

REPORT

You work as a trend-hunter for the textile company Fashion & Co.

In order to adapt the company's next collection to the latest trends in fashion, you are asked by Ms Glove, your manager, to write out a report about these new trends and to suggest a few ideas for Fashion & Co's own collection.

Durée de l'épreuve : 1h30

N.B. : votre *Report* ne doit pas excéder la longueur d'une copie d'examen.

Metallic shine

The London 2012 Olympic bid success came at exactly the point when Christopher Bailey and Phoebe Philo, the British designers fronting Burberry and Chloé respectively, were creating their spring collections. When Bailey's outpourings shone with more gold than Steve Redgrave's medal stash and the only colours that Philo exploited frequently (bar white) were gilded yellow and bronze, you had to wonder if there was something Olympian in the air.

Granted, it's not an obvious style stimulus, but if you go beyond the spandex-clad athletes and think laterally to the glimmer and gleam of the medals, you've got yourself a trend. In the same vein as rubies or emeralds, gold, silver and bronze denote elitism and splendour. Whether sparkling on the podium, translated into trapeze coats on the catwalk or gleaming wantonly in a lighting-savvy boutique, metallics form a scintillating coterie that fashion magpies can't resist.

■ You don't have to plunder Fort Knox to afford such luxury. The high street also fell for the lure of the podium metals, albeit in a more subtle way. It wove gold thread through linen-mix skirts (River Island) and applied a silver sheen to unexpected colours and garments, such as a violet peep toe (£15 from George at Asda) instead of attacking the theme head-on.

■ The high street got it right with its subtle take on metallics. Avoid block colours if you can't afford to splash out on expensive fabrics. Metallics fulfil their glamorous remit best when applied to a refined material such as silk (see the Chloé top featured). It's often the sheen of a quality fabric that predisposes it to the metallic effect – remember, cheap can look tacky.

■ As for wearing more than one metallic piece per outfit, the glinting effect might just blind an innocent bystander if worn on a sunny day. Wearing a metallic swing jacket or one of John Smedley's new Lurex-weave knitwear pieces will create a flattering reflection of light on the face, but if you twin it with a less lustrous garment such as a black wool skirt, it will accentuate the sheen even more.

■ Shiny materials can be flattering to the curves as well as the complexion when used shrewdly. A metallic A-line skirt will reflect light away from any unwanted lumps and bumps, leaving a clean and fluid silhouette.

■ If the whole thing strikes you as the sartorial equivalent of loose change – a hotpotch of meaningless coppers and silvers – then play safe with gold sandals. Gold is the favoured metallic – it's less Eighties and more flattering than silver, and the high street is awash with it. You might not be able to feel your toes in sandals right now, but come sunnier times, there's no cooler thing to wear.

NICOLA COPPING

The Times

March 13, 2006 -

Designers Find It's Time To Revive Art of Seduction

By GUY TREBAY

MILAN — The phrase parroted by the so-called style news media at Fashion Week last month was "Sex is back." Sex, of course, is never far from the concerns of fashion, nor should it be, a truth that designers as unlike as Madeleine Vionnet and Tom Ford have understood.

Fashion Diary

Mr. Ford, who recently inspired a spate of predictable press coverage, if not exactly outraged protests from conservative groups or a surge in subscription rates, with his Vanity Fair Hollywood issue, always placed sexuality at the foreground of his designs at Gucci. If his well-merchandised libido rarely strayed into territory that was unpredictable or even, for that matter, all that erotic, it nevertheless got consumers panting for a once-lifeless brand.

Lately Mr. Ford's brand of sexuality has come to seem quaint. "You know, I love Tom Ford, and I love what he has done," Carine Roitfeld, the French Vogue editor given to outfitting herself in the fishnets, high heels and hobbled skirts of the Dangerous Woman, said at the Bottega Veneta show.

"But Tom is finished, in a way," said Ms. Roitfeld, the onetime stylist widely credited with helping Mr. Ford concoct Gucci's slick, erotic look. "We have to find a new way to interpret sex."

Anyone who has spent 10 seconds in the loamy netherworld of the cybersphere understands the wisdom of this observation, with its instinctive understanding of how mutable sexual identity is turning out to be.

As the Internet thrives, so too does polymorphous perversity in all its unapologetic manifestations. Heterosexuals, gay people, metrosexuals, ambisexuals and the wide range of folks lumped under the clumsy and inadequate prefix "trans" all share, it would appear, a desire to find clothes that make them look sexy without seeming as if they're wearing gender costumes.

One might not imagine that these are the concerns driving dressmakers in this gray commercial city. But even Milan, in its own way, is grappling with newly dimensioned notions about sex.

Already, in a week that saw as many as 16 daily shows crammed onto the official roster, we were presented with the deeply nostalgic and romantic sexuality of, say, Giorgio Ar-

Marni, right, presented a girly-girl playing dress up at its shows. Prada presented a version of overt sexuality in Milan.

mani, whose fidelity to the shapes and silhouettes favored by Italian women in the era when his mother was young are a sort of working obsession. We have seen the girly-girl efforts of Consuelo Castiglioni at Marni, where eccentric lace and wool ensembles put together as if by a 6-year-old playing grown-up are given a jolt of assured sensuality with the addition of opera gloves.

We have seen the capricious sexuality of Miuccia Prada, whose bras worn over sweaters, wool bustiers, fur patch pockets and cinched parachute nylons took the conventions of lingerie seduction and subjected them to an itchy, Calvinist rendition. And although she said after the show that her heavy woolens, animal prints, fur helmets and clogs were meant to reflect defiance and the "strong and savage" aspect of women, the clothes resembled instead a truce brokered by partisans from opposite sides of the butch and femme divide.

Fashion still offers more latitude than most fields to explore strange libidinal byways.

A recent issue of the influential men's fashion magazine *Numéro Homme* has a feature called (Fe)Male by the photographer Greg Kadel that can be counted on to show up in fashion quotations for seasons to come.

Styled by Bill Mullen, a behind-the-scenes force at Versace and other labels, the photographs feature male and female models in men's and women's clothing with interchangeable androgynous allure.

This androgyny is not the gender tease of rockers like David Bowie or the New York Dolls, intended to frighten the horses and change some rules. The men in these pictures wear pearls, marcelled hair and crisp suits by Valentino. The women in the pictures also wear pearls, marcelled hair and sleeveless smoking shirts designed by Hedi Slimane for Dior Homme.

Come hither is the basic message the pictures communicate. And aren't those exactly the words everyone secretly wants to hear?



The New York Times

March 11, 2006

Small Tremor of Rebellion Slips Into a Conformist Era

By GUY TREBAY

NEW YORK — Trend-spotting is a little like the ancient art of divination. You stir the ashes. You consult the entrails of birds. A pattern emerges, perhaps even one that contains unexpected meanings about where the culture is headed. Maybe this seems ridiculous regarding fashion, which many still find it easy, if not intellectually obligatory, to dismiss. But in a culture of surface it is a mistake to ignore the potency of any visual language. And it does not take a sibyl to survey the current fashion season and see portents and signs.

Of what? Well, to paraphrase the observers at Condé Nast's Web site, Style.com, a revival of Bold Prints, the arrival of something called the New Innocents, an infusion of the New Sexy, whatever that may be. These categories are correctly descriptive, since the first five days of Fashion Week in New York's Bryant Park were replete with upholstery and wallpaper patterns, First Communion dresses, tense imaginary sophisticates and stylish but crazily anachronistic renditions of a Working Girl as imagined by a working woman, the designer Diane Von Furstenberg.

The working girl of her fantasy, curvy as Veronica Lake in snug Raymond Chandler-era jackets and skirts worn with vertiginous platform sandals, was a bit more playful than the grim "Ice Storm" outfits Carolina Herrera propelled onto the runway on robotic Eastern European blondes.

Critics greeted one show with praise, the other with a collective boo. But what was striking was how fundamentally alike the collections were in their packaging of sexuality and how they celebrated feminine passivity through period attitudes and costume.

Then something great happened, starting with Holly Golightly (her real name) at the Union League Club. She is a small band cult musician who started her career in 1995 as a founder of an all-girl band called Thee Headcoates and has since released 12 albums, toured the country eight times and played with the White Stripes and Mudhoney, while remaining semi-obscure.

Hers was the music that the British designer Luella Bartley was listening to when she designed her current collection, clothes that referred to British Invasion bands and would not have been out of place at the Mudd Club, the 80's underground music mecca. The territory has been covered before in many New Wave revivals.

Ms. Bartley's messed-up party dresses and ironically worn pearls, her cheap-looking white sunglasses and pipe-cleaner jeans looked cool, which may have had something to do with a more serious re-evaluation of that time in the

80's when New York could still credibly lay claim to being the pop culture center of the Western world.

The mood of Ms. Bartley's presentation turned up again at Alice Roi's show, where the clothes were inspired, the designer said, by Wednesday Addams and Cousin Itt from the Addams Family, ghoulish characters from the cartoon, movies and television show.

"There are a lot of choices there this season," said Linda Fargo, the new fashion director of Bergdorf Goodman. "There's a lot of 1940's, there's a lot of Cristobal Balenciaga influence with the swing coats and balloon shapes." But there is also something compelling, she said, about the appearance at different shows of women wearing black lips and nails, motorcycle jackets and buffalo plaids of the sort that Vivienne Westwood was toying with in what seems a century ago.

"Perhaps when you look at what's happening politically in this country, you can understand why people are looking for something that's less about conformity," Ms. Fargo said.

Her point was borne out by the aural backdrops of many shows, where there was an emphasis on early punk, the playful bands of the 80's like Tom Tom Club and the stylized tristesse of bands like OMD and Depeche Mode.

"There's a lot of New Wave again," said Michel Gaubert, the French D.J., who was in New York to play for the Proenza Schouler and Michael Kors shows. "But it's new New Wave."

As usual it was Marc Jacobs who synthesized what this observer likes to think of as a bracing spirit of resistance with a show less about anything so chronologically limiting as a specific decade than a long bohemian genealogy. Lazy minds associated the huge knit caps and skirts worn over trousers to Mr. Jacobs's notorious 1992 grunge collection, which got him fired from Perry Ellis and more or less established him on the fashion map.

But the collection was grunge only in the sense that it refused to capitulate to conventional ideas about what renders clothing masculine or feminine and what it means to be sartorially legible as an adult.

If there is anything in the success of "Transamerica," "Brokeback Mountain," transsexual plot lines on cable television, drag kings in cabaret and movies like the new Miramax production "Kinky Boots," it seems to show that Americans are regaining their interest in cultural flux. This is not to suggest a revolution is going on or, for that matter, that the barricades for such an event are likely to be the celebrity-lined bleachers at a Marc Jacobs show. But even small subversions come as welcome at a cultural moment as static, obedient and politically benumbed as our own.

Fall fashions reminiscent of 80's punk bands.

The New York Times

February 18, 2006