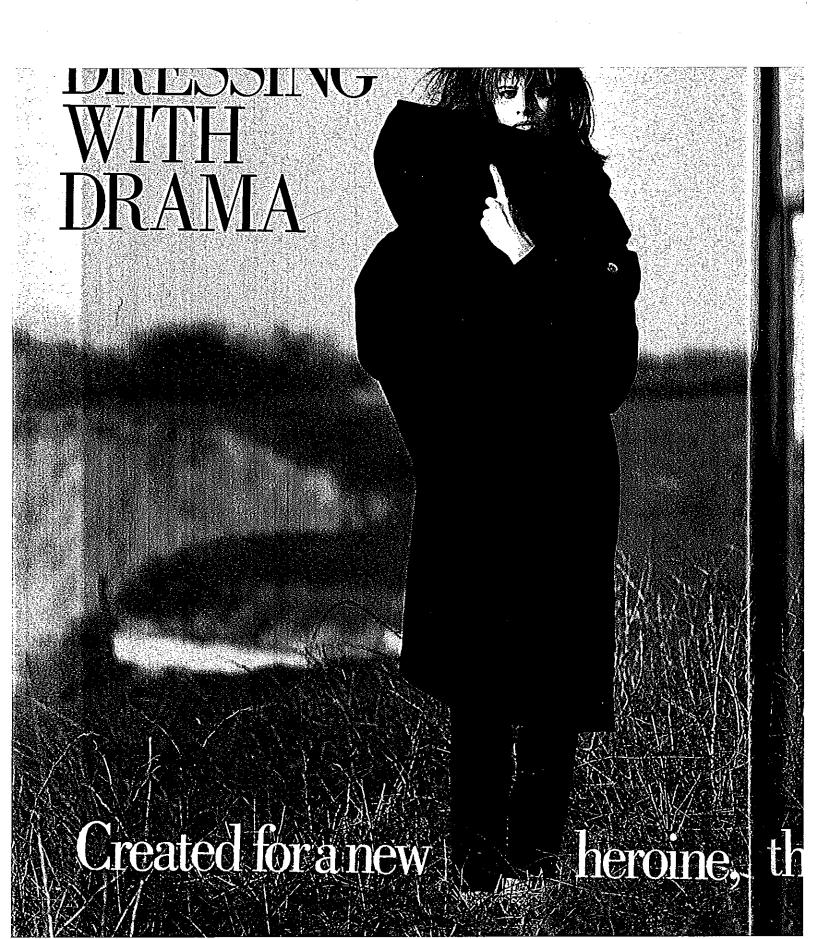
Vines Mag 1983





By Anne Hollander

When women first began to declare their independence of men, their clothes showed they actually felt otherwise. In fact, throughout this century, the strongest visual mode has been modeled on a relentlessly masculine standard. From classically tailored jackets and well-cut trousers to casual T-shirts and jeans, female dress has ranged through all the work clothes of the conventional male occupations. More recently, the originally masculine elements of active sportswear have been added — clothes for boxing and for basketball, for skin diving, running and mountain climbing — and, even more lately, the fantasy garb of men from other planets. Women have also briefly taken up historical accouterments suggesting Regency dandies, swashbuckling cavaliers and Romantic poets. Since women

got the vote, the most consistent spirit expressed in fashion for the free woman has seemed to be identity, not equality, with men: The greatest liberty has been permission to dress like a man.

Meanwhile, naturally enough, the alternative fantasy has been polarized and developed with equal force - and with equal dependence on men's eyes. When women have not been using female fashion to mimic men's clothes, they have shown a desire to mimic the creatures of men's imagination in the more standardly eroticized and romanticized trappings designed for the opposing principle, the ultrafeminine self. Later 20th-century fashion has produced infinite variations on very traditional themes: the wicked siren, the sophisticated lady, the cheeky schoolgiri, the farmer's daughter and the Romantic heroine, mixed with occasional traces of peasant and gypsy. To convey all these ideas, clothes have kept firmly within a visual vocabulary drawn from the entire history of female iconography literary, pictorial and cinematic - and the formal language composing such clothes has been as confined as the roles they suggest. The masterly skill of some of the greatest dress designers of this epoch, especially in France, in translating all such associative sexual imagery into fashionable terms has done much to insure its lengthy appeal.

But modern female freedom in clothes, once the male sartorial empire was annexed, has seemed to consist mainly in the liberty to shift at will among the standard costumes — to be a kid in faded denim one day and a lacquered sophisticate the next, to shed leather and metal for feathers and lace on impulse, or vice versa. And the result has been simply to confirm the ancient notion of female mutability that fash-

bove
and left: Wrapped poncho
side-fastened with three
silver buttons over pants
with narrowed legs by Yohji
Yamamoto. Wool poncho,
\$500. Wool pants, \$170. At
Barneys New York.
Charivari Workshop, 441
Columbus Avenue. If
Boutique, 474 West
Broadway. Knit Wit,
Philadelphia. Antique
Scottish pin of agate set in
silver, circa 1860, \$400. From
James II Galleries.

Anne Hollander, the art and fashion historian, is the author of "Seeing Through Clothes."

he designs are strong and defiant.

ion itself has so long supported. Even the very real freedom to succeed in the corporate world has further served to chain up serious women in the most potent sartorial scheme of all: the public costume of modern female power, the perfect skirted suit. This outfit shares with a vengeance in the very conventions that women have loved to think they were escaping.

Women now seem to be reaching for an even more serious kind of freedom than those they have so recently achieved, and not just for practical freedom but for freedom of self-image — for greater inner scope and its appropriate outward expressions. A need for strong, profound feeling and thought, perhaps of a dark and difficult kind, seems to be demanding a new outlet in fashion. After so much public progress, some larger inward liberty may now be taken and may become visible.

At the cutting edge of fashion, the whole shape of women's clothing is signaling a new wish — a liberation from old visual associations, a breaking of the customary molds. In many new clothes the colors are muted and dim, the shapes large and fluid. They suggest a greater interest in basic form and less attention to effective variations of the surface. The new clothes offer fabric released from its traditional stylistic boundaries, ready to create its own drama, to suggest inner states of release from old codes, even of free behavior. A dressed woman can begin to suggest a cliff wrapped by Christo or a banner in the wind. She can strip off old shapes and be entirely reclad in new assumptions.

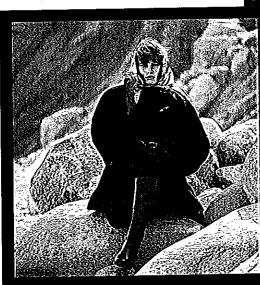
One way to be new is to be Other — to forsake the forms of Western fashion entirely and seek revision by the light from the East. The recent flow of talented designers from Japan has

opened Western eyes to hitherto unseen possibilities in the use of asymmetry, in creating unfamiliar relations between the body and its garments, and between garments themselves. Their uncustomary looks contain no immediate associations for us of status or class, of sex

or age, of historical period or literary genre:

ar right:
Dark brown and black
leather coat with large cuffs
and a deep inverted back
pleat over pants from
Vittorio Ricci. Coat, \$2,575.
Wool pants, \$235. At Bergdorf
Goodman. Vittorio Ricci, 645
Madison Avenue, by special
order. Shoes by Manolo
Blahnik. Scarf by Hermès.

ight: Black
suede and dyed shearling
three-quarter-length coat
from Basile, about \$1,800. At
Barneys New York.
Jimmy's, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Hattie, Birmingham, Mich.
and Palm Beach, Fla.
Stanley Korshak, Chicago.
Boots from Millers Harness
Company. Scarf by Herměs.
Gloves by Aldo & Ivo
Portolano.



Strong feelings seem to be

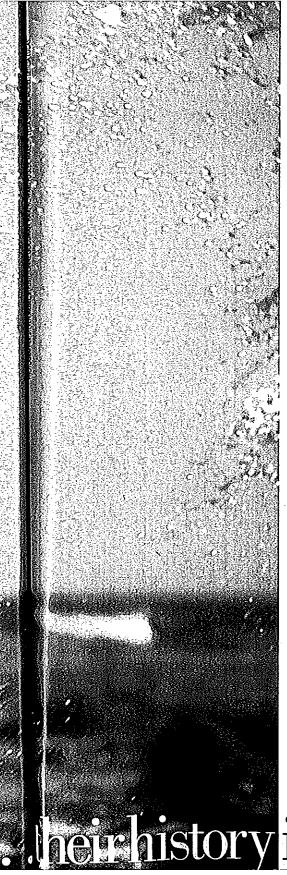




ong doublebreasted rubberized-cotton
slicker lined in black and
white checks by Norma
Kamali, \$170. At
Bloomingdale's, OMO, 5
West 56th Street, Saks Fifth
Avenue, Bullock's, Los
Angeles, Jordan Marsh,
Boston, Macy's, San
Francisco, Wanamaker's,
Philadelphia, Boots from
Millers Harness Company.

These are new

clothes



They are quite free of our old allusions.

But the Far East is not the only source. In the last two decades, Italian designers have been deploying in cloth their own native love of essential form, although it always carries with it an inescapably Italian classicism, an intrinsic restraint. And in America, where a distinctive kind of radical artistic experiment has had a long tradition, a related kind of elemental originality has surfaced in fashion, in the work of Norma Kamali, for example, or of Ronaldus Shamask. A certain fundamentalism is a strong American trait, always infused with a candidly Romantic longing and desire for transcendence. Clothing no less than architecture or poetry may be the conduit for this impulse among us, especially among women.

The new look is hitherto uncharted, an unmapped terrain of style suggesting unmapped and possibly untapped areas of female thought and feeling. These are clothes for the new heroines of a future and as yet untold and unwritten Romance.

versize wrap
coat with a collar closing by
Yohji Yamamoto, about \$745.
At Barneys New York.
Charivari Workshop, 441
Columbus Avenue. If
Boutique, 474 West
Broadway. Alan Bilzerian,
Boston. Ultimo, Chicago.



heighistory is yet to be written.