



A Conceptual Framework for Post-postmodern Garment Design

Andrew Reilly (University of Hawai'i, Mānoa) and Sherry Schofield (Florida State University)

Significance/usefulness

Contemporary culture theorists argue that we are entering a post-postmodern age, a period characterized by social, cultural, geographic, economic, environmental and aesthetic features fundamentally at odds with those associated with the waning postmodern era (e.g., Bourriaud, 2009; Eshelman, 2008; Kirby, 2009); but, little scholarship has addressed how these changes are revealed in, or might be applicable to, post-postmodern dress. We examined theoretical works to identify characteristics of varied post-postmodern art forms, and used these as the basis of a conceptual frame for considering how post-postmodern characteristics might be expressed in dress. In this presentation we identify elements of that framework, and we describe how it guided us in the design and construction of a garment that reflects post-postmodern times.

Theory and literature

Art critic and exhibition curator Bourriaud is among the foremost post-postmodern theorists. Bourriaud (2009) identifies an emerging “altermodern” epoch wherein artists work to foster a global culture, one that “transcends existing cultural codes” by breaking down national, cultural, geographic, and historic conventions and obliterating sexual identifications. Another post-postmodern theorist, Eshelman (2008), argued that “performatism” includes disregarding traditional categories such as sex and gender. Morgado (2014) speculated how these theses could be applied to dress via elimination of, or juxtaposition of, cultural and social codes.

We applied Bourriaud’s (2009), Eshelman’s (2008), and Morgado’s (2014) theses to guide us in making a garment that could defy cultural and social conventions, resist rigid identities, and foster meaningful connections across disparate traditions. Thus, we challenged ourselves to design and construct a garment incorporating elements characteristic of varying historic periods, geographical regions, and ethnic costumes; to eliminate any suggestion of gender and sexual orientation; to avoid overt signs of marketing to particular consumer demographics; to defy conventional industry standards; to incorporate elements unique to our own personal backgrounds; and to successfully combine disparate features into a unified whole.

Method

We began with a photograph of a 1,000-year-old silk samite shirt that appeared in a *New York Times* article on a Sotheby’s auction. Using this silhouette as the starting point, we looked at other forms of attire that have resisted change and noted how the modern Japanese *haori* was

similar in design, but included sleeves. We decided to combine elements of the two jacket forms into a single form for our design while incorporating a printed design motif, which allowed for the introduction of a third culture. Dogs are common pets in Euro-American culture, and canine pets are significant in the lives of both author-designers. Working from a photograph of one of our childhood pets, we designed a wave-like motif based on the simplified form of a dachshund pup. The importance of balance in Asian cultures, as expressed through the yin and yang, influenced the positioning of the motif. The repeating pattern and boundaries of the print were inspired by the original print found in the Samite jacket. All modifications of the print were made using Photoshop software and the pattern was printed using a Mutoh dual head printer on 100% silk charmeuse fabric. We selected silk charmeuse fabric as a nod to the original Samite shirt, because of its semi-transparent quality which allowed for the design to be visible on both sides of the fabric, as well as the origins of silk and importance of silk in Asian cultures. However, we stitched the garment together with polyester thread, an American invention. (See Figure 1).

Results and Implications

Our post-postmodern jacket combines the ancient Samite and modern ethnic Japanese *haori* forms, and is androgynous with no gendered distinctions. The canine motif, silk charmeuse fabric, printing, and construction techniques combine elements from different times (ancient, modern, postmodern) and cultures (Asian, western, personal), and are worked so as to transcend cultural categories and codes. The simple, relaxed silhouette of the jacket unifies the disparate elements and creates meaningful connections between all parts of the garment.

We appreciated the challenge of attempting to design and construct a garment that represents post-postmodern times. Our conceptual framework, based on theoretical elements of Bourriaud (2009), Eshelman (2008), and Morgado (2014) assisted in identifying characteristic of post-postmodern artwork. This project enhanced our appreciation of post-postmodern theory, of artists who work in this area, and of resulting artworks. The framework may be used by other designers who wish to explore novelty and creativity in the new post-postmodern age.



Figure 1: Our post-postmodern jacket.

References

Bourriaud, N. (2009). *Altermodern*. London: Tate Publishing

Eshelman, R. (2000–2001). Performatism, or the end of postmodernism. *Anthropoetics*, 6 (2).

Kirby, A. (2009). *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Morgado, M. A. (2014). Fashion phenomena and the post-postmodern condition: Enquiry and speculation. *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, 1 (3), 313-339.