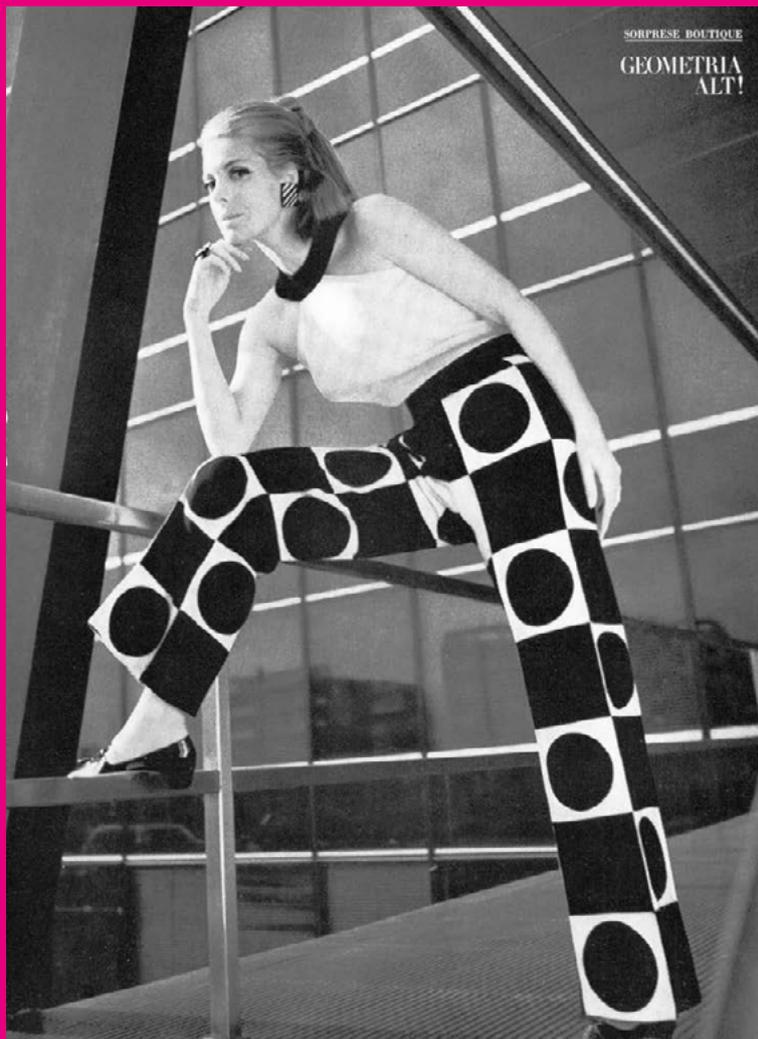


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OP IN VOGUE



2020

Opin Vogue

Elena Galleani d'Agliano

Op in Vogue
Master Thesis

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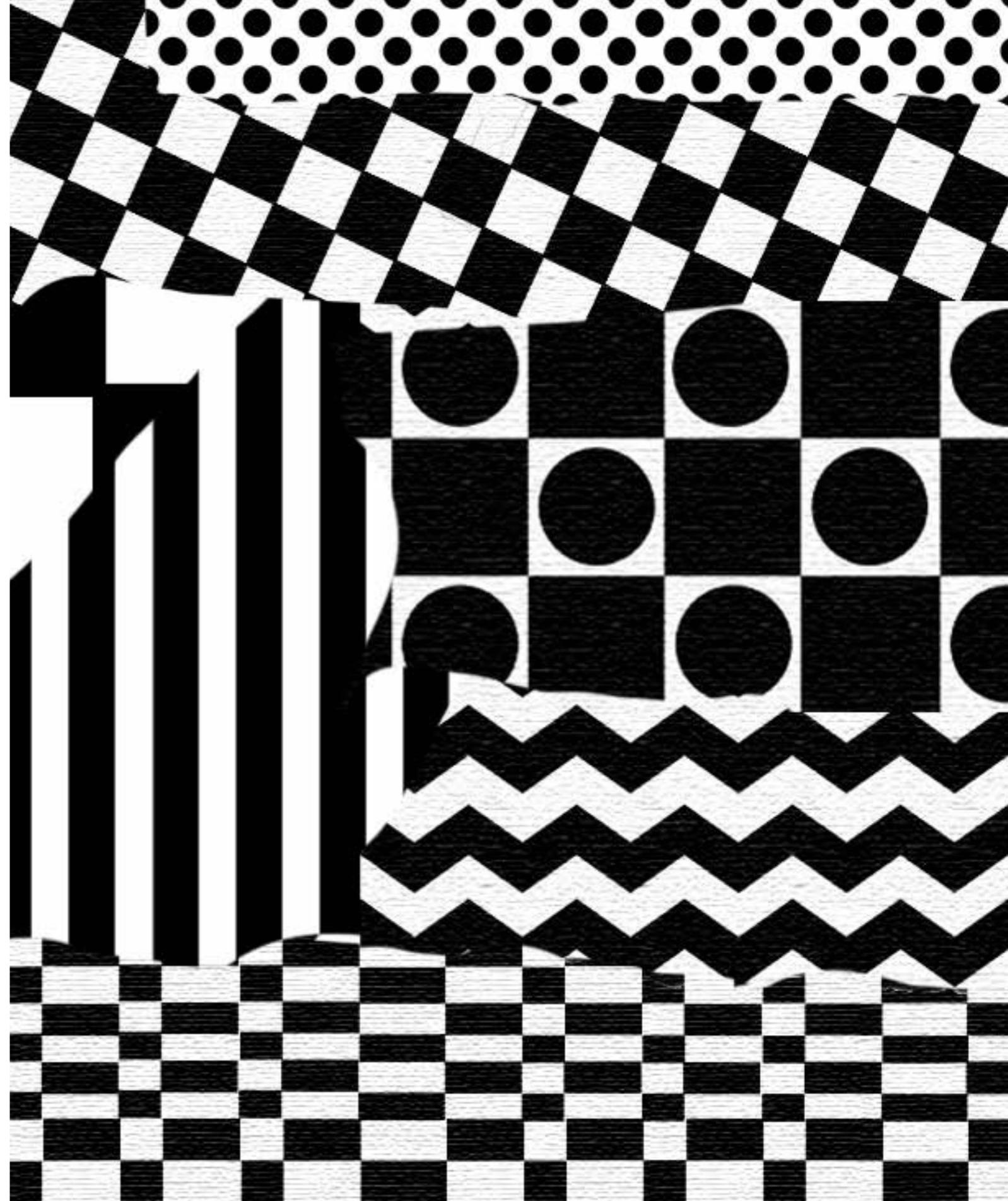


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Prologue

Nearly sixty years ago, an artistic movement known as Op(tical) art became a mainstream phenomenon in mass culture, significantly influencing until the following decade the aesthetics of many other fields, such as publishing, cinema, design and architecture. In opposition to the American and figurative Pop art, the Op art was instead interested in the perceptive and kinetic phenomena.

This research will focus on the influences of the Op art in fashion, and in particular on how fashion photography contributed to his diffusion, by creating in response his own aesthetic language, through the medium of the fashion magazine.

For this analysis, I have selected photographs and articles published in *Vogue Paris*, *Vogue British* and *Vogue Italia* (the most known and international magazine at the time) between 1964 and 1968. 1964 issues did not give many results, allowing though to identify with more precision the beginning of the trend and the two years of his maxi-

mum diffusion, 1965 and 1966. The choice of focusing on the European editions rather than on the US situation, is due to the fact that in the Sixties Europe had become the actual core in terms of experimentations and creativity in fashion, and therefore it guaranteed a more fertile ground to explore (although *Vogue US* will be mentioned in more occasions). This also allowed to make frequent parallels between the different *Vogue*, discovering the differences and the choices in fact of contents and graphic, as well as providing diversified material to analyse. As for the images, after an early research on internet (which was obviously imprecise, lacking and unreliable), it was necessary to go directly to the source, in order to historically contextualize those pictures. The issues of *British Vogue* and *Vogue Paris* have been consulted in the archive of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, while the complete *Vogue Italia* was available online.

The *mémoire* begins with the Kinetic art and how it became popularly known as Op art, attempting to identify the elements that inspired further applications in other fields.

Then, the structure of the work has been subdivided into three big blocks: the definition of the Op fashion in relation to *Vogue magazine*, the analysis of the images- which is the real core of this mémoire-, and the sociological implications that derived from it. In the last part, I extended my research in order to gain better understanding of the impact that a new kind of fashion could have on the society. I could assume that the success of the prêt à porter and the various imitations of the Op fashion made it more accessible and therefore, most widespread.

Before starting, I considered it necessary to introduce the Op/Kinetic art, in order to better understand the elements and the forms that inspired the patterns of the Op fashion creations in that period.

Definition of Op art

The Op(tical) art was originally known in the art field as Kinetic Art: *Op* was a term coined by the press in the United States. It appears for the first time in 1964 on the *New York Herald Tribune* as *Optic art*.¹ A few months later, the *Time* reporter Jon Borgzinner, in a

piece about the upcoming exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, changed *Optic* in *Op*.² On the other hand, the term *Kinetic Art* (from the greek *κινητικός*, der. from *κινέω* «to move»), was used originally by the Spanish group *Equipo 57*, and then “adopted” by the Italian designer Bruno Munari.

For this paper, I will use the term Op instead of Kinetic to distinguish the artistic phenomenon from its diffusion. This choice is motivated by the fact that *Op art* was the denomination through which it was internationally known, and therefore, the use of this term to refer to a popular trend is more precise.

An accurate definition of Kinetic Art was provided by Umberto Eco in the catalogue of the exhibition *Arte Programmata* (1962), defining it as « a form of plastic art, where the movement of forms, colours, plans is the medium to obtain a changeable wholeness. The aim of Kinetic art is to obtain shifting forms and not definitive artwork ».³

Among the most known exponents, we remember the Italians *Gruppo T* (Milan), *Gruppo N* (Padua), Bruno Munari, Getulio Alviani and Franco Grignani, the French group *G. R. A. V.* (Paris) and

1. Anonymous, “The avant-garde”, *New York Herald Tribune*, special 17th May 1964, p. 4.

2. BORGZINNER Jon, “Op art: Pictures that attack the eye”, *Time*, vol. 84, n 17°, 23th October 1964, p. 78-86.

3. GRANZOTTO Giovanni; MARGOZZI Mariastella, *Arte programmata e cinetica: da Munari a Biasi a Colombo e...*, Roma, Il Cigno, 2012, p. 36.

4. DORFLES Gillo, *Ultime tendenze nell'arte d'oggi*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1961, p. 86.

5. WERTHEIMER Max, *Gestalt Theory*, Vol. 21, n. 3, November 1999, pp 181-183.

6. SEITZ William, *The responsive Eye*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, 1965, p. 30.

7. VERGINE Lea, *Art on the cutting edge: a guide to Contemporary movements*, Milano, Skira, 1996 p. 92-93.

Victor Vasarely (Hungarian adopted French), the Yugoslavian group *Nove Tendencije*, the British Bridget Riley, the German *Zero* (Düsseldorf), the Venezuelan Carlos Cruz Diez.

Within the kinetic movement, it is necessary to make a distinction between the real *kineticism* and the *kineticism* perceived by the spectator.⁴

In the first case, the movement is created physically through the support of machines and mechanic systems, as well as through the construction of spatial ambiances: this approach, known as *Arte Programmata*, was born and experimented in Italy, in particular by

Munari and exponents from *Gruppo T*. In the second case, the movement is not real, but is created by playing with human perceptions, that are driven to perceive the motion in a bidimensional painting. This intent is observable, for example, in the artworks of Bridget Ri-

ley and Victor Vasarely, who translated his ideas about a new kinetic language into the *Manifeste jaune* (1955). This ambiguity was also made possible by using malleable materials such as aluminium and generating effects with the light,



as experimented by Getulio Alviani. The kinetic artists were influenced by psychology and other theories of visual perceptions, for example the Gestalt theory,⁵ and they attempted to transfer those suggestions on their works, in order “activate the vision” besides the aesthetic effects.⁶

However, Lea Vergine pointed out how this scientific

aspect had been deeply misunderstood from his supporters, that elevated and celebrated the Op art as a scientific art: the critic accused the Op art because it was based on suppositions and not on a real scientific research.⁷ The dilemma is in part explained by Carlo Argan:

«The scientific research is the guide for the kinetic artists in their work. But the purpose is different and the artistic and scientific research can't be dependent to each other»⁸.

In occasion of *Arte Programmata*, the Italian art critic and writer Umberto Eco introduced the concept of *Open Work*, *Opera Aperta* in Italian, that's also the subject of the homonymous essay he wrote.⁹ The idea is that the artwork is an *open field*, that leads the spectator to variable and not definitive interpretations. He also claimed that through the Kinetic art, the movement has entered art in a more successful and radical way than before, as soon as it started to include the spectator to complete the artwork.

Another important aspect of Kinetic art is the idea that the piece of art can exist in multiple versions, and the quality of the object does not rely to the choice of the materials.¹⁰ At this purpose, Bruno Munari coined the term *multiplo*, an object designed by the artist to be produced in series according to the principles of industrial design or eventually hand-made, but always with the intention of producing identical

exemplars. Victor Vasarely, one of the most known artists of the movement, considered art as a social phenomenon, where the piece of art is conceived to be reproduced and multiplied through the modern resources. In contrast to Bridget Riley, that fully disagreed with the unauthorized replication of her pieces, he approved their diffusion among the masses.¹¹

The Influences

To fully understand what Kinetic Art is, it is necessary to take a step back to the lesson of the avant-garde of the XXth century. In the 1920s, the Dutch group *De Stijl*, headed by Theo Van Doesburg, theorized for the first time the term *Concrete Art* to designate a type of geometric-oriented artwork, free of any references with the external world.¹²

The notion of movement in the static material was explored both by Futurism and Dadaism: the futurists attempted to translate the motion into their bidimensional paintings, by decomposing the images in repeated photograms like in *Dinamismo Muscolare* from Giacomo Balla.¹³ The Dadaists, instead, worked physically on the ambiguity and the

8. MELONI Lucilla, *Gli ambienti del Gruppo T: arte immersiva e interattiva*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana, 2004, p. 84.

9. ECO Umberto, *Opera Aperta*, Milano, Bompiani, 1962, p. 153.

10. MUNARI Bruno, *Artista e designer*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 1971, p. 72.

11. MARI Pauline, *Le voyeur et L'halluciné : au cinéma avec L'op art*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires, 2018, p. 22.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

13. POPPER Frank, *L'art cinétique*, Paris, Gauthier-Villars, 1970, p. 37.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

16. GRANZOTTO Giovanni; MARGOZZI Mariastella, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 12.

process of elaboration, by creating different visual effects. Duchamp's *Rotorelief* is generally considered as the first kinetic object of the history of art.¹⁴ Scientific research in art had been previously explored in the work of the Pointillists, that towards the end of XIXth century found a technique that consisted in dividing the brushwork into little dots of pure colours which blend directly into the viewer's brain. Kinetic Art has also a huge debt to the Bauhaus, and in specific to experiences of the experimental preparatory classes run by Johannes Itten, Lazlo Moholy Nagy and Jozef Albers.¹⁵ Itten focused mostly on the study of colors and their architectural and kinetic function. Albers was a painter and former Bauhaus' student and he used to work with metal and glass, obtaining light variations. Moholy Nagy's work ranged from lighting design, photography, photograms and film to kinetic-constructive systems.¹⁶

Exhibitions & diffusion

In the early Sixties, the results of the kinetic groups started to be known in the international art scene. Italian, German and French avant-garde artists

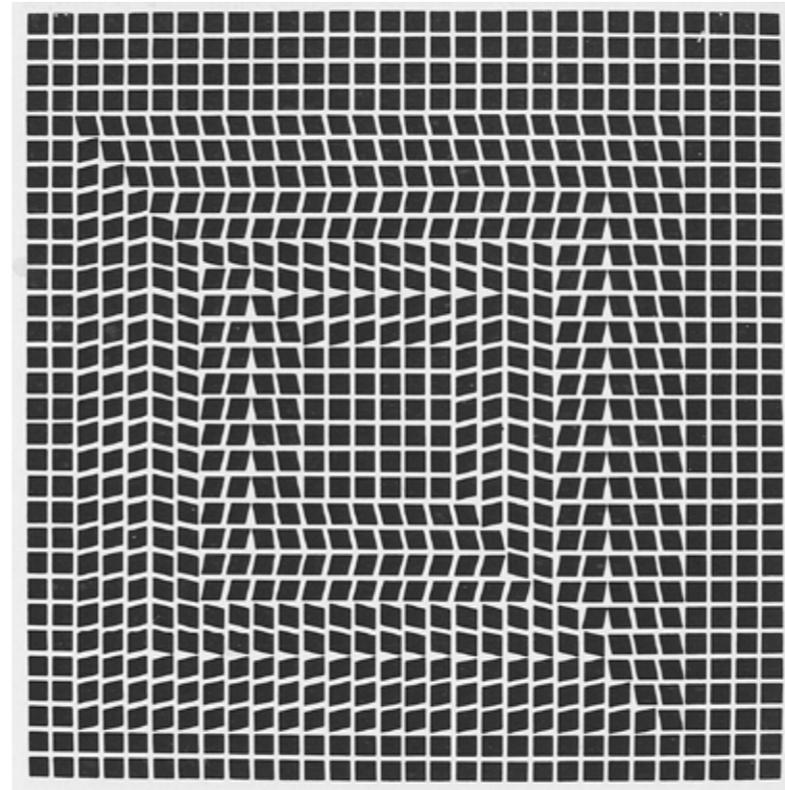


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2

1: Cover from the Catalogue "The Responsive Eye".
2: Students from Jozef Albers' class at Bauhaus. Study on paper (1928).



3

3: Victor Vasarely: Tau-Ceti, 1964, 2,50x2,50



4: Giacomo Balla: Dinamismo Muscolare di un cane al guinzaglio, oil on canvas, 1912.

4

were invited to show their works together in several exhibitions throughout Europe, and in a second time in the USA. Among them, we remember *Nove Tendenze*, that took place in Zagreb in 1961, *Arte Programmata* curated by Munari in 1962 and hosted at the Olivetti's space in Milan, *Kunst Licht Kunst* held in Eindhoven in 1966, and last but not least, *The Responsive Eye* by William Seitz, presented at MOMA in 1965, collecting a resounding success among the international public. The effects of *The Responsive Eye* were huge, since it caught the attention of international media for several months, creating a full-fledged mainstream phenomenon around it.

This allows us to affirm that this exhibition had a decisive role in the diffusion of the Op art in the mass culture, including in fashion and his depiction. Moreover, *Vogue* dedicated several articles to the Op art, besides the optical collections. Within this research, my goal is to define the relationship of the Op fashion with his source and how photography was responsible of his success.



The Op Fashion

1

1. AMBROSIO Daniela, "Non solo moda. Germana Marucelli e Getulio Alviani", *Elle Magazine*, 31th January 2019 (from the website <https://www.elle.com>, visited in August 2019).

2. <https://www.associazionegermanamarucelli.org> (visited in August 2019).

3. *Ibid.*, (visited in August 2019).

The Op art phenomenon spread with a certain success across the fashion world: stylists, photographers, and fashion magazines all took for a moment an Op direction, suggested by the innovative forms of Kinetic Art. Fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, were the medium of this diffusion between the masses and elite world of *haute couture* that they intended to depict.

What is Op Fashion? It is the meeting of Op art with the fashion world that results in black and white fabrics decorated with geometric patterns.

It is possible to start talking about Op fashion in the year 1964, when Getulio Alviani and Germana Marucelli began their artistic collaboration.¹ The result was *Optical Line*, a harmonious match between the proprieties of the fabric and the optical patterns. The decision to combine the kinetic textures with a *plissé soleil* fabric (small folds radiating from a center, usually the waist), helped to create effects of optical

illusions each time the wearer was moving, elevating the dress to a full-fledged artwork. The collection was officially presented in January 1965, on the occasion of the *XXIX Manifestazione della Moda Italiana* held in the Florence and was a great success.² The partnership continued with the *Aluminum line*, which, according to the same principle of the changeability of the artwork, made light the protagonist in interaction with the metal. Some years later, she recalled her experiences during the Sixties this way:³

«My meeting with the modern artists from 25 years ago has led to a meeting with the artists of the *Nuova Programmazione* and in specific with Getulio Alviani, first with Op art and then with shining aluminum, that gave me the opportunity to (experiment) the magic dimension of the enlightened aluminum in order to valorize a totally new woman»

Meanwhile in the United States, Larry Aldrich, the most important manufacturer of New York's 7th

Avenue, hired Julian Tomchin to design a collection inspired by his personal collection of kinetic artworks.⁴

The collection benefited from the success of the *Responsive Eye* exhibition at MoMA opening just few months after its release. About that exhibition, *Time* stated that the visitors of the exhibition were nearly able to realize with their clothes those same optic—kinetic effects as the artists.⁵ It is said that Bridget Riley, upon seeing her patterns applied to clothes without any authorization, claimed with disappointment that her art «was sold to hang on a wall, not on a girl»⁶. In January 1965, André Courrèges, a Paris-based couturier, debuted with a futuristic and geometric collection that exploited black and white as dominant elements.⁷

The phenomenon of diffusion began from 1965 under the reflectors of the *Responsive Eye*, that made the Kinetic art known to the rest of the world as Op art. It is possible to establish 1965 as the year when it started this diffusion and 1966 as the time of its peak; then we can still find traces until 1968,

alongside the flourishing youth style.⁸

An interesting evidence of the success of the Op aesthetic (and specifically in the fashion sector), is given by the French journalist Jacque Michel, who in his polemical piece *L'Op dans la rue*, released in 1966, speaks against this Op madness:⁹

«[...] it's a fact: what Americans have called Optical art won the street, entering the daily life so quickly that it leaves no doubt. Browse the women's newspapers, look at the shop windows along the boulevards: 'op' dresses, op 'earrings', candy boxes op '... In London, op' makeup and hairdressing... in Rome, Madrid or in the German cities, op' handkerchiefs, kitchen towels or raincoats as we were in the United States, bathing suits, sunglasses or wrapping paper reproduce the paintings of artists that a large advertising campaign in the United States called Optical art ».

This feeling of indignation is unsurprising; many intellectuals and conservatives both in Europe and United States disapproved of the success of this artistic phenomenon

4. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *Bianco e Nero*, Novara, Istituto geografico De Agostini 1991, p.75.

5. LOBELTHAL Joel, *Radical Rags. Fashion of the Sixties*, New York, 1990, pp. 76 and following.

6. Anonymous, "It's Op from Toe to Top", *LIFE*, 16th April 1965, p. 52.

7. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 74.

8. This affirmation has been made by analysing the three different European editions of *Vogue* (Italia, Paris and British) between 1964-1968.

9. BORGZINNER Jon, "Op art: Pictures that attack the eye", *Time*, vol. 84, n 17°, 23th October 1964, p. 78-86.



10. MARI Pauline, *op. cit.*, 2018, p. 24.

11. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 76.

12. LILLI Laura, "La nuova moda degli abiti stile *Op art* è appena arrivata a Milano dall'America", *CRONACHE PER LE DONNE- LA STAMPA*, n. 79, 3rd April 1965.

13. ANTONIONI Michelangelo, *Blow Up*, U.S.A - United Kingdom - Italy, 1966.

that compromised itself as soon as it reached the streets, transforming into a **kitsch art for the masses**.¹⁰

In the case of fashion, the effects were imitated by a relevant number of stylists, who found in black and white - the two and diametric non-colors - infinite possibilities of combination, simplifying at the same time the manufacturing (industrial) process.¹¹ What was missing from the pages of fashion magazines were the perceptions of the the movement generated while wearing the dresses. Interesting evidence of how Op art could be perceived in that time is given by the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, in the *Women's Chronicles*.¹² The article described one of the fashion shows featuring the Marucelli's *Optical collection*, as a big *rendez-vous*, where the creative community in Milan was invited to attend. It consisted of an exhibition-vernissage, where instead of paintings and sculptures, there were living artworks in fabric. The article points out the multitudes of effects produced by the dresses in motion, applauded by the public:

«the models were parading like delicate living kaleidoscopes».

By the end, the author made an acute prediction, about the Op phenomenon and its popularization:

« The Op art solutions seem to be destined for vast consumption, and certainly they have the possibility of being economically exploited. It is possible, therefore, that the *Op-Art* will appear on the summer dresses of the girls of all social classes. Then it will become so obvious that it would make the effect of a floral cretonne»

The Op fashion phenomenon is also observable in two films from that same period. Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* released in 1966 is worth of note. It is the story of a hallucinated experience lived by a rough fashion photographer, directly inspired by David Bailey, within the bustle of *Swingin' London*.¹³ A backstage of an optical shooting has been recreated, with a group of models that stand up in series behind transparent panels, wearing futuristic dresses. As soon as the films get more hallucinated, the optical motifs appeared later on the walls of an underground club, emphasizing the sense of confusion of the film.

That same year, William Klein released



Aluminium line,
Vogue Italia,
September 1968.



One of Larry Aldrich's
creation. Appeared on *Life*
Magazine, 16th April 1965.

Who Are You, Polly Maggoo? a satirical art-house film that criticizes the fashion world.¹⁴ The movie makes use of an optical language that reflects the time's mainstream aesthetic. The movie follows top model Polly Maggoo (played by Dorothy MacGowan) and her surreal participation in a weekly TV program titled "Who are you?". In one of the most famous scenes, Polly

and other models are talking in a dressing room, all wearing striped dresses against the backdrop of striped walls. This optical aesthetic appears in many details, such as in the rounded banner of the crest of the kingdom of the prince of the story. In some scenes it is also possible to see actual pictures from *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, showing Dorothy MacGowan posing in several Op clothes.

The relationship with the source

Op art entered fashion and other sectors few years after its creation: this differing of times, and the diffusion in the mass culture when the avant-garde groups were at their end,

14. MARI Pauline, *op. cit.*, 2018, p. 36.



1, 2, 3: Some still-frames from Blow Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966).



4: Vogue Italia, October 1966. Photos shot by Franco Rubartelli.

5, 6, 7: Some still-frames from Who are you Polly Maggoo? (William Klein, 1966).



15. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 76.

16. DORFLES Gillo, *La moda della moda*, Genova, Costa e Nolan, 1984, p. 13.

17. SEGRE REINACH Simona, *La moda*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 2005, p. 113.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

19. BARILLI Renato: *Il ciclo Postmoderno. La ricerca artistica degli anni Ottanta*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1987, p.86.

20. ANGELI Franco, *La moda nel consumo giovanile. Strategie & immagini di fine millennio*, Milano, Franco Angeli editore, 1999, p. 43.

21. MARI Pauline, *op. cit.*, 2018, p. 35.

contributed to the separation of their destinies and their ideological values. Wearing Op art clothes in fact, **didn't mean embracing the principles of kinetic art**, nor did it mean wearing an artwork. With the exception of a few cases, the mass phenomenon was instead a projection of how Op art was perceived by the masses and it often translated into dresses that imitated others without considering the artistic sources. In Op fashion, there are not rigid schemes or rules, nor is there a real founder. In many occasions the fashion magazines adopted from the art critic the vocabulary specific to the artistic genre, such as «geometric rhythms» or «perceptive vibrations».¹⁵

The relationship between fashion and art continues to be a topic of debate. Can applied art be considered as a full-fledged artform? Gillo Dorfles claimed in his essay *La Moda della Moda*, that there have always been intimate relationships between fashion and art, but those interactions are not always taken in consideration by the specialists of both sectors, «diffident from each other's work».¹⁶ According to Crane, art is an instrument, a **market strategy** for those designers who struggle

to impose themselves for reasons related to the weakness of the textile industry.¹⁷ However, art can also be an element that ennobles the clothes, as is the case of prêt-à-porter. On the other hand, fashion contributes to the diffusion of art by its own rules. Another consideration has to be made for fashion photography, whose relationship with art is much more undefined and hybrid.¹⁸

It is possible to talk of a *Poptical* phenomenon, a term coined by Renato Barilli, that brought attention to the frequent exchanges between the Op and Pop art in fashion.¹⁹ This syncretism largely influenced the work of Cardin, Saint Laurent and Krizia, as well as the **vast production of unbranded clothes, accessories, bracelets, and shoes**.²⁰ Op art, between 1965 and 1966, was already a mainstream phenomenon.²¹

The perspective of a mass diffusion was already positively supported by Op art, which accepted the idea that creativity could be at the service of industry and that art works could exist in multiple versions. In the fashion sector, this idea was represented by the



Mondrian Collection, *Vogue Italia*, September 1965. Photo shot by D. Bailey and I.Penn.

advent of the ready-to-wear or prêt-à-porter, which was strongly supported by many exponents of Haute Couture, including Pierre Cardin and André Courrèges.²² The same argument can be addressed to the images in fashion magazines: they were shot to be reproduced and viewed by hundreds of thousands of readers, making Op fashion a popular and elite form at the same time.

A final consideration would be the role of black and white in both Op

art and Op fashion. William Seitz, in the catalogue of *The Responsive Eye* “affirmed that “color is unnecessary for perceptual ambiguity, variability and movement”.²³ Op art is, in our popular belief, a mainly black and white artistic style. However, it could also be the result of precise chromatic studies as can be seen, for example, in many Vasarely's works. The same could be applied for fashion: if we consider - for example - the *Mondrian Collection* of Yves Saint Laurent (accredited indeed as Pop fashion) or the Castillo's dresses

22. cf. p. 31.

23. SEITZ William, *op. cit.*, 1965, p. 30.

Photo attributed to
Guy Bourdin, 1965.



Le jersey joue
(Castillo's geometric
dresses), *Vogue Paris*,
October 1965. Shot by
Irving Penn.



in jersey, shot both in and without colours, we realize the deception pursued by fashion photography. The power of photography created a perception of a black and white trend, amplifying it through images. This meant that the Op fashion could exist in colors as well, but in terms of marketing, it sold more in greyscale.

Op art and its representation on *Vogue*

The term Op appeared for the first time in all the three editions of *Vogue* in 1965, but at different moments. *Vogue Paris* introduced the style as *L'Optique 65* in March in an editorial entirely dedicated to the new Courrèges' collection.²⁴ The title is a play on words referring to the (sun) glasses worn by the models although there is no specific reference to Op art. The artistic movement would be presented in an article released in July of the same year: *Op art? His place is on the street* by Michel Ragon, where he explained the movement and its diffusion beyond the wall of the galleries.²⁵

British Vogue followed suit in July. An exotic feature set in Egypt and featuring Marucelli's *Optical line*

introduced the new kinetic fashion, accompanied by the title *Eye View of Hypnotical Illusions*. The historical setting is used as a pretext but has no a real connection with the optical clothes.²⁶ In the following September, a frizzy title introduced the new trend in a series of pictures shot by David Bailey. The photos were a mixture of the young British style with the geometries of Op art:

«How to add black and white and make more: positive new look. Black and white in new proportions, new textures. And the only dash of colors it's you». In the next page, with the same tones, the title highlights the connection with the Op style: «Jump in feet first: black and white Op art. The black and white and the Op art go together with the accessorizes».²⁷

Although *Op art* already appeared within some descriptions, in October *Vogue Italy* dedicated a two-page spread, titled *Moda Op*, showing two creations from Valentino, in a mirrored, kaleidoscopic composition. A short text introduced it in this way: «The fashion noticed the Op paintings and found that was a pity that their rhythms

24. Anonymous, "L'Optique 65", *Vogue Paris*, March 1965, p. 137.

25. RAGON Michel, "Op art? His place is on the street", *Vogue Paris*, July 1965, p. 98.

26. Anonymous, "Eye View of Hypnotical Illusions", *British Vogue*, July 1965, pp. 29-33. 27. Anonymous, "Eye View. How to add black and white and make more", *British Vogue*, September 1965, p. 82.

27. Anonymous, "Eye View. How to add black and white and make more", *British Vogue*, September 1965, p. 82.

28. Anonymous, “Moda Op”, *Vogue Italia*, October 1965, p. 66.

29. Anonymous, “Op-tic Boutique”, *Vogue Italia*, May 1966, p. 60.



were constrained to stay in the galleries. It would have been great to extend them to the everyday life». ²⁸ The next pages reprinted the aforementioned *British Vogue* article (and the pictures), presenting this new «girlish, swinging, that bewitches» style coming from the UK.

Since the end of 1965, the term *Op* recurred alone or in combination with compound words, such as *Oplà* or *Op Tic*, suggesting a diffused familiarity among the readership. In 1966 *Vogue Italia* invented the fictional *Op-tic Boutique*, which recommended the right outfit for a dizzy summer season. ²⁹ «The boutique found out that

the summer is a continuous overlap of black and white: in one word, is Op».

For Christmas '65, *Vogue Paris* recommended a series of Op theme-gifts to its readers, that included a pair of Op sunglasses, a striped fur coat, a series of Op hand-made decorated balls, an Op winter hat and a chessboard, sold as *Op*, made in Italy. ³⁰

The prices were precisely listed, as were the locations. There was no big brand anymore, but rather accessible options for everyone. This small column situated at the bottom of the magazine, is probably the most truthful evidence of the success of the Op fashion at a mass level, during the very apex of its popularity.

This analysis attempts to figure out when Op art appeared on the pages of the three *Vogue* magazines, but it has thus far failed when it tried to categorize the phenomenon under a specific name. Op art has been used at the beginning in relation with the artistic movement, but then it loses importance, and begins to be used simply as an adjective. Therefore, *Op* designated everything that fulfilled the requirement of geometric, hypnotic and black and white.

However, more frequently *Op* wasn't used at all, but instead replaced by *geometry* and other similar adjectives. After a while, *Optical fashion* was visually largely recognizable.

Moreover, the parallel between the three editions of *Vogue* highlights the differences and the directions taken

by the fashion designers of the three countries. In the UK, Op fashion absorbed the influences coming from the youth culture (and vice versa) and it was mostly associated in relation with the new generation of designers. In Paris, the influences of Courrèges, Cardin and Rabanne gave to Op fashion a futuristic and spatial identity. The Italian creations instead, represented by Germana Marucelli and Roberto Capucci, as well as Roman tailors, distinguished themselves for their elegance and sophistication, addressing a wealthier target.

Within this process, photography had a key role in contributing to the success of the Op fashion, by building an optical world around the clothes.



On the opposite page: *British Vogue*, September 15th, 1965. Shot by David Bailey

Above: *Cadeaux Noel*, *Vogue Paris*, December 1965.

At the side: *Op-tic Boutique*, *Vogue Italia*, May 1966. Shot by Leobruno Bodi

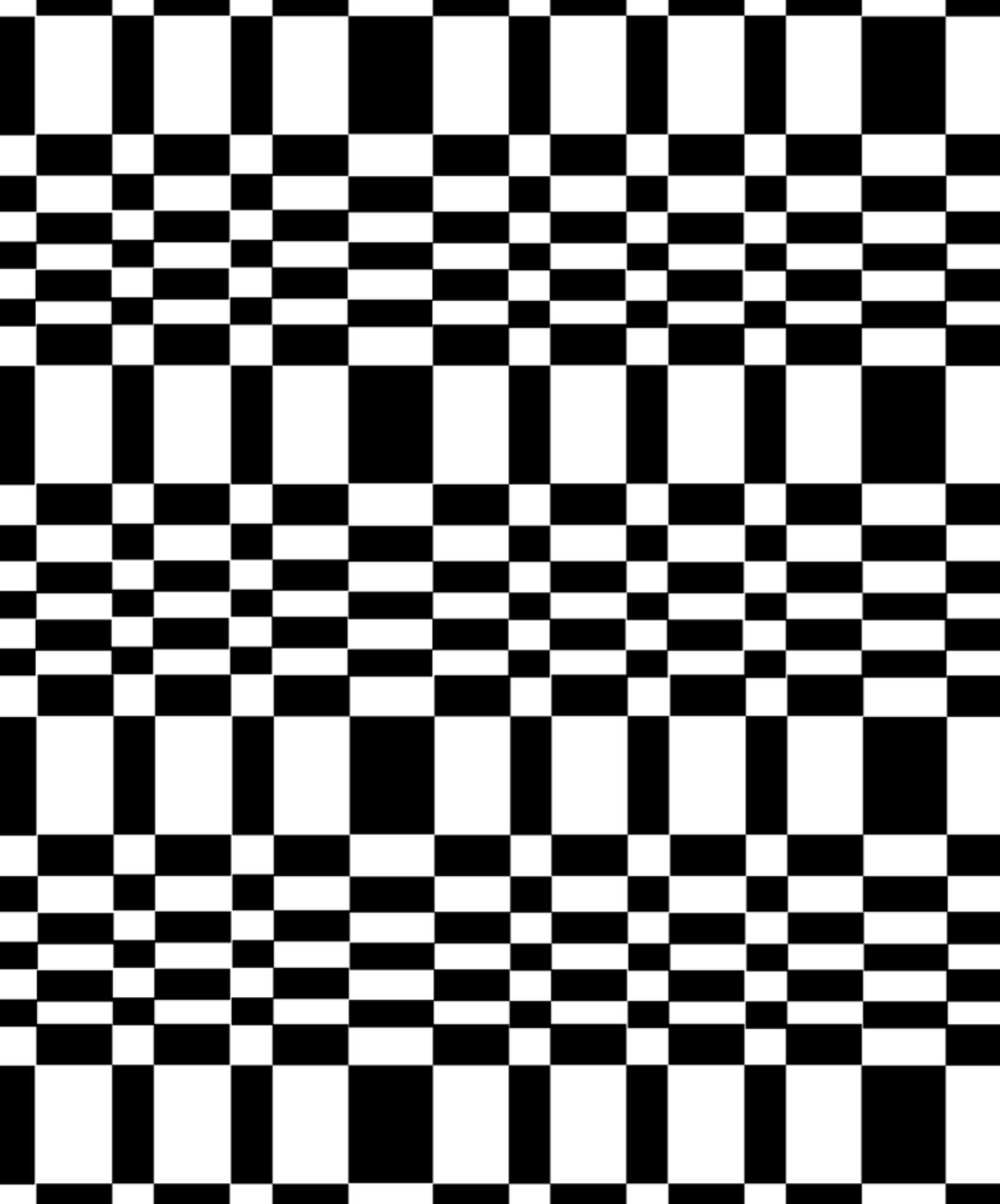




OP MODA

Curioso. I colori non hanno mai dato la vertigine che in questo momento stanno dando, nella moda, due non-colori: il bianco e il nero. Con un mezzo molto semplice, in apparenza: la geometria. Solo che c'è dell'arte in questa geometria, allucinante, come stregata. Si tratta della «optical art» o «op-art». La moda ha visto i quadri op e ha trovato un peccato che i loro ritmi rimanessero ristretti nelle gallerie. Sarebbe stato bello prolungarli all'infinito nella vita di oggi, con gli abiti. Come sta succedendo... Qui due momenti nella deliziosa vertigine della moda op. *A sinistra:* i bottoni, le tasche, la cintura e le pinces creano un'illusione ottica su un tessuto di lana a righe bianche e quasi-neri. Il tessuto del tailleur è di Nattier. *A destra:* proporzioni che oscillano continuamente in un mantello piccolo con cintura bassa — tratto del motivo stampato in nero e grigio sulla gabardine bianca, di Fornetis. Entrambi i modelli sono di Valentino.

FRANCO RUBARTELLI



Op Fashion
photography

1. HALL-DUNCAN Nancy, *The history of fashion photography*, New York, Alpine Book Company, 1979, p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

3. Term coined by Owen Edwards in "Blow Out: the decline and the fall of the fashion photographer," *New York Magazine*, 28th May 1973, p. 49.

When we look at the history of fashion, we can also understand much about the costumes and the habits of the people of the past. Fashion photography are therefore a precious document, a box containing the spirit, the *zeitgeist* of the period in which those images were taken. On the one hand, fashion photography is a commercial product, the primary goal of which is selling clothes to people, following a market demand. On the other hand, it can be creative and commercial at the same time, producing progressive and experimental pictures on commission and representing elite High Fashion for the masses.

Photography depicting women in fashionable dress has existed since the birth of the photography. Developing initially as an extension of portraiture (1839), fashion photography started to be used in periodicals around the second half of the XXth century, with the intention of selling clothes to a large audience.¹ The goal could be achieved thanks to the invention and application of the halftone printing process, enabling the reproduction of the same picture thou-

sands of time.

In the post-war period, fashion magazines became a point of attraction for the best photographers at international level while simultaneously encouraging a new crop of talent. The search for top-quality photos was very lucrative, transforming the headquarters of the fashion magazines – usually based in London, Paris or New York – into huge creative empires.² In specific, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, were both able to maintain their presence in different countries at the same time, allowing them to exchange each other's materials and to be updated about events on the global scene.

The Sixties was the period during which fashion photographers fully attached themselves to fashion magazines. This union inaugurated the era of the *photographer-hero* as coined by Owen Edwards.³ Within this context, the role of photographer became more importance in magazines and his work started to be considered -and payed- differently. During this period, a new generation of photographers emerged including personalities such as Irvin Penn, Helmut Newton, Franco

Rubartelli, and Guy Bourdin. In the UK, *Swinging London* turned into the most dynamic and creative hub for young professionals and the center of the contemporary youth scene. It was in this context that David Bailey, Terrence Donovan and Brian Duffy, three British men from the *East End* known as the *Terrible Three*, became famous for their excessive, unconventional and free loving lifestyle, embodying the myth of the Sixties. Most importantly, they brought a different, sometimes irreverent approach to photography, by reducing the distance between the lens and the model. The famous scene from *Blow Up* in which Thomas is engaged in a wild and sensual shooting with the German model Verushka, was inspired by Bailey's way of working.⁴ This allure began to decline towards the end of the decade, as the photo shoot transformed into a more elite environment dominated by few.

Alongside the work of photographer, there is a huge, often-invisible amount of work carried out by a team of hairdressers, makeup artists, tailors and scenographers under the supervision of an art director. These figures, along with

editors, were in charge of supervising and unifying the vision of the magazines, as well as selecting and hiring the photographers. Alexey Brodovitch and Alexander Liberman, the creative directors of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue US* respectively, were pioneers in their field and representative of the two biggest competitors of that time.⁵ Brodovitch was also an influent teacher for many promising students, including Avedon, Penn and Henry Clarke, through his legendary photography classes held at the New School for Social Research.⁶

The Sixties were a turning point for the *Vogue* brand: *Vogue UK* and *Vogue Paris* finally emerged from the shadow of *Vogue US*, offering innovative content that could compete with the flagship edition for audacity and innovation.⁷ In the British edition, this growth translated into experimental and joyful pictures depicting the youth movement of *Swinging London*, and into experimental/creative graphic layouts. In those years there was a succession of many art directors, under the direction of the editor in chief, Beatrix Miller. John Parsons, who launched the career of David Bailey ('62) was followed by Terence

4. HALL-DUNCAN Nancy, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 161.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

6. Anonymous, "Alexey Brodovitch, 76, Is Dead; Leader in Fashion Photography", *The New York Times (Online archive)*, 24th April 1971 (visited in October 2019).

7. HERSCHDORFER Nathalie, *Papier glacé : un siècle de photographie de mode chez Condé Nast*, Paris, Thames Hudson, 2012, p. 17.

8. Source: *British Vogue*, n. Jan. 1964-Dec. 1968, London, ed. Condè Nast.

9. Source: *Vogue Paris*, n. Jan. 1964-Dec. 1968, Paris, ed. Condè Nast.

10. HORWELL Veronica, "Edmonde Charles-Roux obituary", *The Guardian (Online Version)*, 25th January 2016, (Visited in September 2019).

11. PANIZZA Raffaele, "Intervista a Flavio Lucchini", *Vogue.it*, 10th november 2018, (Visited in September 2019).

Whelan ('65) and ten Peter Stillwell ('68), who was part of a transition away from the youth styles to a more classical structure.⁸

Meanwhile, *Vogue Paris* was characterized by a traditional visual. Nonetheless, it was able to alternate the new, very well represented by the Courrèges and Cardin's proposals, with the classic style of the tailleurs and evening dresses, addressed to a conservative audience.⁹

Like at *British Vogue*, the Sixties saw a series of different art directors. Among them was Antoine Kieffer ('65-66), who worked first as a graphic designer, served twice as the artistic director of *Vogue*, and launched the career of André Carrara. There was also Jacques Faure ('62), Daniel Dufour ('67) and Charete del Castillo ('68). At the time the editor in chief was Edmonde Charles-Roux, who supported throughout her career the work of great photographers like Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin. In 1966 she was abruptly removed from her role for having published a black model's picture on the cover. Her colleague Françoise de la Renta replaced her for a short time before later joining *Vogue US*.¹⁰ The Italian edition was founded in 1964,

under the direction of Franco Sartori and the artistic direction of Flavio Lucchini. Despite its short history, *Vogue Italia* became in a short time the second most important edition for influence and revenue after *Vogue US*, outclassing the French and English editions. Flavio Lucchini, who operated there until the Eighties, launched and promoted Italian prêt-à-porter to the world and raised the prestige of the magazine by attracting big names in photography.¹¹

Defining Op photography

Photography wasn't just the main medium that led Op fashion to be popular with the public. It actively participated in the process of popularizing this style. In this phase, it's very important to understand whether the Op fashion phenomenon existed outside the pictures and magazine or if it was just a construction.

In fashion, some stylists conceived their collection with an optical purpose, while others absorbed the optical influences more passively. That explains why we find traces of the phenomenon almost everywhere from clothes to pictures of the period. The same thing happened with photography. The



Vogue Paris, August 1965.
Shot by Guy Bourdin

approach used for shooting optical collections was also extended to other type of shots, so that in some cases, it is no longer possible to make distinctions between what was made Op on purpose and what was not. For this reason, it is also good to talk about *Optical fashion photography*, alongside the Op fashion.

Op photography uses primarily black and white tones just like Op fashion, a choice which could be seen as strategic

for both aesthetic and economic reasons.¹² The grayscale was more effective at creating compositions halfway between abstraction and photography and emphasizing the perception of the lines and geometries of the clothes.

Photography was able to go beyond fashion by **transforming colored dresses into black and white images** and exploiting every geometry and light to build an optical environment.

The scenography depicting *Op* collections could be quite different. They ranged from exotic backgrounds to futuristic environments, as well as asep-tic geometric spaces that vaguely recall some structures of the *ambienti spaziali* of the Italian avant-garde groups.

The majority of these pictures were shot in a studio and had no backgrounds outside the white or occasionally black page. Graphically, this choice allowed the subjects to integrate perfectly with the layout and the text of the magazine, by eliminating shadows or incorporating the white of the dress within the blank page. The space created in the photo-studio thus became undefined and artificial. This is

12. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *Bianco e Nero*, Novara, Istituto geografico De Agostini 1991, p.78



A destra in alto: maniche gradite sul polsino a smpensio. Nella linea bianca le sottile righe blu. In basso: le parallele e si accostano in un'aria d'impulso con scialomato. Karyon. A destra in basso: una blusa a stacco. Di sera sempre è nera, da il via a un'atmosfera centrale. Foto: Arago.

Nella pagina accanto: a optici per e sulla maglia di visaglia. Le righe bianche e nere si scontrano, si scontrano, si scontrano, maniche e caviglie sono tutt'uno, scalfati insieme da un'aria centrale centrata nel dorso. Suvaco. Zucchi di sogno, completamente esposti di pelle. Biliro.



A sinistra in alto: a suo agio nella mo Di maglia di cotone scure nella gonna, di apparentemente il Noni sport. Gli stiva — nel dinamico stile sono di «The Whip». A sinistra in basso: e stampata, colori pa disegni di fiori bare rendere attuale la el «passepartout». Bot Nella pagina accanto nel nuovissimo acco rosso metropolitana. La blusa a doppio inserito nello scollo; ha maniche a kimon colore contrastante, e e forma un gioco g. I pantaloni, piuttosto strisce alla carabinieri Celli. Scarpe-sandalo.

On this page: *Vogue Italia*, Mai 1965. Photos by Franco Rubartelli.

Opposite, above: Catherine Spaak, *Vogue US*, August 1st, 1965.

To the right: Optic Boutique, *Vogue Italia*, Mai 1966. Shot by Leobruno Bodi.



Catherine Spaak

Catherine Spaak — hour-shaped face, broken eyes, inverted tulle hair... Belgian young age... at twenty, a teenage idol in Europe. She sings, plays the guitar, makes records; has acted in *Francine*, *Les Destinées*, *Les Destinées*, *Les Destinées*. Her current movie in Italy is *The Lion*; in this country, she'll be seen next in *The Little Nana*. Knitted, beaded, bright, lefty and too-and-pink wool knit pulled loaded with red drapery, pink wool. Red wool openwork knit tights. By Micia. Side Filly Assom. Nissim Marron. Op knit, with sequins, right: deeply V'd top of black and white wool in a tempo-Fuel knit, thickly sprinkled with black plastic sequins in big in poker chips. Black wool tights, knitted in huge loops. By Micia at Sola 1786 Avenue. Nissim Marron. Earrings by Nacci of Rome. Both pages: Gowns by Claudio di Renne. Shoes: Silvia of Fioravante.



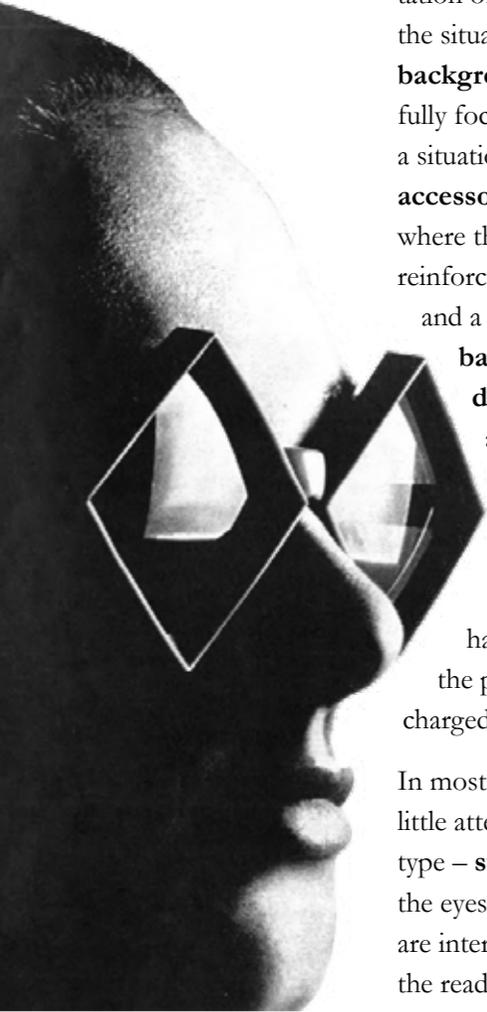
A sinistra: tutte le combinazioni possibili di bianco e di nero in un minimo di spazio per la tessitura di cotone con spalline sovrapposti. Tondross. A destra: fazzo di jersey di cotone nero è tagliato alla scollatura e sotto la vita da strisce nere, bianche, sempre Tondross. Tutti gli indovini a pag. 102.

A sinistra: vibrazioni piccole per la linea di valle di cotone, grandi per la gamma di passoni che arriva alla caviglia. Billy Ballo. A destra: le serpentine bianche e nere si stupiscono sotto la vita impura nell'abito di jersey di cotone senza maniche, scollato a V. Billy Ballo.

La folla vip di una linea di seta ha risultato sulla miscelazione di cotone bianco con seta nera. Tondross. Occhiali di Nancy; sandali di Dal Gai; occhiali di Intropia; paltinare di Spattaco à Ugo.

13. HARRISON, Martin, *David Bailey monographie*, Paris, Ed. de La Martinière, 1999, p. 72.

14. HERSCHDORFER Nathalie, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 152.



particularly evident in images shot by Guy Bourdin portraying black and white fur, in which the black tones seem to be painted on the white page (picture).

Within Op photography, it's possible to identify different type of representation of the Op fashion: we can find the situation **optical dress on white background**, where the attention is fully focused on the subject/clothes; a situation **black and white dress/accessories on optical background**, where the visibility of the Op dress is reinforced by Op elements in the scene, and a situation **optical/dress on a background that has nothing to do with it**, in which the clothes

are fit into different contexts. The situation **optical dress on optical background** is definitely rarer and can be explained by the difficulty of handling too many elements in the picture, that risked being too charged and kitsch.

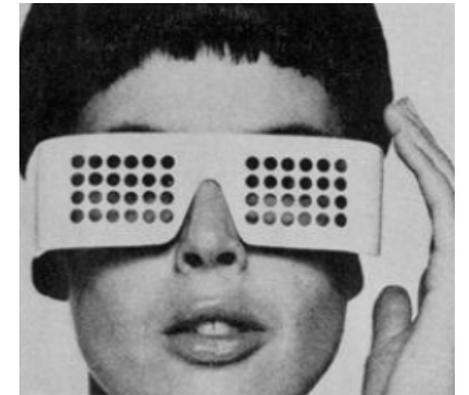
In most of the optical pictures there is little attempt at realism. Barriers of any type – **sunglasses** that hide completely the eyes or even the cut of the frame – are interposed between the model and the readers. The sight of the subjects

rarely points to the spectator – in some cases part of the visage is cut. **The optical girls seem to belong to another spatial dimension and another time, where we are not allowed to enter.** With the Op Wear, we are dealing with an innovative-experimental fashion design that seeks to expose the body to new modes of expression, shapes and angles. The models were shot in motion, and sometimes they even appeared to have fun, and they sat down quite informally. The rigidity, whenever it appeared, became functional to the geometry of the composition and it served as a structural element.

The format of the pictures varied according to the dictates of the editors and it is possible that many shots that we see in the pages of the magazines were conceived differently. However, the limits imposed could be instead a creative way to create something new. David Bailey, for example, used to put his shots into frames, purposely cutting the images to suggest other actions.¹³ He, like Guy Bourdin and Richard Avedon, benefited from a good relationship with the editors in chief (Edmonde Charles-Roux for *Vogue Paris* and Beatrix Miller for *British Vogue*) that ensured



them a certain amount of freedom with regard to choosing models, clothes, and concepts.¹⁴



Above, left: *British Vogue*, Mai 1967. Photo by Peter Rand.

Above, right: *Vogue Italia*, Mai 1967. Photo by Bert Stern.

At the side: *Vogue Paris*, March 1965. Photo by William Klein.



Lunettes pour une vision
autre. Julio Le Parc, 1965

Portfolio

Guy Bourdin's elegance.

15. BOURDIN Guy / introd. de Gilles de Bure, *Guy Bourdin*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2008, p. 9.

Guy Bourdin was a French photographer, who spent almost 30 years working for *Vogue*. Before landing in fashion, Bourdin was a *post surrealist* painter and former apprentice of Man Ray's (who also worked as a fashion photographer for *Vogue*). His constant pursuit of beauty and poetic freshness in his shots led many to consider him an artist of fashion photography.¹⁵

In the mid Sixties he was one of the top photographers of *Vogue Paris*, realizing many Op-oriented pictures. He used to shoot in black and white (he moved to color photography in the Seventies) and he generally photographed in the studio. Despite the lack of a real context, his pictures are dynamic and natural, focusing attention on the models and their movements, as with the jersey collection in January '66. For that feature, he preferred a small and framed format that evoked of the form of polaroid and emphasized the effect of the *stolen shot*.

In another series dedicated to black and white shoes, he removed half of the bodies of the girls, incorporating the legs into an optical scenography, rendering it difficult to distinguish to whom they belonged. The dynamism



is reinforced by the geometric patterns as well as by the rims of the bicycle. In another shot that was supposed to sell socks, he plays with the repetition of a series of identical legs, creating one more time a confusion illusion for the viewer.

Above: *Vogue Paris*, September 1965.

Bike shoes: *Vogue Paris*, February 1966.



The three photos are part of the same series, *Vogue Paris*, January 1966.



The youth quake according to Bailey

16. HARRISON Martin, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 15.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

18. HALL-DUNCAN Nancy, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 161.

David Bailey is today considered one of the most influent photographers worldwide. A native of the *East End* of London, he began to work as Jon French's apprentice from whom he learned how to master light before moving on to a career at *Vogue* in the late Fifties.¹⁶ Because of his fresh and innovative approach, the magazine would regularly assign him the newest trends in the space *Young Idea*. He got along with the editor Beatrix Miller, who convinced him to come back after a period for *Queen*, supporting his proposal in terms of form and contents.¹⁷ His provocative approach to photography (that he considered most definitely a sexual thing) and his rumored lifestyle outside the lights of the studio, elevated him to the level of myth in *Swinging London*.¹⁸

Bailey's unconventional way of work led him to work with the same models. Throughout the Sixties he discovered and collaborated with Penelope Tree, Jane Birkin and Jean Shrimpton, (with

whom he had a four year long love affair). He also shot the iconic portrait of two key figures of his time, the stylist Ossie Clark in company of the model Chrissie Shrimpton, who's wearing an optical black and white trench coat.

The images of those years express all the vitality and freshness of youth culture without going down on the streets. The subjects are dynamic and they abandoned any traditional static pose. Bailey was able to show an unedited point of view on Op fashion, something less serious/dramatic and more playful, exploiting the possibilities afforded by black and white.



Above-left: *British Vogue*, September 15th 1965. Appeared also on *Vogue Italia* in October 1965.

Above-right: *British Vogue*, April 15th 1968.

On the side: Jane Birkin, *British Vogue*, June 1965.



Opposite: Ossie Clarke and
Christie Shrimpton, *British
Vogue*, March 1st 1966.

Above: Luna Donyale and
unknown wearing some of Yves
Saint Laurent creations,
British Vogue, March 1st
1966.

The emancipation through the lens of Helmut Newton

19. NEWTON Helmut / introd. par Karl Lagerfeld, *Helmut Newton*, Paris, Centre national de la photographie, 1986, p. 7.

20. Anonymous, "La pluie en blanc", *Vogue Paris*, February 1965, pp. 38-43.

21. Anonymous "La moda chiama Marte", *Vogue Italia*, September 1965, p. 42.

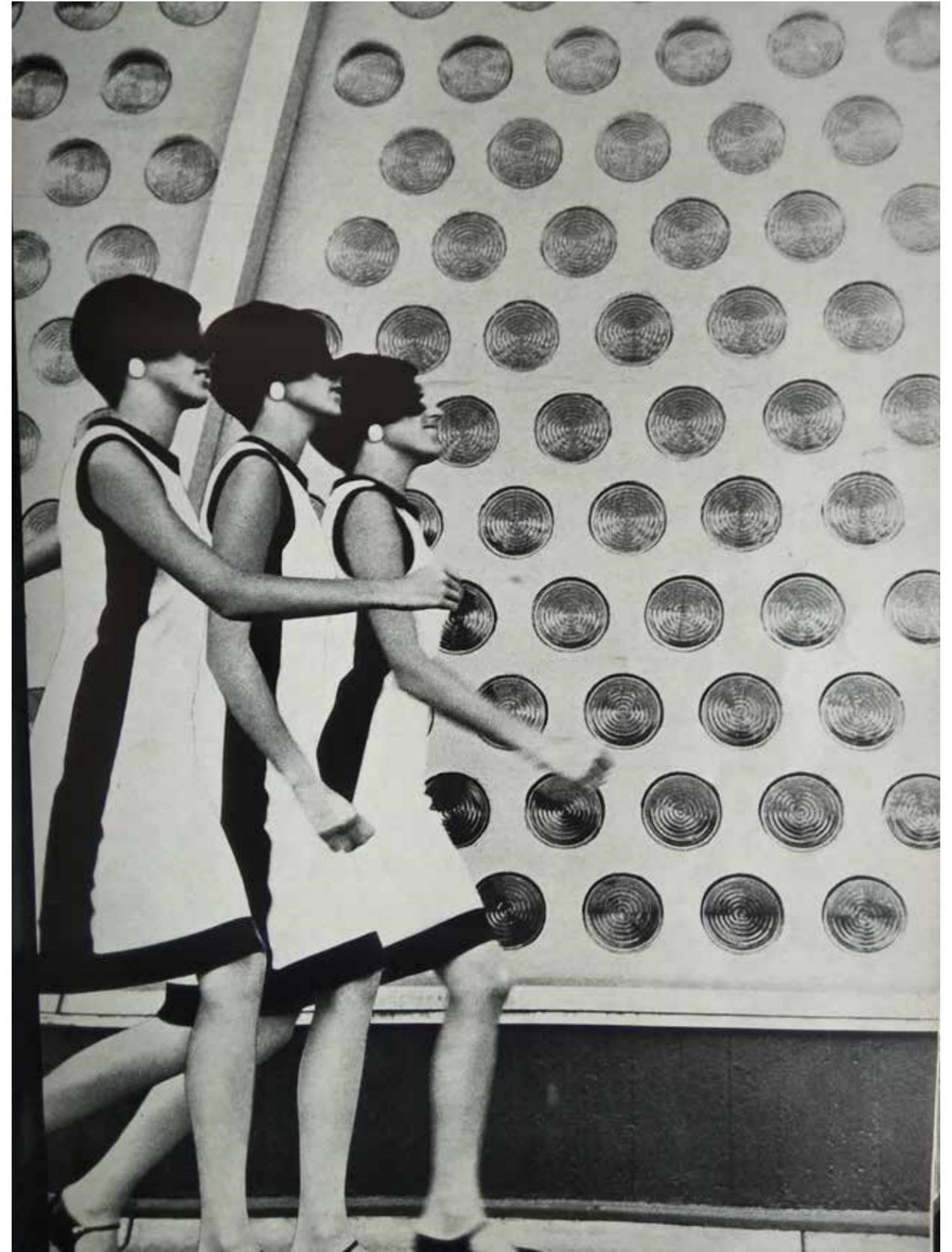
Helmut Newton was a German-born photographer (pseudonymous of Helmut Neustädter). He worked first for *Vogue Australia* and then for *Vogue Paris* in the Sixties. From the beginning of his career, he was interested in portraying women as he saw them: not idealized and abstract but emancipated and determined.¹⁹

Differently from Bourdin and Bailey, Newton preferred to set his shots outside the lights of the studio. In 1966, he realized one of the most interesting Op pictures, using the new *Philharmonie Berlin* designed by Hans Scharoun, as a background set piece for some German fashion creations. The porthole in frosted glass created the perfect canvas for a group of three identical women who are marching with bold steps. The composition is thus comprised of different elements that are juxtaposed into a larger black and white geometry.



Another series is the V&V (=Vêtements de Vacances) series of André Courrèges that shows a fashion «almost ready to leave to the moon, effective, black and white and hyper-practical».²⁰ The atmosphere is dark, nearly toxic and the whole scenario seems to be projected in a dystopian future. The back ground has been recovered by Rubartelli a few months later, although with softer and less dramatic tones.²¹

Vogue Paris, February 1966





Vogue Paris, February 1965



Above: *Vogue Paris*,
April 1966.

On the side: *British
Vogue*, May 1966.

The monumentality in Irving Penn

22. WESTERBECK
Colin, *Irving
Penn: a career
in photography*,
Chicago, The Art
Institute of Chi-
cago, 1997, p. 12.

23. HALL-DUNCAN
Nancy, *op. cit.*,
1979, p. 154.

Irving Penn was an American fashion photographer who began working first with *Harper's Bazaar* and then later for *Vogue*, first by becoming Alexander Liberman's assistant. Throughout his long career as a photographer, he experimented with different genres, ranging from reportage, still life and headless nude photos.²² He aimed to depict women in all their femininity by re-elaborating the classicism of XIXth century portraiture with a more modern interpretation but without any sort of eroticism.²³

Penn portrayed Op fashion as well, but according to his specific codes. In a series that showcases Castillo's geometric dresses in jersey - edited in different variations in both Italian and French *Vogue* - the models are static, like headless caryatids that seem to sustain something that we cannot see. An overlapping composition in addition to the hypnotic geometry of the dresses (in particular in the Italian version) adds

dynamism to the page. Penn also photographed the elegant optical two pieces made of ostrich feathers by the Italian designer Roberto Capucci, in a way that recalls more a portrait of the XIXth century in the background of aquarellus, than a contemporaneous creation: the woman seems to be painted and points her enigmatic look elsewhere.



**MAGLIA
GEOMETRICA**

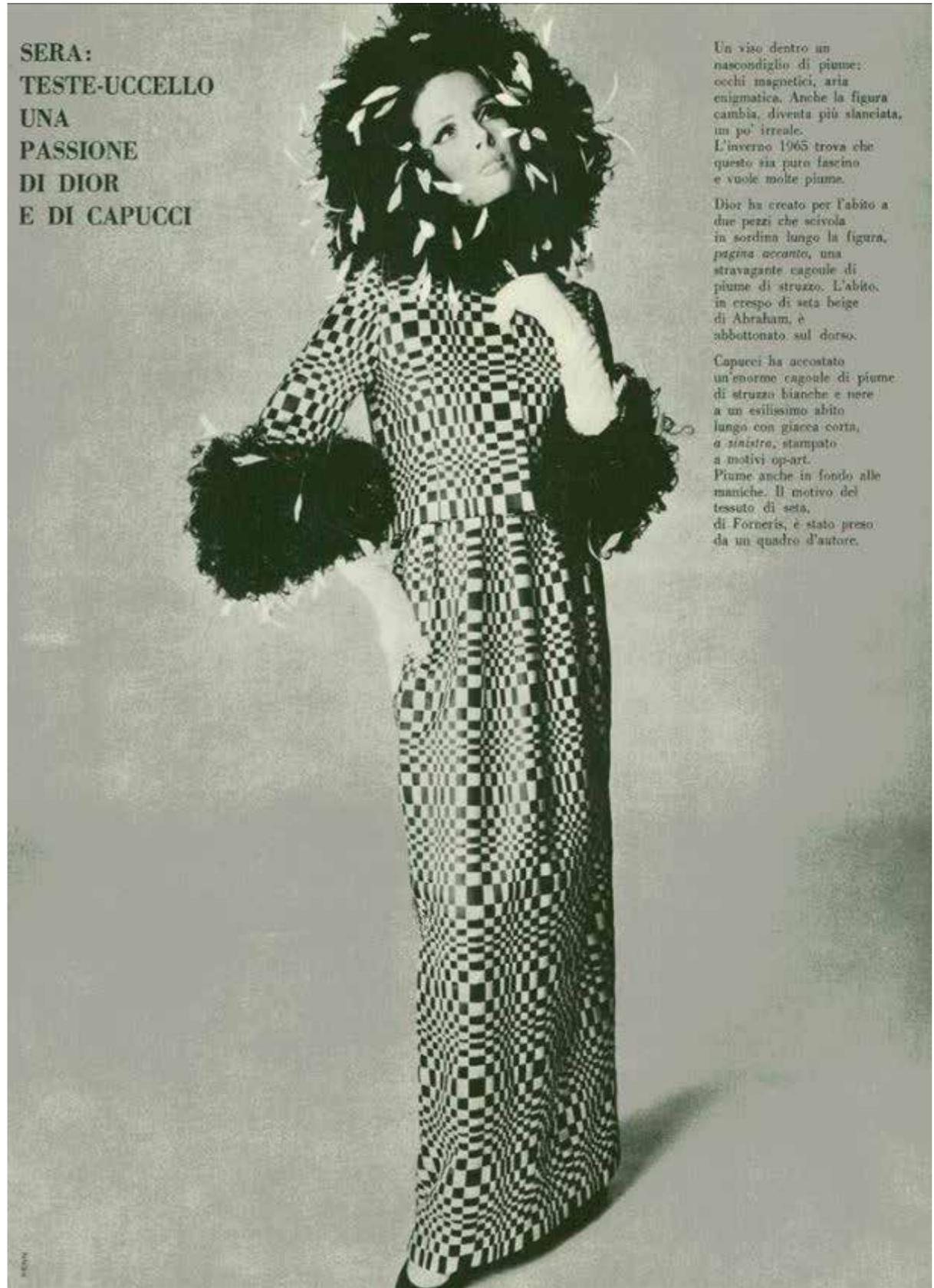
La più nuova maglia d'inverno porta la firma di Castillo. È geometrica, grafica, divertente come un tiro a segno: sul fondo nero le strisce dai colori vicinissimi si rincorrono, si incontrano, si allontanano seguendo un ordine solo in apparenza illogico. Formano riquadri, triangoli, losanghe che a volte scendono fino ai piedi, a volte salgono e si avvolgono intorno al collo. Dal centro verso destra. Tonalità cinesimo per i riquadri e le strisce di quest'abito lungo con colletto montante. Bianco totale per l'abito più semplice; il disegno geometrico è determinato dal motivo a X sul corpetto. Come disegni simbolici, i triangoli e strisce di quest'abito lungo con l'abito di maglia nera.

Above: *Vogue Italia*, November 1965. Appeared in a different version on *Vogue Paris* in October 1965.

On the side: *Vogue Paris*, January 1965.



Roberto Capucci Optical dress, *Vogue Paris*, September 1965. Appeared on *British Vogue* in a different version.



**SERA:
TESTE-UCCELLO
UNA
PASSIONE
DI DIOR
E DI CAPUCCI**

Un viso dentro un nascondiglio di piume: occhi magnetici, aria enigmatica. Anche la figura cambia, diventa più slanciata, un po' irreali. L'inverno 1965 trova che questo sia puro fascino e vuole molte piume.

Dior ha creato per l'abito a due pezzi che scivola in sordina lungo la figura, pagina accanto, una stravagante cagoule di piume di struzzo. L'abito, in crepe di seta beige di Abraham, è abbottonato sul dorso.

Capucci ha accostato un'enorme cagoule di piume di struzzo bianche e nere a un esilissimo abito lungo con giacca corta, a sinistra, stampato a motivi op-art. Piume anche in fondo alle maniche. Il motivo del tessuto di seta, di Forneris, è stato preso da un quadro d'autore.

In the search of other worlds with Henry Clarke

24. VAL Williams, "Obituary: Henry Clarke", *Independent (Online Archive)*, 13th May 1996, (Visited in October 2019).

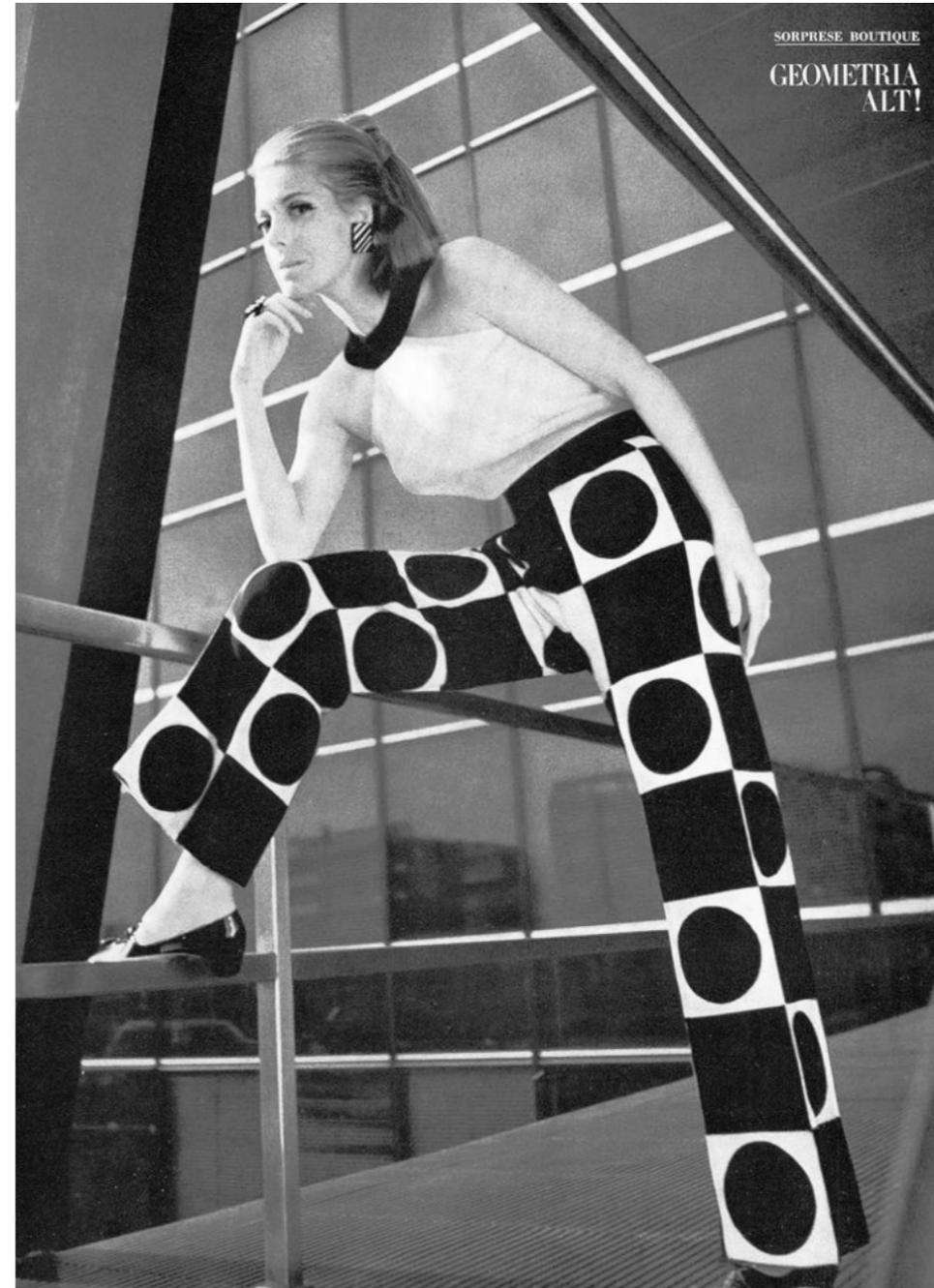
25. cf. p. 23.

Henry Clarke arrived in the fashion world in the late Forties, starting his career in the *US Condè Nast* studios. He attended Alexey's Brodovitch classes where he learned «how to combine the fantasy of fashion with the energy of photo-reportage». ²⁴ He understood the importance of using smaller cameras, like the twin-lensed Rolleifel with which he experimented, in order to keep pace with the times. Clarke moved from New York to Paris, collaborating for the French magazines between the Sixties and the Seventies. ²⁵

Clarke used a very different approach to depict optical fashion. Instead of shooting in studio, he preferred real yet metaphysical surroundings. He set the kinetic collection of Germana Marucelli and Getulio Alviani among undefined Egyptian ruins for *British Vogue*, where the models leaned statically on the hieroglyphs. The same approach is used for a series that he realized in Rome against the backdrop

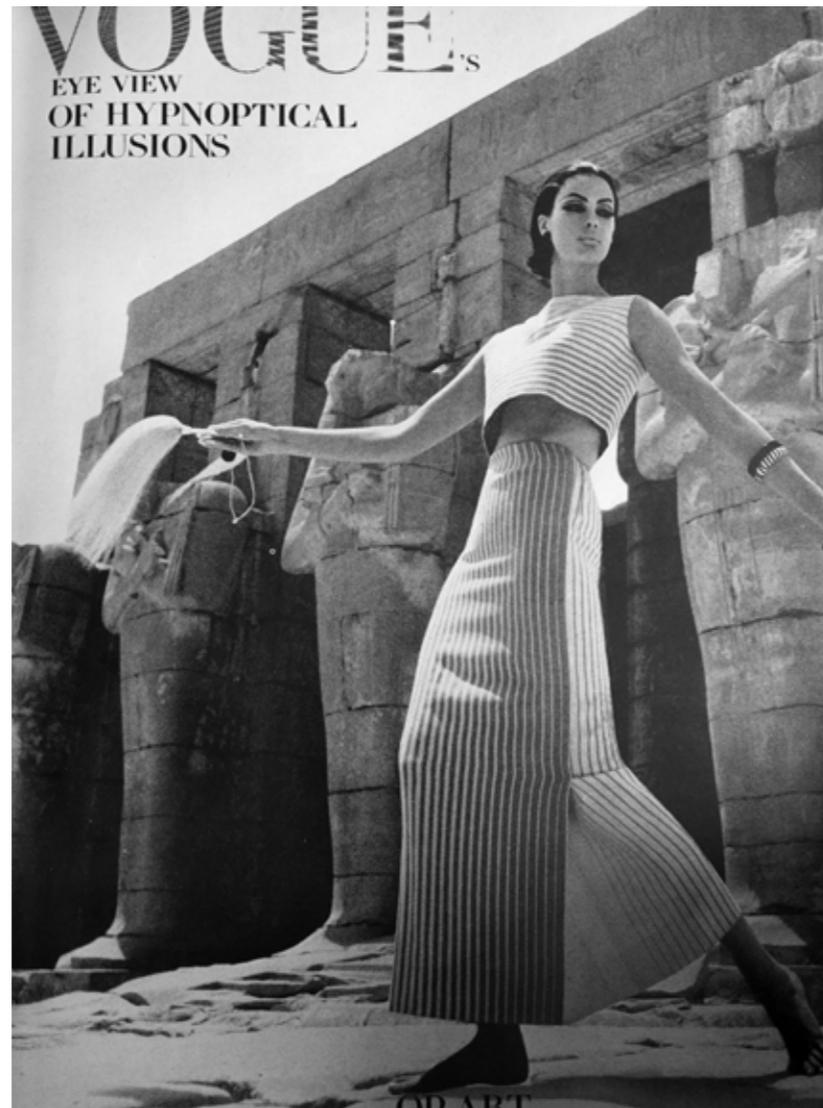
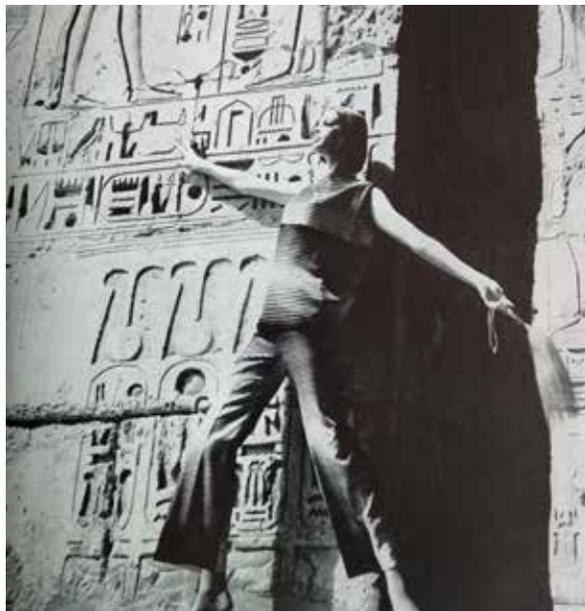
of the *Palazzo della Civiltà italiana*. **He is not interested in creating an evident connection between the subjects and an optical background.**

He makes new stories, in which the protagonists speak with their gaze rather than with their bodies: they look at you or towards a specific point, hiding a mysterious message about which we are unaware. Clarke also portrayed several noble Italian women for *Vogue Italia* (but some of them appeared on *Vogue Paris* as well), surprising them in intimate and domestic situations, inventing a sort of fashion reportage.



Opposite: Allegra Caracciolo, *Vogue Italia*, Mai 1965. Appeared in April 1965 on *Vogue Paris*.

On the side: Princess Luciana Pignatelli, *Vogue Italia*, June 1966



Opposite: Eye view on optical illusion. *British Vogue*, July 1965.

Above: *Vogue Italia*, March 1966. Appeared also in March 1966 on *British Vogue* in a different version.

Architectural visions in Mulas

26. GROTE Laura Guilda, *ModArte moda nell'arte*, Diploma Tesis II level, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milano, 2019, p. 32.

Ugo Mulas has been one of the most important Italian photographers of the XXth century. His approach to photography began with reportage in the years immediately after the war. He asserted the need for depicting and criticizing the society that surrounded him. He began to work for magazines such as *Domus* and *Rivista Pirelli*, for which he realized a series of architectural pictures. Starting from the Sixties, he established artistic partnerships with both Italian and international artists, documenting the contemporary art scene and editing a series of books with his results.²⁶ He had a strong preference for black and white because of its more ideological and therefore less realistic effect.

Mulas's approach to fashion photography appears quite varied and adapted to each specific situation. He was able, with an architectural accuracy, to fuse together model and dress, realizing one of the most succeeded optical pictures in *Vogue*. He created a composition in

which every stripe of the dresses becomes an extension of the body, that nearly doesn't exist anymore. The women portrayed by Mulas are not no more human beings; they are like trapped in the pictures, transformed into frozen statues.



On the side: *Vogue Italia*, July-August 1966

Above: Marimekko, cover costume, *Vogue Italia*, June 1966.

Another interesting series is the advertising made for the *Taroni* Store. The photographer chose a dark set for the scene, placing the models inside transparent boxes that work as a sort of vitrine. The darkness of the background - that occupies almost the totality of the page - highlights the black and the white of the clothes, illuminated by selective lights.

Like Henry Clarke, Mulas portrayed Allegra Caracciolo, realizing a fashion reportage about the newest styles of Roman couture. She wears an elegant black and white suit that create an interesting modern contrast with the old palace in the background, **showing us at the same time, how this popular trend could be ennobled by the nobles.**

Who are you, William Klein?



Above: Taroni Store adv, *Vogue Italia*, March 1967.

On the side: Allegra Caracciolo, *Vogue Italia*, December 1965.

27. NAGGAR Caroline, *William Klein photographe etc*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, Herscher, 1983, p.5

28. HERSCHDORFER Nathalie, *Papier glacé : un siècle de photographie de mode chez Condé Nast*, Paris, Thames Hudson 2012, p.148.

29. cf. p. 3.

30. Anonymous, "Cape Courreges", *British Vogue*, March 1st, 1965, pp. 107-109. cf. p. 12

William Klein isn't just a photographer: throughout his life he has also been painter, graphic designer, and film maker.²⁷ He met Alexander Liberman during an art exhibition. He offered him a job at *Vogue* after having seen his pictures for *Domus* magazine. Despite originally being from New York, he spent most of his life in France, where he also collaborated with the French edition of *Vogue*. He invented a new language for fashion photography, choosing to work on the streets, experimenting with different cameras and angles.²⁸

Klein didn't shoot many Op oriented pictures for *Vogue*, but he neither was a stranger to the phenomenon, as can be seen in the aesthetic of his satiric *Who are You Polly Maggo?*²⁹ He realized the famous opening series of the André Courrèges collection, that appeared both in the Italian, French edition (in *British Vogue* it was shot by Bailey).³⁰ Apparently at odds with his critical po-

sition on the artificiality of fashion, he shows the real essence of Courrèges's work. The pictures established a breaking point with any other images showed before. The models are deliberately artificial, enigmatic as if they didn't belong to our planet, they wear matte sunglasses and very short skirts (for the time) above the knee. It was a radically different approach from the playful and dynamic images of the same collection shot by David Bailey.

He also portrayed the star Audrey Hepburn wearing some of the Michèle Rosier's optical creations. Despite the absence of any kind of environment, the series is incredibly real and natural. The first page opened with the actress sitting on the floor, looking towards the reader, while playing with a dog. In the following images she is shown in the act of buttoning a striped trench coat and in another she is pretending to march with an ironic look. Like a reportage, the pictures seem more like a behind-the-scenes peak of an interview rather than a fashion photo shooting.



Above: Cape Courreges, *Vogue Italia*, March 1965. Appeared also on *Vogue Paris*.

Opposite: Audrey Hepburn, *Vogue Italia*, May 1966. Appeared also on *Vogue US* in January 1966.



Franco Rubartelli the storyteller

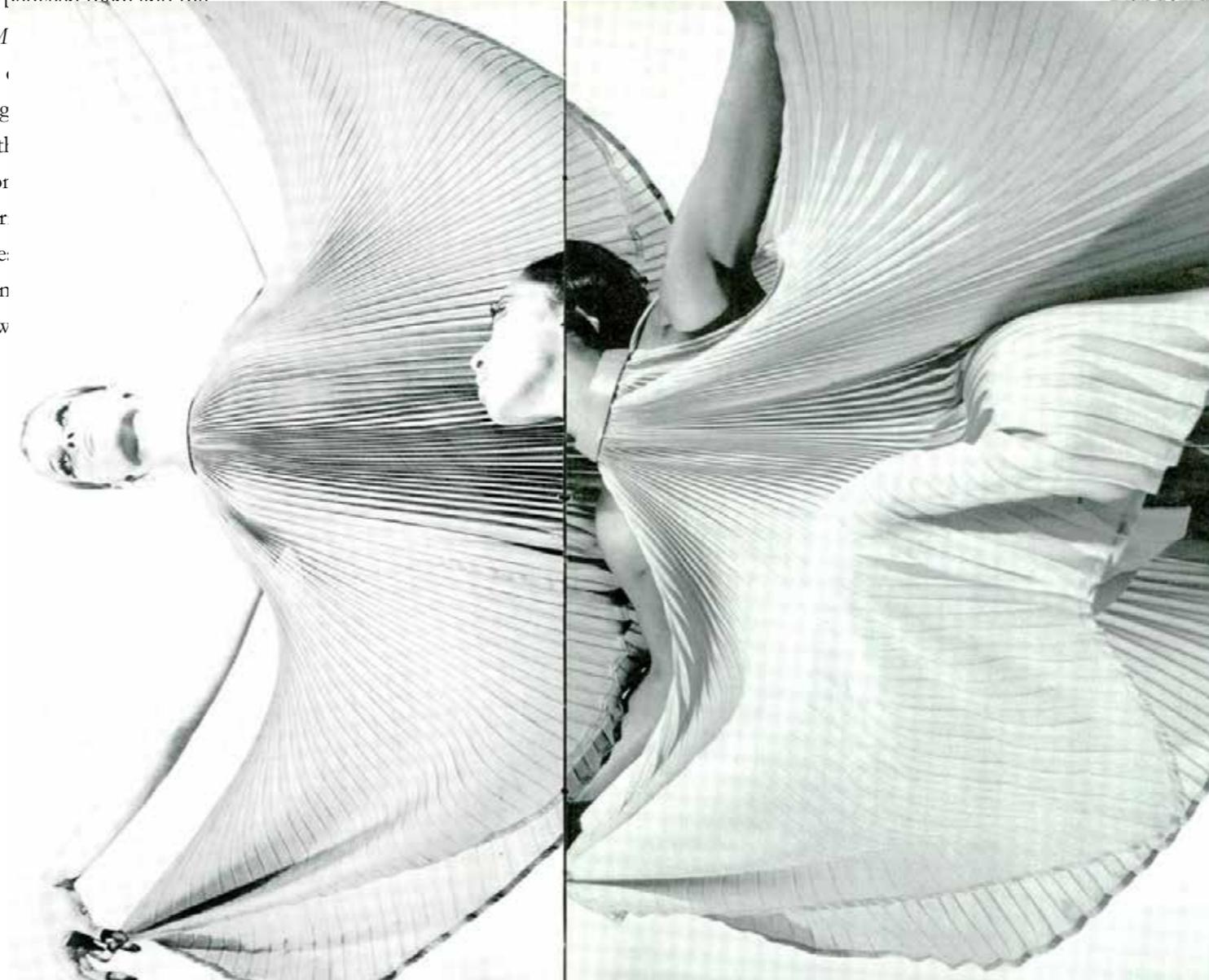
31. BORRELLI-PERSSON Laird, "Photographer Franco Rubartelli Talks to Vogue About Love, Veruschka, and Diana Vreeland", *Vogue US (Online Version)*, 29th August 2017 (Visited in October 2019).

32. Anonymous "La moda chiama Marte", *Vogue Italia*, September 1965, p. 42.

Franco Rubartelli was a self-taught photographer before starting to work for *Vogue*. He was discovered by Diana Vreeland, the *US Vogue* editor in chief, who decided to hire him after having seen some pictures of Françoise Schluter, Franco's wife. The both moved to Rome, where they worked alongside the Italian editor of *Vogue*, Consuelo Crespi. Between 1964 and 1970 he realized a great number of images for the different editions of the magazine, becoming particularly known for his shots depicting **Verushka**, with whom he had a long love affair.³¹

He didn't own a specific artistic style, but he was able to adapt with extreme versatility to many different situations. However, it's necessary to credit to him a certain modern way of shooting that aligned with the trends of the international scene. The images of Franco Rubartelli tell ill-defined stories, captured in the core of the action. The choice of using real backgrounds and

the absence of eye contact with the models, **reinforces the fiction**, establishing a barrier between them and the readers. In *La Mion call Mars*, he which the protagonist come from another world by lines and geometry. When shot, he transformed Luna Donyal into a kinetic collection ready to fly (as worlds).

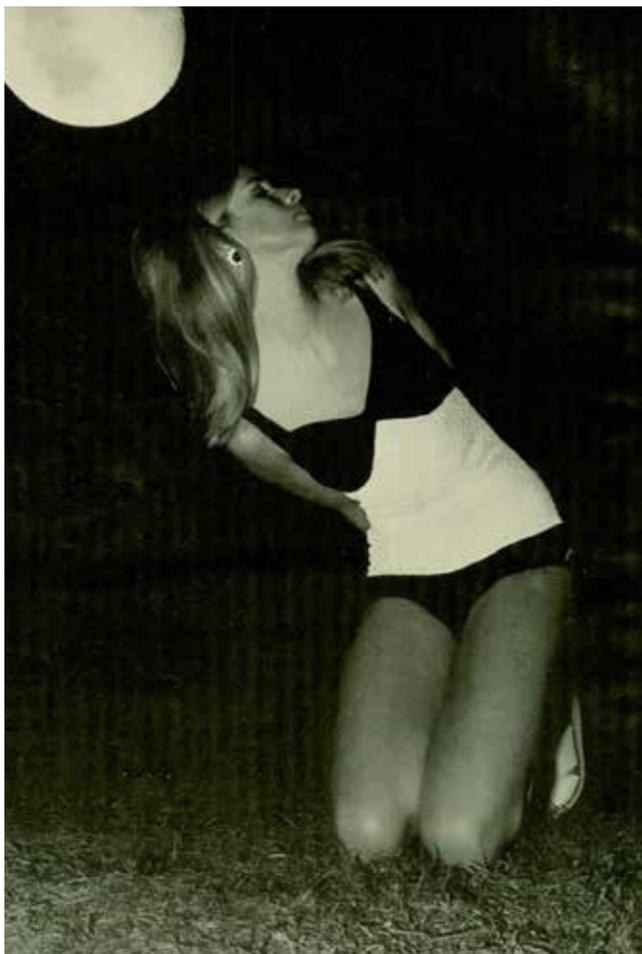


Le geometrie della moda si addolciscono sugli abiti di maglia, soprattutto quelli lunghi. Ogni movimento dilata, incurva, fa deviare certe linee del disegno e la sua costruzione rigida svanisce. È un effetto nuovo, piacevolissimo. In questa pagina: le strisce nere, beige e ruggine si incontrano al centro dell'abito di maglia di lana shetland e sembrano chiudersi. Colletto alto rovesciato. Mirta, Orecchini e bracciali di jais.



On the side: Germana Marucelli and Getulio Alviani's Optical Line worn by Verushka and Luna Donyale, *Vogue Italia*, December 1966.

Opposite: Verushka, *Vogue Italia*, January 1966.



Fondo bianco, più
 nero, più bianco.
 Le tinte forti,
 accostate
 contrastanti del
 due tonalità
 anche nel
 costume più bello,
 armonizzato
 da raggi di
 accostate. In
 bianco,
 bianco, Cole of
 California,
 Trench di Hirtle,
 Milano.
 Nella pagina
 accanto: un costume
 intero che
 veste come un abito
 a due pezzi.
 Il tessuto di
 lana pesante a
 jacquard
 ricamato a
 bordato di bianco
 con un effetto
 di scarpone.
 Il resto
 è nero. Foto:

is page: *Vogue Italia*,
 1965.
 site: "La moda chiama
 ", *Vogue Italia*,
 umber 1965.



Completo da sci, in questa pagina.
 Gigantesca spina di pesce bianca e nera
 per i pantaloni a calzamaglia di tessuto
 elasticizzato. Accecante incastro di bianco
 e di nero per la giacca a vento di popeline.
 Elmetto rigido, lucente.
 Emilio Pucci boutique, Firenze.

Completo dopo-sci, nella pagina accanto.
 Bordi e bottoni grigio piombo
 scaldano le superfici piatte e perfette
 del casentino bianco.
 Il cappuccio-paisamontagna lascia
 scoperti solo gli occhi. Glans, Milano.
 Scarpe alte nei due colori, con tacco di cuoio.
 Calzaturificio di Varese, Sez. Alta Moda.

Swinging with Ronald Traeger

33. WERNER Thomas, *The Fashion Image: Planning and Producing Fashion Photographs and Films*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 1.

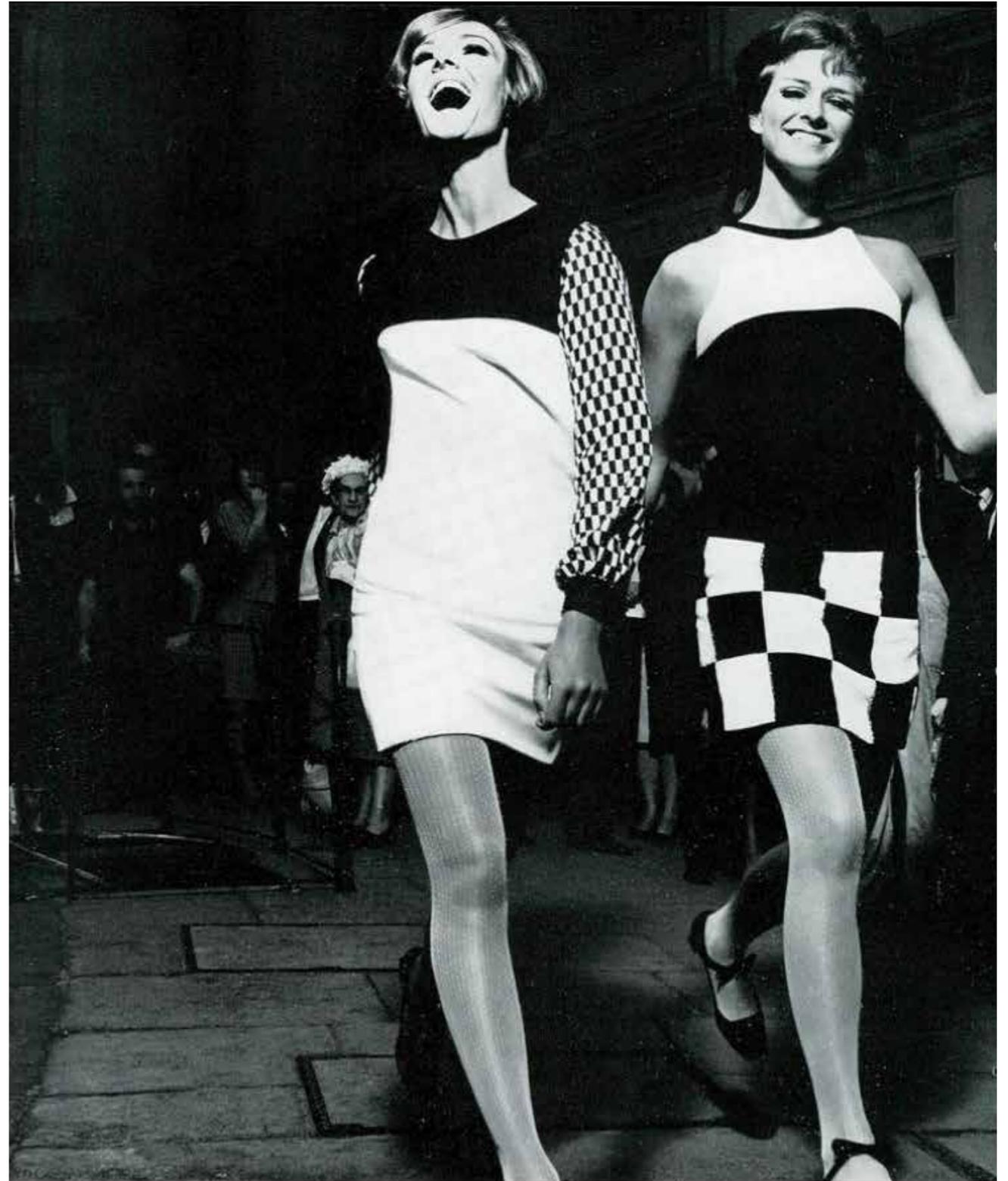
Little is known about Ronald Traeger's life. He was born in America and later moved to London where he met and married the fellow photographer Tessa Traeger. His short but active career as fashion photographer for *Vogue* – he died at the age of 32 - left us incredible images of the Swinging London. He is responsible for some of the most iconic images of the British model Twiggy. Like the new generation of photographers, he preferred the smaller format of the 35mm, which allowed him to shoot fashion in a very new way, free from the heavy tripod of the studio.³³

He knew how to use black and white with absolute elegance, depicting the two opposite tones in all their purity. Traeger pointed selective lights on the clothes without leaving space for half-tones: the white of the dress fuses with the blank page and vice versa.

For a shooting of optical ski suits, he expanded the background through a system of mirrors, so that it is difficult

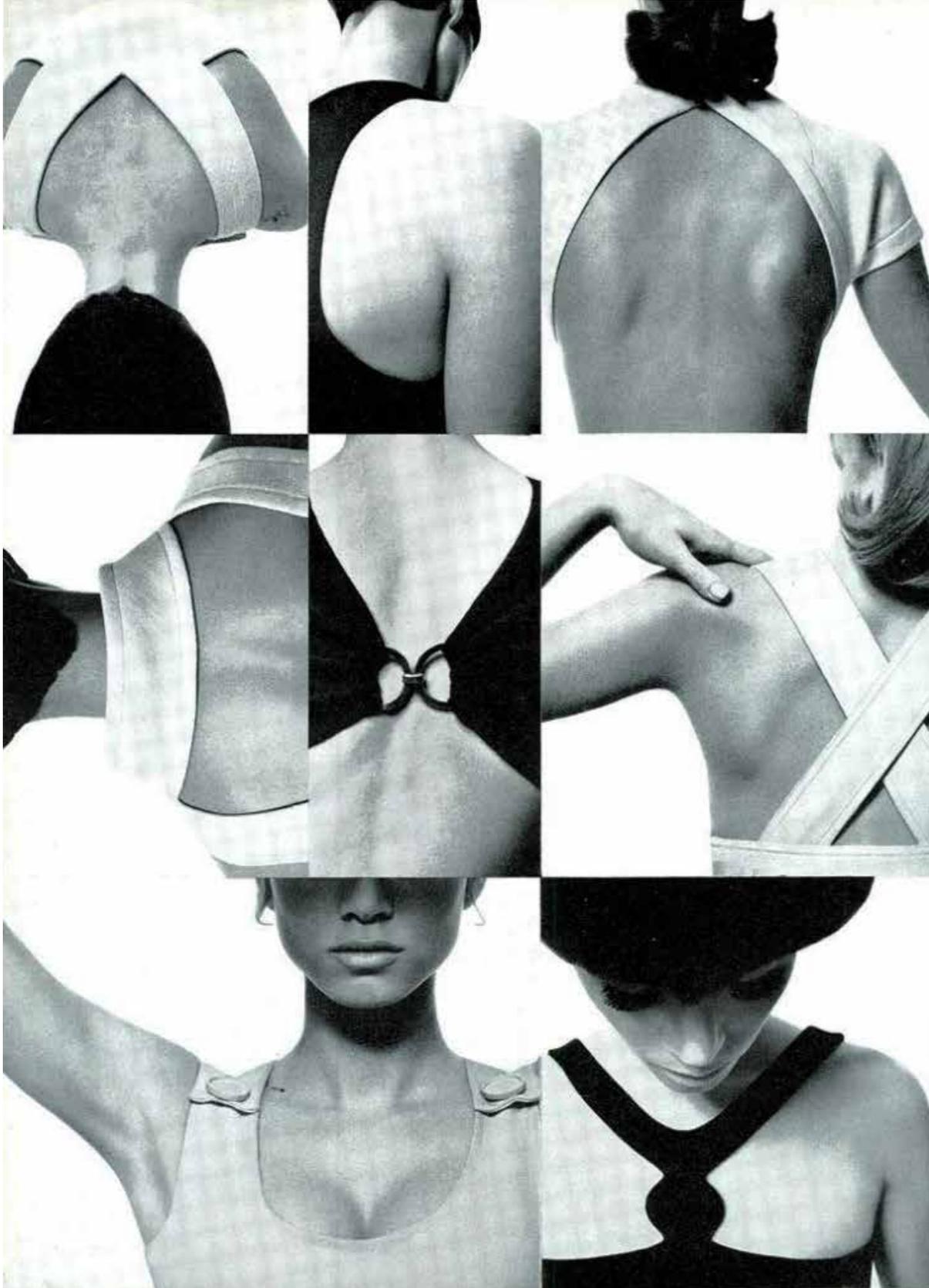
to distinguish where the fabric starts and ended. There is no perfection anymore: the visages and the bodies of the models are cut, fusing with the clothes and the compositions. With the same principles, he made a real optical-geometric series, like an alphabet, with just the backs and the front of black and white clothes.

Vogue Italia, February 1966.



**l'avanguardia inglese
è allegra,
esuberante,
contagia
tutto il mondo**

Agile e danzante, sempre più all'avanguardia, la moda inglese corre e fa allegri girotondi nelle austere strade di Mayfair. Ora, anche per le sere piccole, le sere giovani, le gonne sono corte, ma corte!... al limite delle valze; i pantaloni invece sono lunghi e ampi, e si rannufano da gonne. Sopra: crespo bianco e nero compatto per i due abiti a motivi geometrici. Jean Varon. A destra: tessuto di fili d'argento, il pigiama lunare. Harriet, Filibia di filigrana sulla cintura bassa. Gli stivaletti sono di vernice bianca. All'estrema destra, un abito di lurex intessuto d'oro e di nero, con due spalline incrociate che chiudono la scollatura. Femme 90.



Vogue Italia, June 1966.



Below: *British Vogue*, November 1965. Appeared on *Vogue Italia* in January 1966.

On the left: *Vogue Paris*, April 1966.



en
 a Drop-
 arreaux
 et blanc,
 ssant vers
 doublé de lof-
 lor. Erès, 265 F.
 beige en gabardine
 ine extensible Prouvost
 toire pour Hauser Sport
 eries Lafayette. 150 F. Page

Others

34. Ellie, "Swayne's Swinging Sixties", *Telegraph (Online version)*, 25th April 2012 (visited in October 2019).

Vogue attracted and collaborated with a great number of photographers, some of whom were forgotten over the many years. Photographers such as Aldin realized a significant number of images for *Vogue Italia* in the years 1964-1967 which characterized by an inner vibrating energy. Erik Swayne, another photographer from the *East End* of London that used to hang out with the *Terrible trio* in the 60s, met the *Rolling Stones* and shot one of the most optical creation of Mary Quant.³⁴ A beautiful striped trench on dark background was photographed by a certain Daiho, of whom there are no others traces.

Other photographers, like Norman Parkinson and Brian Duffy collaborated occasionally with *Vogue* as well as other fashion magazines. Duffy captured the energy of a vibrant robe in zigzag pattern worn by a presumably very young girl. Parkinson, a veteran of fashion photography that started his own business in the Sixties, attempts with optical

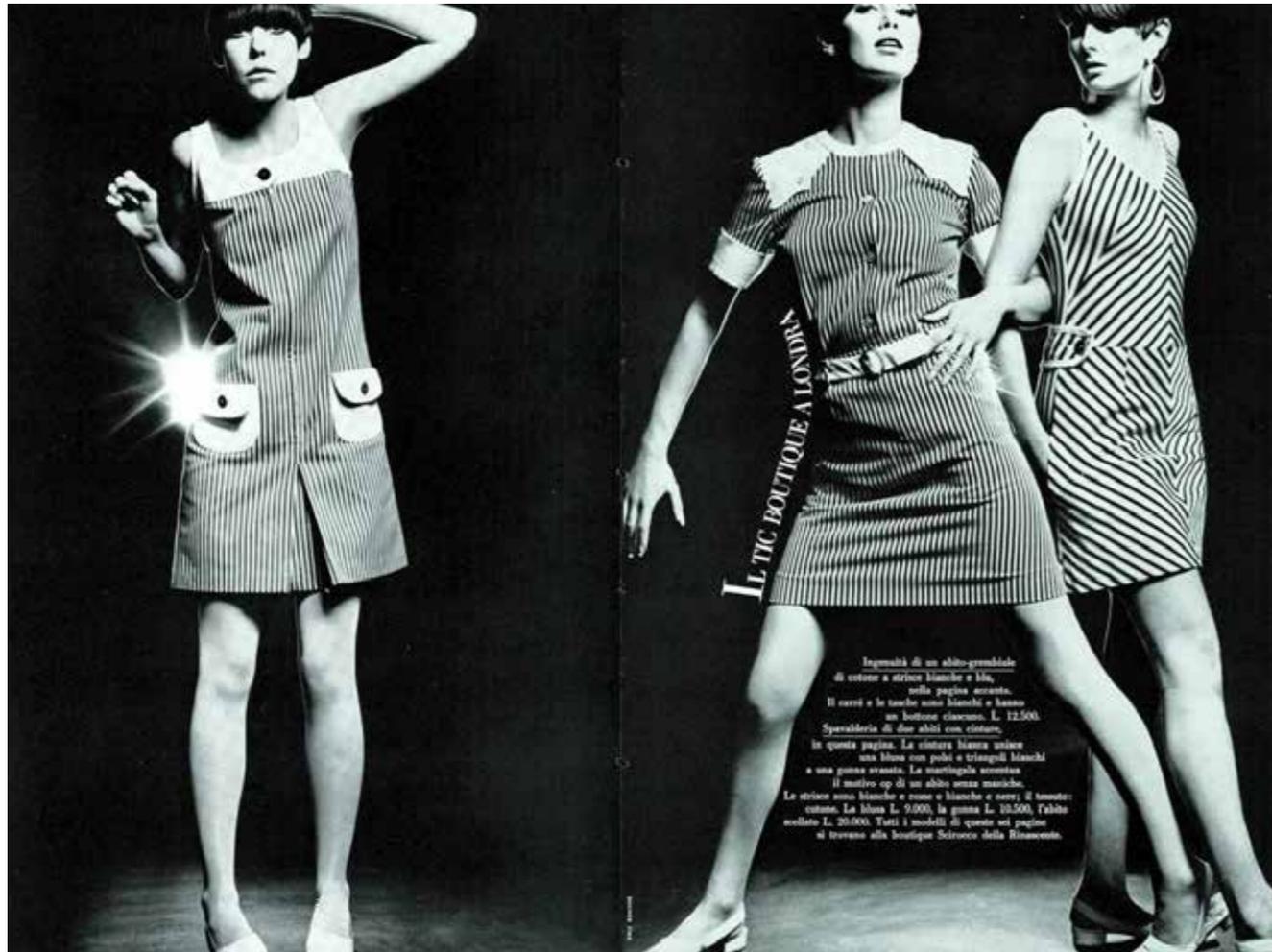
art to build a bicolour beam as the only scenography, where the models could lay down..



British Vogue, June 1965.



Vogue Paris, February 1966. photo by Daiho.



Above: *Vogue Italia*, March 1967. Photo by Aldin.

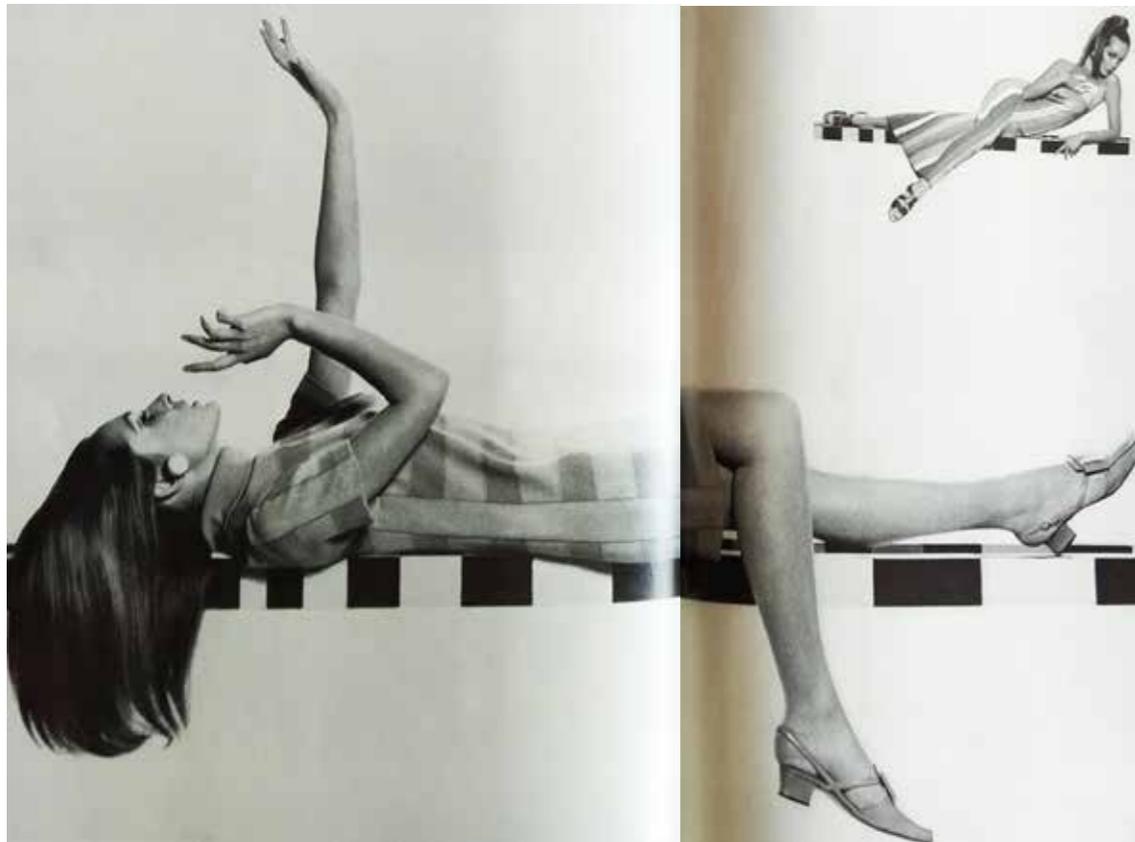
Below, on the right: *Vogue Italia*, February 1966.



Above: *Vogue Italia*, May 1966. Photo by Eric Swayne.

On the side: *Vogue Paris*, May 1966, Photo by Miralda.





British Vogue, May 1966. Photo by Norman Parkinson



British Vogue, February 1967, Photo by Norman Parkinson.

Advertising

The last genre of fashion photography we find, and probably the least noble but no less historically important, is the advertising category. In some aspects, all fashion photography is advertising



since it responds to market demand – and this is probably its most criticized point – but it is always guided by an artistic and editorial direction. While fashion brands today invest heavily in advertising, in the Sixties, it was mostly boutiques and certain firms with a more direct sales tone that purchased advertising space.

Many boutiques - often run by retailers that sold clothes under big names (sometimes under licenses) - used to have their own studio photographers

who often imitated the poses of the magazines photo shoots. Within the Op phenomenon, we see a great number of boutiques that sold collections in prêt à porter, including Nina Ricci, Ungaro, Cardin. It is interesting to see how the optical clothes and accessories advertised in the photos appeared sometimes even more Op (and often kitsch) than the creations showed in the photographic services.



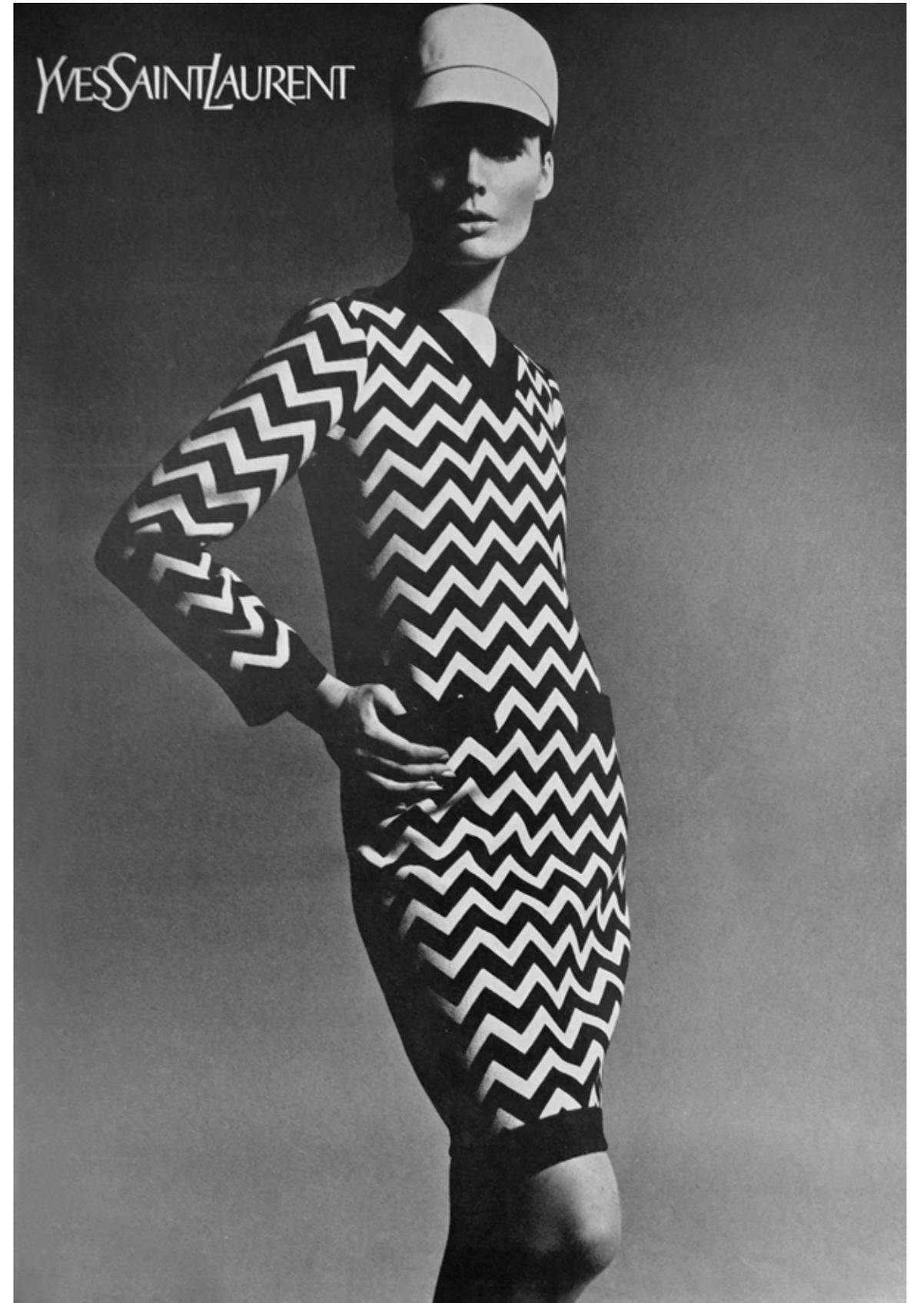


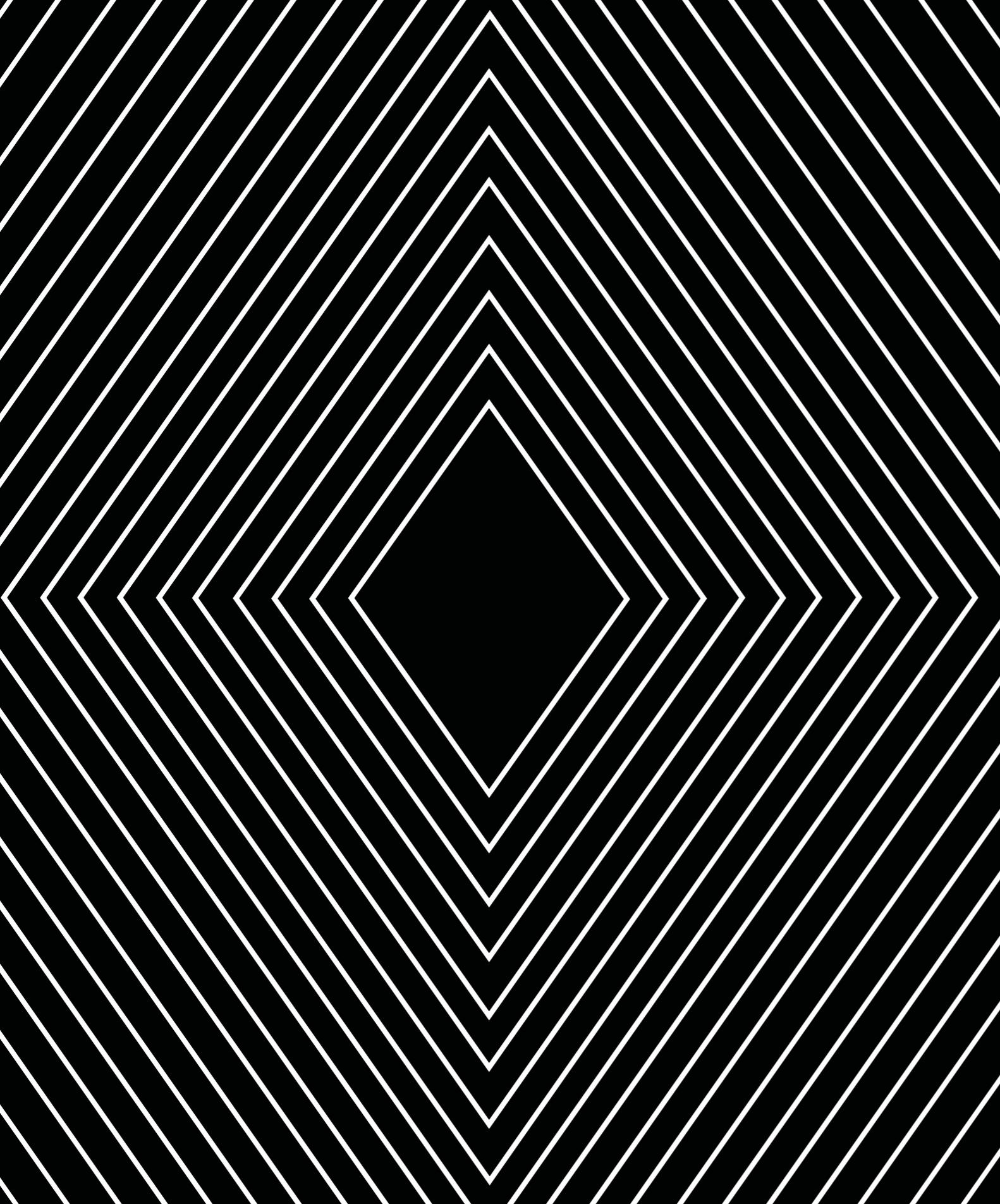
Above: *Vogue Italia*, December 1966.

On the right: *Vogue Paris*, September 1967.



Vogue Paris, March 1966.





Sociological Implications

1. PALOMO-LOVINSKI Noel, *The World's Most Influential Fashion Designers*, New York, Barrons Educational Series, 2010, p. 54.

2. TALMEY Allene, "La Pillola Oggi", *Vogue Italia*, January 1968, p. 61.

3. POLAN Brenda, *The great fashion designers*, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 123.

4. PALOMO-LOVINSKI Noel, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 54.

5. POLAN Brenda, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 125.

6. PALOMO-LOVINSKI Noel, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 53.

7. HERSCHDORFER Nathalie, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

The Sixties were essential years for the emancipation of women.

A combination of events put the basis for the following feminist movements of the 70s, that demanded equal rights and other fundamental requests such as abortion and maternity.¹ The invention of the contraceptive pill –that was actually prescribed to married women in first time and therefore they start to talk about «family planning»- was fundamental for their independence, allowing them to have more control of their body and sexuality.² The economic boom of the Fifties and Sixties across the major western countries, improvement of living standards: job opportunities grew – including women - and disposable incomes were available for everyone.³ People could economize and dedicate part of their salary to leisure activities, such as buying a car and getting a mortgage for a house.

In the Sixties, the fashion industry traversed a new era: women afforded to buy more clothes for themselves, thanks also to the birth and diffusion of the prêt-à-porter; the miniskirt,

whose invention is still object of debate between Courrèges and Mary Quant, marked the beginning of a new freedom of expression.⁴ In those years many stylists began to design clothes for sport, including ski suits, tennis clothes, flat shoes. At this purpose, Courrèges believed that the sportswear had the potential of being used for everyday use in everyday life: they just should be ennobled by using materials such as silk or wool and implementing the elements that made the sport wears so comfortable.⁵ Ten years before, Coco Chanel already claimed the needs for working women of wearing clothes without constraints, designing in 1954 her response to the *New Look* of Dior.⁶

The role of female fashion magazines within those transformations varied according to the country and their target audience. In the Sixties, *Vogue* was one of the most widely-read monthly magazines at international level and was published in six countries including Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.⁷ Among its competitors, only *Harper's Bazaar* was able to compete in terms of international influence. *American Vogue*, which released over a million copies each month, was more susceptible to

the market demand and a conservative target audience: this enabled the European editions -that were initially in the background - to experiment and grow creatively, becoming trending leaders of the latest in fashion.⁸

British Vogue depicted London as the center of a contemporary youth scene, portraying free and independent young women. Models such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton became the icons of the young generations, embodying new standards of beauty and femininity.⁹ *Vogue Paris*, instead, was still in part dominated by the elegant and classical dresses of the *Haute Couture Parisienne*. On the other hand, free space was also given to a new group of designers and photographers, who portrayed women wearing short and geometric dresses that seemed to come from the future. *Vogue Italy* was the most recent of the three (it was founded in 1964), but it started from the beginning to show the latest of both national and international styles.

A glimpse of the conditions of the women in the mid-sixties can be found between the pages of *Vogue Paris*, where the feminist and sociologist Evelyne

Sullerot wrote an article about the situation in France.¹⁰ She was the first woman to write on this subject in these magazines with the authority of a specialist. In the article, titled *Maintenant que la femme travaille* (*Now that the woman is working*), she claimed that in the Sixties there were fewer female workers than in the past - in 1920 there were over eight million and in 1966 just six -, but what now has changed is the quality of work. Before women worked to survive -while women from wealthy families didn't work - and they were often low paid. In the Sixties, more

8. HERSCHDORFER Nathalie, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

9. HALL-DUNCAN Nancy, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 158.

10. SULLEROT Evelyne, « Maintenant que la femme travaille », *Vogue Paris*, June 1966, p. 96.



11. Anonymous « Le point de Vue de Vogue- Ou allons-nous ? » *Vogue Paris*, March 1966, p. 159.

12. POLAN Brenda, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 123.

13. CALÓ Giorgia and SCUDERO Domenico, *Moda e arte. Dal decadentismo all'ipermoderno*, Roma, Giangemi Editore, 2009, p. 175.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

and more women (especially from the young generations) were pursuing a higher education just like men, aiming to become journalists, economists, diplomatic, etc. Toward the end of the article, she affirms that the change is not easy: women have still to front sexism and the male power on work, particularly in certain fields such as politic sciences, but on the other side, the interactions on work were increasingly de-sexualizing.

The Optical Woman

An editorial published in *Vogue Paris* in March 1966, titled “Where are we going?”, questioned which direction fashion was taking.¹¹ Like a statement, it affirmed that it was moving “Towards a more fast, alive and daring woman”, that shows her legs, “but also arms and often the back”.

It was a kind of fashion that, like never before, was made for the body, “We say no to the modifications of the female body, narrow sized, increased breast, puffed hip. The true female body, that one that’s naked”. “We ask the stylist to help us, to give us our freedom back”.

This announcement highlights the deep

transformation that fashion had undergone in a few years, more and more stylists had begun to design clothes for a new generation of women who didn’t want to dress like their mothers, that wore some variation of the *New Look*.¹² The skirts became shorter, the dresses and shoes more comfortable, and the prices more accessible: the Op style fully embraced all those transformations, bringing a breath of fresh air to the fashion system. Consequently, a new generation of fashion photographers modernized the genre, refusing static traditional posing and experimenting with the possibilities offered by black and white in the studio. However, we are still far from the realism of the Seventies, **and in the optical images there is no trace of any feminist or sexual revolution.**¹³

The absence of a real context, replaced by a white background or by exotic or futuristic settings, projected the models into another world, elevating them as divine entities rather than women to identify with.¹⁴ The *Optical* model, although incredibly modern and athletic, has nothing to tell us. She’s swallowed up by an optic vortex, that incorporates her into a **pure aesthetic Op compo-**

sition. Sometimes only a single part of her body appeared - the leg, the front or the back - making her part of a geometric picture. **The images depicting Op dresses rarely try to go under the surface.** Even the most *swinging* image depicts the shadow of an exclusive world we aim to be part of.

It’s precisely the superficiality of fashion that is one of the main topics in *Who are you, Polly Maggoo?* In one sequence, when the producer of the reality claimed that “this girl (Polly) doesn’t exist” and “it must be found the truth under the makeup”, Gregoire, the director, answered that “the external is also the reality”. Pauline Mari in *Le Voyeur et l’Halluciné* asserts that Polly is Op by nature and that she’s the essence of the metamorphosis, just like Op art she changes her dresses and make-up continuously and she’s blamed for her presumed emptiness.¹⁵

Certainly, there were different levels of realism in depicting women that varied according to the photographer. Helmut Newton was probably the one that came closest to a realistic depiction, as well as Traeger’s rare shot of Optical dresses on the street.¹⁶ Other photog-

raphers, like Bailey, had no intention of achieving *political topics*. He believed that fashion photography was a “portrait of someone wearing a dress” and it shouldn’t be political. For him, his apolitical stance was a form of politics.¹⁷

This aspect brings to light one relevant fact: the lack of a **female gaze**. In the Sixties, there were female photographers in fashion and some of them worked for *Vogue* as well, but they were an absolute minority. However, the woman photographer among the Op pictures was impossible to find. In the optical images, women still struggle to emerge as *thinking beings* rather than objects trapped in the printed page. An exception is however represented by the celebrities that posed in optical clothes, such as Audrey Hepburn and women of the Italian aristocracy, best known to the public and therefore became sort of *ambassadors* of the Op fashion.

The diffusion of the prêt-à-porter

Since its birth ready-to-wear, also known as prêt-à-porter, has been closely related to the industrial process. It is therefore unsurprising that it was born

15. MARI Pauline, *op. cit.*, 2018, p. 37.

16. cf. p. 25.

17. HARRISON, Martin, *op. cit.*, 1999, p.34.

18. SEGRE REINACH Simona, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 79.

19. GRUMBACH Didier, *Histoires de La mode*, Paris, Editions du Regard, 2008, p. 149.

20. Cardin was expelled from the *Chambre Syndicale Parisienne* (but shortly after reintegrated) after having launched his Boutiques selling collections in prêt-à-porter (POLAN Brenda, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 101).

21. SEGRE REINACH Simona, *La moda*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 2005, p. 79.

22. Anonymous "Tutte le luci sul prêt-à-porter", *Vogue Italia*, April 1966, p. 99.

23. Anonymous « Le point de Vue de Vogue- Ou allons-nous ? », *Vogue Paris*, March 1966, p. 159.

24. Cf. p. 4.

in the United States, the most advanced country at the time of the late Forties.¹⁸ Curiously, in Europe and Paris specifically, ready-to-wear passed first through the Haute Couture, that was facing in those years a severe crisis. As a result, French prêt-à-porter tried to distance itself from the American industry, by trying to be an updated deluxe version of the Haute Couture.¹⁹ Throughout the fifties it was a relevant discussion among the couturiers of the *Chambre Syndicale Parisienne* who worried about the dignity and future of the profession. By the beginning of the Sixties, almost everyone, with the exception of Chanel and Balenciaga, had their own prêt-à-porter collection.

Not everybody had the resources to manage an industrial production which led some of them to delegate to third parties the manufacturing. Others, like Cardin, started to sell contracts of licenses that turned into an increasingly common (and lucrative) business.²⁰ Towards the Seventies, Italian prêt-à-porter established itself in the international fashion system, toppling the Parisian predominance.²¹

The impact of prêt-à-porter on soci-

ety was extremely powerful, resulting in a wide variety of offerings and a general lowering of prices. *Vogue Italy* astutely defined the phenomenon as a contemporary, agile, fresh trend that «satisfies in every moment the wish of obtaining immediately and holding something new».²² *Vogue Paris* affirmed that prêt-à-porter is the only life-line for the survival of Haute Couture. In this way, designers could both reach more people to dress and offer more variety of choice. The *tailleur* is *démodé*, and the trend should head towards a more uninhibited way of dressing that is not ashamed of showing legs, even for the not-so-young woman. Fashion should start existing and walking on the street.²³

Economic implications

The revolution of prêt-à-porter embraced entirely the **optical phenomenon**, that by its side was well suited to the idea of seriality and industrial production.²⁴ Op fashion involved a different and younger generation of designers, favorable to innovation in the fashion system. On the other end of the spectrum, a new kind of clientele demanded affordable prices and more

possibilities of choice.

However, this revolution in fashion, (that should not be confused with the today's *fast fashion*) still excluded a significant sector of women that belonged to the working classes (including employers, workmen etc)²⁵. An analysis of the average wages of that period demonstrates just that.

It must be also considered that *Vogue*, like other fashion magazines, showcased the latest styles from the world of Haute Couture and the most famous fashion designers, and therefore those dresses could be bought only by a limited wealthy section of the readership. The majority of people purchased clothes in department stores or through mail-order catalogues such as *La Redoute* in France or *Postalmarket* in Italy. However, unlike from the catalogues, *Vogue's* aim was not just selling clothes, but also tendencies, articles, updates for an accessible price and without distinction of target.²⁶

Vogue was a vitrine that gave the possibility of finding the addresses for who was interested in, but most of the time the costs of the dresses weren't even

displayed. There were different policies for each of the three editions of *Vogue*. *Vogue Italia*, for example, used to indicate the prices only within specific columns sponsored by the department stores such as *La Rinascente*. The British and French editions showed the costs more frequently, especially for those clothes that could be found both in Paris and London. The following analysis of the costs of the clothes and accessories extracted by *Vogue* has the purpose of understanding, by comparing salaries and essential goods, the effective size of the diffusion of the Op fashion.

Vogue Italia (See the price list on the next page).

The price list shows an evident reduction in cost of dresses from the category of prêt-à-porter, considering that in 1965 a tailored dress cost around 35.000 L. The clothes by Courrèges were instead above-average price, costing almost half of a worker's monthly salary, (after all, he once admitted "I'm perfectly aware that my prices are completely crazy").²⁷

In 1965, an **Italian** employee earned

25. SEGRE REINACH Simona, *op. cit.*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 2005, p. 115.

26. *Vogue Italia*: 500 L; *Vogue Paris*: 4-10F; *British Vogue*: 4s -/-. Today it's 5 €.

27. BUTAZZI Grazietta, MOTTOLA Alessandra, *op. cit.*, 1991, p.78.

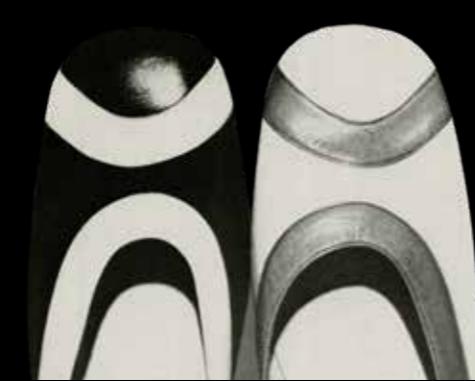


Example of prices between 1965-1968 on *Vogue Paris*:

- Coat b&w by Jacques Heim: 1260F
- Paco Rabanne, t-shirt in black and white circles: 350F
- Pullover in Cashmere: 130F
- Op art shoes in white leather: 125F,139F
- Sunglasses for Christmas: 60F
- Coat in vinyl by Courrèges: 250F
- Ski suits in B&W: 350F
- Swimming suit: 82F
- Op skirt: 150F

Example of prices between 1965-1968 on *Vogue Italia*:

- Pant skirts for young ladies, ideal for the bike, by Coin: 2.600 L
- Striped dress, in cotton, by Cose: 25.000 L
- Striped shoes by Ferragamo: 17.500 L
- Tailleur (Prêt-à-porter) by Marucelli: 24.000 L
- Young dresses in tricot by Mary Quant: 14.000 L
- Tailleur in gabardine by Courrèges: 42.000 L
- White Gloves by Courrèges: 2.500 L



Example of prices between 1965-1968 on *British Vogue*:

- Summer dress: 7£ 9s
- Striped Shoes: 3£ 9s 11d
- Suit (Skirt+jacket) by Susan Small: 22 gns
- Black and white Fur: 26 gns
- Ski sport-anorak striped: 27 gns
- Streamlined shoes: 13 gns
- Swinging dress by John Bates: 11 gns
- Sunglasses: 5 gns



28. “Stipendi e Beni di Consumo dal 1945 al 2000”, extract from the Libro-Agenda “Fino al 2001 e ...Ritorno”, Francomputer.

29. www.storiologia.it/ the data are taken by the website Leonardo.it, which analyses the salaries and the life's cost between the 1945 and 2005. (visited in September 2019).

30. Anonymous, « Les salaires de 1950 à 1975 », *Economie et statistique*, N°113, July-August 1979, pp. 15-22.

31. <https://www.thedesignlab.co.uk>: cost of living (visited in September 2019).

32. DARREN BOYLE, “A window into the past: A look back into the London of 50 years ago when the sixties truly began to swing”, *Daily Mail (OnLine Version)*, 11th May 2014 (Visited in October 2019).

33. Anonymous, “Cadeaux Noel”, *Vogue Paris*, December 1965, end pages.

around 86.000 L monthly (today it would be estimated 1200-1300 €).²⁸ In proportion, a kilo of bread costed 70 L and a pasta package 250 L; lux products like a *Fiat* family car and the television ranged from 1.050.000L and 150.000L.²⁹

Vogue Paris

In **France**, the average salary of a worker of the middle class was approximately 1500F (a bit less for women), while for an employee, it was around 920F for a month.³⁰ To make a comparison, a kg of bread cost about 1.30F (2.05F in 1970, with the inflation).

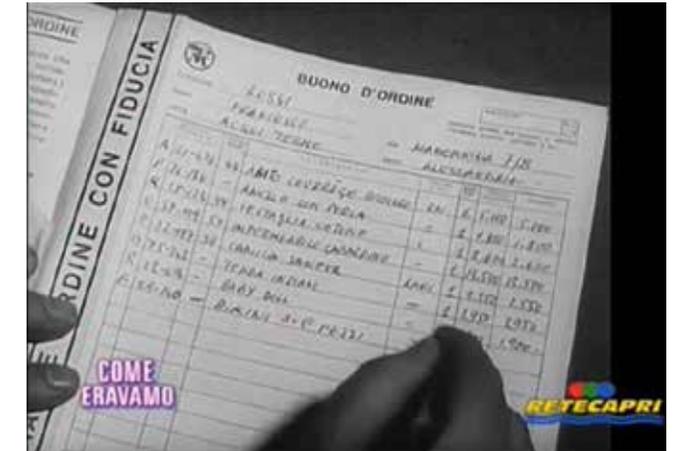
British Vogue

A British employee of the Sixties earned around 846£ a year (70£ c.a monthly).³¹ The average house price was £2,530 while a pint of beer cost 8p, a loaf of bread 5p and a packet of 20 cigarettes just less than 25p. In comparison, a season ticket to see Manchester United in 1960, when Sir Matt Busby was manager and Sir Bobby Charlton a star player, cost £8.50.³² It's interesting to see how even the dresses designed for the young generations were probably too expensive for them.

The three price lists points out one relevant aspect: Op fashion displayed in *Vogue* could never become a fashion for the masses. Even for the middle classes it would have required a certain economic effort, although the arrival of prêt-à-porter and more efficient manufacturing processes made it more accessible than ever before. This doesn't take into account the ease with which these styles could be copied and adapted by a large number of manufacturers and boutiques. After all, it was pretty rare that an Op dress in black and white geometries, realized by a famous couturier could be recognized as such; **the large diffusion made them similar and anonymous, since the optical forms weren't that original anymore.** It's sufficient to look at the mail catalogues of that period, that sold vague imitations of the Cardin's dresses, or also the “Cadeau de Noël” concealed at the end of the magazine that suggested cheap Op ideas for Christmas.³³

Basis for further experimentations: the Space Age Style

Before Neil Amstrong and Edwin Aldrin set foot on the Moon on July 20th, 1969, fashion had already imagined a



Two still frames from the video *Anni 60 - Il fenomeno Postalmarket - La politica in Italia*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPB3ozPPVJg>

Advertising from *La Redoute*, 1966. and Cover from *Jours de France*, 1967.

34. CALÓ Giorgia e SCUDERO Domenico, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 144.

35. SOZZANI Franca, "Space Age", *Il Blog del direttore, Vogue Italia (Online Version)*, 31th August 2012, (Visited in October 2019).

36. Anonymous, "La moda chiama Marte", *Vogue Italia*, September 1965, p. 42.

37. CALÓ Giorgia e SCUDERO Domenico, *op. cit.*, 2009, pp. 145-6.

38. PALOMO-LOVINSKI Noel, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 54.

future set in outer space. A group of artists represented by the previously mentioned Courrèges, Cardin and Rabanne launched in the mid-Sixties the *lunar style*, aiming to create a perfect synthesis between design, architecture, and fashion.³⁴ All superfluous elements were eliminated in favor of squared and functional cuts, designed with rulers and compasses.³⁵ Synthetic and plastic materials replaced traditional fabrics, establishing a totally new style without any connection to the past.

A comparison with the Op style is necessary if we intend to fully understand the aesthetic choices of the *Space Age* style. The geometries of Op art were resumed and applied to colorful fabrics, replacing the use of black and white (with the exception of Courrèges, who was always devoted to white). In *Vogue* magazine, this hybridization between space age and Op fashion is evident in the photo feature "Fashion calls Mars" by Rubartelli featuring models that seemed ready to fly into space.³⁶ The feature had a sort of post-apocalyptic ambience. The models interacted with transparent- curved panels in plexiglass while wearing striped ski suits, mantles,

and squared helmets.

While in the Op style we still find elegant and feminine forms, the cut of the spatial style is taken to the extreme, depriving it of any form of sexuality. Cardin released *Spatial* collections for both men and women, taking a unisex direction with minimal differences between them. Paco Rabanne explored unusual materials such as metals, plexiglass and aluminum, held by pincers and hooks instead of wires and scissors.³⁷ This kind of fashion, which was clearly unwearable in an everyday life context, left instead a significant heritage in our fashion culture. In fact, it is in that period that the concept of sportswear was established, which Courrèges pointed out as the future of fashion; comfortable and practical clothes that liberate women from uncomfortable constraints.³⁸ Stylists started to design not just miniskirts, but also pants, flat boots, and squared headgears.

The ski suits, transforming into futuristic space suits and appearing in the pages of *Vogue* magazine, reflected this



idea. (fig.). The space clothes were also employed in several movies of that period such as *The Tenth Victim*, with wardrobe designed by Giulio Coltellacci and realized by the Fontana sisters, and *Barbarella*, in which Jane Fonda wears a Paco Rabanne creation.³⁹

One last point must discuss fashion photography and how the space age style offered an entirely new world to explore. Contrary to the Optical style, the space fashion recovered a context in which the photo could fit: aliens, the moon and new planets.

On the opposite page: Luna Duniyale, *British Vogue*, November 1968.

Above: *Vogue Italia*, December 1967. Photo by David Bailey.

At the side: *British Vogue*, July 1968. Photo by Paul Anthony.

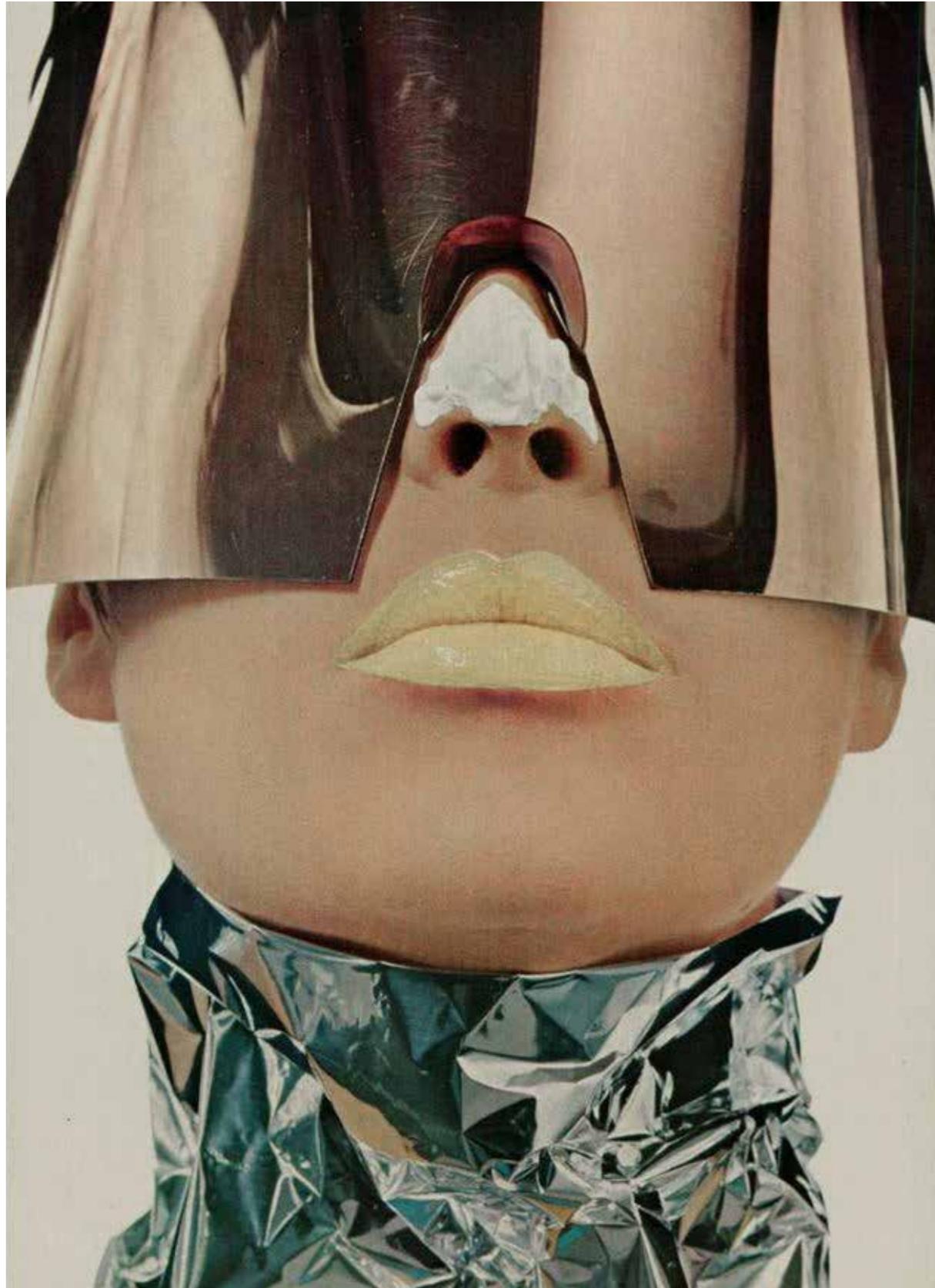


39. CALÓ Giorgia e SCUDERO Domenico, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 147.



The heritage today

In the last few years, the booming rediscovery of Optical art, led



British Vogue, January 1967. Photo by Irving Penn.



Above, on the left: Space clothes from Cardin, *Vogue Paris*, September 1967.

At the side: *Vogue Italia*, October 1968. Photo by Irving Penn.

Above: Paco Rabanne, *Vogue Italia*, April 1967.

40. Enrica Morini in *Bianco e Nero*, (Novara, Istituto geografico De Agostini, 1991) affirmed that throughout the history of fashion, the black and white return periodically in trend, but the last case is represented by the Optical style.

41. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/Gareth-Pugh-biography> (visited in October 2019).

42. <https://www.irisvanherpen.com> (visited in October 2019).

tions such as *The eye attack* at Museum Louisiana in Copenhagen (2016); *The illusive Eye* at the Museum del Barrio in New York (2016); *Vertigo, Op art and a History of Deception* at Mumok of Wien (2019) and a major retrospective of Vasarely at Centre Pompidou (2019).

In fashion the Optical style has been cyclically imitated and reinterpreted by many fashion designers, but nevertheless there will never be a return of black and white as happened in the Sixties. The conditions that occurred in this decade (kinetic art, the space race, the youth movement etc) were so singular that no further aesthetic choice justified such success.⁴⁰ Alternatively, in just two years, Op fashion exhausted itself and ran out of new things to say, and it was therefore necessary to find new paths to explore.

In the following years, several stylists and photographers paid a tribute to Op fashion and to the art of the Sixties - although always in isolated instances - while others re-elaborated the forms and the principles to create something new. After over fifty years there are fewer limits to creativity, many of which have already been surpassed,

like the height of the skirt or the naked back, and innovative technologies offer new space for investigation

An interesting example is represented by Gareth Pugh, a British fashion designer who is known for «his dramatic, often sinister, inflated and constructed creations».⁴¹ For his 2015 collection he showed a series of hypnotic black and white clothes, that are constructed to conceal the wearer. Another designer channeling the legacy of optical illusions and Op art is Iris Van Herpen, a Dutch designer who explores the possibilities offered by non-traditional techniques such as the 3d printing. She conceives futuristic collections, focusing her interest on the movement of the bodies, creating spectacular visual-kinetic effects.⁴²



At the side: *Vogue Italia*, March 2016.

Above: Emilio Pucci, collection Fall 2015.

On the right: Gareth Pugh, collection Spring 2015.



Direttore: Daniel Hechter. © Louis Vuitton - 2013

Louis Vuitton, Spring Collection Campaign 2013.

LOUIS VUITTON

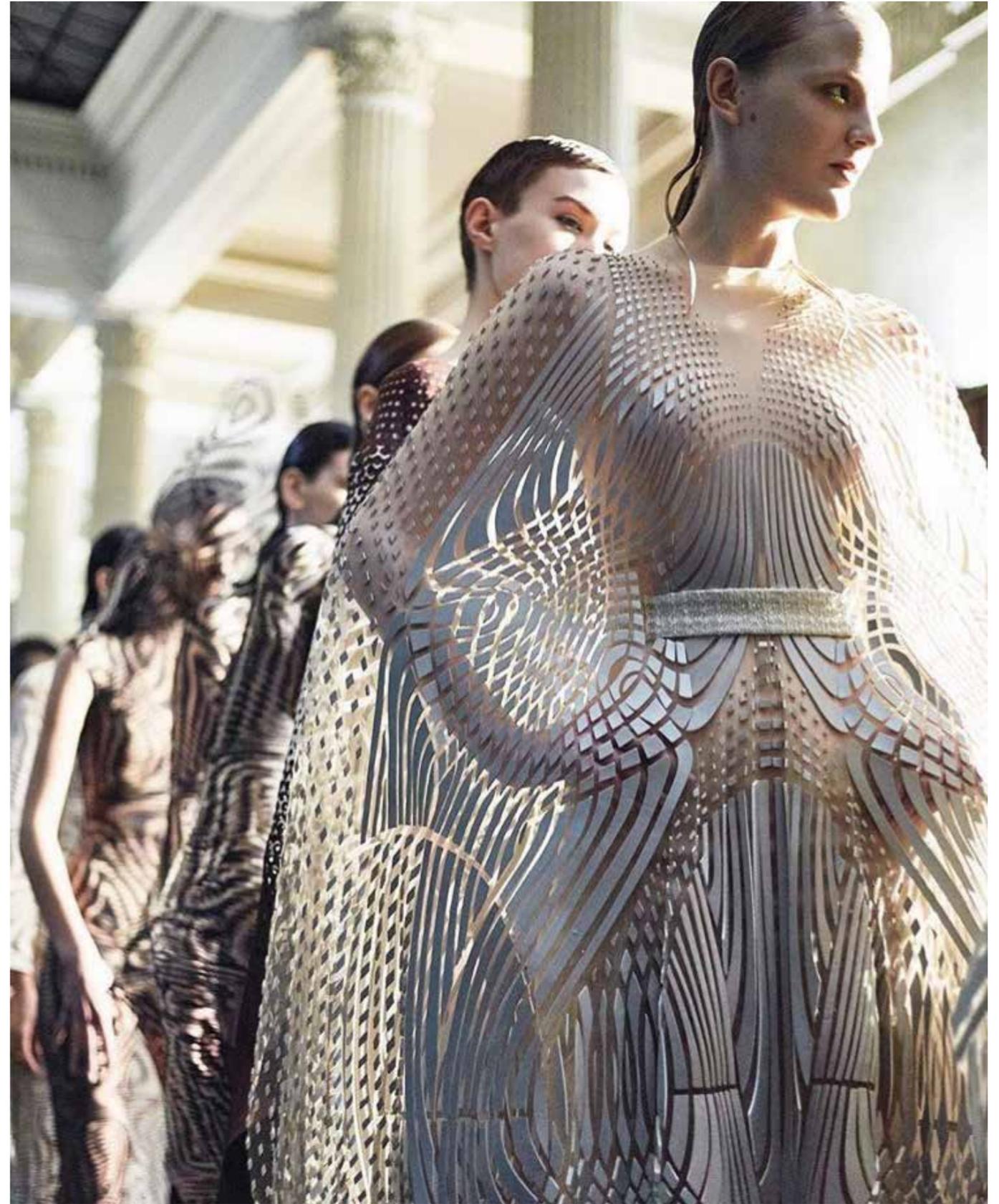


Vogue Italia, June 2013. Photo by Greg Lotus.



On female model:
 Michael Kors broadcloth
 jacket, shantung shirt, and
 broadcloth shorts. Mordekai
 by Ken Borochoy chokers
 and cuff. Chanel gloves, bag,
 and shoes. vintage hat.
On male models, from left:
 Salvatore Ferragamo wool
 jacket. Hardy Amies cotton
 shirt. Giorgio Armani wool
 pants, and tie. Gucci shoes.
 Louis Vuitton wool and
 silk jacket. Giorgio Armani
 cotton shirt, and tie.
 Salvatore Ferragamo wool
 pants. Falke socks. Tom Ford
 cummerbund and shoes.

W Magazine, January 2013.



Iris Van Herpen, Spring Collection 2018

Epilogue

O *Op in Vogue* questions, resorting to dozens of images, the actual role of photography within the diffusion of Op art in fashion. Op art was a phenomenon with a remarkable media coverage at international level, as it has been for the contemporaneous Pop art, defining a new relationship between media and art.

However, we should only partially consider its application in fashion as an artistic expression: fashion took from the Op art the most notable elements to use them to its advantage, keeping at a distance from the true principles of the artistic movement to create something different. Those aesthetic forms started therefore to appear almost everywhere, among accessories, swim wears, ski suits, shoes etc, often unbranded: this unification made the work of the single couturier of firm anonymous and less distinctive. Even the term *Op art* was used by the magazines without a real coherence and specificity, appearing as simply *Op* with a certain frequency.

Within this context, fashion photogra-

phy, under the artistic direction in the magazines, was the main medium of diffusion of the Op art in fashion and therefore it had a decisive impact not only on the creation of its own aesthetic language, but also of the *Op way of being*. It amplified its perception for a considerable period, defining a recurrent Op aesthetic line in fashion magazines (in this case, *Vogue*) for over three years. Photography turned colours off, creating black and white compositions even from coloured dresses. Despite the variety of styles of the different photographers, it could be possible to find common elements that identify those optical pictures as such. Moreover, two kinds of Op pictures can be found: those realized by the most notable fashion photographers -and therefore characterized by a certain refined aesthetic- and those shot with the primary purpose of selling. While the photographs that belong to the second category highlight the real nature of the mass Op phenomenon without any particular sophistication, it is instead the first type of pictures that conveyed the Op art to the wider public.

The third part is dedicated to the context where the Op art fit into: the

Sixties were intense years, full of sociological changes, including the economic boom, the protests, the youth quake, the mutation of the female condition. Within those events, Op fashion became a diffused trend, that embraced the policy of the prêt à porter and modern and comfortable forms of dresses, addressing a new type of woman.

However, **Op photography** turned out to be only half interested communicating sociological and political changes that the society was traversing throughout the Sixties, remaining always on a superficial and aesthetical level. But perhaps there was not really the need to achieve that purpose: the protagonists were the optical patterns, that put the model in second place, transforming her into an *optical woman*, objectified by a male gaze.

Afterwards, Op fashion inspired over the years several stylists that reinterpreted it: the forms and the cuts changed from the Sixties, but in terms of decorations, there is hardly something new to say. However modern technologies and fabrics offered new inputs for further explorations, like in the case of the

work of Iris Van Herpen.

After all, fashion suffers from obsolescence, as Gillo Dorfles said “Fashion is like oil and not wine: aging does not improve but gets worse”.¹

1. DORFLES Gillo, *op. cit.*, Genova, Costa e Nolan, 1984.

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Vogue Italia has been consulted on the online archive (<https://www.voguearchive.it>, visited between July and October 2019).

Credits for the other images

p. 12: *Manifeste Jaune*, (online) https://monoskop.org/Kinetic_art

p. 14: Fig. 1, Cover of *The Responsive Eye*, (online) https://monoskop.org/The_Responsive_Eye

p. 14: Fig. 2, Study on paper (1928), from Jozef Albers' class at Bauhaus. Extract from POPPER Frank, *L'art cinétique*, Paris, Gauthier-Villars, 1970.

p. 15: Fig 3, Victor Vasarely: Tau-Ceti, 1964, 2,50x 2,50. Extract from *L'art cinétique*.

p. 15: Fig 4, Giacomo Balla: *Dinamismo Muscolare di un cane al guinzaglio*, oil on canvas, 1912. <http://www.arte.it/giacomo-balla>

p. 22 and 23: Still frames from *Blow Up* and *Qui êtes-vous, Polly Maggoo ?*

p. 26: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/vasarely-victor/>

p. 42: *Lunettes pour une vision autre*, Julio Le Parc. <https://www.artribune.it>

p. 97: The two images of catalogues were found on announces from Ebay. <https://www.ebay.fr> and <https://www.ebay.co.uk/> (visited in September 2019).

p. 103: <https://www.vogue.es/pasarelas/otono-invierno-2015-2016-pret-a-porter/emilio-pucci->

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