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10.

Be My Baby: Sensory Difference and Youth Identity in British Fashion Retail, 1945-1970

Bethan Bide

My mum moved to London from South Wales in the dying days of the Swinging Sixties. Prepared by a long-term subscription to *Honey* magazine, she was ready to take advantage of the city's gigs, clubs, and, of course, its internationally renowned fashion boutiques. Some of the items she purchased still survive in her attic, including a shirt from Biba that cost a substantial part of her paycheck. Although she professes she shopped for pleasure and leisure, her strongest memories of boutique retail revolve around sensory experiences that were not necessarily pleasant, including the experience of buying this shirt in Biba's dark and sensorially disorientating Kensington Church Street store. Yet even the most viscerally unpleasant of these memories – the stale stench of old dog in an overcrowded shop on a wet day as a result of the fashion for vintage afghan coats – conjure a nostalgic fondness, and it is clear she considers them proof that she lived an authentic experience of 1960s youth culture.

If, as Christopher Breward has professed, it is not just consumption but an acutely pleasurable form that lies at the heart of the archetype of the Swinging Sixties, then the relationship between the challenging, disorientating, and unpleasant sensory experiences offered by many of the most successful fashion boutiques of the era and our understanding of what constitutes youthful pleasurable consumption demands further attention (Breward 2006, p.8). This chapter addresses two key questions to our understanding of the period: firstly, how radical experimentation in retail sensory stimuli fostered consumer identity and loyalty amongst young shoppers and secondly, how this focus on sensory experience built upon,

rather than invented, the development of distinctive spaces for youth cultures in British fashion retail.

The chapter challenges the idea that 1960s fashion boutiques were necessarily pioneers by positioning them within a longer history of sensory youth retail. By tracing the importance of sensory difference back to the emergence of specialist spaces for teenagers in department stores in the mid-1940s, this chapter confronts the elitism present in histories of youth culture that privilege "the vanguard rather than mainstream consumer culture" (Capuzzo 2012, p.617). The timeline presented in this chapter illuminates how the circulation of discourses concerning what types of experience and sensory stimuli constituted pleasurable consumption in relation to teenage and youth fashion retail shaped the development of distinctive postwar youth cultures in Britain. Moreover, it explores how conscious methods to translate these encompassing sensory experiences into words and images in magazines permitted the sense of cultural belonging and authenticity that they evoked to reach and ensnare much broader consumer groups than would ever be able to visit the Kings Road or Carnaby Street (Smith 2007, p.131).

In order to begin to make sense of the evolving relationship between disorientating and even unpleasant sensory retail experience and pleasurable consumption it is necessary to recognize that senses – and our reactions to sensory stimuli – are socially situated (Smith 2007, p.4). As chapters by Bailey, Raines, Ferreira and others in this volume show, there is a long history of retailers using sensory stimuli to persuade shoppers to frequent their establishments and make purchases. As Smith discusses in her chapter, the development of the department store in the late nineteenth century further increased the need for retailers to actively stimulate sensory engagement within the retail space. In order to counter the passifying effects that fixed prices and the open arrangement of goods had on their customers, department stores developed increasingly spectacular retail displays to build

consumer relationships by creating moments of interaction between the shopper and the retail space (Corrigan 1997; Scott and Walker 2010).

However, trying to create sensory engagement in order to mold consumer behavior to a desired pattern is not a straightforward process, in particular due to the multi-layered relationship between social interactions and identity creation (Lancaster 1995, p.164). To further complicate issues in the mid-twentieth century, the association between the retail space and pleasurable consumption was disrupted by the Second World War, as British fashion retailers faced severe stock shortages and shabby, damaged infrastructure.

Yet, for all the challenges of the immediate postwar era, there was also a development that offered exciting opportunities for selling new types of fashion goods in enormous numbers: the growth of the teenage consumer. This new demographic wanted retail spaces that were unlike those in which their parents shopped, ones that felt like entirely different environments that belonged solely to them (Bide 2021). This chapter traces how this was achieved from mid-1940s onwards through the experimental use of lighting and music to create distinctive sensory experiences in teenage fashion departments. Using store promotional materials, discussions about retail spaces in teenage magazines, and the retail trade journal *Display*, it explores how the boundaries of pleasurable consumption were tested in the pursuit of sensory difference and excitement by British retailers. Finally, it asks how disseminating these sensory experiences through print culture helped establish broad identification with postwar youth cultures.

Taking a sensory approach to the development of youth retail spaces provides a deeper understanding of the impact that retail spaces had on identity formation. As Lucien Febvre noted, how the world is sensed through a person's physical body shapes their thoughts, and as such the creation of intense sensory difference in retail spaces is closely connected to identification with an idea of a youth culture that is distinct from that of their

parents (Classen 2012, p.200). However, identifying and interpreting sensory experiences and responses within historical materials is fraught with challenges due to the highly intuitive nature of the sensory and the difficulty for historians of extracting information about sensory experience from the language and visual materials it is bound up within (Widdis 2020). For example, although many photographic images of 1960s fashion boutiques look rather conventional to modern eyes, verbal, written and artistic depictions of their sensory impact on consumers reveal how they were perceived as innovative, and even shocking, at the time. This highlights the importance of resisting the temptation to "trust" in the primacy of sight, or to interpret visual materials through a contemporary lens (Smith 2007, p129).

Conscious of these challenges, this chapter focuses on what historical sources can tell us about the processes by which fashion retailers sought to manipulate sensory experience, what motivated this, and how these interventions shaped collective consumer identities. These are important questions to ask due to the centrality of the sensory to cultural values, practices and expression (Howes 2004, p.xi) and the heightened power of the sensory as a tool to resist or replicate social values within retail spaces due to their role as sites in which people are empowered to actively negotiate their relationship with consumer society (Miles 2010, p.184). As Nigel Thrift (2008) argues, in order to understand why people are attracted to goods, it is necessary to consider how retailers and marketers manipulate material surfaces in order to generate imaginative engagement with the commodities they aim to sell in a way that stimulates both individual and communal aesthetic pleasure, creating shared experiences between groups of people. As such, understanding what is considered to be a desirable or pleasurable sensory experience and how this changes over time and place can greatly illuminate our understanding of how young people in the postwar period asserted their dissatisfaction with prevailing social norms using the tools provided to them by a consumer

society, where identity is negotiated within continuous processes of self-creation through the consumption of new, fashionable goods and experiences (Slater 1997, p.10).

The importance of sensory difference to the teenage consumer

Although the *New York Times* had considerable basis for claiming in 1945 that "Teenagers are an American invention", looking closely at the significance of the sensory in fashion retail indicates that postwar British youth culture evolved quite distinctly from its American counterpart, in response to a more localized set of cultural forces (Savage 2008, p.462). While the term "teenager" originated with market researchers in the mid-1940s, the idea of the "teenage" had been around long before this in relation to American fashion retailing, where "teen" sizes had been marketed in fashion departments since the mid 1930s (Osgerby 1997, p.33; Schrum 2011, p.144). Although the interwar period similarly saw the formation of specific youth cultures in Britain, both in the form of an emerging "teen-aged" consumer and group identity amongst young people, it was not until after the Second World War that the British teenager was really taken seriously as a distinctive consumer group and cultural force (Flowler 2008, p.115; Hennessey 2007, pp.491-2).

The rise of ready-to-wear fashions in the middle decades of the twentieth century was a significant factor in the growth of teenage fashion consumption. Relatively inexpensive ready-to-wear clothes offered an opportunity for young people to experiment more freely with changing styles. Furthermore, ready-to-wear clothes often used standardized sizing, giving customers greater autonomy as they no longer required a sales assistant to help them navigate the varying sizes of different fashion brands. This led to the widespread adoption of "self-selection" (or self-service) retailing, which encouraged consumers to develop their own sartorial identities and to shop with friends as a leisure activity (Schrum 2011, p.136). It also meant that retailers were no longer able to rely on the influence exerted by salespeople on the

shop floor to persuade customers to make a purchase, making the design of retail space more important than ever (Sandgren 2009).

Yet the innovations made by department stores and multiple retailers as they developed distinct retail spaces and strategies for selling to this emerging consumer group in the late 1940s and early 1950s are broadly overlooked in histories of postwar youth culture and consumption. Instead, these overwhelmingly focus on the emergence of the fashion boutique in the mid 1960s, connecting the development of these spaces to nineteenth century arcades or the prêt-a-porter concerns of couture houses (Pimlott 2007, p.1). The sidelining of department stores in this story is indicative of a broader cultural snobbery towards these retail spaces. However, the sensory design of these new physically separate departments for female youth fashions and the role they played in developing sensory retail methodologies merit further attention.

As newly created spaces, teenage, or Junior Miss, fashion departments functioned as a crucial testing ground for implementing modern interior design ideas in a retail environment, minimizing the risk of upsetting existing customers with unwelcome changes. This led to clear distinctions between new teenage departments and the rest of the store they sat within. At many stores, including London's D. H. Evans, the layout of the Junior Miss department was conspicuously less formal than the store's womenswear department, and haphazardly arranged clothes racks were interspersed with tables and chairs to encourage visitors to linger (*Display, Design & Presentation* 1948, p.23). The considerable effort expended towards creating this distinctive aesthetic reflected emerging market research that suggested young people desired retail spaces in which they felt comfortable and autonomous, and that it was worth investing in the creation of these spaces because this youthful demographic was particularly susceptible to make purchasing decisions as a result of publicity and promotion (*Display* 1947, p.35).

The ability to manipulate sensory experience was a crucial tool for department stores in creating a sense of difference between their teenage departments and the rest of the store. Lighting proved a key means to achieve this and there was widespread interest in understanding how young consumers might responded differently to lighting conditions than their older counterparts. In 1948, following research suggesting that fluorescent lighting could be used to influence the customer into making a purchase, the merchandise director of Bentalls department store experimented with the use of colour in their fashion departments. He concluded that coloured lighting had a positive effect on customer experience and sales, but more significantly, that adult and teenage consumers responded differently. While soft pink lighting tones were particularly effective in the womenswear department, as they flattered customer's complexions, brighter colours such as greens and eggshell blues were more popular in the Junior Miss department (*Display, Design & Presentation* 1949a).

Elsewhere, more radical experiments in lighting were used to transform the sensory experience of retail spaces in order to disrupt customers' expectations. When designing the new "Young Liberty" fashion department at Liberty & Co., Hulme Chadwick used lighting to render the famous interior of the Arts and Crafts department store unrecognizable. The store's dark wood paneling was first covered with white pained panels and mirrors, then lit by stark halogen strip lighting. This visually and conceptually separated the Young Liberty department from the softly lit spaces with exposed wood beams and richly patterned rugs for which the store was reknowned.

Many teenage departments also experimented with the use of music to create a youthful atmosphere. Liberty & Co. treated customers to live jazz music in order to create an informal but exciting setting more akin to a club than a shop, while other retailers installed record players (*Display Design & Presentation*, 1949b, p.23). But these types of interventions were expensive and resource intensive at a time when access to materials was limited by

postwar shortages. Therefore, in order to distinguish themselves as spaces, teenage departments combined these techniques with experimental, make do and mend interior and display design. Rather than resort to using display mannequins with outdated makeup and hairstyles, many teenage departments presented their mannequins without heads or used mannequins crafted from chicken wire (Fig. 10.1). When combined with the trend for "found" display props – ranging from bomb debris to foliage foraged from local parks – this resulted in the creation of surreal and uncanny retail displays that challenged viewers' expectations. Furthermore, this aesthetic evoked and replayed the implausable scenes of the Blitz, when bombing created strange, fragmented, and disorientating langscapes. Just as artists and writers of the 1940s responded to these wartime landscapes through the creation of surrealist work (Mellor 2011), so display designers too drew on these sensorially disorientating reference points in order to challenge consumers' levels of visual comfort, helping to further emphasize the sensory novelty and strangeness of experiments in lighting and sound (Bide 2018).

[Fig. 10.1 image caption: Eric Lucking window display for the 'Young Liberty Shop' at Liberty & Co., 1949. Westminster City Archives/Liberty Ltd.]

By the mid-1950s, many of the more experimental DIY retail display trends had subsided as postwar austerity gave way to an era when ready-made mannequins and display props were more accessible. While the idea of a distinct space to sell clothes to teenagers persisted in department stores, these spaces became less distinctive due to the broader adoption of some of the techniques they had pioneered across retail design and the widespread use of mass-produced display props that could be customized by colour, but little else (*Display* 1958, p.5). The increasing homogeniety of display props reduced the capacity

for displays to surprise or disorientate consumers. In comparision with the uncanny sensory encounters shoppers had experienced when passing by the surreal fashion displays of the 1940s, there was little opportunity to provoke imaginative discomfort when arranging components that were so reasuringly familiar.

However, young consumer's desire for sensory difference in retail spaces had not diminished. Furthermore, teenagers were increasingly affluent, making it more important than ever to cater to the considerable spending power of this demographic (Abrams 1959, p.9). This raised significant questions for retailers about how they could continue to evolve the design of the sensory retail space in order to maintain the interest of a fast-changing set of young consumers as new teens aged in to this rather fleeting category and young adults cycled out, whilst continuing to foster the strong associations between youth identity and retail spaces that had been developed through promotional events and in-store "clubs" (Bide 2021).

By the mid-1960s, department stores and multiple retailers turned to young people themselves to drive these ideas. Young display designers were recruited directly from Art Schools and Technical Colleges (*Display* 1967, p.32). These recruits were given freer rein to innovate than many of their more experienced counterparts, reversing the trend towards visual consistency that had dominated retail display design for much of the 1940s and 1950s with the aim of creating a sense of difference. This sentiment is encapsulated by the display manager at Marshall & Snelgrove in Birmingham whose only instruction to assistants creating a series of widows promoting their teenage department, the 21 Shop, was that their efforts should be "of a different type" from the store's usual style (*Display* 1968, p.30). But these efforts were not enough to keep a competitive advantage in the youth market when compared with the innovative designs utilized by a new type of retailer - the fashion boutique.

Fashion Boutiques and the Boundaries of Sensory Pleasure

Boutiques' success in creating distinctive retail spaces can be explained through their willingness to develop the sensory innovations of the Junior Miss department in radical new directions, pushing the boundaries of pleasurable consumption further than many of their competitors. As early as 1965, boutiques were exploring how customers responded to visual discomfort through the uncanny manipulation of display mannequins, such as covering mannequins' heads and hands in different coloured felts in the windows of John Stephen's His Clothes boutique on Carnaby Street. Although the effect was rather sinister, the display provoked curiosity in passersby, an emotion triggered by extreme visual difference (*Display* 1965a, p.29). The freedom boutiques offered for display designers to push boundaries in this way further exacerbated problems for their more established competitors as it attracted talented young designers to leave their jobs at department stores as a result of a relative "lack of creative elbow room" (*Display* 1967b, pp.22-24).

As part of this boundary-pushing agenda, designers working in boutiques refocused their efforts away from the purely visual in order to create distinction through a multi-sensory retail experience. This trend followed a growing interest amongst retailers in scientific studies, consciously drawing on work into the relationship between sensory organs and object perception and the potential for sensory manipulation of object perception to trigger emotions (Vernon 1967, pp.22-24). The relative creative freedom and inexpensive DIY display cultures of boutiques made them ideal testing grounds for experiments into the most effective ways to evoke desire and emotion in customers through sensory manipulation. Once again, this was achieved by pushing the boundaries of pleasurable consumption. As the trade press highlighted, excitement could be stimulated by unfamiliar, and even uncomfortable environments, such as the "cave-like" design of Amber boutique in Liverpool where shoppers

were asked to request a record to be played loudly over the store's PA system as they descended into the claustrophobic "coat cavern" (*Display* 1967b, p.22). This type of retail experience was memorable and generated valuable word-of-moth publicity precisely because it was intensely individual and different. By sowing a little disorientation and confusion, retailers provoked curiosity, intrigue, and hype.

Technological innovations further enabled retailers to play with customers' sensory perceptions by introducing unfamiliar materials to retail spaces. By harnissing material innovations as consumer spectacle, retailers used new technologies to capture consumer's imaginations, making space for consumers to be emotionally engaged and "moved" through having their understanding of sensory norms repositioned (Thrift 2008). This explains the popularity of new materials in display design, such as the enthusiastic uptake of new metallized films that created inexpensive colored lighting (*Display* 1965b, p.8). But many of the most successful sensory manipulations were achieved through much more basic methods of manipulating light and sound to create sensory stimulation or deprivation.

Cutting down the amount of light entering a store through its windows was an extremely low-cost, and therefore highly popular, way for boutiques to create sensory deprivation. This method was particularly effective at creating a novel and surprising atmosphere within the store because the extent of the impact changed with the seasons and weather conditions, depending on the light levels outside. In the mid-1960s, Biba's Abingdon Road shop used a mixture of signage and curtains made from varying weights of material to control the amount of light entering through the store's large glass windows (Hulanicki and Pel 2014, p.45). When Biba moved to a larger premises on Kensington Church Street in 1966, they took this principal with them, painting over the windows with a large black and gold Biba logo (Hulanicki and Pel 2014, p.75). This not only prevented natural light entering the store, it also created a barrier to window shopping by leaving only small areas of

unpainted glass for passersby to try and peer through, meaning that curious shoppers would need to enter the store in order to see what was for sale. The creation of visual barriers and sensory deprivation by covering windows in this way was widely copied by other boutiques such as Carnaby Street's Kids in Gear (Lichfield Archive 1967), even though this technique contributed to a physically uncomfortable environment inside the store during the summer due to its heating effect – which even led to one window at Biba exploding on a particularly sunny day (Hulanicki and Pel 2014, p.75).

Once their eyes had adjusted to the gloom within the darkened store, shoppers were often confronted with further disorientating lighting effects. These were particularly sensorially shocking in small spaces, such as the Carnaby Street boutique that installed strips of flashing lightbulbs circling an entire room, running up the walls from the floor and onto the ceiling (British Pathé 1970). While these lighting effects made it almost impossible to get a sense of the true colour or texture of fabrics, they did replicate the experience of being in a nightclub, arguably showing off garments designed to be worn in that environment to the best effect. Although it can be argued whether this was a primary or even intended motivation for certain shops, a clear commercial rationale developed for certain boutiques. The dark lighting conditions in the Lady Jane boutique on Carnaby Street were particularly effective for showing off the reflective qualities of mirrored and metallic embellishments in low lighting conditions, giving shoppers an understanding of the overall visual effect their potential purchases would have on a night out (Barnes 1967).

Dark and disorientating lighting approaches broke many of the established rules of retail design, which assumed customers wanted the optimal sensory space for inspecting items for purchase and, by this logic, that retail spaces should be well lit, with room for customers to closely interrogate the material quality of the goods for sale. However, sensory deprivation enabled 1960s boutiques to mask the fact that many of their wares were not of a

particularly high quality – a result of the proliferation of new types of man-made fibres and the drive for efficiency in an increasingly international ready-to-wear manufacturing industruy (Paris 2010). Innovative sensory techniques offered an opportunity to invert the traditional sensory relationship between the consumer and the materiality of the objects in the store. Instead of providing optimal conditions for consumers to interrogate the material qualities of goods, retailers could benefit by creating sensory environments that obscured and distorted customer perceptions of material goods. In doing so, these retailers both anticipated and contributed to a wider cultural shift that prioritised novelty, the cultural cachet, and broader aspirational consumer experience over the very attributes of the item being purchased.

Novel sensory experiences further enabled boutiques to create a sense of exclusivity surrounding their retail spaces. The embodied and situated nature of the sensory means that sensory experiences are framed by dominant social and cultural values and power relations, and as such sensory experience can be designed to attract certain groups whilst also excluding others with less cultural capital (Degen et al. 2017). Because the design of boutiques varied so greatly from other retail spaces, they could be extremely disorientating and alienating to consumers who were not used to shopping in them. The sense of imposter syndrome this could elicit is captured by a story from *Jackie* magazine in 1967, in which Sally, a newly-arrived teen from Preston, went boutique shopping in order to transform herself into an in-scene Londoner:

> Saturday morning went to Biba's, this vast dimly-lit boutique in Kensington. Julie Christie and Brigitte Bardot shop here. All the dresses are displayed on Victorian coat racks and old wardrobes and you have to search round frantically for an assistant because it seems that half the time they're in the dressing rooms trying on things themselves. Can't tell them apart from the customers. (*Jackie* 1967, pp.6-7)

Sally's story captures a sense that persevering through the confusion and difficulty of boutique shopping was an important ritual, necessary in order to transcend to a level of urban belonging personified here by celebrity actresses and singers. Retailers responded to this sentiment by designing spaces that were purposefully confusing and difficult to use through techniques ranging from placing items high up, making them hard to reach, to creating confusion about what goods were actually for sale by presenting displays in which the props and merchandise were indistinguishable (British Pathé 1967; *Display* 1965c, p.62). Many made a feature of small and unpleasant spaces, such as using an old coal cellar as a mixed gender changing room. Not only did the small space, shared by both men and women, leave little room for privacy as customers squeezed past each other for access to mirrors, but the vaulted ceiling left taller customers hunched over and the rising damp, evidenced by images of blistering plaster, must have left the space unpleasantly cold and smelly (British Pathé 1966). These disorienting effects were sometimes compounded by temporal confusion. Décor, lighting and display props were used to bring together the past and the present by mixing antique props and shop fittings with contemporary fashion design and music in a way that simultaneously evoked cutting-edge counter culture while evoking memories of your grandmother's house.

The way boutiques distorted and disterbed consumer expectation of what shopping should feel like is characteristic of heterotopic spaces (Johnson 2013). Concieving of boutiques as heterotopic helps explain how these seemingly exclusionary spaces simultanously transformed the conventions and power dynamics of consumer society. Their intense and often contradictory sensory stimuli prompted shoppers to contest existing social categories, and, through exploration of a different kind of retail space, imagine a different kind of consumer society. Thus those customers able to endure and navigate the sensory challenges and barriers presented by the boutique were rewarded with the confidence of

knowing they were part of a new youth culture that redefined social norms in retail environments and beyond.

Beyond the Boutique: Disseminating Youth Identity through Sensory References

The sensory extremes of boutique retail spaces created a powerful impression on visitors, leaving strong sensory memories with shoppers who only visited them rarely. They were also manifested in photographs, film, print, and the written word, enabling the idea of the boutique to evoke sensory reactions in wider populations beyond their regular clientele. In this way, extreme sensory difference was an important business strategy for boutique retailers who relied on mail order to sustain their businesses, enabling people who did not live near London or another major city to buy themselves a material connection to a relatively limited urban retail experience (Gilbert 2006, p.117). This can be seen in the mail order catalogues produced by businesses such as Biba, which used underexposed sepia photographs of models, staged in shadowy rooms, in order to replicate the décor and dark atmosphere of its retail spaces. The lighting of these images obscured the materiality of the garments for sale, allowing mail order customers to experience a taste of the sensory deprivation of the physical retail space (Biba, 1969).

The extreme sensory experiences offered by some boutiques were also useful frames of reference for more conventional retail spaces, including the teenage departments within department stores. By 1966, *Honey* magazine, a publication for teen-aged girls launched in 1960, had developed a line of Honey "boutiques", operating as stores-within-stores in nearly 50 shops throughout the U.K. (Ashmore 2006, p.61). These were publicized through a regular magazine feature entitled "Boutique news from room 113", which drew on sensory tropes about boutique spaces in their description of music and "artistic" atmospheres (*Honey* 1968, p.62). This served to imbue these rather pedestrian retail spaces with credibility in the eyes of

their young readers by creating an artificial distance between the Honey boutique and the conventions it shared with department store teenage fashion departments.

While *Honey* focused on building its retail business, *Jackie* magazine, founded in 1964, used written and illustrated descriptions of boutiques to help create a sense of community and belonging amongst its readers. Through cartoons and editorials, *Jackie* showed a visual and verbal language that evoked the sensory experience of boutique shopping for readers throughout the country. In the same manner as mail order catalogues, *Jackie* promised its readers that they could still be a part of this youth movement even if they could not physically access it. In doing so, *Jackie* built a particularly loyal readership and came to dominate teenage magazine sales throughout the 1970s (McRobbie 1991). In turn, *Jackie*'s written and illustrated depictions of boutiques cemented the idea that disorientating, confusing and unpleasant sensory retail experiences were a formative part of youth culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, confirming Angela McRobbie's assertion that teenage magazines should be more widely recognised as "powerful ideaological forces" (McRobbie 1991, p83).

[Fig. 10.2. "Boutique" cover illustration. *Jackie*, 10 December 1966, 1. DC Thompson Archive.]

Jackie's most explicit sensory references came it is regular column "Around the Boutiques", which first appeared in March 1966. These columns give an indication of young consumers' growing sensory awareness about retail spaces over the last years of the decade. The earliest iterations of "Around the Boutiques" focused on detailed descriptions of interior design and the style of clothes stocked, suggesting that the majority of the magazine's readership were not yet be familiar with the visual tropes of the boutique (*Jackie* 1966, p.19).

But, as time went on, the columns began to focus on the more intangible sensory qualities of the retail spaces, paying particular attention to audio-visual stimuli, noting how busy spaces were and even commenting on the atmosphere evoked by the personalities of sales assistants:

> At lunch time, the tiny boutique, with its aspidistras, bamboo rails and Victorian phonograph, is packed out with girls […] There's always coffee on the go, all the latest hits on the record player, and a friendly word from Susan (*Jackie* 1967, p.22)

In doing so, Jackie drew on the language employed by fashionable directories detailing the London scene, such as "Get Dressed: A Useful Guide to London's Boutiques" (Bultitude 1966) and "Gear Guide" (Johnson 1967), as well as a growing public knowledge of the extreme sense of sensory difference offered by these retail spaces. By 1969, the content of "Around the Boutiques" suggests that readers had developed a stronger sensory understanding of boutique spaces, allowing its writers to evoke the boutique through brief descriptions of certain colours and textures, as well as coded terms like "casual" and "dramatic" (*Jackie* 1969a, p.19). In order to maintain interest in the originality of these spaces, the writers made sure to highlight a few of the more exotic décor features in each column, such as a mobile "consisting of dozens of cardboard eyes" (*Jackie* 1969b, p.25), a ceiling covered in "trays from apple crates" (*Jackie* 1969c, p.22), and another which "looks like shimmering metal, covered in 14 packets of ordinary cooking foil" (*Jackie* 1969d, p.19). In paying particular attention to creative DIY projects and praising boutiques with "paintbrush happy" owners who change the décor frequently, the magazine created an inclusive understanding of the visual tricks of these spaces whilst simultaneously encouraging readers to think of sensory change as exciting and dynamic, rather than disorientating (*Jackie* 1969e, p.19).

Jackie helped its readers overcome their sense of impostor syndrome by creating associations between certain types of sensory stimuli and experiences described as desirable

and fashionable. Readers were encouraged to see unfamiliar spaces as exotic rather than intimidating through gentle written metaphors and the use of soft, abstract illustrations (*Jackie* 1969f, p.8). These illustrations never attempted to faithfully recreate the design of the shop space itself. Instead, they developed something of a symbolic language that would have been reassuringly recognizable to regular readers, like using a floating record player to symbolize a shop where music was atmospherically important, or adding a cloud of hearts and flower shapes for somewhere with particularly friendly sales staff (Fig. 10.3).

[Fig. 10.3. "Around the Boutiques" column, Jackie, April 15 1967, 22. DC Thompson Archive.]

In order to understand the impact of *Jackie*'s "Around the Boutiques" columns, it is important to note that experiences that occupy imaginary spaces become very real for those doing the imagining (Wood 2005, p.12). Although these fantastical columns presented a romanticized and embellished ideal of the boutiques they featured, their descriptons evoked sensory experiences in the imaginations of their readers, with real-world consequences for the way they consumed fashion. Sensory description in "Around the Boutiques" helped *Jackie* readers situate themselves within the sensory cultures of boutiques and in turn, develop a sense of belonging and identification with the authenticity of youth experience that these spaces conveyed. The strength of this, and its consumer impact, is evidenced in the mail order instructions that accompanied these columns. Although the illustrations never showed the garments in enough detail for readers to glean their cut or fabric, readers could purchase them by tearing out the page and sending it with a postal order and personal details to the featured boutique. Readers who did so cannot have been sure of either the quality or exact design of product they were going to receive in return, highlighting that these mail-order consumers

attached more importance to their ability to buy into the sensory environment of the boutique and the youth culture to which it belonged than to the materiality of the product purchased.

Conclusion

The boutique culture of the Swinging Sixties, characterised not just by new fashions but by broader consumer and cultural trends, undoubtably changed how and why we shop in a way that continues to impact our understanding of pleasurable consumption today. However, this chapter demonstrates the significant lineage of these trends – both in the sensory techniques employed and the broader identity-driven youth cultural connections they aimed to foster.

As early as the mid-1940s, retailers began to experiment with sensory stimuli in order to create distinctive spaces for young people to shop so as to drive consumption of new types of inexpensive fashion products to an increasingly affluent young demographic. Specialist teenage fashion departments during this period trialed ideas about how lighting, sound, and visually confusing and uncomfortable displays could be used to stimulate sensory difference, and through this create group identity amongst young consumers. Because of their sensory difference, these spaces became formative for young people navigating their transition into adulthood. By the 1960s a new type of retailer – the fashion boutique – pushed the sensorial boundaries of pleasurable consumption even further.

The sensory bricolage of the boutique created spaces in which strong and distinct youth cultures were formed through ambiguity, imagination, and a shared knowledge and understanding of the seemingly disorientating and discombobulating sensory experiences provided by these heterotopic spaces. This knowledge was widely disseminated through a proliferation of sensory description in visual and print cultures, simultanously helping diverse audiences of young people navigate these uncomfortably unfamiliar spaces and embedding

the boutique in national mythologies about postwar British youth cultures. Understanding that sensory stimuli were experienced both in-person and in-print provides insight into how the relatively short-lived, small-scale, and geographically limited phenomenon of the 1960s fashion boutique developed such an outsized cultural legacy (Gilbert 2006, p.117).

By acknowledging the sensory methodologies and motivations shared by the postwar Junior Miss department and the boutiques of the Kings Road and Carnaby Street, this chapter breaks down some of the nostalgic mythologies about the boutique. In so doing, it enriches our understanding of the business strategies of retailers and helps explain why boutique aesthetics and sales techniques were widely replicated by department stores and multiple retailers well after the heyday of boutique retail (Ashmore 2006, p.70). Perhaps most importantly, it forces us to look again at our conceptions of what counts as pleasurable consumption. By both re-examinaging a sensory approach to youth fashion retail and investigating its mutually reinforced motiviations and role in broader cultural shifts, this chapter furthers our understanding of how integral shared sensory experiences are for processes of identity formation in a consumer society – even if deafening, blinding, or smelling a bit of damp dog.

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