National College of Art and Design

Fashion Design

4th year

Youth Fashion In The 1970s (The Relationship Between The Dress Of Subculture, High Street Fashion, And Designer Fashion)

Linda - Jane Dunlop

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Fashion Design.

1996

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1. Introduction

I am interested in studying the decade of the 1970s for this thesis, because, although often referred to as the decade of bad taste, it is continually finding it's way into contemporary culture through one means or another. For this reason it is an intriguing subject, so I intend to return to the original 1970s fashions and see what they were actually about.

The 1970s were an exciting decade. Although movements and social rebellions occurred in the 1960s to a great extent, they were much more widescale in the 1970s. In fact, the 1970s took that which was only available to the few and made it accessible to every man. And by "that" one means freedom of speech, of rights, of music, and fashion. Mass production and selling dreams were key elements of the 70s. It is fashion culture, I am intrinsically interested by, although in the 1970s, popular youth cultures ran alongside one another. In this study, I intend to delve into several different facets of the 1970s. In chapter one, I shall explore the qualities inherent uniquely to the 1970s era, in order to give a context in which the fashion existed. Following this, in section two of the first chapter, I intend to look at the 1970s silhouette, using family photographs, as well as books on the subject to examine the characteristics and attempt to explain some reason as to why it was as it was. I intend to research the 1970s textiles in Chapter one section three, and in Chapter two examine the fashion industry in the decade.

For Chapter three, I shall investigate the relationship between the various levels of young persons' fashion : namely - the style of subculture - high street style and designer fashion. I will look at the way in which street-style clothing reflects contemporary culture, also at the way in which street-style watered down and filtered up, to create high street and designer level fashion.

Chapter four is devoted to the work of two top designers of the decade, and on examining several of their outfits I shall pinpoint the influences from the culture from which they emanated. The designers are Zandra Rhodes and Bill Gibb. I am using top designers for the reason that there is more information available about them. From this chapter, I can draw conclusions as to how the 1970s popular cultures influenced fashion design. Section 2 looks at the 1970s clothes collection in the Ulster Museum including various outfits, mainly by top designers of the decade, with two exceptions of dress of a high street standard. With these I shall further investigate the cultural influences on fashion from the 70s society.

1.1 The Relationship Between Culture And Fashion In The 1970s

(i) "To look for the message behind the [1970s] clothes, is to discover a statement of imaginative bankruptcy."

There was much going on inside of the 1970s brain; wars, movements, anti-movements, shallowness, deepness, rights, civil rights, racism, woman's rights, chauvinism. There had been plenty, then economic depression. There were actions, and there were opposite and unequal reactions. Confusion was the key. Popular culture, needless to say reacted as much as the people on the street, in the same kind of way, sending in the process waves in every direction. Film, television, music and magazines picked up the vibes; fashion too went with the flow, generally against the ebb of authority and any kind of hard and fast rule.

In fact anyone writing on the 1970s, endeavouring to describe its fashion, refer to it as "fragmented", reflecting the social times, wherein no lead emerged and "anything goes." The Virgin story of Rock 'N' Roll describes the 1970s as

(ii) "a decade devoted largely to utter daftness,"

backing up this point with the fact that there was very little point to deedly-boppers, space hoppers, bean bags, soap on a rope, and extra bristly sideburns, except craziness itself.

The 1970s were times for people who wanted to speak out. Take for example 1970. The feminists spoke out after their arrival at the Miss World competition in order to demonstrate. The equal pay act was written, although this did not take effect until 1975. Gay liberation was formed in the UK. A sit in at Keele University was begun by

the students to demand representation on the senate. British industry lost more day to strikes and stoppages than in any year since 1926. The list is a long one. People doing what they like and saying what they feel. As Frank Zappa said:

(iii) "Rock journalism is people who can't write interviewing people who can't talk for people who can't read."

In many ways the 1970s was just a continuation of the 1960s, only this time as John Savage puts it "filtering" through to the population at large, of everybody getting a watered down version of what a tiny few had enjoyed in the late 1960s. The cause of this to a critical extent is due to the mass media, and the exploitation of the fact that there was a youth culture.

"Sex, drugs and rock and roll" was the key to the 1960s culture, and continued, at least in the first part of the 1970s, without the knowledge of AIDS, which came in the early 1980s.

The society of the 1960s was intent on freedom of expression, especially love and this continued and expanded in the 1970s. The hippie era had given way to a new, young pop-literate culture, which gave that relatively newly found teenager (from the 1950s) a cause - censorship, dress- coding, Vietnam, racism, sexism, and other important issues.

The young saw their liberty and took advantage, trying to stretch the rules of their remaining limits. In fact, unlike the 1960;s, not only sex, but violence and racism in the extreme were asserted. For example in 1971, we had the introduction of sex in murder mysteries in "Klute," sexual perversion in "Harold and Manda" wherein a 79 year old woman and a student fall in love, we had gay rape in 1972 with "deliverance"

wherein four guys go to the outback and get raped by backwoodsmen, violence portrayed in the Oscar winning "The Godfather," and so on.

Film remained up to date with the culture and even if the film in question didn't overtly refer to topics of the time, like the Watergate scandal - portrayed in "Fuck some, drink some" the comic assault on the authority of the day, they gave an aura of the 70s. They spoke of a state of mind. The people of the 70s reffered to it as "craziness" and "freedom", yet in hindsight it seems more like a turbulence of an unsettled spirit.

The advancement of contraception gave licence to the sexual freedom, and discos became a way in which to take advantage of this. Logically music began being designed for this new market - like it is today for the rave scene, films were produced to capitalise on this, e. g. ,"Saturday Night Fever," and as a knock on result, fashion came to accommodate the scene.

In fact fashion - at least high fashion had a hard time, trying to keep up in the 1970s. For a start in Britain the 1970s Labour government (beginning 1974) had attempted to make Britain a classless society. Gradually many poor were getting richer and many rich were becoming poorer. This, in part was the reason for all of the strikes and people exploiting their rights.

1.2 The 1970s Silhouette

(iv) "Start in the middle with a skinny waist, and explode outwards in all directions into massive flares, lapels, shirt collars, cuffs, shoes like ocean liners, a rooster haircut, and some large trademark facial feature."

This is a somewhat comical description of the 1970s silhouette, and it describes in essence what it was. See for example fig 0, and a popular group, "The Manhattans." No matter what the decoration was on the outside, or the fabric, one could generally depend on one part of the outfit being wildly disproportionate, in relation to the next. On the whole garments had a point of focal ostentation, whether a mainstream tweed coat with, over-the-top fake weasel fur collar, or Gary Glitter-esque sequinned flares, and tidal wave of a quiff. It was this unnecessary ostentation that resulted in the Punk allergic reaction. It was the overwhelming decadence and meaninglessness, not only of society but fashion cultures as well, that provoked the anti-everything reaction and it is hardly surprising.

It is arguable that this wasp-waisted silhouette, where the extremities and details were big, although the fundamental shape was lean and scrimped, was a reflection of the 1970s interest in Edwardian nostalgia, however it is in my opinion slightly more conceivable to imagine it as the result of an adult growing up in child's clothes, which could be argued was the sentiment of the 1970s fashion follower mentality and a reflection of their sense of responsibility.

A lot of the time clothes were for fun. They came in nursery colours and fabrics like satin and lurex. According to Savage, they coincided with the first great Nostalgia boom, and the idea that

0: The Manhattans - dated 1975

(v) *"life was one great romper room, and the past provided the toys."*

The following illustrations (Figure 1 (i) - Figure 1 (v)) provide us with images of down- to- earth 70s dress. The photographs date from 1975 - 1978, and give us some idea of how dress of the period was worn in an everyday context. Figure 1 (i) provides evidence of the bad-taste, adult in children's clothing phenomenon. These clothes appeared on High street store level, in Northern Ireland, specifically.

Understandably, especially for Ireland, the concepts are somewhat "watered down," however it is notable that the main fashion elements remain. Figure 1 (i) presents us with the general silhouette of the 1970 - what with the tight waist and expansion towards the extremes - hand and feet. The jacket lapel shows signs of aspiring to become flared also. As for the point of focal ostentation - the flares have to be in this case. Gaudy patters were in full swing in the 1970s and often exaggerated the widening with illusion; here however, a conservative pinstripe is utilised, to a similar effect.

Figures 1(ii) and (iii) make use of the adult in children's clothing ideal, wherein the main bodies of the top are tight, and sleeves having fallen short of adult sleeve length reveal cuffs. The focal point tends in both cases to be the horrendous collars that peek out from the V of V-neck sweaters. The geometry of art deco, a 70s fad is recognisable on the yoke of figure (ii), and ethnic stripe and colouring is seen in figure (iii).

The neat, tight shoulder and waist apparent in figure (iv) will work up to great flares at the trouser hems. Comfort required a ribbed polo shirt.

1 (i) Family Photograph - 1978

1 (ii) Family Photograph - 1975

1 (iii) Family Photograph - 1978

1 (iv) Family photograph - 1975

1 (v) Family photograph - 1975

Figure (v) gives us an example of a costume inspired by the Laura Ashley image. Checks and gingham are juxtaposed with plain to provide a romantic country kind of clash. The tie adopted from the hippies, together with the collar provided a flamboyent focus.

1.3 Textiles of the 1970s

One important influence on fashion was related to economic and green issues. The bombardment on the news of the escalating oil prices set people against synthetic fabrics. Extremely popular in the 1960s culture, they were now either too expensive (more expensive than natural fabrics) or too harmful to the environment. Since the end of the 1960s demonstrations, parties had been organised in order to protect the environment. In 1970 "Earth Day" was celebrated for the first time with environmental demonstrators in the USA, in 1971 environmental pressure groups "Greenpeace" and "Friends of the Earth" were founded, the former entered a US nuclear test site in the North Pacific and disallowed the tests to be carried out (only one was eventually carried out.) In the same year the control of nuclear reactors at Windscale Cumbria was transferred from the UK Atomic Energy Authority to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, and the plant renamed Sellafield. It was the worlds greatest discharger of radioactive waste. In 1972 the world's first Green Party formed in new Zealand, the Oslo Convention was signed restricting dumping in the North Sea, environmentalists protested at the start of a construction of a nuclear reactor in Kalkas, West Germany. In 1973, Sea Star spilled 100,00 tonnes of oil in the Gulf, WARROL - the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from ships, set limits and distances from shore for the discharge or dumping of sewage, and The Ecology Party, which became the UK Green Party was founded. These are only a few of the many parties established throughout the 1970s, as well as the disasters which spurred more action. These are only the ones leading up to the end of 1973. Constant media play kept visions of the earth and in particular "Mother Earth" in the public eye, and this together the hippies and their summer solstice festivals in the Stone Henge (first held in 1974) alerted the advertisers as well as the producers of a new need. In 1975 lead free petrol was introduced in the US.

A further reason for the decline of the synthetics industry in the West in the 1970s was that developing countries created synthetic industries themselves, thereby devaluing Western products.

In the 1950s and 1960s synthetics became a motif for modernity. People were encouraged to fill their closets with these crease and fire and water-resistant "wonder fabrics," and in many cases the synthetic manufacturers cashed in on the fact that they were sending men to the moon. Anything laminated or shiny, anything melanine or nylon would be advertised as spacial fabrics.

The 1970s rejected nylon, it was horribly unbreathable and retained perspiration; the advent of lycra onto the scene meant it's burial. The synthetic years began with nylon, and dupont after the Second World War (whenever no traditional fabrics were available.)

Often fabrics were used that ressembled nature, like tweeds and wools. Fake furs acted as a reminder that nature was to be used as inspiration and not stolen from. Stretch, woven, knit, shiny, matt, glitzy, mundain, rigid or floaty. Any type of "nature friendly" fabrics were permitted, and with an infinate number of patterns to suit every type of individual. From the polka dot of the 50s, the ethnic stripe, the keep fit stripe, the check, the guerrish pattern, the tie-dye, to the pschedellic.

2. The fashion industry of the 1970s

(vi) "In 1970, 1971 clothes became pure decoration - 'decoration' not labelling"

At certain times throughout the 1970s, the economy was strong, and because of it's strength there was much disposable income around. This led to a flourish in luxury industries, predominantly the film and music industries. Music and film marketed the idea of style, taste and attitude and from then it was up to the designers to do with the market what they could. The new fashions did not arrive out of the Paris establishments, nor any other, but sprung from recently graduated art students who were uninhibited about the way things were supposed to be in the outside world.

With the American discovery of teenages, media began to centre completely on them, fashion on both sides of the Atlantic took the initiative of dressing them. After all, the youth had money to spend, the rest of popular culture was opening up the need, all fashion had to do was see it and fulfil it. The 1960s and 1970s were not like any other period. It was as if the youth existed as the only generation. Never before had clothing been designed more or less exclusively with the young in mind. Some would argue that fashion

(vii) "in the 1920s had been youthful - but not exclusively for the young."

Fashion therefore grew for the youth, alongside which, traditional fashions continued to flourish, and meet the needs of most women over 35.

The trend for trained designers had its effect; schools following the London Royal College of Art, established design schools. The London Royal College of Art started

its design school in 1948, and with it went the recognition of the fact that Western society needed a new kind of designer - namely one who understood the practical need of producing for a mass-market. In the schools, design had an eye centrally focused on costings and savings, on sizings and gradings. Detailing was analysed and often sacrificed to maintain specific costings. This generation of designers therefore went from the schools and became involved in large-scale fashion production.

Form the 60s onwards Britain and in particular London took the reigns. Mary Quant (although ironically not from their schools) was the pioneer, inventing the "new look" of the 1960s in the form of "Chelsea Girl." This was seen as a symbol for the new wave in fashion. The "London look" of the early 1960s did wonders for British fashion, and superseded America and France, leaving them as it were, to follow. She enjoyed tremendous success across the Atlantic. This new look which she created, reflected a new attitude. It encompassed the disregard for traditional fashion, coupled with a complacent breakdown of what was evening and what was casual wear. It concentrated instead on newness, youthfulness and crispness.

"All a designer can do is anticipate a need before people realise that they are bored with what they have already got."

Quant, Mary

As skirts became shorter and shorter, mainstream fashion found itself following suit, despite various attempts at keeping the skirt long, or at least longer. The appearance of the mini and maxi in the 1970s are the result of this, although in the 1960s skirt length settled at or above the knee, and in most cases shorter, in all areas of fashion.

The mini skirt is an example of the emergence of fads completely our of the blue, which appear as the evidence of a zany personality that both the 1960s and the 1970s emitted. the 1960s mini-skirt had no origins, save a slight resemblance to the garments on Greek and Roman athletic statues. Who can explain where the platform of the 1970s came from, or more generally the art of tastelessness (which became perfected and polished) in flares, wide lapels, and grotesque proportions and colour and textures clashes?

While this "bad taste" phenomenon existed in it's own warped originality, it borrowed from the past eras in a slightly unimaginative way. Of the newspapers and magazine articles researched, there is very little (if any) credibility given to the 1970s dressing scene. As John Savage expands,

(viii) "There was no point in going out on a limb to be creative, it was infinitely more important to appeal to the consumer."

An argument which is unrestrictively drummed in, in Harraps "Dreams for Sale." Savage makes his point in reference to "the latest mass pop product Kenny."

A recent article in the Mail on Sunday supplement "Culture" describes John Travolta in his various film roles throughout his career. The author begins by describing himself awkwardly sifting through old photos in front of his girlfriend. He writes,

(ix) "I've lost this girls' respect. In the picture I'm wearing a short black leather jacket with a silver chain around my neck, my shirt collar worn on the outside, my hair a tight, neat quiff - I'm done up, in fact, as John Travolta, in Saturday Night Fever."

and,

"For me, in 1979, a moment of hideous social awkwardness."

The author describes John Travolta in the film as

(x) "in a way, seventies male stupidity personified."

He was "Mr Flares, he was Mr Musical, he was Mr Silly Chart-topper."

Talk to anyone about their teenage life in the 1970s, and they will laugh as they tell you what they wore and their shannanigans, either that or deny the whole thing, claiming that they never owned a pair of flares in their lives, but more seriously Benson hit the nail on the head when he wrote

(xi) "Travolta wasn't just someone who was displaced by better actors - he was someone you had to erase from your personal history. It was a sort of conspiracy. If I never mentioned the collars and pointy cowboy boots and to my friends, they would never mention them to me."

In 1977, in an article surverying what the 1970s so far had to offer in context, that is, regarding hand painted murals, ceilings sprayed with words, and slogans, tigerskin sprayed cars, pop-painted walls dn toadstool chairs, Vogue blatantly asked the question :

(xii) "Is bad taste a bad thing?"

What appeared to be fashionable, was going out of your way to be seen as being free to do what you wanted. Little did the people think that Vogue and the rest of the culture were selling a dream of freedom, and that they were in fact ordering you to invest in it.

The Travolta analogy goes to provide another point, that is perhaps related to the first one. In fact, ideals were bought and forgot at a tremendous rate in the 1970s. Vogue records :

(xii) "women have now lived through more fashion that at any other time."

It was important to keep in step. Benson explains it :

(xiii) "John Travolta inspired a generation - for two minutes. And then the whole world turned against him."

It was the same with fashion in general. Since the introduction of the boutique in the 1960s, originally by Mary Quant, consumer feedback increased sensitivity to the market. As soon as a need was recognised, and it was much easier to recognise in

boutiques as opposed to department stores, it was seen to. The informal atmosphere of the boutique, and good customer relationships meant that the boutique owner was on to a winner. The focus could then be on the new and trendy. Keeping up with the demands was a great money-spinner, but it also meant that fashions were going to be evermore transparent. This was not a factor for concern according to the boutiques, but for the department stores whose garments were produced on a seasonal basis, such fleeting trends could only mean trouble. This also points out an inherent difference; not only were boutique clothes indifferently casual or evening wear, they were also trans-seasonal.

So poignant at selling the dream, as the boutiques were, with the pop art, or art deco decoration, and their popular music blasting in the background, that new ideals and dreams were whole-heartedly accepted. Imagine how successful Mary Quant was in selling the mini-skirt. In those times surely a skirt so short would be unthinkable. It all hinged on the changing focus of fashion, which was readily adapted by those who had street credibility.

The appraisal that the boutiques achieved as being the centres of trendy culture was further qualified, by the Department Stores incapacities, to keep up with the ongoing trends. Whilst the range available in the boutique made it possible for every type to get what they wanted - from expensive to elegant, exotic, austere, inexpensive, gay, gimmicky or chic, department stores in the 1960s catered for the more traditional side, often for the older woman, which was the remaining 50% of the market :- easy flattering well made clothes. Frederick Stark in the 1960s commented that fashion would have to exist on two levels, the young and trendy, and mainstream. It is ironic in the 1970s however that mainstream fashion was a follower in many terms of the trendy fashions.

In the latter half of the 1960s, department stores thought it was time to walk in step, and opened boutiques within their own stores. Some examples include Miss Selfridges from Selfridges, The Way In from Harrods, and so on. High retail names such as Jaegar and Polly Peck, introduced their own clothes in a cheaper and younger version - under the names of Young Jaegar and Miss Polly respectively.

By 1967 the youth movement in fashion was at it's peak. The age bracket 15 - 19 years dominated the market as 60% on dresses sales, 48% on all coats and skirts, 42% on all knitwear. By 1971, the Daily Mail recorded that there were 15,000 boutiques in Britain, doing £300 million pounds worth of business a year. By the time the 1970s rolled in consequently, the emphasis remained on evolution of fashion and it's renewal, and competition between boutiques in their renewal and their price became a major factor in 1970s fashion culture. In fact Vogue records:

(xiv) "In the 1960s clothes hinged on age. In the 1970s they will hinge on price."

The introduction of mail order boutique at Biba in 1964 asserted that the race was on and that pretty soon originality in marketing ploy would hold the key. Mary Quant asserted the philosophy keenly that shopping should be fun, as Biba nodded, claiming shopping at least should be a complete experience. Before anyone would know what was going on you could shop in the comfort of your own home. The scene would have been far more alluring and comfortable to the young than that of the cold hearted department store.

Vogue in 1974 explained their definition of fashion investments. After running monthly articles on "More Dash then Cash" they got around to summing it up. Basically Vogue began on the point that there were two types of woman, both of whom spend a great deal of money on clothes. One however is always well dressed,

the other is always looking for something to wear. This typifies the apparent difference between boutique and department store. It is not difficult to see which side Vogue is on.

(xv) "An investment is really something that captivates to give pleasure long after the novelty is over."

This budget shopping was topical at the time anyway.

1973 led by the Conservative party marked the end of the post was boom. This was the year in which Britain joined the common market. In reaction to the West's support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war, the Arab Oil Cartel quadrupeled the price of oil. In response Richard Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard (effectively devaluing it.) The result of these events triggered a period of high, and at times uncontrolled world recession. Britain was most dramatically hit towards the end of this year, the rising inflation caused the miners to strike again, escalating problems to a greater extent still. Electricity was cut off from houses as a direct result of no coal. Faith in the government, or the lack of it were revealed in the elections of the following year when Labour were reinstated to power.

These cultural issues acted as a catalyst to effect the fashion industry. People would have less money to dispose of and this sparked a trend for the consumer to take to buying second hand, or wearing hand-me-downs which wasn't altogether unfathomable in the present climate, where much emphasis was placed on nostalgia, however eclectic that might be. The hippie culture of the 1960s was given another airing. Clothes were allowed to clash. The trend was mix and match (even if it didn't really match,) but this didn't make any dramatic changes because the boutiques were designed with mix and match in mind anyway.

Vogue gave some budgeting advice in April of 1977 :

(xvi) "Compensate in tender loving care for your wardrobe - change cheap buttons for better ones, wash cotton by hand, turn a dress with a damaged skirt into a good blouse.

Vogue also picked up on something in 1977 that had been around at least since 1965, and Mary Quant :

(xvii) "Forget about day and night - length means nothing, except for big evenings. Crepe de chine, and towelling, cotton and lurex appear at any time : silver and gold shine better in the sun."

So mainstream fashion followed, although behind by a considerable period of years.

3 The relationship between sub-culture, high street style and designer fashion

In this chapter I am investigating the relationship between the 1970s sub - culture styles, taken from groups formed through their cultural behaviour (the identity of which was rendered through clothing, and the way in which garments were worn and juxtaposed,) the high street fashion, worn by the ordinary people, in the case of Northern Ireland, who did not necessarily have anything to say. Further comparison will be drawn between these two levels and the designer level.

During the 1970s the hippie streetstyle fell into two main categories - originating form the 1960s Californian generation of flower powers - who made great effort to deny their own culture in terms of dress - since it was ordered according to monetary and social status. Therefore they adopted the clothing trends of other countries, especially third world countries, wherein all fabrics were equal, and decoration went according to taste as opposed to rank. This fundamental thought behind the hippie movement, began a wave, which was to abound in the 1970s, of craft, and handled fabrics. The categories were as follows :

Firstly there were the remainder of the original hippies, and then there were the commercialised hippies, who felt a need to run with the style, even if the meaning behind it didn't matter to them a lot.

Figure 2 (i) reveals the hippie look, which began as a style from the street, signalling the breakdown of a centralised fashion authority. Figure 2 (ii) highlights to what extent the "hippie look" was adopted by the ordinary consumer. The loose floppy, corduroy flares, and V-eck T-shirt, coupled with the Moses sandals, that were adopted

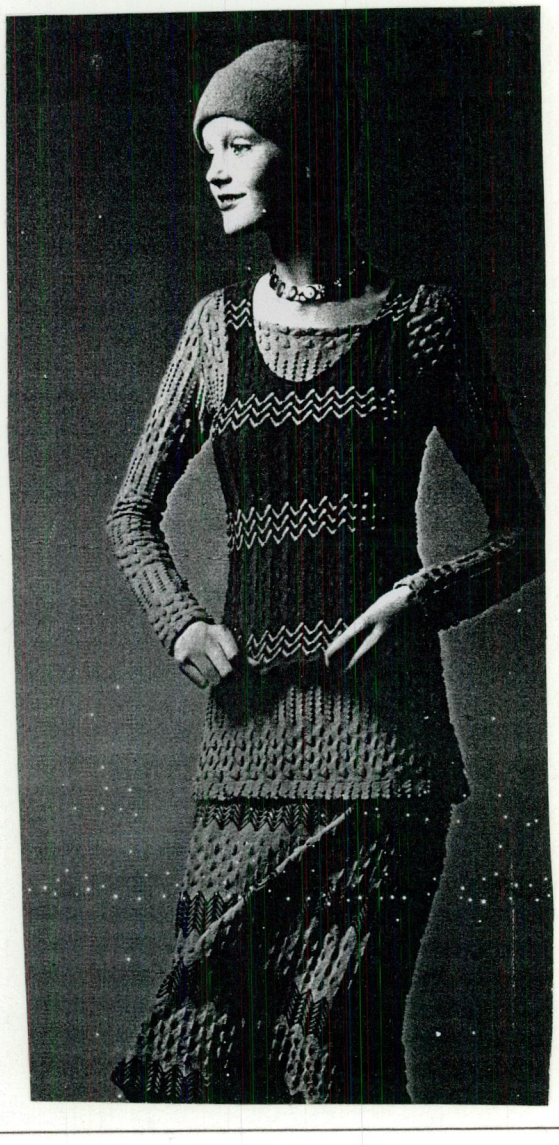
2 (i) The hippie look

2 (ii) Family photograph - 1972

2 (iii) The hippie look reaches designer level - 1976 ⇨

2 (iv) Garment by Thea Porter - 1972

2 (v) Family photograph - 1971



3 (vi) Outfit in Vogue ⇨

from a Middle Eastern country. This photograph was taken around 1975/76, and I do not think this young guy was of an inherent hippie nature.

Figure 2 (iii) & (iv) describes the hippie look actually filtering up through the street. Figure (iii) was designed by Lagerfield in 1976. The hippie connotations are obvious - long, loose, flared, floppy collars, floppy hats, it symbolises the struggle that top fashion designer must have been faced with, in the eye of mass speedy production, which was accessible to all and allowed for speedy changes in trend. Figure (iv) is a caftan style dress by Thea Porter.

Figures 2 (v) (vi) & (vii) have been included to represent the interest in craft. National and federal councils were set up to promote crafts, including jewellery, ceramics, hand-knitting and embroidery. New magazines promoted the fine art approach to textiles. They offered an alternative to mass-produced goods, yet at the same time many craftspeople hoped that their designs would be mass-produced. Figure (v) displays a red, yellow, navy and black crocheted waistcoat which were common in the 70s, and have made a substantial comeback today. Figure (vi) shows a designer knit from 1975 where there is a more intricate repeated pattern, coloured zig-zag, juxtaposed with it's negative. The underknit has beads which contrast with the zig-zag of the skirt and vest top.

The difference between the original subculture style, and the designer shape involved simplification of the original. The middle stage reveals the bridge betwen the two. From Figure (i) to Figure (ii) beads, jewellery overlaying is done away with; to create an unclutterred hippie. Figure (iii) is a further step which adds style and swing to the original line, and plays around with accesories which denote "hippie", as in the case of the buckle which is red in colour which is used in a witty and stylish way.

The lumberjack and cowboy street style made it's debut in the 1960s. Dishevelled exterior and long hair for men epitomised the image of counter culture - of poverty and irresposibility. Such an image remains today and signals the same type of person - the traveller, moreover the drifter. The appearance of the lumberjack and cowboy was a further offshoot from the hippie phenomenon. It made more of a conscious effort to exact the uniform that went with a certain "cause" in the culture. For example the lumberjack and cowboy image came as a result of the Western movies. It was adopted as a tough guy image and intriguingly as time went on, into the late 1970s, such an image was consciously taken to rights for the gay community, beginning first on America's West Coast (although Figure 3(i) does not typify gay code, since the hair is not the short soldier style cut.)

Denim was also a kind of uniform. They were often added to or changed in some way to make them individual, an indication of the type of wearer. Faded jeans signified wear and tear, and implicated hard work. Often old jeans were ripped apart and the pieces sown together to form a skirt or jacket etc. Patched jeans were common among students, pressed jeans accompanied with silk shirts were common among the better off.

In Figure 3 (ii) we see a 10 year old girl, in the later 1970s in faded jeans and lumberjack shirt worn over a long sleeved cotton T-shirt. It is very similar in silhouette to Figure 3 (i), and induces the same kind of aura, although evidently the background scenery and age difference implicate different attitudes. It therefore is considerably useful in describing sub - cultures effect on the masses during the 1970s. What was chosen through semiotic dress or indeed necessity was grasped by fashion, watered down, and made available to all, young and old.

3 (i) Lumberjack / Cowboy image ⇨

⇦ 3 (ii) Girl with lumberjack image

In both cases, the element of comfort is evident. The leisure fad is also evident with the wearing of fleece cotton in Figure 3 (i,) and the cotton T-shirt in Figure 3(ii). You need warmth and comfort when you are out on the road a lot.

It is interesting to note that the cordurouy mania came in during the late 1960s as a reaction against jeans, opting for a more comfort giving choice.

A major influence of the 1970s came in the form of nostalgia, fashions were borrowed from the 1920s, 30s and 40s, however they were worked in many authentically different ways. Laura Ashley, punk, new wave and Biba all have clear differences, and the way in which haute couture designers used them had distinct incongruities. Whereas Paris designers focussed on the classic line of the 1930s and 1940s, top English desinged like Zandra Rhodes, along the same vein as laura Ashley contemplated the manipulation of fabric, with ruffled leg of mutton sleeves, touches of lace and prints alligned with late Victorian and Edwardian styles. These had a more domesticated home made and endearing look, as opposed to the sophistication of the Parisean designer. The American offshoot of this look was the prarie look, with it's layered petticoats, and rustic innocence.

Figure 4 (i) reveals the Laura Ashley style which was a semiotic style uninfluenced, or reacting against womans rights and the questioning of the female role. Although Figure 4(ii) does not possess the same unquestionable femininity, it is none the less typical of the high street having been influenced by culturally influenced fashion. Notice the similarities in the simplistic repeat pattern of the prints in both cases. the colours too are similar. Figure 4 (ii) however appears much more influenced by the general 1970s silhouette which was narrow with flared extremities. Figure 4 (iii) appears as a contrast to Figure 4 (ii), however it is comparable to Figure 4 (i) in it's general silhouettte. The lips and lipstick print on the organza are in contrast. The

⇦ *4 (i) Laura Ashley dress - 1976*

4 (ii) Family photograph - 1978 ⇨

4 (iii) Zandra Rhodes design - 1976

comparisons and contrasts only go to illustrate the fact that the 1970s were eclectic and random and borrowed without apology from different times.

4 Top Designers of the 1970s

4.1 Zandra Rhodes and Bill Gibb, and their influences

In this chapter I hope to look at the work of two designers. The reason is primarily to discover the influences of the contemporary culture on the fashion world. High street clothing may equally have been of use in this, however, due to extensive information on the designers, and the fact that the clothing had to be more delicatly thought about meant I found myself selecting the designer as opposed to the common shop wear. The relationship between high street and designer level fashion discussed in Chapter three may consolidate the view that either could have been used.

Also studying a designer, helps one to see the interests, and pressure of the 1970s designers, if they are found to be typical. This in turn would provide an even wider view of the fashion industry.

Zandra Rhodes and Bill Gibb studied at the Royal College of Art in London, and are among the few who made it from there internationally.

The output of Bill Gibb during the 1970s was described by Frances Kennet as a "constantly high standard, verging on couture," and through the following paper, I intend to look at some of his outfits and relate their specifications to the culture from which they eminated.

He produced some fine knitwear, reflecting the interest in soft thinner fabrics, a concept generated in Italian design, at a time, a decade earlier when there was an Italian revival internationally. When authors report on the garments of Bill Gibb, they often refer to his use of patterning on knit as his quintessential individuality and forte that made him famous. In 1970, he followed his interest in the ethnic styling

5 (i) Bill Gibb design, 1971

with some mixed patterns, pleats, figures and beads. In 1975 he created stunning leather clothes using the softest of skins for coats and jackets, taking hold in many cases of the 1930s and 1940s revival in his shapes with the use of wide collars and peplums.

The pressures of the designers of the day were exemplified by Gibb. The costs of fabrics and manufacturing, even the cost of running a small studio operation forced designers into mass production. Through a majority of the 1970s, Gibb ran a small wholesaling house, but was forced into liquidation. Such were the pressures of the clothing game in the 1970s. The shifting emphasis on clothes were a struggle for everyone never mind those who manufactured clothing that may have seemed less reasonably priced.

Figure 5 (i) reveals a combination of 1970s cultures and interests, eclectically strewn together, although one might argue tastefully done. For a start the indulgence in eclecticism is a 1970s anomaly. Although this frugal mixing and matching was probably acheived before, and certainly considered after the 1970s, say in Versaces fusing of Baroque and Classical, such was never adhered to, to such an extent as it was in the 1970s. The outfits display a soft casual comfort, acquianted with the sport and leisure fad of the 1970s begun in America. There are hints at a hippie influence in the floatiness and looseness. They also allude to the ethnic theme, with the use of patterning, beads, bows, and calf-length skirts which are strictly 1970s fascinations.

His textures give an ethnic feel with the geometrical formation of triangles and squares, in both the skirts and the bow tied cardigan. Notice, the outfit on the right has a blouse either in lace or knit which also succumbs to the notion of ethnic geometry - this time the circles are knit into the garment through little wedges.

The cardigan print is the negative of the pattern on the skirt. The outfit on the left includes a lingerie like top with thin straps, tied at the waist with a fine belt.

Over all she wears a large shawl, with fringes. The soft lines are indiciative of the 1970s. Either clothes were nipped and scrimped at the waist and expanded towards the extreme points, or they followed the hippy philosophy of comfort, and lack of restriction. This was their policy in life - democracy and anti-authority, but the mould was universally adopted in the loose and floppy rounded clothing silhouette.

In the 1960s, orientalism originated in the US with the hippy movement. The hippies asserted the right of ordinary people to expressive taste of theie own, and that style should not be for the priveleged. Before the commercialisation of the hippie, in the form of flower power etc, in the late 1960s, the hippie received press - bad press due to their image as drop-outs, constantly high on drugs and sex. They expressed this disatisfaction with their own culture, by adopting the clothing of other cultures, seeing them as more meaningful. They made deliberate analogies within the way they dressed. For example many took to wearing "Afghans," designed to offend the traditionalists who were used to wearing fine English sheepskin. (Incidentally a point which Gibb himself picks up in 1976, when he uses a covering of verticaly slung silver fox skins, tails bobbing, to create a look outdoing all peasant looks, following in the vein of Oscar de la Renta from 1970.)

The "afghan" was a badly cured sheepskin, often with holes which were crudely patched with embroidery. The American Indian decoration had first been borrowed by the hippies. Much of the hippie paraphenalia was thrown aside to accommodate designers. Strings of mangled beads were reduced to one or two, evident in this Gibb illustration; fringing was also cut down to a minimum and on reflection became a chic finishing edge, also evident on the large (oversize was also a feature) shawl. Floating scarves and flapping trousers were also refined to create something more subtle, and

more becoming, ironically for the traditionalist. Therefore the irony remains - from native and primitive, to chic and stylish; that is fashion and it's invincible power to steal style, ignore the politics and change the meaning of clothes.

The turnaround of the hippie image was reported to have occured in 1968 which British Vogue entertained a photograph of Lady Antonia Fraser, sitting on her dining table in a gold and purple Indian tunic and trousers with elaborate Indian earrings. This was the :

(xviii) "signalling of the end of the real hippies, and a rise of their fashionable imitators."

Then Porter was also responsible for it's accessiblity, with her reputation for extending bizarre or exotic images into a softer and more sophisticated mode.

The shawl featured in Figure 5 (i) is simple and has several stripes running around the bottom which could be seen as a functioanl visual feature. Because of the unapologetic juxtapositioing of so many patterns and textures the stripes along the bottom serve to hold the eye into the complete image. This was a device used in classical Greece, where verticals were always "lidded" with horizontals to prevent the eye from escaping into the sky. Stripes were made popular in the 1970s due to the sports craze, but here they also cleverly serve a purpose. The horizontal stripes are then contrasted with the vertical fringes.

Bill Gibb was one who picked up on the hippie translation of "mix and match" into "mess and muddle," and this made a positive contribution to British fashion. Frances Kennet refers to it as :

(xix) "the magpie assembly of clothes."

Clash became as acceptable as harmony. It is arguable that in Figure 5 (i) we can detect signs of the 1920s and 1930s, in the draping lines, originally taken by art deco (and art deco is itself eclectic) from classical Greek and Roman Architecture. The large bow is a hippie feature, and was often used in the 1970s disproportionately.

Pictured in Figure 5(ii) is an outfit by Bill Gibb, designed in 1973. It comprises of a dress in several parts: a long - sleeved blouse gathered up just on the ribs and worn underneath a short, tight fitting, tie - string jacket. The skirt is a long flared, pleated skirt, with the contrasting prints of the harsh chequered shapes and the non - cluttered floral print. The further geometrical pattern on the jacket show evidence of Bill Gibbs' fascination with juxtaposing all kinds of prints together. His use of the chessboard print is reminiscent of the previous outfit, where he places positive and negative prints beside one another. In this case the subtlety of difference is caused by the drape of the fabric. The checks on the skirt which fall into pleats appear to take on a more diamond check than those on the second tier of the bodice section. Gibb uses the dramatic check to keep the outfit composed, and uncluttered. Subtle changes in pattern such as these, appear as a trait of Gibb.

Although mixing and matching of patterns was very much a 70s trait,Gibb stands out, with the ability to do it tastefully. The close fitting cap, of crocheted wool, and numerous, uncut strings is also a 70s element. It could have been stolen from many sources, although the original source would have been exotic. If you take a look at Figure 5 (iii) one can see a striking resemblance in style. Notice the skullcap with the hanging beaded strings. Also note the jewellry, the drape of the skirt, and how the lines are echoed by the pleats in Figure 5 (ii). Even the poses are of a similar nature. Art deco was a major influence on culture, design for living and fashion in the 1970s. Art deco itself stole from a whole host of other artistic styles and orders, so in short, if

5 (ii) Bill Gibb design, dated 1973

5 (iii) Art Deco statue

the 1970s fashion were to take from art deco as an artistic style they would automatically be stealing from a host of others.

Zandra Rhodes was born in Kent in 1940. She had an interest in fashion from an early age, as her mother was a fitter. At the Paneworth House before being appointed senior lecturer in fashion at the Medway College of Art.
At 19 she enrolled in the school, studying fabric design, which was to become her individual trademark. Following two years there, she continued in her specialised subject at the Royal College of Art, graduating in 1964 with First Class Honours.

Her career began, with teaching at the London College, and simultaneously designing for print works she had set up with Alexandre McIntyre. Dissatisfied with the way in which designers were using her fabrics, she became a partner in a boutique called the Fulham Road Clothes shop, where she made her own clothes as well as fabrics.

The 1970s marked the time where she had most freedom, going it alone beginning 1970. She got good press from Vogue and Woman's Wear in the US. The British fashion press followed suit. Three years after her emergence as a solo designer, her clothes were chosen by Cecil Beaton for his fashion retrospective at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her career as a designer was ultimately secured.

Besides evening dresses she designed day clothes, knitted sweaters, coats and dresses, and created upholstery fabric, tailored coats, furs and lingerie, and even managed to costume plays! Her fabrics are organza, metal shimmered silk, floating cotton, viyella, chamois. Every collection includes Crinoline dresses. Her lines are outrageous, though gently flattering, feminine, and never harsh. The wiggly undulating line is a personal motif, as it is also used in her prints. Deatils and accesories are suggested by the themes chosen.

Collections include "Medieval Pagaent," "Flower Fairy," "Indian Minature Painting" and "Conceptual Chic" which cleverly contrasted itself to the street clothes of 1977 and the punk era, with the use of ripped jersies, saftey pins, etc. She reveals how even the top designers were in tune with the culture, and how fashion was influenced by popular fashion as oppossed to vice versa.

Zandra Rhodes is a designer of the time, in whose work I percieve several qualities also inherent in that of Laura Ashley, but am suggesting that their influences may very well be from the same source.

Figure 6 (i) describes loose fitting denim dungarees, with the hem rolled up above the ankle, and a cotton blouse with full bishop sleeve. It is possible to see the influence of the soft hippie lines.

The large bishop sleeves and ruffled collar are nostalgic references to the past. Films made in the 1930s reveal similar blouses. Yet the fabrics (cotton) and the feel is not a romantic, film star one (it should have been chiffon or silk if this was the case.) Instead it is rather rough and tumble. The changing views on class following the Labour government are reflected in the outfit. The dungarees are indicative of the labourer (the male.) In part the appearance of the workman's dungarees as fashion was simply an act of rebellion, in that no-one should be ashamed to show that they work; furthermore, for women to wear menstyle garments revealed an audacious personality in the wearer, and attitude not untypical of the decade.

Such audacity was little more than a question of male and female roles. Pressumably since male and female roles were merging, mingling and swapping over, then according to the semiotics, so should the clothing. Although the unisex theme is apparant, and the boldness is there, we are not required to take it too seriously. The blouse for one, softens the masculinity, together with the boyish roll-ups at the end of

6 (i) Dungarees by Zandra Rhodes, dated 1971

the trouser. It is reminicent of "The Little House on the Prarie," a programme which became very popular towards the end of the 1970s.

The country, anti-city feel was a common one, and in essence merged along the edges with the hippie-esque softness of line, in both cases eminating from the awareness of the importance of the environment.

Her ankle-strap sandal have high heels and ridged platform soles, applied with glitter. Such platforms were an all important 1970s feature. They reveal a potion of 1970s interests - glamour from the 30s,with the glitz and sparkle, childish clumsiness, delicate female sandal, attached to a monstrous, manly sole. Connotations of which imply misunderstood sexuality, the image of which was taken to extremes in the case of Gary Glitter and David Bowie.

4.2 An Analysis of the Collection of 70s Costume from the Ulster Museum Textiles Department

I made an appointment with to go and see what the Ulster Museum had to show in the way of 70s dress, and was enabled to see first hand the work of several designers, namely Bill Gibb, Zandra Rhodes, Ossie Clarke, Thea Porter and Geoff Banks,as well as a couple of high street items.

Figure 7 (i) shows a skirt designed by Gibb. It is a very flared skirt, with a split running the whole way from its' hemline,ending inside its' waistband. There is a wrapover sewn into the waisband. The skirt is gathered all the way around and neatly stiched into the waist. On the body, the length of the skirt would fall below the knee, probably at the lower calf. The outer skirt is made from wool and is lined with a satin lining. It is made up of a total of seven panels, presumably a necessary option, in order to create such a flare. A geometrical pattern is repeated on each panel. Figure 7 (v) shows a purple ribbon, possibly to create the appearance that the skirt truly is a wrap-around which would be the case in proper peasant tradition.

The general silhouette is undoubtedly a 70s one, as it indulges in the hippiesque lines, with the semiotics of comfort. The crazy patterning is quite South American which would have been wholeheatedly admired by the hippies.

The pattern is also rather Art Deco, with its' geometrical qualities. The lines are used to dazzle the eye and create illusions. (best seen in Figure 7(iii)). The large circular shapes compliment the bouncy flared silhouette. The vertical zig-zags create a feeling of length,and prevent the skirt from looking "frumpy". The horizontal zig-zags complete the whole image of the skirt,preventing the eye from falling off the bottom

of it. Notice also how the small circles increase in size towards the bottom, again emphasizing the appearance of flare.

Figure 8 is immediately comparable, in- so- far as the pattern here is also an automatic point of interest. The suit consists of a narrow hip length jacket with two toggle buttons, and a pair of flared trousers. The pattern again probably inspired by Art Deco, and is indicative of some of the wild patterns that were going on in the high street. Again we have a familiar silhouette, that of an adult in a childs' clothes. It has the usual wasp- waist and neat shoulders. Figure 8(v) shows the button detail, where the two buttons are attached by cord, and hold the two sides of the jacket together on the centre line, through using them as a toggle.

The influence of jeans on the 70s scene is played through in the seams where there is double stitching, (Figure 8 (v))where there is no neccesity to use them. Notice the stylines in the jacket,and the panel in the back of the trousers.

Seeing these garments in real life allowed one to realise deatail, and it was interesting to find that the workmanship on the Biba clothes was of a middling standard, (see Figure (iv) for a non parallel double stitched seam, and fig (vi) for a badly sewn zip.

Perhaps the reason is due to the high turnover in boutiques, and their essential requirement to keep up the trends, at a relatively low cost to the consumer, quality therefore becoming secondary. Couture having a slower turnover and longer life expectancy had to think more carefully about influences, and make sure that what was being made had the quality that was neglected on lower levels.

Figure 9 is a design by Ossie Clarke, a well known English designer of the 70s. It is a simple lower calf length dress, with satin lower sleeves and satin yoke and collar. The shape is a soft hippie one, yet the collar attached to the dress is more formal. The

satin brings to mind an undercurrrent of Saturday Night Fever, yet the dress itself is hardly a disco piece. The way in which the satin has been inserted is reminiscent of the Little House On The Prarie where a blouse could be worn under a pinafore, to be worn with boots.

Figure 10 displays two detail shots of an evening dress by Zandra Rhodes. It is a heavily ornamented piece, with sequins, and coloured stones. It is comparable to Figure 7 (vi) by Bill Gibb. The ressemblance of shapes within the patterns are uncanny. See the circular lines, and then the jagged zig - zags. At first it is not apparent, because the glamour of the sequins takes your eye away from the basic pattern. The garment does not really typify 70s by any means, but it indicates that influences of the 70s were still there even in less conspicuous ways.

The caftan in figure 11 by Thea Porter was a shape commonly worn by the hippies. For them it was made in a primitive way out of squares of sewn together to form a long loose fitting garment.

Here the chiffon is cut into squares and the seams are edged with a white piping. In this case, unlike the hippies, the squares are narrowed at the bottom to create more of a shape. Thea Porter lifts the caftan completely away from the hippie arena with the use of the red polka dots on the black background. Figure 12 was a popular style garment in the 70s, having a kind of peasant aura, with the tight chest and baggy sleeves gathered at their head, and elasticated at the wrists.

The commercialization of the hippie costume is revealed in figure 13 (i) which was bought in from a mainstream fashion store. It is a typical hippie dress, with the juxtapositioning of, in this case, three different fabrics. Here again, it is done tastefully. The open neckline, empire line cut, and the full long skirt are all features

of hippie dress. The craft element is shown with the superfluous embroidery, a trait originally borrowed from third world countries.

Each of the garments described reflect a wesern preoccupation with third world and peasant styles. Ironically these clothes would have been bought in fashionable shops in cities in the 70s. They were also worn by mainsteam people and not by people on the edge of society. To be able to afford to dress in these hippie - inspired styles, one had to be associated with some element of established and mainstream society.

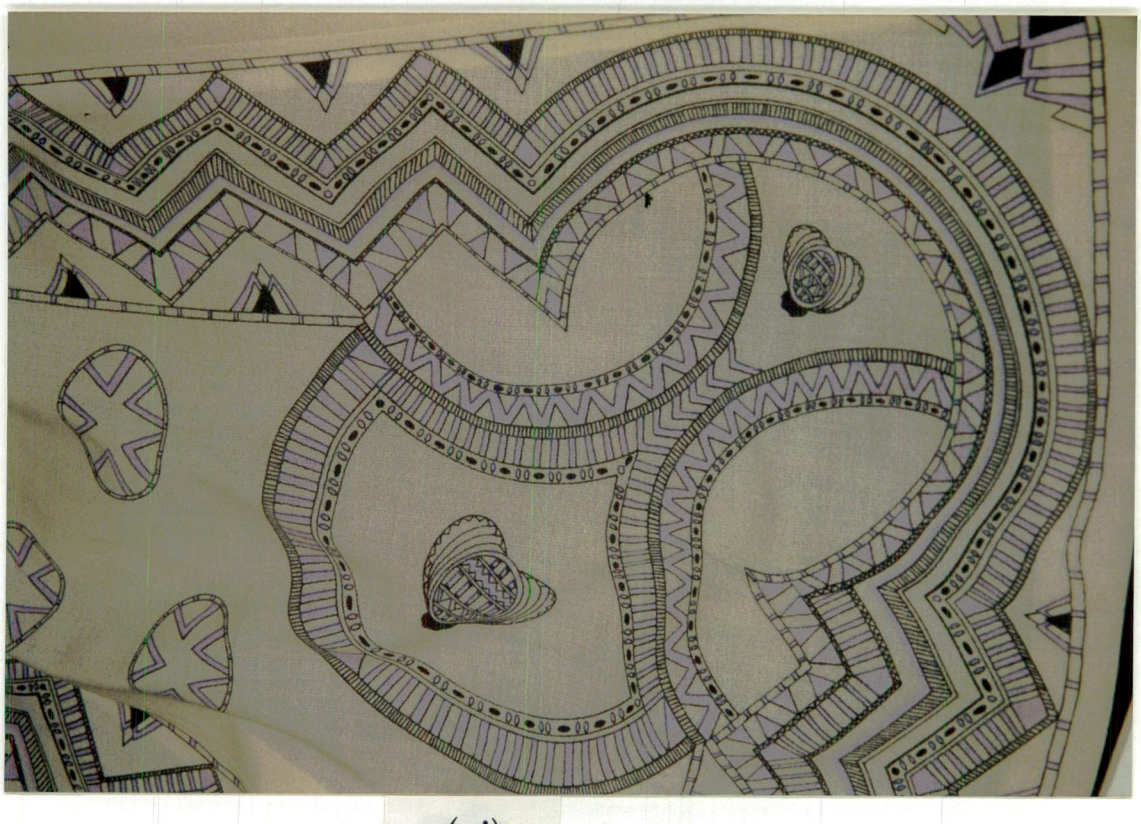
(i)

(ii)

(iii)

(iv)

(v)



(vi)

8 Biba Costume, dated 1975

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

(vi)

(vii)

(viii)

9 Ossie Clarke design, dated 1972

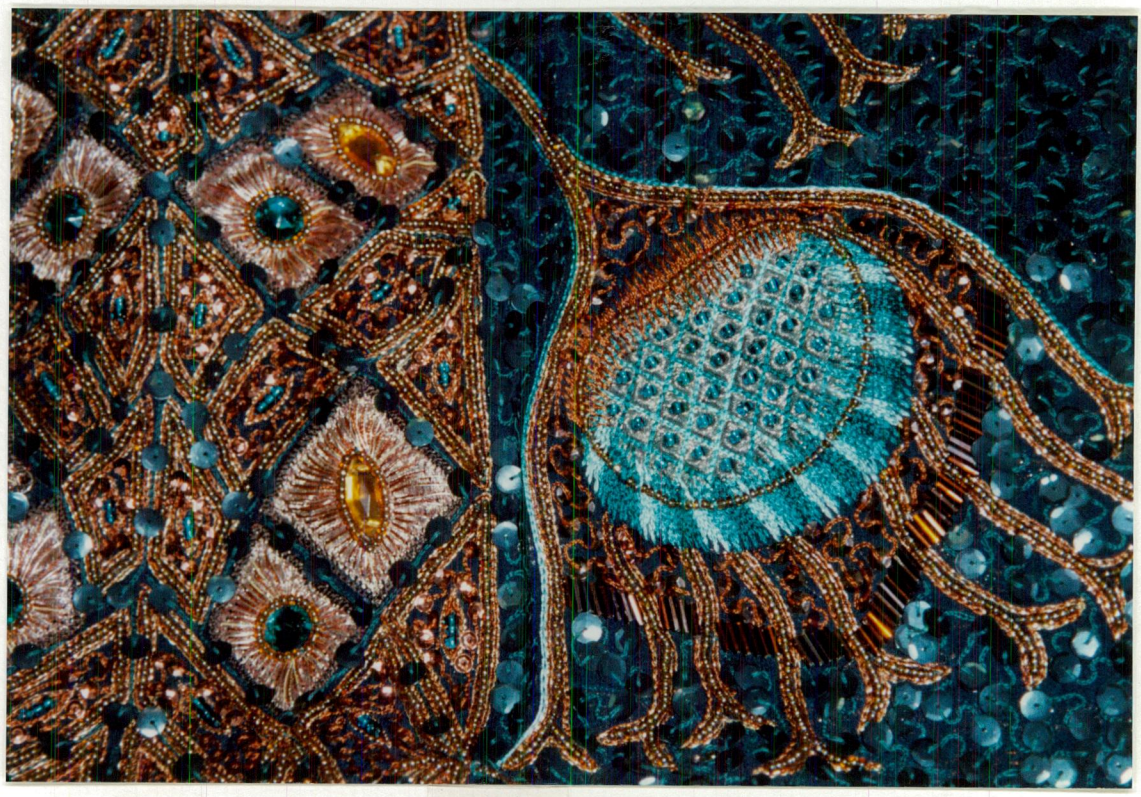
(i)

(ii)

(iii)

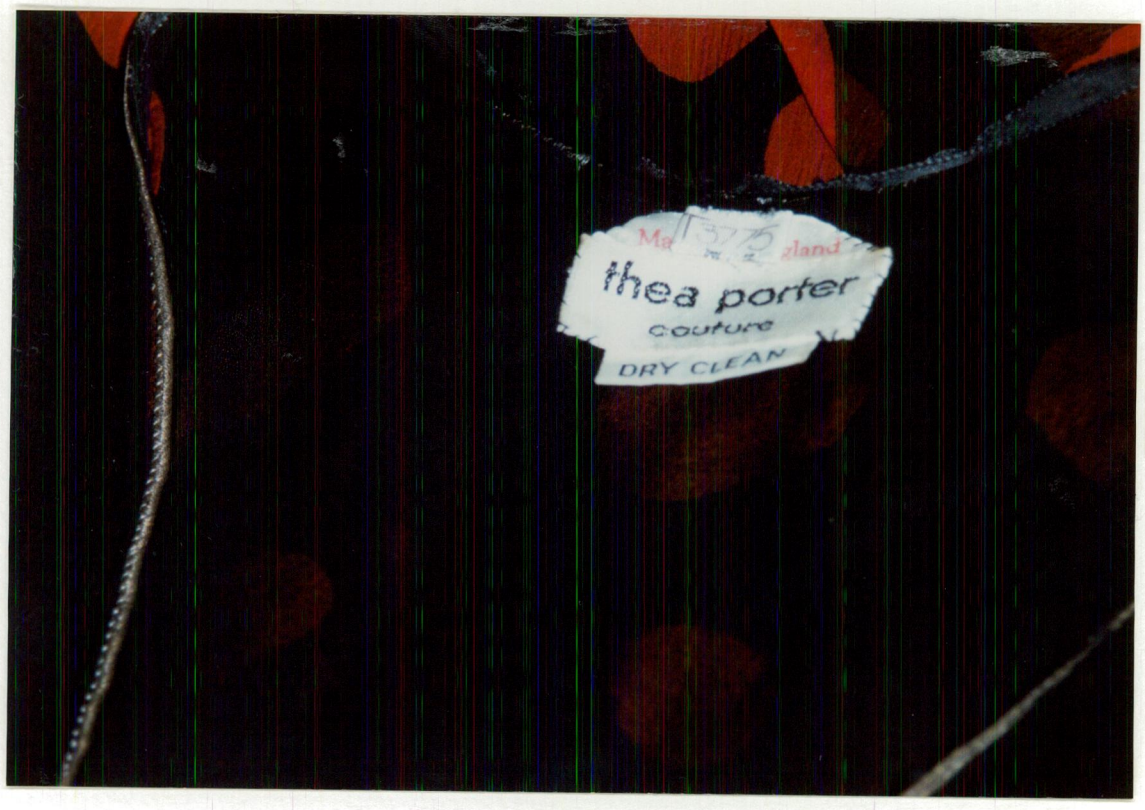
10 Zandra Rhodes, dated 1978

(i)



(ii)

11 Thea Porter caftan, dated 1972



(i)

(ii)

12 Geoff Banks, dated 1972

(i)

(ii)

13 High Street hippie dress

CONCLUSION

Much of the 1970s dress hinged on the evolving culture's opinion on male and female roles.

(xx) "together they comprise of a coherent sign system, which seeks to ratify and legitimate at deepest ... levels of everyday life the culturally endorsed gender division of labours in society."

In Victorian times fashion was headed by the idler woman - a lady of leisure - portrayed by the fact that her garment took time to take care of and was elaborate in detail or fabric so that it implied that a lot of money was required to get it. It was a case of "living up to your position," or "dressing according to your position" - phrases which were heard up until the Second World War. These patterns acheived such acceptance, that even with the role of the middle classes conventions remained. Such traditions were dealt a blow with the onslaught of the 1950s and 1960s youth explosion. Together with the heralding of the classless society under the labour government in the 1970s, dress was made to take on a different quality. So what was to happen whenever one didn't dress according to status, and what would happen when woman were to struggle to be seen as equals? Although class influences still existed, they declined dramatically.

With womens liberation marches, significant colleges disregarding their all- male traditions, and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, which made it illegal to discriminate in employment housing and education, womens power began to stengthen. More than any other decade, the 70s made public that issue that was otherwise considered a personal problem.

Hollywood highlighted what was going on in the real world, with films like 1971's "The Owl and the Pussycat" where Barbara Streisand played a Jewish hooker,

commonly regarded as the lowest of the low, firstly for being Jewish, and secondly for being a woman being abused according to sexuality.

These phenomena ushered in unisex dressing, unheard of in pre-war times. It also resulted in a renewed interest in dressing according to some other purpose - according to tribe. The changing role of women, during the war (for instance, working in factories,) when the men were at war acted as a precipice for all the movements and thoughts that were to follow. However, unisex dressing wasn't an end in itself. This acted as a catalyst to a whole lot of alternaitves. Women, men, designers questioned sexuality, what were the roles? Surely women should be women and men should be men - and seen to be the sex that they are? On the one hand men and women were presumed to be no different, save for their sexuality. It was therefore argued that they should dress the same, yet on the other hand sexuality is a rather important thing, and many psychologists would argue that women's clothing has only been tainted by one thing - their concern to attract men. This is known as the "Seduction Principle," James Lover.

So fashion went in two major directions, virtualy non-sexual clothes - flared trousers and narrow jackets etc. , and conversly hot pants (female equivalent of pimps dress - took off on stage in 1971,) cat suits, and glamorous sequins and glitzy dresses, repercussions of pre-war times themselves. There were off shoots from this, and it was exemplified by the Laura Ashley culture, in half inspired by the hippie movements, in half a reaction against overtly sexual culture. There was already an inkling towards Mother Earth, and being natural, and this acted as a reinforcement of the concept. Innocence consequently was a feature of some styles of dress.The image was inspired by and reaffirmed the principles of families like The Waltons, Little House on the Paraire, beginning in 1973 and added a new dimension to the fashion, and design for living culture. This look conscribed to the nostalgia of the time, as Laura Ashley did.

Fashion continued along the principles held in esteeme by different groups mainly initiated in the 60s. While semiotics continued to some degree for the wearers, on a more general scale, they lost their meaning, as fashion began borrowing stylistic elements of the subcultural dress.

This was due, in part to the music and film industries which were flourishing at the time. Music and film marketed ideas of taste and style, originally taken from from the subcultures, and began that process of commercialising that which was dress with meaning. Even the return to pre-war times and the glizy sequined dresses and Art Deco, were adopted by performers, as in the case of Gary Glitter, creating a new kind of wearer. Harking back to the past for the 70s wearer often meant mocking it.The 70s were crazy after all, and if anything was left with meaning the popular industries had to do something about it, to instill that inherent wackiness. That's what sold.

Designers had different views as to what had to be done with existing styles. It appears their philosophy had more to do with transforming ideas of subcultural clothing into tasteful, and chic outfits, with care taken to preserve the important elements that made them fashionable.

High street versions, isolated from their decade had very little chic, they also did not speak of any of the meaning from the subculture from whih they were derived. Certain elements were there; prints, fabric types, and silhouette. They were trendy, and for the 1970s that was all that was asked.

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