

Article

Managing fashion creativity. The history of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne during the interwar period[☆]



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ABSTRACT

In the creative industries, managing creativity and business is a complex process. This article explores the history of the oldest and most prestigious employers' syndicate in the fashion industry, the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne (1868) during the interwar period, a time of crisis and change. The study of the private, unpublished archives of the syndicate allows us to understand the tensions between management and creativity. Paris fashion entrepreneurs federated to face external and internal challenges. Two major topics emerge from their concerns: the relations of entrepreneurs with the workforce, and the protection of intellectual property rights. The Chambre Syndicale's members, in response, developed social services, schools for apprentices, lobbied the French institutions, and shared information among themselves. In so doing, the Chambre developed unmatched politics of exclusivity that underline the role of the syndicate as a gatekeeper.

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Gestión de la creatividad de moda. La historia de la Cámara Sindical de la Costura Parisina durante el período de entreguerras

RESUMEN

En los sectores creativos, gestionar simultáneamente creatividad y negocio constituye un proceso complejo. Este artículo explora la historia de la asociación patronal más antigua y prestigiosa del sector de la moda, la Cámara Sindical de la Costura Parisina (1868) durante el periodo de entreguerras, que supuso un tiempo de crisis y de cambios. El estudio de los archivos privados e inéditos de la asociación nos permite comprender las tensiones que se produjeron entre la gestión y la creatividad. Los empresarios de la moda parisina se aliaron para hacer frente a las dificultades externas e internas. De entre sus preocupaciones surgieron dos grandes cuestiones: las relaciones de los empresarios con los empleados, y la protección de los derechos de propiedad intelectual. Como respuesta, los miembros de la Cámara Sindical, pusieron en marcha servicios sociales y escuelas de aprendices, y presionaron a las instituciones francesas compartiendo información entre ellos. Con esta labor, la Cámara desarrolló políticas de exclusividad inigualables que destacan el papel supervisor desempeñado por la asociación.

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1. Introduction

In 1937, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne*, the most prestigious association of fashion professionals, came out of the Great Depression exhausted and divided. Newly elected president Lucien Lelong urged his peers to set dissent aside, and to help him reconstruct the *Chambre Syndicale*. His discourse was also an exercise in self-defining the profession of *couturier*:

“We declare to belong, on the social level, we and our houses, to the *middle class*, and we desire not only the absolute equality of rights for everyone, but also of duties. There should exist no sense of magnitude, neither people issues. Let us clearly state that as far as quality is concerned, there are no small, medium, or large houses. Let us consider permanently acknowledged that each house, whatever her importance, contains in fact and in potential, a principle of creativity and that its more or less important industrial development will sanction success and quality.”¹

In creative industries like fashion, managing creativity and business simultaneously is not an easy task. Creativity and business can even be mutually self-destructive (Howkins, 2002, p. 45; Townley and Beech, 2011). In this article, I examine how the oldest and most famous employers' syndicate in the fashion industry worked to bring together the most creative enterprises in the field, through routine work and in times of crises. As observed by Philip Scranton about batch production industries, firms united to create governance mechanisms that “might manage routine relationships or sustain solidarity in times of challenge or crisis without creating constraining rigidities” (Scranton, 1991, p. 36). The *Chambre Syndicale* was the most prominent fashion professionals association in Paris, then still the fashion center of the world. Twice a year international buyers flocked to the French capital to see the new trends in women's fashions, that would be reproduced all over the world (Simmel, 1957, pp. 541–558). Textile production concentrated in two major areas: the North of France and the region of Lyons (Vernus, 2007). Other small centers existed, scattered in various parts of the country (Daumas, 2004; Maillet, 2013). Fashion creativity was the privilege of haute couture, one precise category of the industry that catered to higher end consumers and to professional buyers worldwide. Fashion and garment producers worldwide aligned on the creativity and soft power deployed by Paris *couturiers* (Steele, 1998).

Haute couture is but a small part of the fashion industry. In France, a significant number of associations gathered retailers, tailors, manufacturing companies, at the national and local levels, and included the professions of fashion intermediaries (Błaszczuk, 2007). In this paper, I have chosen to focus on haute couture as the major remit of creativity in fashion design during the interwar years. Access to sources pertaining to the management, accounting and finances of Paris fashion entrepreneurs is uneasy, partly because of the fragmented structure of the fashion industry, and because conservation of archives is primarily done to keep the memory of designs past. I address the history of fashion entrepreneurs through the lens of an employers' syndicate, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* (hereafter *Chambre Syndicale*) (Scranton and Fridenson, 2013). The *Chambre Syndicale* is keeping her archives private to this day.² This article is based on the meeting minutes of the general assembly, and the minutes of

the Committee, a smaller group gathering the directors of a dozen firms elected within the *Chambre Syndicale*'s membership. Other sources, notably the trade press and the general press, have been used in this article to complement and crosscheck the minutes of the two assemblies of the *Chambre Syndicale*. These series help us understanding the functioning of haute couture, a major creative industry. Not all specialists of the field, however, include fashion in their studies of the creative industries (Caves, 2000). While the extent of the creative industries varies, so does their definition; however, a few salient points can be cited, that include the interest developed by the workers for their job, the diversity of their skills, the uncertainty of the demand, the variations in the products created, the timing of innovation, and the revenue involved from intellectual property rights (Caves, 2000; Howkins, 2002), all core aspects of the creative industries that we find represented in the matters treated by the *Chambre Syndicale*.

Founded in 1868, the *Chambre Syndicale* was the oldest association of her kind in the Paris region, and counts among the oldest French employers' associations (Lefranc, 1976; Offerlé, 2009, p. 14). It was founded, explains historian Alexandra Palmer, as “an umbrella organization to support and promote individual couture houses and Paris *couturiers* as a collective” (Palmer, 2001, p. 14). The association still exists today. In interwar France, the *Chambre Syndicale* was the only organization of fashion professionals acknowledged by the public authorities, the National Economic Advisory Board (*Conseil National Economique*), the textile makers' syndicate (*Union Syndicale des Tissus*), and the workers' unions. The *Chambre* was therefore the only organization that had a mandate to sign collective labor agreements.³ As underlined by historian Richard Kuisel, the late 19th century movement for industrial self-government developed, in France, into two categories of associations, one being commercial *comptoirs*, or cartels, and the other professional employers' syndicates. Cartels “classified products, fixed prices, set production quotas, arranged transport, and operated a common selling office” (Kuisel, 1981, pp. 21–22), which is a more comprehensive commercial activity than what the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* did (Chatriot, 2008, pp. 7–22). The *Chambre Syndicale*'s activities are however matching the classical definition of a professional syndicate. The *Chambre Syndicale* was a group of capitalists that engaged in collective action (Lanzalaco, 2007, p. 294) by organizing locally, studying legislation, tariffs, and tax regimes, and developing paternalistic programs (Offerlé, 2009, pp. 62–86).

The members of the *Chambre Syndicale* elected their President every year on the principle of one firm, one vote. In carrying out his task, the President was helped by a yearly elected board (*bureau*) composed of two vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and an auditor.⁴ All were managing directors of haute couture firms.⁵ The frequency of meetings was left to the discretion of the Committee. The Committee tended to meet five times a year, and in addition extraordinary meetings could be convened when needed.⁶ Michel Offerlé, who has extensively written on the French employers' syndicates, proposes to study the *repertoires* of the collective action of employers under the triple agenda of routine, strategy, and constraints. Indeed all three appear within the material examined in this paper. The *Chambre Syndicale* represented firms that produced very small series of designs tailored to an elite. The typology of the

¹ *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* (hereafter in footnotes: CSCP), *General Assembly Minutes* (hereafter: GAM), Letter of Lucien Lelong, July 9, 1937, 3–4.

² Didier Grumbach, former President of the *Chambre Syndicale*, has written an important book on the history of haute couture that is based on his souvenirs, and also for a large part on the *Chambre Syndicale*'s archives. This book however raises

questions of historical critique, as it is the work of an insider to the profession. Didier Grumbach, D., 1993, 2008 [revised]. *Histoires de la mode*. Seuil, Paris.

³ Archives of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* (hereafter: CSCP), *Committee Meeting Minutes* (hereafter: CMM) ledger, July 27, 1937, letter from Lucien Lelong to M. Cagnet, Paris, November 18, 1937, 2.

⁴ CSCP, CMM, June 24, 1938, 1.

⁵ For example, see the board in 1934: CSCP, CMM, June 20, 1934, 1.

⁶ CSCP, CMM, May 19, 1933, 1.

production dictated a set of constraints in the action of the association (Offerlé, 2009, pp. 62–91). In 1937 the membership of the *Chambre Syndicale* was of 104 member firms, that totaled between 13,000 and 14,000 employees.⁷ This was the lowest point in interwar membership. The number of firms members would go back up to 122 in 1938, and 140 in 1939.⁸ These numbers are in stark contrast with today's membership of the same association, that is around two dozen members, although the prestige of the *Chambre Syndicale* has even reinforced from what it was between the wars.⁹

Employers' syndicates occupy a significant part of business history and, in France, the works of Claire Lemerrier, who has studied the Paris Chamber of Commerce, have shown the role of this association in terms of business regulation during the first half of the 19th century (Lemerrier, 2003). Her article on the National Union of Commerce and Industry (NUCI) founded in 1858 focuses on local small business, of which some were related to fashion. Lemerrier studies one of the most successful syndicates within the NUCI, the industries of flower-making and feather dyeing, "a paragon of *articles de Paris*" (Lemerrier, 2009, pp. 304–334). Both were *fournisseurs* to couture houses, milliners, and fashion retailers. In a country where guilds had been abolished, professional associations embodied cooperation in a community of local actors. Associations made external economies of scale possible (Lemerrier, 2009, p. 328). In the case of the NUCI, cooperation developed in the context of external threats, like counterfeiting, and the association therefore acted as an informal complement to the courts (Lemerrier, 2009, pp. 322–326). The repertoire of the *Chambre Syndicale* addresses constraints (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 89) as they pertain to the classical issue of the workforce but also, and this brings us closer to the case of the NUCI studied by Lemerrier, the issue of counterfeiting (Béaur et al., 2006), considered to be a plague by luxury entrepreneurs. The members of the *Chambre Syndicale* developed in response a variety of strategies of prevention and repression.¹⁰

The main employers' syndicate gathering haute couture entrepreneurs during the interwar period was the *Chambre Syndicale*, but it was not the only one. In Paris, two other important, albeit smaller, associations were the Association pour la Protection des Arts Plastiques et Appliqués, and the Protection Artistique des Industries Saisonnières (PAIS). Both were offsprings of the *Chambre Syndicale* and specialized in the question of intellectual property rights. Other syndicates federated fashion industrialists, by branch and by region.

Nationally, the umbrella organization was the Association générale du commerce et de l'industrie des tissus et matières textiles. The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* was technically a member of this much larger Association, although the *Chambre Syndicale* clearly appears in her minutes as pursuing her own agenda unconstrained. In 1932, year that we can document thanks to the *Bulletin* of the association, it counted 10 specialized commissions – for comparison, the *Chambre Syndicale* usually counted between three and five internal commissions (see Annex 2). The Association générale listed 66 member chambers, among which were the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne*.¹¹ Other syndicates listed the milliners ("Mode"),¹² garment makers¹³

⁷ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, p. 3. CSCP, *General Assembly Minutes*, March 15, 1939, 7–8.

⁸ CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, 7–8.

⁹ <http://www.modeaparis.com/fr/la-federation/>

¹⁰ CSCP, CMM, December 13, 1929, 2.

¹¹ *Bulletin de l'Association générale du commerce et de l'industrie des tissus et des matières textiles*, January 1932, 4–7.

¹² *Bulletin de l'Association générale du commerce et de l'industrie des tissus et des matières textiles*, January 1932, 6.

¹³ *Bulletin de l'Association générale du commerce et de l'industrie des tissus et des matières textiles*, January 1932, 7.

("Fédération du Vêtement"), and numerous others (see Annex 2). The Association générale actively developed social work, that included the organization of a retirement fund for workers and a fund dedicated to the rent of workers' housing.¹⁴

The *Chambre Syndicale* did not represent the whole profession. It was possible to be a *grand couturier* without being a member of the *Chambre Syndicale*. Haute couture was not a closed profession, like medical doctors or lawyers are (Dubar and Tripier, 1998). While many enterprises were called by the name of their head designer, most delegated their managing director to represent them in employers' syndicates. The history of the *Chambre Syndicale* features a pioneer, couturiere Jeanne Paquin, who became in 1917 the first woman President of an employers' syndicate in France, in 1924, became Vice-President of the *Syndicat d'Initiative* of Paris, the tourism association of the city.¹⁵ In 1891, Paquin had founded with her husband the couture house bearing her name. She developed an intense syndical and international activity, directly related to her business (Font, 2012, p. 34). The interwar period was, as states Valerie Steele, a golden time for women haute couture entrepreneurs (Steele, 1998, p. 247). Yet the exercise of leadership inside the *Chambre Syndicale* brings some nuance to this picture (Kwolek-Folland, 1998). Most female haute couture entrepreneurs were represented in the professional syndicate by their managers, of whom most were men. Prominent examples for this are Madeleine Vionnet, represented by her managing directors Louis Dangel (until 1924), and Armand Trouyet (from the early 1920s until 1939), both lawyers. Vionnet sat in meetings of the *Chambre Syndicale*, but not systematically, and most often questions were discussed not by her, but by her managing directors.¹⁶ Maggy Rouff was generally represented in meetings by her husband, M. Besançon de Wagner. Jeanne Lanvin was represented by Jean Labusquière for most of the interwar period. The house of the Callot sisters was represented at the *Chambre* by the son of Marie Callot, Pierre Gerber, who presided the *Chambre* between 1930 and 1933, and between 1935 and 1937.¹⁷

Some prominent couturiers chose to stay aside from the main professional association.¹⁸ Others came to the *Chambre* after several years in the business, like Lucien Lelong, who was the son of couturiers, started as a couturier upon his return from the Great War, became a member in 1928, and was elected President of the *Chambre* in 1937.¹⁹

The 19th Century *Chambre Syndicale* was more mixed and included manufacturers. In 1911, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* deeply reorganized, resulting in an increasing specialization into higher-end creativity. During the interwar period, the members of the *Chambre Syndicale* reserved the right to select members (Garnier, 1987). Entrepreneur Anny Blatt, who owned a couture house specialized in knitted dresses, applied several times and was rejected on the grounds that her production was not high-end enough in comparison to the current membership.²⁰

¹⁴ *Bulletin de l'Association générale du commerce et de l'industrie des tissus et des matières textiles*, January 1932, 8.

¹⁵ Ch. Prévost, Du Féminisme effectif. Madame Paquin vient d'être nommée Vice-président du *Syndicat d'Initiative* de Paris. In *La semaine à Paris*, Nov. 14, 1924, 3.

¹⁶ See for example the session of Committee of Sept. 24, 1930. In this eventful session, several cases of counterfeiting are discussed by the Committee, a matter in which the House of Vionnet is particularly active. The list of houses present on the first page of the minutes mentions "Madeleine Vionnet", yet the person that intervenes in the meeting on behalf of the House is managing director Armand Trouyet. CSCP, CMM, Sept. 24, 1930, 1, 5–6.

¹⁷ CSCP, CMM, Dec. 13, 1929, 1. CSCP, CMM, June 24, 1938, 1.

¹⁸ CSCP, CMM, May 30, 1933, 1.

¹⁹ CSCP, CMM, June 20, 1928, 1.

²⁰ *New York Public Library*, Fashion Group Archive, Box 72, File 13, Monthly meeting of the Fashion Group, Inc., Nov. 24, 1933.

Table 1
Size of couture and garment manufacturing enterprises in Paris (Deschamps, 1937, pp. 76–77).

	1926	1931
One-person enterprises	657	1537
Enterprises employing 10–20 workers	502	457
Enterprises employing 21–100 workers	409	363
Enterprises employing 101–500 workers	15	13

Small and medium sized companies dominated the French fashion industry. Haute Couture did not have a legal definition before 1943, but sources coincide to define haute couture: enterprises were called *houses* (*maisons*), they were creating their own models, they showed at least twice a year full collections that comprised day and evening wear, and they offered made-to-measure services to their private clientele (Simon, 1931). Table 1, compiled by lawyer G. Deschamps, gives the number of workers of Paris couture enterprises in the years 1926 and 1931, which is a way to assess the size of the enterprises (Scranton and Fridenson, 2013, p. 77).²¹ A few companies, Chanel, Lelong and Vionnet, had at times a higher number of employees than 500, but most were smaller. A limited number of small and medium-sized companies therefore played a fundamental role in defining the materials, designs, and colors followed in Western fashions, with a worldwide dissemination. Palmer underlines that the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* played a central role in assessing the supremacy of France on international fashions (Palmer, 2001, p. 14).

In late 1920s France, the most generous figures counted up to 450,000 employees in all national fashion and accessories industries, textile non included (Simon, 1931, p. 7). Such figures lowered considerably when the economic crisis hit in the early 1930s. Table 1 shows that the number of one-person businesses in Paris garment and fashion industries increased in 1931, the year that the Depression hit France with full force. Because of the crisis, many newly unemployed fashion workers had established as one-person businesses. In retail and in textile manufacturing the companies' scale could be radically different (Chandler, 1977, pp. 224–233).

The capital of most Paris couture enterprises was in French hands. Despite persistent rumors of Americanization of the haute couture houses' finances, it did not happen during the interwar period. Enterprises most often followed a familial and local model of capitalization and of management (Lescure, 2000, p. 336). The House of Madeleine Vionnet was financed by a businessman from Argentina, Martinez de Hoz, whose wife was a good client, but this was only for a part, as French department store owner Théophile Bader was Vionnet's most important investor (Brachet Champsaur, 2012, pp. 48–66). Vionnet's type of capitalization remains the exception in a dominantly local and familial model of industry. While haute couture had an international reach as one of the flagship exports industries of France, the structure of Paris couture industry was of a local cluster (Saxenian, 1996; Porter, 1990), a network of densely concentrated firms whose expertise were interdependent and who created common institutions for governance (Scranton, 1991, pp. 35–6).

The *Chambre Syndicale* elected commissions to work on specific issues. Under the leadership of Jacques Worth in 1933, the *Chambre* counted five commissions: on social questions, on apprenticeship and schools, on Balls and events, on juridical matters including customs and taxes, and one dedicated to publishing a bulletin.²² Commissions changed through time in purpose and number (see Annex 2), therefore, the structure of the paper goes by topic rather

Table 2
1923 Bal de la Couture profits.^a

Subvention to the Institut Professionnel Féminin, 64 bis rue du Rocher	10,000 francs (1025,821 euros of 2014) ^b
Subvention to the Association Féminine pour l'Etude et l'Action sociales, 56 rue du Dr. Blanche	2000 francs (2051.64 euros)
Subvention to the Apprenticeship Committee, 196 boulevard Malesherbes	1000 francs (1025.82 euros)
Subvention to the Professional Workshops, 5 rue de l'Abbaye	1000 francs (1025.82 euros)
Subvention to the Familial Association the XIII, 11 rue Vaudrezanne	500 francs (512.21 euros)
Subvention to the professional schools of the City of Paris (competition prize)	1000 francs (1025.82 euros)
Annual foundation of two beds at Villepinte	3000 francs (3077.46 euros)
Annual foundation of two beds at the Saint Joseph Hospital	3000 francs (3077.46 euros)
For immediate assistance to the female workers	30,000 francs (30,774.6 euros)
For the apprentices' competition	25,000 francs (25,645.54 euros)
Total	76,500 francs (78,475.34 euros)

^a Source to the table: CSCP, CMM, February 8, 1923, 1. I translated the names of the associations to make them more legible.

^b Conversion with tables from INSEE. Note that the conversion takes into account the erosion in purchasing power.

than by commissions. Core topics are education of the workforce, protection, advertising, lobbying, gatekeeping, and relations with the employees. I put the emphasis in this paper on the topics that are related to gatekeeping, as it is the key I have chosen to analyze the activity of the employers' syndicate, but other angles of approach are possible. Because prominent couturiers, although in small numbers, did not join the *Chambre Syndicale*, I address the question of those that remained outside. I also look at the issues left aside by the *Chambre Syndicale*, in order to better define the contours of the syndicate's action.

2. Educating

Educating the workforce was a constant concern of the members of the *Chambre Syndicale*, who regularly took part to apprenticeship congresses (Scranton, 1991, p. 80).²³ The *Chambre* sponsored the education of young couture workers. After WW1, couturiers directed their apprentices to professional schools, especially the Institut Professionnel Féminin, 64b rue du Rocher in Paris. Teaching was concentrated on 2 years, one and a half morning per week in the first year, and two mornings per week in the second year. In 1921, the *Chambre Syndicale* set up a fund that would pay half of the school costs of haute couture apprentices, while member firms would pay the other half. Subventions to the schools were paid by charitable donations of the haute couture houses and by fundraisers. In the early 1920s the most important of them was the Bal de la Couture.²⁴ In 1923 for example, 76,500 French francs out of 119,167,80 net worth resulting from the Bal de la Couture were allocated to professional schools and to workers charities, as in Table 2.

Jacques Worth, director of the very respected House of Worth, exposed reasons for enterprises to send apprenticed girls to the Institute of the rue du Rocher, "where they are perfectly taught their job, and in an atmosphere of discipline and order that is

²¹ In the US law, small firms are the ones with 0–99 employees.

²² CSCP, CMM, May 30, 1933, 2.

²³ CSCP, CMM, Sept. 13, 1921, 1.

²⁴ CSCP, CMM, September 21, 1922, 1–2.

highly regarded from the moral point of view”.²⁵ The morality of the young women working in the fashion industries was a constant concern to entrepreneurs (Roubaud, 1928), yet the involvement of the *Chambre Syndicale* in the education of the young workers stemmed from a deeper concern: “France is the country of excellent workforce; elsewhere one works in series, here the artisan imprints his personality in her work. She brings in originality, she achieves [what she does]. But, to achieve, one needs to know! Hence the issue of apprenticeship that has, for us French, a particularly strong importance”²⁶ (Omnès, 1997, p. 28).

In 1931, the *Chambre Syndicale* started her own schools, the *Ecole Supérieure* and the *Ecole* of the rue de la Sourdière.²⁷ This task had been assigned to M. Dupouy, director of the house of Dupouy-Magnin, who had himself been an haute couture worker at the beginning of his career,²⁸ and was now sitting on the boards of several professional schools. Dupouy had noticed how difficult it was for a young apprentice to acquire knowledge and become a highly qualified worker, *seconde* or *première d’atelier*. The purpose of the new school was to train women in haute couture, with focus on management, fitting, workshop organization, raw materials, and creative design. Dupouy and a small team of members of the *Chambre Syndicale* drafted an educational program, that included the cut of the *toiles* (raw linen prototypes), fitting, drawing, as well as the study of color, ornament, esthetics, and textiles (Scranton, 1991, pp. 72–3, Donzé, 2008, pp. 6–8). Dupouy commented that “Creation, in terms of couture, is submitted to unchanging laws imposed the necessity to clothe a body; these laws limit the field left open to the imagination of the designer.”²⁹

From this, two currents developed: draping, and tailoring. It was helpful to develop knowledge in these bases, to study the History of Costume, defined as “not only [...] the study of the shapes of the ancient clothes in themselves, but also of the reasons which explain their evolution, their transformations, in all times and all countries.”³⁰ The students would receive documents, learn where to find sources of information, attend conferences, and haute couture shows. Classes were planned on evenings and Saturdays, three times a week on 2 years. Preliminary education, in the form of the *Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle*, was a condition for enrollment. Haute couture houses contributed to the discussion over programs. Famed *grande couturière* Madeleine Vionnet was particularly keen on the place given to fashion history and sketching in the program, thinking that educating the workforce into fashion history would help developing good taste and creative aptitudes. Several haute couture houses rewarded the best students with grants and apprenticeship within their firms, a convenient way to recruit young talents.³¹

3. Protecting

Helping members facing outside threats is a classical feature of the activity of professional associations (Lemercier, 2009, pp. 322–326). Threats form a vague and potentially subjective

²⁵ “[...] où on leur apprend parfaitement leur métier et dans une atmosphère de discipline et d’ordre très appréciable au point de vue moral”. CSCP, CMM, July 5, 1921, 1. Translation of archives quotes are mine.

²⁶ La *Chambre Syndicale* de la *Couture parisienne*. In *La Semaine à Paris*, February 13, 1925, 4.

²⁷ CSCP, CMM, June 16, 1932, 2.

²⁸ CSCP, CMM, Oct. 1, 1931, 10.

²⁹ CSCP, CMM, May 7, 1930, 8. “La création, en matière de couture, est soumise à des lois immuables, imposées par le nécessité de vêtir un corps, lois qui limitent le champ laissé à l’imagination du modéliste.”

³⁰ CSCP, CMM, May 7, 1930, 9. “[...] non seulement [...] l’étude des formes de vêtements anciens en elles-mêmes, mais aussi des raisons qui expliquent leur évolution, leurs transformations, dans tous les temps et dans tous les pays.”

³¹ CSCP, CMM, May 7, 1930, 11, 20.

category, but the *Chambre Syndicale*’s archives allow to identify clear points beyond the social question. The *Chambre Syndicale* acted like a forum of information for her members. Sharing information was a fundamental mission of employers’ syndicates, and the textile and garments industries of France were no exception. The *Association générale du commerce et de l’industrie des tissus et matières textiles*, the umbrella group above the *Chambre Syndicale*, regularly published information on topics of interest like exchange rates, tariffs, and social policies implemented by the French government, with a keen interest, during the interwar period, for family allowances, or *allocations familiales*, that became mandatory following the Landry law of March 1932 (Pedersen, 1995, pp. 224–288).³² The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* therefore generally focused information on topical points of social policy, and on affairs specific to the haute couture networks. For example, in 1920, a crook based in Brussels was operating in the Paris haute couture milieu. Explaining that he was sent by Belgian retailing companies, the man used fake credentials to obtain delivery of haute couture pieces, that he paid with uncovered checks. The *Chambre Syndicale* immediately informed members to avoid business with the said crook, using the experience of the robbed houses to give as many clues as possible on his identity.³³ Warnings were emitted in similar situations. In 1923, this concerned a series of Colombian firms that ordered merchandize from Paris haute couture firms and did not pay their orders after delivery, using a loophole in the Colombian tariff rule.³⁴

The *Chambre Syndicale* members created common policies for debt recovery. Credit was often a habit of private clients, who sometimes took months to settle their accounts, a practice inherited from the *Ancien Régime* (Sombart, 1922; Fontaine, 2014).³⁵ The *Chambre Syndicale*’s members further shared information about foreign markets, researching questions pertaining to customs, tariffs, currencies, and debts recovery. Blacklisting bad creditors and counterfeiters was a common practice. Researchers specializing in the history of French employers’ organizations underline the use of blacklists in the context of strife against workers, but I have not found mention of such a use in the archives of the *Chambre Syndicale* (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 90). Lists were regularly updated and sent in the post to members.³⁶ In addition, toward the end of the interwar period, couturiers developed communication on black lists with other professional syndicates, like the jewelers and interior decorators associations.³⁷

4. Advertising

The relation between couturiers and advertising was complex, which surfaces in the use by the *Chambre Syndicale* of the term “propaganda”, that more easily brought consensus among the couturiers’ ranks. Part of the *grands couturiers* were deeply convinced that haute couture should not engage in mass-market advertising campaigns. Others, like Lucien Lelong, used the most modern advertising techniques.³⁸

The notion of “propaganda” included the organization of manifestations abroad, and the visits of foreign guests to the *Chambre Syndicale*. In the early 1920s, the members of the

³² On the Landry Law: *Bulletin de l’Association générale du commerce et de l’industrie des tissus et des matières textiles*, May 1932, 175; example of the further numerous discussions on the *Allocations familiales* in the *Bulletin*: June 1937, 5, 194, 201, 224.

³³ CSCP, GAM, [undated folio from 1920].

³⁴ CSCP, CMM, February 8, 1923, 2.

³⁵ CSCP, CMM, Sept. 21, 1922, 1.

³⁶ CSCP, GAM, June 21, 1937, 3; CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, 2.

³⁷ CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, 18.

³⁸ The Dressmakers of France. In *Fortune*, August 1932, 76.

Chambre Syndicale were keen on exhibiting and promoting their work abroad. For example, the Committee of the Chambre Syndicale encouraged members to participate “in as high as possible a number” to the exhibition organized in New York by the French Ministry of Commerce in 1921. Couturiers were expected to send pictures of their works.³⁹ They also participated in fashion and decorative arts exhibitions in April 1923 in London, in 1924 in Paris Grand Palais. A special effort was put into the 1923 San Francisco Exhibition, where a palace was erected to the memory of the American soldiers fallen in France during the Great War. In this hall, one room was dedicated to haute couture. Members realized an exhibition of dolls celebrating the French history of fashion and regional costumes. Dolls were historically an important medium for the circulation of French fashions (Maillet, 2013).⁴⁰

In the context of the early 1920s economic reconstruction, members of the Chambre Syndicale avidly participated to shows abroad, but it took them barely a few years to revert to a cautious attitude. In 1928, the Chambre Syndicale’s Committee mentioned the increasing demand from colleagues abroad to exhibit Paris couture creations. The Committee recommended that all projects be carefully examined, and that no enterprise would take the decision to show without asking the Chambre Syndicale. From then on, the Chambre most often rejected participation to foreign exhibitions,⁴¹ developing politics of rarity and exclusivity, to participate only in major, prestigious events.⁴²

Representing France at home and abroad, was also a conscious mission of the Chambre Syndicale. At all times, not only in Depression and crisis, the discourses of the Chambre Syndicale was, within meetings as well as when advertising couture, the language of a national industry. The agenda of the Chambre Syndicale was to defend haute couture as an essential industry to the French nation. All Presidents of the interwar period repeatedly underlined the key contribution of haute couture to the French economy, exactly in the terms that, eight decades later, President of the Medef (the French association of entrepreneurs) Laurence Parisot used to describe the mission of her syndicate (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 88). In times of crisis – economic hardship or difficulties internal to the association – the national argument could be further used by the President to motivate his members and underline the contribution made by haute couture to the national economy.⁴³

5. Negotiating with the public authorities

Negotiating for a better protection of the industry was part of the Syndical Chambers’ activity. It is legitimate to ask whether the activity of the Chambre Syndicale can be defined as forms of lobbying, a concept defined by Michel Offerlé as a “portmanteau word that not solely refers to the usage of watching techniques, persuasion more or less discreet or widened, or even oriented pressure, and production of argumentations aiming to put, or withdraw, a question from the agenda, but also to propose solutions in the form of amendments, in a more or less free competition, unbiased with other groups of interest (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 91).”⁴⁴ In regard to

this definition, the Chambre Syndicale often pursued interests that were too much of a industrial niche to raise preoccupation at the governmental level. Recurring points in the activity of the syndicate, however, pertain to the somewhat loose definition of lobbying practices, that we trace in this paragraph. Yet the area where the Chambre Syndicale farthest developed lobbying is the protection of intellectual property rights in the couture industry.

At the City level the question of Paris rent prices was a constant concern. In haute couture houses everything from creation to production and retail was done on the premises, which demanded large spaces and imposed very high costs on firms. The Chambre Syndicale tried to defend the interests of haute couture in front of the City of Paris authorities, arguing that too expensive rents hampered the survival of the profession.

At the national level, a recurrent subject of lobbying was the luxury tax. The Association générale du commerce et de l’industrie des tissus et matières textiles, the large umbrella organization of which the Chambre Syndicale was a member, had developed a federation of industrials for the lobbying against the luxury tax. Pierre Gerber, President of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne, was a member of the bureau of this group.⁴⁵ Haute couture entrepreneurs wanted the tax to be lowered (Simon, 1931, p. 75). In 1922, Louis Clément, then President of the Chambre Syndicale, wrote on behalf of the association to the Commission of Finances by the French Assemblée Nationale, asking the removal of the luxury tax.⁴⁶ The couturier did not obtain an answer at the time. In 1930, Louis Clément, who had stepped down as President but was chairing a Committee meeting in his quality of vice-president of the association, told his colleagues that “the Finances Administration has given us satisfaction as far as the transfer of lingerie articles, from table A to table B, is concerned”.⁴⁷ This meant that lingerie articles, including the ones designed and produced by haute couture houses, and other articles of clothing in natural silk, went from been subjected to a tax of 12% (as in table A), to a tax of 6% (as in table B).⁴⁸ In the Chambre’s general assembly minutes, one can read that members considered this the work of couturier Jacques Worth, the third generation director of the House of Worth. Founded in 1858, the firm is considered to be the first French haute couture house. The Worths were the *grands couturiers* best connected to the French high society.⁴⁹

This raises the question of the relation between couturiers and the political class. Jacques Worth was particularly active and sat on governmental commissions, like the *Commission de taxation à la production*, delegated to the French government in 1929 for 4 years.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that haute couture firms were catering to upper class clients, couturiers generally remained outside of the political world. While in other types of industries, entrepreneurs could seek political mandates, this was not the case among couturiers (Salsano, 2013, pp. 43–52). The Chambre Syndicale’s archives however show that visits to Ministries and to the Président du Conseil were the best way to defend the interests of the profession.⁵¹

³⁹ CSCP, CMM, September 13, 1921, 1.

⁴⁰ CSCP, CMM, September 21, 1922, 2.

⁴¹ CSCP, CMM, June 20, 1928, 3.

⁴² La couture française au Canada. In *L’expansion commerciale de France*, March 1924, 13th series, 106, 82–83.

⁴³ CSCP, CMM, May 7, 1930, 1.

⁴⁴ “Mot valise qui renvoie non seulement à l’usage des techniques de veille, de persuasion plus ou moins discrètes ou élargies, voire de pressions orientées, et à la production d’argumentations destinées à mettre une question à l’ordre du jour, ou à l’en retirer, mais également à proposer des solutions, souvent sous forme d’amendements, dans une concurrence plus ou moins libre et non faussée avec les représentants d’autres groupes d’intérêts.”

⁴⁵ Bulletin de l’Association générale du commerce et de l’industrie des tissus et des matières textiles, January 1932, 8, Fédération des Industriels et Commerçants frappés par la taxe de luxe.

⁴⁶ CSCP, CMM, September 21, 1922, 1.

⁴⁷ CSCP, CMM, March 5, 1930, 1. “L’Administration des Finances, nous a donné satisfaction en ce qui concerne le transfert des articles de lingerie, figurant au tableau A, au tableau B”.

⁴⁸ CSCP, Committee Meeting Minutes, March 5, 1930, 2.

⁴⁹ Library of Congress, Edward Louis Bernays Papers, Worth files. CSCP, CMM, March 5, 1930, 1.

⁵⁰ Journal officiel de la République française, March 25, 1926, 1509; December 4, 1929, 13045–6.

⁵¹ See for example, on the visits of Jean Labusquière, from the House of Lanvin, to the Ministry of Commerce and the Présidence du Conseil; CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, 10.

6. Gatekeeping

Haute Couture houses sold to private clients and to corporate buyers. Corporate buyers were of two kinds: foreign corporate buyers, and French province couturiers. The French department store and *confectionneurs* (a term that would be replaced postwar by ready-to-wear, or *prêt-à-porter*) were not allowed to enter haute couture houses, neither to buy designs from them (Simon, 1931, pp. 9–10). If new designs were accessible to French *confectionneurs*, they would be reproduced industrially in a matter of weeks. Rather than going to Paris and buying from couture houses, foreign buyers would quietly wait for their designs to appear in ready-to-wear iterations, and snatch them for less. Refusing to sell to French manufacturers was also a matter of not vexing private clients, prescribed Pierre Gerber, president of the *Chambre Syndicale*.⁵² The haute couture clientele was significantly larger during the interwar period than it is now, partly because the cost of labor was cheaper. Haute couture was more affordable than it is today (Simon, 1931, pp. 75–78). Bourgeoisie, nobility, and socialites bought haute couture for their own use. Made-to-measure ensured an exceptional level of fit. The typical private client was vexed when seeing *her* outfit exhibited for sale in a department store. The *Chambre Syndicale* tried to retain the exclusivity of members' designs, although it was impossible to avoid style leakage.⁵³ French industrialists used various tactics to keep abreast of the new haute couture fashions, by obtaining models sold abroad, or by "looking through the keyhole" (Lanzmann and Ripert, 1992, p. 45). In this case, the agenda of the *Chambre Syndicale* hindered the interest of another professional association, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture en gros*, that defended the interests of wholesale couture (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 92). In the meeting minutes of the latter employers' syndicate, one can read that French ready-made dress manufacturers and wholesalers were disappointed by the decision of the *Chambre Syndicale* to keep the doors of haute couture closed to the French manufacturers. Wholesale couture would "not disarm".⁵⁴

The strategy pursued by the *Chambre Syndicale*, especially in the early 1930s under the presidency of Pierre Gerber, was to select corporate clients – that formed some 25% of the sales of haute couture, the rest being private buyers (Simon, 1931, p. 74) – and to privilege foreign markets. During the early 1930s, the *Chambre Syndicale* especially sought to develop relations with the American, German, and Belgian buyers, who sent delegations to visit couturiers. The Garment Retailers of America, the Belgian *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, and the German *Reichsverband der Deutschen Sneider Gewerder* all visited the Paris *Chambre Syndicale*.⁵⁵ In a unique case, such relations evolved in the development of a bilateral agreement that had the vocation to encourage the legal reproduction of Paris haute couture in Belgium, that was chosen as a test market, in the words of Pierre Gerber, because it was "a small market very easy to control"⁵⁶ (Pouillard, 2006, pp. 409–452). The strategy deployed by the *Chambre Syndicale* was therefore, to secure markets with corporate buyers, in order to ensure the dissemination and supremacy of French design abroad, and develop the symbolic capital of haute couture. This point was, as the later developments show, extremely successful. The prestige of the syndicate, as well as of its members, was and still is undeniable (Kawamura, 2004; Steele, 1998). While the *Chambre Syndicale* fits the model

⁵² CSCP, CMM, July 4, 1930, 5–6.

⁵³ On the expression of "style leaks" or leakage, see for example: 8 Couturiers on Joint Pact on Opening Dates. In *Women's Wear Daily*, Jan. 4, 1929, 1/1.

⁵⁴ Bulletin de l'Union syndicale des tissus, matières textiles, habillement, ameublement, May-June 1934, 209.

⁵⁵ Vincent Breton, Avec les couturiers allemands qui visitant les grandes maisons parisiennes. In *Paris-Soir*, February 27, 1931, 2.

⁵⁶ CSCP, CMM, December 9, 1930, 3.

of the French semi-artisanal industry highlighted by historians like Richard Kuisel, haute couture somewhat offsets his analysis of a French capitalism lagging behind, because of the international scope of the haute couture clientele (Kuisel, 1981, p. 28). The techniques used in haute couture indeed took their roots in the past, and the industry had universal appeal (Simon, 1931, pp. 65–73).

Yet this also made couture vulnerable, notably to piracy (Simon, 1931, p. 69; Troy, 2002; Stewart, 2008). It seems hypothetical that haute couture managed to retain the secrecy of models. More realistically, what mattered to most couturiers was to slow down the cycles of innovations and copying. Retaining the secrecy of their designs long enough to attract the interest of foreign buyers and private clients was most needed. Fashion shows for the happy few were therefore a powerful marketing tool. The *Chambre Syndicale* acted literally as a gatekeeper to the shows, preventing anyone to enter the sanctuaries of haute couture. The *Chambre Syndicale's* propaganda service selected and registered journalists, corporate buyers, and private clients. The association then issued press and buyers' cards required to attend the couture presentations. Without a card, there was no entry to an haute couture house. In some houses, corporate buyers who did not make purchases were black-listed after a few seasons. Couturiers presented their collections during several consecutive days, gathering visitors by groups. Private clients had different times than corporate clients, and than the press. Entrance was severely guarded, although the *Syndical Chamber* archives show recurring difficulties in properly tracking the clients. Stories document cameras hidden in handbags or umbrellas, unauthorized sketching, in a romantic narrative of industrial espionage (Stewart, 2008; Troy, 2002).

The protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) was, along with the question of the stabilization of the workforce, the most pressing on the *Chambre's* agenda during the interwar period (Howkins, 2002, p. 45). It was also a major cause of debates, and even of dissent. In 1921 the *Chambre* created within her own ranks a Service of Defense against the Copying of Models (*Service de Défense contre la copie des Modèles*). The Committee expected that the costs for this service would be high, and that federating enterprises in the fight against copying would bring better results.⁵⁷ The problem of copying was hardly new. Couturiers within and outside the *Chambre Syndicale* had denounced it since the late 19th Century. Lawyers Allart and Carteron had dedicated a full handbook solely to case law in the copying and counterfeiting of couture (Allart and Carteron, 1914). Yet, the development of such laws, and especially of case law, was still in its infancy. As observed by historian Gabriel Galvez-Behar on innovation patents, the law was not static. Rather, practices were constantly evolving, and in this process lawyers, as well as entrepreneurs and their syndicates, were essential actors (Galvez-Behar, 2009, pp. 98–105).

It is also in 1921 that Madeleine Vionnet started suing copyists with the help of her lawyer, Louis Dangel. The fashion and the trade presses advertised Vionnet knock-offs and Vionnet-inspired models in all price ranges.⁵⁸ Vionnet tried to rally peers to her fight against copying. She also sponsored the creation of the Association pour la Protection des Arts Plastiques et Appliqués, founded in 1921 in collaboration with Dangel (Grumbach, 2008, p. 27; Simon, 1931, p. 153). This new Association defended all applied arts, published press campaigns, and worked on the production of substantial and rigorous information on the problem of copying (Simon, 1931, pp. 153–154). The Association encouraged the registration of designs. It used the French law of 1793 to prove the theft of originals by copyists. This law allowed for a simple procedure: the couturier considering himself pirated required the Police to establish proof

⁵⁷ CSCP, CMM, July 5, 1921, 2.

⁵⁸ Couturiers Who Count. In *Women's Wear Daily*, June 26, 1931, 1/4.

of the theft by visiting the premises of the copyist and seizing the suspected merchandize (Simon, 1931, pp. 156–157). The Police then proceeded to the sealing of the dresses or prototypes seized, and transmitted them to the tribunal registries. The Association exerted influence to have such cases treated in criminal courts (*en correctionnelle*), rather than having them treated by the consular jurisdiction (*jurisdiction consulaire*) (Simon, 1931, p. 155). Several couturiers were represented at the Chambre Syndicale by administrative directors trained as lawyers. In addition to this, the Chambre Syndicale helped members find lawyers when requested. Upon a simple vote procedure, the Committee could also decide that the Chambre Syndicale would be a plaintiff against copyists of haute couture designs. During the interwar period piracy of haute couture was incrementally criminalized in France. Lawsuits multiplied and the penalties meted out by counterfeiters rose (Pouillard, 2011, pp. 319–344).

With the same concern in mind, the members of the Chambre Syndicale encouraged the development of a national brand. The French industrialists, not only in haute couture business but in other industries as well, exported their products to the United Kingdom under the national brand Unis-France since the early 1920s – well ahead the heated protectionism that developed in the context of the Great Depression. The Committee members of the Chambre Syndicale thought of extending this practice to the export of haute couture to a wider array of countries.⁵⁹ This addition of the national brand Unis-France to haute couture *griffes*, or brand names, was regularly promoted among the ranks of the Chambre Syndicale with the objective of reinforcing the French identity of haute couture.⁶⁰

Another, albeit complementary point in the gatekeeping politics of the Chambre Syndicale touched upon the employment policies. Without going into all the details here, as it would exceed the scope of this paper, it is useful to assess that the Chambre Syndicale played a major role in unifying the directions taken by their members in managing their employees in routine as well as in crises times (Scranton, 1991, p. 36). In couture, careers tended to be longer and more stable than in the other branches where Paris women worked (Omnès, 1997, p. 42). Workers leaving one firm for another were taking their capabilities with them, as well as trade secrets and techniques learned in their former employer's workshop (Omnès, 1997, p. 51; Stewart, 2008, p. 132). This made transitions difficult, whether an employee was leaving one haute couture house for another, for a department store, or for a manufacturing enterprise. In frequent cases couturiers went to the courts, suing a former employee or a new employer for breach of confidentiality. For example, in 1928, the house of Lanvin, a firm very active in the organization of the Chambre Syndicale, came up with a case of corruption of an employee. Lanvin pressed charges as a civil party against that employee. The Committee of the Chambre agreed to examine the case in order to see whether the association could also, as a private person, press charges against the employee.⁶¹

The best strategy to ensure the stability of the workforce was to offer correct labor conditions, which the Chambre Syndicale's members applied.⁶² This, however, did not prevent sporadic crises between employers and the workforce, notably in the Spring of 1923, and during the *great fear* experience by French employers during the Front Populaire government in 1935–1936 (Le Bot, 2013, pp. 99–100). During the strikes of 1923, the extension of the strike

induced the Chambre Syndicale to vote a *lock-out*.⁶³ Contrary to practices in Germany and in the US, *lock-out* was little practiced in France (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 90). This extreme measure meant that the entrepreneurs would close their workshops (Escudero, 2013, p. 21).⁶⁴ Nancy Green analyzes the 1923 strike as a failure because of union strife (Green, 1997, p. 89).⁶⁵

The mid-1930s were marked by a new wave of strikes that was possibly the most difficult period in the Chambre Syndicale's existence. The couturiers were frustrated because many of them had always had the impression to be close enough of their workers, considering the rather small scale of many haute couture houses.⁶⁶ Concertation and negotiation were more deeply rooted in the culture of the haute couture industry, than in other sectors, for example as shown in the history of the UIMM, the French employers' association of the metallurgic sector, where concertation between social partners was analyzed as endured most often than wished for (Fraboulet, 2012; Lefranc, 1976, pp. 50–51). The members of the Chambre Syndicale had offered paid holidays to their workers before the Matignon agreements, that marked the *congés payés*, the revolution of paid holidays for all in France.⁶⁷ But the divisions between workers complicated the negotiations (Green, 1997, pp. 91–92). The Chambre Syndicale had a more serene relation with the Christian labor unions, than with the left-wing ones, and using such divisions pertained to the classical repertoire of strategies developed by employers' associations (Fraboulet, 2012, p. 131).

On the side of the employers, the problem was to unite in respecting the collective agreements, as in the words of Lucien Lelong: "because we consider unjust that a certain amount of houses accepts and loyally applies the agreements set up while others, that are not part of the Chambre Syndicale, are not doing it."⁶⁸ Indeed the mid-1930s were the most divisive time for the Chambre Syndicale. The agreements of Matignon signed on June 7, 1936 were followed by the laws of June 19 and 11, 1936 that limited the workweek to 40 hours and gave right to 2 weeks of yearly paid holiday. The Chambre Syndicale applied the law on the 40 h workweek, on 5 days of 8 h. In addition, the possibility to open the haute couture houses on Saturday mornings was decided as an experiment.⁶⁹ A general pay raise of 8% was granted on the basic salaries of haute couture workers in all categories.⁷⁰ The discussion on the collective conventions between the Chambre Syndicale and the labor unions went back to the table and a newer version was finalized in 1938.⁷¹ The direct consequence of the Matignon agreements on the couture as well as on the confection industry was a rising of the prices (Garnier, 1987, p. 197).

⁵⁹ Le lock-out de la couture. Tous les ateliers ont été fermés à midi. In *La Presse*, April 23, 1923, 1.

⁶⁰ CSCP, Plenary Assembly, April 4 and 6, 1923, 1 p. [in the CMM ledger].

⁶¹ Chronique. Aux Syndicats professionnels de l'Abbaye. In *La vie au patronage*. Organe catholique des œuvres de jeunesse, January 1928, 26. La Commission mixte, deuxième degré de l'organisation professionnelle. In *Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens*. Circulaire mensuelle, January 1928, 487–9.

⁶² CSCP, CMM, January 22, 1932, 7.

⁶³ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, 5.

⁶⁴ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, 7. "[...] car nous considérons comme injuste qu'un certain nombre de maisons accepte et applique loyalement les conventions souscrites alors que d'autres, ne faisant pas partie de la Chambre Syndicale, ne le font pas."

⁶⁵ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, 5. This was developed into the possibility of a six-days workweek including overtime pay in 1938. CSCP CMM, November 18, 1938, document "Modification d'application des nouveaux décrets-lois concernant la durée du travail."

⁶⁶ CSCP, GAM, July 31, 1937, 2. Convention collective de travail réglant les rapports entre employeurs de la couture et leurs ouvrières dans les départements de Seine et de Seine-et-Oise. In *Journal officiel de la République française*, July 13 1937, 7932–3.

⁶⁷ For details on the various versions see CSCP, GAM, July 31, 1937, pp. 51 sq. The records on the convention are very complete. Also see: *Journal officiel de la République française*, August 10 1938, 9548.

⁵⁹ CSCP, CMM, July 5, 1921, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ CSCP, CMM, November 7, 1928, 1.

⁶² CSCP, CMM, March 5, 1930, 1.

The records of the *Chambre Syndicale* are incomplete for this period but enough elements point to the delicate situation of the association in the mid-1930s. The *Chambre Syndicale* came out of the crisis divided, and financially exhausted. The finances of the *Chambre Syndicale* had much suffered through all the mid-1930s and it is eventually in 1937 that President Pierre Gerber took measures to liquidate the association's liabilities. This was done by raising the rate of the members' annual contributions, on a scale commensurate to the numbers of employees per firm. The *Chambre Syndicale* voted the payment of an extraordinary contribution, in order to settle the *Chambre's* accounts.⁷² The process was successfully carried out.⁷³ It is also in 1937 that I found the only mention of the hypothesis of a dissolution in the *Chambre Syndicale's* archives. Jacques Worth, now honorary president of the association and a much trusted member of the profession,⁷⁴ invited his peers to brush aside the "hypothesis of the dissolution" ("*l'hypothèse de la dissolution*"). Worth commented on the activity of the "dissident syndicates", and asked his peers to help the *Chambre Syndicale* out of the difficult times they were in.⁷⁵ In July 1937, Lucien Lelong was elected president of the *Chambre Syndicale*. He required from the onset that members give back the association "her importance, her utility, and her reputation".⁷⁶

7. Remaining outside

During the heyday of haute couture, France was not able to cater to the total worldwide demand for fashionable women's wear (Lipovetsky, 1991). The dissemination system of haute couture required that it was possible to reproduce abroad designs from Paris. Foreign buyers acquired a fully finished garment along with a technical sheet that presented necessary information for reproduction. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, full garments were increasingly replaced by *toiles* – raw linen prototypes – or even by paper patterns. Those were paid by with a one-time fee authorizing in principle a restrained number of reproductions, although the latter criterion remained blurred. There is no mention in the *Chambre Syndicale* archives of the number of reproductions prescribed. Higher-end fashion houses or department stores abroad were generally cautious with the number of the first line-for-line reproductions. They preferred to sell a limited quantity of reproductions to a few selected clients for a higher price, at least during the first season. Then, after the novelty of the model wore out, reproduction could massify should the said design be a success. Yet the couturiers did not receive royalties for mass reproduction (Simon, 1931, p. 155).⁷⁷

In the *Chambre Syndicale's* meetings, members often talked about their wish to avoid that too fast a dissemination of innovation and creativity would result in an acceleration of the fashion cycles on worldwide markets (Barthes, 1967). In order to keep a manageable rhythm in design innovation, most haute couture houses had chosen to organize the presentation of their collections seasonally (Segre Reinach, 2005, pp. 43–56). Still, a few couturiers did not enter the *Chambre Syndicale*. Jacques Worth, who was President of the *Chambre Syndicale* at the peak of the Great Depression, worked hard to obtain that the most prestigious *grand couturiers* all become members. In May 1933, a triumphant Worth introduced new member Jean Patou, along with these words:

"I want to thank here, in your name Mister PATOU for having accepted to abandon his position as a *franc-tireur* in joining us. [...] Other memberships will come: MARCEL ROCHAS. We have asked them to delay their request a little bit, considering the dispute that exists between this House and the House of SCHIAPARELLI. I was also hoping to bring you the membership of Miss Gabrielle CHANEL, but let us be patient. You see therefore that my presidency starts under the sign of agreement. There is one thing that I had predicted to you, it is the crisis; it has not only a domestic but also an exterior reach, and you know that I have made an explicit condition that I could speak in the name of everyone [...]."⁷⁸

Worth advocated unity in times of crisis, but was too optimistic in terms of membership. Chanel and Rochas remained outsiders, *franc-tireurs* said Worth, a word heavily connoted in the post-Great War context.

One of the most important couturiers of her time, Chanel had her own vision of copy, and it was an ambiguous one. She used to talk about copy as the highest form of flattery, a view that is coherent with her business strategy to make and sell her own fabrics. Should others copy her designs, they would have to buy her fabrics anyway. Yet, Chanel was also known to be merciless with copyists when found in her house, and she occasionally sued them (Pouillard, 2011, pp. 319–344). Chanel went further than remaining an outsider. In 1937, a small group of French province couturiers gathered to discuss the project of forming a Federation of Couture and Millinery (*Fédération de la Couture et de la Mode*) intended to become the national umbrella organization of fashion entrepreneurs. The President of the Syndicate of Couturiers from Lille, in the North department, had taken the initiative. Other syndicates that gathered province couturiers were interested in the project, as well as Chanel herself. The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* had not been conveyed to this first meeting. When President Lucien Lelong eventually heard of the project, he objected that the first place in a national federation should be given to the Paris *Chambre*, "since Paris is the uncontested creative center and that the most important syndicate activity also takes place in Paris".⁷⁹ This question was also, and more importantly, raising the problem of the access of French Province industrialists to Paris creativity. A Federation not directed by Paris would question the state of center-periphery relations in the profession, a sensitive topic in the *Chambre Syndicale* (Garnier, 1987). The issue of the opening of Paris couture to French manufacturers and department stores was once more clearly stated, and Lelong was certainly more sensitive to it than his predecessor Pierre Gerber. It would still take a few years to see the creation of Paris–Province agreements, discussed in 1944 and passed in 1947. The creation of a National Federation of Couture, that would eventually comprise the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne*, would have to wait longer, until 1973 (Grumbach, 2008, pp. 307–308).⁸⁰

⁷⁸ CSCP, CMM, May 30, 1933, 1 [Translation is mine]: "Je tiens à remercier ici, en votre nom Monsieur PATOU d'avoir bien voulu abandonner sa position de franc-tireur pour venir se joindre à nous. [...] D'autres adhésions vont venir: MARCEL ROCHAS. Nous leur avons demandé de bien vouloir retarder leur demande étant donné le petit différend qui existe entre cette Maison et la Maison SCHIAPARELLI. Je pensais aussi pouvoir vous apporter l'adhésion de Mademoiselle Gabrielle CHANEL, mais soyons patients. Vous voyez, par conséquent, que ma présidence commence sous des auspices d'entente. Il y a une chose que je vous avais prédit, c'est la crise; elle présente non seulement un aspect intérieur mais un aspect extérieur et vous savez que j'ai mis comme condition expresse que je puisse parler au nom de tout le monde [...]."

⁷⁹ CSCP, CMM, November 18, 1937, Letter from Lucien Lelong to M. Cagnet, 3. "[...] alors que Paris est le center créateur incontesté et que l'activité syndicale la plus importante se place également à Paris".

⁸⁰ <http://www.modeaparis.com/fr/la-federation/>

⁷² CSCP, GAM, June 8, 1937, 1–2.

⁷³ CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, Financial report, 1.

⁷⁴ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, 2.

⁷⁵ CSCP, GAM, June 8, 1937, 1.

⁷⁶ CSCP, GAM, July 9, 1937, Discourse of Lucien Lelong, 2.

⁷⁷ Paris Anti-Copyist Society Renews its Activities. In *Women's Wear Daily*, February 28, 1923, 20.

Another famous entrepreneur that refused to join the ranks of the *Chambre Syndicale* was Marcel Rochas, that opened as a society of limited responsibility in Paris in 1925.⁸¹ Rochas refused to be part of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* or of any other association protecting intellectual property rights. To protect his models, he adopted a very modern method: the fast-paced renewal of his collections.⁸² Rather than suing copyists Rochas tried alternative strategies. He was unconvinced of the utility of the ‘traditional’ system of design protection:

“Marcel Rochas [...] opposes the methods somewhat rigid adopted so far for the presentation of models. The identity cards and the payment of deposits by the confectioners have not proven efficient to prevent the copying of models. Rochas had proposed to present the collections of all the houses on one same day for all the buyers. This proposition had not been adopted and from now on Rochas will seek to protect his creations independently from the other houses. Every buyer will have the possibility to be shown his models without identity card nor payment of deposit, but every collection shown will be replaced a few days after by new models”.⁸³ In the press, Rochas defended the protection of the quality of haute couture, the French luxury industries, the partnership of Haute Couture and textiles, and denounced dissemination as countering national interest.

Most couturiers kept complaining that free-riders, or pirates, were a plague to the industry (*Le Fèvre, 1929; Simon, 1931; Valabrègue, 1935*). Whether this was a reality or a marketing strategy is not the focus of this article. The archives of the *Chambre Syndicale* reveal that the association’s own ranks were not immune to copying. During the interwar period, the house of Alice Choquet, member of the *Chambre Syndicale* and even elected to the Committee, was at several occasions called out to justify copying by fellow members.⁸⁴ In front of repeated accusations, the direction of Choquet denied the facts. Settlement eventually occurred by an amicable agreement between the members of the association. There was no publicity of the case outside of the *Chambre Syndicale*. Similarly, during this period of time, another member of the *Chambre Syndicale*, Monsieur Rey, was called upon for copying. He acknowledged the facts and spontaneously resigned from the *Chambre Syndicale*: “The latter had indeed, accepted to make for a client who had ordered it, copies of certain Houses represented at the *Chambre Syndicale*; these houses had the designs seized, and M. Rey acknowledged the facts.”⁸⁵ Two things emerge from the latter case: Rey did not seem to have trouble recognizing that he had made unauthorized copies, and, by his resignation, he admitted that he no longer belonged to the most prestigious creative circle, but to another category of fashion production. Such incidents reveal the ambiguities of creativity among a small network of entrepreneurs

who shared inspiration sources, and whose personnel, especially the *modélistes* who worked on collections design, constituted an informal network (*Simon, 1931, p. 80; Scranton, 1991, p. 87*).

8. Going further: the Protection Artistique des Industries Saisonnières (PAIS)

In France, the place of fashion design in the economy, added to the fact that the field had largely kept archaic structures of small, artisanal production coexisting with modernized manufacturing, put the country at the forefront of design protection (*Troy, 2002; Stewart, 2008; Pouillard, 2011*). But couturiers considered the law to be obsolete and insufficient to protect their works in front of the numerous copyhouses in Paris and abroad (*Simon, 1931, p. 46*).⁸⁶ In December 1929, during a Committee Meeting of the *Chambre Syndicale*, Armand Trouyet⁸⁷ proposed a new “defense project” (“*projet de défense*”) against piracy of haute couture designs. The Committee designed a special commission to examine Trouyet’s outline.⁸⁸ In the Spring of 1930, the Commission accepted the project, which meant that the *Chambre Syndicale* would support it in front of the French government.⁸⁹ The project, called the Fabry law, was then developed into a proposition of law examined by the *Assemblée Nationale*.⁹⁰

In the meanwhile, internal tensions marred the work of the *Chambre Syndicale*. Voices rose to complain during the election of a new President in Spring 1930, initially on the question of the technicalities of election. From 25 years, the *Chambre* had allowed members to vote by post mail, but M. Wormser, director of the House of Chéruit, declared this illegal and refused to take part in the election.⁹¹ Pierre Gerber, director of the House of Callot, was elected, but tensions persisted, this time over the election of the *Chambre Syndicale*’s Committee. The House of Madeleine Vionnet, represented by lawyer Armand Trouyet, had not been reelected. Trouyet complained in front of the General Assembly that this was the result of a campaign against him.⁹² The opposition between Pierre Gerber, who presided the *Chambre Syndicale*, and Armand Trouyet, who represented the hard line against piracy, grew to a crisis in 1930. Madeleine Vionnet, Armand Trouyet’s boss, remained the most respected and admired couturière in the profession, but Trouyet had stirred opposition. Then, lawyer Louis Dangel, who was the predecessor of Trouyet at Vionnet and had left for the house of Lanvin, admitted having campaigned against Trouyet. Beyond the personal question, this discussion among the ranks of the *Chambre Syndicale* reveals complex dynamics between the managers of fashion houses. Louis Dangel, explaining to his peers why he had campaigned against Trouyet, commented as follows:

“We all have for Mrs. MADELEINE VIONNET utter deference. We admire her talent and if she were candidate to any post, I would vote for Her. It is feeling sick at heart that I struck her name on my ballot, but acting otherwise we would have voted for M. Trouyet and we did not want to do so. In business, the Administrators, the Directors, the Collaborators bear the name of their firms. There is no DANGEL, nor TROUYET, but there is LANVIN or VIONNET. We are, let us not forget it, the collaborators and the

⁸¹ AN F12 10504, Questionnaire relatif à la classification couture-cr ation, Jan. 1952, Maison Marcel Rochas, 1.

⁸² Rochas, Renouveau dans la Haute Couture. In *International Textiles*, II, 24, December 28, 1934, 12.

⁸³ “Rochas, Renouveau dans la Haute Couture”, *International Textiles*, II, no. 24, 28/12/1934, 12. Marcel Rochas poursuivra son activit  ind pendamment de la PAIS et suivant ses propres id es. Il s’oppose aux m thodes quelque peu rigides adopt es jusqu’ici pour la pr sentation des mod les. Les cartes d’identit  et le versement de garanties par les confectionneurs ne se sont pas av r es efficaces pour emp cher la copie des mod les. Rochas avait propos  de pr senter les collections de toutes les maisons le m me jour pour tous les acheteurs. Cette proposition n’a pas  t  adopt e et Rochas cherchera dor navant   prot ger ses cr ations ind pendamment des autres maisons. Tout acheteur pourra se faire pr senter ses mod les sans carte d’identit  ni versement de garantie, mais toute collection pr sent e sera remplac e quelques jours apr s par de nouveaux mod les.

⁸⁴ CSCP, GAM, April 29, 1930, 19.

⁸⁵ CSCP, CMM, September 24, 1930, 5. “Ce dernier ayant en effet, accept  de faire pour un client qui le lui avait demand , des copies de certaines maisons repr sent es   la *Chambre Syndicale*; ces Maisons ont fait saisir les mod les en question et Monsieur Rey a reconnu ces faits.”

⁸⁶ Bertram J. Perkins, Klotz Deplores Inefficiency Of French Style Piracy Laws. In *Women’s Wear Daily*, May 22, 1929, 1/1.

⁸⁷ CSCP, GAM, March 18, 1948.

⁸⁸ CSCP, CMM, March 5, 1930, 2.

⁸⁹ CSCP, CMM, December 13, 1929, 1.

⁹⁰ Journal Officiel de la R publique fran aise, lois et d crets, table, 1930, 6.

⁹¹ CSCP, GAM, April 29, 1930, 1–2.

⁹² CSCP, GAM, April 29, 1930, 16–20.

debtors of the creators. Without them, without their collections, we cannot do anything.”⁹³

At the *Chambre Syndicale*, most houses bore the name of the designer, that was also the entrepreneur, but were represented by their administrative director. Designers were often women, and administrative directors were men, which meant that the *Chambre Syndicale*'s committee often listed female names for the couture houses, but was at several periods nearly entirely composed of men. Louis Dangel's words reveal the relations at work within the haute couture houses, and the fact that internal management had to disappear, in public, behind the aura of the designer. As it is the case today in the fashion industry, success was often ensured by a dual form of management. The designer would direct creation in the house, and give his or her name to the firm and the brand. Another person would be in charge of the administrative and financial direction of the enterprise, assuming a fundamental role while remaining in the shadow. The latter could be self-made men, but also have an education in economics, and increasingly during the interwar period, in law, which answered to the growing interest of the profession in the protection of intellectual property rights.

More importantly, what divided the *Chambre Syndicale* in the early 1930s was the question of the prospective changes to be made to the law regulating intellectual property rights in the fashion industry, in the form of the new project of law on intellectual property rights. Armand Trouyet, Madeleine Vionnet's managing director who was trained as a lawyer, had worked on the early drafts of this text of law that Maître Boucheron, an elected representative (*député*) of Paris, had finalized, and that was proposed to the French Assembly by Colonel Fabry. Facing debates on the orientation of the new law, president of the *Chambre Syndicale* Gerber had to gather the profession around him. Everyone, added Gerber in front of his peers in September 1930, agreed that copying had to be curbed, and a simple modification of the penal code, increasing the sanctions against copyists, would be a great improvement. Yet the *Chambre Syndicale* was divided between two *currents of opinion*.⁹⁴ One was the hard liners against copyright, who were led by Armand Trouyet and supported the very repressive position of the Fabry project of law, that planned prison sentence for copyists from the first condemnation (Simon, 1931, p. 169). The other was a more flexible line (Scranton, 1991, p. 36), led by Dangel, who proposed a nuanced view, that would conserve the existing law and repress copying with fines, while keeping a certain tolerancy for affairs that would be solved, whenever possible, by negotiated agreements.⁹⁵

In response to this, Dangel insisted, in front of the *Chambre Syndicale*, that his purpose was to help protecting original design, and that in so doing, he was not representing his personal views, but the work of the House of Lanvin.⁹⁶ Dangel opposed the Fabry project of law on the grounds that it was inferior to the law on author's right of 1793 (modified by the law of 1902), and the law protecting industrial property of 1806 revised in 1909, the texts of reference

used by lawyers of the haute couture houses suing counterfeiters (Simon, 1931, pp. 42–55).⁹⁷

Despite the strife on counterfeiting, all parties around the table, Vionnet and Lanvin, and even the outsiders like Chanel, sued counterfeiters, and often did it together (Pouillard, 2011). In the Committee of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne*, the vote on the Fabry project of law yielded 8 favorable votes, 5 negative, and 5 abstentions.⁹⁸ The Fabry law eventually remained blocked in the Parliament.⁹⁹ Despite the numerous efforts developed by the French haute couture associations, the French law on author's right remained unchanged until the 1950s (Brodbeck and Mongibeaux, 1990, p. 371).

At the end of the year 1930, Armand Trouyet developed a new association, the *Protection Artistique des Industries Saisonnnières* (hereafter PAIS).¹⁰⁰ This new association focused on the protection of industrial and intellectual property, and the defense against piracy. It counted a very exclusive and prestigious, but also a more diversified membership than the *Chambre Syndicale*: among its ranks were haute couture houses, silk weavers and embroiderers. The member firms were defined as *seasonal industries*, industries that underwent strong variations in demand during the year. They were mainly craftsmen related to haute couture and other high luxury niche products. Soon was the PAIS considered a competing, and possibly more prestigious, circle than the *Chambre Syndicale* (Garnier, 1987, p. 9; Deschamps, 1937, pp. 54–55). Although seasonal industries faced difficulties when they tried to stabilize their workforce, the PAIS program mainly consisted of organizing the repression of piracy. Cases could be settled amicably, out of the courts. When lawsuits occurred, the plaintiffs were entrepreneurs acting as private persons, and in addition the PAIS could associate herself to the case as a plaintiff, as well. The PAIS' constant objective was to reinforce case law. The PAIS also established black lists of buyers of pirated designs. Despite rather conflicted beginnings, the PAIS soon cooperated efficiently with the *Chambre Syndicale*. In 1933, President Jacques Worth demanded the *Chambre Syndicale*'s members to join the PAIS in order to better support the defense of the industrial and intellectual property rights of French couture. He underlined the immense efforts made by Armand Trouyet to better protect design from piracy, and added that thanks to these efforts, piracy was now diminishing.¹⁰¹

The *Chambre Syndicale* went back to business as usual, but in the mid-1930s, dissent developed again within the ranks of the *Chambre Syndicale*, the PAIS, and other professional associations in related industries. As we have seen, in 1937 the possibility of a dissolution of the CSCP came up, albeit “it would be a disaster in the present circumstances”.¹⁰² The circumstances were characterized by workers' unrest. In the years following the agreements of Matignon, Lucien Lelong became president of the *Chambre Syndicale*. He urged his peers to form a united front. The climate between workers and employers had improved, and the economy was finally showing signs of recovery from the Great Depression.

⁹³ CSCP, GAM, April 29, 1930, p. 18. “Nous avons tous pour Mme MADELEINE VIONNET la plus grande déférence. Nous admirons son talent et si elle était candidate à un poste quelconque, j'aurais voté pour Elle. C'est la mort dans l'âme que j'ai rayé son nom de mon bulletin de vote, mais en agissant autrement, nous aurions voté pour M. TROUYET et nous ne le voulions pas. Dans les affaires, les Administrateurs, les Directeurs, les Collaborateurs portent le nom de leurs firmes. Il n'y a ni DANGEL, ni TROUYET, il y a LANVIN ou VIONNET. Nous sommes, ne l'oublions pas, les collaborateurs et les obligés des créateurs. Sans eux, sans leurs collections, nous ne pouvons rien.”

⁹⁴ CSCP, CMM, Oct. 15, 1930, 2–3.

⁹⁵ CSCP, CMM, Oct. 15, 1930, 3.

⁹⁶ CSCP, CMM, Oct. 15, 1930, 3.

⁹⁷ Law of July 14, 1909 on industrial designs and models, http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jessionid=B36E87CFB5DC433BD5B7AFD39FB2183B.tpdjo13v_3?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000315081&dateTexte=19920702, accessed December 1, 2013. Dessins et modèles. – V. Contrefaçon. – Propriété littéraire et artistique. Chapitre I. Généralités et notions historiques. In *Frèrejouant du Saint and Godefroy* (1926, pp. 340–341).

⁹⁸ CSCP, CMM, April 2, 1931, 2–3.

⁹⁹ CSCP, GAM, April 29, 1930, 16. M. Armand Trouyet. *Journal Officiel de la République française*. Débats parlementaires, July 8, 1930, 3003; November 18, 1932, 3055.

¹⁰⁰ CSCP, CMM, October 1, 1947, 12.

¹⁰¹ CSCP, CMM, May 19, 1933, 4.

¹⁰² CSCP, GAM, June 8, 1937, 1. “[...] une dissolution qui s'avèrerait désastreuse dans les circonstances actuelles”.

9. Conclusions

The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* promoted cooperation, trust, and provided informed complement to the courts, which is not uncommon in the history of employers' syndicates in Europe (Lemerrier, 2009, pp. 304–334). Cartellization is an important feature of the history of enterprises during the interwar period in France. Companies worked together to agree, for example, on the price of wages, and on the selling price of their production. The *Chambre Syndicale's* members did not form a cartel (Offerlé, 2012a,b), yet observed a very coherent policy, including on the price of wages and of production. Members regularly shared information and developed common policies in regard to questions of management.

The topics that remained aside the *Chambre Syndicale* debates may also matter. The reading of the meeting minutes of the Committee and the General Assembly of the *Chambre Syndicale* does not mention questions of form and esthetics, except when designing the program of the syndicate's professional schools. Haute couture belongs to the creative industries, yet the main employers' syndicate in the field did not develop common work on esthetic content. Paris haute couture was famous for issuing recurrent *fashion revolutions*. Every few seasons, the general line of the collections mysteriously changed among all, or among many, haute couture houses. For example, in 1937, a return to longer skirts was nearly unanimously perceptible in the production Paris houses. This was not decided by the *Chambre Syndicale*. Rather, communication could happen in the most informal and impressionistic way among the *modélistes*, who were in charge of executing drawings and models for the couture head designers. Entrepreneurs did not discuss the esthetic component of their work at the *Chambre Syndicale*. One reason may be that enterprises were represented by their managers, but in the case of small houses especially, the managing director and the designer could be one same person. Only very rarely were such questions discussed, like, for example, when in the Spring 1923 a communication for the American commercial attaché to the *Chambre Syndicale* mentioned the new color range of the Textile Color Card Association of America. The colors of the year had been decided along with the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, and matched the recent discoveries in Egyptian archeology, notably of Kings' tombs with green, reds and blues inspired by Egyptian art. Although the practice of elaborating colors cards dates back from the 19th Century in France (Maillet, 2013), such information very seldom appeared in the columns of the meeting minutes of the *Chambre Syndicale*, and there is no indication that it became a routine after that.¹⁰³ The fact that the houses were represented at the *Chambre Syndicale* by their managing directors might have put strong limits on the discussion of creativity itself within the association. This however, also points to the power of the managing directors, who remained in the shadow of the designers, and did not decide on the esthetic lines, but had a strong influence on the economics of haute couture. The best way to manage fashion creativity was to create conditions for creation to flourish, but to leave discussion on esthetic content aside.

The members of the *Chambre Syndicale* did not discuss their new colors and lines together, and they intended to respect trade secrets. The archives of the *Chambre Syndicale* offer a glimpse of cases of breaches of trust, that can otherwise not be documented because they were ruled by amicable agreements within the profession, without going to the courts. During the interwar period, the concern of Paris couturiers for the protection of their intellectual property rights absorbed an important part of the activity of the

Chambre. The topic appears in the work of many commissions. For example, exhibitions abroad were progressively diminished out of fear of piracy. The question of intellectual property rights doubles, in the case of haute couture, with a marketing argument, since the protection of designs and brands becomes a very effective tool to advertise the exclusivity and authenticity of the trade. During the interwar period, the *Chambre Syndicale* mostly discussed the protection of intellectual property rights on design. The archives also show cases pertaining to the protection of the brand, but they were then less common. The stress on the protection of brands would incrementally develop during the postwar period (Pouillard, 2013, pp. 815–835).

The concern for intellectual property rights places fashion front and center in the creative industries. Research in the archives of the oldest fashion professionals syndicate show how creativity and business could work together. The *Chambre Syndicale* protected creativity by easing the relations between managers and workers, or in the worst cases finding ways out of conflicts, and protecting trade secrets. On working together, Lucien Lelong advocated “a discipline of free consent” (*une discipline librement consentie*).¹⁰⁴ The exact same phrase had been advocated a bit earlier in the umbrella Association générale et Union des Tissus.¹⁰⁵ The most active and respected presidents of the *Chambre Syndicale* during the interwar period, Jacques Worth and Lucien Lelong, constantly advocated the pursuit of their efforts for the common good of haute couture (Le Bot, 2013, pp. 109–10). The links between business and politics remained, during the interwar period, either personal to couturiers, or linked to occasional lobbying practices. Haute couture was considered a part of the French cultural patrimony, which explains that it was possible to obtain a lowering of the luxury tax, for example.

The *Chambre Syndicale* went further and deeper than many other associations in implementing practices of collective action (Offerlé, 2012a, p. 87). Cooperation became extremely strong during the interwar period, to the extent that some aspects of the management of the member firms took place within the *Chambre Syndicale*. Members agreed on salaries and work guidelines. The *Chambre Syndicale* provided education and elements of social security, healthcare and childcare for example, in the context of an incomplete social system (Stewart, 1989; Omnès, 1997; Pedersen, 1995). By refusing to sell to French manufacturers and department stores, the *grands couturiers* are an exceptional case in the selection of clients and the implementation of politics of prestige. Were the couturiers, like Lelong defined the profession in the intervention quoted in introduction of this paper, middle class people? Most may have defined themselves as entrepreneurs, but they worked for the happy few. The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne* is probably one of the best examples of gatekeeping exercised by a professional association. Haute couture has raised the bar so high that the *Chambre Syndicale* is today reserved to a small elite of barely over a dozen couturiers. The *Chambre Syndicale* applying more or less strictly barriers to membership before Haute Couture earned a legal definition in 1943 (Grumbach, 2008, p. 434). During the post-war period, while haute couture was losing an ever more important client base, gatekeeping by the *Chambre* became stricter, as well.

¹⁰⁴ CSCP, GAM, March 15, 1939, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Procès-verbaux. Association générale et union syndicale des tissus, matières textiles, habillement, ameublement. In *Bulletin de l'Union Syndicale des Tissus, matières textiles, habillement, ameublement*, 457, June 1937, 193.

¹⁰⁶ Source of the table: *Bulletin de la Chambre de Commerce de Paris*, 1919–1939.

¹⁰³ CSCP, GAM, April 4 and 6 1923, 1 p. [in Committee Meeting Minutes ledger].

Annex 1. List of the Presidents of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne.¹⁰⁶

1917–1919: Jeanne Paquin
 1920–1927: Louis Clément
 1927–1930: Jacques Worth [steps down in 1930 due to ill health]
 1930–1933: Pierre Gerber
 1933–1935: Jacques Worth
 1935–1937: Pierre Gerber
 1937–1945: Lucien Lelong

Annex 2. List of the Commissions of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture parisienne in 1929.¹⁰⁷

“Salaires et secours: Beer, Donguy, Jenny, Mad. Vionnet, Rey, Tambuté, Bernard & Cie, Agnès.

Apprentissage: Agnès, Aïne, Gros, Dupouy, Sirie, Blanche Lebouvier.

Bal et Fêtes: Brialix, Chéruit, Lanvin, Poiret, Prémet, Lucien Lelong.”

[Examen de la loi sur] La Copie: MM. Gerber (Maison Callot), Trouyet (Maison Mad. Vionnet), Wormser (Maison Chéruit), Courtot (Maison Martial & Armand), Labusquière (Maison Lanvin), Tambuté.

[Organization de la] Fête de l'Elégance: M. Gerber (Maison Callot), M. Trouyet (Maison Mad. Vionnet), M. Wormser (Maison Chéruit), M. Courtot (Maison Martial & Armand), M. Labusquière (Maison Lanvin).”

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- Journal officiel de la République française, 1926, 1929, 1937, 1938.*
- New York Times, 1931.*
- Paris-Soir, 1931.*
- La semaine à Paris, 1924.*
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