

TRANSIENT *VOGUE*:
THE COMMODIFICATION AND SPECTACLE OF THE VAGRANT OTHER

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Abstract

As creative director of Christian Dior, John Galliano received substantial press attention in early 2000 when he debuted his haute couture collection portraying models dressed as if they were homeless. Galliano's couture collection is one of numerous 'homeless chic' examples, a trend referring to the resignification of symbols denoting a marginalized social identity into fashion statements by commodity culture. While there has been a re-emergence of 'homeless chic' within the contemporary context, the motif encompasses an extensive history which has not yet been properly acknowledged by the media outlets comprising what Angela McRobbie refers to as the fashion industry. A content and critical discourse analysis of the mainstream news media places 'homeless chic' within its significantly larger social and intertextual context, an element best illustrated through a comparison with its sister trend, 'heroin chic,' and a visual analysis of *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess" photo editorial.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One: Introduction – The Socioeconomic Context of ‘Homeless Chic’	1
Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks of Fashion, Consumption, and Identity	8
Chapter Three: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Fashion	51
Chapter Four: Contextualizing Early Discursive Formations of ‘Homeless Chic’	70
Chapter Five: Contemporary Mediations of ‘Homeless Chic’	106
Chapter Six: Intertextuality in <i>W</i> ’s “Paper Bag Princess”	152
Chapter Seven: Conclusion – ‘Homeless Chic’ as Cultural Parasite	195
Bibliography	203

Chapter One: Introduction – The Socioeconomic Context of ‘Homeless Chic’

Fashion is not art, you know. Fashion isn't even culture. Fashion is advertising. And advertising is money. And for every dollar you earn, someone has to pay.¹

--- *Gia*

Following the sharp decline of the stock market and affiliated mortgage crisis of October 2008, the state of the American economy has consistently remained a highly influential issue within public discourse at both the domestic and international levels.² The crisis became the subject of the 2010 Academy Award-winning documentary *Inside Job* by Charles H. Ferguson, which traced the trajectory of financial deregulation and alleged corruption of the American economy.³ Popular news outlets quickly broadcasted sympathetic testimonials of American families, who naively trusted their life savings with gluttonous bank managers and mortgage brokers only to find themselves out of work and their homes foreclosed. Families moving out of their homes and adults lining up at employment fairs searching for work were disheartening scenes broadcast daily on CNN, MSNBC and Fox News. When not attempting to humanize the ‘innocent’ victims of the recession, news outlets turned to demonizing individual actors within the capitalist economy, placing the blame on their greed as opposed to questioning the functionality of the system. *Time* composed a list of the “25 People to Blame for the Financial Crisis,” documenting the “good intentions, bad managers and greed behind the meltdown,” complete with backgrounds on industry insiders such as stockbroker Bernie Madoff and

¹ Jay McInerney and Michael Cristofer, *Gia*, directed by Michael Cristofer (1998; New York: HBO Pictures, 2000), DVD.

² Sections of this thesis first appeared as “Homeless Chic: Fashion, Consumption and the Symbolic Parasitically Intertwined,” in *Fashioning Identities: Cultures of Exchange*, ed. Sarah Heaton (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013), 199-234.

³ *Inside Job*, directed by Charles H. Ferguson (2010; New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 2011), DVD.

Countrywide Financial CEO Angelo Mozillo that explored the overwhelming debt of American consumers.⁴

The inclusion of the American consumer in *Time*'s article is representative of a larger issue embedded within the politics of consumer society pertaining to wasteful consumption and consumer debt. Recognizing the intricate history of debt in American cultural politics and its previous sinful connotations under the Protestant work ethic, Jackson Lears argues that while the term, "is as American as cherry pie," debt continues to shed its twentieth century association as an hedonistic expenditure with larger percentages of Americans resorting "to borrowing for groceries as well as cars."⁵ *Time* reported that in 2007 U.S. debt represented more than 130% of reported income,⁶ while *The New York Times* cited the claim made by the Federal Reserve that \$1 trillion in American consumer debt had been cleared by credit lenders as of October 2012.⁷ Recognizing the drastic disparities in earned income and the growth of class inequalities originating in the 1970s with Ronald Reagan's financial political structure, socioeconomic theorist Juliet B. Schor argues in *The Overspent American* that the following decades gave rise to a "new consumerism."⁸ With the upper-middle-class lifestyle the predominant representation on film and television programs, Schor's "new consumerism" speaks to American consumers' competitive desire to emulate a higher social class beyond their tax bracket, achieved through the consumption of luxurious commodities. At a philosophical level, the current economic climate is marked by an intensification of the neoliberal policies set forth in the 1970s. The

⁴ "25 People to Blame for the Financial Crisis," accessed December 22, 2012, <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1877351,00.html>.

⁵ Jackson Lears, "The American Way of Debt," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2006.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Annie Lowry, "Rise in Household Debt Might Be Sign of a Strengthening Recovery," *The New York Times*, 27 October 2012, B1.

⁸ Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 12-19.

present capitalist system imparts social approval and acceptance to individuals who consume within a manner deemed productive by the cultural politics of neoliberal consumer society, where those who fail to satisfactorily perform this cultural practice are stripped of their symbolic social citizenship.⁹

It is within this perspective of global financial instability and drastically escalating socioeconomic inequalities that consumer society has also created the images that comprise the fashion trend of ‘homeless chic’ in contemporary popular culture. ‘Homeless chic’ refers to the semiotic transformation of markers of poverty, such as ripped, torn and oversized clothing, and the appropriation of essential material commodities, including garbage bags, mattresses and blankets, into fashion statements by consumer culture. The trend gained significant press attention in early 2000, when John Galliano, creative director for Christian Dior, debuted his runway collection featuring models dressed as members of France’s homeless population. His haute couture collection was highly criticized by the news media, and became the source of satire for actor and writer Ben Stiller, who incorporated the fashion collection into his 2001 comedy film, *Zoolander*. ‘Homeless chic’ relies on the individual consumer comprehending the appropriate signifiers in order to understand how the symbolism and imagery of the trend is detached from the materiality of economic scarcity.¹⁰ The trend’s cultural power is contingent upon the consumer exhibiting the appropriate knowledge, taste and cultural capital in order to

⁹ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), and, more recently, *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities In A Global Age* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2011).

¹⁰ For a discussion on how the function of *difference* is expressed through fashion advertising from a Marxist-psychoanalytic framework, see Judith Williamson, “Women Is an Island: Femininity and Colonisation,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 99-118.

grasp the identifying socio-political forces ‘homeless chic’ both rejects and embraces through its symbolism.

Categorizing what constitutes ‘homeless chic’ is often problematic as the trend is expressed through a plenitude of cultural identities, predominantly articulated in appearances of ‘heroin chic,’ ‘peasant chic,’ ‘shabby chic,’ and ‘poor chic.’ Sociologist Karen Bettez Halnon views ‘poor chic’ as the commercialization of commodities symbolic of a lower-working class identity for the pure enjoyment of middle-class consumers, citing examples such as Timberland construction boots, designer trucker hats, wife-beater t-shirts and bowling shoes by designers such as Prada and Kenneth Cole.¹¹ Halnon and Sandra Cohen expand the boundaries of ‘poor chic’ to include tattoo parlours, weight lifting, dirt biking and wrestling, sports and activities that have been transformed from the recreation of the working class into lucrative and incredibly profitable entertainment media.¹² In a similar manner to ‘poor chic,’ flea markets, specialty vintage retailers and thrift stores have experienced a growth in social recognition, popularized by interior designers like Rachel Ashwell and television programs including *Trading Spaces* and *Antique Roadshow*. While previously considered a necessary source of consumption for those experiencing economic hardship, thrift shops and flea markets have become a trendy means for upper-middle-class consumers to express their aesthetic knowledge and cultural capital.¹³ Despite the variety of consumer trends contributing to the commodification of marginalized identities, this analysis focuses primarily on ‘homeless chic’ and its representation in popular

¹¹ Karen Bettez Halnon, “Poor Chic: The Rational Consumption of Poverty,” *Current Sociology* 50, no. 4 (2002): 502-503.

¹² *Ibid.*, 503 and 510-511; Halnon and Sandra Cohen, “Muscles, Motorcycles and Tattoos: Gentrification in a New Frontier,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 1 (2006): 35-37.

¹³ Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 510; Julie Ann Rauli, “From Shabby to Chic: Upscaling in the U.S. Thrift Industry” (PhD diss., Colorado State University, 2005), 6-10. See also, Penelope Green, “Making Shabby Chic, Again,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 2009, D1.

culture, deconstructing examples derived from a variety of media including television, advertising, fashion, film and magazines.

The representation of a marginalized or alternative identity in popular culture is not a concept unique to the socioeconomic problems currently plaguing Western consumer society. Prior to its re-emergence in light of the current economic recession, ‘homeless chic’ comprises a far more extensively complex history that is often disregarded by the cultural intermediaries critiquing the trend’s symbolism. This thesis analyzes the contradictions and tensions composing the socioeconomic context of ‘homeless chic’ by tracing the trajectory of the trend through its various incarnations. A critical discourse and visual analysis of press coverage derived from 11 American, Canadian and British publications document the various reactions ‘homeless chic’ has received from the popular news media. While there exists a tendency to discredit fashion reporting as a ‘frivolous’ field of journalism, the news media provide valuable insights into the larger social, political and economic factors influencing the negotiation and construction of identity politics, a critical element central to comprehending the social function of the ‘homeless chic’ fashion trend. In addition to situating the trend within a larger socioeconomic framework, in which the politics of representation constructing the imagery of ‘homeless chic’ gain their semiotic value, the press treatment of ‘homeless chic’ also offers a discursive platform to examine the motif’s intertextuality. The cultural trend of slumming, commonly associated in popular culture with Marie Antoinette and later a form of entertainment experienced by wealthy urban individuals, functions as a mediated reference point to the origins of ‘homeless chic.’¹⁴ An analysis of ‘heroin chic’ follows a critique of slumming’s representation in Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette*. Although ‘heroin chic’ invoked substance abuse as opposed to homelessness,

¹⁴ For a discussion on the pinnacle of slumming in the pastoral, refer to Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

the trend is a potent example to understand the forces of commercialization similarly adopted by examples of ‘homeless chic’ in contemporary consumer society. Following a deconstruction of prevalent examples constituting ‘homeless chic,’ including Galliano’s 2000 haute couture collection, the 2001 film *Zoolander*, and episodes from the television programs *Sex and the City* and *America’s Next Top Model*, the intertextual nature of ‘homeless chic’ is critiqued through a visual analysis of *W*’s 2009 photo editorial, “Paper Bag Princess.” Drawing upon a wide variety of cultural references, “Paper Bag Princess” alludes to the intertextual nature of ‘homeless chic’ and the motif’s semiotic history. The editorial critiques numerous themes shaping the cultural politics of consumer society, particularly in regards to how longstanding ideologies concerning the role of consumption in Western society are threatened by drastic economic difficulties.

Fashion itself is a multifaceted medium of communication in popular culture, and the cultural influence of its social function is an argument that continues to be negotiated and disputed by scholars and journalists. Malcolm Barnard specifically draws upon Raymond Williams’s paradoxical theorization of cultural production as “valued as revelation [and] transcendence or dismissed as mere fancy,”¹⁵ to frame the rhetorical question discussed in his text *Fashion as Communication*: “if clothing and fashion are cultural phenomena, of what kind or model of culture are they the phenomena [of]?”¹⁶ Barnard’s critique of fashion provides a fitting structure to address the cultural implication of ‘homeless chic’ in consumer society. The ‘fashion’ of ‘homeless chic,’ such as ill-fitting clothing and the appropriation of commodities not ordinarily articulated as ‘clothing,’ cannot be understood or discussed without, to quote Barnard,

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin/Pelican, 1961), 35 as cited in Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 24.

¹⁶ Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 28.

a consideration of the “kind or model of culture” ‘homeless chic’ is mirroring in its imagery.¹⁷ In a 2009 commentary published by the *Washington Post* on the recession’s effects on the male retail sector, Robin Givhan indirectly addresses the relationship of ‘homeless chic’ with the larger socioeconomic forces underlying the cultural production of the trend’s imagery:

In this town, where seemingly nonstop television ads run begging the governor not to cut health care and where subway service reductions are in the offing even as fare increases are looming, this is not a season that calls for egghead fashion. Instead, the times cry out for salt-of-the-earth clothes that a man can depend on. Clothes that are perfect for a job interview. Or those that make a man still lucky enough to be salaried look wise, confident and indispensable. Weekend wear should be ideal for cocooning – comfortable and broken in – without making a fellow look like he’s wearing some sort of tragic homeless chic. There is nothing enticing or admirable about fashion that would try to romanticize poverty. Right about now, clothes need integrity.¹⁸

Givhan’s disapproval of ‘homeless chic’ as a romanticization of poverty speaks to the larger tendency to disregard the imagery of ‘homeless chic’ as immoral, disrespectful and in bad taste, a criticism that undermines the trend’s cultural power.¹⁹ The symbolism and discursive construction of the trend is more than a romanticization of poverty – it is a reflection of the cultural fears, insecurities and tensions framing public discourse, and it is only through a deconstruction of its symbolism can ‘homeless chic’ address these underlying social ‘threats.’ ‘Homeless chic’ possesses a parasitic relationship with visual culture, and the treatment of the trend by the news media demonstrates the dangers in undermining fashion’s role as a authoritative medium of communication in popular culture.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Robin Givhan, “In N.Y., Menswear Captures The Mood,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 2009, C01.

¹⁹ See, for example, Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 501-516.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks of Fashion, Consumption, and Identity

Writings on fashion, other than the purely descriptive, have found it hard to pin down the elusive double bluffs, the infinite regress in the mirror of the meanings of fashion. Sometimes fashion is explained in terms of an often over-simplified social history; sometimes it is explained in psychological terms; sometimes in terms of the economy. Reliance on one theoretical slant can easily lead to simplistic explanations that leave us all unsatisfied [...] The attempt to view fashion through several different pairs of spectacles simultaneously – of aesthetics, of social theory, of politics – may result in an obliquity of view, even of astigmatism or blurred vision, but it seems that we must attempt it.²⁰

--- Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*

Although it is a key signifier of Western consumer culture, the study of fashion remains neglected by various fields of academic inquiry, including communication studies, political economy and cultural studies. This lack of a solid theoretical framework is partly due to fashion as an emerging phenomenon within academic thought, in addition to the overwhelming tendency to diminish the powerful role clothing contributes in the symbolic cultural economy. For example, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Jean Baudrillard critiques the symbiotic relationship between consumption, identity and the construction of meaning through analyzing fashion's discursive conventions.²¹ Acknowledging that as a fundamental component of consumer society fashion is similarly governed by the conventions of signification, Baudrillard condemns fashion for what he believes is its failure to construct meaning as persuasively as language. Language, for Baudrillard, “*aims* at communication,” while “*fashion plays* at it.”²² Rather, fashion modifies communication into a “goal-less stake of signification without a message,” and, as a trivial

²⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013 [1985]), 10-11.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1993), 87-99.

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

medium of communication, “aims for a theatrical sociality, and delights in itself.”²³ Baudrillard’s condemnation regarding the triviality and insignificance of fashion, however, reflects society’s “cultural ambivalence” toward fashion’s role not only in consumer society, but also its positioning within the cultural politics of Western capitalism.²⁴

The cultural ambivalence exemplified by Baudrillard’s criticism metaphorically represents a dominant weakness in this area of study, where the relatively recent proliferation of foundational academic texts from a variety of disciplines has hindered the development of a cohesive theoretical framework to approach a scholarly analysis of fashion, the medium’s social context, and its role in consumer society. A truly interdisciplinary approach is required to understand the theoretical intersections of fashion, consumption and identity in order to make the connections with a wide variety of disciplinary frameworks, such as history, economics, sociology, literary criticism, design, social science, and the humanities, amongst others. Due to haute couture’s longstanding aesthetic association with the ‘high’ arts, the discipline of art history has been a popular framework to study fashion, a theoretical approach demonstrated by Rebecca Arnold’s *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century* and Caroline Evans’s *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*.²⁵ With language functioning as a comparable medium in Baudrillard’s analysis, semiology is a second prevalent

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4-6 for a deconstruction of the cultural ironies composing fashion as a cultural industry, and Wilson, *Fashion and Modernity*, for an in-depth analysis of the cultural ambivalences defining modern fashion.

²⁵ Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) and Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003). For a critical analysis on the relationship between fashion, art, aesthetics and popular culture, refer to *Fashion and Art*, ed. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (London and New York: Berg, 2012).

discipline in this field of study, with Roland Barthes and Alison Lurie applying linguistic techniques in their respective deconstructions of fashion as a social signifying system.²⁶

The disciplines of art history and semiology have provided an initial point to situate the study of fashion, yet relying on these two disciplines alone does not account for the circulation of fashion in popular culture and the medium's symbiotic relationship with advertising, consumer culture, capitalism, and the symbolic economy. The larger literature placing fashion within these areas of popular culture draws upon multiple areas united in the common theme of situating fashion as governed by the conventions of capitalism: fashion's connection to the discourses of modernity, industrial capitalism, the development of consumer society, and its role in facilitating conspicuous consumption practices; the commodification of culture as expressed through the imagery of fashion, with specific attention directed towards commodity fetishism, the spectacle, postmodernity and the consumption of *difference*; and how these areas of study are useful to comprehend the relevancy of 'homeless chic' examples in contemporary consumer culture.

Fashion, Consumer Society, and the Discourses of Modernity

A central theme uniting a significant majority of scholarship in this field also connects fashion to discourses of modernity. Reflected in works by scholars including Elizabeth Wilson, Angela McRobbie, Caroline Evans, Gilles Lipovetsky, and Christopher Breward, this theme focuses on the social influences of industrialization and urbanization on the construction of new social identities, and the challenges these processes posed to previous conceptions of identity, reality, art, and authenticity.²⁷ The connection between fashion and modernity that is central to

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) and *The Language of Fashion* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006); Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

²⁷ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 2013; Angela McRobbie, "The *Passagenwerk* and the Place of Walter in Cultural Studies: Benjamin, Cultural Studies, Marxist Theories of Art," *Cultural*

this stream of literature largely draws upon the work of Walter Benjamin, who conceptualizes fashion as a metaphor symbolizing his conception of history as a ‘labyrinth,’ where past historical artefacts and events are ‘recycled’ to create ‘modern’ culture.²⁸ Rather than viewing modernity as an historical moment, these writers, inspired by Benjamin, argue that the social influences defining popular concepts of modernity continue to demonstrate their relevancy in contemporary fashion culture.²⁹

Linking the emergence of fashion as a communicative medium shaped by the social forces of modernity, these scholars inextricably highlight the association between fashion, capitalism and the development of consumer society. With consumer society promoting a standard of living strategically designed to help individuals overcome modernity’s consequential sensation of anomie, cultural historians Stuart Ewen, Sut Jhally and Ian Angus, and Jackson Lears recognize the disintegration of feudalism, the expansion of domestic and transnational markets, and the development of the professional class as critical socioeconomic trends that

Studies 6, no. 2 (1992): 147-169; Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 2003; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 145-179; Wilson, “Magic Fashion,” *Fashion Theory: Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 8, no. 4 (2004): 375-386; Breward and Evans, *Fashion and Modernity* (London: Berg Publishers, 2005). See also Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancient Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden: Polity Press, 2000); Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Ilya Parkins, “Material Modernity: A Feminist Theory of Modern Fashion,” (PhD diss., York University, 2005); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, ed., *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion & Modernity* (Chicago and New Haven: Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2012); Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli: Fashion, Femininity and Modernity* (London and New York: Berg, 2012) for the relationship between art, fashion, consumer culture and the politics of modernity.

²⁸ Benjamin as cited in Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 9.

²⁹ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 9 and Breward and Evans, *Fashion and Modernity*, 3.

enabled consumer society to emerge as a powerful institutional social structure.³⁰ The development of advertising as a cultural institution is identified by critic Raymond Williams as representative of industrial capitalism, where the marketing of commodities to industrialization's emerging mass audience helped consumers achieve a condition labeled by Lears as the 'therapeutic self,' in order to surmount what Robert Dunn identifies as "new forms of power and inequality of a largely class nature, and an alienation caused by the ascendancy of the market."³¹ In *Fables of Abundance*, Lears recognizes fashion as a particularly popular medium incorporated into the discourse of corporate advertisers, who felt the ostentatious aspect of dress helped consumers overcome boredom fostered by the development of mass culture.³² Reflective of Anthony Giddens's thesis of the self as modernity's project, the development of commodity culture during the industrial period helped instigate a societal obsession with self-improvement to achieve an element of authenticity, a process continuously embedded within the discursive construction of contemporary fashion trends in consumer society.³³

In "Advertising: The Magic System," Williams questions how Western industrial capitalism, the philosophical economic framework grounded by the rational ideals of the

³⁰ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), Sut Jhally and Ian Angus, eds., *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), and Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

³¹ Raymond Williams, "Advertising: The Magic System," in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 190-219; Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Theoretical Roots of the Consumer Culture," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1800-1890*, ed. Richard Wrightman Fox and Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 1-38; Robert Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 160.

³² Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 231-232.

³³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991). See also Andrew Hill, "People Dress So Badly Nowadays: Fashion and Late Modernity," in *Fashion and Modernity*, ed. Breward and Evans, 67-77, for an analysis on the contemporary relationship between modernity, consumption, fashion and identity as demonstrated in the London street fashion scene.

Enlightenment, could permit such an advanced society to be subjected to the persuasive power of advertising, a medium whose symbolic power resides in its ability to manipulate consumers into attaching intangible aspirations to material products.³⁴ After historicizing the development of advertising from its origins during the early industrial period as a form of communication for local shopkeepers, facilitated by the democratization of the print press, Williams argues that the social power of the highly influential medium “has to be traced, essentially, to certain characteristics of the new ‘monopoly’ (corporate) capitalism,” where advertising emerged as a central component of “capitalist business organization.”³⁵ Parallel to how Williams identifies the development of industrial capitalism as the facilitator behind the growth of advertising, Wilson highlights this period of economic intensification as the central originating focal point towards a theorization of fashion as a cultural institution discursively very similar to that of advertising. Arguing that the language of capitalism is expressed through fashion as both an economic industry and a medium of personal creative expression, Wilson writes:

Capitalism maims, kills, appropriates, lays waste. It also creates great wealth and beauty, together with a yearning for lives and opportunities that remain just beyond our reach. It manufactures dreams and images as well as things, and fashion is as much a part of the dream world of capitalism as of its economy.³⁶

Inspired by Friedrich Engels work in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, the “dream world of capitalism”³⁷ – primarily the desires, fantasies and visions adorning clothing with their symbolic meanings – masks for Wilson the exploitation experienced by European sweatshop

³⁴ Williams, “Advertising,” 208.

³⁵ Ibid., 199 and 206.

³⁶ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 14.

³⁷ Ibid.

workers, who were predominantly women.³⁸ In a manner evocative of Williams's chronological trajectory of advertising's relationship with mercantile capitalism, Wilson's argument is enriched through her identification of key technological, economic and political developments in the wool, cotton and mill industries, where emphasis on the labour involved in the production, distribution and subsequent consumption of garments identifies fashion as yet another capitalistic art form.³⁹ While the research by these two scholars focuses on two exceedingly similar, yet equally different, media institutions, their work is representative of a cultural materialism approach to the study of advertising and fashion supported by a Marxist analysis.

Reflective of this historical framework, the social effects of modernity are central in reaching an understanding regarding the cultural production of fashion in helping consumers make sense of economic and political change. This foundational stream of literature accounts for modernity's powerful role in facilitating the socioeconomic factors that shape the fashion industry, and highlights how these 'historical' influences continue to play a prominent role in the theoretical understanding of contemporary fashion trends. The complex role of modernity's characteristics in fashion theory is best reflected in Evans's *Fashion at the Edge*, in which she argues that the idea of fashion is a discursive construction enabling the articulation of particular social identities in order to comprehend and navigate the intricacies, tensions, paradoxes and 'horrors' of society. Evocative of Benjamin, her work supports the necessary continuation of

³⁸ Wilson introduces her historical trajectory of the European garment factories with Friedrich Engels's reasoning in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* that "It is a curious fact that the production of precisely those articles which serve the personal adornment of the ladies of the bourgeoisie involves the saddest consequences for the health of the workers." Engels as cited in *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁹ Accounting for the labour involved in the cultural production of advertising, Williams writes: "Advertising, is also, in a sense, the official art of modern capitalist society: it is what 'we' put up in 'our' streets and use to fill up half of 'our' newspapers and magazines: and it commands the services of perhaps the largest organized body of writers and artists, with their attendant managers and advisors, in the whole society." Williams, "Advertising," 207.

situating fashion theory within the context of modernity. Evans argues that the social rupture caused by industrial capitalism offers a framework to understand contemporary moral panics regarding the rapid socioeconomic changes that allows fashion to perform such powerful social critiques on Western cultural politics.⁴⁰

Conspicuous Consumption

Due to fashion's inextricable connection to capitalism, the field of economics is often considered one of the more popular frameworks to approach the medium.⁴¹ It is within this historical context of modernity, industrial capitalism, and urbanization that Thorstein Veblen conceptualizes the argument of conspicuous consumption in his 1899 text, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.⁴² While there exists an historical custom of social differentiation displayed through consumer goods, a tradition identified by Veblen as originating in predatory culture, consumption as a mechanism for the wealthy to signify a desired social standing became a prime activity for the leisure classes to enforce their highly regarded standing as "the head of social structure."⁴³ This practice in turn fostered increased consumption amongst the lower classes aiming to emulate the ideal standard mediated by those consumers of a superior class status. Conspicuous consumption acts as a persuasive distinguisher of decency and respectability, where emphasis is placed on the 'wastefulness' of the goods as opposed to their necessity for survival:

No class of society, not even the most abjectly poor, forgoes all customary conspicuous consumption. The last items of this category of consumption are not given up except under stress of the direct necessity. Very much of squalor and discomfort will be endured before the last trinket or the last pretence of pecuniary decency is put away. There is no class and no country that has yielded so abjectly

⁴⁰ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 5-7.

⁴¹ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 49.

⁴² Thorstein Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Douglas Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 187-204.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 187-188 and 195.

before the pressure of physical want as to deny themselves all gratification of this higher or spiritual need.⁴⁴

Conspicuous consumption in Veblen's model represents a discriminatory activity where those lacking the economic means to consume in a manner equivalent to those privileged consumers at the forefront of the social hierarchy are signified as distinctly inferior.⁴⁵

The notion of 'waste' in Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption is an argument that subsequently had great influence upon Baudrillard's ideas regarding the social function of fashion in consumer culture. Wasteful consumption, or conspicuous waste, represents for Veblen a pointless expenditure on a commodity in which the feature selling points of the object or service have absolutely no correlation to its use value. Silk fabrics, silver and gold finishes and jewelry serve no purpose for Veblen other than functioning at a semiotic level to denote the economic prosperity of the wearer.⁴⁶ The impractical nature of women's clothing, such as the corset, the high heel, and the full skirt, were not only direct signifiers of their leisure as unproductive and subordinate members of the capitalist economy, but symbolized her husband's wealth and social positioning.⁴⁷ This wasteful and unfeasible nature of female dress in Veblen's writings directly influenced Baudrillard's disdain for fashion as expressed in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.⁴⁸ Baudrillard also comments upon what he believes to be the uselessness of fashion as marked by its unattractiveness, writing, "fashion continually fabricates the 'beautiful' on the basis of a radical denial of beauty, by reducing it to the logical equivalent

⁴⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁷ Veblen, "Dress as an Expression of Pecuniary Culture," in *Fashion: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Barnard (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-125.

⁴⁸ Veblen's theories in general were a source of great inspiration for Baudrillard in developing the political economy of the sign, in which he argued that commodities help differentiate consumers in the symbolic economy by creating a sign system privileging certain associations over others.

of ugliness.”⁴⁹ The inherent hideousness of fashion, as opposed to its class connotations, is what fosters the increased consumption and the maintenance of the fashion system in Baudrillard’s reworking of Veblen’s thesis. Consumers are continuously in search of a genuine, yet unattainable, beauty, and it is the continuous negotiation of these binaries that maintains fashion as a cyclical system of cultural production.⁵⁰

The prominence of Veblen’s thesis of social stratification achieved by conspicuous consumption as a cultural practice is similarly reflected in the writings of German sociologist Georg Simmel. Writing from a comparable institutional political economic approach to that of Veblen, Simmel models fashion as a social exercise negotiating the tensions between “the tendency towards social equalization,” and “the desire for individual differentiation and change.”⁵¹ Simmel identifies the leisure classes as the social group influencing the consumption activities and patterns for the larger consumer society. The basis of Veblen and Simmel’s arguments structure the groundwork of what is generally referred to in studies of fashion and consumer culture as the Veblen-Simmel model of trickle-down theory. Although “trickle-down” is never directly referred to in texts written by either author, the basic assumption of the model is that the upper classes act as opinion leaders who influence the trends that the lower classes appropriate to either emulate or imitate a more privileged identity.⁵²

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 79.

⁵⁰ See also Wilson, *Fashion and Modernity*, 48-54 for a critique of Veblen and Baudrillard’s writings on fashion.

⁵¹ Simmel, “Fashion,” 543.

⁵² Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 110-112.

Critiques of Conspicuous Consumption

Despite Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt arguing for the continued relevancy of Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption in articulating status within the present framework of commodity culture, numerous scholars, including Herbert Blumer, Paul Blumberg, Grant McCracken, Kaja Silverman, Colin Campbell, Fred Davis and Diana Crane, have discredited the Veblen-Simmel model of trickle-down theory for failing to acknowledge fashion as an endlessly transformative social experience.⁵³ American sociologist Herbert Blumer's work critiques the Veblen-Simmel model from a framework of collective behavior, and is one of the more prominent academic works accounting for fashion from a sociological perspective. Highly influenced by the school of sociological inquiry taught by George Herbert Mead at the University of Chicago, Blumer's conceptualization of fashion as a form of collective selection

⁵³ Schor and Holt, "Introduction: Do Americans Consume Too Much?," in Schor and Holt, *Consumer Society*, xv; Herbert Blumer, "Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection," *Sociological Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1969): 275-91; Paul Blumberg, "The Decline and Fall of the Status Symbol: Some Thoughts on Status in a Post-Industrial Society," *Social Problems* 21, no. 4 (1974): 480-98; Grant McCracken, "Trickle-Down Theory Rehabilitated," in *The Psychology of Fashion*, ed. Michael R. Solomon (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1985), 39-55; Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 139-154; Colin Campbell, "The Desire for the New: Its Nature and Social Location as Presented in Theories of Fashion and Modern Consumerism," in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, ed. Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsh (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 48-66; Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, 103-120; Campbell, "When the Meaning Is Not A Message: A Critique of the Consumption As Communication Thesis," in *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption*, ed. Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Iain MacRury and Barry Richards (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 340-351; and Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). See also Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 12-19, for a critique of conspicuous consumption within the context of contemporary neoliberal cultural politics. Schor argues that conspicuous consumption is no longer a practice exercised by consumers within a similar tax bracket. Instead, individuals are consuming beyond their means to emulate a lifestyle similar to that viewed on television, and in film and magazines.

minimizes the agency of social elites in determining ‘appropriate’ standards of dress. His argument demonstrates that fashion is inherently incorporated into the practice of symbolic interaction, since fashion, “appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world.”⁵⁴ From this sociological perspective, fashion represents a form of individual creative expression equally enjoyed by all levels of the social order in spite of class position, cultural capital or economic means, an argument also reflected in Grant McCracken’s discussion of ‘trickle-across’ theory.⁵⁵

Implied in his support of Blumer’s thesis, Fred Davis takes issue with theories of social stratification as implemented through fashion in *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, highlighting the model of ‘trickle-down’ theory as being the most susceptible to academic critique.⁵⁶ While recognizing the ambiguity of Blumer’s thesis, primarily due to the lack of a clear definition regarding the process of ‘collective selection’ as an alternative to ‘trickle-down theory,’ and Blumer’s lack of interest in the symbolic meanings expressed by clothing – a criticism shared by the trickle-down theory – Davis argues that Blumer’s model provides a more comprehensive account of the intricacies involved in the social production of fashion.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Davis recognizes that trickle-down theory fails to consider the intricate “institutional, organizational, and market structures” involved in the production of fashion as an industry.⁵⁸ In his historical analysis of advertising as a cultural institution in American society, Lears identifies that it was

⁵⁴ Blumer, “Fashion,” 282.

⁵⁵ McCracken, “Trickle-Down Theory Rehabilitated,” 42.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, 55-78 and 101-120.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, 118-20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

the market-orientated structure suggested by Davis that helped fashion lose its ‘Veblenesque’ connotations as a form of lavish bourgeois enjoyment.⁵⁹

Highly critical of Veblen’s work – and the tendency for conspicuous consumption to be viewed as a prevailing concept in discussions of consumer society – Campbell highlights the model’s inability to account for the cultural power of ‘novelty’ in sustaining fashion as a practice exercised by consumer society as one of the more pronounced problematic assumptions with trickle-down theory.⁶⁰ In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Campbell critiques Veblen’s oversight in considering the influence of new consumer products on both the fashion industry and the consumption patterns of larger consumer society:

People might make the wrong assessment of an individual’s status if he continued to wear out-of-date clothes or to drive an old model of car. The dynamic here, however, is not status competition or emulation, or even imitation, but the phenomenon of fashion itself, and it is only because this is so closely identified with status emulation that the Veblenesque model gives the appearance of accounting for change.⁶¹

The continuity of capitalistic consumption practices for Campbell is conditional on the unremitting societal introduction of novel products to foster increased consumer demand, with novelty performing a specific hegemonic function maintaining the ideological power of consumer society.

Recognizing that mass production and a relative degree of wealth and economic prosperity are obligatory prerequisites for the institutionalization of novelty in consumer society, Campbell draws upon Paul Blumberg’s work to argue that socially constructed notions of novelty are rooted in periods of intellectual and artistic change, with Romanticism a particular

⁵⁹ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 232.

⁶⁰ Campbell, “The Desire for the New,” 48-66.

⁶¹ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987), 56.

philosophical influence for Campbell.⁶² Commenting upon the threat that post-World War II economic prosperity poses to the legitimacy of material commodities as rightful signifiers of class status, Blumberg argues that the mainstream appropriation of countercultural signifiers of lower working class identities, such as “long hair, head bands, beads, pretie-dyed apparel, vests, miscellaneous leather and suede,” is representative of the rather chaotic social movements occurring during the 1960s that challenged the cultural authority of upper-middle class American values, including the anti-war and civil rights demonstrations.⁶³ Blumberg’s assertion that the corporate embracement of counterculture signifiers represents the death of conspicuous consumption is a central component of Campbell’s discussion on novelty. As opposed to viewing this appropriation as threatening traditional semiotic references and articulations, Campbell reads Blumberg’s discussion on counterculture as a mainstream acceptance of the ideals of the Romantic movement, where notions of authenticity, individuality and creative expression are used to promote ‘novelty’ to consumer society by naturalizing “a greater freedom to produce and market previously taboo products.”⁶⁴ Campbell recognizes that the idealism central to Romantics is not shared by all social groups of consumer society, yet all social groups partake in what Campbell terms as “self illusionary hedonism” by embracing different forms of “imaginative stimuli.”⁶⁵ This desire to seek pleasure through the novel products introduced by counterculture groups to larger consumer society – a cyclical process that cannot be materially achieved due to idealistic expectations – is not rooted in class-based activities of “imitation or emulation,” but is identified by Campbell as an “inner-directed theory” of modern consumerism.⁶⁶

⁶² Campbell, “The Desire for the New,” 47 and 54.

⁶³ Blumberg, “Decline and Fall of the Status Symbols,” 493 and 495.

⁶⁴ Campbell, “Desire for the New,” 54.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pg. 55.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pg. 56.

A second critique of the Veblen-Simmel model of trickle-down theory is located in the work of Angela Partington. Her historical deconstruction of the New Look, popularized by French haute couturier Christian Dior during the post-war period, pays specific attention to how working-class women negotiated the discursive construction and symbolism of the now-iconic fashion trend. Partington's critique of the dominant socioeconomic theories that form a foundational stream of literature on the symbolic elements of fashion and its communicative potential sheds insight into the tensions and contradictions entrenched within the fashion industry, where designers, mass marketing and advertisers attempt to 'train' and 'relegate' the clothing choices and consumption practices of 'vulnerable' working-class women. With the New Look marketed by advertisers and cultural mediators as signifying 'good taste,' Partington's argument critiques trickle-down theory for emphasizing "a cultural hierarchy in which class-specific lifestyles are ranked," transforming fashion into a manifestation of "socioeconomic distinctions with clothing acting as signifiers of particular, and often stigmatized, class identities."⁶⁷ Veblen-Simmel's functionalist argument of trickle-down theory represents a stigmatizing tendency to frame those individuals positioned at the lower ends of the social hierarchy as a passive, homogenous consumer market who are highly susceptible to the politics of those at a higher income bracket.

Cultural Capital

In their respective analyses on consumption as a Western cultural practice, anthropologists and sociologists echo the position of Campbell and Partington that the intersections of fashion, identity and consumption are far more complex than originally theorized

⁶⁷ Angela Partington, "Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence," in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 145-46.

by the Veblen-Simmel model. As foundational texts in this area of concentration, Mary Douglas and Baron C. Isherwood's metaphorical argument of "fences and bridges" and Pierre Bourdieu's thesis of the "practical logic" dictating the authority of cultural capital highlight the complex process of symbolic exchange involved in associating class position with material possession. This symbolic association concurrently privileges and discriminates against particular class identities though the expression of *difference* in accordance to ideological notions of knowledge, aesthetics and taste.⁶⁸ For Douglas and Isherwood, despite the fact that commodities are neutral in nature with no fixed or determined meaning, material goods are inscribed with particular cultural values through processes of symbolic exchange. Their work in *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* is distinguished by their emphasis on how commodities engraved with cultural value work to mediate social relationships in consumer culture; the enjoyment of a particular commodity by consumers is not based on a precise hedonistic pleasure, but rather the gratification of consuming the status associated with material goods.⁶⁹ In Douglas and Isherwood's conceptualization of materiality, consumers have an obligation to not only understand how to appropriately expend, but more critically, how to comprehend the situational aspect of material commodities. In order to successfully participate in consumption as social activity, this symbolic understanding is dependent upon class-based notions of cultural capital and aesthetic knowledge.

The emphasis on consumer goods as objects mediating status in social relationships relates suitably with Bourdieu's work in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, where, through a survey questionnaire of over 1,200 responses, he explores the

⁶⁸ Mary Douglas and Baron C. Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

⁶⁹ Douglas and Isherwood, *World of Goods*, 50-51.

predominant role of cultural capital in governing how individuals participate in consumer society. Seeking to explain how “cultivated disposition and cultural competence [...] are revealed in the nature of goods consumed, and in the way they are consumed,” Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital legitimizes the *tastes* of the upper-middle-classes.⁷⁰ The values of this particular demographic are conveyed as intrinsically proper and natural, expressed through the consumption of ‘suitable’ material goods, in contrast to the ‘unrefined’ tastes and habits characterizing those consumers belonging to a lower tax bracket. The symbolic significance of these class-based mediations of ‘taste’ is in their power to construct binaries of approval and revulsion, functioning at a representational level to *differentiate* between opposing privileged and marginalized identities. The complexity of the field of cultural production is best represented in Bourdieu’s analysis of haute couture fashion and its symbolic reproduction as a cultural industry.⁷¹ He argues that when the consumer is ostracized from the inner-workings of haute couture production, the appeal of fashion is the mystification of the label representing “the collusion of all the agents of the system of production of sacred goods.”⁷² The established designer of haute couture fashion signifies, for Bourdieu, the highest realm of cultural capital and taste, and whose position as a cultural intermediary within a highly influential industry is romanticized as a “prophetic creation.”⁷³ Emerging designers correspondingly do not possess the same capital, either economic or cultural, as those belonging to the inner circle of haute couture, and their struggle to overcome this differentiation for Bourdieu leads to stylistic change in the industry. The danger in this model of capital struggle is in the possibility of new designers

⁷⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 13.

⁷¹ Bourdieu, “Haute Couture and Haute Culture,” in *Sociology in Question* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 132-138.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 137.

reducing the credibility of haute couture to the point it no longer possesses the same cultural power. Bourdieu's work affirms how hegemonic class politics and status distinctions continue to be entrenched, obscured and naturalized within fashion as a cultural practice of consumer society.

His framework has influenced the analyses of consumer culture and the fashion industry by other scholars, including Douglas B. Holt, McRobbie, David Hesmondhalgh, Steph Lawler, Beverley Skeggs and Joanne Entwistle.⁷⁴ Recognizing that Bourdieu's empirical study on French cultural relations has not been well received by American theorists, Holt conversely argues that symbolic class differences in American society are not only highly visible through their consumption patterns, but rather reflect the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture; through a sample of 20 interviews with individuals from rural Pennsylvania, Holt's work demonstrates the relevancy of Bourdieu's thesis within the American social context.⁷⁵ Within a European context, Bourdieu's writings form the basic framework for the analyses of the cultural industries by McRobbie, Hesmondhalgh and Entwistle. While highly critical of Bourdieu's tendency to overlook social change in favour of focusing on models of cultural production,

⁷⁴ Douglas B. Holt, "Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu's Theory of Tastes From Its Critics," *Poetics* 25 (1997): 93-120; Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997); Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (1998): 1-25; Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); McRobbie, "A Mixed Bag of Misfortunes? Bourdieu's Weight of the World," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 3 (2002): 129-138; Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Steph Lawler, "Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities," *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 5 (2005): 429-446; David Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu, the Media, and Cultural Production," *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (2006): 211-231; Lawler, "The Hidden Privileges of Identity: On Being Middle-Class," in *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2008), 122-142; and Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Values in Clothing and Modelling* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009).

⁷⁵ Holt, "Cultural Capital and Consumption," 6-7.

McRobbie draws upon Bourdieu's emphasis on the role cultural intermediaries – such as journalists, critics, and artists – contribute in constructing the allure of a particular commodity or lifestyle in her ethnographic study on London's emerging fashion scene and the associated role of the British media in promoting the glamour of the industry.⁷⁶ Bourdieu similarly forms the theoretical framework for Entwistle's notion of the "aesthetic economy," referring to how aesthetics, culture and economics are mutually constitutive in the symbolic economy.⁷⁷ Entwistle's ethnographic study similarly incorporates Bourdieu's argument regarding the soft power of cultural intermediaries to critique how specific individuals, primarily retail merchandisers, models and agents, reach an understanding as to how "aesthetic objects become entangled and acquire meaning and value."⁷⁸

Commodity Fetishism, Spectacle, *Difference*

The process of commodification is a principal element connecting the foundational literature by providing structure for the symbolic economy that dictates fashion trends in North American consumer society. Commodity fetishism acts as a theoretical framework connecting this stream of literature that deals with the cultural currency of fashion, the spectacle, identity politics, and the appropriation of *difference* in advertising and consumer culture.⁷⁹ Influenced by Veblen's writings on conspicuous consumption, Baudrillard's early work in *The System of Objects*, *The Consumer Society* and *For A Critique on the Political Economy of the Sign* accounts for how commodities are adorned with symbolic meaning by the signifying conventions

⁷⁶ McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, 12-13 and 151-174.

⁷⁷ Entwistle, *Aesthetic Economy of Fashion*, 55.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 168.

⁷⁹ Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," in *Consumer Society Reader*, ed. by Juliet B. Holt and Douglas B. Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 331-342.

of consumer culture.⁸⁰ For Baudrillard, the commodity is the organizing force of consumer society, and consumer society functions socially as a signifying system mediating various hierarchies of differentiation. He equates the semiotic value of commodities as a form of language adorned with meaning by institutional social structures.⁸¹ The “political economy of the sign” implies that the cultural value of a material object is detached from its economic properties, with signification acting as the governing structure of the capitalist economy.

In this system of signification, Baudrillard’s theorization of consumption integrates consumers into the ‘communal’ through the antithetical argument of ‘individuality.’⁸² Consumer society thereby acts as an altruistic ideology strategically designed to uphold social control. While in his later writings Baudrillard rejects economic production models of analysis in favour of a semiotic approach, he recognizes the parallels between consumption and the forces of urbanization in creating consumer society as a social institution:

It is difficult to grasp the extent to which the current training in systematic, organized consumption is *the equivalent and extension, in the twentieth century, of the great nineteenth-century-long process of the training of rural populations for industrial work.* [...] The industrial system, having socialized the masses as labour power, had much further to go to complete its own project and socialize them (that is, control them) as consumption power. The small savers or anarchic consumers of the pre-war age, who were free to consume or not, no longer have any place in this system.⁸³

Baudrillard’s argument of consumer society as an indoctrinating social system evokes parallels with the theoretical positioning of the Frankfurt school, with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer proclaiming that the appropriation and commodification of culture into a method of

⁸⁰ See Baudrillard, *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, *The System of Objects* (New York: Verso, 1996); and *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998).

⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*, 147.

⁸² Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 183.

⁸³ Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, 81-82.

capitalist reproduction has transformed the economic structure of modern society.⁸⁴ While the Frankfurt School prefers to locate the ideological effects of consumer society within a psychological perspective influenced by technological and institutional change, Baudrillard shares the cynicism of critical theory in his conceptualization of consumer society as exemplifying a semiotic determinism in which individual consumers lack any personal autonomy over their actions.⁸⁵

Spectacle

With the commodity signifying a method of capitalist social organization in the ever-intensifying consumer culture, Laura Mulvey identifies commodity fetishism as the achievement of the spectacle, where objects are transformed into images mystified by a pseudo-erotic glamour.⁸⁶ Popularized by the academic significance of Guy Debord's work, at a theoretical level the notion of 'spectacle' represents a cultural practice referring to the conception of a society's ideological principles, customs, values and practices achieved through the symbolic exchange of commodities.⁸⁷ Defining the spectacle as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images," Debord argues that the spectacle performs a specific hegemonic role within the cultural politics of advanced capitalism through naturalizing dominant ideologies, accomplished by celebrating the appearance of representation as "the prevailing model of social life."⁸⁸ Cultural institutions, including advertising, fashion, film and television, work to sustain

⁸⁴ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Consumer Society*, ed. Schor and Holt, 3-19.

⁸⁵ See Dunn, *Identifying Consumption*, 50-57 for an analysis regarding the similarities and differences between Adorno and Baudrillard and their respective theoretical orientations.

⁸⁶ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4.

⁸⁷ See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995) and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

⁸⁸ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 12 and 13.

the spectacle as a mechanism of social power by the “colonization of social life” with imagery that ultimately disconnects and isolates its citizenry.⁸⁹

Debord’s work represents a larger theme embedded in this branch of literature, where the institutional discursive conventions of the spectacle are associated with the visual inducement of the department store discussed in the texts of Rosalind Williams, William Leach, Erika Diane Rappaport, Baudrillard, Mica Nava, John Fiske, Donna Belisle and Judith Williamson.⁹⁰ Speaking to the spectacular imagery of nineteenth-century consumer displays in Parisian department stores, Rosalind Williams refers to the whimsical and mythological nature of material commodities displayed for purchase in window shop displays as “the dream world of the consumer.”⁹¹ Similar to Debord’s argument placing the commodity as the central facilitator of material growth in the symbolic spectacular economy,⁹² the commodity in Williams’s analysis surpassed art and religion as the medium in which consumers communicated their respective desires, pleasures and fantasies. The department store operated for Williams as a new

⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁰ Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late-Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982); William Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925,” *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (1984): 319-342; Williamson, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1988); Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, 159-173; Mica Nava, “Modernity’s Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store,” in *The Shopping Experience*, ed. Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 56-91; John Fiske, “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance,” in *Consumer Society*, ed. Schor and Holt, 306-330; Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Donna Belisle, “Shopping, Pleasure, and Power,” in *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 126-157.

⁹¹ Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 65.

⁹² In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord highlights American economist Clark Kerr’s prediction that each period of history is marked by a particular (im)material product helping to facilitate the growth of the economy, such as the railroad and the automobile during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 137-138.

commercial hedonistic space enabling consumers “to indulge in dreams without being obligated.”⁹³ It is this very identification of a shared space by consumers that represents the symbolic value of the shop-window for Baudrillard:

The communication which is established at the level of the shop-window is not so much between individuals and objects as a generalized communication between all individuals, not via the contemplation of the same objects but via the readings and recognition in the same objects of the same system of signs and the same hierarchal code of values. [...] Shop- windows thus beat out the rhythm of the social process of value: they are a continual adaptability test for everyone, a test of managed projection and integration.⁹⁴

The displays of department store windows epitomize an ideal space visualizing Baudrillard’s argument of collective consumerism achieved through the “spectacular logic of fashion.”⁹⁵

Defined by negotiating binaries of private and public, commerce and fantasy, the shop-window homogenizes cultural values through the captivating display of material goods.

The captivating ‘dream world’ of commodity culture as mediated by the department store to a mass audience is argued by Mulvey to have functioned as a precursor to the cinema, symbolizing the early development of the gaze. Mulvey equates the department store and the cinema as two mediums sharing numerous conventions, particularly in regards to what she refers to as “the pleasure of looking.”⁹⁶ Williamson similarly refers to Mulvey’s “pleasure of looking” as “congealed longing.” A play on the Marx term “congealed labour,” human emotions, desires, fantasies and wants are coagulated in Williamson’s argument into the form of the commodity.

The only socially acceptable means for consumers to express their feelings is through the act of

⁹³ Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 67.

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, 166.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, 6.

retail purchase.⁹⁷ With both Mulvey and Williamson writing from a psychoanalytic-Marxist perspective where consumers are interpellated – referring to Louis Althusser’s process in which ideology recruits individuals into its social power⁹⁸ – into the seductive pleasure of the spectacle, the image of the department store mystifies the various levels of production involved in the creation of the material goods displayed by department store windows.

While Debord’s spectacle is a popular theoretical framework utilized in contemporary research on the connections between media studies, consumer culture, and branding, technological advancement, the development of the knowledge economy and the shift to postmodernity as the philosophical framework governing Western cultural politics are identified as significant factors jeopardizing the relevancy of Debord’s thesis.⁹⁹ Evans, in particular, acknowledges that the theoretical applicability of Debord’s spectacle for the study of fashion has diminished in the contemporary context, where his “sour denunciations of the image seem

⁹⁷ Williamson, *Consuming Passions*, 11-13.

⁹⁸ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 79-88.

⁹⁹ For scholarship on the applicability of Debord’s spectacular framework see, for example, Wilson, “These New Components of the Spectacle: Fashion and Postmodernism,” in *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi (London: MacMillan, 1990), 209-236; Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Christine Harold, *OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Evans, “A Shop of Images and Sign,” in *Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion*, ed. Eugenie Shinkle (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 17-28; Nick Couldry, “Form and Power in an Age of Continuous Spectacle,” in *The Media and Social Theory*, ed. David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 161-176; and Helen Wood and Skeggs, “Spectacular Morality: ‘Reality’ Television, Individualisation, and the Remaking of the Working Class,” in *The Media and Social Theory*, ed. David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 177-193. For an analysis of Debord’s spectacle, Baudrillard’s conceptualization of postmodernity, and the challenges posed by socioeconomic changes in the global public sphere, refer to Steven Best and Kellner, “From the Society of the Spectacle to the Realm of Simulation,” in *The Postmodern Turn*, ed. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 79-123. See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1989).

curiously redundant in a culture in which the fashioned garment circulates in a network of signs as both image and object: no longer representation, the image is frequently the commodity itself.”¹⁰⁰ Drawing upon Debord’s premise that “a culture now wholly commodity was bound to become the star commodity of the society of the spectacle,”¹⁰¹ Evans conversely argues for the continued relevancy of Debord’s thesis in contemporary fashion theory, supporting her analysis with examples from the runway collections of Galliano, Viktor & Rolf and Alexander McQueen. Incorporating Thomas Richards’s argument that the conventions of the spectacle helped initiate a shift in capitalist production, Evans identifies the abundance of new communicative platforms immediately transmitting images within the global marketplace as a factor placing pressure on haute couture and high fashion labels to construct highly visual runway performances that would translate easily into a striking image.¹⁰²

Evans commendably demonstrates the relevancy of Debord’s political orientation in the application of Situationist subversion tactics in her analysis of fashion imagery, particularly in regards to *detournement*. Designed with the aim to offset the depoliticizing effects of the spectacle, *detournement* involves stripping the initial context of an image in order to destabilize or modify its intended meaning as a form of sociopolitical activism, a practice that originated with the Situationist Internationale during the 1960s and was later popularized by culture jamming.¹⁰³ Evans focuses her deconstruction on Viktor & Rolf’s Fall/Winter 1996-97 runway

¹⁰⁰ Evans, “A Shop of Images and Signs,” 23.

¹⁰¹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 137.

¹⁰² Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 74. In *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 258, Thomas Richards writes: “it may turn out that the semiotics of spectacle played a transitional role in capitalist mythology.”

¹⁰³ See Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (Toronto: Vintage, 2000), 279-310 and Harold, *Ourspace*, 1-69 for an analysis on culture jamming, its intent, and how corporate culture has recuperated resistance into a form of branding.

performance, in which the Dutch design duo purposely designed a collection absent of clothes and advertised their stance with flyers distributed during Paris Fashion Week proclaiming, “Viktor & Rolf on strike.”¹⁰⁴ Reading the performativity of Viktor & Rolf’s absent stance as a critique on the fashion industry’s emphasis on the consumption of clothing and accessories as opposed to its artistic value and the historical craft of haute couture, Evans argues that the fashion label “managed to simultaneously critique the industry and its spectacle yet be a part of them in an ironic way.”¹⁰⁵ Her deconstruction of Viktor & Rolf through the conventions of Debord’s framework provides a model of analysis for how to approach a critique of subversive fashion trends within the contemporary context.

Postmodern Lifestyle Consumption

While Baudrillard and Debord may differ in their approaches to the role of the commodity in social relationships, they are united in the argument that the commodification of socio-cultural life facilitates the proliferation of depoliticized representations, a central convention defining discourses of postmodern lifestyle consumption. Highly influenced by Baudrillard’s theoretical framework, Fredric Jameson contends that postmodernism, partially defined by the implosion of conventional signifiers in commodity culture, functions as the cultural philosophical framework governing contemporary consumer society.¹⁰⁶ Dunn argues that while modern conceptions of identity stressed notions of authenticity and self-realization, postmodernism prioritizes the ideology of choice in identity construction, a defining element signifying post-war society’s transition into a consumer culture in which “the complex but

¹⁰⁴ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 83.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 482-519.

relatively stable identity linked to modernity gives way to a more fragmented identity reflexive of the image-based intensities of mass media and a rapidly changing, highly differentiated marketplace.”¹⁰⁷ Theories of postmodern lifestyle consumption question whether the customary consumption of commodities as an indicator of a desired class status have been displaced by the proliferation of branded ‘lifestyles’ as a means of fostering identity construction, with the individual consumer governed by the spectacular conventions of commodity-capitalism.¹⁰⁸

The central defining characteristic of postmodern discourses of consumption for Dunn is the destabilization and subsequent pluralization of identity. In what Celia Lury and Scott Lash refer to as the global cultural economy, the implosion of signifiers articulated by the commodity form permits the consumer to exhibit a more fluid, and constantly transforming, social identity focused on attaining a particular lifestyle achieved through the appropriation of particular goods.

¹⁰⁹ Mike Featherstone questions the implication that this new society of consumption has for the traditional association between material commodities and capitalism’s historical class hierarchy:

Are consumer goods used as cultural signs in a free-association manner by individuals to produce an expressive effect within a social field in which the old co-ordinates are rapidly disappearing, or can taste still be adequately ‘read,’ socially-recognized and mapped onto the class structure? Does taste still ‘classify the

¹⁰⁷ Dunn, *Identifying Consumption*, 161-162.

¹⁰⁸ Theories of postmodern lifestyle consumption critique the notion of a fixed identity, and instead argue that identity construction is dictated by the conventions of ‘lifestyle’ or ‘dream world’ consumption influenced by the post-war marketplace. For a larger discussion on postmodern lifestyle consumption, refer to Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 11-125; Mike Featherstone, “Lifestyle and Consumer Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 4, no. 1 (1987): 55-70; and *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 93-109; Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), 93-117; Dunn, “Identity, Commodification, and Consumer Culture,” in *Identity and Social Change*, ed. Davis, 109-134; and, more recently, Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 121-189.

¹⁰⁹ Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007), 4-15.

classifier'? Does the claim for a movement beyond fashion merely represent a move within, not beyond the game, being instead a new move, a position within the social field of lifestyles and consumption practices which can be correlated to the class structure?¹¹⁰

Featherstone's rhetorical questioning of the implications regarding class relations in postmodern consumer society are subsequently answered by Dunn in "Identity, Commodification, and Consumer Culture," who connects the supposed breakdown of social hierarchy to the ideology of the classless society in American culture.¹¹¹ Dunn recognizes the tendency in post-war American society to romanticize the commodity for its democratizing function enforced through the mass availability of credit.¹¹² In doing so, he draws upon David Harvey's thesis of flexible economic accumulation to argue that postmodern lifestyle consumption represents a renegotiation of class-based identity politics as opposed to its inherent elimination in consumer society, arguing "the market forces accompanying post-Fordist economics work to destabilize the identities of class and occupation by introducing new kinds of lifestyle-based distinctions that operate at an increasing distance from class position."¹¹³ As opposed to the construction of "regularity" through the production models of industrial capitalism, the defining aspect of flexible accumulation for Dunn is the thesis's emphasis on *difference* as an economic principle defining late capitalism; whereas commodity production in the Fordist economy mediated class distinctions and status, flexible accumulation distinguishes consumers based upon lifestyle, where highly personal identities of class, race and gender are appropriated into the process of signification.

¹¹⁰ Featherstone, "Lifestyle and Consumer Culture," 56.

¹¹¹ Dunn, "Identity, Commodification, and Consumer Culture," 123-125.

¹¹² For an historical analysis of the democratizing function of consumer society in post-war America, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

¹¹³ Dunn, "Identity, Commodification, and Consumer Culture," 124.

Difference

The argument of *difference* identified by Dunn as an intrinsic aspect of postmodern lifestyle consumption represents the academic framework in which ‘homeless chic’ finds its theoretical relevancy. Writing from a psychoanalytic-Marxist framework and influenced by the vocabulary of semiotics, Williamson refers to the commodification of identity as a distinct, yet equally powerful form of imperial colonization in “Woman Is an Island: Femininity and Colonization.”¹¹⁴ Drawing upon Rosa Luxembour’s argument in *The Accumulation of Capital* that capitalism is dependent upon non-corporate means of production to ensure its survival and symbolic power, Williamson identifies the construction of *difference* as integral to the symbiotic relationship between advertising, capitalism and representation.¹¹⁵ With difference performing an integral narrative function in liberal democracies by helping society achieve a constructed notion of balance, capitalism, in spite of its desire to eliminate the fear of the unknown, cannot possibly annihilate those located outside its symbolic borders, since to survive as a governing socioeconomic system, capitalism “needs *constructs* of difference in order to signify itself at all.”¹¹⁶ Providing a rhetorical answer to postmodernism’s imperial expansion of capitalist production into new sectors of the market, Williamson focuses on the role of fashion in illustrating how difference strengthens capitalism’s soft power in constructing the identities of its (un)willing subjects:

Fashion is the area of social communication where the function of difference is perhaps most visibly seen. A debutante could go to a party in a pair of overalls and be regarded as highly fashionable; a plumber could not. It is currently ‘in’ for the young and well-fed to go around in torn rags, but not for tramps to do so. In other words, the appropriation of other people’s dress is fashionable provided it is

¹¹⁴ Williamson, “Woman Is an Island,” in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Modleski, 99-118.

¹¹⁵ Luxembour as cited in *Ibid.*, 99.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

perfectly clear that you are, in fact, *different* from whoever would normally wear such clothes.¹¹⁷

Williamson's argument of the principle of difference in social communication, expressed through the medium of fashion in her example, is conditional upon both the individual wearing such clothing, and her/his larger consumer network conscious of the appropriate cultural capital necessary to comprehend and appreciate such a highly constructed social identity achieved through commodity appropriation. While Williamson's text consists of a psychoanalytical semiotic reading of mainstream British print advertisements, arguing that women are signified as *vehicles* of mediation in consumer culture in order to visualize the imperial characteristics associated with otherness – the sexual, the desired, the exotic – the complex theoretical composition of her text and the accompanying semiotic deconstructions of selected imagery provides an effective example to analyze the reproduction of difference through commodification as a capitalist practice.

The function of difference and its role in representation and identity politics is a central component of the work by social critic bell hooks. hooks's analysis complements Williamson's psychoanalytical reading by providing insight into the inextricable connections between desire, race, gender and class politics as expressed through commodity fetishism's colonization of contemporary American consumer society. Whereas Williamson's semiotic deconstruction of advertising's imperial function focuses on female sexuality read with a consideration of British sociopolitical colonial relations, in "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," hooks scrutinizes what she refers to as the "consumer cannibalism."¹¹⁸ Incorporating a variety of media into her analysis, hooks's "consumer cannibalism" refers to the appropriation of signifiers of black

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 115.

¹¹⁸ bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Consumer Society*, ed. Schor and Holt, 351.

culture for the exclusive hedonistic enjoyment of middle-class white consumers. The danger in this rearticulation is how the desires, fantasies and pleasures enjoyed by “consumer cannibalism” are expressed as an admiration as opposed to appropriation of black culture, a distinction that masks the inherent racism embedded within the commodification of difference. Citing Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen’s claim in *Channels of Desire* that social relationships are defined by the exchange of commodities in consumer society,¹¹⁹ hooks argues that this process of cultural appropriation depoliticizes the political symbolism of black culture. Consisting of material commodities discursively articulating their social resistance, the cultural appropriation of black culture and its otherness – disguised under the fulfillment of an exotic desire – instead creates what she terms as “communities of consumption,” which thereby limits the potential for countercultural artefacts to mediate oppositional significations.¹²⁰

In “Spending Culture: Marketing the Black Underclass,” hooks expands upon her argument of “consumer cannibalism” to question how the commodification of racial and economic difference expressed through cultural appropriation affects class relations within those very marginalized communities.¹²¹ Focusing her analysis on the correlation between class relations and socially constructed notions of blackness, hooks identifies the commodification of underclass black identities as constituting the “intensification of opportunistic materialism.”¹²² The “intensification of opportunistic materialism” refers to the tendency for black individuals experiencing material prosperity to appropriate signifiers of a ghettoized underclass identity, the

¹¹⁹ “The politics of consumption must be understood as something more than what to buy, or even what to boycott. Consumption is a social relationship, the dominant relationship in our society – one that makes it harder for people to hold together, to create community,” Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen as cited in hooks, 354.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ hooks, “Spending Culture: Marketing the Black Underclass,” in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 169-179.

¹²² Ibid., 171.

predominant class status associated with black communities, in order to construct a “shared victimhood” with their larger racial community.¹²³ The risk in this process of downward appropriation for hooks is in the way “no correlation is made between mainstream hedonistic consumerism and the reproduction of a social system that perpetuates and maintains an underclass.”¹²⁴ Although her analysis in “Spending Culture” focuses on class relations within the black community, hooks’s criticism of how the commodification of stigmatized identities are appropriated for the benefit of those in possession of economic privilege is an applicable argument to the cultural politics of other marginalized social groups, including those experiencing financial hardship within the current context of economic recession that frames the symbolism of ‘homeless chic.’ Exemplifying a social criticism pinpointing the discriminating intersections of gender, race and class, hooks’s body of work provides valuable insight into how institutional power, class relations and political economy play significant roles in the formation of subjective identities in consumer culture.

Ethnographic anthropologist John Hartigan provides a complementary analysis to hooks’s work, in which he focuses on the circulation of the phrase ‘white trash,’ the term’s negotiation of white class relations, the lifestyle’s commodification by consumer-capitalism and its subsequent circulation within popular culture.¹²⁵ In a manner comparable to hooks’s distinction between the privileged and the impoverished in black class relations, Hartigan labels the discursive term ‘white trash’ as a signifier encumbered with political connotations that suggest “there are important class dimensions to whiteness and that whites are not uniformly

¹²³ Ibid., 176.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 178.

¹²⁵ See John Hartigan, “Unpopular Culture: The Case of ‘White Trash,’” *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997): 316-43, and, *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

privileged and powerful.”¹²⁶ Drawing upon hooks’s critique of otherness, representation and identity politics, Hartigan insists that very little scholarly attention has been directed towards how class relations within the white community are represented in popular culture.

After contextualizing the significant history of iconic cultural works and their positioning on white class relations in American society, most notably in the key literary works of Margaret Mitchell (*Gone with the Wind*) and Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), Hartigan’s “Unpopular Culture: The Case of White Trash” identifies the trend of commercializing ‘white trash’ as climaxing in 1990s consumer culture. Citing examples including photo-editorials in *Vogue*, the television programme *Roseanne*, films such as *True Romance*, *Guncrazy*, and *Gas, Food, Lodging*, and the music of John Mellencamp, Hartigan argues that ‘white trash’ as a cultural trend works to “trivialize the demographic and social shifts underway in America’s class structure.”¹²⁷ Hartigan also uses Mary Douglas’s rhetorical argument of pollution as a discursive construct symbolizing the social class hierarchy to contend that the hegemonic function of ‘white trash’ in popular culture is to preserve the authority of whiteness in American cultural politics by distinguishing, and subsequently stigmatizing, a lower-classed identity distinct from that of the privileged members of upper-middle class white America.¹²⁸

Homeless Chic

The imagery of subversion fashion trends, in particular ‘homeless chic,’ are often viewed by cultural critics as especially polarizing in spite of their social context and timing, yet they are often overlooked when it comes to scholarly attention.¹²⁹ One reason for the lack of literature on

¹²⁶ Hartigan, *Odd Tribes*, 1-2.

¹²⁷ Hartigan, “Unpopular Culture,” 325.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 319-21.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of subversive fashion trends and the politics of commodification, see Martin Chalmers, “Heroin, the Needle and the Politics of the Body,” in *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand*

the subject is the multiple approaches to deconstructing these trends; often examples of ‘homeless chic’ fashion, for instance, are grouped with discussions of deconstructionism, postmodernism, and literary criticism.¹³⁰ The very limited number of scholarly publications on ‘homeless chic’ share the common theme of the aestheticization of poverty, a process Harvey identifies as a consequential factor of postmodernity, where the romanticization of urban landscapes of decay diminish social critiques on neoliberalism’s “attempt to deconstruct traditional institutes of working-class power.”¹³¹ Commodification, postmodernism, and detournement continue to be especially relevant theoretical concepts in the discussion on subversive fashion trends, prompting Evans, in her introduction to the chapter “Dereliction” in *Fashion at the Edge*, to quote postmodernist Hal Foster’s question regarding the avant-garde:

Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music, ed. Angela McRobbie (London: MacMillan, 1989), 150-155; Hartigan, “Unpopular Culture,” 316-343; Harold, “Tracking Heroin Chic: The Abject Body Reconfiguring the Rational Argument,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 36, no. 2 (1999): 65-76; Arnold, “Heroin Chic,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 3, no. 3 (1999): 279-295; Arnold, *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety*, 2001; Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 247-263; Evans, “Desire and Dread: Alexander McQueen and the Contemporary Femme Fatale,” in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 201-214; Halnon and Cohen, “Muscles, Motorcycles and Tattoos,” 33-56; and Kit Dobson, “Derelict and the Oppressed: *Zoolander*, Hollywood and Representing Activism,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010): 309-326. See also Jennifer Kissko, “Homeless Chic: Cultural Contradictions in Contemporary Literature” (PhD diss., University of Rhode Island, 2010) for an analysis on the metaphorical usage of homelessness in contemporary American literature.

¹³⁰ For a discussion on theories of deconstructionist thought as applied to fashion, refer to Kim Sawchuk, “A Take of Inscription/Fashion Statements,” in *Body Invaders: Panic and Sex in America*, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 61-77, and Alison Gill, “Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-Assembled Clothes,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2, no. 1 (1998): 25-50.

¹³¹ Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 336-37.

“are postmodern *pasticheurs* any different from modernist *bricoleurs* in this ambiguous recuperation of cultural materials cast aside by capitalist societies?”¹³²

In his conceptualization of postmodernity, Harvey identifies the economic transformation to models of flexible accumulation and the creation of new class distinctions and inequalities as consequential factors of the cultural philosophy in which the aestheticization of poverty is situated.¹³³ While the socioeconomic changes integral to Harvey’s analysis of postmodernity reflect much larger cultural trends, his argument finds parallels in the work of Lipovetsky and historical sociologist Diana Crane, who both account for the emergence of subversive fashion trends as resulting from the structural transformations occurring in the fashion industry during the post-war context.¹³⁴ Lipovetsky identifies this period of fashion as the ‘democratic revolution,’ during which the Parisian haute couture houses began to shift away from their historical association with aristocratic cultural values. Market changes required fashion houses to expand their client base through licensing and the development of associated merchandise lines, such as the highly profitable ready-to-wear, fragrance and cosmetic collections.¹³⁵

With the popularity of ready-to-wear lines articulating the democratization of fashion, Lipovetsky’s argument draws larger conceptual parallels with Campbell’s emphasis on hedonism as an imaginary pleasure enjoyed by all individuals of the social order regardless of their class position. Lipovetsky accounts for the social acceptance of this new era of fashion production as “stimulated by the new hedonistic mass culture;” high fashion has come to shift away from its earlier elitist connotations “in a society that [now] holds change, pleasure, and novelty

¹³² Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1993), 269 as cited in Evan, *Fashion at the Edge*, 250.

¹³³ Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 336.

¹³⁴ Lipovetsky, *Empire of Fashion*, 98-128 and Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 132-168.

¹³⁵ Lipovetsky, 89.

sacred.”¹³⁶ Campbell’s analysis of novelty is limited to a theoretical deconstruction of the Veblen-Simmel model, whereas Lipovetsky offers a more practical reasoning as to why novelty emerged as an influential consumption practice. Lipovetsky similarly recognizes the rise of youth culture and the post-war period’s emphasis on discourses of democracy and individualism as philosophical factors, yet at an economic level he identifies the technological changes in clothing production occurring during this time frame that allowed fashion to produce and distribute larger orders of fashion pieces for relatively little cost.¹³⁷ While Campbell highlights the cultural prominence of counterculture social groups, such as the bohemians and the Romantics, as influential opinion leaders in helping consumer society eventually embrace novel commodities, Lipovetsky places more influence on the media promoting the spectacle of the fashion industry, including film and magazines, which helped postmodern society transition to embrace novelty, and its associated ideals of euphoria and gratification, as an acceptable consumption practice.

Further to this connection to Campbell, Lipovetsky’s analysis draws parallels to the rhetorical questioning of the distinctions between modern and postmodern culture by Foster. Lipovetsky identifies this period of fashion as constituting a new course for the medium while simultaneously symbolizing the emergence of new techniques, principles and conventions within the larger fashion industry. Echoing Benjamin, the shift to market-based principles in Lipovetsky’s work, however, does not signify a “total break in continuity with the past,” an argument often central to theorizations of postmodern culture.¹³⁸ This period of fashion, defined by the spectacle of the runway performance, the shift to principles of mass production and the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 95.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 88.

pressing need to maximize profit for the haute couture houses, is argued by Lipovetsky to represent a continuation of the industrial capitalist conventions of modernity that have been reconfigured and reorganized to meet not only the demands of the fashion industry, but also the discursive changes of contemporary cultural politics.¹³⁹

It is within this context of systematic change in the fashion industry, as identified by Lipovetsky, that ‘homeless chic’ emerges as a subversive trend. One of the most predominant examples of ‘homeless chic’ fashion discussed in the academic literature is that of Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo and her work for Comme des Garçons, a Tokyo-based high fashion label she founded in 1969 with runway collections displayed seasonally in Paris.¹⁴⁰ Kawakubo’s designs are noted for their deliberately distressed look and muted colour palette of blacks, grays and other neutral shades. Documenting systematic changes in the fashion industry during the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, Crane argues that Kawakubo’s emergence in the Parisian fashion scene is representative of a larger

¹³⁹ Ibid., 88-95. For an historical analysis of the fashion runway performance and its connections to modernity, commerce, class relations and the spectacle, refer to Evans, “The Enchanted Spectacle,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 3 (2001): 271-310, and, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013). Evans also provides an analysis of the relationship between the visualization of the fashion runway performance in French cinema and how this new form of media was received culturally in “The Walkies: Early French Fashion Shows as a Cinema of Attractions,” in *Fashion in Film*, ed. Adrienne Munich (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 110-134.

¹⁴⁰ See Harold Koda, “Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty,” *Dress: Journal of the Costume Society of America* 11 (1985): 5-10; Deyan Sudjic, *Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990); Richard Martin, “Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s,” *Textile & Text* 15, no. 2 (1992): 3-8; Robin Givhan, “The Problem with Ugly Chic,” in *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York and London: Verso, 1997), 263-274; Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 155-168; Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 249-60; Yuniya Kawamura, “The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 8, no. 2 (2004): 195-223; and Llewellyn Negrin, “The Paradoxical Nature of ‘Pauperist’ Style as *Haute Couture*” (presentation, Fourth Global Conference – Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues, University of Oxford, September 12-16, 2012).

avant-garde movement embraced by foreign designers attempting to gain attention and notoriety amidst a competitive haute couture environment.¹⁴¹ Kawakubo's work for Comme des Garçons gained mass attention in Paris due to her seeming rejection of the conventions of haute couture, an avant-garde trend incorporated into the designs of other foreign designers debuting collections in Paris, including Belgium's Martin Margiela and Austria's Helmut Lang. With Kawakubo's work composed of references to the homeless, complete with intentional holes, ragged and highly visible stitching, and fabrics not traditionally associated with haute couture fashion, Crane identifies the avant-garde trend popularized by Comme des Garçons as a social critique of Western decadence achieved through the "simulation of poverty."¹⁴² While Crane argues that the techniques utilized to imitate destitution function to "reveal and comment on the implication of luxury fashion by proposing clothes that deliberately defy the perfect craftsmanship of haute couture,"¹⁴³ her analysis does not satisfactorily place the aestheticization of poverty within its larger social context and the politics of Western consumer society, a position better represented by fashion scholar Harold Koda in "Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty" and Evans's *Fashion at the Edge*.

Incorporating cultural critiques from *The New York Times* and letters to the editor published in issues of *Vogue*, Koda, currently the head curator for the Costume Institute at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, highlights how the mixed reception of Kawakubo's designs reflected cultural misunderstandings of Comme des Garçon's message. Fashion buyers for major retail outlets viewed the designs of Comme des Garçon "simply as style," yet the sale of pieces from the design house at major American department stores provoked criticism and

¹⁴¹ Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 155.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

demonstrations for the “financial exploitation of such a real and serious problem.”¹⁴⁴ Koda identifies the removal of the designs from their intended socio-economic and political meaning for corporate profit as the consequential factor for this cultural misinterpretation.¹⁴⁵

In his discussion, Koda emphasizes that the imagery of *Comme des Garçons* – “dark, rough-textured fabrics that sometimes resemble a bedraggled shroud” – was first popularized by British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood and her business partner Malcolm McClaren, who were an apparent influence on emerging Japanese fashion designers.¹⁴⁶ The street-style influence in the work of Westwood revealed the economic frustrations experienced by alienated British youth, leading Koda to question Kawakubo’s incorporation of signifiers of poverty as the Japanese experienced relative prosperity and affluence in the postwar period:

The ‘poor look’ is a style volatile with meaning. Worn by alienated British youths, the exaggerated, theatrical aspects of the poverty references suggest self-satire and the nihilistic hedonism of economic frustration [...] However, when American editors, journalists, merchandisers, and consumers are presented with Kawakubo’s interpretation of the ‘poor look,’ confusion would seem inevitable, for they are yet another level removed from any original meaning. The ‘poor look’ by Westwood, so deeply rooted in socio-political considerations, is invariably stripped of this original meaning outside its primary context. With Kawakubo, there is only a quoting of forms: Westwood’s political content is lost, supplanted by an inevitably Japanese meaning.¹⁴⁷

As opposed to a commentary on class relations, Koda reads Kawakubo’s work as metaphorically representing the Japanese notion of *wabi-sabi*, an aesthetic Buddhist concept embedded within the nation’s ancient tea rituals. With *wabi* evoking images of decay and *sabi* in reference to allusions of death, poverty and age, *wabi-sabi*, in Koda’s analysis, is expressed in the designs of

¹⁴⁴ Koda, “Kei Kawakubo,” 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. For a larger discussion on Westwood’s collections, see Claire Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood* (London: V&A Publications, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Koda, “Rei Kawakubo,” 8.

Comme des Garçon through the label's embrace of imperfection as an intentional aesthetic.¹⁴⁸

Koda's work is distinguished from other analyses on Kawakubo for providing a cultural analysis of Comme des Garçon as opposed to strictly reading the designs as sociopolitical statements on European fashion.

Drawing upon theoretical works by Marx, Benjamin, McCracken and Susan Sontag,¹⁴⁹ Evans conceptualizes the larger trend of "Derelict" fashion, starting with Westwood and Comme des Garçons and consistently displayed on the fashion runways through to the 1990s, as representative of a metaphorical narrative of recycled history. Several notable fashion designers, including Kawakubo, Margiela, and Viktor & Rolf, recycled vintage second-hand clothing and military fabrics, commodities identified by Evans as historically associated "with low economic status and class" and, citing costume historian Madeleine Ginsburg, socially articulated as "symbol[s] of poverty and lower class oppression and patronage."¹⁵⁰ Evans also makes reference to the discussion of patina from McCracken's *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, in which McCracken examines the social aspect of patina in pre-industrial society, which was often associated with an affluent class status until the introduction of novelty replaced durability as conspicuous signifiers of prosperity in industrial capitalism.¹⁵¹ With the tarnish considered out of vogue and unworthy of haute couture following the "consumer revolution that formed the bedrock of the modern fashion system,"

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Marx and Sontag each respectively argue for a narrative of cultural recycling. While Marx argued, "...in history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life," Sontag views cultural recycling as an intrinsic aspect defining American ideology, writing in *On Photography* that "America is built, *ad hoc*, out of scraps and junk. America, that surreal country, is full of found objects." Marx and Sontag as cited in Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 262 and 258.

¹⁵⁰ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 249 and Madeleine Ginsburg, "Rags to Riches: The Second-Hand Clothes Trade 1700-1978," *Costume: Journal of the Costume Society of Great Britain* 14 (1980): 128 as cited in Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 249.

¹⁵¹ McCracken as cited in Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 255.

Evans expands upon McCracken's example by highlighting the paradoxical relationship of patina and fashion. Designers, such as Margiela, McQueen and Galliano, often used the tarnish during the 1990s to embody a sense of history in their contemporary collections.¹⁵²

Evans connects the predominance of this imagery to the politics of the anti-globalization and anti-capitalism movements, where the transformation of symbols of decay into fashion statements symbolized the political backlash directed towards the Kyoto Treaty and the refusal by the United States to ratify the agreement. She supports her argument with the example of London fashion designer Jessica Ogden, whose experience as an artist and local activist with the Oxfam Recycling Scheme (an initiative aimed at decreasing the amount of discarded, but still wearable, clothing sent to landfills in the United Kingdom) helped inspire her entrance into fashion design.¹⁵³ A central aspect to her argument that distinguishes Evans from other scholars writing on the predominance of subversive fashion in contemporary culture is her emphasis on the production of the clothing as opposed to its presentation:

There is a paradox inherent in this type of design: however oppositional or experimental it might be, it remains locked, like the foraging of the nineteenth-century ragpicker, into the very capitalist system whose cycles of production and consumption it might be seen to be criticizing. If images of decay masked the failure of environmental politics and global protest, one interpretation of this material is that it was a despairing re-enactment of the spoiling of the world's resources through the production of symbolically spoiled clothes. Just as we worry about the world rotting and wasting so our most avant-garde designers and photographers use this imagery in cutting-edge fashion design and images. This type of fashion design makes theater out of material that spoke to us, reaching parts that most polemics cannot reach, but only in the realm of the symbolic.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 260.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 262.

As fashion met its democratization in the postmodern context, haute couture and high-end labels turned to placing emphasis on the technique of the clothing and the fabrics used. With the aestheticization of poverty in this period of fashion obtaining “a symbolic value through the discourse of art,” the use of unconventional textiles to achieve a distressed aesthetic and the recycling of second-hand clothing fetishized production in her argument.¹⁵⁵

The literature addressing the intersections of fashion, consumption and identity demonstrates the theoretical complexity of this area of study, influenced by a rich variety of interdisciplinary approaches. In her analysis of ‘heroin chic’ and its rejection of the commodity gloss of 1980s consumer culture, Arnold spoke to the privileged, yet too-often dismissed, function of fashion in cultural politics:

The closeness we feel to the images that surround us make it difficult to give distance and consider the meanings and identities that such representations contain. Our society is saturated by imagery, and fashion is frequently seen as inhabiting only a commercial, escapist sphere, a trivial froth that floats upon the surface of culture.¹⁵⁶

Arnold’s argument speaks to the pressing need to connect images that are so pervasive in their cultural power with the discursive context in which they are produced by the fashion industries, the very agents who downplay the symbolism of imagery as undeserving of critical attention.

The ‘trivialness’ of fashion, earlier argued by Baudrillard, is also a way to diminish the ideological importance of the medium. Fashion is popularly viewed as an exploitative consumer product, a critique that depoliticizes the power behind representations of the marginalized. With the emergence of fashion as an industry governed by modern discourses of consumption, and in view of its influential role in extending the sphere of commodification further into the cultural

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Arnold, “Heroin Chic,” 280.

realm of identity politics, the social significance of fashion remains a persistent area of concern for academic scholarship.

Chapter Three: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Fashion

Designers should make clothes that fit into the aesthetics, society and identities of the moment: the times they live in. [...] They should do clothes that express all that without them commenting too much. That can give an unbearable pretension – what some designers like as an image, I suppose. Do the right things in the right moments, that is what designers should do. Look ahead, but don't comment too much. Great speeches can make the clothes not up to the dialogue once you see them. 'Intellectual,' like 'avant-garde,' are labels to make designers feel like they are serious people. The same problem exists with art.¹⁵⁷

---Karl Lagerfeld

The complexity of the various approaches to the study of fashion and the continuous debate regarding the medium's social communicative ability represent the significant limitations to this area of study. The field lacks a cohesive methodological framework to examine fashion in practice due to the wide variety of interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives influencing recent cultural criticism of fashion. The most prominent critiques of fashion's social function are conducted by art historians and are predominantly based upon archival research due to the medium's longstanding association with the disciplines of art and history, a methodological tendency best displayed in the works of Elizabeth Wilson and Diana Crane.¹⁵⁸ Despite the intercultural fascination surrounding fashion and the growing attention paid by academics, journalists, activists and the legal community to the systematic inequalities embedded within the organizational structure of the industry,¹⁵⁹ the majority of scholarly work focusing on fashion's social implications remain largely situated within a European context, particularly in regards to

¹⁵⁷ Miles Socha, "Thinkable Fashion: Designers Create Collections in a Language All Their Own. But When It Comes to the Customer, What is Lost in Translation?" *Women's Wear Daily*, March 24, 2008, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 2013 [1985]) and Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 2000.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Andrew Ross, ed., *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade and the Rights of Garment Workers* (New York: Verso, 1997); McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, 139-150; and Klein, *No Logo*, 2000.

the United Kingdom and France.¹⁶⁰ By analyzing the commercial magnetism of fashion's enchanting and seductive qualities in the current state of commodity culture governed by the techniques of the spectacle, the work of Evans continues the historical approach to the study of fashion by applying theories of modernity to contemporary images of European fashion culture.¹⁶¹ *Fashion at the Edge*'s historical investigation into the cultural strength of haute couture's spectacular nature, however, is strictly devoted to a literary analysis of the images comprising her select sample.

Prior research on fashion reflects a more theoretical orientation, an approach representing the natural progression for an emerging field of study, yet there remains a pressing need to discuss specific examples, genres and case studies supported by a more empirical framework. Building upon the theoretical foundations laid by Wilson, McRobbie, and Evans, this work situates the 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' fashion trends within the larger public discourse of current North American consumer society through a methodological approach triangulating content analysis, critical discourse analysis and visual analysis. A content analysis and critical discourse analysis of mainstream North American newspapers in addition to magazines, advertisements, film and television examples enables an understanding as to how 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' have been received, critiqued, and supported by cultural commentators.

Following the April 1994 heroin-induced suicide of Nirvana's lead singer Kurt Cobain and art produced by the fashion photographers Juergen Teller and Corrine Day, 'heroin chic' gained cultural prominence in advertising campaigns for Calvin Klein and photo editorials in

¹⁶⁰ This European-centric analysis of fashion is best exemplified in Lipovetsky, *Empire of Fashion*, 1994.

¹⁶¹ This methodological approach is best demonstrated in "A Shop of Images and Signs," in *Fashion as Photograph*, ed. Shinkle, 17-28; *Fashion at the Edge*, 2003; "Desire and Dread," in *Body Dressing*, ed. Entwistle and Wilson, 201-214; and "The Enchanted Spectacle," 271-310.

magazines including *The Face*, *Dazed & Confused* and *Allure* during the mid-to-late 1990s. Emerging models, such as Kate Moss and Kirsten McMenamy, were photographed as portraying emaciated drug addicts with injection scarring visible along their arms. Condemned by numerous social commentaries and publicly criticized by President Bill Clinton for ‘heroin chic’s’ glamorization of drug culture during the onset of AIDS awareness, the popularity of Calvin Klein’s images helped inspire the grunge fashion that became highly iconic of the decade. With its polarizing emergence in popular culture, the signifiers of ‘heroin chic’ imparted the discursive and symbolic foundations for ‘homeless chic’ to emerge in consumer society almost ten years later, with the latter incorporating numerous intertextual references to its predecessor. ‘Homeless chic’ first gained the attention of the popular press in 2000, when Galliano introduced his “Derelict Clochard” haute couture runway collection for Christian Dior. The runway performance showcased models portrayed as Parisian tent dwellers and dressed in a variety of rags, newspapers and scrap metal. Incorporating stereotypical representations of urban poverty and romanticized notions of leisure, ‘homeless chic’ continued its cultural circulation throughout the decade, exemplified by the fashion choices of celebrity ‘style icons’ Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Sienna Miller, Mischa Barton, Winona Ryder, Nicole Kidman, Courtney Love, Ke\$ha and Lana Del Rey, photo-shoots in various magazines, online blogs and television shows including *W*, *The Sartorialist*, *America’s Next Top Model* and *Sex and the City*, and the runway collections and advertisements of a variety of designers, such as Marc Jacobs, Prada, Chanel, Christian Dior, Balmain, Comme des Garçons, Viktor & Rolf, Yohji Yamamoto and Vivienne Westwood, amongst numerous others.

Although Harold and Arnold argue their support for the potential of subversive fashion trends to negotiate dominant ideologies governing the body in visual culture through illuminating

the false consciousness naturalizing romanticized notions of beauty,¹⁶² the minimal existing analyses discussing ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ have predominantly criticized both trends as extending the sphere of commodification and the corporate control of commercial culture.¹⁶³ This thesis, however, rejects the rather common and repetitive argument that the trends of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ function exclusively to preserve the symbolic power of commodity culture by eradicating any reference to the socioeconomic realities of capitalism’s ostracized identities. While processes of commodification are visible components in ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ fashion, the conclusion that these trends reflect nothing more than a fundamental capital exchange fails to consider whether they speak to a larger symbolic force in the cultural politics of Western consumer society. In contrast to the strictly theoretical analysis that commonly comprises the dominant approach to fashion research, this study accounts for the social significance of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ by placing greater emphasis on the reporting of fashion by the popular press, particularly in regards to how the imagery produced by the fashion industry is concurrently critiqued, negotiated and validated by cultural commentators. After understanding how the news media addresses the cultural circulation and negotiation of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ within the public discourse of consumer society, the dominant ideological narratives derived from the initial content and critical discourse analysis of the print press are then used as a socioeconomic framework to conduct a close visual reading of *W*’s photo editorial “Paper Bag Princess.”

¹⁶² Harold, “Tracking Heroin Chic,” 65-76; Arnold, “Heroin Chic,” 279-295, and *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety*, 48-54.

¹⁶³ Henry Giroux, “Heroin Chic, Trendy Aesthetics, and the Politics of Pathology,” *New Art Examiner* 25 (1997): 20-27; Hartigan, “Unpopular Culture,” 316-343; Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 501-516; and Halnon and Sandra Cohen, “Muscles, Motorcycles and Tattoos,” 33-56.

Content analysis is used principally in this study as a framing device for the critical discourse analysis.¹⁶⁴ Illuminating the more significant trends, issues and figures involved in the press treatment of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic,’ content analysis enables what David Deacon, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock argue are “broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation.”¹⁶⁵ Content analysis has not been effectively utilized in fashion research, as previous work on the subject has tended to select particular examples to compose narrowly based samples of archival documents and selected imagery, opposed to the broader empirical approach that frames the sample for this analysis. The method serves as an initial first step to widen the sample material, classify the data, reveal the themes, narratives and actors that play roles in the substantially enriched critical discourse analysis, and connect fashion trends to their larger social context.

Conceptualizing language as representative of the particular social reality in which it is produced, critical discourse analysis examines the systematic relationship between language practices and social structure with a particular focus on categories of class, ethnicity, gender and other mediations of identity. For Norman Fairclough, ‘discourse’ is defined in *Language and Power* as “internal and dialectical,” since “linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena.”¹⁶⁶ This study focuses on addressing the particular social relations and conditions occupied within the discursive construction of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ by the fashion industry through deconstructing the production and interpretation of media texts in accordance to Fairclough’s three-tiered matrix

¹⁶⁴ Klaus Krippendorf, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodologies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), 15-22.

¹⁶⁵ David Deacon, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007), 119.

¹⁶⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), 23.

model: discourse as text/description, discourse as text/interaction, and discourse as context/explanation.¹⁶⁷ The first stage, discourse as text/description, focuses on the basic properties and identifying information of the media artefact selected for analysis, such as the composition of headlines, article placement, font, typography, length and accompanying visual imagery and graphics. The second stage, discourse as interpretation, deconstructs the thematic structure and discursive schema of the media artefact, with a particular focus on the narrative, intertextual references and linguistic techniques constructing the text. The final step, discourse as context/explanation, situates the media artifact within its larger social context, a deconstruction supported by corresponding theoretical frameworks.¹⁶⁸

The critical discourse analysis of the mainstream news media and fashion press will largely draw upon the second and third stages of Fairclough's matrix model. The selection of the sample from online digital databases prohibits a viewing of the respective articles in their original print format, consequently limiting the ability to analyze its descriptive and visual properties. The second and third stages of Fairclough's matrix model, however, are critical to the deconstruction as they not only situate the texts selected for analysis beyond their initial production, but also provide the necessary framework and conceptual models to undertake a critical reading of the fashion industry. By closely examining the discursive schemas, frames, narratives, themes and intertextual composition of the articles composing the sample, the analysis highlights the complex symbolism of 'homeless chic' and its relation to socioeconomic change. In accordance to Fiske's argument privileging interpretation as opposed to production as the moment in which meaning is created,¹⁶⁹ particular emphasis in this stage of the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 25-27.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), 249.

deconstruction will focus on the *interpretation* of meaning by those consumers who are generalized as the targeted readership of the fashion industries. The targeted consumer is interpellated into the discursive construction of the fashion industry as a cultural institution and educated with the appropriate values deemed compulsory to buy into and maintain what Sharon Zukin describes as the “critical infrastructure” of a society, roughly referring to the systems of power invested within the production of cultural texts.¹⁷⁰

In order to create a non-random critical case sample, 511 articles were selected for analysis from 13 different sources, collected from a sample time frame ranging from January 1994 to July 2012. This 18-year sample represents a period of significant social and economic change within North American culture that laid the structural foundations for the emergence of the ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ fashion trends. The April 1994 suicide of Cobain and Calvin Klein’s advertising campaigns for his newly launched perfume and denim collections, which also coincided with the modeling debut of Kate Moss, represent the beginning months of the sample in 1994. The sample’s end date corresponds with the final haute couture collections presented in July 2012 at the time of data collection. Since runway collections and magazine issues are in pre-production at least a year in advance of their debut or publication, expanding the sample to July 2012 takes into greater consideration a larger array of economic and political activities impacting Western cultural politics. It also allows for an examination into how the fashion and magazine industry responded to the economic downturn that is generally understood to have begun with 2008’s mortgage crisis and its associated fallout, a timeline that is central in reading the symbolism of ‘homeless chic.’

¹⁷⁰ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 202-206.

The first publication selected for the sample is the industry trade journal *Women's Wear Daily*, often referred to as the “bible of the fashion industry.”¹⁷¹ Founded in 1910 and reporting a circulated readership of 57,608 and a total audience of 214,384, the weekday publication targets a niche audience of fashion buyers, retailers, manufacturers, advertisers and financiers, amongst other industry professionals.¹⁷² Under the ownership of Fairchild Publications, a division of Condé Nast Publications, the trade journal has grown considerably to develop a reputation for providing “credible business news and key fashion trends to a dedicated readership of retailers, designers, manufacturers, marketers, financiers, Wall Street analysts, international moguls, media executives, ad agencies, trend-makers and socialites.”¹⁷³ In addition to identifying designers, retailers and advertising campaigns perpetuating the trend of ‘homeless chic’ fashion within the sample time frame, the inclusion of *Women's Wear Daily* acts as a reference point in this study as the publication covers the larger fashion trends and themes in which ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ are situated, and supports a consideration of whether or not these trends are comparable or represent a direct contrast to other representations, designs and collections produced by the fashion industry within the sample time frame. Exploring the atmosphere of the fashion industry at the time when these trends peaked enriches the study, since juxtaposing the imagery with the larger fashion environment will help lead to an understanding of why and how these particular trends were able to gain such widespread attention within a cluttered and chaotic cultural landscape.

¹⁷¹ Lia Miller, “*Women's Wear Daily* Setting Its Sights on the Luxury Market,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2005, C6.

¹⁷² “*WWD* Circulation Demographics,” *Condénast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/wwd/media-kit/print>.

¹⁷³ “About Us,” *WWD.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.wwd.com/about-us>.

Apart from the extensive reporting by *Women's Wear Daily* on the insider workings of the fashion industry and reporting the reaction or commentary from designers and public figures on the trends, the trade journal does not reveal the economic, social and political tensions that brought 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' into the forefront of cultural debate. A combination of American, British and Canadian newspapers were selected for this study to help situate 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' within the larger public discourse and contextualize the fashion trend in accordance to the socioeconomic and political dynamics of the global public sphere. *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Time*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star* and *The Guardian* were specifically chosen for their consistency in fashion reporting as a result of the growing popularity of 'Lifestyle' subsections, their wide geographic reach serving the main North American retail markets based upon the circulation statistics released by the Alliance for Audited Media and the Canadian newspaper industry for the first six months of 2012, and their potential in reporting on the larger social events and occurrences influencing the fashion trends of a particular season.

Produced and distributed by the Dow Jones News Corporation, *The Wall Street Journal* is America's largest newspaper with an estimated weekday circulation of 2,378,827 and a weekend circulation of 2,406,332.¹⁷⁴ Since the primary focus of the paper is reporting on the domestic and global economies and their associated financial issues, *The Wall Street Journal* provides the financial perspective necessary to help situate the 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' fashion trends within the context of economic recession and ensuing social deprivations. In addition to satisfying its niche audience, *The Wall Street Journal* reports on the market trends dominating

¹⁷⁴ "Total Circulation," *Alliance for Audited Media*, last modified March 31, 2013, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/newstitlesearchus.asp>.

retail merchandising with a socio-cultural focus distinct to that of *Women's Wear Daily*; the weekly 'Pursuits' subdivision of the paper features lifestyle, fashion and arts criticism and opinion pieces. As America's second-highest circulated national newspaper, *USA Today* reaches a daily audience of approximately 1,674,306 readers. This circulation number, however, includes the roughly 800,000 who receive the paper through free distribution at various hotels and airports across the United States.¹⁷⁵ Published Monday through Friday and including a 'Lifestyle' section that comments on a variety of various popular culture trends and texts, *USA Today* is selected for its more populist and easily comprehensible content targeting a different demographic than other publications included in the sample. With an average weekday circulation of 1,865,318, a Saturday audience of 1,824,347, and a Sunday edition circulation of just over two million readers, *The New York Times* is the largest metropolitan newspaper in North America.¹⁷⁶ Priding itself as the premier publication in "overall reach of U.S. opinion leaders,"¹⁷⁷ *The New York Times* introduced their Fashion & Style feature section in 1946, with Cathy Horn currently serving as the paper's fashion critic following the death of Style Editor Amy Spindler in 2004.¹⁷⁸ As the second-highest metropolitan newspaper in the United States after *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* recorded a 2012 weekday circulation rate of 656,868, followed by the *Washington Post* at 474,767, and the *Chicago Tribune* at 414,930.¹⁷⁹ The *Washington Post*'s daily 'Style' section featured journalist Robin Givhan, who, after previously holding positions at *Vogue*, joined the D.C.-based newspaper for over ten years as fashion editor until her departure

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Newspaper," *The New York Times Media Kit*, accessed September 9, 2012, <http://nytmktg.whsites.net/mediakit/newspaper>.

¹⁷⁸ Cathy Horyn, "Style Editor Was Noted for Fierce Opinions: New York Times Critic Recognized Fashion as a Cultural Barometer," *The Montreal Gazette*, March 1, 2004, B6.

¹⁷⁹ "Total Circulation," *Alliance for Audited Media*, <http://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/newstitlesearchus.asp>.

in 2010. The first fashion critic to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize in Criticism for her weekly fashion beat in the *Washington Post*, Givhan was praised by the Pulitzer Committee for her “witty, closely observed essays that transform fashion criticism into cultural criticism.”¹⁸⁰ These publications were specifically selected to provide a comprehensive and nuanced coverage of current affairs, domestic and international news, social commentary, cultural criticism, and fashion reporting.

Three Canadian newspapers were incorporated into the sample to give a more balanced North American viewpoint on fashion trends and their social context. As Canada’s highest circulated daily newspaper, the *Toronto Star* reaches an estimated weekly audience of approximately 2,503,284 readers. The Thursday edition of the paper also features its long-running ‘Fashion’ subsection with reports on the latest fashion trends that spotlight both emerging and established Canadian designers.¹⁸¹ Since the *Toronto Star* is directed at a regional market, *The Globe and Mail* is the highest circulated national newspaper in Canada, with an estimated weekly audience of 1, 813,141 readers.¹⁸² In an attempt to compete with the *Toronto Star*’s readership, *The Globe and Mail* added its daily ‘Globe Life’ section to its regular format in April 2007. In contrast to the longer histories of the *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*, Conrad Black created the *National Post* from the skeletal framework of Toronto’s *Financial Post* in 1997. Intended as a second national newspaper to compete with *The Globe and Mail*, the

¹⁸⁰ “The 2006 Pulitzer Prize Winners – Criticism,” *The Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed September 9, 2012, <http://www.pulitzer.org/citation/2006-Criticism>.

¹⁸¹ “Newspaper Canada Releases 2012 Circulation Data Report for Daily Newspapers,” *Newspapers Canada*, last modified April 18, 2013, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.newspaperscanada.ca/news/research/newspapers-canada-releases-2012-circulation-data-report-daily-newspapers>.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

paper reports a significantly lower weekly circulation of just over one million readers.¹⁸³ The *National Post* was strategically selected for this study due to its ownership under Postmedia Network Inc. A significant majority of the articles analyzed in the study were produced by the Postmedia News Agency (previously CanWest) and appeared, in addition to the *National Post*, in multiple publications owned and operated under Postmedia News Inc., including the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Ottawa Citizen*.

While the primary research focus is to address the social permeation of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ within North-American culture through examining the discursive construction of these trends by the fashion industry with primary material distinct to North America, *The Guardian* was also included in the sample since fashion and social commentaries are regular fixtures in the United Kingdom, to provide international breadth to the study. The inclusion of *The Guardian* takes into consideration the global impact of the fashion industry, which is especially relevant since the majority of designers central to these trends are based in Europe with origins in London. Reporting a daily circulation of 203,592,¹⁸⁴ *The Guardian* traces its historical roots to the textile workers and merchants of industrial 1820s Manchester, and it has since developed a reputation as a bourgeois newspaper targeting those identifying with the mainstream left of British politics.¹⁸⁵ Currently the newspaper offers an extensive commentary on European fashion trends, with columnist and features writer Hadley Freeman serving as the newspaper’s popular fashion critic in addition to her role as contributing editor to British *Vogue*.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Josh Halliday, “Guardian, Daily Mail and Daily Express Circulations Rise Month on Month,” *The Guardian*, last modified December 7, 2012, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/dec/07/guardian-daily-mail-daily-express-abcs>.

¹⁸⁵ “History of the Guardian: A Brief History of the Guardian Newspaper,” *Guardian.co.uk*, accessed September 7, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gnm-archive/2002/jun/06/1>

The exclusion of fashion magazines in this study was deliberate due to the difficulties this type of print media imposes on time constraints of the research. As primarily visual media, fashion magazines including *Vogue*, *W*, *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *InStyle* are composed predominantly of advertisements, photo shoots and various other imagery with minimal textual content. While the articles collected from the sample newspapers were retrieved from online databases providing digitally archived copies of participating publications, the fashion magazines that carry the cultural cachet necessary for this research have not been fully digitized in their original format, nor are original copies easily accessible for researchers at institutions due to the widespread tendency to discard the magazines once out of date. A second limitation is access restrictions to the databases housing digitized magazine content. If a particular magazine has been digitized, often it is only the textual content that is available for download as opposed to the visual imagery, including both photo editorials and advertisements.

Vogue is consistently mentioned throughout the newspaper coverage comprising the sample time frame, particularly in Anna Wintour's dismissal of the 'grunge' characteristics of 'heroin chic,' and her control over the fashion industry by threatening to exclude from coverage in her magazine those designers who incorporated elements of the trend into their collections.¹⁸⁶ As demonstrated by Wintour's actions, fashion magazines, and the larger press who comment on their opinions, maintain very privileged positions as both industry and cultural opinion leaders, a role recognized in a profile of Wintour by Horyn that was published in *The New York Times*:

[For] as much as Ms. Wintour is scrutinized, her deal-making within the fashion industry is one activity that has received scant attention. In recent years she has gone beyond the editorial domain and

¹⁸⁶ Amy Spindler, "How Fashion Killed the Unloved Waif," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1994, 13, and Kevin Gray, "Wintour's Tale: The Summer of Her Discontent," *New York*, last modified September 20, 1999, accessed April 6, 2013, <http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/1460/>

involved herself in the placement of designers at fashion houses. Her efforts fall across a spectrum of involvement, from outright pitching the name of a person she likes to a chief executive, to putting her weight behind a pending decision, to effectively make a marriage.¹⁸⁷

Supporting her profile on Wintour, Horyn attributes the influential power of magazine editors within the fashion industry to the changing political economic context of luxury conglomerates that originated in the 1990s, with “new corporate owners, like Bernard Arnault, the chairman of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, com[ing] from the worlds of real estate, finance and timber. Important editors found themselves consulting about everything from the meaning of grunge to the importance of designers.”¹⁸⁸ While designers are responsible for creating ‘fashions,’ it is the press who dictate when and within what context a piece of clothing or an accessory is transformed into a ‘trend.’ When necessary, particular examples, advertisements and editorials from various fashion magazines and other forms of cultural expression, including film and television, will be brought in to complement and enrich the critical discourse analysis on the social commentary of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic.’

The usage of critical discourse analysis moves beyond a technical sociolinguistic deconstruction of the textual content in order to delineate a sociocultural narrative of comparable fashion trends, as ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ cannot be contextualized without reference to each other. Out of the 511 newspaper articles collected for the initial content analysis, roughly half of the sample was in reference to ‘heroin chic,’ with the remaining articles devoted to ‘homeless chic’ and the current economic recession originating in 2008. In addition to the discrepancies in press coverage between the two trends, the commentaries regarding ‘heroin chic,’ while often critical and contradictory in their nature, predominantly attempted to account

¹⁸⁷ Horyn, “Citizen Anna,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2007, G1.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

for its stigmatizing and provoking representations by associating the trend's imagery with other related social issues and events. This connection to the sociopolitical dynamics of contemporary popular culture is in direct contrast to the minimal reporting on 'homeless chic.' Both fashion trends are centered upon representing the marginalized, or vagrant other, of Western society, yet why did 'heroin chic' become a trend so highly debated within public discourse when 'homeless chic' failed to attract the same critical attention during a period of considerable social change? Why was 'heroin chic' viewed as a subversive fashion trend challenging consumer society's ideological structure, whereas 'homeless chic' is predominantly trivialized and disregarded for commodifying the underclass for mass consumption without any examination into the social influences perpetuating the trend towards the forefront of consumer capitalism? The fashion industry as described by McRobbie has significantly changed since 'heroin chic' made its popular culture debut. The proliferation of new media technologies instantaneously communicating images in a visualized global market places growing demands on the workers of the fashion industry to create striking imagery. The development of 'shock' advertising popularized by United Colors of Benetton,¹⁸⁹ the maturity of the spectacle, the influence of branding, the growth and popularity of fashion news, and the introduction of social media providing instantaneous access to a world once considered highly exclusive were key influences factored in to the analysis on the narrative trajectory of 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic.'

After contextualizing the trends and how they are shaped and presented by mainstream North American social commentators, the analysis moves to a critical visual analysis of a

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Serra A. Tinic, "United Colors and Untied Meanings: Benetton and the Commodification of Social Issues," *Journal of Communication* 47, no. 3 (1997): 3-25, and Martin Morris, "Interpretability and Social Power, or, Why Postmodern Advertising Works," *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 5 (2005): 697-718 for discussions on the cultural impact of United Colors of Benetton's advertising campaigns and their emphasis on spotlighting global social issues through cause marketing.

particular example derived from the discussion of the trend in the sample. Notwithstanding the variety of academic work applying the defining characteristics of critical discourse analysis to a deconstruction of visual media,¹⁹⁰ the method is predominantly utilized for research on news media content.¹⁹¹ Addressing this overwhelming predisposition to adopt critical discourse analysis as the prime methodological approach in a textual analysis, Peter Garret and Allan Bell argue this tendency is primarily due to the positioning of the methodology within the critical paradigm, with the news media a suitable medium for examination due to critical discourse analysis's "explicit sociopolitical agenda, a concern to discover and bear witness to unequal relations of power which underlie ways of talking in a society, and in particular reveal the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging sociopolitical dominance."¹⁹² Demonstrating the effectiveness in combining a semiotic critique with the traditional conventions of critical discourse analysis, Gillian Rose suggests that discourse as a concept "can also be used to explore how images construct specific views of the social world."¹⁹³ The connection made between discourse and the socially constructed nature of media imagery is best contextualized by Williamson's work revealing the complex function of advertisements to conceal the more

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Mary Talbot, *Media Discourse: Representation and Interaction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); and Justine Coupland, "Dating Advertisements: Discourses of the Commodified Self," *Discourse & Society* 7 (1996): 187-207.

¹⁹¹ Peter Garrett and Allan Bell, "Media and Discourse: A Critical Overview," in *Approaches to Media Discourse*, ed. Peter Garret and Allan Bell (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 6.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001), 140.

significant sociopolitical issues and inequalities embedded within Western consumer-capitalism.¹⁹⁴

Receiving considerable press attention upon its release in the magazine's 2009 September issue, *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess" was shot by famed photographer Craig McDean and featured Russian model Sasha Pivovarova posed against various signifiers of destitution, such as deserted alleyway corners, subway grates and park benches. In addition to showcasing various haute couture clothing and accessories from designers including Chanel, Christian Dior, Lanvin, Christian Lacroix, Prada and Balenciaga, Pivovarova models makeshift clothing and shelters of paper bags identified with the associated designer's trademarked labels, monograms and graphics. With a total circulation of 447,656 paid annual subscribers, *W* reports a total audience of 1,389,000. *W*'s subscribers possess a median household income of \$158,940 with 91% of the magazine's audience having earned at least a bachelor's degree and 67% employed as professionals and executives.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to *W*, *Vogue* reaches an estimated total audience of approximately eleven million, a figure composed of just under one million subscribers, and records a medium household income of \$68,519, a significantly lower figure than that of its sister publication.¹⁹⁶ While both publications operate under the management of Condé Nast, *Vogue* appeals to a much wider and demographically more diverse audience than *W*, with the latter developing a reputation for its thought-provoking editorials often attempting to 'push the boundaries' of what is generally accepted in mainstream fashion magazine layouts. The avant-

¹⁹⁴ Williamson, "Woman is An Island," in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Modleski, 99-118, and, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978).

¹⁹⁵ "W Circulation Demographics," *Condénast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/w/media-kit/print>

¹⁹⁶ "Vogue Circulation Demographics," *Condénast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue/media-kit/print>.

garde nature of *W* photo editorials was best exemplified by the magazine's 2005 "Domestic Bliss" photo essay by photographer Steven Klein portraying Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie acting as a married couple in a 1960s setting in promotion for their upcoming spy thriller, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, amidst extensive tabloid rumours of infidelity between the two actors during filming.¹⁹⁷ While the Jolie-Pitt and "Paper Bag Princess" photo editorials are significantly different in nature, their timing coincides with highly contested topics circulated by the press, with "Paper Bag Princess" featured in *W* roughly a year within the onset of the current economic recession and the mortgage crisis threatening the financial stability of the American middle class.

The visual analysis of *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess" complements the critical discourse analysis of the fashion industry by demonstrating how the larger public discourse works to shape the construction of visual representations reproduced and negotiated in the sociopolitical imagery of the editorial. Although the trend of 'homeless chic' has produced numerous visual representations worthy of a close semiotic deconstruction, such as Galliano's 2000 "Derelict Clochard" haute couture collection for Christian Dior and *America's Next Top Model* 'homeless' episode that aired in 2008, "Paper Bag Princess" best incorporates and negotiates the discursive conventions constructing the trend of "homeless chic." In addition to the editorial's position as a definitive example of the 'homeless chic' fashion trend, "Paper Bag Princess" visualizes the numerous social tensions regarding the role of consumption in Western consumer culture and the economic uncertainties threatening the financial stability of the American middle class. Employing Williamson's work as a theoretical framework for a close analytical reading of the editorial's ideological function, this stage of the research deconstructs the appropriation of

¹⁹⁷ Steven Klein, "Brad and Angelina: Domestic Bliss," *W*, June 2005. For a deconstruction of this cover shoot, refer to Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 75-76.

stereotypical representations of poverty, subcultures, and homelessness and their use in constructing cultural meaning, paying specific attention to the intersections of gender, race, identity and class. The visual analysis also considers the spatial environment that serves as the backdrop for “Paper Bag Princess,” viewed through a framework of gentrification and the rebranding of urban culture within the socioeconomic context of consumerism. Particular attention in the visual deconstruction is directed towards the appropriation, repurposing and juxtaposition of the designer paper bags and their symbolic meaning, with this aspect of the analysis supported by Dick Hebdige’s work on style as a form of communication in addition to the intertextual reference to Robert Munsch’s children’s story of the same name.¹⁹⁸ The triangulation of methodologies and the wide variety of media artefacts selected for analysis in this study are best suited not only to examine fashion within its social context, but to demonstrate the critical importance these trends play in the relentless negotiation and political struggle over socially constructed notions of hegemony, identity, social class, power, cultural capital and the politics of representation.

¹⁹⁸ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 105 and Robert Munsch, *The Paper Bag Princess* (Toronto, New York and Vancouver: Annick Press, 2012 [1980]).

Chapter Four: Contextualizing Early Discursive Formations of ‘Homeless Chic’

In what may be the fastest turnaround time in fashion history, grunge is set to make a comeback this winter – that is, if designers like Marc Jacobs who showed at the recent New York fashion shows get their way (and, of course, if we're really pathetic and buy into it). The grunge look, originally a phenomenon spurred by such early 1990s Seattle-based bands as Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden, involved ripped jeans or cords, flannels, greasy hair and ennui. Nirvana's Kirk Cobain was (begrudgingly) anointed grunge's patron saint. He died in 1994, and two years later grunge was over. Britannica.com points to a reason for its demise: "Fashion's exploitative nature had come under fire in the spring when U.S. President Bill Clinton spoke out against the popularity of heroin chic. Though the grunge-inspired look had been popular in 1996 and was not a major theme for fashion collections in 1997, Clinton's comments followed the heroin overdose and death of 20-year-old New York photographer Davide Sorrenti." Suddenly, fashion houses turned their backs on grunge wear, and fashion turned to more positive themes such as body-conscious clothing and athletic wear. But four short years later, it's back. Could it be a comment on the downturn in the economy? I mean, if you've been laid off and are sitting at home collecting UI cheques, you should at least be comfortable, no? Or perhaps it's simply a backlash against the '80s. Or maybe we're all fed up with washing our hair. Can't say for sure, but Donna Karan for one is hoping you won't mind looking like crap again.¹⁹⁹

--- Amy Rosen, *National Post*

Despite the interdependent relationship between the images of popular culture and the larger social context in which fashion trends gain their cultural currency, fashion journalism, as an industry, remains an area of study often disregarded for its ‘frivolous’ tendencies. Considered a foundational text for the linguistic deconstruction of fashion reporting, Barthes’ *The Fashion System* is one of the earliest studies addressing the discursive construction of fashion in the mass media, where the semiologist analyzed the textual content of French lifestyle magazines.²⁰⁰ The social significance of fashion media is a specific focus in McRobbie’s ethnographic analysis of

¹⁹⁹ Amy Rosen, “Grunge Again,” *National Post*, April 7, 2001, W12.

²⁰⁰ Barthes, *The Fashion System*, 1983.

the British fashion industry's political economic expansion. She argues that the progression of fashion design in the United Kingdom during the second half of the twentieth century would have been hindered without the development of fashion magazines, as the medium provided a platform to showcase emerging British designers such as Galliano and McQueen.²⁰¹ McRobbie argues that the growth of fashion journalism correlated with the neoliberal shift in visual culture prioritizing "personal image and style," a transformation reflected by greater coverage of the industry by the 'traditional' print press, the rise of lifestyle programming on daytime television and the subsequent popularity of the fashion makeover.²⁰² Drawing upon McRobbie's work, other studies on fashion journalism have similarly focused on women's magazines as opposed to other disciplines of journalism, such as the 'traditional' news media. Particular attention in this area of journalistic study is directed towards *Vogue*, and how the tone of its written content has altered in accordance to the preferences, background and social networks of *Vogue*'s various editors-in-chief, specifically in relation to Diana Vreeland and Wintour.²⁰³ While Agnes Rocamora's discourse analysis documenting the hierarchal division between popular culture and aesthetics embedded in fashion reporting by *The Guardian* and *Le Monde* is one of the few commentaries on fashion content derived from the news media as opposed to magazines, the

²⁰¹ McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, 151.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 155 and 154-155.

²⁰³ See, for example, Laird O'Shea Borrelli, "Dressing Up and Talking about It: Fashion Writing in *Vogue* from 1968 to 1993," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 1, no. 3 (1997): 247-260; Anna Konig, "Glossy Words: An Analysis of Fashion Writing in British *Vogue*," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 10, no. 1-2 (2006): 205-224; Agnes Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009) and Christopher Breward, "Fashion on the Page," in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 399-402.

relationship between journalism, fashion, and its socioeconomic context remains particularly overlooked in regards to the North American mainstream press.²⁰⁴

‘Heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ were discussed in depth in 511 news articles from the period of January 1994 to July 2012, a sample collected from the publications *Women’s Wear Daily*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Guardian*. The sample collected was initially in the thousands, however, only those articles directly referencing ‘heroin chic,’ ‘homeless chic,’ and the broader fashion and retail environments during the onset of these two trends were selected for analysis. *The New York Times* provided the most coverage of the two trends with 139 articles, followed closely by *Women’s Wear Daily* with 105 news reports. The extensive coverage by *The New York Times* and *Women’s Wear Daily* was expected given their reputations for fashion and lifestyle reporting. *The Globe and Mail* ranked third in coverage, offering 74 articles on the two trends. The *Toronto Star* and *The Guardian* provided a similar content quota, with 59 and 54 articles. While *The Wall Street Journal* registered with 46 articles collected by the sample, their coverage on fashion was limited to the immediate decade and focused exclusively on the economic recession, with only three articles dated throughout the early periods of the sample time frame, in comparison to the majority of the newspaper’s articles ranging from 2007 to July 2012. Coverage on ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ in the *Washington Post* was sparse with 19 articles on the two trends, nine of which were published by their Pulitzer Prize winning-critic Givhan. The *National Post* provided a Canadian perspective on the trends with its 15 articles; a further 10

²⁰⁴ Rocamora, “High Fashion and Pop Fashion: The Symbolic Production of Fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 2 (2001): 123-142.

articles were published in newspapers owned by Postmedia Network Inc. across Canada, including the *Calgary Herald* (1 article), the *Edmonton Journal* (1 article), Montreal's *The Gazette* (7 articles), the *Ottawa Citizen* (6 articles), and the *Vancouver Sun* (6 articles). Although press coverage of 'heroin chic' was significantly larger in comparison to 'homeless chic,' with 293 articles on the former trend and 110 focused on the latter, social criticism was the dominant theme narrating the press coverage of both trends. This theme was reflected in roughly 79 percent of the articles comprising the sample, and it provides the underlying tone to approach a critical analysis of press treatment on 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic.'

Identifying a tendency amongst fashion writers to elevate their profession by emphasizing the "creative genius" of designers through hyperbolic language, McRobbie argues that fashion journalism fails to facilitate a similar level of social criticism prevalent in other forms of journalistic inquiry.²⁰⁵ Citing factors such as commodity culture's "economy of looking" that dictates the tastes and preferences for consumer society, McRobbie argues that the spectacle of fashion reporting:

is never critical, only mildly ironic [...] The editors and journalists rarely break ranks and produce more engaged and challenging writing on this subject. This, in turn, keeps them isolated and away from those policy makers and politicians who are anxious to see the fashion industry become more stable and more profitable and give a better return on the investment made in education and training. The fashion media thus secures the marginalized, trivial image of fashion as though it cannot be bothered to take itself seriously or to consider its own conditions of existence. The excuse is invariably that this kind of material frightens both readers and advertisers.²⁰⁶

McRobbie's harsh criticism of fashion journalism contextualizes a conservative industry focused on maintaining the vanity, insincerity and spectacle of fashion as a consumable image. The press

²⁰⁵ McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, 152.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 172 and 173-174.

treatment of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic,’ however, complicates and identifies the weaknesses of her argument when applied to fashion reporting by the news media. Press treatment of the two trends embodies the complex role fashion plays in consumer society and the construction of intersecting identities at both the macro and micro levels. The imagery of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ is inspired by the social, political, and economic landscapes shaping contemporary visual culture. News coverage of the two trends acknowledges, though at times indirectly or even accidentally, fashion’s cultural power in not only shaping the politics of representation, but also in providing the examples, narratives and symbolism constructing the necessary discursive schemas for consumers to navigate social change, a complex process of mediation in which journalists are active participants and contributors.

Escapist Fashion in the Age of Revolutionary Social Change

Although the relatively minimal press coverage of ‘homeless chic’ is significantly disproportionate in comparison to the staggering quantity of coverage devoted to ‘heroin chic’ by the popular press, ‘homeless chic’ involves a much longer history than its fashionable ‘predecessor.’ Past examples of ‘homeless chic’ in popular culture were largely ignored by the press in reporting on the trend, and this absence worked to detach contemporary examples of ‘homeless chic’ from the expansive cultural narrative constructing the trend’s continuance in public discourse. As a discursive construct, ‘homeless chic’ gains its symbolic power and social meaning from the trend’s historical trajectory circulated and negotiated by popular culture, a dialogical element which, according to Fairclough, compels readers to, “view discourses and texts from a historical perspective, in contrast to the more usual position in language studies which would regard a text as analyzable without reference to other texts, in abstraction from its

historical context.”²⁰⁷ Although contemporary examples of lower-working-class identity appropriation are a product of the current global economic struggles, Marie Antoinette – who was cited 13 times in articles derived from the content analysis – provided one of the more predominant intertextual references utilized by the press and other cultural intermediaries to assist audiences in situating ‘homeless chic’ within a larger historical framework.

Built in 1783 and known as Hameau de la Reine, Marie Antoinette’s cottage retreat serves as a celebrated early example of ‘homeless chic’ in visual culture. Inspired by the natural philosophical orientations of Rousseau and the influence of the romantic English garden, the peasant cottage functioned for Antoinette as a form of escapism from the political atmosphere of Versailles.²⁰⁸ The contrast between the exceedingly ostentatious life at Versailles and the pastoral nature of Hameau de la Reine is visualized in writer and director Sofia Coppola’s 2006 film *Marie Antoinette*, starring Kirsten Dunst in the title role.²⁰⁹ Juxtaposed against the seemingly exhaustive daily life at Versailles, the purity of Hameau de la Reine is reinforced through the simple white linens worn by Dunst, accessorized by flower hair bands composed of grass and weeds. The cottage scenes depict Coppola’s Antoinette and her young daughter Marie Thérèse tending to the grounds of her “little village” complete with lambs, swans, chickens and calves. Visiting the retreat, Antoinette’s ladies-in-waiting characterized the setting as “heaven,” praising the “beautiful” and “divine” linens while Dunst’s narration of Rousseau’s commentary on nature plays in the background. The representation of the cottage retreat in *Marie Antoinette* fittingly

²⁰⁷ Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 155.

²⁰⁸ Marie Antoinette’s Hameau de la Reine is representative of pre-Revolution era French cultural politics, where ‘simplicity’ and ‘naturalism’ were adopted as integral social values for the aristocracy. For a discussion of the aesthetic history and social influences of French gardens, see William Howard Adams, *The French Garden 1500-1800* (New York: Braziller, 1979).

²⁰⁹ Sofia Coppola, *Marie Antoinette*, directed by Sofia Coppola (2006; Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2007), DVD.

captures the idealism often framing working class farming communities as uncorrupted, pure and simplistic while ignoring the poverty and unrest occurring in French society at the time.

Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* was met with criticism following the film's debut for failing to provide an accurate historical representation of France's political climate prior to the Revolution.²¹⁰ Coppola's cinematic Antoinette functions metaphorically to symbolize the current ambivalence of contemporary society in regards to socioeconomic discrepancies by not explicitly addressing politics. The film serves as an example representing elite personalities appropriating working-class identities to assist in the continuous negotiation of cultural politics at a time of drastic social change, a process of identity construction central to contemporary discourses of 'homeless chic' in consumer society.

Captured on location at Versailles, a prominent scene in the film features a montage set to "I Want Candy" by Bow Wow Wow, in which Dunst is presented with a variety of conspicuous fabrics, shoes, treats, jewelry, hair products and alcohol in eye-catching colours of bright pinks, blues, yellows and purples.²¹¹ Birthday parties with Chinese acrobats as entertainment, masked balls, and coronation celebrations marked with lavishly designed pastries, champagne and fireworks convey the affluence of palace life. These scenes of ostentatious materialism are particularly distinguished by the film's soundtrack consisting of new age and post-punk artists including New Order and Gang of Four, bands representative of a particular temporal period of British music responding to the disaffection, anomie and discrimination experienced by working-

²¹⁰ *Marie Antoinette* was the third and final film in Coppola's series addressing female alienation, following *The Virgin Suicides* and *Lost in Translation*.

²¹¹ For a critical deconstruction of the use of fashion in Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, please refer to Heidi Brevik-Zender, "Let Them Wear Monolos: Fashion, Walter Benjamin, and Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*," *Camera Obscura* 26:3 (2011): 1-33, and Diana Diamond, "Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*: Costumes, Girl Power, and Feminism," in *Fashion in Film*, ed. Munich, 203-231.

class youth. Gang of Four's "Natural's Not in It," from their debut 1979 album *Entertainment!*, begins the film, with the opening credits displayed in a vibrant pink font against a black screen. Alongside cutaways to Dunst's Antoinette leisurely daydreaming, the lyrics of, "The problem of leisure/What to do for pleasure/The body is good business/Sell out, maintain the interest/Ideal love a new purchase/A market of the senses/Dream of the perfect life/Economic circumstances/Ideal love a new purchase/A market of the senses" emphasize the contrast between the baroque aesthetics of the film and the socio-political dynamics inspiring the post-punk movement. The opening minutes of the film introduces the audience to the negotiation of the themes of leisure, waste and conspicuous consumption central to not only Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, but also the cultural contradictions defining the trend of 'homeless chic.'²¹²

The whimsical Bow Wow Wow montage further evokes the juxtaposition of aesthetics through the calculated positioning of a pair of distressed black-and-white Converse high-top sneakers placed amidst 'historical' period-piece costume footwear. The footwear featured in *Marie Antoinette* were designed personally for the film by esteemed shoe designer Manolo Blahnik, who rose to a level of mass popularity in consumer culture due to consistent referencing by the characters of the iconic HBO television program *Sex and the City*.²¹³ A commodity with an extensive history dating back to 1917, Heidi Brevik-Zender argues that the deliberate placement of the Converse high-top sneaker amongst footwear designed in the present, yet coded as historically realistic by the visuals of Coppola's film, enables the director to "[confuse] the very notions of old and new through her sartorial choices."²¹⁴ The placement of the clearly

²¹² Coppola, *Marie Antoinette*, 2006.

²¹³ Brevik-Zender, "Let Them Wear Manolos," 13. See also Guy Trebay, "In His Shoes," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2011, ST1, for a discussion on the relationship between Manolo Blahnik and *Sex and the City*.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

distressed Converse sneaker in this scene, however, adds an additional layer of class-based escapism to the film for contemporary audiences. The shoe is decontextualized in *Marie Antoinette* from its original environment to signify a lifestyle of authenticity naturalizing class-based identity politics in order to signify an idealized representation of the aesthetics traditionally associated with poverty. While the film received negative reviews from critics who felt *Marie Antoinette* resembled more of a shallow and materialistic music video, Coppola's visualization of the peasant farm and her resignification of fashionable commodities symbolize the emergence of a new media of escapism in the form of slumming.

Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* is just one of numerous examples within the last two decades that exemplifies the growing fascination with the polarizing historical figure within popular culture. The trend sparked in the early 1990s after Madonna embodied Marie Antoinette's distinctive fashion identity during her performance at the 1990 MTV Video Music Awards.²¹⁵ Prior to Madonna's performance, however, Galliano – a pivotal figure in the cultural discourse of homeless chic – drew influence from this period of revolutionary French society in his 1984 graduation collection from London's prestigious Central Saint Martins School of Art.²¹⁶ Entitled "Les Incroyables," Galliano's collection attained the necessary critical and commercial acclaim for the emerging designer to solidify his status within the fashion industry. Browns, an exclusive London designer boutique, purchased his Revolution-themed graduation collection from Central Saint Martins School of Art for its display window.²¹⁷ As creative director for Christian Dior, Galliano would later revisit the theme of French society in his Autumn/Winter 2000-2011 haute

²¹⁵ Jess Cartner-Morley, "Guillotine Chic a Slice of Excess," *The Age*, last modified January 29, 2006, accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/fashion/guillotine-chic-a-slice-of-excess/2006/01/28/1138319489792.html>.

²¹⁶ Brenda Polan and Roger Tredre, "John Galliano," in *The Great Fashion Designers* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), 211.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

couture collection, “Masquerade and Bondage.”²¹⁸ The collection included Galliano’s “Marie Antoinette” dress, which *Women’s Wear Daily* described as “lavishly embroidered with prettily rendered guillotine imagery.”²¹⁹ Complete with a corset embellished with a row of intricate lace bows vertically lining the bodice and a grandiose skirt emphasized by a ruched petticoat, the panels of Galliano’s dress incorporated portraits of the Queen’s life, including one image of Antoinette, as described by Caroline Weber, “in her notorious faux shepherdess’s garb – a frilly little apron tied over a pastel frock, a decorative staff wound with streaming pink ribbons, an a mile-high hairdo obviously ill suited to the tending of livestock.”²²⁰

The framing of Marie Antoinette as symbolic of the continuous negotiation over identity politics in consumer society helped construct a discursive schema for the press to categorize the mediation of taste, fashion and conspicuous waste central to the representations of ‘homeless chic’ as a fashion trend. Criticizing Christian Dior’s ‘trailer park trash’ handbag, embellished with rustic car parts inscribed with the couture house’s label and available for purchase at a cost of approximately \$2,000 – an accessory praised by Valli Herman-Cohen of the *Los Angeles Times* for poignantly visualizing “the trappings of lower-class America”²²¹ – Jeet Heer of the *National Post* accounted for the handbag’s popularity as a further example of the trend initiated by Antoinette:

The historical roots of trailer trash fashion can be found in the 18th century, when aristocrats such as French queen Marie Antoinette would occasionally dress as poor peasants. As British historian Emily Brooks notes, Antoinette set up a small farm where she could

²¹⁸ Galliano’s “Masquerade and Bondage” haute couture collection for Christian Dior is also notable as it was the predecessor to his “Derelict” homeless fashion line.

²¹⁹ “Party Town,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, July 10, 2000, 6.

²²⁰ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2006), 1.

²²¹ Valli Herman Cohen, “The Key to Life? It’s in a Handbag,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2002.

pretend to be a milkmaid. After the queen draped her cows ‘with fine scarves and doused them with perfume, she would use their milk to make butter and cream – in the finest Sevres bowls,’ Brooks observes. ‘It all left a nasty taste in the mouth of her detractors. There were too many French villages that did not need to fantasize about poverty, after all.’²²²

Writing in *The New York Times*, Maureen Dowd similarly alludes to Marie Antoinette’s passion for her cottage retreat and its social and political consequences in her negative review of Galliano’s ‘homeless chic’ collection, observing, “When Marie Antoinette dressed up like a shepherdess, there was a glint of the guillotine.”²²³ William Norwich, a former contributing editor at *Vogue*, reinforced the discursive prominence of the historical figure in *The New York Times*, writing, “[I]ike Marie Antoinette la-di-da [...] fashion has always had a remarkable talent to annoy.”²²⁴ When news reports shifted to detailing the social consequences of the economic recession during the period of 2008-2012, the schema of Marie Antoinette was similarly induced to illustrate how the ostentatious display of wealth during times of financial hardship was considered in bad taste, illustrated in the discussion of conspicuous consumption’s newfound inelegance by Alex Williams in *The New York Times*, who argued, “bejewelled fashionistas are pegged as tone-deaf Marie Antoinettes,”²²⁵ and in the newspaper’s analyses on the problematic marketing challenges faced by luxury goods advertisers upon the continued effect of the recession on tourism.²²⁶ Marie Antoinette remains an integral discursive script framing

²²² Jeet Heer, “The High Price of Cheap: A US\$2000 Christian Dior Purse is the Latest Accessory for the Rich who Wish to Purloin the Authenticity of the Poor. It’s Something Marie Antoinette Used to Do,” *National Post*, February 6, 2002, B01.

²²³ Maureen Dowd, “Haute Homeless,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2000, 15.

²²⁴ William Norwich, “A Talent to Annoy,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2003, 45.

²²⁵ Alex Williams, “In Hard Times, No More Fancy Pants,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 2008, ST1.

²²⁶ Jane L. Levere, “2 Hoteliers Form Partnerships to Enhance Luxury Image,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 2011, 3.

discussions of homeless chic, with the historical figure often alluded to by the press in order to ground the trend within the paradox of decadence and disparity.

As the former style editor to *The Washington Post*, Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic Givhan's characterization of contemporary 'ugly' fashion as, "yet another chapter in the book of slumming,"²²⁷ refers to a second commonly cited example of cultural appropriation exhibiting discursive similarities to Antoinette's peasant retreat. Referred to as slumming parties, the activity involved wealthy individuals from predominantly Protestant, upper-middle-class neighbourhoods of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles visiting the city's marginalized working-class communities composed largely of sexual and visual minorities including Chinese and Jewish immigrants, and African Americans.²²⁸ American cultural historian Chad Heap writes that slumming involved the literal invasion of these communities by wealthy white individuals to experience how the 'other' lived. Slumming participants would often pose as figures of authority, such as social workers, health inspectors and religious officials, in order to gain entrance into such communities, ultimately searching for the adventure of experiencing a police raid.²²⁹ The activity quickly experienced the processes of commodification and commercialization with the establishment of promotional material, guided tours and the integration of slumming into successive plays, musicals and films.²³⁰ The popularity of this form of entertainment, alongside other developing media at the time including vaudeville, circuses, world fairs and motion pictures, coincided with sweeping socioeconomic changes in American

²²⁷ Givhan, "Ugly Chic," in *No Sweat*, 265.

²²⁸ See Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1-22; Robert M. Dowling, *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 1-18; Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1-15.

²²⁹ Heap, *Slumming*, 44-50.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-149.

society. Mass immigration and the formation of new ethnic communities characterized by Italian, Chinese and Irish descent introduced modern suspicions of internal ‘otherness’ into the socio-political dynamic of the American nation.²³¹ Slumming as an early example of ‘homeless chic’ signifies the intrinsic racial, social, economic and political aspects of American popular culture. It functions to naturalize the early symbolic conventions produced by the continuously intensifying capitalist system enabling ‘homeless chic’ to emerge as a cultural representation in consumer society.

The identity of slumming as a cultural practice altered during the 1930s, reflective of the economic crisis stemming from the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression of the following decade. The activity developed into a fundraising opportunity for wealthy individuals to raise charity and social awareness for victims of economic depression through holding ‘poverty balls,’ a form of entertainment referenced in E.L. Doctorow’s 1975 historical novel *Ragtime*,²³² and a later source of artistic stimulation for Galliano and his work at Christian Dior. Dining halls and banquet rooms were transformed into scenes of decomposition, where an affiliated downtrodden dress code was required for invited guests to help achieve a sense of realism in this hyper-real slum simulation. The frequency of slumming as a cultural activity declined in popularity in the post-Second World War context. The development of new highly exclusionary subdivisions composed of middle-class Caucasian families, the introduction of radio and television into the private domestic setting of the home, racially-motivated violence in identifiably ethnic communities and stricter policing of inter-community mingling are identified

²³¹ Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, “American Mass Culture Takes Form,” in *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14-46.

²³² E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Random House, 1975), 40.

as consequential factors diminishing the cultural value of slumming as a form of entertainment.²³³

While the activity's cultural presence may not be as apparent today as during its historical roots, slumming as a social phenomenon continues to display political and economic significance by constructing the boundaries through which consumer society produces, distributes and reinforces the imagery and conventions of 'homeless chic.'²³⁴ In her discussion of 'poor chic,' Halnon's conceptualization of the trend finds parallels with the larger historical discussion of slumming, as she integrates Zygmunt Bauman's²³⁵ philosophical notion of 'tourists and vagabonds' to argue that the consumption of established signifiers of poverty functions as a perverse form of lifestyle consumption for middle class audiences, who are privileged with the opportunity to temporarily 'retreat' in material scarcity.²³⁶ With the escalating global class divide fostered by the inequitable division of wealth, Bauman terms those individuals representative of a desired class status as 'tourists' who are afforded the luxury of spatial movement, and whose identity is deemed flexible in contrast to the constrained identity of the vagabond as a 'flawed consumer.'

²³³ Heap, *Slumming*, 277-282.

²³⁴ 'Slum Touring' continues to be a popular practice in cities such as Mexico City, Mumbai, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, and New Delhi. 'Slum tourism' is argued to help strengthen local economies by attracting visitors from the United States, Canada, Europe and Japan. For the reasons why slumming turned into a transnational activity, see *Ibid.*, 277-286. For an opinion-piece documenting the experience of growing up in an area featured on a 'slum tour', refer to Kennedy Odede, "Slumdog Tourism," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2010, 25. See also Michael Glawogger's 2006 film, *Slumming*, where two wealthy young professionals enter the Czech Republic and abandon an intoxicated vagabond. For a discussion on the class critique and other social themes reflected in Glawogger's work, see Nicolas Rapold, "A World of Troubled Beauty: A Look Inside the Films of Michael Glawogger," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2012, AR14.

²³⁵ Bauman, "Tourists and Vagabonds: Or, Living in Postmodern Times," in *Identity and Social Change*, ed. Davis, 13-26.

²³⁶ Halnon, "Poor Chic," 505-508.

The irony is, though, the life of the tourist would not be half as enjoyable as it is if there were no vagabonds around to demonstrate what the alternative to that life – the sole alternative that consumer society renders realistic – is like. Tourist life is not a bed of roses, and the roses most likely to be found there have thorns. There are many hardships one needs to suffer for the sake of tourist freedoms: the impossibility of slowing down, the uncertainty surrounding every choice, and the risks attached to every decision most prominent among them [...] And so, paradoxically, the tourist's life is all the more bearable, even enjoyable, for being haunted by the nightmarish alternative of the vagabond's existence [...] Were there no vagabonds, the tourists would need to reinvent them. The consumer society needs both. They are bound together by a Gordian knot no one seems able to know how to untie and no one seems to have a sword to cut. So we go on moving, the tourists and the vagabonds, the half-tourists and the half-vagabonds that we have become in the postmodern society of lifestyle consumption.²³⁷

Halnon's perspective of 'poor chic' as representative of Bauman's dichotomy of tourist and vagabond permits the middle-class consumer to assume a false sense of control and power over the larger social conditions influencing and, in some cases, dictating their class positioning, where "one can take charge, dominate the alter ego by displaying discretionary power to occupy and vacate poverty."²³⁸ The occupation of poverty that is central to Halnon's discussion of 'poor chic' evokes similar discourses to the experiences of slumming, where the form of entertainment functioned as a commodity.

In the same vein to his reference of Marie Antoinette's peasant retreat, Heer refers to Christian Dior's "trailer purse" in the *National Post* as a continuation of slumming, arguing, "Another example of the wealthy aping the fashions of the poor was in late-19th-century New York, when members of high society would dress like tramps and go 'slumming' in the poor sections of the city."²³⁹ The popularity of Christian Dior's trailer park collection preceded the

²³⁷ Bauman, "Tourists and Vagabonds," 25-26.

²³⁸ Halnon, "Poor Chic," 508.

²³⁹ Heer, "High Price of Cheap," B01.

December 2003 debut of *The Simple Life*, a reality television program aired on the Fox Network and E! cable channels from 2003 until 2007. *The Simple Life* featured socialites Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie leaving their hometown of Los Angeles to gain work experience in various low-paying occupations that included shifts as hotel maids and fast food workers in small American towns, such as Altus, Alabama, while stripped of their cell phones, credit cards, and other class-based lifestyle conveniences.²⁴⁰ The entertainment value of *The Simple Life* derives from the program's depiction of labour and work ethics. The advantaged backgrounds of Hilton and Richie are upheld despite their failed attempts to gain employment experience; while the 'stars' of *The Simple Life* appear no more intelligent than the 'white trash' individuals featured on the program, their inheritance enables the pair to never have to 'work,' and it is this crucial distinguishing factor that characterizes *The Simple Life* within the discourse of slumming. Heather Henderson argues the program bluntly "manifests the shaky foundations of the American myth of class mobility," through spotlighting the industrious lower-class workers Hilton and Richie meet during the show,²⁴¹ yet the reality program functions in a similar manner to Christian Dior's 'trailer park' purse. Both examples of cultural appropriation represent opportunities for consumers to 'tour' various mediations of identity politics.

Despite the historical relevancy of slumming to contemporary discourses of 'homeless chic,' the cultural activity was only referenced in 13 articles derived from the sample. While this number represents less than 3 percent of newspaper coverage on the subversive fashion trends collected by the sample, the lack of press attention addressing the connections between 'homeless chic' and slumming, an aspect illuminated by the content analysis, is notable since it

²⁴⁰ Heather Henderson, "Belabored Reality: Making It Work on *The Simple Life* and *Project Runway*," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 243-259.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

represents a larger problematic issue with cultural criticism of ‘homeless chic’ – the inability of the press to connect discourses of cultural appropriation to their larger historical narrative. The symbolic significance of slumming depends on fulfilling an entertainment value through the desire and subsequent consumption of the internal other, and, conversely, reaffirming established upper-middle-class ideological values of ‘respectability.’ ‘Poor chic,’ vagabond tourism and slumming represent the paradox of mass culture’s imperialistic power to ease social anxieties through cultural appropriation, a complex political struggle that hooks appropriately distinguishes as the “intensification of opportunistic materialism.”²⁴²

Commercializing Marginalized Identities: ‘Heroin Chic’

The cultural appeal, desire and aversion embedded within slumming as a media attraction signifies the central paradox defining the internal other of American society represented by popular culture. The characteristics and conventions of slumming as a genre of entertainment, however, are reciprocated in ‘heroin chic,’ a trend escalating in the early 1990s that functioned as a precursor to the proliferation of ‘homeless chic’ examples in the fashion industry. Popularized by Calvin Klein’s advertising campaigns and Corinne Day’s photographs in *Vogue* featuring a young Kate Moss posed as an emaciated drug addict, contextualizing ‘heroin chic’ is necessary to understand the existing cultural currency of ‘homeless chic’ fashion. The visualization of ‘heroin chic’ through various media laid the semiotic foundations and intertextual references for ‘homeless chic’ to emerge into the forefront of popular culture in subsequent decades, and the mass hysteria surrounding the trend consequently resulted in the muted attention ‘homeless chic’ received from the press.

²⁴² bell hooks, “Spending Culture,” 171.

Discussed in 293 articles collected by the sample, ‘heroin chic’ first appeared in popular discourse in May of 1994 in an article by Kim Masters that was published in *The Washington Post*.²⁴³ Masters examined the deadly consequences of heroin addiction as experienced by influential musicians and actors after the suicide of Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain.²⁴⁴ With *The New York Times* proclaiming that the “re-glamorization of heroin is now appearing everywhere, from alternative music to the fashion runways,” ‘heroin chic’ enjoyed cultural prominence throughout the 1990s after receiving considerable media attention through depictions of drug use in films iconic of the decade, such as *Trainspotting*, *The Basketball Diaries*, *Drugstore Cowboy*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Pulp Fiction*, and news reports of accidental overdoses by prominent media celebrities and personalities including Cobain, actor River Phoenix, and Smashing Pumpkins’ member Jonathan Melvoin.²⁴⁵ Of the first 20 articles comprising the sample until the reporting of the heroin-overdose accidental death of photographer Davide Sorrenti in May 1997, 17 reports approached a discussion of drug culture through the frame of its negative social influence. Responding to the proliferation of the ‘junkie’ aesthetic in fashion and enforced through both film and television, New York City-based stylist Amee Simmons noted a rise in filmmakers’ demands for costume pieces resembling designer Helmut Lang’s “morning-after-a-rough-night-style.”²⁴⁶ Elaborating on this trend identified by Simmons, Givhan argues,

²⁴³ An earlier article published on July 13, 1986 by Mick Brown of *The Sunday Times*, entitled, “The Habit The Goes With Hits: Pop Stars and Drugs,” first referred to the drug dependence among the musicians Boy George, Eric Lapton and Keith Richards as ‘heroin chic.’ However, as *The Sunday Times* is not part of this study’s sample, the first instance of ‘heroin chic’ appearing within the parameters of the sample is in the *Washington Post*.

²⁴⁴ Kim Masters, “Smack Dabbling: A New Wave of Heroin Users Is Finding It Chic. And Deadly,” *Washington Post*, May 1, 1994, F01.

²⁴⁵ Trip Gabriel, “Fast-Lane Killer: Heroin Finds a New Market Along Cutting Edge of Style,” *The New York Times*, May 8, 1994, 1.

²⁴⁶ Givhan, “Dark-Eyed Junkie New Fashion Icon of ‘90s Nihilism,” *Toronto Star*, August 1, 1996, B2.

“[f]ashion didn’t conjure up the look of zoned-out kids. The days when fashion could single handedly create an aesthetic are long gone. Instead, designers have dutifully absorbed it, copied it from the street, from the addicts themselves. They cleaned it up. Validated it. And now they’re selling it.”²⁴⁷ The commercialization of heroin addiction in the 1990s contributed to the development of a moral panic regarding drug use in America, escalated by the ready availability of addictive substances at decreasing prices combined with the developing hysteria regarding AIDS and unsafe needle injections.²⁴⁸

A framing device representing approximately 25 percent of the commentaries on ‘heroin chic,’ the content analysis exposes that early reports on the cultural popularity of heroin addiction emphasized the symbolic power of media personalities, artists, musicians and celebrities in bringing heroin to the forefront of cultural debate, constructing figures such as Cobain and Phoenix as discursive opinion leaders in approaching the topic. After Cobain was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound with traces of heroin later identified in his blood system, early obituaries of the Nirvana lead singer painted Cobain as a passive individual lacking agency over his addictions, instead framing his death within the larger discursive construct of musicians suffering from substance abuse. Multiple reports cited Cobain’s mother, Wendy O’Connor, proclaiming, “Now he’s gone and joined that stupid club,” in reference to the untimely deaths of other popular singers and musicians as a result of substance abuse, including Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin.²⁴⁹ *The Globe and Mail* enforced this discursive construct by citing Brion Martin, a 23-year old aspiring musician, who remarked, “In the ‘60s

²⁴⁷ Givhan, “Dark-Eyed Junkie,” B2.

²⁴⁸ Bryan E. Denham, “Folk Devils, News Icons and the Construction of Moral Panics,” *Journalism Studies* 9:6 (2008): 945-961.

²⁴⁹ Timothy Egan, “Kurt Cobain, Hesitant Poet of ‘Grunge Rock,’ Dead at 27,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1994, 1.

this happened to Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison. This is our generation's turn."²⁵⁰ Writing on the sociological consequences of heroin addiction, Kim Mathers writes, "As it has in generations past, and despite a tragic legacy, heroin has made its way into the recreational repertoire of a variety of creative artists. It has been cool among the fast young Hollywood crowd for a few years."²⁵¹ This discursive schema helps readers place the trend of 'heroin chic' within the realm of popular culture and celebrity influence, providing the situational context for the press to approach a discussion on fashion, drug addiction, identity politics and visual culture in consumer society.

While celebrities were credited with playing an active role in glamourizing heroin as a popular culture phenomenon, the press naturalized this existing discursive schema through the strategic incorporation of authoritative sources from the medical and legal professions. While approximately 25 percent of the articles composing the sample relied on the referencing of celebrities to support their narrative, only 8 percent of 'heroin chic' coverage included mention of political, social, legal and medical figures. As opposed to identifying possible social, political or economic influences perpetuating the trend, the press instead isolated 'heroin chic' as a trend detached from any social influence, emerging into public discourse solely based on the cultural presence of its celebrity users. In *The New York Times*, Trip Gabriel cited Peter Bill, the son of director Tony Bill of the Academy-Award winning film, *The Sting*, who characterized the predominance of heroin among the Hollywood party scene as, "It's exploding [...] At just about every party I've been at in the last six months, whether public or private, whether early or late,

²⁵⁰ "Kurt Cobain: Nirvana's Lead Singer Spoke to a Generation's Pain," *The Globe and Mail*, April 9, 1994, C3.

²⁵¹ Mathers, "Smack Dabbling," F01.

there is a definite bitter almond smell.”²⁵² The enduring attraction associated with heroin is similarly utilized by Mathers, who writes, “Not that it ever left us – but for two decades it kept to its corner, flowing mostly into the veins of a few hundred thousand long-term urban users.”²⁵³ The personalization of heroin in Mather’s report is further enforced by Jared of the band Chemlab, who remarks to Mathers, “You’d be surprised how pervasive it is [...] It’s very chic now.”²⁵⁴ Arguing that the “conditions are right” for heroin to emerge as a new social phenomenon similar to cocaine in the 1970s and 1980s, Mark Kleiman, an associate professor in public policy at Harvard University, continued the theme of personalization and natural progression: “If she don’t rain, she’s sure missing a good chance.”²⁵⁵ The sourcing of Kleiman by Mathers represents a significant trend in the press coverage of ‘heroin chic,’ where accredited individuals were sourced by reporters to comment passively on the drug’s social significance within the spectacular context of celebrity culture and popular culture rather than identifying the social, politics, and economic factors increasing prevalence of heroin use in public discourse. As a narcotic investigator for the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Office, Detective Dave Valentine told *The New York Times*, “[i]t’s one of those things that never actually went away but for some reason it’s back as the hip thing to do.”²⁵⁶ Dr. Robert D. Millman, New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center’s director of substance abuse programming, echoed a similar rhetorical positioning to *The New York Times*, noting, “In the last year there has been a remarkable increase in the number of people who are doing heroin in the middle and upper classes,” with the paper detailing that “his programs have treated a feature film director, a partner in a corporate law firm, a famous model

²⁵² Gabriel, “Fast-Lane Killer,” 1.

²⁵³ Mathers, “Smack Dabbling,” F01.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Gabriel, “Fast-Lane Killer,” 1.

and a fashion designer.”²⁵⁷ An advisor to the Bush administration’s anti-drug policies, Columbia University’s Dr. Herbert D. Kleber vilified the news media for the increasing abuse of heroin in American society, arguing “To talk about it as chic is a come-on, which got us into so much trouble with cocaine.”²⁵⁸ In *The Wall Street Journal*, Dr. David E. Smith, president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine and founder of San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic, commented on the cyclical history of heroin, suggesting its re-emergence in cultural politics was not a cause for concern: “We see this every decade [...] There’s a form of generational forgetting. You’d think they’d remember, but they think they just discovered heroin. It’s in the early romantic phrase.”²⁵⁹ The sourcing of representatives from law enforcement and medical professionals functions to enforce a discussion of heroin within the realm of celebrity and popular culture, maintaining a symbolic boundary between reality and the allure of the cultural industries.

The organic qualities associated with heroin as suggested by the sourced commentary in *The New York Times* was often utilized by the press as a rhetorical device in reporting on the ‘heroin chic’ trend within the fashion industry. With heroin having “crossed over from the drug demimonde to the haut monde of art, fashion and Wall Street,”²⁶⁰ Givhan in the *Toronto Star* referred to the blossoming trend of ‘heroin chic’ as another example of how “fashion has gotten high on a bewildering variety of statements [...] now, in the late ‘90s, there are some new addictions.”²⁶¹ While the revival of heroin chic was viewed as a cultural reaction to the gluttonous associations iconic of the 1980s, the trend possessed considerable resilience

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Marilyn Chase, “Doctors Puncture Myths Used to Justify Growing Heroin Use,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 26, 1996, B1.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Givhan, “Dark-Eyed Junkie,” B2.

throughout the decade, despite numerous attempts by fashion insiders to alter the visual discourses of the industry's imagery. The moral panic of the trend was most noticeably articulated through public discourse condemning the "waif" body image of fashion models, a theme reflected in just under 20 percent of 'heroin chic' coverage derived from the content analysis. In September 1994, Amy Spindler of *The New York Times* reported that numerous insider figures, such as *Vogue's* editor-in chief Wintour and Neiman Marcus fashion director Joan Kaner, lobbied designers to embrace more glamorous looks in their fall collections. Celebrating that fashion has discarded the 'strung-out' and 'unkempt' characteristics defining the waif look so predominantly associated with 'heroin chic' by the press, Spindler writes:

There is no Yalta summit of fashion's heads of state. Considering what a big business fashion is, and how much money can be wasted when things go wrong, the industry is frighteningly haphazard. That's why so few fashion houses can successfully go public. Fashion, with its meandering course and dependence on fickle customers with fluctuating bank accounts, doesn't tolerate the sort of business plans that make other industries more predictable and bankable. But a year ago, a frail, washed-out creature called the waif almost did fashion in. And in what may give conspiracy theorists a sense of satisfaction, magazine editors, certain designers and retailers joined forces like characters in an Agatha Christie novel to deal a blow to the waif, whom most magazine readers and store customers had rejected. This is a story of the conspiracy last March to haul fashion away from a look that wasn't selling clothes or makeup. In its place is glamour, which has been interpreted as everything from 1940's Marlene Dietrich to 1970's Bianca Jagger. It explains why the model Kate Moss, in her usual position reigning over Times Square in a Calvin Klein jeans billboard, suddenly looks a lot less like last year's waif and a lot more like Patti Hansen circa 1978.²⁶²

Designers including Galliano and Marc Jacobs, with the former receiving significant assistance from Wintour in gaining the required financial capital to continue his prominent position as a fashion runway fixture, responded to the wishes of magazine editors by designing and styling

²⁶² Spindler, "How Fashion Killed the Unloved Waif," 13.

collections evoking an aura of ‘opulence’ inspired by the works of influential 1970s photographer Helmut Newton. As their pieces corresponded with the desires of influential media and publishing figures in the fashion industry both collections received substantial press coverage in magazines, such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, and were allotted privileged retail space in luxury department stores including Bloomingdales and Neiman Marcus.²⁶³

The success of this lobbying campaign, however, was short-lived. Spindler later reported on the consistent presence and maturation of the ‘heroin chic’ look, noting in *The New York Times* in May 1996 that:

Other fashion references have faded away, be they punk, mainline Philadelphia or monastic austerity. The heroin-addict look, evolving from grunge to the waif to its latest manifestation, has had the tenacity in fashion, of, well, an addiction. Despite fashion’s habit of moving on once a look goes mainstream, the heroin-addict aesthetic is the look that just won’t go away. It’s on runways and in magazines, most recently featuring messy knotted hair and the clammy skin [...] It has replaced the outdated model’s hauteur, which comes from imposing beauty, with the contemporary vision of detachment.²⁶⁴

Spindler draws upon commentary from Gucci’s creative director Tom Ford, who accounts for the cultural endurance of ‘heroin chic’ due to fashion’s intrinsic ability to transform boredom into something, “cool [...] the goal is to look like you’ve seen everything, done everything, been everywhere. It’s an intimidating look, and the drug thing is a continuation of all that. If you look like you’ve been up all night, it conjures up all these images in your head.”²⁶⁵ In addition to a wide array of popular culture examples, such as the critical success of the films *Trainspotting* and *Kids* and the musical *Rent*, the semiotic conventions of ‘heroin chic’ continued their prominence in fashion imagery, with Spindler citing examples such as the advertising campaign

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Spindler, “The 90’s Version of the Decadent Look,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1996, 20.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

of German designer Jil Sander which featured model Guinevere van Seenus with a rolled-up sleeve implying potential narcotic use, the actress Chloe Sevigny of *Kids* fronting Miu Miu's advertising campaign, and a Matsudo billboard with the lead model displaying notable scarring and bruising along the insides of her arms.²⁶⁶

While she previously reported the rejection of 'heroin chic' by designers and industry figures, Spindler maintains that 'heroin chic' remained a prominent fixture due to the trend's naturalization into a lifestyle diminishing the shock value and controversial panic initially stigmatizing the trend as a countercultural discourse. Arguing that visualizing the effects of heroin addiction have become an aesthetic as opposed to a social phenomenon, Barney's creative director Simon Doonan noted to Spindler that, "At this point people may be immune to it to a certain extent [...] What had the druggy frisson may not anymore, because people have habituated to those type of images. That's what fashion photography has become."²⁶⁷ Doonan's commentary, supported by photographer Steven Meisel defending his work as devoid of any reference to drug culture, led Spindler to suggest that "fashion is, to use a rehab word, in denial."²⁶⁸ Designer Donatella Versace evoked a similar rhetorical statement, arguing the intentionally styled models mediating a frazzled appearance for her runway performances and advertisements symbolized an urban adolescent as opposed to a heroin addict. Versace's reiteration that the tenacity of the grunge styling of 'heroin chic' is an urban lifestyle as opposed to an appropriation of countercultural identities finds support in the commentary of magazine publisher Riley John-Donnell, who argues, "clammy and sweaty is what someone can look like in their apartment in New York. A lot of these images are domestic, sitting in apartments, sitting

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

on couches. It makes fashion more accessible [...] What you're calling a heroin look we're calling a real look."²⁶⁹ The commentary of Doonan, Versace and John-Donnell differentiates their designs and opinions from the realm of controversy 'heroin chic' initially garnered, yet the lifestyle alluded to in their remarks is not the result of society's acceptance of the imagery of 'heroin chic,' but rather signifies fashion's evolving aesthetic facilitated by the new cultural power of the fashion photographer.

The visual conventions of 'heroin chic' would not have resonated so deeply with the cultural politic of North American consumer society if not for the work of emerging photographers such as Corinne Day, Juergen Teller, Craig McDean, Mario Sorrenti and David Sims. A prevalent example drawn from the content analysis, the role of the fashion photographer was a recurring theme referenced in approximately 15 percent of the newspaper articles comprising the sample. This period of controversial artistic creation helped elevate the credibility of fashion photography from a medium once viewed as purely commercial into an aesthetic noteworthy of critical attention, a transformation apparent within both alternative publications, such as Britain's *The Face*, and mainstream 'glossy' magazines including *Vogue*, *Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Teller's photograph of Kristen McMenamy in the German magazine *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, in addition to Day's images of Kate Moss in *The Face* and British *Vogue* are repeatedly cited as especially iconic of the decade. In particular, the image of McMenamy naked and crawling on the floor of an industrial backdrop, chaffing highly visible in contrast to her pale skin is condemned by Holly Brubach as the "work of a lone terrorist" and unrepresentative of fashion photography's general aesthetic,²⁷⁰ a discursive frame similar to the 'lone wolf' phrase utilized in Western news reports of terrorist attacks. Photographer Dewey

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Holly Brubach, "Beyond Shocking," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1997, 24.

Nicks compared ‘heroin chic’ to a pair of designer shoes, since the trend has “been used as an accessory in every shoot [...] It’s the Manolo Blahniks of this particular period.”²⁷¹ The social significance of ‘heroin chic’ photography is argued by Harold offer an opportunity for audiences to critically question the negotiation of Western ideological notions surrounding realism, morality and the body central to the work of Teller, Day and other ‘heroin chic’ photographers.²⁷² While Harold dismisses the trend’s social significance and continuance, her analysis does not adequately place the photography within both an historical narrative and the continuously contested cultural politics of consumer society, a position best exemplified by Brubach’s reflection, “Beyond Shocking,” published in *The New York Times*:

Do images like Teller’s of McMenemy constitute yet another desperate attempt at transgression – in an industry that thrives on it, at a time when we find ourselves running out of taboos? Is the recent spate of fashion pictures in tacky, trailer-park surroundings the handiwork of spoiled young esthetes gone slumming in a white-trash wasteland? The politics and attitudes that gave rise to grunge, a fashion trend promptly scuttled by magazine editors and retailers when it became clear that the clothes would fail to sell, appear to have survived after all, sublimated in these images. But just as grunge has gone down in history as a ‘look,’ bereft of any context, the new photography is presumed to be completely superficial, as if appearances could exist without ideas. The rush to judgment has been predictable and entirely too easy, oblivious to the impetus for these images, which in many cases is a noble one: a quest for a more honest way of seeing, for a beauty that might serve as an alternative to the perfection habitually featured in magazines.²⁷³

The criticism received by ‘heroin chic’ photographers is particularly intriguing when compared to the subdued commentary following the deaths of Cobain, Phoenix and other celebrities. While these media personalities were framed by the press as passive victims of an addictive habit in

²⁷¹ Spindler, “A Death Tarnishes Fashion’s ‘Heroin Look,’” *The New York Times*, May 20, 1997, A1.

²⁷² Harold, “Tracking Heroin Chic,” 65-76.

²⁷³ Brubach, “Beyond Shocking,” 24.

which they had no direct control over, the fashion photographers of ‘heroin chic’ received a substantial amount of blame from journalists for actively strengthening the trend’s notoriety in visual culture.

Despite its overarching cultural prominence, President Bill Clinton’s public condemnation of ‘heroin chic’ following the 1997 overdose of fashion photographer Davide Sorrenti at the age of 21 symbolically denoted the trend’s demise. Captured by the headline of “Death Sparks Attack on Heroin Chic” in Britain’s *The Times* in May 1997,²⁷⁴ the content analysis demonstrates that Clinton’s public remarks on ‘heroin chic’ were cited by 30 news accounts on ‘heroin chic.’ Clinton’s condemnation of ‘heroin chic’ did not arise independently, but was sparked by Amy Spindler’s coverage of Sorrenti’s overdose in *The New York Times*.²⁷⁵ Well established in the fashion industry, Sorrenti’s family included his mother Francesca Sorrenti, known for her images in *Vogue*, brother Mario Sorrenti (photographer of Calvin Klein’s “Obsession” perfume campaign modeled by Kate Moss), and fashion stylist Vanina Sorrenti.²⁷⁶ Apart from a hastily included obituary inserted into the final pages of *Detour* following the publication of the young photographer’s last fashion images, coverage of his death in February 1997 remained minimal within the industry, with Spindler arguing, “[t]he eerie silence in the fashion industry immediately following Mr. Sorrenti’s death may have reflected a sense of complicity. By publishing such photos, magazine editors could be seen as implicitly condoning the life style represented.”²⁷⁷ Spindler instead uses Sorrenti’s death to comment upon the trend in

²⁷⁴ Bronwen Maddox, “Death Sparks Attach on ‘Heroin Chic,’” *The Times*, May 22, 1997, 16.

²⁷⁵ Spindler, “Death Tarnishes Fashion’s ‘Heroin Look,’” A1. The same article, with Canadian commentary added by Alexandra Gill, was published under the title, “Magazines Kick Junkie Habit: A Fatal Overdose Has Underscored the Link between a Taste for Heroin-Chic Imagery,” in *The Globe and Mail* on May 21, 1997, E1.

²⁷⁶ Spindler, “Death Tarnishes Fashion’s ‘Heroin Look,’” A1.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

relation to the fashion industry, relying upon the expert commentary of psychiatrist and president of the drug-treatment centre Phoenix House, Dr. Mitchell Rosenthal, to highlight the glamourization of substance abuse within fashion:

Because they are in the culture of the communications business, they are communicating a message of acceptability. They are also communicating that this is not dangerous [...] This kind of campaign, for example, Calvin Klein has done is not making any connection with how dangerous this is [...] They're out there using those images to promote their business and thinking this is just another fashion statement rather than a statement of encouragement of invitation or acceptability to use drugs.²⁷⁸

Placing Sorrenti's death within the larger socioeconomic context of narcotic addiction, Dr. Rosenthal's commentary maintains the position of 'heroin chic' not only broadly within the realm of popular culture, but the fashion industry in particular, and directly acknowledges fashion as a medium of communication. Yet such commentary evokes the ambiguities argued by Wilson in *Adorned in Dreams* that has come to define fashion's social function in consumer society.²⁷⁹ While examples and visualizations of celebrities suffering from substance abuse and addiction were framed by the press as a separate reality unconnected to the conditions of drug culture in America, reports were quick to place blame specifically on the fashion industry, a tension best illustrated in Bill Clinton's reaction to 'heroin chic.'

Answering to the publication of Spindler's report on the industry reaction to Sorrenti's death, Clinton condemned the imagery of 'heroin chic' at a mayoral roundtable at the White House on illegal drugs and trafficking. While the roundtable discussed issues including prevention and treatment programs and the policy measures required to combat drug and money

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 14-15.

laundering,²⁸⁰ only Clinton's comments on the fashion industry were reported by the press, appearing in articles published in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Women's Wear Daily* and *The Washington Post*, as well as in the United Kingdom by *The Times*.²⁸¹ Rather than commenting on the social, political and economic issues debated at the mayoral roundtable, Clinton's stance on 'heroin chic' maintains the discursive power of previous expert commentators on the trend, as he similarly identified the actions of the fashion industry as the specific root of substance abuse plaguing American society. His position characterized as "a risk-free venture" by *USA Today's* Walter Shapiro, Clinton continued to voice "the role of the Good Father,"²⁸² by condemning the prevalence of drug imagery within the fashion industry, arguing in many circulated reports that:

You do not need to glamorize addiction to sell clothes. American fashion has been an enormous source of creativity and beauty and art, and frankly, economic prosperity for the United States, and we should all value and respect that. But the glorification of heroin is not creative, it's destructive. It's not beautiful, it is ugly. This is not about art, it's about life and death. And glorifying death is not good for any society.²⁸³

Women's Wear Daily quoted Clinton's correlation between the fashion industry and what he refers to as an epidemic affecting American youth:

²⁸⁰ Christopher S. Wren, "Clinton Calls Fashion Ads' 'Heroin Chic' Deplorable," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1997, 22. The inclusion of issues discussed at the roundtable did not appear in Wren's article, but rather in the abstract accompanying his work.

²⁸¹ Ibid.; Elizabeth Snead, "Clinton Criticizes Fashion Industry for Glamorizing Heroin," *USA Today*, May 22, 1997, A01; Peter Baker, "Clinton Blasts 'Glorification of Heroin' in Magazine Fashion Photo Spreads," *Washington Post*, May 22, 1997, A11; Lisa Lockwood and Joanna Ramey, "Industry Reacts to Clinton's Criticism," *Women's Wear Daily*, May 22, 1997, 3; Grace Bradberry, "Britain's Fashion Elite Rejects Blame for 'Heroin Chic,'" *The Times*, May 23, 1997, 9; Tunku Varadarajan, "Clinton's Homily on Drugs Offers American Analysts a Quick Fix," *The Times*, May 23, 1997, 9.

²⁸² Walter Shapiro, "Wheelchair Barbie Still Lives in Malibu Dreamworld," *USA Today*, May 23, 1997, A02.

²⁸³ Wren, "Clinton Calls Fashion Ads' 'Heroin Chic' Deplorable," 22.

Many of our fashion leaders are admitting flat out that images projected in fashion photos in the last few years have made heroin addiction seem glamorous and sexy and cool [...] We now see in college campuses, in neighborhoods, heroin becoming increasingly the drug of choice. And we know that part of this has to do with the images that are finding their way to you young people.²⁸⁴

While numerous figures involved in the fashion industry applauded Clinton's stance on the commercialization of addiction in popular culture – including *Daily Mail's* fashion journalist Brenda Polan,²⁸⁵ *W's* editorial director Patrick McCarthy,²⁸⁶ and *Harper Bazaar's* editor-in-chief Liz Tilberis –²⁸⁷ others criticized Clinton for turning the fashion industry into a political scapegoat to mask greater socioeconomic issues within the nation.²⁸⁸

Clinton's dismissive remarks regarding the lack of intrinsic artistic value within the imagery of 'heroin chic' sparked significant controversy within the fashion industry as reported by both fashion publications and the popular news media. While previous press coverage of 'heroin chic' contextualized the social influence of the trend by placing it within the realm of celebrity culture through reporting on the deadly narcotic addictions of actors and musicians, this

²⁸⁴ Lockwood and Ramey, "Industry Reacts," 3.

²⁸⁵ "A ragged cheer could be heard echoing around the fashion industry yesterday [when Clinton berated 'heroin chic']. President Clinton put his considerable weight behind an opinion held by many who work in fashion," Polan quoted in Arnold, *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety*, 48.

²⁸⁶ "The President's right. There is a problem, and responsible editors and fashion designers are doing something about it," McCarthy quoted in Wren, 'Clinton,' 22.

²⁸⁷ "['Heroin chic'] has been over for an awful long time now. We've had grunging and waifing, and we've moved away from it. I'm thrilled that President Clinton says anything about drugs," Tilberis as quoted in Lockwood and Ramey, "Industry Reacts," 3.

²⁸⁸ Fashion designer Marc Jacobs responded to Clinton's denunciation of 'heroin chic' as "the most ridiculous thing [...] when people start to verbalize any suspicion, other people tend to get on the bandwagon [...] Fashion isn't health care. What do you want to see? A cover of *Vogue* with someone sipping carrot juice? It's absurd." Style editor Holly Brubach of *The New York Times* was similarly quoted by *Women's Wear Daily*: "I actually think fashion is everybody's favorite target. It's a good scapegoat for a lot of things. I think that President Clinton saw in this a sort of easy vehicle to denounce drugs." For these quotes by Jacobs and Brubach and for further insider commentary and reaction to Clinton's remarks, see Lockwood and Ramey, "Industry Reacts," 3.

aspect of the trend was predominantly absent from news reports following Clinton's remarks. The press refrained from commenting on or analyzing any statistical or policy reports conducted on this supposed 'epidemic,' and instead relied solely on the commentary of magazine editors, photographers, designers, advertisers and other industry representatives. The sole exception to this discursive trend was an editorial written by Jacob Sullum, a magazine editor and syndicated newspaper columnist, that was published in *The New York Times* immediately following Clinton's mayoral roundtable. In contrast to the mass hysteria following Clinton's attitude towards the fashion industry as a result of Sorrenti's death, Sullum took a different approach towards the proliferation of drug imagery within fashion, arguing:

In reality, heroin is not "the drug of choice" by any stretch of the imagination. In the Government's 1995 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 0.1 percent of respondents reported that they had used the drug in the previous month. A nationwide study done in 1994 for the Department of Health and Human Services found about the same level of heroin use among 19- to 28-year-olds; marijuana use was 140 times as common, and alcohol was far and away the most popular intoxicant. And there is no reason to expect that people attracted to the look promoted by Calvin Klein and other advertisers – a cynical, sanitized vision of drug use that pretends to reflect a gritty reality – will also be attracted to heroin, any more than suburban teen-agers who wear baggy pants and backward caps will end up shooting people from moving cars. Nevertheless, the editors of the cutting-edge fashion magazines that helped popularize the heroin-chic look are professing repentance. "With Davide's death," said Long Nguyen, Detour's style director, "we realized how powerful fashion pictures are." And how powerful is that? Leaving aside the point that Mr. Sorrenti, as a producer of these images, can hardly be seen as an unknowing victim of their influence, it is important to keep in mind what pictures can and cannot do. Clearly, they can provoke outrage. They can also pique curiosity, create awareness and elicit a range of emotional reactions. But they cannot make anyone buy jeans or perfume, let alone take up heroin.²⁸⁹

The "repentance" of fashion magazine editors alluded to in Sullum's editorial speaks to a larger

²⁸⁹ Jacob Sullum, "Victims of Everything," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1997, A37.

theme structuring coverage of ‘heroin chic’ after Clinton’s remarks, with press coverage devoted to a discussion of the morality of fashion photographers and the complete control enjoyed by editors over the mediation of specific images within their magazines portraying a highly stereotypical representation of drug use.

Clinton’s highly public position on ‘heroin chic,’ however, coincided with the decline of the trend as a less prominent representation in visual culture, evident in the coverage of the launch of Donna Karan’s third diffusion line, D, by Bernadette Morra in the *Toronto Star* in November 1996. With its debut runway collection characterized by a notable “rough, heroin-chic kind of edge,” Morra reported on the perceived weaknesses of the designs, noting, “many complained that the collection was too derivative.”²⁹⁰ *Women’s Wear Daily* similarly reported in April 1997 that Isaac Mizrahi, a long-time critic of the grunge conventions of ‘heroin chic,’ appropriated the faded colours and fabrics emblematic of the trend to create a refined eveningwear collection. Described as his “strongest collection in years” by *Women’s Wear Daily*, the designer renowned for his unconventional yet highly glamorous designs transformed “elements of age and imperfection and recast them, not in an image of angst, but as elements of inherent grace and strength. The result was as interesting as it was beautiful.”²⁹¹ Debuting in the fall of 1997, the Spring/Summer 1998 collections at Milan Fashion Week featuring labels such as Prada, Miu Miu, Dolce and Gabbana and Giorgio Armani embraced a more feminine and romantic style, with chiffon, silk and satin fabrics, while Gucci and Versace reflected a more futuristic and authoritative look with pieces constructed out of luxurious materials including

²⁹⁰ Bernadette Morra, “Donna Karan Hits, Misses,” *Toronto Star*, November 7, 1996, H5.

²⁹¹ “The New York Beat,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, April 14, 1997, 6.

alligator leather and bold, jeweled beading.²⁹² *The New York Times* reported that “fashion’s age of reason is giving way to an age of romance,” in which the “austere jackets, sharp slim trousers and pallid makeup of the last few years are yielding to the elegant ease of languorous ankle-brushing skirts, insouciant boas, luxurious brushes of fur, delicately embroidered sweaters, rose-blushed lips and glossy hair.”²⁹³ While the morality of ‘heroin chic’ continued to be debated by the mainstream press months after Clinton’s mayoral roundtable, the *Toronto Star* was one of the first publications to refer to the trend as a past frame of reference for readers, reporting, “Forget edge, forget angst – they’re as passé as heroin chic. Suddenly, the catchword of the moment, at least as far as Miu Miu is concerned, is one even more shocking in fashion circles. It’s cute.”²⁹⁴ However, the press failed to attribute the demise of ‘heroin chic’ in visual culture to any specific reason apart from fashion’s cyclical nature.²⁹⁵ For example, during the Great Depression, flapper styles of the 1920s were replaced by feminine styles as a way to restore socially constructed notions of femininity during times of gender renegotiation. This oversight in press reporting minimized the power of the fashion industry, even though previous industry coverage of ‘heroin chic’ constructed a hypocritical narrative of the trend, blaming ‘heroin chic’ for drug overdoses, with some commentators going as far as connecting the trend’s visuality to the Columbine High School massacre in April 1991.²⁹⁶

Despite the widespread attention directed towards the issue of substance abuse in

²⁹² “Milan Shows Chic and Cheeky: Spring/Summer Collections Range from Cute to Divine,” *Toronto Star*, October 9, 1997, H2.

²⁹³ Constance C.R. White, “Dressing Up a Decade’s Spareness,” *The New York Times*, December 2, 1997, D24.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Simona Chiose, “Ganging Up on Teen Culture,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 26, 1999, C1, and, Marcus Gee, “Littleton and the Culture of Violence,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 28, 1999, A13.

American culture resulting from ‘heroin chic’ and Clinton’s highly public opposition to the trend, the press did not identify the larger discursive schema in which drug use and marginalized populations are defined, reinforced, discriminated and naturalized. Though identified largely with the 1990s, the semiotic conventions of ‘heroin chic’ were not unique to the social climate of the decade in which the trend met its commodification. As pointed out by historian Timothy Hickman, the commercialization of drug addiction in contemporary popular culture is but one stage in the discursive construct of substance abuse and its cultural trajectory that continues to be negotiated and rearticulated.²⁹⁷ While numerous press reports acknowledged the photographs of Larry Clark and Nan Goldin as early influential precursors inspiring the artistic conventions of ‘heroin chic,’ the strongest connection reached by a cultural commentator linking fashion photography to its larger historical aesthetic development was made by Amy Spindler in “Homage: Balthus Rocks,” published in *The New York Times* on December 13, 1998.²⁹⁸ Spindler identifies the post-‘heroin chic’ trend of the late 1990s in fashion photography, in which advertisements for Yves Saint Laurent and Versace by Mario Sorrenti and Steven Meisel drew influence from and incorporated numerous intertextual references to the works of Manet and artists of the Renaissance.²⁹⁹ Despite recognizing that “appropriating imagery from art has a long history,” Spindler’s work demonstrated the critic’s inability to connect ‘heroin chic’ to the very aesthetic trajectory referenced throughout her criticism.³⁰⁰ Comparing her approach to Spindler, in *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety*, Arnold highlights the historical tradition within painting that connected substance abuse to conventional perceptions of femininity as associated with an

²⁹⁷ Timothy A. Hickman, ‘Heroin Chic: The Visual Culture of Narcotic Addiction,’ *Third Text* 16:2 (2002): 119-136.

²⁹⁸ Spindler, “Homage: Balthus Rocks,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 1998, 104.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

exotically submissive sexuality since the late 1800s, themes particularly evident in the works of artists such as Delacroix and Degas.³⁰¹ The integration of opium into the artistic representation of women, particularly those of North African descent, functioned in Delacroix's work to enforce a discourse of exotic otherness that stood in contrast to Western ideals of the Enlightenment. While Delacroix emphasized a particular feminine sexuality, Degas' *Absinthe Drinker* spoke to what Arnold describes as the "fears of degeneration" central to contemporary discourses constructing the trend of 'heroin chic.'³⁰² Visualizing the tranquillizing effects of intoxication and substance abuse, the women of Degas's painting first evoked the dehumanized and pale facial expressions that would serve as an early intertextual reference to the semiotic conventions of 'heroin chic,'³⁰³ and remain a predominant representation of women in advertising for the fashion industry, an image associated with significant sociological consequences.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Arnold, *Fashion, Desire & Anxiety*, 48-50.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Jean Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising* (New York: Free Press, 1999) provides a sociological analysis of the objectification and subsequent dehumanization of women in commercial advertising.

Chapter Five: Contemporary Mediations of 'Homeless Chic'

Beauty is what I look for in my inspiration and research trips: beauty in conflict, beauty in struggle, beauty in revolution and the unexpected as much as beauty in color, textiles and art," he [Galliano] explains. "You have to keep the shows fresh, exciting and unexpected as much for those that attend as us working on them." [...] "There have been wars, rationing and much worse than recessions and still fashion and fantasy survive. The more the belt tightens, the more people will want the best, the ultimate and true luxury. If you are terrified by the news, depressed by world events and economy, rather than hit the bottle, isn't it better to hit the shops? Fashion is intoxicating, escapist and indulgent.³⁰⁵

--- John Galliano

The 2001 film *Zoolander*, a satire of the North American fashion industry, features Ben Stiller as Derek Zoolander, a male model known for his charming persona as opposed to his intelligence. After losing VH1's "Male Model of the Year" award to upcoming model Hansel, Zoolander accepts an offer by industry mogul Jacobim Mugato to appear in a fashion show that Mugato promises will provide Zoolander with opportunities to revive his stalled career. Mugato's real objective, however, is to brainwash Zoolander into assassinating the Prime Minister of Malaysia, a progressive political figure and advocate for stricter laws governing the working conditions of child labour in sweatshops operating within his country. With the help of Hansel and fashion reporter Matilda, Zoolander is able to save the Prime Minister of Malaysia at the fashion show designed for his assassination attempt, and, in the process, reveal Mugato's corrupt history.³⁰⁶

Zoolander provides an ironic critique of numerous political, social and economic issues that continue to plague the fashion industry, such as the conditions of child labour and the call to global awareness by activists pressing for political action against corporations profiting from the

³⁰⁵ Socha, "Thinkable Fashion," 38.

³⁰⁶ Drake Sather, Ben Stiller and John Hamburg, *Zoolander*, directed by Ben Stiller (2001; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2002), DVD.

unsanitary conditions experienced by sweatshop workers.³⁰⁷ A prime example of the film's socio-political commentary is the fashion show organized by Mugato that simultaneously functions as Zoolander's cover for assassinating the Prime Minister of Malaysia. The "revolutionary" runway collection to be unveiled at the fashion show, entitled "Derelict," is held in an underground warehouse with models dressed in a variety of rags, cardboard boxes and garbage bags; Mugato introduces the collection to Zoolander as "the future of fashion [...] a way of life inspired by the very homeless, the vagrants, the crack whores that make this wonderful city so unique."³⁰⁸ *Zoolander* helped popularize the fashion trend of 'homeless chic' in mass culture through Mugato's description of the collection to his protégé. In his socio-political reading of *Zoolander*, Kit Dobson argues that the film mediated an oppressing representation of the homeless by limiting their political agency for capitalist exploitation and profit.³⁰⁹ Although his argument effectively correlates the homeless and those working in sweatshops as victims of the global fashion industry, Dobson's analysis does not contextualize the larger discursive framework in which *Zoolander*'s incorporation of 'homeless chic' finds its cultural meaning and relevancy.

'Homeless chic' received far less attention from the 11 publications selected for analysis than that garnered by its sister trend 'heroin chic.' At 110 articles, coverage of 'homeless chic' represented 21 percent of the sample, a figure drastically lower 'heroin chic,' which constituted just over 57 percent of the sample's news articles. Press reporting of 'heroin chic' noted that the trend was largely a consequential reaction to the cultural politics of the 1980s, a decade

³⁰⁷ For example see Andrew Ross, ed., *No Sweat*, 1997, and Klein, *No Logo*, 279-437. For a socio-political analysis of the representation of activism in the film *Zoolander*, see Dobson, "Derelict and the Oppressed," 309-326.

³⁰⁸ *Zoolander*, 2001.

³⁰⁹ Dobson, "Derelict and the Oppressed," 320.

associated with lavish notions of decadence, wealth and glamour.³¹⁰ *The New York Times* alluded to the cyclical nature of fashion trends following the symbolic demise of ‘heroin chic,’ arguing, “the backlash against heroin chic was inevitable, given how politically unchic it is to say it’s O.K. for models to look like they just shot up. As it happened, the call to make models look healthier and more traditionally attractive dovetailed nicely with the cyclical nature of fashion, which dictates that a trend start asphyxiating every seven years.”³¹¹ While the late 1990s signified the symbolic death of ‘heroin chic,’ the shift to embracing a more Romantic fascination with design helped instigate the trend of ‘homeless chic.’ Britain’s *Independent on Sunday* announced the mainstream arrival of the trend in fashion by opening an article reporting on the modeling opportunities offered to a former homeless man living on the streets of London with the introductory tagline, “Heroin chic is dead. Long live homeless chic.”³¹² The *Independent on Sunday*’s story represented the classic “rags-to-riches” narrative of class mobility, yet its reference to the expression traditionally associated with a change in the nation’s reigning monarch denotes the cultural power of fashion trends in dictating the politics of representation facilitating their emergence in visual culture, and how their symbolism fluctuate in accordance to social, political and economic change in consumer society.

As demonstrated by the cultural prominence of Marie Antoinette’s peasant farm and the popularity of slumming as a medium of entertainment, notions of Romanticism and fascination embedded in ‘homeless chic’ have historically been associated with those social groups categorized as the disenfranchised. Despite the lengthy cultural trajectory of the trend, the phrase ‘homeless chic’ first appeared in popular discourse in December 1988 as the titled letterhead in

³¹⁰ Nina Jones, “Day’s Work,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, March 9, 2006, 4.

³¹¹ White, “Dressing Up a Decade’s Spareness,” D24.

³¹² Marie Woolf, “Fashion Falls for Homeless Scotsman,” *Independent on Sunday*, January 17, 1999, 10.

an editorial published by the *Washington Post*.³¹³ Responding to a feature by Jim Naughton in which he interviews members of the city's homeless population regarding the creative abilities required to appropriate material commodities into survival utilities,³¹⁴ a *Washington Post* reader sarcastically referred to the author's artistic framing of homelessness as an example of a fashionable "chic," writing, "I look forward to follow-up pieces in Style featuring high-fashion models wearing old blankets and brightly colored cardboard jackets while posing over grates at the corner of Connecticut and L."³¹⁵

While *Zoolander* helped solidify the trend of 'homeless chic' into the vernacular of American popular culture, the inclusion of the fashion trend within the film parodied a similar haute couture collection designed by Galliano for Christian Dior that was pivotal to the construction of contemporary discourses of 'homeless chic.' Galliano was evidently a critical example referenced in the content analysis of 'homeless chic' coverage, cited 64 times in 110 articles, a figure representing 58 percent of this portion of the sample. Following Galliano's January 2000 Spring/Summer runway performance, cultural critic Maureen Dowd best describes the polarizing imagery prevalent on the Parisian catwalk:

Dior models who starve themselves posed as the starving. They came down the runway raggedy and baggy, some swathed in newspapers, with torn linings and inside-out labels, accessorized with empty little green J&B whiskey bottles, tin cups dangling from the derriere, bottle caps, plastic clothespins and safety pins. Some posed as lunatic ballerinas in frayed tulle, others in straightjackets and white madhouse makeup.³¹⁶

³¹³ Beverly Patterson, "Letter to the Editor: Homeless Chic," *Washington Post*, December 7, 1988.

³¹⁴ Jim Naughton, "The Hard Chill of Winter: Washington's Homeless, Seeking Cold Comforts in City Streets and Parks," *Washington Post*, December 1, 1988, B01.

³¹⁵ Patterson, "Homeless Chic," A20.

³¹⁶ Dowd, "Haute Homeless," 15.

In their overview of the Paris couture collections, *Women's Wear Daily* offered a highly favourable review of Galliano's utilization of "remarkable mixes of luxury and tatters," describing the performance as a "mad, mad world" of "extraordinary flight of fancy."³¹⁷ Referring to Christian Dior's creative director as "magic," the publication celebrated Galliano's audaciousness in envisioning a rather unorthodox collection, suggesting that the designer "has more guts than the local butcher. The collection he showed on Monday for Christian Dior was a startling display of talent, bravado and confidence, one in which he thumbed his nose at his critics."³¹⁸ Known for extensively researching his collections in the archives of Victoria & Albert and other arts institutions, Galliano, "bid au revoir to the high born damsels and duchesses who so frequently inspire him. His new source of material: [homeless] people. Galliano based a couture collection on homeless people. And it wasn't offensive, perhaps because he shows such great affection and respect for his subject, and even falls in love with them a little."³¹⁹ The notion of fantasy is further enhanced in *Women's Wear Daily* by their suggestion that Galliano's 'homeless chic' collection may be "yet another figment of his hyperkinetic imagination," a description alluding to the designer's reputation for developing highly outlandish runway performances.³²⁰

While the imagery evoked by Dowd's description denotes the runway performance as an oddity, the importance of Galliano's collection in the successful construction of 'homeless chic' cannot be understood in isolation from the situational context through which it derives its

³¹⁷ "The Lady is a Tramp," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 18, 2000, 1.

³¹⁸ "From Hobos to Ho-Hum: As the Paris Couture Collections Got Underway, John Galliano Did a Runway Extravaganza for Dior, Inspired by, of All Things, the Homeless, while Emanuel Ungaro Went on a Bacchanalian Romp – and Valentino Revisited Some of His Greatest Hits," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 18, 2000, 8.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

significance. Following the demise of ‘heroin chic,’ Galliano’s collection coincided with a notable aesthetic shift within the industry, reflected in the reporting by *The Globe and Mail*’s fashion editor Deborah Fulsang on the trends from the Fall/Winter 2000-2001 ready-to-wear collections.³²¹ Emphasizing the exuberance and assurance mediated by designers through a “sea of flowers, polka dots and op art abstracts,” the new collections represented the industry’s “collective consciousness” that “fashion’s new-millennial optimism had officially taken hold.”³²² *Women’s Wear Daily* remarked on the sense of Romanticism defining the Paris runway collections, where designers including Emanuel Ungaro, Alexander McQueen and Jean Paul Gaultier evoked the theatricality associated with Christian Dior’s ‘homeless chic’ collection in their runway performances. Such Romanticism was also extended to the reviews of Emmanuel Ungaro’s collection, where “Ungaro’s beloved bohemian hippie morphed into a strange fairy tale nymph in a bacchanalian frenzy of flora, fauna and lots of printed pastels,” amongst a runway decorated in butterflies.³²³ Jean Paul Gaultier similarly echoed a bohemian vibe with India serving as his source of creative inspiration, opening his runway collection with “two young sari-clad women tossing flower petals along the orange runway that twisted through the former residence of the legendary art patron Marie-Laure de Noailles,” demonstrating the synthesis of his “haute French sensibility with the riches of India, sometimes no more overtly than by showing tailored pieces topped with a turban.”³²⁴

Despite debuting in a season where a variety of designers presented collections with rather unorthodox inspirations, Galliano’s take on ‘homeless chic’ instigated a significant wave

³²¹ John Galliano’s ‘homeless chic’ aesthetic was also prevalent in Christian Dior’s ready-to-wear collection, and featured during the same period as Fulsang is commenting upon.

³²² Deborah Fulsang, “In Print: Spring Forward,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 25, 2000, R32.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ “Controlled Substance,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 18, 2000, 6.

of controversy regarding what many critiqued as derogatory and stereotypical representations of the impoverished. With journalist Bridget Foley questioning, “How far is too far? John Galliano is finding out. The furor over the couture collection he showed last week for Christian Dior [...] just won’t go away. In terms of controversy, it’s the biggest thing to hit fashion since heroin chic,”³²⁵ *Women’s Wear Daily* later recanted their initial support for his collection and instead reported on how the designer had sparked outrage from both fashion insiders and social activists. *Le Figaro*’s fashion editor Janie Samet expressed the antagonism felt within the industry towards his collection: “John didn’t spend one second thinking about the implications of poverty; he saw only the picturesque. He spent seven, eight, maybe nine million francs to stage his ‘Three Penny Opera.’ The critics have grounds for their complaints. To dramatize the hopelessly mad was just going too far.”³²⁶ *Women’s Wear Daily* also reported on the public outcry and ensuing activism that emerged following Galliano’s runway performance:

For a few weeks in early January, each day brought a new attack on the house. French homeless advocacy organisations issued statements and organized protests. One demonstration outside Dior’s ultrachic Avenue Montaigne headquarters and store forced the business to close its doors for two hours and brought out the riot police.³²⁷

France’s Comite des Sans Logis sent twenty-five demonstrators, a move prompting Christian Dior representatives and company president Sidney Toledano to meet with the protestors to prevent continued heckling of their customers.³²⁸

After receiving substantial negative press, with social welfare groups advocating for a public apology, Galliano faced what he termed his “condescending and smug”³²⁹ critics by

³²⁵ Bridget Foley, “Dior: The Saga Continues,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 26, 2000, 8.

³²⁶ “Couture Scoop,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 19, 2000, 8.

³²⁷ Janet Ozzard, ‘Dior’s Hobo Chic,’ *Women’s Wear Daily*, December 18, 2000, 10.

³²⁸ Sarah Raper, “A Protest in Paris – And Dior’s the Target,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 28, 2000, 2.

defending his couture collection for visually depicting the destitution he witnessed during his daily jogs around Paris, a “wet world,” in Galliano’s words, composed of “tramps, but not in the American sense.”³³⁰ With his designs inspired by the ‘poverty balls’ of the 1930s – described by *Women’s Wear Daily* as an event where “socialites assumed the cloaks of poverty for a night of revelry,” to which Galliano responded, “let’s face it, they asked Worth to make their rags”³³¹ – alongside the images of the mentally ill by photographer Diane Arbus, Galliano emphasized the political nature of his artistic vision as a combative measure to his critics:

One is allowed to have women mincing about in high heels and combat trousers and a scarf around their head, inspired by the war in Bosnia. One is allowed to be inspired by India, even though there is enormous poverty there. One is allowed to be inspired by Africa, even though the Masai tribe is a disappearing race. One is allowed to have bohemian chic inspired by the Gypsies even though we all know now where Gypsies are coming from. I don’t get why, just because this is on their doorstep, it’s any different. Because they don’t want to know about these people? I didn’t set out to make a political statement. I am a dressmaker. But jogging around the Seine has thrown Paris into a whole different light for me.³³²

In a similar vein to this statement, which Dowd incorporated into her widely publicized criticism of his collection, Galliano questioned the unwarranted disapproval of his artistic vision:

Why is this wrong? [...] Designers have dealt with so many themes: Africa, the Masai tribe, but they’re far enough away not to think about [...] There is acute poverty in India, along with great spiritual and cultural richness, and one is allowed to draw influence from this in fashion. Yves Saint Laurent, Jean Paul Gaultier, myself too – we are all inspired by India, but again, it’s not on our doorstep. These things have all become part of the fashion vocabulary.”³³³

³²⁹ Socha, “Fantasy Island – From Pirates to Hobos, John Galliano’s 10-Year Tenure at Dior Has Been Filled with the Fantastical While Keeping the House Mantra Firmly In Mind,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, February 27, 2007, 18.

³³⁰ “From Hobos to Ho-Hum,” 8.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Dowd, ‘Haute Homeless,’ 15.

³³³ Foley, “Dior,” 8.

His remarks signify the cultural tendency to structure discourses of pain and suffering into a hierarchy of social acceptability, where, “in an age of identity politics, being a victim is a mark of distinction.”³³⁴ The appropriation of the narratives, stories, and identities of those victimized by the forces of globalization is considered worthy of artistic inspiration by the fashion industry. Privileging a global identity and dismissing the narratives of the Western poor in Galliano’s inspiration is reminiscent of a hegemonic class politic where class distinctions are continuously reproduced through systematic hierarchies. Developing countries serve as appropriate sources of creativity, as poverty is not only acceptable but also ‘exotic’ in environments isolated from capitalist structure. Poverty within the Western world cannot be ‘fashionable’ as its existence threatens the very values of consumption and materialism that serve as the foundation to American commodity culture.

Despite the critical backlash Galliano suffered with his ‘homeless chic’ collection, the line was relatively successful amidst continuous questioning by members of the cultural elite, such as from *The New York Times*’s Horyn, regarding the logic of purposely dressing like the underclass when privileged with the opportunity to exercise immense purchasing power in the form of both economic and cultural capital.³³⁵ With an estimated cost of at least \$10,000 per attire,³³⁶ French socialite Mouyna Ayoub, known for her vast collection of haute couture fashion, purchased multiple pieces from Galliano’s line, including a “‘burnt coat’ made to look [...] as if the wearer had ‘gotten too near a fire’ for her couture collection.”³³⁷ Pieces from the collection

³³⁴ Gross and Hoffman as cited in Lawler, “Stories, Memories, Identities,” in *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 26.

³³⁵ Dowd, ‘Haute Homeless,’ 15.

³³⁶ Cartner-Morley, “Drinking, Yes, Violence, No. Fashion World Puzzled by Galliano Allegations,” *The Guardian*, February 26, 2011, 9.

³³⁷ Remy De La Mauviniere and Richard Lautens, “Galliano’s ‘Garbage’ Puts Dior in the News: Social Activists Outraged by Haute Couture Designs,” *Toronto Star*, February 10, 2000, FA03.

quickly appeared on the red carpet during that year's film award season. Courtney Love was outfitted in one of the "Derelict Clochard" collection's "slash and burn" couture gowns for the Golden Globes in January 2000.³³⁸ The *Toronto Star* sarcastically noted the musician and actress "had clipped off the dead mice and beer cans which hung as decoration,"³³⁹ and that upon wearing a dress from the controversial collection, "the headlines raced around the world, and Galliano and the house of Dior got what they wanted: free publicity."³⁴⁰ The collection continued its red carpet presence the following month, with Nicole Kidman selecting a Christian Dior haute couture gold lame ruffled gown from the same 'homeless chic' line to wear to the Academy Awards.³⁴¹

From a semiotic perspective, what is perhaps more intriguing than the disapproval Galliano received for his aesthetic vision is the way in which elements of his collection are rearticulated at a semiotic level into new and entirely different meanings according to the conventions of consumer capitalism. The most prominent example of this process of resignification is the widespread popularity and notoriety of Galliano's newspaper print. In detailing the runway proceedings from Paris, the *Toronto Star* reported on how the print was central to Galliano's catwalk performance:

A newspaper print, a reference to the newspapers the homeless use as coverings, emerged under a giant Italian Renaissance fresco of trumpeting angels projected from the runway on to the ceiling. Text, headlines and Galliano's mug appeared under the banner *The Christian Dior Daily* with the print on chiffon slip dresses, wrap

³³⁸ "Hollywood Vice: It's Count Down to Oscar Night. Fashionistas are Armed and Ready to Bust Celeb Perpetrators of Fashion Crimes," *Toronto Star*, March 22, 2000, EN01.

³³⁹ De La Mauviniere and Lautens, "Galliano's 'Garbage,'" FA03.

³⁴⁰ Richard Lautens, "A Real Passion for Fashion and Writing – But With Degrees in Criminology and Sociology, Editor's Feet are Planted Firmly on the Ground," *Toronto Star*, February 11, 2000, BE03.

³⁴¹ Morra, "Razzle-Dazzle Missing: Stars Play it Safe and Dress Old Hollywood Style," *Toronto Star*, March 30, 2000, FA03.

tops, trench coats and bomber jackets. The various newsprint pieces often appeared in consort with blush coloured chiffon or lace skirts, blouses and dresses as well as shapeless, tattered sweaters and mittens that looked like wrapped up strips of newspaper [...] The show opened to the crooner Frank Sinatra belting out ‘That’s Why The Lady Is A Tramp.’ But on the word ‘tramp’ the sound technician cranked up the volume.³⁴²

First introduced for the associated ready-to-wear collection in March 2000 following the haute couture debut of Galliano’s take on ‘homeless chic’ fashion, the newspaper print is often recognized as the most identifiable pattern from his collection, and became a Galliano emblem incorporated into subsequent collections.³⁴³

Whereas the majority of commentary on the collection published by the press understood the newspaper print to signify impoverished identities, as alluded to in Graham’s description in the *Toronto Star*, the newspaper print represents an interesting collision between the residual symbolism of the pattern and the shift by haute couture houses in embracing new forms of branding to increase revenue. In a piece entitled “All the News That Fits,” Bill Cunningham was the only journalist to contextualize the newspaper print with its significantly larger semiotic history in visual culture, writing:

The last word in fashion is old news, revived by a new generation. Last January, Dior’s designer, John Galliano, showed clothes cut from newspaper-print silk. It caused a scandal because he said he was inspired by homeless people he saw along the Seine, covered in newspapers to keep warm. Today, women in Paris and New York are wearing these newsprint designs. The idea stretches back centuries. In 1860, caricaturists spoofed the follies of fashion in the journal *Le Rire* [...] For generations, fathers have folded newspaper pages into

³⁴² David Graham, “It’s ‘Homeless Chic’ Again,” FA05.

³⁴³ In “Fassbinder Colors, ‘Cold Mountain’ Hoopskirts and Posh Anoraks,” published on March 8, 2004, *Women’s Wear Daily* reported on Galliano’s Fall/Winter 2004-2005 runway collection, noting that “Items plucked directly from Galliano-land, however, were the best, and included a fur jacket embroidered with hot pink roses, a pompon sweater, glorious chiffon gowns in sweet floral prints and underpinnings done up in that house favorite - newsprint, which Galliano first introduced with his homeless chic collection for couture 2000.”

play hats for children, while newspaper printers did the same to keep the ink out of their hair. In the late 1930's, inspired by Picasso's collages using newspaper scraps, the Paris designer Elsa Schiaparelli made blouses and accessories in newspaper prints and called them Surrealist.³⁴⁴

Elsa Schiaparelli and Galliano's garments featuring the newspaper print were displayed at the Royal Ontario Museum's Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume in 2011 as part of the installation, *Riotous Colour, Daring Patterns: Fashion & Textiles 18th to 21st Centuries*, curated by Dr. Alexandra Palmer.³⁴⁵ While scholars such as Lipovetsky conceptualized the aesthetic of poverty embraced by avant-garde designers such as Kawakubo and Margiela as constituting a democratization of high-end fashion,³⁴⁶ Llewellyn Negrin argues that the trend of 'homeless chic' represents a reinforcement of the artistic values defining haute couture. She contends that the boutiques of these designers are designed to model art galleries as opposed to retail outlets, an experience complete with the sales associates providing insight to the client on the finer aesthetics of the garment.³⁴⁷ Galliano's newspaper dress represents a continuation of this narrative of 'homeless chic,' where garments initially justified as visualizations of the inequalities embedded within high fashion are decontextualized to normalize the hegemony of haute couture through rebranding 'homeless chic' as 'art,' notwithstanding Galliano's hesitation in categorizing the output of his profession as 'art.'³⁴⁸

With the requisite historical context on Galliano's newspaper print missing from press reports on the collection, an intriguing absence due to *Women's Wear Daily's* caricature of Galliano as a "cultural historian" who extensively researches "the grand dames, contessas and

³⁴⁴ Bill Cunningham, "All the News That Fits," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2000, 4.

³⁴⁵ Emma Yardley, "The Style List: What Caught Our Eye This Week? Two Looks Inspired by the ROM's Riotous Colour, Daring Patterns Show," *Toronto Star*, July 26, 2011, E8.

³⁴⁶ Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion*, 88-128.

³⁴⁷ Negrin, "Paradoxical Nature of 'Pauperist' Style as *Haute Couture*," September 12-16, 2012.

³⁴⁸ Foley, "Dior," 8.

divas of old, bringing them magically to life in his runway reveries,”³⁴⁹ press attention on the newspaper print conversely utilized the framing of commercialization in their criticism. Following Galliano’s move from Givenchy to Christian Dior in October 1996, *Women’s Wear Daily* reported that retail power was the primary reason for LVMH Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy chairman and chief executive officer Bernard Arnault’s decision to hire Galliano as Christian Dior’s creative director. Kal Rutenstein of Bloomingdale’s acknowledged that “Dior in the States has nowhere to go but up,” due to the lack of Christian Dior ready-to-wear business outlets in the United States.³⁵⁰ Representative of a larger trend popularized in the 1970s by Gucci and Louis Vuitton, high fashion design houses embellished merchandise with the logos of their respected label for the sole purpose of maximizing brand power for corporate profit.³⁵¹ With the ‘homeless chic’ collection presented during the introductory years of Galliano’s tenure at Christian Dior, the newspaper print signified the first of numerous attempts by the designer to maximize the brand of Christian Dior through the strategic labeling of clothing and accessories. In a negative review by *Women’s Wear Daily* of Galliano’s ready-to-wear collection, the publication noted the pervasiveness and subsequent distraction of the newspaper print:

Logomania won’t last forever, but Galliano is not ready to give it up yet, splattering just about everything with Dior insignia. Nor is he ready to retire the controversy, and accompanying hype, of his spring couture, when he ruffled feathers with a collection inspired by the style of homeless people and insane asylum patients. So he revisited the topic with crazed ballerinas decked in tattered-and-torn sweaters over newspaper-print dresses and undies. Only here, the paper was Christian Dior Daily, and the headlines, about Galliano himself. An

³⁴⁹ “Pretty Tough, Quite Racy or Even Apocalyptic: There’s More Than One Way to Create an Appealing or Intriguing Collection,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 11, 2000, 6.

³⁵⁰ “Store Talk,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 14, 1996, 11.

³⁵¹ “The 100 Remarkable Moment: A Look at Some of the More Memorable Styles, Socials, Parties, Designers, Entrepreneurs, Artists, Celebrities and Newsmaking Events from *WWD*’s One Hundred Years of Coverage,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 30, 2010, 105.

amusing joke at his own expense, but when he let it go on too long, it wore as thin as those delicate pink dancing frocks.³⁵²

In the collections following “Derelict Clochard,” Galliano consistently revisited the theme of visualizing subversive forms of disparity and socioeconomic inequality, expressed through Christian Dior’s Spring/Summer ‘trailer park’ fashion line³⁵³ 2004’s “Rasta” collection, united in the common theme of showcasing the Christian Dior insignia on a wide variety of products, including handbags, shoes, bikinis, hats, scarves and sportswear.³⁵⁴ *Women’s Wear Daily* reported on the retail popularity of the ‘trailer park’ collection, writing that pieces from the line are “still fuelling shops around the world. Customized Saddle bags [...] just arrived in Dior shops with a retail price of \$1,000 [...] The denim bags, bejewelled and decorated with badges, sequins, a fabric flower and a metal plate, were introduced to meet the strong response to customized accessories on the runway.”³⁵⁵ One particularly successful form of branded merchandise was the line of hosiery.³⁵⁶

John Galliano's design influence at Christian Dior continues to spread, just like a run in a stocking. For the second season, Dior's fall hosiery collection takes direct inspiration from Galliano's pithy runway romps. His “Barbarella” stockings have strategically placed snags, while the “Demonia” tights with their web-like design transform the wearer into Spiderwoman. The packaging is as eye-grabbing as the product: each style is showcased on a model posed inside, on top and under the hood of a Pink Cadillac, reminiscent of Dior's headline-grabbing “trailer” collection for spring 2001.

³⁵² “Eighties Bravado, Urban Flash and High Glam: As the Paris Fall Collections Switched Into High Gear, Marc Jacobs Gave the Eighties a Whole New Spin for Vuitton, while John Galliano Embraced Urban Flamboyance for Dior and Valentino Created Glamour Sans Excess Glitz,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, March 1, 2000, 6.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ “Eighties Bravado, Urban Flash and High Glam,” 6; “Pretty Tough, Quite Racy or Even Apocalyptic,” 6; Karen von Hahn, “Rasta Riffing,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 7, 2004, L3.

³⁵⁵ Alison Beckner, Robert Murphy, and Socha, “Notebook from Paris: Summer Has Arrived and Everyone in Paris is Inspired by the Outdoors,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, June 25, 2001, 7.

³⁵⁶ Fulsang, “Dior’s Hosiery a Leggy Show of Galliano Panache,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 16, 2000, R29.

According to a Dior spokesman, large-scale fishnet hose and the web design were among the wholesale bestsellers. The first deliveries are slated to arrive in stores in July.³⁵⁷

The discursive shift to promoting the brand of Christian Dior through the notoriety of Galliano's image and the subsequent success of the newspaper print and logo-embellished accessories of the 'homeless chic' and 'trailer park' collections resulted in significant profit revenue for LVMH Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy.³⁵⁸ Christian Dior reported a 61% increase in operating income in 2001,³⁵⁹ and revenue reached an all-time high of \$1.39 billion by 2011.³⁶⁰ The increases in revenue were in large part credited to Galliano's unequivocal aesthetic and the resulting growth in popularity of Christian Dior's ready-to-wear collections.³⁶¹

The successes of monogrammed products were largely attributed to their presence within American visual culture during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Audiences became familiar with and eventually consumers of high-end brands largely due to their inclusion on the popular HBO comedy *Sex and the City*, a program referenced in a total of 27 articles collected by the sample. *Sex and the City*'s prominence in the content analysis speaks to the program's status as a cultural opinion leader in naturalizing the technique of branding in fashion retailing, a theme prominent in approximately 11 percent of the news coverage composing the sample. The television program's fashionable lead characters provided a platform of free advertising for numerous established and emerging labels. *Women's Wear Daily* described the character Carrie Bradshaw as a "trendsetter" representing "the powerful intersection of celebrity [and] fashion [...] with her

³⁵⁷ Beckner, Murphy and Socha, "Notebook from Paris," *Women's Wear Daily*, May 1, 2001, 10.

³⁵⁸ Socha, "The Galliano Factor: Dior Lays Groundwork for 'Exceptional' 2001," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 16, 2001, 1.

³⁵⁹ "Dior Income Rises, Galliano Sales Cited," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 12, 2001, 2.

³⁶⁰ Horyn, "Dior Picks Raf Simons, a Low-Key Romantic, to Succeed Galliano," *The New York Times*, April 10, 2012, B1.

³⁶¹ Marc Karimzadeh, "The Couturier Time Line," *Women's Wear Daily*, April 10, 2012, 5.

Manolos, berets, leggings and nameplate necklaces.”³⁶² The relationship between cultural meaning, branding, fashion and narrative is particularly evident in *Sex and the City*, where, as sex columnist Carrie, actress Sarah Jessica Parker wore Christian Dior’s newspaper dress in an episode first broadcast in October 2000. The program’s third season saw Carrie in a serious relationship with her boyfriend Aidan, yet involved in an affair with Mr. Big, her “on-again/off-again” boyfriend throughout the series. Mr. Big is married to Natasha, a significantly younger woman working at Ralph Lauren, who decides to seek a divorce after discovering their affair first-hand. Realizing that she has been experiencing bad karma since her affair became public, Carrie attempts to reach out and apologize to Natasha, and, after unsuccessful efforts to connect, decides to interrupt Natasha’s lunch at an upscale New York City restaurant.

The strategic selection of clothing in the scene at the restaurant is particularly compelling. While associated with notions of classic style due to her employment at iconic American brand Ralph Lauren, Natasha is the embodiment of timeless elegance, dressed in a pink dress accessorized with a matching necklace-earrings pearl set and her hair neatly tied back in a ponytail. Carrie, however, is outfitted in Christian Dior’s newspaper print dress with her hair clearly disheveled, evoking an overt sexual connotation through the choice of her clothes in direct contrast to the pure and virginal signifiers of Natasha’s appearance. In discarding Carrie’s apology, Natasha proclaims: “I’m sorry that you felt the need to come down here. Not only have you ruined my marriage, you’ve ruined my lunch. I guess that’s just what I had to say.”³⁶³

Reading Carrie’s outfit within the context of the collection from which it originated, the

³⁶² “Up For It,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, June 1, 2004, 22S.

³⁶³ Darren Star, ‘What Goes Around Comes Around,’ *Sex and the City*, season 3, episode 17, directed by Allen Coulter, aired October 8, 2000 (New York: HBO Home Video, 2002), DVD.

newspaper print dress signifies Carrie's tarnished status as a 'whore' and 'tramp' for participating in such a scandalous activity.

The sexual connotations embedded within the narrative of this particular episode of *Sex and the City* denote a more refined symbolism of promiscuity embodying the representation of 'homeless chic' examples circulated by popular culture. There exists a longstanding historical sexualization of the lower-working classes,³⁶⁴ a prominent stereotype of rural identities incorporated into the imagery of 'homeless chic,' as expressed in the example of Marie Antoinette and slumming as a cultural activity. In his critique of the apparent popularity of Christian Dior's 'trailer park' handbag, *The Globe and Mail's* Jeet Heer cites historian Peter Brears's commentary on the "sexual glamour" often blanketing the realities of poverty, arguing, "as far as aristocrats were concerned, dairymaids were the sexiest things on God's Earth,"³⁶⁵ with Heer elaborating, "Marie Antoinette and many in her court wanted to look like milkmaids."³⁶⁶ The scenes at Hameau de la Reine in Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* visualized an affair between the Queen and the Swedish soldier Hans Anxel von Fersen.³⁶⁷ The sensual nuances of slumming acted as a prime source of artistic inspiration for Galliano, a reference reported by the *Toronto Star*: "the collection pulsed with sex appeal. One leopard print slip dress had large gold chain straps. The majority of the gowns were diaphanous, either lace or chiffon. He showed abbreviated leather bomber jackets and lots of skin."³⁶⁸ The newspaper dress is thereby situated within this larger theme of sexual promiscuity, and the episode's critique of

³⁶⁴ See, for example, Robin Ganev, "Milkmaids, Ploughmen, and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (2007): 40-67.

³⁶⁵ Heer, "High Price of Cheap," B01.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Coppola, *Marie Antoinette*, 2005.

³⁶⁸ Graham, "It's 'Homeless Chic' Again," FA05.

female sexuality cannot be read without this larger context in which the fashion styling of *Sex and the City* finds its cultural meaning and symbolism.

While the newspaper print dress is read as a signifier of Carrie's lack of class in her sexual activities, this scene in particular helped solidify the episode as especially iconic of the series. Carrie is viewed as empowered in her desperate attempt to be held accountable for her selfish actions. Partly due to the sense of personal action exhibited by Carrie in the episode, the newspaper dress is considered one of Carrie's iconic looks in a series widely popularized for its character's fashion statements. Often included in retrospectives of the show as one of Carrie's signature outfits, the newspaper print dress made a cameo appearance in the film sequel *Sex and the City 2*.³⁶⁹ Yet with the rebranding of the newspaper print gown as "Carrie's dress," the dress's original articulation as an artistic work creating a visual representation for those marginalized groups excluded from occupying a position in public discourse is lost. The episode falls short in creating the correlation between the dress and how it confers a lower-class identity upon Carrie. The dress is instead rearticulated by commodity culture to signify a commercialized brand promoting a highly exclusive privileged identity.

'Homeless Chic' During the Financial Crisis

The influence of the economic recession was a prominent theme highlighted by the content analysis comprising approximately 23 percent of the sample, with 128 articles directly referencing the economic difficulties facing the retail sector following 2008's stock market crash. This period of financial hardship witnessed the reemergence of 'homeless chic' examples in popular culture. 'Homeless chic' continued to demonstrate larger social significance and cultural prominence within the new millennium, with fashion houses such as Prada, Calvin

³⁶⁹ Michael Patrick King, *Sex and the City 2*, directed by Michael Patrick King (2010; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010), DVD.

Klein, Helmut Lang and DSquared designing similar collections that echoed the trend first evoked by Galliano.³⁷⁰ In a spotlight piece by Tralee Pearce in *The Globe and Mail* detailing the success of the Toronto-born design duo Dean and Dan Caten of DSquared, the siblings commented on the inspiration behind their ‘homeless chic’ collection.³⁷¹ Contrasting their approach to that of Galliano, Dan defended their collection by emphasizing the designs were about, “celebrating their style, not their situation – less money, more creativity,” with Dean adding, “Ours was about real clothes, found and altered [...] There’s no season, no size, no sex. You have to mix it all together [...] A homeless person wears all his clothes at once. We incorporate all those layers into one garment.”³⁷² ‘Homeless chic’ also became a popular trend during this period amongst Hollywood’s celebrated young starlets, where child-star Mary-Kate Olsen, actress Sienna Miller and Mischa Barton, star of the popular teenage drama *The O.C.*, captured tabloid headlines for their incorporation of ‘homeless chic’ style into their everyday outfits. In spite of the market collapse and ensuing financial crisis in October 2008, ‘homeless chic’ continues to occupy a prime position in America’s cultural landscape through various media, including print, television, fashion runway collections, and magazine editorials.

One prominent representation of ‘homeless chic’ occurred in an episode of *America’s Next Top Model*, which featured contestants on the show modeling couture fashion while posing as homeless people. First airing in February 2008, the episode begins with the season’s contestants moving into the loft that will be their home for the remainder of the competition. The

³⁷⁰ von Hahn, “Rasta Riffing,” L3; Leah McLaren, “Dirt Ain’t Cheap: The High Price of Looking Desperate and Disheveled, the Designer Way,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 8, 2000, R3, and Tralee Pearce, “Canada’s Unsung Expats Make Inroads at Home: Toronto-Raised Men’s Wear Designers Dean and Dan Caten Went to Milan a Decade Ago and Made it Big. Canadians Will Get to See What the Fuss Is About this Fall,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 30, 2002, L4.

³⁷¹ Pearce, “Canada’s Unsung Expats Make Inroads at Home,” L4.

³⁷² Ibid.

theme of social consciousness directly meets television viewers as the walls of the trendy loft are decorated with posters of past contest winners exhibiting their choice of social causes, such as charitable work focusing on AIDS. Contestant Fatima Siad, a refugee from Somalia who described the dire living conditions she and her mother escaped in the audition round of the program, spoke to her hope that fame from *American's Next Top Model* would raise awareness for the issue of female circumcision, a process she herself survived. Contestant Marvita, a twenty-three-year old from San Francisco, also reveals that she was homeless for a considerable period later in the same episode.

For the episode's central photo shoot, where each model's best images are selected and then used by the show's judges to determine who should be eliminated from the competition, the program's creative team partnered with the Reciprocity Foundation to help bring attention to the social issue of youth homelessness. Founded by Adam Bucko and Taz Tagore in 2004, the Reciprocity Foundation, a non-profit organization serving underprivileged communities, targets youth homelessness in New York City through workshops designed to help teenagers and young adolescents gain the creative and educational skills required to achieve a college education and secure financial funding and scholarships.³⁷³ The foundation recruited three women from affiliated shelters and living programs – including Isis, a transgendered fashion designer who competed in cycle eleven of *America's Next Top Model* following her participation in the photo shoot – to pose with the show's contestants. Anya, an eighteen-year old contestant from Honolulu, remarked that in this photo shoot, “the girls [shelter volunteers] are putting their selves out there for the world to see, for the world to get inspired by them, and that's what *American's*

³⁷³ “Reciprocity Foundation: Transforming Youth from Within,” accessed November 16, 2012, <http://www.reciprocityfoundation.org/about>.

Next Top Model should be, it should be an inspiration for other women out there.”³⁷⁴ The photo shoot occurred in a back alleyway corner, with notable markers of decay, including discarded trash, graffiti, and crumbling brick walls; the contestants would be wearing “street clothes” (described by the shoot stylists as “mixing some very casual clothes with more couture clothes”), while the homeless youth were dressed in traditional “high fashion” and posed next to the models.

The episode comes at the beginning of the program’s tenth cycle, and was noted for the show’s return to New York City from Los Angeles as its base. The theme of the cycle was “New Year, New Attitudes, New York,” a premise that was emphasized by the show’s move into dealing with areas of social concern, most notably with its first refugee contestant and its open discussion on issues of rape, poverty, domestic abuse, body consciousness, and sexuality. The show’s ability to promote social justice, however, was minimized due to the competitive nature of the challenge and the self-interests of its contestants. Contestant mentor Jay Manuel captures the vain essence of the photo shoot while directing model Atalya, an eighteen-year old from Brooklyn: “This is a fashion image still, but it’s a more somber mood for you. They are working around you. It’s about them being fabulous and you embodying this mood.”³⁷⁵ The rhetoric of the models during their personal candid commentary highlighted how the cause behind the photo shoot became appropriated into a form of slumming for the main purpose of accumulating power in the contest. Contestant Claire noted during her personal profile: “I love to be raising the awareness of homelessness. Hopefully, you know, I gave a really strong picture.”³⁷⁶ Laughing at her “strung out” look for the shoot, Whitney, the eventual winner of cycle ten who received

³⁷⁴ Tyra Banks, “New York, Here We Come,” *America’s Next Top Model*, cycle 10, episode 2, aired February 27, 2008.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

attention for being the first plus-sized model to receive the title, believed her material distance from at least symbolically appearing as homeless helped her achieve success, noting: “I’m dressed like nothing I would intentionally wear. And I think because it has greater meaning, it was so easy for me to not be ‘glamour’.”³⁷⁷ Similarly, contestant Katarzyna remarked: “I didn’t really know what I was doing. I was just trying to think of poses that would work with the attire and work with the environment.”³⁷⁸ Katarzyna’s commentary stresses the labour involved in creating such representations that were then mediated to a national audience at a time when the American nation was experiencing such troubling economic uncertainty.

While the contestants openly embraced the idea behind the shoot, any theme of social consciousness was lost due to the fact their photographs would determine their status in the competition. The photo shoot, originally designed as a form of social awareness, provided an opportunity for the contestants of *America’s Next Top Model* to “vacation” in constructed poverty in order to maintain their success in the competition. As contestants vacationing in the hyper reality of a modeling competition where first prize is a \$100,000 contract and a feature spread in *Seventeen*, a highly constructed notion of homelessness became the standard to achieve.

‘Homeless chic’ resonated beyond television into other avenues of popular culture, evident by the trend’s reappearance in the fashion runways of haute couture and in forms ranging from online photo-essays to magazine editorials. In 2008 *The Wall Street Journal* reported Marc Jacobs was escorted out of a New York City art gallery after an employee believed the designer

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

to be homeless, since his “clothes apparently signaled ‘soup kitchen.’”³⁷⁹ On the night of Galliano’s infamous anti-Semitic slur at a Paris bar that later resulted in his firing from Christian Dior, witnesses testified they initially misjudged the designer as homeless due to Galliano’s intoxicated and unkempt appearance.³⁸⁰ At the January 2009 Action Sports Retail Trade Expo in San Diego, established consumer brands such as Roxy, Hurley International and Quicksilver pulled out of the biannual convention, citing the sparse economic climate. Podium Distribution, a footwear brand distributor, modeled their booth at the convention as a homeless shelter under the name, “Camp Recession.”³⁸¹ Celebrating Toronto Fashion Week in March 2009, organizers borrowed codes from Galliano’s collection, dressing mannequins in “ruffled and pleated Living sections of the *Toronto Star*, with a big cheerful newsprint bow.”³⁸²

A year following the collapse of the American financial markets, the trend of ‘homeless chic’ was a prominent theme within the Fall 2009 runway collections. Christophe Decamin’s work for Balmain featured strategically ripped jeans and plain t-shirts; *Women’s Wear Daily* described the designer as one who “studs, shreds, rips, tears and punks his way to five-figure price tags – and even with the recession not yet in the rearview mirror, his racy ladies can’t get enough.”³⁸³ Moth-eaten pants and dresses characterized the work of Yohji Yamamoto. Kawakubo’s collection for Comme des Garçons incorporated ripped clothing sewn back together in a ragged fashion, and Viktor & Rolf debuted a conceptual look with thick tulle dresses

³⁷⁹ Christina Binkley, “The Suit That Turns Me Into a VIP: A Splurge on St. John Shows What You Can Get for the Price of Luxury – Best Table in the House,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 2008, D8.

³⁸⁰ Joelle Diderich and Alex Wynne, “Galliano Says Combo Led to Outburst,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, June 23, 2011, 1.

³⁸¹ Khanh T.L. Tran and Andrew Harmon, “Brands Cope With Raising Challenges at ASR Expo,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 28, 2009, 14.

³⁸² Graham, “On Runways, Black’s the New Green: It was St. Patrick’s Day, but the Style Industry Wasn’t Crying in its Beer,” *Toronto Star*, March 18, 2009, L05.

³⁸³ “The 100 Remarkable Moment,” 105.

modeled as decomposing cheese.³⁸⁴ The effect of the recession influenced Decamin, known for his highly tailored jackets embellished with jewels and crystals,³⁸⁵ to embrace a mentality of inconspicuous consumption, leading the *Toronto Star*'s Graham to proclaim, "Blame Balmain. That's the French luxury brand that has women willing to pay \$1,625 for a plain, army green cotton T-shirt." Though Graham distinguishes the trend of inconspicuous consumption, reflected in the clothing staples designed by Balmain in addition to collections by Tom Ford, DSquared2 and Christian Louboutin, "that retailers such as Old Navy and the Gap can produce [...] for next to nothing" from other "anti-fashion trends like 'homeless chic,'" the pieces from Balmain discussed in Graham's article were part of the 'homeless' theme connecting collections showcased at Paris and New York Fashion Week in fall of 2009.³⁸⁶ Alexander Wang offered what *The Guardian* referred to as a "deconstructed Wall Street look," where the coats, blazers and blouses in his collection featured slashes running down the sleeves.³⁸⁷ The following year Marc Jacobs continued the theme of 'homeless chic' at New York Fashion Week, in which his namesake line embraced a style of minimalism, accessorized by cardboard boxes decorating the runway, as described by Imogen Fox in *The Guardian*:

It isn't always the clothes that tell you which way the wind is blowing in fashion. In New York this week it was all about a cardboard box. OK, not any cardboard box, but hundreds of them, covering the walls at the Marc Jacobs show, while one huge, wooden-framed box wrapped in brown paper concealed the models

³⁸⁴ Graham, "Eve of Destruction: Dresses with Holes; Ripped up Jackets. It's Not Called Homeless Chic, But That's What it Looks Like," *Toronto Star*, October 8, 2009, L01.

³⁸⁵ Binkley, "In Fashion: Leather, a Cat and a Big Party – The Paris Spring Shows of Balenciaga, Azzaro, Christian Dior and Lanvin," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2009, W4.

³⁸⁶ Graham, "Inconspicuous Consumption Fashion: Just as Fast Fashion Helps Those of Modest Means Look Rich and Famous, Another Trend Lets the Wealthy Conceal Their Spending," *Toronto Star*, April 22, 2010, L1.

³⁸⁷ Imogen Fox, "Less is More: New York Fashion Week Revelled in the Elegance of Understatement, from Chic Tailoring to Catwalks Covered in Cardboard," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2010, 12.

at the end of a plywood catwalk painted to look like a cardboard [...] Was it intended as some comment (not again) on ‘homeless chic’? Who knows, but the message was that understatement was back in fashion.³⁸⁸

While coverage of these fashion collections noted the intertextual influence of ‘homeless chic,’ the majority of cultural critics reviewing the collections overlooked the fact that Kawakubo helped originate ‘homeless chic’ with the aestheticization of poverty during the 1970s.

With a looming economic recession and identity politics emerging as a developing field of study, the 1970s inspired a genre of deconstructionist, street-style fashion created by designers including Westwood, Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, Margiela and Zandra Rhodes. The most prevalent example of this lack of reference occurred in the coverage by *Women’s Wear Daily* of the Spring/Summer 2011 collections at Paris Fashion Week, notably in their review of Comme des Garçons:

While this show has some of the familiar Rei bells and whistles, the extra sleeves, the tacked-on garments, the bound arms, it proved less powerful than most of her collections, almost like a palate cleanser before a major moment percolating ahead. The primary ruse was the tailored, two-fabric jacket. Full-frontal it looked perfectly normal, but give a girl a spin and the visual truth revealed: These were actually combinations of two jackets, one worn on each arm and buttoned together in front, with their free sides fastened together loosely in back. And on and on and on through myriad combinations, the 10th not more riveting than the first. Kawakubo varied the lineup with upside-down outerwear similarly tacked together and worn as piled-on wraps. These recalled John Galliano’s infamous homeless couture for Dior, but without the wow factor.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ “Le Weekend; And What A Chockablock Weekend It Was: At Christian Dior, John Galliano Sent Out A Parade of Jaunty Sailorettes, While At Lanvin, Alber Elbaz Delivered Glamour and Tons of Style,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 4, 2010, 4.

This period of design sparked a subversive fashion trend transforming poverty into an aesthetic through the conventions of *bricolage*.³⁹⁰ Seven years prior to Galliano's infamous collection, Yohji Yamamoto similarly drew influence from the homeless in his male Spring/Summer 1994 collection at Paris Fashion Week Press, where *The New York Times* made the connection between the struggling French economy and the images of his runway performance:

With 10.7 percent unemployment in France, what possessed him to use the homeless as fashion inspiration? There was nothing subtle about this message: one 'clochard' talked to himself, shoes were cut out, the models were stubble-bearded and disheveled. The clothes themselves – perfectly pared-down fresh linens in soothing pastels, high-waisted trousers with the tops turned down, beautiful hand-knit sweaters, long white cotton shirts with painted borders – were overwhelmed by the inappropriateness of the presentation.³⁹¹

Writing in *The Globe and Mail*, Jeet Heer connected the street-style of Rhodes to the homeless aesthetic featured in *Zoolander*, writing, “during the 1970s, designer Zandra Rhodes borrowed from London punk rockers to create a line of torn dresses and leather jackets with jewelled safety pins. In *Zoolander*, [...] an evil fashion mogul creates a ‘Derelict’ fashion line based on the clothes of the homeless.”³⁹² The closest connection established between Galliano and previous incarnations of ‘homeless chic’ fashion came from Karl Lagerfeld when pressed by *Women’s Wear Daily* to provide a reaction to the Christian Dior runway performance:

Taken out of the context of the show, the pieces looked to me more like costumes for ‘Rake’s Progress,’ very Hogarth, [...] or like David

³⁹⁰ For a more in-depth analysis of this period in fashion, refer to Koda, “Rei Kawakuba,” 5-10; Lipovetsky, *Empire of Fashion*, 88-128; Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 149-168; Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 247-263; and Negrin, “The Paradoxical Nature of ‘Pauperist’ Style as *Haute Couture*,” September 12-16, 2012. Harvey identifies the aestheticisation of poverty as a consequence of postmodernity, where the romanticisation of urban landscapes of decay works to naturalise the diminishing social critique on neoliberalism’s “attempt to deconstruct traditional institutions of working-class power.” See Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 336-337.

³⁹¹ Spindler, “In Paris, All Roads Lead to a Men’s-Wear Melange,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1993, B7.

³⁹² Heer, “High Price of Cheap,” B01.

Hockey's costumes for Stravinsky's opera inspires by 'Rake's Progress.' It did not even look like old Margiela or Comme des Garçons to me. It was more stage-like – and fun to photograph. Very English, not at all 'French clochard.' [...] Maybe the timing was wrong [...] To start a new millennium with the ruins of a finished century may not be the most brilliant idea, although there was fun and invention in the clothes. But people were like Queen Victoria, 'not amused.' It was an idea for a very private show, but not decent enough for what the media can take these days.³⁹³

While Lagerfeld's commentary does not necessarily place Galliano's imagery in a similar conversation to that of Maison Martin Margiela and Comme des Garçons, his statement to *Women's Wear Daily* represents one of the sole references to Galliano's predecessors regarding the aestheticization of poverty. Even when Kawakubo and Margiela's work was discussed in reference to Galliano's homeless collection, such as in spotlights on the powerful influence of street-style deconstructionist fashion in *The Globe and Mail* and *Women's Wear Daily*, both publications failed to connect Galliano's work to the aestheticization of poverty central to Comme des Garçons and Maison Martin Margiela, instead conversely accounting for Christian Dior's collection as an isolated phenomenon.³⁹⁴

Published in the September 2009 issue of *W*, "Paper Bag Princess," a twenty-eight page photo editorial, juxtaposed high fashion with scenes of destitution in an urban environment. The spread showcased haute couture collections that repurposed designer shopping bags from the associated labels to serve as makeshift dresses, coats and mattresses. "Paper Bag Princess" photographed model Sasha Pivovarova posed against alleyways, park benches and subway grates while modeling dresses, coats and accessories from the designer labels in addition to the paper

³⁹³ "Karl on the Homeless Flap," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 28, 2000, 11.

³⁹⁴ Fulsang, "Not Haute Couture, Once the Laboratory of the Avant-Garde, Is Now Pure Fashion Spectacle. Call It the Triumph of the Street," *The Globe and Mail*, February 3, 2001, R28 and Socha, "Thinkable Fashion?" 38.

bags.³⁹⁵ Pivovarova further raised the profile of ‘homeless chic’ in the magazine industry when she appeared on the September 2009 cover of *Vogue Italia* and the associated lead photo shoot, in which she was photographed alongside male models in designer ‘rags,’ smudged make-up and disheveled hair. The autumn of 2009 also witnessed the trend’s emergence into cyber culture, as ‘homeless chic’ became the subject of controversy for street photographer Scott Schuman. Breaking his own personal rule to refrain from publishing photographs of the impoverished online, Schuman published a photo of a homeless man in his street fashion photo-blog *The Sartorialist*. Recognizing that homelessness has been a source of artistic inspiration for street photographers, Schuman felt the image of a man in discarded and mismatched clothes projected a type of authentic, individualized identity in comparison to the manufactured identities produced by commodity culture.³⁹⁶

‘Homeless chic’ continues to demonstrate popularity among Hollywood’s emerging starlets, with the trend appropriated by recording artists Ke\$ha, Rihanna and Lana Del Rey to construct their celebrity identity. Rihanna’s “We Found Love” and Del Rey’s “Born to Die” music videos incorporate imagery composed of signifiers to the ‘trailer trash’ aesthetic of Christian Dior, a look described by *The Guardian* as “a dizzying deconstructed version of a trailer-park beauty pageant [...] his [Galliano’s] motorcycle leather shoulder shrugs and slashed tunics, with models swigging from beer cans, were *Braveheart* meets *The Wild One*.”³⁹⁷ One scene in the “Born to Die” music video visualizes Del Rey outfitted in a fringe leather jacket unzipped to reveal a studded crop top and distressed Converse sneakers – not unlike those

³⁹⁵ Craig McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” *W*, September 2009, 260-287.

³⁹⁶ Guy Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless? Well, You Could Say That,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2009, A22.

³⁹⁷ Cartner-Morley, “More Edgy than New York, Not as Harsh as London, or Over-Enthusiastic as Milan,” *The Guardian*, October 13, 2000.

incorporated into *Marie Antoinette* – while the artist is shot lounging in a cathedral embellished with trumpeting angels, reminiscent of the runway performance of Galliano’s “Derelict Clochard” collection.³⁹⁸ In a feature profile in *Women’s Wear Daily*, Ke\$ha described how her fashion choices reflected the “electro trashy pop magic” of her debut album, revealing that her “favourite stuff [...] has been from trash cans [...] And I bought this incredible vest off a homeless guy recently [...] I went to P. Diddy’s White Party with a white garbage bag tied around me because I didn’t have a white top. I think confidence can sell anything.”³⁹⁹ Ke\$ha’s remarks on the creativity inspired from homelessness draws rhetorical parallels with statements made by model and designer Erin Wasson to Nylon TV, in which she applauded the style capabilities of the homeless: “The people with the best style for me are the people who are the poorest. Like, when I go down to Venice beach and I see the homeless, like, I’m like, ‘Oh my God, they’re pulling out, like, crazy looks and they, like, pulled shit out of like garbage cans.’”⁴⁰⁰ With *The New York Times* acknowledging that the homeless have been a source of artistic inspiration for designers including Yamamoto, Jacobs and Kawakubo, the paper published Wasson’s response to the public backlash targeting her previous comments to *Nylon*, including a *Funny or Die* parody with actress Julia Stiles mocking the model’s initial statement:

I’m not saying let’s glamorize the homeless [...] It’s not like I’m saying, ‘Oh, God, that’s so inspiring – you got your clothes from a garbage can [...] When I moved down to Venice Beach, I found these people with this amazing mentality, this gypsy mentality – people that you couldn’t label and put in a box [...] I got trashed for it [...] But I still don’t think I’m wrong.’⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ Lana Del Rey. “Born to Die,” directed by Yoann Lemoine, 2012.

³⁹⁹ Nick Axelrod, “Hard Candy,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, August 26, 2009, 6.

⁴⁰⁰ Amy Odell, “Erin Wasson: ‘Homeless People Have the Best Style,’” *The Cut*, last modified September 15, 2008, accessed April 15, 2013,

http://nymag.com/thecut/2008/09/erin_wasson_homeless_people_ha.html

⁴⁰¹ Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless,” A22.

While ‘homeless chic’ may not possess the same cultural prominence previously enjoyed by ‘heroin chic,’ the fact that ‘homeless chic’ continues to be a persistent representation since its origins with slumming speaks to the endurance and cultural power of this particular motif.

The appearance of diverse examples constituting the trend of ‘homeless chic’ coincide with the social anxieties regarding the financial adversity plaguing consumer society as a result of the economic crisis of 2008-2009. Public discourse reflected the trepidation of the economic climate, with the news media reporting on the consequences of the severe recession for American consumers, a theme reflected in 128 articles and a figure representing roughly 25 percent of the sample. The phrase “recessionista” entered the vernacular of American popular discourse, since, “in an economic climate in which buying a handbag with a four-or-five-digit price tag is starting to seem gauche, the free-spending style hounds formerly known as ‘fashionistas’ are rebranding themselves.”⁴⁰² *The Wall Street Journal* reported on the trend of “closet recycling,” in which previous consumers of luxury goods turned to their own closets as opposed to spending on new products, with businesses, such as Abigail Michaels Concierge Co., providing style consultants to clients wanting advice on how to reuse pieces from their existing wardrobe.⁴⁰³ French cosmetic line Bourjois produced a collection of relatively mid-priced mascara, lip-gloss and eyeliner, advertised as the “Recessionista Collection.”⁴⁰⁴ The press positioned consumers as passive “victims” of the recession, with blame on the financial meltdown associated with department stores and industry insiders. The victimization of American consumers is best illustrated in Stuart Elliot’s reporting for *The New York Times* in his

⁴⁰² Natasha Singer, “A Label for A Pleather Economy,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2008, ST1.

⁴⁰³ Teri Agins, “Fashion’s Closet Raiders: Recession Forces New Strategies for the Clothing-Conscious,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2008, W7.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

article, “When S.V.U. Stands for ‘Shopping Victims United.’”⁴⁰⁵ With the title of the piece capitalizing on the cultural popularity of the television program *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, Elliott directly associates American fashion shoppers with crimes of sexual assault, a reference further entrenched by the example of K&G Fashion Superstore’s advertising campaign designed to entice recession-conscious shoppers. Produced with a budget of approximately \$20 million by the New York City-based agency DeVito/Verdi, the campaign’s television commercials featured “a woman suffering shopper’s remorse,” calling the police “to report she was ‘robbed’ by a clerk in a department store who ‘took my money, and all I got was this dress;”” another commercial in the series depicts a “man complain[ing] to the judge of a make-believe TV courtroom show that he was ‘scammed’ out of hundreds of dollars by a clerk who sold him a suit in a department store,” and, in the campaign’s “guerrilla” advertising techniques, “outlines of dresses and pants, resembling the outlines of bodies chalked on crime scenes by the police,” were painted in parking lots and sidewalks under the tagline, “Don’t fall victim to department stores.”⁴⁰⁶ The popularity of ‘homeless chic’ during the recession is also a way for privileged groups to ‘cloak’ their own identities by appropriating the characteristics of those suffering from financial deprivations, while still consuming in a manner considered appropriate for their class. Embracing aspects of ‘homeless chic’ in the context of the recession is not discouraged as such consumers “look the part” while preserving the very values of materialism and consumption that jeopardize the economic survival of the lower classes and are utilized as values to diminish their social citizenship.

⁴⁰⁵ Stuart Elliott, “When ‘S.V.U. Stands for ‘Shopping Victims United,’” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2009.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

Conflicting Reactions to ‘Homeless Chic’ in Popular Culture

Apart from the criticism Galliano received for his attempt at mediating a political statement on poverty through fashion, there exists very little press coverage on the trend in comparison to the numerous representations of ‘homeless chic’ prevalent throughout the new millennium. ‘Homeless chic’ failed to ignite the same reaction and backlash initially directed towards Galliano, which itself was manifestly reminiscent of the commentary framing ‘heroin chic.’ While the majority of mainstream press covering ‘heroin chic’ connected the images circulated within popular culture to a larger discussion on drug policies during the Clinton administration, the lack of press coverage and cultural commentary connecting ‘homeless chic’ with financial destitution is particularly perplexing. In contrast to his previous defense of ‘heroin chic’ – proclaiming that “fashion isn’t health care”⁴⁰⁷ after Clinton criticized the fashion industry for commercializing population similarly marginalized by society – Jacobs was highly critical in his condemnation of Galliano’s work to *Women’s Wear Daily*:

I’m not one for the story telling school of fashion. Inspiration doesn’t make a good piece of clothing. I didn’t see the show, but it sounds very ‘Let them eat cake’ to me, and they cut off Marie Antoinette’s head over that. Fashion isn’t art. I’m pretty open-minded; I don’t take offense easily. But I think that, whenever you touch on someone’s misfortune or seem to be caricaturing their culture, you’re likely to be misconstrued. Inspiration is a personal thing; you can find it anywhere. The danger is not in being inspired by a group of people, the danger is in boasting about the inspiration, unless you’re putting it to a charitable pursuit. Once you start talking about it, it becomes exploitation, and I don’t think that’s right. You don’t go around parading on other people’s plight.⁴⁰⁸

Echoing a similar rhetorical position as Jacobs, Dowd compares the representation of poverty in the runway performances at Christian Dior to the political actions undertaken by New York City

⁴⁰⁷ Vida Roberts, ‘Heroin Chic’ In Withdrawal,’ *Toronto Star*, June 12, 1997, D3.

⁴⁰⁸ Foley, “Dior,” 8.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. After arresting approximately one hundred of New York City's homeless population on outstanding arrest warrants for minor infractions, Giuliani defended his "predawn sweep of shelters" by reasoning, "you have to pay attention to people urinating on the street, and you have to get people to stop urinating on the street."⁴⁰⁹ In asking what situation is more problematic, "a Paris fashion designer who wants to look at the homeless as aesthetic objects, or a New York mayor who does not want to look at them at all?" Dowd supports her argument with commentary from Mary Broshahan of the Coalition for Homelessness, who remarks in a similar fashion, "I'm no puritan; I have a cashmere sweater now. But the fact that this is a matter of life and death seems lost on Galliano and his Eurotrash following, and on Giuliani. Maybe the mayor should have one of those little straitjackets."⁴¹⁰ Dowd's criticism of Galliano stands as one of the few visible attempts to analyze the subject of homelessness through a socio-political reading.

Following the significant backlash Galliano received for his collection, Mary-Kate Olsen represents a critical turning point for 'homeless chic.' The celebrity is credited for naturalizing 'homeless chic' as a stylish mainstream fashion trend. Previously known to young consumer audiences as the twin-sister act, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, and for their shared role on the long-running television sitcom *Full House*, Forbes estimated her net worth in 2007 at approximately \$100 million due to her position as co-president of the limited liability company, DualStar Entertainment, and sharing a media empire comprised of direct-to-video feature films, video games, accessories, cosmetics, clothing and other affiliated branded merchandise.⁴¹¹ Olsen

⁴⁰⁹ Dowd, "Haute Homeless," 15.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ "The Richest 20 Women in Entertainment," *Forbes.com*, last modified January 20, 2007, accessed June 21, 2012,

captured the attention of the headlines in 2004, when she entered rehab for an eating disorder and subsequently retreated from the public spotlight. Upon leaving rehab that summer, Olsen re-emerged as a tabloid fixture following her move to New York City from her hometown of Los Angeles to attend college as a freshman at New York University with her twin sister.

Extremely thin and exhibiting the same lifeless facial expression that characterized the imagery of ‘heroin chic,’ the fashion press and celebrity tabloids published photographs of Olsen dressed in various states of impoverishment, wearing clothing that previously articulated stigmatized class identities, including ripped jeans, oversized sweaters, smudged makeup, bathrobes as coats and jackets, and mix-matched shoes and socks. Her look received such noteworthy cultural attention that *The New York Times* eventually devoted a featured article analyzing the social significance of her new fashion sense:

Last fall, soon after Mary-Kate Olsen enrolled as one of only two self-made millionaires in the freshman class of New York University, she was seen dashing around Greenwich Village wearing floppy hats, huge sunglasses, dust-catcher skirts and street-sweeping cable-knit cardigans. As fall turned to winter and edged toward spring, Ms. Olsen, 18, pushed her version of ashcan chic to emphatic extremes, an evolution charted by glossy magazines that snoop on stars’ everyday activities. The look became dottier and dottier, until it morphed into a kind of homeless masquerade, one that was accented by subtle luxuries like a cashmere muffler, a Balenciaga lariat bag and of course her signature carryout from Starbucks.⁴¹²

The New York Times applauded Olsen’s incorporation of ‘homeless chic’ for her apparent rejection of the material opulence often associated with youth of the millennium, supported by the newspaper’s criticism of celebrities such as Jessica Simpson and Paris Hilton for flaunting a lifestyle governed by ostentatious materialism. Her wearing of habitual signifiers of a lower-

http://www.forbes.com/2007/01/17/richest-women-entertainment-tech-media-cz_lg_richwomen07_0118womenstars_slide_12.html.

⁴¹² Ruth La Ferla, “Mary-Kate, Fashion Star,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2005, 9.

working and underclass identity symbolized Bauman's argument of a "class of people who are beyond classes ... with neither chance nor need of readmission, people without a role, making no useful contribution to the lives of the rest and in principle beyond redemption."⁴¹³ Rather than disapproving of Olsen's own disregard for her privileged lifestyle, *The New York Times* instead highlighted her unique role as an opinion leader amongst young girls, characterizing Olsen as a "fashion role model for a generation entering adulthood."⁴¹⁴ Yet what remains to be seen is why Olsen's incorporation of 'homeless chic', which is in no way any less stigmatizing or stereotypical than the outfits sent down the runway at Christian Dior, was praised while Galliano met such considerable backlash from cultural intermediaries.

After leaving New York University following her freshman year, Olsen co-founded with her twin sister the successful high fashion labels The Row and Elizabeth and James. The Council of Fashion Designers of America legitimized the credibility of the Olsen twins as high fashion designers by awarding the duo top womenswear design honours in June 2012 at the association's annual ceremony. As part of a promotional tour for The Row, the Olsens were questioned concerning their role in popularizing 'homeless chic,' a style in which they have largely abandoned. When asked by Style.com how deliberate or contrived their participation in the trend was, the twins offered this explanation:

Ashley: That moment for us was us waking up, going to school, and not wanting anyone to take our picture. Kind of a piece of protection.

⁴¹³ Bauman, "Collateral Casualties of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7:1 (2007): 31.

⁴¹⁴ La Ferla, "Mary-Kate, Fashion Star," 9.

Mary-Kate: For me, it was so cold, like the wind chill. How could you not put on 20 things when you're going from Los Angeles to walking through the snow? ... I think it was probably that. And laziness.⁴¹⁵

Rather than claiming agency over the trend they helped popularize, Mary-Kate Olsen's commentary highlights how fashion can be appropriated into the politics of (in)visibility. Linda Shearer supports the situational aspect of dress as a medium of social communication, where clothing enables the wearer to navigate through particular life experiences in the process of identity construction.⁴¹⁶ Based upon her defense of 'homeless chic,' the ripped jeans, oversized clothing and fingerless gloves instead appear to act as a form of security for an immensely privileged teenager attempting to escape the glare of the paparazzi in a new city following a stay in rehab. Within the context of Shearer's argument, Olsen's commentary on 'homeless chic' limits the trend's semiotic statement signifying a social criticism on Western consumer society's embrace of luxurious materialism as an intrinsic value and living standard, and thereby devaluing the acceptance of 'homeless chic' by *The New York Times*. By incorporating 'homeless chic' fashion into her wardrobe, Olsen manipulates the situational context of these clothing pieces to construct a spectacle designed to intensify the allure, and, arguably, the 'visibility' of her celebrity achieved through attracting the headlines of gossip tabloids.

Lacking from the commentary on Olsen's take of 'homeless chic,' however, is any correlation between the imagery captured and mediated by the press and the actual socioeconomic conditions of consumer society. The closest semblance to a critical commentary of 'homeless chic' that reflected the economic uncertainty plaguing consumer society came from

⁴¹⁵ Emily Singer, "Ashley Olsen & Mary-Kate Explain "Homeless Chic" Look," *Huffington Post*, last modified May 26, 2011, accessed February 19, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/26/ashley-olsen-homeless-chic_n_867484.html.

⁴¹⁶ Linda Shearer, "Being Yourself: Dress as a Change Agent," (presentation, Fourth Global Conference – Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues, University of Oxford, September 12-16, 2012).

The New York Times in its discussion of the predominance of ‘homeless chic’ examples proliferating popular culture in 2009, following the mortgage and stock market crises the previous year:

The overused journalistic trope used to be that the zeitgeist whispered and fashion listened. These days no special auditory skills are required to gauge the spirit of the age [...] Some of us prefer to think of fashion as a charcoal filter that indiscriminately sucks up whatever's swirling around, rather than a big ear that listens to what's going on in culture. Sometimes ideas become clarified in fashion, and sometimes they get stuck.⁴¹⁷

The inability of the press to correlate ‘homeless chic’ with any discussion of economic or social policy continued to be a discursive trend structuring the remainder of ‘homeless chic’ press coverage. As a comparison, ‘heroin chic’ was often viewed by the press as a subversive fashion trend challenging consumer society’s ideological conceptions of art, fashion and morality, whereas ‘homeless chic’ was trivialized for commodifying the underclass without any examination into the social influences perpetuating the trend into the forefront of consumer capitalism.

The subdued reaction to ‘homeless chic’ in contrast to ‘heroin chic’ is notable for the latter trend’s entrance into the mainstream. The gain in discursive momentum by ‘heroin chic’ coincided with the debut of cause marketing, a philanthropic corporate measure designed to bring larger awareness to a particular social issue through either advertising or the design and sale of limited edition merchandise.⁴¹⁸ The Italian fashion brand United Colors of Benetton is credited with popularizing this public relations tactic. After hiring Oliviero Toscani as director of advertising in 1984, United Colors of Benetton debuted its \$80 million campaign in 1991.

⁴¹⁷ Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless?” 22.

⁴¹⁸ Inger L. Stole, “Philanthropy as Public Relations: A Critical Perspective on Cause Marketing,” *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008): 21.

Advertisements for the company that ran in prominent magazines including *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *Rolling Stone* and the *New Yorker* featured graphics spotlighting global social issues such as capital punishment, AIDS, environmental politics, exile, war, genocide, and race, amongst others.⁴¹⁹ When asked by *Women's Wear Daily* for his opinion on Galliano's homeless couture collection, Lagerfeld associated 'homeless chic' within this larger postmodern trend of cause marketing: "The homeless may not be a couture theme [...] But too politically correct also becomes a bore, and I understand why people go in the opposite direction. If that's good, I have no idea [...] This collection is nothing compared to the lessons we are supposed to get from the Benetton ads."⁴²⁰ Lagerfeld's commentary speaks to one of the underlying factors plaguing the muted reception of 'homeless chic.' Combined with the boundary-pushing representations defining 'heroin chic,' the shocking imagery of Benetton's advertising campaigns helped popular culture develop a tolerance in regards to fashion imagery and the industry's place in cultural politics. Despite an extensive historical connection to various socioeconomic crises, 'homeless chic' as a trend is often dismissed as yet another attempt at cause marketing for the sole commercial and artistic benefit of the industry, an argument manifested in both Lagerfeld's statement. Since 'heroin chic' made its commercial debut, the fashion industry has experienced considerable change, a transformation directly influencing how 'homeless chic' has been received by popular culture. The development of shock advertising and its naturalization into a popular promotional technique, the maturity of the spectacle, and growing industry pressure on

⁴¹⁹ Henry Giroux, "Consuming Social Change: The 'United Colors of Benetton,'" *Cultural Critique* 26 (Winter, 1993-1994): 9, and Marwan M. Kraïdy and Tamara Goeddertz, "Transnational Advertising and International Relations: US Press Discourses on the Benetton 'We on Death Row' Campaign," *Media, Culture & Society* 25, no. 2 (2003), 147-148.

⁴²⁰ "Karl On The Homeless Flap," 11.

branding and marketing are key factors influencing the subdued reception of 'homeless chic' as a cultural trend.

In place of the absent social criticism, Galliano and *Zoolander* became the two intertextual references used by the press to help create a discursive schema to frame commentary on future 'homeless chic' examples, a rhetorical technique best illustrated in the reporting on Westwood's male ready-to-wear collection in January 2010. The line featured similar imagery to Galliano and *Zoolander*, comprised of models dressed in rags, appropriating pillows for hats, and often pushing abandoned shopping carts storing personal belongings down the runway. While her collection did not receive the same negative attention as Galliano, the positive treatment first garnered by Olsen's foray into 'homeless chic' was not attributed to Westwood's visualization of the trend. Rather her collection was viewed as comedic and unworthy of any critical attention, a criticism evoked by *The Guardian*: "Some might call it desperate. Some might even point out that John Galliano tapped this shtick years ago. Those of a more positive bent might say that any year that starts with the suggestion that *Zoolander* was no exaggeration is a year with definite promise."⁴²¹ By creating a correlation between Westwood, Galliano and *Zoolander*, *The Guardian*'s commentary represents the power by journalists to not only shape the discursive construct of 'homeless chic,' but also dictate the terms of reference for readers, a complex process of signification elaborated by Fairclough:

Discourses and the texts which occur within them have histories, they belong to historical series, and the interpretation of intertextual content is a matter of deciding which series a text belongs to, and therefore what can be taken as common ground for participants, or *presupposed*. As in the case of situational context, discourse participants may arrive at roughly the same interpretation or different ones, and the interpretation of the more powerful participant may be

⁴²¹ "Homeless Chic? It's so last decade," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2010, 3.

imposed upon others. So have power may mean being able to determine presuppositions.⁴²²

Fairclough's argument is best contextualized in Hadley Freeman's discussion of *Zoolander*'s applicability to the contemporary fashion industry, in which she incorporated the film as a discursive schema to approach her review of Westwood's collection in *The Guardian*:

As everyone knows, this film [*Zoolander*] is about a male model, one who fears neither cheese nor mockery, and whose signature looks, known as Blue Steel and Magnum, are things of beauty. The film also features a homeless-inspired fashion show which is so self-parodic it can only be a cover for something – and it is: a plot by the designer, Mugato, in which he brainwashes male models to kill ... the prime minister of Malaysia. Well, it just so happens that last week Vivienne Westwood showed a homeless-inspired menswear collection and Westwood's explanation about just how she totally, like, vibes on homelessness ('The nearest I have come to it is going home and finding I don't have my door key. I mean, what a disaster that is, dying to get in your house and you can't. And what if it wasn't there any more?') bears more than a smack of similarity with that of Mugato on the same subject: 'Homelessness is a fashion, a way of life inspired by the very homeless, the vagrants, the crack whores that make this wonderful city so unique.' Oliver Stone, where are you when you're finally needed?⁴²³

In a similar critique to that of *The Guardian*, *The Times* later questioned whether Westwood mistook *Zoolander* for a documentary as opposed to a comedic satire on the fashion industry.⁴²⁴

The newspaper similarly utilized the *Zoolander* frame of meaning when reviewing the collections by London's fashion graduate students, who "served up a full house of *Zoolander* classics."⁴²⁵ The intertextuality of Galliano and *Zoolander* gain their currency as frames of reference for readers due to the longstanding association connected to these examples amid the

⁴²² Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 152.

⁴²³ Hadley Freeman, "Did You Think *Zoolander* Was Just a Funny Film About the Fashion Industry? Really? It Is, I'll Have You Know, All True," *The Guardian*, January 27, 2010, 5.

⁴²⁴ Luke Leitch, "Front Row Gets Feet Wet as Designers Dip Toes in World of Men's Fashion," *The Times*, January 17, 2011, 7.

⁴²⁵ Leitch, "Britain's Got (Serious) Talent: The Most Shocking Thing About These New Looks? Their Designers Are Still at College," *The Times*, June 9, 2010, 31.

superficial theatricality typically correlated with fashion. Despite the diverse “looks” characterizing Galliano’s tenure as creative director at Christian Dior, his homeless collection and the subsequent public outrage that ensued were the primary examples of the designer’s public persona referenced in the newspaper coverage of his firing following the anti-Semitic allegations against Galliano. The referencing of *Zoolander* and Galliano as examples to ground a discussion of ‘homeless chic’ in the press entrench a tone of insincerity to criticism of the trend. Journalists further anchor the triviality of ‘homeless chic,’ such as in the examples from *The Guardian*, in their continued allusion to the hyper reality of ‘homeless chic,’ where the rich narrative of the trend is eliminated in favour of its simulation.

Crediting a friend of her husband who provided legal counsel to London’s homeless population in shelters as the inspiration behind her collection,⁴²⁶ Westwood emphasized access to culture when asked for a possible solution to tackling urban poverty: “if I were homeless, I would steal a bike and visit all the art galleries. Through culture homeless people can also participate in society. In London the streets have free admission, so they can be shelter for the homeless.”⁴²⁷ Westwood’s collection and her subsequent solution to homelessness emphasize the irony entrenched in the support of Olsen and ‘homeless chic’ by *The New York Times*. The trend enforces a highly exclusionary conception of cultural capital symbolic of a preferred class identity that ‘homeless chic,’ in the case of Olsen, supposedly rejects. The aesthetic of ‘homeless chic,’ encompassing a creative history as extensive as the introduction of mass media in Western consumer society, functions as a platform of symbolic violence naturalizing the growing separation of wealth; or, as Dowd phrased it, “our giddy gilded age is stretching the chasm – and

⁴²⁶ Leitch, “Homeless? It’s so chic at Milan fashion show,” *The Times*, January 18, 2010, 25.

⁴²⁷ Elke Swart, “Fashionably Homeless,” last modified January 18, 2011, accessed November 16, 2012, <http://www.streetnewsservice.org/news/2011/january/feed-264/fashionably-homeless-.aspx>.

perhaps also the tensions – between the haves and the have-nots.”⁴²⁸ Fashion, in the context of Galliano, Olsen and Westwood, is not eliminating the boundaries, restrictions, and inequalities governing the elitism of the industry, but rather romanticizing the poverty, debt and hardship experienced by the victims of economic recession through embracing the façade of the trend’s symbolism at the pinnacle of its implosion.

‘Homeless Chic’ and the Power of Cultural Intermediaries

The cultural trajectory of ‘homeless chic’ in popular culture represents the extent to which fashion trends are intricately embedded within the sociopolitical dynamic of public discourse, and the trend provides an abundance of examples to analyze the visualization of socioeconomic inequalities in Western consumer society. The differing commentaries and critiques of the trend reveal insight into the political and social complexities regarding the discursive construction of ‘homeless chic’ fashion and its circulation within contemporary popular culture. While ‘homeless chic’ has retained a consistent cultural presence, the trend has been at times equally, and sometimes unfairly, praised, supported and criticized, as demonstrated in the conflicting narratives utilized by the press and other cultural intermediaries in their treatment of ‘heroin chic,’ Galliano, Olsen, *Sex and the City*, Westwood, and Derek Zoolander.

The conflicting narratives central to the discursive circulation of ‘homeless chic’ represent the two dominant yet contrasting positions regarding the trend’s rebellious potential: do these representations reinforce the conventional circuits of commodity culture by offering a new constructed identity for mass consumption within the framework of postmodernity, or, conversely, what do these representations and their continued presence suggest in regards to the

⁴²⁸ Dowd, “Haute Homeless,” 15.

historic socio-political structure of Western consumer society? By historicizing the trend, this discussion not only examines ‘homeless chic’ within its larger social context, but demonstrates the imperative value of ‘homeless chic’ in illuminating the constant political struggle that is the negotiation over identity politics central to the hegemonic power of consumer society. The cultural intermediaries who are granted the role in praising or dismissing fashion trends are privileged with an influential and highly authoritative position as opinion leaders dictating how consumer society interacts and responds to issues of social inequalities. Despite whether critical or in support of specific examples, it is the commentary of the press that validates ‘homeless chic’ and helps the trend continue its narrative trajectory, for without the validation of the press, the material artefacts that define the symbolism of ‘homeless chic’ would remain as long-established and uncontested signifiers of an impoverished identity.

Notwithstanding their numerous similarities, differences and contradictions, the press treatment of ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ by the news media demonstrate the complexity of fashion's discursive construct circulated by the popular discourse. In *British Fashion Design*, McRobbie provides an overview of the social function of the fashion media in public discourse:

The fashion media ‘represents’ fashion, and in doing so adds its own gloss, its own frame of meaning to the fashion items which serve as its raw material. The support it offers, and the role it plays, are limited by the various traditions and conventions which have defined fashion journalism as a specialist field, shaping what can be said, and in what kind of format [...] We are entering the world of journalism as soon as we step inside the offices of *Marie Claire* magazine, or *Elle*, or the *Guardian* newspaper. It is the professional codes of journalism which dictate the way in which fashion is packaged and presented on their various pages.⁴²⁹

While McRobbie correctly details how the conventions of journalism organize and govern the practice of fashion reporting, her analysis primarily focuses on magazine publishing as opposed

⁴²⁹ McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, 151.

to newspapers. Press coverage of fashion in the news media is far more sociologically complex than suggested by McRobbie in *British Fashion Design*, and absent from her analysis is an identification of the inherent distinguishing characteristics between the two media. Focused on selling products to its consumer readership, magazines retain a synergetic relationship with advertisers. This emphasis is largely absent from newspaper publishing where concentration is placed on social coverage expressed through professional ideals of objectivity.

The specialized journalist is distinguished in McRobbie's work as a feminized figure contributing to the trivialization of the fashion industry, primarily due to the tendency to diminish fashion writing in magazines as a traditional "female" occupation. In contrast to male journalists who often report on a variety of topics such as politics, sports and business, few fashion or beauty specialist journalists switch areas of expertise or work in a general editorial capacity. The fashion journalist in McRobbie's study lacks "the broad cultural capital of the Oxford-educated journalist," and instead gains industry experience through precarious retail positions or creative freelance work.⁴³⁰ McRobbie argues that this professional isolation from other journalistic areas and the small, yet highly exclusive network of individuals who compose the fashion industry prohibits the emergence of fashion journalism as a form of critical cultural negotiation.

The niche industry of fashion journalism as described by McRobbie, however, is largely absent in discussions of 'heroin chic' and 'homeless chic' by the mainstream press. While each newspaper produced content authored by specialized journalists noted for their fashion criticism, such as Spindler and Wilson for *The New York Times* and Givhan for the *Washington Post*, the vast majority of articles were written by journalists whose area of expertise is not rooted

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 167.

exclusively in the fashion industry, but in economic fields such as finance, marketing and business, or in general lifestyle commentaries on literature, music and others forms of artistic mediation. In a feature on their fashion editor Bernadette Morra, the *Toronto Star* emphasized the writer's "serious" background, writing, "Make no mistake about Morra, though. This is a woman with a University of Toronto degree in criminology and sociology, real-world fields that encompass human situations that are often less than pleasant."⁴³¹ In an obituary published by *The New York Times* following the death of Amy Spindler, Cathy Horyn stressed the level of cultural sophistication embedded within the style editor's criticism. Following a specialized career path similar to the industry experience narrative documented by McRobbie, Spindler held jobs at various Condé Nast fashion publications following her graduation from Indiana University, ultimately earning a position at *W* Europe as an associate features editor before *The New York Times* created a fashion editorial position specifically for Spindler. This move by *The New York Times* transformed Spindler into "an equal with the paper's other critics," while symbolically endorsing, "the weight of her view on a subject she not only knew in depth but also believed should be taken seriously."⁴³² Although Spindler exemplifies McRobbie's theorization of the negative aspects of fashion journalism that limit the potential for the area to be viewed as a legitimate medium of cultural debate, Horyn recognized the critical significance of Spindler's writing, since the late fashion editor "was never interested in simply putting a dress on a page or talking about hemlines. She recognized that fashion was as important a cultural barometer as

⁴³¹ Doug Ibbotson, "A Real Passion for Fashion and Writing: But with Degrees in Criminology and Sociology, Editor's Feet Are Planted Firmly on the Ground," *Toronto Star*, February 11, 2000, BE03.

⁴³² Horyn, "Amy M. Spindler, Style Editor of Times Magazine, Dies at 40," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2004, C15.

music or art and that it should be – demanded to be – covered as rigorously as a political campaign.”⁴³³

Although the numerous journalists reporting on ‘heroin chic’ and ‘homeless chic’ possessed a wider variety in background and specialization than the norm argued by McRobbie, this diversity became an intrinsic weakness that was detrimental to the level of quality reflected in their treatment of the two trends. This weakness was particularly pronounced in the press reporting of ‘homeless chic.’ It received public attention only when framed by the press as a parody intended to assist readers in their interpretation of the trend, which, based on the perspective of Jeanne Becker, is an invention of the media specifically designed to guide consumers through what she refers to as the “madness” of an industry that is, at times, chaotic.⁴³⁴ While trends do perform a critical schematic function, the assumptions and interpretations of journalists in their mediation of the imagery of ‘homeless chic’ proved detrimental to the motif. Without a background in fashion design or the knowledge of past collections to help situate contemporary themes, journalists decontextualized ‘homeless chic’ into a trend defined by the caricatures of Galliano and Derek Zoolander. Rather than help frame fashion for mass audiences, this decontextualization diminishes the rich discursive construction of ‘homeless chic’ and the complex relationship the trend possesses with socioeconomic change. At a larger discursive level, the decontextualization of ‘homeless chic’ by the articles comprising the sample further illuminates the pressing need for journalists, as cultural intermediaries shaping public discourse, to take on a more active role connecting fashion, as a powerful medium of communication, to issues of identity, class, economics and politics.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Jeanne Beker, “Fashion Crimes: The *Big Debate*,” (panel discussion with Jeremy Lang, Robert Ott, Ashlee Froese, Nicholas Mellamphy and Dr. Alexandra Palmer, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, April 10, 2013).

Chapter Six: Intertextuality in *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess"

Fashion photography has always, at its root, been about creating a fantasy world into which the consumer is lured. In virtually all forms of fashion photography, there is a patina of glamour. Once anything is touched by the hand of fashion, it takes on an enticing glow and a secular and commercial appeal. It is only when fashion steps out of the world of fantasy and proposes something more ambitious that it conjures controversy and uneasiness. Consider fashion's recent volatile constructions of Hasidic and monastic chic, the disheveled glamour of grunge, the vibrant pastiche style of the African diaspora, the celebration of the childlike waif and the soigne hopelessness of heroin addiction. These were broad trends that were seen throughout the industry, from *Detour* magazine to *Vogue*. And whether the trends were distasteful, challenging or simply pretty, there was a belief on the part of the fashion industry that it was doing its job at its loftiest level: reflecting the culture at its best and worst.⁴³⁵

--- Robin Givhan, *Washington Post*

Signifying the unofficial commencement of the autumn/winter retail season, September is considered one of the more critical months of the year for the fashion industry. Amid the childhood and teenage demographics fostering September's "back-to-school shopping period," the month acts as a financial precursor to the Christmas season for merchandisers and retail analysts.⁴³⁶ The importance of the fall retail season is particularly emphasized by fashion magazines; a medium of cultural mediation bearing significant social power as an opinion leader of style and taste dictating particular consumption patterns, publishers direct meticulous attention to detail as they plan a fashion magazine's September issue. This influential example of cultural mediation in dictating the trends for the autumn/winter retail seasons became the subject of R. J. Cutler's 2009 documentary, *The September Issue*, which revealed behind-the-scenes insight into the creation of *Vogue*'s 2007 September Issue. In the introductory minutes of the documentary,

⁴³⁵ Givhan, "Ghoulish Spin On Fashion: Magazine Agrees Photo of Hanging Is in 'Bad Taste,'" *Washington Post*, August 12, 1998, D01.

⁴³⁶ Stephanie Rosenbloom, "Retailers' Sales for September Only Reach 2005 Levels," *The New York Times*, October 9, 2009, B1.

Vogue's Executive Fashion Director, Candy Pratts Price, speaks to the social power of the fall retail season, declaring, "September is the January in fashion, you know? This is when I change. This is when I say, you know, I'm going to get back on those high heels, because that's the look!"⁴³⁷ According to *The September Issue*, the fall edition of a particular magazine plays a highly influential role in shaping, critiquing, and enforcing fashion trends to consumer society, trends that are mirror reflections of the sociopolitical dynamic of contemporary North American cultural politics.

Launched during the first year of the economic crisis that began in October 2008, the fall 2009 fashion season is an effective example of the process of cultural mediation insinuated by *The September Issue*. With the weakening state of the American economy a frequent topic of discussion within the news media, financial hardship became a theme that could not be overlooked by an industry devoted to promoting extravagant, and largely unattainable, ideals of luxury. Comparable to other periods of socioeconomic turbulence, popular culture appropriated the imagery and discursive conventions of 'homeless chic' to reconcile the financial collapse with a changing political atmosphere and consumer society's embrace of austerity as a new spending practice. Writing in *The Globe and Mail*, business journalist Marina Strauss commented on the general distaste felt by consumers towards Canada's luxury market, where their apparent detachment from previous ideals of conspicuous consumption represented "a sign of the new times," with Strauss elaborating:

Many wealthy customers don't want to flaunt what they have in an economic crisis. Coupled with this is the general slump in consumer spending, leaving many high-end companies scrambling to cut back and trying to lure shoppers with discounts and special events. Holt Renfrew, Canada's premier upscale fashion chain, yesterday trimmed

⁴³⁷ *The September Issue*, directed by R.J. Cutler (2009; Los Angeles: Roadside Attractions, 2010), DVD.

131 employees, or 5 per cent of its work force, amid declining sales and customer traffic and no prospect of better times in 2009. And it's not alone. Car maker Bentley is axing 220 jobs; It Holding of Italy, home to the Gianfranco Ferre label, is facing bankruptcy. And holiday sales nosedived at Neiman Marcus, Tiffany & Co. and Saks Fifth Avenue. "People are looking for quality and quality experiences but they're not looking for conspicuous consumption," said Larry Rosen, chief executive of upscale men's wear retailer Harry Rosen, whose sales fell about 4 per cent over the past six months, although it is not handing out pink slips. Consumers are scaling back and trading down, and not only because of the money. They don't want to wear luxury on their sleeve in this economic climate.⁴³⁸

News reports on the effect of the recession on the retail sector provided similar statistics on the declining status of the American retail industry, a discursive schema ultimately functioning to enforce a narrative of austerity. Journalists sourced merchandise buyers and stylists stressing the need to purchase one or two high-quality 'timeless' designer pieces, as opposed to spending large dollars on trend-driven seasonal clothing items.⁴³⁹ Caryn Lerner, chief executive officer at Holt Renfrew, referred to cashmere as an "investment piece" in *The Globe and Mail*, noting that the luxury department store had witnessed sales of clothing designed with the rather exclusive wool rise since the beginning of the recession.⁴⁴⁰ Men's fashion became a prime focus for retailers; the press subsequently praised the male demographic for exemplifying the inconspicuous nature of the recession shopper.⁴⁴¹ *The Globe and Mail* ran a profile of 22-year-

⁴³⁸ Marina Strauss, "Canada's New Recessionary Consumer: Purveyors of Luxury Goods, Services Start to Tiptoe Down-Market," *The Globe and Mail*, February 11, 2009, B1.

⁴³⁹ See, for example, Eric Wilson, "Irresistible and Affordable," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2009, E1.

⁴⁴⁰ Strauss, "Serving Lattes To Sell Cashmere: Luxury Retailers Are Feeling the Pinch. But While Her Rivals Just Slash Prices, Holt Renfrew CEO Caryn Lerner Is Confronting the Situation," *The Globe and Mail*, December 29, 2008, B1.

⁴⁴¹ See, for example, Strauss, "My Recession Suit: Just A Couple of Years Ago, Adam Conn Might Have Come to Work in Khakis and a Sports Jacket. But Today, in these Uncertain Economic Times, He's Taking No Chances," *The Globe and Mail*, March 16, 2009, B1; David Colman, "When No One Wants to Look Like a Banker," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2009,

old Torontonian Adam Conn, who, after spending over \$1500 on clothing following his full-time hire at Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, evoked the very discourse of the recession constructed by cultural intermediaries: “I want to step up my game in every aspect, whether it’s working harder, putting in the extra hours, being more productive – but also looking as good as I can. Image is extremely important. If I am spending money on clothes, I am spending money on suits or ties. I do need to look my best.”⁴⁴² Retail executives, merchandisers and stylists, on the other hand, constructed a discourse of restrained expenditure, and popular culture embraced the ‘homeless chic’ aesthetic commercialized by Galliano and Olsen. North American newspapers reported on the predominance of ‘homeless chic’ examples infiltrating the fashion runways in fall 2009. Eric Wilson of *The New York Times* sarcastically argued the ‘imaginative’ intrigue of Christophe Decamin’s \$1500 cotton t-shirt for Balmain was “some artfully placed holes.”⁴⁴³ The *Toronto Star* referred to ‘homeless chic’ as a lapse in judgment as opposed to connecting the trend’s representation in the collections of Comme des Garçons, Viktor & Rolf, Balmain and Yohji Yamamoto to the socioeconomic conditions influencing the contemporary dynamic of popular culture.⁴⁴⁴

Fostered by the onset of the economic recession, this negotiation between the binary of indulgence and austerity central to current discourses of ‘homeless chic’ is integrated into both the textual and visual content of *W*’s September 2009 issue. The influence of the economic

E1; Christina Passariello and Ray A. Smith, “Rewarding Men With a Store of Their Own: New Hermes, Coach Boutiques Offer Clubby Décor and Shoppers Don’t Have to ‘Traipse Through the Women’s Department,’” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2010, D6; Josh Patner, “Damsels in His Dress,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 9, 2010, D1; and Strauss, “Slimmer Fit, Fatter Margins as Men Boost Fashion Sales,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 14, 2012, B1.

⁴⁴² Strauss, “My Recession Suit,” B1.

⁴⁴³ Wilson, “Hello, Customers. Are You Out There?” *The New York Times*, October 16, 2008, E1.

⁴⁴⁴ Graham, “Eve of Destruction,” L01 and Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless,” A22.

recession is an aspect directly referenced in Deputy Editor Julie L. Belcove's "Letter from the Editors" column outlining the features, tone and theme of *W*'s September issue: "[A] woman so besotted with status brands she even wears their shopping bags – not your typical magazine fare. But such are the scenarios of *W*'s sumptuous fashion shoots this month, the traditional kickoff to the fall retail marathon."⁴⁴⁵ *W*'s September 2009 issue incorporates numerous references to the collapse of the American economy and the ensuing recession prohibiting consumer spending. Belcove directly refers to the ongoing recession in her opening address, noting, "Of course, the economy, still sputtering and wheezing, would not seem to augur well for the rag trade. If there's a winner, however, it may be she who still has a well-fortified credit card."⁴⁴⁶ Dana Wood, the magazine's Senior Fashion Features Editor, argues that the crippling effects of the financial crisis would be most visible in the spending patterns of the young female demographic, with older women the new target market for design houses due to their access of the monetary means to consume exclusive high-end labels.⁴⁴⁷ The magazine's long-running satirical column – written by the Countess Louise J. Esterhazy, a pseudonym for *W*-founder John Fairchild – questions the continued ostentatious lifestyle and political connections enjoyed by those individuals of the most privileged societal classes.⁴⁴⁸ In spite of these numerous textual references to the critical condition of the American economy, the photo-editorial "Paper Bag Princess," published in *W*'s September issue and indirectly alluded to in Belcove's opening statement, best illustrates the tensions, contradictions and unique nuances of the relationship between fashion, consumption

⁴⁴⁵ Belcove, "Fall Classic," 158.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Dana Wood, "*W* Fashion Flash: Adult Content," *W*, September 2009, 180-182.

⁴⁴⁸ Louise J. Esterhazy, "*W* Last Laugh: Louise's Frugal Fantasy," *W*, September 2009, 340. See also Meryl Gordon, "John Fairchild: Fashion's Most Angry Fella," *Vanity Fair*, September 2012, 342, for an overview of John Fairchild's role and influential power in shaping the fashion industry.

and class-based identity politics in light of the socioeconomic context in which the editorial is produced. The power of “Paper Bag Princess” as a form of visual representation is in the editorial’s ability to differentiate various classes of consumers by targeting the middle class, provoking socially constructed notions of disgust that separate the magazine’s constituents from lower class identities. The numerous intertextual references incorporated into the editorial’s imagery simultaneously anchor “Paper Bag Princess” within a larger discursive narrative of cultural appropriation, urban identities and escapism.

Twenty-eight pages in length, “Paper Bag Princess” evokes the contrast between prosperity and destitution through juxtaposing high fashion clothing with a decaying environment representing the “ghettos” of an urban neighbourhood, most likely that of New York City.⁴⁴⁹ The imagery of ‘homeless chic’ depicted in *W*’s “Paper Bag Princess” would not be as ubiquitous in popular culture if it were not for the rise of fashion photography, a medium that helped frame critical discussions regarding fashion’s social function in the popular discourse. Profiling a series of exhibits on fashion photography displayed at New York City’s International Center of Photography, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on the unique characteristics that distinguish fashion photography from other forms of visual expression, and specifically the contentious relationship between art, commerce and mass appeal described by the exhibit’s curators:

“Some of the questions that we've addressed toward other areas of photography such as photojournalism could also be addressed to fashion photography,” argues Brian Wallis, the center's chief curator. The photographs “address sociological issues or issues of social history and shape public consciousness and attitudes. All kinds of social views go into the production of images for fashion photography.” The center began planning this series two years ago. Fashion photography is “an area that involves a lot of inventiveness

⁴⁴⁹ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 260-287.

in order to keep things lively for the reader – to do the same thing month after month, year after year really requires extreme innovation if you're going to be any good," says Vince Aletti, a co-curator of the series. "A lot of the people who are working [in it] today are producing some of the most interesting photography out there, and virtually all of that work hasn't been seen by anyone unless they're looking very regularly at American and European fashion magazines.⁴⁵⁰

Highlighting the cultural power of *Vogue Italia* in creating stimulating editorials that are frequently mimicked by the rest of the industry, Amy Spindler argues photographers, editors and stylists are placing greater emphasis on the commercial interests of their magazines as opposed to the creative, consequently resulting in increased artistic prominence of fashion advertising. In detailing the artistic degeneration of the fashion editorial, a medium of artistic expression popularized by photographers such as Steven Meisel, Craig McDean and Paolo Roversi, Spindler writes:

[t]his decade has produced the most powerful visual stimulation in history [...] But you wouldn't know all that from looking at most American fashion magazines. Photographs are published like the tree that falls in the forest when no one is there: they are soundless. They cause no ripples. There are no aftershocks [...] The pressures to produce a fat magazine with lots of advertising and million-mark circulation has put a heavy burden on the creativity at American magazines. The cover that sells best at the newsstand isn't necessarily the most creative one; market tests dictate what the choice should be. Editorial spreads with the most progressive ideas aren't necessarily the ones readers like best; researchers test-market the layouts and even the individual photo.⁴⁵¹

Photographed by Craig McDean (referred to by *Women's Wear Daily* as a "star photographer,"⁴⁵² and known for his work in *W*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *The Face*), and styled by *W*'s former Fashion Director Alex White, *The New York Times* summarized "Paper

⁴⁵⁰ Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, "Photography: Where Fashion Spreads Are Taken Seriously," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2009, D5.

⁴⁵¹ Spindler, "The Splash Heard Round the World," *The New York Times*, September 13, 1998, 1.

⁴⁵² "The Decades – 1990 to 1999," *Women's Wear Daily*, September 28, 1998, 140S.

Bag Princess” as, “repurpos[ing] shopping bags from labels like Chanel and Dior as makeshift dresses, and shows them worn with fur and pearls and designer bags.”⁴⁵³ Responsible for helping elevate the stature of fashion photography as a respected art, McDean was a pivotal figure in discussions of heroin chic’s polarizing imagery, with Amy Spindler describing the photographer’s aesthetic in *The New York Times*: “Mr. McDean shot the most recent Jil Sander campaign and catalogue, where the model Guinevere van Seenus has messy knotted hair, clammy skin, red-rimmed eyes, and, in one picture, the left sleeve of her sweater pushed up.”⁴⁵⁴ Comparing the environment of “Paper Bag Princess” to a “dream,” Belcove describes the editorial to *W*’s readership as “featuring model [Pivovarova] decked out in fabulous coats and designer shopping bags. Now there’s a recession buster. And recyclable, to boot.”⁴⁵⁵ The photo-editorial shot Russian model Sasha Pivovarova wearing a combination of designer labels, including Christian Dior, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Jean Paul Gaultier, Prada, Comme des Garçons, Versace and Lanvin, amongst others, in addition to “cleverly constructed”⁴⁵⁶ paper bags modeled as dresses, coats and accessories, displaying the labels associated with each designer.⁴⁵⁷ The somber setting of the photo-editorial is emphasized by the imagery of deterioration, particularly with the inclusion of dark alleyway corners marked with graffiti, isolated park benches, rusting subway grates and potholes lining the crumbling sidewalks of inner-city streets.

Despite the polarizing imagery of “Paper Bag Princess” in light of the fragile North American socioeconomic climate, the editorial received minimal press attention. *Adbusters* and

⁴⁵³ Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless?,” A22.

⁴⁵⁴ Spindler, “The 90’s Version of the Decadent Look,” 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Belcove, “Fall Classic,” 158.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 260.

The New York Times stand out amongst the trend's larger press coverage as notable exceptions, with the latter appropriately noting that "'Paper Bag Princess' is just one of numerous examples defining the cultural trend of 'homeless chic.'"⁴⁵⁸ In her review of September issues by publications including *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Elle*, the *New York Post*'s Serena French critiqued *W*'s editorial as one of the magazine's weaker points, arguing, "'Paper Bag Princess' is a spread where homeless-chic street style collides with high fashion, and has cool elements, but there's too much paper bag – and it might even just be in poor taste."⁴⁵⁹ *Adbusters*, a Canadian anti-corporate magazine aimed at destabilizing the capitalist mythology of consumer-culture, offered subtle praise for "Paper Bag Princess" for indirectly generating awareness towards capitalist forms of symbolic exploitation:

It would be all too easy to fly into an indignant, leftist rage at the sight of a wan model dressed in luxury shopping bags and splayed out next to garbage cans. But that's probably the exact reaction *W* was banking on with its 'homeless chic' pictorial. Fashion advertising is increasingly driven by the dialectic between salacious imagery and moral outrage. Something so absurd as the *W* spread, in which destitution has never looked so glamorous, seems more like a culture jam – an effort to subvert the advertising – than advertising itself. But advertising, like a virus, is always evolving. It has appropriated absurdity in an attempt to render itself immune to subversion. And now people who see the magazine will break into two camps – those two sides will argue, keeping *W* exactly where it wants to be – in the spotlight. So anyone truly concerned with lessening advertising's grip on culture will have to figure out not how to subvert this kind of ad, but how to jam the dialectic it feeds on.⁴⁶⁰

The praise for "Paper Bag Princess," and the suggestion by *Adbusters* that the larger trend of 'homeless chic,' of which *W*'s editorial is its most pronounced example in recent years,

⁴⁵⁸ Trebay, "Aware of the Homeless," A22

⁴⁵⁹ Serena French, "Thinner Is In For Fall Magazines: Fall Fashion in the Mags," *New York Post*, August 18, 2009, 33.

⁴⁶⁰ Nardi, "Damn the Fashionistas!," <https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/new-aesthetic/fashionistas.html>

possesses the potential to ask critical questions regarding the ensuing influence that the intersections of fashion, advertising, and identity have on Western consumer culture, initially seemed disconcerting due to *Adbusters'* editorial stance and political positioning. Yet their commentary and rhetorical call to critique the discourses of consumer society address the symbolic significance of "Paper Bag Princess" as a form of cultural mediation, in addition to fashion photography's power to provide a visual representation to the unique ideological tensions, contradictions and nuances of not only 'homeless chic' in popular culture, but the place of consumption in the cultural politic of North American society. Drawing from Judith Williamson's framework in *Decoding Advertisements*, the power of "Paper Bag Princess" lies not in its attempt to visually stigmatize the conditions experienced by society's urban homeless communities, but rather its ability to appropriate the insecurities, reservations and ambiguities experienced by contemporary consumers in order to construct and perpetuate the cultural mythology and narrative of 'homeless chic' as a fashion trend.⁴⁶¹

Distinguishing Difference

The imagery of "Paper Bag Princess" finds its cultural relevancy through appealing to the cultural capital, aesthetic knowledge, and the perceived sense of 'respectability' among upper-middle-class consumers, the targeted demographic of *W*. *The New York Times* referenced American author Mary McCarthy's conceptualization of the interdependent relationship between *Vogue* and its readers, an observation applicable to the hyper-real spectacle visualized by *W*: "This paradoxical relation between magazine and audience had a certain moral beauty, at least on the subscribers' side -- the beauty of unrequited love and unflinching service to an ideal that is

⁴⁶¹ In *Decoding Advertisements*, 23, Williamson argues that advertising appropriates the signifiers articulating the conditions of social reality in order to construct a mythical message. The power in this process of rearticulation is validated when referents to reality become embedded into the language of advertising.

arbitrary, unsociable, and rejecting, like Kierkegaard's God and Kafka's Castle."⁴⁶² With their circulation audience of 465,920 paid annual subscribers reporting a medium household income of \$158,940, *W* caters to a very specific demographic, in contrast to other more mainstream or commercial fashion magazines.⁴⁶³ In contrast to *W*, *Vogue* reaches an audience of approximately 921,418 subscribers with a reported medium income of \$69,447.⁴⁶⁴ While both publications operate under the management of Condé Nast, the commercial nature of *Vogue*, and the notoriety – and, at times, criticism – of its Editor-in-Chief, Anna Wintour, appeals to a much wider and more demographically diverse audience than *W*, where the artistic orientation of the latter enables the magazine to explore aesthetics not generally accepted in fashion magazine layouts. Stefano Tonchi, *Esquire*'s creative director, compares *W*'s impact as a creative trade publication to that of *Italian Vogue*, a status that positions the Condé Nast publication to “be more provocative and interesting and on the edge than American *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*.” Spindler similarly argues that the creative work comprising *W* and *Vogue Italia* is “perused with fervor by insiders to the fashion trade, who are not only educated in fashion but also indoctrinated.”⁴⁶⁵ This relationship between the production of a media text and the imagined readership or viewership of that particular message is argued by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen to represent the symbiotic relationship between production, circulation, reception, and the “rigidly defined values and beliefs of the social institution,” in which these representations develop their cultural currency.⁴⁶⁶ Drawing upon Althusser's structural argument of interpellation Williamson argues

⁴⁶² Dowd, “Dressing for Contempt,” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1997, 31.

⁴⁶³ “*W* Circulation Demographics,” *Condénast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/w/media-kit/print>

⁴⁶⁴ “*Vogue* Circulation Demographics,” *Condénast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue/media-kit/print>

⁴⁶⁵ Spindler, “Splash Heard Round the World,” 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Kress and Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 115.

that individual consumers are actively interpellated into the message of advertising, and, in doing so, validates the currency of advertising as a social institution by working to create symbolic meaning.⁴⁶⁷ Power is generated through the individual consumer exhibiting the appropriate cultural knowledge, what Williamson refers to as “the rules of the game,” to comprehend consumer society’s ideological panorama, an understanding central for *W*’s readership to navigate the complex symbolism of “Paper Bag Princess.”⁴⁶⁸

At a basic connotative level, “Paper Bag Princess” *differentiates* the privileged consumer of *W*’s targeted readership from actual conditions of material scarcity, a tactic achieved through framing the imagery of the editorial to invoke class-based notions of disgust and revulsion towards the underclass subjects of consumer society. With Williamson establishing that the discourse of advertising functions to depoliticize class relations by concealing the socio-political inequalities at the core of the cultural institution,⁴⁶⁹ Lawler argues that class-based politics are “an absent presence,” that “circulates socially while being unnamed.”⁴⁷⁰ Economic distinctions between various statuses are continuously circulated and reinforced by media texts, yet the politics of neoliberal consumer society blurs these boundaries and shifts them to the realm of the symbolic, with Lawler suggesting:

That such references, such easy invoking of a few signifiers, do a great deal of work in coding a whole way of life that is deemed to be repellant. In a kind of join-the-dots pathologization, the reader (or viewer), is left to fill in the picture by understanding that certain kinds of clothing, location and bodily appearance indicate not only a despised class position but an underlying pathology.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 41 and 99.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁷⁰ Lawler, “Hidden Privileges of Identity,” 126.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

The imagery of “Paper Bag Princess,” enforced by the traditional articulations of a “ghetto” lifestyle, denotes a neoliberal association of material poverty as an individualized failure symbolizing a subordinate identity. The stigmatizing and highly stereotypical representation of urban poverty as defined by the “ghetto” lifestyle, however, conversely functions in “Paper Bag Princess” to maintain upper-middle-class values of respectability and decency.

The most prominent way in which “Paper Bag Princess” induces socially constructed notions of disgust from its marketed upper-middle-class readership is through the incorporation of signifiers reflecting urban ruin. The inner-city alleyways of an urban centre, marked by crumbling townhomes, empty store-front windows, and graffiti notes, function to enforce the hopelessness of the underclass environment. Two years into the recession, Manhattan offices posted vacancy rates of 11.3 percent in 2010,⁴⁷² and *The New York Times* reported on the infrastructure collapse plaguing Phoenix, a city once heralded for its economic potential:

In 2006, when growth peaked, about 30 percent of the Phoenix area's economic output was tied to real estate and construction. So it was not long after the once white-hot housing market fell apart, in 2007, that the rest of the city's economy stumbled, and hard. As jobs in construction and real estate dried up, and stock market losses curbed the relocation of retirees from the north, in-migration to the city radically slowed. Commercial brokers blame a confluence of factors for the worst downturn in memory: rampant overbuilding, a national economic crisis, spiking unemployment and a near halt in population growth. The result is visible all over the city in the form of empty storefronts and ‘for lease’ signs affixed to office buildings. The worst-off of these projects were built in marginal locations on the outskirts of the metropolitan area, and stand completely empty months and even years after completion. ‘We've got some see-through shopping centers,’ said David Wetta, senior vice president and managing director in the Phoenix office of the real estate brokerage Marcus & Millichap.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Steve Ladurantaye, “The World of Retail Rents,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 8, 2010, B2.

⁴⁷³ John Collins Rudolf, “Phoenix Meets the Wrong End of the Boom Cycle,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2010, B6.

The financial problems and urban ruin experienced by Phoenix, however, were not an isolated phenomenon, as demonstrated by commentaries on the deteriorating state of Western commercial centres, particularly New York City, London and Toronto.⁴⁷⁴ Yet the description of the recession's spatial effects on Phoenix provides a textual reference grounding the visual setting of "Paper Bag Princess" within a larger narrative of urban ruin circulated by the public discourse.

With consistent news reports of retail vacancies and foreclosures, the mania expressed by the press regarding the collapse of American consumer society provides the appropriate socioeconomic context for comprehending the urban ghetto visualized by McDean's "Paper Bag Princess." The opening image of the "Paper Bag Princess" shows Pivovarova walking down a deserted urban avenue. The depreciating townhomes and local business establishments outlining the street are in clear disarray, with their windows boarded and decorative paint chipped, exposed piping and black iron trimmings corroding, and the sidewalks and roadways filled with potholes and crumbling cement edges. The forsaken urban setting of "Paper Bag Princess" gains its symbolic potency by drawing upon the dominant theme of economic abandonment constructed by the press in their reporting of the recession's socioeconomic consequences, a narrative best expressed by Marc S. Cooper, managing director for investment advisory firm

⁴⁷⁴ Ramey, "High-End Retail Bet in Pacific Northwest," *Women's Wear Daily*, June 10, 2009, 12 and Julia Werdigier, "Pop! An Empty Shop Fills With Art," *The New York Times*, September 1, 2009, C1. For news reports on the effects of the recession on local business and independent fashion boutiques, refer to Strauss, "Iconic Names Salvaged from Recession Casualties," *The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 2009, B1; Christine Haughney, "Recession Has Landlords of Retail Tenants Extending Discounts of Their Own," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2009, A23; Robin Finn, "Sad Days at Fortunoff's, but the Bargains!," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2009, L11; Rita Zekas, "Fashion's Victims: With Formerly Loyal Clientele Feeling the Economic Crunch, High-End Shops Have Become Casualties of the Crisis," *Toronto Star*, March 11, 2009, L01; Horyn, "Yes, We're Open," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2009, E1; and Stephanie Clifford, "As U.S. Retailers Retreat, a Japanese Chain Sees an Opening," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2012, B1.

Peter J. Soloman Co.: “as we know, this is more than just a recession.”⁴⁷⁵ The financial (in)stability of luxury department stores Barneys New York and Saks Fifth Avenue were continuously debated in press reports of the recession’s impact on retail,⁴⁷⁶ where murmurs of the latter’s bankruptcy drew strength in the media after Saks Fifth Avenue “began posting double-digit declines and selling luxury goods at 75 percent off,” measures viewed as “decimating the luxury market.”⁴⁷⁷ As opposed to staying within the limits of the sidewalk, Pivovarova occupies the centre of the deserted road; this deliberate detachment from the sidewalk further enforces her apparent ostracism in what is visibly a post-industrial city neighbourhood. Combined with appropriation of paper bags into a fashion, the deserted street in “Paper Bag Princess” symbolizes the death of American textile manufacturing. Significant press attention in the news media discussed the apparent demise of New York City’s Garment District, an icon of America’s retail industry designated as “in danger of extinction” by *The New York Times*.⁴⁷⁸ The second photograph of the editorial incorporates similar spatial imagery into its landscape, where a close-up of Pivovarova resting against an alleyway corner spotlights the fading graffiti messages, the eroding wood, crumbling cement and brick fragments of debris littering the sidewalk and the abandoned entrances of storefronts and apparent buildings. Other

⁴⁷⁵ Rachel Dodes and Peter Lattman, “Corporate News: Dubai May Opt to Bag Barneys,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2009, B2.

⁴⁷⁶ For press reports on Barneys and Saks, refer to Rosenbloom, “Possibly On Sale At Barneys: Barneys,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2009, B5; and Julia Werdigier, “Icelandic Firm Seeks Creditor Protection,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2009, B10; and Rosenbloom, “For Spring Clothes, A Lost Season?,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2009, E1.

⁴⁷⁷ Rosenbloom, “As Saks Reports a Loss, Its Chief Offers a Plan,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2009, B1.

⁴⁷⁸ Charles V. Bagli, “New York Seeks to Consolidate Its Garment District,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 2009, A20. See also Shelly Banjo, “Block Party: Garment District Frays,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 2010, A24 and Jean Appleton, “Long Live the Garment District,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2012, A12 for selected press treatment on New York City’s Garment District.

photographs in the editorial showcase Pivovarova positioned on park benches, makeshift tarp tents and subway grates, artefacts and materials often utilized by homeless communities as forms of shelter and protection.

The materiality of “Paper Bag Princess” articulates an industrial landscape in decline, enabling readers to construct an economic correlation between geographic space and class status. While there exists an historical tendency to utilize ‘space’ as a mechanism to categorize – and accordingly demonize – particular areas known for relatively high tendencies towards criminal behaviour, the imagery associated with these areas help solidify space as landscapes endowed with cultural narratives and memories.⁴⁷⁹ As Donna Laframboise of the *National Post* writes:

When a filmmaker wants us to know a scene is unfolding in a dangerous part of town, he shows us graffiti. This is because graffiti is shorthand for urban decay. Cinematically, it is the opposite of a white picket fence on a clean, friendly street. [...] Graffiti tells everyone the community has broken down, that no one cares enough to keep it clean and orderly. Which is why graffiti attracts criminals.⁴⁸⁰

The editorial directly relates the space represented to those individuals who inhabit it through associating the industrial landscape of “Paper Bag Princess” with traditional notions of disparity. In contrast to other visual depictions of ‘homeless chic’ in popular culture –most notably the photo shoot from *America’s Next Top Model* that featured residents of local New York City homeless shelters – the neighbourhood’s dwellers are not afforded the privilege to be visualized in their own community by “Paper Bag Princess.” By excluding any reference to the very residents whose neighbourhood provides the visual setting for “Paper Bag Princess,” the editorial adds a sense of disgrace to an identity otherwise segregated from exclusive spaces. This semiotic

⁴⁷⁹ Lawler, *Identity*, 132-141. See also Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1989): 14-25.

⁴⁸⁰ Donna Laframboise, “The Writings on the Wall,” *National Post*, January 9, 2001, A15.

exchange transforms the materiality of space into a site of symbolic meaning fostering the production of particular identities.⁴⁸¹

In addition to the references anchoring the editorial's cultural narrative of economic and aesthetic decline, the rough visuals of its imagery evokes a harsh and hopeless atmosphere largely through the use of colour. While a few photographs of "Paper Bag Princess" are shown in the traditional black-and-white format, the editorial features a dark and solemn colour palette utilizing browns, grays, blacks, burgundies and neutrals, shades that are incorporated in both the material objects constructing the landscape and in the clothing modeled by Pivovarova. The strategic use of colour, as argued by Williamson, is a visual rhetorical technique often incorporated into the imagery of advertisements in order to create associations between the material product being sold by advertisers and the larger fantasy constructed by the respective advertisement.⁴⁸² The dark brown fur coat worn by Pivovarova easily camouflages her appearance on the deserted city street, with the hue closely matching the painted trim of the townhomes and the brick storefronts. The colour scheme of "Paper Bag Princess" enables Pivovarova to blend into the decaying urban environment, creating a visual connection to the geographic landscape in decline and her inherent identity as an underclass subject excommunicated from commodity culture, and relegated to occupying the deserted environment.

Visualizing Urban Ruin

Although the editorial connotes Pivovarova as an underclass subject through her ostracism from the proper, acceptable consumers of society, it is this exact visual isolation of community residents that positions "Paper Bag Princess" as a form of artistic expression into the

⁴⁸¹ See, for example, W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscapes and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴⁸² Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 20-23.

cultural narrative of the American landscape. While five of the editorial's photographs are merely fashion images designed to showcase the clothing as opposed to serving as visual storytelling, Pivovarova is depicted alone throughout the entire series, an essential feature of "Paper Bag Princess" that is more pronounced in the artistic scenes. The opening photograph of the editorial, featuring Pivovarova walking down the empty city street with a fur coat thrown over her slumped shoulders, mediates a post-apocalyptic atmosphere. Pivovarova clutches on to a commodity to protect her in this new, unknown environment, a direct visual reference to the decline of the American industrial landscape. This ambiance is further suggested by the ostracism of the model posed in deserted places that would normally be characterized by bustling crowds, such as central city park benches and subway stations.

The post-apocalyptic atmosphere created by the editorial's imagery symbolizes a declining American industrial urban landscape resulting from the highly detrimental consequences of neoliberal economic thought. The theme of urban industrial degeneration mediated so powerfully by the opening image of "Paper Bag Princess" finds a realistic comparison with *The Ruins of Detroit*, a collection of photographs by French artists Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre. *The Ruins of Detroit* showcases the urban devastation and architectural ruin Marchand and Meffre witnessed after touring Detroit's city centre, an aesthetic itself representative of a rich history of competing socioeconomic interests and racial tensions.⁴⁸³ Providing the necessary historical context to comprehend the social, political and economic influences manifested in Detroit's urban landscape, historian Thomas Sugrue indirectly highlights the very narrative enriching the cultural meaning of "Paper Bag Princess:"

The abandoned factories, the eerily vacant schools, the rotting houses, and gutted skyscrapers that Yves Marchand and Romain

⁴⁸³ Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, *The Ruins of Detroit* (London: Steidl, 2010).

Meffre chronicle are the artefacts of Detroit's astonishing rise as a global capital of capitalism and its even more extraordinary descent into ruin, a place where the boundaries between the American dream and the American nightmare, between prosperity and poverty, between the permanent and the ephemeral are powerfully and painfully visible. No place epitomizes the creative and destructive forces of modernity more than Detroit, past and present.⁴⁸⁴

While the racial and socioeconomic problems plaguing Detroit remain incomparable to the landscape mediated by "Paper Bag Princess," Sugrue's commentary fittingly captures the critique of consumption embedded within the editorial's polarizing imagery of urban centres. The imagery of urban ruin signifies an ideological crossroads at the heel of industrial consumerism as a dying social institution. In a society governed by the politics of neoliberal thought, "Paper Bag Princess" visualizes a society where the materiality and values that were once praised are now the cause of national ruin.

Press coverage of the economic recession displayed a tendency to focus on the symbiotic relationship between American consumer spending, debt, and the (un)willingness of credit lenders to hold their clients fiscally responsible.⁴⁸⁵ By individualizing the recession, the result of significantly larger policy decisions at both the domestic and international levels, news media subsequently defined the discursive schema utilized to frame the majority of discussions concerning financial hardship circulated within public discourse, and directly visualized by

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas Sugrue as cited in Sean O'Hagan, "Detroit in Ruins: The Photographs of Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre," *The Guardian*, last modified January 2, 2011, accessed March 13, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jan/02/detroit-ruins-marchand-meffre-photographs-ohagan>. See also Jean-Thomas Tremblay, "Beyond the Necrological: Affective Encounters with Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre's *The Ruins of Detroit*," paper presented at *Geographies of Promise and Betrayal: Land and Place in US Studies*, University of Toronto, October 25-28, 2012.

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, Gretchen Morgenson, "Given a Shovel, Americans Dig Deeper Into Debt," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2008, A1; David Leonhardt, "We're Spent," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2011, SR1; and Robert J. Shiller, "Spend, Spend, Spend. It's the American Way," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2012, BU3.

“Paper Bag Princess.” Whereas the decline of the American automobile market is one of numerous factors responsible for Detroit’s socioeconomic condition, the post-apocalyptic setting of “Paper Bag Princess” visualizes a setting in which consumers have wasted their capital to the brink of annihilation. The urban environment understood as New York City – the pillar of American retail merchandising and its related industries – begins to deteriorate under the destructive conditions historically associated with consumer society.

While the editorial features signifiers visualizing the destitution, ruin and devastation of economic uncertainty – and offers complementary stereotypical imagery of the conditions experienced by urban homeless individuals – what distinguishes “Paper Bag Princess” from this basic semiotic interpretation is the inclusion of haute couture and high-end designer clothes from exclusive labels including Chanel, Christian Dior, Comme des Garçons, Lanvin, and Jean Paul Gaultier, amongst others. Rooted in cultural narratives and mythologies, *difference* is a central component of advertising for Williamson, who theorizes the concept of *difference* to function as a form of reverse totemism, “where *things* are used to differentiate groups of people.”⁴⁸⁶ “Paper Bag Princess” thereby works to construct a system of *difference* between the underclass subject living in material ruin from the upper-middle-class consumer of *W*. It is apparent that Pivovarova is not homeless, a differentiating aspect articulated through her immaculate hair and cosmetics, nail polish, jeweled accessories, and incorporation of ‘wasteful’ clothing marked by the use of conspicuous textiles and trimming, including fur and silk. Guy Trebay of *The New York Times* described Pivovarova’s appearance in “Paper Bag Princess” as “listless but still ineffably glamorous.”⁴⁸⁷ While the editorial’s characterization of Pivovarova as a “waif” in *W*’s short textual introduction to “Paper Bag Princess” can be read as a reference to the historical usage of

⁴⁸⁶ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 27.

⁴⁸⁷ Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless,” A22.

the word in relation to homeless youth during the Victorian period, the word has recently been re-articulated into a desirable status by the fashion industry, conferred upon style icons and celebrities including Audrey Hepburn, Kate Moss, Natalie Portman and Keira Knightly.

Sexuality

The correlation constructed between Pivovarova and the urban ruin of consumer society is an articulation further anchored in meaning by the deliberate positioning of her body within such scenery. Her passivity and inactivity in the spread helps enforce a feminized notion of an underclass subject. Pivovarova is coded by the editorial as a workless body, in contrast to the working body associated with masculine notions of paid productive labour. “Paper Bag Princess” accentuates Pivovarova’s body as a signifier of her ‘repulsive’ underclass position, supported through the provocative and hypersexual poses of the model on side streets, alleyways and city park benches, an iconography articulating a reference to prostitution, and thus naturalizing practices of objectification and dehumanization. The images of Pivovarova photographed lying across the park bench and the subway grate both feature the model with her legs slightly spread open. The directional cues of the images, particularly prevalent in the park bench image, lead the reader directly to the latent sexual connotations of Pivovarova’s body, inviting the viewer to consume her lifeless body. The park benches, strategically positioned horizontally and lining the upper half of the image, form a triangle with the cement creases of the sidewalk initiating in the bottom right hand corner of the photograph, directing the reader’s eye straight to the center of the model’s immobile body. Pivovarova’s body runs vertically, with her arms spread out and head tilted to the side, inviting the reader to consume her. The strategic use of clothing and accessories help to sustain the reader’s attention on her sexualized body. While she is wearing a garbage bag

appropriated into a skirt, a strategic slit makes visible a part of her leg, further drawing the viewer to the centre of her body marked by the tip of the letter “A.”

The photograph of Pivovarova resting on the subway grate utilizes similar directional cues as the park bench image. The most prominent way in which the image initially captures the attention of the viewer is in the way Pivovarova’s paper mini-skirt is subtly raised to expose the model’s upper-thighs. Pivovarova is photographed upright in a manner similar to her positioning in the editorial’s park bench image. The length of her body is exaggerated by wearing a pair of over-the-knee Miu Miu socks adorned with glitter and sequins; the leggings serve to navigate the viewer’s eye back towards the centre of Pivovarova’s body. Encompassing a spread of two full pages, Pivovarova takes up the left-hand side while the opposite page is devoted to showcasing the breaks in the cement sidewalk, which function as similar directional cues that return the viewer’s gaze to the image of Pivovarova.

While the submissive sexuality of Pivovarova in “Paper Bag Princess” evokes narratives of a loose morality and hypersexuality, the imagery codes the editorial with a pedophilic lens. Pivovarova is represented by the editorial as a doll, imagery successfully visualized by the subway grate photograph. Pivovarova’s body is visibly out of proportion, with her legs shot at a lengthening angle, and her head tilted unnaturally. Her face appears lifeless and expressionless, and her hair is styled in an artificially straight bob with a perfect blunt fringe bang. The idea of Pivovarova as a doll is further evoked through the strategic incorporation of particular styles of clothing, an aspect significantly more pronounced in the park bench and subway grate images. In each of these photos, Pivovarova wears a pair of T-strap Chanel flats that appear childish in nature. The flats in the park bench image are paired with a pair of white socks, rolled over in a similar fashion to that worn by young girls.

In addition to these child-like signifiers, the photo editorial represents Pivovarova as a young girl playing dress up, an articulation emphasized through the juxtapositions of mismatched clothing and accessories that over-power the model's petite frame. Fur, pearls, fishnet stockings, combat boots and oversized coats articulate that Pivovarova is experimenting with different styles, designs and textiles in a similar fashion to a child playing 'dress-up' in her mother's closet. Although there are other images in the photo-editorial that are prevalent with sexual symbolism – such as the photograph of Pivovarova on a stripped-down mattress covered in ripped Carolina Herrera shopping bags, in which her leg is spread open and raised, and her eyes directly meet the gaze of the viewer – it is the child-like imagery of a play doll that imbues the park bench and subway grate photos with their latent sexual meaning. These very subtle sexual articulations are what make the particular images of Pivovarova as a doll in "Paper Bag Princess" captivating, yet uncomfortable to consume.

The sexual and pedophilic undertones of "Paper Bag Princess" are not unique to the trend of 'homeless chic,' and these signifiers have an extensive history in forms of female visual representation. The most prominent representation of female sexuality in fashion history is the mannequin, which Marshall McLuhan has described as a symbol representing the congealing of Western cultural narratives of female sexuality, fetishization, technological advancement and commodity culture.⁴⁸⁸ The symbolic function of the mannequin in consumer society is a particular focus for Caroline Evans,⁴⁸⁹ who identifies the return of doll-like imagery during the late-1990s in the fashion shows and promotional material by designers and labels including

⁴⁸⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 96-99. See also Lloyd W. Brown, "Mannequins and Mermaids: The Contemporary Writer and Sexual Images in the Consumer Culture," *Women's Studies* 5, no. 1 (1977): 1-12.

⁴⁸⁹ See "Movement, Model, Mannequin, Modernity," in *Fashion & Modernity*, ed. Breward and Evans, 125-146, and "Living Dolls: Mannequins, Models and Modernity," in *The Body Politic*, ed. Julian Stair (London: Crafts Council, 2000), 103-116.

McQueen, Viktor & Rolf, Comme des Garçons and Maison Martin Margiela.⁴⁹⁰ Drawing upon Benjamin's work in *The Arcades Project* concerning the 'deathliness' of fashion, Evans argues the theme of visualizing models as dolls finds its currency in the history of the spectacle, and must be read "in the context of the tradition in fashion of using living women to display clothes, a tradition which draws attention to the commodification of the body through fashion consumption in nineteenth-century Paris."⁴⁹¹ Evans connects the ghastly images of 1990s fashion, popularized by the trend of 'heroin chic' and its lifestyle of drug addiction, to "an underlying structural connection to [the mannequin's] industrial origins [...] and mass production in nineteenth-century consumer capitalism."⁴⁹² The blank, exploited and sunken facial expressions of Kate Moss in Calvin Klein's advertisements and Corrine Day's photographs, a look that largely defined contemporary 'heroin chic' imagery, was likened by the British model to those of a twelve-year-old child, with Jean Kilbourne noting that Moss's vulnerable appearance was "androgynous enough to appeal to all kinds of pedophiles."⁴⁹³ In her critique of the popularity amongst European designers of gaunt and withered models walking down the runways of Paris and Milan, Givhan utilized similar language to describe Pivovarova, writing in the *Washington Post*: "[a]nother emaciated model, [Pivovarova,] has been the star of Prada advertisements. She marches down the catwalk with her icy blue eyes staring wide and unblinking from their hollow sockets. If folks saw her looking like that on the street, they'd think she was delirious. They'd throw her a bagel and run the other way."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁰ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 165-188.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁹³ Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion*, 283.

⁴⁹⁴ Givhan, "Milan's Beef About Skeletal Models," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2006.

The erotic undertones of “Paper Bag Princess” are identified by Kilbourne in *Deadly Persuasion* as a consequential factor of advertising’s influential social power, an institution heavily incorporating the imagery and symbolism of pornography into its messages for the sole purpose of commercial gain.⁴⁹⁵ Providing a sociological analysis of the objectification and subsequent dehumanization of women in commercial advertising, Kilbourne argues “when power is unequal, when one group is oppressed and discriminated against as a group, when there is a context of systematic and historical oppression, stereotypes and prejudice have different weight and meaning.”⁴⁹⁶ While the images of “Paper Bag Princess” are sexually explicit, they cannot be read without the context of the larger landscape in which Pivovarova is situated. The environment of urban ruin works to depersonalize Pivovarova as an underclass subject, in which her gaunt and emaciated features, combined with the hypersexuality of her clothing and body expression, evoke the stereotypical representation of addicts, rape victims, prostitutes and the homeless. By associating Pivovarova as a member of the underclass through the setting of the editorial, “Paper Bag Princess” induces disgust from its viewership through breaching the naturalized upper-middle-class values of acceptability, conferring cultural judgments against those in materiality who sleep on park benches, idle in back alleyways and are victims to the sexual crimes in which Pivovarova is fictionally visualized as experiencing herself.

Slum Interpellation

The multiple references to Pivovarova’s status as an upper-middle-class consumer, similar to the social standing of *W*’s desired magazine audience, help locate “Paper Bag Princess,” in a similar manner to the argument of Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion critic Robin

⁴⁹⁵ Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion*, 271.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 279.

Givhan, “as yet another chapter in the book of slumming.”⁴⁹⁷ With the privileged members of the upper-middle-class occupying the lower-working-class communities of London, New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago in order to experience the livelihood of the other during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries,⁴⁹⁸ slumming as a cultural activity represents a more widespread phenomenon, evident in examples such as Marie Antoinette’s peasant farm⁴⁹⁹ and the poverty balls referenced in E.L. Doctorow’s 1975 historical novel *Ragtime*.⁵⁰⁰ As a fashionable recreational activity from the late nineteenth century until the early decades of the twentieth, slumming continues to be a popular practice in not only cities classified as the “third world,” such as Mexico City, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, New Delhi and Mumbai, in which “slum tourism” is purported to help strengthen local economies by attracting visitors from the United States, Canada and Europe,⁵⁰¹ but also in Detroit. The popularity of photographing the urban ruin of Detroit stands as a prime Western example of the continued popularity of this historical activity.⁵⁰²

With this historical context in mind, the discursive conventions of slumming are highly visible in the imagery of “Paper Bag Princess.” Combined with the conspicuous nature of the clothes and accessories outfitting Pivovarova in the editorial, the appropriation of paper bags distinguished by the labels of haute couture designers into makeshift shelters, dresses, and blankets demonstrates that the model possesses the appropriate cultural capital to maintain her position of a proper consumer in neoliberal commodity capitalism. The introductory image of

⁴⁹⁷ Givhan, “Ugly Chic,” 265.

⁴⁹⁸ See, for example, Heap, *Slumming*, 2009.

⁴⁹⁹ Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 501.

⁵⁰⁰ Doctorow, *Ragtime*, 40.

⁵⁰¹ Heap, *Slumming*, 277-286.

⁵⁰² Mark Binelli, “I Came to See the End of the World!” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 11, 2012, MM58.

“Paper Bag Princess” showcasing Pivovarova walking down the deserted industrial street evokes notions of slumming. Pivovarova is photographed holding a thick, dark fur coat over her shoulders with the hood consuming her head. Her body language, especially Pivovarova’s slumped shoulders, and her inability to directly meet the viewer’s gaze, demonstrates that she is uncomfortable in this environment of urban ruin.

While slumming as a cultural activity predominantly consisted of white individuals invading demonized communities composed largely of various racial minorities, Chad Heap notes that there was an intrinsic sexual component to slumming. With drag balls a popular form of entertainment in Harlem and the south side of Chicago, the predominance of forms of sexual expression allowed upper-middle-class individuals to explore different sexualized identities free from the boundaries and jurisdictions of classed-based Victorian notions of ‘acceptability.’⁵⁰³ This sexual connotation to slumming is particularly evident in the second image of the editorial, in which Pivovarova is photographed leaning against an alleyway corner. Shot in black-and-white there is an inherent drag-like quality to the image, emphasized in the strategic use of particular clothes and accessories. The Chanel top hat adorned with an oversized white camellia, referred to in the image’s textual description as an “early Halloween hat,” an accessory commonly associated with male fashion, is the most blatant signifier of conventional gender-role negotiation in the editorial.⁵⁰⁴ This form of experimentation as expressed through clothing is further entrenched with the neck braze and associated silk blouse Pivovarova is wearing, complete with circus-like ruffled sleeves. While the image is in black and white, it is obvious that her heavy-set makeup is overdone, complete with a dark lip and smoky eye shadow. The

⁵⁰³ Heap, *Slumming*, 231-276.

⁵⁰⁴ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 262.

semiotic references to cross-dressing in this picture appear as camp-like, and the performativity of this particular image further entrenches the idea of Pivovarova as a child playing dress up.

The notion of the gaze is an intrinsic component to the argument of “Paper Bag Princess” as being situated within the discursive framing of slumming. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey argues that the gaze represents the patriarchal construction of Hollywood as a social institution. With her analysis rooted in Lacan’s theorization of female sexual difference where the spectator receives visual pleasure, the cinema functions to fulfill male desires through contradictory processes of scopophilia and identification, enabling the exploitation of the gender binaries of male activity and female passivity.⁵⁰⁵ As forms of visual representation, film and photography, despite the technological differences between these two media, both aim for a similar “illusionistic narrative” by constructing codes that “create gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire.”⁵⁰⁶ While Mulvey’s psychoanalytic analysis is focused on the cinema, which she herself distinguishes from other forms of spectatorship, her analysis is crucial to understand the interpellation of the viewer into the imagery of “Paper Bag Princess.”⁵⁰⁷

The images of “Paper Bag Princess” play with notions of the gaze, with Pivovarova either directly returning the gaze of the spectator or coyly turning away. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue that this directional play helps to create meaning by establishing various levels of imaginary contact and intimacy between the gazed object and the associated viewing subject.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 14-27.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 and 26.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 26. Mulvey distinguishes cinema from other forms of scopophilia, such as vaudeville, theatre and burlesque, as the “pleasure in looking” becomes a central convention supporting the spectacle of film.

⁵⁰⁸ Kress and Leeuwen. *Reading Images*, 113-124.

Establishing a level of comfort with *W* readers, eye contact in “Paper Bag Princess” between the model and the viewing subject is maintained in the images where the sexuality of Pivovarova is most clearly manifested. This viewing relationship between object and spectator is best represented in the image of Pivovarova with her legs spread wide apart on the mattress, as well as in the editorial’s final images. The Versace image features Pivovarova sitting on the ground with her legs spread open and wearing a revealing low-cut fur coat. This visual direction is similarly evoked in the Moschino spotlight: Pivovarova is again sitting on the ground, with her legs relatively close together but spread in a way that teases the viewer. By directly returning the gaze of the *W* viewer, not only does Pivovarova’s eye contact emphasize an awareness of intimacy between the model and the spectator, but it functions to naturalize her sexuality, and comfort the spectator in consuming her for visual pleasure. This level of understanding, however, is absent in the images where Pivovarova deliberately does not meet the lens of the camera. By failing to return the gaze, Pivovarova is directing the viewer to look elsewhere in the image, shifting the spectator’s attention and focus to her clothes. This technique is clearly exemplified in the two most disturbing images of the editorial: the park bench and subway grate photographs.

The negotiation of the gaze in “Paper Bag Princess” leads to the direct question of the intended audience for the editorial. *W*’s readership is largely female, with the magazine reporting that women compose 79% of its subscription membership.⁵⁰⁹ Due to the predominant gender orientation of *W*’s readership, the gaze functions in this particular example to interpellate the magazine’s upper-middle-class spectators in order to participate in a hyper-slum simulation through the “pleasure of looking.” As demonstrated by the plentitude of cultural examples

⁵⁰⁹ “*W* Circulation Demographics,” *CondeNast.com*, accessed May 19, 2013, <http://www.condenast.com/brands/w/media-kit/print>.

composing the trend, ‘homeless chic’ remains a popular motif, and the symbolic value of “Paper Bag Princess” is contingent on *W*’s culturally educated audience ability to understand the conventions and symbolism behind the editorial’s imagery.

The imagery of the editorial largely draws upon Mary-Kate Olsen’s approach to ‘homeless chic,’ a look that became a prominent topic of conversation for the fashion press.

Detailing Olsen’s take on ‘homeless chic,’ *The New York Times* reported:

The look became dottier and dottier, until it morphed into a kind of homeless masquerade, one that was accented by subtle luxuries like a cashmere muffler, a Balenciaga lariat bag and of course her signature carryout latte from Starbucks [...] Stylish young women used to wear Gucci or Prada head to toe. Today they are more apt to be seen at supermarkets or parties toting a beat-up Chloe bag, their eyes shaded by enormous, high-priced Laura Biaggiotti sunglasses, the faint suggestion of opulence hidden beneath chadorlike layers of cashmere and ankle-length peasant skirts.⁵¹⁰

Presuming the *W* reader understands the cultural significance and subsequent influence of Olsen’s vagrant aesthetic upon the larger trend of ‘homeless chic,’ “Paper Bag Princess” follows the discursive framing of the trend first referenced by *The New York Times*, where an inevitable hierarchy of luxurious commodities structures the trend, as evident in the newspaper’s subtle reference to signifiers of affluence. The copy-writing associated with the images of “Paper Bag Princess” emphasize this discursive convention of ‘homeless chic,’ apparent in the referencing to specific material details in the clothing and accessories, such as “Dior’s stretch wool and alpaca coat,” “Chanel’s black silk satin jacket,” “Jean Paul Gaultier’s fox fur coat with wool fishnet overlay,” and “Carolina Herrera’s burgundy mohair gown.”⁵¹¹ It is through this specific discursive convention that the power of the female gaze in “Paper Bag Princess” is validated. In

⁵¹⁰ La Ferla, “Mary-Kate, Fashion Star?,” 9.

⁵¹¹ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 260, 262, 266 and 271.

returning Pivovarova's gaze, the *W* reader is interpellated as a participant into the hyper-slum simulation of Paper Bag Princess's post-apocalyptic consumer society.

Intertextual References: *The Paper Bag Princess*

As demonstrated in the visual references to slumming, the symbolic significance and cultural meaning of "Paper Bag Princess" resides in the magazine's audience and their ability to recognize and understand the intertextual references embedded within the editorial's imagery. Intertextuality is a central characteristic of critical discourse analysis, with Norman Fairclough arguing that "intertextual analysis draws attention to the dependence of texts upon society and history in the form of the resources made available within the order of discourse."⁵¹² The most prominent intertextual reference associated with the editorial is through the title and the appropriation of paper bags as accessories, clothing and forms of shelter, a direct reference to Robert Munsch's 1980 children's story, *The Paper Bag Princess*. This popular book narrates the story of Elizabeth, a princess who initially took pride in her lavish clothes and her impending marriage to Prince Ronald. After her castle is attacked and a dragon abducts Prince Ronald, Elizabeth vows to follow the animal's trail and save her soon-to-be husband. With all her material possessions burned by the dragon's attack on the castle, Elizabeth is left with nothing to wear but a paper bag, the only resource untouched by the dragon's wrath. After tricking the dragon into a deep sleep, Elizabeth saves her Prince Ronald, who, upon seeing her now distressed appearance, angrily declares to Elizabeth, "You are a mess! You smell like ashes, your hair is all tangled and you are wearing a dirty old paper bag. Come back when you are dressed like a real princess!"⁵¹³ Following this rejection of her disheveled appearance, Elizabeth

⁵¹² Fairclough, "Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis," *Discourse & Society* 3, no. 2 (1992), 195.

⁵¹³ Munsch, *Paper Bag Princess*, 21.

identifies the vain and superficial qualities of Prince Ronald, and decides to run away without him and claim her independence.

The editorial first creates a correlation between Pivovarova and Elizabeth through their similar upper-class status as ‘princesses.’ In the opening line of *The Paper Bag Princess*, Munsch describes his heroine through highlighting her materialistic qualities: “Elizabeth was a beautiful princess. She lived in a castle and had expensive clothes.”⁵¹⁴ By naming the editorial “Paper Bag Princess,” *W* signifies Pivovarova as an elite social figure in a similar position as Elizabeth, anchored in meaning through the emphasis on ostentatious clothes as conspicuous markers of a desired class identity. Though both use the commodity as a form of clothing, the paper bag functions in Munsch’s text as a mechanism for an identity formation that would have otherwise have been problematic for Elizabeth due to her class positioning. Elizabeth actively decided to maintain her fashion choice following her rejection by the Prince, proclaiming, “Ronald, your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince, but you are a bum.”⁵¹⁵ Elizabeth’s adoption of the paper bag as a fashion statement symbolized a break from her past where commodities were the central governing force in constructing her identity and social relationships. The passivity and lifelessness of Pivovarova in *W*’s “Paper Bag Princess” signifies that the appropriation of a paper bag into clothing and shelter was not a personal choice for the model in the same way that it was an expression of liberation for Elizabeth. This difference is best expressed in the incorporation of designer labels on the paper bags outfitting Pivovarova. In the fictionalized post-apocalypse consumer society of *W*’s “Paper Bag Princess,” graphic labels on the paper bags serve as the only way for Pivovarova to adhere to her upper-middle-class lifestyle, using old markers of wealth to mediate what she once was

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 23.

despite the fact these signifiers lose their cultural symbolic value in an environment of deserted urban ruin. The textual inclusion of the label on the paper bag signifies Pivovarova's attempt to grasp on to any existing remainders of status markers, even if the signifier in question is a graphic print displayed on an essential commodity at the most basic level of capital production.

The incorporation of the paper bag in McDean's photography symbolizes an ironic critique of consumer society's longstanding political structure and power as a cultural institution governing the construction of social identities. With the framing of conspicuous consumption as a practice considered in bad taste by consumer society following the financial hardship instigated by the recession, the paper bag became highly symbolic of this socioeconomic circumstance. News reports on declining retail sales noted the popularity of plain paper bags detached from any brand or label, a trend, according to forecaster Carly Stojsic, enabling consumers to embrace a mentality of humbleness, since "in the wake of an economic storm, people don't want to seem ostentatious. We are entering an age and aesthetic of humility."⁵¹⁶ The *Toronto Star's* Rita Zekas characterized this newfound sensibility as "the shame in shopping," with luxury design houses including Hermes and Prada responding to this consumer embarrassment by, "offering customers plain brown shopping bags instead of ones with their logos. Imagine declining that iconic orange Hermes bag."⁵¹⁷ Critiquing the "theory of the recession-proof industry" that "luxury goods companies [have] always been somewhat immune to economic downturns," Eric Reguly reported in *The Globe and Mail* that "luxury items seem to have gone from social status symbol to stigma [...] Some shoppers in Milan, New York and elsewhere are even asking for logo-free bags to cart away their booty, all the better to avoid broadcasting that they didn't have to

⁵¹⁶ Graham, "Inconspicuous Consumption Fashion," L1.

⁵¹⁷ Zekas, "Fashion's Victims: With Formerly Loyal Clientele Feeling the Economic Crunch, High-End Shops Have Become Casualties of the Crisis," *Toronto Star*, March 11, 2009, L01.

mortgage their house to buy a Gucci or Vuitton bag.⁵¹⁸ *The Globe and Mail* further reported, “many [shoppers] are going out of their way to make themselves appear as if they're like everyone else. They're asking for their purchases to be put in plain bags, or be shipped to their homes so that they're not seen carrying a Louis Vuitton or Chanel bag.”⁵¹⁹

The intertextual reference to Munsch’s children’s story provides a critique of the prevalence of consumerism and labels in times of economic recession, but also alludes to the larger theme of a growing preference towards older female consumers as expressed throughout the textual content of *W*’s September issue, in addition to the imagery of “Paper Bag Princess.” The effects of the recession on the luxury fashion industry were apparent as early as October 2008, when fashion insider Eric Wilson of *The New York Times* reported:

With the spring Fashion Weeks coinciding with the fall financial meltdown, retailers are faced with a dilemma that is partly economic and partly psychographic: How do they convince consumers of luxury goods to loosen their wallets when even the wealthy are showing signs of cutting back? And how do they plan for spring when the fall collections, now in stores, seem to be toxic? Sales were off last month by 15.8 percent at the specialty retail segment of Neiman Marcus, which includes Neiman Marcus stores and Bergdorf Goodman; 10.9 percent at Saks Fifth Avenue and 9.6 percent at Nordstrom, declines that surprised even seasoned retail executives. Luxury goods have seemed all but impervious to economic downturns over the last decade [...] One woman, stopped outside Barneys on Friday, was carrying two shopping bags from the store. Asked what she had bought, she said, “Nothing. I’m just returning everything [...] But with Wall Street shedding tens of thousands of jobs and financial industry bonuses expected to be meager, one wonders if there are enough members of the Saudi royal family to sustain the designer stores on Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue.”⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Eric Reguly, “Bling Goes From Status Symbol to Stigma,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 28, 2008, B1.

⁵¹⁹ Strauss, “Canada’s New Recessionary Consumer: Purveyors of Luxury Goods, Services Start to Tiptoe Down-Market,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 11, 2009, B1.

⁵²⁰ Wilson, “Hello, Customers,” E1.

The question posed by Wilson and *The New York Times* is rhetorically answered by *W*'s Dana Wood in the "W Fashion Flash" column, entitled "Adult Content" with the tagline, "Not a cash-strapped, trend-crazed kid anymore? Perfect. You're fashion's new best friend."⁵²¹ Fashion as an industry has largely marketed itself towards the young adolescent audience, with Wood citing a statistic from the NDP market research firm that the desired demographic of fashion designers and retail outlets represents only seven percent of the consumer audience.⁵²² *W* Deputy Editor Belcove recognizes this discrepancy in her editorial introduction to the magazine's September issue, thereby responding to Wilson's questioning of the sustained power of the luxury fashion market:

The smart designers have caught on fast in this recession that the customers who can still shell out for \$3,000 frocks most likely aren't slim-hipped 20-year-olds looking for party clothes. Rather, they have more womanly figures and more mature tastes. Will they wear whatever silly whim comes prancing down the runway? No, thank you. But will they pay for coolly innovative yet immensely wearable fashion? Hell yes.⁵²³

Wood's piece supports Belcove's argument by incorporating the commentary of designers such as Narciso Rodriguez, Oscar de la Renta, Donna Karan, Carolina Herrera and Behnaz Sarafpour, who each account for the importance of designing clothes for women over the age of thirty, recognizing not only shifting demographics in the American retail industry, but also the changing politics of consumer society as a result of economic change.

Combined with the imagery of "Paper Bag Princess," the theme of disinterest directed towards young consumers by *W* symbolizes the death of their purchasing power as a lucrative demographic. Wood's column on more mature, female consumers in *W*'s September issue is

⁵²¹ Wood, "Adult Content," 180.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Belcove, "Letter from the Editor," 158.

complemented with an illustrated cartoon by the magazine's visual artist Matt Collins. A play on *The March of Progress* diagram, Collins visualizes the evolution of the female consumer, from the frivolous, trend-centered young adult into the mature and fiscally responsible 40s and 50s-something women as discussed in Wood's feature. As the women age and mature in the illustration by Collins, they become less financially burdened by their consumption patterns, symbolic of *W*'s argument that older women are the new marketed demographic for luxury retailers during the economic recession.⁵²⁴ While at first glance this illustration may seem unrelated to the symbolic meaning of McDean's "Paper Bag Princess," the two forms of visual representation in *W* share numerous similarities that strengthen the magazine's condemnation of self-indulgent consumption patterns. The first female depicted in Collins's illustration displays several similarities to Pivovarova. Both women are outfitted in fishnet stockings, short haircuts, frilly accessories and heavy black boots, with the young female in Collins's illustration unable to stand straight due to the oppressive weight of her consumerism. Combined with the stigmatizing imagery of "Paper Bag Princess," *W*'s September issue represents the desertion of the young female subject by larger consumer society (historically the central commodity defining the spectacle of the fashion industry),⁵²⁵ in which she is disgraced as a child performing a haute couture fantasy within a cultural politic that no longer gratifies her existence.

Intertextual References: Constructing Authenticity

A second intertextual reference in *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess" is the reference to the 1970s, a decade marked by similar sociopolitical change as the contemporary period as evident through the tagline of the editorial, "Street style meets high fashion, and the 1970s and 2009 collide as an

⁵²⁴ Wood, "Adult Content," 180.

⁵²⁵ See, for example, Evans, "The Enchanted Spectacle," 271-310.

urban waif gets all wrapped up in designer wear – and wares.”⁵²⁶ With a looming economic recession, the women and civil rights movements gaining political momentum and identity politics emerging as a field of study, the 1970s inspired a genre of deconstructionist, street-style fashion popularized by designers such as Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, Vivienne Westwood, Martin Margiela and Zandra Rhodes, that maintained its cultural power well into the 1980s and 90s.

Numerous pieces from Comme des Garçons are incorporated into the fashion styling of “Paper Bag Princess,” with the penultimate image of the editorial solely devoted to Kawakubo’s label and the photograph highly representative of the Japanese label’s brand. This image is one of two in the entire editorial featuring Pivovarova standing upright as opposed to resting lifelessly against various alleyways and shelters. With a clear plastic garbage bag covering her hair tied together with a vintage Victorian cameo pin, Pivovarova wears a beige-and-brown printed Comme des Garçons “wool and nylon tulle jacket” overtop of a pair of deliberately ripped Comme des Garçons fishnet tights; a second Comme des Garçons checkered “wool and cotton coat” is pictured lying on the ground.⁵²⁷ The Comme des Garçons jacket outfitting Pivovarova at first glance resembles a blanket, an image reinforced by the manner in which the model has the coat wrapped around her body as a form of security.

The clothing pieces showcased in this particular image are representative of the brand of Comme des Garçons, with Kawakubo appropriating fabrics and techniques not typically associated with haute couture in order to create a niche for her label in the competitive Parisian fashion market. In order to critique the refined taste of haute couture, Kawakubo designed collections to contrast the symmetry typically associated with fashion, such as adding extra arms

⁵²⁶ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 260.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 285.

to coats and dresses, even going so far as to deliberately engineer the machines involved in the production of her collection as to ensure a defective and rough aesthetic.⁵²⁸ The Fall 2009 runway proceedings marked a return to form for Kawakubo, with the *Toronto Star* reporting, “the clothes were often ripped apart and then stitched back together in a way that was more puzzling than merely conceptual – shoulder pads situated across the body, for example.”⁵²⁹ “Paper Bag Princess” incorporates numerous pieces from this particular Comme des Garçons collection, ranging from hosiery to dresses and coats, and operates under the assumption that the *W* reader understands the critical importance of Comme des Garçons in establishing the imitation of poverty as a fashionable aesthetic.

Despite the fact that Comme des Garçons, along with other European designers such as Vivienne Westwood, helped initiate the trend of ‘homeless chic’ with the aestheticization of poverty originating in the 1970s, Galliano and the character of Derek Zoolander are the predominant intertextual references structuring the majority of press coverage of the trend. The continued visibility of Galliano’s collection is especially evident in Guy Trebay’s attempt to understand the cultural significance of “Paper Bag Princess” in *The New York Times*:

Were the *W* feature a one-off, it would hardly merit mention. Fashion has been down this road before. John Galliano, to cite the most notorious example, was pilloried some years back for his “clochard” collection, which took as its inspiration the still increasing ranks of tent dwellers (mainly Polish immigrants) and others in Paris with no roof over their heads. The collection, of ripped and shredded dresses, stocking laddered with runs and holes, and sooty hats, sold well, as it turned out, although nobody seemed to pick up on the idea of wearing a balloon hat.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 155.

⁵²⁹ Graham, “Eve of Destruction,” L01.

⁵³⁰ Trebay, “Aware of the Homeless?,” A22.

The commentary of *The New York Times* speaks to one of the critical differences distinguishing the representations and imagery of Comme des Garçons, Galliano and “Paper Bag Princess.” Galliano’s collection was marked by a theatricality, which, in turn, partly inspired the satirical mockery of the film *Zoolander*. The performativity of homelessness defining Galliano’s collection, where models “accessorized with empty little green J&B whiskey bottles, tin cups dangling from the derriere, bottle caps, plastic clothespins and safety pins,”⁵³¹ is not a representation evoked in either Kawakubo’s work for Comme des Garçons or in the visual imagery of “Paper Bag Princess.”

The monochromatic colouring of “Paper Bag Princess,” the inclusion of signature pieces from Comme des Garçons by *W*’s stylist Alex White and the mention of synthetic fabrics in the copy editing of the editorial, such as nylon and polyester, represent the simplicity of Kawakubo’s label, an integral virtue to her brand as an avant-garde designer. It is also this minimalism that connects Kawakubo’s work for Comme des Garçons to the larger historical discussion on slumming. While some scholars, such as Crane, read Kawakubo’s designs as critiques on the juxtaposition of haute couture’s decadence against the sociopolitical inequalities plaguing Western society, Koda argues that Kawakubo is conversely embracing the Japanese Buddhist principle of *wabi-sabi* as opposed to a political statement.⁵³² With *wabi-sabi* referring to a visual admiration of death, decay, poverty and solitude, the aesthetic was often incorporated into the Japanese tea ritual, serving as a form of escapism from the spectacle of court life.⁵³³ *Wabi-sabi*’s emphasis on escapism and its longer history with Japanese tea rituals functions in a manner similar to the historical discussion of slumming portrayed in Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette*, where

⁵³¹ Dowd, “Haute Homeless,” A15.

⁵³² Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 149-159 and Koda, “Rei Kawakubo,” 5-10.

⁵³³ Koda, “Rei Kawakubo,” 8.

the peasant farm signifies a tranquil departure from the politics of aristocratic court life at Versailles. In describing the effect of *wabi-sabi*, Koda uses the example of a shattered tea cup to contextualize the conventions of the aesthetic: “A tea cup with a crude and imperfect glaze evocative of a ‘withering chill’ was deemed no less beautiful when it was broken and repaired, and was, in fact, enriched in its qualities of *wabi-sabi*.”⁵³⁴ The aesthetic of *wabi-sabi* is represented most vividly in the introductory image of “Paper Bag Princess,” where the aesthetic conventions of the Buddhist principle are evoked in the imagery of urban ruin. There is an intrinsic beauty to the isolation of Pivovarova, surrounded by the devastation of post-apocalyptic consumer society. In order to appreciate this aesthetic, however, a viewer must abandon any political, economic or social judgments they may have of the imagery.

In addition to the intertextual references to Munsch’s *The Paper Bag Princess* and the visualization of slumming as a continued modern cultural activity, the symbolic power of “Paper Bag Princess” encompasses a class-based racial dimension, articulated through the references to subculture and the appropriation of a ‘ghetto’ lifestyle. The concept of subculture, a prime area of study for British Cultural Studies during the 1970s and 1980s, focused on the formation of new, subversive social categories for individuals identifying outside the boundaries of majority groups, a form of belonging sustained through the appropriation and juxtaposition of commodities achieved by the tactic of *bricolage*.⁵³⁵ Drawing upon Umberto Eco’s argument of “semiotic guerilla warfare,”⁵³⁶ Dick Hebdige argues that the appropriation of commodities by subcultural groups works to “disrupt and reorganize meaning” by creating new structures of

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵³⁵ John Clarke, “Style,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 147-161. For a discussion of the use of *bricolage* in fashion, see Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 179-182.

⁵³⁶ Eco as cited in Hebdige, *Subculture*, 105.

mediation in order to challenge governing normalities.⁵³⁷ While once a tactic of resistance, particular in the British punk movement (a genre chosen for the soundtrack of Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*), the tactics of *bricolage* have been successfully recuperated by mainstream consumer society, consequently embedding subculture, as an expression of identity, into the politics of postmodern lifestyle consumption.⁵³⁸

Pivovarova is outfitted throughout the photo-editorial in strategically ripped fishnet tights by Comme des Garçons, and in one particular photo, wears a Jean Paul Gaultier “black and nude wool and nylon fishnet body stocking.”⁵³⁹ Arm warmers, leg warmers and combat boots by Comme des Garçons and Prada are other accessories articulating a subcultural identity incorporated into White's styling of Pivovarova. In two images from “Paper Bag Princess,” Pivovarova is sitting coyly on the ground, with a vintage radio and boom box next to her.⁵⁴⁰ The appropriation of these stereotypical signifiers of a subcultural identity in “Paper Bag Princess” is anchored by the short textual introduction displayed on the first page of the spread: “Street style meets high fashion, and the 1970s and 2009 collide.”⁵⁴¹ Through this visual and textual reference, “Paper Bag Princess” attempts to exude a sense of Lawrence Grossberg's argument of authentic inauthenticity gained through the appropriation of signifiers traditionally associated with subcultural identities. For Grossberg, it is by the conventions of postmodern discourses of consumption that the inclusion of particular markers of an established identity can be depoliticized through systems of difference:

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁵³⁸ See, for example, Evans, “Dreams That Only Money Can Buy...Or, The Shy Tribe in Flight from Discourse,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 1, no. 2 (1997): 169-188, and “Street Style, Subculture and Subversion,” *Costume: Journal of The Costume Society of Great Britain* 31 (1997): 105-110.

⁵³⁹ McDean, “Paper Bag Princess,” 266.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 280 and 283.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 262.

This “hip” attitude is a kind of ironic nihilism in which distance is offered as the only reasonable relation to a reality which is no longer reasonable [...] If every identity is equally a fake, a pose that one takes on, then authentic inauthenticity celebrates the possibility of poses without denying that is all they are.⁵⁴²

Following Grossberg’s argument, the ironic incorporation of subcultural commodities with racial connotations works to help provide an historical reference in the post-apocalyptic consumer society visualized by “Paper Bag Princess” in order to maintain the survival of *W*’s imagined consumer society.⁵⁴³ Rather, they serve as an historical reference for *W*’s readership to the urban ruin of “Paper Bag Princess” within what Kembrew McLeod terms as a “highly charged dialogical conversation that struggles to renegotiate what it means to be a participant in a culture threatened with assimilation,” or, in the context of *W*, a consumer society threatened with extinction.⁵⁴⁴ With the ideological power of consumer society threatened by the consequences of economic recession and the devastation initially associated with consumption, these signifiers are stripped of their original connotations representing the subordination of particular social groups within the politics of representation.

In her introduction to *Decoding Advertisements*, Williamson argues that the power of advertising as a cultural institution is in its ability to veil social inequalities in which class, race and gender differences are not traced back to systems of institutional oppression, but rather are expressed through consumption practices naturalized by the conventions of consumer

⁵⁴² Grossberg as cited in Evans, “Dreams That Only Money Can Buy,” 176.

⁵⁴³ In “Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (1999): 134-150, Kembrew McLeod argues that when a particular culture and its respective traditions, conventions and signifiers are susceptible to processes of commercialization by commodity culture, the group in question displays a tendency to draw upon their distinct cultural symbols in order to convey a “pure identity.”

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

capitalism.⁵⁴⁵ *W*'s visualization of a post-apocalyptic consumer society speaks to how deeply embedded the politics of consumerism as an ideology is embedded in American culture, where the only means to approach a socioeconomic discussion of the intersections of fashion, consumption and identity is through the discourses long associated with consumer society. In their discussion of "Paper Bag Princess," *Adbusters* called for a greater awareness regarding the dialectic in which *W*'s photo editorial derives its meaning and symbolic value. Yet the imagery and symbolism of "Paper Bag Princess" is an intrinsic component of the politics of consumer society, with the editorial's discursive conventions dating back centuries.

⁵⁴⁵ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 13.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion – ‘Homeless Chic’ as Cultural Parasite

Hold the schmaltz, Babs. Sure, we love nostalgia. Especially in fashion, so rich in characters, history and over-the-top antics [...] The last decade was a volatile time for fashion, opening with the economy and the industry in turmoil. Suddenly, anything too grand or chichi felt wrong. So in typically extremist mien, designers did a 180. Deconstruction! Grunge! Heroin chic! All of which bombed at the mainstream box office, with heroin chic denounced from printed page, pulpit and Oval Office alike. It took the fashion world a while to get a collective grip. Oddly enough, derided though it was, grunge had laid the foundation for a new, widespread casual attitude and the re-embrace of street style by top-tier designers; like it or not, the women's suit has never regained its former stature as a staple. Yet experience has shown that too-casual doesn't cut it either. Remember that corporate flop “casual Friday”? Somewhere along the line, fashion fought back and won – with more than a little help from Hollywood. After a long stretch when movie stars looked as fashion clueless as possible, presto! They started to care again, to revel in matters of style just like those divine screen goddesses of yore. And it didn't hurt that a new generation of stunning actresses emerged: Gwyneth, Julia, Cameron, Nicole know, love and understand clothes. So with a push and a shove to the supermodels, movie stars muscled into fashion editorial, leading magazines to vie for their charms, and the trend shows no signs of waning. Still, fashion's biggest coup now turns up weekly on the small screen, in a chronicle of the lives and wardrobes of four sex-obsessed, clothes-worshiping women who embrace the notion that while men come and go, true fashion endures. So, as Carrie Bradshaw chided Aidan in one “Sex and the City” episode this season, “don't mock the clothes.”⁵⁴⁶

--- Bridget Foley, *Women's Wear Daily*

On October 19, 2012, Justin Timberlake married actress Jessica Biel in a lavish ceremony in Fasano, Italy at the highly exclusive Borgo Enanzia resort. Timberlake started his career as a child actor on the Disney Channel television program, *The New Mickey Mouse Club*, before becoming the lead signer for the popular boy band N'Sync. A transition into a highly successful solo artist followed; Timberlake branched out in other fields in later years, including as an actor

⁵⁴⁶ Foley, “Glory Days: American Designers Braved It Through The Tumultuous Nineties And Flaunt Their Style From Wall Street To Paris,” *Women's Wear Daily*, May 28, 2002, 38S.

in films such as David Fincher's *The Social Network*, an entrepreneur with restaurants in New York City and Hollywood, and as a fashion designer with the William Rast label designed by Timberlake and his close friend Trace Ayala. Biel rose to fame as the eldest daughter in the long-running series *Seventh Heaven*, followed by multiple film roles and her associated emergence in the fashion media as a style trendsetter. Their upcoming nuptials were the subject of much scrutiny in the celebrity tabloids, and the couple released the rights to their wedding photos to *People* magazine for \$300,000. With the wedding costing a reported \$6.5 million, invited guests to the Italian ceremony included Timberlake's music producer and collaborator Timberland, *Saturday Night Live*'s Andy Samburg, and late night personality Jimmy Fallon.⁵⁴⁷ Pre-ceremony activities lasted a week for the invited 100-guests, including a beach party marked with fireworks and evenings wine and cheese receptions, events designed in part due to the sacrifices of wedding attendees, since, as Timberlake remarked to *People*: "it was a lot to ask of them to travel, so we figured we'd give our guests a good party!"⁵⁴⁸ Biel wore a custom-made petal-pink haute couture creation by Italian designer Giambattista Valli, while Timberlake wore a suit designed with his input by former Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent creative director Tom Ford.

Hours after *People* published the photos and ostentatious details regarding their wedding ceremony and subsequent receptions, Timberlake and Biel captured headlines after celebrity blog *Gawker* obtained a private video shown to guests during their festivities. Shot by Timberlake's close friend Justin Huchel, the video entitled, "Greetings from Your Hollywood Friends Who Just Couldn't Make It," featured acquaintances of Timberlake probing members of Los

⁵⁴⁷ Malene Arpe, "Justin Timberlake and Jessica Biel Set to Marry in Italy," *Toronto Star*, 18 October 2012.

⁵⁴⁸ Arpe, "Justin Timberlake Jumps for Jessica Biel in First Look at Wedding Pictures," *Toronto Star*, 24 October 2012.

Angeles's homeless population to send their best wishes to Timberlake and Biel.⁵⁴⁹ With the 'humour' of the video grounded in providing these individuals the opportunity to express their 'regret' at not being able to attend the couple's Italian ceremony, the 'wedding present' was received in poor taste after leaked by Gawker. In a similar fashion to Galliano after the debut of his 'homeless chic' collection, Timberlake faced considerable criticism, leading to the singer to apologize in a statement posted on his blog. He defended the actions of Huchel by stating, "I don't believe it was made to be insensitive. More so, I think it was made as a joke on me not having that many friends attending my own wedding (which IS kind of funny if you think about it)."⁵⁵⁰ Biel and Timberlake's wedding coincided with the final weeks of the 2012 United States elections, where the economic recession played a key role as a prime talking point in the platform for both Democratic and Republican candidates. Regardless of the intent behind the video, Huchel's 'wedding gift' represents the continuation of 'homeless chic' in popular culture, and consumer society's continued captivation with the motif's symbolism, iconography and narrative.

Notwithstanding the abundance of popular culture examples composing 'homeless chic,' from its earlier incarnation as a form of slumming visualized in Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* to representations in *Zoolander*, *Sex and the City* and *America's Next Top Model*, the motif is often dismissed as a frivolous 'fad' enabling middle-class consumers to provisionally consume a dehumanized representation of poverty, a process referred to by Bauman as "tourists and

⁵⁴⁹ John Cook, "Justin Timberlake's \$6.5 Million Italian Wedding Featured a Video of Sad L.A. Vagrants Wishing Him Well," *Gawker*, last modified October 24, 2012, accessed June 1, 2013, <http://gawker.com/5954494/justin-timberlakes-65-million-italian-wedding-featured-a-video-of-sad-la-vagrants-wishing-him-well>.

⁵⁵⁰ Cook, "Justin Timberlake Apologizes for Mocking Homeless People at His \$6.5 Million Italian Wedding," *Gawker*, last modified October 26, 2012, accessed June 1, 2013, <http://gawker.com/5955296/justin-timberlake-apologizes-for-mocking-homeless-people-at-his-65-million-italian-wedding>.

vagabonds”⁵⁵¹ and Halnon as a form of “class vacationing.”⁵⁵² While Halnon conceptualizes poverty as a commodified lifestyle, her analysis of ‘homeless chic’ does not evidently place the motif within its larger social context, nor does she examine the narratives and discourses that instill ‘homeless chic’ with the potency that polarizes the motif’s imagery. Critiquing the tendency to discursively construct marginalized identities through narratives of “lack” and “deficiency,” Skeggs argues that “working-class culture is not point zero of culture; it has a different value system, one not recognized by the dominant symbolic economy.”⁵⁵³ The symbolic economy behind ‘homeless chic,’ however, recognizes and directly acknowledges the representations of working-class culture by appropriating marginalized identities in order to construct its imagery and symbolism. Although Halnon does recognize that poverty as a lifestyle is acknowledged by the symbolic economy,⁵⁵⁴ her analysis conceptualizes ‘homeless chic’ as a further example of commodity culture’s infatuation with processes of co-optation for commercial profit. The extensive cultural trajectory of ‘homeless chic’ demonstrates the weaknesses in such an argument of commodification, since ‘homeless chic’ functions more as a brand in consumer society as opposed to a form of cultural appropriation or co-optation. In Halnon’s analysis, in addition to previous research on ‘heroin chic’ by Harold and Giroux, minimal attention is directed towards the trend’s relationship with the larger cultural mythologies, discourses and narratives that enrich ‘homeless chic’ with its intertextuality and help naturalize and maintain ‘homeless chic’ as a powerful motif in visual culture.

⁵⁵¹ Bauman, “Tourists and Vagabonds,” in *Identity and Social Change*, ed. Davis, 13-26.

⁵⁵² Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 513. See also Halnon and Cohen, “Muscles, Motorcycles and Tattoos,” 33-56.

⁵⁵³ Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture*, 153.

⁵⁵⁴ Halnon, “Poor Chic,” 513.

A relatively recent introduction to studies on advertising and consumer culture, branding has become a defining convention of capitalist accumulation in consumer society, exacerbated by the translation of postmodernism's emphasis on lifestyle and the transformation of the symbolic into business practices, as explored by Naomi Klein and Douglas B. Holt.⁵⁵⁵ Opposed to an example of co-optation by commodity culture, 'homeless chic' personifies Holt's argument of brands as ideological parasites. Drawing upon Roland Barthes work in *Mythologies*,⁵⁵⁶ brands, for Holt, act as parasites, since it is not the material qualities of an individual commodity that develop a brand's symbolic dimension, but rather how brands position their products to leech off larger cultural narratives.⁵⁵⁷ The news media, film, television, literature and other forms of artistic mediation, referred to as "myth makers" in Holt's model, are the intermediaries actively involved in the continuous process of discursive construction, and it is through the consumption of a brand's product that consumers are proposed the opportunity to actively engage in commodity culture's "myth market."⁵⁵⁸ While Holt's classification of what constitutes a 'brand' is limited to highly iconic corporations supported by icons recognized by global audiences, such as Jack Daniels, Apple or Nike,⁵⁵⁹ 'homeless chic' shares a similar symbolic political economic structure as the companies discussed in his theorization of branding, and, more importantly, the

⁵⁵⁵ See, for example, Klein, *No Logo*, 2000; Holt, "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding," *Journal of Consumer Research* 29 (2002): 70-90; Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004); Holt, "How Societies Desire Brands: Using Cultural Theory to Explain Brand Symbolism," in *Inside Consumption: Consumer Motives, Goals and Desires*, ed. S. Ratneshwar and David Glen Mick (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 273-291; Holt, "Toward a Sociology of Branding," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 2 (2006): 299-302; Holt, "Jack Daniel's America: Brands as Ideological Parasites and Proselytizers," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 3 (2006): 355-377.

⁵⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

⁵⁵⁷ Holt, "Jack Daniel's America," 372.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 372-375.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

symbolic power of ‘homeless chic’ resides in the trend’s intertextuality, in addition to the strategic appropriation of particular cultural narratives and discourses.

Iconic brands, in Holt’s outline of capitalistic ideological parasites, “garner cultural power from their role in expressing identity myths,”⁵⁶⁰ and ‘homeless chic’ has played an active role in the construction of “collection identities” at the intersecting levels of class, gender, ethnicity and race.⁵⁶¹ Further to his theorization of branding, Holt identifies the agents involved in the construction of cultural myths, particularly the association between commodities and subcultures, the role of the journalist in connecting a product to a mythology, and the integration of these particular products into film to create a visual association for audiences between the commodity and the brand.⁵⁶² Galliano’s ‘homeless chic’ collection would not have existed if it were not for the aestheticization of poverty popularized by the deconstructionist designers of the 1970s and 1980s. Designers such as Vivienne Westwood, Rei Kawakubo, Martin Margiela and Jessica Rhodes helped popularize the subcultural distressed aesthetic in order to gain respect within the highly competitive environment of haute couture fashion. Galliano’s work represented a progression of this period of fashion, an aspect alluded to in *Women’s Wear Daily*’s review of his trailer-park collection as an allusion to “his deconstructionist London days.”⁵⁶³ In addition to the association with a subcultural identity, Holt identifies films for “playing a powerful role in amplifying the brand’s articulation to myth.”⁵⁶⁴ Film and television programs such as *Marie Antoinette*, *Zoolander* and *Sex and the City* help audiences situate the symbolism of the trend of ‘homeless chic’ within a larger cultural framework. Since its origins as a form of slumming and

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 372.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 357.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 373.

⁵⁶³ “Pretty Tough, Quite Racy, Or Even Apocalyptic,” 6.

⁵⁶⁴ Holt, “Jack Daniel’s America,” 373.

class-based escapism at the expense of various vagrant identities, 'homeless chic' enjoys a parasitic relationship with visual culture, public discourse and consumer society. The visuality of 'homeless chic' continues to demonstrate its ubiquity as a cultural representation, growing in symbolic power as a result of continuous social change, from social revolution, mass immigration and economic recession.

While branding is inextricably woven into the corporate logic of consumer society, discarding 'homeless chic' as yet another example of the commodification and spectacle of marginalized identities undermines the trend's ability to instigate cultural criticism in light of social, political, and economic change. Ignoring the larger history of the trend's symbolism and imagery is dangerous as such disregard enables critics to view 'homeless chic' through the lens of the present, an oversight evident in the widespread denunciation experienced by Galliano. The tone of triviality and insignificance framing the vast majority of press coverage of 'homeless chic' neglects not only the complexity of 'homeless chic,' but the role of fashion to negotiate change in the cultural politic of consumer society, a process of identity construction best visualized by *W*'s "Paper Bag Princess." The ambiguities of fashion first addressed by Elizabeth Wilson, specifically pertaining to fashion's constant negotiation of the paradoxes between affluence and exploitation, artistic creation and capital expenditure, and individuality and the collective,⁵⁶⁵ are argued by Susan B. Kaiser and Karyl Ketchum to transform fashion into a unique platform of metaphorical critique, as "the consumption of fashion becomes a process of visual simultaneity, enabling the joint communication of previously disparate identities and temporal and spatial contexts [...] Issues of time, cultural space, and identity/community all

⁵⁶⁵ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 14-15.

intervene in this construction”⁵⁶⁶ Conceptualizing ‘homeless chic’ as an iconic brand in accordance to Holt’s theorization enables the motif to be examined in regards to how particular patterns of representation circulate when consumer society is most vulnerable to critique in light of socioeconomic change, and provides popular culture with the narrative framework to negotiate these changes in visual culture and public discourse. Despite the history behind the motif, the basic underlying conventions fostering the imagery of ‘homeless chic’ have not significantly altered despite the social, economic and political changes experienced by Western culture since the construction of Marie Antoinette’s Hameau de la Reine. As long as the binaries of wealth and poverty continue to manifest in such a pervasive, yet subtle, manner, ‘homeless chic’ will maintain its parasitic relationship with visual culture.

⁵⁶⁶ Susan B. Kaiser and Karyl Ketchum, “Consuming Fashion as Flexibility: Metaphor, Cultural Mood, and Materiality,” in *Inside Consumption*, ed. Ratneshwar and Mick, 132 and 128.

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