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Made in Yorkshire: Harnessing the Zeitgeist

Kevin Almond

Abstract

A meeting at The Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, UK in March 2012, inspired this research. It was initiated by Rita Britton, the outspoken owner of the independent fashion boutique Pollyanna, based in Barnsley, South Yorkshire. During conversations with the fashion journalist Colin McDowell and with Bill Skidmore, the president of the Huddersfield Textile Society, Britton spoke of her vision of creating a fashion label that combined the use of Yorkshire heritage fabrics with cutting-edge, contemporary design. The range would be designed, produced and marketed in the Yorkshire region, capitalising on the manufacturing and design skills within the county. The intention of the endeavour is to put the concept of a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand on the global fashion map. According to Veronica Manlow, an expert of fashion branding, 'Cultural branding is seen as the most effective means by which brands can be infused with enduring meanings that enable them to become icons.'¹ This article explores this idea by assessing the viability for creating a fashion brand beyond the confines of a major fashion city that can be both meaningful and economically feasible. As fashion has become a globalised industry the established fashion powers of New York, London, Milan and Paris have been joined by cities such as Shanghai, Los Angeles, Copenhagen and Melbourne. However, there has been little expansion of fashion hubs beyond the nucleus of major cities. Although many designers and consumers of fashion products exist in smaller provincial areas, urban giants overshadow them. Regional centres often lack the sophistication and financial incentives of cosmopolitan municipalities, and fashion designers located in them have to tap into different cultures and traditions in order to be inspired. Fashion perpetually attempts to harness the zeitgeist or the 'spirit of the times,' which is centred in a general cultural, intellectual, ethical, spiritual, or political climate. In-depth qualitative investigations through questionnaires and interviews unearthed much of the history and culture of fashion in Yorkshire and reveals how the county responds to and creates its own 'spirit of the times.'

Key Words

Yorkshire, fashion, fashion city, fashion hub textiles, design, production, brand, fashion label, region, heritage, style, zeitgeist, Harris Tweed.

1. Introduction

The article investigates both historical and contemporary fashion activity within the Yorkshire region in the UK. The objective is to identify whether Yorkshire is a viable centre for the design and production of fashionable clothing. My research revealed a relative lack of enquiry addressing the growth of fashion products within global provinces. It seeks to redress this absence by focusing upon the Yorkshire region as a case study. The investigation aims to encourage a greater appreciation for the branding and marketing of regions as sustainable fashion entities on the worldwide stage.

Yorkshire is the largest county in England, situated in the north. Because of its size, it is subdivided into four sections known as the East, West, North and South Riding of Yorkshire. The county combines substantial acres of unspoiled countryside from the acknowledged beauty

of the famed Yorkshire Dales (Image 1) to the bleaker aspects of the Pennines hill range and the Yorkshire coast. There are combinations of industrial and market towns and five cities in total: Hull, York, Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield, which vary in size. Leeds is the largest city and is the main regional shopping centre for Yorkshire and the approximately 3.2 million people who live there. There are roughly 1,000 retail outlets in Leeds with the most upmarket shopping area being the Victoria Quarter, which houses many designer stores.² The Victoria Quarter is also a stylish venue for fashion oriented exhibitions such as the annual *British Wool Week*, an exhibition organized by the *Campaign for Wool*.³ The cities of Bradford and Sheffield have an industrial heritage for textiles and steel, respectively. Hull is predominantly a fishing port and York, originally founded by the Romans, offers a multitude of historic attractions. York Minster, the most famous, is the largest gothic cathedral in Northern Europe.



Image 1: Yorkshire Dales, June 2013. © Photo courtesy of Kevin Almond

Yorkshire is in the fortunate position of having a variety of natural resources, including soft quality water that helps to clean raw wool. These resources were a huge asset with the rapid growth of the textile industry during the Industrial Revolution as wool was imported in vast quantities for the manufacture of worsted cloth in Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield. Locally mined coal provided the power the industry needed, and the cool, humid climate was ideal for textile manufacturing. In 1711, Leeds opened the ‘First White Cloth Hall,’ which became an exchange hub for the trade of un-dyed cloth, contributing to Leeds becoming an established centre of the British woollen industry.⁴ By the late eighteenth century, merchants in Leeds were responsible for 30 per cent of the UK’s woollen exports, leading to the expansion of the city’s textile manufacturing industry during the nineteenth century and eventually to Leeds becoming a nucleus for clothing manufacture.

Yorkshire today is a thriving region that seeks to capitalize on its rich heritage. Its reputation derives from the culture of its people, a collective product of a number of historical values and beliefs about life in the region, illustrating the type of people that reside there. Yorkshire's literature, art, culture and landscape combine to establish its reputation. For instance, the literary work of the Bronte sisters,⁵ who lived in a remote Yorkshire village in the early part of the nineteenth century, often employed the stormy Yorkshire moors as a background to their famous novels. It could be argued that Emily Bronte's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*⁶ should be considered a foundation to depict life in Yorkshire, illustrating through its characters the type of people who have resided there. Interestingly the unworldly and archaic 'Eee bah gum'⁷ dialect of an archetypal Yorkshire person contradicts wildly with the more sophisticated language used in cosmopolitan fashion circles. This makes the argument for Yorkshire being taken seriously as an urbane fashion entity challenging. The region today has a mixed economy that combines traditional industries from the service-based to textile manufacturing and coal mining, as well as the tourist industries that exploit the urban and rural mix. The challenge in packaging the region as a viable fashion entity arguably lies in the careful distillation of its heritage, combining the traditional with the new. This research seeks to further investigate these possibilities.



Image 2: Rita Britton in her store Pollyanna, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, 2012. © Photo courtesy of Kevin Almond

2. Methodology and Literature Review

Through conducting this enquiry I learnt a great deal about fashion in the Yorkshire region. I was also able to draw on my own experience as a fashion designer and lecturer. I focused on historical research and on qualitative investigations. Object-based research developed my knowledge of the intellectual and social value of fashionable clothes through an increased awareness of how the clothes were designed, produced and worn within the region and in what circumstances. This included examination of garments in retail outlets, museum collections, archives and photography. I also distributed questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews with fashion students, academics, costume curators, designers and followers of fashion. My rationale for this open approach was to allow those I interviewed to bring up new thoughts and ideas. Interviewees included Rita Britton, an independent Yorkshire retailer (Image 2), Colin McDowell the fashion journalist and commentator, Natalie Raw, a costume curator at Leeds Museums and Galleries, Lee Hicken, a creative consultant of Hebe Media, Bernadette Gledhill, who owns a Yorkshire based model agency, and Lee Mason, a Yorkshire based entrepreneur, fashion designer and manufacturer. During the interviews, there was generally a framework of themes to be explored, structured around the interviewees' thoughts and opinions related to historical and contemporary fashion within Yorkshire.

Following theory about the creative economy and the aesthetic marketplace, I explored how regional economic development depends on the creative activity of the area and 'a region's ability to foster three main ingredients: tolerance, talent and technology.'⁸ The urban studies theorist, Richard Florida argues that a tolerance attracts a diversity of talented people with ideas and skills and this incubates creative thinking.⁹ It creates a dynamic reputation in which creative businesses flourish and from which economic growth and job creation grows. The UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) describes the creative industries as 'Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'¹⁰ In the context of fashion businesses, the aesthetic qualities of a region's commodities are concentrated in order to influence how designs are selected, promoted, distributed and sold. The sociologist Joanne Entwistle describes how below.

Aesthetic commodities are more nebulous than other sorts of products, such as vegetables, since they are concerned with properties of 'beauty,' 'style' or 'design', which are effervescent categories that change over time and across different social spaces.¹¹

I explore how the district of Yorkshire could exploit its heritage of skill and craft inherent in the region's 'tolerance, talent and technology,'¹² in order to generate credible fashion products that are economically viable while incorporating 'effervescent' factors of 'beauty,' 'style' and 'design.' In *The Warhol Economy*, the cultural economist, Elizabeth Currid, argues that the creative industries in New York, such as fashion, art and music drive the economy forward. Currid describes how an urban economy is developed through the vibrant creative practices of artistic communities within the city.¹³ I transpose her theory about an urban, social, cultural and economic mix to the urban and rural regional mix within Yorkshire and explore how creative potential can be manipulated through packaging a region's traditional heritage and culture as a fashion concern. The regional mix demonstrates how creative industries could potentially be a major component in a new knowledge economy,¹⁴ capable of delivering regional fashion regeneration through initiatives linked to exploitation of creative and cultural heritage.

I also examined literature that focused upon fashion marketing, promotion and branding, discussing both the theory and practice of marketing in the fashion industry. I wanted to develop my understanding of brands and how they are communicated, launched and evaluated. This approach helped me compare ideas discussed with interviewees about the marketing of Yorkshire fashion as a branded label and the process of communicating the value of the product to a potential customer base. Linking these to theories about the creative economy and the aesthetic marketplace helped to contextualize ways in which Yorkshire fashion could be identified as a source of economic revitalization, exploited on a more global basis. These ideas have been particularly explored by Florida, who emphasises how investment in culture and technology are key ingredients to attracting and maintaining a local creative class which links directly to the economy. As Florida has observed, the creative industries have become increasingly important to economic well-being, which suggests that 'Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource.'¹⁵



Image 3: Burtons staff day out to Morecambe, Lancashire, 1960s.
© Photo courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries

In order to contextualise Yorkshire within an aesthetic marketplace, my research also investigated the historical, social, business and visual growth of fashion design and production in the Yorkshire region. Established during the Industrial Revolution, Yorkshire's weaving industry has long set the benchmark for high quality, made in England cloth. The region's mills continue to produce the majority of England's worsted and woollen fabric and are used by many of the world's great fashion brands, including Burberry, Prada, Gucci and the tailors on London's Savile Row. Yorkshire cloth was recently showcased in a collaboration between ten of Yorkshire's leading textile mills and a sophisticated in-store display presented under the collective brand 'Yorkshire Textiles,' launched at the prestigious Harvey Nichols store in Leeds in 2010. The literature review identified the history of textiles within Yorkshire. There proved

to be little documentation through books or journal articles about the subject, and much information was discovered through Internet sites. From these sites I gathered data about exhibitions, fashion and textile shows and events and was able to follow up the information gathered by visiting exhibitions or arranging to speak with individuals associated with them. I then formulated a specific questionnaire exploring ways in which fashion products have been designed, marketed and consumed within Yorkshire. I sent the questionnaire to over two hundred fashion students and academics in a large West Yorkshire fashion and costume department at University of Huddersfield as well as to members of the Northern Society of Costume and Textiles (I presented this at their bi-annual meeting 24 April 2012). I ultimately received seventy-four responses from students and academics and twenty-six responses from costume society members. Their responses provided me with many valuable voices and oral histories related to fashion (and textiles) produced within Yorkshire. The respondents were asked to jot down any thoughts, however long or short. The questions included:

- What does the phrase ‘Made in Yorkshire’ mean to you in relation to fashion?
- Do you have any significant thoughts or memories about ‘Fashion in Yorkshire’ i.e. any significant retailers or shops?
- Where did you/do you go to ‘dress up’ (i.e. social events or shopping occasions when you dressed up)?
- How do you think a fashion brand such as ‘Made in Yorkshire’ could compete at the top end of the global fashion market?



Image 4: Burton's shop, Leeds, West Yorkshire, 1960s.
© Photo courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries

I wanted to discover perceptions of Yorkshire as a fashion centre and whether the interviewees thought that fashion ideas and products can be successfully established beyond cosmopolitan and municipal centres. I also asked my respondents for their memories of fashion in Yorkshire, i.e., significant retailers, designers and dressmakers. During my interview with the costume curator Natalie Raw I was allowed access to archival material about the department stores Marshall and Snelgrove (in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Harrogate and York), Marks & Spencer, Burtons, Hainsworth and the Leeds Tailoring archive (Images 3, 4). My aim was to develop an understanding of both the historical and contemporary context of fashion and the aesthetic marketplace within Yorkshire. The main objectives were to:

- Identify the significance of the heritage of fashion within the Yorkshire region.
- Identify contemporary initiatives that promote the design, production and consumption of fashion within Yorkshire.
- Identify the feasibility for establishing a 'Made in Yorkshire' fashion brand.
- Develop further ideas for fashion research related to the development of fashion within provinces around the world and how this impacts upon design, production and consumption.

3. Yorkshire's Fashion Heritage

When asked whether Yorkshire was perceived to be a fashion centre, Rita Britton answered 'No, but it is our job to turn it into one.'¹⁶ She felt it was more important as a textile centre than a fashion centre. Britton noted that if Yorkshire considered its exquisite textiles and developed more exciting things this could be used to support the establishment of a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand. The basis of the initiative could be likened to sliding back a glass door to reveal the quality and craft from which Yorkshire fashion could trade. Britton discussed fashion brands and labels that have been established beyond international locales such as Carpe Diem from the Perugia region of central Italy, whose designer Maurizio Altieri focuses on the artisanship and craftsmanship of the garment.¹⁷ A questionnaire response from a member of the Northern Society of Costume and Textiles emphasised how 'Fashion and quality may in some sense seem opposites in a Yorkshire context. Fashion equates to transience and disposability – quality endures.'¹⁸ The response seems to encapsulate the spirit of Britton's ideas, as well as Florida's concepts about the creative economy, and highlights her belief that quality fashion products can be established by capitalising on the heritage and cultural aesthetics within a region and the economic potential of human creativity in order to develop new and exciting ideas merging tradition with innovation.

In the initial meeting at The Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield the assembled party discussed ideas about the development of a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand. The initiative could potentially establish a uniquely supportive environment where new designers benefit from a wide range of services to support the creation of top quality products in the Yorkshire region. Support could be provided by key partners and include the sourcing of Yorkshire-produced fabrics from the top manufacturers, the provision of Yorkshire based manufacturing/CMT capacity, commercial testing and distribution through top retail outlets and potentially business start-up grants. Establishing such a brand could potentially create an increased number of new business starts and jobs, with higher than average chances of success through ongoing support from an expert network. The development of increased quality manufacturing capacity could also serve to re-establish a proportion of prestige manufacturing back to the UK and the region from overseas. Resourcing would help to repatriate the fashion

and textile industries and its wealth of skills, which Maurice Bennett CBE, Joint Chairman of Long Tall Sally and Kookai, described as a 'Lost heritage we have allowed to slip away.'¹⁹

My research revealed other similar initiatives within Yorkshire. I attended a meeting of the Leeds Fashion Design and Manufacturing Hub (LFDMMH) at the Melbourne Street Studios in Leeds in September 2012.²⁰ In an email sent to me on 29 August 2012, members at the Hub revealed that the initiative had worked with the Business Support Team of Leeds City Council to deliver a vision for a centre of fashion design and manufacture. It was supported by an 'Active promotional programme and a wider network of facilities, including prime retail locations and high profile gallery and event space.'²¹ To make this vision a reality the initiative had decided to look for designers, manufacturers and machinists to participate in the development of the Leeds Fashion Design and Manufacturing Hub to be based at Melbourne Street Studios. The initial discussion focused upon a 'Made in Leeds' concept. In the talks, however, I was able to emphasize the wider initiatives in Yorkshire that are developing an inclusive Yorkshire fashion brand. I observed that focusing solely on Leeds was perhaps too narrow a vision and excluded the fashion design and manufacturing potential of the region as a whole.



Image 5: Marshall and Snelgrove garment label, circa 1930s.

© Photo courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries

To contextualise the development of a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand, my research identified the historical growth of Yorkshire's fashion and textile heritage and its legacy of skills and technologies through both oral and written histories. I also considered its economic impact locally, nationally and globally. I discovered two short films that discussed the industrial clothing and textile heritage of two Yorkshire centres during the post-World War II years, Huddersfield and Leeds. It is interesting to compare the footage of the films as both provide

historical narratives about the production of clothing and textiles within the region. The Huddersfield film *Looking at Britain: Industrial Town*, filmed in 1962 for the British Film Institute, provided a survey of the industrial and social life of Huddersfield.²² The second film, *From the Same Cloth: A Family History of Clothing Manufacture in Leeds*, profiles the Zimmerman family who ran a series of clothing factories in Leeds throughout the mid to late twentieth century.²³ Both films provide a resume of thriving industries steeped in the heritage of mass clothing manufacture. Huddersfield is described as an internationally renowned centre of excellence due to the quality of light engineering and textiles produced within the town, whilst Leeds from the 1950s to the 1980s is depicted as 'Totally dependent on the clothing industry; it was just a boom time; it was easy to get the fabrics, get the labour and easy to produce.'²⁴ Each film emphasises how thousands of men and women were involved in the clothing (not necessarily fashion orientated) and related textile industries in small, medium and large companies. David Zimmerman, who established the Leeds clothing factories, discussed how Leeds was a powerhouse for clothing with many bespoke tailors working for individual companies. I interviewed the clothing manufacturer and entrepreneur Lee Mason, who revealed how some of Yorkshire's manufacturers swung between the pendulums of both fashion related and more ordinary clothing related production.²⁵ For several years Mason was managing director of Heaton's Factory in Leeds, a business that produced ranges of leather, sheepskin and corporate uniforms. He also established the fashion label 'Lee Mason,' which sold to several department stores in Europe including Dickins & Jones in London. Heaton's Factory had a contract with the Parisian fabric merchants Dormeuil, which promoted and sold ranges of fashionable cloth globally. Lee Mason's career mirrors those of other Yorkshire entrepreneurs who balanced fashion businesses during the boom time from the 1950s to the 1980s. These industries also supported thousands of small businesses connected to it. Sadly by the late 1990s, because of globalisation and the search for lower cost manufacturing overseas, the clothing business in Leeds and the Yorkshire region was in terminal decline becoming what the banks termed a 'Sunset industry.'²⁶

I sent the same questionnaire as that sent to fashion students and academics to members of the Northern Society of Costume and Textiles, and asked them to jot down any significant recollections about Yorkshire based designers and retailers. Many from the Society remembered Marshall and Snelgrove, a department store originally opened by a Yorkshire man James Marshall in Oxford Street, London in 1837 (Images 5 & 6). The store had branches in Leeds, York, Harrogate, Sheffield and Bradford and was in business until the 1970s. A book published in 1950 by the fashion journalist Alison Settle, described the impact of this luxury store beyond London, as it expanded by opening stores in fashionable areas of regional cities.

Today shopping out of London is as keen a business, as smart and competitive as it is in Oxford Street or might be in Regent Street or Bond Street. Life is swifter and more mingled; women no longer come up to London 'for the season' if rich or "for a stay" if moderately well off.²⁷

Settle analysed the needs of customers regionally, emphasising that taste away from London, was in danger of being regulated by London. Marshall and Snelgrove stores were designed to be individual and were promoted as understanding the sartorial needs of their regional customers, for example, 'Why women want certain types of specialised goods for life that is lived in that district, with its special functions, its differences of climate.'²⁸ The store claimed to understand the nuances of changing fashions yet had a policy for keeping costs low whilst offering fantastic quality.



Image 6: Marshall and Snelgrove, Leeds, West Yorkshire, circa 1930s.
© Photo courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries

Reflections from members of the Costume and Textile Society gave a picture of retailers and dressmakers, social events and shopping occasions both attended and 'dressed up' for in Yorkshire. They also captured how fashion was appropriated, understood and promulgated within the region. Since the average age of the Society members was over sixty years of age, it was possible to gather data recording family memories stretching back throughout the twentieth century. One respondent reminisced about shopping in Leeds.

Department stores such as Schofields and Marshall and Snelgrove held frequent fashion shows, which showed current 'high' fashions and examples of designer items. For those of us who may not have been able to aspire to the original, it was possible to make our own versions, sometimes aided by the quickly available *Vogue* patterns, thereby sporting high fashion at affordable costs.²⁹

For followers of fashion, the above reminiscence demonstrates how fashionable looks could be achieved through affordable home-dressmaking techniques that made fashion accessible on lower incomes. Other Society members recalled stores that were fashion conscious yet inexpensive, including Bickers in Dewsbury and other outlets for shoes, hats and accessories.

In the seventies Hewlett's, (family based firm outside Bradford) had original couture and cutting edge fashion. I purchased many items from here, including items for before, during and after my honeymoon. Nick Hewlett (son of the family) subsequently opened Hewlett's in Harrogate and central Manchester - both successful until his early, untimely death. C&A store (Leeds) provided much up to date fashion at very reasonable prices.³⁰

4. Contemporary Yorkshire Fashion

As emphasised in the methodology/literature review, my initial attempts to investigate contemporary fashion enterprises in Yorkshire revealed little documentation. This was a challenge because I had to delve deeper to unearth information. I wanted to discover designers who operated within the area and what sort of initiatives had been set up to promote and market Yorkshire fashion. As noted above, the Internet proved to be the most useful tool in this process. The website for Hebe Media – Leeds Fashion Scene (Hebemedial, 2011 parts 1 and 2) demonstrated how the company attempted to pitch Leeds as a global fashion city.³¹ Leeds is the largest metropolis within Yorkshire and boasts independent designer boutiques (Vivienne Westwood, Paul Smith, Oliver Sweeney, Mulberry, etc.), the luxury stores Harvey Nichols and Flannels as well as many well-known high street retailers (Whistles, Jigsaw, All Saints, etc.). When Hebe Media was formed in 2009, its vision was to drive Leeds into the list of emerging, exciting, international cities and acknowledged there were some great stories and brands to have emerged from the city and from the Yorkshire region. As the creative consultant for Hebe Media Lee Hicken said:

Our Head of Fashion, Shang Ting and I both studied Fashion Marketing and Communication at Instituto Europeo di Design in Barcelona and, after graduation, we both had a number of offers to take jobs in established 'fashion cities' such as New York, London and Shanghai. We made the decision to come to Leeds because we saw the city as a blank canvas.³²

Hebe Media began to research fashion activity within the Leeds area, unearthing much information. As with many large cities, Leeds, they found, had a creative, fashion-oriented community that included designers, artists, DJs, models, musicians, actors, marketers, photographers, stylists etc. This fashion hub centred on the luxury department store Harvey Nichols, which gave Yorkshire a huge boost to its fashion credibility when it opened its first regional store in Leeds in 1996. The store produces many fashion events within the city such as Fashion vs. Football, fashion shows and collaborations with Yorkshire textile mills. *The Leeds Guide* website detailed events which also centred on the thriving bar and club culture within the city. Hebe Media identified several designers with businesses in Leeds and discussed the challenges faced in facilitating and supporting the path of a 'talented young designer' to 'important fashion brand,' particularly beyond the nucleus of a major capital. Hebe Media recognized their business initiative would include nurturing some of the raw talent in the city and helping them with manufacturing facilities with the goal of establishing a successful

company/brand based in Leeds. These objectives were expanded and explored in the 'Made in Leeds' meeting I attended at the Leeds Fashion Design and Manufacturing Hub at the Melbourne Street Studios in Leeds in September 2012.

Historically, several independent dressmakers and tailors have established businesses in Yorkshire. One of the better-known dressmaking houses was that of Madame Clapham (established by Emily Clapham 1856-1952) who ran a dressmaking salon in Hull from 1887 to 1952. By the 1890s this was highly regarded and attracted worldwide patronage for the quality and style of ladies' fashion produced. Clapham was able to maintain a high profile clientele of the wealthy and the titled and compete with London fashion houses of the period, without advertising.³³ The success of her business was established through personal recommendations based on the quality and craftsmanship of the products. As a marketing campaign for contemporary Yorkshire fashion enterprises, this has a similarity to the *Carpe Diem* philosophy which relies on the artisanship and craftsmanship of the garments to build its reputation.

I discovered several contemporary fashion designers and retailers operating within Yorkshire of which I was unaware. These businesses produce ranges of clothing, shoes and accessories manufactured in Yorkshire and are often sold from boutiques such as Aqua Couture or boutiques named after the designer such as Nicholas Deakins and Dawn Stretton. The retailers Marks & Spencer and Burton were both established in Leeds at the end of the nineteenth century and remain large scale multiples today.

Rita Britton's iconic boutique in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, is arguably the most established and well-known independent store within the region. Established in 1967, Pollyanna remains at the forefront of designer wear retailing for men and women and was one of the first stores in the UK to stock designers from Japan such as Junya Watanabe, Issey Miyake, Comme Des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto. This decision paved the way for the Japanese revolution in fashion in the 1980s from which other retailers followed suite. The store sells other labels such as *Carpe Diem*, Yves Saint Laurent and Lanvin as well as Rita's own range Nomad, a luxurious collection designed and produced in-store. There are several other independent retailers selling designer clothing throughout the region in shopping centres such as those in Harrogate (Lynx and Julie Fitzmaurice etc.) but none who have the vision to be hailed by the Victoria and Albert museum in London as arguably one of the 'Leading shops in the world.'³⁴

The Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield initiated the first 'Yorkshire Fashion Week' in 2009 with an aim to:

Raise awareness of, promote and showcase regional design and manufacturing talent, attract greater numbers of ambitious students to regional universities and colleges who want to study fashion design or launch their own collections, develop links between design and manufacturing bases to maximize commercial exploitation of exciting, emerging regional design talent.³⁵

The event was launched with great fanfare at a special parliamentary event and was attended by Members of Parliament and the Yorkshire born designer Christopher Bailey (now chief creative director at Burberry). As Bill Macbeth, managing director of The Textile Centre of Excellence, said:

Many people know Yorkshire already has an enviable history of textile production but we believe it also has an enviable future in fashion design and production. It's clear we have an immense pool of talent in the region that we

need to encourage but we also want to make sure the local economy enjoys the benefits in terms of jobs by developing links between designers, textile producers and creative hubs such as our own Textile Centre of Excellence.³⁶

Yorkshire galleries and museums have curated exhibitions, celebrating fashion and textiles produced within the region. Three new galleries, opened in the historic Leeds Industrial Museum at Armley Mills in 2011. These venues have showcased Yorkshire's contribution to the global fashion industry by exhibiting products made with fabrics from local mills. They have also focused upon cutting edge and time-honoured techniques that focus upon the skills involved in making clothes. Led by Leeds Fashion Works, an initiative aimed at linking the region's fashion and textile-related activity, the galleries jointly emphasise the importance of the region's fashion industry while using fashion to develop educational opportunities. According to Suzy Shepherd, the co-founder of Leeds Fashion Works:

So many of Yorkshire's economic roots can be linked to textiles; however, there is a common misconception that the industry has disappeared. The reality is that the mills have shifted from mass production to high-end niche markets and are producing some of the finest cloth in the world.³⁷



Image 7: Graduate outfits from University of Huddersfield fashion students, made in Hainsworth cloth, *Behind the Seams*, Armley Mills, Leeds, West Yorkshire, 2012. © Photo courtesy of Kevin Almond

Behind the Seams, a permanent exhibition in the largest gallery at Armley Mills, opened in 2011. The exhibition celebrates those people who work out of the limelight using their practical skills to turn design ideas into luxury products and highlights different craft related career paths. Suzy Shepherd also collaborated with the University of Huddersfield fashion department when she selected eight outfits from graduate collections (Image 7). These are made up in Hainsworth cloth and celebrate Yorkshire fabric and fashion design and were added to the exhibition in 2012.

The role of higher education in contributing to the development of Yorkshire's fashion identity has been considerable. With the expansion of the UK higher education sector in the late

1990s many Yorkshire universities and colleges developed undergraduate fashion programmes. The initiatives developed by these new programmes tapped into local industries through sponsored projects, which helped to increase the profile of Yorkshire as a credible fashion entity. Several graduates have a set up their own labels in the region and employed skilled local crafts people. University of Huddersfield fashion students participated in a live project with Armley Mills in 2012 that drew on the collection of menswear held in Leeds Museums and Galleries as well as on existing research on the Leeds tailoring industry through its association with companies such as Burtons and Hepworth's (Images 8 & 9). The project asked students to investigate this heritage to inspire the design of a range of contemporary tailored garments, which were amalgamated with the historical garments in a curated exhibition. The work of Huddersfield fashion students was also celebrated in an exhibition with Huddersfield Art Gallery called *Insufficient Allure, The Art of Creative Pattern Cutting*, which emphasised the role of the pattern cutter, which many view to be as significant as the role of the fashion designer within the industry³⁸ (Image 10). The exhibition inspired a peer reviewed conference 'The First International Symposium for Creative Pattern Cutting' held 6-7 February 2013, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK. Although Huddersfield is not associated with innovation in fashionable garments, the event was the first global event to promote contemporary research into creative cut and its significance within the fashion industry. It provided a platform for pattern cutters, fashion designers, students, and educators to explore the impact and direction for creative pattern cutting within a Yorkshire setting.



Image 8: Armley Mills tailoring exhibition, Leeds, West Yorkshire, June 2012.
© Photo courtesy of Kevin Almond

The fashion department at University of Leeds established 'The Yorkshire Fashion Archive' with an avowed purpose to provide a 'unique historical and cultural record of Yorkshire life' and document 'clothing produced, purchased and worn by Yorkshire folk' in the twentieth century. According to its curators, 'The collection reflects changing social attitudes and multi-cultural influences, economic prosperity, global trends and the regional technical excellence in textiles and clothing over a 100 year period.'³⁹ In 2012 the Archive collaborated with the Woolmark Company and asked University of Leeds fashion students to choose vintage clothing from the collection and rework it to make a contemporary fashion statement, this was exhibited in the *Wool Re-Fashioned* exhibition from 7 September to 12 November 2012. The garments were produced in donated fabric from Woolmark and formed part of an exhibition at the nineteenth-century industrial mill 'Salts Mill' in Saltaire, West Yorkshire. Each garment was presented next to the vintage garment showcasing old designs and new inspirations. The vintage garments were displayed with captions detailing information about the original Yorkshire-based wearer and their recollections about their purchase and where it was worn, which served to build up a picture of fashionable life within the region from the preceding one hundred years.



Image 9: Burton's Tailoring Factory, Leeds, West Yorkshire, 1930s.
© Photo courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries

5. Fashionability in Yorkshire

Separate interviews with the fashion journalist Colin McDowell, the fashion retailer Rita Britton, and the costume curator at Leeds Museums and Galleries Natalie Raw, revealed differing opinions about fashion and fashionability in Yorkshire. Colin McDowell claims that Yorkshire has no profile as a fashion centre. 'Apart from Rita's shop, Yorkshire had no more claim to being a fashion centre than any other county,' he observed.⁴⁰ On recent visits to Yorkshire, McDowell had viewed the streets of Leeds, Huddersfield and Sheffield and said that he had not seen anybody he would call really fashionable, which he viewed as a reflection of

the economic situation of many and also to the fact that in England, traditionally, men and women outside the narrow confines of London's West End and Knightsbridge do not dress in a way he would term as 'fashionable.' According to McDowell, there are few places in the UK with a strong restaurant culture and social life, where people regularly and frequently visit outside the home. Rita Britton agrees with McDowell's view but thinks it is the job of Yorkshire people to turn the county into a fashion centre by leading the times not merely harnessing them. She feels that in ways similar to creative groups such as the 'Arts and Crafts Movement',⁴¹ and 'Beatniks',⁴² it is important to establish an individual identity through underground movements that would drive a return to quality and handcrafting. Natalie Raw claims that people do not really know about Yorkshire and its fashion history, particularly in relation to manufacturing, and are therefore surprised about how much goes on. She notes that textile companies such as Abraham Moone and Bower Roebuck & Co. Ltd. are pitching themselves as luxury brands, mainly because of the huge costs of UK production, which dictate that its products must be considered luxurious because of their prices. Colin McDowell's perspective is that for Yorkshire to have a fashion society huge numbers of people are required to play the fashion game at all levels, from the super wealthy and leisured to young kids who make their own fashions. Outside of London, even for the young fashionista, he says fashion is about 'Topshop, not a little Saint Martin's fashion graduate working in a chicken shed in Dalston' (Dalston is in East London).⁴³ According to McDowell, it is difficult for a fashion designer to make a living outside of London. Research disproves his claim, through historical and contemporary analysis. For instance in 1950 the view from the standpoint of Marshall and Snelgrove was that 'Shopping out of London is as keen a business, as smart and competitive as it is in Oxford Street or might be in Regent Street or Bond Street.'



Image 10: University of Huddersfield 'Insufficient Allure: The Art of Creative Pattern Cutting,' Huddersfield Art Gallery, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire 7 April – 2 June 2012.

© Photo courtesy of Kevin Almond

At the inaugural meeting for 'Made in Yorkshire' in March 2012, the discussion centred around how the initiative could promote strategic product areas to make an impact on the current market. For example, it was recognised that the Chinese desire Western fashion labels but operate on a huge scale, placing large and multiple orders, which would necessitate a guaranteed infrastructure for manufacturing. A 'Made in Yorkshire' initiative could create a supportive environment to attract such a market with key partners via an 'Enterprise Foundation' model and include sourcing of Yorkshire produced fabrics, manufacturing capacity, investment, matching business involvement and business start-up grants.⁴⁴ Such an initiative would require access to a network of support for manufacturing and planning, marketing advice and export, business development and financial planning. Top-end retailers would be needed and the biggest challenge would be manufacturing the garments. This optimism is a stark contrast to the redundancies suffered by the Leeds clothing industries in the late 1980s after being recognised for decades as a 'Power house for fashion,'⁴⁵ operating on a mass-manufacture scale. The success of such an endeavour could only be measured by its potential ability to create a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand in the imaginations of global consumers.

6. Branding 'Made in Yorkshire'

Arguably many individual countries are already branded as fashion entities. This helps build fashion identities which impact on the economy and exploit 'Human creativity as the ultimate economic resource.'⁴⁶ Consider 'The 'Made in Italy' label, which is synonymous across the world as a symbol of elegance and refinement.'⁴⁷ The fashion historian Valerie Steele has observed:

Not only are there fine quality clothes 'Made in Italy,' there also exists a conceptual category known as the 'Italian look' which is internationally recognized as a signifier of refined opulence and deluxe modernity, of casual, expensive, sexy elegance. Yet within this category, there is room for a variety of individual styles each of which apparently express some aspect of what foreigners perceive as *la dolce vita*.⁴⁸

In contrast, a 'Made in Britain' look is described by McDermott as, 'Beyond fashion: an enduring image that dresses an attitude and a lifestyle, and that continues to combine quality and tradition with the contemporary and the new.'⁴⁹ It could be suggested that each fashion-producing province within a country operates within these conceptual constraints. For instance a 'Made in Yorkshire' brand could be described as an extension of a Made in Britain look as it capitalizes on the local industries and traditions of its combined regions in order to establish an individual slant to its identity.

In the initial discussions with Rita Britton about 'Made in Yorkshire,' she recognized there could be a much greater initiative relating to the production of fashion within the region. In buying collections for her expansive client base she identified a new way of branding beginning to emerge within the fashion industry. Several of the labels she sourced, including the Perugia, Italy label Carpe Diem and were focusing on exclusive ways of marketing their products, creating an aura for style and quality. They selected which stores they wanted to sell to and dictated which stores could buy which stock. This opposed the traditional notion of the retailer placing the order for the product, determining which styles would be ordered. Maurizio Altieri, the creator of Carpe Diem, says he wants to remove himself from the fake glitter of selling fashion through his approach to crafting clothes.

The design philosophy from day one was creating timeless, utilitarian, hand-

made clothes from the highest quality fabrics that have undergone unique treatments. These included leathers that have been washed, distressed, crushed, and buried in soil for months, silver sterling buttons, 12-gauge over dyed cashmere, and hard cottons. The pride in craftsmanship techniques and attention to detail is on par with one that goes into fabric development - all garments are hand-made, the pants are lined, seams are carefully distressed. The result of this industrious labour is that the soul of the maker can truly be seen in the clothes. The garments, displayed on meat hooks come with their own tube cases – a sign of respect for a garment.⁵⁰

Carpe Diem refuses to advertise, produce seasonal collections, fashion shows, and engage in other activities that are expected of a fashion house. Maurizio believes this philosophy enforces an appreciation of the garment itself, the purest and most beautiful reason for creating clothes. Britton argues that such an approach could be the building block from which to develop fashion brands within Yorkshire. The concept could help to create labels that combine the use of heritage Yorkshire fabrics with a craft approach. Ranges could be designed, produced and marketed, capitalizing on the craft and skill inherent in the manufacturing and design skills within the Yorkshire region. Whilst maintaining a strong sense of British style this approach to fashion design and manufacture would be merged with an individual 'Yorkshire' identity that would 'Combine quality and tradition with the contemporary and the new.'⁵¹

7. Conclusion

The careful planning and infrastructure of a 'Made in Yorkshire' enterprise, modelled in some way on the business concept of Carpe Diem, suggest the possibilities for developing credible fashion brands beyond major cities. Further research could investigate and compare additional fashion initiatives in emerging fashion cities and provinces beyond the big five capitals of New York, London, Milan, Paris and Tokyo, 'Fashioning the City: Exploring Fashion Cultures, Structures and Systems,' a conference held at the Royal College of Art in London, 19-21 September 2012, attempted to address this. Describing how catwalk images can immediately be accessed globally and how off-shore production can de-value the legitimacy of fashion products, Nathaniel Dafydd Beard, the conference chair, commented:

Is it still possible to trust labels such as 'Made in Italy' or 'Made in Britain', while cities such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Dakar, Seoul or Sydney, amongst others, are increasingly asserting themselves as "alternatives" to the "Big Five" Fashion Capitals, with their own distinct fashion cultures.⁵²

By harnessing the zeitgeist of globalism, not only can more discrete countries be individually branded, so can particular regions within them, which are developing their own distinct fashion slant. Such branding could build distinctive fashion looks and positively impact local economies.

The initial stages of this research were presented at the 'Fashioning the City' conference as a working paper. My paper was placed in a session named 'Marketing Fashion and Place: Managing Legacies of Local Reputations and Identities.'⁵³ The other papers in the session focused on the branding of cities not normally associated with fashion. In 'What's in a Name? The Marketing of the Antwerp 6,' Emmanuelle Dirix described how six designers from the Antwerp Academy (including Dries van Noten and Ann Demeulemeester) transformed Belgium

and in particular Antwerp into ‘the world’s unlikeliest fashion capital.’⁵⁴ In ‘Lisbon as an Emerging Creative City: A Site for Fashion Cross Contaminations,’ Alexandra Cabral explained how Lisbon could merge its unique fashion and art cultures in a cultural fusion to turn the city into a ‘reference in the field of fashion cross-contamination approaches,’ boosting investment in the creative economy.⁵⁵ The fashion initiatives described in all three papers adhere to Currid’s ideas about the importance of cultural economy.⁵⁶ As discussed in the methodology of this article, this could be transposed to the urban and rural mix of regions such as Yorkshire. By tapping into the social, cultural and economic environment of a region it can begin to brand its fashion potential in order to result in economic gain.

Future research could focus in greater depth upon fashion-producing provinces, globally. This could expand a global notion of fashion design and production and help to develop greater opportunities for talented designers and manufacturers within much wider geographical expanses. It could pave the way for greater credibility and subsequent economic value in the design, production and consumption of these products. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida produces an overall ranking of regions in the USA according to a creativity index. This statistical argument includes a discussion of a creative class concentration and a talent index. Florida argues that those regions with more vibrant cultural scenes have greater potential for economic growth and a strong job market. Future research that produces such data on a global basis is needed and identified enterprises could be upheld as exemplars. For instance, the UK company, The Harris Tweed Authority, which has produced loosely woven wool in remote hamlets off the west coast of Scotland for generations, today has a wide-reaching fashion credibility.⁵⁷ Rocketed to fashion prominence by Vivienne Westwood in her ‘Harris Tweed’ collection in 1987, Harris Tweed was recently used in a funky menswear collection sold by the fashion retailer Topman (*Autumn/Winter* 2012). The correlation between creative concentration and growth here lies with the creativity of the weavers and the ways in which the fashion industry exploits this creativity. The ‘Made in Yorkshire’ brand, produced amid the vast traditional heritage of the Yorkshire region, could emulate this example in order to catapult itself into global fashion prominence. Arguably, there are many other undiscovered worldwide fashion industries poised for similar recognition on a global fashion map, and their struggles and successes could be assessed according to a creativity index to measure their potential impact.

The next steps for the research could be to broaden the sample by issuing the questionnaire used in this case study of Yorkshire to explore the ways in which fashion is designed, marketed and consumed outside the district. This would gauge opinions from those who reside in different regions in other parts of the world who work in provincial fashion industries. Additional research could also establish ways to support further a greater recognition for the branding and marketing of regions as viable fashion entities on the global stage.

Notes

¹ Veronica B. Manlow, ‘Creating an American Mythology: A Comparison of Branding Strategies in Three Fashion Firms,’ *The Journal of Fashion Practice* 3, no. 1 (2011): 86.

² ‘V Q Victoria Quarter,’ *Victoria Quarter*, accessed 16 October 2013, <http://www.v-q.co.uk/>.

³ British Wool Week is organized by The Campaign for Wool whose patron is HRH the Prince of Wales. It is an initiative by British wool producers to celebrate the fibre. Various events are held throughout the UK and globally to promote the natural, renewable and biodegradable benefits of wool.

- ⁴ The 1st White Cloth Hall is a Grade II* listed building in the city centre of Leeds, UK. Built in 1711 its purpose was to sell white undyed cloth.
- ⁵ The Bronte sisters: Charlotte (1816-1855), Emily (1818-1848) and Anne (1820-1849) were part of a literary family of poets and novelists who lived in the village of Haworth in West Yorkshire. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are accepted as masterpieces of literature.
- ⁶ Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
- ⁷ 'Eee bah gum' is Yorkshire dialect. It is an exclamation of surprise roughly translated as 'Goodness me.'
- ⁸ Thomas R. Sadler, 'The Rise of the Creative Class,' *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 34, no. 1 (2005): 133.
- ⁹ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 249.
- ¹⁰ Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2001), *Second Mapping Document: Creative Industries, Department for Culture, Media and Sport*, Creative Industries, London, 2001.
- ¹¹ Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Marketing Values in Clothing and Modeling* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 55.
- ¹² Sadler, 'The Rise of the Creative Class,' 133.
- ¹³ Elizabeth Currid, *The Warhol Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2.
- ¹⁴ A 'Knowledge Economy' uses knowledge technologies to produce economic benefits as well as job creation.
- ¹⁵ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 249.
- ¹⁶ Rita Britton, interview by Kevin Almond, 17 April 2012.
- ¹⁷ 'Designer Profile: Maurizio Altieri of Carpe Diem,' *Fashion Critic* (blog), January 2006, <http://fashion-critic.blogspot.co.uk/2006/01/designer-profile-maurizio-altieri-of.html>.
- ¹⁸ Questionnaire response from a member of The Northern Society of Costume and Textiles on 30 April 2012.
- ¹⁹ Maurice Bennett, 'Supply Chain Challenges' (presentation, ASBCI Facing Fashion's Supply Chain Challenges, Leeds, UK, 15 March 2012).
- ²⁰ 'Leeds Fashion Design and Manufacturing Hub,' *Eventbrite*, accessed 25 November 2012. <http://www.eventbrite.com/event/4195613192/?ref=enivte&invite=MjQwMzE4MC9zdXp5Lm1hc29uQGxlZWRzLWFydC5hYy51ay8w>.
- ²¹ Melbourne Street Studios, email message to Kevin Almond, 29 August 2012.
- ²² *Looking at Britain: Industrial Town*, directed by Nigel Hemsley (1962; London: Production Company Impact for British Film Institute, 2012), DVD.
- ²³ David Zimmerman, narrator, *From the Same Cloth: A Family History of Clothing Manufacture in Leeds*, directed by David Zimmerman (2012; Leeds: HebeMedia, 2012), DVD.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Lee Mason, interview by Kevin Almond, 30 November 2012.
- ²⁶ Zimmerman, *From the Same Cloth*.
- ²⁷ Alison Settle, *A Family of Shops* (Margate: The Thanet Press, 1950), 5.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 7.
- ²⁹ Questionnaire response from a member of The Northern Society of Costume and Textiles on 30 April 2012.
- ³⁰ Ibid.

- ³¹ 'Leeds Fashion Scene Part 1,' *Hebe Media* (blog), 25 October 2011, <http://www.hebemedial.com/everything-blog/2011/10/25/leeds-fashion-scene-part-1.html>;
- 'Leeds Fashion Scene Part 2,' *Hebe Media* (blog), 27 October 2011, <http://www.hebemedial.com/everything-blog/2011/10/27/leeds-fashion-scene-part-2.html>.
- ³² 'Leeds Fashion Scene Part 1,' *Hebe Media* (blog), 25 January 2011, <http://www.hebemedial.com/everything-blog/2011/10/25/leeds-fashion-scene-part-1.html>.
- ³³ 'Madame Clapham: Hull's Celebrated Dressmaker, *Hull Museums Collections*, accessed 19 March 2012, <http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/museumcollections/collections/storydetail.php?irn=405>.
- ³⁴ 'Pollyanna,' (Rita Britton's shop), accessed 20 December 2012, <http://www.polyanna.com/>.
- ³⁵ 'Christopher Bailey Joins MPs to Help Support Parliamentary Launch of Yorkshire Fashion Week,' *Policy Connect*, accessed 19 March 2012, <http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/christopher-bailey-joins-mps-help-support-parliamentary-launch-yorkshire-fashionweek>.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Fiona Ferguson, 'Behind the Seams,' *The Leeds Guide*, accessed 2 June 2012, <http://www.leedsguide.co.uk/review/review/behind-the-seams/18687>.
- ³⁸ Kevin Almond and Kathryn Brennand, 'Insufficient Allure: The Art of Creative Pattern Cutting,' *ROTOR*, no. 1 (2012): 8.
- ³⁹ 'Yorkshire Fashion Archive,' *University of Leeds*, accessed 19 March 2012, <http://www.yorkshirefashionarchive.org/>.
- ⁴⁰ Colin McDowell, e-mail message to author, 25 March 2012.
- ⁴¹ Mary Greensted, *The Arts and Craft Movement in Britain* (London: Shire, 2010).
- ⁴² Alan Bisbort, *Beatniks: A Guide to an American Subculture* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2009).
- ⁴³ Colin McDowell, e-mail message.
- ⁴⁴ An Enterprise Foundation model drives the establishment of new forms of business that create social and economic value.
- ⁴⁵ Zimmerman, *From the Same Cloth*.
- ⁴⁶ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, xiii.
- ⁴⁷ Ellen McIntyre, 'The Methods and Motives of Manipulation: The Fascist Regimes and the Fashioning of Women' (Undergraduate diss., University of Huddersfield, 2012).
- ⁴⁸ Valerie Steele, *The Italian Look* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 92.
- ⁴⁹ Catherine McDermott, *Made in Britain* (London: Octopus Publishing, 2002), 1.
- ⁵⁰ 'Designer Profile: Maurizio Altieri.'
- ⁵¹ McDermott, *Made in Britain*, 1.
- ⁵² Beard, Nathaniel Dafydd. 'Fashioning the City: Exploring Fashion Cultures, Structures and Systems,' accessed 7 December 2012, <http://fashioningthecity.wordpress.com/about/>.
- ⁵³ Kevin Almond, 'Made in Yorkshire: Harnessing the Zeitgeist' (presentation, Fashioning the City: Exploring Fashion Cultures, Structures and Systems, Royal College of Art, London, 19-21 September 2012).
- ⁵⁴ Emmanuelle Dirix, 'What's in a Name? The Marketing of the Antwerp 6' (presentation, Fashioning the City).
- ⁵⁵ Alexandra Cabral, 'Lisbon as an Emerging Creative City: A Site for Fashion Cross Contaminations' (presentation, Fashioning the City).
- ⁵⁶ Currid, *The Warhol Economy*, 1.
- ⁵⁷ Lara Platman, *Harris Tweed* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2011).

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