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# Creating Original Garments Using Couture Sewing Methods

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CREATING ORIGINAL GARMENTS USING COUTURE SEWING METHODS

by

Nicole S. Eckerson

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
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Advisor: Barbara Frazier, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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## CREATING ORIGINAL GARMENTS USING COUTURE SEWING METHODS

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Western Michigan University, 2012

As part of my research, I examined the techniques and methods used in couture sewing from the past to the present, drawing inspiration from historical couture garments by designers Charles Worth (19<sup>th</sup> century designer) and Charles James (20<sup>th</sup> century designer). The four pieces I drew inspiration from include Charles Worth and Bobergh's evening gown (1861), Charles Frederick Worth's evening gown (1883), and Charles James's "Butterfly" ball gown (1954) and "Swan" ball gown (1954). These designers were chosen based on their use of structure and form throughout their pieces. After researching couture sewing methods and using the gowns mentioned above for inspiration, I used my interpretation of these gowns to create three original garments. Justification for this research is to provide advanced knowledge in couture sewing methods, which will enable me to educate others on couture sewing and to sustain the practice and use of such techniques.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Project Objective**

The focus of this project was to develop an advanced knowledge of couture sewing techniques and to create three pieces inspired by two major historical couture designers. The techniques used in my line evolved during the design and construction process. In an effort to keep advanced sewing construction techniques alive, goal number two was to build couture (see page 5 for couture definition) sewing method awareness. Mass production is the common method taught to design students, due to the majority of garments being mass produced. This leaves students and design professionals with little advanced knowledge of couture sewing techniques. Unlike in European countries, where children are taught hand sewing fundamentals at 5 or 6 years of age, the United States' design students, design professionals, and home sewers are much more familiar with sewing on a machine than the art of hand sewing (Shaeffer, 1993).

#### **Historical Background of Couture Industry**

It is vital to know the history of couture before moving forward and propelling designers to becoming innovators. Fashion's origins began in Paris in

the 1670s. Couture came into existence to supply the increasing demand for high fashion garments to members of Louis XIV's court and the general public. From day one, the fashions and the fashion industry had a clear sense of self-definition and mission. The same concepts invented then are key to the way we experience fashion today. Fashion was referenced by its French name, *la mode*, and was to be considered inherently French. La mode was a constantly and quickly changing phenomenon whose every variation was observed and emulated. Those who wanted to be truly fashionable believed they had to follow the Parisian scene, acquire French goods, and, if possible, make a trip to the world's fashion capital. By the end of Louis XIV's reign, fashion had begun to matter to many of his subjects. In 1715, fashion plates (women who wear the latest fashions) sensed and talked of a new look approaching in fashion. The ladies of the court took action and called a meeting inviting fashion plates, clever tailors, and the best couturieres. They worked together to make sure the new fashions were a hit to those that were setting the fashion style in the Western world and the ladies in the French court. Using this collaborative method allowed couture to come into existence (DeJean, 2005). Dresses were often made by hand by the women who wore them. Wealthy women had their dresses made by hired dressmakers. Kings and queens became trend setters, and the textile and detailing of garments were signs of the wearer's wealth and social position (Nudelman, 2009).

In the 1700s, one of the first known fashion designers was Rose Bertin. She was a milliner and designer to Queen Marie Antoinette, who played an

important role in bringing fashion and haute couture to the French culture. Haute couture would not be complete without mentioning English designer Charles Fredrick Worth. In 1850, Worth changed the way exclusive dressmakers conducted their business. He designed whole collections of dresses, which were displayed on live models in his showroom. Worth revolutionized fashion and was a pioneer of haute couture fashion (Nudelman, 2009).

There were many recognizable designers, following Bertin and Worth, who played an important role in couture. Among these designers were Jeanne Paquin, who introduced a dress that was tailored for day wear but elegant enough to wear in the evening to an informal event; and Paul Poiret, who introduced a straight silhouette that did not require a corset and was known for the hobble skirt. Coco Chanel introduced jersey dresses and wool jackets. Jean Patou popularized V-neck sweaters and tennis skirts, bringing a casual style to women's apparel. Elsa Schiaparelli was the first designer to use zippers in her dresses and introduced the long dinner suit and voluminous trousers. Christian Dior created the new look in 1947, and was known for contributing to the modern wardrobe for women (Nudelman, 2009).

To fully understand the history of couture, it is important to understand the way in which couture's lucrative industry operates. There is a particular set of terminology for the staff and the responsibilities they have in a couture house; these roles allow a couture house to function properly. The roles today include the designer, who is responsible for overseeing the entire operation including

designing, fitting of muslin samples, choosing models, arranging fashion shows, and talking to the press (Nudelman, 2009).

The *premiere de l'atelier* is head of the tailoring workroom and cuts first patterns; makes and fits the muslin samples, also known as the *toile*; prepares, cuts, and fits the finished garments; and oversees the garment's completion (Nudelman, 2009).

The *seconde de l'atelier* is second in command to the *premiere de l'atelier*. The *tailleur* is in charge of the production of the garments. The *flou* is responsible for the second workroom, where soft pieces made from soft fabrics such as silk are made by the *ateliers*, who are the professional dressmakers in the second workroom (Nudelman, 2009).

The *atelier* is a professional dressmaker who constructs *toile* and muslin sample. The *directrice* is the managing editor. The *vendeuse* is responsible for overseeing the whole experience of the client, from selection of styles, to arranging and attending the three fittings, to delivery of the finished product (Nudelman, 2009).

There are usually two tailoring workrooms in the couture house. One concentrates on tailored, menswear-influenced designs made of fabrics similar in texture, weave, and weight. The second workroom concentrates on softer dressmaker styles made of soft wools, mohairs, boucles, or chenilles (Shaeffer, 1993).

The dressmaking atelier is where many gowns, dresses, blouses, and other garments are sewn. Silk is the main fabric used in this workroom. The

garments are softly draped designs that are normally sewn right on a dress form from the right side of the garment in order to accurately pin and stitch in place the draped folds. Some of the garments have no inner structure and rely on the body to form the shape of the garment. Other dresses, like those of Charles James and Charles Worth, rely on an elaborate inner structure to give the garment its form. Garments made in the dressmaking workroom are rarely lined because the lining will not allow the garment to move easily with the body (Shaeffer, 1993).

There are two associations in Paris that support and govern haute couture. The Federation Française de la Couture, whose membership is based on high standards of excellence, and the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Parisienne, which Worth originated (Nudelman, 2009).

Couture refers to fine custom dress design, made to measure for a particular customer. Haute couture is the most exclusive couture. It is reserved for the very best design and highest quality of fabrics and craftsmanship (Frings, 2008). Haute couture is considered to be one of a kind piece of wearable art, which only about 2,000 of rich and often famous women can afford to buy. Only about 200 of these women buy on a regular basis (Laushway, 2000). Couture garments can cost from \$20,000 to \$50,000 for a suit or up to \$100,000 for an elaborate gown (Frings, 2008). "What is most important is that haute couture is the ultimate luxury. It's about design, exclusivity, custom-made refinement, and the most exclusive and unique service," said Bruno Pavlovsky, president of the fashion division at Chanel (Socha, 2008, p. 1). The haute couture philosophy is

that high design and production standards take authority over controlling the expenses (Shaeffer, 1993).

A couture garment is made up in the exact measurements of the client and can take several fittings to get an accurate fit. Construction usually takes weeks. There is an enormous amount of hand work and attention to detail involved in couture sewing. It may require 70 to 90 hours for a workroom team of four to eight people to make a simple day dress. To produce a much more complicated evening gown can take hundreds of hours (Shaeffer, 1993). The fabric, fine trim, and hand beadwork are other design enhancements to couture garments. The garments are made of the finest fabrics, many times using silks and luxurious wools. Fabrics are specifically designed for the couturier and cost hundreds to thousands of dollars a yard (Nudelman, 2009). This is the major difference between luxury ready-to-wear and couture (Kapp, 2008).

By the 1960s, designer ready-to-wear (mass-produced garments) became as influential as couture. To keep up with the competition of mass production, couturiers began to design ready-to-wear collections. Ready-to-wear garments are made from much less expensive textiles, have less handwork, and may come in multiple colors and sizes (Frings, 2008). Many times the same techniques are used in both couture and ready-to-wear, but it is how the techniques are applied that makes the aesthetics so unique in couture garments (Nudelman, 2009). Garments are made available by simply going into a store and trying it on for fit and appearance and can be taken home the same day of purchase. Today ready-to-wear cost can range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 dollars.

The creation process of ready-to-wear garments is similar to couture; however, there is no exclusivity, meaning it is not one of a kind, not made to specific measurements, and there is less high quality craftsmanship used (Frings, 2008).

### **Project Inspiration**

Many advanced sewing techniques used today were used centuries ago by couture designers. Examining the sewing techniques of past couture designers has helped me understand how these sewing techniques have been adopted by today's couture designers. This allows me to implement both past and present couture sewing methods into my garments.

Intrigued by the garment complexities and construction of Charles Worth (19<sup>th</sup> century designer) and Charles James (20<sup>th</sup> century designer), I chose two pieces from each designer from which to draw inspiration. With my interpretation of these gowns, I created original garments consisting of three pieces. I focused on techniques such as hand sewing, edge finishing, garment closure, and support techniques, including interfacing, boning and stays, fabric manipulation, and pressing techniques.

Worth and James are both known for their use of support materials to provide structure to the garment's under layers and for their use of fabric manipulation techniques to create a particular form and esthetic. The four pieces I drew inspiration from were Charles Worth and Bobergh, evening gown (1861); Charles Frederick Worth, evening gown (1883); Charles James, Swan ball gown



(1954); and Charles James, Butterfly ball gown (1954) (Long, & Steele, 2008, pp. 14, 18, 19, 92–95).

These designers were chosen based on their use of structure and form throughout their pieces. *Structure* is a term used by dress designers for lines of the dress that are concerned with the functional design of the dress (Calasibetta, 1988). *Form* refers to the shape and structure of a three-dimensional object (Lauer & Pentak, 2012). Both designers have similar uses of form and structure to their garments. Worth was a master of three-dimensional shape. Shape, also referred to as silhouette, describes the outline of the whole garment (Frings, 2008). The high rounded bust, arched back, and sweeping extension of the ribcage have an abstract aesthetic value for the time period. Worth's garments had such a bold shape that they successfully resisted the "remodeling" efforts of his customers' dressmakers. One way Worth achieved this shape was by lining the bodices and skirts with starchy book muslin (a coarse, sheer, and shiny finished muslin) (Brooklyn Museum, 1962).

I focused on fabric manipulation (i.e., pleating, puffing, gathering, ruffles, shirring, flounces, godets, tucks, ruching, and smocking), construction methods, and fit, while using form as a design esthetic in my three original garments. Form is a consistent design esthetic used by Charles Worth and Charles James. I used form throughout my designs by cinching in at the waist and using my support materials to create a distinct form and shape.

Both Worth and James were also known for the impeccable fit of their garments. Couture designers are known for their dressmaking skills, and clients

who can afford these garments expect them to fit like a glove. If the garment does not fit right, it can often be uncomfortable and unflattering to the body. Fit is an important element of couture garments. With these points of focus on my garments, I have delivered quality garments that provide a strong creative design aesthetic, couture construction methods, interesting fabric manipulation techniques, and an impeccable fit.

Because my inspiration pieces are historical garments, fashion trend research was an intricate part in the design development process. Conducting trend research helped me translate how these historical garments could be transformed to create modern designs. The three garments I designed reflect today's trends and style. To begin my research on the thesis topic, I examined 2010 trends. The spring 2010 fashion trends gave way to many historical references. Vintage military was the 2010 fashion trend with embellishments, added fullness, and structured jackets, intermingled with an air of femininity (WGSN, 2010). Hitting the runway were Raffia-embellished dresses, bell skirts worthy of Marie Antoinette (Style.com, 2010).

### **Today's Couture Industry**

Today Paris is still the center of the couture industry, with a very strong support structure of skilled workers in different specialties. Spending millions of dollars each year showing collections twice a year, the shows attract the necessary publicity to help the couture houses stay afloat. Today the most

popular couture designs get copied into mass-produced clothing at a wide range of price points (Nudelman, 2009).

Traditional couture houses still exist; however, profits for the couture industry are largely made through designer accessories, perfumes, and ready-to-wear (Laushway, 2000). The couture industry has an expanding international customer base filled with wealth, and clients from the east are demanding more exclusivity and service than ever (Socha, 2008).

A few years ago, the industry was sounding the death alarm for couture as a long list of houses closed, including Yves Saint Laurent, Emanuel Ungaro, Balmain, Jean-Louis Scherrer, and Hanae Mori. Sales of the remaining designers have been rising, so much so that many couture houses are expanding their ateliers and hiring more temporary workers to keep up with demand (Socha, 2008).

The remaining couture designers reported that sales growth increased from 5% to 80% last year due to gaining new clients. Valentino credits the quality of its couture collections for an 80% bump in couture sales last year, bringing sales back to the levels of 2006/2007, before the global financial crisis (Socha, 2012).

Couture is a key point of differentiation for designer brands, and a way of expressing their excellence (Socha, 2008). Executives expressed concern but not alarm about the speculation of yet more economic turbulence ahead. Couture executives agreed emerging markets are fanning the craft's fortunes (Socha, 2012).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section, I discuss why I chose Charles Worth's and Charles James's designs as inspiration and what importance these two designers had in the history of haute couture. These two designers played an important role in the history of fashion. I chose Worth and James based on their innovativeness and what they had done in their careers that pushed fashion to what it is today. In order to study couture sewing techniques, I had to first know its contributors and their contribution. While researching, I studied very carefully which materials they liked to use, where boning was placed, what types of interfacings and support materials were used, what types of finishes were used, what types of stitching techniques were used, and whether they were done by hand or machine. I was able to compare James's and Worth's techniques with couture sewing techniques and methods used today, which helped me to analyze which couture sewing methods to use. Through this literature review I will explore the construction process in some of James's and Worth's creations.

#### **Background of Designer Charles Worth**

Unlike other designers who used their customer designs and fabrics choices to create a dress, Worth differentiated himself by creating his own designs and selecting his own fabrics. For this reason he became the founding

father of haute couture, a phrase coined by one of his American clients, Mrs. Moulton, in 1863 (Shaeffer, 1993).

Charles Fredrick Worth was born in Bourne, Lincolnshire, England, in 1825. Worth first started out as a salesman at Swan and Edgar and then at Lewis and Allenby, which were both drapery stores in London. In 1845, Worth set off to Paris and started working as a sales assistant at Maison Gagelin, the famous Parisian fabric store. Charles Worth began a startling innovation by having his attractive French bride model garments that customers could purchase. For the first time, the customers had the opportunity to see what a garment looked like before having it made. With his talent and notoriety he persuaded his employers to open a new department and to give him a few dressmakers (Olian, 1982). Worth established himself as the only male dressmaker in Paris. Worth was able to develop a flourishing department due to his many skills and knowledge (Shaeffer, 1993).

In 1858, Worth constructed his own couture house with his partner Gustof Bobergh. By 1860, Worth & Bobergh employed over 1,000 workers and had opened several workshops (Brooklyn Museum, 1962). Worth received his big break when French Empress Eugenie, who at the time was one of the most important and influential fashion leaders, decided to make Worth her exclusive dressmaker. Having the Empress's support meant a great deal for Worth's career (Shaeffer, 1993).

Worth was the first to create a house style and collection of seasonal designs shown on live models. He also established the Chambre Syndicale de la

Couture Parisienne, which remains the governing body of French couture fashion houses. Chambre Syndicale sets forth a very strict set of rules to follow in order to be established as a French couture designer (Shaeffer, 1993). To be a member of Chambre Syndicale, a couture house is required to have at least one atelier (workroom) in Paris, with a minimum of 15 staff members, and present a collection of at least 50 designs, both day and evening garments in January and July (Nudelman, 2009).

With the innovative path Worth had started, he continued to make revolutionary changes in his field. He was the first to understand the proper fabrics to use on specific designs. He was the first to cut patterns using different grain lines of fabric. Worth was the first one to use one of the concepts of mass production, creating interchangeable parts to create a variety of designs (Shaeffer, 1993).

Worth felt that his greatest accomplishment was the discontinued use of the hoop skirts, creating a more relaxed silhouette (Shaeffer, 1993). In 1868, he designed a dress without the cage or crinoline (hoopskirt). Instead, he used tapes inside the skirt to control the fullness of the front skirt, allowing the train to flow over the hips and sweep to the floor. Worth, who had introduced the cage decades before, tried many seasons unsuccessfully to make women abandon it. After the launch of the new slim silhouette, there were other changes made to the design such as a sleeve, which was set in closer to the body and narrowed to create a more transitional shape. The slimmer silhouette became the new look in the 1870s (Brooklyn Museum, 1962).

When the Franco-Prussian War toppled the Second Empire, Empress Eugenie went into exile in 1870 and Worth then lost his most important and visible client. Worth continued to supply wardrobes to women of wealth both in Europe and America (Shaeffer, 1993). In 1874, Jean Philippe Worth and Gaston Worth entered their father's employ. Twenty-one years later in 1895, Charles Frederick Worth died and his sons became his successors. In 1946, after several years of the Worth couture house being family run, Gaston's grandsons sold out their interest (Brooklyn Museum, 1962).

The house of Worth will forever be known in the couture world. With Worth's many accomplishments he was able to make a substantial impact on the couture industry rich in the traditions that Worth started.

### **Background of Designer Charles James**

Charles James was one of America's great designers. In James's first Paris showing in 1937, Paul Poiret, who is widely thought of as one of the great innovators of dress design in the 20<sup>th</sup> century told James, "I pass you my crown, wear it well." (Coleman, 1982, p. 81). This was an enormous honor coming from an expert in the field. Charles James was a designer known for his use of form. Charles said, "I am not a designer; designers are hired help that only copy what's in the wind. They don't create fashion. Only a couturier does this, with his client as inspiration." Charles viewed his garments as works of art and believed that after they served their use in someone's wardrobe, they should be in museum collections (Coleman, 1982, p. 84).

Charles was born in Camberley, Surrey, England, in 1906 and died in 1978. In 1954 he married Nancy Lee Gregory and they had two children, Charles Haweis James and Louise Brega James. Coming from a traditional upper-class education, James was able to attend school in England and New York (Coleman, 1982).

Charles was given a job with his father's employer, utilities magnate Samuel Insull, in Chicago. James was assigned to the architectural design department where oil stations were designed. Later in life, Charles would describe himself as both an architect and an engineer, as opposed to a designer. This position assisted him greatly later in his design career (Coleman, 1982).

In 1928, James moved to New York City and opened a shop designing dresses and catering to private clients. Throughout James's career he would move in and out of the United States. In 1929, James established himself in London and had his first showing (Coleman, 1982).

In an effort to increase visibility, James sold about 200 designs, some for copying, mainly to American buyers. He was in Paris at this time and he outraged the Parisian couture industry by the act of selling his designs to be copied. Decades later the entire French industry caught on to the advantages of doing business overseas (Coleman, 1982).

In 1947, during James's exhibition "Decade of Design," designer Christian Dior, who introduced the "New Look," was in attendance and was quoted as saying that James inspired the New Look. This was a huge compliment coming



from a designer who was instrumental in changing the style of consumers (Coleman, 1982).

James worked on his garment designs like an engineer, planning and outlining in precise dimensions over wired, padded, structured dress forms he built himself. The shape of his silhouette was to take the extremes of fantasy and create a functional design. James once said, “All my seams have meaning—they emphasize something about the body” (Coleman, 1982, p. 84). To James this was more important than following the trends in fashion. James said that a major element when contemplating the development of a design was the human form “variation of physical appeal; in other words, all garments should be cut and constructed so as to make up for and correct deficiencies of the human figure in relation to the projected fashion” (Coleman, 1982, p. 84). James would make the body forms of his clients as he wished their body to be, rather than as they really were (Coleman, 1982).

James was a designer who believed that couture work could be achieved with a master pattern (or “sloper”), the basic module from which many developments, adoptions, and variations could be made. In James’s couture house, muslins were squared off like an architect’s graph paper slip covering dress forms. Others were padded out like blocks of marble, waiting for James to stretch contrasting colored tapes with mathematical precision in the displacing of seams and in the search for new points of tension. James would disregard the natural way the bias fell and force the many different grains into his desired shape. While couture houses work their patterns flat or draped, James cut and

molded his fabrics into sweeping forms. His use of the diagonal grain rather than the vertical or horizontal, which is more commonly used by dressmakers, was one of the mysteries involved in his achievement of the desired shape (Coleman, 1982).

Another example of James's preciseness in the details is that James's muslin was marked by apprentices in six-inch grids, just like graph paper. James would layer four to five different pieces of graphed muslin on top of each other, each on a different grain, tracing a pattern through so that he had five different grain sections to experiment with before deciding which shaped best to the body and the design. James had a passion for hip-line drapery. James's cutting trademarks have been rigid geometrical forms and fluid asymmetrical folds. He would also cut and pin directly on his clients (Coleman, 1982).

Some of James's favorite fabrics to work with were faille, velvet, and satin. James liked to experiment with his choice of fabric and welcomed the possibilities of new synthetic fabrics for his couture (Coleman, 1982).

James loved the displacement of a dart to achieve a more perfect bodily fit. James liked to point out his use of drapery to enhance curves and his application of the "Z-cut" at the waistline to give it form. James said, "My designs are not luxuries, they represent fashion research" (Coleman, 1982, p. 85). James was known for his perfectionism and research in getting something just right. James spent three years and \$20,000 just to perfect a straight sleeve. James also made an exhaustive analysis of bodices ranging over 50 and 100 years of age to determine by comparative measures both what remained consistent and

what had changed. James was constantly researching in order to provide the best outcome. Ironically, even though he spent fortunes on perfecting his designs, the dresses that his clients wore were known to be uncomfortable. The wearer could not always sit or walk well. However, his clients were appreciative of his exquisite designs and didn't mind the discomfort as long as they looked fabulous (Coleman, 1982).

James would rank his creations himself. His first choice was his black and white thesis or "Abstract" 1953 ball gown, called by James the "Four Leaf Clover." Over the course of James's career as a designer he became more structurally oriented in his work and execution of garments. He felt his "engineering" techniques were worthy of study by engineering students. One of James's clients reported, "There were so many pieces in one of his garments that the cut became a jigsaw puzzle" (Coleman, 1982, p. 107). It took 30 pattern pieces to construct the dress, using many different materials to get the desired form (Coleman, 1982).

In James's career he was known for many things. One of his other design contributions was a padded jacket. Soft sculpture refers to a design molded in soft fabric and padding to create a distinctive shape, compared to a sculpture made out of hard materials such as stone or metal. Charles James is best known for his earlier work, specifically his formal gowns from the 1920s to the 1950s. His gowns were praised for their exquisite color, fabric, and cut. James is also known for his "figure-8" skirt (Coleman, 1982).

## Couture Sewing Methods

Haute couture is “the most exclusive couture,” which involves many particular steps and techniques used in the design process to achieve a couture garment. Many of the techniques used in the couture workrooms can be duplicated at home. The construction process for couture garments involves hand sewing. Sewing the garments by hand allows control in the construction process. The atelier starts by sewing from the right side and works in narrow corners of the garment that are too narrow to be sewn by machine. An advantage to hand sewing is that hand stitches are less likely to mar the fabric than machine stitches. When the garments are hand sewn, the stitches are softer than machine stitches because there is only one thread compared to two linked by the machine. Thousands of perfectly spaced basting stitches mark or hold the garment layers together temporarily to fit the design on the client or dress form, before making the permanent stitching. The fabric is shaped and manipulated in the hands or on the form until the garment is complete. The seams may even be sewn permanently by hand (Shaeffer, 1993).

With all of the hand sewing that occurs, a thimble is an indispensable tool in couture sewing. It protects fingers from the needle and it helps to make neater consistent stitches with greater speed. Most tools and supplies used in couture are familiar to home sewers (Shaeffer, 1993).

Like fabric, thread too has a grain, so when sewing it is important to thread the needle going with the grain, not against it. This prevents the thread from kinking and knotting. Thread grain runs in the direction from the loose end

of the spooled thread toward the spool. When sewing permanent stitches by hand, all varieties of threads should be pulled once or twice through a small cake of beeswax and then pressed with a warm iron to prevent knotting or fraying and to keep wax from rubbing off on the fabric (Shaeffer, 1993).

The proper position for hand sewing is to sit at the sewing table and let the bulk of the fabric rest on the table. Right-handed people should rest their left forearm on the table with the palm curled toward them and pick up the edge of the garment. Then they rest the right forearm on the table and begin to sew right to left, with the bulk of the garment below the needle unless design requires otherwise (Shaeffer, 1993).

Hand sewn stitches fall into two categories according to their use as temporary or permanent. Temporary stitches, frequently referred to as basting stitches, are used for marking the garment, preparing it for fittings, and keeping the various fabric layers into position during construction. Temporary stitches are often sewn into a garment rapidly throughout the construction process, and then removed after they have filled their purpose. Temporary types of stitches used are even basting, lap basting, uneven basting, diagonal basting, and slip basting (Shaeffer, 1993).

Permanent stitches are sewn once and only removed if an error has occurred or for alterations. Permanent stitches are used to manipulate the surface of fabric (for example, to pleat, tuck, or gather it), shape the garment, and finish edges and details. These stitches can be simple, utilitarian, functional, and decorative depending on the type of style of stitch used. Some of these

types of stitches serve a limited number of applications, where other stitches like the backstitch can be adopted for a number of tasks. Some frequently used stitches are the running stitch, backstitch, slipstitch, fell stitch, and whipstitch, amongst many more (Shaeffer, 1993).

Seams, darts, and pressing techniques are crucial elements of garment construction. These elements are combined with support fabrics to shape a two-dimensional piece of fabric to fit the three-dimensional contours of a body. These are essential skills to home sewers and ready-to-wear, practiced with the greatest skill in couture workrooms, where both fit and construction of a garment are intended to appear flawless. Exterior seams and darts shape a garment, while interior support fabrics and expert pressing shape it invisibly. Darts are used less often in couture garments and when possible are converted to ease. However, darts are still used occasionally in couture sewing and are placed in usual areas. When stitched correctly, a dart is barely visible on the right side of the garment. When pressing a couture pattern, it may appear to have little relationship to the final garment. Distortion occurs when pressing because of the garment sections being stretched and/or shrunk extensively during the pressing process (Shaeffer, 1993).

There are four basic seams on which all other seam variations are based. These seams are used extensively in couture and among them are the plain seam, lapped seam, abutted seam, and French seam. The purpose of seam finishes is to complete the edges of seams, facings, and hems, which prevent them from fraying when the garment is worn and cleaned. This is particularly

important in a garment that is not lined. The preferred way of finishing the raw edge of seams allowances is by hand overcasting, which reduces bulk. It is the flattest, softest, and least likely to show on the right side of the garment.

However, it is also the most expensive and time consuming (Shaeffer, 1993).

Marking the garment is an important element in couture sewing and an essential part in the assembly of the garment. Unlike in ready-to-wear and home sewing, raw edges are rarely used as a guide for seaming. Basting stitches are used to make all necessary markings for seamlines, hemlines, darts, and matching points, and also used to note fabric grain lines and design details such as pocket positions and buttonholes. Garments can be marked with thread, chalk, or a tracing wheel. In couture, markings are generally made with thread, because it is visible on both sides of the fabric and durable enough to stay in position as long as needed during the construction process without damaging the fabric. There are two basic marking stitches. First, thread tracing is most commonly used in dressmaking workrooms to mark dresses, blouses, and gowns. Second are tailor's tacks, used in tailoring workrooms on suits, pants, and tailored dresses. Both types of markings are made before the pattern is removed from the fabric and in some cases even before the fabric is cut (Shaeffer, 1993).

Stays are made from strips of seam binding, constructed of plain weave tape or selvage, used as a technique in stabilizing seamlines or edges of the garment so they fit the body smoothly. This method is called stayed or taped seam, frequently used on eased or gathered seams to make the garment section

easier to handle during construction and to prevent the finished edge from gaping away from the body. Another purpose of stays is to keep fabric from stretching at foldlines on garment edges, such as a zipper placket or slashed pocket, and when used in this way it is called a grain stay. Stays are usually sewn to signal garment section and don't cross seamlines. The only exception to this rule is waistline stays, which tend to be sewn to the waistline seam after the skirt and bodice are joined (Shaeffer, 1993).

Interfacing and backings are much more extensively used in couture than in luxury ready-to-wear and home sewing. Interfacings and backings are generally made of natural fiber fabrics sewn in the interior of a garment to help shape and support the design. Unlike synthetic and fusible materials, natural fiber fabrics used for interfacings can be applied to a section or the whole garment. The distinctions between an interfacing and backing can be blurred. They can both help shape a garment, but a backing (under lining or mounting) usually lends body to the fabric itself, while interfacing helps control or produce support for the shape of the garment. Most of the time backings cover the entire garment section it backs and are often applied for modesty and to make a fabric opaque or change its color. Interfacing fabrics include hair canvas, silk organza, china silk, handkerchief linen, organdy, muslin, cotton flannel, net, tulle, crinoline, and self-fabric. Even more luxurious fabrics have been used, like fine Egyptian cotton, faille, silk taffeta, charmeuse, and chiffon. A stiffener horsehair braid is loosely woven from transparent strands of nylon thread and has been found used in interesting ways of support (Shaeffer, 1993).



Contrast lining, generally silk, serves only for esthetic purposes rather than for support. Even though it is almost always used on tailored jackets and coats, linings are much less frequently used in couture than in luxury ready-to-wear for dresses and evening gowns. Depending on the type of design and shape, linings may add an unnecessary layer that may wrinkle or distort the garment's drape (Shaeffer, 1993).

In a couture sewing workroom it is not uncommon to find more irons than sewing machines. Pressing occurs throughout the design construction process, from shaping and molding garment sections before joining them, to pressing seams and edges during and after their shaping or sewing, to the final pressing of a completed garment (Shaeffer, 1993).

Pressing tools used in couture workrooms are similar to those used domestically. An industrial steam iron with an outside water tank can be found in the tailoring workroom of a couture house. In the dressmaking workroom there is a dry iron and a domestic iron, and sometimes the domestic iron may be the only one used. Other essential tools include an ironing board or pressing table, point presser, sleeve board, large pressing pad or tailor's ham, clapper for flattening seams, lint brush, and an assortment of pressing cloths in cotton, linen, wool, and silk to press the various types and weights of garment fabrics (Shaeffer, 1993).

Everyone presses differently, but everyone can press successfully with some experimentation. There are not set formulas. The key in receiving professional results is in the understanding of the essential elements of pressing

including heat, moisture, and pressure and knowing how they work together and affect the fabric before desired results are achieved. The amount of heat, moisture, and pressure needed is dependent on the type of fiber content, weight, thickness, and texture of the fabric. The fabrics become more malleable when pressed with both moisture and heat. You can apply moisture with a steam iron, damp pressing cloth, dauber, or sponge. It is recommended that a damp press cloth is used and the dauber because they are more dependable and versatile since they are directly used on the fabric; plus, they will not leave water spots (Shaeffer, 1993).

Shrinking and stretching the garment is another technique. The ease with which one can shrink or stretch fabric in pressing is also dependent on fiber content and grain line of section pressing. Shrinking is used mostly to reduce excess fullness when shaping sleeve caps, easing skirts to waistbands, controlling flared hems, tightening an armhole, or converting darts to ease. Stretching a garment section to conform to the body is a new technique for most home sewers. It is used to straighten and lengthen inward curves and to transform straight edges into outward curves. Stretching and shrinking are frequently used in tandem (Shaeffer, 1993).

The assembly process in haute couture is more complex than in home sewing or ready-to-wear. In step 1, the sewer begins by draping several rectangles of muslin on the right side of the dress form. Symmetrical designs are half draped. Unless the design is complicated, the client has an asymmetrical figure, and or an embellished design needs scaling to fit body proportions, then

full pattern is made. When working with an asymmetrical design, a full pattern is always made. Step 2 involves pinning and shaping the muslin on the dress form to create the toile (Shaeffer, 1993).

In the third step, the toile (muslin sample) is laid on the garment fabric with the lengthwise grains aligned with plenty of space between pattern sections, leaving room for a one-inch seam allowance. In step 4, the backing is cut and the sleeves, collar facing, pockets, and lining are left uncut until needed. In step 5, all cut garment sections are marked with thread tracing at stitching lines, hemlines, matchpoints, garment centers, and horizontal balance line (Shaeffer, 1993).

In step 6, garment pieces are hand basted together and fit on the dress form. Once fitted, the basting stitches are removed. In step 7, pattern pieces are laid flat and necessary fitting corrections are made. In step 8, the client's first fitting is conducted; the garment is rebasted with small basting stitches that make the garment appear machine stitched. The seams are folded to one side and top-based close to the seamline for the fitting. All support materials including shoulder pads, stays, and boning are basted in place. Some couture houses baste the zipper, pockets, and lining in place, while other designers might fit with few facings and may even use the muslin sleeve instead of the fabric sleeve (Shaeffer, 1993).

Proceeding with step 9, the garment's marked lines are carefully corrected and basting stitches are removed. The pieces are laid flat again to make corrections. Moving to step 10, sections requiring shaping are eased, shrunk, or

stretched to shape the fabric permanently. Pockets and stays are set. In step 11, set-in sleeves are pinned and basted with sleeve heads and shoulder pads while the garment is on the dress form. The fit is evaluated to make sure that earlier alterations are correct and to see if any additional corrections are needed (Shaeffer, 1993).

In step 12, following the second fitting, the sleeves are carefully marked and removed so that underarm seams can be stitched and pressed, and cuffs, vents, and any linings can be finished. Shifting to step 13, every seamline is checked to make sure seamline intersection matches accurately, also checking the basting stitches for tautness to keep the layers from moving before the garment is permanently stitched (Shaeffer, 1993).

Step 14: Except for basting stitches that hold the seams together, all other bastings including thread tracing are removed. The seams are stitched on the basting seamlines. Next, in step 15, the sleeves are basted and permanently stitched into the armholes. All unfinished seams are basted and stitched permanently and pressed (Shaeffer, 1993).

During step 16, the garment is hemmed, lingerie guards added, and the zipper set permanently. The garment is given a final check to make sure all basting stitches have been removed. The garment is pressed lightly and is ready for the final fitting on the client. Lastly, in step 17, the fit and drape are examined a last time, the client accepts, and the label is sewn in place. Not sewing in the label until after the client accepts the garment is a tradition in a couture house (Shaeffer, 1993).

Applying couture sewing methods adds many benefits to the look, fit, and feel of garments. It is important to know these techniques so that the mind builds a reference library of these many skills, allowing the designer to pick and choose the techniques that work best for the construction of the garment. Educated and fully developed skills will ensure techniques are being used correctly to achieve the desired look, fit, feel, or shape.

Charles James once said,

I nailed into the heads of my students that there is no going back; study the past to know why, not what and from the why, dream and do. There is no shortcut to creation. There may also be no profit, but the search for the idea, found after a long, exhausting struggle, stands on its own merit. (Coleman, 1982, p. 106)

It is the research and skill involved that make a great designer and garments stand out from the rest. There are fundamental sewing applications whether consumer markets require a more luxurious application or a quick and less expensive application suitable for the mass market. Pulling from the same sewing application, it is the techniques that differentiate the quality. Knowing the different techniques enables designers to diversify their esthetic.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Accepted Design Process**

The accepted process for apparel design creation used today is as follows. Each collection or line is designed around a theme conceived by the designer that links each individual piece together to create a great look. Inspiration for the theme can come from anywhere (Nudelman, 2009).

Designers often begin by draping fabrics on the dress form to see how they drape on the crossgrain, the lengthwise grain, and then on the bias. At this time, designers work on the color story and pull together fabric swatches, trims, and buttons, and try different combinations. This helps in the next process—sketching the designs (Nudelman, 2009).

Then sketches of possible design styles are illustrated, and after the best designs are chosen, they are passed to the *premiere de l'atelier* who constructs the *toile* (muslin sample) (Nudelman, 2009). When the designer knows exactly what steps are needed to construct a garment, they start to work on developing the patterns by either flat patterning or draping. Patterns are very important in achieving an excellently fitted garment. Making up an order-of-construction list with a step-by-step guide ensures that the garments are sewn correctly (Nudelman, 2009).

The entire design, including all details and the entoilage (the structure inside the garment, including interfacing, shoulder pads, boning, and so on), is constructed in muslin with exceptional craftsmanship. The design is in working progress and fitted on the house model (Nudelman, 2009).

After toile is completed, the designer checks it inside and out. When toile is approved, it is then taken apart into pieces and pressed. These pieces are patterns for the final garment. The garment can be fitted two or three times, or even more, during the development process to ensure garment fit quality (Nudelman, 2009).

### **My Design Process**

In following the same process of methods as outlined above, I first created design illustrations and then chose my top three designs. Based on the style, use, and type of garment, I selected my fabric and color palette that I wanted to use. I chose my fabric carefully using fine fabrics such as silk and luxury wools. I did my best to simulate the types of fabrics the couture designer would use.

Next, I draped or created flat paper patterns of the designs. After I had my patterns complete, I constructed the first fit sample in muslin fabric. I performed several fittings on my models to ensure the fit was just right before cutting into the fashion fabric. The muslin enabled me to make all the appropriate markings needed to achieve an accurate fit. This ensured a close-to-perfect fit before cutting into my fashion fabric. Once all corrections were made on muslin sample,

I constructed the garment in the final fabric and did one last fitting to make sure it fit perfectly. If any final adjustments were needed, I made the necessary adjustments at this time.

### **Materials and Techniques**

The use of couture sewing technique books such as *The Art of Couture Sewing* (Nudelman, 2009), *The Art of Manipulating Fabric* (Wolff, 1996), *Couture Sewing Techniques* (Shaeffer, 1993), *The Basics of Corset Building* (Sparks, 2005), and *Tailoring Techniques for Fashion* (Di Lorenzo, 2010) allowed me to follow the instructions on how to perform my chosen techniques.

Given that couture garments are constructed almost entirely by hand sewing, I concentrated on hand sewing techniques throughout this process. I sewed both by machine and incorporating hand sewing techniques in some places on the garments. I experimented with fabric manipulation, trims, and embellishments and used the different materials needed to create form as an esthetic in my designs.

Based on the research I conducted, it is extremely important to have a solid foundation of support in a garment's under layers. Worth and James both used an enormous amount of support materials like boning in their bodices to help create support and shape. Worth's and James's dresses could consist of multiple layers, one for support bodice, a slip, and another for the exterior garment. Worth and James used many of the same methods and materials and were able to create beautiful garments. Worth and James both used flat pattern



and draped to create final patterns. Both used fabric manipulation and hand sewing techniques to complete garments. They made initial sketches of designs and fitted both on dress forms and live models.

### **Project Outcome**

Following a similar process and using similar materials and techniques as Worth and James, I created garments that are reminiscent of a previous era with a modern feel. Both James and Worth are well known for their contribution and innovation in couture construction and design. It was important for me to apply similar methods to get a full understanding of the couture process. Using designers Worth and James as inspiration, I produced three original garments. I used couture sewing methods and techniques such as hand sewing; edge finishing; garment closure; support techniques using interfacing, boning, and stays; fabric manipulation; and pressing techniques.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Project Outcomes

The garments I constructed for the creative portion of this thesis project were an embellished silk dupioni quilted skirt, a matching embellished silk dupioni corset, sleeveless habotai and charmeuse silk ruffled crop jacket, and a 100% wool tailored suit coat, shown in Figure 1. My goal was to complete three garment pieces and I completed four pieces. I would have liked to have created a tailored slack to go with the jacket and a formal dress. My plan is to create these pieces and to continue to practice and enhance the skills I have learned.



*Figure 1. Silk corset, skirt, and cropped jacket.*

Through this study of couture construction methods I learned many new techniques including toile, pressing, padding, quilting, basting, and permanent hand sewing stitches. Basting stitches are used to sew and mark garments with. Using basting stitches extends the time for completion but made the garments easier to sew and increased the quality of the garments. I am accustomed to making a muslin sample, but in couture there is a lot more time and attention devoted to making sure the muslin is perfect before cutting in the fashion fabric. There are many more fittings involved in the sample and finished couture garment. Given the exceptions above, the rest of the design process that I used was the same as ready-to-wear. It is the attention to detail and the skilled hands involved in the sewing and pressing techniques that make the largest difference in couture.

Even though I implemented as many couture techniques as I could in the four garments I created, there are many skills I would still like to practice and develop. I learned as much from the things I did right as the techniques I did wrong and had to start over. It takes a long time and lots of practice to develop skills in couture techniques. The corset I made took me over 100 hours, the skirt took about 200 hours, the cropped jacket took about 100 hours, and the tailored suit coat took me over 500 hours. Consistency when hand stitching is a grueling task. The hand work involved in couture garments is extremely time consuming and meticulous, but worth it when the difference is seen in the quality and

appearance of the garments. I did a lot of experimenting with different techniques before finding the techniques that captured the look I wanted to create. The garments are truly unique and quality driven. After studying couture techniques and having been trained in mass production techniques, I can attest to how vastly different couture is versus ready-to-wear. Couture methods are completely different than ready-to-wear because there is so much craftsmanship involved in the techniques. The result is truly a beautiful work of art.

### **Couture Processes Used**

First I chose and concentrated on the inspiration pieces I selected from designers Charles Worth and Charles James. I conducted trend research to see how I could incorporate aspects of these historical designs into modern fashion trends. Once I sketched out many designs, I narrowed them down and selected my top three designs. I selected my color palette during this phase of the project and chose the appropriate textiles for each garment.

In constructing the suit coat, I used draping techniques for the bodice and flounce and created flat patterns for the sleeves and corset. I also used draping techniques for the skirt and cropped jacket. For the embellishments I cut directly on the fabric in the measurement and size I needed to create the different pleats. A toile (muslin sample) was constructed for each piece I created and fitted. Once the fit was correct, I

used my muslin sample as pattern pieces to cut out my fashion fabric. More fittings were conducted once the garment was constructed in the fashion fabric.

If I were to redo the garments, I would have conducted even more fitting in the muslin and included any interfacing, boning, stays, and closures needed to finish the garment. I would have obtained a better result if I would have concentrated more on the toile. It is that preciseness and process that makes couture so unique.

### **Materials and Couture Sewing Techniques Used**

I used the following techniques to structure my corset. Habotai silk was used as a ruffle embellishment on the top rim of the corset. Next, I created handmade box pleats as an embellishment to be layered in front of the ruffled trim. A metal busk was used for the front closure and I added a front and back privacy panel. Metal boning was used throughout the corset and spiral boning on the side seams for comfort and movability. On the back closure I created hand embroidered eyelets. I used machine stitching for most of the garment due to the top stitching being visible and needing the stitches to look clean and consistent. Coutil, a durable fabric designed for use in corsets, was used for a lining. Some whipstitches were used on the inside of the garment and hand stitches were used to sew the binding and embellishments on. I made a waist stay to create a cinched-in look at the waist. I pressed during construction to mold and create a finished appearance.

For the silk quilted skirt, I designed and drafted design lines to be top stitched by machine on the skirt front and back. After topstitching the skirt, I stuffed the seam inserts with quarter-inch binding to give the skirt the same quilted look as the corset. I used stay tape at the waist seam to prevent the skirt from stretching out. The same ruffles and box pleats used for the top of the corset were hand stitched to the bottom hem of the skirt. Pressing was used to complete the garment structure. Silk lining was used for the garment interior. Basting stitches were utilized for sewing seams and marking the garment was used. An invisible zipper was placed at the side seam.

For the silk cropped jacket I designed, I used techniques such as plastic boning for the back darts. The habotai silk I dyed was used to create ruffle embellishment that I hand sewed onto the wide collar of the jacket. I used horse hair interfacing for the collar and front and back bodice of the garment. Charmeuse silk was used for the exterior and interior lining of the jacket. Pressing techniques were used to mold the jacket. One hook and eye was used for a closure.

Techniques used in the tailored wool jacket included parallel pad stitching on the front and back bodice, shown in Figure 2. Silk organza and horsehair were used as interfacing on bodices and back flounce. Catch stitches were used to finish all interior seams. Metal boning was used on all seams and darts encasing them with self-made casings and/or inserting the boning in the darts and encasing them. Like the corset, I used spiral boning at side seams. I used



Figure 2. Suit coat.

basting and permanent stitches for seams and markings on the garment. Flat and inverted pleat embellishments were used for collar, center front and back flounce. I also created and hand sewed a spiral flounce on the center back of the garment. A running stitch was used to hand sew pleats on the collar and pleats on the center front bodice. Handmade shoulder pads and sleeve heads were created for the sleeves. The sleeves were backed in silk organza to create a similar weight and drape of the rest of the garment. The entire jacket was lined in charmeuse silk. Hook and eye tape was used for the center front closure. The jacket was draped and I created a flat pattern for the sleeves.

The final result included three garments constructed of duponi silk, charmemuse silk, habotai silk, and wool. I used techniques such as pad stitching, boning, quilting, creating embellishments, draping, flat pattern, embroidered eyelets, busk, and hand stitches. This was my first time using many of these techniques. I learned a lot about the different kinds of pad stitches and their purposes. There is a lot to know about the different kinds of boning. I learned how boning has changed over time when different material like real whale bone, ivory, metal, and wood was used. There are many hand stitches to choose from. For some of the embellishments, I had to experiment and create my own stitch in order to sew them on because of the thick layers. I learned how to use an awl to create eyelets, busk, and insert hook and eye tape. I had to experiment when it came to interfacing and finishing techniques to decide what worked best. Overall I experimented with many different techniques in order to achieve the desired outcome.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Implications for Loss of Couture Techniques**

A major part of fashion history would be gone if couture techniques were no longer taught and practiced. There is such beauty and craftsmanship in these techniques it is critical to preserve couture sewing techniques that have been practiced for centuries. These techniques bring so much value and uniqueness to this art form in the fashion industry. Couture houses no longer produce garments to generate a profit, but rather to build brand awareness. In the current fashion environment, original couture designs are created as expensive wearable art, which contributes to the sale of other products, such as fragrances and accessories (Errey, 2006) Couture allows designers to unleash their creativity, using the finest materials and techniques. Couture styles inspire other designers to design garments that are edited and simplified for mass production for the retail consumers. The dwindling number of artisans who pose couture skills is a challenge for the couture industry. An aging pool of traditional "petites mains," or "little hands," sew in cramped ateliers, hand-stitching yards of shimmering sequins or silk-petaled roses that make couture unique. It's hard to attract young craftsmen to this low-paying and repetitive work, which threatens the couture industry's existence. In an effort to preserve the artisans' skills,

Chanel bought out a handful of specialty companies that the couture house depends on (Barchfield, 2009). An embroidery firm, which Chanel now owns, began a school in 1992 to train embroiderers in what appeared to be a resurgent market paired with a declining skilled workforce. The average age of the staff is now 37 as compared to the high 50s ten years ago. France is concerned with protecting and preserving the different specialists that contribute to couture techniques, which is one of their most cherished heritages (Errey, 2006).

The fashion industry is in the business of creating desirable fashion trends in the hope that they generate revenue. Globalization has made it possible to produce clothing at such low prices that many consumers consider this clothing to be disposable. Some call it “fast fashion.” With the fashion industry creating fast fashion, it is important for consumers to have fashion that is better quality, extending the life cycle of garments (Green, 1994) Before and during World War I, most clothing was repaired, mended, or tailored to fit other family members, or recycled within the home as rags or quilts. The general public is accustomed to the ease of access and affordability of fashion and do not treat the use of clothing like people centuries ago. According to the EPA Office of Solid Waste (Claudio, 2007), Americans throw away more than 68 pounds of clothing and textiles per person per year; clothing and other textiles represent about 4% of the municipal solid waste and this figure is rapidly growing. Once bought, an estimated 21% of annual clothing purchases stay in the home, increasing the amount of clothing and other textiles held by consumers, according to *Recycling of Low Grade Clothing Waste*, a September 2006 report by consultant Oakdene

Hollins (Claudio, 2007). If design students were educated on higher quality construction techniques, there may be a shift in the quality of clothing production, reducing the amount of waste consumers produce.

The garment industry has become a battleground in the war between nations for economic share. The weapons of each country in the commercial battlefield are price and style. French goods are proudly hailed as a reflection of the French character itself. The combination of an artistic sense with industrial technique has been acclaimed as a French specialty that no other country has mastered. French artistry against American industrialism has become a staple of the industrial language. The good taste of the French is praised as fundamental to producing the incomparable elegance of the French industry. This image comes into conflict with calls to standardize clothing production further. American notion of style differs from that of the French. Comfort, practicality, and simplicity are the new values of the American consumer. English, German, or American women, by contrast, are seen as having lower and more uniform standards. The economic problem of reproducibility and standardization is in the cultural scale of values, whereas the appreciation of art becomes an economic issue. So those consumers that can afford will continue to buy couture pieces of art. Twentieth-century manufacturers and industrial observers are more concerned with industrializing of couture art, combining fantasy and reason, the flighty and the serious, creative dynamics with the reality of industrial constraints. With the growth of increasingly standardized goods, industrial commentators and manufacturers in England, the United States, and Germany from the 19th

century on have all been concerned with the effects of reproducibility on art. Individualism and quality are the ultimate values in all countries (Green, 1994). Since the majority of consumers cannot afford couture, it is important that couture techniques are taught and modified to add quality value to the mass market.

### **Curriculum Development**

Couture techniques are a large part of our fashion history and should be preserved. Teaching higher education apparel design students mass production techniques is important in meeting the needs of today's consumer. Mastery of couture techniques gives students the ability to create higher quality goods. Learning couture techniques enhances students' critical thinking skills when designing complicated garments. The academic skills enhanced by couture techniques include math skills in the measuring and drafting of patterns. Personal outcomes to students include increased self-esteem and creativity (Montgomery, 2006). Couture techniques allow students and designers to build a mental library of the different techniques to pull from that enable them to be more knowledgeable and skilled in the construction process. Construction skills are enhanced when students and designers develop hand sewing and pressing techniques. A broader knowledge of skills assists designers with the required ability to instruct manufacturers on garment specifications and construction.

In order to sustain and keep couture techniques alive, curriculum development should be evaluated in higher education apparel design programs

to find ways in which these techniques can be taught. Some areas in curriculum development where couture techniques can be introduced are in line development, experimental design, or a tailoring course. It is important for students to go through the entire couture process from concept to completion. It would be beneficial for students to develop a book cataloging raw samples of couture techniques from which they can select when creating a garment line. Students learn best when performing techniques first hand (Zollinger & Martinson, 2010). One of the most important techniques students need to learn is how to properly perform pressing techniques used in creating couture garments. The couture inner support structure of a garment is just as important as the design itself. It is vital that students experiment with different support materials in creating their design esthetic. This is a critical point in the development process. Couture garments cannot be created without knowing how to hand sew. Only a small percentage of students know how to perform hand sewing correctly, since sewing machines are so widely used (Montgomery, 2006). Mastery of couture techniques has the potential to improve a design student's ability to improve garment quality and skill level. Another way to preserve the craft of couture is to start sharing information through different online resources and social media sites. This will enable the information to spread and educate the general public who are interested in developing specific crafts (Bonanni & Parkes, 2010).

It is the design program faculty's responsibility to equip students with the skills and abilities needed to be successful for a career in the fashion industry.

Regardless of the market that students end up designing for, they need to have the ability to analyze the construction of the latest couture trends in order to make garments at the price points for their consumer. Developing one's craft is not just in the way objects are made, an integral part is rethinking the kinds of objects we make (Bonanni & Parkes, 2010). Couture techniques give students the ability to conceptualize larger concepts, which, in turn, helps them to rethink the application of these techniques and how they can be applied to mass production. One of the goals in this thesis is to build couture sewing method awareness. It is like any preservation task; there cannot be preservation if the skills are not passed down. Hopefully, enhancing students' construction knowledge will be reflected in the quality and sustainability of garments being produced in the fashion industry.

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