



# Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now

*Ms. Valerie Steele*

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From haute couture to hot pants, from glamour to grunge, the past 50 years have witnessed some revolutions in fashion. This survey of postwar fashion not only describes the great designers and their creations but also places trends in clothing within their social and cultural contexts. Valerie Steele begins by discussing the impact of World War II on the international fashion system, explaining, for example, how the success of Christian Dior's "new look" was the result of sweeping social and economic changes that included a shift from the atelier to the global corporate conglomerate. In the 1950s Steele argues, developments in the world of fashion were influenced by sexual politics and the anxieties associated with the Cold War: social conformity and gender stereotypes led to such phenomena as "wife dressing" and "the man in the grey flannel suit". Steele traces fashion revolution of the 1960s, which smashed both social and sartorial rules as "swinging London" inaugurated its own new dictatorship of youth. She describes the rise of the women's movement and the hippies' anti fashion sentiment, which ushered a new freedom of choice in the 1970s, "the decade that taste forgot". She finds that the 1980s, often described as "the decade of greed", was actually a more complicated period, during which Calvin Klein jeans as well as suits by Armani became yuppie status symbols. An she shows that the fashion of the 1990s, emphatically postmodernist, have repeatedly returned to the themes of retro, ethno and techno styles.

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