



# Placing fashion: Art, space, display and the building of luxury fashion markets through retail design

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the spaces in which fashion is displayed and consumed. In order to ‘place’ fashion space within the contemporary city, the paper focuses on a set of alliances between art and fashion in the making of current consumption space. The collaboration between art and fashion opens up a means to critically explore how representational worlds are brought into being and offers new ways to understand how creative activity can be rooted in (and reflective of) broader social, economic and cultural concerns. Such collisions and collusions represent a key means of making and shaping commodity and brand value.

**Keywords**

fashion, art, space, luxury, brands, design, Louis Vuitton

**I Introduction**

Aesthetic battles are at the heart of an economic war for the control of emotions and affections. (Assouly, 2008, preface)

Since Wrigley and Lowe’s (1996, 2002) and Miller’s (1995) path-breaking interventions, there has been significant interest in the geographical underpinnings of retailing and consumption. In parallel, an important body of work has emerged from the disciplines of organizational strategy and marketing on brands and branding as key mechanisms in creating commodity meaning (Arvidsson, 2006; Holt, 2004; Lury, 2004). A third strand of work has focused on the design of shopping space (Goss, 1993, 1999) and, more recently, on store architecture and innovation (Barreneche, 2008; Crewe, 2010, 2013; Curtis and Watson, 2007; Dean, 2003; Manuelli, 2006).

Whilst this latter work has developed our understanding of the significance of form, function, interiority and technological innovation in the creation of new retail spaces, it has been less well attuned to the visual and material cultures of retail space and has rather side-stepped the broader cultural, social and political implications that fashion space has on cultural consumption, fashioned identities and subjectivities. Further, the relationships between fashion retailing space and creative collaboration in the creation of commodity value have received limited attention. In this paper I advance understanding of these relationships by analysing the role of

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luxury fashion retailing, display and consumption as a remarkably enduring and resilient feature of contemporary capitalism and a key component in the creation of brand and commodity value. The luxury fashion industry is an empirically significant but theoretically neglected area of scholarship and one with a pronounced geography that requires scrutiny.

In order to develop these arguments theoretically, the paper conjoins three bodies of literature that together enable us to better understand how luxury fashion value is created and maintained under conditions of market expansion and accelerating globalization. Firstly, drawing on studies of value from an economic sociology of markets perspective, many derived from Dewey's seminal work on *The Theory of Valuation* (1939) (Aspers, 2010; Beckert and Aspers, 2011; Karpik, 2010; Stark, 2011, Velthuis, 2011, Zelizer, 2011), the paper explores the strategies that are adopted by luxury fashion houses in order to maintain aura and grow their markets whilst retaining brand value and signature under increasingly complex global conditions.<sup>1</sup> There are evident tensions between the continued expansion and growth of luxury retailers and the premise of luxury brands being exclusive (Kapferer, 2012). The drive for desingularization as a means to distinguish and valorize the unique (Karpik, 2010), together with the financial interests that accompany the mass production of fashioned commodities, are significant forces that threaten brand valorization, uniqueness and aura, a tendency that echoes Benjamin's early works on the demise of authenticity in an age of reproduction (Benjamin, 1936). Drawing on devices and techniques that suggest metonymy, luxury labels have created an economy of qualities whereby a finish, logo-type or print evokes the essence of the brand. Fashion's luxury products cannot be valorized or financialized by conventional methods because they are 'multidimensional, incommensurable and of uncertain or indefinable quality' (Karpik, 2010: 24). As a result of their uncertain and

highly subjective valuation, markets such as luxury fashion are necessarily equipped with 'judgement devices', such as labels and brands, which provide consumers with sets of knowledges with which to make consumption judgements (Arvidsson, 2006; Karpik, 2010).

Secondly, the paper adopts an explicitly cultural economy approach to the study of fashion value that underscores the impossibility of severing strictly commercial or financial explanations from those that emphasize the aesthetic, creative and immaterial determinants of worth and desire. The paper argues that powerful performative and affective affordances are enshrined in contemporary fashion space that help to explain its enduring competitiveness. In order to understand fashion value it is thus imperative to explore the spaces in which fashion is displayed, consumed, exhibited and performed and thus to understand how fashion markets are ordered, regulated and maintained in space and through time (Aspers, 2010; Breward, 2003; Breward and Gilbert, 2006; Crewe, 1992, 2003, 2008; Entwistle, 2009; Potvin, 2009). Financial pricing devices must be understood in conjunction with social and cultural mechanisms as intricate parts of circuits of commerce (Zelizer, 2011). One powerful strategy has been the pursuit of an aggressive logic of differentiation based on the aesthetic qualities of commodities. In order to construct themselves as rare and desirable whilst simultaneously catering for the demands of more inclusive and larger markets, luxury firms are conjoining the creative and commercial elements of their business and are emphasizing the symbolic and immaterial qualities of their brand. Brands thus become repositories of meaning, a means of conveying distinction and value (Arvidsson, 2006; Bourdieu, 1984; Lury, 2004; Simmel, 1904). It would appear that the luxury fashion market is a sharp illustration of the powers of aesthetic capitalism in the contemporary era (Gasparina, 2009) in which luxury is increasingly traded in symbolic terms rather than being a sector

defined by high-skilled and artisanal craft production and by a fixed geographical manufacturing identity (Tokatli, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Thirdly, and emerging out of early work on the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), the paper draws on recent theories of display, visuality and space and develops these to explain the power, pull and reach presented by the visual aesthetic of the luxury retail store. Fashion has always been both sartorial and spatial and consumption spaces really do matter. They produce a sense that there is something more, some more intense experience or a wider horizon to be found (Quinn, 2003: 35). The tactics employed in the design and creation of retail space are themselves a representational strategy that frames and influences the visual and material experiences of fashion (Potvin, 2009: 2). The store is never simply a visual backdrop but actively engages the consumer's imagination and shapes our experiences, understandings and perceptions of fashion. Space is a practiced place because bodies move in and through it and in turn enliven and transform it (de Certeau, 1998: 117). The fashion store thus becomes a locus of the performing subject and a point of connection that bonds and conjoins the creator, the commodity and the embodied consumer (Potvin, 2009: 2). By incorporating visuality into an analysis of luxury retailing we bring the sensory and the material into simultaneous view (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012). This approach attests to the simultaneous range of scopic regimes experienced in fashion space that involve both seeing and experiencing, the body and the psyche. As Quinn argues so effectively,

the fashion system is premised on visuality; a concept essential to the consumption of fashion but often underestimated in interpretations of it. . . . Visuality is not the same as sight; it occurs when visual media and sensory perceptions intersect, where gaze meets desire. (2003: 21)

Visuality is a key component of contemporary aesthetic capitalism, characterized by a confluence

between commercial imperatives and cultural tastes and practices (Assouly, 2008). It captures the affective and sensory powers of signs, symbols and images, the iconography of the contemporary city, and is a key means through which we experience and understand it (Foster, 1988; Mirzoeff, 2006). Visuality and visibility are, argues Potvin, 'the conceptual glue that binds space with fashion. . . . Space thickens fashion, it extends it, attenuates it, grounds it, while fashion adds texture, colour and life to space' (2009: 6). In adopting such an approach it becomes possible to conceptually rework our understanding of the place of fashion and to develop a far richer insight that acknowledges both the commercial and the affective and material affordances offered by fashion images, spaces and performances. Such a cultural economy approach to the study of luxury markets acknowledges the significance of moving beyond strictly economic calculations of value and problematizes the notion that geographies of production and 'Made In' appellations are the key locus of value-creation.

The argument is developed over four sections. In Section II the scope, scale, significance and geography of the global luxury fashion market is analysed. Section III explores a set of alliances between global fashion firms, their creative directors and contemporary artists that are emerging as a central strategy in the making of current consumption space in the particular case of flagship stores in global fashion cities (Breward and Gilbert, 2006).<sup>2</sup> Building on recent work by Currid (2007, 2012) and Hawkins (2013), it is argued that the collaboration between art and fashion opens up a means to critically explore how representational worlds are brought into being and offers new ways to understand how creative activity can be rooted in (and reflective of) broader social, economic and cultural concerns. Significantly, this approach inserts the practices of consumption into the analysis of retail space, offering insights into the affective dimensions of consumption during and beyond

the moment of purchase. Section IV discusses the much-neglected role of the shop window as a key site for the display of luxury goods. Fashion houses have become increasingly concerned with how the product and the brand are visually communicated to the customer via store window displays, which have become significant interfaces that bring the consumer, the fashioned object and the store together to the point where the store window has become a 'key instrument of many retailers' communication strategy' (Kerfoot et al., 2003; Sen et al., 2002: 277). Significantly, the creative collaborations and shop window installations discussed here are centrally engaged in the creation of retail environments that speak directly to key contemporary geographical questions about time, space, sound, vision, longevity, transience and the environment. The implications of the analysis are explored in the conclusion.

## **II The geographies of the luxury fashion market**

The growth of the luxury fashion sector and its highly uneven geographies is currently little understood. What is clear is that the luxury market has displayed remarkable resilience in the face of global recession and the slow-down in consumer spending. The UK luxury fashion sector, for example, is forecast to almost double in size from £6.6 billion to £12.2 billion between 2012–17 (Ledbury Research and Walpole, 2013). At a finer level of granularity, a number of luxury fashion houses are continuing to grow in spite of the difficult economic climate – Burberry, for example, have seen global revenues triple (2006–13) and opened their largest Asian flagship store in April 2014, using store openings as a way of raising brand awareness among Chinese customers (Sharman and Robinson, 2014), and the French fashion house Yves Saint Laurent reported a 59 per cent increase in annual sales during 2013 (Butler, 2013). The rate of growth has been driven by

a variety of factors, including a desire on the part of consumers for more responsible investment purchasing, a renewed interest in the creative capacities of experiential retail spaces and an increase in the number of high-net-worth individuals (HNWI) with the emotional desire and economic capital for luxury brand consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; Capgemini, 2013). One of the most significant reasons for the dramatic and sustained growth of the world's largest luxury fashion conglomerates<sup>3</sup> is geographic expansion, particularly in China but in a range of other emerging markets too. Luxury fashion firms are actively using geographical variation as an organizational expansion strategy that is both driving, and driven by, luxury consumption. The appetite for luxury consumption is particularly apparent in the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil and, more generally, in Asia and the Middle East (McKinsey & Co, 2013, Shukla, 2012; Tynan et al., 2010). The resurgence in the acquisition activity of luxury brands by investment firms in Asia and the Middle East, and by luxury conglomerates such as Louis Vuitton, Moët Hennessy and Richemont since 2011, is further testament to the buoyancy of the sector and to the apparent immunity of high-end branded products to the more deleterious effects of global crisis. Luxury firms are responding to the growing global demand for luxury products, particularly in emerging markets, through engaging in dramatic international store-expansion strategies. They are also maintaining scarcity and continually raising their prices at significantly above-inflation rates: 'Think of it as an exclusivity tax . . . this is something really extraordinary' (Hershops, 2014). It is predicted that 85 percent of all luxury retail stores will be opening in emerging markets over the coming decade (Shukla, 2012: 576). Strong growth figures are particularly reported in China, which offers enormous opportunities for global luxury brands and is predicted to become the world's largest luxury market by the end of 2013, worth £16 billion (McKinsey and Co,

2013). The Chinese luxury sector continued to grow in spite of the global recession and now accounts for 25 per cent of the global market, making it the second largest luxury consumer market after Japan (Zhan and He, 2012: 1452). Rapid urbanization and growing wealth outside China's largest cities is driving the emergence of new geographic markets for luxury in China and global brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Coach and Burberry are all expanding into third-tier Chinese cities in order to take advantage of continued rising demand (Kapferer, 2012). The consumption of luxury goods in China is projected to rise from 12 per cent in 2007 to 29 per cent by 2015 (Zhang and Kim, 2013: 68) and Chinese customers are expected to buy in excess of 44 per cent of the world's luxury goods by 2020 (CLSA Asia Pacific). Rising GDP in emerging middle-class markets has increased the demand for luxury goods (Kapferer, 2012). Particularly in China, middle-class consumers are being targeted as key consumers for whom luxury products are seen as aspirational commodities, a key means through which to increase social status via their associations with affluent, cosmopolitan Western lifestyles given the relaxing of social mores that previously sanctioned excessive displays of wealth (Zhan and He, 2012: 1453; Zhang and Kim, 2013).

Within this complex tapestry of global retail investment and variegated consumption practice, two specific developments within luxury markets are apparent that have pronounced implications for the geographies of the sector. Firstly, there has been a notable global shift in the geographies of luxury production, with a number of fashion houses out-sourcing production to off-shore locations including China in the case of Burberry and Prada.

The example of Gucci is particularly instructive here. The Italian heritage of the brand was formerly secured and promoted by the 'Made in Italy' appellation. Since the 1990s production has been met through increasingly complex

supply chains including the off-shoring and outsourcing of production to China, Turkey, Vietnam, and Romania for cost-related reasons (Reinach, 2005; Tokatli, 2014). In order to manage this 'dark side' (Holt, 2004: 6) of their operations, Gucci subtly shifted their marketing message away from the primacy of the geographical origin of production towards the 'context of consumption' for their products (Tokatli, 2014) and, in the process, both highlighted the significance of the retail store as a key geographical site for the production of the brand image and re-defined what counts as 'place' in a more relational and unbounded manner (Tokatli, 2013: 239). This was an adept move that enabled Gucci to maintain their luxury credentials and aura by blurring the lines between country of origin (or manufacture) and brand origin – which 'can be thought of as the country a brand is associated with by its target consumers regardless of where it is manufactured' (Shukla, 2011: 243). Such developments begin to blur the boundary lines between luxury and mass markets and problematize the definition of luxury products which traditionally created and maintained exclusivity and value through transparent 'Made In' labelling, craft production, quality and scarcity. It is, in short, a skilful obfuscation of the places and means of production in what amounts to a strategy of super-commodity fetishism.

Secondly, there are tensions between the continued expansion and growth of luxury retailers and the premise of luxury brands being exclusive and rare (Kapferer, 2012). In order to construct themselves as exceptional and exclusive, whilst simultaneously catering for the demands of more inclusive and larger markets, luxury firms are conjoining the creative and commercial elements of their business and are emphasizing the symbolic and immaterial qualities of their brand whilst also maintaining scarcity of supply and artificially inflating prices (Herships, 2014). Central to this strategy is the ways in which luxury organizations are actively putting geography to work in their creation of value. One

way of achieving this in the wake of globalization and geographical expansion is through the symbolic and authoritative presence of the flagship store. The flagship store acts as the material expression of the brand and offers a place of seduction and desire. For the retailer, a flagship store serves to showcase the entire brand story to the consumer under one roof and to make use of all of the tools available to highlight the brand statement and philosophy. Situated in prestigious retail sites within global cities, flagship stores represent a key means through which luxury fashion houses internationalize (Ferne et al., 1997). Located in luxury enclaves to increase exclusivity and prestige (Doherty and Moore, 2007), these luxurious streets of style ‘form communities of affluence which appear to support and feed-off each other in terms of their sense of exclusivity and style’ (Nobbs et al., 2012: 931). These clusters of luxury stores are quite literally ‘economies of icons’ (Sternberg, 1999) where brands are enshrined in exclusive spaces and products are displayed as ‘treasures’, behind glass, in sleek cabinets placed delicately on pedestals and directly lit – echoing the artistic tradition of exhibition space. Just as in a museum, distance is maintained between the viewer and the object (Dion and Arnould, 2011) – touching is strictly forbidden. The space is ‘intimidating. It is done on purpose ... you shouldn’t feel like anybody can participate in that world’ (Hershops, 2010). This creation of spaces of display is an additional means through which luxury brands legitimize their power (Cervellon and Coudriet, 2013: 880) and emphasize the sacredness and scarcity of their brand.

### **III When fashion and art collide: The contemporary artist and the fashion director as a creative project**

Vital, receptive, responsive, tensed between imagining and making, constantly in progress and

eager to interpret the meaning of existence and the world ... the two disciplines – art and fashion design – live together in harmony and disagreement, connivance and drastic divergence. (Scardi, 2010: 13)

For far too long fashion and art have been viewed as disparate disciplines, warring factions that are technically and philosophically opposed. Fashion is popularly understood to be fickle, transient, superficial and largely driven by popular culture (Castle, 2000; Mores, 2006; Sudjic, 2001; Wigley, 2001). Fine art, in contrast, is viewed as timeless, rarified, considered and elitist (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013; Ward, 2008): ‘We think of art appreciation as erudite, but an interest in fashion is considered airheaded’ (Gregory, 2014). Fashion is routinely criticized for its perceived lack of content and ephemeral nature in spite of the skill, craft and artistic rigour demonstrated in both the design and the display of luxury fashion. Art, it has been argued, ‘has historically been exalted as the more noble and intellectual pursuit in comparison to fashion, which was regarded as a primarily commercially motivated form of expression’ (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013: 12). Certainly art and fashion have been seen to exist in separate, discrete, constructed categories, wherein art represents something valued as an object with longevity whilst fashion is seen as a commodity with accelerated cycles of production and consumption. ‘Art is normally aligned with meaningful intention and thus meaningful engagement, fashion is generally regarded as momentary and meaningless’ (Ward, 2008). Of course these broad generalizations fail to acknowledge the long-standing intersections, dialogues and creative crossings between the worlds of fashion and art which demonstrate that the alliances between art and fashion are in many ways nothing new (Tokatli, 2011). From Elsa Schiaparelli’s collaborations with Salvador Dali in the creation of the lobster-print gown fabricated from silk organza

and synthetic horsehair to Yves Saint Laurent's planar shift dresses that resembled Mondrian's canvasses, the special relationship between the same-but-different worlds of art and fashion has always been commercially lucrative (Gregory, 2014).

What is striking now are the ways in which the boundaries between art, visual culture, fashion, commercial commodities and the meaning of consumption, have become increasingly blurred and opaque in recent years. Emergent partnerships between fashion designers and artists are raising new questions about the similarities and synergies between the two practices of art and fashion: the notion that an artist's creativity and authenticity could be jeopardized by corporate fashion collaboration now seems rather precious and naïve (Gregory, 2014). This paper contributes to this debate through interrogating the practice and significance of a number of collaborations between art and fashion (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013: 10), recently described as a 'mutual appreciation society' (Gregory, 2014). The Italian fashion house Fiorucci was arguably one of the first to grasp the significance of the hybridization of art and fashion. Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton has argued that 'every time we try to do new things, it feels like we're doing Fiorucci' (in Mores, 2006: 60), and Vivienne Westwood has argued that Fiorucci is 'the teacher of us all'. He collaborated with some of the most subversive artists and pioneered the mobilization of street art onto the fashion scene by, for example, covering every surface of the Fiorucci store in Milan in graffiti overnight. 'The artistic contamination of which Fiorucci was so fond found expression in communication, architecture, graphics and merchandising' (Mores, 2006: 69).

Thus, whilst art works and genres have long been associated with luxury production and retailing, recent developments have brought fashion creators and artists into much closer and more productive dialogue via longer-standing project-based collaborations (Girard and Stark,

2002; Grabher, 2002). The American sociologist Howard Becker's book *Art Worlds* (1982) is theoretically instructive here. Becker examines the cultural contexts in which artists produce their work and emphasizes collective activity and the joint contribution of a number of people in order to produce a work of art or fashion. The artist's position is that of the indispensable figure in the centre of a large network without whom the work could not have been accomplished (Grabher, 2002). The alliances between art and fashion are in part an attempt to bond the product of the fashion retailer to that of both 'high' and more contemporary street art and thus to enhance the status of the product. This is particularly apposite in the contemporary period as the traditional crafted production of luxury fashion goods gives way to mass production methods. The drive for desingularization, together with the financial interests that accompany the mass production of fashioned commodities, are significant forces that threaten brand value (Harnett, 2014). One powerful strategy to dissipate this tendency has been the pursuit of an aggressive logic of differentiation based on aesthetic qualities, most notably evidenced by the spectacular alliances between fashion and 'art in general and with contemporary art in particular' (Karpik, 2010: 163). Karpik's originality model includes a diversified set of products, including art and fashion, that are increasingly defined by aesthetic criteria. Crucially, their practice (and place) of commodity production becomes less significant and may indeed be industrially produced: their value increasingly lies in their aesthetic credentials and brand allure.

A number of luxury organizations have re-defined themselves as not simply producers and retailers of commodities but as cultural aficionados whose creative directors act as guarantors of cultural credibility. A number, including Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton and Miuccia Prada have, in the process, 'elevated themselves to the role of insightful intellectuals' (Tokatli,

2014: 6). Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton was a particularly directional force in promoting luxury fashion as an artistic cultural enterprise. Well known for his 'self-identification as a postmodern fashion designer, and for his self-conscious understanding of his role as a cultural arbiter in a global world' (Tokatli, 2011: 1256), Jacobs understands very well that the 'creativity of designers is rooted as much in their ability to pick up on cultural currents and popular culture as in their own "thinking repertoires"' (Tokatli, 2011: 1256). Creativity emerges from immersion in and engagement with a suite of cultural practices that require collaboration and co-creation.

The example of the global luxury retailer Louis Vuitton is instructive here and is a clear illustration of the ways in which alliances between artists and fashion firms are emerging as a key means of 'placing' fashion and maintaining commodity aura in an era of off-shoring and the global outsourcing of production. In 2005 it took 20 to 30 craftspeople eight days to produce a Louis Vuitton bag. The high price for the item could perhaps have been justified on the basis of its skilled craft production, and consumers undoubtedly bought into the concept of the value, aura and singularity of artisan production (Aspers, 2010; Karpik, 2010). This valorization of commodities and consumers' visuality of them became altogether more problematic when the company shifted towards the mass production of their goods, accompanied by front-page headlines such as 'Louis Vuitton Tries Modern Methods on Factory Lines' (Passariello, 2006). As one means to justify the high price of mass produced items, Louis Vuitton's collaboration with a range of super-artists, including Takashi Murakami, Richard Prince, Yayoi Kusama and Stephen Sprouse, is undoubtedly an aesthetic investment in the immaterial and symbolic definition of the brand. Many of these collaborations have themselves become iconic and are consumed by some as investment pieces that will accrue value through their lifetime and become collectable

pieces in their own right. The Louis Vuitton art collaborations have helped to define the brand's value and shop space, both structurally and conceptually. These alliances go some way towards fixing the consumer's imagination on retail space and serve as a key means to enhance and extend the cultural value of the brand.

What is striking about contemporary retail space, particularly in the luxury branded sector, is how value is created not just (or not at all) in relation to the high quality of raw materials and the craft and skill involved in their fabrication but in relation to their immaterial qualities; value is increasingly seen to lie in the codes of meaning enshrined in commodities through processes of dematerialization, commodity fetishism and the elevation of the retail store and commodity aesthetic as key creators of value. By adopting a cultural economy approach to fashion it becomes possible to see how aesthetic valorization thus becomes an increasingly important component in the making of luxury fashion markets (Aspers, 2010). Collaboration with artists is thus argued to be a key means through which brand value is created and maintained. The boundaries between high art and popular culture are beginning to fray and new partnerships are being created. Fashion ceases to be art's 'Other' but begins to vie for equal status (Geczy and Karaminas, 2012: 3). Whilst art and luxury fashion have always been intertwined, what is new and innovative in the contemporary era is the multiple ways in which these collaborations are emerging. Art and fashion, as a number of scholars have recently argued, are rarely discrete ideas and practices but, rather, are joint players in a complex aesthetic firmament that together shape and make markets (Currid, 2007, 2012; Hawkins, 2013; Karaminas, 2012; Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013; Rantisi, 2014; Steele, 2012; Webb, 2012; Yeomans, 2012).

The global luxury brand Louis Vuitton is again a forerunner in many of more notable recent art-fashion collaborations (Castets, 2009: 174;



Edelman, 2011; Golbin, 2012; Pasols, 2005). It has been argued that ‘No other fashion house has wielded as much influence on the work and reputation of an artist in the way Louis Vuitton cultivated its highly visible relationships’ (Saillard, 2009: 71). The partnership with the cartoon-print artist Takashi Murakami in 2002 involved printing Murakami’s soft toy images over Louis Vuitton’s feted monogram, a logo central to the fashion house’s closely protected authenticity. The result was both a radical artistic gesture and one of the house’s greatest commercial successes. ‘By aligning with contemporary art, fashion affords itself a criticality that it lacks. This criticality can then be acquired, literally, by the buyer, in a knowing gesture of cultural and economic mastery, turning a shopper into a collector’ (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013: 16). In the case of this particular collaboration, ‘the distinction between commercial product and high art was blurred in a truly Warholian gesture when the artist later incorporated the paintings and sculptures he had produced for the house into his solo gallery exhibition’ (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013: 17). As the fashion house themselves argued in relation to the Murakami monogramouflage: ‘Our collaboration . . . has been, and continues to be, a monumental marriage of art and commerce. The ultimate cross-over – one for both the fashion and art history books’ (Geczy and Karaminas, 2012: 9). Murakami accurately pitches his promiscuous style of artistic spectacle as a product of a ‘specific, interpenetrating alignment of economy and culture, a perfect exemplar of cultural economy at work’ (Geczy and Karaminas, 2012: 9).

The project undertaken jointly between Vuitton’s Creative Director Marc Jacobs and the artist Olafur Eliasson in 2006 was another example of their pioneering approach to collaboration in both business (economy) and aesthetic (cultural) terms. The team created a site-specific store installation that challenges the tropes of retail design and display and actively enrolled



**Figure 1.** Copyright 2006 Olafur Eliasson, Courtesy of Louis Vuitton Malletier, Paris *Eye See You* - LVMH Christmas Window 2006.

the consumer in the production and interpretation of the space – visibility at its most stark. The *Eye See You* lamp installation blocked the consumer’s view of every commodity in the window in every Louis Vuitton store worldwide – an audacious move during the feverish Christmas holiday consumption period (Gasparina, 2009: 45). Resembling the pupil of an eye, the sculpture comprised a low-pressure sodium lamp that resembles the pupil of an eye that produces a strong monochromatic yellow light (see Figure 1). The image is illuminating, spectral and vibrant and creates a dialogue and connection between the interior of the store and the exterior viewer, flooding the street with light as darkness falls and so transgressing the physical and psychological boundary represented by a commercial window display. The installation was viewed by millions of pedestrians and *Eye See You* became part of urban streetscapes around the world for the duration of its showing, combining the conventional notion of window shopping with the visual experience of looking at art ([http://artagenda.com/client/tanya\\_bonakdar\\_gallery](http://artagenda.com/client/tanya_bonakdar_gallery)).

The emotional and affective charge of the window design is engaging and powerful. By representing the eye, quite literally, we see how

this collaboration questions the very nature of the shop window as a space for looking at commodities. In a striking inversion of the gaze, the 350 Louis Vuitton windows display nothing but the illuminated monochromatic pupil of an eye, watching, following, surveilling. The eye-light is so bright that it is difficult to look at and the remainder of the window is shrouded in blackness. In this daring switching of the relationship between viewer and viewed the consumer sees nothing. The eye sees you. The installation, as a metaphorical eye with an indifferent and/or aggressive relationship to moving viewers, effectively speaks to a number of conceptual debates about the gaze, the relationship between watcher and watched, consumer and store, surveillance and social control (Modigliani, 2007). The relations between art and fashion provocatively reveal how, on the one hand, fashion can ‘transform places and spaces, adding, deferring or altering the identity of the environment, while, on the other hand, it can increase the cachet and cultural cachet of [an artist]’ (Pottvin, 2009: 5). ‘What is absolutely new and avant garde is that fashion designers and visual artists will co-author a single, collaborative work of art in which their contributions are perfectly integrated: both craft and concept a joint enterprise from the start. Whether blatant, referential or allusive, this exchange of ideas continues to be a work (of art) in progress’ (Webb, 2012: 11).

Contemporary artists and their relations with fashion designers thus become a key means of making and defining markets. The collaboration constitutes a real axis of aesthetic invention. The nature of art and fashion practice and their aesthetic status become interwoven and combined in order to preserve aura and ensure the continuation of their status as markets of singularization (Karpik, 2010). Both groups of agents have evolved into cultural impresarios, and an appreciation of their work is increasingly connected to being part of a collective, as opposed to consumption being an individual, aesthetic

experience. Contemporary artists are increasingly comfortable to work alongside fashion creatives as ‘imagineers’ and to frame their work according to the specifications of fashion houses. It would appear that the emergent fashion-art fusion is capturing a complex set of contemporary cultural developments – on the one hand, the alliances reflect the increased mainstream currency of contemporary art, and a popular hunger for meaningful consumption experience; on the other hand, this tendency is in turn bound up with the need for artists, and the institutions that support them, to reach out and see and be seen as more than rarified collectors’ pieces. Fashion and art are together key cultural actors in the fabrication of contemporary urban space and are simultaneously reflections and representations, both constantly in the process of presenting and interpreting the contemporary geography of the fashioned city. Both art and fashion translate a dream into a material form. Thus ‘the differences are less in the objects of fashion and art, since both are aesthetic creations for which judgement is always subjective, but the places of exchange – social, economic, linguistic – that they occupy’ (Geczy and Karaminas, 2012: 5).

#### **IV Window wear: The art of the street**

Consumers are first of all gatherers of sensations: they are collectors of things only in a secondary and derived sense. (Bauman: 2007: 39)

Shop windows tell ‘stories about ourselves and the desires that drive us’ (Moreno, 2005: 8). They are ‘mirrors that reflect the faces of our time’ (Portas, 1999: 8). Windows communicate desire and dreams, they build brands and shape consumption. In an era saturated by the screen and ways of looking and seeing (Turkle, 1995) it is curious that shop windows have been so neglected in critical consumption literature. The alchemic properties of glass have transformed

retail space in a number of dramatic ways. Glass is a solid liquid, a magical paradox, which links the real world outside to the world of luxury inside. A display surrounded by windows, the most efficient type of temporary staging of expensive goods, is a neglected focus in the discipline of retailing, yet one which plays a crucial role in consumption and culture.

Historically, windows were little more than a means of introducing light into a store. In medieval times, large, arched, unglazed windows were used for shopkeepers to draw attention to their wares (Manco, 2010). As glass-making methods improved, so too did display techniques. The first shops with transparent window displays appeared in the Netherlands at the start of the 19th century and began the process of communication between the street and the store, the merchandiser and the consumer, interior and exterior (Pevsner, 1976). Initially, store windows were small and functional, but as shops grew larger and department stores evolved, windows transformed into selling tools and the importance of windows grew in direct proportion to their size (Portas, 1999). By the early 20th century the potential role that store windows could play as performative, spectacular spaces was acknowledged: 'The best window displays aspire to imitate the theatre by framing and illuminating the commodities and mannequins in a carefully arranged scenario in order to imbue them with the captivating qualities of the theatre' (International Correspondence School, 1912).

In more recent decades store window displays have become a unique form of advertising and are the first point of contact between the store and the customer (Fibre to Fashion, 2012). Thus 'the pane of glass separating the object of desire from the shopper forms an imaginary screen not unlike the mirror, a surface for receiving and reflecting' (Oswald, 1992: 53), which highlights the complexity of this space. The multi-faceted dimensions of shop window displays remain under-theorized considering their importance and significance in contemporary

consumer culture. The shop window provides a space for image makers to experiment and challenge notions of physical display (Arnold, 2001). Contradictory messages haunt fashion imagery in the store window as in many other commercial spaces, and tensions between the commercial and aesthetic, financial and creative placing of fashion shape the forms and modes of display (Arnold, 2001). Windows are both an outward projection of the interior of the store and also a means of relaying a series of more subtle and unconscious messages, what can be found inside the shop and yet also relay a whole series of more subtle and unconscious messages'. Shop windows have developed into forms of art themselves and produce some of the most interesting imagery within fashion culture. They are a space for making, assembling, displaying and performing fashion – a co-production place that reflects contemporary consumer culture:

Although they are ephemeral, they mark the seasons, record a moment in our politics, our characters, our fantasies, our times. If they persisted, boxed carefully away, they would provide rich artefacts for future archaeologists. (Moreno, 2005: 8)

A display window, like film, can be a space for the creation of desire. Store windows are liminal spaces that can bring dreams and fantasy into reality. They are at once inside and out; for looking and seeing. They are simultaneously spaces of reflection and contemplation, such that 'the store window is the physical mediator between products and consumers, between stimulus and shopping decisions and between the store's fantasy and street reality' (Cuito, 2005: 5). 'It is what each person chooses to take away from the windows that is significant: looking without buying may make us richer in more ways than one' (Moreno, 2005: 14). 'The label itself is not enough; it requires to be housed in a space equally endowed with the potential to elicit reverence and pleasure, a coveted destination' (Potvin, 2009: 247).

Selfridges is an excellent illustration of the ways in which store windows can challenge conventional commercial signals and raise questions of a more socially attuned and provocative nature. The collaboration between Selfridges and the Scottish artist Katie Paterson in 2013 is a particularly apposite example of the ways in which store windows can act as spaces for reflection and contemplation – in much the same way as the iconic Vexed Generation stores in London’s Soho did in the 1980s and 1990s. In an unlikely move Selfridges, one of the world’s largest and busiest chains of department stores, launched a collaboration that centres on silence, mindfulness, mediation and anti-branding. Its ‘No Noise’ campaign urged customers ‘to seek out moments of peace and tranquillity in a world that bombards us with information and stimulation’ while capturing ‘the western world’s focus on detoxing, decluttering, bettering oneself and finding greater well-being so commonplace at the start of a new year’ (Selfridges, 2013). The installation was launched officially with a 500-strong mass meditation session led by former monk Andy Puddicombe in the London store’s ground-floor beauty hall. The campaign included the re-opening of Selfridge’s ‘Silence Room’, which had been closed for 90 years, and was redesigned to provide a quiet sanctuary for those who wanted to take some time out from shopping and relax. The store also opened a ‘Quiet Shop’ that offered customers de-branded products such as Levis and Marmite, stripped of their logos and branding and wrapped in the distinctive yellow Selfridges bag, minus the logo. The conceptual complexity of this particular Selfridges window-display communication reveals the potency and currency of contemporary intersections of culture, fashion and art. One of the window displays was stripped back to gallery-style white walls displaying one Selfridges shopping bag with no logo and no products on display. No Noise is an initiative that goes beyond retail by inviting the consumer to reflect on the power of

quiet, to see the beauty in function and find calm amongst the crowds. As Selfridges state:

... and who wouldn’t have lifted her dear, distracted head from her mobile device to contemplate the significance of the No Noise windows earlier this year? The No Noise campaign ... was a comment on the fact that, in a world of 24/7 information overload, simplicity and serenity are the greatest luxuries. For one of the world’s largest department stores, a palace to consumerism and the desire for more, it was a provocative exercise in debranding. (Selfridges, 2013)

Many of the other window displays in the series were created by Katie Paterson, a Scottish conceptual artist whose work asks the viewer/consumer to contemplate time, space and the environment – key questions for geographical enquiry. One of Paterson’s window displays was called ‘Light Bulb to Simulate Moonlight’, comprising a set of light bulbs which, combined, would provide a person with a lifetime supply of moonlight (see Figure 2). Not only was this an installation that encouraged the viewer to think beyond the moment of purchase, but it also raised broader questions about the temporal cycles of night and day, about energy supply and sustainability, use and re-use – again, key contemporary geographical questions.

In another of the windows the consumer could view the ‘100 Billion Suns’. This comprised a confetti canon that was set off each day at 12 noon and burst 3216 tiny pieces of coloured paper into the store window. Each piece of paper represented the colour of a gamma ray burst – the brightest explosions in the universe which burn with a luminosity 100 billion times that of our sun. Again, we see here how the store window is far more than a space for commodity display but, rather, is a spatial spectacle that enrolls the viewer/consumer into a performative event that in turn encourages contemplation about space, time and their relationality. Powerful aesthetic affordances emerge when we



**Figure 2.** Katie Paterson's 'Light bulb to simulate moonlight'. Source: Installation at Selfridges London, 2013. Photo © MJC Courtesy of the artist.

bring the background to the fore and arouse contemplation rather than just consumption. Store windows not only reflect and anticipate some of the most exciting developments in consumer culture but also prompt more philosophical and conceptual questioning.

As these examples demonstrate, shop windows are in a constant state of flux, reflecting pace and change, energy and creativity. The question that critics continue to pose is whether the display of affective objects in affective spaces that are the result of a fusion between artists, fashion creatives and space are anything more than hypocritical/hypercritical gimmicks that exploit 'art' in what amounts to little more than a gestural critique of consumerism that is in fact masquerading as simply another means of driving markets and fuelling consumerism itself. But as the examples above illustrate, these new alliances reveal how the space between fashion and art – *ma* in Japanese – are drawing closer together

in far from trivial ways. 'Collaborating with contemporary artists brings a new kind of creative fecundity to the product. It forces creativity that is different to that typically found in fashion' (Carcelle, 2007). The collision between the two practices in the spaces of the fashion store reveals the significance of visibility and affective affordance in consumption, framing the consumer in a new role as active participant and interpreter rather than merely passive receiver of prescribed sales messages. This is significant as it emphasizes new relations and subjectivities and opens up new opportunities for how we understand and theorize retailing and consumption in space and time, foregrounding the 'personal and public, material, imagined and visual experiences of the subject with its objects of desire. The spectator is active, that is, as the inevitable scopophilic participant in the display of fashion, the engaged interpreter of what is seen and, finally, the fashionable interloper' (Potvin, 2009: 10).

## **V Implications and conclusions**

At one level this paper contributes to social scientific research on luxury fashion markets by revealing the increasing significance of creative practice and retail design and display. At another level the argument presented has demonstrated the fundamental importance of geography and space as key mechanisms through which to explain the enduring growth of the luxury fashion sector. Significantly, and in contrast to many new economy prophets who imagined that physical stores would become a 'dead weight' global luxury stores appear to demonstrate the enduring power and potency of the physical retail store that has the capacity to recast luxury in line with shifting global consumption practices. This is important given that luxury fashion and its complex geographies are an extraordinarily resilient feature of contemporary capitalism and may act as an early warning system for major economic transformation. This requires that we better understand the means and mechanisms through which luxury brands grow and develop. It further depends on exploring more critical approaches that engage and question the desires and demands for commodities with a high ratio of intangible value in order to more fully understand their affective capacities, emotional reach and ongoing commercial success.

Through the analysis presented the paper makes two significant conceptual contributions. First, whilst art, fashion and luxury have always been intertwined, recent decades have revealed that contemporary notions of luxury, quality and added value are quickly combining with the immaterial qualities of retail design, display, atmosphere and experience. This is engendering a shift away from the significance of the materiality and origin of luxury objects per se towards their aesthetic pull – as evidenced by the original etymology of the word, *aesthesis*, meaning sensation. The paper explores the uneasy alliance between the two practices and the tensions

that unfold between integrity and authenticity, commercialism and craft, medium and message in the creation of contemporary retail spaces. In so doing the piece offers a more critical reflection on the worlds of art and fashion and draws attention to the many ways in which the two practices are coalescing around a set of practices that enshrine value in the spaces of retailing and consumption as much as in the place of origin of goods. Conventional accounts have argued that 'art and fashion inhabited different modalities of presentation and reception'; they had different uses and were subject to different responses within both monetary and aesthetic economies (Geczy and Karaminas, 2012: 5). Within extant social scientific research, cultural objects have conventionally been classified in terms of their varying properties in a system of categories of goods relative to one another (Bourdieu, 1989). The contribution of this paper is to argue that the boundaries between art, fashion, creativity, and what is institutionalized as such have been breaking down or at least becoming more porous in recent years. This is conceptually significant as it furthers our understanding of the possible ways in which the immaterial and aesthetic qualities of goods can generate, or even determine, value (Karpik, 2010). The contemporary alliances between contemporary artists and fashion houses are an exemplar of a market of singularity that is characterized by the primacy of competition by qualities over and beyond economically-determined competition. These are aesthetic markets where the issue of quality, value and worth lies beyond purely economic explanations or pricing regimes (Beckert and Aspers, 2011). The important point here is thus that the particular nature of the luxury fashion market requires that we theoretically integrate culture, creativity, aura and allure in ways that take us far beyond price-based determinants of value. Cultural objects, in both the art and fashion worlds, carry multiple meanings which in part shape their value. The adoption of a cultural economy

approach to fashion markets allows us to interrogate the geographies and politics of creativity that are emerging through fashion and art's fusion and collusion and to explore how new creative practices of design and display are impacting on regimes of commodity valorization in very important ways. The paper has argued that this is a critical moment for the mixing and melding of genres and for hybridizing art and fashion (Lipovetsky and Manlow, 2010: 110). The creative practices explored in the paper 'engage a whole suite of relationships between bodies, materials and matter, technology and objects that are a source of creativity's subject, place and world-making potentials' (Hawkins, 2013: 6). They represent a key means of making and shaping value and reveal the significance of visibility, singularity and judgement in determining commodity and brand meaning and value. This orchestration of fashion through artistic collaboration in store also provides a critical space for reflections on the workings of commercial and creative practice and offers insights as to how, together, these may offer new ways through which to theorize value, aura and the ordering of markets (Beckers and Aspers, 2011; Karpik, 2010; Stark, 2009).

The alliances and convergence between art and fashion are in part the product of the rise of the creative director as a key agentive figure in the production and reproduction of luxury spaces and markets – a collision of craft, commerce and cultural production that requires detailed scrutiny given the central role it plays in the creation and determination of value. The art of designing a fashion space is an exercise in communication, in making concrete the imaginative energy and creative power of artists and designers. It is also a key strategy in foregrounding the space of consumption whilst masking the intricate shifting global geographies of luxury production. In an increasingly integrated, mobile and volatile world, the creation of retail spaces is one means through which to communicate the concerns of our lives in motion with

urgency and power. As Hawkins has argued to great effect, and as the examples explored here too reveal, the geographies and economics of creativity are 'not just a way of making a living but also about making lives' (Hawkins, 2013: 3); they reveal the critical potential of fashion space to address key concerns of contemporary geographic enquiry – sight, temporality, day, night, sustainability. Fashion space has both cultural and economic power and potential. This is geographically critical in furthering our understanding of the economic, social and political dimensions, possibilities and tensions of creative practices (Hawkins, 2013: 5).

Second, the paper develops current understandings of the globalizing nature of the luxury industry and argues that the luxury fashion store remains a pivotal feature in a world where retail markets are more fragmented and diverse than ever before (Kozinets et al., 2002); it is a space where dreams are created and fantasies fulfilled. Fashion has always been framed by the use of image and display and is characterized by an ongoing compulsion to create ever more striking images (Arnold, 2001: 56). Images play a key role in defining global fashion culture and in capturing its discursive power (Shinkle, 2008: 1). Brand identity and consumption spaces, as the discussion has revealed, are fundamental to the fashion industry and instrumental in a variety of forms to the global fashion culture of the 21st century, not least in dramatic in-store collaborative installations. The paper has demonstrated that the micro-geography of the shop window is a key (and much neglected) site for the constitution and representation of contemporary consumption – a space of possibility where art and fashion, culture and commerce, design and desire merge and meld. Store windows act as a powerful spatial landscape that set the stage in the contemporary city for the performance of everyday life, acting as theatres of signs and symbols in which representation is not the opposite of materiality but rather its alter-ego – a space that both

constitutes and reflects commerce and culture, transaction and imagination.

## Notes

1. The empirical focus of the paper is on the eight largest luxury fashion organizations: Louis Vuitton (LVMH), Hermes, Gucci, Prada, Chanel, Burberry, Fendi and Coach, and on global 'flagship' spaces of display such as Selfridges and Harvey Nichols.
2. There remains a pronounced geography in the distribution of flagship stores in global cities that agglomerate in, for example, Bond Street/Sloane Street (London); 5th Avenue/Madison Avenue (New York); Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore/Avenue Montaigne (Paris's Triangle D'Or); Via Manzoni/Via Montenapoleone (Milan); Harumi Dori (Ginza)/Aoyama Dori (Tokyo); Queen Street/Canton Road (Hong Kong).
3. Hermes, Kering, Richemont and Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy have, for example, all grown ten-fold in the past two decades

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