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Chapter 12

Children’s Clothing Versus Children’s Fashion: Contextual and Design Approaches of Childrenswear in the Global North

Aude Le Guennec

Keywords: Childrenswear; gender; fashion; childhood studies; fashion history

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to demonstrate an understanding of:

- The impact of the democratisation and standardisation of children’s fashion on clothing shapes and dress codes in childhood in the Global North.
- The analysis and sourcing of the inspirations for mixed dress codes and genderless children’s fashion in post-1950s Global North.
- The role of contemporary fashion apparel in perpetuating the breakdown of children’s clothes collections per age range and gender.
- The rationale behind globalised dress codes imposed by the fashion apparel and its impact on children’s position in society.
- From high-end to high-street, from niche labels to mainstream offers, the way the experimentation of children’s fashion and design contributes to an innovative and visionary evolution of childrenswear.

Introduction

This chapter is based on the analysis of the design process in the contemporary childrenswear, combined with the study of the fashion apparel. The observation of an industry, maintained in a model inherited from the period of democratisation of fashion,

serves the understanding of a childrenswear apparel based on the distinction between genders and ages. From this contextual approach, this research will measure the gap between the beliefs on consumers' expectations, and the constant evolution of children's education questioning this binary approach of an objectified childhood in the Global North. When policy-makers and educational institutions are addressing these changes, the fashion industry remains behind. However, from high-end to high-street, from niche labels to mainstream offers, brands can contribute to an innovative and visionary evolution of childrenswear. Meanwhile, a focus on children, as users, allows the understanding of their appropriation and diversion of a gendered fashion generated by adults as makers as well as co-consumers.

Background Context

Babies should no longer be categorized in light blue or pink and retail should take away all gender divisions to begin with. (Edelkoort, 2021)

In her introduction to the Spring Summer 2023 *Trend Union Book*, Li Edelkoort advocates for a gender free children's fashion. This inspirational approach of genders expression in styling reflects the current evolution of our society towards more gender fluidity and echoes an ongoing trend which, from catwalk to street style, revolutionises fashion design (Bragg & Buckingham, 2013). If nothing seems outbreaking in this issue of *Trend Union*, the unexpected content comes from the inclusion of childrenswear into the conception of a holistic approach to fashion, from birth to adulthood. However, it is particularly insightful that this influential trend-forecaster, opportunistically passionate about the impact of childrenswear on the construction of the self, expresses the limitation of the fashion apparel in general and the retail in particular to support the diffusion of gender-neutral collections for children. There is indeed a dichotomy between a groundswell movement in support of a non-binary education to create a more inclusive society, and the well-established commercial distinction between girls and boys departments from toys to clothing, from high-end to mass-market. When policy-makers and educational institutions are addressing these changes, the fashion industry seems to remain behind.

Based on the analysis of the design principles *en œuvre* in childrenswear, combined with the historical study of the fashion apparel in post-WW2 Europe, this chapter will communicate the outcome of an analysis of the childrenswear apparel and its contemporary development, initiated in the context of the author's PhD research in 2010. This chapter will consider the child as per the definition provided by the fashion industry, objectified in a specific age group (from birth to teenage) (Le Guennec, 2018b). Based on the cross-analysis of a corpus of children's clothes gathered from the collections of European fashion museums (Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Musée du textile de Cholet, France), the study of sale catalogues and adverts from fashion brands and department stores from the 1950s onwards, as well as the investigation of the range and retail of a selection of global childrenswear brands, this chapter presents the background of the fashion industry. Moreover, it explores the obstacles that the childrenswear apparel is currently facing to address the evolution of our society. The final discussion focuses on children, as users as well as co-consumers, to foresee the future of an inclusive and participative children's fashion.

Children's Clothes and Gender Construction

The Contours of Mixed Dress Codes in Childhood

Relaying the educational principles of societies which, either by bringing together or by distinguishing between boys and girls, prepares individuals for their adult roles, children's fashion reveals the constant tensions between genders in society. The historical analysis of children's style in Northern Europe since the mid-nineteenth century, reveals the articulation between periods of uniformisation of genders in childhood, and times of extreme differentiation between boys and girls, this whatever the age or social background (Rose, 2010). Due to the socialising power of fashion (Balut, 2013), being dressed as a male adult or wearing clothes inspired by the female style, contributes to the identification of the child to one or the other category of gendered adults. Therefore, the technical analysis of the style is essential to measure the reality and the extent of the influence of adult's style on children's fashion. The following developments are based on the analysis of the archives of the fashion industry and retail in France in the twentieth century (Le Guennec, 2018). As part of this research, an investigation into the organisation of leading European brands (*Jacadi*, *Catimini*, *Okaidi* and *CWF*) demonstrates how these particularities have shaped what is considered as a distinct sector of the fashion industry.

Until after the WW1, infants and the youngest children of the European wealthy society were wrapped up in lace and wore dresses that referred to female fashion (Join-Diéterle & Tétart-Vittu, 2001). This uniformed dress code contributed to the identification of children to the female environment, bonding two groups of socially overlooked individuals at the time (Becchi & Julia, 2004). However, after a period of dimorphism in children's fashion, the inspiration of a 'modern' dress code shifted in the 1960s. The evolution of girls' style over this decade, reveal the way in which childhood diverts from traditional female inspirations, to give more room to masculine shapes. Interestingly, this evolution was concomitant with the rise of coeducational schools in Europe, and particularly in France. Indeed, in a context where sports practice was enhanced and the sharing of playground facilities was the norm, girls started wearing trousers inspired by male clothes (Le Guennec, 2006). Alongside the leggings influenced by sportswear, the masculine origin of girl's trousers was revealed by the presence of the fly at the centre front, which is not a functional element for female clothes (Fig. 12.1). Could this attempt towards the identification of girls to boys echo the rise of feminism and the recognition of women in society (Bard, 2010)?

However, as opposed to this contextualised example of male inspiration in girls' wardrobes, the stylistic distinction between boys and girls appears to be the norm in contemporary childrenswear. From 1930 to 1965, children's dress codes demonstrate extreme dimorphism from birth (Fig. 12.2). In early childhood, the boys get ready for the male pants that they will have to wear as adults, while wearing rompers and shorts, when the girls wear dresses and skirts. Masculine blue contrasts with girls' pink (Paoletti, 2012); the decorative motifs of the clothes refer to the games and stories of gendered literature and differentiate boys and girls dress codes (Le Guennec & Riboreau, 2013). The role of the apparel, not only in the perpetuation, but also in the construction of this gender distinction, needs to be established in order to measure the impact of the fashion industry on children's socialisation.

Fig. 12.1 'Le Noir et le Blanc', Au Bon Marché, Winter 1963–1964, p. 101, Private Collection.



Girls With Girls ... and Boys: Gendered Fashion, Design and Retail

The analysis of the childrenswear market over the past centuries demonstrate that most often, the tailors or brands specialise in a gender. For example, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the centenary Maison *Devred*, a brand appreciated by the bourgeoisie based in the North of France, dressed the entire male side of the family, from the boys to the grandfathers until the early 1970s. The 1920s sales catalogues found in the archives of the company, mention the importance of an intergenerational matched dress code between the 'males' of the family (Fig. 12.3).

Apart from this relatively isolated but nevertheless exemplary case in the history of French fashion, children are generally associated with the female range (Fig. 12.4). Following centuries of uniformed styles in early childhood, the association of the child

Fig. 12.2 'Vêtements Pour Enfants, Garçonnetts et Fillettes', La Belle Jardinière, 1932, Private Collection, Front Cover.



with the female world reveals the way in which brands target mothers and favour the principle of matched dress codes to better dress the child. For example, the generalist *Petit Bateau* has recently marginalised its adult male offer and mainly produces children's collections for both genders, alongside the female range and a unisex adult offer. However, if over time children and mothers continue to shop from the same brands, from the point of view of the retail and production, the female and children departments are clearly separated.

Within the children's department, girls and boys ranges are broken down into separate sections, production lines and retail corners. The designers and pattern makers specialise in one gender. Curiously, the evolution of the society towards mixed fashion and co-education, which evidences a shift in the conception of a binary society as demonstrated above, has not yet influenced a change in the fashion industry. Stuck in a traditional pattern, the apparel maintains a distribution of the tasks linked to the constraints of the industry instead of being turned towards the needs of the users.

Genderless

Meanwhile, since the 1970s in the Global North, voices have been advocating for a more inclusive education, which would not be based on gender construction but consider both girls and boys equally (Julien, 2010). Recent media coverage witnessing the effect of gender dysphoria on children's socialisation (Lifshitz, 2020), demonstrate the genuine interest for this topic and emphasise the role of dress codes in the construction

Fig. 12.3 'Devred a 50 ans', Devred, 1952, Private Collection, Front Cover.

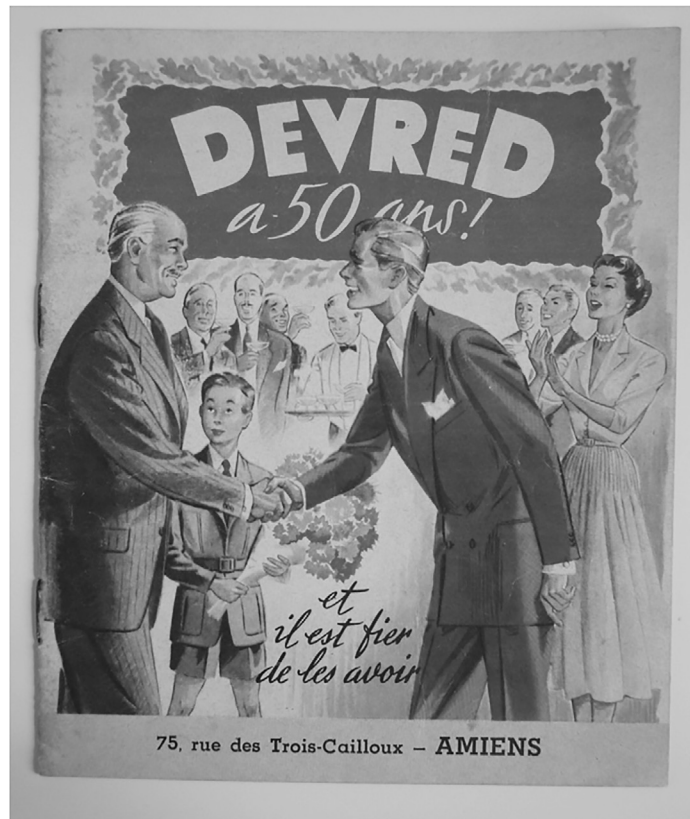


Fig. 12.4 'Modèles des Magasins du Louvre', La Mode Illustrée, 6 Mai 1894, p. 141, Private Collection.



of a non-gendered self. This movement, echoing the eighteenth century reflections on children's education (Rousseau, 1783) or the Dress Reform of the late nineteenth century Britain (Newton, 1974), takes into consideration the impact of dress codes on the social position of children. The genderless or neutral style emerging in niche brands in the 2010s, reveals the importance of sartorial reflexions to support children's socialisation. Indeed, recent considerations for the impact of a 'gender-neutral' education on the development of inclusive societies (Lupold, 2020), echoes dress codes addressing gender equality in a uniformed manner (Kim & Lee, 2016; Luna, & Barros (2019)). Particularly well represented in children's design trade fairs such as *Playtime*, Scandinavian brands like *Aarrekids* or *Småfolk* create unisex collections printed with plain and colourful patterns. Inspired by iconic ranges such as *Marimekko* in the 1960s, this gender-neutral approach implies a revolution in the production, from the design process to the communication and retail: indeed, the distribution of the roles in the production and the management of the retail is not dependent on the genders to dress anymore, but needs to be considered as providing goods for a non-gendered childhood and contributing to an intergenerational uniformisation (Petersen, 2021). Therefore, resulting from a clear intention to innovate in childrenswear, these examples evidence the possibility for cultural shifts in education and the representation of the child, to influence the apparel as well as the dress codes in childhood.

However, exploring the inspiration of these neutral collections reveals the limitations of the innovation in children's fashion. Specific to this design, alongside clothes for early childhood, such as dungarees or romper suits, and in place of dresses and skirts, shorts, trousers and T-shirts are inspired by male fashion and sportswear (Fig. 12.5). The little girls avoid the princess skirts and pair with the boys in short hair and pants. The same is true in current trends. For example, the very recent brand *Niinini*, bases its collections on the variation of simple shapes in so-called 'neutral' tones and uses the same graphics indiscriminately for girls and boys from birth. Thus, when it comes to neutrality, contemporary designers look towards menswear for inspiration. Finally, gender-neutral appears not as non-gendered as it states to be.

Gender construction in childrenswear is a main aspect of a politicised debate in Europe, where advocates for a more inclusive and forward-thinking approach of society contradict opinions in support of a longstanding binary environment. Far from anecdotal, childrenswear appears as an impactful medium shaping the identities of future adults and thus modelling tomorrow's society. The offer of gender-neutral collections is not 'neutral' from a political perspective. Thus, childrenswear companies, like *IDKids* (*Obaibi* and *Okaidi*) have decided to focus on mixed dress codes and disengage from any discourse on gender-neutral fashion. However, and despite niche examples as provided above, the constraints due to the management of the design, production and retail might play in favour of the perpetuation of a binary childrenswear and prevent the evolution of children's fashion according to the changes in education.

Age Construction and Children's Dress Code

Another specificity of children's clothing remains in the differentiation of dress codes and clothing construction depending on the age of their wearers. Indeed, the extraordinary physiological evolution of children during the first years of their life conditions the design of their clothes. Since the development of a standardised fashion industry in the early nineteenth century, and the democratisation of fashion post-WW2,

Fig. 12.5 'Les Jolies Petites Sportives', Au Bon Marché, 1973, p. 173, Private Collection.

les jolies petites sportives

A Décontractée, veste sport non doublée en drap marine fermeture glissière devant et aux poches.

Âges	marine	Prix
6 ans	53 72 32	89,00
8 ans	53 72 33	89,00
10 ans	53 72 34	99,00
12 ans	53 72 35	99,00
14 ans	53 72 36	115,00
16 ans	53 72 37	115,00

B En bleu, coton rayé le pantalon veste rayé pour les week-ends, fermeture incluse.

Âges	Prix
6 ans	53 73 19
8 ans	53 73 20
10 ans	53 73 21
12 ans	53 73 22
14 ans	53 73 23
16 ans	53 73 24

voir également photo p. 175.

C La veste de l'été, cet ensemble pantalon en jean's coton avec chemise liquette épaule de corseaux rouge et blanc.

Âges	bleu	Prix
6 ans	53 72 30	70,00
8 ans	53 72 31	70,00
10 ans	53 72 32	80,00
12 ans	53 72 33	80,00
14 ans	53 72 34	90,00
16 ans	53 72 35	90,00

D Le 8 ans 99,00

E Débardeur rayé en jersey Ceylan's jersey-mélange.

Âges	Prix
6 ans	53 45 78
8 ans	53 45 79
10 ans	53 45 80
12 ans	53 45 81
14 ans	53 45 82

F Sports Wear n° 2001, non bleu-jean, agrément de rayures, ensemble pantalon en jersey quendaan, fermeture glissière.

Âges	marine	Prix
6 ans	53 73 40	99,00
8 ans	53 73 41	99,00
10 ans	53 73 42	119,00
12 ans	53 73 43	119,00
14 ans	53 73 44	129,00

173

the segmentation of the market per ages has been the norm. Furthermore, the fashion apparel has been adapting to the growth of the child either by offering a constant renewal of clothes that are quickly becoming too small, or by designing adaptable outfits that accompany the physical changes of the child. Despite a current interest towards more durable children's clothes, the latter remains marginal. One famous example of this sustainable approach can be found in onesies by *Babygro* or the French *Fra-For* (Join-Diéterle & Tétart-Vittu, 2001, p. 52). Thanks to the stretchy material of which it is made, this outfit dresses the toddler for several months in the 1960s. This is also the principle explored by the brand *Petit Pli*, which since its foundation in 2017, uses Japanese folding techniques to create expandable garments for early years (Fig. 12.6).

Based on the principles of the standardised ready-to-wear, the industry offers clothes that are adapted to the standardised measurements of children according to age.

BELLE JARDINIERE
VÊTEMENTS
PARIS

NOS VÊTEMENTS pour ENFANTS et BABIES

40468. **PYJAMA BABY**

nr 1402, veloutine
rayures fantaisie rose et
bleu ou ciel et
blanc. 2 ans. -
12.- en plus par 2 ans.

4.- **ROBE de**
CHAMBRE nr 1403,

même tissu. 5 ans.

4.- **ROBE** nr 1404,

pyjama nr 1445,
fleurie blanche
passacouille
bleu. 2 ans.

12.- **en**
plus par 2 ans.

40467

40463 bis

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40455. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1402, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40456. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1403, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40457. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1404, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40458. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1405, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40459. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1406, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40460. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1407, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40461. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1408, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40462. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1409, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40463. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1410, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40455. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1402, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40456. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1403, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40457. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1404, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40458. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1405, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2 ans.

40459. **COSTUME** baby

nr 1406, velours noir,
marinette ou marron,
chemisette manches
longues et garniture
plissée crêpe de Chine
3 ans. -

7.- en plus par 2

Examples of this approach can be found as early as the second half of the nineteenth century: for example, in the 1890s, the female magazine *La Mode Illustrée* offers models of clothing whose patterns were sized for a particular age (*La mode illustrée* [PER D65 Rés Fol]: [1889–1937] Bibilothèque Forney Paris). At the same time, the sales catalogues of well-established department stores such as *Au Bon Marché*, or *La Belle Jardinière* in France (*La Belle Jardinière*, [CC 110]; *Au Bon marché*, [CC 182] Bibliothèque Forney, Paris) evidence the segmentation of childrenswear by age. The departments differentiate the collections for new-borns or layettes, the range for babies or toddlers, girls and boys of school age and young people. The systematisation and

complexity of the segmentation of children's fashion were reinforced by the specialisation of children's material culture related to growing considerations for this age group in Europe during the industrial revolution (Fig. 12.7).

These ages in childhood are not only driven by the growth of children, but echo the evolution of their role and responsibility in society. For a socialising child (Quentel, 1997), the passages between the stages of infant, baby, child and the contemporary category of pre-teen, are subjects to rituals, for some orchestrated by changes in dress codes (Van Gennep, 1909). The common example of the pair of shorts swapped for the long male trousers in boy's childhood between mid- nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries Europe, witnesses the role of clothing in the recognition of the child's

Fig. 12.7 'Pre Teen-age', Au Bon Marché, 1971, p. 58, Private Collection.

pre teen-age

A Trés junior, veste longue prise du corps, découpe et fente dos, grandes poches appliquées avec rabat, col officier, pantalon forme nouvelle, col évasé, est en jersey fibre acrylique mélangée.

Tailles	10 ans	12 ans	14 ans	16 ans
mauve	41 87 05	41 87 09	41 87 13	41 87 17
marine	41 87 09	41 87 13	41 87 17	41 87 21
Prix	125,00	131,00	137,00	143,00

B Fraîche et entretien facile, cette robe est en jersey polyester mélangé, sur fond naturel.

Tailles	8 ans	10 ans	12 ans	14 ans	16 ans
mauve	41 85 81	41 85 85	41 85 89	41 85 93	41 85 97
Prix	69,00	63,00	66,00	69,00	72,00

C Pour la saison nouvelle, robe en jersey acrylique, jupe unie et haute fantasia formant découpe devant, fermeture à glissière dos.

Tailles	8 ans	10 ans	12 ans	14 ans	16 ans
mauve	41 85 75	41 85 79	41 85 83	41 85 87	41 85 91
Prix	69,00	63,00	66,00	69,00	72,00

D Jupe en gabardine nette et boutonnée, Tergal (polyester mélangé, 2 poches avec rabat boutonné).

Tailles	8 ans	10 ans	12 ans	14 ans	16 ans
rouille	41 88 35	41 88 39	41 88 43	41 88 47	41 88 51
marine	41 88 43	41 88 47	41 88 51	41 88 55	41 88 59
Prix	35,00	39,00	42,00	45,00	48,00

E Chemisier voile Tergal (polyester mélangé), colons et impression brés mode, marine/rouge, manches longues, poignets boutonnés, col pointu.

Tailles	8 ans	10 ans	12 ans	14 ans	16 ans
mauve	41 87 55	41 87 59	41 87 63	41 87 67	41 87 71
Prix	35,00	37,00	39,00	41,00	43,00

58

socialisation. In Christian contexts, the acknowledgement of children's entry into the adult group can also be evidenced via rituals such as the communion which was considered as a milestone and supported by a shift of dress codes towards adult's style.

Furthermore, the role of the school, as an institution in charge of children's education and socialisation, needs to be emphasised in the acknowledgement of the breakdown of childhood and the uniformisation of peer groups (Le Guennec & Coutant, 2019). Looking at countries where the school uniform is not the norm is particularly significant to understand the subtle changes in dress codes between the schooling stages. For example, the current advice given to families by the educational teams of the French *maternelle* school insists on this need for autonomy in clothing. This conditions the range entitled '*Maternelle*' by the brand Obaibi, dedicated to children of pre-school age. These functional clothes support children in their daily activities and self-dressing up. As evidenced by Vinel (2016), the passage from junior to senior school is also subject to a shift in dress codes and the significant effort placed in the styling of own appearance by a child becoming a teenager. The segmentation of childhood wardrobes operates differently depending on historical contexts but remains a mechanism specific to children's dress code, ruled by the society and impacting the fashion industry.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, in the rise of the democratisation of fashion, this segmentation invites itself as a marketing argument. By multiplying children's offer, by specialising it, by making outfits that could be worn longer obsolete due to the insistence on seasonal change and trends, by triggering the need to change wardrobes, the market justifies the fragmentation of children's fashion into functional categories defined by the age of their users (Le Guennec, 2018).

'Small Couture': The Standardisation of an Offer Designed by Adults for a Socialising Child

Dressing the Child

Modelling children's fashion requires to take into consideration the confection, in other words the socialisation of production (Bruneau & Balut, 1997), and the way this addresses the needs of a physiologically growing and socialising child. Children's clothing doesn't differentiate from adult's fashion because of the materials it requires. Nor does it because of the construction techniques which are, after all, similar to the make of adult's clothing or teddy bears. But childrenswear is distinct because of its ability to adapt to a particular wearer whose needs differ and who depends on the adult for the design and purchase of their clothes (Cook, 2004). From home production to the sectorisation of a '*Small Couture*', production for children is organised into a particular sector. It is therefore appropriate to question the way in which the apparel specialises according to the particularities and needs of young users and to seek the diversity of responses provided to dress a future adult. This section looks into the complex interactions between children, as wearers as well as co-consumers, and the fashion industry, looking not only at dressing the socialising child but also at perpetuating a marketing system focused on the adult's vision of the child. The adult as an educator as well as a designer and maker shapes the material culture dedicated to the child and produces clothes that are influenced by nostalgic representations of own childhood. Contradicting the agency of the child as a becoming adult (Prout, 2004) and overlooking children's interpretation of clothing, the fashion apparel provides a

socialising range for a future adult, itself conditioned by the limitation of the production in industry. To understand this context, we will convey the testimonials gathered from professionals of the childrenswear company *IDKids.Community* between 2009 and 2016 (*Okaidi, Obaibi, Jacadi and Catimini*).

The Rise of the Childrenswear Market Post-WW2: France as a Case Study

In the 1960s, the fashion industry focused on the standardised production of clothes for baby-boomers in a phase of the French re-industrialisation. Produced on a large scale and accessible to as many people as possible, clothes for children were only occasionally produced by female members of the household or next-door tailors. Following the industry processes in place in the adult's fashion apparel, the childrenswear market was supported by a structuration of the retail and the development of the fashion communication and advertisement. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, 'ready-made' fashion and 'made in advance' articles were distributed in the department stores and confirmed the existence of a specialised industry and retail (Rose, 2010).

This movement towards the rationalisation of the production reveals the early quest for commercial solutions to reduce the price of children clothes. In order to inspire the designs of more developed ranges and to stimulate the market offer, the stylists and the first trend-forecasting agencies such as *Mafia* in France, contributed to the design of original collections, inspired by adult's styles and looking at new dress codes for children (Brabant, 2021). Acknowledging this commercial interest, the first children's fashion show (S.I.M.E.) took place in Paris in 1966, soon followed by the first trend book for children, published in 1969. However, from trade shows to fashion communication and retail, the childrenswear apparel is mirrored to the adult's one, demonstrating poor consideration for the specificities of children as fashion users (Joffre, 2001, p. 202). The 'Small Couture' becomes a flourishing sector following the steps of men's and women's fashion, and the rules set by the adult consumer, from the production to the distribution (Cook, 2004).

In contemporary clothing, the designers in charge of children's collections generally specialise by age segment: there are specialists in layette (infants), lying baby (from birth to six months), toddlers and children. Indeed, the designer must take into account the physiological needs for each age, as well as the particularity of childrenswear in terms of style. However, mostly based on an empirical approach of the needs of the child gained through their parenthood, and certainly due to the lack of specialist education in this sector, the childrenswear designers are influenced by their own experience. Indeed, this is only in 2000 that the Parisian Fashion Design School *Esmod* offers the first design elective specialising in childrenswear. The same designers expressed the fact that they were employed for a specific segment and very few moved to the production for a different age range during their career in childrenswear. Patronage, fittings, knowledge of safety standards, these house-trained highly skilled professionals detain the knowledge to the production for a very constrained market, which certainly explains their long-term loyalty for this segmented market.

If the breakdown of childhood into ages acknowledged by different dress codes, justifies this segmentation, the professionalisation of 'age' specialists contribute to the objectivation of childrenswear. What is related to the marketing segmentation, does

not necessarily require such a refined breakdown to address the needs of the child but might find some justification from a marketing perspective. By setting in stone these age-differentiated dress codes, the fashion industry, while creating more purchase opportunities, influences the vision that the society has of children, and imposes artificial and logical considerations on a fluid definition of the stages in childhood, which relies on family rules and tacit social negotiations. Finally, the fashion industry contributes to the artificialisation of children's fashion, consisting in a range broken down in a logical manner and supported by the vision that the institutionalisation of children's education gives on a segmented childhood (Fig. 12.8). Analysing the breakdown of childrenswear reveals the influence of the fashion apparel on the concept of age as a social construct (Le Guennec, 2020a, p. 1562), and demonstrates the impact of the industry on the definition of childhood in the contemporary society.

However, the analysis of the organisation of the production reveals that the distribution by age category lacks clarity in places. Indeed, in 2019, at *Catimini*, the newborn outfits are designed for children from 0 to 18 months, the 'Mini kid' from 12 months to 6 years old, the 'kid' from 5 to 14 years old; at *Jacadi*, the 'birth' range is dedicated to babies from 0 to 12 months, the 'layette' (standing baby) from 6 to 36 months and the 'child' from 2 to 12 years old. The fluctuating segmentation and overlaps between the different categories of childhood depending on ranges and companies question the apparent logic of the management of the apparel and, ultimately, the power of organic social ecologies over market regulations.

Fig. 12.8 'Rentrée des Classes', Au Bon Marché, 1965, np, Private Collection.



Conclusion

The recent history of childrenswear reveals the impact of the industry on children's socialisation and interactions with adults. Split between the constraints of the apparel, and the needs of a growing and socialising individual, childrenswear reflects the conception that adults have of children in society. Resulting from adult's representation of the child, children's fashion is the reflection of adult's vision as makers, as providers as well as educators. With this in mind, the management of a specific apparel, distinct from the adult's range, seems justified due to the physiological particularities of children. However, the production remains curiously segmented according to the genders and the ages to be dressed, which are not always aligned with educational trends. This organisation contributes to the objectivation of childhood and overlooks children's direct interaction with and appropriation of clothing. This minimises the importance of the stories to be lived by children as wearers of a socialising dress code. The delocalisation of the fashion production in the 1970s, combined with the constraints related to the standardisation of the design and make, might have contributed to the disconnect between the market and the actual needs of children as specific users, shaped by their culture and cradled in their history. Ultimately, as the notion of sustainability in fashion relies not only on the durability and functionality of clothes, but also on the emotional impact of clothing (Norman, 2004), one can argue that the childrenswear market as it stands perpetuates dated patterns of over-consumption and disincarnated products. Therefore, rethinking the production of childrenswear towards a more personalised offer, where children are invited as users to take ownership of their clothes, is crucial in the current educational context. Combined with a reinvention of standardised mass-market towards customised products, the creation of new models of bespoke production, close to the consumer and to the user, which invite children to co-create their clothes, might be the future of a sustainable children's fashion, reflecting the evolution of our social ecosystems.

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