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An East Central European folk aesthetic as a postmodern garment design inspiration

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An East Central European folk aesthetic as a postmodern garment design inspiration

by

Jessica Ann Havlicek

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The author proposed first to develop a group of postmodern artwear garments inspired by an East Central European folk aesthetic, and second to briefly examine the history of East Central European folk aesthetics as inspirations for modern and post-modern garment design. The research included a historical survey of how the adaptation of folk motifs has been approached by individuals working in different fields, visual research, and creative development including the design and creation of a group of Slavic-inspired artwear garments.

The historical survey included a discussion of dress scholars, anthropologists, fashion designers, and fashion commentators who have addressed the influence of East Central European aesthetics in garment design. These findings put the design process for this study in context. The visual research component included the collection of images from contemporary and historical texts on East Central European folk art and a visual inventory of the inspiring aesthetic, specifically: the use of bright colors including blue, red, pink, yellow, purple, green, white, black, and metallic gold and silver, a mix of textile materials, a amalgamation of textile embellishment techniques, an eclectic combination of semi-geometric, sharp, and naturalistic patterns of flowers, hearts and birds, a historical accrualment of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density. The creative development phase concerned the application of this aesthetic to the creation of three jackets with companion garments. Non-traditional sewing machine embroidery played a key role in experimentation with designs, as well as in the final adaptation and implementation of the East Central European folk aesthetic in artwear design.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion and artwear designers have frequently turned to other cultures for inspiration. This inspiration can influence surface design techniques, such as embroidery or printing, it can appear in the cut or silhouette of a garment, or it can affect both surface ornament and garment shape. As an inspiration source, ethnic influences are often blended with other design elements for a contemporary appearance. This blending of disparate design elements and historic and cultural references represents a postmodern approach to design. This is in contrast to the modernist method that preceded it, which emphasized harmony and unity in dress.

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, I proposed to develop a group of postmodern artwear garments using an East Central European folk aesthetic as a starting point for design. The aesthetic I chose to work from emphasizes historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, and layered patterned materials, resulting in a high visual density. Floral motifs are an important component of this aesthetic. Traditionally, floral motifs are embroidered, appliquéd, or printed on clothing, or carved or painted on furniture and other surfaces. This interpretation of the East Central European folk aesthetic for garment design emphasizes floral motifs through decorative stitching on materials selected to suggest a simultaneous humility and luxury. The motifs are incorporated into structured garment designs and are manipulated to communicate an air of nostalgia and romance, and of history reinterpreted. This interpretation also draws on the cut and silhouette of East Central European folk dress and historical fashions of the same region.

Second, to place my own design work into context, I wanted to briefly examine the history of East Central European folk aesthetics as inspirations for modern and postmodern
garment design, and also examine the history of how these designs have been understood. Examples of East Central European inspired designs can be found in nearly every decade of the twentieth century, from Paul Poiret in the 1910s to John Galliano today. One particularly renowned example is Yves St. Laurents’ 1976 Russian Collection (also referred to as the Ballets Russes or Rich Peasant Collection), which combined historical Russian ethnic elements like dirndl skirts, billowing blouses, short vests, and printed fabrics, with sumptuous materials and the slim-waisted silhouette popular in the 1970s. The vogue for East Central European looks has often coincided with trends for Eastern inspirations; however, the latter has been much better documented by historians and scholars than the former.

Many dress scholars have addressed the topics of the appropriation of ethnic dress and influences in fashion and postmodern garment design from a theoretical standpoint. However, my dual concentration on garment design processes and the analysis of these processes separates this project from the work of these scholars, and also from the work of those concentrating purely on design. This type of study, which encompasses original design work, documentation of processes, research, and analysis, is referred to as a practice-based study, and in this case a practice-based thesis. It is a relatively new approach in academia and has yet to form rigid conventions.

The limitations of this study include peripheral issues, such as the cultural process that takes place as East Central European folk influences are adapted for fashion and the associated changing meanings of visual signs. An examination of possible cultural, political, or social influences underpinning trends for East Central European influenced designs is beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, in-depth analysis of the meaning behind
typically concurrent East Central European folk and Far East influenced designs has been excluded. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this study does not include an analysis of the use of East Central European folk inspirations by individuals specifically designated as artwear designers, though most of the designs created by the fashion designers discussed could be considered artwear. While the work of fashion designers has been extremely well documented in fashion magazines and fashion texts, the one-of-a-kind pieces created by designers working in a small studio setting do not have a similarly accessible historical record, and it is primarily for this reason that the topic is not addressed.

**Terminology**

There is a lack of consensus on what should be termed artwear (or a derivative of this label) and what should be termed fashion, because the line between these two categories is blurred. Hubbell (2005) proposed that all artwear, art to wear, wearable art, etc. be relabeled “fashion” (p. 38), since they all reflect certain signs of the times. Summa (2005) suggested that one-of-a-kind collections produced in a small studio by an artisan who both designs and produces garments be placed under the heading of “artisan collection” (p. 43). Alternately, garments created in a small studio through traditional garment cutting techniques, with some reference to current trends may be termed “fashion collections” (Summa, 2005, p. 44). Artists using traditional materials in contemporary ways and contemporary materials in traditional ways may be producing “Avant-garde” collections (Summa, 2005, p. 44). This project incorporated elements of studio practice, and flat patterning and draping using conventional dress-making techniques. I have chosen to apply the term “artwear” to the designs created for this study as shorthand for the idea that all designs will be one-of-a-kind and will be subject to various studio-based, rather than mass-production, techniques. Though
both Summa and Hubbell implied that “artwear” as a term is outdated, I have chosen to use it as I feel it is less cumbersome than other designations.

I have taken my definition of “postmodern” from Morgado (1996). In answer to confusion over the definition of the term, Morgado clearly laid out its uses and meanings in different cultural arenas, and went on to define and contrast modern and postmodern fashion. The characteristics of modern fashion were extrapolated from modernist ideas of history, progress, and rational thought, and include rhythmic cycles of change, a set system of rules of style, an emphasis on unity, elite fashion as the inspiration for mass fashion, the dominance of a few styles of dress at a time, a suppression of ethnic distinctions, emphasis on simplicity, and clear communication of cultural categories such as gender and status through dress (Morgado, 1996, p. 48). This contrasts with traits of postmodern fashion including recycled looks, quickly changing styles, challenges to traditional aesthetic codes, eclectic and disordered combinations of materials, garments and categories of dress, “trickle-up” fashion, simultaneous popularity of many styles, ethnic styles, intentional confusion of cultural categories, emphasis on surface design and ornamentation, deconstruction, and a disregard for fit (Morgado, 1996, p. 48).

That is not to suggest that there is unanimous agreement about what makes designers and their work “postmodern.” Morgado (1996) posited that fashion “is the model on which virtually all of social life is based. Insistence on novelty, replacement, and transformation are paramount and infiltrate every sphere of social life” (p. 44). By this view, fashion is not only inherently postmodern; it is the archetype for postmodernism. This idea contrasts with Polhemus’ (2005) view of fashion as a modernist phenomenon, with “linearity and obligatory futurism” (p. 106). Polhemus suggested that only select, fearless designers have embraced
postmodernism, while the “fashion industry and most fashion designers are living in a state of denial” (p. 111). Both authors agreed, however, that multi-culturalism, a re-positioning of ideas about progress and cultural pre-eminence, and an emphasis on signs are central to postmodernism in fashion. They also both imply that the term postmodern can be used to describe current avant-garde fashion design.

Maurières seemed to disagree with this last point in his 1996 work, *Christian Lacroix: The diary of a collection*, when he wrote that some may view his book as:

> another example of the confusion we are experiencing today, the way the established hierarchies and the boundaries between the genres are being blurred, lumping together ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, noble and popular forms in the manner that was so terribly fashionable under Structuralism and then Postmodernism, but which has become outmoded now that the novelty has worn off. (p. 14)

This statement implies that postmodernism is passé, and that Maurières would prefer to classify Lacroix under a more cutting-edge heading. However, many of the characteristics Maurières uses to describe Lacroix’s work—for example random play of signifiers (p. 16), bricolage, a historically recycled style, deconstruction, “a taste for ornament,” and a disregard for traditional aesthetic codes (p. 17)—fit Lacroix neatly under Morgado’s postmodern umbrella. So, taking into account that there is some disagreement about just who and what should be labeled postmodern, and that postmodernism as a term may be too variously used to be truly descriptive, I have chosen to use it to describe this body of work, because it consciously addresses many of the postmodern fashion concepts defined by Morgado (1996).

My design approach emphasized a “previously marginalized ethnic ...style” and “ornaments and decoration” (Morgado, 1996, p. 48). The garments have a vintage or recycled look; the materials were distressed and discolored in the studio to convey a feeling
of age, wear, the passage of time, and history. Single outfits include references to incongruous times and places. The designs reflect a “collapse of previously meaningful coded references to race, gender, status, time, and occasion” (Morgado, 1996, p. 48). For example, while my inspiration was an East Central European folk aesthetic, the garments were designed to function in a contemporary American setting. The floral motifs that I placed on contemporary women’s casual garments were drawn from ethnic East Central European women’s clothing, but also from textile design, men’s wear, and home furnishings. I believe that the ideas this project incorporated are a good, if not exact, fit for Morgado’s characteristics of postmodern, and that her definition of the term is cogent.

I have labeled the inspirations for my designs “East Central European Folk.” East Central Europe includes Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia west of the Urals, Serbia-Montenegro (and Kosovo), Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine (Schutz, 2006). This is a culturally diverse region covering over two million kilometers, representing 19 nations, more than 27 spoken languages, multitudinous ethnic groups, and widely ranging histories of cultural development (CIA, 2006). This project was inspired by folk art from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine in particular, though even narrowing the inspiration to this smaller group of countries does little to define a specific aesthetic when one considers the diversity of artistic expression, materials, and techniques employed in these countries through centuries of visual history. Figure 1 demonstrates the particular East Central European folk aesthetic (henceforth abbreviated as ECEFA) of interest for this project (The term “aesthetic”
Figure 1. Moravian wedding ensemble exhibiting many characteristics of the East Central European folk aesthetic.
encompasses the overall combination of design, patterns, colors, impressions, shapes, materials, techniques, etc. that make up the characteristic look of a visual style).

The image is a wedding costume from Moravia (a region of the Czech Republic) dating from the mid-nineteenth century. This ensemble's historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density make it a good example of the ECEFA that inspired this project. Moore (2004, p. 48) posits that this kroj (a term meaning Czech or Slovak folk costume) was passed down from one generation to the next, with each bride embellishing, adding or replacing elements as needed. This accruement of pieces over time gives the ensemble a storied and mismatched look which is, at the same time, surprisingly visually unified. This visual unity can be explained by colors (bright blue, bright red, yellow, purple, green, white, black, and metallic gold and silver), materials (brocade, lace, silk ribbon, and woven silk and cotton), and techniques (pleating, edge trimming, cut and sewn garments) which recur in disparate pieces.

This ensemble incorporates several different types of surface patterning, another aspect of the sought-after ECEFA. The collar, sleeve, and placket bands exhibit semi-geometric floral patterning paired with zigzagged "sharp" motifs (others include teeth, hooves, and scissors) intended as protective devices" (Moore, 2004, p. 48). These patterns have a jarring, jagged appearance, repeated in the sharp pleats of the sleeves and waistband and rickrack trimming on the armholes. This contrasts with the semi-naturalistic floral patterning of the vest. The front panel of the vest features semi-naturalistic roses, violets, lilies of the valley, and leaves on a white background. The blue silk brocade body of the vest features roses, five-petal flowers, tulips, whorl-designs, carnations, wheat, and agricultural tools (rakes and scythes) in a flowing design. The fabric of the apron exhibits naturalistic
roses and leaves. An eclectic combination of semi-geometric, sharp, and naturalistic floral patterns of roses, violets, carnations, lilies of the valley, five-petal flowers, tulips, whorl-designs, and leaves, is a characteristic of the ECEFA, as are historical accrueement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density. Other characteristics of the ECEFA not pictured in Figure 1 include heart and bird imagery and the use of the color pink (in addition to the aforementioned bright blue, bright red, yellow, purple, green, white, black, and metallic gold and silver). These characteristics can be seen also in East Central European textile design, men’s dress, and home furnishings.

The term “folk” is complex, and it is necessary to briefly address its pejorative connotations within the realm of cultural studies, as well as its more benign usage in art and design disciplines. Discussing terminology applied by Western scholars to the dress of the rest of the world, Baizerman, Eicher and Cerny (1993), representing a material culture approach, state; “Terms such as primitive, tribal, folk, exotic, native, indigenous, and peasant may connote the patronizing perspective of the colonizer and the implied inferiority of the colonized. Furthermore, terms such as exotic, tribal, or folk seem inappropriate when applied to the courtly dress of non-European civilizations. They deny a complexity and elegance” (p. 23). However, they use the term non-disparagingly when noting that dress historians “excluded clothing practices of indigenous European folk from their definition of European dress” (Baizerman et al., 1993, p. 23). The authors’ use of “folk” in this article implies that they are more comfortable with its application by Western scholars to indigenous European dress than to the dress of other ethnic groups, though their conclusion is that “ethnic” is the preferable term for discussions of the dress of cultural groups.
Because this study emphasizes design practice, an overview of “folk” as it is applied in art and design may be more pertinent than its problematic application in cultural studies. Folk art is defined as; “Art of people who have had no formal, academic training, but whose works are part of an established tradition of style and craftsmanship.”

This usage is reflected in the names of numerous American art museums: the American Folk Art Museum in New York, The Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, The Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco, and the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, all of which feature the work of non-professionally trained, and sometimes anonymous, artists (as well as commercially produced utilitarian objects). Because “folk” connotes hand or artisan craft production, and because the inspiration for this study was a common aesthetic present in the work of untrained artists of East Central Europe, I have chosen to employ this term as it is employed in art and design, as opposed to its more questionable usage in cultural studies.

“Folk” and “folk dress” are used in this study as adjectives to describe the East Central European craft artisan aesthetic. “Ethnic” is used to refer to cultural groups, specifically in discussions of the influence of the dress of these groups on fashion.

“Folk” is also used by fashion writers and commentators to describe certain types of clothing, often emphasizing embroidery (or other techniques traditionally produced by hand), bright, and contrasting colors, and voluminous silhouettes. The application of the term to this study is intended to connect my work to other collections of garments which have been labeled folkloric or folk inspired. Such collections are discussed in greater detail below.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of analyzing or developing contemporary designs inspired by folk designs has been examined in various ways by dress scholars, anthropologists, academic designers, fashion designers, and fashion commentators. Generally speaking, each of these groups approaches a design problem from a different perspective. Dress scholars are a diverse group who often take on issues that can be explained statistically, for example performing frequency counts of design elements appearing in fashion magazines over a given period of time. However, they may also approach the problem from a historical perspective, or from the perspective of other academic disciplines, for example, anthropology. Anthropologists may be concerned with understanding, analyzing, and comparing cultural practices and meanings and creating aesthetically and intellectually compelling presentations of their findings in books or museum exhibits. Academic designers may allocate more time for consideration of the meanings behind their creations and the process of adaptation. A fashion designer would be most concerned with quickly producing and selling garments palatable to a large audience. The fashion commentator is primarily interested in isolating the most accessible elements of a look and communicating those elements to the consumers they inform. Because the influence of East Central European folk aesthetics on dress and fashion has not been explicitly examined by dress scholars or designers, the first portion of the literature review will focus on issues related more generally to ethnic influences in fashion.

Academic analysis of ethnically influenced designs

The influence of Asian dress in Western fashion has been examined quite thoroughly by dress scholars, while the influence of East Central European dress in contemporary
fashion has not (though there have been studies of Russian influence on fashion during specific historical periods). This is interesting when one considers that Asian and East Central European trends in fashion often appear together during fads for Eastern styling (the term “orientalist” or “orientalism” is often used to refer to such styles). One example of a study of Asian influences on Western fashion is Delong, Wu, and Bao’s 2005 paper, The influence of Chinese dress on Western fashion. This paper examined the marketability of Chinese-influenced fashion designs and found that college students preferred a unified Chinese look rather than a bricolage of ethnic influences in a single ensemble.

Yu, Kim, Lee, and Hong’s (2001) paper on design and consumerism, An analysis of modern fashion designs as influenced by Asian ethnic dress, asked which Asian influences were the most frequently occurring in recent fashion, and found that Chinese and Japanese influences were the most prevalent. They also found that these influences were most often expressed in colors (Ming red and gold), fabrics (silk satin and brocade), motifs (geometrical patterns, dragons, cranes), and trimmings (looped button holes, tassels).

Herbaugh’s (1994) historical survey of Chinese and Japanese influences on western women’s fashion examined the period 1910-1925. The study found that far-eastern influences appeared concurrently and with equal frequency in both high and mass fashion publications. All three of the above studies limited their examination of the influences of eastern fashions to Asian countries without consideration of Middle Eastern or East European styles.

Some scholars have addressed the topic of Russian influence on fashion design, particularly in the first part of the twentieth century. Los Angeles County Museum of Art Curator Kaye Spilker’s 2006 presentation at Woodbury University in Burbank, California, A
quantum leap: The impact of the Ballets Russes on fashion, focused on the influence of the Ballets Russes on fashion in the early twentieth century. She addressed the work of Bakst, Roerich, Poiret, Erte, Fortuny, Delauny, and Chanel, and made the argument that the Ballets Russes set a precedent for ethnic clothing trends occurring later in the century. Many of the designs shown were in the orientalist style, exhibiting vibrantly colored materials, sheer drapery, fabrics with oversized prints, and body revealing designs. The study was grounded in an art history methodology, and was accompanied by many illustrations of Ballets Russes costumes and contemporaneous garments created by fashion designers.

Vassiliev’s 2000 work, Beauty in exile, documents the movement of members of the Russian nobility to European, American, and Asian capitols as they fled the 1918 Russian Revolution. The book has a strong biographical leaning, but also examines fashion developments including trends for Russian-styled embroidery and orientalism. Like Spilker’s presentation, the book describes the Ballets Russes as a phenomenon which broke the ground for ethnic styles of the 1920s and later decades.

Richard Martin’s Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western dress (1994) is an examination of the interpretation of the East in Western art and fashion. Drawing mainly on items in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Martin created an exhibit illustrating fashion designers’ interpretations of ethnic dress from China, India, the Near and Middle East, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Western fashion garments were accompanied by historical photographs, portraits, and other works of art. The exhibit encompassed works from the 18th century through the mid-1990s and demonstrated the Western world’s enduring fantasy vision of the East. In terms of dress, Martin described this vision as:
confected from Western desire and imagination...a sumptuous wardrobe—clothing to enchant 1,001 nights and to bring to Western dress motives of pagodas, picturesque Asians, as exotic botany, a hermetic and delicate Japan of lacquered and geishaed idyll, a stylized form of the botah that was matrix to the Kashmir and Paisley design and shawls, and many other riches of import and importance. (Martin, 1994, p. 11)

Martin also emphasized adaptations of untailored clothing forms, the use of luxurious silk fabrics, the use of vibrant color, and designs that allude to the body’s form as traits of orientalism in Western dress. Martin’s exhibit did not include ethnic dress garments, separating it, to some extent, from the work of those who have taken a visually comparative approach to understanding the interpretation of one culture’s dress practices by another.

**Comparative approach to ethnic dress and fashion**

Another approach to understanding ethnically-influenced fashion has been to place fashion garments and the styles that inspired them side by side for comparison. In their 2004 exhibit, *Fashion’s memory: From peasant art to wearable art*, Schoester et al. presented contemporary fashion designs and artwear designs alongside the drawings of Max Tilke, an anthropologist working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to demonstrate how peasant art has served as a continuing inspiration for wearable art. Schoester et al. use the term “peasant art” to refer somewhat loosely to “authentic” (Schoester et al., 2004, p. 2) “ethnographic and historic garments...from North Africa, Spain, the Balkans, and the Caucasus” (Schoeser et al., 2004, p. 1), while “wearable art” denotes the work of “artists whose medium is textiles” including “leading fashion designers and wearable artists” (Schoeser et al., 2004, p. 2). While the distinction between leading fashion designers and wearable artists is not explicit, the implication is that wearable artists produce one-of-a-kind garments as a means of artistic expression, and personally steer the creation of these works.
from inception forward, while fashion designers work in a more commercially-driven setting with teams of skilled employees to aid them in the creation of commodities. The work produced by wearable artists and fashion designers are treated with equal regard in terms of artistry. East Central European embroidered garments were compared to Mexican huipiles (to illustrate similarities in design over vast geographic areas) and to fashions created by contemporary Italian designer Roberto Cavalli.

Geoffroy-Schneiter’s 2001 work Ethnic style: History and fashion also displays ethnic and fashion designs side by side, though in a somewhat more haphazard fashion. This is a coffee-table style book with large-scale, color images. Geoffroy-Schneiter includes many more images of Asian, Indian, African, Latin American, Native American, and South Pacific ethnic dress than of Western fashion, and emphasizes body modifications which appear sensational to the Western viewer, such as large lip plugs and necks elongated by rings. Because the book focuses on historical images of body modification and extreme styles of ethnic dress, compared with relatively tame, contemporary, professionally fashion-photographed Western styles, it tends to encourage an us-them mentality and a view that ethnic styles are static. The work might have been more interesting had it included examples of extreme Western dress from throughout the past century (for example dramatic corseting or picture hats). Non-fashion and historic dress of Europe and America are excluded from this work.

Stevens and Wada’s Kimono inspiration: Art and art-to-wear in America (1996) addresses the interpretation of a single style of ethnic garment, namely the Japanese kimono, as interpreted by artwear designers, as opposed to fashion designers. Here, the term “art-to-wear” refers to the work of participants in the “Art-to-Wear movement…a response to the
1960s desire for individualized, homemade, and comfortable ethnic clothing” (p. 69). These textile artists “saw the body as a site for moveable creations” (p. 69). In this work, art-to-wear contrasted with fashion designs, which are defined as mass-produced, functional and marketable (p. 77). Published as companion document for the Textile Museum’s exhibit on American-made kimono, this work provides a history of kimono in Japan, a history of kimono in the American wardrobe and imagination, and many color images of kimono created by artwear designers. This work demonstrates reinterpretation of kimono by artwear designers in terms of garment cut, surface design, and function. This work is very specific to kimono, and does not address other types of dress.

Academic designers and ethnic-inspired design

It would be difficult to identify a period when designers did not study and employ ethnic inspirations for their own designs, though this process may have changed through time. Corry’s 1930 thesis, *Original adaptations of the European peasant costumes to costumes of the present day*, presented a generalized overview of the traditional dress of 21 European countries, drawn largely from *National Geographic* magazine. In her original designs, Corry, a student of the Applied Arts at Iowa State University, made use of the “line, color, and decoration” of folk dress, and did away with voluminous ethnic silhouettes, concluding that “the mode of today demands garments that reveal the trimness of the modern figure” (p. 4). While much of Corry’s attention focused on folk dress of Western Europe, there were some adaptations of East Central European folk dress (see Figure 2). Her adaptation of Russian dress incorporated sleeve and placket embroidery, full sleeves, and an apron-like panel at center front. These elements were integrated into a dress with a long, slim silhouette and flowing lines characteristic of fashions of the early 1930s.
Figure 2. Corry's adaptation of Russian peasant costume to the fashionable dress of the period (1930).
Given the period of the study, Corry’s modernist approach to the problem is revealed in such statements as: “Social equality of men and women, religious tolerance, mechanical inventions, and scientific discoveries have greatly influenced the mode of the day, producing...a more intelligent selection of ... ensembles than in any previous period” (p. 4). These ideas embrace a belief in scientific and social progress, a hallmark of the modernist paradigm (Morgado, 1996, p. 42), and present an interesting contrast to a postmodern approach. Visually, this approach is evident in Corry’s emphasis on harmony, simplicity, and functionality of design and in her communication of cultural categories of class and gender through dress.

McHaffey’s 1954 Iowa State University Applied Art thesis, *Traditional motifs in modern textile design*, focused on motifs from the ancient and classical world and their adaptation for textiles for home furnishings and clothing. Though McHaffey’s thesis was less explicitly modernist than Corry’s, a linear view of history, the idea of progress, and an elitism in art are revealed in her discussion of “the movement toward improving design in the applied arts” (p. 17). McHaffey did not explicitly address the topic of East Central European motifs, though she traced the development of the anthemion and rosette, which appear frequently in East Central European folk designs as curling leaves and roses.

A more recent example of an adaptation of ethnic designs for artwear is Jya’s 2001 thesis from Iowa State University, *Manipulation of Chinese ethnicity in traditional Ch’ing Dynasty dress through the use of digital printing techniques*. Jya maintained traditional shape and cut of Chinese garments, and emphasized digital printing techniques in her creative design. Her focus on multi-culturalism and “eclectic mixing of aesthetic codes” (Morgado, 1996, p. 43) in printed textile designs represent a postmodern attitude. Though
Jya’s work did not deal with East Central European motifs, her practice-based approach
addressed issues of textile surface design, artwear, and postmodernism—all applied to her
own design practice, thus making it a relevant precedent for this project.

**Fashion designers: East Central European inspirations**

East Central European folk aesthetics have served, in different ways, as inspirations
for some of the most prominent fashion designers of the past century, including Paul Poiret,
Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, and Yves St. Laurent. These designers’ solutions to the problem
of adapting an East Central European folk aesthetic to the fashions of their times hint at their
individual creative styles and also at prevailing attitudes toward dress.

Paul Poiret enjoyed his greatest acclaim between the years 1908 and 1914. During
this period and after, Poiret’s designs were often described as *orientalist*, a clue to the
zeitgeist (Mendes et al., 1999, p. 32) and the influence of the *Ballets Russes* (Troy, 2003),
which had an aesthetic driven in part by revival of interest in folk arts among Russian artists
(Mendes et al., 1999, p. 31). Russian influences can be seen in Figure 3 from late 1913,
specifically, embroidered floral motifs at the cuffs and hem, fur trimmings, a wide waistband
which simultaneously defines and thickens the waist, a standing collar, and a belled
silhouette. Poiret blended these influences with a hobble skirt, which was an element of the
fashionable silhouette of the period (for which he is given credit). Similarities to the ECEFA
examined for this study include the use of embroidered floral motifs and the use of garment
shapes reminiscent of East Central European historical dress.

Poiret’s designs adhered to modernist ideas of rhythmic cycles of change, an
emphasis on unity in dress, elite fashion as the inspiration for mass fashion, the dominance of
Figure 3. A 1913 Poiret design exhibiting East Central European characteristics.
a few styles of dress at a time, and clear communication of cultural categories such as gender and status through dress. However, he did not always work within a set system of rules of style, or place an emphasis on simplicity or functionality. His designs often had a strong dramatic effect, and were sometimes “assembled in a decidedly crude manner” (Mendes et al., 1999, p. 36). He also did not suppress ethnic distinctions. Many of Poiret’s ensembles exhibit ethnic influences, albeit in altered form. Polhemus described Poiret’s approach as framing “exotic delights within [western fashion’s] own structure” (2005, p. 108); however, one might argue that Poiret brought previously marginalized influences to the forefront even as he exploited a trend in Western fashion for costume or fancy dress for masquerade purposes.2

Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel also utilized East Central European inspirations in the course of her design career, which spanned the years 1910-1971 (Breward, 2003). De La Haye et al. (1994) define 1920-1924 as Chanel’s “Slav Period” (p. 31). Figure 4 is an example of Chanel’s designs from this period, with an ECEFA defined by surfaces embroidered with geometric, sharp designs and a reinvention of traditional Russian garments for the silhouette of the early twenties. The silhouette is tubular and sleek, and the predominant color of the dress is black. The invocation of the term “peasant” in this case suggests a naïve, pastoral aesthetic, but the embroidery itself belies a large investment of time and skill. The cut of Chanel’s designs suggest simplicity and humility, but the

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2 Costume balls were frequently featured in fashion magazines at this time, see for example the articles entitled; “Crinolines by Paul Poiret,” Harper’s Bazar, August 1914, p.12, and “In the world of make-believe,” Harper’s Bazar, February 1914, p. 12 or accounts of Poiret’s own 1002nd Night ball with Arabian Nights theme. It is possible that Western fashion participant’s fascination with “dressing up” as characters from other times and places found expression in everyday dress as well.
Figure 4. A Chanel design from her Slav period in the early 1920s.
ornamentation evokes a feeling of luxury and richness. Unlike the ECEFA examined for this project, Chanel’s gown does not exhibit mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, or overall visual density. However, the localization of the hand-worked embroidery on panels at the front, back, and shoulders of the gown suggest an apron and vest, hinting at the idea of an historical accruement of these shadow elements. Like Poiret, Chanel’s East Central European designs make use of ethnic details and surface ornamentation.

Yves St. Laurent’s 1976-77 “Russian Collection” was a hallmark for both folk and ethnic influence in haute couture, and is probably the fashion collection most often cited as East Central European influenced. St. Laurent’s ECEFA is labeled Russian and is characterized by long layers of coats, vests, shawls, peasant blouses, dirndl skirts, head wraps, and corsets that created a covered look and a voluminous silhouette, often with a wide cinched belt at the waist, as seen in Figure 5. The designs were executed in lustrous fabrics in intense colors. The designs, with disparate, mismatched scarves, belts, and sashes are reminiscent of the historical accruement of elements seen in historical East Central European folk dress. St. Laurent made use of mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density. Off-the-shoulder blouses and sheer material emphasize the female body. The overall effect is romantic and dramatic. That Russia served during this period as a symbol for connection to deep, dramatic feelings is evidenced by a 1976 Oscar de la Renta ad (with foreign inflection): “At last. I’ve found it. The dressing to match the Russian in my soul...Oscar de la Renta. Oh that man. He knows how to put feeling into clothes. Nevermind

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3 See for example Steele, 1997, p. 292 and Yu, 2001, p. 309
Figure 5. Designs from St. Laurent’s 1976 Russian collection.
his name. He is Russian." At this time, Russian costume was examined not just in the fashion world, but in other cultural arenas as well. For example, Jacqueline Onassis’ 1976 collaborative work with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *In the Russian style*, addressed the dress and customs of Imperial Russia. This work complimented Diana Vreeland’s exhibit for the Metropolitan Museum, *The glory of Russian costume*, which opened on December 6, 1976 (and was attended by the likes of Andy Warhol and Imelda Marcos).

If East Central Europe, and particularly Russia, served as a conduit to deep emotion in 1976, it was also a connection to influences farther east. In her feature article on Russian cuisine for *Vogue* in September of 1976, Sonia Uvezian described the Caucasus as “that bridge formed by three Soviet Republics—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—linking Russia to Iran and Turkey” (p. 250). It is interesting to note that, like earlier trends during Poiret’s and Chanel’s times, the vogue for East Central European influenced design in the 1970s was one aspect of a larger orientalist fad. Some of St. Laurent’s designs from 1976-77 show a more obvious Asian influence than Russian, and in the winter of 1977-78 he presented his “Chinese Collection” (Steele, 1997, p. 292). Similarly, Poiret’s earlier designs were described alternately as “Turkish,” “Moorish,” and more generically “Oriental,” indicative of a long-standing precedent for a mélange of visual cues in ECEFAs.

In an article in which Paul Poiret is invoked in name and image, Pierre Schneider (1976) agreed that St. Laurent “has drawn his inspiration from what, loosely speaking, we called the Orient” (p. 235), and continued on to make a firm argument that St. Laurent was a postmodern designer, without using that term. Schneider wrote that St. Laurent’s collection

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4 Quoted from Oscar de la Renta advertisement: *Harper’s Bazaar*, September 1976, p.89
5 See for example: *Vogue*, September 1976, p. 119
was "a tissue of chronological and geographical non-sequiters" (p. 235) with "blatant unnatural hybridization" (p. 235) of influences including "Afghan shepherds and Detroit mechanics" (p. 235). He wrote that "signs have lost their significance" (p. 235) and concluded that St. Laurent had ushered in "the end of modernity, of the epoch when history exercised the powers that once were the prerogative of the gods" (p. 235). St. Laurent's collection adhered to the postmodern ideas of recycled looks, a confused mélange of chronology, ethnic styling, and emphasis on image. However, compared to more recent East Central European-inspired haute couture collections such as John Galliano's 2002 "From Russia with love," St. Laurent's ensembles appear unified and harmonious as a collection. It is perhaps the conceptual, fantasy-driven nature of St. Laurent's 1976-77 collection that is its strongest postmodern element.

It seems to have been the idea of becoming a "glorious heroine"\(^6\) or "romantic peasant"\(^7\) that was the hook of St. Laurent's ECEFA, more than the floor length volume or ornate materials of his ensembles. Chanel's ECEFA focused on sharp embroidery motifs and subtle suggestions of folk dress garments, like aprons. Poiret's ECEFA employed novel silhouettes, elaborate surface embroidery, printed fabrics, and intricate woven designs with leanings farther east. However, figures 3-5 are recognizable as East Central European-inspired designs because Poiret, Chanel, and St. Laurent made use of stereotyped symbols for the region. Poiret's wide belt and thick silhouette evoke an East Central European peasant, as do Chanel's embroidery and suggestions of an apron. St. Laurent's scarves, layers, and silhouette suggest babushkas and cossacks. The garments created for this study also exploit

\(^6\) *Vogue*, October 1976, p. 208
\(^7\) *Vogue*, December 1976, p. 163
certain stereotyped symbols—for instance; aprons, embroidery, and volume—making them recognizably East Central European folk-inspired.

**Fashion commentators and the recent East Central European folk look**

During 2005-2006, an ECEFA burgeoned in both high and popular fashion. Examples come from Anna Sui, Roberto Cavalli, and Cacharel, to name a few. Fashion writers for web-based trend publications, Barford, Franklin, and Weston-Thomas, agree on certain characteristics that define the recent ECEFA. They all cite the use of velvet, fur, lace, heavy brocades with a baroque feel and embellished fabrics. Embroidery, appliqué, soft gathering, dark colors, high contrast, and printed materials are others markers of the aesthetic, as defined by these authors. Skirts, coats, wide belts, and dresses with romantic styling are highlighted as important garments for achieving the look. Inspiration for the recent ECEFA is drawn from diverse sources, including folk dress garments, Russian imperial dress, Dr. Zhivago, Edwardian dress, Cossack military uniforms, and socialist revolutionary style. As this project was conceived prior to the 2005-2006 explosion of East Central European folk styles, this recent wave had little or no effect on my design work. Furthermore, this study was intended primarily to be an examination of design techniques for artwear, and not to have a strong tie to contemporary fashion.

My own designs are similar to St. Laurent’s in that I am attempting to capture a mood and a particular aesthetic. They are generally East Central European-inspired, not specifically Russian-inspired like Chanel’s, or inspired by all lands East, like Poiret’s. However, my aesthetic is less unified and more rough-hewn than St. Laurent’s. I believe that East Central European lands inspire me differently than it did these designers. For Poiret it was the drama and passion of the Russian ballet. For Chanel it was the reality of a circle of
Russian émigré friends and their embroidery skills. For St. Laurent it was Russian historic fantasy. My own approach to this design problem finds the essence of its solution in vaguely remembered images of my Czech grandparent’s heirlooms and souvenirs.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the design process, it was established that three original East Central European-inspired ensembles would be created as the focus of this project. The design process involved phases of inspiration-seeking and concept development, during which design themes and moods were explored. This was followed by a design development phase, when inspirations were merged with ideas for garment structure and garment combinations. The implementation phase involved the creation of three jackets with companion garments. This process was typical of the standard design research method, which involves “three or four phases that include some type of problem statement or identification, a conceptual design phase, a prototype development phase, and final implementation or solution to the problem” (Parsons et al., 2004, p. 89).

Inspiration seeking and concept development

The initial concept for the folk aesthetic I chose to develop was drawn from vague memories of my grandparent’s Czech souvenirs and heirlooms. When I was a small child, their house was decorated with plates and trays painted with animal and floral designs, with lace table cloths and dolls in folk dress. In order to develop a more concrete design concept, I scanned contemporary and historical texts on the folk art of East and Central Europe for images that resonated with those vague memories. Illustrations from these texts were augmented with fabric swatches, wallpaper swatches, and floral images, as seen in Figure 6, a sample inspiration page from the design sketchbook developed for this project. This collection process helped me to recognize recurring themes in the images I found compelling, namely: the use of bright colors including blue, red, pink, yellow, purple, green, white, black, and metallic gold and silver, a mix of materials like brocade, lace, silk ribbon, and woven silk
Figure 6. Sample page from sketchbook: collection of inspiring colors, patterns, and images.
and cotton, a amalgamation of textile embellishment techniques of pleating, edge trimming, and embroidery, an eclectic combination of semi-geometric, sharp, and naturalistic patterns of roses, violets, carnations, lilies of the valley, five-petal flowers, tulips, whorl-designs, hearts and birds, a historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density. Despite conflicting elements, as a group, these images communicated an air of history, nostalgia and romance, and I wanted my garments to communicate the same ideas through a similar aesthetic.

**Design development**

The design development process involved experimentation with designs through sketches and sample construction. Several early designs were rejected because they did not harmonize with the design concept. One rejected design was a black silk dress with lace top, discharge dyed and cyanotype printed with a bird motif. Though the design had a hand-crafted look and utilized bird, floral, and leaf imagery, the surface design and colors of the finished dress were too muddy, dark, and subtle to match the design concept. The final design decision was to focus on development of three structured jackets with companion garments for a total of six garments, with distinctive, but interrelated, surface designs. This decision created six distinct opportunities for design experimentation. To maintain emphasis on surface design, fabrics were selected and surface design options explored prior to resolving garment cut. Fabrics with printed patterns reminiscent of East Central European semi-geometric, sharp, and naturalistic floral patterns presented possibilities for appliqué and quilting. Plain fabrics held potential for embroidery and other “positive” embellishment techniques. Natural fibers were appealing because they could be faded and distressed, in keeping with the postmodern idea of deconstruction (Morgado, 1996, p. 48).
Machine embroidery provided an interesting means for interpretation of floral motifs, since it could be used both to highlight existing designs on printed fabrics and to create original motifs, and because it added a textural element to the surface design. Machine embroidery also removed the idea of embroidery from traditional hand-craft processes, and its stabilizing properties provided an opportunity for experimentation with deconstruction of the fabric surfaces. While each jacket presented unique challenges for the incorporation of motifs, each required the discovery of effective methods for exploitation of the chosen material. Decisions about garment structure and relationships between structure and placement of embellishment followed fabric selection. The final design decision was to focus on development of three short jacket designs with knee-length companion pieces.

In some cases, fabric selections placed strict limitations on garment cut. For example, the fabric from which the second jacket was cut featured narrow strips of floral patterning, lending itself to a linearly focused design, as in a jacket with corset styling. A collection of images of contemporary and historical garment designs was an important source of inspiration for a feeling of historical accruement of elements in garment cut. Sketches of ideas for the jackets were combined with fabric swatches and inspiration images on inspiration pages and compiled in a sketchbook. Designs for the companion garments developed last through a similar method, with the additional objective of pulling the jackets together as a collection, and apart as a postmodern collection. Patterns for garments were developed mainly through flat patterning and draping techniques.

The concept of postmodernism was a guiding factor in the design development process. Because the project centered on the creation of a postmodern group of garments, designs were intentionally conceptualized to communicate dissonance, and were interpreted,
rather than drawn literally, from the ECEFA. It is interesting to note that some general elements of the ECEFA, such as a historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density, play well into Morgado’s (1996) definition of postmodern, which provides an example of a previously marginalized ethnic aesthetic (Morgado, 1996, p. 46) reading as postmodern in a contemporary design setting.

Implementation: Garments, construction, and application of motifs

Each of the pieces in this collection presented unique design challenges. They were each created using different materials, and were embellished with different floral patterns through different surface design techniques. This variety of cut and decoration allowed for a maximum amount of design experimentation.

Ensemble 1

Figure 7 shows the original sketch and inspirations for the first jacket, which features an appliquéd collar, cuffs, buckle and lower edge. The jacket is nipped in at the natural waist and slightly flared over the hips, creating a subtle hourglass silhouette. This shape was adapted from the Polish woman’s jacket from the early twentieth century in the upper right hand corner of Figure 7, originally in Czarnecka (1957).\(^8\) The floral fabric for the jacket was selected for its colors: blue, red, yellow, white and black, and its sharp, semi-naturalistic / semi-geometric depiction of roses, lilies of the valley, five-petal flowers, tulips, whorl-designs, and leaves. These qualities of the print are reminiscent of floral motifs seen on the Czech painted wardrobe in Figure 7.

The jacket was constructed from a blue and white striped denim (evocative of farmer’s striped overalls or a train conductor’s hat), seen in Figure 7, and the quilter’s floral

\(^8\) *Folk art in Poland* (p. 160)
Figure 7. Original sketch and inspirations for jacket #1.
print discussed above. After partial assembly, the denim portion of the jacket was faded in bleach and vinegar baths, and then antiqued in a tea bath to achieve a look of age and wear. Prior to stitching the sleeves and collar facing to the body of the jacket, the floral pattern of the quilter's print was machine appliquéd onto these pieces and the jacket's lower edge and then cut away from its black background, leaving the floral pattern seen on the finished jacket. This technique left an exposed raw edge on the quilter's print, as seen in Figure 8. As the jacket is washed and worn, the raw edges of the floral appliqué will detach, leaving only the black outline stitching of the pattern. This feature plays into the postmodern idea of
deconstruction (Morgado, 1996, p. 46). The jacket fronts were trimmed with piping made from bias strips of the faded denim. An oversized covered button serves as a belt buckle.

Figure 9 shows the original sketch of the companion skirt for the first jacket and its inspirations, both from Odarchenko et al. (1992). The skirt is cut with a swooping front panel, which references an apron, a common element of East Central European women’s folk dress. The pleats at center back echo the woman’s pleated apron pictured in Figure 9, with pleats relocated to the back. Pleats are also commonly seen in petticoats, overskirts, aprons, and blouses of women’s folk dress of East Central Europe. The floral motif on the apron portion of the skirt was adapted from a Ukrainian block print pattern. This pattern, as pictured, was incomplete and was altered by hand, and digitally trued, to form a repeating pattern.

The companion skirt is slim-fitting and knee-length, and was made from the same blue and white striped denim as the jacket, faded and aged in a similar manner. The pieces were cut on partial bias to create sharp, clashing angles at seams. The semi-naturalistic floral pattern was enlarged and traced onto the skirt and outlined with machine stitching. The apron panel is outlined with wide piping made from bias strips of the faded denim. Details of the machine stitching and piping are seen in Figure 10. The machine-stitched motif tacks down knife pleats at center back through the hips.

Figures 11-14 show front and back views of the jacket and skirt of the first ensemble together – on a dress form and on a live model. Worn together, this slim-fitting, structured ensemble evokes the silhouette of the early and mid 1940s, lending it a nostalgic, vintage

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9 *Ukrainian Folk Costume*, Block print pattern p. 31, pleated skirt/apron p. 110.
Figure 9. Original sketch and inspirations for companion garment #1.
Figure 10. Detail of embellishment: companion garment #1.

Figures 11 and 12. Front and back views of ensemble #1.
Figures 13 and 14. Front and back views of ensemble #1 on model.
feel. This feeling is enhanced by the blue and white striped denim, with references to historical American work clothes. The jacket could be worn buttoned or unbuttoned, by itself or over a shirt or dress, with the skirt, or with a different lower garment. The skirt can not be worn in as many ways; however it could be paired with different upper garments. The mismatch of motifs on the skirt and the jacket, the blend of Czech, Polish, Ukrainian elements in a single ensemble, and the re-interpretation of embroidery techniques are postmodern elements of the first ensemble. Other postmodern considerations include the idea that the jacket should fall apart as it is worn, the faded and discolored quality of the denim, and the incorporation of non-related nuances from dress history. The use of blue, red, green, yellow, white, and black, the mismatch of East Central European-inspired semi-naturalistic and semi-geometric floral motifs, the sharp appearance of the pleats and seams, and the suggestion of an historical accruement of elements bind the ensemble to the ECEFA.

**Ensemble 2**

Figure 15 shows the original sketch and inspirations for the second jacket; a quilted, short-sleeved design with off-shoulder puffed sleeves. The fit of the jacket, which emphasizes a nipped-in natural waist, was inspired by Hungarian women’s festive dress vests from the mid-twentieth century pictured in Gáborján (1969). The floral ground fabric, an upholstery material with alternating stripes of wide multi-colored floral and narrow blue-on-white patterning was selected for its colors: blue, pink, red, yellow, pink, green, and white, and for its naturalistic depiction of roses, violets, lilies of the valley, five-petal flowers, tulips, and leaves. The body of the jacket and its sleeves are embellished with free-form

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10 *Hungarian peasant costumes*, see, for example, p. 8 or 40.
Figure 15. Original sketch and inspirations for jacket #2.
Figure 16. Detail of quilting: jacket #2.

machine quilting, which is focused primarily in the spaces of the print that were originally white. A detail of the quilting on the jacket body is seen in Figure 16. The body of the jacket was cut from the wide multi-colored floral portion of the upholstery material, and consists of 16 narrow, contoured pieces, allowing for a close fit and built-in structure. The sleeves were cut from the narrow blue-on-white floral portion of the fabric. The whitish appearance of the sleeves was intended to reference the full, white elbow-length sleeved shirts often worn under East Central European women’s vests. The blue floral stripes of the ground material are still visible, but have been visually linked to the body of the jacket through quilting. The jacket and sleeves are padded with low-loft batting in order to support
the heavy amount of stitching on the surface of the fabric, to lend the jacket a more solid structure, and to add depth and texture to the surface design. Quilting also traces some of the floral figures in the print. This quilting was intended to add color to “blank” spaces in the pattern, to create a flow across the panels of the jacket, and to add texture and depth to the material. From a distance, the freeform stitching has the appearance of a floral pattern.

The lining and trimmings were cut from hand-dyed red silk. Commercially dyed red shell buttons were chosen for the front closure and parallel the luminosity of the silk trim. The jacket has a double vent at center back, which emphasizes the curve of the lower back when worn. The sleeves end at the elbow with a faux French cuff, accented with silk ruffled trim and red shell cuff-links. The style of this jacket, with its tight fit, nipped waist, short sleeves, low, wide neck line, point at center front, and edge trimming is also reminiscent of bodices worn in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

Figure 17 shows the original sketch for the companion dress for the second jacket. The fullness and knee-length of the skirt is reminiscent of East Central European women’s festive skirts. The dress was cut from dark green cotton velveteen and is lined with maroon and white polyester with a polka-dot pattern. The upper edges are trimmed with piping made from bias strips of the velveteen. The dress has a center back closure. The red floral motif was created by combining and altering designs in Sibbett (1977) (an album of folk motifs redrawn from early and mid twentieth century works on peasant art of East and Central Europe), and is a semi-naturalistic representation of roses, carnations, and leaves. The motif sweeps upward across the skirt and onto the lower bodice. It was executed in bright red variegated embroidery floss tacked down with a narrow machine zigzag stitch, a detail of which is seen in Figure 18.
Figure 17. Original sketch and inspirations for companion garment #2.
Figure 18. Detail of embroidery: companion garment #2.

Figures 19 and 20. Front and back views of ensemble #2.
Figures 21 and 22. Front and back views of ensemble #2 on model.
Figures 19-22 show front and back views of the jacket and dress of the second ensemble together — on a dress form and on a live model. Worn together, the ensemble has a romantic, feminine feel. The natural waist is accentuated by the downward point of the skirt waist line, as well as the downward point of the jacket hem. These downward points are echoed in the V-shaped neckline of the dress. The combinations of patterns, including the lining of the dress, contribute to the ensemble’s high visual density. The jacket could be re-combined with other dresses, or with pants and a shirt or camisole for a different feel. The dress could be worn alone, or paired with other jackets. It could also be worn with the skirt tacked up to reveal the lining, with tights or shawls, or over longer skirts or pants.

Postmodern elements of this garment include the freeform pattern of the machine stitching, which represents a breakdown of boundaries between high and low craft techniques, and which disconnects quilting from its traditional hand-craft connotations. The embroidered motif of the skirt similarly represents a breakdown of boundaries between high and low craft techniques, and disconnects embroidery from its traditional hand-craft connotations. The blend of elements from East Central European folk dress, such as a full, knee-length skirt, emphasis on the natural waist and references to a floral vest and white blouse with full elbow-length sleeves, combined with references to eighteenth century European fashion, relate to the postmodern concepts of a collapse of chronology and bricolage (Morgado, 1996, p. 46). ECEFA elements include the use of bright colors including blue, red, yellow, purple, green, and white, a mix of materials, an amalgamation of textile embellishment techniques, and an eclectic combination of semi-naturalistic floral patterns of roses, violets, carnations, lilies of the valley, five-petal flowers, and tulips. The
appearance of an historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density are other ECEFA characteristics.

**Ensemble 3**

Figure 23 shows the original sketch and inspirations for the third jacket, which features a princess seam closure, kimono sleeves, and wraparound collar. The concept for the jacket’s floral design was inspired by embroidered sheepskin jackets of Hungary and the Czech Republic, an example of which is seen in the lower left corner of Figure 23. The jacket maintains the central back placement of the primary floral design, with lighter embroidery wrapping around to the front of the jacket. The specific floral motif, featuring semi-naturalistic, sharp design of roses, carnations, lilies of the valley, and leaves, was adapted from Sibbet’s (1977) design, seen in the upper right hand corner of the inspiration page. The asymmetrical cut of the jacket was inspired initially by Russian men’s shirts with side placket closures, echoed in the jacket’s overlapping front closures. These swooping princess seam panels provided a surface for an upswept floral design.

The jacket is made of denim which has been bleached and antiqued in the dye lab to convey a feeling of age and wear. The front panels curve into the side seams, forming pockets. The sleeve, side front, and side back are cut as a single pattern piece. The chosen floral design was enlarged, simplified, adjusted for balance of composition, and adapted for a repeating pattern before being fitted and traced onto the paper pattern pieces for the jacket. Photocopies of the pattern pieces were stitched directly onto the unassembled jacket pieces following the lines of the motif, and were then torn off, leaving a yellow-orange thread outline. After some initial experimentation with reverse appliqué, portions of the motif were
Figure 23. Original sketch and inspirations for jacket #3.
filled in with free motion machine embroidery, or thread painting. The back of the jacket was filled in more heavily than the front to create an airy look for the up-sweep of the front panel, and to keep an emphasis on the rear embellishment, as in the inspiring sheepskin jackets. The jacket was then assembled and the seams topstitched with the yellow-orange thread typical of contemporary fashion denim. Figure 24 provides a detail of the jacket front embroidery. The jacket lining is cut from hand-dyed thistle-colored silk.

Figure 25 shows the original sketch, fabric swatches, and floral motif for the companion skirt for the third jacket. The skirt’s wrapped design is meant to evoke the idea of an apron, and also to echo the overlap of the jacket front. The skirt’s floral motif was an adaptation of the Ukrainian embroidery design pictured in Figure 25. This motif is a

Figure 24. Detail of embroidery: jacket #3.
Figure 25. Original sketch and inspirations for companion garment #3.
naturalistic depiction of leaves and incorporates hearts.

The skirt was cut from the same denim material as the jacket; however it was not bleached or antiqued. Its dark color and yellow topstitching evoke denim fashions from the 1950s. It’s A-line and wrap design are reminiscent of 1970s fashion. The floral motif was enlarged, simplified, and made into a repeating pattern before being traced onto a Stitch n’ Tear duplicate of the skirt pattern. The motif was thread traced onto the skirt with green, yellow, and red thread, as seen in Figure 26. The skirt was lined with red and white polka-dotted cotton, lending the skirt a high visual density. It fastens with buttons at the side seams.

Figures 27-30 show front and back views of the third ensemble on a dress form and on a live model. The silhouette curves in at the waist and has an overall bell shape. Much of the visual interest of this ensemble is situated in back, with the vibrant embroidery of the jacket and the upsweep of the skirt. Both garments have a casual feel and could easily be paired with other garments for everyday wear.

Postmodern elements of this ensemble include the reinterpretation of the apron, the aged appearance of the jacket material, the scribbled quality of the thread painting, and blended references to fashion denim of the past and present through the use of yellow topstitching, 1970s fashion, and historical Russian men’s dress. ECEFA ideas are seen in the use of blue, red, pink, yellow, purple, and green, the use of embroidery, the representation of semi-naturalistic and sharp roses, carnations, lilies of the valley, leaves, and hearts, the appearance of an historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density.
Figure 26. Detail of embroidery: companion garment #3.

Figures 27 and 28. Front and back views of ensemble #3.
Figures 29 and 30. Front and back views of ensemble #3 on model.
CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS

A postmodern approach opens up a world of possibilities for an artwear designer. The number of ways a single design inspiration could be interpreted, reinterpreted, combined, blended, taken apart and reassembled may be limitless. This idea was the stimulus for this exploration of an East Central European folk aesthetic as a postmodern design inspiration. I set out to create a group of postmodern artwear garments incorporating blue, red, pink, yellow, purple, green, white, black, a mix of materials, an amalgamation of textile embellishment techniques, an eclectic combination of semi-geometric, sharp, and naturalistic patterns, an historical accruement of elements, mismatched motifs, layered patterned materials, and high visual density. This was done with an eye to how others had taken on the problem of adapting East Central European Folk inspirations for garment design. The design research method included problem identification, concept development, design development, and implementation phases, and was intended as a practice-based thesis, with the design process as the main focus of the study.

The findings from the brief historical survey of East Central European inspirations in garment design helped to contextualize the design process undertaken during this study. Inspiration initially came through a visual survey of texts on East Central European folk art. Images from these texts helped to identify themes of the ECEFA, shape design concept development, and guide the design development process. Machine embroidery techniques played a key role in development and implementation phases, because of its decorative and reinforcing properties. History was communicated through aged and processed materials, romance through the use of floral motifs and their placement on the designs as well as with
touches of luxurious materials like silk and shell, and vague nostalgia through the juxtaposition of mismatched motifs and historical references.

**Limitations and recommendations for further research**

One shortcoming of the study was the depth of the historical survey. Though it was sufficient for the purposes of this particular project, it was not a comprehensive overview of East Central European influences in garment design of the past century. A more thorough look at the history of East Central European inspirations as well as an in-depth analysis of political and cultural phenomena that may have prompted or accompanied them is recommended for future studies. In particular, this paper touches only briefly on Russia in the American imagination in the mid 1970s.

Another issue for consideration is the larger amount of scholarly work that has been done on Asian influences in high fashion versus East Central European influences. Trends for Asian inspired clothing have often concurred with trends for East Central European influences, and it might be worthwhile to examine this concurrence or to look at East Central European influences through studies with methods similar to those used to examine Asian influences.

This study provided only a cursory look at the history of postmodernism in fashion through a very specific lens. An analysis of the development of the postmodern approach in fashion is recommended. A study of this type would help to establish a postmodern dress history, into which collections like St. Laurent’s 1976 Russian collection could be placed. Modernist era designs that do not fit perfectly inside the bounds of Morgado’s definition modernism might be differently understood in this context as well.
The historical survey looked only at East Central European folk influences in fashion of the past century. An examination of earlier East Central European folk influences could tie into other folk-influenced fashion phenomena such as Marie Antoinette’s pastoral-influenced styles.

The design process was technologically limited to a certain extent. Though I feel satisfied with the designs created for this study, the utilization of specialized embroidery machinery and fabric printing technologies would open up new areas for surface design exploration. Other studio techniques, such as fabric painting and dyeing, hand embroidery, stamping, and many others may generate alternate solutions to the design problem. Reframing the problem in terms of more formal garment designs (as many floral motifs would be well-suited to fancy dress) or experimental designs would produce different results, and an exploration of the possibilities for textile art, not limited by the body’s constraints, might be an exciting approach to East-Central European inspirations as well.

One challenge encountered during the design process was achieving a balance between a postmodern aesthetic and the creation of a cohesive group of garments. Some garments designed and created for this project were rejected after being viewed with the other pieces in the collection. The appearance of a random group of garments was circumvented by selecting certain specific design ideas to carry throughout the group (for example the color red, floral motifs, and machine stitching), which may partly explain the conservative feel of the collection. Other factors contributing to this unadventurous sensibility included a need to produce a number of well-constructed, time-intensive garments for everyday function within the project’s time-frame.
Finally, the dual nature of the practice-based study presented some distinctive obstacles. At times the writing detracted from the creation of garments, and at others the creation of garments detracted from the writing, as it was difficult to hit a stride that incorporated both scholarly and creative aspects. My solution was to concentrate on one aspect at a time; however this strategy led to a disengagement from the creative and scholarly components as they alternated places on the backburner. An investigation of practice-based studies undertaken in recent years to determine how this inherent duality has been bridged is recommended. It would also be worthwhile to identify the conventions forming for this type of study, which certainly has great potential for design research.
References


http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/ece/country.html


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