

Courreges Raincoat
photographed by
William Laxton.



MAKING HISTORY: INSPIRED BY COURRÈGES

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PART ONE

My *Making History* project is inspired by a black and white photograph of a model wearing a dress/raincoat with cutouts and a flower motif designed by André Courrèges (Note 1). This image included the caption: “André Courrèges, Dress, photographed by William Laxton, 1960s.” My research included examining garments from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection. I also considered the prominent cultural and social forces of the sixties, since fashion captures shifts in culture, being a fugitive form of applied art (Garner 145). Part 1 will present my research. Part 2 will outline the process of remaking the garment.



Courrèges pantsuit,
ca. 1970s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2013.02.009AB. Gift
of Anonymous donor.

André Courrèges was a French designer (1923-2016), and launched his fashion house in Paris in 1961. He has been described as the designer who best captured the space age (Garner 40). DuPont developed textiles which were used for moon suits, and these new materials inspired cosmic silhouettes and a new futuristic style. The space age can be compared to a child exploring parts of the world that are seen for the first time (Topham 156) and this aspect can be linked to Courrèges' youthful designs.

Courrèges clothes were often made for childlike figures. Chanel compared his designs directly with childrenswear (Guillaume 16). Childrenswear definitely had an impact on womenswear, and the influences went both ways. 1960s costume for girls followed the styles that women were wearing. Girls' dresses became less fitted, more A-line, and shorter. Pants became suitable for girls to wear at school and not only for play in the late 1960s, when pantsuits became more acceptable for women (Tortora, Eubank 574).

Courrèges designed two lower priced lines directed at a younger market: Couture Future, targeted towards 30-40 year olds for 1/3rd of couture prices and Hyperbole, a less expensive line for 20 year olds, available for approximately 1/5th of couture prices (Lynam 203).

In the 1960s, the younger generation was looking for something new and shocking in fashion, and the miniskirt fulfilled that need (Garner 145-147). While Courrèges took credit for the miniskirt, Mary Quant said “the girls in the street” were the ones who wanted this style, so neither designer can really take full credit for it (Lynam 198). The look Courrèges wanted to create emphasized freedom, from the silhouette to the styling. **Courrèges saw the body as “a whole”, and therefore did not want to separate the upper and lower body with a waistline** (Guillaume 7). Instead he made clothes that floated over the body. The garments Courrèges created were “easy to wear” (Guillaume 4). He, like his contemporaries, Paco Rabanne and Mary Quant, sometimes incorporated industrial materials such as Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), Velcro® and various plastics into designs. Courrèges said: “At first vinyl used to crack” (Guillaume 15). Mary Quant also initially struggled when working with PVC, since the material would stick to the sewing foot and the seams were weak (Handley 106).

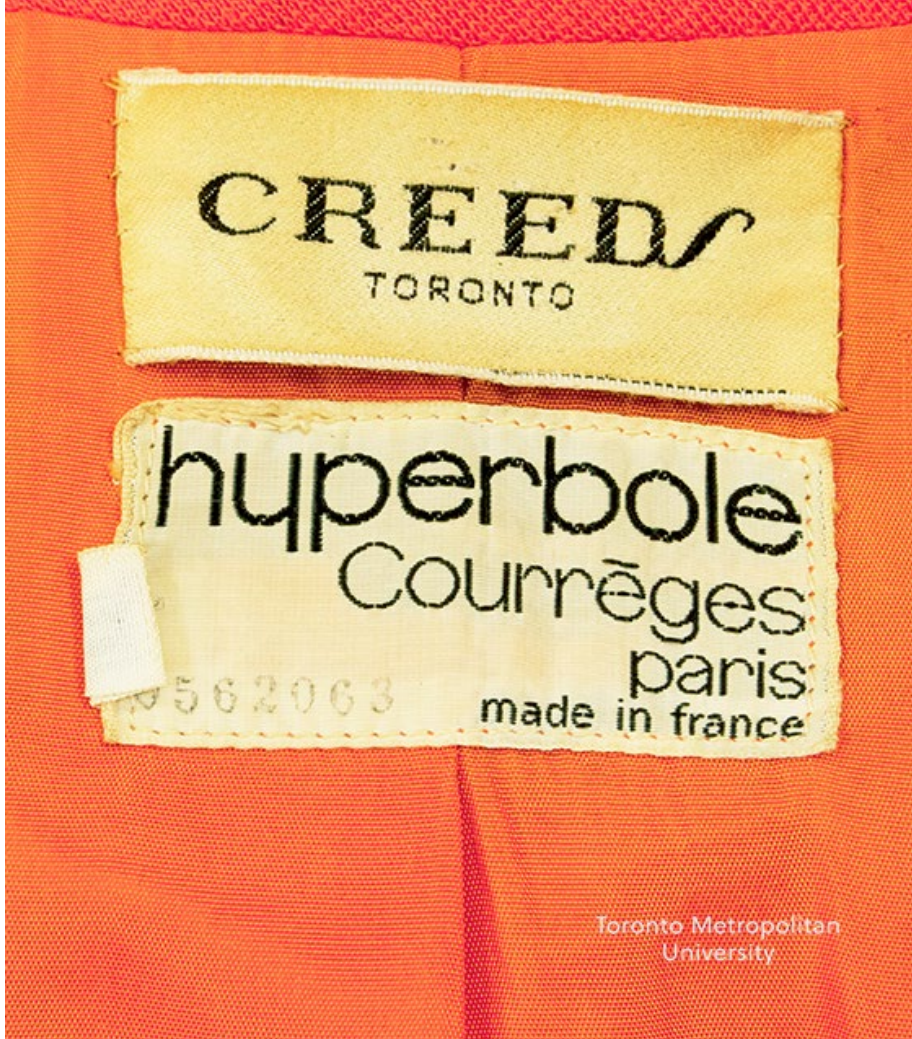
To better understand the construction of Courrèges’ garments, I visited the Fashion Research Collection and examined two Courrèges Paris pantsuits, both of orange knit to study how these garments were constructed and finished.

In the first example, the Courrèges pantsuit consisted of a zippered jacket and matching bell bottom pants with cuffs (FRC2013.02.009 A+B). The seams on this acrylic pantsuit are all sewn and topstitched, except for the pant cuff. Finishing details show that this is high quality garment, for instance the shoulder area is fused from the inside. A small snap closure holds the top of the jacket in place, in addition to the zipper. The garment is highly functional, all of the pockets are real and the garment is lined in a similar orange shade. The polyamide lining is hand stitched with corresponding coloured thread on the pants, and transparent nylon thread on the jacket. Although this garment is from the Hyperbole line, which a cheaper ready to wear lines, functionality, high end finishing and comfort were still considered.

The second orange pant suit (FRC2014.07.587 A+B) is also from the Hyperbole line. Made of orange knit, the pants are surprisingly unlined since the wool, cotton, acrylic blended material is less comfortable to touch. The jacket is lined with 100% acetate and has fake flap pockets, less functional than the first jacket. The vinyl details are in quite poor condition today, peeling off, and according to dress historian curator Ingrid Mida are reflective of the instability of these early plastics. The pants have a zipper that is stitched in by hand.

Although both pantsuits are from the lower priced Hyperbole line, they both featured the famous white snaps and Courrèges initials logo. As well, they both had many fine finishing details using a combination of hand sewing and machine stitching. In recreating the dress in the photo, I used this information to guide my remaking.

In Part II, I will present my remaking of the Courrèges raincoat/dress.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

Courrèges pantsuit, ca. 1970s.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC2013.02.009AB. Label. Gift of
Anonymous donor.

NOTES

Note 1: When referencing Courrèges throughout the project I am referring to the designer himself and his wife as spokespeople of the brand. Although the image of Andres Courrèges stands in front of the brand, his wife and creative partner Coqueline was said to have done much of the casting and design work (Lynam 197).

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Courreges-inspired coat by Shira Yavor. Modeled by Alanna Furlong. Photographed by Arnold Lan.

PART TWO

In Part 1, I outlined my source of inspiration and research for this project. **In part 2, I outline my remaking of the Courrèges raincoat seen in the 1993 photograph by William Laxton.**

In making a technical drawing of the coat, I combined elements that were visible in the photo and inferred what the rest could have looked like. My research in Part 1 helped me understand Courrèges' aesthetic. He once said: **"I made the garments fall away from the body by starting from the shoulders. Darts were no longer necessary"** (Guillaume 8). This suggested that there were no shaping darts in the photographed coat; the front and back would drape freely off the shoulder without darts.

I draped the front and back pieces on a Judy with muslin fabric. I later adjusted the pattern, straightened and trued the lines. I drafted the collar according to the technique shown for drafting an inset band in the book *Pattern Making for Fashion Design* (Armstrong 206). I slashed and spread the collar from the neckline up, so that it sits away from the neck. I used a compass to draft the flowers with 5 petals. The draping and drafting process took approximately 5 hours.

The black & white photograph led me to believe that this dress was made in white vinyl, but I later discovered it was actually made in yellow vinyl. Courrèges space age garments were often made in white, since white represented purity and gave off a futuristic look (Guillaume 13). The fabric I purchased was a white heavyweight vinyl with a shiny surface texture that mimicked leather. The ideal fabric would have been a bit lighter and completely smooth and reflective, however I was not able to source any.

In order to sew this material smoothly, I purchased a Teflon sewing foot and leather needle to help the fabric move along. I also purchased white polyester threads and a thicker thread for topstitching. I purchased a coordinating lining and fusing for the closure part of the jacket. At the end of the sewing process, I had the snaps installed at Leather Sewing Supply Depot.

After I got the desired fit, I transferred the muslin to a pattern and cut the vinyl pieces. This fabric was hard to deal with, because it creased easily, and could not be ironed. I tested out light ironing through another piece of fabric, but the vinyl got sticky. I had to roll out all of the fabric in order to cut it. Pins could not be used at all during the cutting and sewing process because they left holes in the fabric. The fabric was very bulky while sewing. At first I was careful not to crease the fabric and rolled it out of the way while sewing, but it was inevitable that some parts got creased, such as the flowers and sleeves.

I first constructed the front, and then continued to sew the back, the lining, then sewed the collar and sandwiched it between the self-fabric and the lining. I used the guide for sewing circular pocket's in Carr's book for reference in order to figure out how to sew the circular cutouts. For the collar, under-stitching helped it curve nicely. Cutting slits in the seam allowance also helped, and I did this in the collar and cutouts.

I tried to flatten the seams using a clapper - a wood tailoring tool, however it made little difference. Only under-stitching and top stitching held the seams open properly, so I did this wherever possible.

Most of the lining was machine stitched. Part of it was left open in order to flip the garment over to the right side. I then closed this part with a slipstitch. Although ideally, the coat would have had a full lining, I left the sleeves unlined. Instead I serged the armhole opening of the lining to keep it from fraying. This part of the garment construction was not as accurate as it could have been due to time constraints.

The whole process of creating the coat, excluding research and shopping for supplies took approximately 38 hours. I spent 5 hours creating the pattern and muslin, and 33 hours in sewing it.



Close up of flower
cut out. Modeled
by Alanna Furlong.
Photographed by
Arnold Lan.

Shira Yavor is a third year Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Design student. This Making History project was undertaken in Fall 2016 for a Costume History assignment. This post was condensed and edited by Ingrid Mida, Curator and Dress Historian, FRC Collection Co-ordinator.

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