

# B L O O M S B U R Y F A S H I O N C E N T R A L



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# Space Age Fashion

by Suzanne Baldaia

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*Editors' Introduction: During the 1960s, America exploded with political and social protest. The civil rights movement, dissent over the American involvement in Vietnam, and women's rights were just some of the factors that resulted in the wholesale rejection of the status quo. The old rules fell by the wayside for clothing too. Designers began creating pants suits for women to wear for formal occasions. Men broke out of their gray flannel suits and became peacocks. British rock groups, inspired by American blues singers, popularized a new form of music called rock and roll that influenced fashion on both sides of the Atlantic. Against this backdrop, the United States engaged in a race with the Soviet Union to go into outer space. Being modern was in style in art, architecture and design. Suzanne Baldaia illustrates how the American fashion magazine Harper's Bazaar signaled modernity by presenting clothing as part of the 'space age.'*

'Dresses to wear on the moon.' 'Lipstick for space travelers.' 'New designs for unearthly beings.' Phrases like these in fashion magazines, often accompanied by stunning photography, showed American women how to dress for the modern world in the 1960s. Space age styles by André Courrèges, Pierre Cardin and Paco Rabanne bring to mind clean, crisp lines, geometric shapes, smooth leather or vinyl, sleek white jumpsuits, shimmering silver and helmet-like hats. The look seems 'modern' regardless of current fashion styles. In fact, *space age* is synonymous with *modern* according to *Roget's Thesaurus* (Morehead 1985: 530).

Consumers choose fashions not only because they are aesthetically pleasing but also because they mean or *signify* something about contemporary culture (Guy, Green and Banim 2001: 6). Precisely what a fashion signifies in a social context depends on shared knowledge. Shared meanings are expressed through signs and symbols. Regardless of the form of the fashion sign – word or image – the ultimate meaning of fashion is that of *modernity*. According to Blumer (1969: 116), fashion is always modern. For the American woman, fashion magazines provide signs and symbols to comprehend the modern world.

In this chapter, I examine the concept of modernity as expressed in space age fashion during the 1960s, particularly how *Harper's Bazaar*, an American fashion magazine published by the Hearst Corporation, portrayed a 'modern' space age world to promote the consumption of fashionable products. The study reveals how space

exploration became part of the American consciousness and how signs and symbols associated with the space age became synonymous with modernity through the media. Analysis of the text and photographs in *Harper's Bazaar* reveals extensive borrowing of space age terminology and imagery to express modernity in fashion.<sup>[1]</sup>

## The Space Age

Profound scientific achievements marked the space age, defined here as the period from the launch of sputnik in 1957 to 1972 when the United States and the Soviet Union signed The Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes. The US space program was initiated for defense reasons (McDougall 1985: 104). However, by 1961 the civil space program for peaceful purposes was underway. President John F. Kennedy publicly made a passionate commitment to land an American on the moon by the decade's end, a commitment that was later carried out by his successor Lyndon Johnson (McDougall 1985: 404). The highly anticipated and publicized climax came in 1969 when Americans first landed on the moon. The final US lunar landing came in 1972.

As the US and the Soviet Union engaged in what was called 'the space race' – a simultaneously real and symbolic battle for superiority – the media broadcast images and sounds of space age phenomena and events (Mathews 1991). In the United States, portrayals of rocket building and launches, astronauts, space walks, splashdowns and lunar roving provided evidence to the public of an unmistakable 'American spirit.' It was against this backdrop that women viewed the space imagery in fashion magazines.

## Signs and Symbols

Social and cultural theorists help us understand how fashion imagery acquires meaning. According to Grant McCracken, author of *Culture and Consumption*, the fashion object acquires meaning during a two-step process. In the context of space age fashion, for example, McCracken's theory would state meaning was first drawn from the cultural world (e.g. newspaper accounts of space flight) and then transferred to consumer goods by specialists whom he calls *agents of meaning transfer*, including fashion journalists, editors, photographers and advertisers, such as those at *Harper's Bazaar*. They affect the adoption and diffusion of fashion objects by the promotion of some fashions and the exclusion of others (McCracken 1988: 76). The meaning is appropriated by the consumer through the purchase or use of consumer goods (McCracken 1988: 71–89).

In this case space age meanings were contained in and transmitted through *signs*. According to Saussure (1985: 36–7), a *sign* is the union between a *signifier* – a word, sound, or image – and a *signified*, which is a concept. Further, Peirce identified three types of signs: *icon*, *index* and *symbol* (1985: 5–23). An icon is the simplest sign and

signifies by resemblance. An index is a more complex sign that signifies through cause or indication. For example, smoke is a sign of fire because fire caused the smoke. Symbols are the most abstract class of signs and signify through social convention, that is, through a shared *code*. All words are symbols. Space age signifiers functioned as icons, indices and symbols depending on the context in which they were used to transfer meanings.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes (1983) uncovered the systematic nature of meaning in the fashion magazine positing that three categories of fashion exist: the actual (real) garment, the written (described) garment, and the image (photographed) garment. Both written garment and image garment comprise the fashion magazine; however, it is the written garment, communicated through language, which Barthes considers central to fashion's function as a sign. Conversely, image or photographed clothing signifies meaning more ambiguously. With no authoritative structure such as language to guide its communicative effect, the fashion photograph uses its own language. In the case of fashion, the object, whether written about or photographed, always denotes 'fashion.' Barthes' description of how meaning is transmitted easily applies to space age modernist fashion as seen in *Harper's Bazaar* during the 1960s.

The development of a code is a learning process similar to learning a language (Eco 1976: 138) and requires time and is therefore historical. According to Barthes, the interpretation of a photograph is historical because it depends on the reader's knowledge, just as though it were a matter of a real language (1977: 28). Historical knowledge contributes to the development of a stock of signs and a code by which to interpret them, a *symbolic terrain*. The notion of a symbolic terrain and that of shared meaning form a framework from which cultural meaning may be drawn for transfer to the fashion object for consumption by the user.

## Expressing Modernity through Fashion

Modernity is the state of being up-to-date or of the current time period (Bullock and Stallybrass 1977: 397). Modernity is also intimately linked with the concepts of change and progress, which, according to Lauer and Lauer, are deeply rooted in American culture (1981: 174). A modernist style can be defined as a style that is cubic, geometrically organized, regular in form, constructed of materials such as concrete, steel, and glass and, ideally, pure white (Berman 1988: 43). Additionally, Fuller (1988: 117) stated that anti-ornamentalism remained one of the key tenets of the modernist movement in art and design. According to Berman (1988: 11) modernist design expresses modernist ideology, which includes faith in science and rationalism, belief in the progressive nature of technology, and celebration of the machine.

Based on the code of modernism, space age fashion may be defined first and foremost as *modernist*. In *Harper's Bazaar*, both words and images signified modernity by alluding to the space age.

## The Space Age Fashion Code

In *Harper's Bazaar*, both words and images signified modernity by alluding to the space age.<sup>[2]</sup> During the earliest years of the space age, 1957–60, the media laid a foundation of space age meaning by introducing space age objects and phenomena to the general public. Over time, Americans connected space age words and images to forms and ideas on a deeper symbolic level. People recognized memories of previous connections between these elements, accumulating them to develop a *space age code*. Further, in the case of fashion magazines, space age signifiers, reiterated over time, contributed to the development of a *space age fashion code*.

*Harper's Bazaar* editors such as Carmel Snow, Nancy White, Polly Mellen, China Machado and Diana Vreeland, art directors, photographers, and their advertisers created a code by which the language of the space age was understood and served as a promotional tool for the consumption of fashion. They, along with designers, harnessed a pattern of stylistic formal elements to symbolize 'space age' that came to represent modernity. These elements included silver-colored materials and metals (e.g., chrome, platinum, aluminum, silver), white materials, encapsulating forms and helmet-shaped hats.

The compilation of space age signs appears in Table 9.1. These signifiers include words or phrases as explicit as 'space age' and 'astronaut' to denote space age imagery as well as signifiers less explicit such as 'launch' and pictures of planets from which connotations of space age imagery may be construed based on their use in context. Signifiers that functioned in a stand-alone capacity are termed primary signifiers, while signifiers combined with other signifiers to transfer space age meaning are called secondary signifiers.

One of the earliest editorial uses of space age imagery was 'The World of Now,' a nine-page fashion layout from February 1960, using Cape Canaveral as a backdrop. Canaveral was the site of American rocket launches and also served as an aerospace testing site throughout the 1960s. The photographer, Richard Avedon, included a highway sign with the words 'Cape Canaveral' in the opening photo with an actual rocket on the launch pad. The copy on subsequent pages explained the imagery employing basic yet scientific terminology, grounding the entire layout in a base of factual, tangible reality. Avedon takes us to the 'rarely glimpsed behind the scenes' location while the copy identifies less recognizable equipment as 'a rocket tracking antenna,' and a 'pied-a-terre – complete with launching pad and encasement called the umbilical cord' (78, 81).

'The World of Now' layout represents what Barthes termed the 'literal' style of a fashion photograph in which the association of ideas is objective, intentional and direct (1983: 302). However, written signifiers are essential in spelling out the precise motive in using Cape Canaveral to promote these specific fashions: 'Cape Canaveral . . . is the symbol of the pace at which the present is overtaking the future. It is the context in which we should think of today as well as the coming decade' (77). The fashions – straight, geometric and stripped of superfluous decoration – and the technological space age objects are linked conceptually through functional design. '[S]pare and bare' and comprised of 'ordered perfection,' 'the dresses, the antenna, in fact most of the artifacts of our times, are united in a similar austere concept of functional design. Recognition of this relatedness led *Harper's Bazaar* to approach the doors of Cape Canaveral' (77, 85). The motivation for using this specific layout for these particular fashions is made explicit. The written and visual signifiers are used to symbolize the relationship between the 'form' and 'spirit' of the context (a space age location) and the form and spirit of the fashion (linear, functional, spare). Space age meaning, infused with an emerging concept of a new modernity, could shift smoothly from the cultural world to the fashion good. This was the space age: the place, the fashion, the ideology of the 1960s.

**Table 9.1. Space Age Signs**

<b>Verbal (Written) Signs</b>		
<i>Primary Space Age Signifiers</i>		
space age	extraterrestrial	Names of satellites, e.g.:
space ships	splashdown	Sputnik
space travel	earthling	Explorer
spacewalk	Martian	Names of US space exploration missions, e.g.:
space exploration	Venusian	Project Apollo
outer space	Names of astronauts, e.g.:	Project Gemini
rocket	John Glenn	Project Mercury
rocketship	Alan Shepard	Cape Canaveral
rocketfire	Edward White	Cape Kennedy
interplanetary	Neil Armstrong	

Astronaut		
<i>Secondary Space Age Signifiers</i>		
missile launch universe galaxy milky way nova cosmos	earth capsule star meteor celestial astral cosmic	constellation Names of constellations, e.g.: Aquarius Orion Names of planets, e.g.: Mars Jupiter
<i>Primary or Secondary Space Age Signifiers</i>		
space moon lunar satellite alien	orbit gravity earth earthly unearthly	

<b>Visual Signs</b>			
<i>Primary Visual Signifiers</i>			
rocket	spaceship	space capsule	astronauts
spacesuit	spaceboots	space helmets	
<i>Secondary Visual Signifiers</i>			
planets	moon	earth	black space with stars

Using locations that functioned as signs of the space age, such as Cape Canaveral, was a common tactic to exemplify modernity in fashion throughout the 1960s. In the case of the October 1965 fashion layout titled 'St. Louis Night in Space,' the reader is taken to

McDonnell Aircraft Space Center, which manufactured space exploration vehicles. Signifiers of the space age, such as an actual astronaut in a space suit emerging from a space capsule, are used. Backgrounds include 'a mockup of a Gemini space capsule's electrical system,' and a 'retrograde module' which housed the rocket's braking system (222–5). One model is called 'lady astronaut' while the other is ' *Bazaar's* space woman.' The outfits include Adolfo's 'exciting space helmet[s],' white and silver designs, described as 'full of pared-down precision.' Visual signifiers drawn from the world of real space technology, such as rockets and astronauts, supported by written space age signifiers, functioned to create space age meaning. Additionally, the fashion forms themselves – silver, white, helmet hat of precise geometric design – were becoming symbols of the space age and of 1960s modernity. The space age fashion code was unfolding.

Prior to the Cape Canaveral layout, the magazine's editors and the advertisers contributed to the symbolic terrain by publishing stories about space exploration. In July 1959 the editors printed a small photograph of a rocket ship being launched to accompany a short news article titled 'From Sputnik to Astronauts':

as the decade closes seven hand-picked astronauts are vigorously training under the aegis of the U.S. government for man's first return flight into outer space. Glowing with health and confidence, they signal that the incredible day of Flash Gordon is at hand. Science has gone so far so fast, it seems incredible that the birth of the space age occurred less than two years ago when Sputnik I first beeped its way around the earth.

A two-page layout in January 1962 titled 'New Year's Revolutions' further illustrates the development of the space age code. It describes a modern world as seen through the eyes of a visitor to the upcoming World's Fair: 'Satellites will transfer calls through outer space'; and a 'crawling robot' is being developed to explore the moon and Mars. The copy continues: 'Names and terms symbolizing new and difficult concepts of science will gain for [women] the familiarity of the everyday – POGO, OGO, Ego, Echo, Tirus, Midas (the man-made satellites), Dyna-Soar (the Space Glider) . . . Nucleomitophobia (the fear of atomic energy) . . . exobia (extra-terrestrial life)' (85–6). Another example is from the June 1961 issue. Titled 'Avedon on Heroes,' the editorial photo spread by Richard Avedon introduces the 'heroes' of the early space age. Shown are Alan Shepard, the first American in space; John Glenn, the first American to orbit Earth; and Virgil Grissom, one of the first astronauts (who perished in a cockpit fire in 1967). Also introduced are the silver space suits complete with NASA logo patches (78–9).



Thus, we see that *Harper's Bazaar* introduced new words, objects, activities and concepts into the modern woman's vocabulary when publishing non-fashion space age phenomena. Over time the reader learned these signs and became familiar with the modern, space age code as it developed in the cultural world of science and technology.

During this early period, *Harper's Bazaar* not only laid the foundation for a general *space age code*, but also developed a *space age fashion code*. The magazine defined its terms and identified its rules. Likewise, during the middle period of the space age, the code developed, becoming more familiar and allowing the full flower of symbolic meaning in the fashion forms.

Recall the 1960s layout 'Cape Canaveral' where the fashions had the 'Canaveral spirit' and were 'bare' and 'spare,' 'sensib[le],' and comprised of 'ordered perfection.' The copy tells that the dresses and 'artifacts of our times are united in a similar austere concept of functional design.' According to *Harper's Bazaar*, space age fashion of the day was first and foremost functional, austere, spare, sensible and ordered. Therefore, it was modern.

In 'Moonshot,' a fashion editorial from September 1964, *Harper's Bazaar* transferred space age meaning to the fashion forms by simply juxtaposing the fashion photographs with several written space age signifiers. Photographed by Avedon, three fashionable ensembles are shown on two facing pages. The designers are Guy Laroche, Simonetta et Fabiani and André Courrèges. The caption reads 'Moonshot: the Missile Suits . . . Starlight Gleams Pink.' Both 'moonshot' and 'missile' are connotative of 'space age' and are connected to the fashion by simple contiguity or adjacency on the page.

Two of the ensembles are called 'missile suits,' and exemplify an *encapsulation* theme in their formal design. The encapsulating forms are defined here as objects which enclose the body or parts of the body effectively disguising the separation of body parts (similar to Figure 9.1.b). A close-fitting hooded hat is worn with a narrow jumpsuit tucked into boots, which emphasizes the whole unified form. An ensemble features 'bants' described in the copy as 'the combination shoes and leggings melded together.' The shoes are not separating the foot from the leg, but instead joining leg and foot and presenting a sleek line from head to toe. The lines or shapes of the fashion are like a slim missile or rocket, and are also like the spacesuits worn by astronauts which encapsulate and protect the body.

The significance of the models' poses and kinetic signs (signs of motion) must be noted. The fashions referred to in 'moonshot' and 'missile' are shown on the models jumping straight up, arms by their sides, toes pointed. The effect is that of a rocket or missile, the body as human projectile. The written signifiers make the poses clear. Without these signifiers the connotation may have been less clear. Barthes would call

this written fashion. Connecting space age connotations in these specific fashion forms and these specific poses contributes to the development of an autonomous space age fashion code whereby particular fashion forms became symbols of the space age.



### 9.1 Helmet-like hats

- a. 'Sculpting the Sleek Modern Head,' *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1968: 131. Design by Mr. John.
- b. 'Space-Age Helmet,' *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1969: 147. Design by Emmé.
- c. 'Nouveau Pink Helmet . . . Mr. John is First in Space,' *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1965: cover.
- d. 'White Kid Helmet . . . Precise Enough for Spaceship Living,' *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1966: 170. Design by St. Laurent.
- e. 'Reflection of a Modern Design I,' *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1969: 185. Design by Emmé.

The one or two words used to transfer space age meaning to the fashions were replaced with an extended narrative in a May 1966 advertisement for Clairol 'Moon Babies' lipstick (Figure 9.2). The two-page ad uses numerous written signifiers to tell a story of beautiful otherworldly women called 'moon babies.' According to the story, these beauties use sorcery, extra-sensory perception (ESP) and witchcraft in addition to the lipstick to get their men. Combining a mythical fantasy of the moon babies with fashion rhetoric illustrates what Jakobson (1985: 147) identified as the poetic function

of language. Poetic function concerns making a verbal utterance a work of art. The development of an extended narrative drawing from a mythical story utilizes more complex connotation to create space age meaning.



9.2 Clairol 'Moon Babies' advertisement, *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1966: 26–7. Permission by Clairol/Division of Proctor & Gamble, COURTESY OF HARPER'S BAZAAR.

The lipstick itself is frosted silver, described as 'New silver-sizzled pales with a sheen never seen on Earth before.' The word 'silver' appears throughout the ad, significant because early spacecrafts and spacesuits were silver colored. During the 1960s, make-up often shimmered with silver metallic particles, and was either denoted as 'space age' or placed in the context of space age imagery. Recall that in the previous discussion of modernist design 'love of machine' is one of the ideals of modernism. Machines are constructed of steel and in its basic form steel appears silver in color. Other metals, such as gold and copper, lack the inherent strength required to create machines used during industrialization and hence do not qualify as modernist materials. Silver is the choice for space age fashion forms.

A Pierre Cardin dress photographed by Bill King for a June 1968 editorial spread is described as space age based on its chrome halter neckline (Figure 9.3). The copy states: 'Cardin on silver . . . space age hanger for a straight drop of black crepe.' It reinforces why the dress is space age: 'Cool, hard gleam against soft . . . skin. Cardin's lucky stone – a diamond – like a rocket's headlight centered in the motif.' A hard-edged silver halter likened to the nose cone of a rocket, clearly denotes a space age fashion.

Fashion avails itself of new technology in many ways. During the 1960s advances in fiber and fabric technology for use in space exploration led to more comfortable and more affordable metallic yarns for fashionable clothing. As a result, fashions made of silver-colored fabric became more popular. In fact, Stanley Marcus wrote in 1982 that a

silver nylon tricot nightgown advertised in a 1967 Neiman Marcus Christmas catalogue became 'the single biggest selling article of feminine apparel' sold in the catalogue (115). Not only does a 'silver' metallic finish signify 'modernism,' but the use of silver in fashion objects presents the body as machine-like, symbolically placing the wearer within the machine-loving modernist culture of the space age.

Extensive written signifiers appear in the March 1966 issue. Titled 'See Paris,' the nine-page fashion layout photographed by James Moore contains three full pages of written signifiers penned by editor Nancy White. Here the space signifiers function as double entendres: 'Paris is discovering covering and uncovering new areas in space. The part between the shoulders . . . The space . . . between the knee and the hem – four, three, two, one inches? . . . Space as you can see, is as much a topic in Paris as it is in Houston' (170). Space in this case refers to both outer space and the visual space in the fashion forms. Note the metaphoric use of the countdown – four, three, two, one – referring not to a rocket launch, but to skirt lengths. Additionally Paris, the capital of the fashion world, is linked to Houston, home of Cape Canaveral, ground control for all the United States space missions. Thus, Paris, symbolic of fashion power, is linked to Houston, symbolic of space age technology and dominance. By extension, the two sites, Paris and Houston, are conjoined as symbols of modernity.



9.3 'Cardin's Rocket Dress,' *Harper's Bazaar*, June 1968: 112. PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL KING©; collection of Janet McClellan; courtesy of *Harper's Bazaar*.

Written imagery in the fashion layout is combined with other poetic metaphors such as 'the stretch between armhole and hip is missile straight' and 'the booster rocket – a whole dress of plastic paillettes.' The coats, dresses and hats (Figure 9.1.d) are linked once again to space forms such as missiles and rockets; described in terms of their appropriateness for the space age. For example, 'coats so straight . . . all clutter removed . . . precise enough to walk in space and rendezvous' and 'Baby dresses are set for a soft landing on the moon' (170–3). The fashion editors, drawing from the world of fashion exploration, directly followed astronaut Edward White's first walk in space in 1965. These expressions of modernity may be construed as an 'attempt to reconcile the reality of a fissured culture with the fantasy of utopia' (Wilson 1985: 245–7).

The 'See Paris' fashion layout utilizes only written signifiers to transfer space age meaning to the fashion. In fact, written imagery appeared in 97 per cent of all the 460 space age units documented in *Harper's Bazaar* from 1957 to 1972. Fifty-eight per cent used *only* written signifiers. This finding underscores the importance of written language in transferring meaning from the cultural world to the fashion object.

Only 3 per cent of the space age imagery relied solely on visual signifiers to transfer space age meaning to the fashion. The clearest example is from an October 1966 advertisement for fabrics and fashions made from Celanese acetate (Figure 9.4). It is part of a multi-page advertisement, each page showing a model with her mode of transportation. There is a jeweled car, a motorcycle, a boat, a unicycle and a snowmobile. The night setting of a city street features the title caption 'The Great Arrival.' The model emerges from a space capsule covered in jewels. The fashionable space age woman has arrived at the opera in her new mode of transportation – the chicly jeweled space capsule. The capsule is on a smaller scale than an actual space capsule but its signification is clear: this is the space age!

By the time this ad appeared in 1966, both print and broadcast media had depicted numerous *actual* space capsules. The Mercury and Gemini space missions, including the splashdowns of the breakaway capsules, had been shown over and over across the world in locations ranging from elementary schools to homes and businesses. America tuned in no matter what time of day to live coverage and watched the astronauts emerge from their silver wombs bobbing in the ocean to be scooped up by the NASA rescue crew. The capsule and the astronauts functioned as icons of the space age; moreover, they pointed toward the excellence of modern American technology,

becoming stand-alone *symbols* of the space age. By 1966 the modern space age woman had learned the code and shared in the symbolic terrain based in technology and reinforced through the media.



9.4 'The Great Arrival' jewelled in space capsule, *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1966: 74.

PERMISSION BY CELANESE ACETATE LLC, COURTESY OF HARPER'S BAZAAR.

The featured fashion in 'The Great Arrival' is a red crepe shift with an asymmetric yoke by Kasper for Joan Leslie. The style is not particularly 'space age' aside from being clean and spare, stripped of superfluous decoration. It is the capsule that evokes the space age connotation. By contrast, the cover of the May 1966 issue features a space age look that is also described as space age: 'A twenty-first century, knee-stopped jumpsuit of supple quilted vinyl that cleverly molds the body missile. The head: helmeted geometrically – All ready, with a bold-faced watch that runs on tomorrow's time to sail into the future or on the Seven Seas.' In addition to the white and geometric design and the helmet hat, the jumpsuit appears over and over as a 'space age fashion' suggesting a theme of *encapsulation*.

Encapsulating forms appeared many times. Recall the 'Moonshot' spread previously discussed. Other examples include the jumpsuited 'Galactic Girl,' photographed by Avedon, from April 1965 who has a clear plastic bubble over her head. The cover of the same issue shows model Jean Shrimpton wearing a 'nouveau pink helmet' by Mr John

(Figure 9.1.c) described as being 'first in space.' The helmet hat itself is an encapsulating form, and it is repeatedly described as space age or placed in a space age context.

The concept of encapsulation relates to modernism. Modernist design holds 'individuation' as one of its ideals. Encapsulating forms function to individuate, creating a kind of symbolic protection from the hostile, fast-changing environment of the space age. Kurt Back (1985: 12) posited that the influence of modernism has helped individuals accept and adapt to modern technology. He further alleged that fashion trends keep pace with the modernist realities of change and technology by using technical advances in fabric and design, accentuating the individual and flaunting the details of fashion construction. André Courrèges, whose fashions were featured in the April 1965 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, best exemplifies the 'flaunting of construction' with his use of welt seams and bias edging. Courrèges is often identified as a 'space age designer.'

The December 1969 issue shows an encapsulating cape accompanied by the following copy: 'Lacquer grape space-age cape sweeps the sand as if it were moon dust' (147). The glossy nylon ciré cape is worn with a matching helmet-like hat (Figure 9.1.b). The photograph, cropped into a circle, makes the model appear as if viewed through a hole or scope. The circular shapes and spherical forms echo orbital movement.

Copy in a September 1967 advertisement for Estée Lauder skin care uses words to transfer space age meaning to the fashion product: 'a new collection of six space-age treatment essentials so fast acting they make long complicated beauty rituals obsolete' (46–7). Further, the association with space age meaning connotes modernity. Using the new space age products would spare one from 'obsolete' beauty rituals and therefore would bring one in line with modernity.

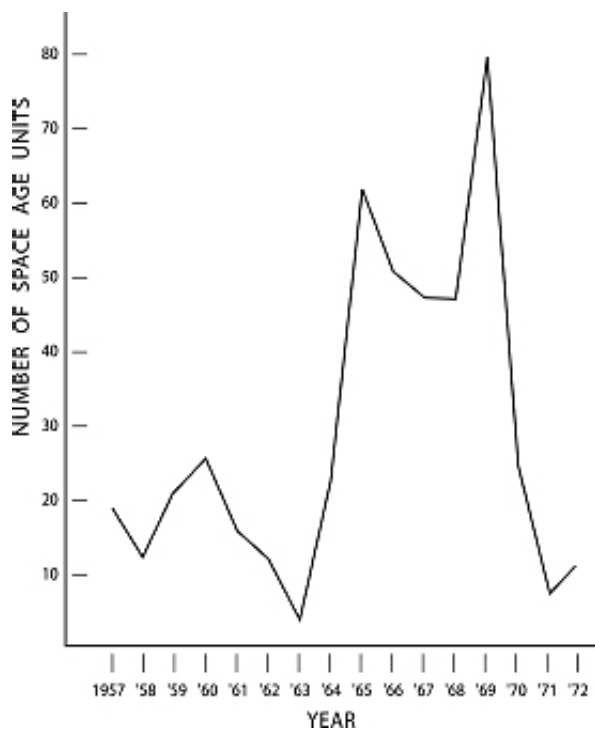
Labeling a fashion 'space age' transfers space age meaning directly to the fashion object. Further, specific fashion forms repeatedly signified as space age became space age *fashion symbols* on their own. Fashion symbolic of the space age includes silver metallic fabric, make-up and jewelry; the head-encapsulating form of the helmet hat and the jumpsuit; the color white; overtly geometric and functional designs. A pattern of stylistic signifiers repeated over time solidifies a space age fashion code, a *lexicon* of specific fashion symbols.

By reading *Harper's Bazaar* during the 1960s, the modern woman of fashion could learn the facts about the early space age world, become familiar with its symbolic terrain and consume the signs of the space age because she learned the space age code – a code which looked to modernist design and ideology for its underlying structure, and which was reiterated visually and verbally.

## Space Age Imagery Over Time

The amount of space age imagery in *Harper's Bazaar* changed over time as seen in Figure 9.5. During the earliest years of the space age, from 1957 to 1960, a few space age images began to appear in *Harper's Bazaar*. Some of these were advertisements for 'rocket-powered' automobiles or 'space-age appliances.' However, their use declined in 1961 and 1962, almost disappearing in 1963.

The fluctuation in appearance of space age imagery in *Harper's Bazaar* may have been due to uncertainty over the value of space age imagery as a tool to promote fashion. In the early years of the space race the United States was viewed as a laggard playing catch-up with the Soviet Union. Political debates questioned the purpose of the space program in 1963 and 1964 after Kennedy's assassination (McDougall 1985).



9.5 Number of space age units over time.

These early years were marked by an increasing visibility of space age objects and concepts; the first manned American space flights with Mercury astronauts such as Alan Shepard, John Glenn and Vigil Grissom took place at this time. The June 1961 *Harper's Bazaar* hailed the men as 'Heroes.' Within a few years, space age imagery appeared in the context of fashion.

The largest amount of space age imagery in the magazine coincided with the most widely publicized and greatest achievements in US space exploration which occurred between 1965 and 1969. Of the years under consideration, 1965 and 1966 had the most manned US space missions. The technological breakthroughs of the Gemini program (which would lead to the success of the Apollo missions) included the first



spacewalks, the first space rendezvous, and the first docking of two vehicles in space – all highly publicized evidence that the idea of space exploration was no longer science fiction but grounded in reality.

More space age imagery appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1969 than in any other year. The Apollo lunar landing in 1969, during the Nixon administration, marked the apex of the space age. Use of space age imagery specifically related to the moon was common at this time and both editors and advertisers drew upon the climactic and evocative pictures of the events to promote fashion and modernity. When astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, declared 'one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,' he drew a circle around all of mankind, not just Americans. The reality of the achievements of space exploration culminated in the planting of the American flag on the lunar surface, which became a symbol of American modernity: a source of pride and a sign of American *power*.

A substantial drop in the use of space imagery occurred during the final years of the space age from 1970 to 1972. Although subsequent Apollo lunar landing projects contributed to our knowledge about the moon, the earth and the solar system, these years were a reorganization period for NASA. National priorities were reassessed in light of financial constraints and unmet needs in the social services sector. Interest in space exploration phenomena declined after the climax of the lunar landing. Also, changing socio-cultural values impacted the ideology of modernity itself.

In 1970, after the lunar landing, the quantity of space age imagery in *Harper's Bazaar* dropped by 66 per cent from the high in 1969 and continued to drop in 1971 and 1972. Further, examples of space age imagery were increasingly non-fashion in nature. Small ads in the back of the magazine featured the stuffed comic character Snoopy dressed as an astronaut (June 1969: 181) and a watch depicting a lunar module (May 1970: 193). Many examples were retrospectives or editorial commentaries that looked back at the 1960s and used written space age imagery only.

The most meaningful fashion editorial during this late period was shown in October 1972. Hiro photographed a model wearing a helmet-hat like one from December 1969 (Figure 9.1.b). The woman is called an 'American Space Age Siren' (87). In the close-up headshot she gazes into space – upward and to the *left*. In the background a fire-powered rocket moves *from right to left* in a window-like frame. No longer luring us, the siren appears to be watching an age gone by . . . bidding adieu . . . the space age had passed. During the final years of the space age, i.e. 1970–72, – space age meaning was no longer a useful vehicle to express modernity in fashion.

Space age imagery became an ineffective vehicle to transfer the ideology of modernity to fashion because the space age itself had become passé. The success of the lunar landing reduced public excitement and press copy. Further, during the late 1960s and the early 1970s the value of space technology was questioned. Enormous social and

cultural changes occurred during the 1960s, which were manifested in the civil rights movements, the 'Black Power' movement, the peace movement, the new religion movements, ecological awareness, and the rise of the drug culture (Haskins and Benson 1988). Although 'winning' the space race may have signified pride in United States technology, to those involved in the growing counterculture it increasingly signified all that was wrong with the world. It could be argued that the increasing use of technology in the consumer culture augmented the potential for manipulative use of the mass media by those in power and could stifle political dissent (Ash 1999: 131). To the counterculture, the space race signified an elitism and a hunger for power that de-emphasized humanist values. The focus on the individual eclipsed the value of community.

In the wake of the space age, values shifted away from modernism toward a *new* modernity. Attention shifted to the 'return to nature' and concerns about the earth. Interest rose in alternative lifestyles, such as communal living, and in alternative religions. These religions referenced Eastern philosophy and used meditation techniques to focus on inner space as opposed to outer space.

New softer, more romantic styles began to appear. Peasant and ethnic looks gained importance by the early 1970s. These styles did not exhibit the functional modernist qualities of sleekness, rationalism, geometry and austerity. Instead they displayed a *mélange* of decoration – flounces, ruffles, layers, patches, beads, embroidery and textured patterned fabrics, often appearing simultaneously. The new post-space age *zeitgeist* based in anti-modernism was underway, and the new fashion forms reflected the changing postmodern ideology.

## Conclusion

The United States' space exploration program supplied new signs of modernity to the world in general, and to the world of fashion. These signs took shape as ideas, materials, images, new vocabulary and new uses of old words. New phenomena contributed to the definition of the modern space age world in the 1960s. Editors, photographers and art directors of *Harper's Bazaar* disseminated space age meaning by using basic icons, indicators and complex symbols. These space age signs included visual imagery, but written imagery was overwhelmingly used to structure a codified symbolic terrain which could be widely understood and which signified American power.

When the space age began with the Soviet launch of sputnik in 1957, the ideas and images associated with outer space were either in the realm of science fiction or specialized knowledge. However, with each successive achievement in space technology came new ways of looking at the world – a new modernity.

The concept of modernity may best be viewed in the guise of its temporal meaning and form. In 1965 modernity was cloaked in the values of modernist technology and love of the machine. Space age fashion symbols included helmet-hats, silver, and Courrèges-style dresses. In 1972 modernity reflected the antithesis of modernism. Old-fashioned values of naturalism, romanticism and humanism took the form of earth shoes and feathers, peasant blouses and granny dresses.

Today, modernity takes shape – transforming and redefining itself – from the myriad of ideas, words, materials and processes which present themselves all around us. We may not be able to view the current modernity or its late-postmodern whole until we gain historical perspective. But we grasp pieces of its nebulous form: a collection of disjointed meanings – icons, indices and symbols – of the modern world of now.

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[1] Space age imagery was quantified by counting pertinent *signs* – word or image – on each page in the magazine from 1957 to 1972. If space age imagery appeared in any form or combination of forms on a page, the page was counted as one *unit*.

[2] Of the 38,138 pages examined, 460 (1.21 per cent) contained space age units. Editorial use accounted for 72 per cent, while advertising made up the remaining 28 per cent (Baldaia 1993).