



**National College of Art & Design
Faculty of Design**

Department of Fashion and Textiles

**"An Examination of the Role and Relationship
of Innovative and Decorative Fabrics and the Designers
within the Fashion Industry in relation to the 1980's**

by

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INTRODUCTION

The upper end of the fashion industry has always commanded the best of fabric in terms of fibre and design. There are various sources available to the couturier, from unusual one off prints and experimental fabric work by artists and designers, to the traditional skills of hand-embroidery and beading of the many seamstresses in Paris involved in couture known as the 'Petit Mains'.

There is a symbiotic relationship between fashion and textile designers. Innovative fabrics often result from the collaboration of a fashion designer and fabric designer and producer. Subsequently the use of some of these fabrics will disseminate into the mass market.

While it is still very early to assess the full impact of the 1980's, it was a particularly interesting time for all involved in the fashion industry due to the revival of Haute Couture and the effect that this had on the innovation, design and production of specialised fabrics.

But design does not happen in a vacuum. All the factors which shape a society, effect, and are reflected by fashion. So it is necessary to examine some of the political, social and economic considerations that shaped

the 1980's in relation to the fashion and textile industry, and to the role of the designer and the customer.

The extensiveness of the background of this subject prevents a thorough discussion within this thesis. The literature available covers the subject adequately. I have however, examined the work of a selected number of fashion and textile designers, especially in relation to the rest of the thesis. Due to their innovative utilization of and collaboration with designers and producers of fabric the work of Paul Poiret and Elsa Schiaparelli is discussed in chapter one.

The explosion of print as a medium in the 1980's was phenomenal and relates to a number of factors which evolved at this time. Chapter two will look at the immediate background to the 1980's which led to a renewal of print and design talent. Postmodernism, with its individualism and eclecticism helped to promote a craft based approach which launched many a designer name.

There was a renaissance of Haute Couture during the 1980's and in chapter three I will chart the rise of the "Super-

Designers" who rose to prominence during this time with special reference to Christian Lacroix and Gianni Versace and their impact on and relationship with textiles. This chapter will also look at some of the reasons why people buy and wear couture.

The anonymity of the textile designer as opposed to the fashion designer is analysed in chapter four. Another important aspect within this chapter will be to look at various successful fabric designers and discuss their work in relation to the decorative European tradition and innovative and minimalistic work of the Japanese.

The background research for this thesis involved extensive reading on the subject and a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in order to examine the use of specialised fabrics in their dress and textile collections.

Researching the 1980's was more difficult. There has been little specialist written material on textiles from this period, therefore Chloe Colchester's book The New Textiles Trends and Traditions was a seminal source as was extensive use of magazine articles. To put the subject in

context I visited various designer shops in London and in particular visited and spoke with the managers of Lacroix, Georgina Von Etzdorf and the fashion and fabric floor of Liberty of London.

Other information comes from interviewing Irish textile designer Patricia Gavin who designs woven fabric for a number of couture houses in Paris. Also from conversations with Irish fashion designers and store buyers as well as from my own experience of designing hand-painting and selling fabric to the fashion industry.

CHAPTER ONE

SPECIALISED FABRICS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY; A SELECTED BACKGROUND

1900-1920:

In some ways the early years of this century between 1900-1920 show the most appreciative use of fabric by designers. Sumptuous fabrics with elaborate embellishment such as embroidery, beading and lace in decorative form were in great demand. Screen printing had not as yet been developed but there was much use made of stencilled work and hand block printed fabrics from design houses such as Fortuny and Liberty (1).

With the prevalence of blatant displays of wealth in the Edwardian era it is no wonder that the mainstream of fashion for rich ladies, was garments which overloaded the body and senses. While the silhouette became narrower, influences from the Victorian era were reflected by the continued use of flounces, ribbons, tassels, stays and hundreds of hooks and eyes. It was the innovative couturier, Paul Poiret, who changed the perception and direction of women's dress before the first world war. His work is interesting, not only for his revolutionary approach to dress, but for daring use of fabrics and prints in particular.

PAUL POIRET:

Poiret's new simplicity and silhouette caused a sensation and influenced the future shape of fashion in much the same way as Dior's "New Look" did in 1947. Possessing an impressive personality Poiret helped in developing the role of couturier as we know it today.

Poiret's inspiration was drawn from a variety of cultures, Russian, Turkish, Persian and Indian and reflecting the mood of the time evoked a feeling of exotic orientalism. (Plate 1)(2) Apart from the simpler lines of the clothes they were much lighter to wear and less restrictive of movement than previously. His use of colour was dramatic and different, using a strong clear palette that was complemented by black. His strong feel for drama, interesting fabric and colour, eventually led him to produce his own customized prints and even to set up an art school cum design studio which he named "Martine" Recruiting, artist Raoul Dufy, to design for him, Poiret had his own source of specialized and individualized fabric to draw from in producing his collections.(Plate 2)

Paul Poiret was a seminal force in early twentieth century fashion and textile design, but his reign was short. His popularity was at a height from 1909 to 1914 and in many ways his approach and work are similar to designers today.





PLATE 2. Two versions of "Longchamp" by Raoul Dufy c. 1919 for Poiret.

His sense of drama and and colour invite comparisons with Christian Lacroix who in 1987 also burst onto the scene in a dramatic way. Lacroix also thrived in a time of "Unabashed and promiscuous living well", a description which could be equally applied to the 1980's as to the late 'Belle Epoque'. (Reynolds Millbank 1985 p65) How Lacroix will fare in the harsh, recession hit nineties remains to be seen. But Poiret failed to adjust and adapt his style successfully to meet the demands of the post first world war period, after which his business fell into decline.

THE WORK OF OTHER DESIGNERS:

Other designers and groups such as Mariano Fortuny and the Omega group were operating at this time, producing specialized fabric both for fashion and furnishing. The Omega group was influenced by Poiret's "Ecole Martine" and concerned itself mostly with objects for interiors from furnishings to ceramics but it did design some textiles for fashion.(3)

There were other designers during the 1900-1920 period who made interesting use of fabric, especially Lucille and The Callot Soeurs but the work of designers such as Poiret, Fortuny, Liberty and the Omega represented different

approaches and ways in which the fabric was used. All of them were daring and their influence affected the way dress and fabric were to be used in the future. Poiret's clothes prepared the way for the slimmed down silhouette of the 1920's. His 'Ecole Martine' along with the artists and designers of the Omega group enlivened the decorative arts by the exciting use of colour and brought influences from the world of contemporary fine art.

Fortuney's work was applied art at its highest level. His technical secrets have remained undisclosed but his style of decoration has been widely copied, (with varying degrees of success), throughout the century.

Liberty and Co. were instrumental in the printing and production of fine hand block printed silks and wool since the late nineteenth century and combined these fashion fabrics with the company's philosophy (which was based on the aesthetic movement), to produce their own individual style of dress. (Plates 3+4)

The point being that these designers may have been termed "alternative" in their day, worn by only a small coterie of people, but those that wore them (mostly the "Avant



PLATE 3. A typical Liberty print

PLATE 4. Liberty dress c. 1890's.

Garde") had a greater and more lasting influence on society than those that wore conventional fashion.

BETWEEN THE WARS:

Perhaps the most radical development in the application of pattern was the introduction of hand screen printing, as Joyce Storey says "the process that has so changed the character of design in fashion and furnishing fabrics all over Europe". (Storey, 1992, p107.)

The result of which was to allow great freedom in decorating fabrics. Virtually anything drawn, painted or applied on paper can be relatively easily printed on fabric in a direct way while keeping the spontaneity of the original artwork. In the 1920's and 1930's there was a demand for "Art Silks".(4) Hand screen printing allowed the economical production of greater yardages than the very laborious block-printing method, and yet less yardage than it was necessary in order to set up for expensive roller printing.

Another widely used and characteristic method of decoration of the time was fabrics which were embroidered or hand beaded. As well as specialist embroidery firms such as Albert Lesage et Cie who worked directly with the couture houses there was a whole back-up industry producing luxury fabrics in France.(5) These textile firms were based mostly in Lyons and Mulhouse and produced lavish

decorative fabrics (printed, woven and embroidered) especially for Paris couturieres. The fabrics were designed by various artists and studios, most notably by Raoul Dufy.

ELSA SCHIAPARELLI:

Inter-war style was first dominated by subtle chic and understated clothes. Elsa Schiaparelli injected drama, fun and brought the influence of contemporary art movements into the world of fashion.

Schiaparelli was influenced by surrealism and in making use of the talents of Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau (amongst others), created a metamorphosis in dress, in the use of fabrics and decoration, heralded the way fashion was to develop through the nineteen-thirties and forties.

Most interesting is Schiaparelli's use and decoration of fabrics. She explored the use of synthetics and utilized conventional fabrics in a radical way (6). With her use of unusual and often startling fabric combinations Schiaparelli's work can at times seem very contemporary. It was certainly a radical innovation in the 1930's to use latex and surfaced rubber, then associated with

underclothes, the sort of fabrics we identify more with contemporary 'avant garde' designers like Gaultier and Mugler, were used by Schiaparelli in her haute couture collections.

Her use of prints and embroidery was equally revolutionary. She persuaded artists such as Dali, Cocteau, Christian Bernard and Vertes to design for her. Some she designed herself. Motifs were animals, flowers, insects, maps, elements from astrology and mythology. Many of these designs were screen printed by hand on rayon. Jean Cocteau's designs were hand embroidered for her by Lesage. (Plate 5,6,7+8)

Perhaps what makes Schiaparelli so interesting is that her approach to her work echoed that of artists of her time. According to Clement Greenberg (Quoted by Elizabeth Wilson in "Adorned in Dreams") "one of the definitions of modern art has been that it 'lies in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself' ". (Wilson, 1985, p62). Conversely to most of her peers, Schiaparelli analysed fashion. With her use of so called 'cheap' fabrics, popular, fun and surrealist imagery for prints she turned the concept of couture on its head. Francois Lesage recalls (he worked



PLATE 5. Lobster by Dali for Schiaparelli.

PLATE 6. Face print by Dali for Schiaparelli



PLATE 7. Embroidery designed by Cocteau and embroidered by Albert Lesage et Cie for Schiaparelli.



PLATE 8. Tear print by Dalí for evening dress by Schiaparelli and detail of print.

with her in the 1950's) "She was a very talented woman whose ideas are even now still being ripped off by some of the names in Paris". (McDowell, 1990,p104)

1950-1970:

One of the most interesting manufacturers of print of this period was Zika Ascher. His company was responsible for supplying hand printed couture fabric to every name in fashion from Balenciaga, Dior, Givenchy to Yves Saint Laurent and Mary Quant.

The brief was to produce innovative fabrics suggesting that "The most attractive designs are not of necessity topical, narrative or floral, but frequently abstract and quite simple" (Withers, Nov./Dec. 1992,p76) They often commissioned famous artists of the day to design for them. One of their more interesting projects was to commission artists such as Matisse, Henry Moore, Cocteau and Sutherland, among others, to design a scarf. The resulting silk scarves were then "exhibited throughout the world as if they were paintings, stretched, framed and lit". (Baseman 1989. p94.) (Plate 9+10)

The art establishment of the time did not take this work very seriously inspite of the names associated with it,

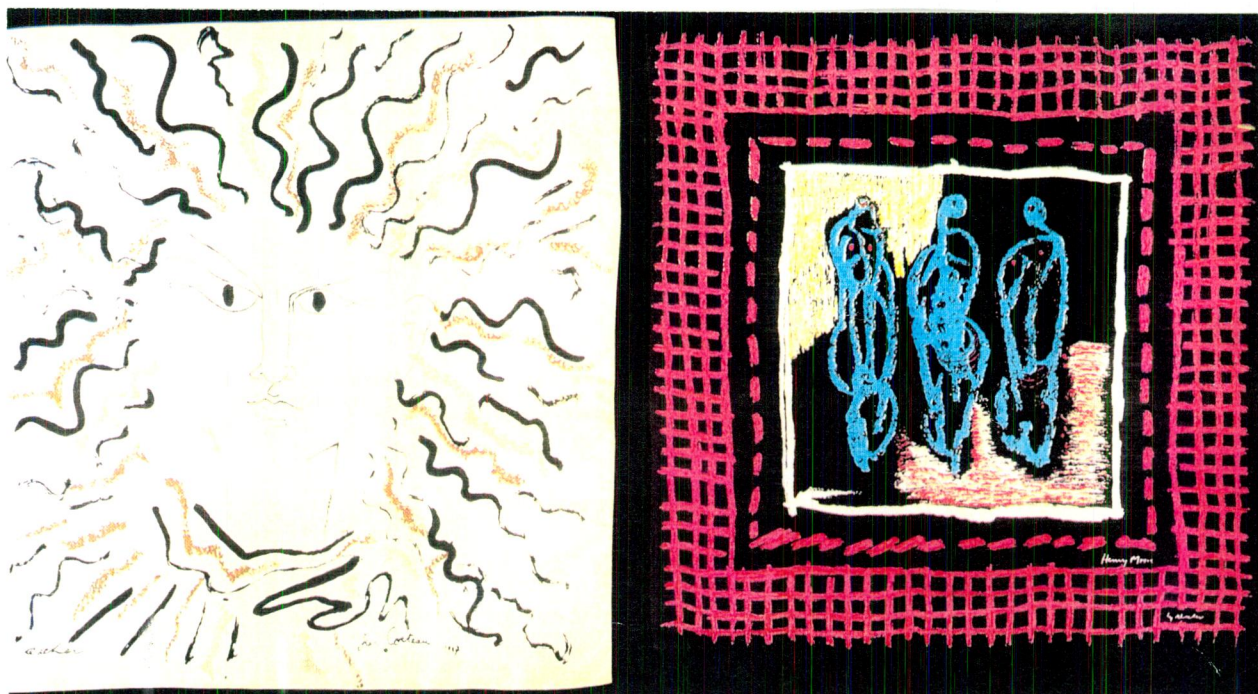


PLATE 9. Ascher scarf designed by (from left) Jean Cocteau and Henry Moore.

Plate 10. Ascher print dress 1945.

seemingly because the prints were a limited edition on fabric rather than on paper and presumably because they were designed to be worn.(7)

What Ascher did was to capitalise on the trend which started with Poiret and flowered with Schiaparelli to collaborate with established artists and in doing so enhanced textile design. The work these artists and others did in creating designs for fabric that was produced for various couturiers lends credibility to the design and decoration of fabrics. If a humble scarf is deemed worthy of being designed by as serious an artist as Henry Moore, does this not make a positive statement about the viability of textiles as a medium ?

The period of 1900 to 1970 is a very long period to cover as the background of specialized fabrics. Because of this and the impossibility of adequately taking into account all aspects of this area (due to space limitations), I have discussed only those artists, designers and manufacturers who are directly relevant to the subject and who will be refereed to in later chapters.

This chapter introduced the background to specialist fabrics, helping to set the scene for developments in the 1970's and 1980's. Included was couture, and aspects of

the 'avant garde' which demanded individuality in dress and by the use of fabric and supported the notion of alternative lifestyles, progressive thinking in colour and design and whose influence gradually permeated into the mainstream. This allowed and supported the work of artists as designers, the burgeoning craft industry and people in the style of the Omega group.

As the century progressed and with increasing democratization and the development of a consumption driven society these factors began to pull together and pave the way for the future.

CHAPTER ONE END NOTES:

(1). Liberty and Co. had been dyeing and printing their own fabrics since 1879.

(2). He was also influenced by the Ballet Russe.

(3). For further information see "The Omega Workshops 1913-19, Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury" by The Crafts Council.

(4). 'Art Silks' was the name for early synthetic fabrics such as Rayons and Viscose.

(5). Now known as Lesage S.A.

(6). Schiaparelli would work in direct collaboration with textile firms producing innovative fabrics such as Jersarelli and Rhodophane.

(7). Subsequently wall-hangings designed by Matisse and printed by Ascher were purchased by the Australian National Gallery for US.\$800,000. (Withers, Nov/Dec 1992. p78.)

CHAPTER TWO

THE EXPLOSION OF PRINT IN THE 1980's

There was a resurgence of print, colour and optimism in the 1980's. At this stage in the early nineties we look back and see the eighties as a boom time, a time of easy wealth, conspicuous spending and in terms of fashion a return to glamour and an attitude that it was acceptable to spend vast sums of money on clothes again.

The decade saw the rise of the designer as superstar and encouraged and promoted the idea, that the fact an item had a designer made label, validated the item no matter what it looked like or how it fulfilled it's function.

The political regimes of the time most notably in the U.S. and Britain supported an enterprise culture. At the same time a new resurgence was taking place in the arts and design. Textile and fashion design flourished particularly in the area of specialized fabrics.

This chapter will explore some of the factors that gave rise to what happened in the eighties in relation to fabric design. Increasingly the spotlight was turned onto new talent coming out of art colleges fresh with ideas and carrying them out without recourse to the conventional print industry. The fact there was more money around and

new money keen to establish itself helped to fund the activities of designers.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND THE PRINT EXPLOSION
OF THE 1980's:

The fast forward method of designing as reflected by Emilio Pucci (1) in the designing of his scarves, of always striving to produce more and faster reflected a trend that was widespread in the 1960's and 1970's. Always nervous of the cheap imports from developing countries a series of trade tariffs and export quotas were introduced and have been regulated for the last seventeen years by a system called The Multi Fibre Arrangement (M.F.A.). This arrangement blocked these cheaper imports and allowed the Western textiles and clothing industry to retain their artificially high prices. These industrialists imagined that mass production, "engorging vast yardage of cloth at speed would provide a lasting solution to the problem of overseas competitors." (Colchester, 1991, p7). It was not successful and the oil crisis of the early seventies closed down many of the smaller textile businesses. These small firms were usually amalgamated into larger conglomerates and the textile industry produced vast amounts of dull products that were all the same.

It is strange that with the technological advances in the print industry, since the mechanization of screen printing in the late nineteen-fifties, that it has not produced more exciting fabrics. Perhaps this was due as Joyce Storey suggests that,

"the assumption in some areas of the mass production industry has always been that cheaply priced cloth could have anything put on it. (Storey, 1992, p132)

The moribund state of the textile industry represented in a way what was happening in other industries, overloaded with fixed ideas about production and the market and an inability to change with the times. There seemed to be little direction for the future. Perhaps because of this, nostalgia became popular in design. Laura Ashley and Liberty of London re-issued small floral and geometric designs. Their popularity reflected a trend started by the hippy lifestyles in the sixties which eventually had a major impact on society.

ALTERNATIVE LIVING AND THE EMERGENCE OF CRAFT:

In the sixties and seventies there was another resurgence of the idea of turning one's back on society and living an alternative lifestyle which was closer to nature. This was not a new idea, its roots hark back very much to the aesthetic movement of the last century.

This trend, which was a reaction to over industrialization and urbanization, was very low-key during the forties and fifties when Europe needed all its energies to recover after the war and the notion of increasing production seemed sensible and vital. When this had been achieved to the stage that society seemed over mechanized, then romanticised back to nature idealism became fashionable again. This time the movement was not confined to a small elite or intellectuals but had far reaching effects on all societies in the industrial world. It started with American hippies searching for an alternative way of life. Many of these people identified with the crafts as a return to a more natural existence. They sold their work at rural craft fairs across the States. Europeans followed suit and soon there was a fledgling craft industry.

Because this movement was a deliberate rejection of mass production and consumption the important feature of these craft produced items was the fact that they were made by hand, rather than what they looked like or how they worked. It was the lifestyle that mattered and with low standards of design, it was then inevitable that "the craft textile movement became firmly associated with 'macrame plant-pot holders.' " (Colchester, 1991, p106).

This fashion, often called 'self-sufficiency', as with all other alternative popular movements entered into the mainstream. It influenced the ethnic look in fashion, was taken up by Paris couturieres to produce folk inspired collections, was exploited by Laura Ashley as a return to 'traditional' style clothes and prints. It promoted conservation movements, vegetarianism and an atmosphere of self reflection and renewed examination and appreciation of non-western cultures.

ECLECTICISM AND THE POSTMODERN IN 1980's DESIGN:

The effect of these counter cultural movements was to foster a diverseness in society which into the eighties, in the area of design, developed into postmodernism.

In the nineteen eighties this pluralism and individualism was applied to the field of textile design. The designer era of the eighties was very much an urban concern, while it's roots developed from the alternative lifestyle of the sixties and seventies, it's ethos rejected much of what went before.

The early eighties saw a boom in technology and computers. The effect of which was the increase of visual information being distributed around the world which in turn accelerated fashion. Suddenly it was no longer viable to dictate what was correct in style. Individuality and eclecticism became prominent in all areas of design including fashion and textiles. The forecasting services were producing more and more trends for style and colour each season until by the end of the eighties it became impossible to identify a definite trend. Colchester likens this trend in design to food manufacturers experimenting with new lines to see what might prove palatable, in the same way designers were also experimenting with style almost to see what would take, and what would be rejected by the public. (Colchester,1991,p9)

TEXTILE DESIGN AND PRINT:

The fashion and textile explosion of the nineteen eighties was originally centred in Britain. Contradictory as it may seem, it was the very stagnation of the garment and textile industries which allowed this to happen.



PLATE 11. Scarf by English Eccentrics c. 1986.

Following on the success of the punk explosion, with its anti establishment ethos, and with continuing media attention, fashion graduates from London art colleges, such as John Galliano and Helen Storey became feted street-style celebrities. Because of their very inexperience and lack of money, backers and orders were not immediately forthcoming and they had to rely on themselves. So collaborating with textile graduates, using hand-painting or hand-printed fabrics and crucially with the help and attention given by fashion editors, street style fashion was launched.

Textile names such as, English Eccentrics and Georgina Von Etzdorf started off in garages or warehouses hand-printing small amounts of fabric which were used by young fashion designers.(Plate 11) With this success many of these designers went into business for themselves, opening their own shops and unusually for textile designers making names for themselves. When the bubble burst most of these young designers went with it, of those that now survive Georgina Von Etzdorf and Timney, Fowler seem to be the most successful at establishing their businesses on a firm financial footing and creating large overseas markets for their textiles.

The early eighties were a very exciting time for these textile graduates. How tempting it must have been to be in the world's fashion spotlight even for a short time. The alternative was to anonymously produce standardized designs on paper for a lethargic print industry.

THE DESIGNER MAKER:

As these designers became more experienced and as others followed to set up on their own there was a shift towards a craft based approach. However even though most of these people made much of the work themselves , and even though it might have been thought of as a "one off" piece, these designers rejected the notion that they were craftspeople. The pages of Crafts magazine were filled during the eighties with debates on the difference between art and craft. Craft-workers became known as 'Designer Makers'.

It is understandable why these designer makers did not want to be associated with the word "craft". If by the end of the seventies craft textiles became associated by the public at large, with stringy macrame pot holders, how could the highly skilled and talented Helen Yardleys and exquisitely detailed designs of Von Etzdorf possibly be prepared to come under the same craft label.(2)(Plate 12) Besides their concerns were different, they wanted to be

part of the urban, style conscious, and consumer society that was around them. Most also wanted to use their training to make a career and not to have an alternative lifestyle.

By the latter part of the decade the message had got across to the public, craft galleries were widely established and places like the Contemporary Textile Gallery and Contemporary Applied Arts Gallery in London were promoting and getting high prices for printed and painted and woven textiles. This seemed a betrayal to the older generation of idealistic craftspeople.

Rosemary Hill in an article in Crafts quotes David Drew

"I think that what most craftspeople and artists are doing is laundering money, and it looks jolly clean, doesn't it buying craft ?" (Hill, 1989, p45).

This remark brings up the question of money. Perhaps David Drew and others thought that some craftspeople had sold out. Many others would say it was perfectly justifiable to be paid well for hard work. Money was central to the decade, films like 'Wall Street' helped to cement the identity of the grasping, "greed is good", eighties. When you actually look at the eighties you may find that in reality there was only a short time of economic upturn, which is hard to actually pin down.

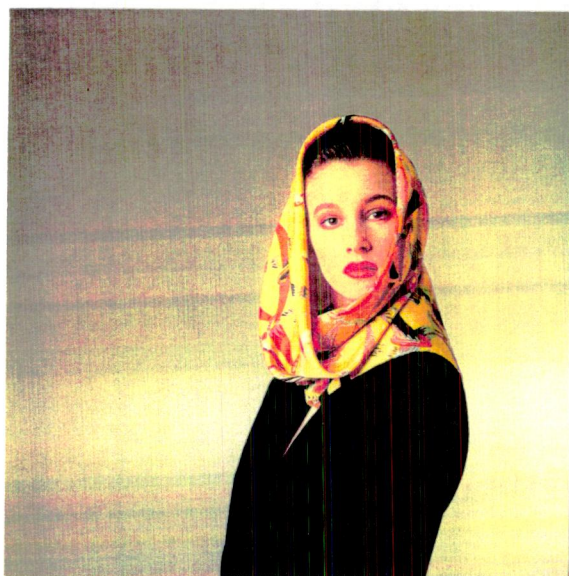


PLATE 12a. 12b. 12c. Screen printed silk scarves by Georgina Von Etzdorf, 1987 plus detail.

There was a recession from 1980-83 (Colchester, 1991,p15). In an article from Design magazine from 1988 Joanne Davis, organizer of the British Designer Show says of buying trends,

"The exuberant period of four years ago, when lots of money was going into lots of different hands, stopped in March 1986, when the Pound/Dollar advantage ended. (Young,1988 p36).

Yet this period from 1986 on was the start of the real renewal of couture, even though there was a stock market crash in 1987.

Perhaps the fact that it was perceived as a time of expansion and growth rather than actually being one, made all the difference. Certainly there was more money around, more credit available, an enterprise culture flourished and taxes were reduced in Britain and America. It's foundation all seems very flimsy now as recession bites once again, but perhaps it was the allusion of a boom and the optimism that, this generated that caused one to occur. What did happen was that those who did have money, and the newly rich felt confident and anxious to spend it on clothes and artifacts that were an outward expression of their wealth and were used as a means of establishing themselves.

CHAPTER ONE END NOTE:

(1). "Pucci has a special colour shorthand and can create intricate colour patterns for as many as one hundred scarves in an hour." (Kennedy, 1991, p118)

(2). Helen Yardley is a designer maker of tufted rugs, who came to prominence during the 1980's.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RISE OF "THE SUPER DESIGNERS"

Couture became relevant again in 1980 in a quiet sort of way, by the mid eighties it was back in a way that we had not seen since the last hey day of couture in the fifties. There were various factors which contributed to this renaissance. Nicholas Coleridge suggests that there were political, domestic and cultural and financial factors. (Coleridge, 1988, p172).

What were these factors which helped make couture viable again ? The social climate had changed , particularly in the United States. The Reagan presidency brought with it's conservative republicanism, undertones of Hollywood and of glamour.(1) The seal of approval had been given from the top and the so called "shiney set" could openly come out and enjoy themselves again. Once it became acceptable and even appropriate to spend money on clothes again, rich American women flocked to Paris to the couture shows.

These "Ladies who lunch" and "Social X-rays" had the necessary leisure to spend the required time needed to wear couture(2). To attend the fashion shows and have fittings (up to sixteen needed for a ball gown) the lady who buys couture must have at least five weeks to spend in

Paris or Europe per season. Of course many of the couturiers send videos of their collections and "venduses" to some of their best customers and allow the customer to choose and be fitted in their own homes.(3) While few women today have the leisure to indulge this, there are less than three thousand couture customers left in the world, and only about six or seven hundred are regarded as regular customers.

Apart from leisure there was immense social cachet to be had from wearing 'Haute Couture', particularly in America. A couture suit may have up to two hundred hours of work in it. It has a long tradition which associates it with royalty, the aristocracy of Europe and quality. Nouveau riche women such as Ivana Trump and their husbands use couture as one of the means of establishing themselves, as Hebe Dorsey puts it.

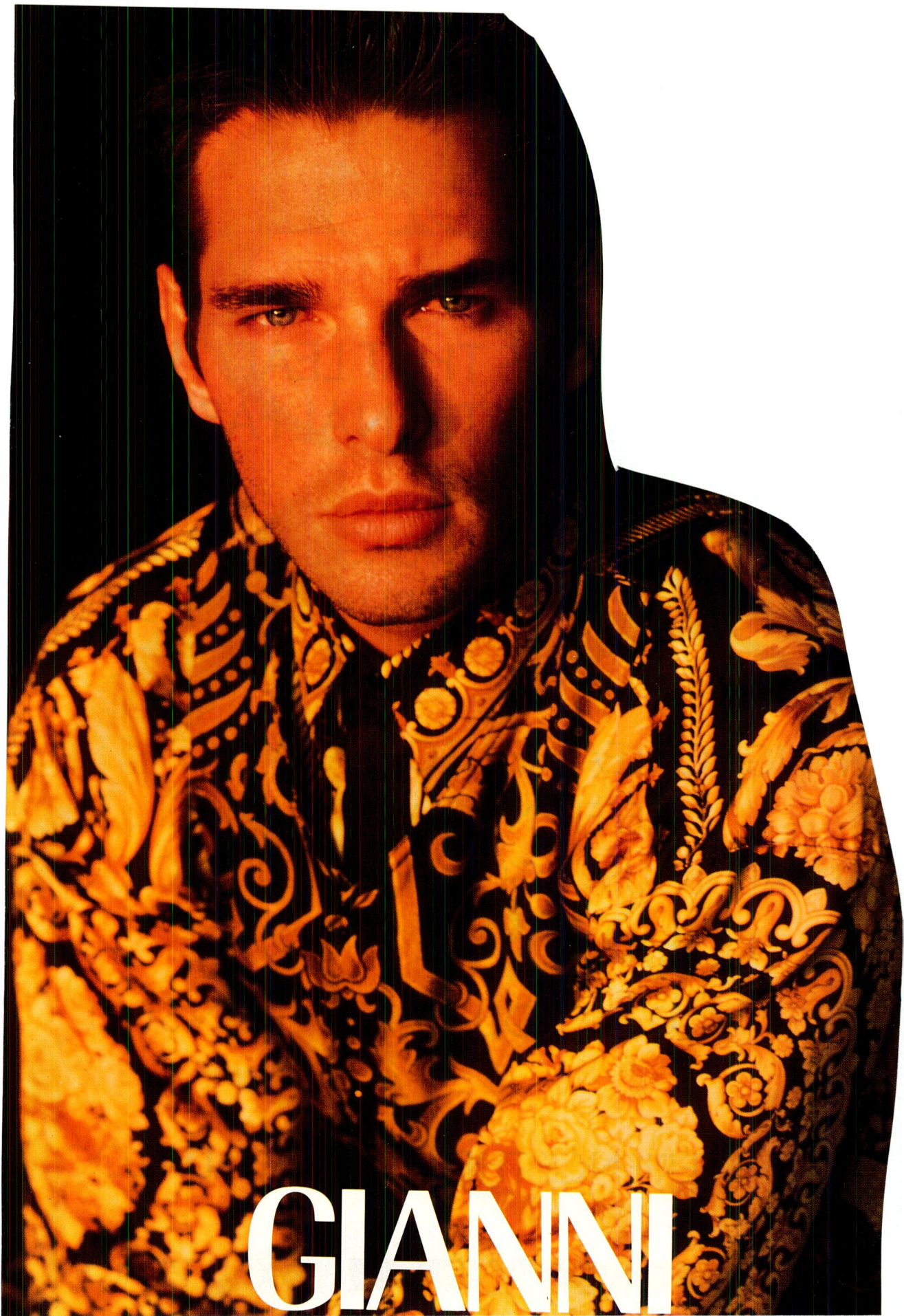
The men (the husbands) don't want glamorous. They want a LADY, especially when their not sure where they picked up the lady, you understand ?? That's why Givenchy is such a success with the Americans. They make anyone from anywhere look like a lady. (Coleridge, 1988 pl75).

These various factors such as the political correctness of extravagant socializing, lots of money and leisure and a means of a certain social endorsement all encouraged American money to flow to Haute Couture. As an

interesting parallel to this theory that a lot of the 80's money was a media allusion, the couture boom shows an interesting statistic.(4) The same number of couture outfits were sold in 1986 as in 1976. (Coleridge 1988, p176). The media excitement was generated by the success of a small number of houses to the detriment of the rest.

THE RISE OF THE SUPER DESIGNERS:

The 1980's saw the phenomenal rise of certain designers whose fame equals that of movie stars and heads of state. With astute marketing, and financial backing, designers such as Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Armani and Versace have in a reasonably short time created fashion empires from nothing and have managed to keep these largely under their own control. Designers like movie stars enjoy publicity. Media attention on their art collections and other facets of their lives helped to foster the rise of these new names. Not only did this increase sales of clothes but also of their perfumes, accessories and even furnishings (5) in some cases. They were no longer humble dress-makers but chief executives. Oscar de La Renta tells Coleridge, "today we sell a lifestyle to the whole world." (Coleridge 1988 p5.).



Gianni Versace, Romeo Gigli and Christian Lacroix all have couture status, recently established names and an interest in fabric and decoration. The fashion of the early eighties was dominated by Japanese innovation in cut and black in colour. It was Lacroix who brought colour and pattern back into fashion, and Versace who exploited pattern and is known as the 'Prince of Prints'.

GIANNI VERSACE:

Versace's work is bright, colourful and sexy, his print patterns are collages of often surprisingly juxtapositioned images with diverse cultural references. They are often inspired by his Italian/Roman inheritance combined with references from Andy Warhol, Marilyn Monroe, to shells, flowers or geometric patterns. While Versace may buy freelance design work, (and has done so from Irish weave designer Tim Roberts for his couture collection), his prints are mostly designed in his studio under his supervision. According to the BBC TV. programme "THE LOOK" it takes up to eight months to prepare and design a print. Each print has up to twenty-seven colours which are painstakingly screen printed in Como in batches of 40m at a time .

What has been Versace's contribution to the design of specialised fabrics ? He has been a powerfully positive influence in the print industry, affecting every section of it from the specialist print area to the mass market. He has made colour and pattern fashionable again, he has also stretched the bounds of so called "good taste". He says in an interview with Georgina Howell,

"Fashion's headlong metamorphosis into style makes judgements about taste irrelevant, good, bad taste is prejudice like racism." (Howell, 1991, p18).

THE INFLUENCE OF VERSACE'S WORK ON THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY:

Versace is unapologetic about the impact of his work, his sense of drama and uncompromising standards of quality in production and print. While some people believe them vulgar and crude, his prints and sense of colour were extraordinary popular, the impact of which was that they were copied widely and very fast. In March 1991 in Versace's Ready To Wear (R.T.W.) shop in London there were a selection of silk, brightly printed signature shirts. At this stage this style of pattern was still new. They were beautifully made, of a high quality silk twill with distinctive, colourful prints. They cost £900 each. Ten months later a similar Versace silk shirt was reduced to £90 in the Brown Thomas Winter sale in Dublin. This massive reduction in price was due to customer fatigue which had set in during the intervening months because

there were so many copies of 'Versace' style prints on everything from leggings to dresses to shirts.

While Versace has been widely copied and vulgarized, so much so that he has even parodied it himself by using street and club wear as influences, his contribution has been to show that people really like colour and pattern. Perhaps the domination of black during the early and middle 80's has led to a reaction and colour and pattern have become a welcome relief from the sobriety of the classics of plain black, navy and brown. There seemed to be a belief, held by society in general, that colour and pattern and particularly decoration were somehow vulgar. Versace and Lacroix proved that this was not so. Lacroix can be accused of "pure over-indulgence" as Paul Costello asserts in a Sunday Observer article but I believe that he manages to do so without vulgarity. (Jeal, 1988, p66)

(6) The point of this is that these designer's successful endorsement of colour affects everyone in the print industry. It encourages manufacturers to be more adventurous in design styles so they perhaps buy more from freelance designers, it encourages innovation in designers both those who work on paper and on fabric, and it stimulates interest in this sort of work in the buying public from galleries to craft fairs.

Versace and other trend setting designers are copied so fast and so well that as soon as they produce a new style it may be seen in less than three months in a watered down version in many chain stores. Because of this the top designers are under constant pressure to come up with new styles or ever more innovative ideas, this accelerates fashion. Before Charles Worth, in the nineteenth century, fashion evolved slowly over decades. A hundred years later by the early 1980's fashion was changing by the season. Now there are numerous trends within each season, and the seasons are getting shorter all the time. The middle years of the 80's harped back to the styles of the 1950's, by 1989/90 the influence was the 1960's, by 1992/93 the current inspiration is the 1970's. By 1995 will the accelerated rate of fashion change have made the styles of the 1980's seem far enough in the past to become attractive again ?

CHRISTIAN LACROIX:

One of the most interesting designers to come out of the 1980's from the point of view of specialized fabric is Christian Lacroix. This is because of his love of colour and the way he combines unusual patterns and decorative fabrics together. He shows 'Haute Couture', 'Luxe' (less expensive), and Ready to Wear collections. His work attracts attention and headlines and could certainly be



PLATE 15.
Decorative catsuit
by Lacroix. Fabric
by Sylvie Skinazi.

considered controversial. His approach to decoration, to piling ornament on ornament, his flamboyant use of colour has infuriated many critics. (Plate 14)

Others credit his work as revitalizing couture. Chloe Colchester says in an article in Crafts "Since his arrival, couture has hit the headlines , showing more splendour and vitality than it has in the past twenty years" (Colchester, 1989, p35).

In "The Look" Christian Lacroix explains that when he set up his house he wanted to show something different. This was important not only from a personal creative point of view but that it could be used to generate the maximum publicity that is necessary to establish a couture house. What he did create and show was something alternative," a new mythology" as Patrick Maurites called it in his introduction to Lacroix's book "Pieces of a Pattern." (Lacroix 1992, p19).

Patrick Maurites goes on to describe the background which Lacroix's work was to respond to and reject.

"the devastated fashions of 1979/80 were another indication of the tiredness of the modernist canon..... of the equation of form and function and of the unrelenting insistence on purity and simplicity". (Lacroix; 1992, p19).

Lacroix's response to the harsh modernism and matt black of the early eighties was an eclectic amalgam of post-modernist, borrowings from the past combined with Latin colourings. The fashion world loved it, probably because it was so different, the Northern European, puritanical, minimalistic school of critic hated it. Lacroix's clothes were anathema to them.

Colin McDowell suggests that Lacroix's work is "Faux Couture," pushed forward by a Paris frightened by the success of the Japanese and fighting back the only way it knew how, the use of traditional decorative skills. (McDowell, 1992 pl55). McDowell goes on to say "To fashion purists and feminists alike, his work at Patou, and later under his own name is insulting both to clothes and to women" (McDowell, 1992, pl56). These statements may seem harsh, the gut reaction of a die hard minimalist frightened by the arrival and ascendancy of the baroque, but there is truth in the theory of the nervous Parisian elite worried for two decades about the demise of couture. However they need not have have been so concerned, Japanese minimalism did not suit the couture customer, it made them look too old and with its emphasis on subtlety did not allow them to display their wealth.

LACROIX AND THE USE OF FABRIC:

What McDowell refers to as Lacroix's 'decorative games' had a definite impact on fashion and on fabrics. (McDowell 1992, p20) Fabrics are the key element to Lacroix's work. Couture demands luxury and exclusivity and Lacroix has added individuality to this. In conversation with Patricia Gavin (an Irish designer who supplies woven fabric to Lacroix's Haute Couture), "Lacroix along with other couturiers uses only the 'noble fabrics', silks, cashmere, and wools". (Gavin, Derry 1993) This is at the dictate of the customer. Colour and the type of weave or print create the unmistakable 'individual' feel of a Lacroix.

Sylvie Skinazi created the swirling, painterly prints of the early Lacroix Haute Couture collections. (Plate 15) These had a distinctive hand-painted look. They were in fact transfer prints, a process where by the image is painted on paper and heat transferred on to fabric. A selling point of this was the fact that each print could be used only once thereby making it even more exclusive. (Colchester, 1991, p18)

While Lacroix buys fabric from various sources, many of them from small designer maker firms, he has also used more unusual sources. Using hand woven fabric from a



PLATE 15. Evening dress by Lacroix, Transfer print by Sylvie Skinazi.

more unusual sources. Using hand woven fabric from a small weaving enterprise/workshop, (set up in the south of France to help reintroduce ex-female prisoners and drug addicts back into society), Lacroix created a jacket for his Haute Couture collection. It took two hundred hours to weave the required fabric. When the colourful jacket was shown at the fashion show, there were six orders received for it. The interesting thing is that two of the orders were placed from New York by two women who mixed in the same small circle. Lacroix's people asked Nan Kempner, (one of the biggest couture spenders in the world), would she mind if Anna Wintour, (Editor of American Vogue), bought one of the jackets as well. She didn't seem to mind and an arrangement was made that the \$20,000 jacket would be worn only at separate occasions, checked by telephone. This arrangement seems extraordinary, if the whole point of couture is to be exclusive and different, surely two women mixing in the same circle with the same outfit, brings couture to the level of the chain store.

Obviously money is the only differential. If people at the lower income level can only afford chain-stores then a lot of them are going to be wearing the same clothes and looking the same, but if this happens at the couture level, that the small number of very rich and social all

shop at the same couture houses then they too are all going to look the same. The only difference is that because there are less of them, they must look even more alike than the ordinary person does, but as Elizabeth Wilson says "fashion cements social solidarity" (Wilson 1985 p6).

Colin McDowell calls Lacroix's work an "insult to clothes and women". (McDowell, 1992, p156.) Though he contradicts the statement by about the clothes when he says

"They (referring to Lacroix and Largerfeld), understand the symbiosis between line, fabric and scale, they are aware of the necessity for balance between movement and proportion. They realise the structure of a garment". (McDowell, 1992 p167.).

Any designer with such an understanding of his craft can hardly produce work that is insulting to clothes. His opinion that Lacroix's clothes are insulting to women is not substantiated. Perhaps he is referring to some of Lacroix's more outrageous outfits which were created more to attract attention from the press than to be worn the way they were presented. All couturiers do this. The point is that many women love Lacroix's clothes, they are decorative and reinforce their femininity and also can be selected so that aspects of Lacroix can be worn with different outfits.

As Andrew Leon Talley remarks " A woman of culture does not buy couture the way it's shown, she changes the colour, she changes the shoes".(Coleridge 1988, p201.). It is insulting of Colin McDowell to suggest that women do not have the taste or intelligence to interpret the designers vision in their own way.

What has been Lacroix's contribution to fashion and to specialized fabrics ? Print, weave, embroidery, brading and hand made tassels; these skills, traditional and innovatively contemporary have all benefited from the House of Lacroix.

But it is the larger overall effect that is more interesting. Along with Versace, Lacroix has challenged modernist conventions and the prejudice of taste, he has divided the fashion world into what could nearly be called his followers and the 'Armani brigade'. He is well aware of this and even has his shops designed in such a way that they encourage his 'type' of customer as his partner, Jean Lacques Picart puts it.

"This strong shop image acts as a filter. As you walk down the street the shop style stands out and you either feel attracted to it or you feel frightened by it. This is a way of pre-selecting who comes into the shop. By the time they've stepped across the threshold, the staff can be sure within reason that this is a potential customer.(7) (Mulvagh,1992,p 8).

THE FUTURE FOR LACROIX:

Whether this postmodernist flouting of the conventions of taste will last for much longer is now questionable.

Picart claims that they pushed the Lacroix image and identity too strongly, that they have become trapped in the house image of bright colours and pattern. (Mulvagh, 1992). Lacroix feels he may have become a caricature of himself and has changed direction for the last couture collection using more muted colours and toned down clothes. Patricia Gavin thinks that it is a reaction to the recession, that the house has become nervous and are playing safe, that the emphasis is now on texture rather than colour. (Gavin, Derry, 1993) It is too early to tell whether Lacroix lost his nerve or is just changing and developing with the times ?

The super designers, the reinstatement of the preeminence of European fashion, the desire for luxury by couture customers of the 1980's, has all led to the revitalisation of couture in the last decade. This along with the general social background of the eighties which produced innovative textile designers led to a resurgence of the best in fashion working with the best in textiles. It has also led to renewed general popularity of pattern, colour

and textile designers establishing themselves in their own right. Some of these people will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE END NOTES:

(1). The stylishness of the Princess of Wales also contributed to this factor.

(2). Tom Wolfe's description of society ladies in "The Bonfire Of The Vanities". (Wolfe 1988, p374).

(3). "Venduses" are assistants to the couturier and fit the customer.

(4). See Chapter 2, page 26 for further information.

(5). The fashion designer Ralph Lauren used his products, including furnishings, to create a total 'lifestyle' image .

(6). Colin McDowell would disagree, he finds Lacroix the essence of vulgarity.

(7). This was not obvious when I visited the Lacroix shop in London.

CHAPTER FOUR

**THE ROLE OF THE TEXTILE DESIGNER;
INNOVATION AND DECORATION**

INNOVATION AND DECORATION:

This chapter will look at the role of the textile designer, and the different approaches through the eighties to fabric design. Because there are so many textile designers and fleeting style trends I will concentrate on the two trends that I consider to be the most dominant to emerge from the last decade and discuss the work of various designers in relation to these trends.

These two trends can be tied in with the two fashion developments of the 1980's, the resurgence of Haute Couture and the emergence of a Japanese style, in textile design particularly where specialist fabrics are concerned. These directions result in what could loosely be called decoration and innovation.

The Role of the Textile Designer:

Ask anyone to name some fashion designers and even the most disinterested (in fashion), can name at least three or four, but how many people, (not involved in the business), can name a single textile designer ? Textile designers in an interview in the Observer Magazine commented on their role as follows.

"Designing textiles is a low profile job, and it shouldn't be. Textile designers are hugely undervalued by the industry....." Cressida Bell. These (textile designers) are often regarded as second class citizens in the industry...."Sue Timney (Daneff, 1990, p11).

Why are textile designers so underrated ? They are usually professionals, as highly trained as fashion designers or graphic designers yet they are largely an unknown species to the general public. In "The New Textiles" Chloe Colchester suggests that it is something to do with the fact that textile designers are mostly women, but the industry itself is run by men who undervalue the designers role, because what they design is associated mostly with the home. (Colchester, 1991, p6)

Maybe it is the fact that an image is on cloth that causes this reaction. Perhaps because cloth is related to the home, to furnishings, and the housewife. It is purely social or intellectual snobbery that has been carried forward from the Victorian Era to the 1990's.

Of course textiles also relate to fashion and society can be accused of dismissing fashion design as vanity, frippery and irrelevance, the design of textiles would by association be also included in this. But how can cloth and clothing, the most necessary items after food, be less

relevant than the design of cars, advertisements or buildings. The simplistic answer would seem to agree with Chloe Colchester, because textiles are designed by women, while the rest are designed primarily by men. Yet if that is so why have any female fashion designers become successful ? (1)

There are two reasons, fashion designers produce a definite, easily describable product and they also create an image or even mystique about themselves. Charles Worth set the mould for the aspiring couturier by raising the social status of the fashion designer from tradesman to that of high artist. When Patrick Maurites referred to Lacroix's work as a 'new mythology' he was talking about something more than clothes, but a vision, a glimpse into that special creative world of the designer, to a lifestyle that you can share in, if you wear their clothes. (Lacroix 1992, p19)

THE REASON WHY TEXTILE DESIGNERS ARE ANONYMOUS:

Textile designers remain mostly invisible because they have never exploited their work in a way that a fashion designer does. It is very difficult for them if their design is only a potential product, a piece of coloured, patterned paper that could become a carpet, a curtain, or

dress fabric. So it would seem that it is important for the textile designer to keep control of their design until it becomes cloth.

This takes place in companies owned by textile designers who produce specialist fabric, but how many of them are known or promoted by the influential fashion magazines in the way that small but interesting fashion companies are. Sue Timney says "when working on a new collection the first person the fashion designer consults is the textile designer" (Daneff, 1990, p11) but as Francois Lesage, Georgina Von Etzdorf, Patricia Gavin and others would agree their contribution to the success of the collection is often overlooked.

When a textile designer sells their fabric to a fashion designer they lose control of their product and also the credit for it. It seems that to be successful and to establish a reputation the textile designer must retain control of their designs until they become a definite product, and to be really successful must create an image and profile that is similar to that of the fashion designer.

In chapter two I mention that there was an explosion of print and design in the 1980's. There was but most of these designers printed fabric for fashion designers such as John Galliano or retailers such as Paul Smith, very few went the road of retaining control of their work and selling it under their own label. Notably of those that did successfully emerge from the 1980's were Timney, Fowler, Georgina Von Etzdorf and English Eccentrics. (2)

ZANDRA RHODES:

Before looking at the work of any of these designers it is worth examining the approach of textile designer Zandra Rhodes. (Plate 16)

Zandra Rhodes made her name designing clothes, but she originally tried the more conventional routes for the textile designer. She unsuccessfully tried to sell designs on paper to the large companies. She then tried printing fabrics for various fashion designers but was unhappy with what they did with her work. Eventually she decided that "It was time for me to take my prints, my designs and my future into my own hands." (Rhodes, 1984, p21)



PLATE 16. Fabric and dresses by Zandra Rhodes c. 1976.

She came to the conclusion that it was vital to keep control of her designs until they became a finished and saleable product. The "mystique" that seems essential to the success of a fashion designer may not be that obvious but Rhodes' unmistakeable and dramatic image played a major role in helping to establishing her by constantly catching the attention of the press. (Plate 17)

The interesting point is that Rhodes in the 1970's created a successful role model for future textile designers in much the same way as Worth did the century before for the fashion designer. However it is surprising that so few young textile graduates of the 1980's followed her example.

TIMNEY, FOWLER:

Sue Timney and Graham Fowler did not start by emulating Zandra Rhodes but their international business has been developed using much the same approach. Known best for their black and white neoclassical inspired designs they are involved in fashion and furnishing fabrics, ceramics, scarves, accessories, jewellery and clothes. They started off in 1979 with consultancy work and used it to finance the launch of their own label. The establishment of their own name was important as Sue Timney says in an interview



PLATE 17. The unmistakable image of Zandra Rhodes.



PLATE 18. Screen printed Scarf by Georgina Von Etzdorf.

PLATE 19. Screen printed dress by Georgina Von Etzdorf 1989.

with International Textiles "our work was being seen in Issey Miyake, but not our own names, so we needed to get our names known". (International Textiles, 1992, p XVII) In promoting and maintaining what Sue Timney calls the 'concept' and 'strong design identity' of the business they have opened shops internationally.

GEORGINA VON ETZDORF:

Georgina Von Etzdorf is another successful British designer who used Rhodes' approach. With her two partners she started off printing fabrics under her own label in a very small way from her parents home in the late seventies. Now they run their own print-works hand printing nearly all the fabrics themselves. (3) Although still mainly known for printed scarves and accessories, they have expanded into fashion, producing shirts, jackets and coats. They have their own outlet in Sloan Street, London, sell in various upmarket shops and have built up a strong export business to Italy and Germany. (Plate 18+19)

These designers previously mentioned, come very much under the label, 'Decorators'. They work with previously selected fabrics and apply a printed design to them. In the case of Timney Fowler, the pattern is paramount, Von Etzdorf on the other hand is more concerned with sensuous

fabric and colour which are enhanced by the pattern. While their work may be popular in Japan, they still work essentially in a very strong European tradition. (4)

INNOVATION IN FABRICS:

During the 1980's there were remarkable advances in the innovation of fabrics. Large firms such as Dupont experimented with combining lycra with a variety of natural fibres. Fashion designers have not experimented so much since Schiaparelli in the 1930's. While British designers such as Georgina Godley used lycra mixes and Nigel Atkinson and Bridget Bailey created excitement with heat treated fabrics it was the Japanese who really pioneered innovation in both the design and manufacture of fashion fabric.

Notably among these are the textile designers, Junichi Arai and Makiko Minagawa and fashion designer Issey Miyake.

JUNICHI ARAI

Junichi Arai, is often described as a 'genius' (Sutton, Dec. 92 pXXXVII). While he may not yet be known to the



PLATE 20. Metallic type
fabric designed
by Junichi Arai.

PLATE 21. A typical ensemble
by Issey Miyake.

general public it seems likely that he may very well establish himself on his own terms as a textile designer.

Arai is a designer of woven textiles. He designs primarily with a computer and uses it to analyse, explore and design what could be described as futurist fabrics which are inspired by a combination of tradition, texture and high technology. (5) His approach is innovative, described by Chloe Colchester as

"Arai never draws his designs but regards weaving as a three dimensional construction, a sensual form of engineering with fibres". (Colchester, 1991, p20)

While he has worked mainly with wool and is a consultant to the International Wool Secretariat, I find his most interesting work is where he has incorporated metallic fibres into the woven cloth. (Plate 20) Arai designs for the Japanese 'Nuno' label, and I saw his fabrics at the 'Nuno' shop within Liberty of London. There was a fascinating silver fabric which was polyester that had been coated with stainless steel. In an extraordinary way the fabric was transparent (sheer) and yet opaque at the same time, the opacity being caused by the effect of light 'bouncing' off the surface of the fabric. The handle, contrary to expectation felt light and supple. (6)

ISSEY MIYAKE:

Arai has worked closely with fashion designer Issey Miyake whose approach to clothes, textiles and fashion epitomises the 'Japanese style'. (Plate 21) His philosophical attitude to his work could be summed up when he declared that if people understand his clothes, he has failed because they have not been challenged. (BBC 2, The Look, 1992) For Miyake his designs begin and end with the fabric, therefore he works very closely with textile designers, primarily Makiko Minagawa and Junichi Arai. His designs are described as futurist but he has a close affinity with nature and the organic world, the brief he sets for his textile designer could be to design a cloth like 'clouds'. His desire for innovation in fabric (using vegetable dyes, wood pulp fabric that looks like bark, mud dyed cloth, lengths of knitted fabric left to bleach in the sun all summer) resembles that of Schiaparelli, but his approach is completely Eastern where as hers was intrinsically European.

EAST VERSUS WEST:

The Parisian Haute Couture was frightened by the popularity and success of Japanese fashion in the 1980's. The Japanese used its innovations in technology and form. While the French mainly used applied decoration and traditional contemporary craft skills, both East and West

utilizing their own special skills, Paris looking to its past triumphs for inspiration, Japan to the twenty first century, two very different ideologies and styles.

I compared Eastern minimalism with Western decoration when I visited Liberty & Co.. The 'Nuno' fabrics were exciting and innovative but apart from the silver ones described earlier they left me cold. I had previously examined the sensuous, wonderfully clever, hand-dyed and printed Fortuney style silk and velvet clothes by Patricia and Charles Lester. They looked so luxurious, a visual and tactile treat. (Plate 22) Nuno fabrics looked technologically interesting, but non-sensuous and unappealing in both a visual and tactile way. Admirable but they had no 'soul'. (7)

THE MARKET PLACE:

It is the market place that will ultimately decide the work of the textile designer. This is especially pertinent for producers and designers of specialist fabric as no matter how innovative their work is, they cannot survive unless they find a place to sell it. Specialist fabrics can be seen at all the levels of the market from one-off batiked or hand painted scarves on cheap silk selling at £20.00 each at a stall in Covent Garden craft



PLATE 22.
Silk dress by
Patricia Lester.

market, to the elaborate creations of Lesage S.A. (8) The market is defined by the customer, at the level of Haute Couture, the couturier may order a fabric from a specialist producer to make up to show at their collection but unless a customer likes it, no further orders are placed. (9) However the customer can determine further changes in the fabric by requesting it in a different colour or fibre as Patricia Gavin has experienced, certain fibres such as mohair are unpopular with the couture customer as they shed on their clothes. (Gavin, Derry 1993)

In the Ready-To-Wear section of the market it is the fashion buyer who has the power to interpret the taste of the customer. Cecily MacMenamin, buyer for the upmarket 'Private Lives' section in Brown Thomas, described her customers as wanting something, luxurious, different and special. They are very selective about even the type of silks that they liked, silk satin and chiffon along with cashmere being popular. (MacMenamin, Dublin, 1992) Pat Crowley, the Irish fashion designer is also influenced by her customer when she buys fabric. It must be of the finest silks, wools or linen, but in design and colour must fit in with the lifestyle of the customer, in this case "occasion wear". (11) (Crowley, Dublin, 1992)

It may be seen then that at all levels of the market there are niches for the specialist producer and designer of fabric. Ultimately it is Haute Couture which determines the style for the rest of the market. If Nan Kempner, Palomo Picasso and Royalty buy exclusive hand woven or hand beaded and hand made clothes, other less well off women around the world seek to emulate their lifestyle by also desiring the exclusive. A way to do this is to buy designer, hand-made fabrics. In this way too other women can buy their way into, if only in part, that exclusive world of customized exclusive garments that is Haute Couture.

CHAPTER FOUR END NOTES:

- (1). One of the most famous fashion designer of the century is Coco Chanel, a woman.
- (2). See chapter two page twenty-three.
- (3). Devore processes are carried out for Von Etzdorf in France as are fabrics woven to her specifications.
- (4). Rhodes and Timney Fowler sell well in Japan and Timney Fowler plan to open a shop in Japan shortly.

(5). Mostly Pre-Columbian.

(6). Liberty, at the time of my visit, was using some of the silver fabric to make an evening dress, as an example of how to use the fabric. They were so unusual the general public was unsure how they could be utilized.

(7). Christian Lacroix commented in 'The Look "Everything made by hand has a soul, something alive". (BBC 2, The Look, 1992) This human input by hand gives a fabric a unique quality that is missing from that which is designed by computer.

(8). For example a Chanel suit was stitched by hand with 280,000 sequins, 200,000 sticks of grey glass, 150,000 bugle beads, totalling 624 hours of work. Cost to the couturier about £30,000 (Jeal, 1990, p33)

(9). According to Patricia Gavin for haute couture the initial order averages five to ten metres.

(10). Occasion wear are outfits suitable for Weddings, The Races and other social occasions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed and examined different fabrics, those who design and produce them, those who use them and ultimately some of the customers who buy them.

The role of specialised fabrics has always been innovative and, or, decorative, either creatively or technologically advanced or produced laboriously and lovingly by hand. Economically, both of these factors have limited the use of such fabric to the upper end of the fashion market, traditionally couture. In today's eyes, the synthetic silks and surrealist imagery used by Schiaparelli do not seem so very extraordinary, but in the 1930's these fabrics were as futuristic as the work of Jumchi Arai and Issey Miyake is today.

In terms of fashion and the use of fabrics the first twenty years of the century were perhaps the most exciting. The shape of women's clothes changed dramatically as did the use of fabric and it's decoration. These twenty years set the trend for the remainder of the century and have constantly provided inspiration for designers of fashion and textiles ever since, particularly so in the 1980's.

Today's textile designers no longer have a background in fine art. This has changed the emphasis and direction in print, no longer do influences of contemporary art find their way on to cloth. The dominant style of the 1980's was images which were a pastiche of the past rather than looking forward to the future (with certain exceptions). Even though designers are today trained as "textile designers" their role is still ambiguous, still partly fine artist in terms of drawing and colour skills, partly craftsmen and technicians yet with a necessary awareness for fabric and the market place, but strangely with such a collection of skills most textile designers are relatively anonymous.

In examining the business of couture it may be seen that the relationship between the fashion designer and the textile designer is close and important. Couturiers want extraordinary, exclusive fabrics, something new and different, they say, yet what they really mean is something which fits in with their own mode of expression and their house style. Fabrics are then customised especially for the fashion designer who then takes all of the credit for them.

Yet there are some textile designers who are established, notably Zandra Rhodes. Her clothes are bought because of the distinctiveness of the print and the fabric as much as for her name. While it may not be Haute Couture, it is different and individual.

What is the future for the textile designer, especially in the area of innovative fabrics ? Computers have made it possible for small designer firms to compete in many ways with the larger companies. But, on the other hand, as industry becomes more flexible, sample production and turn-around become faster and more economical, large companies are now able to erode the niches that specialist smaller firms traditionally occupied.

In reaction to this many fashion designers are talking about one-off pieces and the look of the hand made. This shows that the role of the specialist fabric designer is still feasible, that there will always be employment for creative and innovative designers because in the end it is creativity which is the ultimate test.

APPENDICES

VISIT TO LONDON:

Further information on my trip to London (1st. to 3rd. December 1992). I visited and spoke with the managers of the Christian Lacroix shop and Georgina Von Etzdorf, both in Sloane street and Liberty of London, and spoke to the buyer for Charles and Patricia Lester, and the manager of the 'Nuno' shop in Liberty..

CHRISTIAN LACROIX (1st. Dec. 1992)

This shop stocked a Ready-To-Wear range of clothes and accessories. The manager showed me the clothes and spoke about the fabrics and where Lacroix sources his fabric and design work. While Lacroix seems willing to see designers and order fabric from specialist firms for his Haute Couture collections, his fabric for his ready to wear collection is mostly from the Far East.

GEORGINA VON ETZDORF (1st. Dec. 1992)

This shop stocked a large and varied range of screen printed scarves. Also shown were waistcoats, gloves and jackets. The manager allowed me to examine many of the scarves. It was obvious that Von Etzdorf's main interest is in fabric and colour. There was a great variety of silks in satin, georgette, chiffons, jersey, velvets etc.

These are sourced from all over the world especially in France and the Far East and printed by the company in their premises in Wiltshire. Their main markets are Britain, Germany and Italy. They have expanded into shirts, dresses and coats which are mostly exported.

LIBERTY & CO. (3rd. Dec. 1992)

I examined the use of printed and hand painted fabric in the clothes on the fashion floor. Labels stocked included Issay Miyake, Rifat Ozbek, Vivienne Westwood and Kenzo among others. By far the most interesting was the work of Charles and Patricia Lester. Influenced by Fortuney the range includes evening dresses in pleated, hand dyed and hand stitched silk satins. Also included were dyed and printed silk and velvet jackets. The clothes were expensive but exquisitely made and finished. According to the buyer these clothes sell better than others on that floor inspite of the price (£1,000-£5,000). The dresses tended to suit all ages and sizes of women and are especially popular with brides. People buy them he said because they were luxurious and unique.

Subsequently I wrote to the Lesters in Wales and received further information and postcards of some of their work.

NUNO in LIBERTY

Already covered in text.

SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA GAVIN ON 5th. JANUARY 1993.

Patricia Gavin is a designer of woven textiles. She trained in England, now has a shop in Derry, and works from there. She contracts out her designs to be woven for her to companies such as McNutts, Molloy's and Tim Roberts. Her main customers are Lacroix, Lanvin and Ungaro buying fabric for their Haute Couture collections. Her fabric is also on sale in Liberty of London. Patricia told me where she gets her inspiration from, how she designs, and what made her approach the couture market. She also described her couture customers and how they work with her.

"Each designer is different, but mostly they are only interested in the 'Noble' yarns, silk, wool, cashmere and pure linen. In designing for them, they often show me a piece of fabric as an idea and ask me to interpret it. Then there is a constant back and forwards of the design until it is right..... They all say they want something different, but really what they want is something exactly the same as their style."

Patricia spoke about the amount of fabric ordered and the prices and the difference between Haute Couture and Ready-To-Wear in terms of a fabric designer. She feels that it is unfair that her fabric for Lacroix and others is never credited and hopes to find a way to address this in the future. The designers she admires most are Christian

Lacroix for his excellent use of woven fabrics and dreams of someday working with Junichi Arai.

CONVERSATIONS WITH IRISH DESIGNERS. (21st.-24th. SEPTEMBER 1992).

In September 1992 I visited a number of fashion designers and store buyers in Dublin in connection with specialised fabrics. These included Mairead Whisker, Jen Kelly, Simon Connor, Pat Crowley, Louise Kennedy and Cecily McMenamin, (buyer for Private Lives in Brown Thomas.)

They all had different concerns, but in common was their desire for exclusivity, for quality natural fabrics such as wool and linen and something new, different and exciting but which would fit in with their own particular styles.

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