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EXPERIENCES IN EMBROIDERY: STORIES FROM THE HIGH FASHION EMBROIDERY  
INDUSTRY

by

THERESA C. ALEXANDER

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

December 2014

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Theresa C. Alexander

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Theresa C. Alexander

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Tom and Penny Alexander. You have long pushed me to excel, long wanted me to achieve a doctoral degree. We have endured many arguments, periods of silence, a heart attack, and a stroke, but we all pulled through. Thanks for mowing the lawn, feeding the cats, unfreezing the pipes, and everything else that I needed when I was stressed beyond functional capability. Your help and love means more than I will ever be able to express.

## EXPERIENCES IN EMBROIDERY: STORIES FROM THE HIGH FASHION EMBROIDERY INDUSTRY

Theresa C. Alexander, PhD

University of the Incarnate Word, 2014

Fashion embroidery has been an integral part of high fashion since before King Louis XV of France in the 18th century. Upon the development of *haute couture* in France, a professional fashion embroidery industry arose to serve the needs of the new high fashion designers. Despite significance of professional embroidery in high fashion, there is little documentation of the history of the fashion embroidery industry. Particularly scarce is information about the professional embroiderers working in the industry.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. This qualitative study utilized oral history methods for designing and conducting face-to-face interviews with 20 participants who worked in professional high fashion embroidery workshops in France, England, and Italy. The primary research question guiding the study was: How do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer?

The participants were all professional embroidery professionals chosen via purposeful and snowball sampling methods. 16 participants took part in audio-recorded interviews, while 4 additional participants' contributions were captured in field notes. All but 2 of the interviews took place in the participant's embroidery workshop. Interview transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis.

I uncovered 3 primary themes in the embroiderers' conversations: education and career progress of embroiderers, evolution of the company and methods, and current challenges and future aspirations. Findings revealed that the embroiderer's education or training was one of the most influential events in their lives. The embroiderer's education not only shaped the future of the embroiderer, but also impacted the future of the embroiderer's employing company. In addition to education, a company's history and present working methods also strongly affect the company's potential for future survival and ability to compete globally. The stories of the embroiderers also provide support for teaching embroidery history not only in European embroidery programs, but in American fashion design programs as well.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

When you see an embroidery, you have to touch it and smell it. There's a meaning behind it. A meaning that not only comes from the drawing, but the hands that did it. It's very important.

– Pino Grasso of Pino Grasso Embroideries, Milan

Embroidery, a craft that has developed into an auxiliary industry to fashion as fashion itself, has moved from home-based to a multi-billion dollar industry (Digby, 1963; The NPD Group, 2012). Fashion, and particularly high fashion, would not exist in its current form without auxiliary industries. Yet, while much of the fashion industry's history is documented (Kawamura, 2010), few publications exist about the supporting trades, and specifically, their histories. Embroidery is one of the more visible auxiliary services in the high fashion world as many of the garments are beaded, stitched with decorative patterns, or bedecked with sparkling crystals, making the end product noticeable. Embroidery has become one of the traditional methods of emitting an aura of opulence in fashion and is an expected part of high fashion collections each season (Martin & Koda, 1995). Nevertheless, very little is known about this trade except by the people in this trade. As the older generations of embroiderers die, much of the industry's history is lost with them.

A complete history of the fashion industry is unobtainable without also studying the history of the supporting industries. A common practice in art history is to study objects to better understand the social contexts and design culture of the historical period (Dobraszczyk, 2012). In historical studies, researchers also study a tiny event or a small industry to gain a better understanding of the larger picture. Because studies of smaller aspects of any part of an industry provide important insight into the larger industry as a whole, it is not possible have a complete view of the fashion industry without researchers and historians obtaining a more complete understanding of the history of the auxiliary industries such as embroidery. The auxiliary

industries are much like microcosms that affect the greater environment and are, in turn, affected by the greater environment (Olsen, 2002). The interaction between the greater and the lesser helps to reveal trends, causes, and effects. Due to this need for the history of auxiliary industries, the purpose of my study was originally to create a documented history of the fashion embroidery industry. As I further developed the study, the purpose altered to focus on capturing the life stories of the embroiderers working in the embroidery industry.

### **Historical Overview**

The modern fashion embroidery industry developed in tandem to the haute couture (high fashion) segment of the modern fashion industry (Reynolds, 1997). One of the events that marks the beginning of the haute couture market sector of the modern fashion industry is the opening of Charles Fredrick Worth's fashion house in the 1860s (Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989; Tortora & Eubank, 1994). At this time, the industry began to mutate from dressmaking to fashion designing. Mass production was also taking its first major steps in the garment industry during the second part of the 19th century.

The movement toward mass production of garments was due in part to the new technology of the Industrial Revolution. Before mass production, garments were either custom made or bought as tailor-shop cast-offs, but there was no organized system for producing hundreds of the same garment for the mass populous. The practice of apparel mass production for consumers started with the manufacturing of thousands of soldier uniforms during the American Civil war in the 1860s (Brown & Rice, 2001).

As both the haute couture market and the mass production of apparel began near 1860, this year provides a date boundary for the study of the development of the embroidery industry within fashion. Before mass production and the development of haute couture, embroidery was



either a home craft or a workshop trade for dressmakers. An awareness of fashion history is necessary to understand the history of fashion embroidery.

The history of fashion embroidery is oriented towards high fashion and is primarily European. Its affiliation with high fashion is in part due to the high labor cost of fashion embroidery. The Euro-centricity is the result of the fact that the haute couture market upon which the fashion embroidery industry is dependent developed in Paris and spread to London and Milan (Martin & Koda, 1995). However, haute couture never had much impact on other geographic locations due to the segregation of the fashion markets by location (Stone, 2012). In the last twenty years, an embroidery industry has evolved in Asia in order to provide services at a lower cost and in higher quantity to the mass market segment of the fashion industry (A. Thompson, 1992). Much of garment production has also relocated to Asia (Stone, 2012). However, because the mass-production oriented segment of the industry is newer and culturally segmented from the original fashion embroidery industry, that segment will not be included in the study. Rather, the focus of this history will be European fashion embroidery for haute couture and prêt-à-porter designer levels.

### **The Fashion Industry**

The fashion industry is divided into market levels in order to define and segment design, production, and sales activities. Haute couture and prêt-à-porter are the two highest market levels in fashion (Sorger & Udale, 2006). They are also the two levels of fashion that dominate the catwalk fashion shows worldwide. Paris haute couture (2012) defines haute couture as the ultimate level of fashion in price, luxury, and innovation. Designers working at this level are less constrained by conventional restrictions of production or society than designers working in the lower-priced markets. Rather, garments in haute couture are expected to push the boundaries of

fashion (Sorger & Udale, 2006; Stone, 2012). Prêt-à-porter translates as ready-to-wear. However, as a market level, prêt-à-porter means much more than that. As haute couture is much too expensive to sell many pieces or to sustain itself financially, many designers have elected to produce lines of less expensive garments in greater numbers. The prices of these garments are still high enough to allow use of luxurious fabrics and treatments. Moreover, as these garments are mass produced and not designed for one particular customer, prêt-à-porter, sometimes termed prêt-à-porter deluxe, has become the field in which many designers express their design vision and display their design abilities (Sorger & Udale, 2006).

Garments in these two categories often cost thousands of dollars and haute couture garments sometimes command price tags of well over \$100,000. Special characteristics of the garments include the attention to detail, the quality of materials, the innovation in design, and the amount of handwork required to complete them. Due to these expectations and the ability to command high prices, embroidery is often employed at these two highest levels of the fashion industry. The level of design innovation and quality requires fashion designers to work hand-in-hand with the embroiderers or embroidery designers in order to achieve the desired effect on the garments; therefore, the embroiderers must be readily accessible to the fashion designers. This working partnership has led to the fashion embroidery industry specializing in high fashion (Edwards, 1967a).

The modern fashion industry, as currently defined, started in Europe (Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989) and despite globalization, high fashion is still dictated by Paris, London, and Milan (Sorger & Udale, 2006; Stone, 2012). New York and other cities may have thriving fashion industries, but they are not known for setting the highest levels of fashion trends. The other cities also do not have a strong history of working with haute couture or of having a

flourishing fashion embroidery industry due to their focus on other segments of the fashion market. For example, fashion week in New York is focused on the ready to wear market.

The current fashion industry is a multi-million dollar industry in at least one-third of the world's countries (World Trade Organization, 2013). According to the World Trade Organization, in the United States, the apparel business imported \$87,957 million in apparel products in 2012. The European Union countries imported 170,058 million dollars of apparel products in the same year (World Trade Organization, 2013). In 2011, apparel, accessories, and luxury goods accounted for 15.6% of the world's total retail sales or 1708.7 billion dollars (MarketLine, 2012). These numbers provide a picture of the scope of the fashion industry's financial impact. The fashion industry includes not only design and production of fashion goods, but also wholesale and retail sales of products, design, development, and production (or growth) of raw materials, marketing and advertising, fashion publications, logistics and transport of goods, real estate for fashion business, among many other aspects of the industry (Brown & Rice, 2001). Upon combining all the components of the industry, fashion becomes a major financial powerhouse. While fashion embroidery is only an auxiliary industry of the greater fashion industry, it is an important portion of the fashion industry that can emphasize the whole.

Much of the modern fashion industry focuses on branding and status (Wigley, Nobbs, & Larsen, 2013). An icon on a shirt or the correct emblem on jeans pockets has developed more intrigue to many consumers than the quality of the product or the aesthetics of the design (Cawthorne, Evans, Kitchen-Smith, Mulvey, & Richards, 1998). This concept has left traditional European high fashion embroidery companies in a difficult situation. Designers find it more profitable to produce a garment with a logo printed or embroidered on a pocket than to expend money on embroidery that conveys no brand status. It is not cost-effective to use European

embroiderers to create mass quantities of logo Embroideries due to labor prices. A new embroidery industry has evolved in Asia to accommodate the needs of mass production and cheaper production.

Not only does the Asian embroidery industry cater to the needs of the portion of the garment industry that focuses on branding, but it is also becoming competitive in the European fashion embroidery industry's primary market sectors (Mercier, 1992). These European fashion sectors have primarily been limited to high fashion, such as haute couture and prêt-à-porter deluxe. While these upper markets rely on branding as heavily as the lower-priced market levels (Wigley et al., 2013), they are defined by their association with art and beauty (Kawamura, 2010). Historically, haute couture and prêt-à-porter's emphasis on art and beauty has given European high fashion embroiderers an advantage over Asian embroiderers. Unfortunately, as finances become a greater concern, even for haute couture and prêt-à-porter deluxe, the cheaper labor prices of Asian embroiderers become more appealing to fashion designers (Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994). Creativity and artistic control are often sacrificed for budgets.

Despite the increasing competition from Asian embroiderers, the European fashion embroidery industry is strongly aligned with the haute couture and prêt-à-porter levels of fashion. These two markets are most concerned with design and the least concerned with brand consumerism in garments when designing (Sorger & Udale, 2006). High fashion designers also need the highest degree of interaction with the embroiderers to perfect designs. Due to the relationship between high fashion and European fashion embroidery, haute couture and prêt-à-porter have deeply influenced the development of the fashion embroidery industry.

## **Fashion Embroidery**

The history of the fashion embroidery industry in Europe includes its evolution from a home craft into a full-fledged industry. Fragments of this change are historically recorded (Digby, 1963). However, the industrialization of embroidery is most often recorded through the lens of social justice. The prevalence towards a social justice-oriented view of history parallels the early stages of industrialization and the emergence of sweatshop conditions (Edwards, 1967b).

The general history of fashion embroidery, like the subject of the embroidery industry, is also limited. There are histories of some of the specific embroidery firms such as Lesage (P. White, 1994). Additionally, there are brief chronicles of fashion embroidery or bead embroidery. However, these histories typically focus on a few key events, such as the introduction of tambour embroidery (Bowman, 1985; A. Thompson, 1992). They do not cover broader histories of the evolution of fashion embroidery. Overall, currently available publications on fashion embroidery history provide a segmented view of the history of the fashion embroidery industry, making it difficult to trace and use the history.

## **The Importance of History**

“Design uses experience from the past to create things for the present that look toward the future” (Clark & Brody, 2009b, p. 1). There are currently two primary ways of looking at design history. Dilmont (2009) explains the older supposition that design history as a discipline was dependent on the acceptance by design professionals and therefore should serve the needs of the professionals as a tool. The professional-dependent view of design history still exists. However, a second view is beginning to become more prevalent. The second way of viewing the discipline is that design history is no longer dependent upon design professionals. The move

away from dependence is due to the fact that professionals are not always in the best position to identify or face what issues need to be explored. This frees design historians from studying topics that only serve design professionals and opens the discipline of design history to study areas previously ignored. The concept that design history no longer is tied to the needs of the professional opens the field of study to serve other purposes such as economic, political, or ethical reasons.

Fashion history is one of the core subjects in the education of almost every fashion design student, and fashion design is part of a greater discipline termed design studies (Clark & Brody, 2009b). Dilnot (1984a) defined design history as “the study of the history of professional design activity” (p. 12). Dilnot formed this definition of design history during the early days of the discipline. Dilnot further qualified his statement by saying that design historians were more concerned with the products of design activities than the actual activity. Clark and Brody (2009b) recently expanded and updated the scope of Dilnot’s definition of design studies. They pronounced that design studies must emphasize “design practice, designed products, design discourse or the language that is used to discuss design, and design meta-discourse, which reflects upon critiques and analyses of design” (p. 2). Design history is a part of design studies. Therefore, design history includes the discussion of the history of design practice and designed products. Design history also includes the discussion, reflection, and analyses of the history of design.

Recently, Dilnot (2009) re-examined his view of design history. In this new look at design history, Dilnot examined the discipline’s ability to give importance or meaning to what was previously invisible, to make things visible. In essence, this means that as objects enter the annals of design history, designers take notice of the objects. Dilnot’s re-examination of design

history was oriented towards the fact that there are no histories of African design or histories of design for other traditionally non-affluent societies. Dilnot (2009) argues that the only virtue in creating a design history for places and situations in which design has had so little impact is that it brings to light illuminates “that which or those who are outside, or overlooked by, history (and politics, and economics, and culture. . . ) into visibility and thereby allows them to participate in the world” (p. 387).

While this argument is oriented towards poverty-afflicted societies, it is also applicable to the hidden worlds and people within affluent societies. Design historians have previously ignored certain groups of people and processes, such as embroidery. Studies focused on these previously unnoticed elements of design draw attention to the unnoticed or ignored elements and produce a fuller history of the design discipline. Drawing attention to the hidden people within the design industry serves an ethical purpose. Designers, students, and consumers discover the lives of the people who make their products (Dilnot, 2009). It brings a human element to products that are often only thought of as things.

History is also a tool for designers and students (Forty, 2002). Without an understanding of how design products and practices fit in the greater world and how the world, in turn, influences the product, designers, and design students cannot adequately satisfy the needs of the consumer, nor can they improve practices or move their industry forward. By studying not only the history of the products, but also the industry, designers develop the base knowledge necessary to make educated decisions (Fallan, 2010). The study of design history is as much a part of design education as learning the skills, techniques, and materials used to create the products (Thistlewood & National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1990).

The history of the fashion industry is an inseparable part of the overall history of fashion design. Developments in the fashion industry affect the design of garments and changes in garment designs dictate changes in the industry (Kawamura, 2010). The addition of auxiliary industries, such as embroidery, complicates this relationship. Changes in the embroidery industry affect embroidery design, which affects fashion design, which affects the fashion industry. Changes in embroidery design affect both the embroidery industry and fashion design. Changes in fashion design affect embroidery design. Any combination is possible. Due to this relationship between the fashion industry and its auxiliary industries, the history of the auxiliary industries becomes an influential part of the fashion industry history.

As an auxiliary industry, fashion embroidery's history becomes essential to the education of two different groups: embroidery professionals and fashion professionals. Future embroidery professionals, that is, embroidery and embroidery design students, need to learn their history, just as fashion design students learn fashion history. Professional embroiderer and university embroidery instructor James Hunting (2012) said of embroiderers, "I believe that there will always be a need for skill-based knowledge and an understanding of historical precedent, which is... a solid foundation" (p 136). In a recent interview with another current professional embroiderer, he emphasized the importance for embroidery students to learn embroidery history. He stated that not only does history provide them with a groundwork for their studies, but it also helps them feel linked to something greater, something with a long established history (Alexander, 2012).

By studying the history of their respective design fields, design students can draw upon what was done in the past for inspiration, technique ideas, and as general lessons. Good design, just as good art, is reflexive about its history (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010; Narvaez, 2000). Fallan



(2010), Forty (2002) and other design professionals explain that good designers should look at what was done, reflect upon past work and events, and then use the knowledge to move forward. Without a background in history, designers have no past to reflect upon and inevitably re-invent the same thing.

Almost every design field has the tradition of teaching and reflecting upon its history along with documentation of the history to support the tradition. Commonly seen examples of design history subjects associated with design disciplines include architectural history (Forty, 2002) taught in architectural studies, technological product design history taught to future practitioners of industrial design (Margolin, 2009), and fashion history included in fashion design studies (Tortora & Eubank, 1994). However, fashion embroidery lacks good documentation or a strong tradition of teaching its own history. In my professional practice as an embroiderer and a teacher of design, I have talked with a number of people about the history of the field of embroidery. Many colleagues expressed that without the historical base, embroidery is a difficult subject to teach. It is an even more difficult subject in which to inspire innovation since most embroiderers do not have a strong grasp of the past.

For similar reasons, the history of the embroidery industry becomes useful to the second group: fashion people. My experience as a fashion design teacher and professional embroiderer has shown me that fashion design students are typically taught nothing or almost nothing about embroidery or its history. Fashion design professionals who regularly work with embroiderers gain on-the-job knowledge, but more can be done to support this learning. By learning elements of embroidery history, fashion students understand the greater fashion industry in more detail. Upon graduation, they take this knowledge into the workplace and are better prepared to work with embroiderers.

Fashion designers need this history for similar reasons. Not only can they begin to push embroidery design further if they understand the past, but also designers can better communicate with the embroiderers if they have knowledge of how embroidery works and what is possible. Professional embroiderers with whom I have spoken have told me that communication between fashion and embroiderers is troublesome. Each industry has very deep knowledge about their own jobs, yet they know very little about what happens in the other portions of the industry. In conversations with other embroiderers, they expressed frustration over the lack of shared knowledge. My colleagues indicated that this causes feelings of inadequacy or superiority to occur at times or makes communication difficult. Knowing more about the different industries would help ease these challenges.

### **Oral histories: The People's Story as Foundation for an Industry's History**

An important component to the history of an industry is the story of its people. Documents provide numbers, locations, dates, and names, whereas, oral narratives reveal the emotions behind the occurrences (Portelli, 2001). The narratives people give are often more about the meaning of the events than about the events themselves (Portelli, 2001). The emotions and added meanings can aid in providing depth to historical events.

In contemporary history research where there is a plethora of business, government, and other documents, oral narratives can help determine which events are more significant to examine at a particular point in time. Alternately, when documents and other historical sources are missing, interviews can create the basis of a history, providing information where previously there was little to none (Yow, 2005). Additionally oral histories provide a fuller range of perspectives than written documents. Written document sources are typically written by the person whose job it is to write those documents and reflect the perspective of one writer (P. R.

Thompson, 2000). Oral histories can come from anyone and present multiple points of view. With this more inclusive practice, details that would otherwise be unavailable can be obtained (P. R. Thompson, 2000).

Oral histories are typically retrospective (Linde, 1993). The teller of the tale has had time to reflect on their life and the events that shaped it. The reflection period imparts a different viewpoint to events than immediate eye-witness reports or documents that rarely tie events together over time (P. R. Thompson, 2000; Yow, 2005). The speaker's attributions of influences, relationships, or cause and effect make a valuable addition to the story.

Oral histories pertaining to a company or an industry can be very useful (P. R. Thompson, 2000). Linde (1993) claims that for "some people, although certainly not for everyone" (p. 4) his or her job is an integral part of their own life story; their job affects how they understand their lives. Personal narratives about a person's work life often reveal more than just company history (Linde, 1993). People typically tell how their lives wove in and around their careers and how their work choices affected their lives. They reveal the subcultures within the workplace and the relationships with coworkers (P. R. Thompson, 2000). People also often reveal their daily activities, giving the listener a better perspective on the inner workings of the company or industry (Yow, 2005). In this manner, oral histories provide the information missing from many other sources of historical data.

In addition to the historical worth of the oral history interview, there is a benefit to the storytellers themselves. Oral history projects allow people to tell their story: "Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity" (Linde, 1993, p. 98). People who would otherwise live their lives in the background find that they play an

important role. Stories that would be lost come to light and are preserved for future generations (Starr, 1996).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is little documentation about the history or workings of the fashion embroidery industry. The documented elements are limited to a few subjects. These subjects include events and results, such as the introduction of the tambour hook and its impact on embroidery or an introduction to the important events that triggered innovation, growth, or decline (Edwards, 1967a; A. Thompson, 1992). Other documented areas of the fashion embroidery industry include histories of individual embroiderers or embroidery houses such as the Lesage in Paris (Bayard & Fauque, 1992; P. White, 1994). Additionally, examples of the modern embroiderer's art are available (Rocca & Rapezzi, 2006). Yet, there is no documentation about the history of the fashion embroidery industry as a complete industry, traced from the advent of the modern fashion industry to current times. There is even less record of the stories and experiences of the people working in the industry. This leaves a sterilized and fragmented view of the industry's history.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. The focus was on those who execute and design hand embroidery and beading for high fashion. Since the main embroidery houses of the 20th century have closed because of changing economic times and many of the primary embroiderers have passed away, there is a critical time frame to preserve the embroiderers' stories and fashion embroidery history.

Originally, the purpose of the study focused on capturing the history of fashion embroidery in the words of the embroiderers. However, as I began the interview process, two things became apparent. First, the embroiderers did not know as much of their industry's history as I originally thought. Very few of the workers had any embroidery history classes, and they no longer passed down tales of their company from embroiderer to embroiderer.

Second, the participants were open to talking about their lives. The stories of the embroiderers' lives were not only fascinating, but also important to the story of the industry itself. It became evident in my conversations with the embroiderers that embroidery affected the lives of the embroiderers and a single decision can influence not only fashion embroidery, but also the fashion industry as a whole. These are the stories that form the next chapter in embroidery history.

### **Research Questions**

As I created the interview protocol and conducted interview, I used a set of overarching research questions. These questions kept my interviews aligned with my research purpose and helped provide cohesion between the individual interviews. The guiding research questions for this study were originally:

- How did fashion embroidery develop into a modern industry and what impact does the embroidery industry have on the fashion industry and vice-versa?
- What is the importance of the individual embroidery houses or firms and what impact do the embroidery houses or firms have on the design of embroidery?
- How can this knowledge improve current teaching methods in both embroidery design and fashion design?

After the first six interviews (at two locations), the questions began to mutate. I discovered that history was going to play a less important part in my study than the people telling parts of that history. I soon began to focus on the life of embroiderers and reformulated the question and a set of sub-questions into:

- How do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer?
  - How has the embroiderer learned his or her profession?
  - How does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work?
  - How has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers?

As I worked, I still kept the original questions in mind and tried to answer them, but they became less of a focus. Rather, the questions became more people-centric and more oriented toward recent history and current times in fashion embroidery.

By adjusting my questions to a more current time-frame, I was better able to fulfill the purpose of the study. The participants could better answer questions that applied directly to them and their experiences. Through the embroiderers' personal histories, I also was able to procure some of the industry history. This indirect method of acquiring industry history fulfilled both the old and the new research questions. It also gave depth to the overall study by means of contributing a human element to the history.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

This study is based on the premise that all design disciplines are part of the greater discipline of design studies (Clark & Brody, 2009a). Both embroidery design and fashion design fall under design studies. More precisely, embroidery design is typically classified as a

subsection of both textile design and fashion design. The perpetual inclusion of embroidery design in the fashion studies in colleges and universities provides support to this classification. Embroidery's constant inclusion in textile or costume collections in museums reaffirms the taxonomy. Fashion design and textile design, as the larger areas of study encompassing embroidery design, are subsections of design studies (Clark & Brody, 2009b). Therefore, the histories of each of these disciplines are likewise subsections of the greater design history.

Clark and Brody (2009a) and the *Coldstream Report* by the National Advisory Council on Art Education, Coldstream, and the Ministry of Education (1960) state the pedagogical importance that all students of design are taught the history of their respective design discipline. It follows that embroidery history, as a sub-history of fashion history should be taught in fashion design courses as well as in embroidery design courses. However, in order to effectively teach in any design discipline, a documented history of that discipline is required (Triggs, 2011). The need for a documented history of any design discipline in order to facilitate teaching was the foundation of the conceptual framework for this study. There is currently very little documentation on the history of the embroidery industry.

Narvaez (2000) indicated that the history of the process is just as much a part of design history as the history of the objects. To add to this view of design history, Lichtman (2009) argued that design history should include the history of design practices and changes in industry. These newer definitions of design history as something more than a history of objects validate a history of the fashion embroidery industry as a legitimate part of embroidery design history.

Documenting the history of the fashion embroidery industry is an ambitious task. I needed to give the study further focus, which I gleaned from the embroiderers. Margolin (2009), the first design history PhD in the United States, and Dilnot (1984b), a professor of design

studies at Parsons The New School for Design, New York, argue for the need to understand the circumstances that create the designer and the situations in which they work. I took this argument a step further and reasoned there is also a need to understand those who make the designs and their circumstances. The makers in this case are the embroiderers. Now it is a history of the embroidery industry through the stories of the embroiderers with intended future use in teaching design.

Margolin (2009) argued that not only has there not been enough research on design history, but that new research on design history must not be isolated within itself or be history for history's sake. Rather, it must situate itself in the larger picture, relating to other disciplines such as material culture, business practices, or labor history. In this manner, a design field's history begins to reveal its importance to the world around it (Fallan, 2010; Margolin, 2009). Instead of contrasting the entire history with a separate discipline, I chose to expose elements of the history to other disciplines where appropriate. For instance, I reviewed how business practices have aided different embroidery companies' competitiveness. Additionally, I show how the smaller embroidery industry is part of a larger history of the fashion industry.

Following this framework, I constructed a contemporary history of the embroidery industry through the stories of its people. Through the embroiderers' narratives, many of the nuances that would otherwise be missed came to the forefront. I highlighted the relationship between the embroidery industry and the fashion industry. Inclusion of business and labor practices added depth to the overall history. The use of the embroiderers' stories and the highlighting of fashion industry relations and business practices make the story relevant to many who work in the fashion industry, including the auxiliary industries. The narratives also help humanize the history, making it a story of the people and their impact on the world around them.



## **Brief Overview of Research Design**

Kawamura (2011) explained that fashion and dress research has “no clearly articulated theoretical framework and methodological strategies” (p. 1). Therefore, fashion studies borrow from other disciplines. As a researcher in fashion embroidery, a sub-field of fashion and dress studies, I could find no traditional methodologies used in the field. Instead, I chose a methodology based on my research problem and purpose.

The purpose of the study, to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England, was people-oriented. In particular, it was about people’s lives, how they interacted with their environment, and how their perspectives related to embroidery-related topics. These three topics of concern are almost identical to three of the features Yin (2011) considers essential to qualitative research: “1) Studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions; 2) Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study; 3) Covering the contextual conditions within which people live” (pp. 7-8). The emphasis on the stories and experiences of the embroiderers led me to utilize qualitative research methodology.

Merriam (2002) states that qualitative research is about the “idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). Individuals interpret the world around them and the meanings individuals create about the world are perpetually changing. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research a little differently. They state that qualitative research “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). While the definitions both center around the constructs of environment, action (through interaction or practices), and interpretation, Merriam focuses more on the meanings developed by the individuals. Denzin and Lincoln’s definition emphasizes the larger picture or

making “the world visible” (p. 4). Combined, this qualitative research is about people, their lives, how they live their lives in their environment, how they interpret the world around them, and what these interpretations mean in respect to the world around them.

While general qualitative research is about investigating meanings people construct for their lives, my study was about capturing the stories of the embroiderers. I needed a methodology that concentrated on people’s stories in their own words. Oral history, defined by the Oral History Association as “a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events” (“Oral History: Defined,” 2014, para. 1) was an appropriate method of collecting and analyzing embroiderers’ stories.

According to Dunaway and Baum (1996), one use of oral history is to capture the stories of people’s lives that would otherwise be lost. These stories can provide depth and meaning to existing historical accounts or they may be the only record of an event. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain that oral history traditionally developed to democratize history. A trend since the 1960s was to use oral history to reveal the lives of traditionally marginalized or lesser-known people.

Not only are the embroiderers I interviewed little known outside of the embroidery industry, but their industry has diminished since the 1930s. The stories of the embroiderers may be completely lost in the near future. Oral history methods are an excellent way of capturing their stories, preserving them for the future, and making their stories known to others.

This study was not just about the stories of the embroiderers. I compared their stories for similarities and differences. I utilized documents and onsite observations to augment and strengthen the information gleaned from the interviews. By utilizing a combination of qualitative research methodology and oral history methodology, I not only obtained the embroiderers’

stories, but I also built a deeper and more extensive picture of the fashion embroidery industry's recent history.

I chose oral histories as the guiding data collection method. There are very few documented life stories collected from embroiderers working in the modern fashion. Therefore, I could not work from pre-existing biographies, autobiographies, or recordings. I had to record the embroiderers' stories myself through interviews. Oral history methodology utilizes open-ended, in-depth interviews to guide participants in the narration of their life stories (Yow, 2005). I designed an interview protocol to guide my interview process. The protocol provided an outline of the topics I that wanted to discuss with the participants. I was able to keep the discussions oriented around the information I needed to procure for the study by using the protocol.

Participants in the study were professional embroiderers, embroidery designers, embroidery company executives, and other embroidery workshop employees. The participants all worked in embroidery workshops connected to the high fashion markets. I found participants through contacts I had developed professionally. Once I made the initial connections, I used snowball sampling to locate more participants. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling in which the researcher asks participants for the names of more potential participants (Patton, 2002). The pool of potential participants continued to grow by continually asking, "who else would be ideal for this study?". Twenty people elected to participate. Sixteen embroiderers shared their stories through recorded face-to-face interviews. The study also includes three unrecorded face-to-face interviews and one email interview.

Data collection took place in the workshops of the embroiderers. Given the geographical origins of both the fashion and embroidery industry as well as the Euro-centric nature of high-fashion industry, these sites were in France, England, and Italy. I located more embroidery

companies in Paris and around the village in France called Lunéville near Nancy than in other locations. However, the embroiderers in Milan and London were just as essential to the study as the French embroiderers.

The primary targets for research were Paris and Lunéville. I chose these sites as my focus because the technique that has become one of the most utilized techniques in high fashion embroidery, tambour beading, was invented in Lunéville (Mercier, 1992). Paris embroidery workrooms quickly adopted the technique (Bayard & Fauque, 1992). Paris is also home to haute couture and prêt-à-porter deluxe, the focus fashion market levels for this study (Martin & Koda, 1995).

I included London and Milan embroidery companies in the study as these cities are a critical component of fashion history. London and Milan are also influential cities in high fashion (Breward, 2010). They developed embroidery industries to compete with Paris (Reynolds, 1997). While there are no longer very many embroidery companies in these two cities, major luxury fashion houses still use the ones that remain. Therefore, these embroidery companies still play an important role in the high fashion industry in Italy and England. Additionally, the inclusion of British and Italian embroiderers provides a different perspective on embroidery industry and makes the study less Franco-centric.

To augment, reinforce, and affirm the oral histories, I sought written documentation. The participants gave me the majority of these documents and included a report on education, company histories, and promotional materials. Additionally, I supplemented the interviews and documents with on-site observations, as well as sketches, photographs, and field notes of my own. The field notes included extensive reflections on the interviews and interview sites. The purpose of the notes was to remind me of ideas I heard, saw, experienced, or felt during the

interview the process as well as to clarify portions of the interviews (Patton, 2002). Through the practice of recording field notes, I reduced the need for recall.

I transcribed the recordings using the gisted method, which produced “thin” transcripts that focused on the people’s stories rather than on the exact parlance (Dempster & Woods, 2011; Evers, 2011). Data analysis began with descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive analysis allowed me to write down nouns that described units of the data, such as *education* or *Asian competition*. The nouns became initial codes. As analysis progressed, I utilized the constant-comparative method originally developed for grounded theory (Glaser, 1965). Using a modified version of the constant-comparative method, I used the codes I had identified in the first level of analysis and compared them to other similar pieces of data to determine what exactly made the data similar. I also identified what made the data different.

The coding and cross comparing of data allowed me to reduce the codes into three main themes: education and career path of the embroiderer, evolution and methods of the company, and current challenges and future aspirations of the embroiderers. The themes provided a framework for presenting the embroiderers’ stories. I demonstrated how they had similar concerns and experiences and explained where there were differences. Using the study’s findings, I was able to demonstrate how the interviewee’s stories inform the general history of the high fashion embroidery industry and provide teaching material for future generations of embroidery and design students.

### **Background of the Researcher**

I chose to research fashion embroidery because it is part of my professional life. I am a practicing professional fashion embroiderer. I trained over 15 years ago at École Lesage, one of the premier embroidery schools in Paris. I have a custom embroidery company that executes

commissions for fashion, film, and stage. I am proficient in multiple forms of embroidery, including tambour embroidery, goldwork, traditional needle embroidery, and Japanese silk embroidery. I also have experience with hand-guided machine embroidery, including using the Cornely chain stitch machine and the Irish free-motion machine.

As an embroiderer, I have developed the professional contacts that I needed to establish contact with the older embroidery houses. My background also gives me an insider's perspective on how embroidery works. I discovered that once I revealed my training and experience, embroiderers spoke to me as an equal and talked much more freely. However, because I was an American, the European embroiderers often initially perceived me as an outsider despite my European training and experience. This was particularly evident in France when I was trying to gain admittance to the workshops. The perception of being an outsider slowed down the research process. It took longer to gain the trust of the French embroidery companies and to obtain appointments. In some cases, outsider status prevented me from getting an appointment at all. However, once I met with the embroiderers, my embroidery experience lessened my outsider status and increased my insider status. Not only did this allow me to obtain valuable information from the participants, but we have also established relationships that surpass this study for future research.

As a university instructor in a fashion design program, for fifteen years, I have taught students about the fashion industry and the auxiliary industries. I have also taught numerous embroidery classes, both at the university and outside academia. In these classes, I make sure students learn the difference between professional and hobby embroidery. Additionally, I educate students how to communicate with professional embroiderers. However, there is little usable literature for teaching professional fashion embroidery. I have never been able to

recommend a book for students' classroom use. Instead, I rely on my professional experience and require the students to take notes or record me for future reference.

Also, as a university instructor of fashion design, I understand the connection between documented histories and teaching. In teaching design, I have firsthand experience with how teaching can be more effective with the aid of design history as well as what happens when design history is omitted from the curriculum. In classes in which I take time to thoroughly teach and integrate design history into the lessons, students become more invested in their work and demonstrate a level of depth in their designs that is often missing otherwise. My teaching background strengthens my resolve to document embroidery history for future use.

My background as a teacher provided additional insights when speaking to participants about their own backgrounds. Education was a prevalent theme in the conversations. With my experience as a university instructor, I was able to understand the differences in education between the participants.

Due to my teaching field, fashion design, I am also well informed in the history and operations of the fashion industry. I have two degrees in fashion, and I have worked alongside fashion designers. I can discern the relation between embroidery and fashion clearly. Over the years, I have noted the symbiotic nature of the two industries in which the embroidery industry would likely fail without the fashion industry and the fashion industry would be very different without the embroidery industry. This gives me insight into the embroiderers' conversations about working with fashion designers and the changes in the global fashion market. I have witnessed the changes the major fashion houses have undergone in the last 25 years. Therefore, I can converse with the embroiderers about many fashion-related subjects without need for background explanations.

I have a deep personal interest in the European fashion embroidery industry due to my background. My experiences in both embroidery and teaching were invaluable in establishing relationships with the professional embroiderers. My background knowledge allowed the embroiderers to speak with me on a more detailed level without the need to explain industry-specific terms or procedures. This put the participants at ease and increased the richness of the conversations.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides a written history that not only benefits students of embroidery design, but also students and practitioners of fashion design. The history and the stories of the embroiderers provide teaching material for students in embroidery and fashion design. The history and the embroiderers' narratives of production methods and business practices form foundation knowledge for embroidery students to analyze and utilize. The same information increases fashion students' understanding of auxiliary industries and how to work with the industries.

Fashion design professionals benefit similarly. The information raises designers' awareness of the embroiderers' abilities as well as the embroidery process. The knowledge eases communication between fashion designers, thus eliminating many unnecessary misunderstandings.

The benefit to embroidery professionals is three-pronged. First, like embroidery students, embroidery professionals need a foundational knowledge in their history. This study provides part of that foundation. Both existing literature and the participants' own stories support embroiderers' need for foundational knowledge to facilitate embroidery design, production, and communication (Hunting, 2012).



Second, the study provided an opportunity for the embroiderers to tell their story. Yow (2005) explains that the act of telling a story gives the narrator a sense of validation that they are worthwhile. The story-telling process also allows the narrator to reflect upon topics that she had not previously thought about in-depth (Yow, 2005).

Third, the study is an outlet for the embroiderers' stories. While the opportunity to tell their story is important, the embroiderers also expressed a desire to publicize fashion embroidery. This was not a need to have "*my* story" heard, but to have "*the* story" of embroidery more widely known.

This study also provides a benefit to the research community. It is a resource for future embroidery researchers. The audio recordings are archived for additional analysis and written documents provide source material for future studies. This concept is an important step in building the research field.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by the geographic focus on the European portion of the fashion industry. I also did not take into account the remainder of the industry that operates outside of the high fashion market level, nor did I look at computerized machine embroidery. The purpose of the study imposed these limitations.

My own abilities, resources, and schedule created additional limitations. These limitations included brevity of research time, timing of research visits, and lingual barriers. My teaching schedule limited my fieldwork time to two months. I conducted all interviews during this period. I had to eliminate any potential interviews that I could not complete during this period. The timing of the visit further complicated fieldwork. Summer is a very busy time for fashion embroiderers, thus scheduling appointments was problematic. Several embroiderers that

were in the industry the longest said that they could not meet with me until September. As I could not come back in September, this limited the stories I could record.

I could not ask for tours of the workshops when the embroiderers were pressed for time, limiting my opportunity to observe the sites. Additionally, I had not developed a strong enough relationship with any of the embroiderers to request the opportunity to perform extended observations of the embroiderers at work. Nor did I have a relationship that enabled me to search through their documents for additional historical material.

Language barriers also created difficulties. I do not speak Italian and only limited French. The language barriers posed scheduling difficulties in France. Additionally, I sometimes missed key points in the stories and discovered them only when I listened to the recordings. Had I understood the narrative better during the recitation, I could have asked more questions.

The original purpose of the study was to document the history of the embroidery industry through the stories of the people. However, the memories of the embroiderers centered on experiences from the last 60 years. The contemporary nature of these memories forms a modern history. Much of the history of the fashion industry prior to the 1950s is still unrecorded.

The result of the study was a history seen through a particular lens. Rury (2006) tells us that all history is constructed and, therefore, all history is interpreted. Tosh (2002) reminds us that interpretation occurs in how the blocks fit together and what they may mean. In this case, the interpretation is partially from the point of view of the embroiderers and partially from the researcher. As an embroiderer and educator in the United States, my own experiences affect the analysis. Moreover, the research questions shaped the interviews. By asking certain questions, I determined the basic topics of discussion. A different set of questions would have resulted in a

different story. My study centered on the stories of people, what the events in their stories meant to the embroiderers, and how the events and the embroiderers shaped the industry.

Additionally, as this study recorded the stories of embroiderers and their experiences in the industry, there is still much to record about the history of the products, the techniques, and the creation process. The information revealed in the conversations adds to the existing body of knowledge and aids future embroiderers. However, there are many topics to be researched in order to provide a more complete teaching curriculum and embroidery history.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study utilizes several industry-specific terms. All of these terms are utilized in different ways. Therefore, I must specify how I have used them in this study. Of additional note, the fashion industry, and thereby the fashion embroidery industry uses certain French words interchangeably or in place of the English words. To keep in accordance with common fashion practice, I have also used these French terms where appropriate.

- *Fashion Embroidery* is any form of embroidery that is executed on consumer fashion garments. This can include varieties of traditional hand embroidery, tambour embroidery, and machine embroidery (Nicholas & Teague, 1975; Rocca & Rapezzi, 2006; P. White, 1994).
- *Embroiderer* means someone who embroiders. In this study however, it typically refers to anyone who works in the professional embroidery industry.
- *Tambour embroidery* is a form of embroidery executed with a very fine, sharp hook. Stitches are made in a chain, making the stitching process much faster than traditional needle embroidery (Jarratt, 1991). This is particularly useful for

beading and sequining. This method is also referred to as *crochet beading*, *broderie perlée*, *point de Beauvais*, and *point de lunéville* (Mercier, 1992).

- *Hand Embroidery* has two different meanings within the scope of this study. First, hand embroidery is any embroidery that is executed without the use of a machine, such as traditional needle embroidery. Second, hand embroidery is any embroidery that is executed by control of the hand. This second definition includes forms of machine embroidery that are not computerized, including free-motion machine embroidery such as Cornely embroidery and Irish machine embroidery (all executed on machines in which the motion is controlled by the operator) (Johnson, 1983). For this study, I was seeking embroiderers that specialize primarily in the first form of hand embroidery. However, I found that hand-guided machine embroidery is highly intermingled with needle and tambour embroidery. Therefore, participants in this study come from both areas of hand embroidery.
- *Fashion House/Embroidery Houses*: this is a common way of referring to fashion or embroidery companies in Europe (Mercier, 1992; Stone, 2012).
- *Atelier* is the French word for workshop or workroom. It is often used interchangeably with the English terms in the fashion industry (Assouline, Tahara, & Séguret, 1990; Naudin & Simon, 1996).
- *High Fashion*: the generic term used for the highest market levels in the fashion industry. For this study, this means the couture and prêt-à-porter levels, unless otherwise indicated.

- *Haute couture* translates as “high sewing” and officially refers to the designer houses accredited by the Fédération Française de la Couture du Prêt-à-porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode. The term is more commonly used to specify the highest market level of fashion. I will utilize the term in this second capacity, to denote the highest market level.
- *Alta Moda* is the term for the Italian version of haute couture.
- *Prêt-à-porter* means “ready-to-wear” and properly refers to the entire ready-to-wear apparel industry. However, I, along with much of the industry use it as a shortened form of prêt-à-porter deluxe. In this capacity, prêt-à-porter refers to the designer brand ready-to-wear lines that are less expensive than haute couture (Kawamura, 2010).
- *Couturier*: A designer at a haute couture design house (Stone, 2012).

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. The stories are meant as a means of documenting the contemporary history of the high fashion embroidery industry. The stories and the subsequent history are a tool for future embroidery and fashion students as well as current embroiderers and fashion designers.

I utilized oral history methods in conducting, transcribing, and analyzing in-depth open-ended interviews. The 20 participants were all embroiderers, embroidery designers, or embroidery executives working in high fashion embroidery workshops. I conducted interviews over two months in Paris, London, Milan, and Eastern France.

The remainder of the paper first presents scholarly analysis of available literature in order to clarify what information is and is not available in the field. The literature review is followed by a detailed report of the research methodology. This chapter includes an introduction to the study participants and a description of the sites visited. Data analysis composes the fourth chapter. In the data analysis chapter, I analyze the participants' stories and compare them to each other. The final chapter contains the discussion about the findings and implications of the research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The focus of this study was the high fashion embroidery industry and the people who work within the industry. The purpose was to capture the life stories of the embroidery professionals. The high fashion embroidery industry is a very specialized and small industry, which has ties to traditional embroidery and to the high fashion industry. To examine the relationship between fashion embroidery and fashion design, I began the literature review by providing the necessary background information.

Furthermore, to build the foundation of the study, I examined literature to determine what research and documentation existed and did not exist regarding embroidery. I needed to establish how much of embroidery history was documented and what was the focus of the histories. I searched for any documented ties to the fashion industry and any literature that highlighted the lives of the embroiderers. Finally, I sought studies with similarly structured methodologies or purposes to mine.

As I began to accumulate literature, I organized it first in large themes, such as fashion, embroidery, or other industry. I divided the groups into smaller themes as the amount of literature increased. Embroidery history, embroidery techniques, tambour embroidery, and fashion embroidery all became large collections of documents. Upon writing the literature analysis, I kept the thematic organization. However, some of the acquired literature did not sufficiently enhance the research purpose to warrant an extended discussion of the topic. Therefore, I condensed some of the themes.

The literature review presents the two largest themes first: fashion embroidery and the fashion industry. I organized these sections to present the background knowledge for the rest of the study. Each section also highlights gaps in the literature. The themes that follow are smaller,

but just as important for understanding the study. These themes are also more research oriented. They demonstrate similarities, differences, and gaps in existing research.

### **The Search**

As a trained professional embroiderer, I have been collecting and reading literature on embroidery for over fifteen years. Also, I have developed relationships with booksellers and other collectors of embroidery literature. Therefore, this literature review is the result of many years of reading and accumulating resources, in addition to several more recent direct searches for scholarly literature.

The first search was an effort to find literature on fashion embroidery or anything on tambour embroidery. This was a broad search, as my previous experience had revealed that there were few publications on either topic. I placed no limits on publication dates or types, and utilized very general search terms in order to maximize returns. I utilized multiple search engines and databases including Google Scholar, WorldCat, Academic Search Complete, ERIC (Ebsco), regular Google, Bing, and the booksellers Amazon.com and AbeBooks.com. Additionally, I mined the bibliographies of my existing books and articles and located copies of the most promising publications listed in the bibliographies. As fashion embroidery has a deep connection to both France and England, I also searched the online catalogs for both the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in addition to the U.S. Library of Congress. Finally, I contacted one of my acquaintances who dealt in rare needlework books and scoured her collection for additional material.

I tried a multitude of search terms in three different languages: English, French, and Hindi. The prevalence of embroidery in England, France, and India guided my choice of languages. The search terms included various combinations of the words: embroidery, tambour,



Lunéville, *zardosi*, fashion, history, crochet, hook, bead, sequin, as well as several specialty terms for tambour embroidery such as *broderie perlée*.

In a similar manner, I conducted additional searches to find information on the fashion industry, oral history, design studies, historical methods, and other key topics. I did not complete any search in a single attempt. Rather all searches became iterative, repeated until the topic was sufficiently covered.

### **Scope of Literature**

The searches revealed that there is very little academic research on professional embroidery. Researchers in the embroidery field have focused on cultural embroidery, embroidery as a craft, or embroidery as a design object. Books are the primary source for embroidery history and information about the embroidery industry or fashion embroidery. This approach meant that the majority of my background information on the high fashion embroidery industry came from books (and personal experience) rather than academic journals. Additionally, many of these books were very old and gave no original source of information. I had to cross-reference and compare information in multiple sources in order to determine veracity.

Even in books, I did not find much information on the history of the embroidery industry or on fashion embroidery. Rather, I found a great number of books on embroidery techniques and on the history of embroidery techniques or styles. The lack of books on the history of the fashion embroidery or the fashion embroidery industry alluded to a large gap in the literature.

In my search for oral history research, I found many articles, dissertations, and books on oral history. However, not many of the studies bore similarity to my research. The oral histories I located were primarily focused on the stories of individuals in a community or a specific company rather than in an industry. Oral history studies also chose participants who had

experienced a past event. The studies placed less emphasis on contemporary history and recent events. Most noticeably, the other oral history studies provided less thematic analysis of the stories and comparison of the information within the themes to develop transferable findings.

Only a few articles, dissertations, and excerpts from readers were useful research resources. I used those sources to understand methodology better. I also looked at the dissertations and articles to comprehend how oral history data is presented.

Though not peer-reviewed and sometimes less reliable, books proved the best source of background literature in this study. The lack of usable journal articles and research studies indicated a major research gap, which I seek to address with my study.

### **Fashion Embroidery**

I start the literature analysis with a recap of the categories of literature available in the field. This demonstrates the scope of information available to embroidery students, professionals, and researchers. In addition to providing a scope of literature, the analysis also clarifies the origins and organization of the fashion embroidery industry, information necessary for comprehending the study.

As evidenced by the thousands of catwalk photos released every season, fashion embroidery is well documented in photographs. Yet, beyond physical descriptions of the work, there is a limited amount of literature available. Rather, authors such as Wilson (1962) and Lansberry and the Royal School of Needlework (2012) write about embroidery in terms of the specific technique, such as crewelwork, white work or canvas work. Joan Edwards' (1967a, 1967b) and Angela Thompson's (1992) books on beadwork or bead embroidery briefly describe fashion embroidery and its history. However, fashion embroidery is not solely composed of bead

embroidery techniques. The focus on bead embroidery gives only a partial picture of the industry.

One of the few publications specifically concentrating on fashion embroidery is Nicholas and Teague's (1975) explanation of embroidery techniques. Unlike Wilson (1962) and Lansberry and the Royal School of Needlework (2012), Nicholas and Teague's (1975) techniques are specifically oriented towards fashion application. The book also contains a variety of techniques rather than concentrating on one type of embroidery technique, unlike Edwards' (1967a, 1967b) and Thompson's (1992) books, which cover only beadwork. However, their explanations of techniques are very brief and difficult to understand. Additionally, history of the trade is limited to two pages.

Photographic coffee-table books form another genre of publications on fashion embroidery. Rocca and Repezzi's (2006) book on Italian embroidery includes the transcript of a brief interview with an Italian embroiderer, but the majority of the book consists of photographs paired with quotes from fashion designers. The quotes focus on the inspiration of the design, techniques, or embroidery in general. These authors do not mention the people who created the embroidery or the process of making the embroidery or the history of the industry. Naudin and Simon's (1996) *Les Métiers de L'Élégance* and Assouline, Tahara, and Séguret's (1990) *Tradesmen's Entrance* are two very similar books. Both contain a chapter on fashion embroidery and both feature artistic photographs of the workrooms, tools, and embroidery of Lesage embroiderers. While Naudin and Simon (1996) include a brief history of fashion embroidery and both publications contain an abbreviated history of the house of Lesage, the primary emphasis is on the large, full-color photographs.

While there are numerous books on how to execute embroidery stitches, there is a more limited number of publications oriented towards fashion embroidery. As I looked deeper into the topic, I began to categorize the literature by its primary subject. In the subsequent parts of this section on fashion embroidery literature, I will review the material in the categories of the early history of the embroidery industry history, tambour embroidery, the embroidery houses, and the embroiderers.

**Early history of the embroidery industry.** In order to document the oral histories of the embroiderers, I needed to determine what historians had published about embroidery. Embroidery history is a large field that covers the product from its inception in prehistoric times (Symonds & Preece, 1928) to modern forms. The history also includes production methods, materials, social meanings, technique evolution, and many other aspects of the craft. I oriented my search specifically on the development of the fashion embroidery industry to keep the information concise.

I located information on the fashion embroidery industry's history in several sources. A few publications offer extended histories, but from different points of view, such as the history of a particular embroidery house or the history of English embroidery. One book on embroiderers and two books on the *art trades* associated with haute couture provided brief sections on the history of fashion embroidery. I was able to extract a general industry history from the various publications.

One of the best accounts of the early history of professional fashion embroidery was in Naudin and Simon's (1996) *Les Métiers de L'Élégance*. The history entry is only three pages; however, it introduces the origins of professional fashion embroidery. The book was especially useful in discerning the history of the embroidery industry prior to the 14th century. There were

other sources available concerning the more contemporary history of the industry. I utilized several sources to compile the history of the embroidery industry from the 14th century forward, including Margaret Jourdain's (1910) *The History of English Secular Embroidery* and Digby's (1963) *Elizabethan Embroidery*.

The first event Naudin and Simon (1996) present as evidence of professional embroiderers occurs before 70 B.C.E. Records from this time report Romans buying embroidered bands. The second significant event in fashion embroidery history identified by Naudin and Simon (1996), was the transferal of professional embroidery skills to medieval embroiderers, probably from the Byzantines. At this time in France, only monks practiced professional embroidery, as embroidery was restricted to religious use.

By the 13th century, embroidery was no longer only for religious use, allowing for the third major event presented by Naudin and Simon. In 1292, French officials recognized the organization of the community of embroiderers, which indicates that "embroiderer" was officially considered a profession. Between 1471 and 1719, there were statutes that regulated the embroidery profession and how one trained to become an embroiderer (Naudin & Simon, 1996).

Jourdain (1910) uncovered evidence of King Edward III of England purchasing embroidered dresses in the mid-14th century. Edward's successor, King Richard II retained "king's embroiderers" (Jourdain, 1910). These two royal records, recorded by Jourdain (1910), marked the first documentation I found of professional embroidery in England.

Digby (1963) reported a system regulating the embroidery trade in Elizabethan period England (1558–1603) similar to the French statutes. During this time, a professional guild of embroiderers (that still exists today) controlled the selling of embroidery and the quality of the

goods. There is also mention of organized embroidery workshops producing work for paid commissions.

Current embroiderers and embroidery historians consider the 17th and 18th century in France one of the great periods for professional embroidery (Naudin & Simon, 1996). Naudin and Simon (1996), Synge (2001), and Saint-Aubin, Scheuer, Maeder, & Los Angeles County Museum of Art, (1983) report that during this time, French royalty and nobility patronized embroiderers for embroidering everything from furniture, to clothing, to wall hangings. Charles Germain de Saint Aubin, one of King Louis XV's primary embroiderers, wrote one of the most famous treatises of professional embroidery, in 1770. This book, *Art of the Embroiderer* (Saint-Aubin, Scheuer, Maeder, & Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983), still used today by many embroiderers, reveals the arrangement of professional embroidery workrooms, the use and shapes of embroidery tools, materials used, and the techniques used in French embroidery. Additionally, Saint Aubin records that King Louis XV and the city of Paris had a system, which ranked embroiderers in levels, dictating what different embroiderers did and how they would work (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983).

In the 18th and 19th century, the Ayrshire district of Scotland developed a fashion embroidery industry of its own. Swain (1955) researched its rise and fall. She revealed that the industry developed because of linen production and weaving in the area. The material was an easily accessible and ideal ground fabric for an embroidery style that was popular at the time for clothing items. The embroidery had previously been expensive and difficult to obtain. An embroiderer from Italy came to Scotland and established professional embroidery workshops in which girls as young as five would apprentice to earn their keep. Swain provided evidence of early professional embroidery workshops depending on children and young women for sources

of cheap, dexterous labor. Swain's history demonstrates that fashion embroidery in Europe has had geographic centers other than the current major cities.

By the late 18th and early 19th century, other individual embroidery industries also employed groups of women and children embroiderers. The women and children worked either from their houses or together in small workrooms. In Mercier's (1992) extensive history of the Lunéville embroidery industry, he wrote that prior to the Second Empire (1852), women worked at embroidery jobs 12 to 15 hours a day. There was distress in the region because the women were not spending enough time working their other chores, such as house and fieldwork. Children also worked in the Lorraine embroidery trade. Around 1850 the conditions in which the women and children worked began to change. A doctor published an article on the maladies long-term embroidery work caused women. About the same time, the government of the region became more concerned about child labor and the lack of education the girls received while working in embroidery workrooms. The concerns about child welfare and health of workers initialized social changes in the embroidery business over the next century (Mercier, 1992).

Edwards (1985) revealed that both English and continental European embroiderers suffered similar poor working conditions. At the turn of the 20th century, women working as beaders in England received very low wages. The beaders experienced fluctuating periods in which they worked extremely long hours and then faced periods without any work or wages. In Austria, the beaders worked in dark, damp, and dirty conditions and could only rely on having work nine months of the year (Edwards, 1985).

The increased occurrences of poor treatment of embroidery workers corresponded with an increase in the number of professional embroiderers. The poor treatment of embroiderers did not deter women who were desperate for jobs from working (Edwards, 1967a, 1967b, 1985).

However, the increased number of embroiderers signified a growth in the embroidery industry. The growth of the embroidery industry coincided with events marking the beginning of the modern fashion embroidery industry.

**Tambour embroidery: an industry-changing method.** In the second half of the 19th century, a method of quickly attaching beads and sequins in embroidery was introduced to fashion embroidery. This method, known as tambour embroidery, revolutionized fashion embroidery (Mercier, 1992). Tambour embroidery is a specialized form of embroidery that uses a fine, sharp crochet-type hook to embroider in a continuous chain stitch (Caulfeild & Saward, 1882; Fukuyama, 1987; Jarratt, 1991). The chain stitch can be used alone as a decorative embroidery stitch, or it can be used to attach other materials, particularly beads and sequins. It is in this second capacity through which tambour embroidery established itself as the staple technique of fashion embroidery (Edwards, 1967a, 1967b; Mercier, 1992). Embroiderers can attach beads and sequins significantly faster with the tambour hook than with a traditional hand needle as the materials are pre-strung on a spool of thread (Jarratt, 1994). Furthermore, the motion required in operating a tambour hook is more economical (requires less movement) than a traditional needle, and allows the operator to execute more stitches in a given span of time (Antis, Honeycutt, & Koch, 1979).

Three sources provided the majority of the history surrounding tambour embroidery and the fashion embroidery industry's development around the technique. Saint-Aubin's *Art of Embroidery* (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983) explains tambour embroidery's early uses as well as how embroidery was organized and performed in the 18th century France. Mercier's (1992) *Les Brodeuses Lunevilleuses* is a history of embroidery in the Lorraine region of France. It includes the development of tambour beading and the rise and fall of the tambour beading industry in the



Lunéville area. The book is also one of the few to include interviews with the embroiderers. *Les Brodeurs: Un Metier d'Art* by Bayard and Fauque (1992) is a general history of embroidery, but with an emphasis on France, industry, and fashion. The section on tambour is short; however, it includes aspects of embroidery and geography that the Mercier book did not include. I augmented these three sources with information from publications dedicated to beading, such as Edwards' (1985) *The Bead Dress* and Thompson's (1992) *Embroidery with Beads*. A final source for providing missing historical information was Bowman's (1985) *A Fashion for Extravagance: Art Deco Fabrics and Fashions*. Bowman researched the Paris fashion designers and crafts people that practiced during the art deco period. Using these main sources and elements of a few others, I was able to reconstruct the evolution of tambour embroidery in Europe as the technique applies to fashion embroidery and its influence in the development of the fashion embroidery industry. This background forms the foundation for understanding the organization of the current fashion embroidery industry.

Saint-Aubin (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983) wrote in 1770 that tambour embroidery came to Europe from China. This misconception is not only widely published, but writers and embroiderers continue to print the mistake in modern embroidery literature. I found the reference to China printed in recent embroidery histories, including Synge's (2001) *Art of Embroidery* and Mercier's (1992) *Les Brodeuses Lunevilleuses*. Thompson's *Embroidery with Beads* (1992) and Fukuyama's *Tambour Work* (1987) also cite Chinese origins in their discussions of the history of tambour embroidery. There is some variation that dates as far back as Caulfeild and Seward's (1882) *Dictionary of Needlework* which defines tambour embroidery as a techniques that was worked "in China, Persia, India, and Turkey" (p. 470). However, there was little, if any evidence that the Chinese origin of tambour embroidery is true. I traced the idea that tambour work

originated in China to a single monograph published by Charles Saint-Aubin, the embroiderer for Louis XV of France in 1770. In the section on tambour embroidery, Saint-Aubin stated “About ten years ago [c. 1759], a method was imported from China” (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983, p. 54). However, Edward Maeder, the Curator of Textiles and Costumes for the Los Angeles County Museum, included an editor’s note in the translated version of Saint-Aubin’s book that tambour embroidery originated in India (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983).

Thompson’s (1992) description of tambour’s history further supports the theory of tambour embroidery’s Indian ancestry. While she states that tambour embroidery is “said to have originated in China” (p. 90), she follows this statement by saying that “chain stitch embroidery has been worked in India for centuries” (p. 90). Thompson goes on to list four Indian regions which historically practiced the technique. She further explains that it is probable that tambour embroidery actually came to Europe prior to the date identified by Saint-Aubin. Tambour may have been introduced to Europe in the mid-15th century (A. Thompson, 1992). Marsh (2006) also cites Indian origins for the technique. However, she lists the same translated edition of Saint-Aubin’s book, containing the editor’s notes about the incorrectly ascribed origins of tambour work in the bibliography.

Edwards (1985) clarifies that tambour embroidery gained its name from the shape of the embroidery frames originally used when practicing the embroidery techniques. Initially, round bent wood frames held the ground fabric for tambour embroidery tight and enabled the embroiderer to work with both hands. These round frames looked like a drum, called a *tambour* in French, thus inspiring the appellation “tambour.” The name applied to not only the frame, but to everything that had to do with this particular form of embroidery (Edwards, 1985; Saint-Aubin et al., 1983). Faure (2007), Jarratt (1992), and Johnson (1983) confirm that professional

embroiderers now execute tambour work on the larger slate-style frames. The tambour hoop frame is primarily used in domestic embroidery practice (Jarratt, 1994).

When tambour embroidery came to Western Europe, Saint-Aubin used the technique to create chain stitch embroidery. He instructed the technique to be used for edging “small damasks, painted toiles, and fine embossed linen” (Saint-Aubin et al., 1983, p. 54). Symonds and Preece (1928) wrote that much early tambour embroiderers executed the technique on heavy satin or taffeta. Taffeta was preferred because the embroiderer was less likely to snag the simple weave of taffeta with the hook than the more complicated weave of the satin. Embroiderers used these fabrics to create furniture, clothing, shoes, bags, and other items of luxury. Soon the technique was adapted for use on netting to produce tambour lace (Symonds & Preece, 1928) and eventually was used extensively in white work embroidery (Swain, 1955).

According to Bayard and Fauque (1992) and Mercier (1992), the increased popularity for white work enabled entrepreneurs in the Lorraine region of France to open workshops specializing in white work embroidery. In 1808 there were 3 embroidery companies in the region, whereas by 1843 there were around 200 companies (Bayard & Fauque, 1992). The demand for white work embroidery provided the impetus to make the Lorraine region a major embroidery center. I found only one sentence fragment that confirmed the link between white work embroidery and tambour embroidery techniques in conjunction with Lorraine embroiderers, “when the manager of a workroom in Lunéville, a small manufacturing town... noted for its tamboured muslins” (Edwards, 1985, p. 14). Caulfeild and Saward (1882) and Swain (1955) acknowledge the use of tambour in British and Irish white work embroidery and strengthen the relationship between tambour and white work embroidery.

Embroidery historians commonly credit an embroiderer from the Lorraine region with discovering how to attach beads with the tambour hook. Bayard and Fauque (1992), Mercier (1992), and Naudin and Simon (1996) state that Louis Ferry of Lunéville, in the Lorraine region of France, developed the method of attaching beads by tambour chain stitch between 1867 and 1875. However, others state that Ferry is the embroiderer who made the technique popular when it came into regular use (A. Thompson, 1992). By 1890, the technique had spread to London (Edwards, 1985). Edwards (1985) confirmed that the act of using the tambour needle to attach beads in embroidery brought tambour work to the forefront of fashion embroidery. Using a tambour needle for beading increased the speed of production significantly (A. Thompson, 1992).

The introduction of tambour beading in professional embroidery workshops coincided with the Victorian trend toward heavily beaded gowns, placing the new technique in much demand (Edwards, 1967a, 1985). Mercier (1992) explained that as the demand for the technique increased, schools opened in order to train more embroiderers. One of these schools was in the Lunéville area. As girls trained in the technique, they found work at one of the various embroidery workshops across Europe. The majority of these were in Paris or the Lunéville area (Mercier, 1992). However, a few went to London or other locales, further disseminating the technique (A. Thompson, 1992). There were soon embroidery schools in other cities and countries teaching the tambour technique for fashion embroidery (Reynolds, 1997).

The development and spread of tambour beading occurred in tandem with the development of the modern fashion industry and the haute couture market. The turn of the 20th century ushered in a period of rapid growth in both high fashion and fashion embroidery. Bowman (1985) explains that luxury goods that were once limited to aristocracy were now

available to anyone who could afford the products, making fashion more accessible. At the same time, the Art Nouveau and then Art Deco movements began to influence fashion designs. Both of these artistic styles emphasized simple shapes. When the shapes were interpreted as simple (sometimes, blocky) garments, the garments provided open canvases for fashion designers. Designers embraced textile design as a means of filling the empty canvases. Embroidery was a favored means of achieving the textile design (Bowman, 1985).

Bowman (1985) further elaborates that prior to World War I fashion designers were already developing strong relationships with embroiderers. During the war, many women held jobs, giving them a sense of empowerment. After the war, women's new sense of worth, combined with a post-wartime economy brought about changes in fashion. Designers developed the shorter, looser style of dresses, now often referred to as the flapper style, to accommodate women's new attitudes. At the high fashion level, these dresses were often encrusted in beads, reflecting the desires of the new "monied classes" (Bowman, 1985, p. 17) The beaded flapper dresses of the 1920s were what finally established tambour embroidery as a permanent fixture in fashion embroidery (Bowman, 1985; Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994). Mercier (1992) documented a great increase in the number of tambour beaders and tambour beading workshops triggered by the fashion for heavily beaded dresses throughout Europe and the United States. Due to the speed and precision of tambour work, combined with the spread of tambour embroidery during the 1920s, the tambour technique has become a dominant technique for fashion embroidery (Johnson, 1983; Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994).

As the history of the embroidery houses is closely connected to evolution of tambour embroidery, the same sources provided material for the introduction of the embroidery houses.

**The embroidery houses.** As embroidery became more popular, the organization of embroidery companies changed to accommodate increased production. While there have been professional embroidery workshops since at least the 16th century (Digby, 1963), women working out of their homes did most of the embroidery prior to the 20th century (Bowman, 1985; Mercier, 1992; A. Thompson, 1992). Bayard and Fauque (1992) wrote that at the beginning of the 19th century, Lady Chenut of Nancy was the first person to establish organized embroidery workshops dedicated to fashion in the Lorraine region. Other entrepreneurs soon followed and opened more embroidery workshops. The new embroidery workshops were the beginning of the house of embroidery or *Maison de broderie* (Bayard & Fauque, 1992).

According to Bayard and Faque (1992), Lady Chenut opened her embroidery house around 1800 to accommodate the demand for white work. In 1808, there were only three embroidery houses in Nancy, but by 1843, there were around 200 embroidery houses in and around the Nancy area. As these embroidery houses in the Lorraine region specialized in white work embroidery, any occurrence that affected the production or popularity of white work embroidery had the potential to affect business. Bayard and Faque (1992) state that machine embroidery began by the mid-18th century and Howard (1981) explains that a school for teaching machine embroidery for trade opened in 1889. In 1865, Mr. Cornely invented a machine that produced chain stitch embroidery (Bayard & Fauque, 1992). Between the traditional embroidery machines and the Cornely machine, embroiderers could now produce many of the stitches utilized in white work embroidery by machine.

The introduction of machine embroidery could have ended the embroidery industry in Lorraine. Luckily, Louis Ferry of the Lunéville area developed tambour beading around 1867 (Mercier, 1992), about the same time machine embroidery was becoming known. As the

Lorraine region embroiderers slowly converted to becoming tambour beaders (Mercier, 1992), they avoided losing their jobs to machine embroidery by specializing in a technique that cannot be replicated by machine.

With the new beading technique developed by Louis Ferry, the number of embroidery houses continued to increase until the end of the 1920s. Bowman (1985) records that in 1909, there were 3,000 embroiderers in Paris. Mercier (1992) documents that 15 years later, there were 25,000 embroiderers working in the Lunéville area because of the demand for beaded flapper-style dresses. Some of these embroiderers worked for the early embroidery houses, including Michonet (P. White, 1994), Maison Lallement, Ugo Lo Monaco, and Kitmar (Bowman, 1985) in Paris, and Vuillaume, Gouvernel, and Carel in Lorraine (Mercier, 1992).

Writers have recorded the histories of some of the individual embroidery houses. The most complete history is Palmer White's (1994) *Haute couture Embroidery: The Art of Lesage*. This full-length book covers the history of the Lesage embroidery house from when Monsieur Michonet owned the company in the 1800s until the time of writing in the 1990s. Assouline et al. (1990), Bayard and Fauque (1992), Mercier (1992), and Naudin and Simon (1996) also offer abbreviated histories of Lesage, making Lesage's history one of the most published. The full story of the house offers insight on how Michonet was able to develop his house in tandem with the development of the haute couture market. Michonet was an embroiderer for Worth, one of the first couturiers. Michonet implemented a series of changes in embroidery design that helped make fashion embroidery a specific niche market separate from other forms of embroidery. Albert Lesage purchased the embroidery house from Michonet in 1922. Both Albert and later his son François were known for their open-mindedness and ability to change embroidery with the times (P. White, 1994).

Mercier (1992) recorded briefer histories of other Lorraine region embroidery houses. These houses included Gouvernel, Bacus, Carel, Vuillaume, and Nehlig and Gouillard. These stories followed the events that influenced each of the houses from founding through the date of publication and emphasized the companies' Lorraine origins. Another fashion historian, Bowman (1985), focused on artisans of influence during the art deco period. In her book, she presented chapters on the embroidery houses Maison Lallement and Ugo Lo Monaco. Bowman also offered a brief history of the embroiderer Kitmar. Bowman's company histories concentrated on the houses' artistic styles. She emphasized how the embroidery house utilized materials and techniques to achieve art deco style. While Mercier's and Bowman's histories present the embroidery houses from different perspectives, they each acknowledge the importance of the house in fashion embroidery.

Since the economic crisis of 1929, embroidery houses in Europe have slowly disappeared (Bowman, 1985; Mercier, 1992). Today, I can find conclusive evidence of only two houses in the Lorraine region. I have also found nine houses in Paris, two in London, and one in Milan (Hand & Lock, 2013; Lesage et Cie., 2013; Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda, 2011). There may be more, but not many. The decline in European fashion embroidery houses directly reflects the changing economic climate globally in which labor-intensive professions are outsourced to cheaper labor markets. This outsourcing of embroidery to India and China (Mercier, 1992) emphasizes the need to study how the remaining European embroiderers conduct their work and retain their importance to the fashion industry.

**The embroiderers.** Embroidery houses exist due to the efforts of the embroiderers. Individual embroiderers influence whether embroidery is good or bad, cutting-edge or



traditional, successful or not successful. However, most publications concerning fashion embroidery include little information about the embroiderers.

Yet, there are a few recordings of embroiderers' histories. Howard (1981, 1983, 1984) lists and gives brief biographies of important British embroiderers working between 1851 and 1977. However, these embroiderers are mostly embroidery artists, not fashion embroiderers. Embroidery artists are individuals who utilize embroidery as an artistic medium for producing art pieces. They generally do not produce commercial embroidery or work for high fashion. Kettle and McKeating (2012) present a series of essays in their book *Hand Stitch* that offers insight into the lives and thoughts of embroiderers. Like Howard's books, many of the embroiderers featured in *Hand Stitch* are also embroidery artists, though the book also includes home embroiderers and folk embroiderers. In Kettle and McKeating's edited volume there is one chapter written by a professional embroiderer, James Hunting (2012), which includes some autobiographical material and explanation of what it means to be a professional embroiderer.

Each of the embroidery house histories also includes the history of its primary embroiderer. P. White's (1994) history of Lesage includes an extensive history of François Lesage. Bowman (1985) talks about Felix Lallement, Ugo Lo Monaco, and Kitmar's Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia. Mercier (1992) presents the genealogies of embroidery families for each of the embroidery houses he discusses. However, in each of these cases, it is the story of the embroiderer in relation to his or her house's history. Only White (1994) delves into the history of the embroiderer as a person. Yet he still relates the person back to the house at each opportunity. Additionally, these are the executives in the embroidery houses, not the embroiderers who produced the work or "the hands" as they are sometimes called.

Mercier (1992) did interview some of the hands in the Lorraine embroidery houses as well as a few retired embroiderers. In the published stories, the embroiderers related their experiences in embroidery, what the industry used to be like, how much they used to make, and how they got into the trade. The narratives are brief, but give insight into the lives of fashion embroiderers during the early to mid-20th century. Mercier's book is also the only documentation I located that emphasized the role of the workroom embroiderer in fashion embroidery.

While Mercier (1992), Bowman (1985), and the authors within Kettle and McKeating (2012) volume acknowledged the importance of the embroiderer, only White (1994) provides a lengthy (153 page) history of an embroidery professional. Yet, White's history is about an embroidery executive rather than a workroom embroiderer. Mercier interviewed the workroom embroiderers, however the resulting narratives were one to two pages and without detail. In my searches for literature on fashion embroidery, I found no evidence of researchers who had conducted in-depth interviews with the workroom embroiderers, demonstrating how the embroiderers were an integral part of the overall process and history of fashion embroidery.

In summary, the literature available in the area of fashion embroidery is limited. The majority of publications covering the topic are books, not articles. In the area of embroidery history, there is a wider range of material available on general embroidery history or the history of a country's embroidery, such as English embroidery, than there is of fashion embroidery. I only located two examples of fashion embroidery history consisting of more than 100 pages. The history of fashion embroiderers is even more limited. The limited number of publications written about fashion embroidery and the embroiderers indicate that there is a gap in the literature.

Many of the terms fashion embroiderers use are specific to fashion, since the embroidery industry tailored many of their procedures to meet the needs of the fashion industry. Therefore, in the next section I present the overview of the current organization and history of fashion industry.

### **The Fashion Industry**

This section provides information about the current fashion industry elements that affect the embroidery industry. Understanding the relationship between fashion and embroidery industries provides a foundation for examining the changes the embroiderers speak about in the interviews.

There are numerous books and articles concerning the history of fashion and the organization of the fashion industry. The purpose of this section is not to catalogue the available publications but to provide relevant background information thus revealing the interrelationship between fashion and embroidery industries.

**Current organization of the fashion industry.** The fashion industry is divided into markets, each serving a different price level and dedicated to a different garment type (Diamond & Diamond, 2013). In many cases, the geographic area of a fashion manufacturer determines the market. For instance, the majority of American west coast manufacturers specialize in denim or casual wear for the mass markets. Manufacturers in the New York area often specialize in dressy or career oriented clothing for all price points (Diamond & Diamond, 2013). Paris is known for the highest level of fashion, both in levels of design and in price market (Stone, 2012).

Martin and Koda (1995) explain that Paris remains “the epicenter of couture” (p. 74) because Paris has a network of traditional crafts workshops, artisans, and creative resources that are available nowhere else in the world. The development of haute couture in Paris was one of

the reasons that fashion embroidery originally established in Europe and particularly in France. Likewise, the presence of specialized ateliers like those of the fashion embroiderers is why haute couture stays in Paris.

High fashion embroidery is a labor-intensive trade, which produces work only appropriate for high fashion. Like many of its sibling auxiliary industries, fashion embroidery matured near its consumer, haute couture market (Martin & Koda, 1995). At the same time, the availability of auxiliary industries, such as embroidery, silk weaving, millinery, pleating, dyeing, and leather working, enabled haute couture to achieve the levels of opulence it has in France (Naudin & Simon, 1996).

**History of fashion industry: Origins and early history of the modern fashion industry.** The fashion industry as it is currently defined started during the industrial revolution due to the advent of the sewing machine (Brown & Rice, 2001). However, Martin and Koda (1995) and White (1994) claim haute couture started as a counter movement to the modern fashion industry. Haute couture was an effort to preserve the art of hand sewing and the art of fine hand tailoring with an eye to the needs of the individual customer.

Haute couture developed just as society was changing. Bowman (1985) indicates that fashion was no longer the sole provenance of royalty by the end of the 19th century. Coleman and Brooklyn Museum (1989) uncovered the fact that many haute couture customers between 1870 and World War I were newly wealthy Americans. Cawthorne et al. (1998) confirmed that during the end of the 19th century, fashion was becoming less associated with royal courts and more associated with the social gatherings of the new wealthy classes. In the past, individual tailors and dressmakers had dressed royalty or the upper classes for court. Suddenly, people were dressing for the theater, balls, promenading in the garden, or just to be seen at a café. The

nouveau riche, who had gained their wealth through industry, banking, and trade, were gaining status and fashion was one of the ways in which they could demonstrate this status (Martin & Koda, 1995).

Amidst this background of changing times, Charles Fredrick Worth, a fabric sales clerk from England moved to Paris and soon began to design dresses. Worth eventually started his own dress house. In time, he developed or implemented the customs that are now considered part of a modern design house: the presentation of two collections a year, the use of live models, exclusive designs, and franchising rights to some of his designs (Cawthorne et al., 1998). Moreover, the way that he designed for his clients, dictating what would suit them best set him apart in fashion history as the first modern *couturier*. The start of Worth's fashion house in the 1850s is designated by many fashion authorities, including Cawthorne et al. (1998), Coleman and Brooklyn Museum (1989), Martin and Koda (1995), and White (1994), as the beginning of haute couture.

Worth set the cooperative method of working with auxiliary industries early in his career. He had fabrics woven specifically for him in Lyon, France, had an in-house milliner, and used extensive amounts of custom embroidery. This method of working hand-in-hand with the suppliers and trades still exists today in haute couture (Cawthorne et al., 1998; Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989).

By the late 1800s, following Worth's example, several other design houses opened in Paris (Cawthorne et al., 1998; Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989; Martin & Koda, 1995). Designers and design houses were an established part of the new haute couture market by the 1920s. Due to the self-promotion techniques of designers, such as Worth, Poiret, and Chanel, the fashion houses of Paris became a permanent fixture in the city and Paris became known

throughout society as the fashion capital (Bowman, 1985; Cawthorne et al., 1998; Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989).

**History of fashion industry: The fashion industry in the 20th century.** Between 1900 and 1914, the fashion industry in Paris experienced its first period of strong growth. The interest in fashion was fueled by the new modern art movements commencing in Paris (Bowman, 1985). However, the fashion activities were greatly curtailed with the advent of World War I in 1914 (P. White, 1994).

The fashion embroidery industry of the Lorraine region did not prosper as well as its sister industry in Paris prior to World War I. Mercier (1992) explains that the Lorraine region, home to many of the fashion embroidery workshops, was annexed by Germany between 1870 and the end of World War I. While German annexation did not stop fashion embroidery in Lunéville and the Lorraine region, the political turmoil did make performing business more difficult. The Lorraine region returned to French control at the end of World War I. The period between World War I and 1929 was also the period of greatest growth and activity for the beaders of the Lorraine region due to the fashion for beaded flapper dresses (Mercier, 1992).

After the First World War, Paris fashion houses returned to business. By 1922, shortages incurred because of the war and destruction of stock were overcome (Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994). The influence of artistic movements begun before the war and a strengthening focus on the decorative arts helped drive the fashion business. A series of exhibitions drew attention to art and artisan activities occurring in Paris. Newspaper reporters soon began coming to Paris to write about fashion, further solidifying Paris' position as the fashion capital among the masses (P. White, 1994).

The stock market crash of 1929 was felt worldwide and ended much of the flamboyance in the fashion world (Edwards, 1985; Mercier, 1992). A new tendency towards austerity and frugality showed in the dress styles, which led couturiers to using less of the luxurious auxiliary services such as embroidery. There were fewer Embroideries, less costly fabric, less use of feathers, jewels, and artificial flowers. While the design houses incurred a sharp decline in sales, the auxiliary industries were hit even harder as many of their services became out of fashion (Mercier, 1992).

White (1994) explains that by 1934, the impact of the economic crisis began to lessen in the fashion industry. American customers were beginning to return to French fashion houses. With the return of customers, designers slowly added embroidery to their designs again (P. White, 1994).

In 1939, the beginning of World War II halted the majority of fashion industry activities in France and Britain. Restrictions on fabrics and materials made it nearly impossible to design garments with opulent Embroideries (P. White, 1994). Any unnecessary padding or decoration were banned, numbers of pockets and buttonholes were controlled, and clothes were not allowed to be discarded until they were completely worn out (Cawthorne et al., 1998). Many fashion houses and manufacturers closed during the war years. Some re-opened after the war, but others did not (P. White, 1994).

It was Dior's "New Look" of 1947 that brought opulence and femininity back into fashion after the war (Cawthorne et al., 1998; Martin & Koda, 1995; Tortora & Eubank, 1994). The New Look was the name given to the style of dress that featured long full skirts, tight waists, and narrow shoulders. The style was not practical during the war years because rationing would have not permitted enough fabric to produce the skirt (P. White, 1994). Dior and the other

couture designers soon began to use extensive and luxurious embroidery, pre-war amounts of silks and other sumptuous fabrics, extravagant custom-made hats, and other such fineries not seen in forty years nor allowed in about ten years. Even though most women were still under strong post-war restrictions, the change in fashion had a morale-boosting effect. Women found creative ways to get around the restrictions and shortages (Cawthorne et al., 1998). As the public so readily adopted the new styles, those in the public eye such as actresses and royalty flocked to the design houses to once again be dressed by the couture designers. The renewed patronage helped revitalize not only the couture houses, but also the ailing auxiliary industries (Cawthorne et al., 1998; Naudin & Simon, 1996; P. White, 1994).

Since the 1950s, high fashion and some auxiliary industries have not undergone as many major changes. The three biggest influences have been the influence of youth on fashion that began in the 1960s, the increasingly international aspect of the clientele, and the globalization of the fashion industry. Prior to the 1960s, women dressed to look their age (P. White, 1994). Maturity was a respected component of wealthy dressing (Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989). However, the social movements of the 1960s brought youth to the forefront of music, art, and fashion (Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994). Women asked to be dressed more like their daughters and embroidery had to find ways to reflect the feeling of youth (P. White, 1994). Fashion has remained linked to youth since the 1960s (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

The second major change in high fashion was haute couture houses selling to foreign (non-French) clients. This occurred from the beginning of Worth's fashion house (Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989) and escalated during the 1870s due to the number of newly wealthy Americans coming to France to purchase fashions (Bowman, 1985; Coleman & Brooklyn Museum, 1989; P. White, 1994). The number of foreign couture clients continued to increase



throughout most of the first half of the 20th century. However, in the second half of the 20th century, world economics promoted a shift to a much higher percentage of foreign clients. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, haute couture clients became increasingly more international as wealthy middle-easterners began to heavily patronize Paris couturiers (P. White, 1994). According to an embroiderer I interviewed, wealthy Russians and Chinese clients have become common recently as well.

The third change, globalization, has affected fashion through foreign production. Fashion is increasingly utilizing offshore production in order to reduce labor costs (Diamond & Diamond, 2013). The trend affects high fashion less than mass-produced fashion, but it still influences high fashion. European embroiderers now compete with Asian embroiderers or even send their own embroidery work to workshops in India in order to remain in business (Mercier, 1992; P. White, 1994)

The major political, economic, and societal events that have affected and shaped the fashion industry have likewise affected and shaped the modern fashion embroidery industry. A symbiotic relationship has developed between high fashion and fashion embroidery. Couture, in particular, exists because of its relations with traditional artisans, such as embroiderers (Martin & Koda, 1995) and the artisans are dependent upon the business of the fashion industry (Bowman, 1985; Naudin & Simon, 1996; P. White, 1994).

The fashion embroidery industry has been integral to the development of the high fashion market and embroiderers are the backbone of the embroidery industry. The experiences of embroiderers have the potential to reveal more information about the embroidery industry and therefore about high fashion. However, there is only a limited amount of literature concerning professional fashion embroiderers. Additionally, the majority of literature about fashion

embroidery was published prior to 1999. Information about the embroidery industry and embroiderers' experiences since the 1990s is needed in order to maintain a continuous history of the industry.

Part of the difficulty in locating literature about fashion embroidery stems from the marginal status of fashion and dress research. Taylor (2002) wrote that dress "was seen as an unworthy vehicle for 'serious' academic research" (p. 2) until recently. Kawamura (2011) confirmed Taylor's observation by stating that fashion and dress have been treated "as a marginal area of research" (p. 1). The general relegation of fashion to the status of unworthy of research has deterred many scholars from entering the field (Kawamura, 2011; Taylor, 2002). Only within the last ten to fifteen years, have researchers begun to gain acceptance in the field of dress and fashion research (Kawamura, 2011). Fashion and dress has benefited from the change in attitude towards the subject's research suitability. There are an increasing number of research publications and articles in the field. However, the research increase in fashion and dress has had little effect on the sub-field of fashion embroidery research.

The previous negative attitude towards dress research explains the general lack of scholarly research in fashion embroidery. Because of the lack of scholarly research, the background for my study heavily relies on books. All of the embroidery sources I used were books written for the public. Four of my sources were written in French and three of the sources were translated from the original French. English authors wrote twenty-two of the remaining embroidery publications I used.

Due to the lack of scholarly research on fashion embroidery, there is a large gap in the field. My study begins to fill the gap. I am also addressing the lack on non-scholarly literature on

the history of fashion embroidery since the 1980s and the lack of literature concerning the stories of the embroiderers.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. The focus was on those who execute and design hand embroidery and beading for high fashion. I based this qualitative study primarily on general qualitative research methodology augmented with oral history methods. I built the study on the conceptual framework that a documented history of the embroidery industry is needed for use in teaching and that a history obtained from the embroiderers would add a human element to existing literature.

Design disciplines have a history and a need to document that history (Clark & Brody, 2009b). Sometimes the responsibility of recording the history falls on the shoulders of researchers from the discipline concerned, rather than a traditional historian. In those cases, traditional historical methodology often is combined with other methodologies, capitalizing on the strengths of the researcher (Delamont & Jones, 2012; Henry, 2006).

According to academic tradition, fashion embroidery is a sub-field of fashion or textiles, which qualifies embroidery as a design field. As a design field, fashion embroidery is deficient in documented history. However, there is a limited amount of literature published on fashion embroidery history. I could not locate any recently written scholarly reviewed publications on fashion embroidery history. The limited amount of literature available in the field of fashion embroidery confirmed the need for the study.

As an embroiderer and an educator, I recognized the need for research in fashion embroidery history and understand how my background would give me access to sources unavailable to other researchers. I also recognized how little is known about fashion embroiderers. As an academic trained in qualitative research, I chose to investigate a less-

traditional aspect of embroidery history, focusing on the embroiderers. In concentrating on the embroiderers, I chose to utilize general qualitative research methodology combined with oral history methodology.

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

Qualitative research is an approach for gathering an in-depth understanding on a topic, particularly pertaining to the understanding of human behavior. Features of qualitative research include “studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions” and “representing the views and perspectives of the people” (Yin, 2011, p. 7). This study was about discovering why the participants became embroiderers, how they did so, and how they represented their lives as embroiderers. I conducted the research in the participants’ places of employment. Throughout the paper, I have utilized the quotations from the participants’ interviews to explain their views.

Researchers commonly use qualitative research methodology for the collection and analysis of non-numeric data. The methodology also works well for flexible research designs. This study required the use of recorded interviews. Given that the interviews were open-ended and about professional life histories, I needed a methodology that allowed me to change and modify research questions and interview questions as the participants’ answers warranted. For the purposes of designing and collecting interview data, I used oral history methodology, which is consistent with the overarching goal of general qualitative research focusing on participant meanings.

### **Inclusion of Oral History Methodology**

Kawamura (2011) and Taylor (2002) state that oral history is a well-suited approach to research in dress and fashion studies. Oral history, as a methodology, allowed me to embrace the

interdisciplinary nature of the study. It allowed me to combine aspects of fashion studies, education, and history while focusing on the lives of the embroiderers.

Oral history is “a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events” (“Oral History: Defined,” 2014, para. 1). Oral history is about the people, their stories, and interpreting the meaning of their stories (“Oral History: Defined,” 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that oral history is the history as recited or told by the interviewee. Tosh (2002) adds that oral history often results in a highly personal history or a history of everyday people, whom traditional histories have generally ignored. These people include the poor, the oppressed, and the minorities (P. R. Thompson, 2000). As a methodology oriented around people’s stories, oral history allowed me to give voice to the concerns of the embroiderers, an often-ignored group of workers, and relate the embroiderers’ experiences through their own words.

Oral histories are also used as a starting point for histories that are lacking documentation or to augment existing histories (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). Based on this premise, I used the oral histories to develop a larger picture of the high fashion embroidery industry. Based on the literature available, historians have recorded very few of the embroiderers’ stories. The stories are in danger of becoming lost forever as embroiderers disperse or die. My professional embroidery contacts confirmed that with each generation, there are fewer embroidery houses in Europe and fewer embroiderers. Recording the history becomes necessary to create a foundation for future training of embroiderers and design students.

Oral histories often give voice to stories never told previously. Due to the nature of the open-ended interview, narrators often feel an importance of their tale (Portelli, 1998). Narrators experience a sense of validity because their story is preserved for posterity (Yow, 2005). This

sense of importance helps them to elucidate their stories more completely and in greater detail (Portelli, 1998). Portelli (2001) explains that the added detail gained from narrators' sense of worth adds richness to the people's stories as well as to existing history.

Frisch (1990) argues that the value of oral histories is actually in the story itself. The stories reveal what interviewees consider important enough to remember, how they perceive events from the past, and how they fit them into their modern concepts of the embroidery industry. Oral history methodology places value on the experiences of the people, rather than solely on events or material objects (Yow, 2005). When the people place their experiences within the context of events, then the human side begins to link with what was traditionally considered history, that is the timeline of events and their political or economic context (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). The use of the embroiderers' narratives provides details about events, daily activities, and emotional responses that traditional history would otherwise miss.

### **Research Design**

I used oral history methods primarily to guide the interview process. However, I used other qualitative methods for data analysis and compilation of the findings. I transcribed the recordings using a gisted method of transcription, as described by Dempster and Woods (2011) and Evers (2011). Then I utilized a version of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method data analysis to compare the stories of the embroiderers. From the analysis, I constructed a recent industry history, an explanation of the embroidery design and production process, and a comparison of embroiderers' career paths. The meanings embroiderers placed upon each event, process, or item provided insight into the lives of the embroiderers. Dunaway and Baum (1996) and Yow (2005) warned that oral material should not be used as the sole source of material when building a history. To support and add validity to the embroiderers' stories, I utilized documents,

field notes from onsite observations, and personal reflections from my research journal as additional sources.

According to Yin (2011), qualitative studies often have multiple levels of data collection units. The units are typically structured in nested arrangements of a broader level of study and a narrower level of study. This study contains two data collection units. The broader level unit is the history of the European high fashion embroidery industry. The narrower unit focuses on the life stories of the individuals working in the European high fashion embroidery industry. The broader data collection unit provides a setting for the stories in the narrower data collection unit.

Because the study relied heavily on the stories of individuals, I had to build methods of providing validity and increasing the trustworthiness of the research. Validity methods support the authenticity and accuracy of the researcher's findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By utilizing validity methods, I based my findings on more than an interviewee's story.

The validity methods I chose supported my research design. I utilized triangulation, a method in which I gathered data from multiple types of sources. Triangulation is the act of seeking more than one source or method for verifying information (Yin, 2011). My data sources included the interviews, documents, photos, and field notes. While the interviews provided the primary data source, the other sources supported and verified the participants' stories and also provided additional information.

In addition to triangulation, I developed an audit trail as I completed the research. An audit trail allows other researchers to "verify the rigor" (Patton, 2002, p. 93) of my research methods. I kept a series of detailed field journals that included all my research notes, appointments, and reflections on the interviews. The journals form an audit trail of my entire study.



I increased transferability by using thick description. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define transferability as the degree of similarity between the “sending and receiving contexts” (p. 124). Transferability refers to how the context of the study is useful in other research or situations. The concept of thick descriptions, developed by Geertz (1973) is the use of highly detailed writing that facilitates the understanding of the situation, the people, the social conditions, and the meaningful contexts. By utilizing thick description, I provided the necessary information for determining whether the findings are applicable to other situations.

For data acquisition, I chose to conduct oral history interviews, take field notes, collect documents, and take photos. I created an interview protocol that would encourage participants to relate their professional life story yet keep the participants’ stories oriented around certain topics. After conducting a few interviews, I began to transcribe and analyze the recordings. Simultaneous data collection and analysis is a qualitative method that allows the researcher to adapt the data collection methods based on the emerging concepts, themes, and categories (Merriam, 2002). By analyzing data from an early stage, I was able to adjust the interview protocol and obtain interviews that were more informative.

I describe the participant and site selection methods as well as the data collection and analysis methods in detail in the following sections. The description includes an introduction to the participants and description of the sites, a review of the interview protocol, and an account of the challenges incurred during data collection. Additionally, I explain my rationale behind choosing the gisted method of transcription and constant comparative method of analysis.

Participant and site selection were integral processes for this study. I only approached participants if they worked at a site or were associated with a site that met the study’s

qualifications and I only included sites that employed willing and qualified participants. The relationship between site and participant was symbiotic.

When I speak of finding contacts, sometimes the names were people and sometimes the names were companies. The sampling process produced both participants and sites. The two entities were inseparable until the interview process.

### **Participant Selection**

I conducted interviews with 20 people who were intimately associated with the European fashion embroidery industry, primarily embroiderers, embroidery designers, and executives from the embroidery companies. Fashion embroidery, once a thriving industry, has declined since World War II, according to one of my interviewees. One participant told me that there used to be 80,000 embroiderers in the Lorraine region of France at the turn of the 19th century. Another participant reported that there are now only about 100 hand embroiderers working in workshops across all of France. This limited the number of participants available.

In accordance with qualitative methodology, I used purposive sampling to choose participants who would yield the most relevant information (Yin, 2011). I selected interviewees for their proximity to the high fashion hand embroidery industry and their willingness to share their story. Experience in the industry varied greatly from a few years to an entire career. This repertoire gave a representative cross section of the people in the embroidery industry and resulted in stories from different points of view.

I started with my own contacts in the embroidery industry, explained what I was doing, and asked if they were interested in participating. I gained these initial contacts over the years through my own experiences in the professional embroidery industry, as an embroiderer, a trainee, or a researcher. Additional participants were selected through snowball sampling, a form

of purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) in which I asked my contacts for more potential interviewees. As I developed new contacts, I continued to ask for more names. The snowball sampling resulted in the addition of 17 new names and contacts. Sometimes in researching a provided name, I discovered more potential contacts. More importantly, many of my initial contacts gave me permission to use their name when contacting other embroiderers. The use of other embroiderers' names opened doors more quickly as it gave an element of credibility to my request.

In addition to snowball sampling, I searched books, journals, and websites for any mention of specific embroidery workshops that met my criteria. I knew of three workshops from my own experience, before I started the search. I began to look for other embroiderers whose names were associated with the three I knew. This search led to a few lists of French embroidery workshops, but never anything for other English or Italian embroiderers. I found contact information for the embroidery workshops and started calling. These calls started another round of snowball sampling as contacts gave me more names.

Lastly, I discovered a group of participants through a fortuitous event. When I arrived in Paris, there was an exhibition for haute couture gowns at the Hôtel de Ville. A contact informed me that a lot of embroidery was on display, so I made a point of attending the event. I discovered that not only was the report about the embroidery true, but that in many cases, the display card listed the embroidery atelier for each piece. Acknowledgement of an embroidery atelier is a very unusual occurrence. I recorded all the embroidery names I found, several of which were new to me. This gave me a more complete list of the embroidery ateliers for French haute couture. I immediately set about contacting the new workshops.

With each round of interviewing, I had more contacts. Some contacts did not desire to participate or were not right for the needs of the study, but they often provided additional contacts. When contacts mentioned previously noted names more often than new names, I knew that I was reaching the saturation point. Fashion embroidery is not a very large industry and soon I obtained most of the workshop names as well as the personal names of the heads of these companies. I located 11 high fashion hand embroidery houses operating in France, two in Great Britain, and one in Italy. I was told that there were only about 100 embroiderers in the workshops in France (field notes, July 12, 2013) and based on my experience with the European embroiderers, there are probably less than 200 to 300 embroiderers in England, Italy and France, combined.

I attempted to arrange a few appointments before leaving the U.S. for Europe, but I found that most of the companies would not speak with me until I was in the required city. I spent my first two weeks in France establishing contacts, explaining my purpose and developing relationships. In a few cases, I had to arrange a brief meeting to explain my research face-to-face before gaining permission to interview.

In most cases, I initially established contact with the embroidery houses via email. This was to help lessen the language barriers of my strong American accent, my limited ability to speak French, or inability to speak Italian. My English and Italian contacts immediately agreed to participate. Negotiations with the French embroiderers took longer. The general method for gaining admittance to the French ateliers consisted of the following steps: email the atelier in French, email the atelier again, receive an answer demonstrating interest, email the atelier to set up and appointment, meet with someone to explain the purpose of the project, set up another appointment for the interviews, return and conduct the interviews. I soon learned that this was a

way to develop a relationship with me. The embroiderers expressed their deep interest in the project and a desire to participate in future endeavors once I met with them. However, in three cases, I was not able to make it through the entire cycle to the interview phase as I ran out of time and had to return to the U.S. Yet, because I have initiated this relationship building, I will be more welcome when I return to do additional research.

### **Site Selection**

The embroidery companies of Paris and Lunéville were the prime targets for this study and were the sites where I contacted the most people. I chose these sites because of their importance to the birth of the modern fashion embroidery industry and their significance to the haute couture fashion houses (Martin & Koda, 1995). Between 1867 and 1875, a Lunéville embroiderer developed the tambour technique for attaching beads and sequins to fabric quickly, bringing it to the forefront of fashion embroidery techniques (Mercier, 1992; A. Thompson, 1992). As the Lunéville area was already a hub of embroidery workrooms specializing in tambour embroidery, the technique of attaching beads and sequins with the tambour hook quickly spread throughout the region. Embroiderers trained in the technique migrated to Paris, the fashion capital, spreading the technique further. The technique eventually spread throughout Europe and across the globe. However, it is in Lunéville and Paris, where the history has its strongest roots. These two areas are also where the largest number of this type of fashion embroidery companies still exist (Mercier, 1992). The other embroidery companies I contacted were in London and Milan. Both these cities developed flourishing fashion industries (Breward, 2010) as well as embroidery industries (Reynolds, 1997) and give depth to the history of the embroidery industry.

I chose interview and observation sites according to two main criteria: the site was a high fashion hand embroidery workshop that utilized tambour embroidery and the company was open to my observations. In all but one case, I obtained the name of the workshop before or at the same time as I received a potential participant's name. For five workshops, I knew the company name before I knew any of the employees.

As the period in which I conducted my research was a very busy time for most of the embroiderers, I did not request specific observation time. Instead, if I felt the opportunity was right, I asked to see the workshops during the interview. Some of the embroiderers took me around the premises for an extended tour. They would explain tools, materials, processes, techniques, company history, and answer my questions as we toured. In a few workshops, the embroiderers allowed me to take photographs as well. However, in about half of the interviews, I sensed that the embroiderer was feeling too pressured for time. In those cases, I did not ask to see the rest of the workshop.

### **Protection of Participants**

Traditional oral history methodology emphasizes the importance of archiving the interview recordings and transcripts of any oral history research in order to not only provide a data source for future researchers, but to also preserve peoples' stories in their own voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ritchie, 2003). Additionally, Perry (2007) argues that there is no longer such a thing as complete anonymity in a study such as this, given the availability of information on the internet. Yet, I recognized that confidentiality could be an issue for some interviewees (Ritchie, 2003). Therefore, I provided the participants with a choice whether they would like to be named in the study or would like to remain anonymous. They were also able to choose if they wanted their recording archived and if not, if they preferred it destroyed. These

choices were included in the check boxes on the consent form (Appendix B) and fully explained to the participants at the beginning of the interviews. None of the participants chose to have the recordings destroyed.

If the participant chose to remain anonymous, I preserved his or her confidentiality as much as possible in a number of ways. I did not record the names of those interviewees in the transcriptions of the interviews or in the finalized field notes, nor did I reveal the names in the final written paper. Sometimes I used pseudonyms in place of the participant's real name, sometimes not. In two cases, I used a pseudonym because I referenced the participant often and needed something to call each of them. In one case, I referenced the participant by his role, as he was not a traditional embroiderer. The use of his role title instead of a pseudonym kept his position clear throughout the paper. I did not reference the last unnamed participant often. Therefore, I found it unnecessary to assign him a pseudonym. If at any time the interviewee or I forgot and mentioned the name of the participant or the participant's place of employment in the recording, I have since erased that portion of the interview. I kept all interview recordings, any observation recordings, and any other files in a password-encrypted file on a password-protected computer as well as on a password-protected cloud server. I will transfer the recordings to an archive after completing the dissertation and obtaining the PhD degree. In addition, when possible, I took photographs without revealing faces. The one exception was a situation in which the subject gave me express permission to photograph her (or him) on a consent form.

I addressed each stage of the study in the consent form (see Appendix B). The form listed the participants' risks and rights during the study. Specifically, it informed them of their right to choose confidentiality, to participate at their own discretion, and their right to end the interview or observation at any time without any penalty. It secured their permission to either voice record,

video record, or photograph them as the situation called for and as they agreed. They chose which methods to give permission for and they could rescind that permission at any time. They could also give or deny permission for their face to be visible in any visual records. I have kept strict records of who wants anonymity, which recordings to archive, and what parts of the recordings need to be deleted.

Part of the consent form addressed the potential benefits to the participants. There was no incentive for participating in the study. However, as noted on the consent form, I will furnish participants with a copy of the study upon completion.

I used the consent form for every interview, for each observation, and for all photographs involving people. In this way, I was able to not only explain the rights and risks to everyone involved, but I was also able to explain my purpose for being in certain places during observations and for taking photographs. This raised awareness of everyone involved and made them more likely to speak out if they preferred me not to be somewhere or photograph a particular action or item.

I translated the consent form to French. I do not speak Italian; therefore, I had an associate translate the form into Italian and had the translation checked by a native speaker. The University of the Incarnate Word's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the consent form in all three languages, as well as the rest of the study. This assured that I took all initial precautions for protecting my participants and made sufficient plans for continuing to do so.

### **Introduction of Participants and Workshops**

Using the consent form as a tool for explaining the purpose of my research, I received permission from 16 participants to record their interview. Those 16 participants signed the



consent to participate and released their recording to archive for future research use. Fifteen out of 16 participants gave permission to publish their name and place of employment.

There were also four unrecorded conversations. I fully informed the four individuals of the intent of the research. They were aware that I would utilize the information they provided for the study. In fact, they were happy to provide information. However, they did not want to be recorded. For three of these, I took notes during these conversations and copious field notes directly after to supplement the absence of word-for-word recordings. I conducted the fourth unrecorded interview via email. However, as these four interviews were informal, I removed or changed all identifying information about these interview subjects.

Table 1 lists all of the participants, their general job type, the company they worked for, and the country in which they worked. In the table, I separated the interviewees who participated in recorded interviews from those who gave unrecorded interviews. Then, I grouped the participants first by the country in which they worked, followed by company and finally, classification of job.

Two of the companies, Hand & Lock and Gouvernel, gave me permission to interview multiple employees, giving a broader view of the company and the types of jobs available. In other cases, I was able to interview only the president or artistic director. Table 1 represents the variety of job types held by my interviewees at Gouvernel and Hand & Lock.

In the next section, I introduce the participants in their environments in order to provide a picture of the embroiderers in the contexts of their work. I combined the participant and site descriptions since the work environment reveals who the participants are as professionals and in what conditions they work. Because this study is about the people and their lives as embroiderers, it was important to show the embroiderers in their environment.

Table 1

*Participants*

Subject	Job type	Company	Country
Subjects in Recorded Interviews			
Abbey (pseudonym)	Designer	Undisclosed	France
Brigitte Hoenig	Embroiderer	Gouvernel	France
Édouard Lemarquis	Embroiderer	Gouvernel	France
Sonia Barthelemy	Embroiderer	Gouvernel	France
Valerie	Embroiderer	Gouvernel	France
Victoria Darolti	Executive/Designer	Darolti Ateliers	France
Christine Hindendoch	Executive/Designer	Gouvernel	France
Régis Lièvre	Executive/Designer	Lanèl	France
Raffaella Grasso	Executive	Pino Grasso	Italy
Pino Grasso	Executive/Designer	Pino Grasso	Italy
Jessica Pile	Designer	Hand & Lock	United Kingdom
Scott Heron	Designer	Hand & Lock	United Kingdom
Daisy Williams	Embroiderer	Hand & Lock	United Kingdom
Karin	Embroiderer	Hand & Lock	United Kingdom
Lynn	Material Specialist	Hand & Lock	United Kingdom
Claire Barrett	Executive/Designer	Hawthorne & Heaney	United Kingdom
Subjects in Unrecorded Interviews			
Henri (pseudonym)	Designer	Undisclosed Embroidery Firm	France
unnamed	Member	Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies	France
unnamed	Executive	Undisclosed Embroidery Firm	United Kingdom
unnamed	Executive	Undisclosed Sequin Manufacturer	France

I presented the participants within their respected workshop's description. I listed the workshops in the order in which I conducted the interviews. For instance, I interviewed the Grassos first. I listed Pino Grasso Embroideries first, gave a description of the workshops and introduced Mr. Grasso and Raffaella under the section heading Pino Grasso Embroideries. Three of the unrecorded interviews are the exception to the chronological organization of the interviews. I placed these three interviews at end of the section. I did not want to list those three interviews in chronological order in case their chronological association with other interviews

revealed anything about the interviewees. I placed one of the unrecorded interviews in chronological order because the order did not provide any associational identifying information. Additionally, I referenced this particular interview often in the data analysis. Therefore, I thought the chronological reference would provide distinguishing information to introduce the interviewee in context.

**Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda.** My first interview, on July 2, 2013 was at Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda [Pino Grasso High Fashion Embroideries] in Milan, Italy with Mr. Pino Grasso and his daughter Raffaella (pictured in Figure 1). Pino Grasso Embroideries is located in a quiet neighborhood in the Southeast section of Milan, with the workshops located on the ground floor of the building.



*Figure 1.* Pino Grasso and his daughter Raffaella.

Upon entering, one of the first impressions I had was how light the rooms were. Large windows opened in most of the rooms to allow in the sunshine and summer breeze.

The Grassos participated in a joint interview in which Raffaella translated for Mr. Grasso and also provided her own stories. Both Mr. Grasso and Raffaella welcomed me into their workshop and spent over two hours speaking to me about their company, their experiences, and embroidery in general. After the interview, they took me around the rooms and explained all the steps of the embroidery process. They narrated what each employee's job entailed and clarified the purpose of each piece of equipment. On the ground floor, I visited Mr. Grasso's office, the embroidery room, the design and preparation room, and the supply room.

The office contained two large tables. One acted as Mr. Grasso's desk. The other table served as either Raffaella's desk or a worktable. The purpose was unclear and I did not ask. Colored prints of the company's best and most famous work as well as press clippings covered the walls of the room. A bookshelf along one wall held awards on the top shelf.

The embroidery room could hold about six embroiderers and in fact, the Grassos informed me that they employ five in-house embroiderers. There were windows along two walls, one exterior allowing in the sunlight, and one interior, allowing a view of the rest of the workshop. The embroiderers were each sitting at their individual frame at the time, and all but one were working on samples for a prêt-à-porter collection. These samples consisted of printed chiffon featuring painterly strokes and abstract flowers. The embroiderers were stitching pearlized sequins and bugle beads of spring colors in chains that echoed the printed brush strokes. This was very minimalistic, lightweight work, but caught the light beautifully. The last embroiderer was working on a finished garment. The garment was cut out and re-mounted onto tulle in order to stretch the fabric onto the frame. This embroiderer used a tambour hook to attach lacy black braid in long, irregular stripes, the ends of which dangled loose at the ends like fringe. Surrounding the embroiderers around the perimeter of the room, there were tables holding beads,

sequins, and other supplies. One table held supplies from a project that had just finished. My impression of the room was that it was very quiet and peaceful.

We progressed to the design and preparation room. This was the largest room on the ground floor and three designer/drafters occupied it. The room was on the interior of the building, but had a number of windows that opened out to a bright courtyard. There were three large tables with work in various stages. An area of flat racks for current clients' patterns, organized by client, was located along one wall. Raffaella explained that "current" meant within the last two years for storage purposes. Some of the patterns were made of white craft paper, some were board, some were cut out, and some were not cut. The next wall had a small, narrow table against it, holding black, white, and blue pounce (ground chalk). As well as a number of spray bottles containing alcohol for setting the pounce to fabric. Two electric pricking machines for use in the pouncing process sat on the large tables. The drafters moved the pricking machines from station to station as needed. All design drawings appeared hand drawn.

The supply room was a much smaller room, stacked floor to ceiling with shelves of beads, sequins, cords, threads, and other materials. Bags of colored glass and boxes of sparkling lead crystal hinted at the treasures hiding in that space. Yet, by careful purchasing and use of stock, Pino Grasso had managed to keep their 50 plus years' worth of surplus materials to a minimum.

Finally, the Grassos showed me their archive of embroidery samples. This space was in the basement of the building, but was still bright and welcoming. It was the largest space and featured a consulting area for working with clients. The consultation area contained two comfortable black leather couches and a large coffee table. The actual archive consisted of two walls of small drawers flanking a large worktable. There were perhaps 200 to 250 drawers, each

full of samples. Mr. Grasso and Raffaella pulled out several hundred pieces, explained the techniques, and allowed me unlimited photographs. Two hours and thirty-four minutes later, I exited the workshop, feeling like I had made my first new friends.

**Hand & Lock.** Hand & Lock in London was the site of my next five interviews. I conducted the five interviews over a span of two days, July 4th and 5th, 2013. Hand & Lock occupies a maze of rooms, most of which are hidden from the eyes of visitors. I, too, only saw a portion of the workshop, but the employees referenced several other spaces that I did not tour.

I entered to find a little reception area just inside the door. However, the three times I visited, no one occupied this space. Upon each of my visits, one of the embroiderers or Lynn from the military department answered the door upon my ringing the bell. In each case, whichever person answered the door, led me through the reception area to a receiving room that also doubled as a showroom, supply room, museum, and library. It had all the items necessary for basic design consultations and sales meetings, including pieces of embroidery, books, and boxes of beads scattered around the area. The room contained an antique-style couch with cushions that employees embroidered in-house and two short, modern red ottoman-like stools that acted as additional seating. A coffee table rested between the couch and stools while a few dress forms stood guard at one end of the assemblage, which displayed completed embroidery pieces. Many tall shelves stood behind the forms.

After waiting just a few minutes, the CEO greeted me and then we went through the adjoining military room and up a stairway to the business offices. These offices looked as if the owners were in a state of perpetual creative fervor. Everywhere I looked there were books, samples, and various items associated with an embroidery business. The CEO and I settled in a little seating area in front of his desk and talked about my research, the state of fashion

embroidery, embroidery history, additional people to contact, and embroidery in general for about half an hour. After our meeting, he took me on a quick tour of the workshops and introduced me to the employees of Hand & Lock. As he did this, he pointed out which people he thought would fit my research needs the best and explained my purpose to them. In the end, he granted access to anywhere in the workshops and to interview anyone who would like to speak with me. Here I met Lynn, Scott, Jessica, Daisy, and Karin.

The first room we visited was the military room, Lynn's domain. Lynn was the military specialist that spoke with all customers ordering embroidered military regalia. The products included badges, flags, banners, uniform accoutrements, and any standardized military items that require hand embroidery. Lynn's job was to know every detail concerning military accoutrements. She provided appropriate materials to military tailors and helped individual customers order appropriate badges and other items from the Hand & Lock embroiderers.

A desk fronted the military room, where Lynn sat at her computer. Behind her, loomed several floor to ceiling shelves with bins bursting with gold and silver braids, cords, laces, and other materials used in the making of military embroidery along with boxes of badges. It was like a glimpse into a cave of treasure, given the warm golden glow everywhere I looked.

From the military room, we moved to the design and preparation room, where I met Scott and Jessica (Jess, as she preferred). At the time of the interviews, Scott was creative director and Jess was a designer. They had similar jobs of working with clients to design custom embroidery work. After satisfying the needs of the client in terms of design and cost, they created all the technical papers and drawings that informed the embroiderers how to complete the work.

Scott and Jess worked at opposite ends of the room at small desks with computers. In the center, was a sizable worktable where they would lay out projects. Drawers, shelves, a large

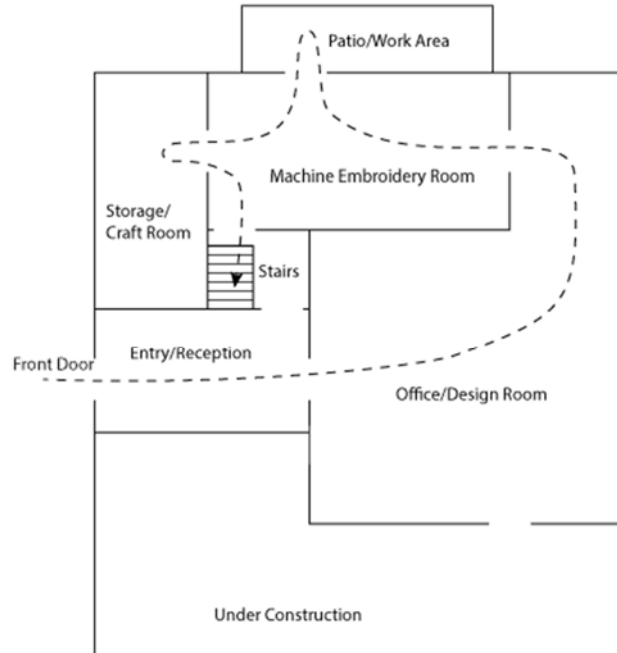
wooden flat-file, and various tools of the trade circled the walls of the room. The back wall had natural light coming through two or three large windows and the front of the room connected to the embroidery rooms for easy communication.

As we progressed through the front to the embroidery room, I met Daisy, Karin, and a couple of other embroiderers. Daisy and Karin were both embroiderers at Hand & Lock. Daisy specialized in needle embroidery and some tambour work. Karin had become the sole hand-operated machine embroiderer for the company. They were also at two extremes in terms of length of employment at Hand & Lock. Daisy was the newest employee while Karin was the employee with the longest history with the firm.

The hand embroidery room at Hand & Lock ran along the front of the building and featured large picture windows looking out onto the street. This meant not only did the embroiderers have a great deal of light, but also that they were also visible to passers-by. The embroiderers worked at embroidery frames along two walls of the room. The other two walls housed old thread cases for thread, shelves, bins, and other storage for materials and projects. A worktable stood in the center of the room. While this was the extent of my tour, there were archives, materials rooms, and a machine embroidery room on the premises as well.

**Broderies Gouvernel.** After visiting Hand & Lock, I journeyed to Eastern France, to the Lunéville area of Lorraine. The companies I contacted in the region were not actually in Lunéville, but in communities surrounding the town. The first company I visited was Broderies Gouvernel on July 11th, in the tiny village of Brémoncourt, about 12 miles from Lunéville. The town contained a total of seven streets and only about twenty to thirty buildings. Gouvernel was located in a remodeled two-story farmhouse in one corner of the village. I approached the red clay tile-roofed building where one of the employees greeted me and led me inside. The entrance





*Figure 2.* Path of Gouvernel tour downstairs.  
Rooms not to scale or precisely correct shape.

contained a small reception area that was unattended, but held examples of the embroidery work and other items. We progressed further into an office that also served as a design room. Figure 2 shows the approximate layout of the downstairs of the Gouvernel building and path of my tour. I met Christine, the owner of the company in the office. She warmly welcomed me and took me on a tour through the workshops, introducing me to the employees as we went. In addition to the reception and the office, downstairs contained a large machine embroidery room, a smaller supply room that doubled as a workroom, and a patio. There was another side to the building, but it was under construction at the time thus preventing a tour.

The machine embroidery room was the former kitchen and ran along the outside wall. Large windows allowed a lot of natural light in the room. There were a couple of racks holding the season's collection of trims and braids near the windows. Shelves of materials on reels, including sequin schlung (sew-on strung sequin cord) and various types of cords covered one

wall of this room. At the opposite end of the room, a table held work in process and completed work. The embroidery machines were down the middle of the room. There were 8 to 10 machines. The machines were all hand-operated Cornelys, primarily the type that carried reels of materials on top. Valerie was the master of this room and the machines. Figure 3 shows Valerie operating a Cornely machine in the machine embroidery room. Her right hand is underneath the machine table clasping the handle that guides the direction of the stitching.

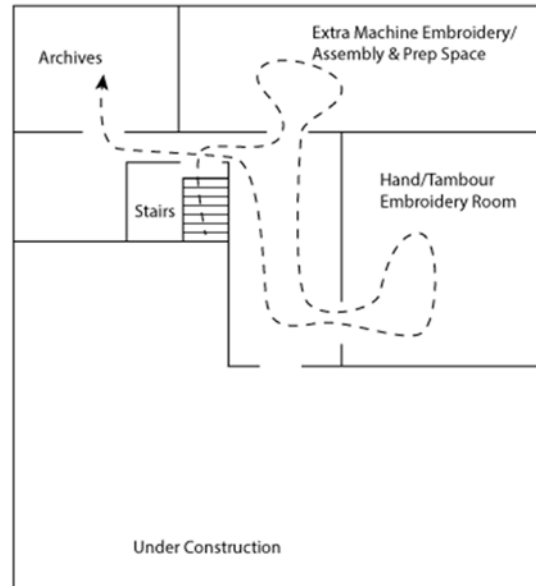
The kitchen led out to a patio, where a worktable sat. One of the employees was working at the table in warm sunshine, braiding one of the trims for a client. Workers used this alternate area during pleasant weather as it provided plenty of light and a pleasant view out across the fields of the countryside.



*Figure 3. Valerie, the hand-guided Cornely embroidery specialist in the machine embroidery room at Gouvernel.*

Off another end of the machine room, Christine led me to the supply room. Shelves of materials covered the walls of this room and there was a large table in the center. Employees used this space for making braids by macramé, crochet, lacing, knotting, and for assembling existing braids together.

A narrow, steep staircase led up to the next floor where three rooms were in use. Figure 4 illustrates the path of my tour upstairs. One large room, directly over the downstairs machine



*Figure 4.* Path of Gouvernel tour upstairs. Rooms not to scale or precisely correct shape.

embroidery room, contained two more Cornely embroidery machines and a very large worktable. The embroiderers used this space for assembly, preparation, and for working on large projects.

To one side of this space was a smaller room, the workstation to the hand embroiderers. At the time of my visit, there were three embroiderers, Sonia, Brigitte, and the intern, Édouard, working at hand embroidery. Sonia and Brigitte worked together around a single frame and Édouard worked on his own frame. The room was large enough for about four embroidery frames, depending on their size. The embroidery room was located along an exterior wall and had large windows, allowing natural light to fill the room. The other three walls of the room held the various tools and supplies the embroiderers needed. The wall opposite the windows had a number of braces attached to hold frame parts. These frames, including the ones Sonia, Brigitte,

and Édouard were working on, were of the traditional slate variety, and looked old. On the adjoining wall, there was a long worktable. This table held large bags of beads, technical charts in a tray, and hanks of beads in a bowl of liquid, perhaps dye. Leaning against the opposite wall, there were finished and semi-finished embroidery pieces on the frame. Next to leaning frames,



*Figure 5.* Sonia (left) and Brigitte (right) working at an embroidery frame. Both embroiderers are using tambour needles.

there was a small table containing pouncing (design transfer) supplies.

Each embroiderer sat at his or her frame. A sawhorse-type stand supported the frames on each end. Beside the frame stand stood a little tray stand that held tools and materials for immediate use to the embroiderers. Sonia and Brigitte were working on a sample for a client. Figure 5 shows Sonia and Brigitte embroidering at their joint frame. They were embroidering over a pre-sewn item that they had basted to a thin sheet of plastic on the embroidery frame. The use of plastic was a method I had never observed. This technique allowed the embroiderers to give clients a quick idea of what the finished work would look like without spending too much time on the process.

The last room in use on the upper floor was the archive. This was a tiny room containing thousands of embroidery samples, dating back to the company's beginning. Christine explained that many of the techniques shown in the archives were difficult to produce now due to the loss in skilled labor and change in labor costs. The pieces were grouped by techniques and were suspended on labeled headers throughout the room. Christine told me that she was expanding the archive space due to the constant demand from clients and visitors to view the samples.

After the tour, I sat down with Christine and had a 23-minute interview. Christine then guided me to the machine room where I interviewed Valerie and to the hand embroidery room where I spoke with Brigitte, Sonia, and Édouard. Christine stayed with me throughout all the interviews to help translate. Additionally, Christine confirmed which embroidery companies in the Lunéville area were still in business and which had closed, helping me significantly with my search for embroidery houses and participants.

**Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies.** After visiting with Gouvernel, I obtained an appointment to meet with the owner of another embroidery company in the Lunéville area, on July 12, 2013. This person and company will remain unnamed. The company used to produce hand embroidery. However, I discovered that they now only produce sequin and bead trims. Nevertheless, the owner agreed to speak with me. This was fortuitous as he was a member of the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies (French Federation of Laces and Embroideries), the professional association for French embroidery and lace companies. Moreover, he belonged to the sub-group Group Main (Hand Group) for professional hand embroiderers.

We talked about French fashion embroidery for about two hours. This was an unrecorded interview because he did not feel he had a story to tell me, just information to share. Yet the

information he provided proved invaluable in clarifying the stories I acquired from the other embroiderers. We spoke at length about fashion embroidery history, the diminishment of embroidery workshops in France, Asian production, embroidery education, and even sequin production. In the end, he provided the names of several more contacts and told me to use his name when reaching out to them.

**Lanèl.** I soon moved on to Paris, where I was in contact with six embroidery houses and one sequin manufacturer. Due to time restrictions, I only obtained interviews at four of the embroidery houses. Lanèl was the first of these, on July 18, 2013. Régis Lièvre was the president and creative director of Lanèl Embroideries. We met after business hours, and since he indicated he was pressed for time, I did not ask for a tour of the workshops. Nevertheless, we had a productive talk for 58 minutes.

When I entered the office, I noticed a large wood crate, approximately 7 feet by 3 feet by 2 feet, on a desk. He later told me that it contained one of John Galliano's Dior gowns that had been in a recent exhibit. The dress needed some of the embroidery repaired because of damage received during the exhibit. Régis proceeded to tell me a story about that particular garment, an orange velvet cocoon coat from Galliano's Scheherazade-inspired line. When Lanèl was originally embroidering the piece for its debut on the catwalks, the embroiderers were extremely pressed for time. Typically, the company keeps a sample of all embroidery they create for the archives. However, due to the tight deadline, they were unable to create a sample. They finished the embroidery just before rushing it to the fashion house. Before the embroidery went out the door, Régis wanted to document it for the archives, so he placed the embroidered piece on the photocopy machine in order to have a visual copy of the work. Unfortunately, the photocopy machine began to draw the embroidered fabric into the paper intake where it stuck in the

machine. Régis saved the dress without damage, but he says that every time he sees that gown, he remembers the panic he felt at that moment. This interview with Régis was filled with delightful stories and was a glimpse inside the world of high fashion embroidery at its peak.

**Ateliers Darolti.** Ateliers Darolti, founded in 2008, was the most recently formed embroidery workshop I visited in France. I conducted Victoria's interview on July 19, 2013. Victoria Darolti, the owner, was very excited to tell her story and help spread the word about fashion embroidery. The workshops were in a small space. Victoria turned a two-room apartment into a studio, office, and embroidery school. Everything in the space was painted white, which reflected light and made the space appear larger. One wall was all windows and the opposite wall held embroidery frames displayed at various levels. At one end of the apartment, there was a small kitchen that could be curtained off.

Victoria, originally from Romania, primarily worked by herself at the atelier. However, she also had embroidery students during the daytime hours. At the time of my visit, there were two students working on projects in the atelier.

Victoria was eager to share information. She also allowed me to photograph her work and explained her techniques. She was particularly proud of some of the techniques she had made up herself as well as some of the techniques she had learned from her mother and grandmother in Romania. Victoria explained how her family had influenced every step of her life and how she shares her love of them in her work. This interview provided a look at how a new embroidery shop begins.

**Abbey and her atelier.** One embroiderer was in a situation in which a big corporation owned her atelier. She did not want to have to run everything through the legal department, so

we both agreed that it would be better if she and her embroidery company remained anonymous. Therefore, for this study, I have changed her name to Abbey and I never identify her atelier.

Abbey, like Régis, was pressed for time; therefore, I did not ask for a tour. Yet once we started the interview on the 22nd of July, Abbey was just as intent on sharing her story and as passionate about embroidery as all the other participants. Abbey, like Christine of Gouvernel, was business-minded. Additionally, she and Victoria were the only executive-level participants who had started as workroom embroiderers. Her revelations of becoming a part of the embroidery industry added a perspective about how youth do not always view embroidery in a positive light.

**Hawthorne & Heaney.** Hawthorne & Heaney of London was the last workshop I visited. I returned to London for this interview July 25, 2013. Started by a former Hand & Lock employee, Hawthorne & Heaney is another new embroidery firm. Though new to the embroidery industry, Claire Barrett, the owner, shared a wonderful story and great deal of information. She had a particular interest in embroidery education and in helping design students get their start. As part of her education endeavors, she also started a small embroidery school.

Claire's workshop was located on the upper floor of a remodeled mews (stable) building in Islington, an outer neighborhood of London. The upper floor had been an old hayloft with large doors across the whole front wall that opened up, making the room very light. The high-pitched ceiling had exposed beams, on one of which Claire had perched a stuffed pigeon. The walls and ceiling were white and reflected the light. Over the fireplace, there was a mural of hunting trophies in the style of the Dutch Masters, but in sepia tones.

We sat in a consultation area with two couches and a low table with a goldfish in a bowl. To the front of the room, there was a small kitchen and bath. Towards the center of the room,



there was a large worktable. Beside the table, one of Claire's embroiderers sat at her work.

Various tools and materials were on shelves or suspended directly from the walls. A small office area was set up behind the consultation couches. There was also one more room in the back, but I did not enter.

**The other unrecorded interviews.** Four interviews were unrecorded for various reasons. The first was with the member of the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies. For the other three interviews, I have provided less information about the participants. I eliminated the details about the interviews in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants. These three participants could be more easily identified than the member of the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies. Therefore, I revealed less about them. One interview was with an executive of an embroidery company in London. Another interview was with the creative director of one of the fashion embroidery workshops in Paris. The last unrecorded interview was with an executive of a sequin manufacturer in France. The sequin manufacturer had started his career as an embroiderer. These people all generously set aside time to speak with me and provided rich information that filled in gaps between the stories of other participants, giving me a more cohesive picture of the industry.

### **Data Collection**

The stories of 16 of the embroiderers were recorded during formal interviews in which I utilized oral history data collection techniques. The data collection consisted primarily of open-ended, semi-structured interviews. I utilized open-ended questions because they encourage participants to give longer answers and engage in storytelling (Dunaway & Baum, 1996). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to change the questions to pursue unexpected leads that arose during each interview (P. R. Thompson, 2000). Both the use of open-ended

questions and a semi-structured interview are common practices in oral history data collection (Yow, 2005).

I constructed an interview guide as a general plan for the interviews. I structured the interview guide (Appendix A) for about a one to two hour interview. However, I predicted that some participants would prefer not to talk long and others would talk for much longer. I aimed for around ten interviews in order to demonstrate differences and similarities in experiences and points of view. However, I acquired more. There were 15 recorded interviews with 16 individuals. There is a difference between the number of interviews and interviewees because I recorded two embroiderers in the same interview. I also conducted three informal, unrecorded interviews in which I took extensive field notes immediately after the event. Finally, there was one email interview. While there are more people in the embroidery industry, the number was limited by my time. I was conducting research during a two month summer period that led up to when the ateliers shut down for the month of August. Several embroiderers said they could meet me in September or get more participants for me in the fall. However, it was not possible for me to return to Europe at that time.

I recorded the interviews with Sony ICD-SX712 digital flash voice recorder with dual microphones for audio recordings. The digital nature of the recordings allowed me to store the recordings as files on the computer. Additionally, I was able to adjust the quality of the digital recordings using software without requiring any specialized equipment or services. The dual microphones allowed both the participant's and my voices to record on the same audio file. Both the interviewees' and my responses were recorded and later transcribed.

English, French, and Italian languages were used during the interviews. For the Italian interview, the interviewee's daughter acted as translator to English. The French interviews

varied. In three interviews, the participants and I used English. I conducted one interview with the aid of the interviewee's friend as translator. In four interviews, the company president acted as a translator for the interviews with the embroiderers. She translated my questions to the embroiderers in French and they answered in French. I conducted three interviews in a mix of French and English. I asked questions in English with key words in French and the interviewees answered in either English or French, as they felt comfortable. Where I used translators, they were included at the suggestion of the interviewees.

The interviews took place at a location of the participants' choice. In all but one case, the interview location was in the work environment, providing me an opportunity to observe the site and the general day-to-day activities. In the single exception, I still met with the interviewee at his workplace before proceeding to the alternate location for the interview and was, therefore, still able to observe the workshop. These locations were all embroidery companies, but access to various areas of the workshops varied. Five of the companies gave me complete tours. Three did not, but this seemed due to time constraints rather than privacy fears.

By conducting the interviews in a location in which the participants felt comfortable, there was a higher chance of the participants providing more information (Dunaway & Baum, 1996). P. R. Thompson (2000) stated that by interviewing the participants in their place of work, the participants are reminded of the work-relation of the interview by the environment. Finally, the environment provided memory cues to the participants that are not present outside of their workplace (P. R. Thompson, 2000).

The first interview I conducted was with Mr. Grasso of Pino Grasso Embroideries and his daughter, Raffaella. When I began the interview with the Grassos, I did not introduce myself as an embroiderer. Until I confided that I was a professionally trained embroiderer, I received what

I felt were “practiced” answers to my questions. For example, when I started the interview, Raffaella began with Mr. Grasso’s history as it is presented on their website. However, after I established myself as a fellow embroiderer about 16 minutes into the interview, the Grassos began giving much more detailed and technical answers, such as when Raffaella explained the details of sample making. I discovered that it was essential to the quality of the interview that I identify myself as an insider to professional embroidery.

As a general interviewer, I received generic answers to questions. When the interviewers needed to reference industry-specific terms or procedures, they would explain the term or procedure in non-technical language. However, when I clarified that I, too, was an embroiderer with professional training and a more than passing interest in the industry, the embroiderers opened up. They spoke to me as an equal and shared information that they normally considered too technical for outsiders. I had read about this relationship between researcher and subject in oral history texts such as Portelli (2001), but this was an eye-opening experience. As Portelli (2001) points out, the researcher is observed as much as she observes.

**Interview guide.** Oral history methodology utilizes interview guides or interview protocols to enable the interviewer to guide the direction of the interview (Yow, 2005). As interviewer, transcriber, and text analyzer, I was the primary instrument in this study. However, I utilized an interview guide (Appendix A) for each interview to help keep the interview sessions on target. The guide was flexible in order to accommodate the contingencies that occurred during the interviews. The guide was a framework of potential question or discussion topics. I grouped the questions and topics in categories to enable me to find the potential conversation points quickly during the interview. The actual questions were formed during the natural flow of the conversation (Patton, 2002).

After I completed a few interviews, I began to see similarities in what the interviewees spent the most time talking about, what information they did not have, and what extra topics participants included in the conversations. I also began to see where the differences in the embroiderers' stories occurred. Each time, I adjusted the interview questions a little. I acquired more complete stories by adjusting the questions to reflect upon the topics that were important to the embroiderers. In this way, part of the data analysis occurred as the interviews progressed.

I grouped questions within the interview guide into seven categories: introductions, personal background of the interviewee, background of the company/house, history of the company/house, history of the fashion embroidery industry, the embroidery process, and overarching questions and closure. I organized the categories and the questions within the categories to give the interview some structure through an opening, rapport building, background questions, knowledge and experience questions, and finally opinion questions leading to a closing (Brenner, 2006). The interview questions did not always follow the order in which I wrote them, nor cover all the sections. However, I always started with introductions and ended with opinion questions and a closing.

I started each interview with greetings and an explanation of my purpose as a part of introductions. After introductions, I asked about the interviewee's background. As suggested by Yow (2005), I placed non-threatening topics at the beginning of the interview in order to make the interviewee more comfortable. I often started with "tell me how you got started in embroidery." This served several purposes. The question helped the subjects feel more relaxed by allowing them to talk about themselves. The participants' answers also helped me understand the embroiderers better and decide how to adjust the interview questions. Additionally, the personal background information provided a basis on which I could compare participants to one

another. The comparisons were broad at this point, such as participant A is an embroiderer of 30 years, whereas participant B is an embroidery designer of 12 years.

A person's background led to the background of their company. I anticipated that the embroiderers would be almost as comfortable talking about their place of employment as they would be talking about themselves. The questions in this category were primarily knowledge and experience type questions (Patton, 2002) that provided information about the company for which they worked. The information that enabled a comparison between the current state of embroidery companies and the companies' histories was particularly valuable. I usually only asked these questions of company presidents or other embroidery personnel who occupied upper-level positions.

As this study was initially about the history of the fashion embroidery industry, I oriented the majority of the interview towards capturing elements of the history. I broke the history topics into separate segments to keep the information organized. The background of the company led into the history of the company, providing a fuller picture of the evolution of the embroidery firm.

The history of the embroidery company was included in the interview protocol in order to guide the conversation towards a discussion of the general history of the fashion embroidery industry. The objective of these questions was to gain information on how the different embroidery companies linked together, what events or trends affected the companies, what made the industry special, and other important items that would help bring the various stories together. I developed knowledge, experience, and comparison questions to help trigger the interviewees' memories. Originally, I hoped that the history of the embroidery industry section would provide information that would enable the unification of the different stories. However, the workshop

embroiderers expressed little knowledge on industry history during the interviews as the development of the industry had less to do with their everyday lives. Only four participants spoke about general embroidery history.

The last major section of the interview guide focused on the embroidery process, including the methods from design through production, the embroidery techniques used, and the materials and tools. The goal was to document not only current methods and materials, but the historical methods and materials as well. The purpose was to record the evolution of embroidery practices while the embroiderers who know the history are still alive. However, I received much more information on current practices than on past methods.

Finally, I asked the participants opinion questions such as what else they wanted to add and what they thought future generations of embroiderers should know. I also asked embroiderers what they foresaw as the future of the embroidery industry and of their embroidery company. The interview closed by thanking the participants and asking if they have any final questions of me.

**Supplementary data sources.** In order to provide sources of validity and add depth to interview material, I utilized additional data sources. These sources included photographs, sketches, supplementary documents, and field notes.

***Visual materials and documents.*** Where possible, I took photographs of the embroidery workshops and artifacts that the interviewees stressed as important. If I could not take photos, I made sketches and in-depth descriptions in the form of field notes. The sketches and notes were of the objects, actions and procedures and the environment described by the interviewees.

I used one of two cameras to take photographs, depending on the situation. These cameras included a point-and-shoot type digital camera with zoom and a digital Canon SLR

camera with professional lenses. I only used the larger SLR camera when I had foreknowledge of a photographic opportunity and the bulk of the camera did not interfere with the situation. In other situations, I carried the smaller point-and-shoot type camera because it was unobtrusive and convenient. I based my choice of photographic material in part on my own discretion and in part on the recommendation of my interviewees. The subjects or objects of these photographs were located within the embroidery companies.

The documents I utilized included documents the participants gave me as well as documents shown to me during the interviews. When I was not able to possess the document or record with a photograph, I made note of its significance in field notes. The displayed items included magazine articles and news releases featuring the interviewee or the interviewee's company and design documents pertaining to embroidery work. Documents given to me were primarily brochures for the company, but also included a research report on the state of embroidery education in France. I had to translate all of the documents in order to analyze them. The documents provided supporting information for the discussions I had with the participants.

***Observations and field notes.*** Finally, I performed fieldwork in form of observations of current practices in four of the workshops. Observations of the participants as they performed their normal job in the embroidery workrooms allowed me to view and record the details of the actions first hand. I was able to experience the embroidery process through tactile senses in ways that the interview could not portray, permitting me to fill in gaps that the interviewees' dialogues left (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Additionally, I took notes after each interview about my impressions and thoughts about the interview. In these notes, I recorded what the workshop or room looked like and contained. I also wrote down any conversations that happened before or after I started the recording device,



and I clarified any points that I thought might be confusing later. See Appendix E for example pages from my field notes. I used the notes to clarify what was not obvious in the recordings. In several cases, I drew objects in the field notes to help clarify my words. This required not only learning to observe competently, but also taking copious field notes of all I saw and experienced that pertained to the study.

While I had the option of video recording on the consent form, I decided not to take this option. In general, embroiderers, like fashion designers, are very wary of having photographs and video taken of work in progress. They fear the possibility of the public seeing a client's work prior to fashion shows. Therefore, field notes and sketches became vital to the study and I only recorded voices.

Field notes allow researchers to not only keep detailed records of what they observe at a research site, but also to better focus on what is important to the study and to make links in the information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The linking of information typically occurs when reviewing the field notes for initial analysis or when typing hand-written notes at the end of each day (Delamont & Jones, 2012). This review process also helps the researcher better understand what information to focus on when entering the field or starting interviews the next day (Hobbs & Wright, 2006). For me, field notes became an important way to reflect upon what happened in the interview. During the writing process, I was able to remember many things that had begun to slip from memory and I began to see the similarities and differences between embroiderers with each new set of field notes I wrote. Later, as I was analyzing, the field notes became a valuable way to recall the many nuances of the interview and to clarify the details that had already begun to blend. In this way, my field notes helped me not only to stay on task, but also to start drawing

links between the interviews, notes, and other materials as they came to hand, focusing the investigation.

**Challenges in data collection.** I faced a few difficulties during the data collection. The greatest problem was timing, a two-fold challenge. First, I was on a very tight schedule for data collection. All the research had to take place in Europe and I teach full-time at a university in the United States. My teaching schedule limited my travel time to the three month summer period between spring and fall semesters. It was mid-June before I could get the study and paperwork fully approved and travel to Europe. The approval process had already reduced my time to two months. Furthermore, all the French embroidery workshops closed at the end of July, for the entire month of August, leaving only a month and a half to complete the research. During this time, I had to make the contacts, establish relationships, explain my study, and obtain the interviews in four different geographic locations. This would not have been such a challenge, except for the second problem of timing.

July was when the high fashion catwalk shows took place in France, Italy, and the UK. Additionally, the biggest catwalk shows of the year, the fall prêt-à-porter shows would start at the end of September. This meant that just as I arrived, the workshops were finishing the July haute couture pieces. Then, they needed to complete a large portion of the next season's work in order to be prepared when they re-opened in September. Summer is one of the busiest times for the embroiderers because of the August break and the two groups of shows. This scenario posed difficulties in scheduling appointments, especially in Paris. Three or four embroidery workshops told me they could meet with me if I would come back in September. In addition, two or three of the people whom I interviewed said they would love to speak with me at more length if I could

come back at a different time. I had anticipated the difficulties posed by timing, but I did not think it would be the largest obstacle.

The problem I expected would be the biggest hurdle was language. However, this aspect really was only a serious challenge in making the initial contacts and establishing relationships. I speak French on a limited basis and do not speak any Italian. It turned out that my inability to speak Italian was a non-issue. As for my limited French, once I made it past the gatekeepers, I soon discovered that my participants and I could communicate quite well. Typically, they spoke enough English that they understood me, and I understood enough French that I understood them. In a few cases, they suggested a translator and someone in the company or a friend of theirs filled that position. This became an advantage because the translator had inside knowledge and could suggest questions that I would not have known to ask.

One problem I never anticipated was the heat wave. In cities dependent upon their public transportation systems, the extreme heat became a problem. People trying to escape the heat packed buses, trains, and subways. The transportation systems slowed down to handle the larger numbers of passengers. After I was late to two appointments because of the slower transportation, I learned to allow a considerable amount of extra time for travel.

The last problem I had was one I predicted, but not to the degree I encountered. I had hoped to find documents that would help piece together the history of the embroidery industry. I thought this facet would be difficult because I would need to establish a much better relationship in order to ask permission to view anything held by the workshops. This was certainly true. However, while there may be a small quantity of documents that I can research after I improve my relationship with the embroidery firms, I discovered that there will be very few documents. One of my anonymous participants explained that most of the existing embroidery workshops

have little to no historical documentation due to the various wars they have endured. Many of these companies have had to pick up and move at a moment's notice or had to leave everything behind during an enemy invasion. If they took anything with them, it was what they considered most important to continuing their trade, such as frames and tools. Papers were left behind and often destroyed. This is something I would like to look into more at a later date.

### **Data Analysis**

When I had completed a few interviews, I began to transcribe the recordings and take notes about what I heard. By conducting simultaneous data collection and analysis, I was able to adjust each new interview based on what I learned from the previous interviews (Merriam, 2002). At first, the analysis was informal. I took notes and began to develop categories based on the interviews. For instance, I noticed that participants talked about their education and career paths more than they spoke about industry history. As a result of the initial analysis, I began to adjust the interview guide. The adjustments allowed me to keep the stories centered on comparable topics across the interviews.

**Transcription.** I began more in-depth analysis after transcribing about one quarter of the interviews. Analysis began with the transcription process (Skukauskaite, 2012) through which I started noting key topics and mark places in recordings for further analysis. As I completed each interview, I transferred the recording to a password-protected computer and placed the file in a protected folder. I transcribed the recordings manually rather than using software as there were too many embroidery terms that were either interchangeable or had subtle differences according to the use. There was the additional challenge of switching between languages constantly, a function that computers do not do easily.

I used the gisted method of transcription in which the recordings are more summarized than in verbatim transcription methods (Dempster & Woods, 2011; Evers, 2011). Since I examined these recordings for historical information and for the life stories they provided, the speech patterns and utterances were not as important to this study as the meanings of the conversations.

I transcribed the recordings into Microsoft Word files. I utilized paragraph formation to indicate subtle subject changes. Sentences and punctuation followed the general speech pattern of the participants. I omitted the false starts and utterances unless they were important to the content of the quote. In order to prevent changing the meaning of the participants' stories, I kept the participants' general sentence structure and word usage in the transcription. I changed capitalization and inserted missing words, translations of foreign words, and explanations of technical or unusual words in brackets. The following is an example of my transcription style.

In French we say the two *casquettes* [boxes], the two different things. I like this. During the day, I can draw for a number of hours. Then I come in here because I have some things to sign. The day, its very *changeant* [unpredictable/shifting].

The above quote from Régis of Lanèl demonstrates my use of brackets for insertions. I kept certain foreign words that either did not translate well into English or were commonly used in their foreign form in the industry. I also used Régis' words and word order to convey his general speech pattern. For instance, I kept, "Then I come in here because I have some things to sign," rather than changing the transcription to the Americanized, "Then I would come into here to sign things."

**Coding and data interpretation.** As transcriptions progressed, I analyzed the text via the constant comparative method commonly used in grounded theory. Originally, constant comparative analysis was a method in which researchers organized and reduced data in order to allow a theory to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, Fram (2013) uncovered that

constant comparative analysis is increasingly used for studies not associated with grounded theory. Moreover, Fram argues that the adapted methods of constant comparative analysis do not have to lead to the development of a theory. Instead, researchers can use the analysis method mainly as a method of organizing and reducing the data, then confirming findings.

The analysis started with intense re-reading of the transcripts to better comprehend the contents. Line-by-line open coding followed in which I wrote terms or phrases in my journal that represented the possible categories the text addressed. As open coding progressed, I re-read the codes frequently in order to identify possible overarching themes. This was a back and forth process that continued until I developed a firm set of categories for the transcripts. As I analyzed more interviews, I began to organize and group the categories into tentative larger themes.

I augmented the information assembled from the interviews with information from the documents, sketches, photographs, and field notes at every step. I also analyzed the field notes from interviews and site observations to determine what information they could provide for the study (Wolcott, 2008). In reading the field notes, I understood the recordings better.

After reading and coding the field notes, I listened to and analyzed the recordings again. As I re-listened to the recordings, new information that I previously did not hear or had already forgotten surfaced to reinforce developing categories or to start new categories. The field notes I took directly after each interview aided in further refining and organizing the categories by adding additional information and confirming my thoughts about different topics. This process of listening, transcribing, and analyzing continued not only through the interview process, but also into the writing process. Every time I listened to the recordings or read the transcripts or field notes, I discovered new information.

I initially organized the various categories into four main themes and later reduced these to three main themes: education and career progress of the embroiderers; evolution of the company and protocol; current challenges and future aspirations. All three themes further subdivided into three sub-themes each. Three of the sub-themes continued to divide into more categories. Three categories needed links drawn to each other in order to prevent category repetition. I did not develop the themes around the research questions; however, each theme addresses at least one, if not more research questions. By continual comparison and reduction of the data, I developed themes about the lives of the embroiderers and the history of the high fashion embroidery industry.

Figure 6 shows the entire analysis map. I organized the map in a top to bottom configuration. The three boxes in the first level under “Interviews” represent the three main themes. I indicated the sub-themes for each main theme on the next level and utilized connection lines to indicate relationships between the levels. I listed any subsequent subdivisions directly under the parent theme or category. Finally, I placed curved connector lines between the categories that required cross-theme relations. For instance, I listed creating atelier-run schools under future aspirations. However, atelier-run schools are also a form of education and are a viable education method for younger-generation embroiderers.

I compared the data within each sub-theme in order to determine how the sub-themes interacted within each theme. For instance I analyzed how the embroiderers’ education and career path influenced each other. I was also able to determine how the information from each theme informs the greater study, how it informs history, and how it informs teaching.

In my design and implementation of the study and analysis of the collected data, I maintained focus on the primary purpose of the project: to capture the professional stories and

histories of the embroiderers. I designed a qualitative study and used oral history methodology in designing the interview process. For transcription and data analysis, I combined oral history methodology with qualitative methods that were conducive to comparing the information from the participants. In this way, I derived information about the three key themes, education and career progress of embroiderers, evolution of the company and methods, and current challenges and aspirations that will be represented in the analysis chapter.



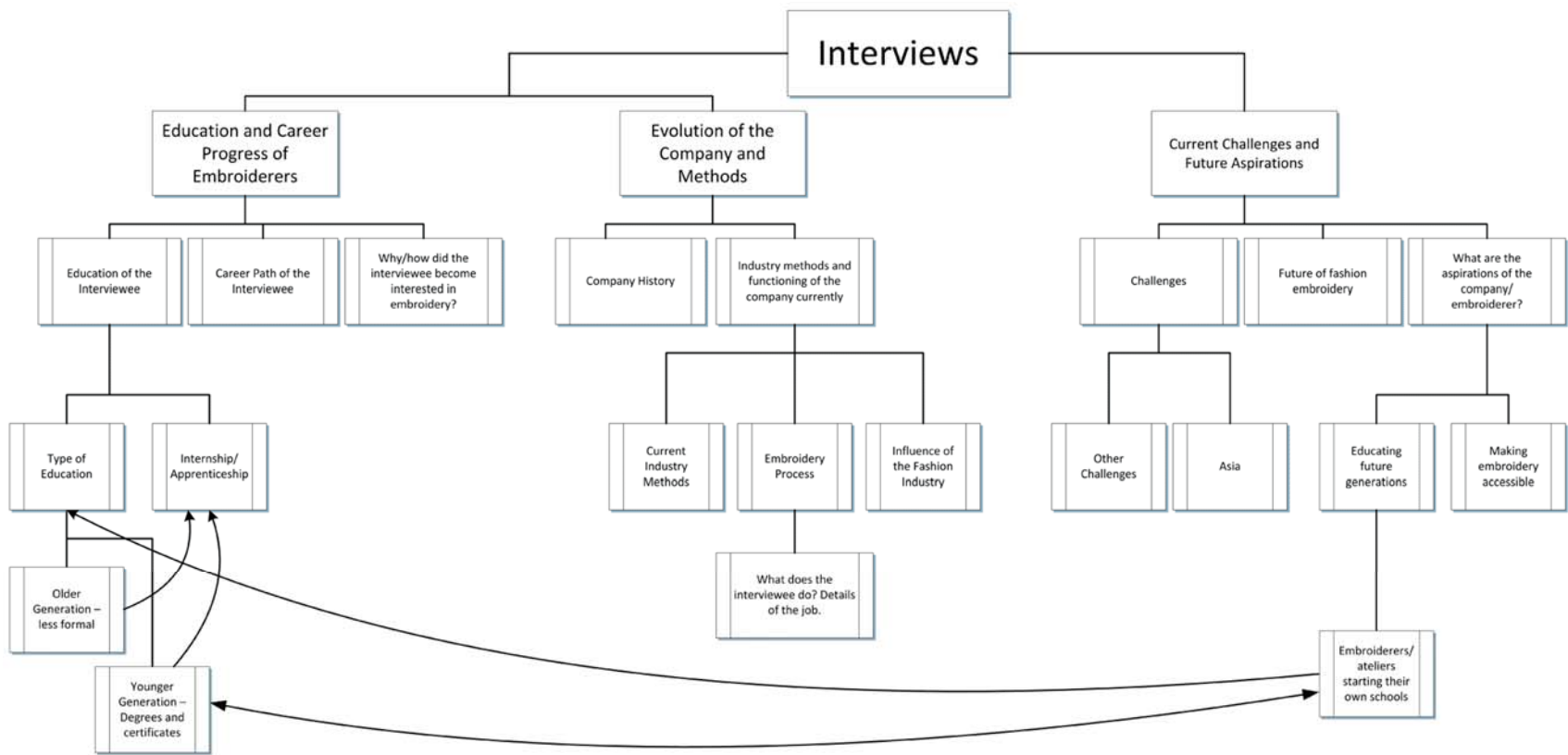


Figure 6. Graphical Representation of Thematic Analysis

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. I based the study on the conceptual framework that embroidery was a design discipline and as a design discipline, embroidery needed a documented history for teaching purposes. Furthermore, the use of embroiderers' stories was designed to build such a history and add humanizing details to the history.

In order to build a history, I had to analyze the embroiderers' stories. Using the constant comparative method of analysis, I reduced the embroiderers' conversation topics to three main themes: 1) Education and career progress of embroiderers; 2) Evolution of the company and methods; 3) Current challenges and future aspirations. Each of the sub-themes is introduced and discussed within its respective section. Newcomers to the industry provided more information on their education than the experienced participants. The more experienced embroiderers provided more lengthy stories about company evolution and challenges. All the interviewees gave me information about company methods or protocol.

By comparing the stories of the participants, I developed a coherent picture of the working methods of the embroiderers and embroidery houses. I also uncovered how the embroiderers acquired their positions in the embroidery industry. I found the similarities and differences in their educations and the choices they made. I compared the difficulties faced by the embroiderers and how they coped with these challenges. Finally, I analyzed the future hopes and aspirations of the embroiderers and how these supported current difficulties or working methods.

I also developed a history by comparing the stories of the younger embroiderers with the stories of the more experienced embroiderers. Additionally, the older embroiderers provided stories about how things had changed or about the history of their company. However, I did not extract a linear history; instead, it is a record of the recent changes in the industry and its methods with emphasis on the embroiderers.

### **Education and Career Progress of Embroiderers**

Education and career progress was one of the three primary themes constructed through the data analysis. This theme combined the different methods in which participants learned their embroidery and professional skills with the evolution of the participants' careers. I combined education and career progress into one theme as education often affected the interviewee's career choice. For all of the interviewees, education was part of their personal career story, not a separate part. For analysis, I divided education and career progress into two sub-themes. Education of the embroidery professionals was the first sub-theme. Source of interest and career path was the second sub-theme.

The embroiderers' stories about their education directly answered the research question: how has the embroiderer learned his or her profession. The stories also indirectly addressed the questions: how does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work and how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers. The embroiderers' description of their professional development involved describing their professional work. Embroiderers also included remarks on how their education was different from the past or current methods of education, demonstrating their perspectives of change.

Education and career progress comprised the largest segments of the personal narratives for all but six participants. For those participants who were presidents, owners of the company,

or upper management, their personal histories entwined intimately with company histories. These upper-level participants are the ones who have shaped the companies; therefore, their personal stories were inseparable from their company histories. Other interviewees were less a part of the company's development and consequently, the embroiderers' career progress and personal stories ran primarily independent of their employing firm.

**Education of embroidery professionals.** Education was of paramount importance to the majority of the embroiderers and embroidery associates. It was a re-occurring topic in six of the interviews, a dominant topic in four, and at least an important presence in the remainder. Every formal interview and every informal, un-recorded discussion emphasized the importance of education in one way or another.

The information gained from these interviews was different from person to person. The differences made it necessary to find alternate sources of information in order to obtain comparable pictures of the different education systems and methods. There were distinct differences in the participants' types of education, but these differences often revolved around nationality, approximate age, and position of the participants.

***Embroidery education from the 1950s to 1980s.*** The interviewees represented two distinct generations of embroidery professionals. The older generation, starting with Mr. Grasso, and including Régis, Lynn, and Karin acquired their knowledge in less formal methods. I estimated that they were educated between the 1950s and the 1980s. However, I did not ask their ages nor years of education. I based the estimate on years referenced during their interviews. I give the time estimate because embroidery education was different from the methods described by the participants prior to the 1950s and after the 1980s.

The education methods the older participants included apprenticeships, one-on-one training, passing of knowledge, and weekly classes at a trade school. The majority of the younger generation, including Jess, Scott, Sonia, and Brigitte, went through some formal program such as degree or certificate programs specifically for embroidery or fashion before beginning their embroidery careers. The different career paths of the two generations showed a change in the way embroiderers prepare for the industry as well as indicate a change in the status of the industry itself.

Mr. Grasso's embroidery education was a prime example of how embroiderers used to apprentice to learn the trade. He first apprenticed at the workshop of his friend's father in Milan, "Making his first steps trying to understand all the things he has to learn to do it properly. That is to say, not only how it works, but how to do it properly." Mr. Grasso completely immersed himself in the business, observing as much as he could from the friend's father. He was intent on learning everything and learning how to do it correctly. When he decided that he needed to learn more, he "went to Paris to learn from Lesage and others, the big laboratories [workshops] of Embroideries." There was only so much Mr. Grasso felt he could learn from his friend's father's embroidery workshop. Therefore, he decided to study with the master embroiderers in Paris in order to increase his knowledge and skills. Mr. Grasso chose to apprentice with a number of well-recognized ateliers to learn their methods. His daughter, Raffaella explained, "In a certain sense, he created his own school, following the people who were drawing. Learning how they were drawing and everything. Then Embroideries, then materials, then fabric companies and producers." Mr. Grasso learned everything he could from the Parisian embroiderers, including who provided their materials. In this way, he made the most of his time in Paris.

Upon returning to Italy and starting his own embroidery firm, Mr. Grasso continued to increase his knowledge and skills through self-study and observation.

Going to Paris, buying the paper patterns, you used to do this, you buy paper patterns and embroidery swatches. You take them back to Italy and with the tailors, the famous tailors here in Italy who did it for the important ladies in Milan, you re-create those dresses that have done fashion shows in Paris and everything. This is so they can buy them here and not go into Paris. And this is how he learned a lot. Not only watching, but doing and touching and tasting.

Rafaella explained that Mr. Grasso would purchase paper patterns of Parisian couture gowns along with embroidery samples and work with tailors to make the garments for wealthy Italian women. He embroidered the Paris runway recreations for the women so that the women could buy locally. Through the process of copying Parisian gowns, he was able to increase his knowledge of embroidery styles, material, uses, and placement. Mr. Grasso also emphasized that he used all his senses in learning embroidery, not just sight.

Régis, the president and creative director of Lanèl, took a different path to learning embroidery. He first trained in fashion: “In the beginning I studied fashion in 2 schools in Paris, Esmod and Studio Berçot.” When he began in embroidery, the experience was directly on the job at Lanèl. The previous owner offered Régis a job at Lanèl. “I had no job, so I say ‘I will try. If I like the embroidery and you like my work.’” He had no embroidery experience, but was willing to learn on the job. Over the years, his job responsibilities increased and he continued to learn by a combination of mentorship and trial and error. Now, “I manage the business, I draw, visit the customers, supervise the atelier, I do a lot of things.... At the beginning, I started to learn the designing for embroidery.” When he first started his assignment, he trained just to design the embroidery, not to handle any of the other job responsibilities. Thirty-some-odd years later, Régis has taken on many more roles.

Lynn, the military specialist of Hand & Lock had a similar path to Régis of acquiring her knowledge on the job. She started working at Patey's Hats in London and comprehensively learned military regalia there.

Basically, I knew which officers had which colors because I was working at Patey's for 10 years in military hats. And I'm quite interested in military; my dad's ex-royal navy. And I've just found the military interesting all my life.

After working for Patey's for 10 years, Lynn developed a deep knowledge about the colors, materials, and symbols required for each military officer's uniform. Additionally, she grew up in a military family, a heritage which instilled a personal interest in military. As Lynn revealed, her work at Patey's, along with her natural love and constant observation of all things military, made her perfect for the military specialist position at Hand & Lock. However, unlike all but one of the other interviewees, Lynn did not credit any formal apprenticeship or courses to her embroidery education, only on the job and self-acquired knowledge.

Unlike Mr. Grasso, Régis, and Lynn, who learned primarily through apprenticeships and job experience, the hand-operated machine embroiderer, Karin, at Hand & Lock attended formal embroidery courses. They were trade classes that were common before universities took up the call for design education. "I did a day at college for machine embroidery one day a week.... It was, what's it called now, the London College of Fashion." The trade classes at the fashion school aimed at training workers for the embroidery industry, not designers. As the manufacturing industry dropped off, this type of program became less common (Reynolds, 1997).

The educational experiences of the older embroiderers contrast with those of the younger embroiderers on several points. The older generation of embroiderers, with the exception of Karin, learned the necessary job skills through individualized forms of education. Mr. Grasso, Régis, and Lynn emphasized learning on the job or in the atelier. Karin trained as a machine

embroiderer in formal trade school classes. This method of learning is in contrast with the younger embroiderers who almost all attended formal classes.

All four of the older embroiderers experienced forms of education that centered on learning techniques or practical information, such as what certain military officers wear or where to purchase sequins. The focus of their educations was on learning industry skills and production information, not conceptual design or exploring creativity.

Only Mr. Grasso talked about his education at length in the interview. Régis, Lynn, and Karin briefly explained how they learned their profession. All four spent a larger percentage of the interview speaking about the rest of their career path, their professional duties, and company history. The brevity of their responses about education indicated that their education has become a less dominant part of their personal history as they have accumulated more life events. In comparison to the brief answers of the older embroiderers, young British embroiderers spoke for a larger percentage of the interview about their education than about their career path. Additionally, the younger British embroiderers attended educational programs that emphasized design over production techniques.

***Modern embroidery education.*** Today there are fairly set paths for the education of young people wanting to become part of the fashion embroidery industry. However, there are pronounced differences according to the country in which the embroiderer was educated and the final intended job within the industry. I utilized the country of education as the primary method of dividing and comparing the modern methods of embroidery education.

There was a difference in how embroiderers from the different countries talked about or referred to their education. Education was a topic of discussion for every embroidery worker I interviewed. Young embroiderers revealed that education was important to their career



development. Additionally, education was the reason behind choosing the particular career path for five participants. Yet French and British embroiderers talked about their education in very different ways.

The young British embroiderers all told me the exact type of degrees or programs they had attended, their major or specialization, and the exact school they attended. They referenced additional specialty courses they completed. The British embroiderers also specified the number of apprenticeships they completed along with the durations and locations of those apprenticeships. The British embroiderers even talked about specific faculty members, classes, and curriculum. I gathered a wealth of information from this degree of openness and detail.

French embroidery workers referred to their time “at school.” Only two interviewees spoke about their precise program, degree, or diploma, and that resulted after the subject of comparison became a discussion between two embroiderers. Régis of Lanèl, representative of the older generation, was the only embroiderer who specified the specific school he attended. The fact that the young French embroiderers did not mention their specific school or degree did not imply that the participants did not value their education. Rather, my analysis indicates that French embroiderers regarded school differently than the British. The French participants viewed schools as a more generalized event rather than a major life-altering event. The British indicated that their education was a defining period in their life; whereas the French considered training as an end to a means.

This difference in information made comparison challenging between the two groups of embroiderers. However, one of the participants gave me a report from the main administrative body for French hand embroiderers that provided much of the missing information. I was able to obtain the majority of the information on modern British embroidery education directly from the

interviews. However, to understand the modern French embroidery education, I needed to rely more on the report, while the interviews provided supporting information. Additionally, the two unrecorded interviews with French embroiderers provided some of the missing links between the report and the recorded interviews with the embroiderers.

Despite the differences in how the young French and British spoke about their education, I was able to determine how young embroiderers learned their profession, answering one of the research questions. I also determined the basic structure of the embroidery education systems in France and England and the differences in the systems. Finally, I compared the interviewees' comments on how well the education systems met the needs of the embroidery industry in the two countries.

*Great Britain.* Since approximately the 1960s, British education for the technical arts (including embroidery) has had a strong emphasis on design and less on the making or learning of the skills needed for making things (Dudley & Mealing, 2000; National Advisory Council on Art Education et al., 1960). As Scott from Hand & Lock explained, "We were trained to become textile designers rather than specialize in becoming an haute couture embroiderer. That's not the degree." By saying that the students trained to be textile designers, Scott indicated that the programs focused on conceptual design lessons and less on learning the hand skills of the embroiderer, as he points out when he says that they were not trained as couture embroiderers. His degree was in design.

This trend is evident in the types of education that the younger British embroidery workers experienced. Claire states that her program "changed the year ahead to more conceptual [design]". She explained that the curriculum became more oriented towards producing designers. She lamented the lack of technical, hands-on skills in her education.

Two of the British embroiderers noted the importance of their personal project in helping them discover embroidery or various embroidery techniques and a third alluded to the same. Personal projects are common parts of British design education and are meant to enable students to explore subjects of interest. Often, students learn specialized techniques while executing these projects; however, the emphasis is still on design. In these projects, students explore how to use the techniques in new or interesting ways rather than copying techniques or items precisely. Students identify and utilize inspiration sources. They develop and sample ideas before transitioning the ideas forward into new looks, blending old with modern. In short, the projects enable the student to think like a designer. The personal projects provide an avenue for British students to learn more hands-on techniques and better learn where their passion lies while still advance their design abilities.

For Claire and Jess, the personal project was the driving force in their choosing to work in their particular branch of hand embroidery. Claire went to Hand & Lock to learn goldwork for her project and loved it so much that she “basically just kept interning until they got fed up and ended up giving me a job.” Jess said that she was working copying a Christian Dior dress for her project in a theatre design program. In replicating the dress “it turned out that I needed to use tambour beading and things like that which I’d never even heard of.” This realization brought her to a placement at Hand & Lock to learn the needed skills. From there, she fell in love with all types of embroidery, eventually leading to a job at Hand & Lock.

While British degree programs are strong at developing the design skills of future embroiderers, all four of the younger British embroidery workers noted that they learned the majority of their embroidery skills either on the jobs or in their internships (placements, as they are called in the UK). Scott alone learned a considerable amount of embroidery techniques while

in school as he was in an embroidery design program. “I just explored an awful lot of techniques. I was taught various different historical movements and events that hold a lot of relevance to embroidery.” Scott talked about learning both embroidery techniques and embroidery history as well as how these work together. Each time that Scott learned about the embroidery of a historical period, he would also learn some of the embroidery techniques from that time and how to use the techniques. Yet even he notes that the techniques he learned were really just enough to help him design embroidery, understand it, and complete his personal projects, “The techniques were there and explained to us. Not everything, but basic techniques.” As Scott further specialized, he had to learn considerably more in his placements at various establishments.

Claire particularly laments the deficiency of a good education in embroidery skills. She notes the lack of emphasis on the practical side of the embroidery business such as costing, sourcing, not to mention the various embroidery techniques. Outside of the recorded interview, she expressed her concerns that without more training in the practical side of embroidery, the young generation of designers will have difficulty understanding the possibilities of embroidery usage in apparel. She also thinks that the young designers will not be able to communicate with the apparel industry without better practical training.

All four of the younger British embroiderers and designers had completed at least one placement prior to finding their embroidery job. Scott and Daisy executed multiple placements before finding their niche or the right opening. I discussed the importance of placements with Daisy. The previous two interviewees from Hand & Lock had already explained how important their placements were to them. Daisy explained, “I think everyone has to start as an intern...I think the normal thing is to do it for a month or longer.” She stated that not only is it common for people to do placements before finding their first embroidery job, but that she thought it was a

requirement in order to get a position at Hand & Lock, at least for young embroiderers. She also said that most placements required a commitment of a month or longer. Table 2 shows that all of the young British embroiderers completed an internship. Where known, I listed the number and lengths of internships completed.

Table 2

*Young British Embroidery Workers' Education*

Subject	Type of formal school	Subject of study	Apprenticeship/internship
Claire	University	Fashion design	Yes – unspecified length
Scott	University	Embroidery design	Several – unspecified lengths
Jess	University	Theatrical costume	8 weeks
Daisy	University	Fashion/print design	1.5 weeks

Scott talked about how absolutely important placements are in the embroidery industry.

Whatever it is, you need to get out there and work along with people that are working in industry. You need to get that first-hand experience, because if you don't, how are you going to get a job?

Scott insists that in any of the fashion or textiles-related trades, it is imperative that young people do placements. He sees these placements in embroidery companies as the way to obtain essential first-hand experience. He further states the experience is a prerequisite for employment. Scott implies that the placements or apprenticeships enhance the conceptual skills taught in formal university education by providing the practical skills: “You can gain a lot of insight on how industries work from universities, but if you actually want to get a job and work in industry, you need to have that hands-on experience.”

Claire said she took a placement in embroidery as part of her personal project in fashion design and as a result, fell in love with the embroidery industry. In her own words, “I became totally obsessed with this process. I thought it was the best thing since sliced bread,” referring to her newfound passion for embroidery during her placement. This placement was what helped her

determine what she wanted to do and eventually led to a job in the establishment where she was interning. Additionally, she officially started learning embroidery techniques during her placement, a process that continues to this day and informs her work at her own embroidery firm.

The three aspects of modern British education that the young British embroidery employees spoke about the most were the emphasis on conceptual design, the role of the personal project, and the importance of placements or internships. Claire especially emphasized the lack of emphasis on practical or hands-on skills. Scott also discussed the deficiency in practical training in his education.

While it is not a requirement to have an embroidery or textile degree, all four of the young British embroiderers had a strong background in apparel or textile manufacturing or design. Scott was the only embroidery employee of the four young British embroiderers who came from an embroidery design program. Claire studied fashion design, Daisy completed a program in print design, and Jess came from a program in theatre design. As shown in table 2, all four embroiderers have design education from universities. Additionally, none of the four took any embroidery trade courses. The British focus on conceptual design and predominance of university degrees forms a contrast to the current methods of embroidery education in France.

*France.* The French system of training students for fashion embroidery is much more hands-on. The embroidery programs focus on the making, not the designing, until a certain level of education. The country has a system of different education levels through which applicants progress and decide how far they wish to go in the embroidery field. The levels include the *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP, translates to Professional Aptitude Certificate), the *Brevet des Métiers d'Art* (BMA, translates to Artistic Trades Diploma), and the *Diplôme des Métiers d'Art* (DMA, also translates to Artistic Trades Diploma, but is a different type)

(Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013). According to the unpublished report, *La formation en Broderie* (2013), a survey on the education of embroiderers in eleven French embroidery companies, each level has a slightly different emphasis.

Figure 7 illustrates the differences in program length and typical student age between the British educational system for young embroiderers (design-oriented) and the French educational system for young embroiderers. The American educational system of high school and university is included to provide a visual comparison of life-stages at which students enter these education systems and how long they last.

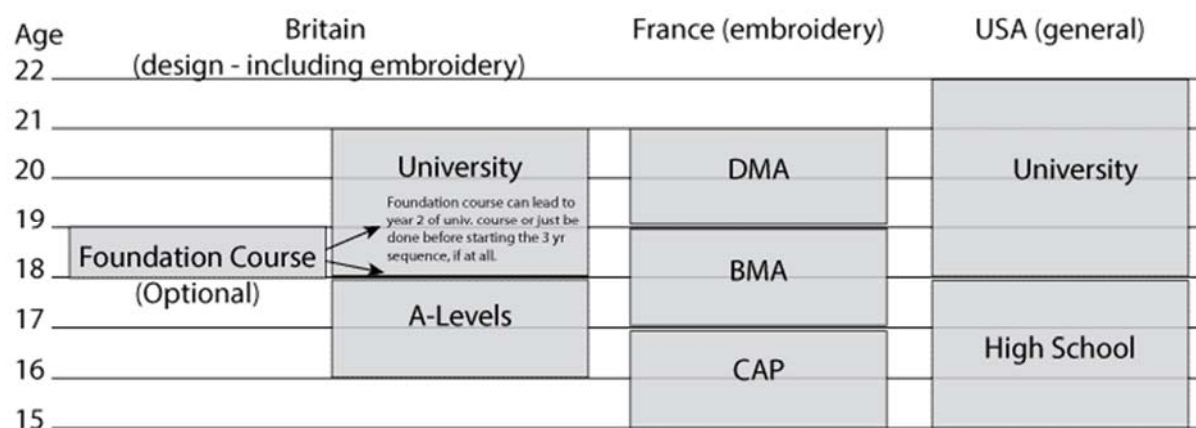


Figure 7. A comparison of French and British embroidery education systems

The French system, in place for over 25 years, starts with the Professional Aptitude Certificate (CAP), a 2-year program. The CAP focuses almost entirely on training embroiderers in the practical skills needed to become a professional embroiderer (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013). Christine of Gouvernel said the CAP was developed for a time when large numbers of embroiderers were needed in manufacturing settings. “It was not especially for training creators, but for making workers that would work all day.” Christine explained that during that time, manufacturing needs superseded training in creating embroidery.

She also specified that as production reduced in France, the skill-based method of training no longer produced the types of workers needed in the evolving workrooms.

According to Christine of Gouvernel and a report from the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies (FFDB), the umbrella organization for embroidery and lace companies in France, the changes in the embroidery industry and the quality of embroidery education are making it more necessary for new embroidery workers to have a BMA (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013). The 2-year program for *Brevet des Métiers d'Art* (Artistic Trades Diploma) follows the *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP) for students who wish to continue their education. The BMA, as Christine explains, is “more artistic”. It expands an embroiderer’s experience after the CAP or after a few years of equivalent experience in the embroidery industry. It is up to the school to determine if pupils have the requisite amount of equivalent experience before acceptance into the program. The report from the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies confirms and expands upon Christine’s brief explanation of the diploma program. “The development of the creativity of the students is one of the priorities of the embroidery BMA. The work is based in particular on ... many personal projects” (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013, p. 5, own translation). This illustrates that like the British, the French utilize personal research projects to encourage exploration of techniques and develop better embroidery design skills.

The third level of embroidery education in the French system is the *Diplôme des Métiers d'Art* (DMA, which also translates as Artistic Trades Diploma, but indicates a different level) in textiles and ceramics with an option in textile arts. This program, also two years long, emphasizes the cultural, economic, and social context of the subject (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013). This program, while still including additional development of the



technical skills, stresses creativity much more than the previous two levels. The DMA is oriented towards developing embroidery designers, creative directors, and textile designers ("École Supérieure des Arts Appliqués Duperré [Duperré School of Applied Arts]," 2013).

While speaking to the various French embroiderers and embroidery workers, I heard about the CAP and the BMA, their pros, cons, and differences. However, I never heard mention of the DMA nor met anyone having that diploma. Through internet searches, I found only five schools in France that offered each of these three levels. However, for each diploma level, I could not confirm if all of the listed schools still offered the programs. Four schools offered both the CAP and BMA in embroidery, but only one of these four also offered the DMA ("ONISEP: L'info nationale et régionale sur le métiers et les formations [ONISEP: National and regional information on the trades and training]," 2013).

While the second and third levels of embroidery training focused more on designing, most creative directors and embroidery designers with whom I spoke had not experienced these education routes. Christine, the owner and designer for Gouvernel did not state her exact program of study or previous background, but she did indicate that she had no embroidery training prior to coming to Gouvernel or even any training in a field related to apparel or textiles. Régis, creative director and president of Lanèl and an anonymous creative director of a well-known Paris embroidery house both came from a fashion background, not embroidery. Only Abbey, also a creative director of a top Parisian embroidery house came from an embroidery education, though she did not state which type of program she had completed. Furthermore, Abbey was the only French national interviewee who had worked her way up from an embroiderer to a designer position.

The French embroiderers had a different educational background than the designers. Of those I interviewed, one had completed the CAP program, one the BMA program, one had attended an atelier-run school, and two came from unspecified training routes. I detailed the educations of the French embroiderers in table 3.

Further reading in the report from the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies as well as a discussion with one of the members of the same organization indicated that the CAP and BMA are far more common among embroiderers in the French embroidery ateliers than other types of education. In fact, the report states that about three-quarters of the embroiderers have earned a CAP. Amongst that group, about half also earned a BMA and the other half stopped after earning a CAP (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013).

Three of the French national embroiderers I interviewed spoke of completing internships. In fact, the FFDB member clarified that the internships were a requirement for employment at one of the ateliers. Equally important to note, these internships are a mandatory part of all three of the embroidery programs ("ONISEP: L'info nationale et régionale sur le métiers et les formations [ONISEP: National and regional information on the trades and training]," 2013). The member of the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies explained that this is typically a two month period in which the potential employee's skills as well as other aspects of the person's work abilities and personality are evaluated. I could not determine how common it was for a person to complete multiple internships or how often interns were hired.

A common topic of discussion amongst the embroidery workers in positions of authority was the national education system's inability to prepare embroidery students. This coincided with the conversations about how the responsibilities of the embroiderer have changed in the last

Table 3

*French Embroidery Workers' Education*

Participant	Type of formal school	Subject of study	Apprenticeship/ internship
Sonia	CAP/BMA - Lycee	embroidery	Unknown
Brigitte	CAP - Lycee	embroidery	Yes
Valerie	unknown	Confection (sewing/making), THEN embroidery	Yes, not in embroidery
Edouard	unknown type, but formal	fashion	2 mo
Victoria	atelier-run school	embroidery	Yes
Régis	unknown type, but formal	fashion	Unknown
Abbey	unknown type, but formal	embroidery	unknown
Christine	unknown	unrelated subject	Unknown

twenty years due to increasing competition from Asia. Christine of Gouvernel was quite blunt about the situation,

“The students that are graduating from the schools are “operational”, but not effective. It takes a very long time to get up to speed.... But, those who have the speed also need to be creative.... Workers that can support the creation process are the ones that get the jobs.... It’s become an artistic profession.”

Christine says that graduates from the French schools have the basic embroidery skills, but are not at a level to work professionally. She has two concerns: speed and creativity. Professional embroiderers must be extremely fast workers to enable the company to remain competitive. She further explains the need for creativity. Previously, a CAP diploma alone was enough to train a student sufficiently for the embroidery trade, but as there are less embroiderers and more demands placed upon them, a BMA is almost mandatory now. In a BMA, embroiderers train in the technical skills of producing embroidery, as taught in the CAP, and in creative skills.

Embroiderers now need creativity to interpret the designer's artistic intentions, and make resourceful improvements in order to help stay competitive.

Régis expresses a similar thought, "They need to have rapidity, good quality. And here, I need them to be creative too because we work together." He too, has his embroiderers interpret the embroidery designs and give creative suggestions. The BMA and DMA include these creative design skills in the curriculum, but not the CAP.

Several of the upper-level French embroidery workers expressed concerns beyond the lack of creativity or speed of the recent CAP graduates. The Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies member spoke to me about the additional problems with the CAP. He said that the Federation (FFDB) had found that the majority of the students who enter the CAP for embroidery have no intention of working in the embroidery industry. Rather, they chose the program because they viewed it as an easy route to fill the time while deciding other options. According to the FFDB member, students in France must stay in school until the age of 16. Some students choose to attend programs just until they reach this age. The students who intend to leave school at 16 are often looking for programs they believe are less challenging. Students often perceive embroidery as such a program; however, professional embroidery is not an easy subject. Often, students have seen their mothers and grandmothers embroider at home and develop a misconception about professional embroidery.

The misconception about the difficulty level of embroidery explains the large numbers of students with no real interest in the subject. As my interviewee stated, this influx of students with no professional ambitions uses the time and efforts of instructors, taking away from the quality of education the serious students receive. The CAP program currently is less efficient at preparing graduates for embroidery workrooms due to the lowering of educational quality. The

FFDB member confirmed that embroidery workrooms are demanding higher quality and more cross-trained workers. Yet, the CAP is producing lower quality workers with a very narrow portfolio of skills.

The FFDB member gave several additional reasons for the problems with CAP embroidery training. He proposed that embroidery has become an un-popular career choice with the youth. He said youth seemed to consider embroidery “uncool” or their grandmothers’ pastime, therefore, the truly talented students are not choosing to join. Another problem the interviewee noted was that embroidery teachers for the CAP now rarely come from the industry where once they did. Now, the government trains the teachers, eliminating the link to the profession as well as all the knowledge that comes with the experience.

Régis of Lanèl expressed concerns about young embroiderers as well. However, he focused more on the generational changes than on the education. In particular, he noted the young embroiderers’ lack of attention. “In order to work at an artisanal trade, one has to be able to work with deadlines.... they have to work for very long periods of time. The youth no longer have these strengths.” These concerns about education and about the changes in generations were common across the countries. The older generation was seeing the sudden changes in their industry and was troubled about how the younger generation will handle the changes.

There is an alternate form of embroidery education available in France, the atelier-run school. Victoria Darolti of Romania moved to Paris as a young adult and attended the Lesage embroidery school, operated by the Lesage embroidery house. Victoria’s attendance at Lesage and introduction to the professional embroidery world helped her earn an apprenticeship at one of the ateliers, which then led to a permanent position. The individual atelier sets the curriculum

of the embroidery courses. However, in my personal experience, the courses emphasize learning techniques rather than creativity.

France's embroidery education programs are more oriented towards developing workroom embroiderers than Britain's embroidery education programs. British programs train designers. France's strength in embroidery training is its emphasis on learning embroidery techniques. In contrast, Britain's weakness in embroidery training is its lack of stress on embroidery techniques. Britain's strength is its training in conceptual design skills, whereas, France teaches little on the subject. Interviewees clarified that embroiderers need to be adept at embroidery techniques and creative tasks. Both French and British embroiderers stated their current embroidery education systems are not meeting the needs of the industry. Instead, young embroiderers must gain the extra skills via internships, personal projects, or additional courses.

I divided the education of the embroiderers first into two age groups. The older embroiderers experienced different types of embroidery education than the younger embroiderers experienced. All of the younger British embroiderers and at least three of the younger French embroiderers attended formalized education programs. In contrast, three out of the four older embroiderers learned their professional skills through non-formal methods of apprenticeships or on-the-job learning.

I further divided the group of younger embroiderers by their country of employment. The young British embroiderers were unique in that they all attended formal university programs that concentrated on training designers. France has a formal education system for training embroiderers. However, the French system emphasizes embroidery skills rather than design skills. Two of the young French embroiderers attended this embroidery program. An alternate form of embroidery education, run by the embroidery ateliers, is available in France. One of the

younger French embroiderers attended an atelier-run program, which also focused on embroidery skills as opposed to design skills. The educational methods experienced by the older embroiders also emphasized embroidery skills, production methods, and industry information rather than conceptual design.

The British participants explained that the modern university programs do not provide enough training in practical industry skills, such as embroidery techniques. The British embroiderers clarified that an embroidery designer needs to know how to make things in order to design them. Additionally, not all graduates, such as Daisy want to follow the design pathway.

The French participants explained that the French embroidery training programs do not train students enough in creativity. The creative directors and executives stated that their embroiderers must now think creatively in order for the atelier to remain competitive. Neither the French nor the British modern education systems are providing adequately trained graduates, according to the interviewees.

The embroiderers' stories about their education answer the first portion of the overarching research question how do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer. Part of their life as an embroiderer includes their education. For the four young British embroiderers, their education is a significant part of their life as an embroiderer. The four older embroiderers and the five French embroiderers do not present their education as a substantial part of their professional life.

The entire section on education answers the question how has the embroiderer learned his or her profession. The embroiderers learned through a variety of methods, including university programs, formal training programs, apprenticeships, and learning on the job. In addition to the education programs, embroiderers also learned through personal projects and internships.

However, the path of each interviewee's education is different. Figure 8 illustrates the similarities and differences between the educational routes of the embroiderers.

The differences between the education of the older generation of embroiderers and the younger generation demonstrate changes that have taken place in the embroidery industry in the last 60 years. Only Mr. Grasso spoke about the changes in education. However, the differences outlined between generations still address the research question how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers.

The embroiderers' education constitutes a part of their career paths. For the young British embroiderers, their education formed a large portion of their career path, whereas for the older embroiderers, education was the beginning of a much longer story. Regardless of what part education played in their lives, the embroiderers all had stories about entering the embroidery industry. Their stories about what interested them in embroidery and their career path in the embroidery industry forms the second sub-theme in the education and career progress of embroiderers theme.

**Interest and Career Path.** All of the interviewees happily related why they chose the embroidery industry as a career path. For several of the interviewees, to share the story of their professional development was very important. From Mr. Grasso explaining how he had left medical school to Claire relating how much exposure to embroidery changed her life, embroiderers demonstrated how strongly they felt about their career in embroidery. Interviewees, including Jess and Scott expressed how much they loved their jobs. Others, including Christine made life-changing decisions to join the embroidery industry based on deep-seated convictions, such as Christine's desire to save Gouvernel. Other interviewees, like Sonia and Brigitte of Gouvernel, demonstrated less sentimentality and excitement when relating their professional



stories. They explained that they enjoyed their jobs, but they did not show as much emotion as some other embroiderers.

When analyzing all the reasons the interviewees chose their career paths, I identified three groups of similar influences. Four of the embroidery workers stated that family members or friends had some bearing on their choice of the profession. School and/or internships helped the next five embroiderers discover where their passion lay. Other people or other personal reasons influenced the remaining six.

The embroiderers' sources of influence were a form of inspiration for the embroiderers throughout their career development. The initial source of inspiration plays an important part through its continued influence on the embroiderers' lives. For a few embroiderers, like Mr. Grasso, who learned about embroidery from a friend's father, the initial inspiration has become more of a reminder of why he chose embroidery. However, for others, like Victoria, whose mother was her reason for becoming an embroiderer, the initial inspiration was the driving reason behind her choices.

The sub-theme on source of interest and career path addresses the primary research question how do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer. The embroiderers' stories about their career paths are stories about their professional lives. For the same reason that these are stories about professional lives, the sub-theme also addresses the research question how embroiderers describe their professional career.

For all but six embroiderers, the narration of their career path formed the largest portion of their interviews. The amount of time the embroiderers spent recounting their career path emphasizes the importance career path plays in the embroiderers' personal stories. As the

purpose of the study was about capturing the stories of the embroiderers, the career paths became an essential part of the study.

The stories also demonstrate how the embroiderers developed their professional identities. Each participant outlined the steps that led to him or her to becoming an embroiderer, designer, or company owner. The steps show how the participant grows professionally.

The embroiderers' professional progressions provide teaching points to future students as well. The stories become case studies on how to become a professional embroiderer or embroidery designer. Students can learn different actions have different results.

Figure 8 illustrates the career paths of 14 of the embroiderers, including Mr. Grasso and Victoria, from source of inspiration through acquisition of current position. Each embroiderer is represented by an individually colored path. Solid lines symbolize British embroiderers, a dash-dot line represents French embroiderers, and a dashed line denotes the Italian embroiderer. The first level of the diagram lists the sources of influence for the embroiderers. The second level of the diagram outlines the categories of school in which the interviewees participated. Personal projects and then apprenticeships or internships follow the school block. Jobs are the last set of blocks. A block for previous jobs precedes the block for current job. I traced each embroiderer's career path by noting through which blocks the embroiderer's line passes. Christine and Valerie of Gouvernel are not included on the figure because I did not have enough information about their education.

***Embroiderers influenced by friends or family.*** Family members or friends swayed the choices of the first group of embroiderers. The center top block on figure 8 represents this group of embroiderers. Mr. Grasso, Victoria, Abbey, and Régis came from family backgrounds in the

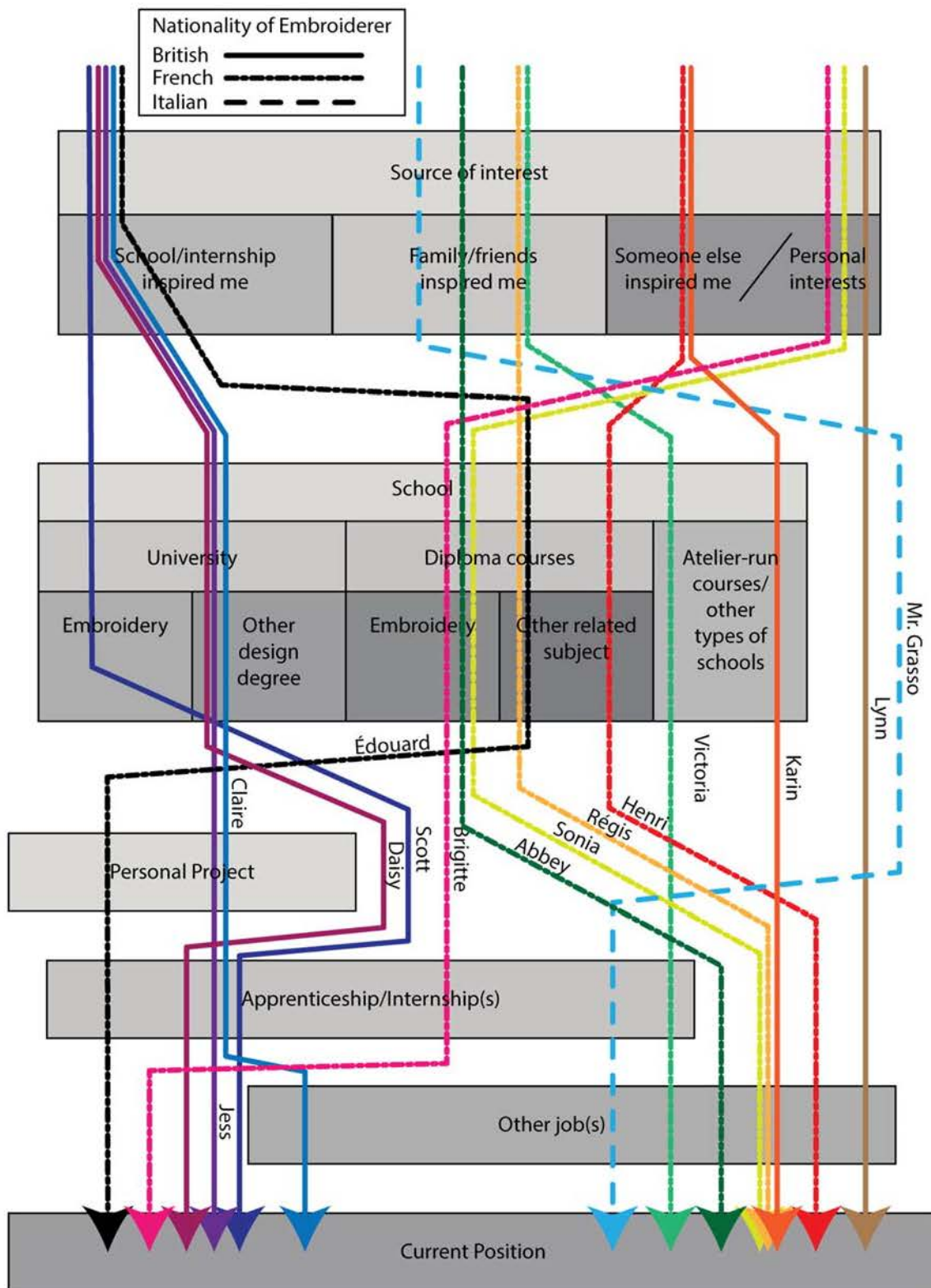


Figure 8. Career paths of selected interviewees from source of inspiration through acquisition of current position

needle-trades or friends exposed them to the profession when young. Régis and Victoria had mothers who either sewed or did handcrafts. Abbey and Mr. Grasso had friends with ties to professional embroiderers. All four embroiderers stated that this early exposure to embroidery, sewing, or needlecrafts peaked their interest and guided them towards embroidery.

Victoria credits her mother for helping guide her towards embroidery and teaching her the embroidery and other handcraft skills. Originally, from Romania and now the owner of her own embroidery company in France, Victoria pushes fashion embroidery further than many of the more established ateliers. She combines French embroidery with her native Romanian embroidery as well as other forms of handcrafts such as needle lace, crochet, and experimental techniques used in jewelry making.

As stated by the translator,

In Romania, where she grew up... there's a long tradition of women doing knitting and embroidery and all types of "women's work"... By the age of nine she could already knit and crochet. Her mother and grandmother taught her a lot of different techniques which are now getting lost and some are already forgotten. She decided when she was very young that she liked this work and that she would like to perpetuate this tradition and would like to pass these techniques to the next generation.

Victoria grew up in a household and a culture that valued handwork and believed in passing it from generation to generation. Because of the strong value placed on the handcrafts, Victoria started learning embroidery and other needle arts from a very young age. She learned a variety of crafts and techniques through the teachings of both her mother and grandmother. Victoria stated that some of these techniques have now all but disappeared, because the tradition of teaching the crafts to younger generations is dying. She made the decision when very young that she wanted to find a way to teach these handcraft techniques to young people.

Victoria's passion led her to move to Paris from Romania and study embroidery. "When she arrived in France, she finally got in touch with the work she really wanted, being fashion." In

Romania, her options were limited, meaning that she had no good way to study high fashion or fashion embroidery. After attending lessons at the Lesage school, “she started working for different French ateliers for haute couture.” This gave Victoria the opportunity to continue perfecting her skills and learning new techniques, but she always pushed herself to do more.

In 2004, she entered the *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* competition and award. Translated, this is the best tradesperson of France. This tri-annual competition is open for professionals to compete against their peers for the designation of the best in their profession. Over the next three years, Victoria worked towards the 2007 competition for best embroiderer and won. In making the competition piece, “She basically used techniques that she learned with her mother and grandmother, other techniques that she learned when she was at École Lesage and some others that she used in the workshops.” Her mother continued to be a source of inspiration for her work and her career progress.

By winning this competition, Victoria gained exposure as an embroidery professional. “It allowed Victoria to get introduced to different kinds of professionals that are in high spheres and exchange with people that know a lot and that can transmit their knowledge to others.” The recognition eventually enabled her to start her own haute couture embroidery atelier.

Additionally, she started a school as part of her atelier, following the same style as the Lesage school she had attended. Through her school, she was able to fulfill her dream of passing down the handcrafts she learned from her mother.

Before I turned on the recorder, Victoria explained that one of the primary sources of inspiration continues to be the women of her family, particularly her mother and grandmother. She showed me a photo of her mother as a young girl that she keeps in her atelier. Victoria’s

strong familial ties developed her continuing love for the needle techniques and her desire to pass the techniques to future generations.

A mother also influenced Régis of Lanèl. Régis' mother was a professional *couturière*, or seamstress who sewed women's dresses. He reflects, "When I was young, I saw a lot of materials and things like that. I think perhaps there was a little influence." The last portion of his statement seems to downplay the importance of his upbringing and the influence his mother played in his ultimate choice of career, but this is a speech mannerism. At different points in our conversation, Régis alluded to the importance of this early exposure to fashion and handcrafts in directing him towards fashion embroidery.

Growing up in fashion did not lead Régis directly to embroidery. Like his mother, he started in fashion but aspired to design, rather than sewing. "The assistant of a designer that made prêt-à-porter deluxe... I worked for him for 3 or 4 years." This career path put him in regular contact with the fashion embroiderers. Régis became good friends with one of the fashion embroiderers, Madame Lanèl. "I asked the woman who worked for Lanèl if she knew a *couturier* of high fashion who was looking for a new assistant because I was looking to change. Later she proposed me to work for her." He wanted to change from working in prêt-à-porter deluxe to the higher fashion level of couture. His acquaintance at Lanèl knew the people in couture since they were fashion embroidery clients. Madame Lanèl soon asked Régis to join Maison Lanèl embroidery company and train on the job. "So I say, 'I will try. If I like the embroidery and you like my work.' And I am falling in love with the embroidery because there are a lot of things to do." Régis was a little unsure of switching to a trade in which he was less familiar, but as a result of his upbringing, he was exposed to many of the materials and skills needed in embroidery, plus he had a lifetime of fashion knowledge to bring to the job.

Régis was initially hired and trained as an embroidery designer.

After one or two years, the lady who was here before me, Madame Lanèl, told me that she was wanting to retire and was looking for somebody to replace her. I was very interested in this, and after 4 years, she began to leave for periods of time. When she decided that she wanted to permanently retire, I said that it was difficult for me to manage all the things, like the office management.

As Madame Lanèl, the president of Lanèl embroidery looked to retire, she started training Régis in her various duties. These new duties were additions to his existing workload as a designer. As Madame Lanèl began to take leaves of absence, Régis moved into his new role of president and business manager slowly and with intermittent guidance from Madame Lanèl.

Eventually, Régis took over Lanèl while continuing to design. He spoke about how his two major roles in the company work together.

Because it is interesting when you manage a company or you draw, you have the creation in part and you should know how it's functioning with the financial things. It's interesting to have the two..., in French we say the two *casquettes* [boxes], the two different things. I like this. During the day, I can draw for a number of hours, Then I come in here because I have some things to sign. The day, it's very *changeant* [unpredictable/shifting]. I like that.

Régis explains that there are two sides to the embroidery business. There is the creative side and the business side. Régis' position requires him to understand the management of both. More than that, Régis expresses that he enjoys the contrast between the two roles. He may work at creative endeavors for several hours, such as drawing. Then he will switch to business or management job to care or financial matters, sign forms, or other operational needs. He likes the unpredictability of the day and the variability of the tasks.

Régis did not acknowledge his mother as a continuing source of inspiration as Victoria did. However, Régis' early exposure to sewing and fashion continued to influence his passion for working in the fashion industry and with fashion collections. Even as an embroiderer, Régis displayed a love for fabrics, design, and the fashion world.

The two other embroiderers influenced by family or friends attributed their choice of professional embroidery to the influence of close friends when they were young. These friends, in a manner very similar to family members, exposed Mr. Grasso and Abbey to professional embroidery on a regular basis, thereby, piquing their interest. The continual exposure to embroidery during the participant's youth links the familial influence to the influence of friends.

Mr. Grasso said that he was originally going to medical school. In the words of his daughter, "he had a very good friend whose father was doing this job, Embroideries. And he was starting to realize that studying medicine and having to deal with ill people all day was not his ambition." Through his friend, Mr. Grasso saw the professional embroidery industry and became interested in it. He quit medical school and served his compulsory military service.

The day he finished with his military academy, he went straight to his friend's father to see how it was, this kind of work. He discovered that he liked it very much and he started his career there [at the friend's father's company].

Raffaella, Mr. Grasso's daughter, said that on the same day as exiting the military service, Mr. Grasso approached his friend's father about learning the embroidery business. Mr. Grasso soon learned that he really enjoyed fashion embroidery and started working for his friend's father in the embroidery workshop.

Upon starting his career in embroidery, Mr. Grasso first concentrated on his education, learning initially from the friend's father. After some time in the father's workshop, Mr. Grasso decided to travel to Paris and apprentice at the haute couture embroidery ateliers. After his apprenticeship in Paris, he returned to the father's workshop. There came a point when Mr. Grasso felt he had reached the limit of his potential working at the company belonging to his friend's father. "In 1958 he started his own activity, left his friend's father and started his company, Pino Grasso Embroideries." Starting his own workshop was a big step. In his daughter's words,



As he came back and started his new activity, he has to do everything himself. He didn't have employees except for the embroiderers, so for instance, he had to do the drawing, the holing [pricking] of the paper, he was doing everything by himself. Materials and going here and there to the embroiderers because in the beginning, all the embroiderers were working at home. So each day he has to do the tour to everyone who is working and after some years when work becomes such an amount that he could open a bigger laboratory [workshop] and have people working there inside and increasing year by year.

Mr. Grasso started by doing every job in his start-up company except the embroidery. He hired embroiderers to keep up with production demand, but he was designer, draftsman, business manager, sourcing specialist, and delivery person. He did not have a workshop with space for the embroiderers, so he had to make a "tour" of the city each day to check the progress of work, deliver materials and work, and pick up finished projects. Eventually, he was able to open a larger workshop and place his embroiderers and other workers under one roof, enabling a better use of time and improving communications.

As business increased, he hired people to take over different positions. Additionally he began to get clients of higher caliber. "Starting from the 60s and 70s, it was a lot of work that was coming from the big names. Valentino, you know, the big names of fashion." Over the years, he has worked with the majority of the high fashion labels from Italy.

Without this friend's father, Mr. Grasso would not have known about fashion embroidery or re-thought his career choice in this particular manner. While Mr. Grasso does not still find inspiration from the friend or his father, he does acknowledge the importance of this connection. The lessons learned and connections made during his first few years at the father's workshop and training in Paris for the workshop formed the foundation of Mr. Grasso's career. For Mr. Grasso, the memory of his friend is also a reminder of why he chose to be an embroiderer.

Like Mr. Grasso, Abbey also attended school in a different field than embroidery. However, she was always doing crafts and other handwork. Yet, "I never sewed, I never saw people doing it." She knew nothing of embroidery or fashion even though she was from eastern

France, near the center of Lunéville tambour embroidery. A friend who saw Abbey doing the handwork suggested that she meet with a professional embroiderer the friend knew.

I came into the house and when I saw what she was doing, this old woman... I was so impressed that I decided - I knew at that moment that it would be exactly what I wanted to do. It was like a revelation for me.

Abbey visited the woman, a semi-retired professional embroiderer, in the woman's house. Upon seeing the embroiderer's work, Abbey had a life-changing moment. She decided that fashion embroidery was precisely what she wanted to learn.

This led Abbey to taking private lessons from the woman for two years. Yet this still left Abbey in a quandary as to the ambitions for her life. "Even my friends didn't know what I was doing at the time because it was so old-fashioned. And at that moment, it was more 'rock 'n roll'." She did not see the connection between her love for embroidery and a possible career even though her mentor worked for an embroidery atelier. Moreover, she did not want others to see her doing something seemingly out of touch with the changing lifestyles of her peers.

"I stopped after two years because I was dreaming about girls like me, or not like me but from my generation. I was at home, always doing embroidery for myself." Questioning how embroidery fit into her life, she stopped her lessons with the master embroiderer. Soon after, she heard a radio announcement for an embroidery exhibition in Paris. She got into her car, drove to Paris, and attended the event. There, she met women who suggested she attend formal schooling in Paris for embroidery. "It was more the research for embroidery and I was completely excited for that, so I moved to Paris and started that school." This was the chance to meld her love for embroidery and her desire to break free of the old-fashioned style of embroidery she felt it was stuck in. She attended four years of embroidery school. After school, the owner of a major couture embroidery atelier hired her.

Again, without the intervention of a friend, Abbey probably would have never discovered fashion embroidery or joined the profession. The main difference between Mr. Grasso and Abbey is that Abbey's friend was not in the embroidery business. Instead, the friend suggested that Abbey meet an acquaintance after noting Abbey's affection for handcrafts and sequins. In contrast, Mr. Grasso's friend grew up in a family embroidery business. Mr. Grasso's friend did not suggest the track to Mr. Grasso; rather Mr. Grasso observed it through regular interaction with the friend. Both Mr. Grasso and Abbey acquired regular exposure to professional embroidery because of their friends.

Also like Mr. Grasso, Abbey does not still consider her friend a source of inspiration. However, the early embroidery lessons Abbey acquired due to the intervention of the friend form the foundation of Abbey's professional education. For Abbey, the story of how she learned about professional embroidery continues to be a reminder of why she chose to enter the industry, just as it is for Mr. Grasso.

In each of these four cases, family or friends played a role in directing the embroiderer towards their career path. Other factors also had influence on the decision or the way things developed, but family or friends planted the initial seed of interest. Without that interaction, Abbey, Mr. Grasso, Régis, and Victoria may have never discovered embroidery.

***Embroiderers influenced by school or internships.*** The academic realm, more than other factors, influenced the next group of interviewees. Jess, Claire, Scott, Daisy, and Édouard indicated that school, courses, projects, faculty, or internships were the turning points in their career paths. The career paths of this group of embroiderers begin on the far left side of figure 8. I incorporated internships (apprenticeships and placements included) into this category because they are often a part of school programs and they are part of the formal learning process. Like for

the previous group, other factors also affected the participants' career decisions. However, each of these embroiderers indicated that something from their education was the main influence for their decision to join the fashion embroidery industry.

Jess most strongly attributed her personal project from school as the item that helped her not only discover embroidery as a career, but also allowed her to develop a passion for it.

And then I did a personal project where I replicated a Christian Dior dress that had lots of embellishment and beading.... I took a real interest in replicating it to the exact point and it turned out that I needed to use tambour beading and things like that which I'd never even heard of. So, from there, I sort of researched into tambour beading and it then got me further and further into the world of embroidery and goldwork and then I found out about Hand & Lock. From there, I did an 8-week placement here to learn about tambour beading to help me with my dress.

In reproducing a Christian Dior gown for her personal project, Jess learned about tambour beading and various other embellishment techniques new to her. Researching these techniques led her to professional embroidery and eventually to Hand & Lock. In an effort to gain enough skills to complete her project, Jess completed an eight-week placement at Hand & Lock.

By using professional resources to acquire the new skills, Jess also learned about a career path and an industry that she had never previously considered. Hand & Lock taught Jess not only the tambour beading that she needed to know for her dress, but also exposed her to many other facets of professional embroidery. The experience at Hand & Lock further opened her eyes to career possibilities. While the personal project was the trigger for turning her to embroidery, the placement cemented it.

“And from there, I got offered a job here and it's kind of rolled on from there.” After Jess's placement, Hand & Lock offered her a paid position. At the time of this research interview, she was one of the two designers for the firm. She has since become the creative director. Jess credits her personal project from school with directly leading her to her embroidery

job. The research for the project also provided the embroidery training that she uses every day as an embroidery designer.

Édouard, a student working on a two-month apprenticeship at Gouvernel, also falls in this group. Even though at the time of the interview Édouard had not finished school nor determined his ultimate career path. Like Jess, Édouard became involved in the embroidery industry through the personal project. He was completing research for his personal project as part of his fashion design program. The research led him to Gouvernel and introduced him to embroidery. He was not only completing the embroidery portion of his project during his apprenticeship, but also training in the basics of couture embroidery production and design. At the time of the interview, Édouard's story was still in progress to determine the ultimate role of his introduction to embroidery through his personal project.

Scott attributes his presence in embroidery to the intervention of his university tutors (instructors or professors) in his studies rather than a project.

I've always been very image based, so thought straight-away that I would be going into print. But my tutors, after the first year, pushed me in the direction of embroidery. Their words were "You're an embroiderer. You shouldn't be doing print."

Scott was already in a textile design program but was more inclined towards print design. He explained that he was "image-based" but had only considered this in terms of print because he was not familiar with embroidery or stitching. However, his tutors saw that his images and artwork translated better into embroidery design than into print design. Because of the tutors' confidence that Scott's work was more appropriate for embroidery, they firmly guided him towards embroidery design in his studies.

Scott explained that the concept of working with stitches was a challenge for him initially because he could not really sew. "I can hardly sew a button on a jacket." However, whatever they saw in him was a correct assessment. Now, Scott not only loves embroidery, but he cannot

imagine doing anything else. Through his lessons and projects over the next two years, he discovered that his passion lies in hand embroidery and particularly in traditional goldwork, such as used in military regalia. The intervention of his faculty encouraged Scott to change his focus from print to embroidery design.

Scott finished his studies in embroidery design by doing “a few placements”. He started his tenure at Hand & Lock as an assistant. At the time of the interview, he was creative director for the company. He has since become head designer.

Scott talked at length about how his faculty, course work, projects, and placements all were essential to his formation as an embroidery designer. He related how the material and skills he learned during his education made him a better designer and how he continues to use lessons from school.

Similar to Scott’s exposure to embroidery, faculty suggestions also helped direct Claire of Hawthorne & Heaney towards embroidery. However, she also attributes influence to her apprenticeships and a personal project. Originally aiming to be a doctor, Claire “started finding things, like my science studies, a lot harder. I got quite distracted and didn’t do as well as I thought I was going to do.” She discovered that she was not good at the skills necessary for a medical career. She had to do a little soul-searching to find where else her interests and skills led her.

“So I took a year out to decide what I wanted to do.... I did a fashion specialization foundation degree and absolutely fell in love with it.” The foundation degree was a one-year introduction program that allowed Claire to get a better understanding of the fashion industry. It led to her joining a bachelor’s degree program for fashion that would provide the more in-depth training needed for a career.

However, Claire again found herself struggling in her studies.

I wasn't so great at the concept and the design side of things.... I was very lucky and one of my tutors could see that I was struggling and said, "Why don't you specialize in something practical, because you working better with boundaries and within a tighter brief than the rest of your classmates and you like doing the detail." Which obviously had been brought over from the sciences.

The same tendencies towards precision, details, and practical application of methods that drew her to medicine became a hurdle in the more creative field of fashion. Luckily, rather than discouraging her, the tutors in her program saw her strengths. The tutors noted that Claire was better in practical fields than conceptual. They also saw that she followed instructions much more precisely and worked within tighter boundaries than her classmates did. Due to her combination of skills, her faculty encouraged her towards an avenue that required those skills but still related to fashion: embroidery.

Upon the tutors' suggestion, she tried an embroidery project after which, her tutors recommended, "why don't you go see this chap talking who's come to the university." Alastair MacLeod, the chairman of Hand & Lock Embroideries was the visiting speaker. Mr. MacLeod not only explained historical and modern fashion, military, and ecclesiastical embroidery, but he also presented examples of these Embroideries to the audience.

What instantly caught me was the military goldwork. I'd never seen anything like it before. This was wonderful, and incredible balance.... But military was just this wonderfully masculine, but yet so delicate and so intricate. I was totally obsessed with it.

The examples and explanations of goldwork excited Claire. She clarified that she never liked things that were too "girly", as she described it. Goldwork provided an outlet for precision and artistic expression in embroidery with a masculine, military feel. Yet, the work was still very detailed and delicate. For Claire, this was the ideal balance for her skills and tastes.

During the interview, Claire's excitement radiated when she was describing how she discovered goldwork. She spoke as if it was a life-changing moment. Claire's newfound

enthusiasm led her to the next stage. “So I decided that I wanted to do a little bit of sampling for my next project. So I went to Hand & Lock and I met the creative director at the time.” She chose to do a combination of a personal project and a placement to learn more about embroidery, particularly goldwork. While learning the embroidery techniques, she began to focus on the designing and drafting (technical drawing) techniques and process. “I became totally obsessed with this process. I thought it was the best thing since sliced bread.... I found my niche and I’m going to specialize and I’m going to be the best at whatever I’m doing.”

Claire’s obsession with embroidery led her to intern “during every free moment I had.” She kept shadowing the creative director at Hand & Lock as well as learning from the other employees at every opportunity. Eventually, her numerous internships led to a job opportunity as a design assistant at Hand & Lock. Later, Claire moved up to creative director and a year after her promotion, she started her own embroidery firm.

Claire was unique in that she listed all the elements of her education as sources of influence in her choice of careers. Claire also describes her decision to become an embroiderer as a series of events rather than based upon a single event, person, or reason. Like Scott, Claire talked about how each element of her education developed her professional skills and identity.

Unlike Jess, Scott, and Claire, Daisy did not attribute any influence to formal education. Rather, Daisy stated that only her apprenticeship helped her to decide to be an embroiderer. She had been through a number of different placements and jobs before she took one at Hand & Lock. “I decided that I wanted to specialize more, so that’s why I came here (Hand & Lock).” She had already tried jewelry-making and other specialties. The internship at Hand & Lock was a trial at another specialty. She only interned for a brief week and a half in embroidery before she obtained a part-time position as an embroiderer. By then, she already loved the work. “I think the



possibilities are endless with what you can get with just a plain piece of fabric and turn it into you know, like a ball gown or whatever.” She was enamored with the combination of endless creativity and making things with her hands. The one thing that concerned Daisy, like many of the others, is that hand embroidery appears to be a declining trade in Europe. Daisy’s internship was short, but it was the start of her career as an embroiderer. The internship also provided Daisy with the most fundamental embroidery skills needed for her job.

Jess and Édouard came to embroidery because of their school personal projects. University faculty members directed Scott to embroidery. Daisy chose embroidery because of her placement experience. Claire joined the embroidery industry due to combination of all of these factors: faculty, personal projects, and placements. While all five embroiderers have slightly different paths, they all directly attribute their career choices to academics and/or their formal internships.

***Embroiderers influenced by other people or personal reasons.*** The last seven interviewees, including Sonia, Brigitte, Karin, Valerie, Henri, Lynn, and Christine, chose to be in embroidery for personal reasons or because of other people's influence. This group started out as being labeled "miscellaneous" in my analysis notes, but the more I looked at it, the more the similarities became apparent. When reduced to the most basic level, these seven embroiderers made their choices either because someone other than family or friend influenced their decision or due to a personal reason.

Two embroiderers, Karin and Henri, found the directions of their lives changed by chance acquaintances. Karin, the embroiderer who has been at Hand & Lock the longest, told me that a career counselor suggested that she try embroidery when she was younger. This was

during a time when embroidery was a more common career path for women. She had always been interested in embroidery, but had not considered it as a career.

My grandmother showed me how to do cross-stitch first, and I really got into that.... This was when I was about 10.... Then I had a specialist embroidery teacher at school. That was about when I was 15. I did a whole embroidery project with her. Only hand embroidery. And then went for an interview with a careers officer in London.... She suggested that S. Lock had space available and they specialized in embroidery. I had an interview with the manager at the time at S. Lock. They were quite busy at the time, but since I hadn't finished school, it was alright. So I started about the following September, doing hand embroidery, tambour beading.

Karin described how embroidery had been a re-occurring influence in her life. However, it was a conversation with a stranger that directed Karin to a career in embroidery. She started learning embroidery as a young girl from her grandmother. Later, she learned more types of embroidery in school from a specialist teacher. When she was near graduation, she went to a professional career counselor. Due to Karin's familiarity and longtime interest in hand embroidery, the counselor suggested that Karin apply at S. Lock Embroideries. Karin interviewed at the firm, which led to her obtaining a job there as a hand embroiderer upon graduation. She continued in that position for "It must have been about 10 years." S. Lock was the fashion embroidery company that later merged with Hand and Company, the military embroiderer to form Hand & Lock.

To continue her training after hiring, she started learning about hand-guided machine embroidery. "I did a day at college for machine embroidery one day a week. Now I'm on machines permanently." This change occurred because of a change in personnel at the company.

Then S. Lock had a spate of machine embroiderists all retiring very close together. And since I'd been to the college to learn the machine embroidery, I was chosen to do the machine embroidery. And then it became full-time on the machine.

Karin's change in job positions was the result of circumstances at S. Lock. The large percentage of machine embroiderers retiring within a short time created an opening that might not have

occurred otherwise. Since Karin had the specialized training required to do this job, the opportunity opened for her. As more machine embroiderers retired and more work was sent to India or was converted to computerized embroidery instead of hand-guided, Karin slowly became the last hand-guided machine embroiderer at Hand & Lock.

Karin originally developed her love of embroidery due to a family member. Yet it took the intervention of a stranger for Karin to realize embroidery was a potential career. The career counselor is no longer a source of inspiration for Karin, but because Karin is still at the suggested job, the counselor's influence is still present in Karin's life.

Henri, the creative director at one of the most respected couture embroidery ateliers in France, was also influenced by someone other than a family member or friend. He told me that he originally trained in fashion. A chance encounter with Mr. Lesage, former owner of Lesage Embroideries of Paris, encouraged him to consider designing embroidery instead of garments. He said that his dress designs attracted the attention of Mr. Lesage. He designed a gown with embroidery and Mr. Lesage, upon seeing this design, suggested that Henri consult someone at the Lesage atelier on how to execute the embroidery. When Henri came to the workshop for his appointment, Mr. Lesage joined the meeting and started discussing Henri's design and embroidery possibilities. The meeting was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Henri and Mr. Lesage never worked together, but the friendship eventually guided Henri to become an embroidery designer for another prestigious embroidery house. Their regular communication continued until Mr. Lesage's death in 2011 (field notes, July 16, 2013).

Mr. Lesage was originally a stranger but became a good friend to Henri. Like Régis and Claire, Henri might have remained in fashion if not for the intervention and influence of others. Henri's source of influence continues to inspire Henri as a designer and embroiderer.

Five other interviewees, including Lynn, Brigitte, Sonia, Valerie, and Christine, became part of the embroidery industry for more personal reasons. These reasons range from personal preferences and hobbies to "right time, right place" business opportunities. All five attribute their current position in the embroidery industry to their own choices.

Lynn is the military embroidery specialist at Hand & Lock. Before she joined the embroidery industry, Lynn worked at Patey's Hats of London, also in a military specialist capacity. She attributes her progression to embroidery in part to the experience she gained in military regalia at Patey's. However, she foremost notes her love for anything military. Her passion drives her to learn her subject matter.

I really enjoy this because I like the militaria. Even Sunday it was, I went up to Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park because it was the Armed Forces Day parade. So, I just popped along Sunday lunch and watched the armed forces parade in the park by the War Museum. So, I do like the militaria and I do like working at Hand & Lock. I just love it basically.

Lynn told me this story to illustrate how her love for the military affects not only her work, but also her personal life. She explained that every opportunity she has to support the military is a joy for her. Her long-time attention to everything military has provided knowledge of the minutia required in military regalia protocol.

Lynn's initial job qualifications originated with a personal interest. The interest developed into a specialized knowledge of the subject that gave Lynn the unique qualifications necessary for specific assignments. Her interest continues to influence acquisition of information and her love for her job.

Three embroiderers, Valerie, Sonia, and Brigitte of Gouvernel stated their career paths also originated with a personal interest. A love for working with their hands ultimately led each of them to embroidery. Valerie started her career in sewing whereas Brigitte immediately started in embroidery. Sonia started in embroidery but worked in sewing before returning to embroidery.

When asked why she originally wanted to learn embroidery, Valerie answered, “I did confection first and when I stopped that, I really liked fabric and became interested in embroidery for many of the same reasons. I wanted to continue it after I gave up confection.” Valerie’s need to work with the materials and her hands that first brought her to the needle arts and that later kept her in it as her career shifted.

Valerie learned embroidery for the evolution of one of her jobs. She trained in the operation and maintenance of hand-operated embroidery machines, specializing in the Cornely machine. Embroidery was a natural extension of her sewing job and her love for creating things with her hands.

I was 18 when I began to work. For 3 years, I worked at “confection” [making is the closest translation], couture confection. After 3 years, I changed because that establishment closed. Then I got a job with Access Mode where I learned to work with a Cornely machine.

Valerie learned some hand embroidery in school but chose to work in a sewing job for three years. Because she needed to learn machine embroidery in her second job, she transitioned towards the embroidery industry.

As Valerie learned hand-guided machine embroidery, she embraced it completely. Her boss, Christine had this to say of her,

She really knows all about the machines. She can repair them. If something gets folded, she knows how to fix it. She can change the machines. She’s completely autonomous. She knows everything about the machines. There’s no need for her to ask “Please, I have a problem”, no. She knows all the attachments and pieces and knows how to adapt them to any type of embroidery that we do in Cornely [the hand-guided machine she uses]. She adapts each guide to work with the materials. This is a very specific technique.

Valerie accepted every opportunity to learn about the embroidery machines during training, including repair, maintenance, and changing components to alter the function of the machines. Additionally, since she understood the capabilities of the various machines and likewise was astute with attachments or changes in machine configuration to use in order to achieve different

embroidery results, she was able to rectify all the problems without the help of a maintenance person. She was excellent at adapting the machines to work with the many types of materials used at Gouvernel. Because of her in-depth knowledge of the machines, she could also achieve techniques and experiment with the machines in ways that many embroiderers cannot.

For Valerie, the need to learn embroidery on the job opened a career path that paralleled her abilities. She has since become the sole machine embroiderer at Gouvernel and controls a room of different embroidery machines.

Brigitte was straightforward about her journey into embroidery, “I liked to do things with my hands and wanted to do something creative so I learned the profession of the embroiderer.” She did not have any family members that sewed or embroidered or other influences that drew her to the career. “I didn’t know anything. I learned it all at school.” Brigitte made it clear that she learned all her embroidery skills at school rather than from childhood training as some embroiderers learned.

Like Karin, Brigitte had a short education to job path. “As part of my studies, I did an internship in Paris. But then I started directly here. For 11 years... I’ve worked here.” Other than a brief internship in Paris, Brigitte’s entire professional career has been at Gouvernel. Eight of the people I interviewed also stayed with the same firm their entire life.

Sonia stated that her mother sewed clothes for the family; however, Sonia did not attribute her path to embroidery to her mother’s influence: “I didn’t know any embroidery, but my mother used to sew some and made us clothes. But embroidery I discovered as I learned it at school.” Sonia insisted that it was her affinity for manual work that drew her towards embroidery. She stated, “I... like to do things with my hands. I first learned to sew at school and after, I learned embroidery.”

After Sonia went to school, she went to work in the embroidery trade.

Me, I worked in another embroidery firm first for 10 years and when that closed, I worked at sewing, and when that closed, I began to work for Christine.... [I have worked here] 10 years now or 25 years in the couture/embroidery world.

Sonia always worked in the needle trades, twenty years in embroidery and five years in sewing between her two embroidery jobs. She has been at Gouvernel, working for Christine, for the last 10 years.

Sonia, Brigitte, and Valerie chose to study embroidery or sewing because of a personal interest in working with their hands. Like Lynn, the three embroiderers elected to work in jobs that coincided with their interests. Their love of manual handcrafts continues to be a source of enjoyment in their embroidery careers.

Christine of Gouvernel came from a completely different background than embroidery, fashion, or sewing. She relates that she joined the embroidery business because of a business opportunity. She saw an excellent business opportunity, took a chance, and bought the ailing Gouvernel embroidery company, learning the embroidery and design skills she needed on the job.

I didn't know much about embroidery, but I knew how to knit, how to crochet, to make drawings, to create handmade things. Also I have an artistic sense.... But I have an understanding of management. Therefore the artistic side and the possibility of management make a perfect answer for this enterprise.

Christine clarified that she did not understand much about embroidery. However, she was good at other handcrafts and artistic endeavors, such as knitting, crocheting, crafting, and drawing. Furthermore, she was also a capable manager. She believed that her combination of skills, though they did not include embroidery, was ideal for saving a historical but failing business.

After purchasing the company, Christine changed Gouvernel's approach to business, focusing less on the labor-intensive hand embroidery. Instead, Christine developed a more

profitable system of making custom embroidered trims that could be sent to foreign manufacturers. The exportable trims allowed designers and manufacturers to have a custom embroidered element, by producing the garments abroad at less expensive locations. She attributes her ability to develop non-traditional solutions to the fact that she does not come from a traditional embroidery background.

Christine elected to join the embroidery industry because she valued the business opportunity. Her reason contrasts with Lynn, Brigitte, Sonia, and Valerie's personal interests. Lynn, Brigitte, Sonia, and Valerie joined the industry because their jobs involved something they each personally enjoyed doing. While each person's path to embroidery was different, Lynn's interest in the military; Brigitte, Sonia, and Valerie's interest in manual handcrafts; and Christine's desire to save Gouvernel are all personal reasons for joining the embroidery industry.

Uniqueness unites these last seven interviewees more than their commonalities. Henri and Karin chose to be in the industry thanks to the intervention of strangers, whereas, the remainder joined professional embroidery for various personal reasons. However, whether family, school, or another reason influenced the interviewee to enter the embroidery field, all of the embroiderers precisely identified what set them on their career path. Additionally, the embroiderers related how their career paths led to their current positions.

The main theme of education and career path included the two sub-themes of education of the embroidery professional and interest and career path of the embroidery professional. The two sub-themes are closely related. The education paths of six participants were sources of influence in directing the individuals into their current career paths. Six other embroiderers chose their educational paths after being influenced to learn about embroidery or first starting in the embroidery industry and opting for more education. Henri, Régis, and Valerie obtained



education in fashion or sewing disciplines and originally did not intend to work in embroidery. However, after joining the embroidery industry, their education from related disciplines provided background knowledge.

The main theme of education and career progress of the embroidery professional answered the research question how has the embroiderer learned his or her profession. The embroiderers' stories about their educational experiences addressed their early learning. Their stories of job progression included how they perfected their job skills through on the job experiences.

The embroiderers' stories also addressed the questions, how does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work, and how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers. Through narration of their career paths, the participants described part of their professional work. Comparison of younger embroiderers' education and career paths to those of the older embroiderers demonstrated change in the embroidery industry.

### **Evolution of the Company and Methods**

Explanations of the status of each embroiderer also involved what the participant does, how the participant fits into the company, how he or she developed with the company, and how he or she influenced the company's development. These stories were about job requirements, company procedures, and company history. The second main theme of the study, evolution of the company and methods, includes participant stories that involve their daily jobs within their workshops and the changes the workshop has undergone.

The embroiderers' stories in this section capture company histories and ways the embroidery processes have changed. These stories directly answer the research question, how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers. Additionally, the

embroiderers' descriptions about what they do on the job partially answer the question, how does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work. The participants' stories address the question by providing a literal description of their daily actions at work.

The theme evolution of the company and methods contains stories about the embroidery industry and embroidery companies from the embroiderers' points of view. I divided the stories into the sub-themes of company history and current embroidery industry methods. Company history includes the participants' narratives about the development of their workshops. The embroiderers' explanations of the embroidery design and production process and their stories about changes in the embroidery process comprise the sub-theme of current embroidery industry methods.

When I set out to do this research, I hoped to gain some insight into the history of the embroidery industry through the personal stories of those in the business. While I learned a great deal about both the people and the industry, the history element was much harder to come by. What I did discover was that more often than not, only certain people were privy to the events that happened within the company or heard much about the company's history.

For the most part, the workroom embroiderers could tell me very little embroidery history. Nor did they know much about what has happened to the company over the years, other than the bigger history that the companies present to the public. Their main concerns were with day-to-day operations, getting work done, keeping a job, and other aspects of their daily life.

The presidents, designers, and artistic directors had different concerns, which included public relations. Mr. Grasso related the history of his company with practiced ease. Christine, Régis, and Abbey took pride in telling how they fit into the modern history of their companies. Henri elaborated on how the different companies relate to each other, what their differences and

strengths were, and how they have changed in relation to each other. The upper-level members of the embroidery workshops became rich sources for how the embroidery industry operates and how it has changed.

**Company history.** Mr. Grasso and Christine narrated the history of their companies during our interviews. Abbey provided her company's history via email. These atelier histories help reduce the gap in known embroidery histories. Lesage already has a well-publicized history and the history of Hand & Lock is available to the public on its website. Since the Hand & Lock history is available, I did not attempt to collect it from the participants. Victoria provided the history of Atelier Darloti and Claire provided the history of Hawthorne & Heaney. However, the latter two companies have both just started and were too new to have a lengthy history beyond their founding date. Lanèl is the only atelier I visited for which I do not have a history.

I present the first two histories as complete narratives, in the participants' own voices. In this manner, the stories remain cohesive. The first is about Broderies Gouvernel, an almost one-hundred year old embroidery company in Brémencourt, France, near Lunéville. The second is about Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda, a fashion embroidery company in Milan, Italy. Christine of Gouvernel gave the first story about Broderies Gouvernel while the Mr. Grasso and Raffaella provided the second history of Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda.

***History of Broderies Gouvernel.*** Christine shared with me her knowledge of how Gouvernel Embroideries began and developed until the 1970s, the height of its operations.

It started in 1910 [1918 according to Mercier (1992)] in a little village in Vosges, that's a region next to Meurthe et Moselle. It was started by a family, the Gouvernel family, hence the name of the company. They started first with white work embroidery and then also began to do embroidery for house linens due to the weaving in Vosges and then afterwards with clothing for fashion, they began embroidery for the garments. At this time they also had a workshop in Paris in order to speak directly to the designers and for the relationships with the designers.

Around the year 1970 they had around 80 people who did Lunéville embroidery. They did all the types of applications, hand embroidery, beads and sequins, lunéville, and they were the only ones in the region that did Cornely embroidery.

Gouvernel Embroideries started in the region immediately south of its present location, in Lorraine, Eastern France. The Gouvernel family began by producing white-work embroidery, a specialty of the Lorraine region. Soon, they also embroidered house linens, a common commodity at the time. Gouvernel began household linen production because the region of Vosges had a strong weaving industry at the time and Gouvernel had easy access to the Vosges-woven fabrics needed to produce linens. After they established their linen embroidery services, Gouvernel began to execute embroidery for garments. In order to facilitate relationships with the designers and fashion houses, Gouvernel also organized a workshop in Paris.

Work continued much the same way for Gouvernel until the 1970s, when business was at its height for the company. During this period, they employed 80 tambour embroiderers. Gouvernel had a well-rounded repertoire of skills, including beading, sequining, needle embroidery, and the use of Cornely machines. Christine adds that they were the only workshops in the region that used Cornely machines.

Christine ended her narrative at this point. However, she later indicated the 1970s or 80s was the beginning of Gouvernel's decline. By time she purchased the company (no date was given), the venerated embroidery company was almost out of business. Through novel business approaches, Christine has managed to reverse the downward spiral and Gouvernel is once again a respected name in fashion embroidery.

***History of Pino Grasso.*** The interview at Pino Grasso started with Raffaella relating how her father started the company. Raffaella related only the early years of the company's history. However, I uncovered the rest of the company's history by isolating pieces of information about history from the rest of the interview.

He was at school. He was beginning his new education in medicine university, [medical school] and he had a very good friend whose father was doing this job, Embroideries. But, his friend did not want to go on with this kind of work. And he was starting to realize that studying medicine and having to deal with ill people all day was not his ambition and he decided to change his way.

After he did his required time in the army, in Italy, it was 18 months of military service. The day he finished with his military academy, he went straight to his friend's father to see how it was, this kind of work. He discovered that he liked it very much and he started his career there.

Making his first steps trying to understand all the things he has to learn to do it properly. That is to say, not only how it works, but how to do it properly.

So, he went to Paris to learn from Lesage and others, the big laboratories [workshops] of Embroideries and things like that. To materials providers for not only sequins and threads, but passementerie [trimmings and edgings], all the things that are useful for embroidery.

So, he stayed there for a period and came back. And goes on. He went on with this kind of work for a long time.

And then, in 1958 he started his own activity, left his friend's father and started his company, Pino Grasso Embroideries. Since then, he has increased his knowledge and abilities with a lot of big names of Italian Fashion, and not only Italian, but mostly Italian. The biggest were the Italian. Starting from the 60s and 70s, it was a lot of work that was coming from the big names. Valentino, you know, the big names of fashion.

He says there didn't used to be a school. You go to these embroidery companies, to their laboratory and you learn there. So, that's why he had to go to Paris and to learn, because they were the biggest and the most famous in this period for Embroideries. That's why he had to go there.

But as he came back and started his new activity, he has to do everything himself. He didn't have employees except for the embroiderers, so for instance, he had to do the drawing, the holing [pricking] of the paper, he was doing everything by himself.

Materials and going here and there to the embroiderers because in the beginning, all the embroiderers were working at home. So, each day he has to do the tour to everyone who is working and after some years when work becomes such an amount that he could open a bigger laboratory and have people working there inside and increasing year by year.

The origins of Pino Grasso embroidery lie with Mr. Grasso's personal history. As a young man, Mr. Grasso found that he did not enjoy his career path. Rather, he was more interested in the embroidery business of his friend's father in Milan. After finishing his

compulsory military service, Mr. Grasso went to the father and requested to learn embroidery techniques from him.

In order to expand his knowledge beyond what he could learn in Milan, Mr. Grasso moved to Paris for a period and apprenticed in the high fashion embroidery workshops, including Lesage. Mr. Grasso considered Paris the best place to learn, because there were no schools in Italy. Paris was home to the most highly respected fashion embroidery workshops. During his apprenticeship in Paris, he made a point to not only learn the embroidery, but also accumulate a working knowledge about the materials, manufacturers and distributors, and to learn about the supporting crafts, such as passementerie. Upon returning to Milan, Mr. Grasso continued to work for the friend's father until starting his own embroidery company in 1958. This was the beginning of Pino Grasso Embroideries.

In the early years, Mr. Grasso could not afford a workshop space to house his embroiderers. Nor could he pay drafters or other employees besides the embroiderers. He did all the jobs except the embroidering. He designed, drafted, prepared the fabrics, and conducted business affairs.

By the 1960s and 70s, Pino Grasso Embroideries was contracting work with many of the major high fashion names in Italy. There was eventually enough work to allow Mr. Grasso to open a workshop large enough to house all his workers. Raffaella ended the story at the 1970s. However, from the rest of the conversation, I extracted more detail.

Pino Grasso now has 15 employees: 12 in-house and 3 who work out of their houses. Three of the employees are drafters/designers, five are in-house embroiderers, and three are home-based embroiderers. He said the number of embroiderers could swell to 30 when work was at its peak.

*History of Abbey's atelier.* While Abbey could not allow me to reveal the name of her employer, she did provide a history of the company. I limited and generalized details in the history to provide Abbey more anonymity, but the story still reveals the development of the atelier. Abbey provided this history in the form of two documents, sent by email.

The company was originally founded in the 1940s as an exporter of embroidered fabrics. By the early fifties, the company began to design embroidered fabrics. The first record of the company embroidering garment parts for haute couture was in the 1950s. Within a decade, the company established a workshop for producing both hand and machine embroidery in Paris. In the late seventies, the business expanded to include trading in silk from Lyon, France and Italy.

In the 1980s, Abbey joined the atelier as an embroiderer/designer. Abbey was one of the major forces in revitalizing the company and fostering a more artistic reputation. In the mid-eighties, the focus of the company narrowed. They ceased many of their trading activities and oriented themselves around haute couture embroidery. The company re-structured workshops and activities to work around the fashion calendar of four fashion seasons per year as they positioned themselves as partners to the fashion designers. Additionally, they began to produce a collection of embroidery samples.

The company changed ownership three times since the 1980s. In the most recent change of ownership, a major fashion house bought the embroidery atelier. This business was the only embroidery house I encountered during my interviews that started as something other than an embroidery house.

The history of Pino Grasso Embroideries is inseparable from the life history of Mr. Grasso. The early development of Gouvernel and Abbey's atelier was independent of Christine and Abbey, respectively; however, later development of the two companies was dependent on

the actions of the two embroiderers. The professional stories of Mr. Grasso, Abbey, and Christine are as much a part of their company's history as their company is a part of their professional story.

Despite different origins, Pino Grasso, Gouvernel, and the atelier Abbey directs have developed similar workshops for high fashion embroidery. However, even in similar workshops, methods can vary. The embroiderers explained how the embroidery process works in each of their embroidery houses.

**Current embroidery industry methods.** The couture houses unofficially recognize a group of ateliers as the main ateliers, and these ateliers get the bulk of the high-fashion business. According to the interviewees, the reputation of the designer, creative director, or owner and the dependability, skill, and production capabilities of the ateliers keep the companies in business and in favor with the fashion houses. Some of these top embroidery names include Lesage, Montex, Lanèl, Hurel, Vermont, Cecile Henri, Vernoux, Safrane-Cortambert, and Gouvernel. I was able to speak with embroidery workers from four of these firms, gaining a better understanding of what sets these companies apart.

The majority of the top embroidery ateliers are members of the Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies or French Federation of Lace and Embroidery (FFDB). They are also members of the Groupe-Main (Hand Group), the hand embroiderers' sub-group of FFDB. These memberships give them an official channel through which to communicate, to advertise or publicize as a group, and to act in political matters when necessary ("La Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies [French Federation of Lace and Embroidery]," 2014).

The other organization to which half of the embroidery firms belong is the Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant (Living Heritage Company, or EPV). This company recognizes the



embroidery companies for their excellence in traditional French skills. The EPV is a government organization that protects and supports industrial and artisanal trades. The label is awarded "to any undertaking that has economic heritage, consisting in particular of rare, renowned or ancestral skills which draw on a mastery of traditional or technically advanced techniques, and restricted to a particular geographical area" (Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant [Living Heritage Company], 2012, para. 3).

As Régis of Lanèl, the creative director of one of the primary Parisian embroidery houses, and a member of the FFDB, explained, the designers and presidents of these embroidery workshops not only know each other well, but communicate regularly. Régis stated, "We all know each other (the embroidery community). You know sometimes we help with things. We help with the materials or.... We have the same clients. I think it's good to be very close." The high fashion hand embroidery industry is a very small community. This community of embroiderers is in turn, part of the larger high fashion community.

However, the long-time embroiderers have noted a big change in the relationship between the embroidery houses and the fashion houses. Régis recounted how things had changed during his tenure at Lanèl.

When I came to the company in the beginning, I knew all the couturiers. They were the managers of their own companies. I knew Mr. Balmain, Mr. La Roche, Mr. Scherrer, Mr. Givenchy, St. Laurent.... You know, all the couturiers. And after, they sold the companies and it was the artistic director who came and the way of work changed a lot.

Régis reminisced about how when he first started working at Lanèl he personally knew and used to work directly with the head designers, the "big names". He listed several famous Parisian designers with whom he worked on a regular basis. However, he said that once these designers sold their companies, the working methods changed. No longer, does the head designer speak

with the embroiderer; now the artistic director is the mediator between the designer and the embroiderer.

I found no documentation of when the changes in the design process occurred. However, the changes in relations between embroiderers and fashion houses were a result of many of the fashion designers selling their fashion houses in the 1980s and 90s. Dior sold to Groupe Arnault in the mid-1980s ("Bernard Arnault 1949: Biography ", 2014). Givenchy sold to the LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) group in 1988 and designed his last collection in 1995 ("Givenchy," 2014). Yves Saint Laurent sold to the Gucci Group in 1999 (Menkes, 1999). Monsieur Scherrer was forcibly evicted from his fashion house by investors in 1992 (McDowell, 2013). The new owners of the fashion houses were large corporations, which ran the fashion houses differently. Because of the changes in fashion house working methods, creative directors and assistant designers now coordinate with the embroiderers and the head designer. As Régis relates, there is less camaraderie between the two industries than in earlier years, but they still cooperate well.

Despite the changes in relations with the fashion industry, the majority of the methods and procedures for the high fashion hand embroidery process have not changed for the last one hundred years or more. The embroidery techniques, in particular, have remained the same.

I asked several of the embroidery professionals to talk me through their embroidery process in order to determine differences between the methods of the different workshops compared to my experiences. There were minor variances, but no major differences between methods. To document the methods of embroidery and to understand the embroidery process, I drew on the data from the 16 recorded interviews. The analysis of embroidery methods also includes a glimpse at how the process has changed over the last four or five decades.

***Production, sampling, or collections: Work modes of the embroidery atelier.*** The activities of an embroidery workshop change according to the intended use of the embroidery. Work during collections (the seasonal fashion shows) is different from work for product production and different again from sampling. Each of these three distinct work modes is associated with the needs of the client.

Sampling is the process of making small trial or experimental Embroideries. These are often about the size of a piece of printer paper and are usually unfinished. Embroiderers use samples to analyze different techniques, materials, styles, colors, or a combination of these. Samples also communicate what a finished embroidery will look like to the client. This is typically the most creative embroidery activity.

Production is making multiple units to sell. This case involves embroidering multiple garments for an apparel designer or manufacturer so the designer or manufacturer can subsequently sell the finished goods. Manufacturers scrutinize and if possible, reduce labor, materials, and all elements that add to the cost because production goods need to make a profit. Therefore, production activities are streamlined.

The high fashion world produces fashion collections, which they release to the public via high-profile fashion shows each season. The public and trade know the seasonal collection debuts as the catwalk shows. There are four primary groups of shows each year. Haute couture and *Alta moda*, the highest market level shows, are in January and July. Prêt-à-porter or ready-to-wear shows are in March and September, with some variation in the dates. While ideally some sales and production originate from these collections, the garments shown during the shows are not made like production garments. Collection garments utilize a much more hands-on and

creative process. The collections work mode is also a very rushed process in order to finish all the garments in time for the fashion shows.

Raffaella briefly explained how the activities differed at Pino Grasso according to work mode.

If we have to create new samples and things like that, [we have] to understand what they [the embroiderers] need, to look for the materials, to look for the fabrics if we need them, to explain to the embroiderers how to do the swatches, to have new ideas, to look at the internet or something else.

If we are going to production, we have to organize all the laboratories [workshops], all the production, the work, timetable. Usually we already have all the materials because they [the clients] give us all the numbers [amounts] before we receive the fabrics and everything so we can provide it before, not to lose time later, so materials are already done.

If we are going to make new Embroideries for collection for fashion shows, we have to make it in a hurry we have to organize everything more or less, and materials, the drawings, if the drawings are more or less correct, if the paper patterns are correct, if everything is following the correct timetable.

In the first paragraph, Raffaella explains what activities take place when Pino Grasso creates samples for a client. Raffaella states that before starting the samples, the embroidery designers need to understand what the client, usually a fashion designer, wants from the embroiderer. The embroidery company must also spend time researching material, such as sequins or beads. Sometimes they have to research and find fabrics as well, especially when the fabric is part of the embroidery. However, part of the time, the client provides the fabric. Since swatches are typically new embroidery “looks”, the embroidery designer has to explain the methods and intended finished results to the workroom embroiderers so they are able to bring the designer’s ideas to fruition accurately. Often at different stages the embroidery designer must perform additional research in order to find better solutions or to refine designs. Designers use the internet, books, or any other source available for research.

Raffaella talks about what Pino Grasso has to do during production, in the second paragraph. Raffaella begins by explaining the organization of the workshops, all elements of production, and the timetable. Pino Grasso is trying to make their portion of the production as smooth and quick as possible, because of the cost restrictions placed on production. Additionally, because Pino Grasso and garment manufacturers plan production well before its execution, Pino Grasso is able to pre-order the materials and have it ready before the order arrives for actual production. The pre-organization reduces the amount of time the order spends in the Pino Grasso workshops and thus reduces costs.

Collections are the subject of the last paragraph. By the time embroiderers start work on collection garments, embroidery designers have usually completed the sample process. Raffaella explains that the embroidery company organizes the materials, double-checks all the technical drawings and patterns, and makes sure they have scheduled enough time for completion of each piece. The information about materials, time, and techniques comes from what the embroiderers learned during the sampling process as well as additional negotiations with the fashion designer. The last challenge is scheduling so that Pino Grasso completes all commissioned embroidery by its scheduled deadline. Typically, all the shows for a season are scheduled during the same week, which creates a period of very rushed embroidery prior to each fashion week.

There are three main differences in these work modes, the amount of interaction between the embroiderer and the client, the speed of the work process, and the amount of research and design required. Sampling is primarily a research and design process. If the sampling is for a client, speed is sometimes a factor and client interaction is a big factor. If the sampling is for the embroidery house's own collection, then speed and interaction are not a concern. For production, the research and design are already completed and there is little interaction with the designer.

However, speed is important in order to keep costs lower. Therefore, everything must be organized and efficient. Collection work is about speed. Usually embroiderers and the fashion designer completed the design work during the sampling phase, but the designer still interacts with the embroiderers to make sure the results meet expectations.

***Designing embroidery: Beginning the embroidery process.*** When I inquired about the embroidery process, the embroiderers usually combined the process into one collective cycle. They included design, sampling, and embroidery in the cycle without reference to work mode. Some of the embroiderers such as Jess and Claire indicated the embroidery process starts with design for the client. Other embroiderers, including Régis and Christine said the process starts with making their own collection of embroidery samples each season. Fashion designers use the samples to get ideas about embroidery design and possibilities of techniques and materials. Sample collections are different from “sampling” or creating individual samples for a client. Régis of Lanèl talks about making the sample collection.

Because two times a year, we prepare the samples. It all depends on if you have time, but it's around 90 samples. We speak in terms of “season”. When we talk about a season, it's 6 months. And by season, we have about 90 or 100 samples. This period I like because there is no constraint. We can do what we want. There is no problem of price or time. It's very interesting. And after, when the client chooses a sample, wants the sample we have created here to put on the dress, it's a very exciting period.

Twice a year, Lanèl makes its own sample collection of about 90 to 100 samples. The sample production periods correspond to the fashion seasons of fall/winter and spring/summer, which places the collections about six months apart each time. Régis considers sample making one of the activities he most enjoys, as he is not limited to any financial restrictions nor does he have to confine his designs to the needs and desires of fashion designers. He has free creative reign in designing samples, and he extends the same creative freedom to his in-house embroiderers. The compatibility of fabric and materials, the availability of goods, the embroiderers' abilities, and

their imaginations form the only limits on sampling possibilities. Régis finds it rewarding when a client chooses to work from one of the collection samples.

Gouvernel also produces an extensive sample collection and relies heavily upon the collection. During the tour of the workshops, Christine showed me a large rack of the current season's samples. Christine explained that she used the samples for proposing ideas to clients and demonstrating the use of materials, color combinations, and techniques. The rack contained a large number trims, appliqués, and other embroidered samples. Gouvernel sometimes produced trims in multiple colorways (color combinations) to help the designers visualize different possibilities (field notes, July 9, 2013).

Having samples available in the workshop has influenced the role of the embroidery house. While previously embroiderers did what the client requested, now the embroiderer has more say in the design process. Christine explained:

Before embroiderers, it was the client who made the requests. "I would like you to make this for that dress. I would like some embroidery for this coat. I would like something." And we could not deviate from the clients' requests, but now it is us that makes suggestions to the clients. We use our samples in several colors.

As Christine explains, prior to the introduction of embroidery sample collections, fashion designers had complete control over what embroiderers created. They would dictate exact instructions to the embroiderer and allowed no deviation. It was generally understood that only the fashion designer's opinion mattered, despite the experience of the specialist embroiderers. However, as the embroiderers developed a stronger rapport with the fashion designers, the professional experience and opinions of the embroiderers began to gain merit in the eyes of the designers (P. White, 1994). Christine attributes the Gouvernel's ability to make suggestions to the clients to the trust in embroiderers' skills and opinions that have developed over time.

However, both Régis and Raffaella of Pino Grasso said that the process of working with fashion designers during the creative phase and the use of samples have begun to change in the last twenty years. Régis said that the artistic director of the fashion house is less open to suggestion and less likely to listen to the embroiderer. Rather, the embroiderer must find a way to adapt embroidery to the needs of the artistic director, even when the technique and materials are not compatible with the dress design.

Because in the beginning when I came to Lanèl, we made two sample collections per year. And we showed the samples to the couturiers and they do the clothes from the samples. And now, with the artistic director, it's completely different. They have a story with the clothes, and you should adapt the embroidery to the dress, not the opposite. And sometimes, it's not easy because you have the constraint of the materials. You can't do some things. You should follow the materials. It's not the materials that follow the dress. There is some problem sometimes.

When Régis first started working at Lanèl, he relied more on the company's in-house sample collections. He would show the collection to the fashion designers and the designers typically chose samples to incorporate into their fashion collections. However, the new fashion artistic directors are less understanding when the embroiderer communicates that a particular material or technique will not work well for a given design. Régis clarifies that some materials simply do not work well for certain things because the material dictates design usage. Problems sometimes develop because of the diminishing direct communications between the embroiderer and the fashion designer.

The changing nature of fashion design requires that embroiderers work more diligently to understand the mindset of the fashion designer. At Pino Grasso, Raffaella explained that she and her father have adapted their working methods in order to meet the needs of their clients better. It now requires more research and often more sampling and experimentation to achieve the results desired by the fashion houses.



Everything has changed another time because of the taste, because of the different idea of embroidery, so you have to follow another kind of mind. Every time you work with a designer, you have to enter his mind, to understand what he wants and reproduce his goals.

In this quote, Raffaella shows that the embroidery process often begins with talking to the client. The fashion designer must communicate the required or requested kind of embroidery as well as the theme of the design collection. A theme is an idea or group of ideas that guide the designer in a specific concept for the season's fashion collection. The embroidery must support the collection's theme.

However, fashion designers decide upon embroidery type and design by utilizing different starting points. Raffaella explained three routes the design process can take in detail: working from the archives, working from the client's idea, or working from a client's swatch.

The beginning is always different. You start from, I don't know. We've got an archive of about 10,000 pieces. And so the client can come here and look at the archive and decide something, choose something, or mix two things together. Or finding an idea and developing it and then come back with a new idea. Or they can come here already with something already decided and tell us, I don't know, "I want something with roses," or other flowers, or geometricals [geometric patterns]. And then we create swatches and develop them as the client needs them to be done.

Or [the process starts] with an idea - just a general idea of something. For instance for Armani, we did the moon ground [surface]. The idea of the moon ground, something to develop the idea of this general idea. And you have to create something that can satisfy his need about this specific topic.

Or, sometimes they come here with swatches created by their in-house embroidery consultant. And they create something by gluing pieces together or stitching them just like this and telling me, "This is the idea. Develop something similar with good technique and good materials." And sometimes we do something like that. This is the beginning. From this or there or our swatches or their swatches or ideas.

In paragraph one, Raffaella explained that the design process is different for every project. The process can begin with the archive of embroidery samples. Clients can look at the samples in the archives for ideas. They can work from a single sample, mix ideas from multiple samples, or develop a new idea based on a sample. Clients sometimes already have something in mind before

approaching the embroiderer. They may ask for embroidery with flowers or some other specific type of motif or design. Pino Grasso creates new samples (also called swatches) based on the instructions of the client.

Raffaella clarified in the second paragraph that the client's idea might be more specific such as "the moon's surface." In that case, Pino Grasso does more research and development around the idea, while keeping the client's needs and tastes in mind. Again, Pino Grasso produces swatches in the design process.

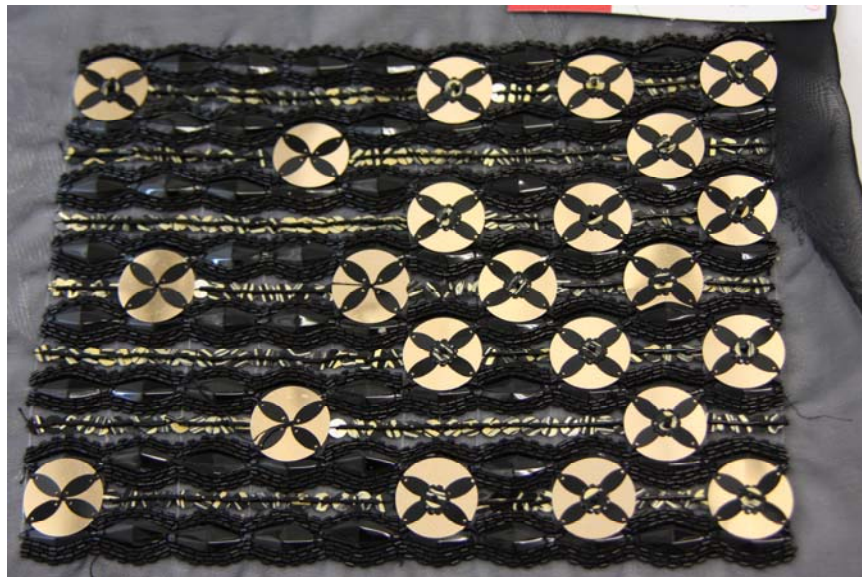
Lastly, clients may come to Pino Grasso with their own samples. In-house embroidery consultants may have produced these swatches for the fashion designer. The swatch makers do not always utilize professional embroidery techniques or quality materials. The designers use the swatches to convey an idea of the requested embroidery; however, they want Pino Grasso to execute the work with professional methods and better materials.

Most of the embroidery houses and all of the long-established embroidery houses I visited had an archive like Pino Grasso. The new embroidery companies build their own archives from scratch. Archives, like the collections, are one of the main sources of embroidery ideas for fashion designs. Even when a fashion designer has something distinctive in mind, they will often find pieces in an embroiderer's archive to help communicate their idea or further refine his or her design (P. White, 1994).

Archives house items that demonstrate what the embroidery does best as well as provide a way to trace the house's embroidery and stylistic history. In a sense, the archives are miniature museums for the company. The Grassos at Pino Grasso and Chritine at Gouvernel took me into their archives. In both cases, the embroiderers dug through the samples to show me specific pieces. Christine looked for items she thought epitomized the techniques Gouvernel did best

before the economic downturn in the embroidery industry. The Grassos looked for pieces that were the starting point of famous fashion, pieces that demonstrated unique techniques, and pieces that showed off the skill of the embroiderers. Ateliers Darolti did not yet have a large archive as it was a new company, but Victoria displayed a number of the pieces she had already accumulated and she commented on the uniqueness of each piece. Figure 9 shows one of the samples from Victoria's archive. The photo shows a piece of embroidery in which Victoria was sampling a particular set of embroidery techniques and material to make a geometric design. Victoria layered the materials to create a unique look. Additionally, Abbey revealed the lack of an archive when she started employment and outlined how she changed the working methods of the atelier to build an archive. Her workshops now have a large archive for design and documentation purposes.

Scott at Hand & Lock spoke about the technical drawings and embroidery he discovered



*Figure 9.* Embroidery sample from archives of Ateliers Darolti.  
Copyright Victoria Darolti.

in the archives of his place of employment and how influential he found them in his work.

When I come across in our archive entire drafts for embroidery, for a pattern of an entire garment. For instance a privy council uniform or privy council coat and the whole thing is completely covered in goldwork foliage.

And all these drafts [technical drawings] are drawn back before the times of computers. And they're all hand drawn in ink, which anyone who is creative knows that you can't change that, you can't rip it out it has to be perfect.

The most fascinating thing I've found in my job is going back and referencing existing work and it might not be a tangible piece of embroidery there with it, but it's almost always at least a blueprint of what it was and you can see how it's designed and understand that relationship between an embroidery designer and the embroiderer.

I think some of our drafts that I've seen are from the early 1800s and it's the exact same principle and it's wonderful because w/ embroidery you can develop and change things aesthetically through what is available in terms of fabrics and threads etc. It's almost like the backbone towards working to new innovations, the crossing over of techniques.

Scott described his experiences in the Hand & Lock archive. He discovered technical drawings for complete garments. One of the drawings was for a Privy Council coat, the design of which was composed entirely of goldwork leaves. In the second paragraph, Scott explained that the former drafters executed the drawings without the aid of computer. The drafters used ink and worked without the option to correct mistakes.

In the third paragraph, Scott remarked that the items in the archive reveal a relationship between the embroidery designer and the embroiderer. Scott enjoyed referencing the pieces in the archive and studying how designers communicate. The archives date back to the early 1800s. Scott clarified in paragraph four that despite the change in aesthetics, the basics of design communication have remained the same over the years. Additionally, Scott explained that he uses the samples from the archives as inspiration for new designs. Scott's narrative about the archives demonstrates how an embroidery archive is an asset to the embroidery designer, not just clients.

However, these archives are not the only way fashion designers communicate their ideas. Raffaella outlined as a second starting point that designers sometimes just give the embroiderer a

“general idea of something,” and then the embroiderer has to work with it. This process is when the embroiderer’s research skills come to the forefront. The embroiderer has to interpret the fashion designer’s idea, keep the “feel” and mood that the designer is trying to achieve with the collection, and produce an item that will still be profitable for both parties.

Raffaella gave the example that they had to work with the idea of the moon’s surface for one designer. She showed me one of the samples that resulted from the moon research (figure 10). Pino Grasso and the fashion designer worked the results of the research into the fashion collection.

In order to achieve a texture that was reminiscent of the moon, but still beautiful and worthy of high fashion, Pino Grasso cut sheets of pearlized plastic into wavy shapes. They subsequently dyed these pieces of plastic to create color inconsistencies and heated to make the edges curl. The embroiderers stitched the plastic pieces to a ground fabric then filled the spaces between with various rhinestones, crystal beads, pearls, and other elements to create shine, variations in color, a rough texture, and visual movement in the piece. Pino Grasso used this sample as an example of how an embroiderer can take a rough idea and interpret it to meet the designer’s needs.

The third method for designers to initiate their ideas is supplying their own samples. Raffaella discussed that some fashion companies have in-house embroidery consultants, hire outside consultants, or may purchase ready-made samples from free-lance embroidery designers. In any of these situations, the fashion designer comes to the embroidery workshops with either a sample or drawing of what they want the embroiderer to execute. Fashion designers will request how they want the embroiderer to adapt the sample or drawing and will typically specify or



*Figure 10.* Pino Grasso sample inspired by the moon's surface. Copyright Pino Grasso Ricami Alta Moda

suggest materials or changes to the materials. This situation usually requires much less research and development on the part of the embroidery company.

Jess of Hand & Lock outlined the design process in a similar manner. However, as Hand & Lock specializes more in custom pieces and less in fashion collections, her experience in working with designers is a little less exploratory and more focused on embroidery technique. In particular, she spoke about interpreting what types of embroidery customers want when the customer does not know the different types available.

Well, they usually come in with an idea. So they'll bring references, images about where they want to go with it, what they want to do. Then I'll sit down with them and show them some techniques. Because usually when you see a design, you can't imagine straight away what it looks like and what it's going to turn into.

Like if they bring you a coat of arms, you know it's going to be using goldwork, pearl purl, and all those sorts of things rather than if they brought in a dress with lots of little

dots on it, you know it's probably going to be beaded. So you want to show them all the different sorts of techniques they don't know about because people don't know about embroidery.

Jess said that her customers usually come to her with an idea and images or drawings to communicate what type of design they want, what types of materials or techniques they would like use, or about the placement and use of the embroidery. In order to clarify the customer's needs, Jess consults with them and shows them design and technique possibilities. The consultation process is necessary because customers have difficulty visualizing the finished embroidery.

Jess further explained that as an embroidery designer, she has a working knowledge about the requirements of different types of embroidery. The working knowledge allows her to narrow the choices of materials and techniques before presenting ideas to the customers. For instance, if the customer indicates that he or she want a coat of arms, Jess knows that she will use goldwork embroidery. Additionally, she knows the materials include pearl purl and other metal materials. If the customer brings a picture of a dress with tiny dots all over it, she understands that the dots probably represent beading. Therefore, she begins to show them beading techniques that are appropriate for the dress design. Jess explained that most customers are unaware of embroidery techniques or the design possibilities of the techniques. She shows the customers the appropriate varieties of techniques to help them become more knowledgeable.

Jess referenced both fashion designers and private customers in her quote. Most embroidery customers have to rely upon the professional knowledge of the embroiderers or embroidery designers because embroidery is a specialized field. The embroiderers not only understand the design possibilities, but also possess the production knowledge that affects costs and production time.

***Sampling: Confirming the client's design needs.*** Whichever way the initial design process starts, samples and sampling are a re-occurring theme. Sampling is different from the process of creating a sample collection. Embroidery designers use sampling to test design and research ideas based on the client's requests or specifications. Sampling, part of the embroidery design process, allows the fashion designers to see the embroidery ideas developed and make changes before applying the embroidery to the garment.

Raffaella explained that the size of the sample depends on the type and scale of the embroidery as well as what the designer needs to see before approving the work.

And when we have created in our mind what we have to do, we start with our samples, the swatches, with a drawing or without, it depends on the kind of embroidery. We start making small swatches. Something like this, like an A4 sheet [8.3 x 11.7 inches]. More or less. Then it depends on if they want to see a *dégradée* [material or color fades out]. And if you need more, it depends.

Once the designers at Pino Grasso have established the idea for an embroidery design, then the sampling process begins. Sometimes they draw the design before starting the embroidered sample, and sometimes the designer just gives embroidery instructions directly to the embroiderer. The type of embroidery and complexity of design determine whether a drawing is necessary. Initial swatches are typically the size of a piece of paper. However, some types of embroidery or designs require larger samples in order to convey the finished look to the client. Embroidery that fades out or to another color requires more space. Many of the samples Pino Grasso completes are stored in their design archives for future design use.

While the Italian and French embroiderers emphasized the sampling process and its importance to the overall embroidery process, the English embroiderers did not place quite as much value on the samples. In most cases, they still made samples. However, because they worked with slightly different clients and the companies were not as focused on high fashion as



the French and Italian workshops, this changed their working methods a little. Jess demonstrates lower prominence of the sample process at Hand & Lock when she talks about what steps occur after talking with a client.

From there, they'll pick out which ones [techniques] that they like. Then we'll probably make a small sample so that they can see it in its actual form. Then they approve it and they approve the design.

In describing the consultation and design process at Hand & Lock, Jess said that clients decide which types of techniques they want used in their embroidery. After the consultation, the designers will probably have the embroiderers produce a small sample for the clients in order to confirm the clients' wishes. However, they do not always create samples.

*Drafting, preparation, and embroidery.* After the design and sampling process, embroidery designers and drafters finalize the design. The embroidery designer sketches the embroidery to its correct size and shape. The designer or drafter then makes a technical drawing from the sketch. A technical drawing includes every detail of the embroidery. Drafters annotate the drawing so that the workroom embroiderers know exactly what to do when the piece comes to them. Additionally, drafters must insure the work fits exactly on the garment, if applied to a finished product, or that the seams (and other details) match precisely, if embroidered directly on the unfinished garment panels.

Figure 11 illustrates the embroidery design process from concept origin to finished product. The process, represented by a line of stitches, starts in the upper left corner of the diagram, with the thread tails. At intervals along the stitches, an invisible hand embroiders a motif. The motif becomes more complete at each stage.

The thread tails of the diagram represent the different ways a design idea starts. The three methods discussed by Raffaella, the use of the house archive, the client's original idea, and the client's swatch are included with Christine and Régis' suggestion of starting with samples from

the house's seasonal sample collection. Step two involves consulting with the client to determine his or her needs. Research and development in accordance to the client's need occurs in step three, followed by step four, sampling. The backwards arrows from the sampling stage indicate that more consultation or research may be necessary after sampling. After the sampling is completed, step five, technical drawing, or drafting, begins. The arrows from step two and three to five indicate that embroiderers may skip the intermediate steps sometimes.

Steps five, six, and seven of figure 11; drafting, preparation of the piece, and embroidery occur after the design development process. Raffaella explained the progression from samples through technical drawing: "We take these swatches and then, following the client instructions, we go on. Paper patterns. Drawing. Placement exactly how the client wants." Raffaella also explained that the drafters have to understand a great deal about embroidery and the materials used when drafting the paper patterns.

That is to say, you have to know exactly the materials you were going to use with embroidery and leave the correct spaces, the correct lines, symbols. So you have to follow for... recreate exactly the materials, the effect you want on the fabric.

Drafters have to understand what fabric type, beads, sequins, and trims the embroidery requires in order to note them on the technical drawing. Each material requires a symbol or line type to denote its presence. Additionally, material, technique, and design affects how close items are placed and how tight the stitches are. Each embroidery house has its own way of representing the different materials and techniques on paper so that the embroiderers quickly understand the requirements.

When the drafters indicate materials or techniques through symbols or words, embroiderers call it annotating the drawing. Jess, who does her own drafting, explains the annotation process more completely. Some of the terms she uses are specific to goldwork since Hand & Lock does more of this type of embroidery than tambour embroidery. However,

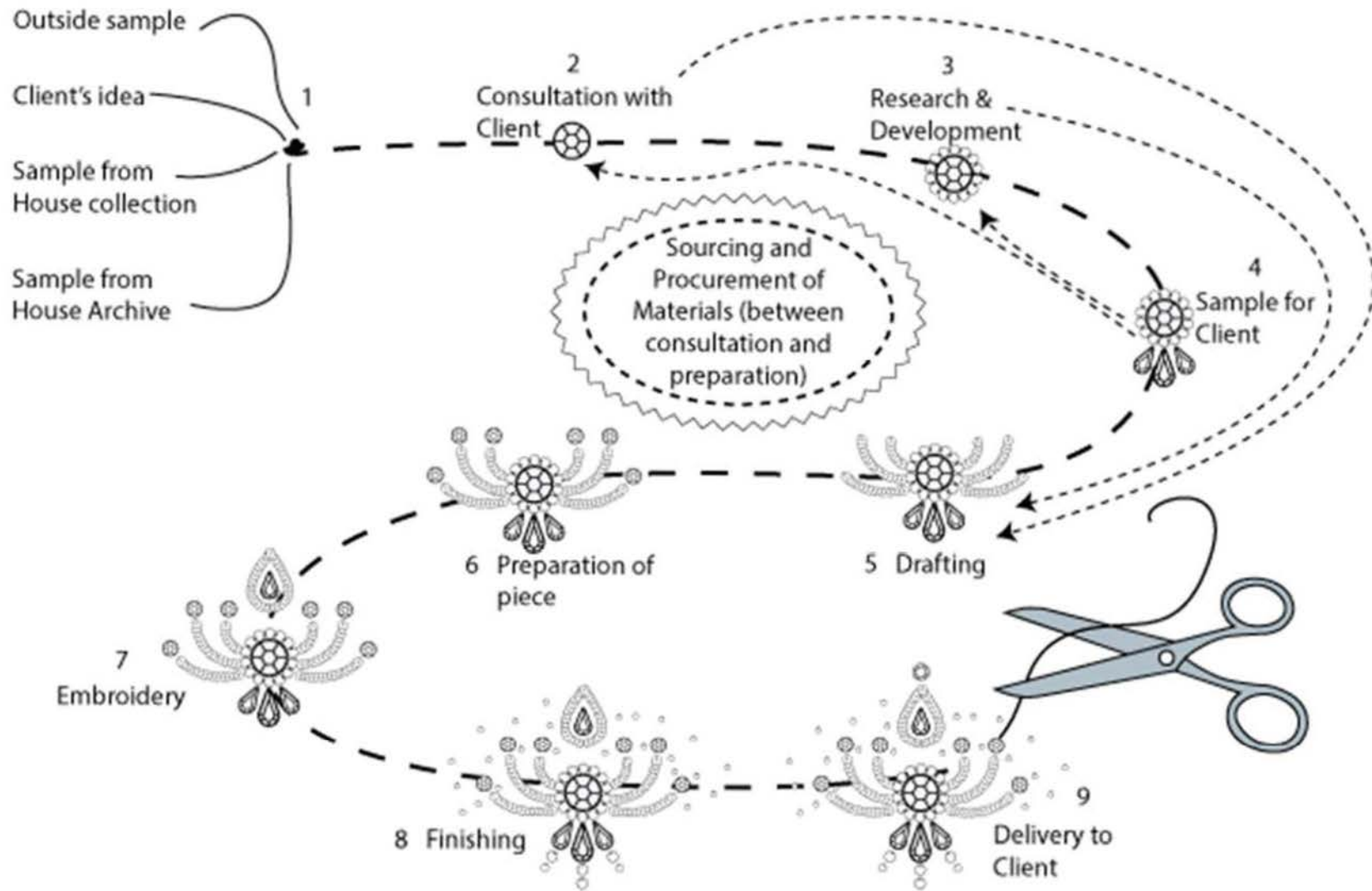


Figure 11. The Embroidery Process from Concept through Completion

she mentions making sure that the embroiderer understands if something is padded and how high the padding has to be. Embroiderers usually cover padding with additional embroidery. The use of additional embroidery over padding demonstrates that annotations may be for multiple layers of work.

Once I have my draft as a pencil drawing, I'll make sure that it's all correct and that the lines draw up [match] together, because embroidery can't just suddenly stop.

And then I'll annotate the design. So this will show the embroiderer which stitch direction they are meant to use, how high I want the padding, if they are going to be using pearl purl, bullion, gilt, plated, all those sorts of things. How I envisage the design to look overall. So everything is annotated down to the tiny, tiniest part of the design. You have to put reference colors as well, whether you want it silk shaded or just all in one block. Fell silks or P silks or anything like that.

Then I'll hand the design over to the embroiderer. She'll prick and pounce the design onto the fabric.

Jess explained that her drawing process starts as a pencil draft of the design. She checks the draft for correction. Jess spoke about making sure the lines match. Matching could refer to several things in embroidery design. She may be creating a design that occurs repeatedly, in which case, she needs to make sure the design lines match when the design repeats. She may be referring to creating drawings across several pieces of paper and making sure that the joined pieces make a complete design. Similarly, Jess may be talking about making embroidery that spans across several garment parts that must match when sewn together.

After checking and formalizing the design, Jess annotates the drawing. She gives the embroiderer detailed visual instructions on stitch direction, height of padding, and what materials to use. Jess must convey to the embroiderer exactly how she wants the embroidery to look. The instructions include every detail, including colors usage.

After completing the technical drawing, Jess gives drawing papers to the embroiderer. At Hand & Lock, the embroiderer prepares the work for the next stage, pricking and pouncing. At Pino Grasso, the drafters completed the pricking and pouncing.

The pricking and pouncing that Jess described is the next step in the embroidery process, transferring the design to fabric. Step six on figure 11 represents this stage. While pricking and pouncing is not the only method of transferring designs, it is one of the most traditional (Naudin & Simon, 1996; Nicholas & Teague, 1975; P. White, 1994). Pricking is a method of making holes in a paper copy of the embroidery design along the design lines. Pouncing, the process of rubbing powdered chalk or graphite through the pricked paper onto the base fabric for the embroidery work, follows pricking. This combined process leaves series of chalk dots on the fabric, forming the embroidery design, much like a very detailed dot-to-dot puzzle.

After preparation of the piece, embroiderers stretch the prepared fabric onto embroidery frames and begin to embroider. I asked some of the interviewees how many embroiderers work for the workshop in order to get a better idea of each company's size. In most cases, they differentiated between full-time embroiderers and part-time embroiderers hired during the busy seasons. This shows a strong fluctuation in the workflow. Table 4 gives the numbers as the embroiderers the interviewees reported. I contrasted the number of regular, full-time embroiderers in the middle column against the number of embroiderers employed by the atelier at the peak of the busy seasons.

After the embroiderers complete the embroidery, the embroiderers or other embroidery workers "finish" the work. Finishing involves checking the embroidery and removing it from the frame. The atelier then delivers the work to the client. Figure 11 show these last two steps, labeled steps eight and nine.

Table 4

*Number of Embroiderers Employed by Ateliers*

Company	Full-time embroiderers	Maximum number (including over-hire)
Pino Grasso	5-8	30
Gouvernel	5	10
Lanèl	unknown	Double the standard number
Ateliers Darolti	herself	3-4

The embroidery is complete and in the client's possession. However, the embroiderer's relationship with the embroidery is not always finished. Outside of the official interview, Régis revealed that embroidered pieces come back to Lanèl for repair after damage at fashion shows or museum exhibitions. An American embroiderer also told me about the practice of repairing past projects for clients. For at least two embroiderers, the embroidery process does not end with delivery.

*The fashion markets, fashion calendar, and influences on embroidery methods.* The embroidery companies adapted the embroidery process, particularly the design process to meet the needs of the fashion industry. However, the adaptations go beyond trying to understand the creative desires of the fashion designers and finding ways to communicate possible techniques to clients. The organization of the high fashion markets and as a result, the fashion calendar has changed over the last 50 years. The fashion industry changes have affected how the embroidery industry works. Raffaella and Mr. Grasso spoke about how the changes in the fashion market affect Pino Grasso.

The big change was in the 70s, the birth of the prêt-à-porter. That has changed everything. Because at the beginning, you had just high fashion and you work with your 10, 12 dresses a year, very, very important, very, very rich and full of Embroideries.

Then the prêt-à-porter changed completely the organization and the evolution of the work because you have to create swatches, then the collection piece, and then the production and so you have to change all the [organization].

So you have to divide your work. One section following the prêt-à-porter, that's to say [the] organization is completely different and people involved just for production and everything.

And high fashion, that still goes on. That's still going on very well. Very important pieces that have a big amount of hours for each piece. So you have to fix those people just for that work and you cannot use them for other things.

Mr. Grasso related that the first major change in recent fashion history was the birth of the prêt-à-porter collections in the 1970s. Before that time, the embroiderers focused solely on high fashion collections. For high fashion collections, embroiderers worked on 10 to 12 very detailed dresses a year.

Prêt-à-porter work required the embroiderers to expand the embroidery process. Pino Grasso creates samples, the collection garment, then production garments for prêt-à-porter, whereas the earlier high fashion collections only required the collection garments. Pino Grasso also had to re-organize the workshop into two sections. Because prêt-à-porter and high fashion are different markets with different price points and different customers, Pino Grasso keeps different embroiderers for the two divisions. The embroiderers become accustomed to the techniques, materials, and styles used in their market as well as the level of detail expected. In this way, they can better ensure that the embroidery techniques and quality are appropriate to the end market. However, no other interviewee mentioned this method of separating embroiderers by market.

In addition to changing how Pino Grasso organized its embroiderers, the advent of prêt-à-porter also changed the work schedule. Raffaella expressed the chaos of the current fashion schedule very precisely.

But today, it's something very schizophrenic. Because you have to change all the time and in a very quick time. And once high fashion had only 2 seasons. Now you have 4 seasons. So it's one day with one, one day with the other, spring, summer, winter all mixed together. It's very difficult to follow their mind. And that's one difference that's become more and more involving every day.

Now, this year for instance, we did high fashion, then cruise, then prêt-à-porter cruise. Cruise is the middle season. Prêt-à-porter is now starting again. But for instance, one client is starting now [beginning of July], one client is starting at the end of July, another one at the beginning of September. Everybody starts when he needs to see his swatches. And then they create their new collection. And so you are [constantly] going from winter, summer and high fashion to prêt-à-porter and back and again. So it's a little more complicated. But the going of the work is always the same, no?

Collection, production, or high fashion big show and going together but dividing persons and materials and seasons. You have to make everything combine exactly and it goes on good.

Raffaella explained that there once were only the two high fashion seasons each year. With the introduction of prêt-à-porter, there are now four primary fashion seasons. The employees of Pino Grasso must move between seasons constantly. The continual change between seasons and markets creates confusion for the embroiderers and embroidery designers.

Raffaella gave an example of how the increase in seasons and fashion markets affects working methods. She said that in 2013, Pino Grasso worked on high fashion, then cruise (an additional season), then prêt-à-porter cruise, then prêt-à-porter spring/summer season. However, there is no standardized timetable for collections. Each client contacts the embroiderer when he or she is ready to discuss embroidery and see embroidery samples. After consultation and the design process, Pino Grasso produces the embroidery for their collection. By then, Pino Grasso may already be consulting and designing for another season's work. Further complicating Pino Grasso's schedule, production work must be planned amidst collection and sampling work for the rotating seasons.

Raffaella says there are four seasons, but mentions six. In fact, there are sometimes up to eight seasons with which the high fashion and auxiliary industries work (B. White, 2010; Wong, 2013). The four main seasons are 1) spring/summer high fashion (*haute couture/alta moda*), 2) fall/winter high fashion (*haute couture/alta moda*), 3) spring/summer prêt-à-porter, 4) fall/winter prêt-à-porter. Two newer additions are cruise high fashion and cruise prêt-à-porter. Cruise is a



late winter/early spring season. The season originally catered to wealthy clients traveling to warmer climates. However, cruise is now a season for reinterpreting previous designs in a more sellable way as well as for design experimentation (Wong, 2013). The newest season, which Raffaella did not speak about, are early fall high fashion and early fall prêt-à-porter. Early fall is the counterpart to cruise, a late summer/early fall season. Early fall serves the same purpose as cruise, redevelopment for better sales and experimentation before putting the designs into larger production in the main fall/winter season (Wong, 2013).

This increase from two seasons, to four, then six, now eight makes keeping track of all processes ever-more challenging. As Raffaella said, people often have to flip between seasons, between markets, between collections, sampling, and production processes on a daily basis. As the fashion designers often suffer the same schedule crunch, each designer starts his or her embroidery design and sampling process according to t personal or company timelines. This in turn affects how much time the embroidery company has to execute the embroidery process. Pino Grasso must arrange a very careful schedule to meet all customers' deadlines.

The division between high fashion and prêt-à-porter also affected the working methods of Gouvernel. While they did not divide embroiderers like Pino Grasso, Christine spoke about dividing collections as well as sometime materials or techniques. Haute couture or *alta moda* not only requires higher quality, but it must look more luxurious.

We say this could be used for prêt-a-porter and this exclusively for haute couture otherwise, it is too expensive. There is a lot of embroidery that does not work for haute couture.

But for prêt-à-porter, they disseminate the line to us for embroidery proposal and to see what will work or not.

In the beginning, there are lots of creations. We propose a collection of about 30 models in 5 or 6 colors for each collection. It's a different approach than embroidery. It's us who give the "look".

Christine said that many techniques do not work for couture. Conversely, while prêt-à-porter also has a certain look, the price point is more important. Therefore, embroiderers cannot use many of the couture-appropriate techniques or materials for prêt-à-porter because they are too costly. The techniques for haute couture must reflect the luxury and quality of the market. Christine states that many embroidery techniques do not meet the requirements of haute couture.

Christine explains that the fashion houses give Gouvernel a brief on the collection's theme, colors, and fabrics. Then Gouvernel does their own research and makes a miniature collection of about 30 embroidery and trim samples in about 5 or 6 colors. Gouvernel presents the collection of samples as a proposal for the fashion house to analyze. The fashion designer will then consult with the embroiderers and decide what works, what does not, what to change, and what to produce. However, as Christine makes clear, Gouvernel, not the fashion house, establishes the initial "look" for the Embroideries and trims.

The embroidery process from concept through realization of the product was generally the same for all the embroidery companies who discussed the steps. There were different nuances according to the companies' specialties or types of customers. However, most of the embroiderers I interviewed emphasized their role in the creative phase. Some felt that they were very autonomous while others believed that the fashion houses were not listening to their opinions and expertise as much as once before.

The main theme evolution of the company included the sub-themes company history and current embroidery industry methods. The sub-themes and the topics within the sub-themes are closely related. The company procedures informed how the company transformed into its current form. For instance, when Gouvernel produced household linens, the company was organized differently that it is today for high fashion embroidery. The embroidery companies also

developed through the influence of the embroiderers. My analyses revealed the embroiderer's role in the design and embroidery processes. Interaction with and changes in the fashion industry affected the working procedures of the embroiderers.

The embroiderers' stories about the history of the embroidery companies fulfilled the core purpose of the study: capturing the stories of high fashion embroiderers with emphasis on the history of the embroidery industry. The embroiderers' explanations of the embroidery procedure, changes in company methods, and the influence of the fashion industry provides depth to the history.

The stories about the design and embroidery process address the question, how does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work. Jess and Scott gave personal accounts about what their jobs entail; whereas, Raffaella described the design and embroidery process from a more generalized point view, including all the jobs.

Through the analyses in this section I answered the research question, how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers. The embroiderers told the stories; they explained the changes. This history comes through the lens of individual companies and individual embroiderers rather than an industry-wide view.

The embroiderers recognized how their companies continue to evolve. Many of the past changes occurred to meet the needs of the fashion industry or to adapt to procedural changes. Current changes are occurring to meet similar needs and challenges. However, the high fashion embroidery industry now exists in a global market. Therefore, the challenges reflect the globalization.

### **Current Challenges and Future Aspirations**

The embroidery workshops I visited were part of a dwindling number of fashion embroidery establishments in Europe. All the interviewees were aware of the fact that their places of employment were in a struggling industry and as such, the challenges their companies faced were often a topic of discussion. Two participants were less optimistic and spoke only of the difficulties or stated that they could not foresee a future for fashion embroidery in Europe. However, six of the management-level participants discussed not only current survival techniques but also their hopes for changes in the future and ways to improve business.

Current challenges and future aspirations formed the third main theme in data analysis. The theme is about challenges to the embroidery industry and solutions to the challenges. I divided the theme into sub-themes: challenges in the embroidery industry, future of fashion embroidery, and aspirations, hopes, and dreams.

The embroiderers' stories about their future and the industry's future reflected the positive and negative outlooks of the embroiderers. The reports on the challenges indicated the embroiderers' depth of understanding for their business. Solutions reflected the innovation of embroiderers. Future aspirations indicated the level of embroiderers' hope for continued success. The stories within each sub-theme revealed how the actions of the embroiderers are essential to the survival of the high fashion embroidery industry.

The stories contained in this section finish answering the research question, how has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers. Education and career path stories provided the beginning of the embroiderers' stories and evolution of the company and methods provided the beginning of each company's and industry's stories. The stories about

the current problems and future hopes provide the ending stories for embroiderers, companies, and the industry.

**Challenges in the embroidery industry.** All of the management-level embroidery professionals I interviewed spoke about the difficulties they were encountering in the embroidery industry. Many of the problems were related. For instance, the most discussed problem was Asian competition. However, the embroiderers also talked about difficulties with changing clientele, the necessity of keeping costs low, and the difficulty in finding embroidery materials. All four listed problems are related to globalization.

*Asian competition in the embroidery industry.* Offshore competition was a re-occurring theme among the participants. Embroidery production is moving to Asia. China and especially India are the biggest sources of foreign embroidery production according to Régis of Lanèl, Christine of Gouvernel, and Claire of Hawthorne & Heaney. Competing with the low labor costs and large workforce of Asia has become a major challenge for European fashion embroiderers. Many of embroidery houses in France, England, and Italy have closed because of the Asian competition. Christine said, “The time has passed for an industry when we had 80,000 embroiderers in the region,” referring to the days when Eastern France was the European center of the embroidery trade and its subsequent demise due to re-location to Asia.

Raffaella, Mr. Grasso’s daughter, spoke out about the nature of this global environment.

We don’t have to face only France or other countries here in Europe, but we have to confront ourselves with India and China too. And that’s a big problem for us because their costs are very, very low and we cannot compete with this.

Pino Grasso is concerned about different types of competition. They have to compete with other European embroiderers, such as the French and the English. In talking with professional embroiderers, I learned that competition amongst European embroiderers is more of a challenge of design ability and embroidery skill. The cost of embroidery among the European workshops is

relatively similar. However, cost becomes an issue when competing against Asian embroidery manufacturers. The low labor costs of the Asian embroiderers make it difficult for Pino Grasso to remain competitive. They now have to find methods to keep or gain customers by means other than just the prowess of their embroidery skills.

In London, similar problems with Asian competition cut into production. Karin, the last hand-guided machine embroiderer at Hand & Lock reminisced over what her job was like before exporting and importing became common practice in embroidery.

Everything seems to get sent to India, or China. In the old days, we used to have racks, you know, dress racks with bags of work. And that used to be full-up. Irish on one side and Cornely [gesturing the other direction]. And that used to be jam-packed with stuff to do. When I started, there used to be 10 machines, Irish and 4 of Cornely. There used to be lots of work. Now it goes to India. Well, they are cheaper. Even going over and coming back.

Karin used to be one of several machine embroiderers at her firm; however, the number has slowly dwindled, leaving her the sole machine embroiderer. The number of machines she quoted indicates the number of embroidery machinists that used to be on staff. She also talked about the amount of work that always used to be waiting for execution before exporting became common practice.

However, as Karin said, Hand & Lock now sends the majority of the machine embroidery to India for production. Hand & Lock uses Asian production because of the lower labor rates. As Karin indicated, the work is less expensive, even when shipping costs and fees are added to the total. Almost every interviewee and certainly every designer, artistic director, or president I interviewed talked about the challenge of competing in a global economy.

Régis of Lanèl talked about how Asian competition and keeping his production entirely based in France has affected his work.

And now, I think I am the only embroiderer that doesn't have an atelier in India. I work only in France. All my embroiderers, the women, are here. And I don't work with India.

But it is more expensive. In the beginning, I worked with prêt-à-porter, but, now, I am too expensive and I only work for high fashion [haute couture].

While several of the other workshops send larger orders to for production in overseas workshops, Lanèl has chosen to keep all their embroidery in France. Régis uses embroiderers who are in his Paris workshops or work from their homes in the area surrounding Paris. Because French labor costs are higher than Indian or Chinese, Lanèl's embroidery is higher-priced than their competition that utilizes Asian labor. Before utilization of Asian embroiderers became common practice, Lanèl regularly worked with the prêt-à-porter market. However as access to Asian labor became easier, designers of the more price-sensitive markets started using Indian and Chinese embroiderers due to the cheaper costs. Because of this price difference, Régis says that Lanèl produces embroidery almost solely for haute couture, the highest price market.

Christine, who rescued a company from failing under such competition, spoke to the topic of global competition at length.

At the beginning, I believe that in France, we always create, and in Asia, they always "do". But I'm not sure. Now the Asians also create because many, many Chinese people have come to France to the embroidery schools, learned the embroidery, learned the styles and designs, the "heart", and many other things. And, they are not stupid, they do a very good interpretation of the work. I'm sure that in maybe 5 or 10 years we will completely lose our advantage. Because we always say, "Oh, we are the best. In Europe, we are the best." Maybe in the USA too.

Christine noted in that France's advantage had previously been its creativity and ability to design, whereas Asia's production capabilities were its strength. However, times are changing. She stated that Asian manufacturers and embroiderers have been sending students to European schools in order to learn European design skills as well as to gain a better sense of European style. By sending students to Europe, Asia is closing the gap between design and production. Christine fears that eventually Asian competition may put French embroiderers out of business

due to the difference in production costs. Christine also explained that arrogance, complacency, and reliance on always being “the best” also add to the downfall of European embroidery.

**Costs.** With more competition coming from Asia, where labor costs are low, embroidery companies in Europe have to cut their own costs in any way possible to help remain competitive. They are adopting various ways of doing this, such as more carefully sourcing materials, designing less labor-intensive Embroideries, or even cooperating with Asian manufacturers and outsourcing their work to Asia once they have done the designing. However, there is still a limit to how much can be cut from the costs. Limiting costs is one of the big concerns at Pino Grasso Embroideries.

The biggest problem now is always prices. This is the problem for everybody now. Something you have to fight every day because they always want lower, lower, lower. But the costs here, it's not something that you can get lower if you have to pay people, if you have to get materials. There are no big solutions for that.

Raffaella said that keeping costs low has become the biggest difficulty not only for Pino Grasso, but also for most European embroiderers. Because clients are constantly demanding ever-lower prices, Pino Grasso is continually evaluating production and business costs. However, as Raffaella indicated, embroidery requires human labor and laborers must be paid. Additionally, embroidery requires substantial amounts of materials; these costs are included in the ultimate price. Embroiderers cannot eliminate labor and materials from hand embroidery, limiting how much embroidery companies can reduce prices.

Christine of Gouvernel discussed similar difficulties with prices and costs.

[Others] buy less expensive machine embroidery. It's not the same as that which is made in France. I think that it's a problem of the cost, the price. We are dealing with luxury items. The price is always very expensive.

Christine explained that the cheaper machine embroidery is not the same as hand-executed fashion embroidery. However, as Christine indicated, some designers and manufacturers are



willing to make the artistic sacrifice in order to save the money. This is because hand embroidery is far more expensive than many budgets allow. It is a luxury item and will always be expensive due to the labor.

The machine embroidery Christine spoke about refers to computerized, multi-head embroidery. A single computer can automate and operate many machines simultaneously. It typically only requires one operator (person) to mind the bank of machines, and they need far less skill than a traditional hand embroiderer or operator of hand-guided machines. This can significantly cut labor costs, particularly when produced in Asia. The difference between Embroideries Christine referred to includes computerized embroidery's more limited stitch abilities and lack of human "artistic touch." She did not clarify the differences since we were speaking as two professional embroiderers.

When producing luxury goods, which is the realm in which hand embroidery exists, reduction in design quality is devastating to the end product's market value. The effort to keep artistic quality and design innovation but not allow costs to escalate to un-reasonable heights is a great challenge throughout the fashion industry (Diamond & Diamond, 2013; Mercier, 1992). Embroiderers, in particular, have had to deal with the problem since they are a decorative part of the garments, not a necessary one.

*Changing clientele.* Part of the pressure for lower costs comes from the consumer. Modern customers often do not understand the value of labor nor the time consuming labor required to embroider a garment. Nor do they have the artistic eye to tell the difference between high-quality embroidery and some product done quickly or by machine. Designers can now use cheaper machine embroidery on high-end garments and the majority of clients are happy. While this makes it easier to cut costs, it makes it more difficult for designers and manufacturers to

justify spending money on hand embroidery if the clients cannot see its value. “People may have the money, but they don’t always have the culture or understanding of the quality of things nor do they have an appreciation for the amount of work that goes into things,” explained Régis of Lanèl. He was concerned that clients and designers cannot always see the difference between his products and more cheaply made import goods. It is a cause of concern for the future of embroidery for him.

Raffaella of Pino Grasso explained that the current culture does not understand the costs and labor behind luxury goods. Additionally, customers think that they should prefer the cheaper object due to socialization, even when they can distinctly see the quality difference.

Everything that’s... even if it’s handmade, even if it requires hours and hour and hours to be done, people don’t understand that it’s something that’s got high cost because of the involvement behind, the hours that the hand, the mind, the thought. They just think that I can find something similar that costs less than half, why should I pay so much for that. Even if they know, because it’s our culture to know that handmade means “precious”.

But it’s the mind, the cultural situation now that tells us if it costs less, why can’t I prefer these things over the other. So it’s very difficult also for us to let people know the importance of things.

Raffaella expressed her frustration that people no longer understand hand-made objects have higher prices because of the labor and time involved in their making. This time is not just physical labor but is also creative and intellectual labor. She noted that as cheaper, mass-produced goods have flooded the market, the population has developed the mindset that if something looks reasonably similar or serves a similar function, but costs half the price, the higher priced item should not cost so much. Consumers do not recognize the differences in quality, artistic merit, individuality, or any of the other attributes that make the higher priced item worth the cost. Nor do they place value on the labor and effort that went into the item. Raffaella felt this is a particular tragedy for Italy since it is part of their culture, brought up on the arts, to understand that handmade equates “precious”.

Raffaella thought that the modern cultural situation has infused the populous with the notion that cheaper is better. She pointed out that people now convince themselves that they should prefer the cheaper objects or services without regard to quality. This current mindset makes it difficult for firms of the “traditional arts,” like Pino Grasso, to educate people on the importance of the arts, perpetuating tradition, and propagating Italian culture.

***Political and economic challenges.*** Fluctuations in the economic environment or problems in the world political climate affect many businesses. Luxury-oriented companies, however, suffer detrimental repercussions on a more global scale than many establishments. Their clientele is composed of only a small number of the wealthiest citizens from countries all over the world. If war or economic crisis affects any group of these clients, the luxury companies feel the loss. For many of the high fashion houses, the wealthy sheiks and royalty of the Middle East were a core portion of their clients (P. White, 1994). “The way of work has changed and when we had the first Gulf War, we had less work because the princes weren’t buying the clothes,” Régis of Lanèl explained.

When hostilities broke out between Iraq and Jordan in 1990, and the Gulf War ensued, almost all high fashion business was lost between the Middle East and Western Europe. During the interim years between the Gulf War and the attack on the World Trade Center towers of 2001, some of the business resumed. My fashion and embroidery contacts explained that since 2001, fashion business with the Middle East has been “spotty” at best. While I have heard this problem discussed and debated by several fashion people over the years, the Grassos explained how this also affected and perhaps permanently changed fashion embroidery. The political environment severely curtailed their business.

A bad situation that has caused problems and destabilized a little bit our company has been the Gulf War. The war in the Middle East, for us has also been a problem because

we were making two very important collections and they stopped everything. Everything went wrong and no more Embroideries for a long period. Everybody stopped for a long time.

The military actions in the Persian Gulf caused difficulties for Pino Grasso. Raffaella said that just before hostilities broke out, Pino Grasso was embroidering two fashion collections. The fashion houses called a halt to all work on the collections when the military actions began. Due to the political atmosphere clients shied away from embroidered products for an extended period.

During my years in contact with the European fashion industry, I have noted that this halt has occurred every time there has been action in the Middle East since the 1990s. The embroiderers spoke of two reasons. The first is that European and American customers do not want to display wealth during times of turmoil. The second is that, according to the embroiderers, many of the best customers of European high fashion are Middle Eastern. War and political unrest in the Persian Gulf disrupt trade between the Middle East and Western Europe.

Other political and economic situations have had just as profound an impact on fashion embroidery. The European financial crisis was of critical concern to Victoria Darolti, Raffaella Grasso, and Abbey. Abbey described how fast the situation changed for her company. "You know that in 2008 the financial crisis arrived and we were at the top, in July. I remember; it was so important. We had a huge collection [in shop]. And in September, phhft, it's like that." The dates mentioned, July and September, are particularly important because they correspond to the weeks when two of the Paris fashion show occur. Couture fashion houses release their fall/winter couture collections in July and show their spring/summer prêt-à-porter collections in September. The fall/ winter couture collections just finished at the height of the economic bubble in July and were starting sales. Fashion houses and the auxiliary industries were also preparing the September prêt collection when the financial crisis began. Suddenly all sales and work stopped.

Victoria Darolti briefly explained that even though the French economic crisis was affecting her business, she was determined to find a way to survive it. As her translator mentioned, there were less jobs during this period, but there was still *some* work. Ateliers Darolti is a small, relatively new company. By being diligent about managing business matters, Victoria was able to survive.

So of course, the crisis is present, even in fashion. But at the same time luxury, people who have money and want beautiful things, still have the money to pay for them. So maybe you just don't make the same amounts that you could do before, but she doesn't regret. She wants to keep doing it.

At the time of this interview, France was still amidst of the financial crisis and work was still slow for fashion. However, Victoria explained that even when the situation was at its worst, there were still wealthy clients who want to purchase luxury items. While they may not have purchased as many items and there were not as many clients, the work was still there. Through prudent management, a small business like Victoria's could persevere. Victoria enjoyed her work and wanted to continue doing it, despite the challenges.

Raffaella of Pino Grasso summed up the effects of any of these negative situations succinctly.

All these political and economic situations have always created a stop in our work. Because luxury finds a decrease. People don't want to show, don't want to - as if they want to keep their head down for a little bit. Everything is still, is quiet. No more big parties, no more big events. Even if there are big events, they are very quiet, no big jewelry.

For instance, I know there was to be a very important show, and the celebrity who was to wear a dress we embroidered. She decided she didn't want to wear this dress anymore because she wanted to wear something without embroidery and without jewels.

And so it becomes difficult because you are something that is added to the dress. So the dress can live also without you. So you are put apart just for a little bit, but for us, it means we don't have work for months. The work was just going slower. But slower means that you don't earn enough to go on.

At the onset of political unrest or after great tragedy, those in the public eye choose not to wear anything that appears too rich, as the public often perceives it disrespectful to those who are directly affected by the event. Clients shun, hide, or tone down luxury goods during these times. There are fewer large events and parties. Those events that do take place are toned down and are more subdued in atmosphere. With the subdued events come subdued appearances and apparel, again, limiting the display of luxury and wealth to the public.

In particular, Raffaella referenced an instance in which a designer commissioned Pino Grasso to embroider a gown for a celebrity to wear to a major event. A political or tragic event occurred that changed the social atmosphere just before the event. Due to this change, the celebrity chose to wear a toned-down gown without embroidery.

Raffaella explains the fact that embroidery is an added element to garments. The dresses can exist without embroidery. Due to its cost, hand embroidery is a luxury item. Fashion embroidery is subject to societal trends of whether it is correct to display luxury and wealth, and is often one of the first things eliminated from the clothing of public figures. This can start a fashion trend of unembellished garments that will last a short while, but in the meantime, is economically difficult for the embroidery companies, as Raffaella points out.

Abbey, creative director of a Parisian haute couture embroidery atelier illustrated the effects of political turmoil in a different manner. “When you look at the embroidery during the war, even during the war, the last one, there is black and no bead, and more thread, but people wanted always to have something.” She told me that embroidery never goes away. It reflects the mood of the people through color and use of materials, such as dark colors and lack of shiny objects to indicate sober times. It changes because of events. It may slow, but it is always present.

**Materials.** Despite globalization and the internet, materials for embroidery are becoming more difficult to obtain. Embroiderers can now order goods from all over the world, but this is often not a viable option because they need the goods immediately to meet production deadlines. Many suppliers also have large minimum order requirements that prevent hand embroiderers from utilizing their services. When embroidering a single dress, the embroiderer does not need 300 kilograms of a single type of sequin. Even minimums of one to two kilograms can be too much. Raffaella Grasso expressed this frustration.

They want as a minimum a very high quantity. So you have to buy for instance, a very big amount of white or red or the color that the client wants. And then use a very small amount and keep it for your life-long because this color will go no more.

Raffaella said that many suppliers require high minimum orders for the materials they sell. Therefore, if Pino Grasso needs a specific material that is only available from one of these suppliers, they have to order a large amount. However, due to the nature of high-fashion hand embroidery, it is rare that Pino Grasso ever needs but a very small amount of the material. That means that they must store whatever materials are leftover from the order. Sometimes there are materials purchased in bulk that no other client ever requests and the materials linger in storage.

Many of the embroidery companies have stock rooms or storage units to house the materials they have bought in bulk over the years; however, not all embroiderers keep a large stock room, because of the expense of the space. Moreover, continually adding more materials to the stock requires more storage space, so embroiderers prefer to buy materials in precisely the required amount.

Along with the trouble of high minimums, embroiderers face the problem that many of their suppliers are going out of business. At Pino Grasso, Raffaella lamented over the fact that there is now only one sequin manufacturer in Italy. “Everybody’s closing. There was another factory near Milan that did some sequins and things and it’s closed now.” The Grassos now have

to purchase sequins from Paris at a much higher price if they cannot find what they need at the sole remaining Italian manufacturer.

Jess of Hand & Lock revealed that while they occasionally sourced materials from abroad, they typically have to find material locally, like Pino Grasso, in order to meet deadlines. Hand & Lock even makes much of their own goldwork materials. They keep machinery to wind the wires and make the braids for the specialized materials. In reference to finding materials locally rather than abroad, Jess said,

Because it's usually short deadlines. It's usually last minute, "this doesn't work, we need to find something else." So it's usually from here. Sometimes, occasionally, we'll get things from abroad, but not very often.

The fashion calendar and the working methods of fashion manufacturers typically influence decisions in fashion embroidery. The rushed nature of the fashion industry impacts the embroidery business, making deadlines very tight. There is very little time for sourcing (industry term for finding) materials and when decisions change, time is even more pressed. Therefore, Hand & Lock usually tries to find materials in London or nearby so shipping does not affect production time. Only when Hand & Lock employees cannot source items locally do they resort to sourcing items from abroad.

Embroiderers expressed their frustration in obtaining materials suitable for high fashion embroidery in the amounts they need, when they need it, and in the right colors, finishes, sizes, shapes, and textures. The high fashion embroidery industry is a small industry that produces limited numbers of goods on a tight schedule but with maximum design variability. These industry traits create difficulties not only in procuring materials, but also in finding trained workers. As fashion embroidery is a small industry, the career choice is less known. The tight schedule and design variability require fast, skilled workers.



*Finding embroiderers.* Finding new embroiderers is becoming a more difficult endeavor for the upper-level management of the embroidery companies in Italy and France. Régis of Lanèl and Mr. Grasso vocalized this concern the clearest, but Victoria Darolti also indicated difficulties. For Mr. Grasso and his daughter, it is a serious concern.

If we need more [embroiderers], we know where to go and find them. The problem is that we find a lot of needle [embroiderers], but they are not crochet workers, that's very difficult. That's why we also want to have a school. To find good hands and train them. To teach them is the best. [There are] lots of people calling us and asking us if we are going to open a school. The problem is that a lot of them are just looking for something that is just a hobby, for free time. But the ones that want to learn it as a job just ask how many hours that they need to learn it. We always tell them that to learn it as it is, it's not a question of hours, but of years. So a lot of people say, "I don't know, perhaps. We'll see." So it's not so easy to find good hands.

The Grassos mentioned on several occasions that, they can still find women that are good at needle embroidery, but that none of them are trained in professional tambour embroidery (the crochet workers). Because of this lack of trained professional tambour embroiderers, the Grassos would like to start an embroidery school. Their hope is that while teaching embroidery, they will find people who have the right disposition and drive to become professional embroiderers. Then they can further train them in the ways of professional embroidery.

Raffaella indicated there is already a demand for Pino Grasso to open an embroidery school. However, many of the requests are from people looking to learn the embroidery techniques as a hobby, not as a profession. Those who call the firm inquiring about learning the skill as a profession typically do not reveal the temperament for full-time professional embroidery. The time involved in learning the trade is more than most people are willing commit. Raffaella Grasso better established the learning curve for professional embroidery when she told me, "We have a woman that has been here for seven years and she still has to learn a lot." The training period of years rather than weeks or months deters most would-be trainees.

There is also the difficulty of finding embroiderers or trainees with the right mentality or personality for full-time embroidery work. Régis of Lanèl was concerned with this aspect of finding future embroiderers. The “constraint” he spoke about refers to the requirements of meeting deadlines, working to the needs of clients, and being disciplined about their work, all necessary abilities for a professional workshop embroiderer.

Now the new generation has some problem to make some effort. The new embroiderers have the passion for the trade, but they can't work within the constraint. In order to work at an artisanal trade, one has to be able to work with deadlines. In order to have things ready for the couture shows, they have to work for very long periods of time. The youth no longer have these strengths.

Régis said that the younger generation of embroiderers has difficulty exerting enough effort. While they have plenty of creativity and love for the trade, they are not very good at working to the professional requirements of the job. To be a success in an artisanal job, Régis pointed out that one must be adept at working within time constraints and deadlines. This is particularly true when working with haute couture because much of the work occurs in very short periods and requires extreme endurance to work to very long hours during these periods. He says that the youth no longer have the discipline and professionalism to meet these needs of professional embroidery.

Victoria Darolti of Ateliers Darolti spoke at length about her desire to educate future embroiderers. She repeatedly described her desire to share her embroidery skills and make sure that the skills do not disappear. However, she mentioned that part of the reason she wanted to expand her embroidery school was to increase her chances of finding her successor. This indicates that she is also concerned about obtaining the right trainees and embroiderers.

The high fashion hand embroidery companies in France, England, and Italy have faced many difficulties. The most trying issues have been competition with the cheap labor rates of Asian manufacturing and the repercussions that come with the new global economy. The

problems related to global economics include a new cultural mentality of the customer and difficulties in sourcing material. As embroidery companies succumb to the economic pressure and close, the remaining companies also have more difficulty in finding new embroiderers due to the shrinking job market and because students do not want to train for what they view as a dying or old-fashioned trade.

### **Future of fashion embroidery.**

And I always say we are the Last Mohicans, you know. So, we try to resist. But, maybe we make something else? We must evolve. It's just part of life. I'm not nostalgic.

-Christine of Gouvernel

Competition from Asia has been one of the biggest hurdles the European fashion embroiderers have had to face in recent decades. Due to the differences in labor costs, direct competition is often not possible for the French, English, and Italian embroiderers. Rather, they have found other ways to remain a viable option for European high fashion.

With challenges come solutions. The embroidery companies that are still in business have survived for a reason. They adapt to changing times. The people within the companies are not only creative, but they are also determined to keep fashion embroidery alive. Moreover, while the majority of the challenges to embroidery are related, the solutions the embroiderers devised to overcome the problems are more varied.

The embroidery house that made the most dramatic change to stay competitive is Gouvernel. Upon purchasing the dying company, Christine used her business sense to make the embroidery less labor-intensive, while still appearing precious. Furthermore, she did it in a way that the embroidery can be added to garment pieces in an outside factory, allowing designers to take advantage of overseas manufacturing opportunities. In Christine's words, "I have developed

a method of exportable embroidery in bands or on patches [appliqués] for applying to apparel during or after manufacturing.”

Before I started the recording device, Christine explained how she changed the embroidery process at Gouvernel. Rather than the traditional method of embroidering directly on the garment pieces, they now embroider on strips or pieces of fine, soft tulle. This process allows Gouvernel to ship the embroidery as rolls of trim or as patches to garment manufacturers; these patches are later applied during the construction (sewing) process. The tulle base fabric blends with the garment fabric and the embroidery appears sewn directly to the garment.

Another change Christine has made is the type of embroidery on which Gouvernel now focuses. Formerly, the company was primarily a tambour and needle embroidery company. While they still do these types of embroidery, with the business now heavily invested in the new sew-on embroidery, they utilize hand-guided machine embroidery far more. This machine embroidery, particularly Cornely embroidery, is used on the tulle strips and trims in such a manner that it is just as high quality as tambour embroidery, but with less labor. Along with the Cornely work, Gouvernel now uses macramé and crochet extensively to augment and enhance the embroidery. These are both handcrafts and still require time to execute, but they are faster for the space they cover than needle or tambour embroidery (field notes, July 9, 2013).

Some of the solutions to competing are more standard. For instance, Christine and the Grassos talked about their quick turn-around for orders being one of their primary advantages over foreign embroiderers. Christine verbalized the constant rush inherent in the fashion world and how it impacts embroidery (sentences 1 through 3):

Things are always needed “tomorrow”. Never in a couple of months, but tomorrow, they always need it tomorrow. “Hello, I want it tomorrow.”

Thus, when you work with foreign countries, things are far away. But, here in France, we are obligated to have the creations quickly for delivery. When a job is not rushed, it is

possible to send it elsewhere [out of the country]. That's fine. But, when they call and want it tomorrow, we must make it here. So there's a chance for us if we stay very, very fast. For the prototypes, for the research, for the short runs, we stay on top.

Christine found an advantage in quick turn-arounds. This is particularly necessary for collection pieces (the garments seen in the fashion shows) and research for the collection development. The development requires proximity to the fashion designers because of their need to interact with the embroiderers. Christine described the process, "We make our proper models and see if they work or not: 'This works, this doesn't, I like this, I don't like this.' [say the designers]." Based on the feedback from the fashion houses, the embroiderers make immediate changes to their work to better accommodate the designers' needs. This would be a slower and less accurate process using email, fax, internet, or parcel delivery service if the embroiderer were overseas, thereby often necessitating that fashion houses work with local embroiderers for at least the development phase.

Christine further emphasized that their advantage was in Gouvernel's ability to meet tight deadlines, maintain high quality, and to work with the fashion designers. The interaction between designer and supplier is key to the success of a fashion collection, as Rafaella makes visible:

It is necessary that we are very certain and efficient with our work, to be of high quality, and to work quickly so that efficient decisions can be made and products can be made. Respect the quality, the delivery date, and [that's] how things work here. That gives us a chance to survive. There are extraordinary companies that never make it because they can't deliver. In embroidery, it's also about the [fashion] designer and the supplier [of services, such as embroidery].

Christine explained that Gouvernel remains competitive through efficiencies at each step of the embroidery process and by maintaining high quality. Gouvernel works towards always meeting the delivery date and the clients' expectations of quality. Christine stated that maintaining standards about timeliness and quality provides Gouvernel the competitive advantage to survive. She also explained that some companies fail due to the inability to meet expectations, despite the

talent or abilities of the employees. Christine emphasized there is a relationship between the fashion designer and the supplier (embroiderer in this case). If the relationship is not respected, ties between the companies break.

Raffaella Grasso spoke about designer interaction more thoroughly. This particular quote is about Italian *alta moda*, the near equivalent to French haute couture. Prêt-à-porter requires similar involvement from the designer to get the designer's vision just right.

If it's high fashion, the work is a little bit longer. And with more swatches and more direct involvement. That is to say, they come here more. They look at the work in progress so that they can change the work step by step. Because high fashion is something more important and with more attention to the particular things there.

Raffaella said that collections work for high fashion requires more work and more interaction with the designers. Pino Grasso develops more samples for the high fashion designers and the designers come to the Pino Grasso workshops more in order to give feedback. The designers involve themselves in the embroidery development at each step and make changes at each stage. The interaction allows more attention to details.

As Christine mentioned in the following statement about Gouvernel's advantages, fashion designers still choose to have pieces embroidered in Europe because of quality. "Very important dresses, high fashion, collection pieces are made here. Clients want them to be done here, so we do them here." The Grassos explained that the dresses that get the most publicity and the most press exposure have the highest quality since thousands, if not millions of people see them. Fashion houses still make collections garments in Europe in order to insure their quality and to allow easy communication and interaction with the designer. Dresses produced for high-caliber clients, such as royalty and celebrities are also typically made in Europe for similar reasons.

Versatility and creativity are sometimes good answers to staying ahead of the competition. Victoria Darolti of Ateliers Darolti utilizes the many handcrafts she learned as a young girl in Romania, alongside her traditional French embroidery skills when designing and producing pieces for her clients. She also experiments with new materials and techniques. Victoria's translator explained, "So she can try out new techniques, new styles. She can propose things that are different from other workshops." This combination of traditional, folk, and experimental provides clientele with more innovative options than they are able to get not only from abroad, but from most other French embroiderers as well.

Pino Grasso experiments with creative ideas to lure both old and new clients. Part of their creativity is how they use materials. Since it is becoming increasingly more difficult to find the sequins, beads, and other materials they need, Pino Grasso has found new ways to use existing materials, especially non-traditional materials. Raffaella spoke about making special supplies, "That's why it's important to find something here that you can create because you can decide how to make it cost if you create it inside here." While the emphasis is on cost, at different times, Raffaella explained that making supplies and being creative also gave Pino Grasso a creative advantage. Additionally, she explained that by being creative, Pino Grasso sources locally more, reducing the time needed for procuring materials. Pino Grasso's method of creating what they need from what they can get has become a necessity for the company as well as a design specialty.

Customers are also coming to Pino Grasso for their distinctly Italian embroidery style.

They want something peculiar [unusual]. Something the others can recognize as Italian taste, good Italian fashion. And this is something that we can take for the opportunity and develop to find our own kind of fashion vision and collaborate with the designers and stylists to find our own kind of peculiar and specific kind of embroidery. To find our way, to find our market.

Raffaella said that Pino Grasso customers want unique designs or work. In particular, the clients want embroidery that is recognizably Italian in design. Raffaella explained that the desire for Italian design provides an opportunity and an advantage for Pino Grasso. Pino Grasso can develop and advocate its own style through collaboration with fashion designers and stylists. A unique style sets Pino Grasso apart from other embroidery workshops.

Raffaella Grasso emphasized that while French and Italian embroidery are the same at the roots, the subtle differences in technique and style make the two distinct. These differences, which often are difficult to put into words, are what clients are now seeking.

This is important, because lunéville [French tambour embroidery] is something, but Italian crochet is something else. Even if it's very similar, even if it's the same thing in the end. It's a stitch point, it's a chain stitch, but the way we work it is a little bit different. Our style, our mind, our background, our culture is something different. So you put it in your work.

Raffaella said the French and Italian tambour embroidery are subtly different. The two styles both utilize chain stitches, however, Italian embroiderers use the stitches in a slightly different way. Raffaella explained that “our style, our mind, our background, our culture” create a different looking product. Just as no two embroiderers will have identical stitches, no two cultures will have identical styles. The cultural differences make “Italian style.” Pino Grasso capitalizes upon Italian design originating from the cultural differences.

Régis of Lanèl expressed a similar idea about embroiderers' styles.

All embroiderers have the same materials. We have some different ways to use it.

I say to my colleague, it would be interesting if one designer gave all the companies one drawing and each company embroider. We would have all different samples with the same materials because the way of work, it's not the same here.

Régis indicated that the style of every embroidery atelier is slightly different. He believed that even if a designer gave each of the shops the same designs and the same materials, they would produce very different pieces because of these differences. Régis and Raffaella both felt that



their companies' individual styles were part of the reason that clients came to them rather than sending work abroad.

Claire of Hawthorne & Heaney has started adjusting some of her embroidery techniques to meet the needs of her clients better and to stay competitive. She realized that not all clients needed or even wanted the finest quality embroidery if it cost more. Sometimes, the fine embroidery was not even appropriate for the end product.

More recently, we've become very flexible. A lot of the problem with hand embroidery is that it's very expensive. People love the idea. They're very romanced by the idea that they can have something handmade for themselves, but they can't afford it. So recently we've been making - we've developed, not new techniques, but we've thought around the techniques to make them more accessible.

For example, [for an un-named] jeans company, the very small, very delicate monograms, because it's on denim, it's really a waste. You don't really need that kind of level of embroidery. So, we've added a few more strands so they're a bit thicker and a bit quicker. We can make them a bit bigger.

Claire has changed her working methods to become more flexible. While people want something handmade, they cannot afford traditional hand embroidery. In order to reduce costs and make embroidery more accessible, Claire has modified the embroidery techniques.

Claire gave the example of creating embroidery for denim jeans. Denim fabric is too heavy for traditional delicate monograms to work well. Fine threads and high stitch count do not show well on the fabric and damage easily. Claire adapted the monogram technique to use more strands of thread in a needle and less stitches in a space. The more heavily threaded needle and use of less stitches speeds up the labor process and makes the work more durable on the hardwearing denim, but is "obviously very exact and very beautiful still."

Claire also mentioned that when she makes these changes, she tries to educate her clients about the changes and about the nature of embroidery in general.

If I've got a bit of a problem with a customer, like it's taking too long or I've got a problem with lead times, or it's getting too expensive, because I've got the school, I go, "Well come and have a look, ok?" And that's quite a nice way of explaining things.

When clients gave Claire difficulties about cost or required production time, Claire decided to educate her clients. As Claire also operated an embroidery school, she was able to take clients into her school for first-hand peek at how embroidery is created and how labor-intensive it is. She found that is a good way of visually explaining difficulties to clients.

The old adage "If you can't beat them, join them," has become a way of business for six of the embroidery companies I visited. Hand & Lock, Hawthorne & Heaney, Gouvernel, Pino Grasso, and two other companies I visited do at least some production in either India or China. The European shops complete the design work and technical planning. Most companies send almost all the materials in order to control the quality. The actual embroidery, which is the most labor-intensive portion of the process, is executed abroad in order to save labor costs. Raffaella of Pino Grasso explained the process.

And so we have the *need* to cooperate with India of course. We cannot avoid this because there are clients that want us to create good Embroideries but at a very low price and in very big numbers.

So, for instance, we have to do have to do a good cooperation. That is to say, we make the drawings, we provide materials, we prepare everything, we send the work there. They just do the work and we receive it back. We check it and adjust where it's needed. We give to the client a perfect work, just as if it was made here. Not really. But more or less. But acceptable. Because we just want them to do exactly what we ask.

Raffaella said that Pino Grasso needs to utilize foreign production in order to keep costs low for large production orders. Pino Grasso does the design work, makes the technical drawings, and procures the materials in order to maintain control over quality. The work is checked when it returns from the Indian workshops. Pino Grasso repairs and reworks any embroidery that does not meet their standards in order to maintain their good name with clients. Raffaella said that the

work produced in cooperation with overseas embroiderers is good, but not as good if Pino Grasso's embroiders did the work.

Gouvernel also has to produce goods overseas to meet production numbers and budgets. Most of the embroiderers with whom I spoke mentioned India as the main competition, but Gouvernel uses an embroidery facility in China for auxiliary production. Christine, like the other embroidery professionals that used overseas production, emphasized her relationship with the foreign embroidery company. She, like Raffaella, Claire, and the others made it clear that only her long-term and strong relationship with the other company has made it possible to obtain the quality required from the foreign-produced goods.

We have to be very certain of the company and the quality of the work if demand requires us to work with China. Because of this demand, I have a company in China that has done needlework for 15 years and which I am always certain has 100 people of quality at all times. That works well. But here in France, we are obligated to have the creations quickly for delivery. When a job is not rushed, it is possible to send it elsewhere [out of the country]. That's fine.

Christine said that it is essential to know the quality of the overseas manufacturers' work.

Christine has worked with the same embroidery company in China for 15 years in order to develop a reliance on the Chinese company's quality levels and production abilities. However, when a client needs a job immediately, Gouvernel cannot send the work to China. Gouvernel only sends slower production jobs overseas.

Claire indicated the Hand & Lock has a similar affiliation with at least one Indian company. She knew this background information since she used to work for Hand & Lock.

Not many people know how to draft for goldwork and no one really knows how to get a brand new design translated into embroidery in India. And that's something I have and something Hand & Lock has. Not a lot of other people have that relationship with them.

Claire said that goldwork designing and drafting is a rare skill. Because it is difficult to find a goldwork designer or drafter, few people are able to get a new goldwork design created in

India. However, both Claire and the embroidery designers at Hand & Lock have the ability to design and draft new goldwork designs. Additionally, both groups of designers have relationships with Indian embroiderers and can communicate new designs to the embroiderers in India.

Claire claimed that if someone has an existing sample of goldwork and needs multiple copies, it is easy to send it to India and get it produced. However, if they just have an idea, it is very difficult to communicate with the Indian embroiderers. There is still one primary method of getting a design made from scratch, and that is to deal with a goldwork specialist like Hawthorne & Heaney or Hand & Lock.

Overseas production is a viable alternative for certain goods sold in European or American markets. However, Pino Grasso has discovered that there are developing markets in which European production is preferable. The first of these markets is the resurgence of the high fashion markets. The customers and designers driving the renewed interest in high fashion are looking for something different from what has been on the market lately. In many cases, this means Asian manufacturers cannot duplicate the strong Italian design style. This has opened a new opportunity for Pino Grasso.

What we have realized, this is Italy we are talking about now, high fashion is coming back a little bit. It was fading for a long time, now it's coming back.

And what they are looking for is peculiar Italian taste. Obviously because India has created a wave that has overcome all the work with their creations. And that's something that has flattened the taste.

Raffaella reported that customers are gaining interest in Italian high fashion again and they want fashion that reflects a distinct Italian style. Raffaella said that the heavy use of Indian embroidery in fashion has reduced style distinctions between fashions, so the customers are coming to local companies for distinct Italian designs.

The increasing wealth in China, Russia, and a few other nations drives the other new markets (Paris haute couture, 2012). The “new wealthy” in these countries are very conscious about where the products they purchase are produced. They will pay to have it produced in Europe in order to better display their wealth as they think it represents quality.

This thing is very important because we have noticed that our clients divide their collections, usually in two or more, depending on where they are going to sell their products. So, if they are going to China, they want something specifically made in Italy because otherwise they won't buy them. They recognize things. Because even if they are new in the rich world, they recognize things very well. They can understand good things from bad things.

China, Russia, all these emerging nations that are finding their new rich economies and they want to buy only good things because it's like this. I mean, if I have to pay something so much, I need to pay for something that supports this cost because it's handmade, well-made. And if it's Italian written on the label, I want it to be done in Italy, of course.

And that's something that we can consider as a new opportunity.

The fashion houses started dividing their production according to the intended sales market for the products. Fashion houses manufacture products destined for China in Italy in order to satisfy the tastes of Chinese shoppers. Raffaella said that shoppers from China, Russia, and the nations with emerging economies pay attention to quality. The shoppers recognize the difference between items made in Asia and items made in Europe. The new clients want the price of the product to reflect the work and materials utilized in the product. Additionally, if the garment carries an Italian label, they want it made in Italy.

Claire from Hawthorne & Heaney spoke about how the competition with Asia has allowed her firm, as well as some of the other English embroiderers to re-orient themselves in the market.

But the changes I've seen in the industry over the time I've been working is it's a lot easier to go directly abroad for your embroidery. Which is making companies like us and Hand & Lock - it's putting us in a different place in the market. It does take work away from us in a way, but it also makes us more specialist because we're definitely bespoke

and one-off now. We're not production. That's not our place in the market. We're not people who make you 20 dresses because it's very easy to go and sort that out for yourself. We're the person that holds the new designer's hand or we're the person that takes that one person that wants that one badge for the occasion and sorts that out rather than doing large processes.

Cooperating with overseas embroiderers and outsourcing have become easier. Because manufacturers take large orders to Asian embroiderers, Hawthorne & Heaney and Hand & Lock now cater to different clients. The two embroidery firms specialize in one-of-a-kind work and custom orders rather than production work. Claire, as well as the personnel at Hand & Lock are also in a position to work with young designers or clients that need more assistance.

Instead of attempting to compete head-on with the Asian embroiderers, Hawthorne & Heaney focuses on the types of embroidery and embroidery services that are not done or done well in Asia. Claire also specializes in embroidery that requires very intensive design processes, such as goldwork. "Someone can send a sample and get it replicated, but if you want one thing, there's still no other way of doing it. Which is kind of good. It's kind of good for us, anyway."

Having a good team and the constant search for future team members are part of competing. For Régis of Lanèl and Victoria, education aids the preparation and acquisition of good team members. Régis explained how Lanèl prepares interns.

When I first came, it was different. The embroiderers were a little old and did not want to explain their secrets. And I said I don't understand the reason. I think they believed that if I knew their techniques, then I would replace them. Quite ridiculous.

But now, it's completely different. When we receive during the year the intern from the school for one month, we show her the - it's not secrets but it's the way to... techniques.

It's the normal way to learn techniques now. The transmission of knowledge. It's very important for me.

Régis recounted that when he first arrived at Lanèl, the embroiderers refused to share their techniques with others for fear of replacement. Now, Régis makes sure that the interns who come to train at Lanèl learn as much about the embroidery trade as possible during their stay with his

company. He feels this better prepares interns for work in the industry and ensures (as much as possible) that trade practices are not lost between generations.

Victoria looks for future embroiderers and employees within her student base from her embroidery school. When she finds potential employees, she plans to train them more extensively, again with hope that she can pass down trade practices before they are lost. “And she [Victoria] especially hopes that by getting more and more students, she will find her successor. Someone she can concentrate and train specifically so that she can take over. She or he.”

The solutions the various embroidery personnel have conceived and put into practice center around staying competitive. Some of the solutions are advantages due to proximity to the fashion houses or shared cultures. However, some embroiderers are more creative with their approaches to embroidery, while others even restructured their companies to compete in the global market. Regardless, all the solutions have the unifying goal of survival.

**Aspirations, hopes, and dreams.** For embroidery professionals, aspirations revolved around making fashion embroidery more widely known or helping it continue in future generations. Education of future embroiderers was an important idea for five of the interviewed professionals. Three of the management-level embroidery professionals already had embroidery schools started and were developing plans to expand or increase awareness. Interviewees from one company were hoping to start an embroidery school soon. Another embroidery professional was more concerned about working with existing embroidery education to increase quality and awareness of these education programs.

In 1992, François Lesage of Lesage Embroideries in Paris started his own school, École Lesage (Lesage et Cie., 2013). Many of the other embroiderers referenced the Lesage school as

they mentioned starting or structuring their own schools. Victoria Darolti of Ateliers Darolti not only attended the Lesage school, but also has since started her own embroidery school. Inspired by Mr. Lesage, Victoria decided having her own school was the perfect way to share her knowledge and inspire future generations of embroiderers.

Especially for her, what was really important, was that she wanted to teach to the young generation this knowledge. She doesn't want this to get lost. She thinks it is very important to perpetuate the tradition and that the new generation know all the different techniques so that the Romanian and French savoir-faire can live on.

As Victoria's translator explained, Victoria not only wants to teach, but wants to ensure the survival of the techniques she learned during childhood. This includes Romanian handcrafts that other French embroidery schools do not teach, as well as traditional French fashion embroidery. Victoria expressed several times a fear that the Romanian crafts would die out and she was determined through education to prevent the loss.

Hand & Lock embroiderers of London started an embroidery school recently. While the embroiderers I interviewed and recorded did not speak about this, in a conversation I had with another member of the company, we briefly discussed the school. Hand & Lock's embroidery school is a little less traditional than the Lesage school or Victoria's school. They rely more on guest teachers, remote locations, and now, online classes (field notes, July 4, 2013; Hand & Lock, 2013). Since the interviews took place, one of the interviewees, Jessica Pile, has started teaching at least one of the online embroidery courses.

Claire of Hawthorne & Heaney started her own embroidery school shortly after starting her embroidery company. While Victoria's school is oriented towards training professionals, Claire's school is strictly hobby embroidery. However, this allows Claire to make embroidery more accessible by making it less intimidating and in turn, she makes more people aware of embroidery.



It's a nice addition to the umbrella of Hawthorne & Heaney. And it's a more crafty, accessible level where Hawthorne & Heaney is more luxury, bespoke, one-off. So we span quite a wide area now, which is quite nice.

Claire also considers the school a way to round out her business interests in embroidery. She uses it as a form of publicity for the production part of the business. The embroidery techniques she teaches in the school are less high fashion and less intimidating to new embroiderers. Additionally, she has found that customers who are uncomfortable with consulting with an embroidery company like Hawthorne & Heaney, will approach the school with embroidery orders. "People find us more approachable as the London Embroidery School, so we get a lot of inquiries for sort of monogrammed hankies and stuff via that than via Hawthorne & Heaney, which is interesting."

While they do not yet have an embroidery school, the Grassos were the most emphatic of all the embroidery professionals about the importance of embroidery schools. Raffaella spoke about the desire to start a school and the reasons why several times during our conversation.

In Italy there's no schools for embroidery. No real schools for this kind of embroidery. So it's very difficult for someone who wants to learn it to find a good place to learn.

We are trying to open a school. The problem for us now is not documents or permits. It's that we don't have good embroiderers that can teach, because they're working. And we need them to work. The good ones that have stopped working have stopped because they've got problems at home. For instance, the old mother that always needs care.

So we are always looking for someone who has time to stay here and learn. It's very important for us not to let this work go lost, in Italy, especially.

You *must* have a school. It's very important. Because the school can give you the opportunity to find people. You don't lose time because it's something specific that goes by itself. You don't lose money because people... you don't have to earn with that kind of work. But you can provide with, with the money they give you, you can satisfy the school itself. It goes by itself [self-supporting]. And this is something that is very, very useful to this situation now, to find new hands, to find new people, without involving them directly, saying it's for your future.

The major reason why the Grassos want to start a school is that there so few professionally trained embroiderers in Italy. At the same time, the lack of professional embroiderers is also a reason they are having difficulty starting the school. The few professionally trained embroiderers they find, the Grassos need to use full-time for production. Even retired embroiderers do not seem to be a viable option for teachers as they usually retire for reasons that would prevent them from taking a teaching job. This is a self-perpetuating problem. Without a school, or some sort of good training system, there will never be a sufficient number of embroiderers with expertise. Soon, there will not be enough for production, let alone to teach.

As Raffaella pointed out, the reason they want to start a school rather than just implement an apprenticeship system or some other form of training is that a school is self-supporting through the students' tuition. Students pay for training. This does not take time or money away from the company. Currently, when an embroidery trainee is hired, Pino Grasso pays the trainee during training. Then, the trainee may decide that they may not even stay at the company after training. This cost the company the trainee's salary as well as the salary of the trainer and the time lost on other projects the company could have been working on. Paying trainees is also a relatively new concept, as Raffaella and Mr. Grasso recounted to me.

I know there was a school, a very important school near Milan, near Lodi, and there were the nuns that used to teach this kind of work. In the 60s, they used to teach them. Mothers used to pay the nuns to teach their girls this kind of work [tambour embroidery] because once it worked like that.

You don't go to a company like this to learn. You have to pay to go there. Because it is something that makes the people lose time. They have to use time for you, so you have to pay to learn. Now we have to pay people to come here and learn and then perhaps, they go away because they don't like it anymore or they think it's something suitable to them.

Raffaella and Mr. Grasso told me about a former school located in Lodi, Italy, in which the resident nuns taught pupils embroidery. Mothers sent their daughters there and paid for the children's training in tambour embroidery. At the time, that was how people learned the trade. It

was a tradition to pay to have a child trained or pay for apprenticeship at a company. Parents and students knew that the training required the time of professionals and therefore paid for the training. Now Pino Grasso has to pay trainees to entice people to come learn the trade and hope the trainees stay with the company after the training period. However, not all trainees stay due to various reasons, costing Pino Grasso valuable time and money.

Lodi's former school with paying pupils provided a steady source of trained job candidates. The presence of an embroidery school made it easier for tradespeople to find trained employees. Raffaella proposed a similar system, but more flexible and designed for adults. The Grassos need flexibility in their curriculum since they plan to train a variety of students, not only trade workers. They understand that many people who are interested in embroidery only want to learn it for a hobby. The Grassos are willing to offer hobby classes and train less serious candidates if it also brings potential new professionals. The students who are only interested in hobby classes will at least help spread word of Pino Grasso to potential clients.

Unlike Italy, France already has an established professional embroidery education system. However, the embroidery executives expressed concern about the quality of the graduates from the French system. One participant discussed his hopes for remedying the issues. In an informal, unrecorded conversation with an embroidery professional from the *Fédération Française des Dentelles et Broderies*, I learned that the embroidery companies in France are attempting to work with the existing embroidery education system. They are hoping to encourage changes to meet the needs of the embroidery profession through cooperation and partnership. Their particular targets for reform are the CAP (*Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle*) and BAC (*Brevet des Métiers d'Art*) diplomas that the majority of professional fashion embroiderers acquire (T. Alexander, field notes, July 12, 2013). Reforming at the CAP and BAC levels could

benefit all fashion embroidery companies in France, rather than a single firm, as with the company-owned schools. However, it is much more difficult to achieve this goal because the French government controls the education system and there are several schools involved. There are many more people required in making a change to an educational system than required for setting up or controlling a single company-owned school.

While embroiderers spoke about the education of future embroiderers more often, participants also discussed the education of fashion designers. In an attempt to raise awareness of embroidery amongst young designers, Claire of Hawthorne & Heaney sponsors fashion students working on their final fashion design collections. She spoke about her experiences as a sponsor enthusiastically.

So I do a lot of sponsorships for young designers because a lot of young designers just can't afford embroidery. Which worries me because if it's not in those very cutting-edge collections, then it's not carried into the industry long-term. So sponsoring them in the beginning, just giving them embroidery for free is twofold. It gets me a lot of press that otherwise I'd have to pay for and also it pushes it in at the sharp-end of fashion which is really great because then we have embroidery in the newspaper after fashion week. It's quite productive.

They [the students] put their whole lives into it and it's so nice to see. And they're so appreciative of any help they can get.

They love the idea of having embroidery in their collection, but they are heartbroken that they can't. And it's so nice to give them that. I say, "I can actually just give you that." And they're like, "Great!"

Claire chose to sponsor students first because they cannot afford embroidery on the typical student budget. She was concerned that if there is a new generation of designers who are unaccustomed with embroidery, embroidery use in the apparel industry will diminish. Therefore, by sponsoring the students and helping them incorporate embroidery into their collections, Claire accomplished several things. She introduced embroidery to future industry leaders, made the designers familiar with her services, and received free publicity for her company. The publicity

came from the published photos of the collections as well as television coverage and other forms of media exposure. It got her embroidery in the press, providing recognition for her name and her deeds.

The students Claire worked with are dedicated to their work, but on very limited budgets. They have shown great appreciation for the embroidery assistance and advice that Claire has provided. Often, students want to feature embroidery in their work but do not have the resources available for the process. Claire has been able to make this desire a reality for a number of students.

As a sponsor, Claire mentored the young designers on integrating embroidery into their fashion pieces and working within their budget. Then Claire provides the embroidery service free of charge. Claire believed that the more the young designers work with embroidery in their early stages, the more likely it is that they will continue to use embroidery as they progress in their careers. In combination with the publicity, she considered the time and money spent now as an investment that will multiply in the future.

Claire had sponsored students for two years, but she already had one former student who had returned to her as a regular customer. While many of the embroiderers are lamenting that the new fashion designers do not have experience with high fashion hand embroidery and are not coming to the embroidery workshops for that reason, Claire solved part of the problem. She tried to give the young designers the necessary exposure and make the experience rewarding, thereby hoping to ensure a future for fashion embroidery.

Like Claire, Raffaella and Mr. Grasso believe in finding solutions and looking to the future, not lamenting about problems. The Grassos expressed a desire to have their own

miniature material factory to counteract the problem of disappearing suppliers, increases in minimum orders, and limitations on color or style availability for goods.

We want and we are trying to find our own machines to produce our own sequins here and do things like that. To have our own small factory of minimum quantity materials just for us. That's what we want to do.

The Grassos would like to produce their own sequins and other hard-to-find materials. This approach requires finding sequin-stamping machines and other equipment. They want to set up a small private factory to house the equipment and manufacture the materials. This would not only give them more design possibilities with more materials, but could cut out the costs of buying supplies from another company.

Abbey, of the unnamed embroidery company had a dream of changing the scale of embroidery, making it much larger, but with all the detail and artistic merit of traditional embroidery. During the French financial crisis, an opportunity arrived for Abbey's atelier to exhibit work in Italy. The exhibit was a chance to gain publicity and find other sources of income for the embroidery firm through the publicity. Abbey turned to the idea of architectural embroidery. She believed the exhibit was a good venue for the new embroidery.

Abbey explained how she developed the architectural embroidery.

And so I met a guy who was an artistic director in lace and also learned interior architecture. And he came and joined the workshop. And we developed a new embroidery, named architectural embroidery. So we changed the scale.

After meeting the artistic director of a lace manufacturer, Abbey invited the gentleman to become a part of the atelier and assist her in the new embroidery endeavor. To aid this new experiment, she also took it upon herself to learn interior architecture. Between the lace manufacturer's skills and her own, they created a new form of embroidery, which they termed architectural embroidery. Essentially, they developed architectural embroidery by making the embroidery much larger and appropriate for display in interior settings.

Abbey clarified why she chose to develop her idea of architectural embroidery for publicizing her atelier rather than featuring the atelier's traditional embroidery work.

At that moment, I wanted to keep the work here, because of what we were doing. Because it's so special. Because it's so easy to take it off to copy. I had that position. So, we decided to do a different activity.

Abbey said she chose to develop architectural embroidery in particular because the exhibition was scheduled in Italy, rather than in France. At the time, she did not want to display something in another country that others could easily duplicate and was as vital to her company's survival as traditional fashion embroidery. Therefore, she developed the new type of embroidery instead. Now Abbey's embroidery company has a unique product and a second source of income. Abbey hoped to continue this type of creative thinking to further expand embroidery's possibilities and secure a better financial position for the workshops. Economic expansion and seeking creative solutions to the challenges is Abbey's way of securing a future for embroidery.

All of the hopes and dreams of the embroiderers revolved around perpetuating high fashion hand embroidery into the future. The embroiderers spoke about their desire for embroidery to become more widely known. However, they all acknowledged that the future would bring change. Régis of Lanèl summed up the general response of most of the embroiderers. "Yes, I think it [embroidery] will continue differently. Embroidery will continue to exist in the next millennium. But in a different fashion. But for the future - 'question mark'."

The third main theme, current challenges and future aspirations, included stories about what embroiderers face now, how embroiderers cope with the difficulties, and what the embroiderers hope to do in the future. The challenges revolved around globalization and competitiveness. The embroiderers' solutions for the problems varied. Some solutions were simple, such as responding quickly by proximity to the fashion houses. Other solutions were more creative, such as Christine changing the format of Gouvernel's embroidery. The

embroiderers' future aspirations were also oriented around current problems. For example, Pino Grasso wants to build a factory because materials are difficult to obtain while Claire wants to continue educating young fashion designers about embroidery. Overall, the participants' stories about their problems add a human element to the difficulties European embroidery houses are facing. Additionally, the solutions and dreams of the participants reveal that the embroiderers are actively attempting to survive and are even working towards a better future.

The embroiderers' stories about challenges finished answering the research question, how has embroidery changed in the eyes of the embroiderer. The embroiderers now have to vie for survival in the global economy. They no longer compete just with each other, but with the rest of the world. Embroiderers also must be much more efficient and cost-effective than in previous decades. However, the creativity and business acumen of individual embroiderers are creating new opportunities.

The three themes I developed during data analysis reflect three phases of the embroiderers' lives. The first theme, education and career progress of the embroidery professional, represents the participants' pasts. The embroiderers shared their stories about how they decided to become embroiderers, how they trained, and how their careers progressed to their current job position. The second theme, evolution of the company and protocol represents the embroiderers' current situation. While the theme includes the company histories, the stories demonstrate the embroiderers' work environment, the embroiderers' job requirements, and the embroiderers' interaction with the fashion industry. The third theme, challenges and future aspirations, represents the embroiderers' futures. The challenges listed by the participants demonstrate how the embroidery industry is changing and foreshadow the future difficulties. Additionally, the embroiderers' narrate their future aspirations.



The information in the themes also weaves a larger story about the relationship between the embroiderer and the embroidery workshop. The actions of the embroiderers determine the development and fate of the workshop just as external factors affect the workshop. There would be no Pino Grasso Embroideries without the actions of Mr. Grasso. Gouvernel would have failed or at least have been a very different company without the intervention of Christine. The endeavors of the embroiderers built high fashion embroidery.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture and analyze the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. I conducted this study to construct a contemporary history of the embroidery industry through the stories of its people. I located no documented history of the fashion embroidery industry that traced from the advent of the modern fashion industry to current times. The literature I found presented the history in fragmented units. Additionally, I located few publications concerning the individual embroiderers working in the industry.

This was a qualitative study that utilized oral history methods. In order to capture the stories of the embroiderers, I chose to conduct and record in-depth interviews. In addition to the recordings of the interviews, I collected documents, photos, and field notes to support the embroiderers' stories and supply additional details. The participants were individuals working in high fashion workshops in France, England, or Italy.

I designed my study to answer the research questions I developed. Originally, the questions focused on the history of the embroidery industry. After I began data collection, I determined that my original research questions about the history of the industry needed to reorient from the industry to the embroiderers and their stories in the industry.

When I redeveloped my research questions, I created one meta-question and three sub-questions. All four questions revolved around the embroiderers and the embroiderers' story of their profession. The questions included:

- How do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer?
  - How has the embroiderer learned his or her profession?

- How does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work?
- How has embroidery changed over time, from the perspective of the embroiderers?

As I conducted further research, I utilized the new questions as guides for the interviews. I adjusted the interviews to answer the questions better. The meta-question was the over-arching guide to the entire study.

During and after data collection, I transcribed the recorded interviews using the gisted method of transcription. As I transcribed, I analyzed the data using the constant comparative method. Analysis continued until I reduced the data into three main themes: education and career progress of the embroiderers, evolution of the company and methods, and current challenges and future aspirations. I did not start by building the themes to reflect the research questions. However, the themes closely paralleled the research questions with some overlap among the themes.

The three main themes and a system of sub-themes (Figure 6 in Ch.3, p. 107) I developed during data analysis provided a framework for organizing and comparing the embroiderers' stories. For example, placing all of the embroiderers' conversations about their education in one sub-theme permitted me to find trends in education amongst groups of participants. Likewise, by comparing all of the participants' conversations about difficulties they encountered, I uncovered the primary challenges embroiderers faced. I conducted similar comparisons for each theme and sub-theme.

## **Findings**

In this section, I provide an overview of each of the three themes and their sub-themes. I have also included the major results I uncovered in each theme and how the information answers

the research questions. After the overview of themes, in the discussion section, I provide a description of how elements of the themes interrelate.

**Education and career progress.** The participants' accounts of their education and career paths answered the research sub-question: how has the embroiderer learned his or her profession. The information contained within the theme also provides the part of the answer for the meta-question: how do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer.

In analyzing the education and career paths of embroiderers, I uncovered considerable differences between the educations of embroiderers from different countries and between embroiderers of different age groups. The older generation of embroidery professionals learned their trade by apprenticeships, such as Mr. Grasso, or by on the job training, such as Régis and Lynn. The younger embroiderers attended formal schools. However, there were major differences between the types of schools and the teaching focus among the three countries in which I conducted the interviews.

The young embroiderers of Great Britain, Scott, Jess, Claire, and Daisy, attended universities and earned bachelor's degrees. The degrees they earned were all in the fashion, textile, and design areas. All these degree programs emphasized the conceptual design process, with less time spent on technical skills. The move to design-based education in the U.K. was begun in the 1960s and was heavily based on the *Coldstream Report* (National Advisory Council on Art Education et al., 1960). Britain's emphasis on creative thinking and downplay of technical skills has been noted by the British professional embroiderer Hunting (2012) in his account of the professional embroidery occupation.

Unlike England, which has developed design-oriented embroidery education, France has a long history of skills-based embroidery training. France developed a formal education system

for embroiderers based on a series of three sequential diplomas, each taking two years to achieve. Most embroiderers stop after the first or second level, as did Sonia and Brigitte. These diploma programs, known as the *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP, translates to Professional Aptitude Certificate), the *Brevet des Métiers d'Art* (BMA, translates to Artistic Trades Diploma), and the *Diplôme des Métiers d'Art* (DMA, also translates to Artistic Trades Diploma, but is a different type), are more technical skill-based than conceptual design-based. The early courses are more oriented towards production and less towards creativity. Students learn more conceptual design techniques as they progress through the levels.

While I divided the embroiderers' education by age and nationality, I divided the embroiderers' reasons for joining the embroidery industry by sources of influence. I uncovered three categories of influences: friends and family, school and apprenticeships, and other people and personal reasons. Friends and family members influenced five of the participants to become embroiderers. The participants' friends or family members exposed the participants to embroidery or needlecrafts for an extended time. For example, Mr. Grasso learned about professional embroidery from his friend's father, who was an embroiderer.

Conversations about how the participants became embroiderers led to conversations about what they did as embroiderers. The participants' stories about their job contained company histories, explanations of workshop organization, and explanations of the embroidery process. I grouped all the stories about the workshops or the work processes within the workshop within one theme, evolution of the company and methods.

**Evolution of the company and methods.** The second theme provided the most evidence for the meta research question, how do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer. The participants' descriptions of learning as they executed their jobs provided

answers to the first sub-question about learning embroidery. The embroiderers' explanations of job duties answered most of the sub-question, how does the embroiderer describe his or her professional work. Finally, a large portion of the answer for the last sub-question, how has embroidery changed over time, came from this theme.

The theme contains the embroiderers' stories about company history, the evolution of the embroidery process, and the impact of the fashion industry on the evolution of embroidery company procedures. I divided the theme evolution of the company and methods into two sub-themes, company history and current embroidery industry methods. The sub-theme company history contained the participants' stories about how the embroidery workshops worked together, the history of the individual workshops, and the embroiderers' roles in the development of the workshops. The sub-theme current embroidery industry methods included the embroiderers' details about their job and the overall embroidery process.

Mr. Grasso from Pino Grasso Embroideries and Christine from Gouvernel both related the histories of their companies. Abbey provided the history of her company through email. Regardless of delivery method, all three histories revealed the important role the embroiderers played in the development of the companies. Without the perseverance of the embroiderers, the companies would be very different, or not exist at all.

The embroiderers built their professional identities upon their current position. The young embroiderers described what their job duties were and how they executed the duties. The embroidery executives used a more company-wide perspective and described the entire design and embroidery process. As they narrated, the executives indicated what part they played in the processes. All participants described their work through job duties and required actions.

The embroiderers' descriptions of the design and embroidery process revealed the importance of each embroiderer's job to the process. The embroidery designers or executives negotiate with the clients and work to satisfy the clients' design needs. Then the embroiderers execute the embroidery. The talent, creativity, and ingenuity of the embroidery personnel create differences in the workshops despite similarities in the embroidery process.

Not only the embroiderers but also the fashion industry affects the embroidery process and the workshops. Embroidery executives adjust the work schedule and work methods of the workshops to meet the needs of the fashion industry. The Grassos, Christine, and Régis explained how they work in respect to the fashion industry's collection seasons. The interviewees revealed that the number of high fashion markets increased in the second half of the 20th century and the number of seasons per market has increased over the last forty years, increasing the pace of the embroiderers' workflow.

As the embroiderers discussed their responsibilities, they also related stories about what has become difficult. The participants explained the challenges that have arisen in the high fashion embroidery industry and the steps to meet the challenges. The participants' conversations about challenges cued discussions about what they hoped will happen in the future. The embroiderers stated what they want to do in the future and the changes they want to make.

**Current challenges and future aspirations.** The challenges and aspirations theme adds further evidence to answer the meta-question, how do professional embroiderers represent their work and life as an embroiderer. Particularly, the participants demonstrated how they foresee their lives as embroiderers continuing into the future. The embroiderers' discussions about challenges and aspirations also provided the final part of the answer for the sub-question, how has embroidery changed over time. When I combined the answers to these questions, I developed

a multifaceted picture of the embroiderers' stories of the past, present, and future of high fashion embroidery industry.

The theme current challenges and future aspirations included the embroiderers' stories about the difficulties they face and their hopes for the future. As I analyzed the data, I created three sub-themes: challenges in the embroidery industry; future of fashion embroidery; and aspirations, hopes, and dreams. The first sub-theme, challenges in the embroidery industry, included the participants' explanations about the changes in the high fashion embroidery industry and the current problems the industry faces. In the second sub-theme, the future of fashion embroidery, I included the participants' current solutions for the problems they listed. The participants also explained how their solutions help prepare their companies for the future. I grouped the embroiderers' stories about their future aspirations into the last sub-theme.

Globalization was the ultimate source of most of the difficulties the embroiderers discussed. The executive-level participants and one of the workroom embroiderers spoke about the difficulties of competing with Asian embroidery manufacturers. Competition means that European embroiderers have to increase efficiency and production speed in order to lower costs. Embroidery workshops must source materials locally to reduce production time; however, many local suppliers have gone out of business.

In addition to creating challenges for production and pricing, embroiderers explained that globalization is affecting the clients. Consumers have become accustomed to cheaper manufactured goods. Many consumers no longer understand the value of labor or the time required to make something by hand. Embroiderers now have to justify their prices and explain their work.



Just as consumers are losing their appreciation for handwork, students are losing their interest in working with handcrafts. In France, embroidery executives are having difficulty finding young embroiderers with the personality and skills needed for the profession. In Italy, the Grassos are experiencing problems finding embroiderers with any training.

The embroiderers' solutions for the problems ranged from utilizing an existing situation to devising creative new work methods. Embroiderers used their proximity to the fashion designers as a competitive speed and communication advantage. Participants also emphasized that individual workshop's design style gave them an advantage over Asian embroiderers. However, Christine of Gouvernel took a more proactive step to increase her workshop's competitiveness. She changed the type and format of the embroidery produced by Gouvernel. She created an exportable form of embroidery for utilization in foreign manufacturing.

The embroiderers proposed solutions to the problem of lack of embroiderers in their hopes for the future. Participants expressed a desire to become involved in the education of future embroiderers by starting a school, being a mentor, or working with the existing education system. The participants' interest in educating future generations was the most commonly discussed future aspiration.

## **Discussion**

I divided the stories of the embroiderers into units and organized the units into themes. However, all three main themes and subthemes interrelate, as demonstrated in Figure 6 in Ch. 3, p. 107. The relationship among the themes reveals the embroiderers' larger story. The embroiderers' educational experiences affect their ability to find solutions to the industry's challenges just as the embroiderers' aspirations have impact on future embroiderers' education.

**Impact of education on European embroidery companies.** The education of embroiderers affects not only the career paths of embroiderers, but also the embroiderers' ability to participate in the embroidery process and compose solutions for the challenges in the industry. In turn, education affects the embroidery companies through the embroiderers. The affect is different in each of the three countries represented in the study, France, Italy, and the UK.

The curricular focus in embroidery training places England and France on different aspects of the profession. However, England and France are facing similar problems in the embroidery industry and their education systems affect their ability to remain competitive. As noted by embroiderers from both countries and confirmed by Mercier (1992), one of the biggest threats to high fashion embroidery in Europe is Asian competition. Several of the upper echelon members of the embroidery companies stated that two skills were imperative for embroiderers in order to remain competitive: creativity and speed. Embroiderers need creativity in order to suggest new ideas and new ways to use techniques or materials. Innovation provides a competitive advantage. Embroiderers have to be fast in order to reduce labor costs. The skills to work quickly and creatively affect embroiderers' ability to execute their part of the embroidery process to the employer's satisfaction. In summary, in order for the European high fashion embroidery industry to remain competitive, companies require embroidery schools that teach both creativity and proficiency in embroidery skills.

**Impact of English education.** The English universities, through their focus on design education, are addressing the need for creativity. However, as Scott of Hand & Lock stated, the schools are training designers, not embroiderers. Graduates not only do not have a strong repertoire of embroidery skills upon matriculation, they also do not fully understand the need for speed and efficiency. There are a limited number of design jobs available. The remaining

graduates are limited to production jobs, such as that of an embroiderer. However, the graduates do not have the requisite skills for production jobs, limiting potential career paths. New embroiderers' lack of skills impedes the British embroidery workshops' ability to be competitive, as they do not have embroiderers with enough technical training to work at speeds necessary for quick but excellent production needed to compete with Asian markets. Under-trained embroiderers make it difficult for embroidery executives to devise solutions to the challenge of competition.

The lack of technical training also affects the English embroidery designers' ability to be competitive with Asian embroiderers. The young designers have difficulty devising solutions to the challenges. Many designers do not have a strong foundational knowledge of what embroidery can do, as they have only been trained in a few basic types of embroidery. As Scott explained, the designers have not been sufficiently exposed to embroidery's technical repertoire and history in order to push designs further. If embroiderer designers do not understand the design and technical possibilities of embroidery, the work regresses or stagnates. Yet, as Claire indicated, in order to maintain a competitive edge over Asian embroiderers, British embroiderers must provide superior design services.

***Impact of French education.*** French embroidery workshop creative directors and company presidents confided that they now needed their embroiderers to be a part of the design process. Régis of Lanèl and Christine of Gouvernel both told me that they could no longer use embroiderers that were just proficient at embroidery. They now need embroiderers' constant creative input in the embroidery process to remain competitive. As the first diploma level of embroidery training focuses almost entirely on technical skills (Federation Française des Dentelles et Broderies, 2013), this means that embroiderers with only the CAP diploma are no

longer useful to the trade. However, French embroidery students' technical training is superior to that of the British students.

***Impact of no Italian education.*** France and Great Britain both suffer from difficulties with their education systems. However, Italy's problem is different. Mr. Grasso of Pino Grasso informed me that there is no formal embroidery school in Italy. The ramifications of this problem have already become evident since workshops such as Pino Grasso have great difficulty finding trained embroiderers. Additionally, while consumers around the globe recognize Italian fashion, the country rarely recognizes its embroidery. In France, high fashion embroidery is considered a heritage craft and receives publicity due to this status (Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant [Living Heritage Company], 2012). In England, embroidery, along with other handcrafts, is recognized by the general public for its place in British history, and is still very popular as both a hobby and an art form (McKeating, 2012). In both the French and the British societies, embroidery's heritage status has helped make the fashion embroidery industry more visible. Students know that embroidery is a viable career choice in France and the UK. Italy's embroidery industry has not enjoyed such strong support.

Italy's lack of embroidery education options has triggered Mr. Grasso's aspirations of educating future embroiderers. The current situation or history of embroidery companies has stimulated other embroiderers, like Mr. Grasso, to dream of a better future. The history of the company influences the embroiderers and their thought process. The current situation provides reasons to dream.

***Impact of a company's past and present on their future.*** The history of each embroidery company affects types of decisions the embroiderers make. For instance, if the company has a history of creative thinking, the personnel are more likely to continue the tradition. If the

company changes and adapts easily, the personnel are more encouraged to suggest ideas for change. Gouvernel, Hand & Lock, and Abbey's atelier have a history of adaptation and innovation. Christine, Abbey, Jess, and Scott suggest or implement changes regularly.

Embroiderers working at companies with a history of progressive objectives work with younger generations to perpetuate the future of the high fashion embroidery industry. Christine and Régis work with interns. Victoria and Claire have atelier-run schools and Claire mentors young fashion designers. The Grassos want to open a school and Jess is involved with her company's school. White's (1994) history of the Lesage company shows that both Mr. Lesage and his father were creative thinkers who led their company through innovative ventures. Mr. Lesage was one of the first embroiderers to open an atelier-run school for students (Lesage et Cie., 2013). Continuing the tradition of working with younger generations at Lesage, the current owners have expanded the school since its inception.

The company's methods and procedures, such as the design process, provide opportunities to observe processes and plan changes. The embroiderers most often based their suggestions or plans for change on existing procedures. For instance, they suggested changes to the existing education process, to the process of obtaining materials, and to elements of the embroidery process. Understanding existing procedures within a historical and current development of the company provides embroiderers the opportunity to think creatively and improve competitiveness.

The company's history and methods affect the embroiderers and may foster creative thinking or a culture of change. However, the embroiderer's personality and past actions also affect their decisions and creativity. The embroiderer's past influences the company's history and development. The embroiderer's involvement in creating or growing the company in the past

is an indicator of the embroiderer's potential for influencing the company's future. In other words, embroiderers who have had strong impact on the development of the company continue to have strong influence on its future. Embroiderers who historically encouraged change within the company continue suggesting ideas for change. Mr. Grasso, Claire, and Victoria, who created and built their companies, related many dreams for the future. Abbey, who was instrumental in modernizing her atelier, continues to suggest new ideas for exploration.

Each embroidery house's past, present, and future are interconnected. Each embroiderer affects the embroidery house and the embroidery house affects each embroiderer. The development of the embroiderer influences the effectiveness of the embroiderer as well as provides the foundation knowledge for decision-making. The elements of the embroiderers' stories are interrelated and form the story of the embroidery industry. The story of the industry is not complete without the stories of the embroiderers.

### **Contributions**

While there are published accounts of the general history of high fashion embroidery, the stories analyzed in this study provide missing information. The existing histories, such as Naudin and Simon (1996) only list the major events in embroidery history or, like White (1994) and Bowman (1985), present the history of individual embroidery companies. This study provides details about changes in embroidery training, development of the embroiderer, and development of the embroidery workshops. Also, where appropriate, I provided comparison of the topics between workshops or countries. Additionally, the publications I located on high fashion embroidery were published before the year 2000. This study provides updated information to existing histories.

The information derived from the embroiderers' training and education stories adds to the literature available. The literature only recorded a limited history of embroidery education methods up to the 1960s. Mercier (1992) provided a brief history of embroidery education in Lorraine, France up to the 1960s. P. White (1994) included the story of Mrs. Lesage's education during World War I. The historical accounts of education in the literature were also devoid of the human stories about how education affected or influenced the lives of the embroiderers. Additionally, I located no information on comparisons of embroidery education systems. To address these gaps in the literature, in this study I have compiled an updated history of education that spans three countries and compares the experiences of 16 of the 20 participants.

The literature I located on the embroidery process described embroidery as a series of steps. The human element and interaction was missing. Also, published descriptions of the embroidery process were either narrated in relation to one embroidery house, such as Naudin and Simon's (1996) account of the Lesage embroidery process or given as instructions for the ideal process, as the book by Faure (2007). The literature does not list variations in the process. Nor does the literature compare the embroidery process as executed at different embroidery companies. In this study, the participants' stories about their work as embroiderers provided much needed information about the design and embroidery process.

The published histories omit the impact of the individual embroiderer. Yet changes occur because of people's actions. The embroiderers make decisions based on needs or problems. The decisions change the history of the embroidery company. In addition to the embroiderers' decisions to change something, the embroiderers also make plans for the future. Only two books discussed embroiderers' dreams for the future. Mercier (1992) provided brief histories for five Lorraine-area embroidery companies. The histories ended with future plans of the company. Of

the five companies listed in the book, one is out of business, two have changed ownership, and I could not determine the fate of the other two. P. White (1994) included Mr. Lesage's hope for the future in his book on Lesage Embroideries. However, Mr. Lesage passed away in 2011. The aspirations of this study's participants provide an example of how embroiderers' plans change with the needs of the company.

The entire study comprises a history of high fashion embroidery. Much of the information has never been published before. The information updates existing literature and provides previously missing information.

### **Implications**

This study provides information in a field that has been traditionally neglected by researchers (Kawamura, 2011; Taylor, 2002). As a researcher, I searched for foundational information about the field to pursue this study. However, since there was little scholarly research on high fashion embroidery, I needed to build this foundation information through the interviews with professional fashion embroiderers. This study establishes a working history of the high fashion embroidery industry in relationship to the embroiderers. Researchers, such as myself, will be able to utilize the results of this study as the starting point for future research.

While the study provides information for future researchers, it also informs educators in Europe and the United States and it benefits the embroidery companies. For European education systems, the study provides data about the education systems' strengths and weaknesses as well as the needs of the embroidery companies.

**Implications for European embroidery education.** The results of the study indicate that European embroidery education requires adjustment in order to meet the needs of the embroidery industry. As repeatedly emphasized by the embroiderers and confirmed by *La*



*formation en broderie [Embroidery training]* (2013), the curriculum should offer a better balance of design training and hands-on embroidery technique training. The participants found the knowledge of history essential in making better decisions and creating better designs. This confirmed the research in other disciplines that design-based trades need to be based on a foundation of design history (Forty, 2002; Margolin, 2009). As Clark and Brody (2009a) stated, the teaching of design disciplines needs to include the history of that discipline.

**Impact on U.S. design education.** The stories from the European embroiderers become a telling case for other countries. The stories suggest how other education systems can take steps to improve their graduates' ability to compete in a global market. I use the American educational system as an example for transferability of findings of this study, as I teach in an American university. The United States has no formal embroidery education for embroidery professionals. Therefore, based on my experience as both a professional embroider and a teacher of fashion design, I applied the information gained in this study to teaching fashion design. By teaching fashion design students about fashion embroidery, the students learn to communicate with embroiderers and understand the capabilities of the embroidery industry.

The study provides a history and explanation of the embroidery design process. The explanation of the embroidery process could be utilized in classrooms to help design students understand how to work with embroiderers, especially when the students cannot experience the process through mentorship. The results of the study also emphasize a need for students to be exposed to embroidery technical knowledge. Like the embroidery students, the fashion students need a balance of creativity and technical skills. Creativity allows them to think of new and interesting designs, but the technical skills allow them to know what is possible to make. A

stronger grasp of how embroidery relates to production capabilities and production costs helps fashion design students understand how to work with embroiderers.

As with embroidery education, fashion education needs a foundation in history in order for students to understand what has been done previously (Clark & Brody, 2009b). Fashion has a developed design history that is part of many fashion design curricula (Tortora & Eubank, 1994). However, if teachers place more emphasis on the construction and production details rather than just silhouettes and key costume items, students would have a better understanding of how to design with embroidery. They would have better exposure to how to use embroidery, how trim has changed, and how the details supplied by the auxiliary industries enhance garments.

**Implications for the European high fashion embroidery industry.** The study benefits the embroidery industry as much as it benefits education. It provides a documented modern history of the industry. More importantly, the study increases awareness of the industry.

Dilnot (2009) stated that one of the purposes of design history is to bring attention to subjects that were previously invisible. Similarly, one of the purposes of oral history is to bring attention to neglected or underrepresented populations (P. R. Thompson, 2000; Tosh, 2002). The study draws attention to the existence of both the high fashion embroidery industry and the individual embroiderers. The recordings of the participants' stories capture glimpses into the lives of the embroiderers.

In addition to general awareness, the study provides an outlet for embroiderers' concerns about Asian competition. Mercier (1992) and White (1994) briefly mentioned professional embroiderers' growing concerns about Asian competition. However, none of the literature I located discussed the industry-wide concerns about the competition or the actions embroiderers have taken to remain competitive. The combined worries of the embroiderers and the stories of

finding solutions for problems give a human element to the difficulties the industry is enduring. More than any other sentiment, the embroiderers expressed, “We want people to know about us.” This study is a first step in raising awareness about the professional embroiderers.

### **Future Research**

More research is needed to continue raising awareness about professional embroiderers and the high fashion embroidery industry. Because there is very little scholarly research in the field, there are many research options. I have outlined a few areas of needed research.

The history uncovered in this study is partial. There are still many aspects of the history of high fashion embroidery that require in-depth research. For example, historians could study the history of the embroidery houses, including their origins, ownership, and mergers. Alternately, historians could research the influential embroiderers and their contributions to the industry. In addition to historical studies, there is a need for further research in embroidery education. The embroiderers spoke about the pros and cons of the education systems, but there is no definitive research about the impact of education on the embroiderer.

The impact of globalization and Asian competition was the foremost concern of the embroidery executives. However, there is no research regarding the impact of either globalization or Asian competition on high fashion embroidery. Studies on the topic could help European embroiderers devise better methods of competition with Asian embroiderers.

The field of high fashion embroidery research is open. The embroiderers are very willing to aid researchers where there is the potential for increased awareness of the industry.

While no qualitative study is generalizable, by employing thick descriptions and providing transparent accounts of the study’s process, the methodology and findings of the study are more transferable. Future researchers will be able to determine if the details of this study are

similar to their own planned studies. Where similar, the researchers will be able to apply my methodology to their studies. The thick description, transparency, and thematic organization allow researchers to determine if this study's findings are applicable to their own situations. For example, a researcher studying the education of British fashion designers will be able to utilize the rich descriptions contained within this study to decide if the findings associated with British embroiderers are cross-comparable.

### **Summary**

This was a qualitative study designed to capture the life stories of the people working in the modern fashion embroidery industry in France, Italy, and England. Using oral history techniques, I recorded the stories of professional embroiderers during semi-structured interviews. The participants' stories provided descriptions of their lives as professional embroiderers. I used the constant comparative analysis method to cross-compare the stories of the embroiderers. During analysis, I uncovered a contemporary history of the modern high fashion embroidery industry. The involvement of the embroiderers wove throughout the derived history, creating a humanized version of history.

While the contemporary history of the high fashion industry will be a valuable resource for future researchers, the act of recording the embroiderers' stories was the most important part of this study. The stories of embroiderers demonstrated the importance of the roles, actions, and decisions of the embroiderers. Without embroiderers, there would be no embroidery industry.

Through their willingness to share their stories, the embroiderers made the study possible. By providing such detail about the industry, their jobs, and the challenges they face, the embroiderers have made the industry and their selves visible through their stories. Not only did the embroiderers need to be heard, but, they wanted to be heard.

**Final Note**

I decided to conduct this study because of my love for fashion embroidery. I try to share my passion with my students, my colleagues, and my friends. Yet it has always saddened me how few people know about the high fashion embroiderers. During my efforts to explain the techniques or the industry, someone will always tell me, “You know they can do that with machine now, right?” It is one of the most disheartening comments. Not only is the statement untrue, but it reveals the person’s lack of appreciation for handwork. Therefore, I continue my life’s mission to share the story of high fashion embroidery with others.

By conducting formal research on high fashion embroidery, I learned much more than just what the embroiderers revealed in their stories. These lessons were about how to be a better researcher. The first lesson I learned was how to conduct a cross-cultural study. I had to figure out how to approach embroiderers in three different countries, all of which were different from my native country. I had to determine what were the best communication methods, best people within the companies to approach, and best ways to explain my purpose. In learning about cross-cultural research, I also determined about how to develop research-based relationships. In particular, I learned how to nurture the relationships for future research opportunities.

I also learned a great deal about conducting the study. Out of necessity, I ascertained how to obtain a lot of information in a short time. When the interviewees could not provide answers to my original questions, I quickly learned how to adjust interviews in progress. After I adjusted a few interviews, I determined how to adapt research design to match the interviews.

Most important to me, I learned how to make friends despite language barriers.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Personal Background of the interviewee
  - a) What company they work for
  - b) Their position
    - i) Years in the position
    - ii) Their role (day in the life of)
    - iii) Evolution of their role/their position
  - c) Their training
  - d) How did they choose this career
    - i) Any influence by family background
  - e) Were you ever taught anything about embroidery history
    - i) How/by whom
  - f) How did you learn about the history of this company
- 3) Background of the company/house
  - a) What is the purpose of the company (embroidery house, museum, fashion house...)
  - b) How is this company organized – who does what
  - c) How many employees
    - i) What positions
    - ii) How many in each position
    - iii) Who has been here the longest/shortest (how long for each)
    - iv) What is the general length of service
  - d) Main clients

- e) Products
  - f) For embroidery houses:
    - i) Specialties
      - (1) Types of embroidery produced (fashion only?)
      - (2) Special techniques
    - ii) Only embroidery?
- 4) History of the company/house
- a) Who/what/where/when/how/why
  - b) Major events
  - c) What are the external change factors
  - d) What are the internal change factors
  - e) Any links/business ties to other companies/houses or free-lancers at any time
  - f) Any close relations to certain fashion houses/designers (embroidery companies only) at any time
- 5) History of the fashion embroidery industry
- a) How has the industry changed since you started
  - b) How is the industry organized
    - i) Was it also this way
  - c) Beginnings – what is considered the beginning
  - d) Is the history of the industry considered separate from the history of general fashion embroidery
  - e) Major events
    - i) Highs and lows

- f) How has the use of embroidery changed
- 6) The embroidery process
  - a) Embroidery
    - i) How does it begin
    - ii) What steps are done at this establishment
      - (1) Outline the process
    - iii) Is there any part of the process that is done differently here
  - b) The design process
    - i) Who designs
    - ii) How
    - iii) How do they communicate with the fashion houses
    - iv) How have design techniques changed
    - v) How have the designs changed
  - c) Materials
    - i) What are the primary materials now used for embroidery
    - ii) What are some of the more unusual materials
    - iii) Have the materials changed over the years
      - (1) How
    - iv) Has anything become difficult to obtain
    - v) How do you source materials
      - (1) Vendor relations – direct to manufacturer or to wholesalers?
  - d) Equipment and tools
    - i) What kind of (frames, hooks, needles, trestles, pouncing equipment, etc.) do you use



- (1) Have these become difficult to obtain
  - (2) Do you have to have anything custom-made now
  - (3) Is there any equipment you still use that is no longer manufactured
    - (a) What would happen if this equipment were to fail or wear out? Is there a way to replace it?
- e) Embroidery Techniques
- i) What techniques do you rely most heavily upon here
  - ii) Are there any you are particularly know for
  - iii) How have techniques changed over the years
    - (1) Have there been any major changes in the last 20 years
- 7) Overarching questions and closure
- a) What do you see as the future of fashion embroidery
  - b) What do you see as the future of this company
  - c) Is there anything else you would like future generations to know?
  - d) Do you have any questions for me as we come to a close?
  - e) Thank and close

## Appendix B: Consent Form - English

### SUBJECT CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A STUDY OF A History of the Fashion Embroidery Industry in Europe Since Worth University of the Incarnate Word

I, Theresa Alexander, am a doctoral student at The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) working towards a doctorate degree in education with a concentration in Higher Education.

You are being asked to take part in a research study of the history of the fashion embroidery industry. The purpose of this study is to trace the history of the modern fashion embroidery industry in Europe. You are being asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as a member of the professional embroidery industry or a person who has significant knowledge of the professional embroidery industry. I hope to document your invaluable memories, experiences and knowledge of professional embroidery.

If you decide to take part, I will interview you in person about your experiences with or in professional embroidery and your knowledge of its history. This will take one to two hours and may occur more than once if we cooperatively decide there should be subsequent sessions.

I would like your permission to audio and video record the interview in order to better analyze the conversation. If permission is given, the recording will be kept secure. You may refuse to have the interview recorded or stop the recording process at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts other than disclosure of your identity and occupational affiliation to interested parties. However, you can still elect to participate and keep this information confidential.

There are no direct benefits or compensation from taking part in this study; however it is hoped that knowledge gained from this study will help future generations of embroiderers.

Unless otherwise requested, your audio and video recordings will be archived in the UIW Library as part of the principal investigator's PhD Dissertation. As such, there is no assumption of confidentiality unless you request it. However, if you request for your identity to remain confidential, your name and any identifying characteristics will not be included in any publically available format.

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time, with no personal consequence or record of participation. If you have questions now or in the future, feel free to ask me and/or contact me:

Theresa Alexander

[talexand@uiwtx.edu](mailto:talexand@uiwtx.edu)

Cell phone: (512) 517-5902 or work phone: (210) 829-3168

If you have additional questions or you wish to report a problem during the course of the study please contact me and/or:

Dr. Kevin Vichcales, Dean of Graduate Studies

UIW Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)

(210) 829-2757

- Yes No I would like my name and identity to remain confidential.  
 Yes No I would like my affiliations to remain confidential.  
 Yes No I agree to be audio recorded.  
 Yes No I agree to be video recorded.  
 Yes No I agree to be photographed.  
 Yes No I agree to the presence of a translator if necessary.  
 Yes No I agree to repeat interview sessions if necessary.

You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep.

*Deed of Gift for Recordings*

I \_\_\_\_\_ do herein permanently donate and convey to the researcher's archive, my interview(s) conducted on \_\_\_\_\_. In making this gift, I understand that I am conveying all right, title, and interest in copyright to the researcher's archive. In return, the researcher grants me a nonexclusive license to utilize this interview during my lifetime.

I further understand that the researcher will make this interview available for research without restriction. Future uses may include quotation and publication or broadcast in any media, including the Internet.

*Consent Confirmation*

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY AND THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION GIVEN ABOVE AND EXPLAINED TO YOU.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (Time)

## Appendix C: Consent Form - French

CONSENTEMENT SOUMIS À PARTICIPER À UNE ÉTUDE DE  
Une histoire de l'industrie de broderie de mode en Europe depuis le couturier Worth  
Université du Mot Incarné (University of the Incarnate Word)

Je, Theresa Alexander, suis un étudiant au doctorat à l'Université du Mot Incarné (UIW) travaillant vers un degré de doctorat dans l'éducation avec une concentration dans l'enseignement supérieur.

Vous êtes invité à participer à une étude de recherches de l'histoire de l'industrie de broderie de mode. Le but de cette étude est de tracer l'histoire de l'industrie moderne de broderie de mode en Europe. Vous êtes invité à participer à cette étude parce que vous avez été identifié en tant que membre de l'industrie professionnelle de broderie ou d'une personne qui a la connaissance significative de l'industrie professionnelle de broderie. J'espère documenter vos souvenirs, expériences et connaissance inestimables de broderie professionnelle.

Si vous décidez de participer, je vous interviewerai en personne au sujet de vos expériences avec ou de broderie professionnelle et de votre connaissance de son histoire. Ceci prendra une à deux heures et peut se produire plus d'une fois si nous décidons coopérativement qu'il devrait y avoir des sessions suivantes.

Je voudrais votre autorisation à l'audio et la vidéo enregistrent l'entrevue afin d'analyser mieux la conversation. Si l'autorisation est donnée, l'enregistrement sera maintenu sûr. Vous pouvez refuser de faire enregistrer l'entrevue ou d'arrêter le processus d'enregistrement à tout moment. Vous avez également le droit de refuser de répondre à n'importe quelle question.

Il n'y a aucun risque ou malaise prévisible autres que la révélation de votre identité et l'affiliation professionnelle aux ayants droit. Cependant, vous pouvez encore choisir de participer et de maintenir cette information confidentielle.

Il n'y a aucun avantage direct ou compensation de la participation à cette étude ; cependant on l'espère que les connaissances acquises de cette étude aideront des générations futures des brodeurs.

À moins qu'autrement demandé, votre audio et enregistrements vidéos seront archivés dans la bibliothèque d'UIW en tant qu'élément de la dissertation du doctorat de l'investigateur principal. En soi, il n'y a aucune acceptation de confidentialité à moins que vous la demandiez. Cependant, si vous demandez pour que votre identité reste confidentiel, votre nom et aucune caractéristique de identification ne seront inclus dans aucun format publiquement disponible.

Votre décision à participer à l'étude est volontaire. Vous êtes libre pour choisir de ne pas participer à l'étude ou de ne pas cesser de participer à tout moment, sans la conséquence ou aucune trace de participation.

Si vous avez des questions maintenant ou à l'avenir, sentez-vous libre pour me demander et/ou pour me contacter :

Theresa Alexander

talexand@uiwtx.edu

Téléphone portable : (+1) 512 517 5902 ou téléphone de travail : (+1) 210 829 3168

Si vous avez supplémentaire les questions ou vous souhaitez pour signaler un problème pendant l'étude svp me contactez et/ou :

Dr. Kevin Vichcales, Doyen de Diplômé Étudie

Le Comité d'Examen Institutionnel de Sujet Humain d'UIW

vichcale@uiwtx.edu

(+1) 210 829 2757

Oui Non Je voudrais que mon nom et identité demeurent confidentielle.

Oui Non Je voudrais que mes affiliations demeurent confidentielles.

Oui Non J'accepte d'être audio enregistré.

Oui Non J'accepte d'être vidéo enregistrée.

Oui Non J'accepte d'être photographié.

Oui Non Je suis d'accord sur la présence d'un traducteur s'il y a lieu.

Oui Non Je suis d'accord sur des sessions d'entrevue de répétition s'il y a lieu.

Vous serez donné une copie signée de cette forme à garder.

#### *Contrat de cadeau pour des enregistrements*

Je, \_\_\_\_\_ donne ci-dessus de manière permanente et transfère aux archives du chercheur, mon entrevue conduite sur le \_\_\_\_\_.

En faisant ce cadeau, je comprends que je donne tous les droit, le titre, et l'intérêt pour copyright aux archives du chercheur. En échange, le chercheur m'accorde un permis non-exclusif d'utiliser cette entrevue pendant ma vie.

Je comprends que le chercheur rendra cette entrevue disponible pour la recherche sans restriction. Les futures utilisations peuvent inclure la citation et la publication ou l'émission dans tous les médias, y compris l'Internet.

*Confirmation de consentement*

VOTRE SIGNATURE INDIQUE QUE VOUS CONSENTEZ POUR PARTICIPER À CETTE  
ÉTUDE DE RECHERCHES ET QUE VOUS AVEZ LU ET COMPRENDRE  
L'INFORMATION FOURNIE CI-DESSUS ET EXPLIQUÉE À VOUS.

---

Signature de Sujet

---

Signature Soumise de Témoin

---

Signature d'Investigateur

---

Le date (temps)

## Appendix D: Consent Form – Italian

Il Soggetto Acconsente a Prendere Parte ad un Studio sulla  
Storia dell'Industria del Ricamo nella Moda in Europa a Partire da Worth  
University of the Incarnate Word

Io, Theresa Alexander, sono una studentessa dottoranda alla University of the Incarnate Word (UIW), e sono in procinto di conseguire il dottorato in educazione con una specializzazione in Higher Education.

Le sto chiedendo di prendere parte ad un studio di ricerca della storia dell'industria del ricamo nella moda. L'obiettivo di questo studio è di seguire la storia dell'industria del ricamo nella moda moderna in Europa. Le sto chiedendo di prendere parte a questo studio perché lei è stato identificato(a) come un membro dell'industria professionale del ricamo o una persona che ha una conoscenza significativa della industria professionale del ricamo. Spero di poter documentare le sue impagabili memorie, esperienze e conoscenze.

Se decidesse di partecipare la intervisterò personalmente sulle sue esperienze nel ricamo professionale e sulla sua conoscenza nella storia del ricamo. Il colloquio durerà un'ora o due e potrebbe anche non essere l'unico se decidessimo di comune accordo di fare sessioni successive.

Vorrei il suo permesso per Régis trarre con audio e video l'intervista per analizzare meglio la conversazione. Se mi fosse dato il permesso, la Régis trazione sarebbe tenuta al sicuro. Lei potrebbe rifiutare la Régis trazione dell'intervista o smettere il processo di Régis trazione in qualsiasi momento. Lei ha anche il diritto di rifiutare di rispondere ad ogni domanda.

Non ci sono rischi o disagi prevedibili altro che la divulgazione della sua identità e affiliazione professionale alle parte interessate. Potrebbe comunque scegliere di partecipare e di mantenere queste informazioni confidenziali.

Non ci sono benefici diretti o compensi per aver partecipato a questo studio; comunque è auspicabile che la conoscenza ottenuta da questo studio aiuterà le generazioni future di ricamatori.

Se non specificamente richiesto, le sue Régis trazioni audio e video saranno archiviate nella biblioteca della University of Incarnate Word come parte della discussione della tesi di laurea dell'intervistatore principale. Come tale, non c'è presunzione di confidenzialità se non espressamente richiesto. Tuttavia se richiedesse che la sua identità rimanesse confidenziale, il suo nome e ogni caratteristiche d'identificazione non sarebbero inclusi in nessun testo pubblico disponibile.

La sua decisione di prendere parte a questo studio è volontaria. Lei è libero/a di scegliere di non prendere parte a questo studio o di cessare la sua partecipazione in ogni momento,

con nessuna conseguenza personale o nota della sua partecipazione. Se avesse domande adesso o in futuro, mi chieda o mi contatti tranquillamente:

Theresa Alexander  
 talexand@uiwtx.edu  
 Telefono cellulare: (+1) 512 517 5902 o telefono di lavoro: (+1) 210 829 3168

Se lei avesse domande aggiuntive o volesse segnalare un problema durante il corso dello studio per favore mi contatti e/o:

Dr. Kevin Vichcales, Dean of Graduate Studies  
 UIW Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)  
 vichale@uiwtx.edu  
 (+1) 210 829 2757

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| Sì | No | Vorrei che il mio nome e identità rimanessero confidenziali       |
| Sì | No | Vorrei che le mie affiliazioni rimanessero confidenziali          |
| Sì | No | Sono d'accordo ad essere audio Régis trato                        |
| Sì | No | Sono d'accordo ad essere video Régis trato                        |
| Sì | No | Sono d'accordo ad essere fotografato                              |
| Sì | No | Sono d'accordo alla presenza di un interprete se fosse necessario |
| Sì | No | Sono d'accordo a ripetere i colloqui se fosse necessario          |

Le sarà data una copia firmata di questo foglio da tenere.

Io \_\_\_\_\_ con il presente documento permanentemente dono e trasmetto all'archivio del ricercatore, la mia intervista/e condotta in data \_\_\_\_\_. Nell'effettuare questa donazione, sono cosciente che sto trasferendo tutto il diritto, titolo, e interesse nei diritti d'autore, all'archivio del ricercatore. In cambio, il ricercatore mi concede un'autorizzazione non esclusiva per utilizzare questa intervista durante la mia esistenza.

Sono consapevole inoltre che il ricercatore renderà questa intervista disponibile per la ricerca senza restrizioni. Futuri utilizzi potrebbero includere quotazioni e pubblicazioni o trasmissioni in qualsiasi media, incluso internet.



*Conferma del Consenso*

La Sua firma indica che lei acconsente a prendere parte in questo studio di ricerca e che lei ha letto e compreso le informazioni che le sono state date sopra in questo documento e che le sono state presentate.

---

Firma del soggetto

---

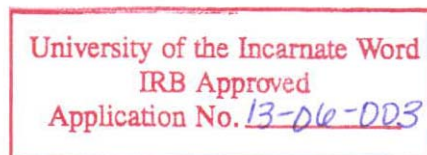
Firma dell'investigatore

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Firma del testimone

---

Data (ora)



## Appendix E: Examples of Field Notes

also many associated &  
 macramé trims or a combination  
 of techniques

They split work between  
 Chanel, independent designers,  
 (& something else - can't remember)

→ 6 prêt collections for Chanel

- 2 sp/smr
- 2 fall/watr
- 1 Cruise
- 1 pre-fall - considered  
 a blend between  
 prêt & couture - the  
 "heart" collections

+ 2 couture

- given fabrics & designs -  
 they propose trims.

"yes, no, change, yes, yes, no..."  
 then they make

Figure E1: Page from field notes from Gouvernel.

The embroideresses worked with uncut tambour needles wrapped in the middle w/ strips of fabric to form a secure & comfortable place to hold it. Much like wrapping thread around a long bobbin



The wrapping is unique to each embroideress. Personalized to their liking & needs

The hestles were ancient & non-adjustable

I think they had turned legs & flat feet

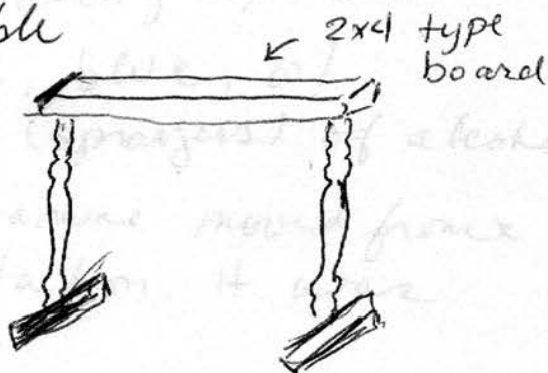


Figure E2: Page from field notes from Pino Grasso Embroideries.

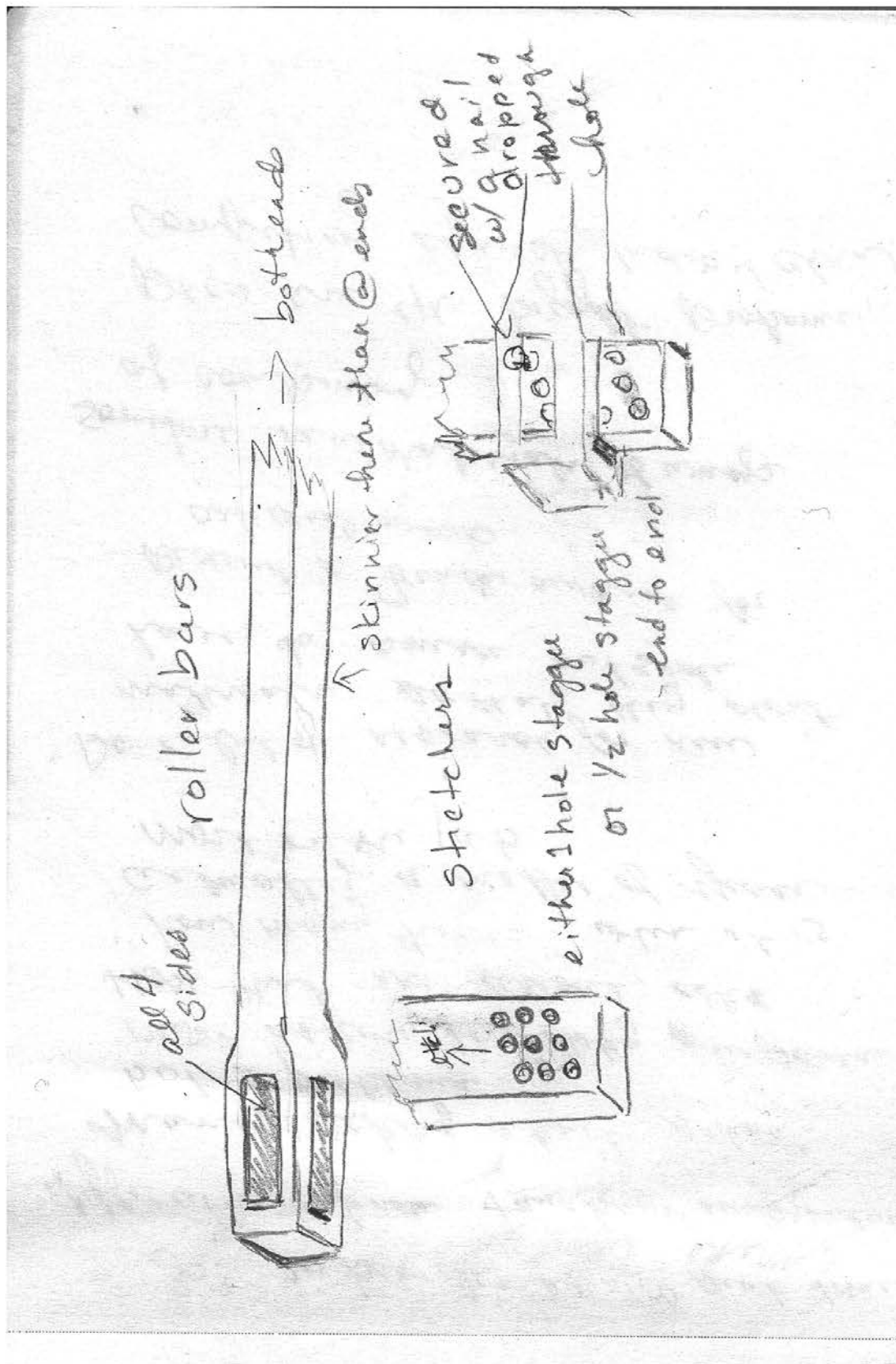


Figure E3: Page from field notes from Ateliers Darolti.