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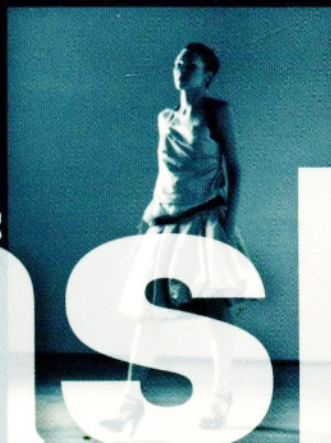
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studies in fashion

Fashion: concept to catwalk

Olivier Gervat

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Preface

For more than 30 years fashion has been my life: not just its history and anecdotes but also the genius and high craftsmanship of French haute couture. To fully understand it in its truest sense, one must love it. Its vast universe, at times falsely criticized as artificial and futile, is, in truth, simply a work of research, devotion and humility.

Which is most important? The garment, from conception to finish? The fashion designer's inspiration and the work of the studio? The fashion show and its team of models, makeup artists and hairstylists who are supposed to present it in its best light? The space where it can be bought? Or the visual props that do their best to promote it in the shops?

From the dream to the drawings, or these "little engravings" (as Mr. Dior called his sketches), to the choice of fabric, detail of the cloth and even to the manufacturing of this much-desired object, how much tension, anguish, application and labor, but also great pleasure, goes into its execution! From the solitude of the designer to the hub of activity and skills of the production studio, or the arrival of the suppliers, this flowing ballet for a fleeting creation is illustrated in this first book of the Studies in Fashion series.

But the garment itself, which is rejected from the outset by the fashion designer as he or she concentrates on the next collection, is bound to be out of fashion and quickly forgotten. Is it just a soulless piece of material to be thrown away? Saying that would be to ignore all the passion that comes with its creation, and the care taken to give it identifiable and palpable qualities.

No! This book aims to place the garment firmly in context. Proving that it endures as well as being admired and cherished by the aficionados of style, elegance, art and beauty. The passing years give it an unrivaled patina and a sense of mystery is linked to all the lives it touches. Like an exceptional wine vintage, with time it acquires a certain smoothness, giving it its own identity. As you will have understood, vintage fashion is my passion, giving me a favorable perspective on what is happening today in the fashion industry.

I defend the authenticity and charisma of vintage fashion, finding it quite wonderful. Imagine all the emotion when discovering Madame Grès' dress, where the designer had inscribed "not for sale"; or the unparalleled structure of a Balenciaga coat having belonged to Mona Bismarck: the affinity of two beings on the quest for perfection.

Timelessness is a dress from Schiaparelli's "Circus" collection, a photo that Christian Dior dedicated to one of his French models, a piece of Bristol board with some words in blue ink by Cristóbal Balenciaga, some phrases from Chanel with her unforgettable voice, the youthful radiance of Jacques Fath ... And then, among all these unique and authentic wonders is the ultimate symbol of Parisian style and feminine elegance — the "little black dress." You will find several famous examples in the following pages. Omnipresent in the fashion scene for more than 80 years, ever since Chanel's "Ford," they are an almost obligatory "rite of passage" for any aspiring designer which punctuates our memories now and then.

Balenciaga has used the little black dress in each of his collections: discreet, almost modest, yet unforgettable as a trademark or signature of his fashion shows.

One of the great merits of the Studies in Fashion books is the ability to pay homage to these talented craftspeople of taste, luxury and style. This book does just that, by logically integrating all the necessary aspects and processes required in the production of a garment.

This is why I am delighted to accept Olivier Gervail's invitation to participate in his first book, because the intrinsic nature of my profession is to share and impart knowledge.

Didier Ludot

The 21st century sees a new chapter in the history of fashion. France loses its monopoly on this activity which is inextricably linked with its history. The advent of new markets, delocalization of manufacturing sites and the birth of a more demanding consumer define new parameters for the designer.

The 1950s were synonymous with a particularly French expertise, that of *haute couture*. Its originators were designers such as Christian Dior, Jacques Fath and Pierre Balmain, to name but a few.

By the time the "space race" was in full flight these big names had started to wane as already designers and street fashion had become symbiotic of which Pierre Cardin was the self-made ambassador.

The American dream had died in Vietnam, with the younger generation and the hippie movement strongly contesting consumerism; Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Blowup*, supermodel Veruschka and iconic designer Mary Quant coincided with the first oil crisis; design was no longer in fashion. Flower power epitomized the return to one's roots and the importance of the craft industry.

At the end of the 1970s, music dictated fashion. *Saturday Night Fever* prevailed over good taste. For designers such as Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, who together founded the punk movement, the world was their oyster. Japanese fashion designers also began to come to the fore at this time – people such as Kenzo Takada, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons), and Yohji Yamamoto, who

collaborated with the film director Wim Wenders. These designers established a trend by introducing specific concepts into their collections. At the beginning of the 1980s a new start took place, with the birth of the fashion designer.

The consumer craze for designer labels, coupled with the media impact of fashion designers on the public, led financial groups to consider more closely the *prêt-à-porter* or "ready-to-wear" sector of the fashion industry. LVMH (Louis Vuitton, Moët Hennessy), Richemont and PPR (Pinault-Printemps-Redoute) took over certain market sectors by establishing artistic directors in order to personalize their company image. This extended into other consumer areas as well as clothing, most notably accessories and cosmetics. The brand image and the personality of the artistic director had a notable effect on a garment's success. For example, Tom Ford was synonymous with the Gucci label in the 1990s, while Marc Jacobs with Louis Vuitton and Alber Elbaz with Lanvin illustrate this type of collaboration today.

So many transformations require a new approach toward the fashion industry, while specialist knowledge and a global understanding of the textile industry are fast becoming indispensable. The designer can no longer ignore the balance that exists between creativity, image control and commercialization; it is the belief that fashion is a "product," coupled with continuing creative research, that allows designers to be successful today. It is also necessary to have a work ethic that can adapt to market demands.

The *Studies in Fashion* books originated from a desire to share my diverse professional experiences in France and the United States and Asia, notably Japan. I have done this by echoing a schools' teaching program I perfected for secondary education. The aim is to give young designers a global vision of the fashion world, in order to familiarize them with the professional sector.

The complete series aims to thoroughly and comprehensively present fashion and its related trades. Each book independently, offering an analysis of techniques, knowledge and working methods from the great masters of the trade, including a glimpse into their studios and ateliers. The series describes all the skills and trades connected with our industry, taking into account their transformations and relocations.

Fashion: Concept to Catwalk presents two types of creative areas. One is practiced by the fashion designer and is simply termed "products." The other, the conceptual side, belongs to the designer. Advice is given regarding the visual organization of the "material" at the research stage – storyboards, silhouettes, illustrations, finishing details, etc., all of which assist the apprentice designer in presenting his or her work to its best advantage. The production stage in the atelier, ranging from the technical drawing to the making up of the garment, must be perfectly mastered. This is thoroughly illustrated by means of an example that is described in the preceding chapters concerned with the concept of the idea. Eventually, the product becomes a finished outfit, including accessories, as the book follows its

journey, which culminates in promotion and marketing.

Fashion: Concept to Catwalk is the result of many exchanges between professionals such as Didier Ludot, Lutz, Stéphane Marais, Odile Gilbert, Rebecca Leach, Stephan Schopferer, Martine Adrien, Antoine Kruk, and so on. Like the other books in the series, it describes the knowledge and techniques that are part of French heritage and that have been so fittingly represented by Jeanne Lanvin, Sonia Rykiel, Christian Louboutin, Loulou de la Falaise and Louis Vuitton. We have access, here, to the creative starting points of these prestigious labels, right through to their commercial strategies.

The label Lutz, which has been chosen to present the fashion show, clearly demonstrates this evolution. With an average-sized company such as this, it is just as important to satisfy its clientele as it is to respond to the demands of the boutiques. In our opinion, this case history seems more informative than that of a large company with the media impact that ensues.

If the *Studies in Fashion* books have been conceived primarily to appeal to young designers wishing to work for large brand names within the international textile industry, then, hopefully, they will equally attract a larger audience curious to discover what goes on behind the scenes of this trade. Fully illustrated and constructed in the same vein as fashion and design magazines, these books aim to appeal to all of those interested in fashion – a passion that is part of my daily life and that I fervently wish to share.

What we understand by the word “products” are clothes which are normally destined for a wide audience, and known as *prêt-à-porter* or ready-to-wear (top end of the market). However, the creation of such a line of commercial products does not at all suggest a lack of originality.

The term *prêt-à-porter* appeared in the 1960s with designers such as Pierre Cardin, Emmanuelle Khanh and Christiane Bailly and their desire to democratize “couture” by making it accessible to the person in the street. Today, we observe the opposite of this phenomenon as collections actually adopt the influence of the street. This shows that if the product is commercialized, it becomes inextricably linked to a certain historical and sociological context.

From the huge range of existing products, we have chosen to concentrate on women’s *prêt-à-porter*. A number of these products will be presented to the reader, accompanied by detailed descriptions. We will also explain how to conduct the preliminary research necessary for developing coherent product lines, as well as how to define the theme of a collection.

Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn are all personalities from the past who, through their photographs, have contributed to the glamorization of our dreams. They incarnate the fashion of their time and have defined past styles for posterity. Model-designer muses tend to be actresses, rock

stars and top models such as Nicole Kidman, Sarah Jessica Parker, Madonna, Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell, and of course veritable fashion phenomenon Paris Hilton. This has the effect of making them seem more accessible.

With reference to these past icons, you will discover Didier Ludot's private collection of vintage fashion – his "little black dresses" being the glamorous items of a woman's wardrobe. Then, to introduce the world of the young designer to the reader, Lutz, ex-assistant to Martin Margiela, will explain his approach to clothing and the notion of the "remake" – timeless clothing reinterpreted for contemporary trends.

The premise of a good collection is finding the right "silhouette" – this is essential for a designer. We will demonstrate how to develop successful silhouettes that contain all the wealth and originality of a collection, as well as clearly expressing a brand identity.

We will then demonstrate the construction phase of the collection by defining the color ranges and harmonies relating to the seasons, plus print and embroidery patterns.

Finally, we will explain how all this work culminates in a collection plan and how it is ultimately made ready for merchandising and marketing.