

Fig. 1 Paper jumpsuit, ca 1960s. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.001. Photo taken by author.



Fig. 2 Paper jumpsuit, ca 1960s. Detail of raw edges. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.001. Photo taken by author.



IMAGINING A FUTURE OF DISPOSABILITY: PAPER FASHION

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Paper clothing was a transient but fervent fad that stood at the intersection of fashion and youth culture consumerism. First established as a coupon mail-order campaign by Scott Paper Company in March of 1966 to promote its napkins and other paper products, the fad began with paper dresses that sold for \$1.25 and rapidly permeated late Sixties' youth culture in the United States and Great Britain (Palmer 88). Often glanced over in favour of longer-lasting trends that emerged during this era such as the miniskirt or women's trousers, paper clothing's ephemeral and disposable essence provides a useful platform to explore the connection between post-war attitudes and cultural obsessions with outer-space imaginings. Grounded in an object-based research study of a 1960s paper jumpsuit from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection (see fig. 1) supplemented by American newspaper articles from 1966-1969 and secondary research from fashion curator Alexandra Palmer and visual arts scholar Nigel Whiteley, I investigate why the ephemerality and disposability of paper clothing signifies ideals of liberation for the 1960s consumer.



LEFT: Fig. 3 1965 Fontana Fabrics psychedelic printed silk two piece ensemble that includes wide-legged pants and a self-tie belt. Museum Collection: Kerry Taylor. Image from Bloomsbury Fashion Central.



RIGHT: Fig. 4 late 1960s Beatle's Apple man's psychedelic printed nylon jersey shirt. Museum collection: Kerry Taylor. Image from Bloomsbury Fashion Central.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

The Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection houses a 1960s women's paper jumpsuit with printed vibrant pink, orange, green, and yellow colours that repeat in a fluid, swirling pattern covering the entire garment. Ruffled detail around the collar extends down the neckline and ends mid-torso. A zipper lines the back to fasten the jumpsuit, and a self-tie belt emphasizes the waist. Designed with long sleeves and wide legs, this jumpsuit conceals most of the wearer's body. The only exposed areas are the neck and collarbone. The most remarkable element of this object's construction is its nontraditional paper fabric, which is made of artificial cellulosic fibres and machine stitched, rather than handmade. The paper is thin and lightweight, but the texture is rough and coarse. Aside from the zipper lining and thread belt loops (both of which are likely cotton, polyester, or a blend), no other textiles have been used. The pants contain raw edges rather than hemlines (see fig. 2).

After approximately fifty years since its construction, the jumpsuit has retained its bright and vibrant psychedelic colors. There are, however, signs of wear; pilling occurs on the surface, indicating friction. The fabric is noticeably thinned under the arms and along the crotch, and a single ripped seam appears at the bottom edge of one pant leg. Maintaining a hint of mystery, the jumpsuit has no maker, store, care, size, or owner labels. Dated 1967-1969 from an unknown designer, this object conforms to psychedelic patterns of hippie fashion, and it is part of the paper clothing fad that epitomizes the decade's carefree youth culture and various ideals of liberation (see fig. 3 and fig. 4)

DETACHMENT FROM WORLD WAR II

The shift from wartime to peacetime for both the United States and Great Britain produced shifts in the respective countries' economies and cultural values. During the Sixties, "fashion had moved from need to desirability" (Morin 6). Paper fashion reflects this larger movement of making purchases from necessity to desire, as paper shifted from utility products to clothing and fashion style. The manifestation of these changes can be witnessed through a material study of paper garments. Scott Paper Company patented and named their paper material 'Dura-Weave,' a "non-woven tissue with cellulose (wood pulp) strengthened by a rayon mesh" (Palmer 90). Rayon is also from wood pulp, so this double cellulosic fibre means 'Dura-Weave' is comprised of artificial fibres. The production used an inexpensive binding process that did not involve any weaving or spun threads (Palmer 90). The inexpensive construction meant that paper garments were fragile, could be easily torn or creased, and could not withstand many washes. This clothing production with its "style obsolescence" in mind stands in stark contrast to the "make-do and-mend" philosophy prevalent during World War II (Whiteley 3). It was much quicker and more convenient to throwaway and buy new paper garments. These practices of replacement also meant no more wartime rationing. The era of denying oneself simple pleasures was over. It is important to note that paper clothing was intentionally designed to be thrown away and then replaced with a new paper garment that was just as affordable to buy. Valourization and celebratory attitudes of replacement (and thus disposability) rather than durability indicates a sense of trust in the future, a carefree exercise in imagination instead of the urgent wartime anxiety around surviving the present moment. During this era, there was the comfort, relief, and luxury of having a disposable income; therefore, durability of products was no longer a significant quality that consumers sought or valued when making purchases (Palmer 93). Consumers experienced liberation as the modern pleasure of replacement.

IMAGE CONSTRUCTION AND SELF-EXPRESSION

According to historian Alice Morin, “it was youth culture that allowed clothes to become tools of self-expression (instead of class signifiers)” (4). Prior to this era, European couture dominated the Western fashion system. During the Sixties, ready-to-wear gained significant prominence in the public space (Morin 2). After World War II, the United States was “eager to expand its mass consumerist model” and “fashion helped design a dominant model of a wealthy, free, seductive country” (Morin 1). Fashion in the Sixties revolved around youth culture; they became a targeted group by advertising and marketing, because of their disposable income due to the “full employment and increased affluence of their parents” (Whiteley 19). Fashion designer Mary Quant, who is often credited with the creation of the mini skirt for the masses, realized that “the young were tired of wearing essentially the same as their mothers” (Bernard 8). The connection between youth culture and consumer culture “amplified a joyous, hedonistic, experiential consumerism” (Morin 4). In March 1967, New York Times wrote a list of various paper garments, including Art Nouveau or geometric print dresses; children’s wear; underwear; robes, etc. (“A List of Fashions and Accessories Available in Paper” 58). Consumers had the ability to assert their unique individuality through paper clothing, which was often designed to allow the wearer to cut to their desired length. Alexandra Palmer notes that “the wearer was encouraged to display their individuality and creativity through custom cutting or sticking, however little skill and time were required” (92). Paper clothing, like the psychedelic pattern jumpsuit (see fig. 1), was intentionally constructed with raw edges rather than precise hemlines (see fig. 2). This is a quick, convenient alternative to slow alterations such as sewing. For young consumers, it was also more fun than “spending a night in with [their] sewing basket” (“Paper Dresses” para. 5).

Similar to the psychedelic patterned paper jumpsuit in the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection, many paper garments were decorated with bright colors, bold prints, Op art, and Pop art (see fig. 5 and fig. 6). Because these garments were meant to be disposed of quickly, those who lacked the confidence to wear such eye-catching bright clothes could be comforted by the fact that “the monetary guilt often associated with extravagance need not apply” and that “little investment in shopping time or money were involved” (Palmer 102). Consumers thus experienced liberation through paper clothing due to the financial freedom to be frivolous, bold, and daring in their sartorial choices.



Fig. 5 1968 "I like boys" Pop art paper dress decorated with psychedelic font of famous figures such as Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Sammy Davies Jr. and the Beatles. Museum Collection: Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Image from Bloomsbury Fashion Central



Fig. 6 1966-67 The Souper Dress, a paper dress with the repeated motif of Campbell's soup cans. Museum Collection: the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image from Bloomsbury Fashion Central.

OUTER-SPACE DREAMS AND DISPOSABILITY

Parallel to the cultural desire to dissociate from past wartime attitudes was the future-focused Space Age phenomenon and obsession with progressive technology, the “provider of material dreams” (Whiteley 10). When the United States government sent astronauts to space, a frenzy for all things Space Age invaded fashion, design, furniture, and architecture. Fashion designers André Courrèges and Pierre Cardin released space-age collections from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, inspiring consumers to enjoy the visual zeitgeist with materials such as plastic and PVC (Topham 75). In a 1966 *Life* magazine article, journalist Helen Carlton interviewed textile designer Julian Tomchin, who asserted the appropriateness of paper clothing as the future of fashion: “It’s right for our age. After all, who is going to do laundry in space?” (Carlton 137). Carlton’s carefree futuristic question takes on a gendered dimension around technology when thinking about the male astronauts during the Space Age, whose spacesuits were designed by the brand Playtex, known for its bras and girdles (De Monchaux 3). For consumers in the 1960s, disposable clothing was the future, and durable, long-lasting clothing was the past. The very phenomenon of designing products with disposability in mind was a contemporary one; it began only in the twentieth century (Whiteley 3). The frenzy around paper clothing indicated “not only the American mindset” but also “American projections for the future” (Knight 1). Through this intersection of paper garments and space age cultural obsession, The United States constructed a specific self-image of power to the rest of the world—one that relied on the liberating luxury and comfort of being able to imagine the future through a post-war lens of optimism and belief in technology and new methods of consumerism, such as style obsolescence and products designed to be disposable.

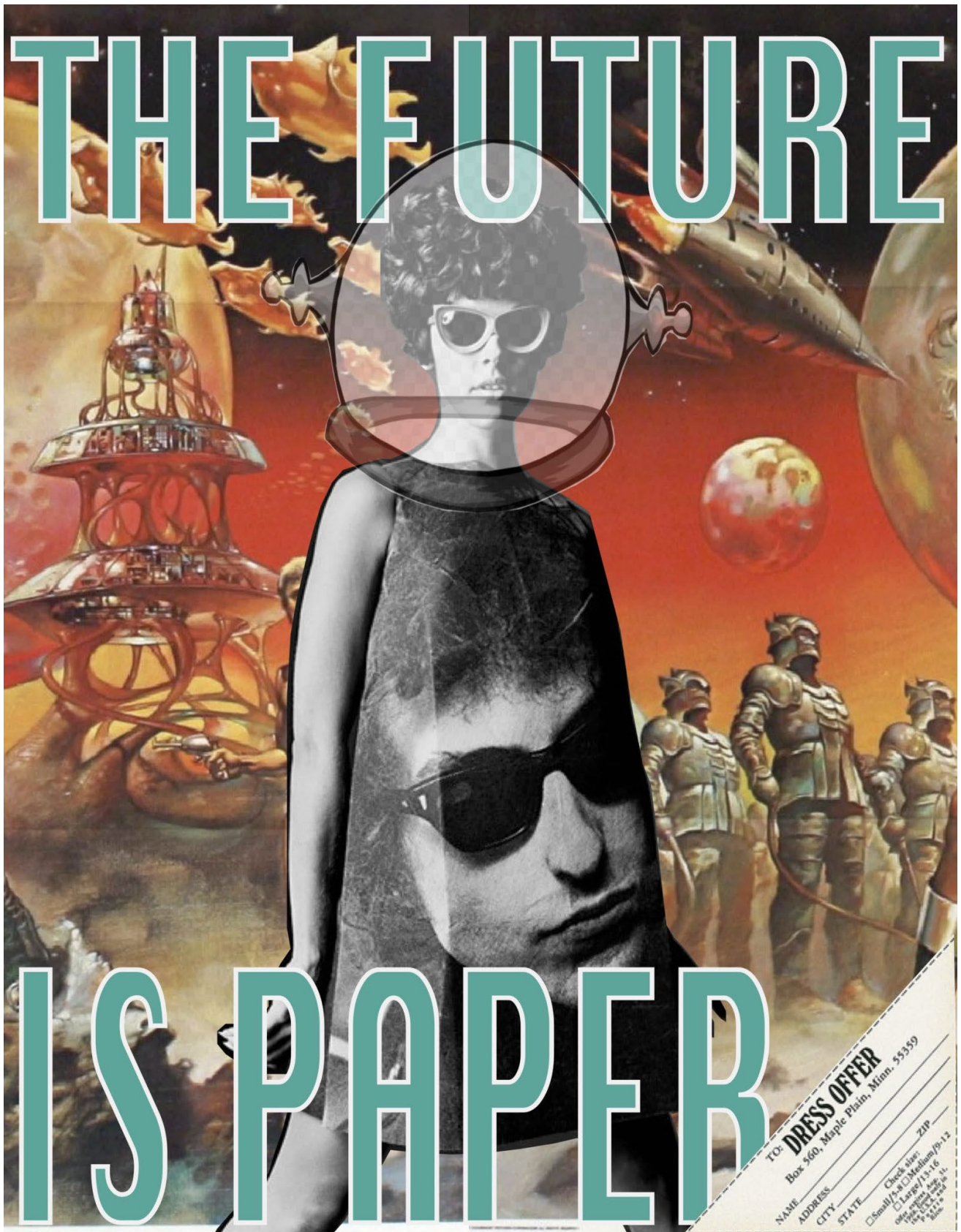


Fig. 7. A graphic poster made by me in collage sensibility featuring a model wearing a paper poster dress in front of the 1968 Space Age film Barbarella poster with a paper dress coupon on the bottom right-hand corner. This creative component reflects the connection between marketing the paper dress as new technology and the futuristic thinking around outer space in the late 1960s.

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