *Le Smoking*, the legendary *La Saharienne*, the Tuxedo Blazer, the Moroccan *Bournous*, the Duffle Coat, the Biker Jacket, and the Spencer. The androgyny is still present together with the lips print, the nude look, the men's pinstripe fabrics, the men's style coat, the one-shouldered sequined evening dress, the crossover top, the sequined bolero-cardigan, and the *animalier* print.

There is no copy, no reinterpretation. Not a mere vintage re-issue. The Tuxedo morphs into the shape of edgy and ultra-slim proportions that is the true one Hedi Slimane's signature: skinny pants, close-fitting, see-through shirts in chiffon with lace jabot. Alternatively, it becomes a Suit with the mini shorts and a see-through blouse. The *Bournous* becomes a silk tricot cloak teamed with maxi tunics. The opulent golden evening dresses are revisited with a 'disco' twist. The *Saharienne* jacket becomes a long dress in suede decorated with fringes or a short one over slim pants. The casting comes straight from the Slimane's photographies — bleached androgynous indie girls, hair undone, and no make-up.²³ This casting marks a radical shift because it was not a common idea for a luxury brand.

Most of the fabrics are reconstitutions of traditional YSL materials. Hedi Slimane has developed all the classic fabrics of the current Saint Laurent permanent items. *Le Smoking*, for instance, now has its *grain de poudre* updated with the nervous look of a 1930's tuxedo. Military fabrics are real army fabrics from Army mills.

Hedi Slimane is an acute and passionate observer of music, fashion, languages, and lifestyles of youth cultures. He documents through photography what is happening all around him with a real ethnographic sensitivity. His work is constantly inspired by what is about to come. "Most of the subjects I photographed during the last 25 years have something in common, an artistic energy, a strong mind and distinctive personality. Beauty was never the subject, as opposed to something heroically real, poetically eccentric or singular about each character, a magnificent chaos. I am rather attracted by the uniqueness of each of them, the charming, alluring and magic world they all built for themselves. I presume I see it as a sacred and scintillating ritual they all perform every second of their lives. With a simple photography, I try to capture the sparkling dust of this enchanting practice, preserve it, make sure there is a memory for it. Most of the time,

20. Hedi Slimane <https://www.hedislidane.com/>.

21. The BoF 500. *The Business of Fashion*. URL: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/hedi-slimane/>.

22. "I always start all my design projects with writing a synopsis, a perspective around the fundamentals of a House, together with my intentions or intuitions on what should be done". Hedi Slimane in Yahoo Style. "Exclusive: Hedi Slimane On Saint Laurent's Rebirth, His Relationship With Yves & the Importance of Music." *Yahoo Style* (August 12, 2015). URL: <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/exclusive-hedi-slimane-on-saint-laurents-126446645943.html/>.

23. Yahoo Style, 2015.

the characters I depict are unaware of this whimsical quality, the spirit of freedom, they just live their lives with a reckless insouciance.”²⁴

The Yves Saint Laurent’s controversial collection for Dior, the Haute Couture f/w 1960 collection, the ‘Beat look’, is inspired by the Left Bank icon Juliette Gréco and the Beatniks of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris. It was innovative for its infusion of youthful, bohemian street style into Haute Couture, including Beat elements as leather jackets, knitted turtlenecks, and plenty of blacks. This Beat line was the first couture collection inspired by a youth culture. The Hedi Slimane’s controversial collection for Saint Laurent (menswear s/s 2016), the ‘Surf Sound. A Tribute to Contemporary Californian Surf Music Culture’, documents a particular and current moment and energy around a youth culture, inspired by the vibrant scene of southern California surf music culture. The catwalk soundtrack: ‘Like Harry Dean Stanton’, Swimmers Original Soundtrack for Saint Laurent (2015).

YSL was the first couture house to introduce in 1966 the concept of luxury *prêt-à-porter* with a collection called ‘Saint Laurent Rive Gauche’, synonymous of youth and freedom, setting a first critical step in the modernization of fashion and revolutionizing the socio-cultural landscape. Yves Saint Laurent invented the idea to play with elements of the past decades in his collections, the 20s, the 30s, the 40s, always looking at his own time and a creation of its own, thinking with the attitude of the moment as the sound and taste of a generation.



Figure 2 – Saint Laurent Paris Spring Summer 2016 ad campaign.

Slimane uses photography to capture what is emerging and what is about to happen in youth cultures. Photography works as an accurate ethnographic observatory, a direct and personal commitment. Music works in the same way as a collage of impressions, a layer, and a composition of influences. “Finally, I

24. Vogue Italia. “Hedi Slimane, the interview.” *Vogue Italia* (August 3, 2017). URL: <http://www.vogue.it/en/news/vogue-arts/2017/08/03/hedi-slimane-the-interview-vogue-italia-august-2017/>.



Figure 3 – Saint Laurent Paris Spring Summer 2016 ad campaign.

design my collections and style it on my own simultaneously, so that the attitude in the clothes can be the initial inspiration. Yves was doing the same, and I presume many other couturiers.”²⁵ In line with Yves, in a timeless modernity, the clothes are never instantly obsolete. This is the idea of the effect of time, the emotional quality of the clothes, and the storytelling side of it for each person that wears them, and that keeps them over a period.

Music is the syntax behind the style in photography and fashion design. Paris in the Nineties with the French Touch. Berlin and young Berliner musicians and street kids in the 2000s. A youthful Pete Doherty, and Carl Barat, Franz Ferdinand, The Others, the Rakes, the Paddingtons, and later a young Alex Turner, the Klaxons, These New Puritans, and many other talented musicians who were part of this golden age in London. Los Angeles was for Slimane a perfect observatory of popular youth culture and inspiring sub-cultures. The LA’s scene (Girls, No Age, the Growlers, Ty Segal, Fidler, Mystic Braves, Allalabs, Froth, the Garden, etc.), where a generation was about to come out from all places of Southern and Northern California, distilling distorted psychedelic riffs and a new surf sound. All this strong and growing amount of young creative artists and musicians create a dynamic on their own. The Hedi Slimane’s fashion design is organically part of this creative and music community and never a design concept.

SAINT LAURENT
PARIS



Figure 4 – Model and singer Julia Cumming for Saint Laurent Paris – Autumn/Winter 2015 season ad campaign.

Preserving the tradition, addressing the time we are living in, Hedi Slimane gave a perspective, a strategy, and a progression to Saint Laurent Paris. The method is an intuitive and holistic process. It encompasses everything from the clothes to the website to the advertising campaigns.²⁶ In particular, the project of the new Couture House, the reform of the ateliers, the packaging and brand identity, the design of an entirely new website, the new concept for the Saint Laurent stores, the photography for the advertising campaigns, the casting of the models, the design of the show sets, and the selection of the runway show music. In the

25. Yahoo Style, 2015.

26. Yahoo Style.

three years since Hedi Slimane took the reins at Saint Laurent, the brand has more than doubled its sales revenue.²⁷

Balenciaga by Demna Gvasalia

Balenciaga²⁸ is one of the finest jewels of French fashion heritage. Creation date: 1917. Renowned for the mastery of techniques and the exquisite artisanship, a radical design with innovative pattern cutting, the use of new materials and bold architectural shapes, Cristóbal Balenciaga had shaped a new concept of modernity and elegance.

Demna Gvasalia is a Georgian fashion designer. He studied at Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. He led design teams at Maison Martin Margiela and Louis Vuitton.²⁹ Currently, he is creative director at Balenciaga and head designer at VETEMENTS.³⁰ The critics were unanimous in acclaiming his ability to adhere to the spirit of the time. Many, from Vogue to The Business of Fashion, praised the “disruptive”³¹ spirit and the outsider point of view; a “new manifesto for the fashion system”;³² “La révolution que la mode attendait”;³³ “the most influential label in modern fashion.”³⁴ The fashion press praised him as a young, upstart outsider, “truly revolutionary,”³⁵ an “alternative fashion hero”³⁶ that belongs to the street, and a design that feels the “whiffs from the underground.”³⁷ Balenciaga hires Gvasalia with this capital of avant-gardism, authenticity, edginess and coolness that endorsed a symbolic effect of legitimacy in the fashion field.

Demna Gvasalia upturns Balenciaga shifting it into a completely new field of fashion, and putting a completely new spin in the process. A balance between the respect for the house heritage and the breaking up of the rules that drove sales up. The goal is the construction of a new kind of coolness — real, authentic, edgy, and rough — by sampling, distorting, and merging the street-style and luxury’s codes. Gvasalia injects strong doses of underground codes without hesitation together with a series of design, materials, technical and technological innovation into the legacy of the house.

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27. Robin Mellery-Pratt, “The Secret of Saint Laurent’s Success.” *The Business of Fashion* (March 5, 2015). URL: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/the-secret-of-saint-laurents-success-saint-laurent-hedi-slimane>.
 28. Balenciaga <https://www.balenciaga.com/>.
 29. The BoF 500, *The Business of Fashion*. URL: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/demna-gvasalia>.
 30. Paris-based collective Vetements grew out of a group of young designers’ desire to escape the continual rebranding and reinvention of the fashion cycle. Focusing on singular, impactful pieces with immediate appeal rather than thematic seasonal collections, the group presents refined alternatives to overthought design. URL: <http://vetementswebsite.com/>
 31. Matthew Schneier, “Vetements Brings Its Brand of Disruption to Couture.” *The New York Times* (July 1, 2016). URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/fashion/vetements-couture.html>.
 32. Tiziana Cardini, “Insurrezionalisti. Un collettivo illuminato, un’idea totale e un nuovo manifesto per il fashion system. Da Parigi l’avanzata di Vetements.” *Vogue Italia*, n. 776 (Aprile 2015):98. URL: <https://www.vogue.it/talents/nuovi-talenti/2015/04/insurrezionalisti>.
 33. Emmanuelle Ducournau, “Demna Gvasalia, créateur de mode de l’année.” *Marie Claire France*, No. 769 (August 2016). URL: <http://www.marieclaire.fr/demna-gvasalia-le-demiurge-de-la-mode,831652.asp/>.
 34. Jess Cartner-Morley, “‘I don’t think elegance is relevant’: Vetements’ Demna Gvasalia, the world’s hottest designer.” *The Guardian* (February 6, 2018). URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2018/feb/06/i-dont-think-elegance-is-relevant-vetements-demna-gvasalia-the-worlds-hottest-designer/>.
 35. Alexander Fury, “Demna Gvasalia Is Making Clothes That Are Meant To Be Worn.” *W Magazine* (March 8, 2016). URL: <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/demna-gvasalia-vetements/>.
 36. Miles Socha, “Demna Gvasalia — His Own Rules. With his appointment to Balenciaga, buzzy Vetements designer Demna Gvasalia was the talk of the season.” *WWD* (November 18, 2015). URL: <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/demna-gvasalia-balenciaga-vetements-10279574/>.
 37. Angelo Flaccavento, “Vetements: Whiffs From the Underground.” *The Business of Fashion* (October 2, 2015). URL: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/fashion-show-review/vetements-whiffs-from-the-underground/>.

Gvasalia reads the Balenciaga semantics in the light of VETEMENTS. Merging the worlds of streetwear and high fashion, he reinterprets the archetypes, the iconic forms and the codes of Balenciaga to translate them into a modern wardrobe. Ugliness is the new beautiful, finding the line where the ugly becomes beautiful and beautiful becomes ugly. The approach is about the clothes and about work with the clothes to make new clothes as for Cristóbal where it really was about the clothes. The method: A creative sampling or the art of taking an item of clothing that existed in one context and putting it and transforming it into another item and context. Appropriation: The using of things around to turn them into a new fashion product. The inspiration come from cutting the clothes, twisting them, and changing them — through the Gvasalia own filter. The crudeness of this technique is surprisingly inspiring. As in the Hip-Hop or Techno music, he plays with snippets and breaks of an item of clothing, doing loops and chops, and arrangements with multiple overlapping samples, deforming it, distorting it, and re-purposing it. The sartorial coolness comes up while he deforms, distorts, and repurposes them. A mix of couture codes with a sense of humor. Juxtapositions, combinations, unusual pairings. This creative process perceives any item of clothing as if it is composed of multiple samples that overlap — as sounds in a space. Pieces of clothing that can be selected cuts, pasted, tweaked and rearranged. Sometimes, they are rearranged into new loops that again can be complete or open for new arrangements. Sonic cues. Tonal cues. Reverbs into frequency response and texture. As in an old school Hip-Hop sampling, it is all about the vibe, the feel and the groove. Balenciaga remastered by Demna means clothes, rather than fashion. The reality is appealing to dress real people in the street. “Being down to earth is the new black.”³⁸ No aspirational fashion, but personae. “When I started university, my most preferred subject was sociology so I think this season was a bit of an outburst of that: social uniforms and how people dress.”³⁹

The archetypes: The Opera Coat, The Hourglass Jacket, The Blazer (Masculine double-breasted tailored jacket), The Swing Collar Shirt (Swing striped shirt, delicately uncovers the neckline). With his debut collection for Balenciaga, Demna Gvasalia makes the puffer jacket a fashion cool thing. A red oversized quilted shell down jacket with a detachable hood and a matching scarf that can be removed. It echoes a Balenciaga’s archetype (open at the front, falling on the back) and slips it slightly off the shoulders. The Pulled Opera Coat is a caramel-beige and black leopard-print faux-fur coat, cut into a 1950s-inspired cocoon shape with bracelet-length sleeves. The asymmetric buttoning that enables the ‘pulled’ fastening — a defining feature first unveiled in the AW17 runway — lends it avant-garde appeal. The Pulled Parka is made of red and black canvas, with reflective gray panels through the middle; it has the House’s signature scarf at the neck and an off-center flap pocket. It can be worn as a classic coat, open and close or using the button at the shoulder to create a twisted swathed volume. Technical outerwear codes: reflecting piping, functional pockets. Light hoody scarf concealed under collar. Accessories: The glove-boots, the stiletto heel boots and pumps, the sneaker “Triple-S”, the platform Crocs, the money prints shoes, the bootleg Chanel, the Ikea-inspired tote bags shopper bag. Accessories to carry in to enliven weekday tailoring. The Bazar shopper shows a striking contrast of red, blue, and white stripes on the creased leather and a gold hot-stamped logo elevates the boxy shape inspired by Thai market bags. The accessories are all desirable pieces in today’s marketplace.

The innovative combination of the Haute Couture savoir-faire and the additive manufacturing represents another way to work to reinterpret and modernize heritage in accordance with traditional means of tailoring. The Fall-Winter 2018–2019 women’s collection has reinstated the threads with the historical experimentations of Balenciaga on design, materials and the construction process of the garment. The collection (74 outfits) presents hourglass-shaped coats and jackets with rounded hips printed in 3D. Gvasalia took 3D scans of his models’ bodies and then adjusted the body scans in a CAD program to achieve the “tailoring” he desired. The scans were then 3D printed, molded and cast with a lightweight foam. Tweeds and velvets bonded the foam to create the finished jacket. The sartorial part is all printed. There are only two seams, one on the side of the garment and the other one on the hole of the arm. There are no darts, no construction, but just a layer of fabric — as in the unparalleled artisanship and tradition of the Balenciaga’s design and construction process. This type of operation has nothing to do with the experimentation of unique items in extruded polymers, as in the design process of the Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen. It has

38. Jess Cartner-Morley, “‘I don’t think elegance is relevant’: Vetements’ Demna Gvasalia, the world’s hottest designer.”

39. Suzy Menkes, “#SuzyCouture Vetements: Subversive Street Style.” *Vogue UK* (January 24, 2017). URL: <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/suzy-menkes-review-vetements-menswear-autumnwinter-2017/>.



Figure 5 – A shirt and jacket from Gvasalia’s first collection for Balenciaga. Photography by Collier Schorr, fashion by Lotta Volkova.



Figure 6 – Balenciaga asymmetrical parka.

nothing to do with the active clothing industry. The bond of the foam with the typical material of tailoring makes it possible to realize garments in industrial production with a high-end virtuosity.⁴⁰ Demna Gvasalia, with his design creative process and material approach, has garnered a great attention, a reputation as the coolest designer into the fashionscape right now.⁴¹



Figure 7 – The Fall-Winter 2018–2019 Haute Couture and additive manufacturing.

Final remarks

Faced with fierce global competition, brands have to decide which way to go to be relevant to the “now”. French historical fashion houses are trying multiple approaches to revitalize their heritage, from the tired heritage-focused model to more irreverent and innovative formulas.

Fashion needs words, images, and imaginaries to ensure its symbolic production. Stories and visions are required to participate in its properly magical logic of the production. The heritage-creativity interplay takes part in this process of “transubstantiation”⁴² of the material world of fashion in its intangible form (the product as fetish). In Dior by Raf Simons, these are stories about non-conformist youth culture and indie music, performance, and visual art. At Dior, he infuses his own vision and values, his own signature, his cool factor, re-imagining and distorting the house’s legacy of archetypes, canons, and codes. In Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane, these are stories surrounding people captured through photography, as their

40. Eric Lai, “Balenciaga 3D scanning and 3D printing for luxury fashion” in AW 2018 Collection.” *3D Printing Industry* (March 9, 2018). URL: <https://3dprintingindustry.com/news/balenciaga-3d-printing-fashion-130162/>.

41. According to data analyzed by Business of Fashion and the Lyst research platform, in the index 2017 of the hottest brands, Balenciaga is at the second place, after Gucci. The Business of Fashion, “Gucci or Balenciaga: Which Was the Hottest Fashion Brand in 2017?” *The Business of Fashion* (January 29, 2018). URL: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/sponsored-feature/the-hottest-brands-in-2017-gucci-vs-balenciaga>.

42. Pierre Bourdieu, (1984) *Questions de Sociologie*.

auras, the uniqueness of each of them, and the charming, alluring and magic world that they have built for themselves. All these stories shape the imaginary of YSL and, with it, of fashion itself. In Balenciaga by Demna Gvasalia, it is an underground attitude that informs the creative process. As in hip-hop or techno music, Gvasalia plays with an item of clothing with snippets and breaks, doing loops and chops, arrangements, multiple overlapping samples, deforming it, distorting it, and re-purposing it. A change that ensures the permanence of Balenciaga.

In its evolution, fashion develops a complex dynamic of change and permanence. The interplay between heritage and creativity echoes the way in which fashion generates its always-changing epiphanies. In particular, it shows how fashion embraces history and images in its new formations, how it relies on the actual with sedimented memories. Fashion has the scent of the modern wherever it stirs in what has been.⁴³ Through its cultural conversations, fashion leaps from the contemporary to the ancient and back again without coming to rest exclusively in one temporal or aesthetic configuration. Leaping into the past, fusing cultures and histories, fashion is able to reconfigure the past in the light of the present. Thus fashion designer, with his visionary gaze oriented to the past to previous generations, makes his own era more vivid than it is for his contemporaries.

Fashion deeply grounds its essence in its archetypal power that is its oneiric quality to which every person can relate. Through its constant self-reference and quotation, fashion breaks the historical *continuum* and activates, and eventually radically changes, the past occurrences for the present. This is radical in its essence and this is why fashion matters. Modern thing.

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