

Paper jumpsuit ca. 1960s.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC2014.07.001AB. Photograph
by Victoria Hopgood, 2018.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

SUSTAINABILITY & A PAPER JUMPSUIT

By Emilie Chan
& Zoe Yin
MA Fashion Students

October 26, 2018

This woman's one-piece jumpsuit from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection is made from a paper textile with repetitive printed patterns in highly contrasting colour combinations—pink, orange, yellow, and green (FRC2014.07.001AB). This jumpsuit is structured with a zipper back, long sleeves, wide legs that flare out from the waist, and is adorned with a self-tie paper strap and a ruffled neckline. The jumpsuit shows evidences of wear through the pilling and thinning in the movement areas, and there are observable jagged edges on the bottoms of the pant legs. This paper garment is dated between 1967 and 1969 by an unknown maker. In this essay, we analyze the sustainability of paper as a textile.



Paper jumpsuit
ca. 1960s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2014.07.001AB.
Neckline detail.
Photograph by Victoria
Hopgood, 2018.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT & ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Paper clothing was a fashion fad of the 1960s. As printing technologies became increasingly advanced in the 1960s (Kent & Williams, 1990), Scott Paper Co., an American company, introduced paper dresses as a marketing tool in 1966 to promote their ability to print beautiful colours onto paper products ("Scott Paper," 1966). They were composed of paper bound with a synthetic material (rayon) called Dura-Weve ("Paper-Dress Fad," 2014). Economic expansion and increased discretionary income ("United States GDP," 2018) allowed consumers embrace these colourful paper garments, prompting other manufacturers and brands to produce paper clothing (Schaer, 1999). The psychedelic colour and pattern combinations seen in this garment represent the aesthetic of the counterculture "Hippie Movement" of the late 1960s ("The Sixties," 2018).

American environmental policies and regulations moved away from a wilderness and resource preservation mentality to one that better understood the relational value between the environment and the American society in the 1960s ("New Environmentalism," 2018), arguably sparked by the release of *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson (Levy & Wissenburg 2004). **Paper clothing embodied a throwaway culture—although made with arguably less resources than today's fast fashion, they were still intended to live a short product lifetime.** Daphne Mohajer (2018) suggests that the 1960's paper fashion "represented a lack of ecological awareness highlighted by its impermanence and disposability" (Mohajer 253). Nonetheless, paper garments were easily hemmed and customizable by the consumer with scissors, evident in the orange paper jumpsuit. Cut off material was then used as hair bows and other accessories (Schaer 1999)—these acts align with "zero-waste" bodies of thinking. Simultaneously, there was prevalent use of synthetic materials in commercial products, aided by government support for the industry ("Timeline," 2018).



Paper jumpsuit
ca. 1960s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2014.07.001AB. Ruffle
detail. Photograph by
Victoria Hopgood, 2018.

PAPER AS A TEXTILE IN TODAY'S FASHION LANDSCAPE

Although paper clothing was deemed un-environmentally friendly in the late 1960s and made no effort to be sustainable (Buck 2017), it touched on ideas of sustainable practices and ways of thinking, such as a dye-free manufacturing process, self customization to extend product lifetime, and a somewhat zero-waste culture. A few contemporary fashion designers of the present have used paper as the primary choice of garment materials. Some, like Hussein Chalayan, chose paper to convey a sociological message (Howarth 2015) while others, such as Helmut Lang, chose paper as a design preference ("Collection," 2018). Small businesses such as Paper No.9 have also developed new paper textiles that are more durable in both garment production and product use ("About Us," 2018). However, the uses of paper as a clothing textile today largely remains within the elite fashion market, or used within sterile environments with a throw-away mindset, such as disposable hospital gowns.

The throw-away paper clothing fad from the 1960s is similar to today's throw-away culture, supported by fast fashion. Both forms of fashion short product lifetimes, but paper fashions are arguably more sustainable because of the lower environmental, economical and social degradation required for production compared to fast fashion products of the 2000s.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

Paper jumpsuit
ca. 1960s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2014.07.001AB. Belt
detail. Photograph by
Victoria Hopgood, 2018.

FINAL REMARKS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Paper as a textile material in the 1960s had unintended sustainable elements—arguably less chemicals were used in production, and was easily customizable by the consumer. However, it posed potential recycling problems (as the paper fibre was coated with synthetic materials). **Comparing fast fashion with paper fashion invokes ideas of resource trade-off- trading less use of one resource for the increased use of another. In view of this, there is still value in self-customization and the limited resources used in paper fashion production that designers and manufacturers can learn from this 1960s fad.** The use of paper as a garment textile is encouraged by many, including Japanese fashion designer Daphne Mohajer (2018), who suggests that although “paper may not seem like a suitable material for making clothing, [it] can be strong and durable if made in a specific way” (Mohajer 236).

This post was edited by Dr. Ingrid Mida.