

**Anticipations of the new urban cultural economy:  
Fashion and the transformation of London's West End 1955-75.**

**Christopher Beward (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)**

**David Gilbert (Royal Holloway, University of London)**

**Final draft, published as:**

***Creative Urban Milieus. Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy and the City.* (Frankfurt / Chicago: Campus /University of Chicago University Press 2008), 163-182.**

**Please quote from published version. Published version contains illustrations.**

The late Arthur Marwick, writing in his book *The Sixties*, described the period as a modern renaissance. While some of his claims for the significance of the period may be over-stretched, it did undoubtedly mark an important moment in the history of the interrelations between culture, economy and certain key cities. Nowhere was this more the case than in London, where developments in popular music, fashion, art and youth culture seemed to many to presage a rebirth of the city. *Time* magazine's famous 'London: The Swinging City' issue of April 1966 helped to establish enduring stereotypes of 1960s London. Its editorial deftly itemized the distinctive character of the new London, stating that:

/quote/

In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene. This spring, as never before in modern times, London is switched on. Ancient elegance and new opulence are all tangled up in a dazzling blur of op and pop. The city is alive with birds and Beatles, buzzing

with minicars and telly stars, pulsing with half a dozen separate veins of excitement. (*Time* 15 April 1966: 32)

The most common interpretation of the 'Swinging London' phenomenon focuses primarily on cultural change. In this reading, London was a central site in transformations of lifestyles, social attitudes, intergenerational relationships and forms of consumption that were to be important across the western world and beyond. Marwick's account is the most comprehensive 'culturalist' account of these changes, but this is also a feature of more popular accounts of the period. At its most hyperbolic this perspective argues that what the new creative forces of London achieved was nothing less than the remaking of the modern world. As Shawn Levy puts it, "in London for those few evanescent years it all came together: youth, pop music, fashion, celebrity, satire, crime, fine art, sexuality, scandal, theatre, cinema, drugs, media – the whole mad modern stew. ... Within three miles of Buckingham Palace in a few incredible years, we were all of us born." (Levy 2003: 6) Understandably much of the emerging historical work on London in the 1960s has attempted to challenge or at least complicate this view of radical, seemingly overnight, change. Some have emphasised the limits of the Swinging London phenomenon, stressing its short-lived and elitist character, and calling for an end to histories and memoirs of the period 'ploughing over the same old turf, gamely pretending that Swinging London changed the world.' (Cohn 2006: 130; see also Green 1999; Sandbrook 2006. For detailed consideration of the mythologies of Swinging London see Gilbert 2006a.)

An alternative response has been to provide a firmer contextualisation of the changes that took place, stressing the continuities with earlier periods in London's history. Both Mary Quant, the designer most often associated with 1960s fashions, and Carnaby Street, now forever remembered and mythologised as the heart of Swing London, started out much earlier than might be expected, given their strong identification with the high sixties. Quant's first shop *Bazaar*, opened in Chelsea in 1955, while the opening of Basil Green menswear store *Vince* in 1954 is often taken as the beginnings of

the men's boutique scene. This contextualising strategy has been pushed further in recent studies of London's fashion history, that have interpreted emergence of new designers, boutiques and forms of street-style in the sixties as a further phase in a long tradition of London-based demotic styles that have emphasised the edgy, playful and experimental (Breward 2004; O'Neill 2007).

This essay is a rather different response to urban creativity in London during what might be described as the long 1960s. Here the emphasis is neither on the 1960s as cultural revolution, nor on the period as another twist in a long tradition of urban creative activity, but rather on the way in which many of the elements of what has been described as the new cultural economy of cities were anticipated in the developments of the period. Our primary focus here reflects our interests and research into the development of the fashion industry and broader fashion culture of the West End in the post-war period, but our more general argument applies to a wider range of cultural industries that developed in the city during the period. Examining the history of London in the 1960s alongside consideration of the new urban cultural economy literature can help to achieve three outcomes. First, this analysis of the urban creative economy that developed in London from the late-1950s onwards complicates what has become a dominant reading of the periodisation of the interrelations between culture, economy and certain key cities. We consider this periodisation model in the following section. Secondly, ideas developed from the urban cultural economy literature can contribute new perspectives to our understanding of London in the 1960s. Finally, this exercise can also be used to reflect on contemporary developments, indicating some of the specificities and limitations of claims about contemporary urban creative sectors.

/Ü1/

**Periodising the new cultural economy of cities.**

Much of the literature about the new cultural economy of cities emphasises that a major turning point took place in the 1980s and 1990s. Such changes were variously associated with the emergence of post-Fordist production systems (Piore and Sabel 1984), and with a decisive shift towards industries whose principle products consisted of images, signs and symbols (Crane 1992, Lash and Urry 1994). The most systematic expression of these ideas comes in Allen Scott's work on the cultural economy of cities (Scott 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2005). Scott makes a number of basic claims about the cultural economy, concerning the sectors of the economy producing goods and services 'whose subjective meaning, or, more narrowly, sign value to the consumer, is high in comparison with their utilitarian purpose.' (Scott 2005: 3) First, Scott argues strongly that the late twentieth century saw the appearance of a distinctively post-Fordist cultural economy in the advanced capitalist societies, associated with a 'vast extension' of craft, fashion and cultural-products industries and a 'great surge in niche markets for design- and information-intensive outputs.' (Scott 2000a: 6) Scott's second argument is that this shift towards post-Fordist flexibility has fostered new geographies of economic organisation. While Fordism was seen as a force breaking up industrial regions and making production ever less place dependent, post-Fordism has seen resurgent spatial agglomeration. One strand of analysis of the economic geography of post-Fordist flexibility has concentrated on the emergence of neo-Marshallian industrial regions like Silicon Valley or the Third Italy. However, Scott argues that the great expansion of commercialized cultural production since the mid-1980s has been very largely based in major urban centres, particularly so-called 'world cities' like New York, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Los Angeles and London (Scott 2005: 6).

There is within the new cultural economy literature, therefore, a strong argument that changes of the 1980s and 1990s formed a redefining set of transformational processes in the metropolitan cores of major world cities (Hutton 2004: 106). There are a number of key elements often identified with this new urban formation. First and foremost of these is the growth of what have become known as creative clusters – concentrated districts of creative, knowledge-based and technology-intensive industries, often found within old

de-industrialised parts of the metropolitan core (Pratt 1997; Hutton 2004). Key examples of such clusters include Manhattan's 'Silicon Alley' in the Tribeca and SoHo districts, and London's Hoxton and Clerkenwell. Secondly such clusters, and the urban creative economy more generally, are characterised by dense networks of strongly interdependent small- and medium-sized firms (Scott 2000: 12). Thirdly, often drawing upon the distinctive profile and traditions of major world cities (what Molotch (1996: 229) describes as a kind of monopoly rent that adheres to places) and using new media to disseminate product, these highly localised cultural economy clusters come to have increasingly globalised recognition and markets. Fourthly, the new urban cultural economy is marked by considerable hybridity of industries and firm types, combining new design-orientated advanced-technology industries (such as software authoring, web design), with established creative industries (themselves increasingly shaped by new technologies) such as graphic design, architecture and fashion design, alongside arts organisations and studios. These zones are marked by a relatively open labour market for creatively skilled workers, who may cross sectors relatively easily.

Finally, the urban creative economy literature places great store on the concept of urban milieu, emphasising the overlaps between economic and social networks. For Allen Scott, these are places 'where qualities such as cultural insight, imagination, and originality are actively generated from within the local system of production.' (Scott 2001: 9) In Richard Florida's controversial arguments about the emergence and significance of a 'creative class', this idea of urban milieu is pushed much further, to include a much wider urban cultural infrastructure and ambiance, emphasising the significance of environments that attract, stimulate and retain young affluent creative professionals. (Florida 2002)

As this collection demonstrates, there is clearly a need to historicise these debates over the cultural economy of cities, and particularly to question the assertion that the last 25 years have seen a marked disjuncture in the nature of major cities. We need, however, to move beyond the

straightforward assertion that cities through their history have often been crucibles of creativity. The new cultural economy model, with its component elements of post-Fordist flexibility, geographical clustering, dense networks of relatively small firms, local-global connections, hybridity, and creative urban milieu, provides the basis for more an effective historical periodisation that compares the details of particular urban formations.

Some responses to claims about the newness of the new urban cultural economy have worked in just this way. In particular, it has been argued that a combination of flexible production and strongly place-specific design cultures has long been a feature of certain sectors and certain world cities. (Gilbert 2006b) Nancy Green argues that the fashion and garment industry (in Paris and New York) demonstrated 'flexible specialisation before the term was coined' (1995: 4). Green's and Sally Weller's work on the significance of copyright and licensing arrangements in the geographies of twentieth century fashion also indicate both the longevity of issues concerning the symbolic economy in a pre-digital age, and the extensive reach of Parisian fashions as both material objects and as symbolic goods (Weller 2004; 2007). There are indeed places in Scott's work, particularly in his writings on Paris, where he recognises the importance of long-running continuities in some features of urban creative economies, particularly in Paris (Scott 2000b). While Scott holds to his model of decisive transition, much of his writing on the development of the Parisian creative economy implicitly indicates the difficulties of applying the crude categories of Fordist and post-Fordist to the economies of established major urban centres. Cities like New York, Paris and London have long been characterised by flexibility, clustering, close inter-firm interdependencies, hybridity of economic activity, and creative milieus. To describe urban formations in eras prior to the take-up of digital technology in creative sectors as 'pre-Fordist', 'craft' or 'artisanal' risks imposing a false teleology of economic activity, and missing some key continuities in urban creativity.

## **Swinging London as new urban cultural economy.**

While the Swinging London period has been recognised both for its general creativity (particularly in popular music, fashion design and the visual arts) and, despite some of the counter-cultural rhetoric of the period, in terms of new forms of entrepreneurialism, it has not been treated as an important antecedent or anticipation of the formation that developed from the mid-1980s. The oil crisis and recessions of the 1970s and very early 1980s (combined with what might be described as urban crises in key centres of the global cultural economy, notably New York City) have served to disconnect this period from discussion of earlier changes, over-emphasising the newness of urban creative economies in the 1980s.

London during the 1960s was clearly in a state of important economic transition. The most obvious features were the decline of the docks, and a collapse of manufacturing industry. Between 1961 and 1973 manufacturing employment in Greater London fell from 1.6m under 1.0 million for the first time in the twentieth century (falling further to 0.68m by 1981 and 0.36m in 1991) (Wood 1978: 38; Hamnett 2003). This process of deindustrialisation was a key issue for policy makers and planners – particularly in the Greater London Council (GLC) – and for contemporary academics, who also highlighted the accelerating depopulation of central districts (Keeble 1976; Clout and Burgess 1978).

Yet while manufacturing in overall was in crisis and the docks were in terminal decline, significant restructuring was taking place. One measure of this was that between 1969 and 1973, even as overall manufacturing employment declined, *vacancies* in manufacturing employment grew by 27% in London, with the highest rates in inner London, indicating substantial skills shortages (Wood 1978: 48). Significant growth in key creative industries such as advertising took place in the late 1950s and 1960s and crucially, the period also saw the beginnings of significant redirection towards international markets. Taken together the ‘boom businesses’ of fashion, design and music, together with photography, modelling, magazine publishing and advertising

added 'nearly a quarter of a million jobs in London during the decade.' (Porter 1994: 363) As early as 1964, advertising was a £0.5 billion industry, employing around 200 000 people in Britain, and was heavily concentrated in London's West End (Pearson and Turner 1965: 323). Public relations also took-off in the period with around 300 agencies based in the West End by the mid-1960s. (Pearson and Turner 1965: 224)

London had experienced an office-building boom during the late-1950s and early 1960s, associated with planning deregulation and aggressive property speculation. There were expressed concerns about London's landscapes, but also about what was described by local government as the 'relentless squeeze' on 'all the other activities essential to the life of the metropolis', such as 'theatres, clubs, hotels and residences' (Robson 1965: 11). While office development did make fundamental alterations to the character of central London, and contributed to both urban depopulation and the demolition of some mixed-use areas, it was also an important factor in restructuring. As geographer Gerald Manners noted, reviewing the developments of the 1960s, while many relatively routine office jobs were decentralised;

/quote/

'in contrast the office jobs that have stayed and expanded have tended to involve more specialised activities and the application of higher skills. In addition, of course, central London's retail trade, entertainments, cultural activities and tourism have all grown in importance as creators of wealth and sources of employment in the centre. In recent years they have added considerably to the diversity and economic strength of the centre of London.' (Manners 1978: 13)

This new office world was a fundamental influence on the development of Swinging London. The new office workers provided a large group of younger consumers, who had disposable income and were increasingly fashion-conscious. By the early 1960s there were also six women to every four men employed in office work in the capital, which provided a significant

new stimulus for certain sectors of the creative industries (Humphries and Taylor 1986: 66). The independent young woman, with an income of her own, sometimes sexistly stereotyped as the 'dolly-bird' secretary or 'girl Friday' was in many ways the primary target of the new fashion sector, and a driving force for change in wider consumption patterns. (Gilbert 2006b: 9-10)

What, in the language of the new urban creative economy school, would be described as creative clusters were important features of the geography of 1960s London. This geography was strongly shaped by the pre-existing geographies of economic activity, and particularly by what Peter Hall described as the 'Victorian Belt' of inner London industrial districts (Hall 1962). The surviving belt in the 1950s was characterised by: a predominance of small workshops; complex inter-firm production networks; dependence on specialised local facilities; and as a consequence, clustering of production into a number of specialised 'quarters', such as the Shoreditch furniture quarter, Hatton Garden jewellery quarter in Clerkenwell, and the printing district around Fleet Street. (Wood 1978: 40)

After near complete collapse by the late-1980s some of these districts formed the sites for the new creative quarters in the 1990s. However in the late-1950s and 1960s, the connections between economic innovation and the established industrial sectors were much closer. Carnaby Street was an important example of this. Although its history had a strong element of serendipity, its geographical position was highly significant, just off the main shopping thoroughfare of Regent Street, but also in a district of mainly Jewish tailoring workshops. It was also close to an area of wholesale garment warehouses to the north of Oxford Street, which connected the district to flexible supply chains reaching to East End factories and beyond. Carnaby Street rose from an unexceptional bomb-damaged backstreet in the early 1950s, to become one of the best-known addresses in the world by 1966. This came about through a combination of newly emancipated young consumers, with the economic and cultural power to force the pace of change, entrepreneur-designers who were able to experiment with short-runs of often highly outré fashions in cheap materials, and a finishing and supply industry

that proved highly flexible (not least because of the sweated wages and conditions in many of the workshops.) (Breward 2006) The fashion boom of the 1960s proved to be the last period of sustained growth for some of the traditional industrial clusters of the Victorian belt.

The 1960s have perhaps been under-recognised in terms of the development of creative industries because it was hard for contemporaries, particularly within the government, media, and academia to take this new urban milieu seriously. The most visible aspects of the transformation of 1960s London – youthful fashion and popular music -- also seemed the most transient and frivolous. A view was shared by many on both right and left that the development of fashion, music and other parts of the creative economy were essentially trivial, a sideshow in a longer story of metropolitan decline. Reactionary critics such as Christopher Booker argued that this youthful world was too dominated by the attitudes of the ‘neophiliacs’ – those in love with newness itself, who paid scant attention to the realities of life beyond their narrow, myth-infused metropolitan concerns. He considered the whole ‘swinging scene’ to be a solipsistic mirage and was not alone in holding such opinions (Booker 1969). At the close of the decade even John Lennon, speaking from a rather different position in the cultural politics of the period, famously claimed that ‘the whole bullshit bourgeois scene is exactly the same, except that there are a lot of middle-class kids with long hair walking around London in trendy clothes... nothing happened except that we all dressed up.’ (Quoted in Green 1999: 256)

This extended to the discourse of those contemporaries who were more enthusiastic about the developments of the period. The oral histories of fashion designers and entrepreneurs from the period often emphasise the ‘amateurishness’ and chaotic nature of inter-connections between key players, firms and sectors in the city during the 1960s. This exchange between Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin, key designers of the period who ran a boutique just off Carnaby Street, is typical of such discussions:

/quote/

Marion Foale: ‘... then I went to Art School and got to the Royal College of Art at the same time as Sally and Sylvia and at the end of Royal College I knew I didn’t want to go and work for those boring, boring firms doing the most awful things. We’d had a talk by Alexander Plunket Greene just before the end and it really impressed me, and Bazaar was open and I thought, “Well, if they can do it, we can!” And that’s basically it – I wasn’t going to go and work for these – nah!’

Sally Tuffin : ‘We used to have tea break downstairs and hatched out these plans didn’t we? I’m not going to do this, I’m not going to do this, I’m better than everybody else!’ (Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin: interview with Sonia Ashmore and Jenny Lister, Victoria and Albert Museum, 4 April 2006)

By the 1980s the culture and language of creative business in the city had changed – the idea of ‘the scene’ had been replaced by a much more purposive rhetoric of contacts and networking. This switch in the language of the socioeconomic interactions of the urban cultural economy is deceptive. Although the ‘classless’ rhetoric of 1960s London was clearly overplayed (despite the rise of significant working class figures such as the photographer David Bailey and the model ‘Twiggy’ – ‘the scene’ was still highly class-stratified), there is also substantial anecdotal evidence of a strongly interconnected creative economy, one in movement between different sectors was relatively common. The hat-designer and milliner Jimmy Wedge recollected his sudden and successful move into fashion photography at the end of the 1960s:

/quote/

*SA: What happened after you closed the shop?*

Jimmy Wedge: ‘I became friendly with Terence Donovan and David Bailey, but mostly with Terence Donovan and I think it was his lifestyle that

persuaded me! He was always driving around in a Rolls Royce with a beautiful model on his arm and I thought I'd like to do that! So anyway I thought it would be quite nice to be a photographer and there was an actress who used to buy her clothes from Top Gear and she had a camera that she bought for her husband, and he didn't want it and she sold it to me, and I thought right this is a sign so I thought I'd go into photography.' (James Wedge: interview with Sonia Ashmore and Jenny Lister, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2 February 2006)

The creative sectors of 1960s London were clearly marked by geographical clustering, by new hybrid firms (the Beatles' Apple Corps was the most famous, if not the most successful of these), by fluid opportunities for privileged members of a creative 'class' to flirt between different sectors, and by strong overlaps between social and economic networks. The period was also marked by rather stronger synergies between what might be described as pre-Fordist industrial sectors and new 'symbolic' industries than was the case in the late twentieth century. There are a number of other useful comparisons and contrasts to be made between urban economic creativity in the 1960s and in the past twenty years.

Firstly the late 1950s and 1960s were characterised by relative entrepreneurial openness, and by relatively low entry costs and starting capital, certainly for a 'World City' and certainly in comparison with the later period. What comes across very strongly in oral history interviews and in contemporary reports from the period is an often-repeated claim that 'anything was possible'. Stripped of the mythologizing of the self-proclaimed 'special' sixties generation, much of this sense of possibility was about a combination of cheap available property and generational money. London in the period was marked by established family money being used to open businesses in what might be seen as high-risk sectors. Mary Quant's pathbreaking opening of the boutique Bazaar in Chelsea in 1955 depended on a combination of fairly cheap premises outside the established shopping districts and the family

money of husband, Alexander Plunkett Green. Scott discusses the way that 'vibrant agglomerations of cultural products industries become magnets for talented individuals from other areas.' (2005: 7) There are however differences in circumstances and an important distinction between places and periods where such agglomeration is likely to take place with a structure dominated by existing firms, or where there will be significant opportunities for new entrepreneurialism.

Related to this is an issue about the relative spatial openness of the city to new creative industries. 1950s and 1960s London was effectively still a post-war city, with significant remaining bomb damage, and was characterised by what we might describe as urban interstices, affordable premises available in central locations. The best of these like Carnaby Street, were just off established centres of consumption in the city. There are strong connections here with Angela McRobbie's discussion of 'a mixed economy of fashion design' in the 1980s and 1990s where young fashion designers were able to find niches in the city through college shows, markets and in small shops outside the established shopping areas. (McRobbie 1998) This kind of small-scale urban creativity has become increasingly difficult in the hypercapitalised London property market of the 2000s. In some ways Carnaby Street has become symbolic of this. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was a cheap opportunity for fashion entrepreneurs like Basil Green, John Stephen and Warren Gold to gain a foothold in the heart of the West End. In 1997, the property company Shaftesbury purchased most of the leases in Carnaby Street and adjacent streets in Soho. The area is now branded as the Carnaby Village, but while it trades on a kind of urban memory of an older Carnaby Street, with an emphasis on street fashion, limited special editions and short-run designs, it is dominated by major international brands like Puma and Diesel. (Gilbert 2006b) The openness of the 1960s must be contrasted with the creative clusters of the 1990s and 2000s. In London, and in other major world cities, such interstices have almost been completely removed from central city areas, and property values even in inner city marginal zones like Hoxton, Shoreditch and Clerkenwell are prohibitively expensive for small-scale start-up businesses.

A second contrast to be drawn concerns the role of consumers in the urban creative economies of the 1960s and more recent times. It is easy to over-romanticise about the performance of fashion and other forms of urban creativity in the past, and our approach to the fashion culture of the 1960s has emphasised the back-regions of rag-trade production and distribution as a more firmly contextualised counter-balance to more sensationalist accounts of a 'youth-quake.' (Breward 2006) Nonetheless, the fashion culture of London in the late-1950s and 1960s saw the development of highly active and creative consumers who were able to shape trends. A vital part of the urban milieu of the period came from the wearing and display of clothes on key streets in the city. This often provoked a direct response on the part of entrepreneurs. Writing in 1970, Tom Salter, owner of 'Gear' on Carnaby Street, described the working methods of one of his competitors:

/quote/

'If a girl liked his style, but could find nothing suitable, he would pretend to have a larger stock and ask her to come back in an hour, to give him time to sort out something from his 'other stockroom'. Eyeing her closely, he would run up something ... before her return.' (Salter 1970: 13-16)

This is indicative, not just of the extreme flexibility of Carnaby Street's businesses, but also of its responsiveness to street-style, and of the demanding, discriminatory nature of its consumers. The male consumers of the early 'mod' movement were particularly active, pushing tailors to tighter fitting suits, narrower trousers, thinner lapels, and experimenting with coloured fabrics. (Chenoune 1993) This should be contrasted with the characteristics of the kinds of urban spaces and associated with Richard Florida's celebration of the new creative classes. The policy effects of Florida's arguments often have the effect of limiting urban consumption to a rather limited repertoire (mostly obviously through outlets of global chains of coffee bars and 'designer' clothing), and have often been accompanied by greater restrictions and controls on public space.

/Ü1/

## **Sensing the creative city**

A final theme that we might take from 1960s London is to stress a closer engagement with the materiality of creative practices than is common in much of the creative economy literature. John Lennon's casual dismissal of 'dressing up' belies the importance of materiality and experience. The very process of dressing-up, however, engendered a powerful sense that the design, manufacture, retailing and wearing of new clothes constituted a key component of cultural, economic and physical change in the city, grounding myth in everyday experience – and this understanding has played a pivotal role in our research on the urban creativity of London in the 1960s. With its emphases on the digital and the symbolic recent writing on the urban creative economy has often distanced itself from the material realities of creative urban environments. The idea of the urban milieu is usually addressed either through a rather generalised sense of attractive consumption spaces, as in Florida's work, or else in the more specific sense of dense networks sometimes conceived in terms of social or cultural agglomeration. (See Moulaert and Gallouj 1993, Thrift and Olds 1996) More recent work in urban theory tries to understand the city as a creative experience, that engages the senses as well as providing commercially useful connections. (Etherington and Meeker 2002) However, there are only limited examples of direct connections being made between the city as a locus of sensory experience and stimulation and the development of the creative economy. (Amin and Thrift, 2002)

Counterintuitively, it has often been historical work that has most vividly demonstrated the significance of the experienced city for creativity. In searching for evidence about past contexts of creativity the historian may turn to material evidence. In own work we have worked closely with the surviving clothes of the period, which reveal ways in which versions of the Swinging Sixties were encountered on the body and in space. They challenge the historian to engage with the period through a consideration of what it *felt* like

to change appearances with the times, to enjoy, for women especially, a novel freedom of choice and movement, and to appropriate the highly specific 'look' of the time and place. In their very materiality such items constitute a complex version of the 'Swinging Sixties' that is in some ways more compelling and convincing a record of the times than the clichés of the *Time* editorial. Examination of actual garments also prompts us to alter our notions of creativity in the city – a dress is not simply about the creativity of designers, advertisers and boutique retailers, but also crucially about the urban creativity of consumers.

Consider, for example this Hessian dress, produced by Mary Quant in 1965. With its short skirt and deceptively simple line, utilizing an extended belt to form a halter neck fastening with a large buckle worn high on the chest over a polo-neck sweater, the ensemble points to the multi-faceted version of an avant-garde fashionable femininity promoted by Quant and her generation of London-based designers. It was clearly easy to wear and maintain, well adapted to the increased pace of modern city-living. But stylistically it moved beyond comfort and practicality to suggest bohemian revolt (in its emphatic use of black), graphic sophistication (in its play with texture, form and bold accessorisation) and sexual provocation (the dress, whose form tends to narrow the hips, was worn with a schoolboy cap in matching linen material). It tells us a great deal more than about the lifestyles and aspirations of the habitués of Chelsea's King's Road than many other contemporary sources.

Yet there is also admittedly also something rather reducible about the Quant dress and its modish signifiers that belies the layered contexts in which it was produced. Like all such artefacts, the object is positioned in a series of relationships between processes of production and consumption that economist Ben Fine has famously termed 'systems of provision' – systems whose workings help to 'explain the mechanisms that lead to the introduction of entirely new commodities, the disappearance or transformation of old ones, or the prolonged survival intact of some inveterate goods' – though its chic surfaces rather disguise this. (Fine 2002:83) Quant's innovations would have gained little purchase without the older, relational networks of London's

longstanding culture of fashion making and distribution. In order to understand the dynamics that produced both a haptic and metaphorical sense of Swinging London, we need to place the garment in an understanding of the city as a complex creative economy. In considering this formation we need to think about the ways that the city's reputation as a site of spectacular consumption, with its celebrated experience of shopping and fashion performances its certain key spaces, sat alongside more mundane geographies of intensive production clusters.

/Ü1/

### **Conclusion**

Writing just as *Time* was lauding Swinging London, the industrial geographer John Martin described the city's economy in terms that anticipated almost precisely the lexicon of the urban cultural economy school. For Martin, what made London unique was its status as a centre of 'enterprise and linkage, contact and flexibility.' (Martin 1966: 261) But Martin also noted that the city was also a centre of 'style and fashion', qualities that crucially extended beyond the dynamism of businesses in London to include the urban creativity of its shoppers, streets and everyday life. There is a danger of slipping into easy mythologizing about Swinging London when looking back and comparing its 'scene' with later examples of the creative urban economy. Nonetheless such comparisons when used carefully can be instructive, particularly in countermanding some of the stronger claims of the urban cultural economy school.

Allen Scott has argued that the recent growth of urban cultural economies in major world cities has been a force for diversification, a counter-tendency to the homogenising imperatives of globalisation, potentially producing what he describes, as a 'global but polycentric and multi-faceted system of cultural production.' (Scott 2000a: 211) This prognostication for the twenty-first century is based upon claims that major cities are usually marked by quite dissimilar traditions and cultures of production, and also 'from the theoretical proposition that the long-run economic vitality of any centre is apt

to be dependent on its ability to offer real alternatives to products originating in competing centres.’ (Scott 2000a: 211)

Such theoretical propositions are hard to test, but the longitudinal study of one world city throws this dynamic into question. While London’s industrial structure has undoubtedly shifted towards the cultural industries, there must be severe doubts that it has become more distinctive or more creative since the 1960s. The competition between major cities for symbolic distinctiveness may be one imperative of the contemporary global economy, but there are contradictory forces that stifle urban individuality and creativity, particularly in the hyper-capitalisation of property markets, and the increasing power of global corporations in a vastly expanded luxury goods sector. The connections between new symbolic industries and older craft traditions were much stronger in the post-war epoch than after the massive deindustrialisation of the 1970s and 1980s. Within fashion in particular there is a danger that the kind of dynamic urban formation found in cities like London, New York, Paris and Milan in the post-war decades, characterised by creative networks, flexible production and vibrant consumer culture, has been replaced by what we have described as ‘Potemkin cities’ of fashion, increasingly left with little more than the corporatised surface sheen of fashion culture. (Gilbert 2006: 30) Beneath its own surface myths of ‘birds and Beatles’, sixties London had far fewer people engaged in its ‘urban creative economy’ than the city of today. Nonetheless, through its openings for new entrepreneurs, its legacy of craft industries, its relatively affordable urban interstices and its new consumer culture, sixties London was a site of a genuinely distinctive and creative urban cultural economy.

/Ü1/

## **Bibliography**

- Amin, A. and N. Thrift (2002), *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Cambridge.
- Booker, C. (1969) *The Neophiliacs. The Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties*. London.
- Breward, C. (2004), *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis*, Oxford.
- Breward, C. (2006), »Fashion's front and back: 'rag trade' cultures and cultures of consumption in post-war London c. 1945-1970« *The London Journal*, Vol. 31, 1, pp.15-40.
- Chenoune, Farid. *A History of Men's Fashion* Paris: Flammarion, 1993
- Clout, H. and J. Burgess (1978), »Central London«, in: H. Clout (ed.), *Changing London*, Slough: pp. 49-60.
- Cohn, N. (2006), »It was 40 years ago today ... « *GQ Magazine* April 2006, pp. 130–38.
- Crane, D. (1992), *The Production of Culture: Media and the Urban Arts*, Newbury Park, CA.
- Ethington, P. and M. Meeker (2002) »Saber y Conocer: the metropolis of urban enquiry« in: M. Dear (ed) *From Chicago to LA: making sense of urban theory*, London, pp. 403– 420.
- Fine, B. (2002), *The World of Consumption: The Material and Cultural Revisited*, London.
- Florida, R. (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*, New York
- Gilbert, D. (2006a), »'The youngest legend in history': cultures of consumption and the mythologies of Swinging London« *The London Journal*, Vol. 31, 1, pp.1-14.
- Gilbert, D. (2006b), »From Paris to Shanghai: the changing geographies of fashion's world cities«, in: C. Breward and D. Gilbert (eds), *Fashion's World Cities*, Oxford

- Green, J. (1999), *All Dressed Up. The Sixties and the Counterculture*, London.
- Green, N. (1997), *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York*, Durham, NC.
- Hall, P. (1962), *The Industries of Greater London since 1861*, London.
- Hamnett, C. (2003), *Unequal City: London in the Global Arena*, London.
- Humphries, S. and J. Taylor (1986), *The making of Modern London 1945-85*, London.
- Hutton, T. (2004), »The New Economy of the inner city«. *Cities* 21, 2, pp. 89-108.
- Keeble, D. (1976), *Industrial Location and Planning in the UK*, London.
- Lash, S. and J. Urry (1994), *Economies of Signs and Space*, London.
- Levy, S. (2003), *Ready, Steady, Go! Swinging London and the invention of cool*, London.
- Martin, J (1966), *Greater London: An Industrial Geography*, London.
- McRobbie, A. (1998) *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?*, London.
- Marwick, A. (1998), *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States c. 1958-c. 1974*, Oxford.
- Mouaert, F. and Gallouj, C. (1993), »The locational geography of advanced producer service firms: the limits of economies of agglomeration«, in: P. Daniels, S. Illeris, J. Bonamy and J. Philippe (eds) *The Geography of Services*, London, pp. 91-106.
- O'Neill, A. (2007), *London: After a Fashion*, London.
- Pearson, J. and G. Turner (1965), *The Persuasion Industry*, London.
- Piore, M. and C. Sabel (1984), *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*, New York.
- Porter, R. (1994), *London: A Social History*, London.

Pratt, A. (1997), »The cultural industries production system: a case study of employment change in Britain, 1984-1991«, *Environment and Planning A*, 29, 11, pp. 1953-1974.

Robson, W. (1965), »The heart of Greater London: Proposals for a policy« London School of Economics: Greater London Papers, No. 9.

Salter, T. (1970), *Carnaby Street*, Walton-on-Thames.

Sandbrook, D (2006), *White Heat. A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*, London.

Scott, A. (2000a), *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, London.

Scott, A. (2000b), »The Cultural Economy of Paris«, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24, pp. 567-582.

Scott, A. (2001), »Geographical foundations of creativity and innovation in the cultural economy« Paper presented at the ESRC Cities Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Workshop on 'Innovation and Competitive Cities in the Global Economy', Worcester College, Oxford, 28-30 March.

Scott, A. (2005), *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*, Princeton.

Thrift, N. and K. Olds (1996), »Reconfiguring the economic in economic geography«, *Progress in human Geography*, 20, pp. 311-337.

Weller, S. (2004), »Fashion's influence on garment mass production: knowledge, commodities and the capture of value« Unpublished Melbourne University PhD.

Weller, S. (2007), »Fashion as viscous knowledge: fashion's role in shaping trans-national garment production« *Journal of Economic Geography*, 7, 1, pp. 39-66

Wood, P. (1978), »Industrial changes in inner London«, in: H. Clout (ed.), *Changing London*, Slough, pp. 38-48.