

Representing markets: The concertation of fashion trends by French and Italian fabric companies

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Abstract

In this paper, we use ethnographic methods to describe and interpret the activities of a network of fabric companies that affirm their style innovations as “the fashion” prevailing at a given moment. Their competitive advantage lies in a collective action, mediated and coordinated by trade associations, aiming to represent future trends in fashion. These companies define their collective action as *concertation*: a term originally employed in political jargon to refer to the orchestrated activities of different social parts and political parties towards a common end. Concertation is linked to the activities of a number of international trade fairs which establish a common ground for co-operation and provide visibility to the innovation of the companies that belong to this value-adding network, and legitimate them as the benchmark to which all other companies in the industry will adapt to. In particular, we focus on *Première Vision*, Paris, the leading trade fair in the fabric industry.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the concertation mechanism as it has unfolded over the last thirty years. In doing so, we intend to contribute to the scholarly conversation on market forms and practices started by Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) seminal contribution. We agree with Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004) on the need for seriously consider the role of representation in the making of markets, and to this aim we use the case of *Première Vision* to illustrate the arbitrary nature of the link between the representation and its referent or, to employ semioticians' terminology, the signifier and the signified. Our argument goes beyond the idea that market actors may represent markets in ways that are beneficial to them. We rather emphasize, together with postmodern theorists such as Guy Debord (1984), Umberto Eco (1986) and Jean Baudrillard (1994), the supremacy of representations over the phenomena they stand for.

Our paper extends Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) theoretical framework on market forms and practices by: (i) exposing the limits of modernist views on representation and suggesting that industrial marketers and purchasers may be similar to consumers in their reliance on simulations and hyperreality; (ii) addressing the role of marketers as self-interested theorists in the shaping of markets and discussing the accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1989) as a strategy for marketers to back their representational practices. Our paper also contributes to the literature on trade fairs, by reconceptualizing them as hyperreal representations of their underlying markets, and by urging scholars to carry out research to illuminate not only exhibitors' value appropriation strategies, but also trade fair organizers' value generation strategies.

Keywords: Concertation; market forms; market practices; trade fairs; symbolic capital.

“[i]t all seems very wasteful and almost meaningless, this discarding of old clothes in order to conform to the whim of half a dozen French designers, but the matter is not quite so simple as that. The designers are not their own masters. They can only introduce an innovation if it happens to be in accordance with the spirit of the age” (Laver 1933: p. 133).

“The mills have surpassed the designers. The weavers are so advanced that they give ideas to the designers. The pupils have become more astute than their teachers” (Angelo Uslenghi, fashion trends expert)

Introduction

Adam Smith’s concept of the “invisible hand” profoundly influenced the way we think about markets. The father of economics employed the expression to refer to the fact that individuals striving to maximize their private interests end up supporting the public interest, even if they do not intend to, or are not even aware of doing so. According to Smith, the term “invisible hand” was not to be intended as a metaphor: being a profoundly religious man, he believed in a benevolent God who created human beings with a nature that guided them to happiness (Joyce 2001). Through semantic migration, the term is nowadays employed in a more general sense, to refer to processes whose outcomes are produced in a decentralized way, with no explicit agreements between actors, and which at the same time are not intentional, so that actors’ aims are neither coordinated nor identical with the actual outcomes (Joyce 2001).

This paper is about one process that *seems* to affirm itself thanks to an invisible hand that coordinates countless agents: the fashion cycle. Fashion, in the past, used to be a highly centralized industry where new trends were diffused from a single location, Paris, where the collections proposed by a small network of *couturier* became the fashion trends that everybody in the world imitated. Nowadays, however, this process has become decentralized: fashion originates from many sources, is profoundly influenced by popular culture and celebrities, and by consumers themselves who, in many cases, inspire designers in the development of their collections (Crane 1999; Polhemus 1994). Yet, in spite of such fragmentation, new styles are consistently affirmed season after season (Davis 1994), in ways that have a striking resemblance to the standard affirmation processes in technological innovation (Cappetta, Cillo & Ponti forthcoming; Golfetto 2000, 2004). To people in the industry, the fact that individual companies working separately tend to produce similar innovations is taken for granted, is natural, since the ideas inspiring them are “in the air”¹. Not surprising, early fashion theorists (Blumer 1969; Laver 1933), even though not explicitly referring to an invisible hand, suggested that fashion trends affirmed themselves in a spontaneous and uncoordinated way, in accordance to the *Zeitgeist*, i.e., the spirit of the age prevailing at a given moment. But from a more careful analysis, what seems natural, taken for given is instead the result of intentional, coordinated efforts by actors that, through collective, focused actions, are able to shape the fashion industry and its trajectories of innovation.

In this paper, we use ethnographic methods to describe and interpret the activities of a network of companies that, through efforts and investments sustained over a long period of time, are able to affirm their style innovations as “the fashion” prevailing at a given moment. To some readers, it may be surprising to discover that such actors are *not* designers or fashion companies: our paper deals with fabric producers, i.e. the upstream suppliers that provide fashion companies with innovative, “stylish” fabrics twice a year. In the fashion pipeline, the fabric sector is a central locus of innovation, and the companies that we analyzed collectively developed the capability to define fashion trends and, hence, provide significant inputs to the fashion companies and designers that are commonly believed to drive the process. These fabric companies are mostly French and Italian market leaders, which dominate the fabric for fine fashion industry worldwide despite the greater-than-ever price competition from East Asian producers. Their competitive advantage, we argue, lies in their collective action, mediated and coordinated by trade associations, aiming to represent future trends in fashion. Through a skilful representation of fashion trends, these marketers symbolically position themselves as trend-

¹ Here and elsewhere, emic expressions and terms employed by our informants are put between quotation marks. See the Methods section for more details.

setters, and are as a consequence able to enjoy a premium price over competitors that are considered imitators. The term employed by these companies to define their collective action is *concertation*: a term originally employed in political jargon to refer to the orchestrated activities of different social parts and political parties towards a common end. Concertation is linked to the activities of a number of international trade fairs which establish a common ground for co-operation and provide visibility to the innovations of the companies that belong to their value-adding network, and legitimate such innovations as the benchmark to which all other companies in the industry will adapt to. In particular, we focus on the network of companies centered on the activity of *Première Vision*, Paris, the leading trade fair in the fabric industry targeting the fashion-apparel industry.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the concertation mechanism as it has unfolded over the last thirty years. In doing so, we intend to contribute to the scholarly conversation on market forms and practices started by Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) seminal contribution. We agree with Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004) on the need for seriously considering the role of representation in the making of markets, and to this aim we use the case of *Première Vision* to illustrate the arbitrary nature of the link between the representation and its referent, or, to employ semioticians' terminology, the signifier and the signified. Our argument goes beyond the idea that market actors may represent markets in ways that are beneficial to them. We rather emphasize, together with postmodern theorists such as Guy Debord (1984), Umberto Eco (1986) and Jean Baudrillard (1994), the supremacy of representations over the phenomena they stand for. As skillfully described by Firat (1992: p. 81), a dominant tendency in postmodern societies is "the dominance of the hype over the concrete, the virtual over the actual . . . the imaginary over the material, and the image over the product". Put differently, the relationship between market representations and actual markets, in a postmodern world, is reversed: it is the market that adjusts to representations, and not vice versa, as it will be evident after our description of the concertation mechanism at work in *Première Vision*. While these ideas now have currency among mainstream marketing scholars and consumer researchers, postmodern thinking is yet to be seriously discussed among the IMP community (Cova & Salle 2003; Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron 2001). By proposing the concept of *hyperreal representations*, we extend our understanding of industrial buyer behavior and we propose that buyers, at least to some extent, may be similar to consumers in their reliance on simulations and represented realities.

It is worth specifying that trade fairs only constitute the empirical context of our paper, and not its object. Trade fairs have mostly been investigated from the individual exhibitor's point of view, mostly with the intention to provide managerial implication on how to improve exhibitors' returns on trade fair investments (Borghini, Golfetto & Rinaldo 2003, Munuera & Ruiz 1999). Yet, since they gather in the same location most of the relevant actors in the field, trade fairs may be considered impermanent representations of the markets they refer to, and constitute an appropriate empirical setting to investigate (and theorize on) market making activities. If this is true of all trade fairs, the case of *Première Vision* is somewhat different, since the concerted activities of the trade fair's organizer (and its stakeholder) are heavily based on the representation of future fashion trends. The case of *Première Vision* is therefore useful to draw some implications on the role of trade fair organizers for the creation of value for its dual categories of customers, visitors and exhibitors, a perspective that has only very recently started appearing in the literature on trade fairs (see also Borghini, Golfetto, Rinaldo 2005).

The structure of this paper is as follows. Firstly, we develop our theoretical framework by reviewing and extending Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) seminal contribution on market forms and practices: to do so, we discuss the nature of representation in postmodern society and theory, and their implications for market making. After a brief methodological note, we provide some industry background, in order to illustrate the supply chain in the fashion-apparel industry. We then describe the *Première Vision* case and provide full details about the four-step process model of concertation. In the final section, we discuss some of the implications of the case in terms of the scholarly conversation about market forms and practices. We conclude by highlighting the theoretical contributions of our paper and one element of inconsistency between our arguments and the representation of our empirical results. That is, arguing for the need of new ways of representing industrial marketing phenomena and failing to do so, by continuing to employ traditional representational strategies in the illustration of our research findings.

Theoretical framework: Representation in a postmodern world

Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) seminal contribution is about the *performativity* of market theories, i.e. the possibility that theoretical understanding of markets may indeed contribute to the shaping of market forms and practices. The two authors note that the vast majority of the related literature has focused on the performativity of the disciplines of economics and financial economics (e.g., Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2003, 2004), and highlight at the same time the dearth of research on the performativity of marketing theories. In order to stimulate scholarly contributions in this direction, Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004) propose to the IMP community a conceptual vocabulary for the study of markets, and identify three linked and mutually influencing sub-categories of market practices (pp. 4-5): (i) *exchange practices*, that include "all activities related to specific economic exchanges"; (ii) *representational practices*, that refer to "activities that contribute to depict markets and/or how they work"; (iii) *normative practices*, that refer to "activities that contribute to establish guidelines for how a market should be (re)shaped or work according to some (group of) actor(s)". In this paper, we are particularly interested in examining (and extending) Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) ideas on representational practices. The two authors highlight the importance of representations in the making of markets: representations, they argue, are strictly linked to performativity, since the making of representations contributes to the shaping of represented phenomena.

The debate on representation and its nature dates back to Greek philosophy, with opposing views held by Plato and Aristotle on artistic depictions (Childers, 1995). Aristotle's idea of *mimesis*, i.e., the "art imitates nature" argument, supported a positive view of representations, as being necessary for learning, and an important medium through which human beings can access the real. Plato, on the other hand, distrusted representations: he considered the world revealed by senses a poor imitation of the realm of pure forms, and representations likely to lead human beings to mistake mere appearances for reality, as well expressed in the allegory of the cave described in book VII of his Republic. Both Aristotle and Plato, agreed, however, on the presupposition that a true reality exists and may somehow be accessed, if not with the senses at least through pure intellect. Influenced by these antecedents, the philosophical debate on sensory and internal representations continued during the medieval period (Lagerlund 2004) and later influenced the project of modernity, with its effort to "develop rational science, universal laws, absolute truths and, through the accumulation of objective knowledge, overthrow the irrationality of myth and religion" (Brown 1993: 20).

Since the late 1960s, however, the modernist faith in scientific progress and the ultimate search for truth have been highly criticized by postmodern theorists², who have proposed many concepts that are relevant for our discussion of representation. The concept of *spectacle*, as developed by the French theorist Guy Debord (1983), refers to a society organized around the production and consumption of images and staged events. In Debord's (1983: section 18) own words, the spectacle is "a tendency to *make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations". Seduced by the spectacle's hypnotic qualities, individuals become spectators, passively involved in the consumption of images rather than in the active production of their own lives. In a related vein, other theorists (Baudrillard, 1994; Eco, 1986) have introduced the idea of *hyperreality*. Umberto Eco (1986) defines hyperreality as a world of "absolute fakes", in which imitations do not merely reproduce reality, but try to improve on it. Hyperreality is epitomized by the two "absolute fake" cities, Disneyland and Disney World, which do not even pretend to imitate reality, where everything is brighter, bigger, more beautiful and entertaining than in ordinary life, to such an extent that the latter may become disappointing. Jean Baudrillard (1994) explains hyperreality by referring to the concepts of *simulacra* and *simulation*. According to the French intellectual, representation is based on the equivalence between the sign and the real and, from this standpoint, one could interpret simulation as false representation. But reality is much more complex than this. Simulations are based on other simulations, and therefore it is not possible to identify where the real ends and the simulation begins. The concept of simulacra refers to these layers of simulation. In successive phases, through a process Baudrillard terms the "procession of simulacra", simulations are built upon other simulations, until the difference until true and false collapses and simulacra are indistinguishable from the real.

The concepts previously presented have been employed by marketing scholars to reflect on the nature of markets and customer experiences on the one hand, and on the role of research, theory and

² For a discussion of postmodernism and its relevance for the practice and theory of marketing, see, among others, Brown, 1993, 1995, 1997; Firat & Clifford (1997); Firat, Dholakia & Venkatesh (1995).

methods in the representation of marketing phenomena on the other. As far as the former aspect is concerned, some have pointed that the hyperreal is a feature of the present consumer society, and not surprisingly many examples of hyperreality, regardless of disciplinary origins, are grounded in consumer experiences (Firat *et al.* 1996). Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron (2001), in the first theoretical contribution on postmodern approaches in b2b marketing, suggest that the conditions of postmodernity are widely diffused in industrial markets. They suggest that the confusion of fantasy and reality that is the hallmark of hyperreality is very common both in brand and corporate image management practices and in new product development activities: much before new products and services are launched on the market, they argue, the parties involved (often, a dyad or a network of companies) have to share dreams and unleash their imagination. The simulations of products that are enabled by new technologies (e.g., CAD software) come into existence much before the actual products: again, an example of the supremacy of the virtual over the real.

Postmodern theories on representation have also spawned reflexivity within consumer research and marketing as disciplines (Brown, 1995; Stern 1998a), mirroring the parallel “crisis of representation” in the social sciences (Marcus & Fischer 1986: p. 7). Traditionally, Stern (1998a: p. 1) argues, representation has been taken for granted, with most of the disciplinary debate focusing on “the most appropriate way to collect, analyze, and report data”. Even those researchers employing the interpretive methods considered more apt to capture consumer experiences (e.g., market-based ethnographies, Arnould & Wallendorf 1994; phenomenological interviews, Thompson 1997; netnographies, Kozinets 2002) continue to employ traditional forms of writing. Words, tables, graphs, diagrams, formulae, and other signs presented in journal articles and books are just means to represent to readers marketing phenomena that cannot be accessed directly (Grayson 1998). Marketing research thus relies heavily on multi-layered representation. As suggested by Brown (1998: p. 73), readers of published research have access to the “representation (verbal delivery) of a representation (written report) of a representation (data analysis) of a representation (respondent response) . . .”. In a way that resembles Baudrillard’s progression of simulations, published research may be seen as simulacra that, ultimately, may bear no relation at all with the marketing phenomena they refer to. Given these problematics of representation, consumer researchers have in the last decade started experimenting with new ways to represent marketing phenomena in ways that make readers feel part of the experience, such as stories and essays (Brown 1998), poetry (Sherry & Shouten 2002; Stern 1998b), pictorial data (Holbrook 1998; Schroeder 1998) and multimedia representations in general (Belk, 1998). More recently, the use of video ethnography (Belk & Kozinets 2005) as a means to provide immediate access to consumer experiences has gained currency among consumer researchers, as proven by a recent special video-graphic issue of the journal *Consumption, Markets & Culture* and the Film Festivals that now constitute an appreciated feature of the *Association for Consumer Research* Conferences (Belk & Kozinets forthcoming).

In the context of b2b marketing and industrial buyer behavior research, postmodern ideas on representation have only recently begun to appear, possibly because of a long-held representation of industrial buyers as rational and professional actors, much less prone than consumers to get seduced by spectacles and simulations. In the last few years, however, some researchers have suggested that the methods employed by b2b marketing researchers are mostly modernist in nature, and have advocated the use of postmodern research methods for the study of industrial markets (Cova & Salle 2003; Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron 2001). Moreover, in a recent presentation at the IMP conference, Cova & Salle (2003) urged IMP researchers to get inspired by the exciting developments in b2c marketing, and to explore not only new methods but also new ways of representing research results.

To conclude, postmodern ideas on the nature of representation have much to offer the nascent conversation on market forms and practices and, more generally, to the IMP community. If hyperreality and the other conditions of postmodernity are as diffused in industrial markets as suggested by Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron (2001), managerial advice based on a modernist approach to research may completely miss the point; by reconsidering the lenses through which we look at marketing phenomena, the managerial relevance of our research could greatly increase. Moreover, because of the interplay between theory and method, the use of postmodern methods may help us identify new marketing phenomena, or see well-studied phenomena in a different way, as has occurred in consumer research (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Finally, the exploration of new, evocative ways of representing our research findings may add an experiential element to the knowledge we produce, by providing our audiences with the means to see, feel, imagine, experience industrial markets and buyer experiences.

Methods

The data and interpretations presented in this paper derive from an extensive field investigation of *Première Vision* and the European fabric industry, conducted in the period 2002-2004. To capture the complexities of the concertation process, we employed an ethnographic approach, mostly based on participant observation and both directive and nondirective interviews. As previously noted, ethnographic methods are among the new methodologies employed by consumer researchers and, together with other interpretive methods, they have helped researchers to develop novel theory in under-studied areas (Arnould & Thompson 2005) and companies to formulate marketing strategies (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994). Scholars from this perspective have investigated specific typologies of markets and market forms (e.g., consumer trade shows, Peñaloza 2000, 2001; flea markets and swap meets, Belk, Sherry & Wallendorf 1988; Sherry 1990). In this vein, the first and second author of this paper employed ethnographic methods in investigations of exhibitor and visitor interactions during professional trade shows (Borghini, Golfetto & Rinallo 2004, 2005). Ethnographic methods, we argue, are well suited for the study of market forms and market practices.

In more detail (but very briefly), ethnographic research (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994): (i) is characterized by systematic data collection and recording of human action in natural settings; (ii) involves extended, experiential participation by researchers into the contexts to be studied; (iii) produces interpretations of behaviors that the subjects investigated find plausible; (iv) incorporates multiple sources of data to generate varying perspectives on the phenomena studied. In the course of the present study, data gathering activities included interviews with the trade associations involved in the concertation mechanism, coupled with participant observation of the many backstage events that take place to coordinate activities before *Première Vision* is held, such as meetings of different natures and workshops employed to explain the new trends to exhibitors. The bulk of the field activities consisted however in participant observation of the trade show itself in several editions, during which field notes, photographs, and videos were employed to document the interactions between and among visitors and exhibitors. Directive and nondirective interviews with informants were realized during *Première Vision*. Additional interviews were realized in other trade fairs of the fabric industry in order to include in our analysis the perceptions of those companies which do not participate to the concertation process or do not visit *Première Vision*, and to avoid biases in our research findings. Overall, 95 interviews were conducted with informants, ranging from 10 to 90 minutes in length. Data gathering also included the collection of secondary data and artifacts, including the trend documentation, *Première Vision* press releases and official pictures, exhibitor brochures, fabric samples, etc.

Overall, verbatim interview transcripts and field notes of our observations were over 350 pages long, and included rich narratives and anecdotes from informants, together with visual material (hundreds of pictures of trade show booths and trend areas; hours of videos of visitor behavior in trend areas, etc.). Such data were separately analyzed by the first and second author, through the logical operations and phases typical of qualitative analysis (Spiggle 1994), when previous readings of texts inform later readings, and at the same time later readings permit the researcher to identify patterns in the data not identified in the initial analysis. The result of such analysis is an informed interpretation of the concertation process and of industrial buyer activities during *Première Vision*. Such interpretation forms the basis for our discussion of the role of representation in the making of markets.

Background: Innovation in the fabric for fine fashion apparel

In the fashion apparel industry, innovation mostly regards style rather than technical features, i.e., creativity in cut, colors and relative combinations, patterns, fabrics and their processing and finishing, which when embodied in clothing will satisfy symbolic functions (allowing consumers to express individual identities and signal social status). As previously noted, contrary to the widespread belief that innovation in fashion style is mainly created by a few celebrity designers working in the isolation of the genius, in the fashion pipeline the fabric sector is a central locus of innovation. Designers, in most cases, could not provide clothes with an aspect that consumers associate with dominant trends (e.g., attention to natural environment), if their suppliers did not have the technical ability and end-market savviness to produce the yarns and fabrics that incorporate creative solutions aligned with those trends. Only under these conditions will it be possible to exploit such yarns/fabrics to produce garments with, say, a raw and “natural” aspect in line with current trends. In other words, designers

are inspired by upstream creativity which is aligned with consumer values and with what they want to express with their clothes. This means that fabric producers have to somehow anticipate consumer needs, in order to develop solutions that complement the core competence of designers and apparel companies in creating “fashionable” end products.

Fabric collections present both technical and creative content. Technical content is mostly provided by upstream actors (e.g., textile machinery producers, chemical component companies) and is equally available to most competitors. Consequently, it cannot be a source of competitive advantage. To differentiate their goods, fabric producers therefore vary their bi-annual collections in terms of color (e.g., ruby or clay furrow), structure (e.g., jacquard, satin, chiffon), aspect (e.g., structured, light, washed-out, opaque), touch (e.g., soft, warm, fluid, compact), decoration (e.g., arabesque, cashmere, irregular stripes), treatment (e.g., burnt-out, washed, gummy coating). These highly differentiated elements are deliberately designed to invest finished goods with symbolic and expressive properties that will be valued by consumers. However, in the development of their new collections, fabric companies have to face severe problems of modularity tied to consumer behavior (clothes and accessories are jointly bought and used by consumers) and the fragmentation and non-integrated nature of the fashion industry pipeline. Innovation cannot occur in a vacuum. To avoid the risk of deviant innovations that do not fit with the prevailing trends at a given moment, companies have to consider both consumers future tastes and the innovation efforts of upstream and downstream partners and producers of complementary products when preparing their own collections. For example, a fabric firm will have to decide whether its range of colors will mesh with that realized by knitwear, velvet and other semi-finished textile manufacturers, as well as by its competitors. Furthermore, all semi-finished textile products will have to fit with the style and cut that will be prevalent in apparel. Finally, compatibility from the purchaser's point of view has to be taken into account, since consumers will combine apparel with accessories (e.g. shoes, bags) to express their identity and, at the same time, signal membership of specific reference groups. This means that, as in technological innovation, some standards are needed to reduce uncertainty in innovation to the benefit of all firms in the system³.

Although modularity/compatibility problems are not unique to this setting, fabric companies have to face additional, and rather unique, challenges that have to be solved if they want to thrive or even survive. Firstly, the fabric industry is very disintegrated and fragmented, i.e. it includes numerous companies within each of the specialized phases of the value chain (see Figure 1 for an illustration)⁴. Moreover, most of these companies are SME, and even the market leaders lack the resources and skills needed to independently establish their own innovative solutions as the “dominant design”. Secondly, because it is linked to the fashion system, the innovation cycle for fabrics is very rapid with seasonal collections launched (at least) once every six months. Thirdly, the new products have to be presented far in advance of consumer purchase. For example, in September 2003 fabric producers had to present to their customers (apparel producers) their proposals for the spring/summer 2005 apparel collections, i.e. 18 months before end-products availability in shops. Thus, since consumer tastes are ever-changing, new product development activities are unavoidably risky and require some form of fashion forecast.

Première Vision and the concertation mechanism

The history of Première Vision

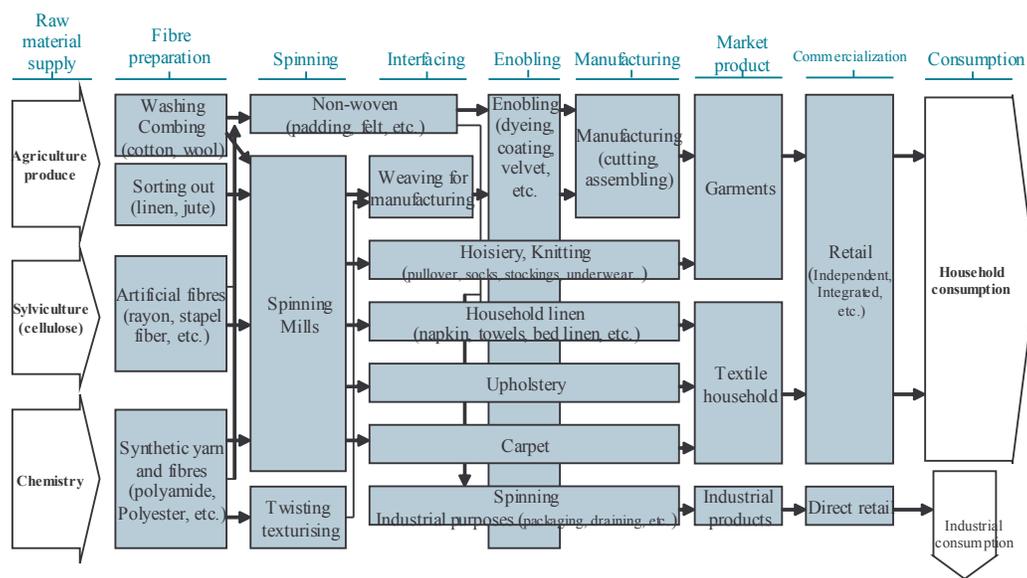
Première Vision is the most important trade show in the fabric for fashion industry (see Table 1 for key facts). Its origins date back to 1973, with a joint promotion undertaken by 15 Lyon weavers who decided to present their fabric collections at the International Textile Centre in Paris. It was only in 1976 that the idea of trend concertation was established. The “weavers decided to meet together

³ Cappetta, Cillo & Ponti (forthcoming) have recently highlighted the similarity between style innovation in fashion and the patterns of technological innovation described by Abernathy & Utterback (1978) and Anderson & Tushman (1990). Also in fashion, innovation cycles include both phases of radical and incremental innovation, with ferment phases (where many new styles are proposed) followed by the selection of dominant designs. However, because of the symbolic properties of fashion goods with respect to consumers' need for distinction, the dominant design co-exists with market niches for products which are radically different, but are nevertheless highly appreciated by some consumers. For example, Chanel *tailleurs* or Armani tuxedos are classics that do not vary with seasonal fashions.

⁴ As a whole, in the EU-15 there are almost 170,000 companies in the textile and clothing industry, most of which are located in Italy and France (Source: Euratex on Eurostat data).

before the Salon to propose a synthesis of seasonal color and fabric trends, paving the way for a coherence in the textile offer” (Première Vision, 2003). In the years that followed, the co-operative effort was extended to other types of fabric producers both from France and other European Countries. Italian companies constitute the majority of *Première Vision*'s exhibitors: for example, in the February 2004 edition of the trade fair, of the 706 exhibitors 339 were Italian, and only 137 French. The greater number of Italian exhibitors is due to the fragmentation of the Italian textile industry, mostly composed of small companies; yet, such fragmentation leads to a greater variety in product offerings. Without the presence of Italian exhibitors, *Première Vision* could hardly sustain its primacy as the world leader in fabric innovation, and this is why Italian companies were soon admitted in *Première Vision*'s network, in spite of the fierce competition among producers from the two countries.

Figure 1 – The Textile-apparel supply chain



Source: Bellon & Chevallier (1983)

In terms of both ‘objective’ data (i.e. space hired, number of exhibitors, and number of visitors) and ‘subjective’ rank attributed by operators in the field, *Première Vision* is the top event in the industry. Its high levels of internationalization (from both the exhibitor and visitor standpoint) means that it is primarily dedicated to international exchanges (Cermes-Bocconi, 2004). Numerous informants explained to us that visiting *Première Vision* is a “learning expedition”, whose value resides in “inspiration” and awareness of fashion trends. In contrast, most of the other trade fairs around the world (e.g. in Hong Kong, China; New York, USA; Düsseldorf, Germany) fulfill a commercial function, providing information of a more operational nature linked to specific purchasing processes. This means that those companies admitted as exhibitors at *Première Vision* are usually considered the innovators in the industry, with the consequent implications in terms of reputation and, frequently, premium price.

To ensure its positioning as an informative trade fair, the companies wishing to exhibit at *Première Vision* (i.e., those who want to be admitted to the network) must meet certain quality criteria to ensure that the overall informational content of the show is not reduced. Criteria employed to select companies include product quality and creativity, as well as financial health. Candidate exhibitors, in other words, must demonstrate that they are innovators, rather than imitators, and prove that their presence will benefit visitors. By restricting access to potential exhibitors (and the trade fair’s turnover) on the basis of quality and innovativeness criteria, *Première Vision* represents its exhibitors as the more sophisticated and fashionable part of the supply, and thus provide them with a competitive advantage linked to the fact that they are perceived as the “best” producers.

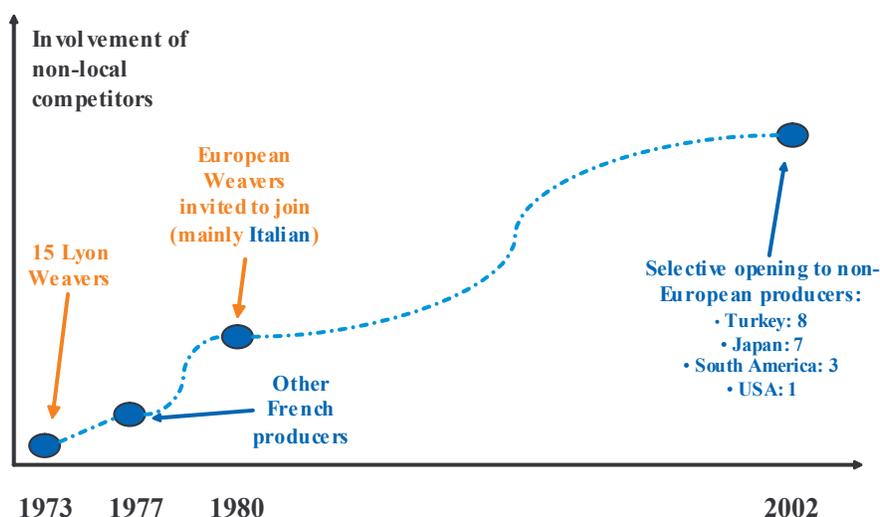
Table 1 – Première Vision: Key facts

Organizer	Première Vision Le Salon s.a. (supported by French textile trade association)
Dates (2004)	Spring/Summer collections: Feb. 12-15 Autumn/Winter collections: Sept. 21-24
Space hired (2002)	41,016 sq. m.
Exhibitors (2002)	775 (77% foreign)
Visitors (2002)	32,634 (77% foreign)

Source: Processing of Organizer data.

An analysis of the geographical patterns of inclusion among *Première Vision*'s exhibitors is illustrative of this logic (see Figure 2). The original 15 weavers of 1973 soon invited other French and Western European companies to join the process. It was previously suggested that the presence of Italian companies was instrumental in establishing a “critical mass” of exhibitors and product variety to attract international buyers. The recent decision to “open” *Première Vision* to the “best” non-western producers may be seen as an extension of this logic. Currently, the trade fair includes among its exhibitors companies from Countries that are traditionally associated with low-cost, mass-market products (e.g., Turkey, Taiwan) and tend to be considered imitators of western companies' creativity. An inclusionary pattern of this kind should not be taken for granted in the case of trade fairs backed by national entrepreneurial associations. In such situations, a protectionist attitude among trade fair organizers is hardly uncommon, and leads to high barriers to entry for foreign companies (Golfetto 2004). Similar patterns of inclusions have not emerged in other European trade fairs in the fabric industry (Rinallo, Golfetto & Gibbert forthcoming).

Figure 2 – Première Vision: Pattern of geographical inclusion (1973-2002)

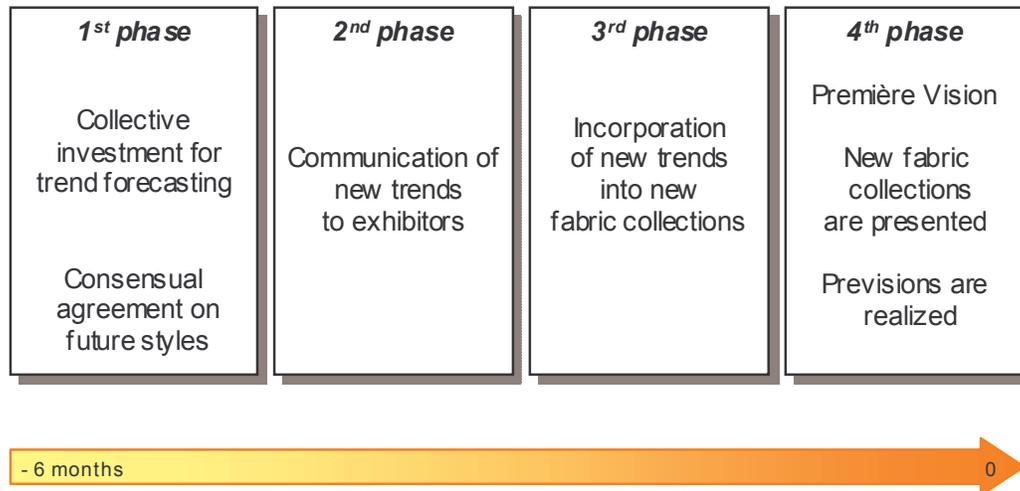


The concertation mechanism

The concertation process comprises several phases, each of which involves a differentiated set of actors (see Figure 3 for a stylized model of the overall process). Trend “forecasting”, i.e. the identification of future trends in consumer society, is realized several months before the actual events. Although it may appear a rather esoteric activity, trend forecasting is nowadays a fairly institutionalized process. The creative experts engaged in trend forecasting usually spend a considerable amount of time in the observation of street-style, and often travel around the world in an activity often defined as

“cool hunting”, i.e. identifying consumption patterns in specific sub-cultures which in the experts' opinion anticipate the directions in which society as a whole will move. From 1997 such activity is carried out at a global level, through the establishment of an International Observatory that aims to identify the emerging social trends likely to have an impact on the textile and fashion industries. The Observatory's analyses in Europe, North and South America and Asia are carried out by a broad network of specialists including architects, designers, trend forecasters, experts in new technologies, sociologists and anthropologists.

Figure 3 – The concertation process



Subsequently, implications in terms of new fashion products and fabrics are derived from the observed social trends. In other words, emerging trends in society are “translated” into new ideas for fabrics and clothing. For example, as a result of the affirmation of social values taking into account the world's ecological problems, products, colors and designs that respect or remind of such principles are increasingly appreciated by consumers: this is the case for example of raw materials that do not harm the environment, natural colors, simpler clothing styles. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Twin Towers terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the world for many consumers was a less secure place and conspicuous consumption was no longer considered appropriate. Consequently, apparel (and fabrics) had to fit with a consumer desire for safety, which meant less blatantly luxurious products.

The trends identified by these experts are validated during concertation meetings, which are a way to bring together in the same place and at the same time representatives of all phases of the fragmented and disintegrated textile-apparel value chain. At the “concertation tables”, representatives and members of trade associations in the fabric industry, in upstream and downstream markets (e.g., fiber and yarn producers, textile finishing and printing companies, fashion designers, apparel producers, etc.) and in complementary products (accessory producers) all have a seat and the right to express their opinion on the future trends that will be pursued collectively. In addition, the leading companies (those that are able to launch their own trends) are involved for the specific contribution that they may provide to the concertation process. In this phase, an important role is also played by the *bureaux de style* (style bureau), i.e. companies specializing in trend forecasting⁵. For these organizations, being part of the set of experts that set trends is considered prestigious, and they often mention this in their

⁵ Style bureaux, which emerged in France in the mid-1980s, are “small-sized organizations, specialized mainly in the production and sale of information on fashion trends which is gathered together in the so-called *cahier de tendance*” (Guercini & Rafagni, 2003), typically representing trends in terms of both colors and concepts. Style bureaux often carry out consultancy activities for textile companies, thus helping the latter to interpret such trends and to incorporate them into their new collections.

promotional activities. During concertation meetings, the trends identified by *Première Vision*'s experts are communicated and compared with those forecast individually by the invited parties. These meetings, then, serve to create a consensual agreement among all relevant actors of what will become the common trends. Thus, these meetings reduce variety in new collections increasing compatibility on the purchaser side.

Once this process is complete, the trends identified are communicated to all firms selected as exhibitors in the context of *ad hoc* workshops. Documents synthesizing the directions for innovation (e.g., color cards, trend books, CD-ROM) are distributed for reference during the development of new collections in the following months. Color tones are specified very precisely by means of the Pantone color system with which a color can be selected and specified by assembling creative palettes and conceptual color schemes. On the other hand, the concepts underlying the trends are communicated with the use of metaphors and suggestive pictures which aim to inspire rather than communicate in a precise way. One of the experts we interviewed commented this way of presenting trends by saying "we make a lot of poetry, here". For example, one of the trends identified by *Première Vision* experts for the Spring/Summer 2005 collection, and presented during the February 2004 edition of the trade fair, was "Vitamin 05". The many elements comprising the trends were described with expressions such as, among others, "Enriching fabrics with vitamins, playing with colors, joking around with futility, poking fun at severity, greedily tasting the delights of the ephemeral, and touching the essential". Visual representations of such trends are similarly suggestive and evocative (e.g., Picture 1).

Picture 1 – Visual description of the trend 'Crystal Elegance'



Source: *Première Vision*, February 2002

During the two trade fairs, exhibitors present their collection to visitors (potential buyers) from all over the world. Now, 'forecasts have become true'. Although exceptions are possible, in general exhibitors' new collections are aligned with the concerted trends and, more importantly, with end consumers' emerging sensibilities. Furthermore, *Première Vision* presents the forecast trends to visitors in specially equipped areas, created with the help of experts in visual communication who display samples of the fabrics most representative of new trends arranged in particularly creative ways (see Picture 2). There are many of these areas, each of which is designed to provide visibility to the trends in general or to specific aspects of them (e.g., trends for particular types of fabrics such as linen, wool, silk, knitwear, etc.). Visitors greatly appreciate these areas (which give a comprehensive idea of trends in a limited period of time), to which they dedicate the initial part of a trade fair visit, often spending several hours or even the entire first day. For some of them, the trends areas are the *only* part of *Première Vision* which is ever visited. In these areas, visitors seek "inspiration" for their new product development activities, new potential suppliers and confirmation of the creativeness and competence of their present business partners. The information search process in trend areas has a physical,

embodied nature, i.e. it involves handling and inspecting fabric samples with attention, in order to imagine new apparel products that could be realized with these fabrics. At present, “virtual” searches (based on on-line catalogs and pictures of fabrics) do not provide the same depth of information, because of the often tacit nature of what the buyer is seeking (see also Golfetto 2003; Golfetto, Borghini & Rinaldo 2005). For most, then, the actual visit is considered irreplaceable: visitors need to actually touch and feel the fabrics and patterns constituting the new trends, take notes on the trends for later use and, most importantly, on the ideas for innovation that are stimulated through this interaction (see picture 3).

Picture 2 – Première Vision: Snapshots from the color, linen and silk areas



Source: Première Vision, September 2004

It should be noted that together with buyers and product designers from apparel companies, *Première Vision* also attracts numerous “atypical” visitors (Borghini, Golfetto & Rinaldo 2004) whose presence eventually contributes to making the establishment of concerted trends more rapid and effective. With respect to exhibitors, atypical visitors can be defined as:

- *competitors*: these companies are fabric producers not admitted to the concertation process (both from Western and emerging countries). In general, they seek to obtain competitive intelligence and “inspiration” for their own new product developments.
- *suppliers and producers of collateral products*: these companies visit the trend areas of the two trade fairs to learn about future fashion trends and to align their own innovative efforts correspondingly. In the case of suppliers (e.g. yarn or textile machinery producers), this means understanding how their customers use the products they are supplying and ways to improve them. Collateral producers (e.g. shoe and bag producers) aim to increase the compatibility of their new products in terms of color, pattern, etc. with those in the apparel industry.
- *experts and journalists*: for many professionals and service providers, visiting *Première Vision* is a routine but valuable activity to discover years in advance “what is going on in the industry” and in society as a whole. Journalists working for specialized media, in particular, tend to provide great visibility in their articles to the trends identified by *Première Vision*, supported in that by the media subsidies provided by the trade fair itself. As a result, the innovations are spread to those people in the field unable to visit the events in person.

Picture 3 – Visitor behavior at *Première Vision*'s trend areas



Source: *Première Vision*, September 2004

The presence of large numbers of these atypical targets is primarily due to the high level of “information externalities” (Borghini, Golfetto, Rinaldo 2004) provided by *Première Vision* to upstream, downstream, and collateral industries. In this sense, the trade fair is an occasion when the usually fragmented textile-apparel value chain is unified and the various dispersed actors aligned. From the exhibitors’ point of view, the presence of atypical targets means that the concerted trends receive worldwide visibility and recognition, and that their collections are immediately imitated. Some exhibitors claim that with the use of digital cameras and e-mail, and despite the fact that photography

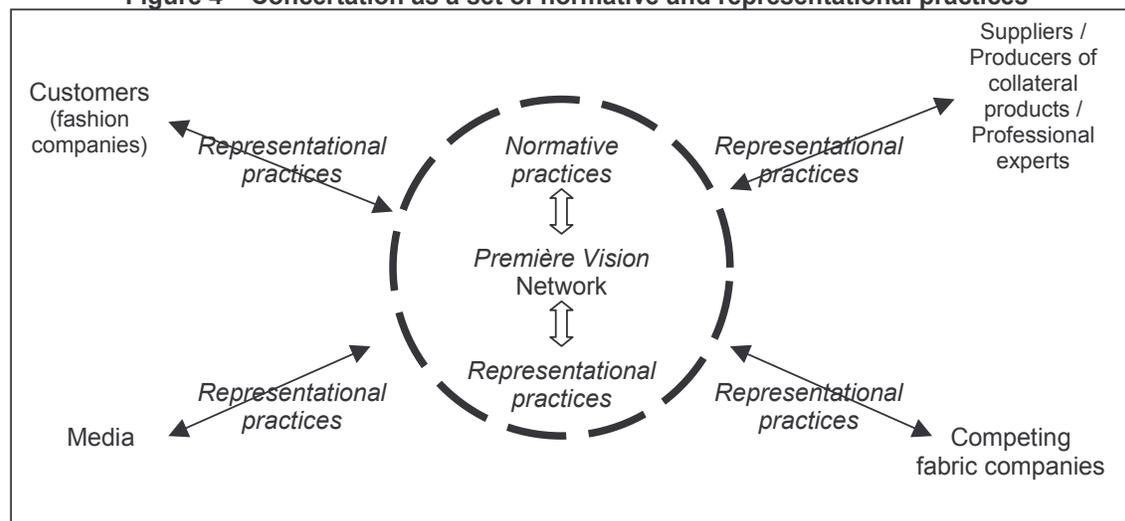
is explicitly forbidden during the fairs, companies from China or other emerging countries may start the production of ‘imitations’ of new fabrics presented at *Première Vision* even before the end of the events. Imitation is hindered by most exhibitors by tactics including: the decision not to show products in the stand’s window displays; the staging of “fake” new products in the displays to “divert competitors”; the selective admission of customers already known or signaled by the sales force, to avoid the access of competitors acting as customers. For other exhibitors, however, imitation is “the price of glory” that has to be paid for being at the forefront of innovation, as “the leaders are always imitated”. In any case, for most exhibitors, the gains in reputation are worth the risks of imitation.

Ironically, imitation from the competitors helps to create a critical mass of products aligned with the trends that makes their diffusion even faster. In this way, through an able exploitation of their reputation as trend-setters, Italian and French textile producers, with the help of carefully selected foreign firms, are able to rapidly affirm as dominant the designs they collectively identified and proposed and, by doing so, are able to secure a first-mover advantage.

Discussion

In this paper, we suggest that concertation is a quintessentially postmodern phenomenon characterized by the supremacy of hyperreal representations of the fabric market and the fashion trends over the concrete reality they refer to. In this section, we discuss our research findings in term of Kjellberg & Helgesson’s (2004) ideas on the interaction between the theoretical understanding of markets and marketing practices. In the terminology proposed by the two scholars, concertation may be seen as a set of *normative* and *representational* practices realized by the backstage coordination of *Première Vision*’s visible hand: once set in motion, however, the mechanism of concertation is able to influence also the countless actors external to the network, which have individual inducements to adjust themselves to the vision of the future proposed by *Première Vision* (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Concertation as a set of normative and representational practices



Trade fairs as travels in hyperreality

Trade fairs may be considered staged events whose purpose is to represent markets. Current trade fair literature considers trade fairs information sources for industrial buyers, particularly effective in the central phases of purchase processes, when alternative solutions, suppliers, and products are evaluated (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). In other words, the more exhibitors are present, the more industrial buyers will find the trade fair informative. In mathematical terms, the share of companies able to fulfill a specific informative need that exhibit at a given trade fair defines its potential effectiveness (Golfetto 2004). Coherently, managerial advice aimed at organizers is to design trade shows by selecting exhibitors on the basis of given demand segments’ information needs (Golfetto, 2005). In this sense, *Première Vision* is a representation of the upper end of the fabric for fashion apparel market and the pattern of inclusion of non-European exhibitors previously reported (see again

Figure 2) are in accord with the organizer's desire to maintain the trade fairs' positioning as an "informative" event.

We desire however to point out that this way of looking at trade fairs is inherently modernist, since it implies that trade shows are "neutral" mirrors of markets existing "out there". Industrial buyers in most cases have access neither to the "real" market, nor to alternative representations. Trade fair visits are often the only way to make sense of the market, and to discover new products, suppliers and solutions. Their distinctive feature is that they are both comparative (permit contemporaneous consideration of different alternatives) and experiential (entail an involving "live communication" experience), a mix that is not to be found in any of the other informative tools available to industrial buyers (Golfetto 2004; Golfetto, Borghini & Rinallo 2005). Even though they are less spectacular than themed park or retail environments, and attract visitors who are there for professional rather than leisure reasons, we contend that *trade fairs may be considered hyperreal representations of their underlying supply and demand markets*.

For suppliers – exhibitors, the vivid memory of experiences occurring during trade fair participation are the only mental representations of the many geographically and culturally distant markets where they operate, at least during the initial phases of their internationalization process. A parallel point can be made for customers – visitors: their lively trade fair experience shapes their representation of the market, its developments, and its main protagonists. In this respect, industrial customers appear to be similar to consumers in their reliance on staged events and representations to make sense of a chaotic reality. The ordered series of exhibitor booths, with their mutable geography; the maps and catalogue provided by the organizers; the sense of familiarity that recurs for long-term visitors... These all are distinguishing features of actual *business travels in hyperreality*. As in consumer landscapes, then, at professional trade fairs the image reigns over the reality. To paraphrase Eco, besides Art, History and Nature, the theme of hyperreal reproduction also involves Business.

Our research findings do not however support the view that hyperreal and spectacular representations put individuals in a position of passivity, as proposed by postmodern theorists (Debord 1984; Eco 1986). Much like consumers in themed park and retail experiences (e.g., Peñaloza 1999; Sherry *et al.* 2001), industrial buyers actively construct their experiences during trade fair visits. While organizers and exhibitors try to impose preferred behaviors and interpretations, visitors make sense of the hyperreal environment in which they are immersed in ways often unpredictable. Countless informants referred to their trade fair experiences as sources of "inspiration" rather than information. Much like in consumer trade fairs (Peñaloza 2000, 2001), also in business trade fairs meaning is constructed through the interaction between marketers and customers.

Concertation as a progression of simulations

As previously suggested, in terms of Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) model, concertation is based on a set of normative and representational practices (see again Figure 4). *Première Vision's* normative power towards its exhibitors depends on the consensual nature of the concertation process, which is supported by national trade associations that represent their members' interests. Normative pressures towards adoption of the trends are also fostered by the workshops through which the trends are communicated to all selected exhibitors. These workshops have a ritual nature, and foster solidarity among participants: similarly to the rituals studied by anthropologists (e.g., Durkheim 1912), they reinforce social ties among network members and *communitas*, i.e., the sense of belonging to the same community of innovating companies⁶.

Normative pressures towards conformity, however, play a role only within the boundaries of *Première Vision's* network. And even within such boundaries, they are backed by powerful representational practices centered on artifacts that act as physical embodiments of the trends identified through the concertation process. In the beginning, trends exist as cognitive representations held by cool hunters, experts, market leaders. During the first phase of the concertation process (see again Figure 3), these inner representations are shared with the help of artifacts such as PowerPoint presentations, pictures, "poetry". Once an agreement is reached, new and more tangible representations are created for

⁶ It is worth noting that not all exhibitors align themselves to the trends identified by *Première Vision*. Yet, these are exceptions that only regard those few companies with strong brand image and design capabilities, which are in the position to differentiate their offer from those of other exhibitors. For the other exhibitors, *Première Vision* trends are not perceived as an undesired influence over their patterns of innovations, but rather as precious, highly needed inputs that complement their creative efforts.

exhibitors (videos, color cards, trend books, etc.). Exhibitors use these representations to create the samples that will represent their new collections. During *Première Vision*, representations have a concrete nature, since they are visible to (and touchable by) all visitors. Trends areas, in this sense, are powerful artifacts with which customers may physically experience the concerted trends. Visitors will return to their offices and factories with fabric samples, pictures, documents that synthesize the trends. Those who have not physically attended the trade fair will learn about the trends from their media representations.

This process closely resembles the procession of simulations described by Baudrillard (1994). During *Première Vision*, visitors have access to representations (fabric samples, trend areas) of representations (video, color cards, trend books) of representations (PowerPoint presentations, pictures, poetic images) of representations (cognitive schemas of new trends in consumer society) of representations (specific events or phenomena that originate such cognitive schemas). Media representations of the trends just add another ring to this chain. Thus, through this multiple layer of representations, it is not possible to tell where the simulation ends and the real begins. The concertation process appears thus to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: the trends presented during *Première Vision*, and backed by the trade fair's powerful representational practices, in due time will migrate to designers' catwalks, apparel shops, and eventually to consumers' wardrobes.

Moreover, the idea that trends in consumer society may be identified or forecast is questionable. Of course, trend forecast/identification is proposed as a "rational" activity, carried out by legitimate professional and scientific experts (cool hunters, sociologists, anthropologists). *Première Vision*, in other words, promotes the modernist idea that novel developments in society exist and that these experts can somehow (by intuition or trained observation) spot them. But an environment as complex and dynamic as postmodern consumer society cannot be analyzed: it can only be *interpreted*. Concertation may be described as a category of interpretive behavior based on enactment (Daft & Weick, 1984; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985), where organizations and environment are co-created through social interaction. Trend forecasting cannot be considered the discovery of "correct" trends in an existing society "out there", but rather the selection of some among many possible alternatives (and the rejection of many others). Put differently, the trends that are enacted reside more in the cognitive representations shared and harmonized among those who sit at the concertation tables than in some "external" environment. Daft & Weick (1984: p. 287) suggested that "[t]he interpretation may shape the environment more than the environment shapes the interpretation". Much like the new product development activities described by Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron (2001), representations of new fashion trends come long before the actual new collections that incorporate such trends. Again, the primacy of the hyperreal over the real.

Market theories and self-interested market theorists

The case of *Première Vision* shows that those actors who have the power to represent markets have the power to affect it, and may do so in ways that are beneficial to them. While Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004) address this point, as a whole their paper appears to be mostly concerned with the performativity of marketing theories. And scholars, while often interested in the managerial relevance of their research findings, in most cases do not try to actively influence the behaviors of the subjects they study⁷. The performativity of the market theories proposed by economists, financial economists, and marketing scholars, in other words, is in most cases an unintended consequence of theory building. But besides communities of scholars, marketing phenomena are also theorized by actors outside the academe: journalists, professional experts, and marketers themselves. The concertation mechanism may be seen as a means through which the network of companies centered on *Première Vision* provides visibility to their own theories about the fabric and fashion markets and lets them be accepted by other theorists and market actors: the specialized media, customers, professional experts, and other marketers. These pragmatic theories are intentionally performative, since they do intend to affect the reality they pretend to describe: as a consequence, it is not an exaggeration to refer to the actors involved as *self-interested theorists*⁸.

The case of *Première Vision* also shows that the ability to theorize / to represent markets, in general, is not equally distributed among market actors. Not all marketers are in the position to let their theories

⁷ Unless, of course, they are carrying out action research interventions.

⁸ We borrow this expression from Rao & Sivakumar (1999), who employ it to refer to security analysts. We extend its use to marketers and other market actors that intervene in the representation of markets.

be promoted. The concept of symbolic capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986; 1989) is useful to make sense of the differences among market actors in their ability to let their views be heard. According to the French sociologist, capital comes in many forms (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) that may be converted into each other. Symbolic capital “is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to impose recognition” (Bourdieu, 1989: 23). In a business context, symbolic capital may be considered as “the value of a firm’s ability to affirm its own vision of reality and its own position in that reality as the one considered acceptable and legitimate by other competitors, suppliers, customers, share-holders, and all the other stake-holders” (Perrone, 1997: p. 19). Over the years, the 15 original weavers have employed their economic, cultural and social capital (investment in trend forecasting, specific know-how, relations with other innovating companies and media) to accumulate symbolic capital and build their legitimacy as trend-setters. A legitimacy that has, over the years, been extended to other marketers as they were accepted into *Première Vision’s* network.

Première Vision’s pattern of inclusion of new exhibitors from countries usually referred to as imitators is a manifestation of symbolic power. From a certain point of view, the official and highly advertised admission of these companies to *Première Vision* is a rite of passage à la Van Gennep (1960), which demarcates the moment a worthy fabric company enters the *communitas* of innovators. At the same time, however, these operations can be understood as rites of institution (Bourdieu 1990): they do not demarcate a before and an after so much as they differentiate (and elevates) the admitted companies from the ones that have not been (and never will be) admitted. In other words, by granting Turkish or South American companies the status of innovator, the network of *Première Vision* exhibitors theorize about the status ordering in the fabric market: while asserting their role as innovators, they imply that other companies in the industry are imitators.

Also within *Première Vision* network, endowments of symbolic capital vary. Some companies are the innovators among the innovators and make their consumer market forecast and product design capabilities available to the network. For a company like Invista (formerly Dupont, the producer of Lycra), for example, this means being part of the inner circle composed of the few companies that sit at the concertation tables and are thus able to influence the entire network’s innovation trajectories. Such a role is recognized by customers, who consider these companies the symbolic leaders of the industry. Other companies within the network, on the other hand, have learned about the enacted trends during exhibitor workshops. In other words, they participate in the progression of simulations in a later phase, even though their new collection development activities and the samples presented during *Première Vision* are necessary for the unfolding of the concertation mechanism.

Conclusion

In this paper, we described the concertation mechanism carried out by the network of companies centered around *Première Vision* and interpreted it as a set of normative and representational practices that, literally, make markets. From many different points of view, our research findings can be seen as an additional illustration of the main ideas expressed by Kjellberg & Helgesson’s (2004) seminal contribution: different market practices produce different market forms, and concertation is indeed a peculiar set of practices, originated by the challenges of the textile-apparel supply chain, that produce a distinct market configuration. Our paper however also extends Kjellberg & Helgesson’s (2004) theoretical framework on market forms and practices: (i) by introducing a different lens, based on postmodern theory, with which to view the nature of representation in industrial markets; and (ii) by addressing the role of self-interested theorists in the shaping of markets.

Postmodern theorists have long suggested that hyperreality and simulations are a dominant hallmark of consumer society. B2b marketing scholars, unlike their colleagues interested in consumer marketing or research, have however employed modernist lenses to look at industrial markets, and only recently some contributions (Cova & Salle 2003; Gomez Arias & Bello Acebron 2001) have introduced postmodern ideas into the theoretical understanding of industrial marketing phenomena. In this modernist landscape, Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004: p. 2) stress the importance of taking “seriously the presence of re-presentations in the making of markets”, but at the same time their model seems to assign equal importance to normative, exchange and representational practices in the making of markets. In this paper, we exposed the limits of modernist views on representation and suggested that industrial marketers and purchasers may be similar to consumers in their reliance on simulations and

hyperreality. The postmodern concepts we discussed thus extend the conceptual vocabulary for the study of markets proposed by Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004).

Our paper also addresses the role of self-interested theorists in the shaping of markets. While Kjellberg & Helgesson (2004) acknowledge the role of different actors in the making of markets, their paper as a whole is focuses on the performativity of market theories proposed by, to say so, "legitimate" academic theorists. Although marketing scholars tend to address the managerial implications of their findings, however, the recurring debate on the reduced practical relevance of our research (e.g., Brennan & Ankers 2004; Katsikeas, Robson & Hulbert 2004; McAlister 2005) shows that this goal is not always attained. By taking explicitly into account theorists that willingly intend to shape markets, our paper thus complements Kjellberg & Helgesson's (2004) framework and suggests interesting implications for marketers. We argue that the accumulation of symbolic capital may be a necessary antecedent for companies that intend to drive (rather than just undergo) the evolution of their markets. Symbolic capital, the case of *Première Vision* shows, may be accumulated by leveraging other forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social) and by engaging in symbolic actions that legitimize a marketer's authority to bestow recognition to other market actors. Accumulation of symbolic capital is thus distinct from, say, branding or public relations, even though such tools may be employed for this purpose. Another important avenue for acquiring symbolic power is involvement in collective events such as award ceremonies (Anand & Watson 2004), business conferences and professional trade fairs.

Although the present paper has been written with the aim to contribute to the scholarly conversation on market forms and practice, our research findings also have implication for the literature on trade fairs. By reconstructing trade fairs as hyperreal representations of their underlying markets, our paper extends current research, that has so far been mostly concerned with the way individual exhibitors may increase their returns on investment (Borghini, Golfetto & Rinallo 2003). The case of *Première Vision* shows that trade fairs may be considered *collective marketing* instruments that aggregate for promotional reasons more or less impermanent networks of marketers. Research is needed to illuminate not only individual exhibitors' value appropriation, but also trade fair organizers' value generation strategies. In this paper, we show that conceiving trade fair organization as a collective market making business (with its implications in term of exhibitor selection and creation of hyperreal spaces) may not only ensure the success of a given trade fair, but also have positive externalities for its exhibitors. But this is just a first step: future research is needed on the value generation role of trade fair organizers. At the very least, we propose that scholars, when discussing their trade fair research findings, also address the managerial implications for organizers.

To conclude, we want to highlight one element of inconsistency in our paper. In our theoretical review, we acknowledged the debate among consumer researchers about the need to represent marketing phenomena in ways that make readers feel part of the experience. While agreeing on such need, we employed a very traditional form of writing in representing our research findings, with a limited use of photography and verbatim quotes. Yet, the data we gathered includes hundreds of pictures and several hours of video, which could have been employed for the realization of a video ethnography (Belk & Kozinets 2005). The first and second author of the present paper have cooperated in the production of a short video-ethnography of industrial buyer behavior that will be shown during this year's IMP meeting alongside to the more traditional PowerPoint presentation (Borghini, Golfetto & Rinallo 2005). We agree with Cova & Salle (2003) that the diffusion of new ways of representation of research findings could contribute to making IMP conferences more interesting.

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