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MAPPING HOW CULTURE IN NEW YORK CITY AND LONDON INFLUENCES
RESPECTIVELY THE ICONIC FASHION BRANDS OF KORS AND MCQUEEN:
A CASE STUDY

by

Carol P. Brathwaite

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2017

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Mapping How Culture in New York City and London Influences Respectively the
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Carol P. Brathwaite

Advisor: David Halle

This thesis is an explanatory case study that applies geographic information systems (GIS) data, biographical data, and other secondary data. It includes mainly qualitative data collection and analysis; furthermore, the study examines quantitative data on the cultural events offered within each city. Overall, this case study adopts a theoretical perspective. The two individual cases (based on a multiple, holistic case-study design framework) of fashion culture in New York City and London, as per Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen respectively, represent ‘confirmatory cases or presumed replications of the same phenomenon’ (Yin 2014:59). Each describes the house’s fashion aesthetics as well as an intersection of the geographic city layout, arts culture, and postmodern fashion culture; it is a means of understanding why and how these two fashion houses evolved to become cultural icons in their respective cities. Kors has become one of the top social media brands and one of the most sought-after on Instagram whereas McQueen has achieved recognition as one of the most politically provocative fashion brands of the postmodern

era. This case illustrates multiple data promulgated by and about these organizations that elucidate their rise.

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Mapping How Culture in New York City and London Influences Respectively the Iconic Fashion Brands of Kors and McQueen: A Case Study.

New York City and London are global cities, competitive in several segments, including fashion, music, finance, innovation and technology. According to Sassen (1991), a dismantling of previously powerful industrial centers in the United States, United Kingdom and Japan in the 1960s led to a 1970s transition into a new strategic role for major cities, based on a 'spatial dispersal and global integration' (p. 20). These cities, which Sassen distinguished as 'global cities,' functioned in four new ways: (1) as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy, (2) as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, (3) as sites of production, including the production of innovations, and (4) as markets for the products and innovations produced (p. 21). These transnational activities, traced from the 1970s to 1990, were located primarily in New York, London and Tokyo. Dynamic changes in how major cities function today have restructured economic activity, redirected a vast number of resources to urban environments, as well as reshaped the social and cultural order.

Prior to urbanization as a key trend in international development, cities were classified based mainly on their level of economic and financial power (for example, 'world cities'), or on the size of their population, in the case of 'millionaire cities' (having over a million residents) and 'megacities' (having over 10 million residents) [United Nations, 2016]. Although the terms 'world cities' and 'global cities' are used interchangeably, the Sassen (1991) empirical inquiry forged a new model; it expanded beyond observations of economic dominance to examine the massive social transformations happening within each city. This shift provoked reflection on the

resulting effect of society and culture in global city growth. The complexity of a global city with a multiplicity of socioeconomic functions, as reported by several cultural sociologists, are an argument for the current case study of two such top-ranked societies, New York City (NYC) and London. Thus, this current inquiry presents the case from the perspective of each city's geographic layout in proximity to its arts and fashion culture.

Several scholars (Abu Lughod 1999; Judd and Simpson 2011; Halle and Beveridge 2013) also examined sociocultural trends in global cities, by addressing issues ranging from the economics and politics of race and social class, immigration and infrastructure, to a city's architecture, and the city's depiction in film. A commonality across these dissections is the acknowledgement not only that each city possesses a unique history but has also evolved to global city rank via complicated means.

A.T. Kearney has been collecting data on global cities since 2008. Today more than half of the world's population lives in cities and the United Nations projects that by 2050 two thirds of the world's population will live in an urban area. A sixth-edition Kearney Global Cities report (2016) ranks London, New York, Paris and Tokyo as the top global cities of 2016, using a *Global City Index* score based on business activity, human capital, information exchanges, cultural experience, and political engagement. In another ranking within the report, Kearney charted a *Global City Outlook* vis-à-vis personal well-being, economics, innovation and governance. The top-ranked cities in this category were San Francisco, New York, Tokyo and London. According to Kearney, the top two *Global Elite* cities are once again London and New York City (p. 3).

The annual World Cities Culture Forum (WCCF) also produces an international ranking of cities based on new data that integrates culture (using 70 cultural indicators) with political and

economic information to promote sustainable urban development. According to Simons, Chair of the 2015 WCCF assembly, “For cities to thrive they need to be ‘liveable’ and their citizens need to feel connected. They need to work hard to close the gap between rich and poor. And in the face of significant growth, they need to maintain their distinctive character” (p. 4). Simons also noted that the *Economist*’s 2016 ranking of the top 10 most liveable cities only included four of the 30 World Cities Culture Forum members. “It won’t be enough to work on transportation and healthcare systems, policing and schools... We also need our people to be fulfilled and happy... [with]... something that generates billions in cash... something that improves health and wellbeing... It makes life worth living. That thing is culture” (p. 4).

The World Cities Culture Report 2015 shows that culture is a key ingredient of world cities’ success – a golden thread that runs across all aspects of urban planning and policy. “It draws mainly on interviews with a cross-section of up to seven opinion formers from each city: artists, business leaders, representatives of civil society, entrepreneurs and politicians. These opinion formers – 150 in all – were asked for their views on the challenges and opportunities facing their cities and how culture can address them” (p. 7).

According to the American Sociological Association (ASA), culture includes “material products, ideas, and symbolic means and their relation to social behavior” (2017). This approach expands the definition of culture beyond a reference to the arts, and even beyond a reference to political beliefs, religious beliefs, and social attitudes. Thus, they view culture in its broadest sense: as an equivalent of society. However, the arts, or fine arts, historically listed painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, as well as the performing arts, theatre and dance before

adding literature, film, television, architecture, music, and fashion. This set of aesthetics were the definition of culture. The current research examined culture from the original ideology of the arts but also looked at its impact on society, namely the relationship between two iconic fashion designers and the cities they inhabit.

Fashion designers Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen both came of age during the transition period from late modernity to early postmodernism. “As a qualifier, the early markers of modernism’s evolution are rooted in a historical transition from classical modernity (1789–1900) to late modernity (after the 1900s). Postmodernism entered Western societies after a period of ‘achieved’ modernism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online 2015)” (Brathwaite 2016). In *the Postmodern Condition* (1984), Lyotard argues that rapid growth of technologies and techniques in the latter part of the twentieth century has shifted emphasis of knowledge from the ends of human action to its means, and has created a distrust of metanarratives. Instead, postmodernism has created streams of knowledge (of person, organization, and society) that can co-exist. The plurality or multiple-pathways-to-knowledge debate is the definitive distinction between modernism and postmodernism. (Brathwaite 2016). The present inquiry examines this narrative as portrayed in a postmodern world.

The philosophy of postmodernism can be found in all forms of art and is often analogous with how we live and consume goods in society today. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the designs of both Kors and McQueen- albeit derived differently.

“While their artistic forms couldn't be farther from each other, both New York and London are important pillars in the fashion community” (Sciacca 2015: para.21). If Michael Kors represents the luxe sportswear, commercialism and capitalism of New York City, then Alexander McQueen

has inherited the theatrical, socially provocative, and experimental street designs ever-present in London's fashion. According to Forbes online (Arthur 2015), although both cities have a population slightly greater than eight million, a bustling metropolis as well as a strong fashion and arts culture, these two design houses and their presentations could not be more different (Brathwaite 2016).

The use of a case study method in the current thesis was implemented to provide context on the real-life situation of evolved cities, its creative inhabitants, and their commitment to sociocultural issues vis-à-vis fashion. This examination included GIS data, cultural historical data, biographical data and quantitative data of two cities: New York City and London. Given the complexity of such a multiplicity as well as any relevant changes over time (for example, with geographical city data), a case study offered greater structure both for evaluating contextual change and for triangulating the multiple sources of evidence. Several scholars (Cronbach et al. 1980; Datta 1997; Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2007; Yin, 2014) have noted the merits of case studies as a legitimate approach to designing and conducting evaluations. Thus, this case illustrates multiple data promulgated by and about two organizations- Michael Kors in New York City and Alexander McQueen in London- that elucidate their rise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Designers Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen

Michael Kors was born Karl Anderson, Jr. in 1959 on Long Island, New York; about a decade later, Lee Alexander McQueen (1969 – 2010) arrived in a lower middle-class family in Lewisham, London. Kors and McQueen each grew up close to female relatives who apparently played an influential role in their lives and contributed to their early interest in fashion. Today,

Kors has become one of the top social media brands and one of the most sought-after on Instagram, whereas McQueen has achieved recognition as one of the most politically provocative fashion brands of the postmodern era. Although McQueen has died, his legendary sociopolitical legacy lives on in his eponymous clothing and accessories lines, now in the hands of his longtime co-designer Sarah Burton.

In a televised interview with CBS News Sunday Morning, during the 2017 Ready-to-Wear (RTW) New York Fashion Week (NYFW), Kors described his clients- patrons of his lower-priced, his high-end as well as his menswear lines – as having one thing in common: “They want to look fashionable and current. They want to feel powerful but sexy. They want to feel youthful but not ridiculous” (Braver 2017). This pronouncement reveals a sound awareness of the roots of the appeal for his lifestyle brands. Chic understated luxury has made Kors a fashion favorite among not only social elites such as former First Lady Michelle Obama, and journalist Barbara Walters but among also social media audiences within the millennial generation. The socialites favor the high-end Michael Kors line; however, the younger Instagram-sharing crowd knows Kors from his highly entertaining appearances on the reality television show, *Project Runway*, which originally aired on the BRAVO network. Consequently, millennials tend to purchase the lower-priced extremely popular clothing and accessories brand, Michael by Michael Kors.

This case study traces Kors’ early alliance with then New York magazine editor Anna Wintour, his financial struggles and recovery, and later his pivotal role as a judge on reality TV. In the first individual case (of the current multiple case study), a spotlight on the highs and lows in an extremely successful design career also highlight the role of NYC as ultimately an urban and global fashion center.

Alexander McQueen was a talented complicated man, widely accepted as one of the most iconic fashion designers of his time. According to the British Council, McQueen once said, “British fashion is self-confident and fearless. It refuses to bow to commerce, thus generating a constant flow of new ideas whilst drawing in British heritage” (Farrukh 2017: para 4). Just before the start of the 2017 RTW London Fashion Week (LFW), the British Council joined a list of organizations by posthumously declaring that Mc Queen’s bold, dramatic beautiful designs have earned him a place in history (Farrukh 2017). Many have described effusively his master tailoring courtesy the time he spent as an apprentice on Saville Row, along with his flair for dramatic storytelling based, in part, on his past designs for the theater and for rock musicians like David Bowie. Several biographies have explored Mc Queen’s life and work in London. The question is to what extent has the McQueen brand been uniquely shaped by the classicism of the bespoke style on Saville Row colliding with the underground rock and roll glamour of London’s Soho district. Thus, this second individual case examines the integration of fashion, culture and geography.

Research Questions

The case study questions in the current research explore the following

- How did the culture of New York City and London influence the fashion brands Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen respectively, and what impact did it have on the designers’ cultural iconic statuses?
- What new can we learn regarding two modern Western global cities, New York City and London, if we examine their geo-data and postmodern fashion cultures- in other words, examine the geographic layout of each city in proximity to its arts culture and its fashion culture?

- How did these two fashion designers use fashion as a modern artistic representation of their respective cities?

The unit of analysis in this case study, a multiple holistic examination of two entities, is the ‘fashion aesthetics’ of the house of Michael Kors and the ‘fashion aesthetics’ of the house of Alexander McQueen. These two individual cases, which explore fashion culture in NYC and London as per Kors and McQueen respectively, represent ‘confirmatory cases or presumed replications of the same phenomenon’ (Yin 2014:59). An important distinction therefore is that this is not a true comparative study; the presumption is that each fashion house exemplifies the city of its location and, consequently, is a replication of postmodern culture. Additionally, the overall inquiry encompasses an intersection of geographic city layout, arts culture and fashion culture as a way of understanding the appeal of these two fashion brands.

Reference.com describes a fashion house as “a company specializing in the design and sale of high-fashion clothing and accessories.” A fashion designer is typically involved in the creation of garments and accessories for either *haute couture* or *prêt-à-porter* clients. Haute couture literally means high sewing; it is the creation of very exclusive custom-fitted clothing by a leading fashion house or atelier (Merriam-Webster’s dictionary online defines atelier as “an artist's or designer's studio or workroom”). Prêt-à-porter or off-the rack clothing refers to high fashion designer clothing, sold ready-to-wear. However, today more high fashion designers are also creating lower-priced or diffusion lines for the mass market, as means of broadening their aesthetic appeal.

According to van der Laan and Kuipers, “Cultural production is about aesthetics. All cultural products, from music to film and from literature to fashion, appeal to the senses to achieve a sensation of beauty, enjoyment or even the sensation of ‘the sublime.’ They do so by

combining different aesthetic elements in ever-changing ways” (2016:64). Fashion has received very little attention from philosophers and scholars of aesthetics (Venkatesh et al. 2010; Negrin 2012; van der Laan and Kuipers 2016). “Kant's concept of aesthetics [which] came to be applied exclusively to the fine arts...[was] defined as a sphere of disinterested contemplation where form is appreciated for its own sake; aesthetic judgment was seen to be applicable only to those art forms that did not serve any externally defined function” (Negrin 2012:43). Venkatesh et al theorize as well that consumers' attitudes and preferences relating to bodily appearance relate to their perceptions of the aesthetics of fashion (2010). The current study details Kors and McQueen fashion products, as well as how both professionals and consumers of fashion articulate or experience these products. Consequently, the approach to ‘fashion aestheticsⁱ’ in the individual cases of the current study adopts the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s (2014) description: It is the sensory, emotional value, completely subjective, placed on an object, based on a judgement of sentiment and taste.

The Relationship Among Cities, Society, and Culture

Next, the relationship among cities, society, and culture, particularly fashion culture, might provide clues to the successes of Kors and McQueen. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, many scholars focused more on the ‘spatial dispersal and global integration’ of cities rather than on its financial power. Furthermore, theorists such as Florida (2002) argued that cities have become dominant not only due to financial power but also because of a creative talent migration. This new socioeconomic group, the *creative class*, relocated predominantly to urban cities, attracted by the amenities that cities provide. Florida (2002:69) defined the *creative class* as “people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative

content," and predicted that this rise could drive future innovation.ⁱⁱ Some scholars applied this theory to fashion.

Wenting, Atzema and Frenken (2010) investigated Florida's theory by using a questionnaire to determine whether the locational decision of Dutch fashion design entrepreneurs is based on 'urban amenities' or 'agglomeration economies.' The study looked at clusters in the Dutch fashion design industry- "a prime example of a cultural industry with a strong degree of clustering with over one in four designers living in Amsterdam" (p. 1334). Economic geographers tend to attribute such clusters to agglomeration economies or the benefits given to the co-location among firms in the same industry. Conversely, urban socio-economists believe that cultural entrepreneurs or creative workers are motivated to relocate based not on economics but on urban amenities such as a tolerant social atmosphere, ethnic diversity and cultural activities.

Wenting et al (2010) sent a questionnaire to a listed 1496 fashion design firms in The Netherlands, to determine the business and personal motives for their location decision. Fashion firms are primarily very small self-employed entities therefore questions about their location, their locational preferences, their firm's size, annual income, the number and type of collaborations and their product markets could provide insight into both motivations. In other words, the location decision both from a worker's perspective and from a firm's perspective coincide. Of the 511 still active fashion design firms, 275 or 54 percent completed the questionnaire.

The Wenting et al (2010:1348) study indicated that "Amsterdam-based designers had a higher income... but that their success showed that entrepreneurs located in the cluster did not benefit from agglomeration economies per se... Rather, network ties with fellow designers and

experience gained in the past explained the economic success.” Thus, the questionnaire provided an important opportunity to obtain direct validation from fashion design entrepreneurs; additionally, it revealed that Florida’s theory is an important notation on spatial clusters of the creative class. The results also indicated that fashion design students, at least Dutch students, should seek internships or begin networking early in their careers. Finally, the results suggested that in small countries like The Netherlands, with small domestic markets, cultural clusters are likely to self-organize into a single dominant cluster.

Since the Sassen (1991) global-cities research and the Florida (2002) creative-class-urban-development theory, scholars across social, cultural, economic and geographic disciplines have been debating the role that urban cities play in attracting cultural, creative groups. The Dutch fashion-design study (Wenting et al, 2010) framework is one snapshot of the debate.

Another example is a case study of fashion designers in Toronto. Leslie and Brail (2011) examined the roles of diversity, tolerance, social services, and cultural dynamism in attracting and retaining talent, in fostering aesthetic experimentation, and in mediating some of the risks associated with cultural work. These set of characteristics were defined as the ‘quality of place;’ the Leslie and Brail (2011) study labelled that as the city’s liveability in attracting, incubating and retaining talent.

Fifty-seven semi-structured interviews with fashion designers, government officials, educators, and design councils in Toronto were conducted between 2007 and 2009. The fashion designers interviewed were diverse in terms of age, gender, profile, and stage of career, potentially representing a broad range of perspectives in the study. Participants were asked how ‘quality of place’ enhanced creativity within the industry, and about the role of place characteristics in ameliorating the risks associated with creative work. Interviews were digitally

recorded, transcribed, and coded according to theme (Leslie and Brail 2011:2902); other data included relevant policy documents and newspaper articles on fashion design in Toronto. This case study (1) reviewed debates concerning amenities and talent attraction and retention, (2) considered the factors responsible for *attracting* fashion design talent to Toronto, and (3) examined the role of amenities (including diversity, tolerance, cultural amenities, affordability, and social policies) in *retaining* talent in Toronto.

A review of the total data indicated that employment opportunities are very important in attracting talent to a city; quality of place also plays a role, particularly in retaining talent in a second-tier city. “This is especially the case for women and gay men, who dominate fashion design” (p.2914). However, quality-of-place considerations keep designers rooted in a not-so-global city, making them less likely to relocate. Leslie and Brail (2011:2914) also notes “this illustrates the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between quality of place and production networks, and between economy and culture.” Furthermore, this case study reconciled the disparate discourses by emphasizing the productive function of quality of place—thereby converging the relationship between culture and economics in urban cities development.

The role of culture in urban cities may perhaps have less to do with the actual size of the city and more to do with its other world or global city characteristics. Although Dakar, Senegal is one of the largest cities in Africa it is not a megacity. However, Grabski (2009:216) posits that both tailors and fashion designers locate their creative practice in Dakar by attributing their engagement with the city's visual and conceptual matrix as fundamental to fashion making. Grabski further argues “As with other forms of creative expression... fashion making is a quintessentially urban phenomenon in that the city offers unparalleled creative and human resources.”

This paper (Grabski, 2009) was based on interviews conducted previously with two groups of Dakar-based fashion producers- tailors in 2001 of local-style garments, and fashion designers in 2002 whose work aligned with an international mode of *haute couture* fashion. The research examined how the fashion producers' location in the city informs their visual production and working methods. The paper focused on the juxtaposition between the work of fashion makers and the various forms of visual traffic throughout Dakar; thus, it detailed the ways in which the city provides a globally inflected matrix for fashion production.

According to Grabski (2009:220), “Dakar's spectatorial realm offers fashion producers a matrix of visual and conceptual propositions.” Citing Bourdieu's “field of cultural production... fashion-making [in Dakar] is analogous to the creation of other art forms in that its production, circulation, and consumption are shaped by and linked to the urban environment.” The paper likens the urban environment to a concentration in visual and creative sensation. Grabski (2009) concludes that regardless of the fashion maker's design approach (local or global) and the location of their business in Dakar, the designers perceive the city's visual and conceptual matrix as elemental to their fashion design.

Another study (Volonté 2012) of the global city of Milan explored how geographical location is linked to the values and aesthetics of fashion designers. It highlighted the main variables determining the specific features of how the profession is exercised in one city or another. Applying 21 in-depth interviews conducted with "ordinary" fashion designers in a recent prior empirical research project, this study (Volonté: 427) concluded that Milanese designers cultivate a "culture of wearability" based on an array of values- driven by incremental innovation and functionality with respect to the use of garments made for everyday life.

A distinction in the (Volonté 2012) study is that it draws on information of the ordinary and not the most successful fashion designers. Conceivably, this focus can reveal information about the mindset or ideology of evolving fashion design entrepreneurs and how decisions made early in their careers contribute to a later success.

Yet other scholars contribute to the creative-class-urban-development debate from a social-psychological perspective of identity. Félonneau (2004) combined segmented approaches about the ideological level of social representations (identified by people's representations of the "Ideal City"), and the psychological level of topological identity and of environmental perception into a single research inquiry. "How is the ideology one holds towards the city—either favorably or unfavorably—related to one's identification with the specific city in which one resides? How do these ideological and identification variables affect the ways individuals perceive negative environmental stimuli, depicted here in terms of incivilities?" (Félonneau 2004:43). A purpose of the study is that it integrates 'place identity' (called topological identity) with socio-cultural perceptions of 'incivilities' (defined as acts of disrespect or aggression rather than criminality) occurring within that space.

The research, which would be conducted in three phases, also included three instruments: a questionnaire based on three protocols (the Ideal City, the Topological Identity, and the Perception of the Saliency of Incivilities), as well as a preliminary research of two word-association tasks regarding two stimuli- "Ideal City" and "uncivil behaviors" (Félonneau 2004: 47). A sample of 100 university students completed the word-association tasks. The sample for the questionnaire is of 150 students registered in Behavioral Science courses at the University of Bordeaux, all of whom had lived in the city of Bordeaux for at least 3 years.

Results of the research (Félonneau 2004: 49), at that stage, provided evidence of an association between two dimensions: the ideological, expressed through representations, and attitudes towards the city with the more directly psychological spatial dimension of identity and of environmental perception. Although at that point no causation had been established, the study asserted that “urbanophilia” is more closely associated with strong topological identity than “urbanophobia” is with weak topological identity. In other words, having a personal representation of the Ideal City based on relationships—social exchanges, encounters with others, animation, or culture—is likely to generate a positive identification with the city in which one lives. Thus, having an “brandophile” attitude corresponds to a strong place identity and a tendency to underestimate the frequency of uncivil behaviors whereas “Urbanophobia” is clearly correlated with a weak urban identity and a tendency to overestimate uncivil behavior in the city.

Finally, this social-psychological study (Félonneau 2004) held an underlying assumption, garnered from twentieth-century theorists, that a preference for natural environments is widespread across Western societies. In fact, the research indicated that “greenery” and “cleanliness” were the among the 10 most mentioned items depicting an Ideal City (p. 48).

On the other hand, another global city offered a fresh perspective on identity in urban environments. According to Fujita (2011), Japanese fashion designers and artists who migrate from Japan to London, New York, or Paris encounter issues about identity, globalization and fashion culture. This study examines the implications of locating fashion in a global city- from a transnational perspective: Do the relocated fashion designers and artists develop new transnational identities as well as create ‘universal’ products? Or do they strategically express

their “Japaneseness” in their designs? Who has the power to determine when fashion products should be labelled one or the other?

This study conducted in-depth interviews with 18 professional designers and artists (ten men and eight women) who had migrated in the past 10 to 20 years; most were 30 to 40 years old at the time. It was a multi-sited ethnographic study that included interviews conducted in both the native city, Tokyo, and the newly settled city, London, New York, or Paris.

The results indicated that most designers and artists who were interviewed aim to produce works with a “universal” appeal, while only a few respondents attempt to strategically express “Japaneseness” in their works (Fujita 2011:43). Immigrant Japanese fashion producers are more focused on producing new creative works that have a broad transnational appeal; however, they are not seeking to forge a new transnational identity and regard themselves as unequivocally Japanese. Nevertheless, “gatekeepers and legitimators of the art world continue to fabricate “the nation” and reinforce boundaries of national culture” (p. 55). Thus, according to Fujita (2011), there is a political identity movement underway in Tokyo in which the ‘gatekeepers,’ via media, promote their own construction of a ‘cool Japan’ culture vis-a-vis fashion products and art.

Urban amenities, a geographic location and quality of life, can affect how one identifies with a city’s culture. Overall, the link among fashion designers, their cities of operation and the unique culture are solidly intertwined, and often influenced by a complex ideology. Global cities themselves tend to display a unique characteristic of postmodernist and artistic cultures. Both Michel Kors and Alexander McQueen have alluded to this phenomenon at different points in their careers.

Postmodern Culture: Postmodernism in Fashion

How postmodernism erupted from modernism. By the 20th century, the rise of modernism signaled an alienation from industrialists and production, and marked a leap toward superpowers and capitalism among Western states. This shift ushered in new modes of expression via art, design, fashion, theatre, architecture, music and literature. Influences in modernism manifested itself, for example, through artistic works: T.S. Elliot and Ezra Pound in literature, Édouard Manet in art, and Paul Poiret, Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli in fashion (Felluga 2011). In conjunction with other forms of art, fashion represented a departure from the previous rigid garment construction (such as the corset) and the adornment of the Victorian era. Poiret's lampshade dress of 1912 (see p. 20) is perhaps the best depiction of the radical movement of fashion towards simple, minimal, tubular lines with bright bold colors. By the 1920s Coco Chanel, who also designed in Paris, was credited with creating the simple deconstructed jacket that emphasized function over form- a key philosophy of modernism. Minimalism or simplicity in fashion design emerged and gained popularity until the 1970s.



Figure 1. Victorian era fashion. Source: British Library online

Consequently, fashion as a marker for social change has been relevant since the Victorian era (p. 18). As modernism invoked a quest for self-expression, fashion too became a logical illustration of that philosophy. Fashion designers inspired by the modernist movement also cited



Figure 2. NYFW Spring 2012 Ready-to-Wear Collection, (Oscar de la Renta, 2012).

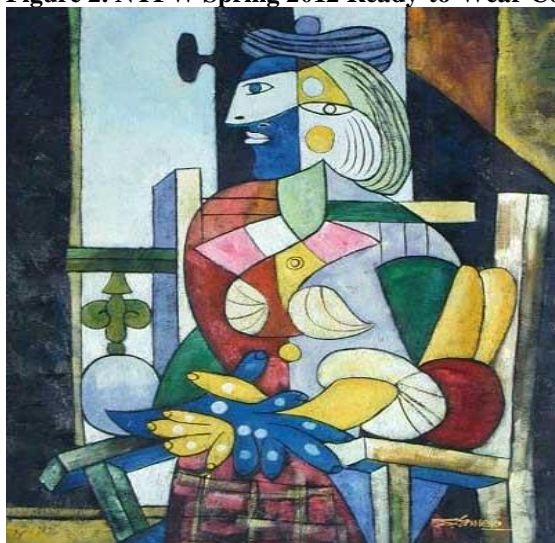


Figure 3. Picasso's 1937 [Femme assise devant la fenêtre (Marie-Thérèse) English: Woman sitting at the Window]. Source: Sotheby's online.

eminent visual artworks in their designs. For example, the surrealistic approach of bold primary colors and strong simple lines came together in Oscar de la Renta's Spring RTW 2012 collection (see p. 19), which was inspired by Picasso's *Femme (Marie-Therese) Assise Devant la Fenêtre*, 1937 (Lee 2014).

The interconnection between fashion and the fine arts in early modernism was also depicted in the Gibson Girl (see p.20). American illustrator, Charles Dana Gibson, created a sketch of a female composite of several well-known beautiful women that became the iconic representation of young, confident, modern, physical, feminine beauty in the Western world (Library of Congress, n. d.).



Figure 4. The Gibson Girl Look by actress Camille Clifford. Source: U.K.'s National Portrait Gallery. Figure 5. Poiret's Lampshade Dress, 1912. Source: V&A Museum online.

The antecedents of early modernism were a rise in technology, economic prosperity, and the incidences of war. Modernism comprised a series of contradictory responses to situations: both science and logic or both mechanically-driven and emotionally-driven urges. Thus, modernism became an immutable aspect of society and culture and its place in history (during a technology boom and two World Wars), has been persistently used to depict the best and worst of human cultural evolution.

After late modernity, numerous revolutions in both science, such as the quantum and relativity theory in physics, and in technology, such as media communications and information systems, disrupted the social and cultural landscape (Geyh 2005). This economic, political and technological transformation have fundamentally challenged previous conceptions of knowledge of people, organizations and society. Consequently, in the last decade of 20th century, a new movement called postmodernity rebelled against the set notions of modernism, shifting paradigms to conceive of knowledge as multi-centered and multifaceted. Whereas modernism emphasized direction, order, coherence, stability, simplicity, control, autonomy, and universality, postmodernism stresses fragmentation, diversity, discontinuity, contingency, pragmatism, multiplicity, and connections (Lyotard 1984).

Postmodernism is based on the philosophy of the creation of streams of knowledge or truths, and their co-existence. Postmodernism rejects the notion of one central hierarchy or a set form of expression. It is essentially about a diversity of expressions- in all forms of art: that is the plurality or multiple-pathways-to-knowledge debate (Lyotard 1984). Thus, postmodernist expressions are not so much a radical change from as it is a reaction to modernism.

“The relationship of the general population to the fashion system has become quite different since the 1980s, with the advent of the acceptance of postmodern eclecticism within many areas of creative and everyday life. New modes of communication—MTV, cable television news, and the invention of fashion TV journalism—gave faster and easier access to fashion ideas, as did the growth of international air travel” (McNeil 2006:134).

Postmodernists were the first to acknowledge and review Pop Art as a hybrid discipline that is intrinsically linked to a commercial mass culture (Geyh: 2005). Fashion epitomizes that hybridization of art. If Kors and McQueen adhered to a postmodernist approach, it could help to explain their iconic statuses.

Barnard (2014:52) also alludes to the nuances of postmodernism vis-à-vis fashion. “Postmodernism may also be explained as a ‘crisis of representation.’ The clothes and fashions that we wear have been explained, for example, as standing for our social, cultural and other identities: The clothes and fashions are not our cultural or social identities but they stand for them and represent them. [Therefore] my striped tie is not my masculinity but, in the culture that I am a member of, it stands for or represents masculinity... [Similarly]... my Levi 501s are neither youthful nor American but they stand for or represent those values... The crisis happens when the structures break down... when the connection between the signifier and the signified becomes less trustworthy” (Barnard 2014:52).



Figure 6. Fashion designer Jeremy Scott uses *bricolage*. Source: Oney, 2010.

According to Oney (2010: para. 6), the mass production (and overproduction!) in fashion has facilitated the collection of objects to create a new template- the essence of postmodernism. In the fashion world, “*bricolage* (Combining and assembling things to form something new) as illustrated by designer Jeremy Scott (see p. 23), *pastiches* (a playful reference to a master work) and *intertextuality* (cultural referencing between signs using more than one medium)” have created an unprecedented plurality of fashion sensibilities that cut across previous social and cultural boundaries. For example, no longer can any reliable socioeconomic evaluation be made about the wearer of a revealing garment.

Additionally, Geyh (2005, para. 7) argues “technologies in transportation and communication” have created the “spatialization of experience” that can intricately reduce the temporal as well as the actors’ ability to “cognitively map” their positions in an increasingly global system. In other words, our increasing reliance on media and technology to represent ourselves have led to “simulacrum,” the ability to create multiple images of ourselves politically and culturally, leaving the recipient wondering what is real and what is a representation. This growing ambiguity could itself become a paradox when applied to the presentation of fashion

cultures across different Western states. The juxtaposition between postmodern cultures in London and NYC illustrates these phenomena.

A retrospective of both London's and New York City's fashion culture. This study focuses on two of the four global fashion centers of the world; the other two are Paris and Milan. Each has a strong dedication to arts and culture but with very different artistic approaches.

Understanding how each artistic approach impacts its city and its creative leaders, such as Kors and McQueen, is the motivation for the current study. According to Kelly (2015), these differences date back to the 1940s, when, for example, American women had to join the workforce to replace the men who were off fighting during World War II. It was after that time that American fashion shifted to functionality. The global fashion centers each produce a trade-and-market week event twice annually- in February and in September- showcasing the latest ready-to-wear fashion trends from their city's high-fashion designers.

During New York Fashion Week, most designers present garments that they think will sell: A casual chic that still signals luxury and polished elegance is classic Americana. Conversely, ever since London designer Mary Quant shocked the world with the invention of the mini-skirt, instrumental in the 1960s Mod Movement, British fashion designers have been the go-to group for edgy, experimental, exciting designs.

The archetypal Michael Kors garments presented at a NYFW show can go straight from the runway to being worn by consumers. However, most of the Alexander Mc Queen garments as presented for LFW could not be aesthetically more different. McQueen fashion shows are usually perceived as dramatic theatrical productions and the clothing presented are not seen as wearable for the everyday fashion consumer- until after undergoing a few alterations.



Figure 7. NYFW Spring 2012 Ready-to-Wear, (Bill Blass, 2012).



Figure 8. NYFW Spring 2015 RTW, (Ralph Lauren, 2015).

In a postmodern world, many of the American designers favor the function-over-form approach to design, which first emerged during the modernism movement. From Bill Blass to Geoffrey Beene to Ralph Lauren (see pp 24-25) and now to Michael Kors, the tendency toward

simple minimal lines and bold primary colors is an enduring American aesthetic. It is one that has captured the loyalty of women and men, both locally and globally.

For the fashion design purists and art lovers, London fashion trends toward a greater adherence to geometric shapes, abstract prints and patterns as well as other adaptations of modern art. The interesting history of London fashion is that many of the quirky sought-after designs have been inspired by a variety of modern art forms (such as cubism, surrealism and Avant-garde) and portrayed through several of their most prominent postmodern designers: Vivienne Westwood, Hussein Chalayan (see pp 25-26), and then Alexander Mc Queen.



Figure 9. London Fashion Week ‘New Wave’ Punk collection (Vivienne Westwood, 2011).

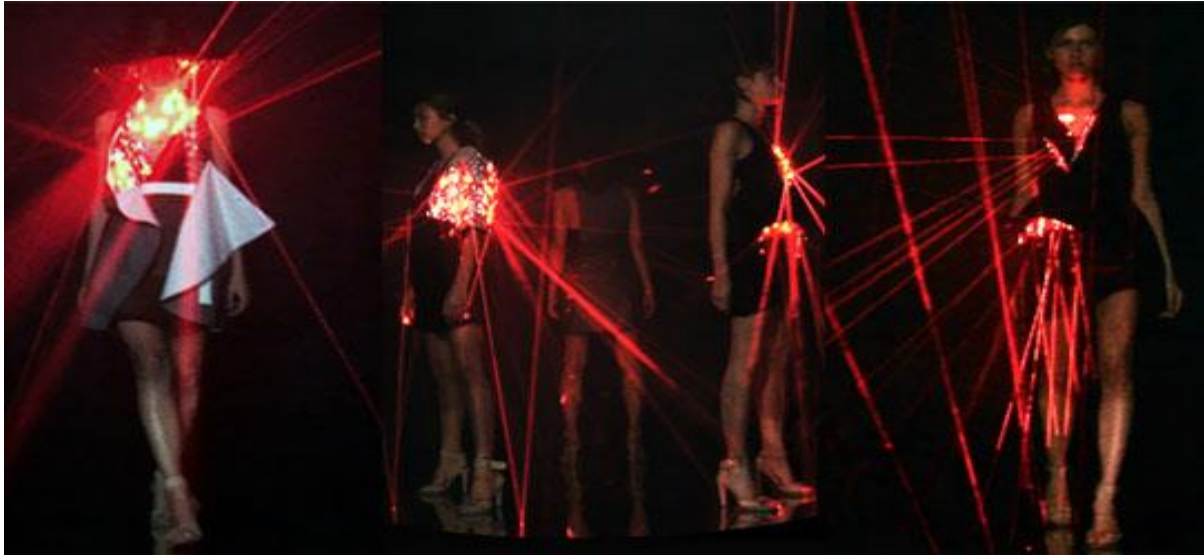


Figure 10. Wearable art/ Techno at London's Design Museum, (Hussein Chalayan, 2009).

Fashion Culture Vis-à-vis Global City Culture

According to Ehrman (2010), London's fashion heritage is rooted in diversity, originality, a hybrid sense of style, experimentation and design principles that draw on an array of cultural references. "The city plays a key role in the creative process. Its history and traditions, geography and environment, popular culture, ethnic and racial mix, and youth and subcultures are all sources of inspiration" (p. 299). Ehrman further details London's fashion culture and geographic layout.

"The production and consumption of fashion in London have an intimate geographical relationship. Production was located traditionally in the East End and West End districts. London's trade schools, founded in the early twentieth century, were also in these areas, those in the East End serving the readymade clothing industry and those in the West End training women for employment with upmarket dressmakers and department stores. The East End and West End are physically linked by the City of London, the capital's financial and commercial sector, and... London's ready-to-wear industry" (p. 301).

Several other fashion scholars (Steele 1998; Styles 1998; Taylor 2002; Rantisi 2010) have also explored the potential link between a global city being a fashion center and having a strong arts culture. “The coveted status of ‘fashion capital’ is closely associated with the perceived benefits of cultural tourism, whose transformative power can produce an increase in visitors, investment and prestige... In recent years cultural tourism has contributed to the shift in the museum’s role in cultural life. Many of these institutions now see themselves as centers of such activity” (Stanfill 2006:69). Museums and other popular arts institutions are becoming more aligned with fashion in world cities in United States and Europe.

“Local museums have long used dress to explore regional social history. More recently, larger museums in major metropolitan areas have investigated city traditions with exhibitions such as London Fashion in 2001 at the [NYC] Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT); Belgian Fashion: Antwerp Style again at FIT in the same year; and The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk in 2005 at the Museum of London” (Stanfill 2010: 70).

A 2005 Victoria-and-Albert (V&A) Museum collection in London displayed American contemporary women’s fashion. Stanfill (2010) reports that although the curator sought to present high fashion culture garments such as evening gowns, it was counterintuitive to New York City: “Another display challenge was that New York’s fashion culture – its designers, their clients and the city’s fashion press – does not represent the whole of the United States. New York fashion leaves out the counter-cultural movements of San Francisco and the red-carpet

influences of Los Angeles.” New York City designers continue to promote innovation while staying true to their longstanding desire for practicality and comfort.

Rantisi (2006:109) posits that “the story of New York fashion is a story of both an industry and a place and of the dialectic between the two.” Through the establishment of the Garment District, the New York City fashion industry managed to create a “proximate network of social and economic relations [or] cultural industry, and by extension a distinct New York fashion aesthetic that could stand apart from... Paris.” However, NYC’s rise to become one of the four fashion capitals was neither easy nor inevitable. Rantisi (2006) argues that France’s dominance made popularity difficult for the casual-chic sportswear ethos of New York City- until 1973. That year, during a fashion benefit at Versailles, five NYC designers, Bill Blass, Oscar de La Renta, Anne Klein, Stephen Burrows and Halston, showed alongside their French counterparts. Europeans gained their first big exposure to American fashion and it was a resounding success (Rantisi 2006).

Some scholars have discussed the influence of these two global cities, New York and London, in the context of their fashion and art scenes. One objective of the current study is to explore how the work of two iconic designers, Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen, have been shaped by their city’s local arts culture.

Fashion and Art

The record-breaking attendance to the Alexander McQueen’s *Savage Beauty* (posthumous) exhibit at NYC’s Metropolitan Museum of Art (the MET) in 2011 not only appeared to revive a long-held debate about fashion and art but may also have led to an increase in fashion exhibits in major art institutions around the world. According to Menkes (2011), at

any given moment there are at least a dozen museums, galleries and shops across the world offering major fashion displays. Moreover, 2011 marked a high point:

“An exhibition opening in Paris is dedicated to the conceptual designer Hussein Chalayan at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs... London at Somerset House’s *Masters of Style* exhibit marks the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy with fashion photographs of iconic advertisements, Armani through Ferragamo to Prada... Jean Paul Gaultier’s show *From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk* displayed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts marked his 35 years in fashion... Chanel showed *Culture Chanel* as a modernist exhibition in Shanghai... [and] the Pushkin Museum in Moscow held *Inspiration Dior*, an exhibition installed by the house of Dior, to compare and contrast fashion with major works of modern art” (Menkes 2011:3).

The proliferation of fashion exhibits in art institutions is relevant because it demonstrates an integration of fashion and arts culture. For example, Lady Gaga’s famous appearance at the 2010 MTV Music Awards show in a meat dress is not the first of its kind. According to Geczy and Karaminas (2012:1), in 1987 Canadian artist Jana Sterbak created *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*. The artist modeled numerous slabs of ‘decomposing raw meat sewn to a dress against her own naked flesh.’ The materials in this creation were jarring, discordant, and clashed on both a physical and psychological level. The art also makes a strong visual statement about the perception of women’s bodies and clothing. Geczy and Karaminas (2012) describe it as a surrealism not unlike Meret Oppenheim’s cup lined with fur or Dali’s Shoe Hat (see p. 31). Since the twentieth century, these two visual forms of culture have influenced each other and we

are perhaps now in an era in which fashion may be having an even deeper impact on arts culture.



Figure 11. Shoe Hat, by designer Elsa Schiaparelli & Salvador Dal. Palais Galliera, Paris, 1938.

This thesis does not offer a direct defense of fashion as a legitimate form of art but explores the impact of fashion on art and art on fashion to understand how it may have influenced the activities of two global cities and their local designers. A global city's sights and attractions also can influence its arts culture.

According to the literature (Sasson 1991; Halle 1994; Kelly 2015; Schmalbruch 2015; WCCF 2015; A.T. Kearney 2016; UN 2016), both New York City and London have repeatedly ranked as top global cities from the perspectives of finances and economics, fashion, and the arts. The local culture vis-à-vis major attractions in the city are a factor in the rankings. Many studies have been done on the society and culture of NYC and London. A few fashion scholars have empirically investigated how fashion impacts each city; some have also theorized on whether

fashion should be considered a form of art or not. However, very little has been done to study the relationship of all three: a global city's physical characteristics (geography) in conjunction with its arts culture and its fashion culture. The current study is an exploration of the intersection of these key areas.

Theoretical Proposition

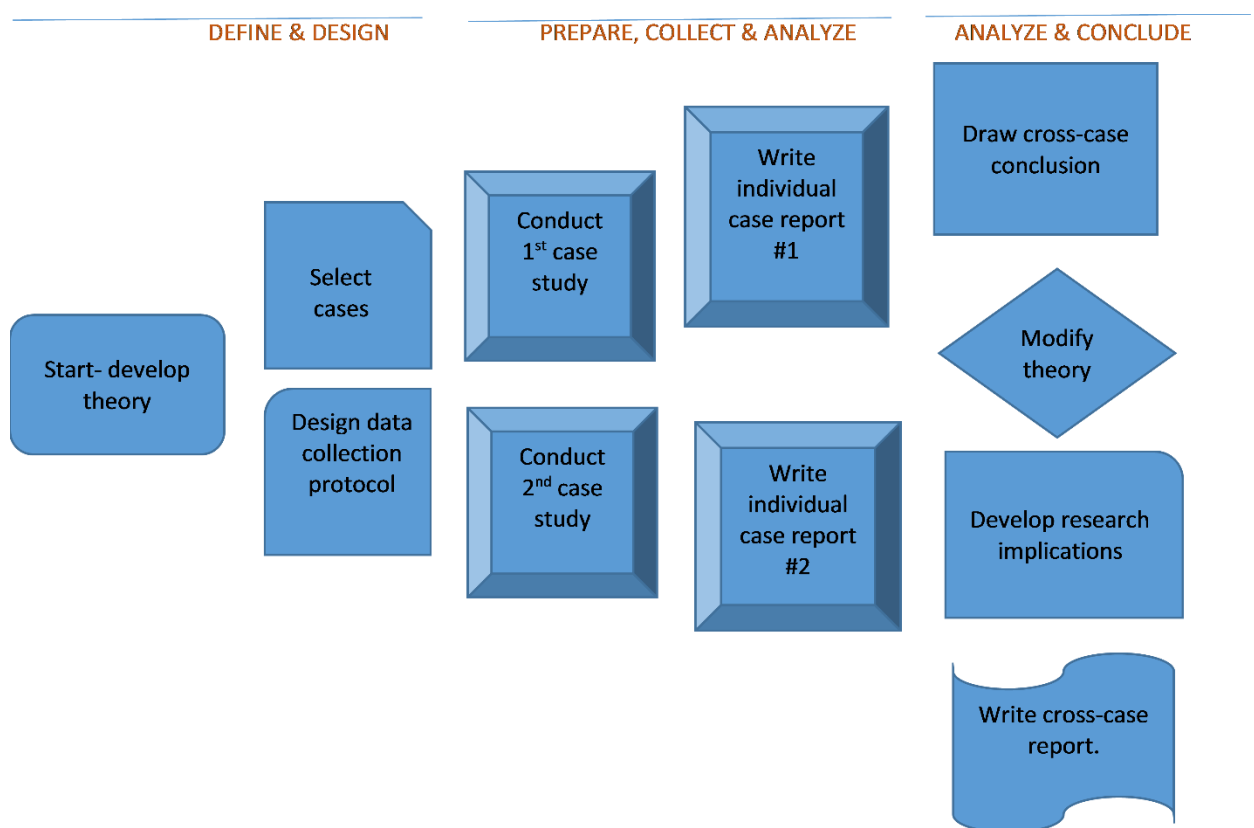


Figure 12. Case Study Design.

Theoretical Proposition Statement: The case study will show why each fashion house exemplifies the city of its location and consequently how the postmodern arts and fashion culture of that city has helped to drive the fashion brand's success.

As a means of determining the interrelationship between two extremely popular fashion houses, Kors and McQueen, and the cities in which they are located, the study collated GIS data on London and NYC in terms of arts culture; it includes a list of influential arts centers. Additionally, the data gathering and initial analysis combines city data with info data on the location of the top fashion houses within each city. Studies that empirically compared the activities of museums, theatres, and other cultural sights and attractions in global cities are included. Finally, biographical data on both designers as well as other data, such as artifacts about their products, reveal the commonalities and disparities in how and why they evolved to prominence.

The current study proceeds as follows. In the next section, the *Methods* discusses the type of evidence presented, with techniques described. First the discussion will focus on GIS data on London and NYC in terms of arts culture. Next, secondary data on a quantitative comparative study of NYC and London in terms of their arts culture is detailed. Thirdly, documented evidence will be presented regarding city data with information on the location of the fashion houses. Evidence on the popularity of each brand (Kors and McQueen) will also be included. Finally, a mini expose of biographical data on each designer is included. Any unusual techniques or procedures will be described in detail.

Using collected data assembled via tables, charts, figures, other exhibits (such as pictures), and vignettes, a *Discussion* section evaluates and triangulates the data. This section also includes why this info is relevant in understanding and addressing the research questions proposed. The discussion topics will proceed in the same order as listed under the *Methods* section.

The *Final Case Study Report* section will include findings and implications for the Michael Kors brand and New York City as well as a separate report of findings and implications for the Alexander McQueen brand and London. In this area of the paper, another sub-section will discuss the triangulated data and report any cross-case findings. Finally, a cross-case conclusion is presented. Any theory modifications and research implications are also included in the final case study report.

METHOD

The current case includes two individual cases and multiple types of evidence collected. Firstly, GIS map data illustrating arts and culture spots in New York City and London were listed. A total of 12 maps were used to show where museums or art galleries, major sights and attractions, mass transit systems and fashion companies are distributed in both cities. Some maps were general reference; other maps were thematic and focused on one of the aspects of culture under exploration.

A 2012 TripAdvisor quantitative study compared London and New York City based on Cost, Housing, Transportation, Unemployment Rate, Restaurants, Nightlife, Attractions, Conveniences, Population, Weather, and Green Space. New York won six of the 11 categories and was consequently ranked ‘the best city in the world’ (Schmalbruch 2015: last para.). Data presented in this case from the TripAdvisor study focused on an examination of the geographical and cultural aspects of both London and New York City.

Five city reports were collated to examine activities on urban research and planning from the perspective of city leaders and scholars. Each of the reports included qualitative and quantitative data of culture from a set of outlooks- economics, arts and culture, tourism and

culture, and technology. The research data were typically collected for at least one year, and involved surveys and interviews with thousands of participants.

Finally, the last set of listed evidence addressed the popularity of each fashion brand as well as biographical information of both fashion designers, Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen. Images of artefacts and past fashion collections were presented as simple visual well-documented evidence of the designers' fashion aesthetics and approach to culture. Additionally, financial data were presented on each company only as a source of evidence of their statuses as successful retail brands.

DISCUSSION

GIS Data on Culture in New York City and London

Maps of New York City and London juxtaposed highlight spatial dispersion of the arts and major cultural attractions throughout each city (figs.13-19: pp. 36-42). A variety of cartographic images were used to determine the locations of one type of tourist attraction and its proximity to other major attractions in the area. The objective was to use general reference maps to illustrate how the layout of each global city works— including the listing of cities and towns in proximity to major streets and transport routes. Other maps, 'thematic maps,' were used along with GIS data to highlight or reveal any trend about the city's physical structure or culture.

The map's layout of NYC's most popular cultural attractions includes locations mainly throughout Manhattan, with a few located in the other four boroughs: Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island. Moreover, three listed maps of Manhattan are further broken down into 'Upper,' 'Midtown' and 'Downtown' (see pp. 39-41). These offer a more effective view of unique sights; for example, the city's major museums are in a district known as the Museum Mile, which runs from 79th to 105th Streets in Upper Manhattan. Similarly, in the outskirts of the

City of London, Brixton is an area in which most of the African and Caribbean boutiques, restaurants, nightclubs or items of historical interests are located. Visitors can therefore locate this subsector of London's culture, in terms of art galleries and museums, in one core area. Brixton is also the birthplace of a key influencer of London's postmodern fashion, David Bowie.

Thus, this paper's examination is based on London, including the Greater London area which encompasses 32 boroughs and the City of London. Correspondingly, New York City locates many of the major fashion and cultural sights in Manhattan; nevertheless, this 'city' analysis is based on the NYC region which includes all five boroughs.

According to a 2012 TripAdvisor report, New York City has won 50 percent more awards for its most prestigious restaurants than any other global city whereas London offers 66 percent more sights and tourist attractions than its closest competitor, NYC (Schmalbruch 2015: para 15). However, this does not give a complete picture: For example, the coastal proximity and dense nature of NYC, particularly in Manhattan, means that several sights, including museums, galleries, and theaters, are very accessible to all.

New York City is a densely populated global city (8.4 million citizens in 303 square miles) that offers an exciting bustling metropolis and rich urban culture. Additionally, this city has had a definitive impact on the media, arts, fashion, entertainment, research, technology, education, and finance. The many events and industries that inspire postmodernist designers might contribute to the functionality and clearly defined execution of NYC fashion.

On the one hand, a Merritt-Cartographic map of London (see p. 36) reveals that most of the small cities or villages in the greater London have at least one museum and gallery. However, significant clusters of sights and attractions including museums and galleries are in London's young popular West End Soho district and in areas such as the Whitehall or Trafalgar Square

road. These are all in and around the central business districts, CBDs. The Arts Council of London also supports local, quirky and home-grown art projects.

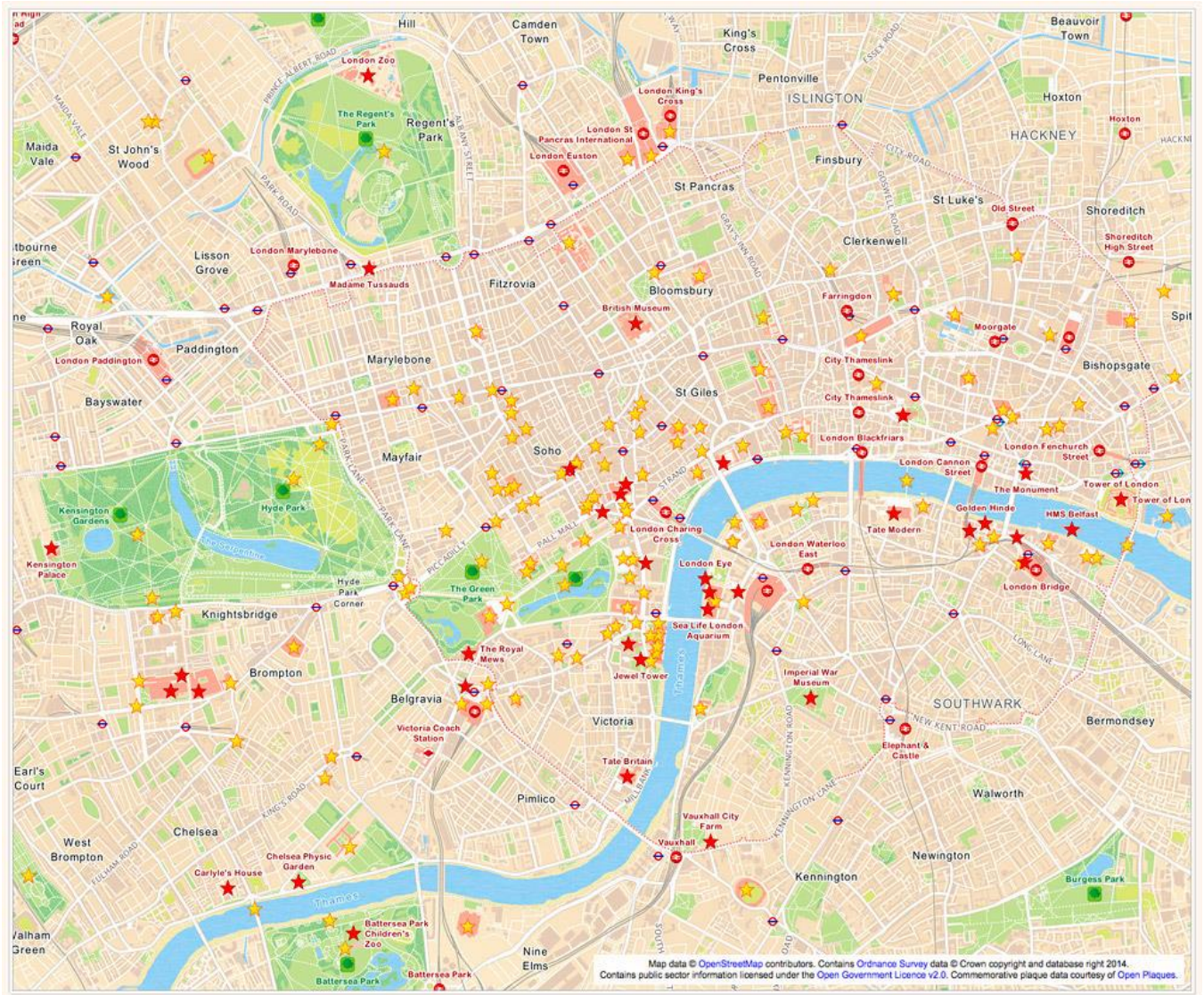


Figure 13. Map of London. Source: <http://www.merrittcartographic.co.uk/london.html>

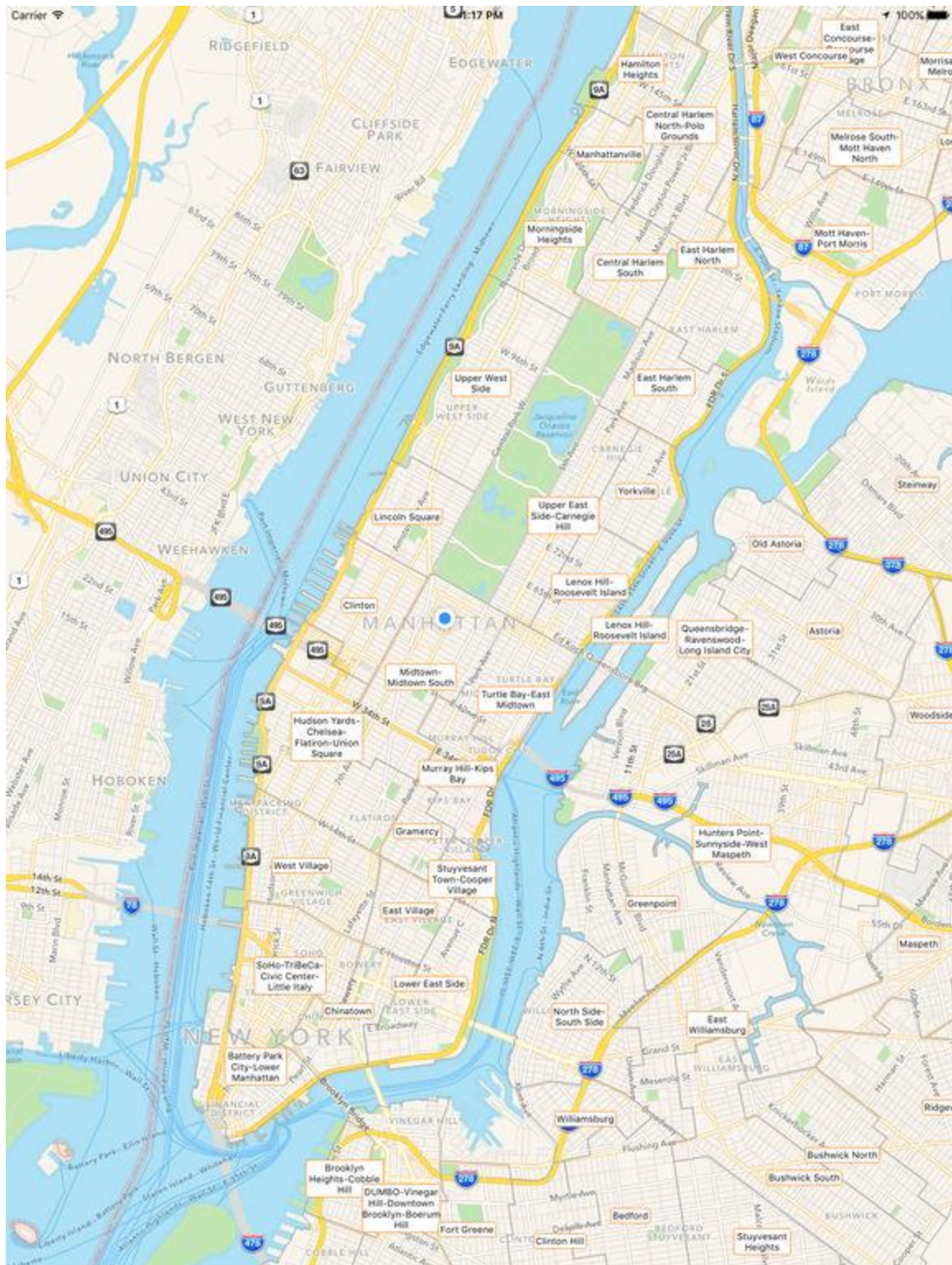


Figure 14. Map of New York City's major sub-districts. Source: Sadlowski, Treffer & Kelly. 2017 *Fodor's Travel*.

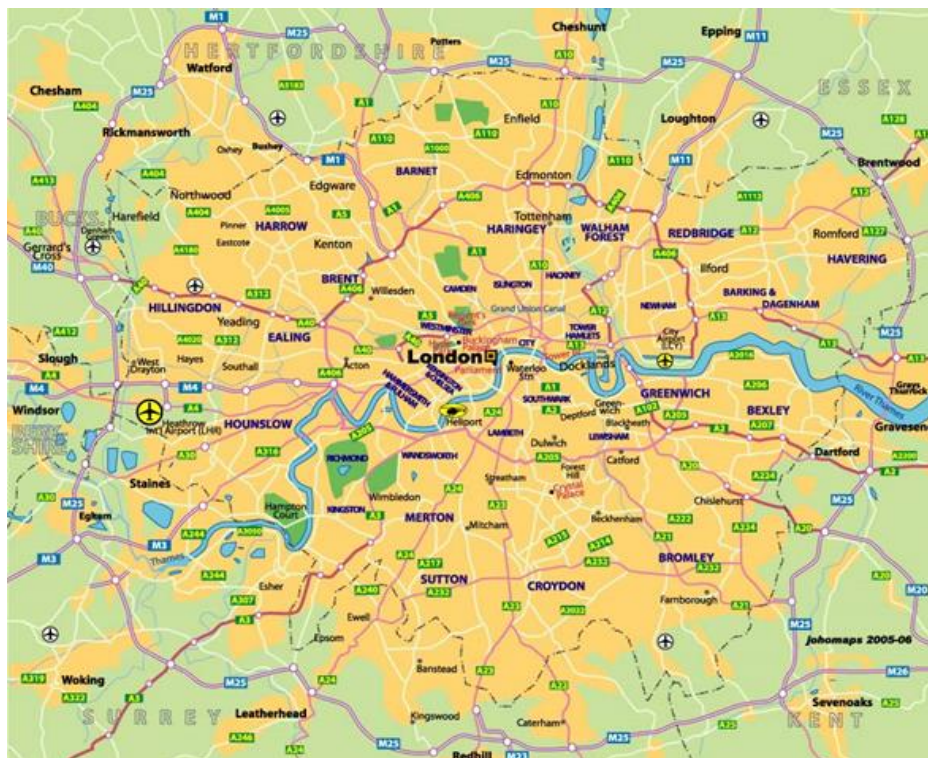


Fig. 15. Juxtaposition of maps of New York City (upper) & London (lower).

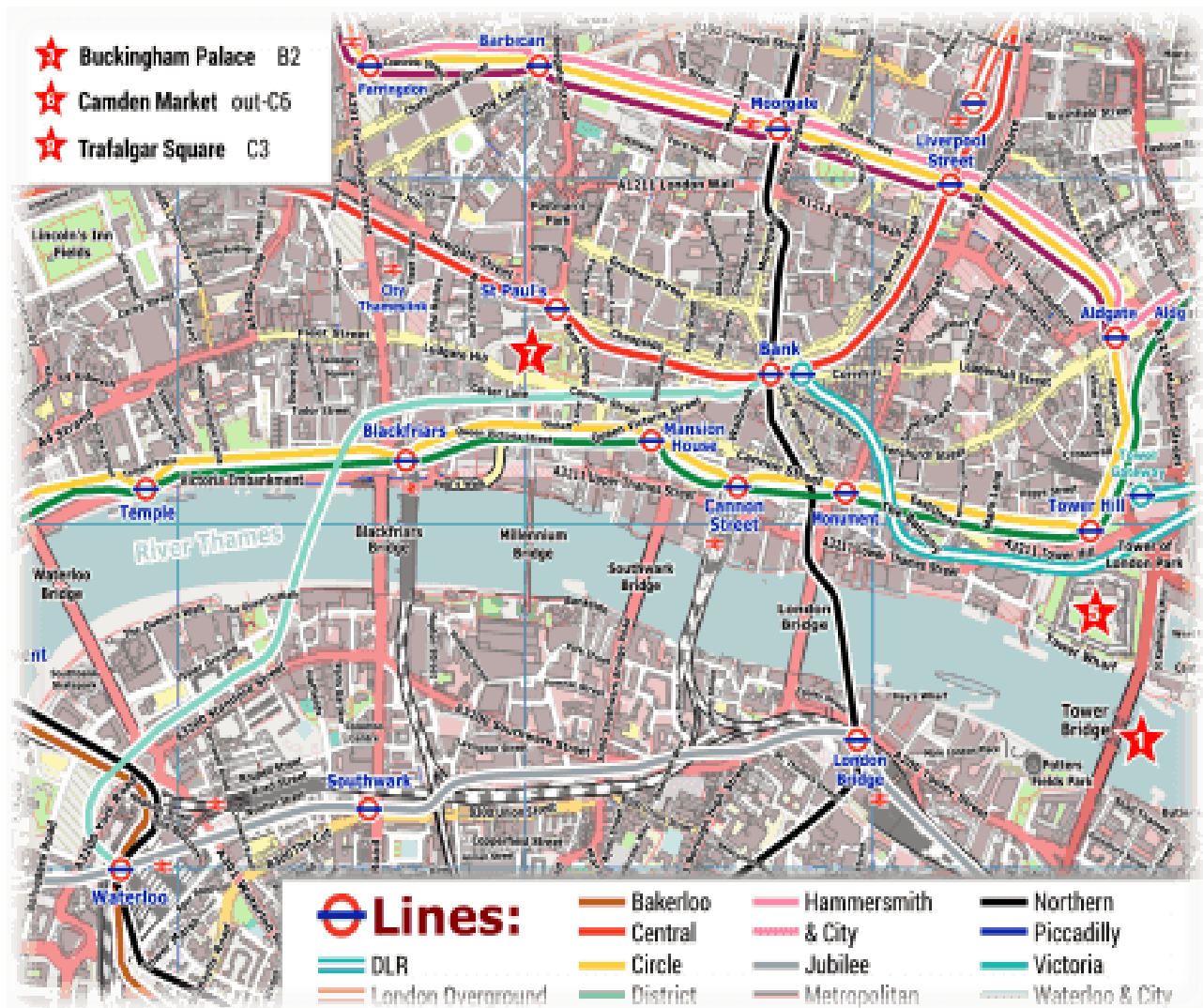


Figure 16. Public Transportation Map of the ‘Tube’ in the City of London. Source: walks.appspot.com/pdf/London/London-Map-City-Center.pdf



Figure 17. Uptown Manhattan includes public transportation ‘Subway’ routes. Source: http://uscities.web.fc2.com/ny/information/sightseeing/museum_m.html

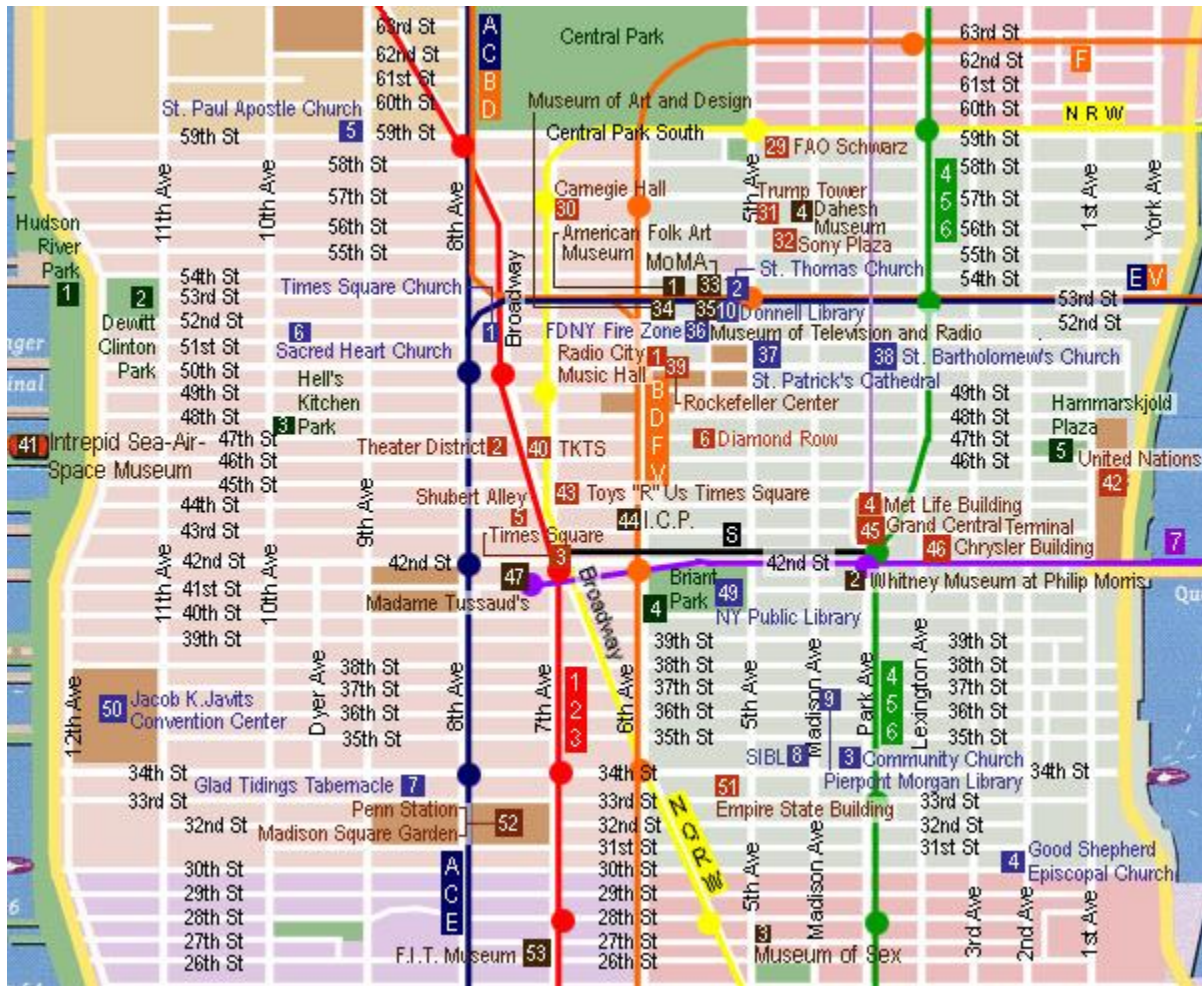


Figure 18. Midtown Map includes public transportation ‘Subway’ routes. Source:
http://uscities.web.fc2.com/ny/information/sightseeing/museum_m.html



Fig. 19. Downtown Map includes public transportation 'Subway' routes. Source: http://uscities.web.fc2.com/ny/information/sightseeing/museum_m.html

Altogether this geographic design can have the effect of creating several pockets of settlements with a small-town atmosphere or with a local, social and political imagery as often expressed by London's influential fashion designers. Thus, the location of the cultural spaces in both cities could in turn influence the arts and culture in fashion trends.

Wang, Chan and Ngai (2012:97) used a 'demographic recommender system' to evaluate and rank major attractions in major cities. The rankings are themselves based on demographic info of different social classes. Focusing on the 'attractions' model on TripAdvisor, Wang et al used different 'machine learning methods to produce predictions of tourists' preferences,' and to determine whether these approaches and demographic information of tourists are suitable for providing recommendations on destinations. Although the preliminary results showed limited accuracy (unless more textual reviews from tourists are provided and made accessible), this methodology was useful for helping users to manage their travel information online.

Repeatedly, international rankings list London and New York City as the top two global cities in the world. The TripAdvisor study data highlights an ongoing debate about which city *is the top global cultural one*ⁱⁱⁱ, as summarized in Table1. Geographically, other than city design, the next most striking difference between NYC and London is land mass. NYC is approximately half the size of London and yet it has roughly the same number of residents. A visual examination of the maps of both cities juxtaposed (fig.15: p.38) is illuminating: London is a larger, broader land mass whereas NYC is mainly a relatively small rectangular-shape rounded out to form an island.

Pertinent to the present inquiry, the TripAdvisor study examined both New York City and London from culture broadly (in terms of economics and politics) as well as from the perspective of arts and major city attractions (see *Postmodern* chart, fig. 20: p.45): "London has a total of

492 sights and attractions, 262 museums, 475 tours and attractions, but only 277 theaters and concerts. Many of the museums and galleries also offer free admissions... “New York City has a total of 295 sights and attractions, 224 museums, and 437 tours and attractions” but truly stood out as having the top-quality restaurants as well as more theaters (363) than other global cities such as London (Schmalbruch 2015: para. 17). The current inquiry proposes that these images of culture intersected with the physical layout of the city and its top proponents of culture, such as Kors and McQueen, offer a roadmap to the successes to both city and designer.

Differences between New York City (L) and London (R) Fashion Culture	
8.4 million	8.3 million
36% foreign-born	40% foreign born
303 sq. miles	607 sq. miles
More dense, particularly in Manhattan	Less dense
Public transport is cheap & fast; subway runs 24/7	Easy to travel <u>from</u> London cheaply
Winter	Milder winter
Lower taxes	Higher taxes
Everything is open late; bar closing hours never on your mind	Bars and city shut down earlier by 1:00 am
Cheaper services like taxis, deliveries, laundry services make day-to-day life more convenient	European-style vacation days, health care & workers' rights improve quality of life
Very urbanized with a metro that runs throughout the city 24/7	More like a collection of villages with a metro that stops running at 1:00 am
Fashion is promoted on what will sell	Fashion promoted as an artistic approach
Early Postmodern avant-garde designer is Bill Blass, Ralph Lauren*	Early Postmodern avant-garde designer is Vivienne Westwood, Hussein Chalayan
Luxe sportswear; comfortable chic	Socially provocative, experimental street designs
Current top design house is Michael Kors	Current top design house is Alexander McQueen
2 nd ranked location for contemporary and modern art	Top-ranked location for contemporary and modern art

Table 1. Data Sourced from Arthur, Rachel. Forbes Online 2015.

Additional evidence collected in the present case study included city reports, each based on research data conducted typically for one year. Within the past six years, perhaps due to the influence of the 2012 London Summer Olympics, the City of London Culture Office under the auspices of the Mayor's Office commissioned several studies documenting London's culture- from perspectives such as economic, financial, innovative, entrepreneurial, technological and social. On the other hand, the New York City's Mayor's Office along with the NYC's Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) completed a broad two-year-long cultural plan in 2017

called *CreateNYC*. Although each city report could be interpreted as self-promotion, the research-project sections provide empirical evidence on how culture impacts each city.

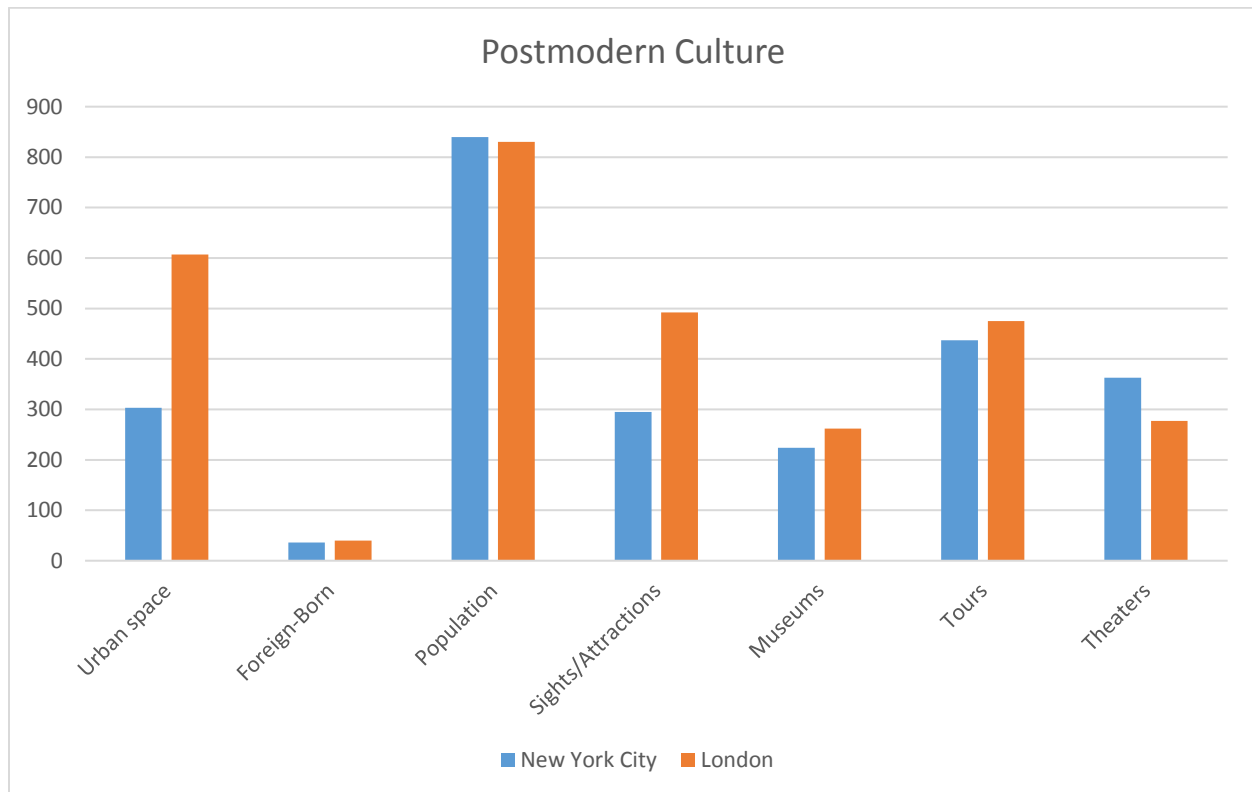


Figure 20: Postmodern Art Culture in Global Cities

Collectively, the city reports indicated that both New York City and London perceive culture as a defining part of their city's identity and has provided an invaluable role for its many residents. Each city has invested more in culture than most other urban cities but the return on investment has been exponential. However, one key critique common to both cities is that although most of the residents place a high value on culture they do not receive equal access to all the amenities that their city has to offer. Thus, the resources, investments, and inclusion must increase if the city plans to satisfy the needs of its urban dwellers.

Report on the City of New York. “A first-ever comprehensive cultural plan for the City of New York, *CreateNYC*, is a report intended to serve as a roadmap to a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient cultural ecosystem” (2017:11). The plan lays out strategies for supporting arts and culture throughout the city. The plan focuses on eight issues areas (equity and inclusion; social and economic impact; affordability; neighborhood character; arts, culture, and science education; arts and culture in public space; citywide coordination; and health of the cultural sector), and unfolded in a four-phase project study- August 2016-March 2017: ‘Research and discovery’; October 2016-March 2017: ‘Public engagement’; May-June 2017: ‘What we heard and draft proposals’; and July 2017: ‘Cultural plan’ (*CreateNYC* 2017:14,29).

Arts and culture have had an undeniable economic and social impact in both London and New York City. In a 2012 Municipal Art Society report, nonprofit cultural groups in NYC reportedly generated \$8.1 billion in total annual economic impact and employed 23,000 full-time employees, 33,000 part-time employees, and 64,000 independent contractors (p. 39). Members of Cultural Institutions Groups (CIGs) also contribute significantly to the workforce with 13,700 employees and an average union job salary of \$48,000. The city report also found that arts and culture played an integral role in creating healthy thriving neighborhoods (This conclusion was based on a research project called *The Social Impact of the Arts Project* (SIAP), that had been conducted by the University of Pennsylvania’s Stern and Seifert from 2014 to 2016).

However, Stern and Seifert determined that “cultural resources in the city are extremely unequally distributed. Manhattan below 125th Street and neighborhoods near downtown Brooklyn have extraordinarily high levels of cultural resources, while many neighborhoods in all boroughs have far fewer” (*CreateNYC* 2017:41). The methodology focused on identifying relative differences in participation across the city’s neighborhoods, and not on estimating the

percentage of residents. Nevertheless, a few lower income districts outside the culture cluster were seen to have pockets of natural cultural strengths.



Sources: SIAP 2017: Cultural asset index, NYC DCP 2014: NTA summaries, NYC DCP 2017: Boroughs and neighborhood tabulation areas

Figure 21. Map of distribution of culture districts in NYC. Source: CreateNYC.

CreateNYC also conducted polls, surveys and one-on-one meetings, both in-person and online, with approximately 188,000 New Yorkers. Overwhelmingly, New Yorkers believe that arts and culture are of vital importance to the city and should be available to all. They also consider art and culture to be represented in a broad spectrum of life, including fashion.

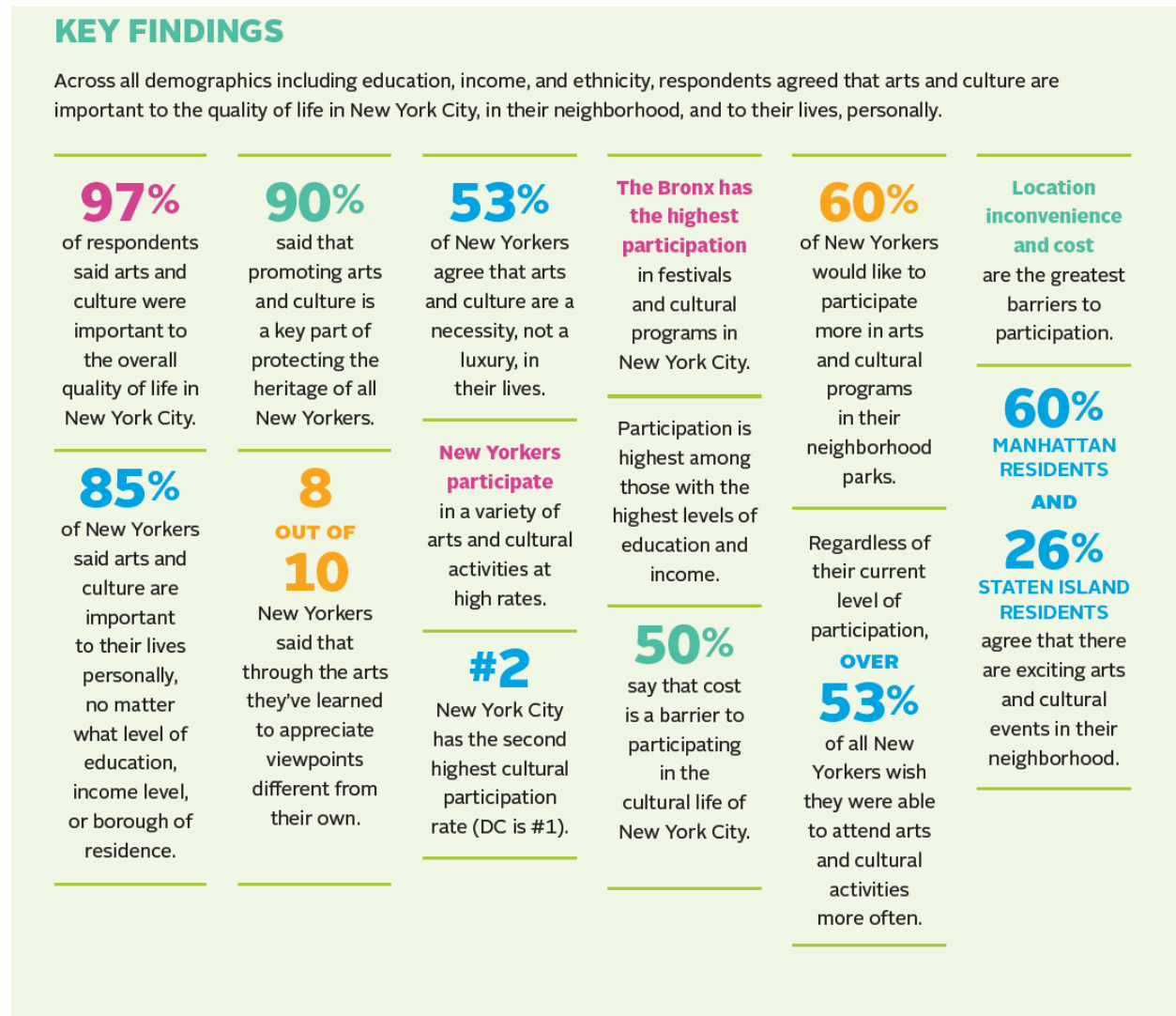


Figure 22. Key Findings from NYC Surveys of the Role of Arts and Culture. Source: CreateNYC.

Report on Greater London- the City and its Boroughs. London's then Mayor, Boris Johnson described his city as "a rich tapestry of urban villages, each with its own unique characteristics. Vibrant local high streets are their lifeblood, where people come to shop, to socialize, to relax and to be entertained. Culture is at the heart of London's high streets and they are in turn at the heart of the capital's economy" (Crook 2013:4).

According to a 2014 report, London's 'cultural tourism' contributed an estimated £3.2 billion GVA to London in 2013 (third largest in the city) and supported 80,000 jobs. In 2014, a record-breaking 8.9 million overseas tourists made a leisurely visit to the city; London's attractions, culture, history and heritage were reportedly the main drivers motivating them to come to the city (Wilks & Mazza 2014:6). This data is based on a 30-question survey of respondents who had visited London during the previous five months (see fig. 24: p. 51-52). It was completed by 11,228 respondents from across the world; however, those living in London (561) were excluded, while only recent respondents were considered in the analysis- 24 percent or a sample of 2,564 responses. Several noteworthy trends emerged from the data in terms of cultural perceptions. While United Kingdom (UK) tourists reported greater interest in shows and concerts, international tourists were twice as likely to visit a top attraction or sight of architectural and historic appeal.

In the City of London report "'cultural tourism' is defined as a broad engagement with London's arts and entertainment offer, both free and paid. It includes: museums; galleries; theatres; music; dance; comedy; exhibitions; fashion; festivals; literature; film; history, heritage and London's architecture and built environment" (Cultural Tourism: Vision for London 2013:21). For instance, the fashion industry contributes more to the UK economy than the car

industry, and the popularity of men's fashion is high, growing faster than women's fashion.

Moreover, the British Fashion Council posits that fashion attracts huge media attention, sending

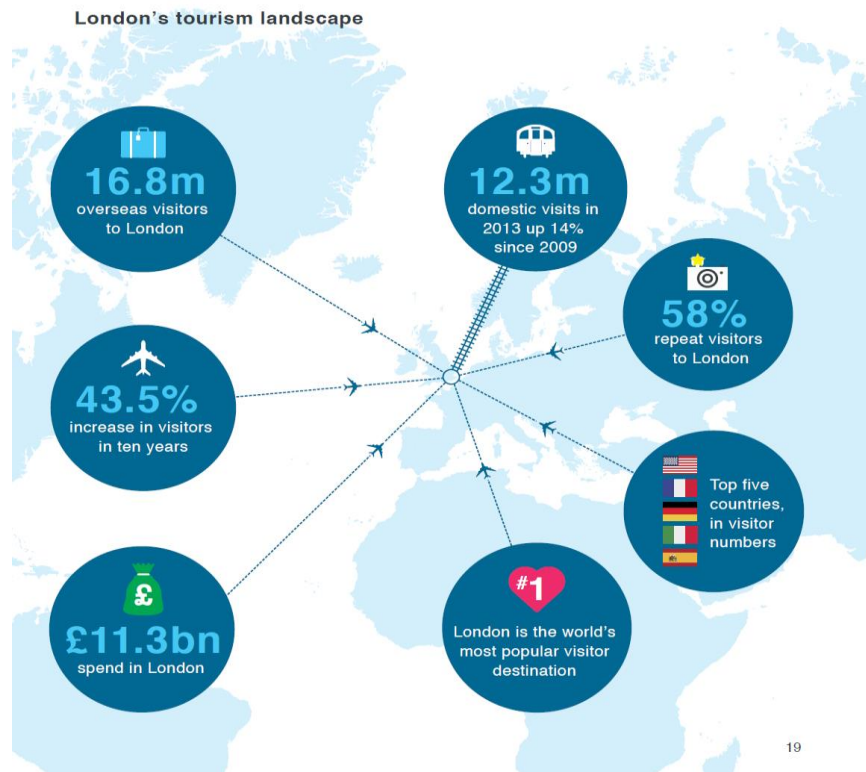
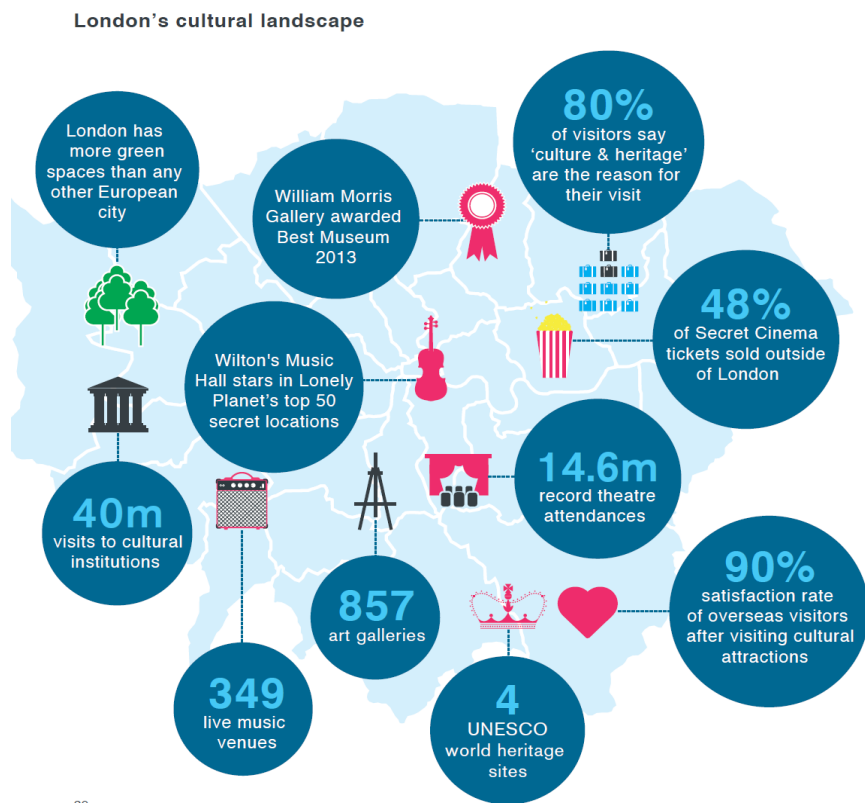


Figure 23 a. Results from *London's Cultural Tourism* research. Source: *Vision for London*.

a broad cultural message. That coupled with the heritage and contemporary themes of London fashion allows the city to “maximize these stories from the catwalk to the street, whether that [street] is Saville Row or Shoreditch (p. 65). The issue of storytelling vis-à-vis London's fashion is therefore a postmodern version of London's fashion aesthetic: It is the bricolage, the intertextuality, the social and political commentaries that have become characteristic of London's fashion designs (see fig. 25:53).



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Figure 23 b. Results from London's Cultural Tourism research. Source: *Vision for London*.

Key drivers for leisure visits to London: international vs. domestic visitors



Figure 24 a. Results from *London's Cultural Tourists* survey. Source: Jennifer Crook.

London attractions visited: international vs. domestic visitors

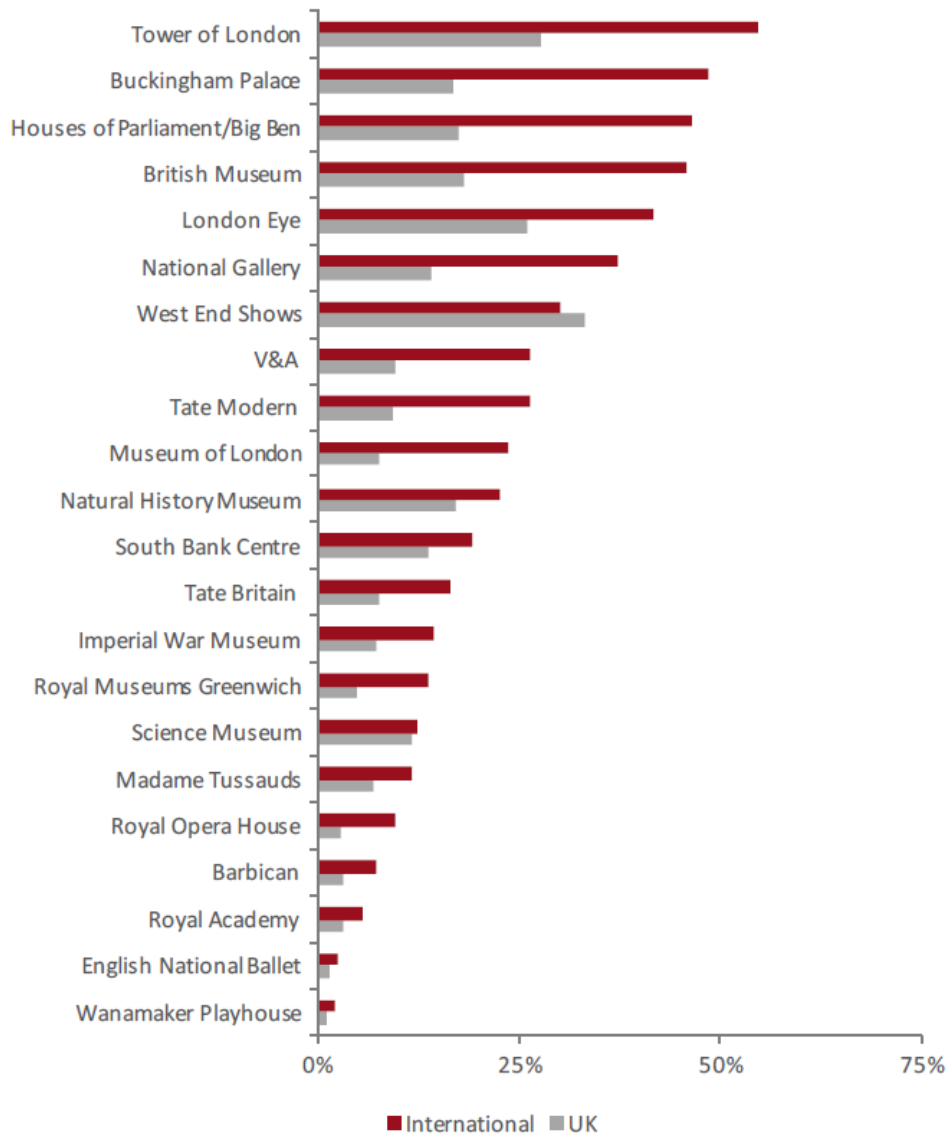


Figure 24 b. Results from *London's Cultural Tourists* survey. Source: Jennifer Crook.



Figure 25. London Men's Fashion is about Storytelling. Source: *Cultural Tourism-Vision for London*.

City Data- Info on the Location of Fashion Houses

Emerging from the literature and research is the indication that fashion businesses tend to settle in clusters in urban spaces. According to Currid-Halkett and Williams (2014), most of New

York's fashion industry is centered in the historic Garment District. The study used the social networking app Foursquare and smart phone data to track the movements of fashion workers at apparel firms in the New York metropolitan area during a most intense market period, New York Fashion Week. Currid-Halkett and Williams (2014) attribute the successful and seamless execution of the fashion shows in NYFW, year after year, to the benefits of having economic clusters, or agglomeration economies. Whether the cluster is the result of economies of scale and scope or of a creative class migration, having designers, wholesalers, manufacturers, fabric sellers, button makers, and seamstresses all working in close geographical proximity is extremely advantageous (see fig. 26: 54).



Figure 26. "Mapping the New York fashion scene, minute by minute." Source: Currid-Halkett & Williams.

For a long time, discussions on the benefits of economic clusters, or agglomeration economies as urban planners call them, have been mainly theoretical or qualitative. Interviews, case studies and ethnographies tell us proximity matters to certain industries. Think Silicon Valley, Wall Street or Hollywood. Therefore, so the argument goes, cities ought to push policies that encourage the growth of spatially concentrated economic activity. But why — and how — these clusters work has remained a mystery (Currid-Halkett & Williams 2014:2).

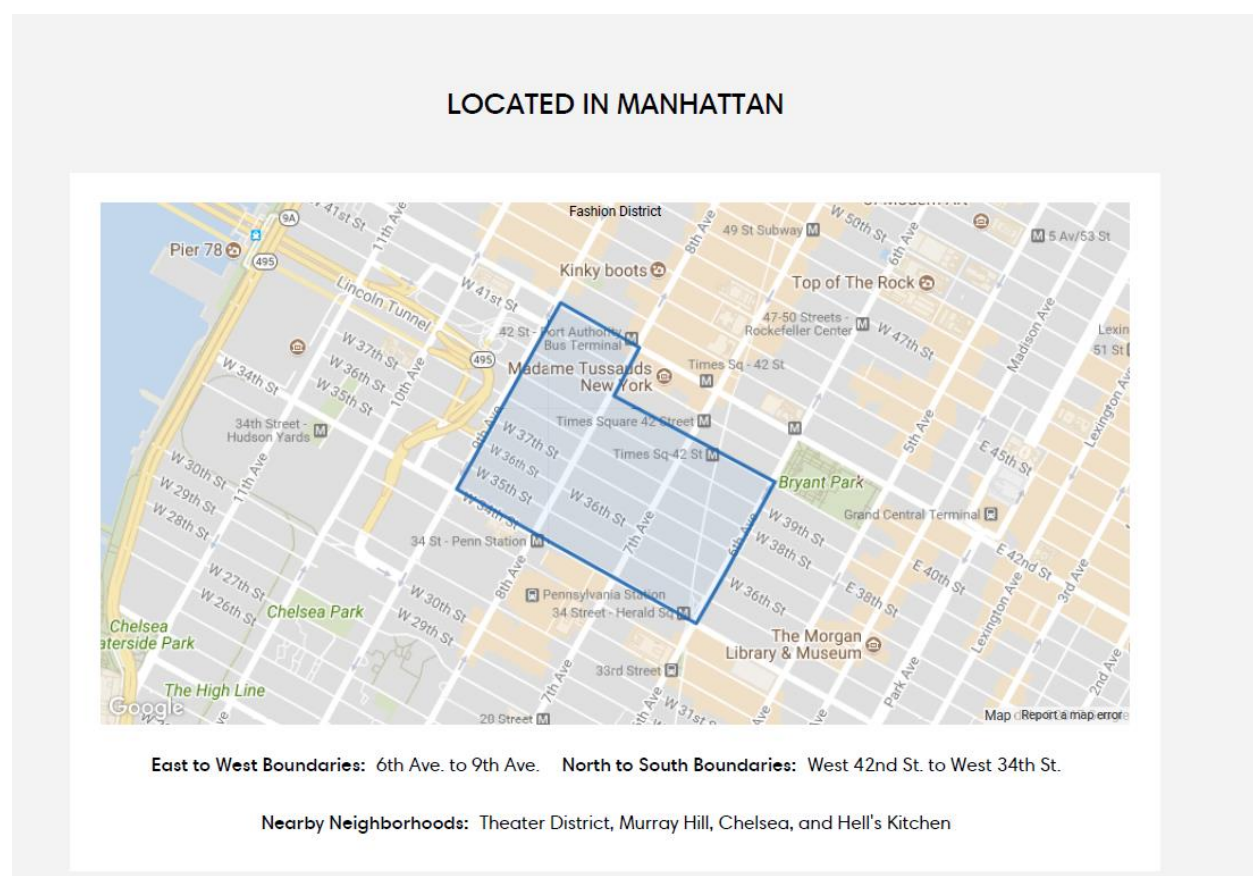


Figure 27. Map of the Fashion District. Source: NYC Neighborhood Guide - Compass

Results of the Currid-Halkett and Williams study indicated that 77 percent of all trips made by fashion designers across the region, and 80 percent of business-related trips, were logged within the boundaries of the Garment District (2014:3). The Garment District, also

known as the Fashion District (see fig. 27: 55), is slightly less than a square mile; it runs from approximately Fifth avenue to Ninth avenue, and from 34th street to 42nd street. Although the Garment District experienced a decline in 1980s and 1990s, a resurgence led to growth from the 2000s (The Municipal Art Society of New York, 2011; The Garment District NYC, 2015). This neighborhood currently accounts for over \$14 billion dollars of retail sales around the globe, and is the home base for legendary fashion designers from Diane von Furstenberg to Calvin Klein (Compass, NYC Fashion District, 2017). The Michael Kors' corporate office is on 42nd street.

Fares and Mower (2017) posit that over the past fifteen years London's fashion community has become dispersed throughout the city, showcasing British culture and boosting the economy by 28 billion pounds annually. Consequently, British politicians should take notice. The book features in-depth examinations of the working lives of 50 of London's most innovative designers. There is also a map that charts each designer's studio or workspaces.

An examination of the geographic spaces of fashion houses in both New York City (see fig. 27:55) and London (see fig. 28: 57) highlight a different orientation of each fashion community. New York's is tight cluster whereas London's is more widely dispersed. This disparity could simply be the logistics of space based on the size of each city; London is almost twice as large and less densely populated than NYC. Despite these differences, both global cities are top fashion capitals in the world and contribute significantly to the economic and cultural strength of their respective regions. The question is how do these city characteristics relate to their top fashion designers' iconic statuses.



Figure 28. Location of 50 London Fashion Designers. Source: *London-Uprising*, pp. 38-39-Map

Fashion Brand Popularity: About Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen

As the keynote speaker at the 2013 CFDA Vogue Fashion Fund Awards, Tom Ford addressed to young designers his top tips for building a brand with your name on it. The list included this edict

- Decide for you if fashion is an art or an artistic business. This will affect how you set up your company
- You have a voice that can influence contemporary culture as much or more than anything else
- If your brand is to have a strong identity, it must come from you and not from a committee
- If you're designing your own label, then know yourself (Frank 2013: para 2).

If the product sold transcends a commodity to develop an identity, be perceived as art, and influence culture, then that product has probably become a brand. Therefore, it becomes almost impossible to discuss the brand without discourse on the designer. Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen have both developed successful brands albeit with very distinct fashion aesthetics.

McQueen: The Man and the Brand. Alexander McQueen's first collection was created in 1992 for his master's-degree-in-fashion-design graduation ceremony. It revealed the turbulent, social, political, cultural yet impeccably-tailored images that portended the raging contradictions of a McQueen fashion design.

In the summer of 1992, the London press was all a-scribble about Lee Alexander McQueen's MA graduation collection, *Jack the Ripper Stalks His Victims*. Among the dark, sexy, Dickensian delights from this cocky son of a cab driver were a thorn-print, silk frock coat with a three-point "origami" tail, and a bustle-backed tuxedo with a daggerlike, red-lined lapel—both with locks of human hair sewn into the lining (Vogue online 2017:2).

Editor Isabella Blow bought his entire first collection and thus began an intensely close friendship and collaboration with the artist. During their time spent together, she became McQueen's muse, his mentor and would oversee his physical transformation as well as the use of his middle name instead of Lee- when he launched the business. According to Baker (2015: para. 3), McQueen's meticulously crafted designs and theatrical catwalk shows pushed the boundaries of fashion into art, making him one of the most visionary designers of his generation. Blow supported him through this trajectory and his multiple projects- until her tragic suicide in 2007.



Figure 29. Alexander Mc Queen's first collection in 1992 at Central Saint Martins. Source: <http://the-widows-of-culloden.tumblr.com/>

McQueen started his career with immediate fanfare; the quality of his tailoring juxtaposed with his flair for highly dramatic presentations was striking, even among young edgy London designers at the time. His unusual background played a major role in this design intrigue: He left school at 16 to become an apprentice at the Savile Row tailors Anderson and Shephard, eventually making suits for Prince Charles. McQueen later worked for Gieves & Hawkes, and Angels the theatre-costume makers, before being employed, at age 20, by Japanese designer Koji Tatsuno. A year later McQueen moved to Italy, working as a design assistant to Romeo Gigli, a Faenza-born luxury designer. By 1994, he returned to London (Gabbatt 2010).

In a prior exclusive interview, the designer once flatly stated, "For people who know McQueen, there is always an underlying message. It's usually only the intellectual ones who

understand what's going on in what I do... For me, what I do is an artistic expression which is channeled through me. Fashion is just the medium” (Blanks, 2014).



Figure 30. Alexander Mc Queen's 1995 Fall/ Winter Highland Rape collection. Source:
<https://makingtheunfinished.wordpress.com>



Figure 31. Alexander Mc Queen's 1995 Fall/ Winter Highland Rape collection. Source: <https://makingtheunfinished.wordpress.com>

These statements were made referring to two of his most controversial legendary collections: Autumn Winter 1995-96 RTW *Highland Rape* show and his Spring Summer 1999 RTW show. According to Blanks (2014), that show, only his fourth at the time, was influenced by a domestic violence incident he witnessed, that his sister had survived. The 1995 *Highland Rape* show (see fig. 30-31:60) became the defining collection of a volatile career.

Mc Queen also indicated that the some of the scenes in that 1995-96 show were a historical reference to Scotland's turbulent relations with England (Blanks, 2014). McQueen, whose father was a Scot, said it referred to the Highland Clearances. Historic Scotland was also a key part of his creative vision.

More than anything else, however, the McQueen creations were often infused with ghoulish fantasies. He would present a grim Gothicism that referenced dark 19th century fairytales including Cinderella, Rapunzel, the Frog Prince, Snow White, and Hansel and Gretel.



Figure 32. Scenes from Gothic fairytales infused McQueen's creative vision. Source: Lindsay Baker

By 1996, a buzz had been created regarding the outrageous London designer, "l'enfant terrible" or "the hooligan of English fashion" as he later came to be known. Therefore, it should have caused little surprise when the president of LVMH, Bernard Arnault, took notice and recruited him to be the head designer of Givenchy in Paris- following John Galliano's departure. The incongruity of it shocked the fashion world and his first Givenchy collection was unsuccessful. McQueen eventually toned down his designs for the traditional, prestigious fashion house and would continue to work there until his contract ended in 2001. His most successful collection for Givenchy was probably the Spring/Summer 1999 RTW collection.

One of his most dramatic collections occurred right after he left Givenchy. His McQueen Spring/Summer 2001 RTW show called *VOSS* was one of the most referenced in the fashion world (Baker 2015).

The audience sat around a mirrored cube, which, when lit from inside, revealed itself to be a mental-hospital holding cell. Demented girls, wearing hospital headbands and everything from extraordinary mussel-shell skirts to impossibly chic pearl-colored cocktail dresses, slithered and strutted while uselessly attempting to fly over the cuckoo's nest... There were gothic, theatrical pieces, like a dress with a miniature castle and rat posing as a shoulder pad; a top made of a jigsaw puzzle; and a huge feathered creation with stuffed eagles suspended over the model's head, poised to attack à la Hitchcock (Vogue overview, Spring 2001 RTW, McQueen).



Figure 33. LFW Spring 2001 RTW, (Alexander McQueen, 2001).

Another one of McQueen's outstanding shows during London Fashion Week was the Fall 2006 RTW collection. Typically, his shows are theatrical presentations with dramatic visual animations from start to finish. For this occasion, "inside an empty glass pyramid, a mysterious puff of white smoke appeared from nowhere and spun in midair, slowly resolving itself into the moving, twisting shape of a woman enveloped in the billowing folds of a white dress. It was Kate Moss" (Mower 2006: para. 1). The clothes reflected an early modernism from the antler-and-lace headdresses, feathered gowns, and pieces made from brocades. There were also references to his heritage as Scottish dress from a bygone era. The influences were 20th century modern literature, which is a vintage McQueen fashion aesthetic.



Figure 34. LFW Fall 2006 RTW, (Alexander McQueen, 2006).

The relationship between London's culture and Alexander McQueen fashion is a nuanced but profound one. From early postmodernity, many of London's designer practiced a *Trickle-Up Theory of Fashion*. The city was known for producing edgy innovative style that took its inspiration from the streets and the arts and then customized it for wealthy socialites. This fashion sensibility did not originate with Mc Queen. Many young London artists drew inspiration from their surroundings... "London's art schools were central to creative practice in the capital... If London influenced its creative practitioners, they in turn influenced London... and London's size and class make-up was, as always, a factor..." The youth in the 20th century began to

assume a new confidence and cultural authority. Therefore, fashions in dress reflected the change, a change embodied by London's most creative fashion designers of the 20th century” (Museums of London, n. d.).

Thus, the Alexander McQueen fashion brand was built primarily on a postmodern culture and a rousing sociopolitical commentary. His brand reflected more of a vision of the world through the cultural experiences of a Londoner than references to the physical aspects of London heritage. In other words, McQueen’s fashion aesthetic referenced (often via surrealism, bricolage and avant-garde ideas) historic symbols of the lived British experience. As a cultural icon, McQueen has been the first designer credited with the surrealist approach of designing skulls on garments. Additionally, his controversial ‘bumster’ trousers are believed to have spawned the wildly popular trend of low-rise pants. Another unforgettable is his intricate impractical footwear called Armadillo shoes.



Figure 35. McQueen featured antlers & metal that transform the body, and the ‘bumster’ jeans. Source: Vogue



Figure 36. LFW Fall 2010 RTW featuring Armadillo shoes. (Alexander McQueen, 2010).

Some of McQueen's other accomplishments included being one of the youngest designers to achieve the title *British Designer of the Year*, which he won four times between 1996 and 2003. He was also named *International Designer of the Year* by the Council of Fashion Designers (CFDA) in 2000, and awarded the Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2003. (Vogue online)

The Alexander McQueen label early on also achieved moderate business success. In 2000, McQueen secured a deal with the Gucci Group (now Kering), which took a controlling stake but allowed him to retain creative reign. Flagships opened in New York, London, and Milan, and fragrances were soon sold alongside eyewear and handbags. In January 2003, Alexander McQueen collaborated with perfumer Jacques Cavallier to launch his first fragrance *Kingdom*, which was launched on the designer's birthday, March 17. Menswear was introduced in 2004, followed by a secondary line, McQ, in 2006. In 2004, Alexander McQueen collaborated

with Safilo via a licensing deal to launch an eyewear range. The 2010 collection featured the house's trademark skull detail (Vogue online 2017:3).

Tragically, on February 11, 2010, Alexander McQueen was found dead in his London apartment. The cause was reportedly an apparent suicide; McQueen was forty years old.

Even by London standards, Alexander McQueen revolutionized the fashion industry and re-contextualized the meaning of fashion and clothes. In *L'Atelier McQueen* (the house of McQueen), Alexander is succeeded by his longtime head designer and friend, Sarah Burton, who has carried on his vision. In 2015, the Alexander McQueen label posted revenues of 250 million euros and is projected to double that by 2018 (CPP-Luxury.com).

Perceptions of the big bold presence of Alexander McQueen, the man as well as the label, were not always positive. In the early days, some in the fashion world saw him as uncouth and brash, and were not impressed with his designs. After his death, analysis of Alexander McQueen (again the man and the brand) and his role in arts and fashion culture intensified. Based on my count of listed publications on Amazon.com, more than 30 books to date have been written about Alexander McQueen. Two of the biographies were particularly negative; they described a tormented man, driven by demons of a traumatic childhood, who abused drugs and could be cruel to friends and lovers. However, an overwhelming majority described McQueen as brilliant and transformational designer, a man who contributed significantly to the fashion and art world.

A major collection of his works, *Savage Beauty*, became memorialized at The Met in New York City in 2011, and later at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 2015, breaking records as one of the top most visited exhibits in both cities- in the world (Menkes, 2015). The world's most popular museum fashion exhibition at the time, *Savage Beauty* attracted a total of 661,509 visitors over three months, making it the eighth most popular show in the

museum's history, as well as the most visited of the special exhibitions organized by the Costume Institute- since it became part of the Metropolitan Museum in 1946 (Steele 2013:420).

Kors and the Fashion Brand. Michael Kors products have become the face of popular fashion culture in the United States. On the issue of popular culture, Michael Kors has famously stated, "I'm definitely curious. I love pop culture. I'm glued to it. I can watch garbage TV, but then I can also watch great theater... Ultimately, clean lines [in clothes] have greater longevity, which women appreciate, and to which they can add their own personality." These remarks, part of a 2015 interview with Marie Claire magazine's Caroline Leaper, reflect the essence of Kors



Figure 37. Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty collection. Source: V&A Museum, London.

and New York City fashion. Michael Kors had always exhibited a fascination with fashion and New York City. As the son of a former model, he left his Long Island home as a teenager and

headed for New York City to design women's dresses. He eventually captured the attention of famous fashion magazine editor, Anna Wintour, and Dawn Mello, then creative director of the Bergdorf Goodman department store.

The story of how Kors came to epitomize New York City fashion is probably due to a more generalist approach compared to most of his London counterparts, who focused mainly on applying the modern arts, science and technology to their design. Kors does not appear to have that as a sole focus. The genius of the Michael Kors design aesthetic is that he seemingly combined the influence of other minimalist and surrealist New York City designers, such as Bill Blass and Ralph Lauren, with modern popular culture. The context of the American reality show, for example *Project Runway* (where Kors served as a judge from 2004 to 2012), as well as the different Michael Kors design labels captures his ability to offer high-quality appealing products to men and women around the world. In other words, Kors has an uncanny ability to offer elegant fashionable clothes that still manages to represent the casual luxe NYC reality-TV-show culture. This plurality of design elements has cemented Kors' status as the quintessential postmodern designer of New York City fashion.

It was a mild winter's morning on Tuesday February 17, 2009 in New York City, the day of the Michael Kors Fall 2009 RTW collection. New York Fashion Week was already in full swing, providing a respite from the economic news on Wall Street. Designer Michael Kors headed quickly across the square to his office to manage a few important details before running back across the street to Bryant Park to the show. Pictured waiting at the traffic light, Kors seemed to be both reflective and focused, despite his current legal troubles, about the upcoming season.

A few weeks earlier, the estate of the late artist and set designer Tony Duquette sued Kors for trademark infringement. Court documents alleged that Kors illegally used Duquette's name and images in promoting the Kors' 2009 Resort Wear Collection. The ongoing matter was in the hands of attorneys and Kors seemed determined to let it not stymie him. So... As he crossed the square with apparent alacrity, a courtroom drama seemed far from his mind.

Since returning home from his tenure at Céline in 2004, the Kors brand had been gradually gaining mileage, enhanced by his assignment as a judge on the design reality television show *Project Runway*, his launch of the *Michael by Michael Kors* diffusion line- both in 2004- and by the launch of his e-commerce site, MichaelKors.com, in 2006. The business was growing faster than even he, an eternal optimist, had anticipated.

In an interview with Tina Craig of *Snob TV* before NYFW, Kors explained, “What the customer wants has not changed. And today- because of information- everyone is learning about fashion. I’ve got women in their fifties; they take care of themselves and are super plugged in and cool. And I’ve got girls who are nineteen and they are sophisticated. Both women are wearing the same clothes! Everyone is thirty- something! [Laughing] I just do what I do... When times are tough, the super trendy things disappear a little... Recently, we went to this vintage store asking if they had Michael Kors clothes from the eighties and the manager said, ‘No because people really **wear** your clothes’.”

Nevertheless, Kors’ take on postmodernism and consumption, ‘Creating clothes that can be chic but have a sense of humor, sexy but comfortable and timeless but fresh’ was a little muted for his Fall 2009 RTW Collection. Moreover, the Michael Kors mission of ‘polished, sleek, sophisticated American sportswear with attitude... that brings a vision of a jet-set, luxury lifestyle to women and men around the globe’ was softened that season. Many of the runway

pieces displayed an understated luxury that was still a little sleek and streamlined; however, they were punctuated with bold neon looks thrown in between strong black garments (see fig. 38:72).

Nicole Phelps of *Vogue Runway* online described this collection as “clothes for corporate boardroom types, anchorwomen, and plenty of other gals for whom real life involves rocking a black fur sleeveless coat from time to time.”

Once again, the Michael Kors Fall 2009 RTW show was another big success for NYFW; the reviews were mostly positive. At that time, Kors’ presentation reinforced his often-stated cultural ideology that ‘because of what's going on with the economy, women are realizing that maybe they don't *need* a closet full of clothes. They just need the right clothes.’



Figure 38. NYFW Fall 2009 RTW Collection, (Michael Kors, 2009).

Surprisingly, another successful fashion show was not the only highlight of Kors' career during February 2009. What transpired ten days after the show apparently stunned the designer and set him solidly on a path of no return- perhaps even beyond the exposure of reality TV.

On Friday February 27, 2009, Michael Kors and his longtime partner, Lance Le Pere, returned to New York from a much-needed beach vacation in the French West Indies. After several days living off the grid, they stopped for dinner before reluctantly turning back on their phones, as they returned to the apartment. To Kors' alarm, his smartphone immediately started beeping crazily before signaling that he had over fifty messages! He called his mother who immediately asked what most of his friends subsequently asked him: "Did you hear? Did you know about it beforehand?"

The White House released the first "official" portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama on Friday February 27, 2009. According to whitehouse.gov, the picture, taken in the Blue Room of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, was shot by White House photographer Joyce N. Boghosian nine days earlier. *People* magazine noted that Mrs. Obama was wearing a classic black shift dress from New York designer Michael Kors' Spring 2009 collection [shown six months prior], which she accessorized with a simple double strand of pearls.

All of the New York Fashion world were abuzz, celebrating the fact that she chose a New York City designer and wondering what it portended for the future of White House fashion. The Twitter world was chirping and this news release trended on social media that weekend.



Figure 39. Official portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama. Courtesy: whitehouse.gov.

It is very telling that the one of the most photographed women in modern American society, who was known for supporting up-and-coming designers, selected for her first important images one of the more classic well-known American sportswear designers. It ensconced designer Michael Kors as a permanent part of American cultural history, and signaled the beginning of an apparent mutual admiration society between Kors and Obama.

He responded to the leading questions from the public: “No, I did not know that she was going to wear that dress for the first Presidential portrait. I mean... a while ago her people had requested a few pieces and we had had them sent over... but we had no idea that this was going to happen. I am very happy that Mrs. Obama selected our dress and I think that she looked beautiful!”

It did not end there. To the delight of New Yorkers, Michelle Obama appears to favor the Michael Kors fashion aesthetics. Although she continues to support emerging American design talent, Jason Wu, Thakoon, and Doo-Ri among them, Kors seems to have become her go-to designer. From 2009 to 2010, Mrs. Obama appeared at several public events in which the popular designer received credit for her clothing. Intriguingly, for a person famous for her attention to details, she sometimes wore Kors designs more than once in a thirty- day period.

Kors rode his wave of popularity all the way to the next fashion season. His star turned up even brighter by his media appearances on *Project Runway*. Shooting began for Season Seven in June 2009, with filming taking place for a second time in Los Angeles. Reviews and social media established Kors as the beloved judge always ready with wisecracks or quips. It seemed



Figure 40. Lady in red: Michelle Obama has frequently chosen Michael Kors designs, including a resplendent red gown that she wore to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's dinner on September 18, 2010.

that young millennials could not get enough of his gentle sarcasm. It also cemented his bond with that group, catalyzed by his lower-priced clothing line, *Michael by Michael Kors*.

Furthermore, working on the West Coast filming *Project Runway* over the past two years (when production shifted from New York) may have led to the next product rollout in his company.

Kors launched a new fragrance called *Very Hollywood Michael Kors* in early September 2009. At the product launch's media event Kors stated, "The *Michael* fragrance is more like "the

little black dress" and *Very Hollywood* is much more of "the gold dress." Unfortunately, his latest fragrance garnered mixed reviews. Nevertheless, this designer has a pattern of demonstrating masterful market timing. It is noteworthy that Kors joined *Project Runway* and launched the affordable *Michael by Michael Kors* label in the same year. Since 2004, a staggering 350 stores in the United States alone carry his brand.

Consequently, despite the inauspicious beginning, the *Very Hollywood* fragrance was nevertheless advertised and glamorized in time for his showing of the Spring 2010 RTW Collection at NYFW- just a couple of weeks later. This season he seemed to take more risks with the design (see figure 41: 77). The looks included silver crinkle lamé, crushed techno taffeta, draped jersey, fabrics in pale soft watercolors (I hesitate to use the term "pastels" because Kors is NOT a purveyor of the style!), and sleeveless shift dresses (his bread and butter). Overall, it was a more playful spring collection- a departure from his usual style sensibilities...

This was not the case for his Fall 2010 RTW collection, shown in February at NYFW! It was a return to the quintessential Michael Kors aesthetic: American sportswear with urban knits and luscious luxury fibers created with a studied casual but glamorous elegance (see fig. 42: 78).

Additionally, as usual, the stars were out for NYFW on February 16, 2010, and especially for this native New Yorker. Michael Douglas, Beth Ostrosky, Laura Linney, and Donald and Melania Trump are just a few who appeared excited to see the clothes. Backstage after the show, he described his collection enthusiastically: "I love the idea of sexy but sporty knitwear. This is about a really fabulous wardrobe that you can wear to a winter vacation, to work, or just out to dinner." Indeed, the collection was vintage Michael Kors, completely aligned with the mission of



Figure 41. NYFW Spring 2010 RTW Collection, (Michael Kors, 2010).

the brand; the designer seemed most in his element when creating these types of designs. This approach had kept the company functioning for what would be 30 years by 2011. The year 2011 was fast approaching. Plans to expand into the Asian market was a natural next step, one he had been discussing for a while with his executives, especially John B. Idol; they believed it was the right move and a sound strategy for a business of this growth potential.

Consequently, in the spring of 2010, Kors and Idol traveled to Tokyo for the launch of the Michael Kors K.K. line, with long-term plans for major expansions across Japan and throughout Asia. During the press interviews, Kors described what he hoped that the expansion would offer overseas- a simple systematic way that stayed true to the brand. One can only speculate that he was thinking back to leaner times in the 1990s where filing bankruptcy and



Figure 42. NYFW Fall 2010 RTW Collection, (Michael Kors, 2010).

getting back to full operations must have become a mammoth task for the company- and for him. A big part of his success, as he sees it, he attributes to a healthy dose of pragmatism, optimism and most of all staying true to his design aesthetics. “We have found what makes our products a Michael Kors bag or a cashmere sweater. We want to give you clothes that solve your problems.”

Shortly after his return to New York, he received a call that seemed like another defining moment not only in his personal life but also in the role of the Michael Kors’ image and brand going forward. Anna Wintour, Vogue’s editor-in-chief and longtime friend, informed Kors that



Figure 43. Courtesy writer and blogger Samantha Watts.

he had been selected by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) to receive the prestigious Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award. Kors has reported that his first instinctive reaction on hearing the news was to exclaim in amazement: “I’m still so young!” At that point, he and Wintour reminisced about those days back in the 1980s when she was working for the New Yorker and had just met the young fresh-faced designer from Long Island. “Michael,” she said. “It’s been almost 30 years.”

On June 7, 2010, The Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Michael Kors, by none other than Anna Wintour, Editor-in-Chief of Vogue. It was a star-studded evening with this award hailed as one of the highest honors. Michael Kors is the youngest recipient of the Geoffrey Beene award. Additionally, the famously popular Michael Kors fragrance company also received a Fragrance Foundation’s Fifi Hall of Fame Award for Lifetime Achievement.

From 2009 to 2010, a pivotal period in the trajectory of the brand, Kors' media status provided a platform for him to offer products to a wide variety of clients. His recognitions during that time however cemented his appeal in a manner more broadly than a mere much-loved reality show entertainer. Shortly after the awards, on August 04, 2010, he held his first online chat with



Figure 43. Courtesy Harper's Bazaar: Michael Kors and Gwyneth Paltrow (left), and Michael Kors and Joan Kors, his mother (right).

Facebook fans. It would be the first of many such forms of communication.

The Michael Kors brand was ranked one of the top 10 most-followed runway brands on Instagram (Yotka) in 2015, and one of the top 10 apparel brands in the world in 2016 (MBASchool.com). Nevertheless, Schlossberg (2016) argues that the Kors brand is losing its luster: sales are down and it no longer has the same appeal among teenagers. Apparel sales are

down across key segments of the market globally. According to Bloomberg.com, a staggering 8,460 retail stores could close by the end of 2017, and the majority would be in the United States. Rupp, Coleman-Lochner, and Turner (2017) attribute these closures to the effect of Amazon's expansion in the marketplace as well as other recent technological developments.

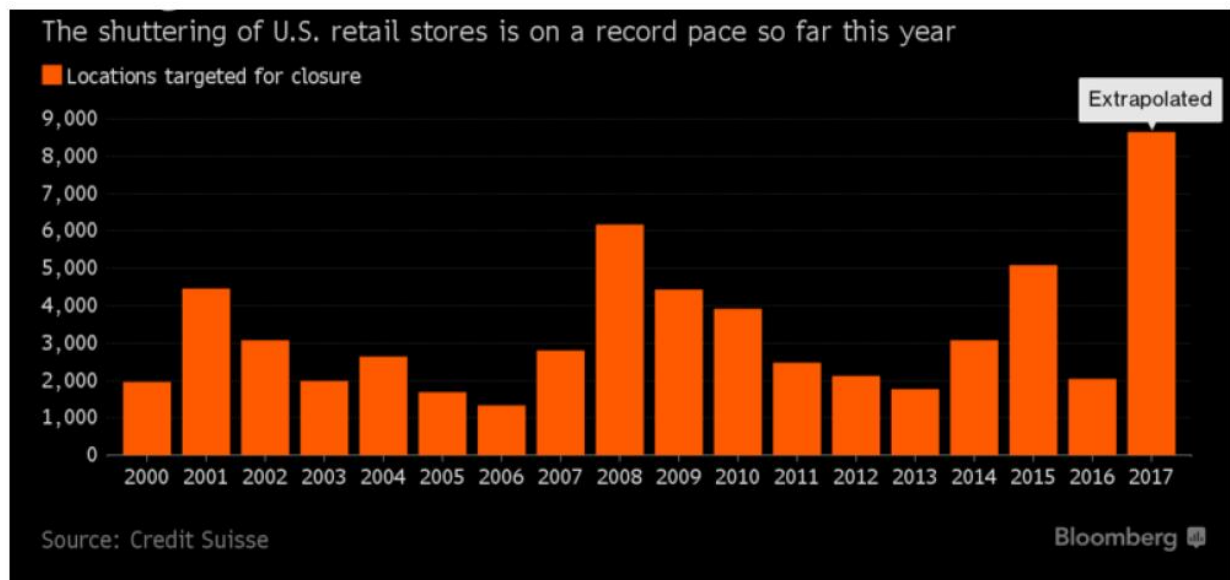


Figure 43. Closing of U.S. retail stores. Courtesy Bloomberg.com

Garcia (2017) noted that the Michael Kors company's efforts to reduce merchandise promotions are all good moves but wonders whether consumers are getting bored with the brand. The pace of success for the Kors brand has been perceived as phenomenal by some; however, the right combination of culture, common sense and commercialism has proved to be a winning formula for the Kors brand in the past. They have been in a similar position before; the question is whether they can overcome this turbulence again.

FINAL CASE STUDY REPORT- CONCLUSIONS

Case #1 Mapping How Culture in New York City Influences the Michael Kors Brand

New York City is a densely-populated, relatively narrow city and its geographical orientation appears to have characterized the layout of arts and culture in the City. For example, although NYC is composed of five boroughs, GIS data and other cartographic information indicated that cultural activities are centered in only one of the boroughs. The *CreateNYC* report concluded that most of the arts and fashion culture events occur in Manhattan. GIS Data also showed that the NYC fashion community is a cluster: Most of the fashion activities are conducted within a one-mile radius called the Garment District in Manhattan.

The City report also revealed a deep serious commitment by urban leaders, planners, scholars and city dwellers to culture in NYC. An overwhelming majority of New Yorkers believe arts and culture are important to the overall quality of life in the city (90%) as well as important to their personal lives (85%). Fashion is openly acknowledged as an integral arm of arts and culture in NYC, and is one of the key clusters, along with Wall Street and the Tech District.

Due to the City's strong commitment to the promotion of arts and culture, many artists might naturally integrate their own artistic creations with the overall arts and cultural activities. Michael Kors has often described the modern city culture as it relates to his designs; this indicates some influence. However, there is no clear indication that he consciously incorporates the city's culture in his designs. Kors seems more influenced by his predecessors- fashion designers such as Geoffrey Beene, Bill Blass, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren- than by arts and culture broadly. Thus, other than the practical, functional aesthetic in his designs, there is no clear indication that Kors deliberately uses fashion as a modern artistic representation of NYC.

Case #2 Mapping How Culture in London Influences the Alexander McQueen Brand

Cartographical images, GIS data and the city reports indicate that the City of London is made up of a series of small urban villages or sub-districts with high streets running like a main vein through each region. Furthermore, as a microcosm of spatial dispersion of the arts and main city attractions, fashion businesses are dispersed across London.

Thus, the geographic layout of London in proximity to its arts culture and its fashion culture shows that pockets of the City have adopted specific cultural orientations. For example, there are the African and Caribbean cultures of Brixton in south London, and the theater and music of London's West End in Central and West London. With the dispersal of the fashion community across the Greater London area, it appears that fashion designers like Alexander McQueen focused on the social, political and historical underpinnings of each location to influence their designs rather than implementing specific physical images of London's heritage. McQueen, throughout his career made visual references, some subtle, others not so subtle, to the tensions between early Scotland and England.

The city reports on London indicated that culture is viewed as a deliberate and critical aspect of the day-to-day functioning of the city. Apart from the economic benefits, the leaders, planners and researchers acknowledged how arts and culture are indispensable factors in the overall success of the city. Furthermore, Alexander McQueen, in one interview, discussed how fashion was simply the medium for his artistic ideologies. In that sense, McQueen seemed to be keenly aware of the impact of arts and culture in his city, and consciously used it as a modern artistic representation of his fashion aesthetic or sensibilities. As was exhibited during his tenure at Givenchy, McQueen did not seem to possess a rational approach to the commercialization of his designs: He was devoted to the arts and it played a key role in his enormous success.

Final Case Report- Cross-case Findings and Conclusions

Cross-case Findings. The literature indicates that most rankings of urban spaces consistently place NYC and London at the top of the list. The examinations of these studies show that the economic impact of culture, arts and fashion is significant. In this type of environment, incorporating culture into your design aesthetic would be seamless. Thus, both Michael Kors and Alexander McQueen have been influenced by the intense promotion of arts and fashion culture in NYC and London respectively.

McQueen and other London-based designers look for inspiration from everyday people and their communities. The intermingling of society and culture with fashion expressions has created a powerful legacy of culture (mostly political) in London's fashion community. McQueen is iconic because he intensified this phenomenon.

Kors also remained true to the legacy of his predecessors by focusing on function over form and creating clothing with understated elegance. However, he never consciously focused on elements of past arts and fashion in NYC but focused on developing a postmodern approach. Examples include joining *Project Runway* and building a bridge with his Millennial customers, as well digitizing how he marketed his products, thereby expanding his reach globally.

Conclusion. Both Kors and McQueen achieved unprecedented success via very different means. The designers were influenced by the arts and culture of their respective cities- NYC and London. Whereas McQueen consciously used the city as a modern artistic representation of his fashion aesthetic, Kors took a different type of postmodern approach by creating several lines and offering culture in a plurality of visions. Thus, there is no clear indication that Kors used the city as a modern artistic representation of his fashion aesthetic. This sensibility has worked for

him. The fashion industry seems to be undergoing a restructuring and only time will tell how any changes affect top global cities such as NYC and London.

An examination of the arts and fashion culture vis-à-vis GIS and other city data proved significant because it revealed how each city functions and how city engagement has led to the successes. A feasible argument can be made about either the role of *creative group migration* as well as *agglomeration economies* in creating successful urban cities. Nevertheless, more empirical work should be done to determine the level of impact of city activities on arts, culture, tourism as well as the successes of the top innovative designers in major fashion cities.

Modification of Theoretical Proposition Statement. The case study shows why each fashion house exemplifies the city of its location and consequently how the postmodern arts and fashion culture of that city has helped to support the fashion brand's success.

NOTES

¹ The term ‘fashion aesthetics’ is subjective and determined by a human sensory response to the clothing of the two designers, Kors and McQueen.

² However, in his 2017 book, *The Urban Crisis*, Florida cautions about a growing inequality that could destabilize the previous years of prosperity in urban cities.

³ Recent political developments in both the United States and Great Britain, the Brexit legislation and the start of a new administration in Washington D.C. have added a new dimension to the top global cities debate. Additionally, the present study does not make a comparative analysis and draw conclusions between the two cities.

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