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The Fashion of the 1960s. A New Power Shaping the American Image

Alice Morin

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Abstract

After WWII, the US emerged as a major world-economic and cultural power. At the same time, it was producing a specifically American fashion, reinventing itself and its image, and channeling the critics. With new styles and new economic forms emerging in the 1960s—as the US, eager to expand its mass consumerist model, pushed ready-to-wear, replacing European couture—American fashion became as a new power, intertwining economic and political, social, and cultural stakes. Thus, fashion helped design a dominant model of a wealthy, free, and seductive country, able to better itself, even though reality was still far from this idealized image.

Keywords: Fashion; Soft Power; Recuperation; Subcultures; Political Movements

Alice Morin: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3 (France)
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6840-6005
Contact: alice.p.morin@gmail.com
Alice Morin is a Ph.D. candidate and teaching assistant at Paris III-Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. Her work focuses on fashion photography in the American press from the 1960s.

1 Introduction

The fashion of the 1960s is often referred to as "revolutionary" and while this opinion may initially seem exaggerated, especially with regard to other events of the period that profoundly changed mentalities, behaviors, and laws, one merely needs to compare photographs from 1959 and 1969 to assess the depth of the turnaround that came about during the decade.[1] Such magnitude is noticeable in the aesthetic upheavals as well as in the number of people concerned—more or less all the inhabitants of the Western world. The very symbolic turn from the 1950s to the 1960s was fast, and the changes it brought were irreversible and plainly visible.

For instance, in that decade, two brand-new clothing forms were popularized: the miniskirt and women's trousers. From the very start, such novelties, among a number of others, were inserted in a socio-cultural context that made it possible for this to happen. From the late 1940s in the US, the transition from a war economy to one of peace did not hinder massive industrialization, a phenomenon often linked with soaring mass consumption, as well as the prominence of the military-industrial complex, which partly accounts for a reorganization of American society on several levels, such as mass access to education, the development of research, the democratization of consumers goods, and more. Similarly, the baby boom and the rise of the middle class changed the concept of family, while the American way of life was presented as the only desirable model, born from the consensus required by the rhetoric of the Cold War.[2] Yet groups such as young people, progressively targeted by market segmentation[3] and subsequent advertising that heightened the generation gap, started to embark on and identify with subcultures,[4] which gained traction. At the same time, dissenting voices arose, in continuity with the activism of the 1940s, especially those of ethno-racial minorities who were still barred from accessing this prosperity.

All these elements shaped the context in which fashion gained importance in the public space.[5] Violent reactions that accompanied the spread of the miniskirt and the women's trousers[6] sketched out the stakes of the "dress revolution" in the 1960s and the decades that followed. Fashion became about defining one's projected identity through clothes, which in turn became instruments of claim in a society that, until then, had been very normalized. Public debates of this kind also had the effect of positioning fashion as a national preoccupation, to unite or divide public opinion, and thus testifying to its growing importance, especially as reflected through the media, which became increasingly interested in covering such social issues. Fashion matters also proved to be of economic importance, as it was in the 1960s that the US positioned itself as a leader on this market.

2 The US as a Fashion Center

2.1 New Modes of Production, Expression, Reception, and Consumption

Until the late 1950s, the world fashion system was very strictly organized in terms of creation and distribution. The US gradually became the center of its own production network — by 1950, 90% of American women already dressed with ready-to-wear, a formula and a term coined nationally.[7] At

1 All translations from French are the author's, and solely her responsibility.

2 See William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey, America since World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

3 See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

4 The term "subculture" in this paper will be used in the sociological sense of the term, designating a network of people, actions, and productions emerging and distinguishing itself from society in general without presenting a viable substitute to its organization in terms of educational and political institutions, commerce, technology, mass media, etc.

5 On the interweaving of fashion and other historical features of the 1960s, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties, Cultural Revolution In Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

6 See Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed. The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009).

7 Nancy Green, "Art and Industry: The Language of Modernization in the Production of Fashion," *French Historical Studies*, 18/3 (1994): 745.

the time, however, the creation impulse still originated from Paris, a process inherited from the nineteenth century, when high society moved to Europe for the season and shopped new collections there. Paris retained its central position and transatlantic influence, despite the slowdown during World War II, from which it recovered rapidly, in part thanks to international solidarity.[8] American luxury department stores' envoys and the press traveled to the French capital twice a year to report on and copy the latest designs, which were then reproduced by 7th Avenue manufacturers in a hierarchical retail system, from the top down.[9] But as the US rose as the world's leading power, its industrialized model sustaining mass consumerism did so as well. The creative strength it was lacking was soon provided for by the appearance of a new job, that of stylist, originating, as was often the case, from the margins,[10] notably from youth fashion. Inventive and unabashedly daring, stylists continually came up with new ideas to fuel a faster-paced rhythm of clothing proposals, and thus started to launch trends in lieu of old-fashioned couturiers.[11] To put it simply, the power balance among the three main channels of fashion distribution (luxury, designer ready-to-wear, and mass clothing) shifted in the early 1960s, thereby giving way to new modes of reception and consumption. As per Solange Montagné-Villette's argument, fashion became "acentralized"[12] and the US model finally proved to be the one of the future globalized society, as can still be observed today. It was in the 1960s that ready-to-wear asserted its independence and replaced couture, as it proved faster and more flexible, also gaining many new customers since it stopped being stigmatized as reserved for the working class.

The dress form of the 1960s directly reflected these economic changes. A straight silhouette emerged in 1963, in which shoulders, waist, and hips (the trickiest points in tailoring) were erased, simplifying production by encouraging size standardization, as well as purchase. These new styles, incidentally permitted by technological progress (notably in textiles[13]), were accompanied by discourses that closely reflected the key ideas of the decade: promoting a more natural beauty with the simplification of the silhouette; inventing new, more liberated feminine lifestyles with women's trousers and so on.

Finally, as its rhythm accelerated, fashion sought varied inspirations for its new offer. It especially turned to the visual arts (featuring painters' works on shift dresses, initiating collaborations, and so on),[14] to music (ties between rock-and-roll and fashion, for instance, are still noticeable) and to the aforementioned subcultures. This proved to be a mostly reciprocal process, for if today the beneficiary of such fashion changes appears to have been the capitalistic order, the new diversity and affordability of clothing permitted greater freedom in dress. In particular, it allowed for a move from conformity (especially class conformity) to individual expression through clothes,[15] and in some cases a rebellion against the white middle-class dominant values that were so far-reaching in the 1950s.

2.2 Fashion and Contestation: Subcultures and Movements

As the dissenting voices of the postwar era became influential, contestation rose and organized in various movements—whether political or subcultural—that intersected and sometimes overlapped.[16]

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8 See Dominique Veillon, "Le Théâtre de la Mode, ou le Renouveau de la Couture Création à la Libération," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'Histoire*, 28/1 (1990): 118–20.

9 See Alexandra Palmer, *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001).

10 See Derek Simon, "Vêtement et Modernité," *Mode de Recherche*, 9 (2008): 22–4.

11 See Jonathan Wolford, *Sixties Fashion, From 'Less Is More' to Youthquake* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013).

12 Solange Montagné-Villette, "La Mode de la Centralité à l'Acentralité," in *La mode des Sixties. L'entrée Dans la Modernité*, eds. Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat (Paris: Autrement, 2007), 25.

13 See Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Du Pont de Nemours : Mode et Révolution des Textiles Synthétiques," in *La mode des Sixties. L'entrée Dans la Modernité*, eds. Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat (Paris: Autrement, 2007).

14 See Joel Lobenthal, *Radical Rags, Fashions of the Sixties* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990).

15 See Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

16 See Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties. Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

While subcultures are not political movements, they shared a number of features. Indeed, such currents and networks are hard to define in a simple, unified manner, but their foundation lies in the collective acknowledgment that something was wrong with the optimistic American model. Such acknowledgment brought together individuals willing to propose various routes toward change, to invent new ways of thinking, of acting, or to reactivate old ones.[17] In order to draw attention first, and subsequently sympathy to their cause(s), activists learned to strategically use the media, which were booming (90% of American households owned at least one TV set by 1960,[18] and technical advances helped the circulation of the printed press, especially magazines, on a large scale). These media contributed to amplifying the presence of these movements, and almost all oppositional cultures (from countercultural to mass ones) adhered to these politics of the spectacle[19] and expressed themselves through a deliberate use of cloth. It is mainly through these channels that subcultural networks infiltrated and fed mainstream[20] culture in a capillary way, which, in turn, incorporated some of its elements. Fashion, very visual and apparently futile, took a central place within this process, as dress was imbued with significance by these movements. It thus clearly marked the changes of the 1960s and emerged as one of the most efficient banners.

Three examples embody this process. The first is the youth culture, characterized by its specific tastes in music, clothing, and entertainment in general (such as Anglomania, pop music, and many other fads). A subdivision of "main culture," yet one defined in opposition to it, the youth culture was encouraged from the very beginning by mass consumerism and advertisement, which saw the younger generation as a clientele to cater to. New references emerged in the process, bringing out new ideals (youthful, slim bodies),[21] new idols (often childlike and/or gender-ambiguous, from Twiggy to Natalie Wood, a symbol of sexual liberation), new clothes (such as jeans, formerly associated with blue-collar work). They marked the will on teenagers' part (often white and educated) to distinguish themselves from their parents' conformist way of life, as evidenced also by a new modus operandi, using provocation, scandal, and play[22] as behavioral patterns. This also reveals the underlying tension at the heart of a current driven by the will to exist differently within a society needed to fester its blossoming. While it was youth culture that allowed clothes to become tools of self-expression (instead of class signifiers), its ties to consumer culture ultimately resulted in the normalization of the new modes of consumption it popularized. These values launched and contributed to amplifying a joyous, hedonistic, experiential consumerism that then spread throughout society (through a reversal of standards and the advent of a juvenile culture).

In political movements, exemplified by the civil rights movement, fashion was of utmost importance, and it reflected the inner conflicts within its various organizations. Respectable at first, clothes radicalized along with the growing frustration of the next generation. The Black Panther Party's use of dress is paradigmatic: it made one's choice of clothes truly symbolic, imbued with new identity markers through reappropriation[23] and bricolage.[24] This was the goal of the leather jackets (quoting rebellious bikers), berets (referring to Cuban revolutionaries), and the statement of the Afro hairdo[25]

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17 Peter Braunstein, "Forever Young, Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation," in *Imagine Nation, the American Counterculture of the 1960s & 70s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 253.

18 Bob Batchelor, ed., *American Pop, Popular Culture Decade by Decade, vol. 3* (Westport: Greenwood, 2008), 18.

19 As theorized very early on by Guy Debord in his seminal *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

20 For a tentative definition and a discussion on what constitutes the "mainstream" see the section about "Fashion and Contestation: Subcultures and Movements".

21 See Anne-Marie Sohn, "Le Corps Sexué," in *Histoire du Corps, 3. Les Mutations du Regard, le XX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Jacques Courtine (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 95–132.

22 See Braunstein, "Forever Young."

23 See Jeffrey Stewart, "Black Hattitude," in *Habits of Being I, Accessorizing the Body*, eds. Cristina Giorcelli and Paula Rabinowitz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 172–84.

24 A sociological notion coined by Claude Levi-Strauss (1962), "bricolage" refers to the reuse of already existing elements, reassociated in new networks of symbols—a process which can be infinitely continued. On bricolage and fashion, see Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

25 Katell Pouliquen, *Afro, une Célébration* (Paris: La Martinière, 2012), 12–4.

they sported, which were also rallying signs at events and media attention-grabbing devices. It functioned in part, as testified by the mythicized legacy of the movements more visually notable, followed by other movements from radical feminists[26] to absurd-loving yuppies, who pushed this rhetoric of clothing into costumery.

The best-remembered group of the 1960s is the hippies, a movement deemed countercultural. While counterculture is especially hard to delineate (with political movements giving birth to countercultures and countercultural ones encompassing a political dimension, albeit sometimes unarticulated),[27] its core aim was to go against the norm. Once again, the contradictory aspect of this ambition was addressed through dress (or undress). The hippie movement relied on three pillars: provocation (inherited from the youth culture and political movements, and which helped to make them newsworthy); the search for a new and more accurate perception of society (through drugs and music, and resorting to Oriental philosophies); and an acceptation of difference (which was even heroized). The hippies' experimental approach, fueled by a wide variety of sources (as indicated by its motto, "do your own thing"),[28] made them enthusiastically divert clothing, taking up numerous forms and granting them a spiritual dimension—beyond symbolism—as part of a total lifestyle (as was the case with Native American fringes and beads,[29] the vintage trend, and so on). The fast cooptation of this pattern by consumerism epitomizes Dick Hebdige's theory of subcultural "recuperation," which dilutes the meaning of fashion in the process.[30]

This process of "recuperation," readable through clothes, whereby at first society is fundamentally contradicted and rejected, yet is subsequently able to "co-opt" such rejection, is primordial for fashion which, with its new economic weight, thereby became a strategic field of (various) expression(s). All these combined proceedings allowed it to gain unprecedented importance.

3 Fashion as a New Power

3.1 Fashion, Culture and Soft Power

In the late 1960s and early 1970s fashion thus entered the realm of the American soft power, which during this period had also evolved and adapted. Theorized in the 1990s, notably by Joseph Nye,[31] soft power is akin to a cultural influence, as opposed to hard power (expressed through military and economic operations). Occurrences of soft power can be noted in the US as early as the late 1940s, with the beginning of the Cold War, and has been rooted in the federal propaganda of both world wars. One could even argue that the foundation of soft power lies with the US's and is closely related to its founding myths, heavily relying on image and imagination. Canonically, soft power stands on three cornerstones: culture, values, and foreign policies.[32] At a time when these elements were increasingly interconnected through the "American influence" that various American political entities were spreading worldwide and propelling through a carefully crafted image,[33] fashion became a part of such an influence, thus finding itself at the confluence of political, economic, and cultural stakes. Its original commercial purpose, amplified by the switch from a traditional structure to the supremacy of ready-to-wear, made it ideal to participate in enhancing the desirability of American products, thus

[26] See Astrid Henry, "Fashioning a Feminist Style, Or, How I Learned to Dress from Reading Feminist Theory," in *Fashion Talks, Undressing the Power of Style*, eds. Shira Tarrant and Marjorie Jolles (Albany: SUNY University Press, 2012), 13–32.

[27] See Andrew Diamond, Romain Huret, and Caroline Rolland-Diamond, *Révoltes et Utopies. La Contre-Culture Américaine des Années 1960* (Paris: Fahrenheit, 2012).

[28] Barry Miles, *Hippie* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co, 2004), 60.

[29] See Philip Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," in *Imagine Nation, the American Counterculture of the 1960s & 70s*, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (eds.), (New York: Routledge 2002), 159–88.

[30] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 106–9.

[31] See Joseph Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, 80 (1990): 153–71.

[32] Pascal Morand, "Le *soft power* Culturel à l'Heure de l'Immatérialisme," *Mode de Recherche*, 19 (2013): 27.

[33] See Annick Cizel, "Clichés d'Amérique, ou les États-Unis idéalisés à des Fins de Propagande (1945-1960)," *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, 89/3 (2001): 54–69.

glamorizing the image of the US. In the bipolar context of the Cold War, but mostly in an increasingly complex search for global dominance, adhesion to a certain lifestyle and a common ideal had to prevail, and thus be sanctioned by purchases, a more and more sanctified activity. The allure of "made in America" needed to resound both nationally and internationally, as both markets were targeted. Thus, the coherence of American style was crucial, as was its flexibility. Leaning on various conscious and unconscious associations by appealing to largely relatable myths, soft power is typically American, just as rapid and ongoing recasting of the founding myths serving a political agenda is recurrent in US history. The will to put forth typically American (and thus, capitalistic) values such as freedom, prosperity, and a consistent cultural tradition—all of which fashion itself could easily mirror—was thus a deliberate process, born at the crossroads of political and diplomatic tactics on the one hand, and marketing and advertisement strategies on the other. All aimed at seducing through culture,[34] which added to rather than replaced a still perennial hard power in the 1960s and 1970s.[35]

Indeed, the very idea of culture, as it lies at the core of soft power, was becoming massively marketed. By the end of the 1960s, fashion itself became a "cultural industry"[36] through the aforementioned shifts that were practical (fashion was now a mass industry), ideological (fashion now articulated individual values and groups), and functional (fashion was now about self-communication). In doing so, it increasingly escaped the artisanal and artistic realm to enter the industrial one at all levels mentioned here. This advent of mass fashion was symptomatic of a society in which art and industrialization tended to merge on a capitalistic background. While ready-to-wear made artistic self-expression appear accessible—"Department stores, their catalogues, and fashion magazines spread the idea that art through clothing was possible for everyone"[37]—couturiers replied by labeling their craft as high art.[38] However, "high art" itself was entering the commercial sphere at the same time (and by similar processes), whether in terms of forms, production,[39] reception and, consumption.[40] Nancy Green sees fashion's simultaneous standardization and diversification as the resolution of one of its core contradictions: it then became art commercialized by industry.[41] Without taking a further stand in the debate between the artistic and commercial essence of fashion,[42] it can be observed that a complex American model was being put in place, which reused creative innovations, however subversive they originally were, to fuel its appeal. In that model, fashion, in flux between art industrialization and capitalization of creativity, has become a cultural product to be consumed indefinitely.

This evolution inserted itself perfectly into a consumer society which based on desire. Indeed, during the 1960s, fashion had also moved from need (clothing) to desirability (a wardrobe, a style). Such a desire for clothes had to be provoked by associating it with values adhered to by the consumer. This was done very consciously: "the more intensely capitalism manifests itself in fashion … the more it strives to mobilize symbolic and more largely cultural forces, thus ceasing to consider culture as remote from social and economic transactions,"[43] according to Olivier Assouly. In this new dynamic, fashion now represented willing adhesion to values that, in turn, were increasingly associated with culture, as he goes on to explain.

Such an association goes hand in hand with then-emerging techniques in marketing and adver-

[34] Jean-Michel Bertrand, "Libres Propos sur le Soft Power, la Culture et la Transmission des Savoirs," *Mode de Recherche*, 19 (2013): 60.

[35] François-Bernard Huygue, "Décryptage et Analyse des Croyances Modernes, Entretien avec Olivier Assouly," *Mode de Recherche*, 19 (2013): 8.

[36] Morand, "Le *Soft Power* Culturel", 30.

[37] Green, "Art and Industry", 728.

[38] Ibid., 730.

[39] See Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'esthétisation du Monde: Vivre à l'âge du Capitalisme Artiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

[40] See Youna Renaud, "L'Art en Régime Libéral," *Mode de Recherche*, 20 (2013): 59–69, and Jennifer Donnelly, "Commerce, Art et Images" in *L'Amérique des Images, Histoire et Culture Visuelle des Etats-Unis*, ed. François Brunet (Paris: Hazan, 2013), 304–11.

[41] Green, "Art and Industry", 748.

[42] See Sung Bok Kim, "Is Fashion Art?," *Fashion Theory*, 2/1 (1998): 51–71.

[43] Olivier Assouly, "De la Consommation Culturelle Comme Arme de Guerre," *Mode de Recherche*, 19 (2013): 50.

tisement, qualified as "intangible." They signaled "the imbrication of content and form, of desire and pleasure (to consume) which push back the very idea of functionality … . The product is not erased behind its image, but both are indivisible more than ever."[44] Symbolic and spiritual revaluation of clothes, held so dear by political movements and countercultures, had been "recuperated" by consumerism to be turned into an image—indivisible from the product that carries it, and at the service of an eco-political ideal that came to represent America, at home and abroad. Their diluted message, easy to embrace, also appealed, beyond imagination, to senses and emotion, just as marketing increasingly did.

Underlying the idea of influence is one of dominant values and culture, which intended to stay so. This is what was at stake here through branding (in this case, transferring "American" values to clothes) and "molding" by creating collective adhesion to a unique model.[45] After the 1960s innovations in fashion had been "co-opted," clothing expression became a "cultural weapon." Notably, the imposition of rigid ways of thinking and behaving was now playful, part of an entertainment industry, just like music, and movies. The light, inconsequential dimension of choosing and promoting styles made fashion the perfect tool to insidiously promote the American ideal. What unfolded here was indeed the rise of a new soft power, a gradually softer, playful, and quiet one, yet also an increasingly omnipresent one.

3.2 The Emergence of "American fashion"

Feeding this new collective imagery, there were several key elements at play in the revival process, ultimately resulting in the emergence of "American" fashion central to American soft power. First, we must discuss the importance that the rise of images had in the circulation of this new, revised American way of life. Joseph Nye indicated how important an effective media system was to soft power,[46] a lesson learned and applied by the movements. While their use of media attention definitely harmed the image of the US, both nationally and internationally, this media's re-use of their now "co-opted" symbols was also very fast, bearing witness to the nation's quality of reactivity and adaptation. Jaime Correa and Anne Crémieux underline the importance of television in this process: "Network television has also been one of the major social strengths in the US during the second half of the twentieth century … It controlled the content of a large portion of information delivered to its viewers, and, in this way, of the ideology which this information could convey."[47] Abroad, too, television and the press were instrumental in disseminating this new mainstream American culture, partly accounting for its international reach.[48]

It is in this media framework that the US channeled contestation to use it to build a new, appealing image. Several regenerated myths thus appear along with the changes of the period, as do several designers or brands, both often intertwined.[49]

A certain number of American designers emerged in the early 1970s. Internationally recognized today, at the time they were claimed and "branded" as American, even though they often originated from subcultures, by definition taking a stance against the mainstream. Betsey Johnson, for instance, started out as an emblematic designer of the youth culture, associated with major boutiques[50] and, later in life, with various countercultural movements (punk in the 1970s, grunge in the 1990s).

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44 Morand, "Le *Soft Power* Culturel," 29.

45 Huygue,"Décryptage et Analyse des Croyances Modernes," 8.

46 See Joseph Nye, "The Information Revolution and American Soft Power", *Asia-Pacific Review*, 9/1 (2002): 60–76.

47 Jaime Correa and Anne Crémieux,"L'âge d'Or de la Télévision," in *L'Amérique des images, Histoire et culture Visuelle des Etats-Unis*, ed. François Brunet (Paris: Hazan, 2013), 299.

48 Cizel, "Clichés d'Amérique," 60.

49 This process echoes the rise of designers and designer brands in the 1980s and 1990s.

50 Boutiques, associated with the youth culture, were affordable and hip shops presenting stylists' fashion in a fun and rapidly renewed way. Also organizing events, the most famous of them (Paraphernelia in New York and Biba in London) were the epicenter of creativity and highly social places. See Gérald Chevalier, "La Boutique des Années 1960 : un Nouvel Espace pour un Nouveau Mode de Consommation," in *La Mode des Sixties. L'Entrée Dans la Modernité*, eds. Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat (Paris: Autrement, 2007), 193–201.

Nonetheless, as early as the late 1960s, she was regularly presented as the exciting new face of American creation, even though she declared that before she was given an opportunity in boutiques no one held her bold, goofy designs in high regard.[51] Bill Blass had more classical training, studying fashion design in Manhattan and favored by *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, yet he consistently proposed collections very different from the ones of his contemporaries. Ahead of his time, he rejected the rigidity of European couture and searched for inspiration in 1930s' Hollywood glamour and the convenience of men's fashion to offer wearable and affordable clothes. While his was a minority stance, as his success aligned with the trends of the time, his visionary outlook on fashion was presented as the result of typically American audacity.[52] Halston, a star designer of the 1970s and now considered as a pioneer of American minimalism, saw his work of the 1960s (still in the same vein, then upstream) unearthed and exhibited as evidence of American simplicity, sensitivity, and farseeing qualities.[53] A pattern of revival is sketched out here: personal creativities were blended in a myth of collective creativity of the American mind, with originality and rebellion presented as American features as well—of a nation of pioneers and adventurers. Nationality was thus "affixed" to personal initiative.

Moreover, some of the main ideas underlying their creations were also isolated and labeled as American, diluting the specifics of the 1960s in past myths in the process. The demand for comfort, central to designers' fashion as well as subcultural experiments, was thus systematically linked to the American tradition of sportswear, while the growing influence of junior fashion on adult fashion was also claimed as an American invention, understood as a tendency to value youth and fresh ideas, an assertion one can still find in most fashion history books. Such "American contributions" are consistent with the national narrative of adaptability, freedom, and innovation that have long pervaded American culture.

This recovery of forms, which shaped the birth of American fashion, was accompanied by a "co-optation" of countercultural symbolism. With this kind of incorporation, criticism was neutralized, since critics were now presented as being heard and taken into consideration. While the aforementioned "inventions" were presented as in line with American history, the hippie movement, for instance, is notoriously represented in some narratives as a rupture, yet one similar to famous precedents of rising against oppression, and of fighting for a more democratic society, while more disturbing elements (the rejection of private property, the refusal of marital life) were left aside.[54] Putting forward some Americans' capacity to break with tradition, they are nonetheless brought back within the fold of national history. Hippie fashion was picked up, along with all its symbols—psychedelic prints, jeans, peace-and-love logos, flowers—the evocative power of which was subdued by this integration. By the late 1960s, people sported "Peace and Love" buttons without any idea of the dissenting significance it once held, leading Haight-Ashbury inhabitants to proclaim, in a 1967 ceremony, the "death of the Hippie."[55] Psychedelic prints, which were meant to symbolize an alternative way of living in which perception was enhanced by drugs and music, soon became a mere trend, enjoyed for its aesthetic qualities and rebellious dimension reduced to a vague aura adding to its appeal.

Certain elements of the hippie culture, likely to harm mass consumption, were also taken up, transformed, and "tamed." Customization became the "Do It Yourself" (DIY) trend, and vintage went from a subversive reappropriation operation to a mere nostalgic fad—or even a design bank for mass production to draw on. These creative propositions no longer threatened mass consumerism, which had commercialized them. Instead, they gave capitalism the look of a varied, diverse, and always inventive and resourceful system.

In the same way, ethnoracial claims that fashion contributed to spearheading were also taken up and integrated into American myths of diversity, of a rich history still in the making, and they were

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51 Caroline Milbank, *New York Fashion, The Evolution of American Style* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 219.

52 Ibid., 215.

53 Ibid., 224.

54 See Ryan Moore, "'Break on Through': Contre-culture, Musique et Modernité dans les Années 1960," *Volume !*, 9/1 (2012): 34–49.

55 Miles, *Hippie*, 26.

diluted in commercial variety. Native American fringes, for example, which were first taken up on hippie clothes, were multiplied by mass offer, and attached to various clothes and accessories, which made them trivial. Cheap copies of ethnic jewelry invaded retail, so the opposition to consumerism and the openness they stood for was thereby countered. Multiple symbolic oppositions to unequal treatment and conformism were thus diluted, while their vehicles were endlessly reproduced (up to today) and posed as evidence of a multicultural, positive dimension of consumerism.

In the end, the emerging American fashion appeared to be free and diverse, its tenants young, creative, rebellious, and expressive. American fashion was total, varied, and apparently poised in a delicate balance between continuity and ruptures.

Obviously, the reality of American society was quite different. At the time of this fast, effective "co-optation," racial, gender, and other political fights were still raging. The war in Vietnam, which had taken a bitter turn, continued well into the 1970s; the Equal Rights Amendment, voted by Congress in 1972, was never ratified, and everyday racism was still a painful reality in the US, a situation confirmed a few years later by the violent backlashes of the neoliberal Reagan era. Yet the new, dominant fashion model nevertheless strived to prevail, thanks to the integration of these forms, symbolism, and the dissolution of their dissenting reach, making it possible to sketch out a rich, diversified, tolerant, and free country that, most importantly, appeared to be capable of constant self-reassessment.

3.3 An Efficient "Diversity" Strategy

American fashion thus emerged as a unifying force, and, as part of a global American image, as mainstream, i.e., mass-oriented and dominant. From the 1960s onward, such a dominant culture has been securing its own hegemonic position by absorbing contradictory elements and actually feeding on them, thus successively assuming different positions in which many—if not all—can recognize themselves. This also partly explains why fashion (along with culture in general) has taken such an important place in public space, in the media, and in collective minds.

Yet the expression "mainstream"[56] is rarely used in a positive way; rather, it is used by subcultural and/or countercultural networks that are defined in opposition thereof. Mass culture, in turn, rarely poses as mainstream, but rather as the culture of "the cool," a protean notion that can be redefined indefinitely. In searching for definitions of what "cool" is and how it evolves, it also becomes in itself a subject, to be treated in the media but also by individuals gathered in various groups (whether friends or family). Fashion focused attention in a context of globalization in which it was taking part through its leveling properties.

The variety of messages conveyed (which, in fashion and in general, tended to take the form of a multitude of signals sent to a larger and larger number of people through various media, rather than a unique signal)[57] offered two advantages. Commercially, it fueled an ever-expanding system, which was evoked earlier in this paper, and which constantly needed new customers and new proposals to please them—new proposals that, in turn, attracted more customers. Politically, it prevented critiques, for every model appeared worth of consideration. This was crucial at a time when the world, and especially the USSR (albeit experiencing dissent of its own)[58] had its eyes on the US, to which internal contestation gave bad press internationally, despite its leading position, and it thus needed to regain consensus.

For François-Bernard Huygue, it manufactured a "negative consensus under the banner of diversity, based on the absence of ideological content [but rather founded on the absorption of others] (except maybe the fear of extremism, of populism and of other anti-modern forces, which are not very cool)."[59] Diversity, turned into a model by the revival of dissent and integrated to the American

[56] The figurative use of the term "mainstream" goes back to the nineteenth century. On the mainstream and the "underground," see Benoît Sabatier, *Nous Sommes Jeunes,Nnous Sommes Fiers, la Culture Jeune d'Elvis à Myspace* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

[57] Huygue, "Décryptage et Analyse des Croyances Modernes", 8.

[58] On the USSR's diplomatic use of fashion, see Larissa Zakharova, "La Mise en Scène de la Mode Soviétique au Cours des Congrès Internationaux de la Mode (années 1950-1960)," *Le Mouvement Social*, 22 (2007): 33–54.

[59] Huygue, "Décryptage et Analyse des Croyances Modernes," 7.

myths, exalted rather than comprehended difference. It is in this context that multiculturalism replaced the melting-pot ideology, and that former hierarchies were reversed. Fashion, where creative, economic, social, political, and diplomatic stakes meet, did more than exemplify this phenomenon: it incarnated it. "Eclecticism allows for a combination of genres, of object categories, of attributes, of feelings, in order to reverse all forms of established hierarchies and lift the last inhibitions. It ultimately serves the unfurling of new forms of consumption, as when culture is used in a metonymic way,"[60] as observed by Olivier Assouly. Thus, even choice through purchase has been rendered useless, as all choices are of equal worth in a larger framework that is nonetheless recommending which "right" values to support.

In turn, fashion as a cultural industry has been subjected to an obligation of creativity, a notion that, with the passage of time, also erased the concept to the benefit of the word: "The permanent resorting to this notion [of creativity] offers to compensate the 'mainstream,' often formulaic dimension of dominant culture. Indeed, speaking of creativity makes it possible to bestow to any small variation the greatness and the qualities of a creation, that is of an act that creates a rupture or an event."[61]

Such an insistence on creativity attests to the hegemonic nature of the model spread through mainstream fashion and, in fact, through a fashion that can hardly resist the mainstream, as every form of protest has been, and efficiently so, "co-opted" up to today. The openness and diversity of forms, symbols, and possibilities of self-expressions are indeed a legacy of liberal utopias of the 1960s, as it claims to be, but it has been deeply transformed by the shift to a mass scale through "co-optation."

4 Conclusions

From stylistic observations (clothing forms greatly evolved between the 1950s and the 1960s) as well as economic observations (the US, willing to impose itself on fashion's mass market as on every other level, devised the forward-looking and American ready-to-wear production model, which took over Parisian couture), this essay has aimed to shed light on several fashion mechanisms that unfolded during the decade. First, dress accompanied the social upheavals of the period, notably becoming a tool of individual and/or symbolic expression rather than a marker of social status. Simultaneously, fashion perfectly adapted itself to the consumer society, which recuperated it, and incorporated it into new commercial dynamics: playful, novelty-fueled, self-absorbed ones.

The ensuing mainstream culture, novel because fed by constant innovation, succeeded in taking a hegemonic place, just like the rigid one that had preceded it, albeit through very different channels. Fashion has also imposed itself, finding its place in a soft power that gained renewed importance, internationally with the Cold War and nationally with the crisis induced by various protests.

It is in this context that mainstream culture has questioned the place taken by individual expression, as introduced by subcultures, and political and countercultural movements, and has deeply altered the articulation between society and the individual, sketching out new boundaries of a world in which choice has replaced need and obligations. As linked, from the start, to mass consumption, mainstream culture has also transformed all parameters of global fashion production and reception, and even today the fashion system is ruled by these new parameters. At the same time, however, it is also still infused with the aesthetic, institutional, and ideological influences of the 1960s.

However, to nuance such picture of inevitable "co-optation," one can add that, in recent years, fashion appears to be freeing itself of mainstream recuperation. Other approaches, departing from the hegemonic one presented here, still seem possible, as demonstrated by numerous postmodern rereadings (recent and otherwise) and by a game on form and message that has now been mastered. Moreover, it would appear that the diluted causes of the 1960s have survived to reemerge recently in fashion, as demonstrated by the "green" wave of ethically and environmentally concerned brands.[62]

[60] Assouly, "De la Consommation Culturelle," *55*.

[61] Jean-Michel Bertrand, "Libres Propos sur le *Soft Power*," 63.

[62] Such a decisive turn in contemporary fashion is evidenced, *inter alia*, by the luxury designer brand of Stella McCartney and her approach of sustainable, eco-friendly, and ethical production and the success it has had, as well as by collective initiatives such as the yearly Copenhagen Fashion Summit (on global sustainability in fashion).

What one can definitely state is that, by the end of the 1960s, fashion indeed triggered upheavals, on both an individual and collective level, at the crossroads of the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. I would argue that the new model resulting from such disruptions is in fact an answer to the various upheavals in all these domains. In any case, fashion's importance has grown. In the early 1970s, its status as a new power was undebatable and paralleled the rise of cultural industries. This was how American fashion in the 1960s foreshadowed, announced, and prepared (post)modern fashion. Perhaps it is in this way that it can be deemed as truly revolutionary.

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