

EXTENDED SUMMARY

**Redefining Haute Couture: collaborations
between the Chambre Syndicale de la
Couture Parisienne and the French State in
the 20th century**

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1 Introduction

This article examines the collaboration between the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne (CSCP) and the French State, aiming to reflect on the redefinitions of Haute Couture in the 20th century. The formation of the union marks the institutionalization of what would become the Haute Couture field, a relatively autonomous place of dispute. This article analyzes the variation in the autonomy of this field, concerning the beginning of CSCP's collaboration with the French State. The cases examined are the legal institutionalization of Haute couture as a terminology, in 1945, and the implementation of Aide-Textile aid, between 1952 and 1961.

It will also be seen how certain aspects and rules of Haute Couture were changed as the transatlantic circulation of the segment was encouraged by the government. Consequently, while the French State asserted its interests, CSCP lost its previous monopoly over defining this type of clothing production.

2 Developments

The CSCP, founded in 1910 in Paris, was an employer's union comprising small, midsized, and a few large businesses producing custom-made clothing. Managed by their respective tailors and administrators, the union aimed to help, protect, and encourage business among their peers. According to Pierre Bourdieu's contributions, the CSCP can be objectively interpreted as an institution that assembles knowledge and *savoir-faire*, resulting from systematization and codification processes representing specific competencies. The process of differentiation of which it is part can be identified, using the author's terms, as the constitution of a relatively autonomous universe, that is, a field.

In Bourdieu's theory, a field is a social universe in which its agents dispute a particular type of capital among themselves, which is, concomitantly, their competition factor and the condition for entering the dispute. In this field, which

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gathered Parisian manufacturers of custom-made clothing, the dispute was over the recognition of authority able to legislate on good taste concerning garments. As in any other field, the strategies agents use depend on their position within this arena of disputes. Therefore, they may play a dominant or submissive role, opting for strategies of conservation or subversion, respectively.

If we assume there is a Parisian custom-made clothing field, it follows that its agents progressively freed themselves from the economic, social, ethical, and aesthetic ruling of the aristocracy and the Church, thereby conquering a relative autonomy to ascertain their definitions. In other words, symbolic borders were established to mark the separation among fields. Thus, it would be correct to assert that this field has borders separating its internal agents from external ones.

Considering the continuous development and transatlantic circulation of Haute Couture, the article examines the redefinitions of the *métier* throughout the 20th century, focusing on the collaboration between the CSCP, the internal agent, and the French State, the external agent in this field. Inspired by Bourdieu's contributions, the analysis delves into the transformations that occurred during the establishment of this space of disputes, as well as the progressive and variable gain of autonomy in its relational system concerning both internal and external agents..

The article addresses two emblematic cases of the aforementioned relationship between the CSCP and the French State. The first case concerns the year 1945 when legal regulations were implemented for Parisian custom-made clothing production, hence officially naming it Haute Couture. It can be observed that this decision originated a series of tensions within the CSCP, as not all the *Maisons* could use the terminology, and the ones that could do it were prioritized by the group.

Through the analysis of the Aide-Textile case, a dispute over the definition of Haute Couture will be examined. Additionally, through the internalization waves of the segment, the French State, despite being an external agent, asserted its interests while the CSCP lost monopoly over the definition of this specific type of clothing.

3 Conclusion

From the CSCP's foundation onward, the formation of a field can be observed, meaning a network of objective relations among positions, with a distribution structure of a specific type of capital in an objective and incorporated state. The union appears as an agent with significant power within the dynamics of the space and, while independent from the French State, it autonomously elaborates definitions, following its own interests. However, while the State appears as an external agent, it exercises power within the organization due to its symbolic and economic capital. Consequently, some members of the CSCP are no longer prioritized, resulting in hierarchies, conflicts, and internal questioning.

It is reasonable to comprehend these events in relation to Haute Couture and CSCP's operations. In 1910, the group sought entrance into international circuits, and by the 1950s, the transatlantic exchanges were already consolidated. During the last decades of the 20th century, they expanded even more. In this context, other agents, external to the field emerged, impacting the activity of Haute Couture, both in terms of definition and circulation.

To delve into the disputes arising from the CSCP's interactions with other agents, external to the field, is a fundamental step in understanding how Haute Couture was redefined and sustained, even in a context where custom-made clothing was less commercially relevant. These cases also clarify that, while the CSCP was still the organization centralizing most of the Haute Couture-related activities, it did not act completely autonomously. The disputes over the definition of the activity, analyzed in the light of State collaboration, revealed symbolic struggles to impose legitimate views of the field of Haute Couture, and the continuous transformations of this space.

Considering the many conflicts surrounding the definition of custom-made Parisian clothing to Haute Couture, this contribution aims to reveal the selection of qualifications that determined which ones should be excluded and which ones should be kept in defining the activities of the segment. The option to either maintain or to exclude qualifications depended on the corresponding interests involved, and while they objectively influenced the borders, paths of entry, and hierarchies of the field of

Haute

Couture, they also distanced themselves progressively from the values that motivated the CSCP foundation in 1910.

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