

# Feature



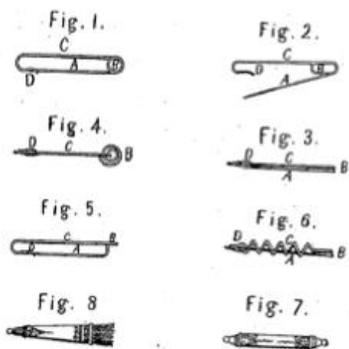
## Wacky Clothing Patents

**Kathie Gust\***

*Patents are the ultimate protection for useful and non-obvious technologies. But when inventors dabble in clothing, the results are sometimes also wacky. Here are some examples.*

Garments may well be one of the earliest inventions of man, and have taken many interesting twists and turns over time in the name of fashion. Garment fasteners such as belts, ties, pins, brooches, buckles and buttons have been devised with great ingenuity over the years. Equal thought has gone into techniques of cutting, joining and decoration of garments, waterproofing and coating, dyeing and weaving with colors.

For most of human history these inventions and techniques were either



Safety pin patent drawings, 1849.

released free for all to share, or held as trade secrets in order to capitalize on the uniqueness of what had been devised.

Some few of

these early inventions were actually patented starting in the 1800's. Such examples as Walter Hunt's Safety Pin (1849) and Charles Goodyear's Rubber Buttons (1849-51) are well known. Others such as Mary Phelps Jacob's Backless Brassiere patent (1914) were improvements on existing known garments, rather than new inventions.

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*"Garments were invented by the human race as a protection against the cold."*

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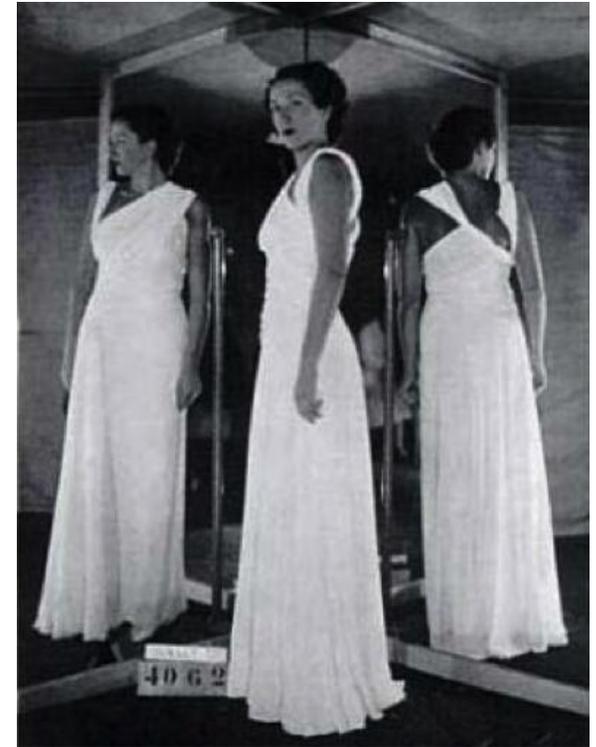
– Ebenezer Scrooge, "A Christmas Carol" (1843) by Charles Dickens.

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The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has two types of patents that can be used for garments:

- Utility patents may be granted to anyone who invents or discovers any new and useful process, machine, article of manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvement thereof; and
- Design patents may be granted to anyone who invents a new, original, and ornamental design for an article of manufacture.

Patent law also specifies that the process or item in question must be "useful", "novel" and "non-obvious". Useful means that it actually works, novel means that it has not been produced or even described



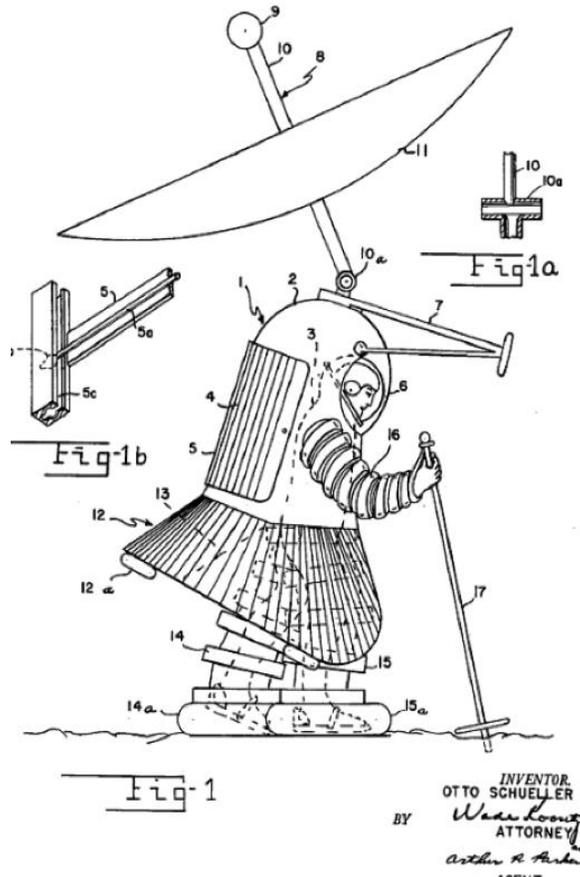
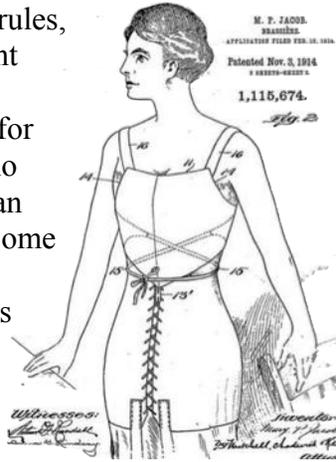
Ivory crepe "twisted" evening dress, 1935-36. Vionnet copyright photo.

before and non-obvious means that a normal practitioner of the "art" in question would not have thought to do it.

Due to those restrictions, some designers opt for copyright protection instead, in the way that a painter would have copyright on a painting. The fashion designer, Madeleine Vionnet used to keep copyright photograph albums on her designs to help her prosecute those who would steal them.



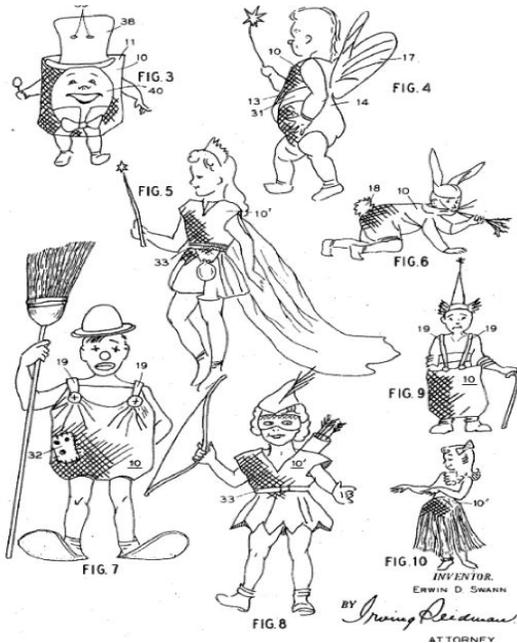
Despite all the rules, there are still frequent patents that make it through the system, for which there can be no better description than the word “wacky.” Some patent lawyers even collect wacky patents in the way that costumers collect buttons, fabrics and trims. Since this issue of *The Virtual Costumer* is all about technology, I was asked to look for some wacky garment patents. I think you will agree that they are at least “novel”, even when they are perfectly obvious and/or not very useful.



Moon Capsule Suits, US Pat. 3139622.

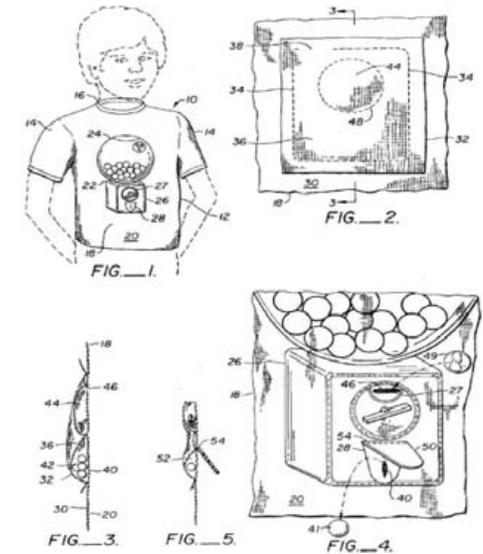
On to 1964. The race to space has begun and everyone wants one of these stylish Moon Capsule Suits, US Patent 3139622 (left). You can walk or sit while tuning in to your favorite television or radio entertainments from Earth. Anyone for Jonny Quest or The Man from U.N.C.L.E.?

There's also hope for people who like to be sure they will not go hungry or thirsty while sightseeing. “Object-dispensing wearing apparel”, US Patent 4120053 from 1978 (below) comes to the rescue. This t-shirt can supply gumballs, peanuts, and apparently your beverage of choice through its cleverly designed interface complete with advertising logo on the front. Not feeling generous? A coin operated dispenser version is also available. Best for skinny models, as the storage facility is a pouch at waist level.

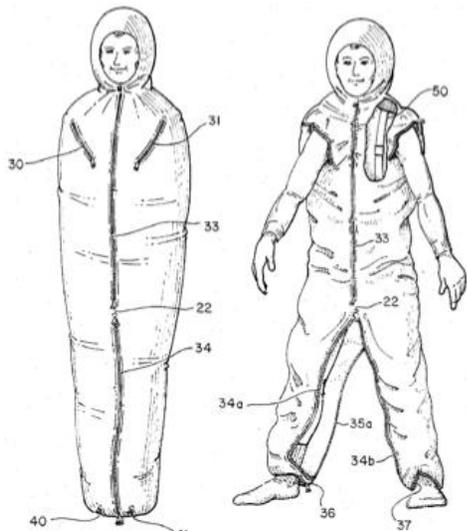


Shopping Bag, US Pat. 2852710.

Let's start off in 1958 with this great Shopping Bag, US Patent 2852710 (left). It comes with perforated lines that allow you to convert it into any of these great costumes! It does not claim that the bag will hold up well if you want to tote any purchases in it, and it does not come with any of the necessary accessories to make your “costume” look like something more than a bag. You need to find those elsewhere.

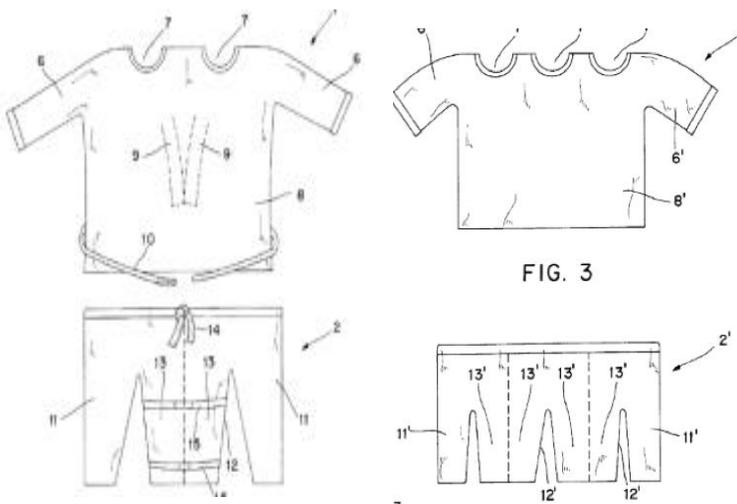


Object-dispensing wearing apparel US Pat. 4120053.



Ambulatory Sleeping Bag, US Pat. 4507805

Can't decide whether you want to spend Hallowe'en as King Tut or just keep warm while wandering around getting your treats, this ambulatory sleeping bag, US Patent 4507805 (above) from 1985 may be just the ticket. Note the inner suspenders to



Multi Person Outfit, US Patent 5970517.

help keep your garment from pooling around your ankles. For those of you who love your Snuggly – here is just one of the ancestors of those blankets.

As we approach the current century it becomes obvious that world population is on the mind of inventors. The “Multiple Person Outfit” (below) comes in either a two or three person version to provide basic cheap apparel for the masses. US Patent 5970517, 1999.

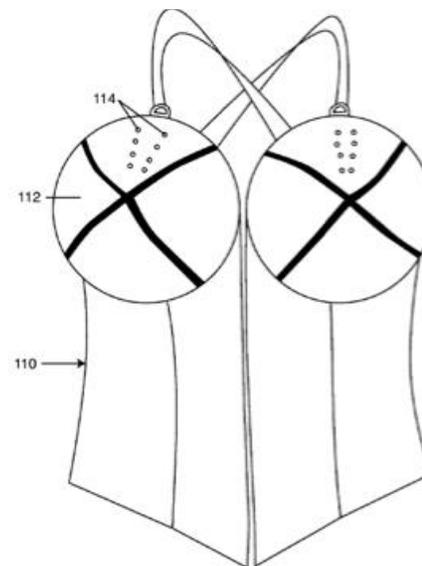


Magazine cover costume, US Design Pat. D634511.

At last our patent tour brings us to the present century. Certainly we will find that ideas and their execution have achieved the pinnacle of practicality and beauty. Why else would people spend several thousand dollars apiece to file patents on these inventions. Let's finish up with a couple of the best the 21st century has to offer.

The “Magazine cover costume”, US Design Patent D634511, 2011 (above). You too can appear on the cover of your favorite magazine with just a little PVC pipe, a printed design and some ties.

Last but not least, in the technology division, US Patent Application 13/295063 (below). This item is so new that patent status hasn't been granted yet for “Air Emitting Device for a Costume”, but based on what the patent examiners have allowed in the past, I see no reason why this one will not make it through the process in time. The designer is obviously trying to capitalize on the popular steampunk corset. Will it be a winner? Will anyone even want to manufacture these? Only time will tell.



Air Emitting Device for a Costume, US Pat. App. 13/295063.

*Kathe Gust enjoys creating clothing for many historical periods, and for various sci-fi and fantasy genre. Visit her [web site](#) to read articles and see photos for some of her costuming projects.*