21M.732 Beginning Costume Design and Construction
Fall 2008

# Psychology of Clothing

1. James Laver in book "Clothes" – clothes worn for 3 reasons.

    a. Utility – Least important

    b. Hierarchical Principle – lend social status, display wearers' importance to the world

    c. Seduction Principle – clothes donned to make wearer as attractive as possible within the framework of what is considered attractive at any particular time in history.

2. Change in fashion is result of struggle of the classes, a way in which the upper classes can declare their superiority.

    a. For years what was considered "socially proper" would keep members of society in their appropriate niches independent of laws.

        i. Sumptuary laws
        ii. Unwritten rules of society (even names)
        iii. What movement lower class jobs entailed

3. How do we express superiority through dress?

    a. Conspicuous consumption – expensive and many layers, girth

        i. when the world is hungry the physical ideal is large, etc.
        ii. Edwardian gentlemen needed 16 different costumes to be correctly attired for every high status activity.

    b. Leisure – clothes that make it impossible to do practical work (corset, fingernails)

    c. Waste – practical things are not beautiful
        i. Military officers, polo players, fox hunting – expensive to maintain

    d. Vicarious consumption

Fashion dictates with no regard for the individual and no concern for how the style will look on many who copy it. It declares what will be considered beautiful and, therefore, what will be thought ugly by reason of no longer being fashionable.

The past is always seen through the eyes of the present, and the appreciation of the styles of the past is influenced by the style currently in vogue.

## The Meaning of Clothes

1. Age
    a. Young – more shape
    b. Old – less fitted, more layers, older style
    c. Exceptions to the rule and what they say
2. Occupation
    a. Uniforms
    b. Hierarchy (religion)
    c. Utility
    d. Period is easier
    e. Exceptions to the rule
3. Social Status/Class
    a. Practical vs. impractical
    b. Cost of garment (fabric, dye, cut, trim, color)
    c. Exceptions to the rule
4. Geographic Area
    a. Country (kerchief)
    b. City
    c. Building
    d. Room
5. Season and Weather
6. Time of Day and Occasion
    a. Any garment worn at an inappropriate time calls attention to itself.
7. Activity
8. Historical Period
9. Gender
10. Intention – past or present

# Psychological Factors

1.  Clothes express peoples' attitudes towards themselves and their society, both what they wear and how they wear it.

    a.  Conform or rebel

    b.  Slight rebellion – how an accepted piece is worn

2.  Clothes can be worn to try and change an existing condition

    a.  Moving up the social ladder

    b.  To alter wearer's mood

    c.  Extrovert – to cause a stir

    d.  Introvert – for security, become one of the crowd

3.  People often select clothes to fulfill the desire to be attractive to the preferred sex

    a.  Items chosen because they are thought to have sex appeal – can be an illusion!

    b.  Parts of bodies that are thought to be sexy are different in different periods and in different cultures

What was once considered attractive in a specific historical setting must be considered along with the standards of beauty accepted by a contemporary audience.

A costume designer must understand both the objective and the subjective factors that work together to determine why people clothe themselves as they do in order to fully develop the possibilities presented by the characters in a given situation.

This understanding comes from OBSERVATION & RESEARCH!