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The Design Connotations of Clothing and Interior Fabrics in the Aesthetic and Application Aspects, Based on an Analysis of Recent Fashion Guidelines

Abstract

The fashion of recent seasons has demonstrated numerous links between the designs of clothing and decorative fabrics. The comparison analysis which this article contains illustrates the frequent connotations of the two assortment areas. These connotations refer to qualities of aesthetics as well as of application.

Key words: decorative fabrics, clothing fabric, aesthetics, application qualities, connotations.

strong relationship between clothing and decorative fabrics as regards design and application qualities.

The Basis of Aesthetic Awareness Influencing the Fashion of Recent Years

In fashion, the turn of the twenty-first century has quite often been compared to a huge melting pot in which there is a mixture of various styles accumulating the experiences of many centuries. It is more and more difficult to catch up with changes and orient oneself among the wide variety of inspirations and influences encountered. Innovative designs characteristic of the 1920s, the 1940s, the 1970s and the 1980s are mixed with elements coming from various eras and cultures, which provokes sharp contrasts and quite often embarrassment [1]. Such combinations of both designs & materials and also styles & techniques are a consequence of a variety of phenomena taking place in our times. It is a response to the era of multimedia.

This fundamental change, which is breaking up the classical unambiguity of design, is also associated with an everlasting need to search for something absolutely different, and not completely specified in its authentic form. The unique atmosphere of the beginning of the new millennium is proving favourable to this tendency.

At the turn of the century, the moment which included the 2000 season, the guidelines presented at the International Fairs of Clothing Textiles *Première Vision* were based on actions relying on the element of surprise. Textiles called by the suggestive name of 'hybrids' aimed to shape a new aesthetic awareness based

on surprising solutions in the area of components, construction and the visual 'destructuring' of fabrics, a variety of decoration techniques and finishing methods [2].

The encouragement to unconstrained inspiration and fun can be also found in the message of Gunnar Frank, a Dutch designer, who has been preparing the guidelines to the International Trade Fair for Home Textiles and Commercially Used Textiles *Heimtextil*. He described the trends for the year 2000 in the words "Everything is different. Everything is new. Everything is possible."

The following season, 2001, was an invitation (such was the slogan of *Première Vision* at that time) into the world of new designs and colours. There was a symbolic presentation of the meeting and mixing of two elements: 'cool', hidden behind a symbolic picture of a Scandinavian boy presented in a clear, fresh interior, and 'hot', a girl with oriental features surrounded by Far Eastern-style patterns, Asian sweets and exotic fruits [3].

At that time three elements, fire, soil and water, became the inspiration for the interior designers. As in clothing fashion, various climates and three basic colour ranges (blue, red and grey) interacted. In fire we encountered a mixture of perfumed East, kitsch and elements of pop fashion, everything connected with Far Eastern philosophy. Water, with its lightness, brightness and clarity, gave inspiration and introduced the atmosphere of imagination and the feeling of a sporting character. Earth, the third element, was traditionally associated with discretion and the warm mood of a comfortable domestic appearance [4].

Introduction

The specificity of the phenomenon popularly called 'fashion' inseparably links various aspects of everyday life. These aspects form a new quality which in its turn responds to the current aesthetic and application needs. The design of planar textile products has to take these growing expectations into account and, like no other area of production, must react to frequent seasonal changes of demand.

The course of these changes is common for various assortment areas because it considers phenomena determining the fashion of today, including manufacturing technologies. The analysis of the last few seasons demonstrates that there is a

The slogan presented at Premiére Vision for the 2002 spring-summer season was 'Alternative'. The variety of inspirations and topics enabled free creation with one aim: discovering and highlighting one's own individuality. Sensitivity, although not free from roughness, optimism, indecisiveness and fantasy harmonising with discipline came to the fore. We can find a similar content in the message from Heimtextil presenting trends for 2002. The motto of the recent season, 'Home is where the heart is', was an encouragement to create one's own world in the neighbouring environment (office, flat, house). This unique style was meant to ensure maximum comfort for the mind and in the application.

The current season in clothing fabrics is based on the experience of the previous years, the tradition of searching and the need for continuous changes. According to the fashion designers, opposites appear next to each other and contrasts build harmony. The leading slogan of the coming winter season encourages us to 'stand face to face with reason, sharpen our imagination and invent new language'.

Finding a new style has also become an overriding aim in creating space around oneself. This year's Heimtextil (the last such meeting took place in January 2003) convinces us that 'there is no way for an individual style. An individual style is the way.' This expression seems to sum up the designing experiences of recent years.

The analysis of the design guidelines presented at the two most important textile fairs in Europe indicates the same direction of search. Numerous similarities can be also traced regarding colours, design and finishing.

Design Connotations in the Area of Colours, Motifs and Decoration Forms in Fabrics

Styles mixing and playing with conventions in terms of literal borrowings or free interpretations occur at various stages of fabric creation. As a result, we receive products which exemplify the link of the new aesthetics with function, textiles which are difficult to classify as regards their application and the way in which they are produced.

Specific preferences common to clothing and interior assortments can already

be observed at the stage of material and yarn selection.

During recent years, the fabric design has highlighted the strong position of natural fabrics, from cotton through soft wool and its mixtures, flax, and silk, to other bast fibres which are also very popular in the production of clothing fabrics. A common element also seems to be the large-scale introduction of various weaving and knitting yarns, including fancy yarns. They give the effects of drizzling, blending and marble-like appearances which are present in clothing and decoration products. It is equally popular to join yarns of different character and extremely divergent thicknesses in one fabric. The consequence is differentiating structures and effects, which is also achieved thanks to the use of combined weaves. A 'handmade' character is quite often obtained by consciously exaggerated weaving structures and the effect of using coarse-grained and texture weaves of. In this way a highlighted fabric's construction or the construction's printed imitation is exposed, which quite often is the clothing's only decoration [5].

See-through and transparency, a very strong accent which builds a mysterious sensuality of the silhouette of the 1990s, is continued in creating the space around us. Air voile, gauze, chiffon, tulles, georgette and etamine, ephemeral plaits, light linens and batiste, together with a group of ultra-light non-woven fabrics, have found their permanent place in the vision of contemporary interior trends. An example of a similar assimilation is etched fabrics, which initially appeared in clothing, and later enlarged their reports and the character of motifs used in curtains, net curtains and special-usage fabrics.

A strong relationship between clothing and decorative design is often based on the use of common motifs with numerous interpretations in various assortments. It is worth mentioning here the popularity of a realistic representation of roses which is equally successful as a dress and blouse or as a typically decorative motif. The characteristic silhouette of the tulip has had similar success.

Connotations between two basic assortment areas are not limited only to interpretation of the same motives. Quite often we also deal with literal borrowings, just as in the case of wallpaper patterns on clothing fabrics. Fashion, especially

for youth, is very keen on the macro-scale, typical of decorative realisations, and bright colours based on contrasts of colour and value.

Prints and jacquards as traditional methods of fabric decoration most fully reflect the character of tendencies, withdrawing from legible, unambiguous forms for the benefit of complex patterns, and nowadays quite often having the character of semiabstract camouflage. On clothes and on decorative fabrics one can recognise motifs inspired by cobbles, archaeological layers, feathers, designs imitating the fur of wild animals, or tree rings, all of which are additionally enlivened by a variety of backgrounds.

Plant and flower motifs are quite often influenced by actions aiming at blurring the borders between the background and the motif. Flower designs have the form of small, irregular patterns, bouquets, meadows as well as free compositions. Flowers, from small to large in size, realise a romantic thread. They respond to the need for decorativeness and splendour in creating our image (especially in clothes for special occasions). Through their diversity and multiple forms, they enchant us with freshness of colours and paint-like character (Figure 1). This popular motif group is completed by presentations of various kinds of exotic leaves, bamboo, meadow and swamp plants, herbs and herbal plants.

The energising power, especially in youth fashion, can be found in the comeback of 'soft' geometry and cashmere designs. Virtual copies and transformations of patterns from the 60s and 70s have appeared in textile design, together with a fashion for pop and op-art and hippie fashion. Irregular polka dots and spots, smooth, small and large stripes and chequers, freely connected with Turkish design or simplified flowers make a kind of ornamental, multicolour *arabesque*. Far Eastern motifs introduce the breath of the exotic (Figure 2) preferred in fashion, often mixed with the atmosphere of the *Tales from a Thousand and One Nights*.

A wide range of classical geometric patterns has for years been a universal canon common for clothing and decorative fashion. Colourfully woven chequers and their printed imitations have taken one of the leading positions in the offer of western producers of decorative products, especially of bedclothes and coverings. The

hit of the season has been a stripe motif in various colour and composition versions, which has been as much used in interior fabrics as in clothes (Figure 3).

As in other thematic areas, geometry is realised with the use of alternative decorative techniques, that is, etching (as already mentioned), embroidery, laces, applications, sequins, filling the surface with shiny materials, and coating with lustrous finish.

All these assortments also share the interchanging of matt and shine, as well as the presence of surface elements. The latter take the forms of wrinkles, creases, pleats and seersucker effects. Crepes, crepons, and embossing fabrics introduce the element of imperceptible movement of 3D structures, sometimes in the form of delicate irregularities of surface, or even as sculpture-like spatial structures [6].

A constant element joining the textile design is colour. Preferences concerning particular colours and their combinations apply to clothing as well as to decorative fashion. Thus we deal with a domination of achromatic colours, white, grey and black. This is a realisation of the tendency for minimalist asceticism, a breakthrough entrance of a wide palette of green, quite often connected with broken pink and red and with an explosion of sickly, sweet colours, characteristic of kitsch and childish carelessness.

Current interior trends tend towards brown, which has anyway been determining clothing fashion in recent months.

Design Connotations Between Clothing and Interior Fabric in the Application Aspect

It is more and more popular to give clothes special qualities which used to be attributed to decorative textiles. Also, decorative fabrics are gaining features that used to be characteristic only for clothing fabrics. This phenomenon is connected with the fact that textile products are more and more often made with the users' comfort, health and safety on the designers' mind. There are ever more examples of these connections on the textile market. They are realised with the use of both familiar and also completely new technologies in the areas of spinning, weaving and finishing. The

same materials, weaves, impregnates and finishing are present today in all textile assortments, creating new aesthetics of products, and thus blurring the borders between decorative and clothing textiles.

Common materials, weaves and constructions

By the end of the 1980s, producers of home textiles had turned towards natural materials such as linen, cotton and wool, introducing products from natural fabrics into their collections on a large scale.

They are applied in a whole assortment of products from bedclothes, upholstery to window decorations, carpets and fitted carpets. In the home textiles industry, after a period of fascination with plastics, the conviction that natural fibres are especially precious materials is becoming more and more popular. Natural materials are ecological and have very good application and aesthetic qualities [7]. Linen fabrics are appreciated by designers and users of home textiles for their smoothness, silky shine, resistance and



Figure 1. Examples of using a flower motif on cushion (a) and clothes (b).



Figure 2. Far-East motifs used on decorative textile (a) and clothes (b).



Figure 3. Examples of using a geometric motif on tablecloth (a) and shirt fabrics (b).

natural coarse texture [8-14]. Application parameters are also important here. Their low electrostatic qualities mean that even a small addition of linen to the fabrics considerably lowers their tendency to electrify (upholstery, carpets, fitted carpets). The anti-allergic qualities of linen and its positive influence on the body (bedclothes) are well known. The small resilience of linen, which causes its excessive folding, is nowadays considered as its greatest virtue. Nowadays there is also a tendency to finish other fabrics in the style of so-called 'creased linen'. Creased linen is one of the most fashionable fabrics of the latest seasons, and not only in clothing. In modern interiors this type of fabric is applied for window decorations in the form of net curtains and bed and sofa coverings. In order to heighten its elasticity, linen is mixed with elastane (lycra, dorlastan). Elastic linen has almost become a standard in clothing. Designers suggest using elastic linen also in interiors, for example as upholstery. Linen can be found not only in standard mixtures with polyester, it is often mixed with cotton, viscose, polyamide, wool, natural silk, hemp, and recently with metal-plated fibres and tencel. In 2000 linen was considered the hit of the season in all assortments of home fabrics. In the modern design of decoration fabrics, linen is used in the forms of sheet, openwork, nets, diagonals, melange, fabrics coated with polyurethane, semi-permeable membranes and knitwear. Knitwear with a proportion of flax is more and more popular, and not only for the top clothes. Characteristic knitwear pleats have very good appearance in all types of interiors. Bed coverings, curtains and pillow covers are made from knitwear.

The inevitable cotton also appears in interiors. Cotton is hygroscopic, resistant to washing and ironing, and is easily dyed with permanent colours. These qualities make the fibre widely applicable and are the reasons for its everlasting popularity. Certain types of cotton fabrics typical of clothing assortments such as batiste, denim, duvetine, flannel, seersucker, cretonne, organdine, jeans, embossed fabric and crepe, have been widely used in our homes. Nowadays these fabrics have come back with the use of various fibres, and techniques of mechanical and chemical finishing including the most recently developed fibres and techniques. The cotton is softened, made flexible, etched, punched, scratched, embossed, creped, crumpled, worsted or flannelled.

It is joined with linen, hemp, lurex, nylon, lycra, Tencel, or acetate fibres. In modern interiors the leading position is taken by classic denim with metal-plated thread applied on it, which is used mainly for upholstery.

The most popular animal fibre is wool. Its precious physical qualities make it irreplaceable. Wool stops external moisture and is resistant to wearing thin. It has a wide application in decoration fabrics used for upholstery and carpets typical for Scandinavian design (IKEA). Classical constructions of wool fabrics, such as gabardines, flausch, lodens, cloth, tweeds, back splices, tennis, jersey, boucle, can be more and more frequently encountered in modern interiors.

Common impregnations and finishing techniques

Links between clothing and home textiles can be also observed on the level of impregnation and finishing. Everyday clothes (underwear, pantyhose, jackets, shirts, blouses) are more and more often water-resistant, anti-electrostatic, antibacterial, anti-mycotic, UV-ray proof, anti-dirt, fire resistant, fluorescent, reflecting, perfumed or even insect repellent [15-25]. Not so long ago these qualities were reserved for interior and technical textiles only.

This trend has quite unconsciously contributed to the creation of a new style in clothing fashion. Fabrics more and more often rustle, gleam, sparkle, shine, are phosphorescent and opalescent. It turned out that a well-known optics of technical fabrics could be used for this trend. Varnished, lustred, glass, gummed and paper textile surfaces are present in top fashion. In this way, new aesthetics have started to mesh with function, which resulted in the creation of a style in clothing fabric design called 'techno'. The style is represented by characteristics including shiny jackets made from gummed fabrics, close fittings similar to a diving suit, aluminium-coated textiles resembling steelworker's overalls, reflecting fabrics and luminous fabrics like traffic signs in the darkness, foil fabrics, false furs. From the textile engineering point of view, techno fabrics are various types of compact and sculptured surfaces achieved through coating and end-use finishing, relief structures achieved thanks to permanent folding, double-layer fabrics with contrasting sides, multi-layer fabrics, fabrics

with metal threads and prints made with fluorescent dyes.

'Technical' effects of drizzling and shine can be achieved with different methods from fibre production, through weaving and knitting, to chemical processing of a ready product. For example, this result can be achieved by using metal threads in fabrics or knitwear. Metal threads have long been used for decorating textile products. In the past gold and silver threads were used for this purpose. The art of weaving with the use of gold and silver threads was known in the times of Alexander the Great. At present, soft aluminium threads are used in order to achieve the desired effect. Aluminium foil is coated on both sides with transparent polyester or acetate foil, after which the laminate is cut into threads of the required wideness. If the glue applied for sticking the threads is colourless, the threads thus obtained have an aluminium colour. When colouring the glue with an appropriate colour, we can achieve any colour of threads. Another method is to expose the polyester foil to aluminium vapour in vacuum, which is called the metallising method.

Innovative solutions achieved on fabric surfaces with a creased paper structure are also associated with *techno* optics. These effects are not connected with the fabric's finishing, but are conditioned by a specific construction of a fibre and its physical and chemical features. Such a fibre has been created by a Japanese company, Kanebo. The fibre is a bicomponent built of two types of polyester with different melting temperatures. A ready fabric made from such a yarn is taken under pressing rollers at a high temperature that melts the lower temperature component. In this way, under the influence of an additional burden, permanent, non-deformable creases appear, imitating a creased paper.

The effects of drizzling and shine can be also achieved when weaving through the application of two different synthetic materials in warp and weft, in connection with an appropriate weave which brings a shinier fibre onto the fabric's surface.

The actions connected with the chemical processing of a fabric give more possibilities in creating 'technical' effects on the fabric's surface. An example could be perfectly white clothes which are luminous in ultraviolet light. The

effect is associated with using so-called optical brighteners, which were already known over 2000 years ago, when the degree of the linen whiteness after sun-bleaching was improved by saturating it with an extract from horse chestnut bark. The plant contains phosphorescing blue-violet esculine, which caused the desired result. In the nineteenth century the phenomenon was given the name of 'fluorescence'. The phenomenon is a result of enriching the radiation emitted by a product with radiation from the optical brightener treated by UV light, which in consequence gives the effect of brighter and shinier whiteness.

Another way to obtain similar optics is to coat a fabric or knitwear with substances called synthetic polymers. Thus films imitating the surfaces of oil, wax, varnish or grease are achieved. This is the result of multiple lustering or coating of a fabric with polyacryl-polyurethane resins in the form of foam. The fabrics have a slightly flashing touch and a delicately shining surface, which is most often the result of using a satin-based weave. Lightly wax-coated layers are achieved through coating a polyester or a polyamide fabric with waterproof finishing.

Techno fabrics can also be double- or multi-layer. The effect of different right and left sides is achieved through weaving, knitting and chemical techniques. The sides are most often in contrasting colours, with different weaves and surfaces. The easiest way to achieve such fashionable dualism is to coat a carrier fabric with a so-called membrane or to glue it. This double- or multi-layer character has virtues not only in terms of aesthetics but also in terms of application.

A new style also means unconventional ideas of coating ultra-thin silk, linen, or cotton fabrics. The coating gives pitch-faced, transient, fleeted and natural layers a rustling, paper-like and the modern *techno* look.

Conclusions

On the basis of a review of the literature, it seems that the trends as analysed will continue. In the future, the trend which designers call 'hybridisation' will be a synonym of a creative composition of various raw materials, spinning, weaving and knitting methods, finishing techniques, and application qualities, all in one fabric. Thus these 'hybrids' will be

the result of interdisciplinary actions in various assortment areas.

The area of applications will increase. Technologists' proposals, which a few years ago were of a purely theoretical character or directed solely at a specific product, may in the future be applied in many areas. This fact heralds unlimited possibilities for the expansion of ideas into areas not hitherto known in textile engineering. Examples are micropore-breathing membranes, which up until now has only been used in sports clothes. At present their usage is proposed for everyday bed mattresses (the proposal of the REHA 2003 Fairs in Düsseldorf) or in textile wallpaper (the proposal of the Heimtextil 2002 Fairs in Frankfurt). These applications are a consequence of clients' increasing expectations and requirements regarding safety, health and comfort of usage.

The fabrics which result from joining new forms with functions will surely be more and more difficult to define in terms of both their production and their purpose. That is why problems may appear in the future, for example with keeping the products in good repair. This situation has been foreseen, and during one of the most recent sessions of *Premiere Vision* in Paris, the use of special pictograms which should characterise a given product was suggested. A similar system of textile marking could facilitate their identification and specify their function in the future.

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