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Two non-profit organisations shaped the French Fashion Industry after World War II.

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INTRODUCTION

“Perhaps what engaged the wheels of the fashion system was not the incessant quest for novelty and the concomitant media hype, but the dynamic interaction between change and stasis, differentiation and uniformity, that varies with time and location”. (BLASZCZYK, 2008).

In *Producing Fashion, Commerce, Culture and Consumers*, the numerous contributors show how important it is to take into account a wider array of organizations in order to better understand the fashion process.

This paper suggests that the two Paris based non-profit organisations, created in 1955 and 1959 played a central role in the spectacular rise of the ready-to-wear industry after WWII.

1. The first non-profit organisation is the “Comité des Industries de la Mode” (CIM), created in November 1955 with the support of the American Government to accelerate the European Reconstruction. 500 French productivity missions and 4,700 French missionaries returned from the USA (KUISEL, 1997).

The missions were dedicated to specific tasks and the 1955 mission¹ known as “the Mission of the Presidents” was directed towards marketing and merchandising operations and embarked major French advertising executives, top journalists and important ready-to-wear managers. (BARJOT, 2002)

2. The second organisation “The Fashion and Textile Section of the “Centre d’Information de la Couleur” (CIC) was created in 1959 by a prominent French Textile Consultant, Fred Carlin, (MAILLET, 2009, a).

The CIC was originally founded in 1950 by pioneers in colour, Pierre Fleury (Directeur of the Optic Institute²) and Maurice Déribéré in association with “The French Organisation for Normalisation (AFNOR)”. Its purpose was to provide the basis for a common colour

¹ : It is title as “La mission des chefs d’entreprises” A.N, 81.A.J.70.

² Institut de l’Optique.

harmonisation and normalisation in line with several works undermined by the International Commission on Illumination and the Committee of the Colour Group (DURUP, 1952)

Both organisations had been created with the support of respective public agencies, one for the diffusion of productivity (AFAP) and the other for the generalisation of norms (AFNOR). At their level they dramatically influenced the entire fashion industry, one providing French companies with the idea of style (the CIM), while the second one diffused common and accepted colours, hence consolidating the on-going process of rationalisation of one industry, Fashion (MOUTET, 1998).

1. “The Comité des Industries de la Mode”

a. The “1955 Mission de Productivité”

"At the invitation of the U.S. Department of Commerce, a new mission conducted by Albert Lempereur³ went off for a five-week stay in the United States. The itinerary was mostly attractive: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Washington. ... The industrials were accompanied with journalists from *ELLE* (and Helene Lazareff, the general manager), *France-Soir*, *Paris-Presse*, *Femina*, *Jours de France*, *Marie-France* (...), the French Radio and Television Network, Agence France-Presse and the advertising agencies represented by Neuville and Publicis (and its Chairman Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet). (GRUMBACH, 2008)

The mission of 1955 was the twelfth one for the fashion and textile industry but the first one to be as much marketing-oriented following the new instructions of the Mutual Service Agency (MSA). It has been created in October 1951, at the end of the Marshall Plan as the new administration in charge of financing the coming missions.

³ The President of the French Federation of the Women Clothing (Fédération du Vêtement Féminin).

As all missions, the one in 1955 was presented to the “French Trade and Industry” through a press conference in the offices of “The French Association for the Improvement of the Productivity⁴ (AFAP)”. It was the French counterpart of the MSA, in charge of managing the missions as an agency from the Ministry of Economy.

Held by ALBERT LEMPEREUR, the President of the French Trade Organisation for the Women Clothing, he proudly announced the launch of the “Comité des Industries de la Mode”. DOMINIQUE PECLERS, a young journalist part-time for a trade magazine, “*Nouveautés, Textiles, Habillement*” was at the press conference. She appointed ALBERT LEMPEREUR for the secretary job as a complementary part-time job who replied positively after a couple of days.

“The Comité de Coordination des Industries de la Mode” (CCIM) was managed under the umbrella of “The French Association for Productivity (AFAP)” and located in Paris in the eight arrondissement at 31 rue Marbeuf. DIDIER COLLETTE⁵ was the General Manager (Délégué Général) of CCIM but also the head of “The French Federation for Women Fashion”. CCIM’s President, ROBERT OFFREY, was also working at a top level at “The French Association for Productivity”. (AFAP)

DOMINIQUE PECLERS started at 25.000 FF/month/part-time (500 €/month) as the secretary of the newly “CIM” but at the beginning she was registered on the payroll of “The French Federation for Women Fashion” presided by ALBERT LEMPEREUR.

The very first objective of the newly formed comity was to help the two industries “Fashion and Textile” to better coordinate and satisfy the consumer needs. Sales in volume were at that point increasing in France (+ 5% in 1954 and 1955, + 8% in 1956⁶) but the two sides of the same cloth, the fabric and the fashion were not walking the same path.

⁴ Association Française d’Accroissement de la Productivité.

⁵ Didier Collette was the General Manager of the Fédération Française du Vêtement Féminin (French Federation for Women Fashion).

⁶ « Elements d’appréciation sur l’évolution des tendances de la consommation textile », *Le Mois Textile*, novembre 1957.

b. The Objectives of the newly formed “Comité des Industries de la Mode”

“Fashion accelerates Consumption. Coordination is key between the press, the department stores and the ready-to-wear industrials” (DE NEUVILLE⁷, 1955 quoted by DOMINIQUE PECLERS, 2010).

At the press conference held in November 1955, HENRI DE NEUVILLE AND ALBERT LEMPEREUR were insisting upon this idea of coordination. Style was not new in the United States at that time. The members of the French Mission had been presented to two market-study companies dedicated to fashion: “TOBY” and “AMOS PARRISH”. The latest was found in the early 1920’s and was already doing style predictions:

“Also announcing style trends last week was Amos Parrish, unique style forecaster for U. S. and Canadian retail buyers and merchandisers. To his seventh Fashion Merchandising Clinic in Manhattan's Hotel Pierre went 100 store buyers, advertising and sales managers. (...) Forecaster Parrish senses style trends like a hound after a badger. From chart records of styles for the last ten years, from reports of scouts stationed on street corners in 50 big U. S. cities he analyzes what most women will wear. He reports his findings to merchants, saves many from heading wrong. Last spring after his scouts reported on over one million women”. (*TIME MAGAZINE*, 1931)

Finally what inspired the French Missionaries was that “The day of the old buyer is passing, that of the stylist beginning ». (*TIME MAGAZINE*, 1928)

It is the reason that the very first name of the “Comité des Industries de la Mode” was “Comité de Coordination des Industries de la Mode” (CCIM), which meant Comity for Fashion Coordination. At that time the expression “Coordination” was often used: “Fashion Coordinator” was the given name for the employee in charge of coordinating Fashion Style within the Department Stores.

The purpose of the CIM was to establish a consensus among the various industrial actors (fabrics, fashion, colours, retailers). The first meeting of the CIM in January 1956 was a failure because, unprepared, the participants declared “ But Miss. PECLERS how can we

⁷ Henri de Neuville was the President of the French Advertising Agency Contact.

decide upon colours and textiles? ‘Haute Couture’ impose its choice”. The newly nominated secretary admitted that she had to bring the participants with ideas and thoughts.

She decided to prepare meetings where these industrials would first agree on colour and fabrics. Design would come next. It was the first time that these sort of meetings were organized in France while colour coordination was as old as 1915 in the United States (BLASZCZYK, 2007).

DOMINIQUE PECLERS prepared the synthesis of the French “CIM”, along a two-steps process. The President ALBERT LEMPEREUR helped her to select the most respectful people within the industry to interview them. She met with several fashion coordinators in department stores, major wholesalers, key journalists as Maimé Arnodin at *Le Jardin des Modes* (CHAPDELAIN DE MONTVALON, 2009) some ready-to-wear producers and even colourists. She also met sampling companies such as fashion and textile consulting firms as FRED CARLIN. (MAILLET, 2009, A)

At the “CIM” she favoured the contacts with the journalists and the fashion coordinators: these people had a “leverage effect, they were capable to suggest others to follow the new method”. (PECLERS, 2010). In doing so, she followed an on-going process in the build-up of the common opinion to finally reach the “likely opinion⁸” (QUÉRÉ, 1997).

DOMINIQUE PECLERS went then a step further and asked fabric producers to suggest their assumptions for the next season. Thus she became able to prepare the second synthesis meetings in March 1956 and to present the colours and the textiles for the next winter season that the “big players” recommended. As the principle actor to select and order several opinions for the next season, the Secretary of the “CIM” was acting as a “Fashion Gatekeeper”. (BRYSTRYN, 1978)

In the position of a “Fashion Gatekeeper”, DOMINIQUE PECLERS had the responsibility to translate in intelligible words the expectations, sensations, common ideas and thoughts of the selected people she interviewed previously. (CALLON, 1986)

⁸ « L'économie du vraisemblable »

While she was then typing down the report of her several meetings, DOMINIQUE PECLERS, understood that the best way to convince her subscribers, the members of the “CIM”, of the common choice made by their counterparts for the next season was to show them. That is when she asked, PRIMROSE BORDIER, who would become a famous designer, to prepare these common choices on mood boards accompanied by trend books including fabric samples that were given by industrials. PRIMROSE BORDIER was also working part-time and her other job was as a colourist in a fabric company called COSSERAT a velvet producer.

c. The impulse and the influence produced by “The Comité des Industries de la Mode”

“At the very beginning we tinker, and then we started to anticipate”. (PECLERS, 2010).

Along the French philosopher MICHEL DE CERTEAU, one can suggest that the “CIM” was producing “bricolage” (the artisans like “inventiveness”) and the discursiveness that combines these elements”. (DE CERTEAU, 1994)

During the first year (1956), the artisan-alike method was applied at the “CIM” but slowly the method became more organised. DOMINIQUE PECLERS’S light prep-study became a complete market study and therefore the mood board prepared by the designer, PRIMROSE BORDIER, became more elaborated. The “CIM” became also more important, members were visiting and it required meeting rooms. At the beginning of 1957 it moved to a new office in the heart of the Paris fashion district: Avenue de l’Opéra.

In her new office, the team of the “CIM” was preparing the coming and still actual agenda for fashion predictions: 24 months in advance for colours, 18 months for fabrics and 12 months for designs. The team also fixed the agenda for the meetings. It was the same for the two seasons: fall/winter and spring/summer. At the first prep session, market inquiries through questionnaires sent to members and the new trendsetters (journalists, fashion coordinators) and finally trend books comprising samples and painted colours were to make the future tangible. “When the press and the retail follow you, the industrials and the providers have to do so.” (PECLERS, 2010)

A several number of young girls joined the “CIM”. At the very beginning they were barely paid (on hourly wages) to help achieving the trend books with staples and glue. One, MICHELINE ALLAND, will end as the style director for the major trade show “Premiere Vision” and the other one, FRANÇOISE MARLIN as first assistant to KARL LAGERFELD at CHANEL. The “CIM” was a true learning place where one could assimilate the entire stylistic process working with a large scope of firms.

For a large number of young employees, the “CIM” was a fantastic start-up, helping them to meet a lot of decision maker managers and creators thus enabled them to benefit from major opportunities. PRIMROSE BORDIER became a famous designer and DOMINIQUE PECLERS left to take into charge the marketing and communication of a new synthetic fibre, “BAN-LON”. Afterwards she did become a fashion director at the department store “Au Printemps” previously the start of her own company in 1970. (MAILLET, 2006)

The 1st of January 1958, DOMINIQUE PECLERS left the “CIM” and was replaced by GANIA KAUFFMAN. During these previous two years the foundations of “The Comité des Industries de la Mode” have been dramatically consolidated establishing methods for fashion prediction for the entire industry.

2. “The Centre d’information de la couleur département Mode et Textile”

a. The Centre d’Information de la Couleur was created in 1950-52

“Various papers have been published on colour terminology (terms, symbols, definitions) (...), the new documents are the result of collective work that continues in England, the United States and France. The following year, various specialists grouped by AFNOR (...) have established the first French standard terminology of colour⁹” (DURUP, 1952).

⁹ Norme Française NF X 08-001. Couleurs, Terminologie de base. Paris, AFNOR, June 1950, 4 pages.

The “Centre d’Information de la Couleur” followed the commission established at the “French Association for Normalisation”. The president of the commission, M. FLEURY became the President of the “CIC” when it became autonomous in 1952. It took seven years before the creation of the extension for “Fashion and Textile” by FRED CARLIN, the owner and manager of a consulting company in textile who wanted to move along style and fashion. In the meantime FRED CARLIN had not been able to enter the “CIM”.

“An intermediary to exist permanently must know how to mediate: he must alter the terms of the debate and show the parties that his shift deserves attention”. (COCHOY, 2000). FRED CARLIN understood that many new structures and accomplishments, as the launch of the first Ready-to-Wear Show in 1956 were taking place in Paris and he wanted to be part of it. (CHENOUNE, 2000)

At “The Centre d’Information de la Couleur” a dedicated section for “Textiles and Fashion” was created in 1959 during the period of its second President YVES LE GRAND (1956-1969). It has not been possible to know yet who favoured more the opening of this section; was it the Comity or the President himself who wanted this enlargement as one can suggest from a speech given in 1956?

“My hope is that we, the lighting community, remember that colour shall be an element of joy, an element of luxury but luxury in its best sense”, as when BAUDELAIRE mentioned it that “this luxury and beauty are largely due to the colour, and when we spread the light, we shall always believe in colour so that our world become more pleasant and beautiful.” (LE GRAND, 1956)

On the other hand one can suggest that it was FRED CARLIN himself, a fashion consultant, who was looking for a dedicated tribune from where he could orient the trends of the fashion and textile Industries. It would have given him a substantial benefit for his professional consulting.

The answer is still unknown but what is certain is that since the beginning FRED CARLIN wanted to position the newly created section for fashion and textile aside the existing comities, especially the “CIM” but also any professional ventures. Some had already started

(Relations Textiles in 1957) or will, such as “Maïmé Arnodin Conseil” in 1960, which immediately published its own colour book. (MAILLET 2006)

“In any case the “CIC” shall not compete nor counteracts the decisions taken by other comities or private companies, on reverse its proposal is to present a large overview of cyclical perspectives in fashion”. (*L’Officiel du Textile*, 1968)

Meetings were held two times a year, in January and June and the comity was working two years ahead. The members were delegates from the various professional federations: Artificial Fibres, Cotton, Linen, Silk, Synthetic Silks, Wool, one delegate from the “CIM”, delegates from major dye-stuff companies and finally from major fabrics. This comity had no dedicated access to the press nor to the department stores, nor the demand side nor the consumer expectations. On reverse as soon as 1963 it wanted to enlarge its international scope.

b. 1963: The International commitment of “The Centre d’Information de la Couleur”.

“An International Commission for the Coordination and Normalisation of colours in Textiles and Fashion is to be set up in Paris. Representatives in each country are to be invited to take part in the Commission, which was formed at the end of the recent International Colour Days in Italy¹⁰. The Commission will sit at the Colour Information Centre, 23 rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, Paris”. (*Style Weekly*, 1963)

As mentioned by DURUP, international coordination was a centrepiece in the colour industry. It also became an economic requirement due to the openings of the European markets and the launch of the Kennedy Round at the GATT¹¹ in 1964.

The meeting took place at the “Centre d’Eclairagisme” the 9th of September 1963. The countries were: Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Britain, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands,

¹⁰ 3-7 may 1963 in Firenze, Padova and Prato.

¹¹ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Sweden, Switzerland and the USA. Several decisions were taken and an agenda had been fixed to reach co-ordination and normalisation for colours in Fashion and Textiles on a worldwide basis. M. FRED CARLIN of Paris was elected President, M. HELLMUTH PALM (Germany), vice-President and M. MILO. LEGNAZZI (Switzerland), Secretary.

Previous to the meeting, a friendly lunch was organized at the “Cercle de l’Union Interalliée¹²”. M. FRED CARLIN was a member of this select Parisian club, thanks to the recommendations of a silk owner known from Lyon (M. AIMÉ BABOUIN).

“(…) The purpose of the International Commission is to reach a coordination of the basic colours¹³ to come to help industrials to avoid excessive charges, costly errors, to facilitate international trade relations in this field¹⁴”. (*Le Parisien*, 1963).

The international orientation of the “CIC” enabled the entire profession to benefit from the establishment of worldwide colour cards known as “Intercolor”¹⁵. Three countries were leading this new international structure: France, Switzerland and Japan¹⁶.

An English journal (the title is unknown) was not that convinced by the work stimulated by the French President, CARLIN:

“Founded in 1963, the International Commission on Colour for Textiles and Fashions (I.C.C.T.F) held a further meeting in Paris recently under the presidency of Mr. FRED CARLIN. While not resolved to the full satisfaction of the delegates from eleven countries, progress had been made in establishing, in conjunction, with all sides of the dyeing and manufacturing industries, restricted cards of “tendency colours” for forthcoming seasons. It was felt that steps had to be made in further restricting the range of tendency colours and that there was too much delay in exploiting them. In September 1963 a “tendency” colour range for Spring/Summer 1965 was submitted and the more recent meeting would result in a

¹² 33 Fb Saint-Honoré, Paris 8°.

¹³ « carte restreinte de couleurs de tendances ».

¹⁴ Traduction de l’auteur.

¹⁵ Intercolor has been the name given to the International Color Association

¹⁶ Olivier Guillemin, the actual President of the Intercolor Organisation, 25 June 2010.

general guidance on colour trends for Autumn/Winter 1965/66. These colours were disseminated via the colour associations in the various countries¹⁷ so that fashion colour ranges derived from a common basis”.

The remaining question was the following: shall the Intercolor cards be recommendations or prototypes? Shall they be adopted with few debates on a country by country basis or shall they only look like mere suggestions that each country could discuss, amend and decide to follow or not?

The answer may come from an American point of view:

The 49th annual meeting of the “Color Association of the USA”, Miss Midge Wilson, executive director of the Color Association noted that instead of color changes for the season “we now have groups of colors which change as the seasons progresses. Miss Wilson emphasized the importance of the International Commissions for Fashion and Textile Colors, which will exchange colour information and select trend colors twice a year. (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 1964).

The French position was more subtle and was expecting from both the prototype and the common suggestion.

“The French Commission was mentioning a trend colour range “prototypes” one for the women fashion and one for the men fashion. These indicative models¹⁸ were supposed to be communicated to the C.I.M and the different trade associations so that they could be used for there own “tendency colour range”. (*L’Officiel de la Couture*, 1965).

While the (I.C.C.T.F) was suggesting “tendency colour range”, an other French press article confirmed the effective role of the CIC.

¹⁷ « in less than ten days”, Commission Internationale “Couleurs - Textiles – Mode”, *Couleurs*, 4^o Trimester 1965.

¹⁸ « Maquettes d’orientations ».

“The C.I.C underlines that in any case the organisation is a publisher nor a sale company and that the prospective work of its several active commissions are free and to the sole profit of the Trade Organisations that later one will use it to establish there own “tendency colour range”. (*L’Officiel des industries de la maille*, 1967).

Finally the Intercolor is still a very efficient international organization while the Fashion and Textile division of the “Centre d’Information de la Couleur” became an Association on its own the 11th of June 1976 and called, “Comité d’Information de la Couleur”. The three members of its Board included FRED CARLIN, CYRILLE OUVAROFF AND FRED WILLIAMS-GOBEAUX who became its first President. FRED WILLIAMS-GOBEAUX was also the General Manager of a sample company based in Paris, Bilbille SARL. (MAILLET, 2009, b)

CONCLUSION

“ In fact, a safer strategy to study styles is to rely on the opinion of first-order experts (participants) which guide decisions in specific fields. An obvious risk, however, is that if experts disagree among themselves, then sociologists end up with different disagreeing perspectives on style, none of them scientifically actionable ». (GODART 2009)

The role played by the two non-profit Organisations shows that alternatives to experts did exist positively during the turning-years for the Fashion Industry, the 1950’s and 1960’s. One can suggest that an alternative to the common expertise resource can be project beyond the firm and that it definitely respond to the expectations of a vast array of actors within the industry.

The “CIM” was able in a very short period of time (two years) and with tight financial resources to establish the Fashion Prediction Methods that were commonly used by the entire industry at least until the end of the XX^o century. Moreover the “CIM” gave the opportunity to many of its employees to set up there own company, including nowadays the N°1 and 2 of the French Fashion Prediction companies (PECLERS and NELLY RODI).

The “CIC” had done a similar job on an international scale, preparing the common colour cards for the entire fashion and textile industry two years ahead, contributing to the improvement of its efficiency.

If there is no doubt that two non-profit organisations shaped the French ready-to-wear industry, the question remains on the effective lasting of such influence. Both, the “CIM” and the “CIC” did not last long: the “CIM” disappeared gently as a fashion prediction structure in 1985 and definitely in the 1988, thirty years after it started. The “CIC” had to change its management structure in 1976 but the new one is still in function.

If it is only recently that mediating forces (COCHOY, 1999) or intermediaries (BLASZCZYK, 2008) have been recognized as legitimate and efficient actors within the fashion industry, it seems that the role of non-profit organisations has yet to be underlined.

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