

**Theories of (management?) fashion:  
The contributions of Veblen, Simmel, Blumer, and Bourdieu**

Charles-Clemens Ruling

HEC, Universite de Geneve,  
and Department of Organization and Industrial Sociology,  
Copenhagen Business School

## **ABSTRACT**

Recently, fashion phenomena in the field of management have received growing attention by scholars and management practitioners alike. Much of the existing management fashion literature however operates without providing a clear conceptual and theoretical foundation. It tends to build on common-sense notions of fashion and overlooks the significant contributions in the sociological tradition of fashion theorizing. This paper aims at making a contribution to closing the 'theory gap' in the discussion of management fashion by presenting four of the major contributions to the sociological tradition of fashion theorizing. First, I briefly outline the fashion writings of Veblen, Blumer, Simmel, and Bourdieu. I then try to integrate the different theoretical positions in a discussion of fashion's double role for social change as well as for the reproduction of social structures. In the third section, I try to outline, which elements from the sociological fashion theories outlined in this paper should be included in the recent discussion of management fashion.

## **FASHION IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION**

From the turn of the century, sociologists have emphasized fashion as a specific type of social process. Thorstein Veblen in 1899 and Georg Simmel in 1904 were among the first to relate fashion to the social position of fashion actors and to social differentiation and integration -- arguments that remain among the most prominent explanations of fashion until today. Other explanations, like the one developed by Blumer (1968; 1969), follow a more economic logic in explaining fashion supply and the processes of collective selection among fashion buyers, which finally lead to the emergence of fashion, or tend to focus on the accumulation of cultural capital through the definition and recognition of the fashionable, like the analysis of the fashion field developed by Bourdieu (1984).

The notion of 'fashion' is not only semantically ambiguous, but can also be associated with a wide range of sociological issues. Some of these theoretical acquaintances are

indicated by Schultheis (1988): Fashion acts as a sign, and activates forces of differentiation in terms of taste, social identity, and cultural capital. As such, it is used to create identity and differentiation. Fashion has normative power in setting standards and creating uniformity. It serves the accumulation of symbolic capital through conspicuous consumption, and it needs continuous innovation in order to keep up its distinctive capacity. Fashion is related to capitalism and the rise of mass production. The relation of fashion and mass production is dialectic: Mass production allowed fashion to spread throughout society and to transcend class barriers, but on the other hand also depends on fashion as a motor for keeping up demand. Finally, fashion setting often appears to be related to elite groups, whereas on the other hand, fashion demand often emerges from groups whose position within society is characterized by a lack or loss of stability.

### **Thorstein Veblen: Conspicuous consumption and the fashion of the leisure class**

The idea of fashion as a result of conspicuous consumption goes back to Thorstein Veblen and his *Theory of the leisure class*, first published in 1899. In this study, Veblen criticizes the lifestyle of the upper classes and shows that ostentatious consumption and waste have become symbols for wealth and social status. He depicts a society based solely on economic principles, private property and individualism, and in which conspicuous leisure and consumption mark an individual's adherence to a new social class of idle owners of capital who appropriate income without having to work themselves (Dehier, 1992). For Veblen, instincts are the driving forces for human actions and attitudes (Pribram, 1992: 666). In *Theory of the leisure class*, Veblen portrays an upper class who struggles for social distinction *within*, and whose lifestyle is imitated by the lower classes. For Veblen, fashion therefore develops on two levels: It emerges through innovation within the upper classes who continually create new forms of apparel, ornament, and dress ever more sophisticated and expensive in order to reaffirm the place they occupy within their own social space. Fashion spreads through imitation as the lower classes start imitating the upper classes' behavior.

Veblen holds three principles responsible for the emergence and the dynamic of fashion (Veblen, 1992: 121-22): The first principle states that members of the leisure class

construct their own social status compared to rival members of the same class through 'conspicuous waste'. In addition, they differentiate themselves from the working classes through the 'principle of conspicuous leisure', and finally act in accordance with "a series of imperatives to change one's garments as soon as they are no longer 'up to date'" (Barnard, 1996: 108).

### **Georg Simmel: Distinction, integration, and fashion as a social form**

In 1904 and 1905, a few years after Veblen published his *Theory of the leisure class*, Simmel outlines a theory in which he also relates fashion to class structure. Simmel does not critique the leisure class, which, in the eyes of Veblen, wasted its excessive income in conspicuous leisure; he prefers to explain fashion through the notions of social distinction and integration, which, according to Simmel, represent two fundamental motives for individual action:

The whole history of society is reflected in the conflict, the compromise, the reconciliations, [...] that appear between adaptation to our social group and individual elevation from it. (Simmel, 1997: 187)

Fashion represents a central social process insofar as it combines social distinction and adherence. The dynamic aspect of fashion emerges from a process in which elite groups (typically, but not necessarily, social classes) are imitated and subsequently create new fashions in order to keep up demarcation.

Fashion is the imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels, it furnishes a general condition that resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation, change and individual contrast. It accomplishes the latter, on the one hand, by the change in contents -- which gives to the fashions of today an individual stamp compared with those of yesterday and of tomorrow -- and even more energetically, on the other hand, by the fact that fashions are always class fashions, by the fact that that the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter begin to appropriate them. (Simmel, 1997: 188-189)

The link between fashion dynamics and class differentiation is probably the most prominent aspect in Simmel's theory of fashion. Fashion emerges as higher classes choose distinctive signs in order to differentiate themselves. As lower classes tend to imitate higher ones, the members of the higher classes need to recreate class segmentation through a new differentiation, etc. Copying and new demarcation efforts between social classes are the driving forces in the fashion process.

Even though social integration and differentiation appear to be universal features of human society, the multitude of expressions fashion takes today is related to modernity. Whereas in a traditional, stable society, social differences can only be displayed in a limited number of ways, modern society is characterized by a multiplication of opportunities for emphasizing differences (Simmel, 1957: 346).

Simmel describes fashion as the prototype of what he calls a "social form", in other words, a stable structure that emerges from the plurality of social facts. Even though its contents may change, the structure itself remains the same. It is not the content of any particular fashion that is important, but the fact that something is recognized as being fashionable. A particular fashion therefore does not need rational justification.

For Simmel, being transitory and thus conveying a "stronger feeling of the present" (1957: 547) is one of the main characteristics of a particular fashion. However, Simmel limits the term 'fashion' to items that appear to be vanishing and only of temporary nature:

In the practice of life anything else similarly new and suddenly disseminated is not called fashion, when we are convinced of its continuance and its material justification. (1957: 547-548)

Fashion is paradoxical in nature as it provides at the same time individual dissociation and group cohesion. These two functions are fundamental to fashion. For Simmel, there is no fashion if one of the two conditions is not satisfied. On the imitation side, fashion provides depersonalization. An individual acting in a fashionable way does not only act as an individual but his or her acts function as representations of a social class and its distinctive features. On the other hand, differentiation is provided through changing

contents over time as well as through the constant reproduction and provision of class differentiation (Simmel, 1957: 543). As a result, fashion creates a state which Simmel calls "relative individualization" (1957: 550), and in which the individual differentiates itself through adoption of the standards of a distinctive group.

### **Herbert Blumer: Fashion as a process of collective selection**

More than sixty years after the first publication of Simmel's theory of fashion, Herbert Blumer went a step further in proposing a general theory of fashion. Blumer supports Simmel's idea of fashion as a social form, but he modifies the social role of the elite. He recognizes fashion as a social phenomenon in its own right that exists to some extent independently from deliberate fashion setting activities. In this perspective, the role of the elite or avant-garde becomes more complex. For Blumer, the elite is not determined outside the fashion process, but it becomes an elite because its members are the first to sense the direction in which fashion will develop.

For Blumer, fashion has become one of the central mechanisms for creating order in modern society, and in this sense he criticizes those authors who either restrict fashion to adornment or present it as socially inconsequential, aberrant or irrational. As has been pointed out above, Blumer defines fashion as a "continuing pattern of change in which certain social forms enjoy temporary acceptance and respectability only to be replaced by others more abreast of the times" (Blumer, 1968: 341-342). Fashion does not operate on a base of rationality, i.e. it can, but it does not need to, recur to utility or superior merit for receiving social approbation. It emerges through a social selection process that mirrors the general direction and tendencies of collective taste.

With regard to Simmel, Blumer (1969) criticizes the traditional link of fashion to class structure. He acknowledges Simmel's theory because it highlights the fact that fashion requires a certain type of society with a focus on prestige and enabling the essence of fashion, i.e. a process change. On the other hand, he states that relating fashion to class struggle "does not fit the operation of fashion in our contemporary epoch with its many diverse fields and its emphasis on modernity" (Blumer, 1969: 278).

Blumer discusses four features of the fashion mechanism. First, fashion is marked by its *historical continuity* or, as Blumer puts it, "new fashions are related to, and grow out of, their immediate predecessors" (1969: 283). Out of this historical sequence of fashion emerges a line of continuity which Blumer calls a "fashion trend" (1969: 283). Of special interest to the researcher are the terminal points of fashion trends as they typically mark a period of experimentation in various directions of potential fashion development (Blumer, 1969: 283). Thirdly, fashion is related with *modernity*, it always reflects the "spirit of the times" (Blumer, 1969: 283).

The most distinctive, but also the most vague element of Blumer's theory of fashion is *collective taste*. Collective taste functions as a selector for the acceptance or rejection of ideas, and as a formative agent for innovation. Blumer sees taste as a product of experience. Collective taste therefore develops among "people thrown into areas of common interaction and having similar runs of experience" (Blumer, 1969:283). Fashion depends on and reproduces collective taste.

Blumer's general theory of fashion builds on the idea of a collective selection process. This process involves a fashion elite as well as potential fashion buyers, innovators, leaders, followers and participants. It is governed by "changes in taste and sensitivity" (1969: 282). Through "intense immersion" (1969: 279), shared experience and a common sense of their field, fashion *buyers* develop a common taste and a shared understanding of the directions in which fashion is heading. The fashion *elite* is seeking to gain adoption of its creations and is eager to "develop an intimate familiarity with the most recent expressions of modernity" (Blumer, 1969: 279). Blumer inverts Simmel's argument of a fashion elite which creates fashion in order to differentiate itself:

It is not the elite which makes the design fashionable but, instead, it is the suitability or potential fashionableness of the design which allows the prestige of the elite to be attached to it. The design has to correspond to the direction of incipient taste of the fashion consuming public. The prestige of the elite affects but does not control the direction of this incipient taste. We have here a case of fashion mechanism transcending and embracing the prestige of the elite group rather than stemming from that prestige. [...]The efforts of an elite class to set itself apart in appearance takes [sic!] place inside the movement of fashion instead of being its cause. (1969: 280-281)

Theorizing about fashion is almost naturally related to accounting for the role and function of social elites. Through inclusion and exclusion it both relies on elite groups which create fashion in their effort to keep up differentiation -- this is the way Simmel turns the case --, and in the same moment produces, respectively reproduces the existing elites through mimetic behavior -- this is the Blumer side of the argument.

Simmel and Blumer look at elite production and reproduction from two different points of view. For Simmel, the elite and the corresponding class differentiation is pre-existing while in Blumer's theory the elite not predetermined but constituted through the fashion process itself. Nevertheless, their approaches appear to be complementary because they focus on different aspects of the elite/fashion relation. From a point of view that focuses on elite reproduction, the differentiation provided by fashion appears as an important mechanism for reproduction. From a theoretical point of view which looks at fashion as an ongoing, institutionally embedded process, it becomes clear that fashion, in a situation in which a number of fashion institutions (typically representing the dominant elites' interests) already exist, tends to create its own logic of the development in which some groups -- typically those who already occupy elite positions -- are (re-)attributed an elite status because they are the first to "sense" the direction in which modernity tends to develop.

From a sociological point of view of course, the "sensing" capacity of the "new" fashion elite cannot be understood as an outcome of individual traits of character, genius, etc. alone. It rather mirrors the more subtle side of social reproduction in which the individual traits that enable the elite-to-be to access its role are conveyed through a number of institutions which are related to specific conditions of social class or other structuring elements in the social space.

### **Pierre Bourdieu: Struggle for dominance in the fashion field**

In the terms of Pierre Bourdieu, fashion can be interpreted as a code that allows for social distinction and activates forces of differentiation in terms of taste, social identity, and cultural capital. In this sense, Finkelstein (1998) notes that "fashion is an

organisation of knowledge based on restricted access to goods and services" (1998: 80), and that the ability to recognize the fashionable reflects an actor's cultural capital.

In order to clarify the *enjeux*, i.e. what is at stake<sup>1</sup>, in intellectual production, Bourdieu (1984) provides an analysis of the field of *haute couture*, which he considers structurally equivalent to the field of cultural production in general. For Bourdieu, the fashion field can be characterized by the struggle between dominating and dominated actors, and new entrants. The struggle for domination functions as the motor of the field:

La lutte permanente à l'intérieur du champ est le moteur du champ. [...] Ceux qui luttent pour la domination font que le champ se transforme, qu'il se restructure constamment. (Bourdieu, 1984: 200)

The structures of the field, the rules of the game, remain stable, because all actors engage to accept and endorse the fashion game and its rules. The *enjeu* in the struggle for power in a given field is the symbolic power to legitimate norms, in the case of the fashion field the norms that determine the realm of the aesthetic.

La condition de l'entrée dans le champ, c'est la reconnaissance de l'enjeu et du même coup la reconnaissance des limites à ne pas dépasser sous peine d'être exclu du jeu. Il s'ensuit que de la lutte interne ne peuvent sortir que des révolutions partielles, capables de détruire la hiérarchie mais non le jeu lui-même. (Bourdieu, 1984: 199)

The ultimate force for the functioning of the fashion field is the faith of all actors in the creations of the field. With reference to Mauss' writing on magic, the functioning of the fetish, and the role of *croyance collective* (see also Bourdieu & Delsaut, 1975), Bourdieu states the necessity of a silent and implicit collusion of all actors in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> In the remainder of this study, I will keep the French term *enjeu* in stead of the English *stake* because it reminds us of Bourdieu's idea of the ongoing struggle in a given field as a game, *jeu*, respecting a set of agreed-on rules which are constantly (and often unconsciously) reaffirmed by the actors.

The following table summarizes the main elements of the theoretical contributions outlined above:

	<i>View of fashion</i>	<i>Explanation of dynamics</i>	<i>Related ideas</i>
T. Veblen (1899)	Conspicuous consumption in order to exhibit wealth and social status	Struggle for status within the upper class, subsequent imitation through lower classes ('trickle-down')	Fashion not only signals, but constructs and reproduces social status
G. Simmel (1904)	Social distinction and integration as fundamental motives for individual action; social form (=stable structure emerging from plurality of social facts)	Imitation of social elites who in turn create new fashions in order to keep up class distinction	Fashion reproduces/stabilizes class structures; its mechanisms operate independently from any particular fashion content
H. Blumer (1969)	Particular social process, likely to occur under (1) high rates of change; (2) openness of a field to recurrent presentation of new models; (3) lack of commonly accepted criteria for the evaluation of alternative models	Process of collective selection in which a fashion elite tries to match the common taste which has emerged through "intense immersion" among the fashion actors in a particular field	Fashion can occur in any field; it depends on the fashion suppliers' attempts to obtain acceptance for their models; the fashion elite is created through the fashion process
P. Bourdieu (1984)	Fashion functions as code allowing for social distinction/differentiation; ability to determine the fashionable reflects an actor's cultural capital	Struggle between dominating and dominated actors, and new entrants	Rules of the game ('enjeux') remain stable, 'hidden collusion' among the actors

**Table 1: Summary of fashion theories**

## **FASHION, SOCIAL CHANGE AND STABILITY**

The occurrence of fashion is related to change. On one hand, fashion acts as an indicator for changes in the economic structure, in norms and values, and in the static of existing social stratification. It is in this sense that Bell (1992) speaks of fashion as a social mirror, and Blumer (1969) of fashion reflecting the 'spirit of the times'. On the other hand, fashion itself acts as a motor for change. In directing consumption and unfolding

role models, fashion contributes to forging the social situation in which individual actors orient their choices for consumption, imitation or objection. Before reaching a particular point in time, fashion is self-reinforcing; its simple existence reinforces adoption. More difficult to explain, however, is why after this point, fashion fades out, and a fashionable item becomes de-moded, or, in Simmel's words, "gradually goes to its doom" (Simmel, 1957: 547). The study of fashion should therefore also strive for explaining when and why the turning point occurs, and what differentiates the study of fashion from the traditions in the study of innovation diffusion (e.g. Rogers, 1983).

Simmel's (1957) view of fashion as a social form points to a second characteristic of fashion, which is seemingly opposed to the notion of change. It is the idea that fashion reproduces and stabilizes the existing social order. In this perspective, fashion acts as a medium or platform for a type of change under elite control that eventually affirms and reproduces the existing social structure. This idea also appears in Bourdieu's (1984) idea of various actors whose ongoing struggle for domination, albeit dependent on an overall respect of an existing set of 'rules of the game', constantly reaffirms the order of the field as a whole.

On an individual level, fashion not only acts as an external constraint to choice. Its dynamics also depend on micro level adoption, reproduction, and abandon. Whereas the occurrence of fashion on the macro level is relatively easy to observe (at least in an ex-post perspective), micro level processes of fashion are closely related to other social-psychological mechanisms. The individual actor's dependence of and contribution to fashion on a macro level is in many cases not evident for the actors themselves.

The micro-level explanation of fashion functions typically starts with the individual's will to distinguish itself, a will which is shared by others and thus leads to copying, imitation, and the emergence of fashion as a "phénomène de contagion imitative" (Descamps, 1979: 28). Another function, which goes beyond assuming a universal human need of distinction appears when we, again, relate fashion to modernity. In his discussion of Simmel and the role of fashion in a modern, urban world, Finkelstein (1998), for example, argues that

fashion serves to protect individuals from a sense of being ground-down, levelled out and overwhelmed by the overarching socio-technological mechanism that is the metropolis. (Finkelstein, 1998: 107)

According to this position, fashion can be seen as a protection mechanism that gives an individual a sense of membership in a particular group and thus provides an orientation in a society that has lost the markers and attributes which had provided orientation in traditional society. This function is underlined through the capacity of fashion to differentiate, i.e. to draw lines of distinction between the members of different fashion communities.

As I have argued above, Blumer (1969) sees fashion as the outcome of a process of collective selection among fashion alternatives that are presented by an elite of fashion creators. According to Blumer, this type of collective selection among a variety of alternatives typically emerges in situations in which traditional criteria for evaluation have become obsolescent, and in which fashion as a "process in which collective judgement of what is proper and correct" (Blumer, 1968: 342) serves to set new, albeit temporary, guidelines.

[Fashion] is analogous to a "universe of discourse". [...] it provides a basis for a common approach to the world and for handling and digesting the experiences the world yields. (Blumer, 1968: 344)

Another important aspect is related to this argument: In giving an individual the sense of, and the concrete fashion item as a means for social differentiation, and together with the idea of free choice propagated by the dominant ideology of economic liberalism, fashion provides an individual with a fiction of manageability and the possibility to create its 'own' expression of personality. The paradox of fashion as a collective phenomenon which at the same time tends to emphasize individuality has been described by Simmel (1957) who acquaints the character of the fashion follower with "lack of personal freedom" (1957: 541), "envy" and "dependence" (1957: 548), but also states that

fashion furnishes an ideal field for individuals with dependent natures, whose self-consciousness, however, requires a certain amount of prominence, attention, and singularity. Fashion raises even the unimportant individual by making him

the representative of a class, the embodiment of a joint spirit. (Simmel, 1957: 548)

The heterogeneous nature of fashion on the micro level stems from the fact that fashion not only shields the individual from an overall loss of orientation, but also makes the individual different from others, and exposes it as the representative of a distinct elite or protest group. It is in the sense of this creation of individuality through adherence to a fashion group that Simmel speaks of "relative individualization" (1957: 550).

Moreover, fashion appears to be endowed with the paradoxical virtue of duration. As Simmel (1957) argues,

in contrast to [the] characteristic [of feverish change, CR], however, fashion possesses this peculiar quality, that every individual type to a certain extent makes its appearance as though it intended to live forever. [...] A peculiar psychological process seems to be at work here in addition to the mere bias of the moment. Some fashion always exists and fashion *per se* is indeed immortal, which fact seems to affect in some manner or other each of its manifestations, although the very nature of each individual fashion stamps it as being transitory. The fact that change itself does not change, in this instance endows each of the objects which it affects with a psychological appearance of duration. (Simmel, 1957: 556-557)

Duration as an explicit or implicit attribute of fashion functions seems to be paradox when we consider the fact that fashion is commonly associated with the futile, the ephemeral, and the superficial. The necessity of endowing fashion with the fiction of duration, however, becomes clear when we consider the role of fashion as an agent for social distinction and as a basis for collectively shared evaluation. As long as society itself is thought of in terms of duration, any system for ordering society has to be endowed with endurance. It is only within a thoroughly postmodern society, in other words, when the notion of society itself has lost all of its 'modern' sense, and fashion in consequence its signification for creating social orientation through distinction and integration, that the fashionable can be fully acquainted with the playful and the arbitrary. In such a world, however, fashion as a collective phenomenon could only occur as an outcome of a genuine human inclination towards imitation, and asking for any particular (social) function of fashion would have lost all of its sense.

## **SOCIOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS IN THE STUDY OF FASHION PHENOMENA IN MANAGEMENT**

Different explanations are put forward in the emerging literature on fashion phenomena in management. For Abrahamson (1991; 1996), fashion dynamics result from imitation (Abrahamson, 1991), they mirror changing norms of rationality and progress as well as external influences on fashion demand. Alvarez (1998) sees the bases for fashion in the interplay of social actors, legitimization and adequate organizations, as does Huczynski who speaks of a "conscious and unconscious collusion between managers as consumers of management ideas and consultants of suppliers of such ideas" (1993: 443). Kieser (1996) adopts the perspective of an arena and argues that the present actors try to attract an ever-wider public by creating new fashions.

The social and organizational functions of management fashion are generally related to the reduction of uncertainty, ambiguity and imperfection (Alvarez & Mazza, 1997). Paradoxically, this reduction of ambiguity is often achieved through the use of concepts that are of high linguistic ambiguity. In addition, fashion provides managers with an image of innovativeness and helps to build up power (Kieser, 1996).

Most authors contributing to the discussion of fashion phenomena in management (implicitly) use some of the concepts and notions of the sociological fashion theories outlined above. The theoretical mechanisms described in the literature reviewed here cover mechanisms of mimetic behavior in a situation of insecurity, struggle for power within the given (sub-)field, and a dependence on shifting overall norms of rationality and progress which reign the management field. In most cases, however, sociological fashion theory is more alluded to than used in a systematic way. In order to provide a clearer view of how the analysis of fashion phenomena in management could be informed by sociological fashion theory, I will use the next paragraphs to recapitulate some of the main arguments that could be derived from the four authors outlined above.

Veblen's approach to fashion yields a major lines of thought that appears of interest for the discussion of fashion phenomena in the management field: For Veblen, fashion not only signals but also constructs and reproduces the social and economic status of its

adopter. It is clear that the ostentatious consumption which is necessary to affirm and reaffirm one's social status depends on the availability of surplus economic resources and wealth as well as on the possibility of social mobility at least for those who can afford to participate in the principles of conspicuous waste, leisure, and innovation.

Likewise, three elements from Simmel's theory of fashion appear to be important for the management fashion debate today. The first is related to fashion as social form. It implies that the study of any particular fashion or actor in the fashion process should be directed at understanding the general dynamics that operate in the fashion process. If Simmel's proposition is true, we should be able to find a limited number of patterns of fashion irrespective of its particular content. The second idea concerns the double function of fashion in providing distinction and conformity. By looking at individual actors' strategies, we should try to find evidence for differentiation efforts as well as for identification and claiming attachment to specific groups. The third issue, which follows from the capacity of fashion for social distinction, concerns the link of fashion and class structure. Here, we should be able to find evidence for the reproduction of class distinction through the fashion discourse. Simmel accentuates the importance of an elite status that is conferred through adherence to a given fashion. Here, an analysis following a class perspective and paying attention to individual and collective actors' attempts to maintain class boundaries appears to be interesting.

Blumer's fashion theory suggests three issues of special interest to the study of management fashion. The first concerns the embeddedness of fashion in the development of collective taste and modernity. Even though there is no necessary direction and progress in the development of fashion itself, it is related to the collective perception of overall development in a given field. Fashion cannot be reduced to deliberate fashion-setting activities; it is also determined by the overall evolution of the field. In this sense, we should be able to find evidence that a given management fashion reflects shared perceptions of the general development of the management field. The second issue in Blumer's theory of fashion interesting for studying management fashion concerns the constitution and social role of the fashion elite, which in Blumer's model acquires its elite status via the fashion process. Here, Blumer's approach suggests the question, who is considered elite in a given field of management, and how does the

attribute of an elite status in a given field actually function. Thirdly, Blumer relates the fashion elite's recurrent presentation of fashion alternatives in an ongoing collective selection process to the sphere of economic interest. Each fashion supplier strives for maximizing adoption of his own fashion proposition, and therefore tries to capture the overall development of taste, style and other attributes characterizing the field in which the collective selection process occurs better than his competitors.

Finally, Bourdieu's view of the fashion field implies three important considerations for the study of management fashion. Firstly, the idea that a field is characterized by a struggle for influence and the power to set the standards of what is 'aesthetic' and what is not, together with the question what the corresponding *enjeu* would be in the management field. A second aspect, which seems important, concerns the (hidden) collusion of the actors present in the field. Even though they struggle for influence, they respect and thus reproduce the rules of the game itself. Thirdly, magic and fetishized terms, objects, etc. play an important role in the adherence to fashion. In our context, it might be interesting to see what the equivalent of the *griffe* and other elements conveying a notion of the sacred might be.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have outlined four major theoretical approaches to understanding and explaining fashion and its double role of providing change and stability within a given social field. I have tried to argue that many contributions to the emerging discussion of fashion phenomena in management fail to acknowledge explanations that have been developed in relation to the more traditional areas of fashion research. In order to illustrate the benefit the management fashion literature could derive from more closely considering the traditional fashion theories, I have finally presented a number of theoretical applications and research orientations.

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