



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FASHION DESIGN DEPARTMENT

THE CURRENT STATE OF BRITISH FASHION

"BY"

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INTRODUCTION







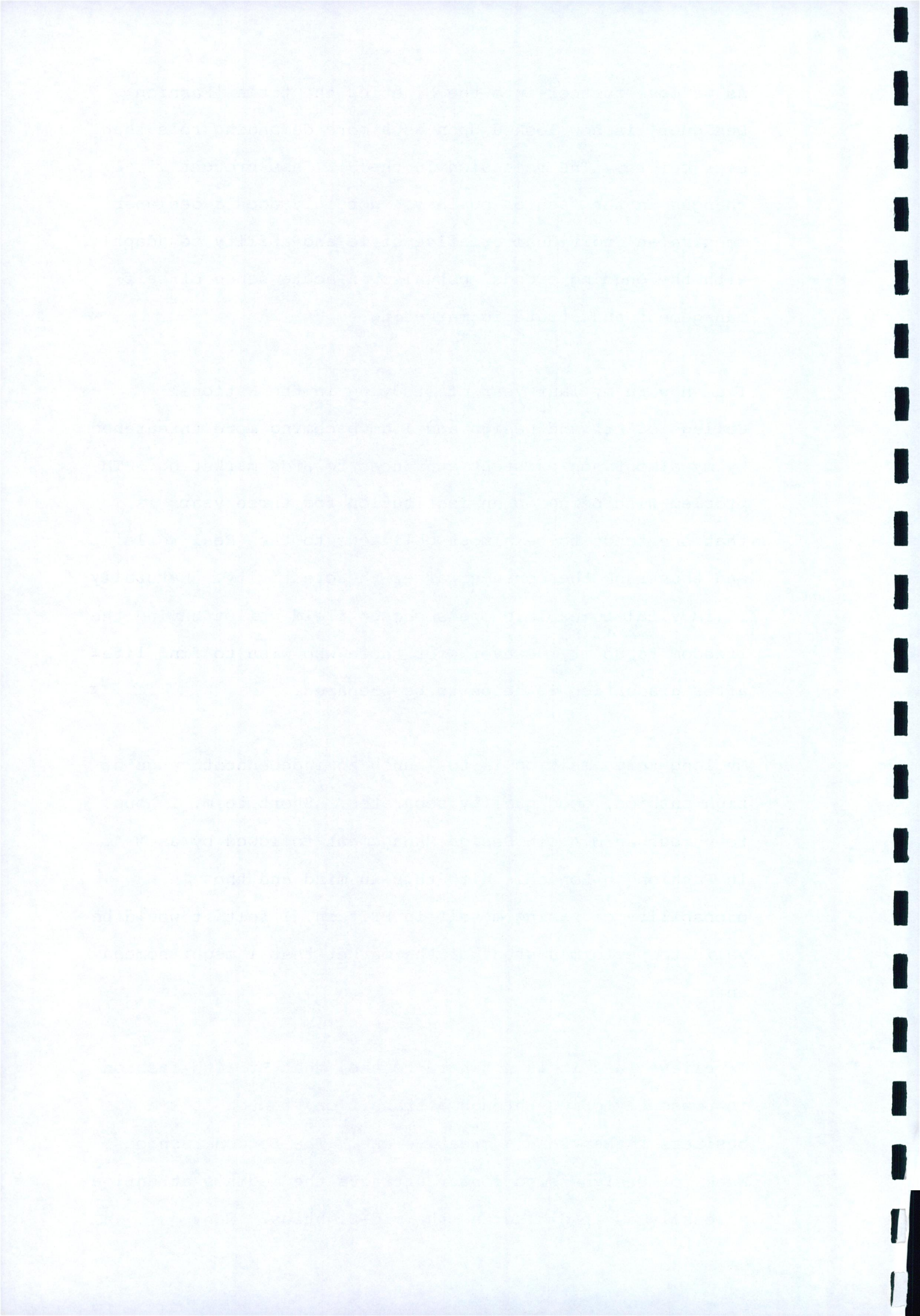
As we move further into the Nineties the title 'Fashion Designer' is now looked upon as a more demanding role than ever before. The recession in the U.K. has brought vital changes in the fashion business, not only does a designer require an individual creative style and ability to adapt with the ongoing trends, but also an acute sense of self management and strategic marketing.

I am now in my last year of studying in the National College of Art and Design and I am becoming more threatened by my almost non-existent awareness towards marketing. The problem with being in an institution for three years is that one tends to be almost oblivious to the 'Real World' and thus rank the consumer after ~~the~~ creativity. Naturally it is vital to explore one's chosen field whilst having the freedom to do it, however, for those who wish to find life after graduation it helps to be prepared.

My long-term ambition is to launch an independent range of high fashion, good quality separates. Short term, I hope to pursue an M.A. in Design Management followed by an M.A. in Fashion in London. With this in mind and the probability of basing myself in Britain, I felt it would be valid to perform a study of the market that I might someday enter.

I believe (and it is not hard to see) that British fashion is presently going through a transition, though it's a business rather than a creative one. The London Fashion Week for Designers no longer attracts the media's attention as easily as it did during the mid-Eighties. Many







designers have lost any remaining glint of optimism towards the social and political structure of their country since the recession began.

The inevitable result is for them to flee England to the arms of the more lucrative fashion capitals, especially Paris. It is not only the recession that has caused designers to make such decisions (though obviously it is the main contributor), but also the fact that they have always been totally undercapitalized by their Government. This would seem quite ridiculous when I think that almost every market report I read stated that the clothing industry accounts for approximately 10% of total manufacturing employment.

Throughout this study I intend to outline the undermining effects of the present recession on the fashion trade and any positive sides to designers having their businesses 'shaken up'. I will also be reflecting on British fashion's boom days in contrast, and the people of tomorrow; the young designers that are emerging now. However the most important end of British fashion is the designer market itself. Therefore I have chosen four main designers whose movements have been closely watched by the media during the last few years: John Galliano, Vivienne Westwood, Jasper Conran and Rifat Ozbek.







CHAPTER 1

THE SIXTIES AND EIGHTIES  
BRITISH FASHION'S BOOM DECADES  
IN RETROSPECT







### The Sixties

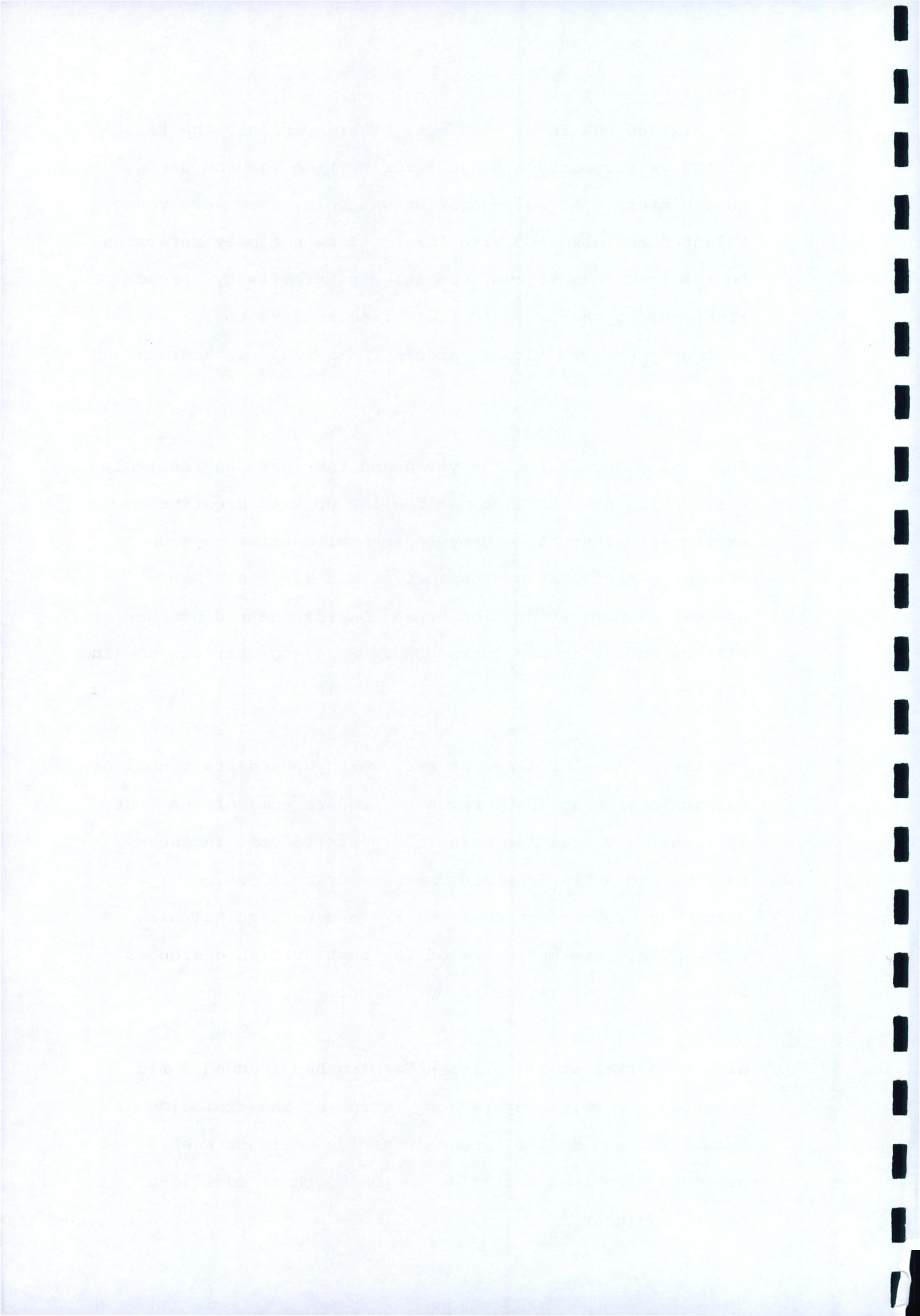
The Sixties was in my, and many other opinions, the first of two very important decades for British fashion during this century. A new generation was born, they were young, talented and obsessed with image. I am not only referring to the fashion spectrum; the surge of creativity spread right across the artistic field from singers to photographers, to actors, models, hairdressers, artists and writers.

This was a decade for the young and they were aggressively self confident. Fashion was fuelled up with creative excitement after the gloomy regimental wartime days and aftermath rationing of the Forties and Fifties. New systems of mass production arose towards the end of the Fifties and nylon was introduced. Ready-to-wear was now in full swing.

The London Royal College of Art, which opened its school of Fashion Design in 1948, began to produce some of the most influentially creative names for years to come in the fashion and artistic world: Anthony Price, Jean Muir, Mary Quant, Zandra Rhodes, Ossie Clarke and Barbara Hulanick of Biba. These are but a few of the best British designers who rose to stardom, fresh out of college.

Within no time at all British Fashion had reached world prestige. Foreign buyers soon learnt of the explosion of creativity and by 1962, London Fashion Designer Week produced more than a million pounds worth of additional export business.







The phenomenal boom in the boutique business was one of the most important developments during this decade. Sites like Carnaby Street, the Kings Road, the Portobello Road and Camden Passage became leading areas for fashion because of all the designer shops and not to mention the colourful and outrageous clientele. Consequently, these highly individual styles that paraded the street became a prime tourist attraction.

Carnaby Street was probably the leading mecca for the young because it also attracted musicians like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Naturally their followers were keen to snatch up anything that reflected their muses.

Commercialism seemed to play a very small part during this decade; it was as though designers were just trying to fuel the ever-expanding wardrobes of their young followers. Quality was not considered because the clothes were worn so briefly. Merchandise and styles were changing so much that seasonal looks were obliterated. At one stage in some of the leading shops, new styles were introduced on a weekly basis.

The two most memorable trend setters at the time were Mary Quant and Barbara Hulanicki of Biba. They had come straight from college so were full of fresh ideas. It was as though they had been thrown into society at just the right moment and because they were young, they could relate to the demands, which before long, they were creating.

Mary Quant attracted a lot of outside interest which was













Mary Quant 1965



important. The foreign fashion press needed to see how individually creative the British could be. The Americans became very interested and Britain needed a huge market to extend their new asset of the fashion trade. Mary Quant therefore became the best export with her perfectly timed introduction of the 'mini-skirt', opening new trade doorways for other designers.

Her newly introduced 'mini' caused a sensation world-wide especially when she toured the States. Not only was she innovative but also humorous; her clothes bore no signs of the traditional British style. Mary Quant received an O.B.E. for her contributions to British fashion and appropriately enough, wore a mini-skirt to Buckingham Palace to receive it! This for me symbolises not only the importance of the young designers at this time but also their individuality and self-confidence.

By 1967 almost half of all British clothing separates were bought by fifteen to nineteen year olds who had only served as a fraction of the consumer market during the Fifties.

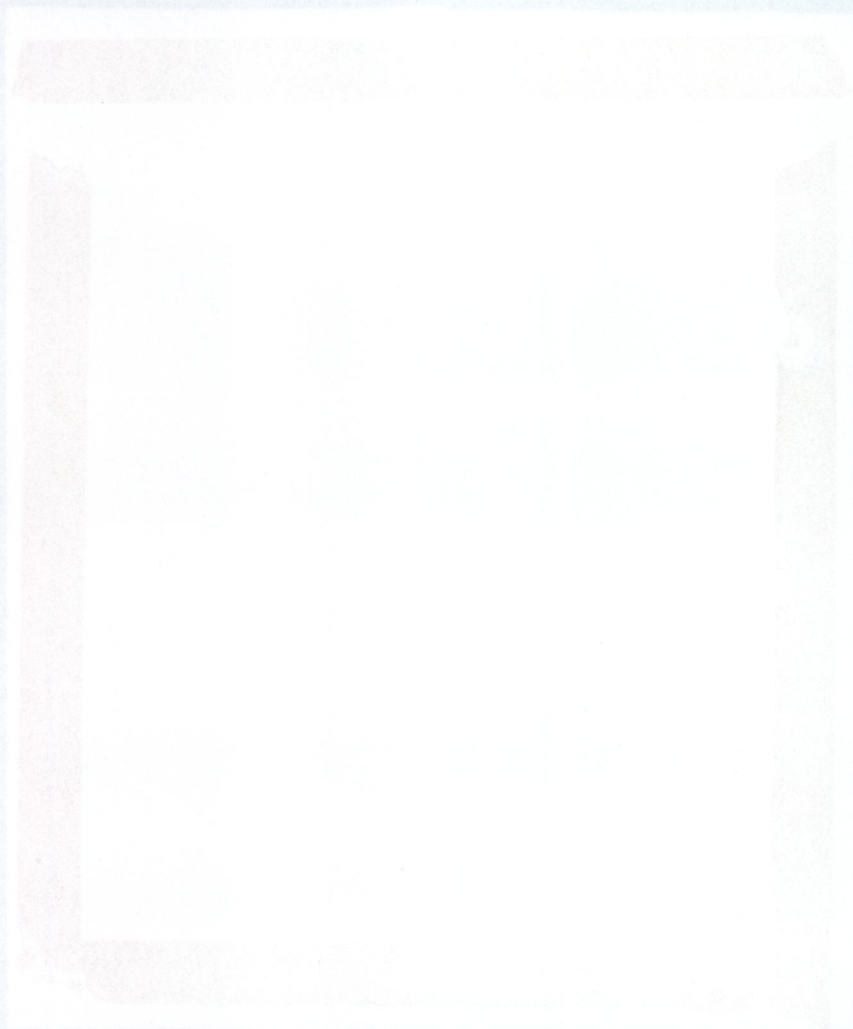
"The youth feared stagnation. England is complacent and the young are bored. There is the desire to hear breaking glass". (1)

Another encouraging side to the fashion trade at this time was the price of some of the designer ready-to-wear. Biba added a whole new meaning to affordable dress. She opened a two-room premises off Kensington High Street, as well as starting the first British Fashion Mail-Order business in













Barbara Hulanicki of Biba 1966



1964. At one stage you could buy a Biba outfit for the same price as a Mary Quant party dress.

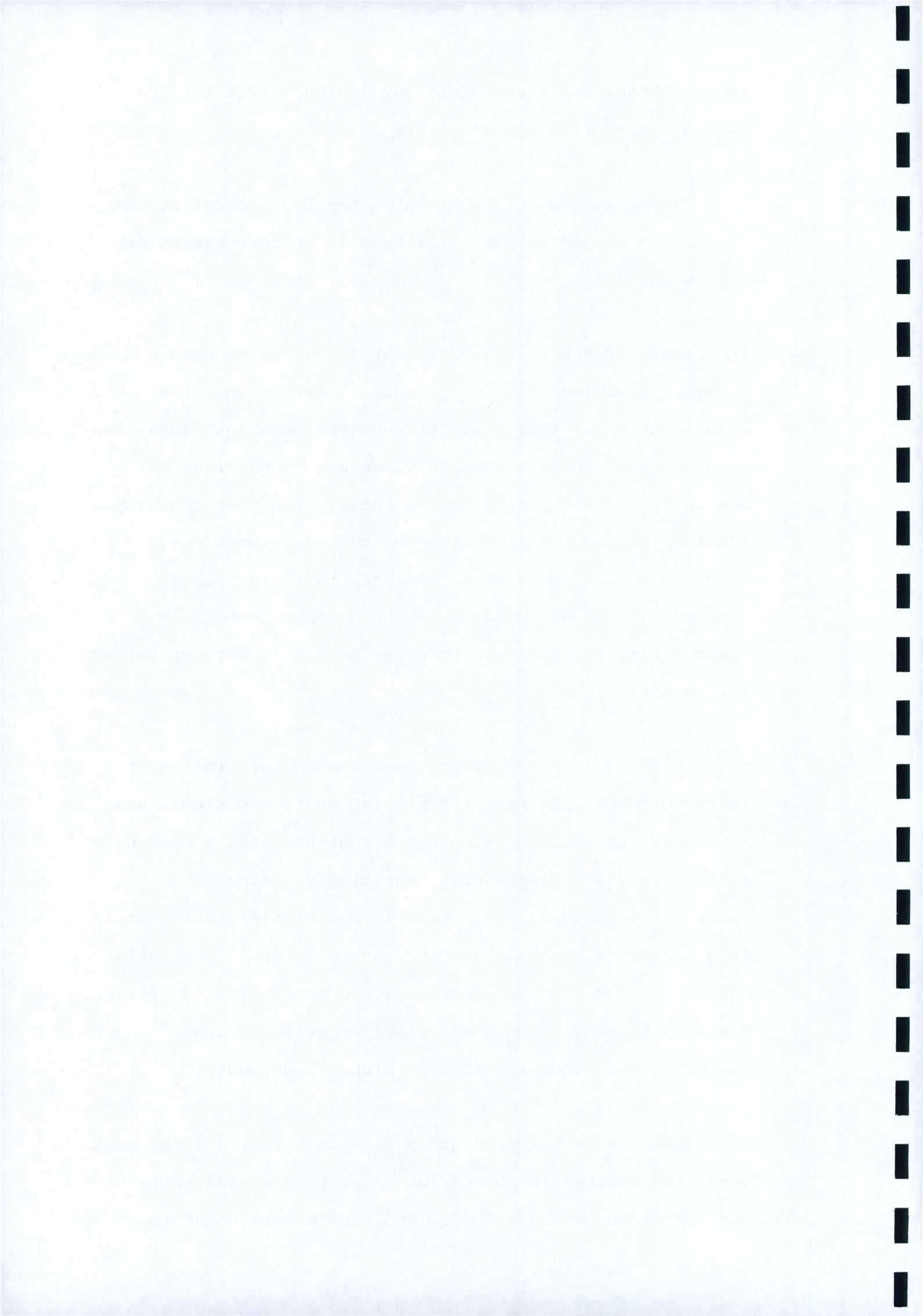
"There were no price tickets, but the poorest student could afford to say 'I'll have it' before asking 'How much?'" (2)

The beauty of the Sixties was that fashion designers had absolute creative freedom. It didn't matter what the press said about them; they could produce the whackiest ideas and be guaranteed to sell them as there was no shortage of demand provided the novelty was there. The ever-changing fashions led to the production of the most temporary garments of all, disposable clothes, known as 'party clothes'. They were made from the cheapest materials (paper, plastic) and in most cases only worn once or twice for novelty.

This cult for eccentric ready-wear saw couture followers lessen greatly. In fact the British couture business has not recovered since. The problem that has always been with couture is its exclusiveness, especially during a ready-to-wear led market. Even if one of the great masters (e.g. Hardy Amies) came up with a very saleable attractive design, it was standard not to exceed an edition of 20-25. Not only that but also the skilled workmanship and tailoring demanded, resulted in high labour costs.

The Sixties made Britain into a fashion leader and the most inventive country in the world. Everybody wanted to be part of it and it became a common fashion statement to







sport the London look as the French called it "Le Style Anglais".

"For the first time the young people who work in the rag trade are making and promoting the clothes they naturally like ..... ours is the first generation that can express itself on its own terms". (3)

### The Eighties

The 1980's for Britain bore many similarities with what had happened two decades previously. Street style was again the driving force behind the London fashion scene. London was a happening, trendy powerhouse of innovative young minds.

Probably the best quality that the British had during this decade was their quick reaction to new creative talent, especially the media. The Eighties saw the rise of new avant-garde magazines like 'Blitz', 'The Face' and 'I-D'. These were the most supportive as they thrived on clothing innovation and any other new occurrences in the artistic world. Many of the contributors to these magazines were not necessarily qualified writers or stylists, they came from all walks of life.

This, therefore, made things a lot more democratic, in that the designer/media relationship became a friendly and inspiring one. It was more respectful as a fashion journalist to be encouraging rather than critical. Fashion designers were being pushed forward especially by the photographers who created the whole mood that went with the

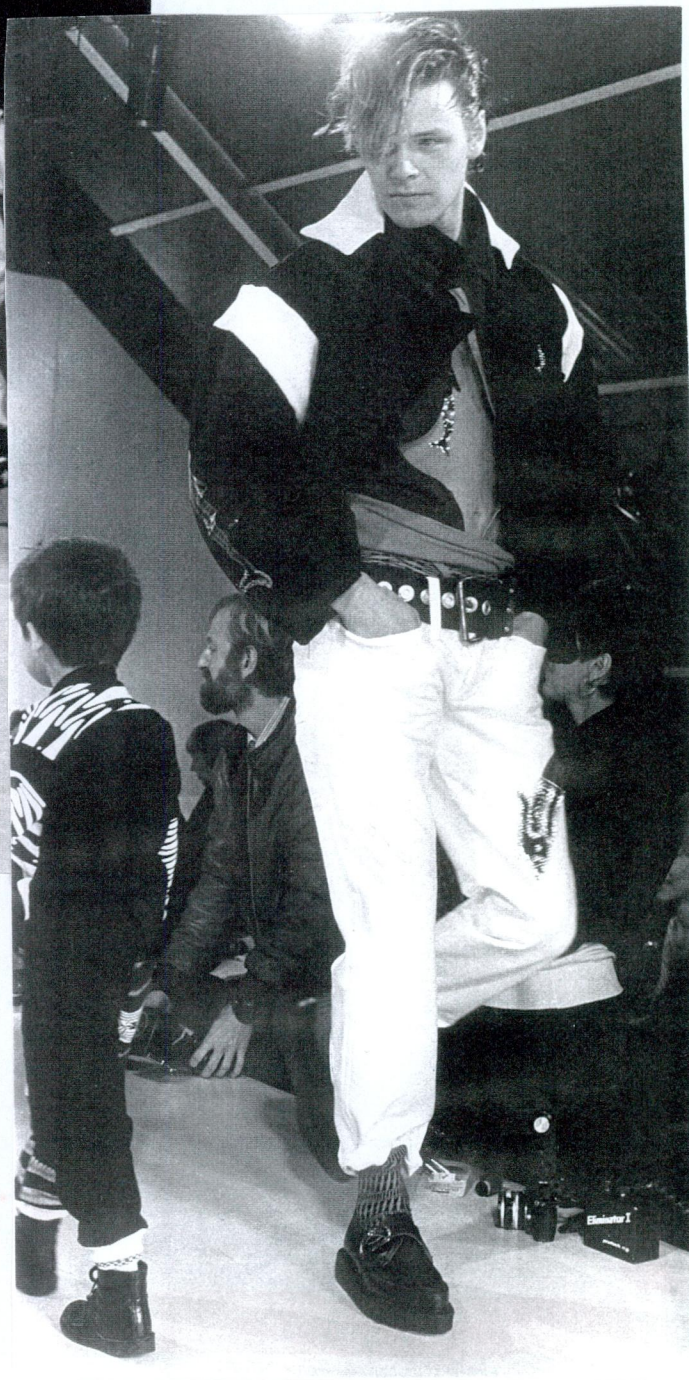
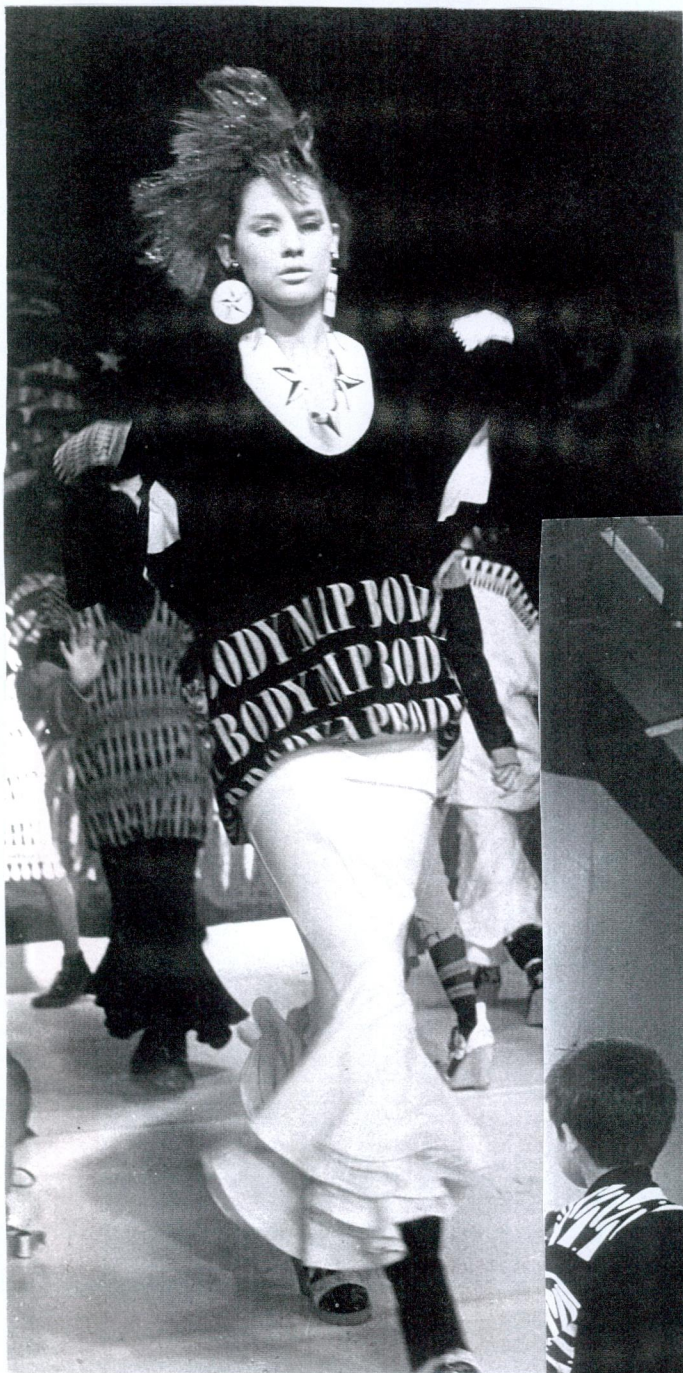












Body Map Clothes 1985



designers work. Photographers like Nick Knight and Ray Petri produced most of the unconventionally powerful photographic images for 'The Face' magazine.

The fashion structure was loosely knit during this decade; there was a strong sense of D.I.Y. in terms of freedom of expression and clothing innovation. Because of the distinct 'street-style', designers were not dictating the fashion, just simply expanding and experimenting with what was already there. Any form of good business practice and planning was learnt by trial and error because it just wasn't learnt in college. Such a frivolous approach to business would never be heard of today from young designers entering the field.

Importantly it was possible for a young designer to leave college and find a niche to make a name for themselves at home; opportunities flourished. One perfect example of a successful entry to the designer market at the right time and right place was that of 'Body Map'. This was the brain-child of David Holah and Stevie Stewart, who created a company that not only utilised fresh young minds by employing mainly young people, but also using textile designers to create their trademark prints.

Their almost overnight success rapidly expanded in the mid-Eighties and used innovative ramp ideas and original alternatives to having conventional models such as a somewhat avant-garde approach using performers, pop-stars, dancers, singers and even sometimes whole families. It would be hard to imagine designers going to such effort and





Margaret Thatcher 1979



expense now, unless of course they just threw aside any hope of gaining sales and 'played to the audience' instead.

One example of just how 'raw' the structure of British fashion was in the Eighties, in my opinion, was seen at a Body Map show. The two designers decided to remove the backwall of the catwalk and reveal the backstage scene to the audience, whilst the models strutted in the foreground. For me this case epitomises the power of innovative suggestion that British designers had. They had become so spotlighted by the rest of Europe that they could afford to turn things upside-down and still retain a high profile.

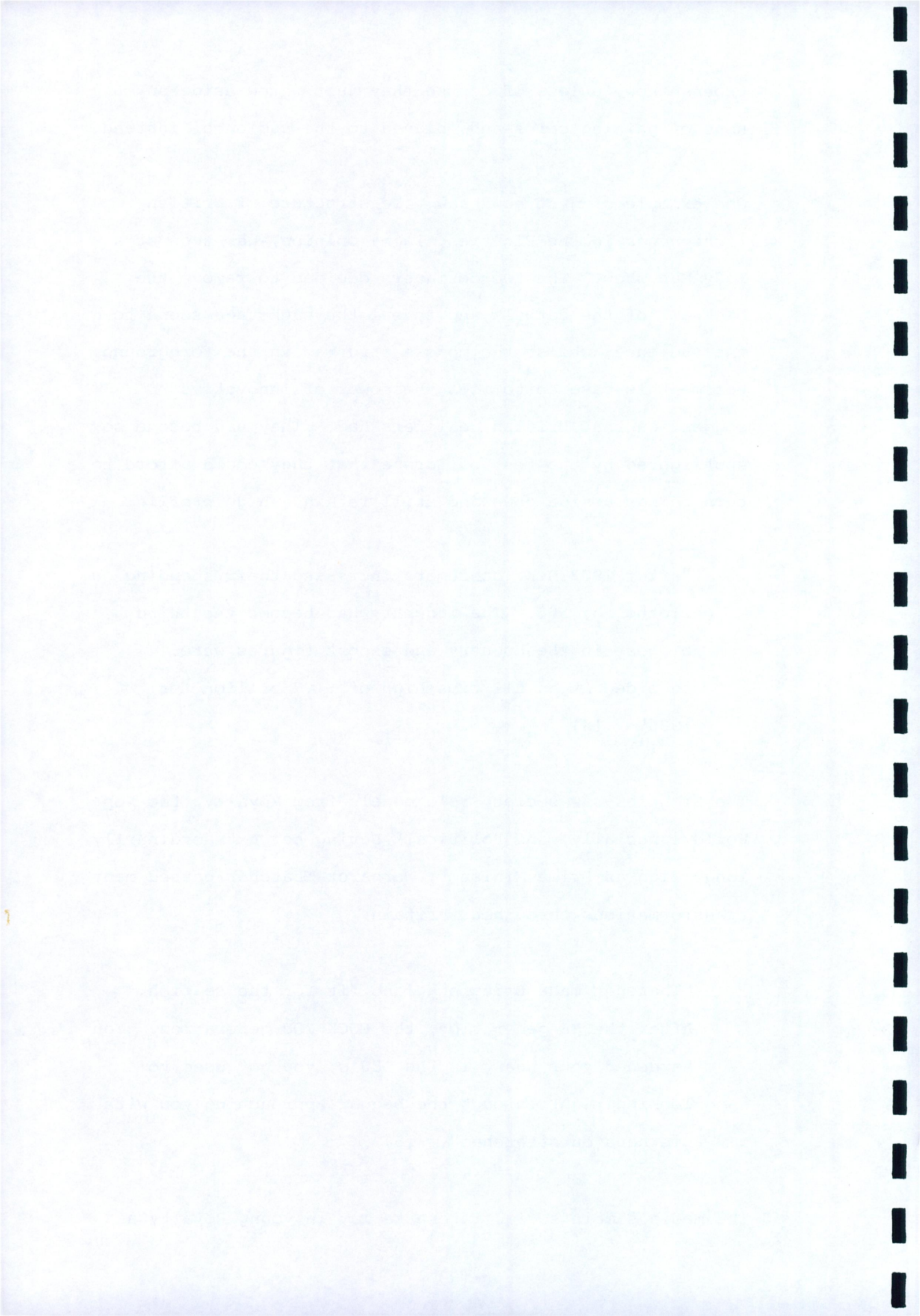
"After 1982 U.K. consumers increased their spending on clothes by 50%. The industry had become the third biggest in the country and export figures were recorded at an all time high of £1.7 billion for 1986". (4)

The Eighties saw society role models from Royalty, the Pop World especially, and Politics. During her extraordinarily long reign as Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher caused many transformations throughout Britain.

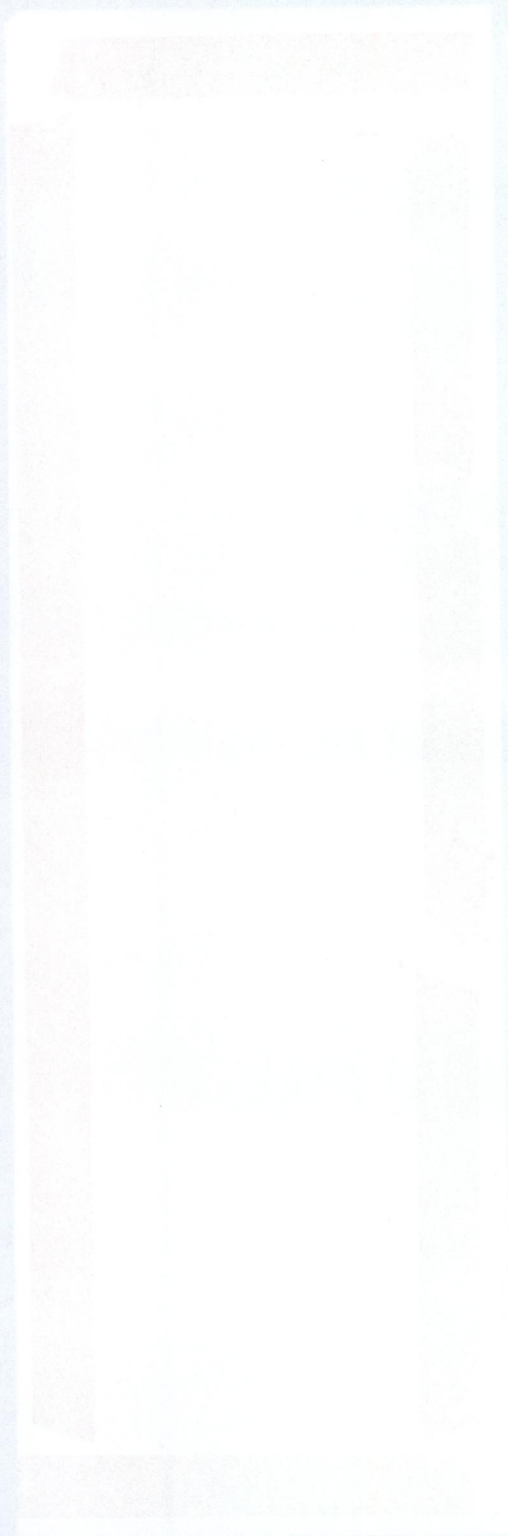
"Thatcher made Britain a land fit for the selfish. After the ME generation, the FUCK YOU generation. You hardened your heart in the '80's, you got used to looking right through the beggar approaching you with his hand outstretched". (5)

The media's main social interests lay in young Royalty and













Boy George 1985



the Pop World, namely Boy George and Princess Diana. There were of course plenty of other 'new romantic' musicians in the limelight, but none drew as much attention and controversy as Boy George. He was the 'voice' of London and his image was twice as important as his lyrics. Anyone who dressed Boy George for his hit videos was guaranteed a garment sell-out.

People of different artistic backgrounds communicated throughout this decade and were very supportive of each other. Designers like Vivienne Westwood used dancers in their shows, experimenting with video, making clothes for pop-stars and building inspirational relationships with make-up artists, hair stylists and journalists.

Anything that was different and could be inspiring was encouraged. One thing that I find quite ironic is that during 1984 Harrods and Harvey Nichols, London's leading stores both underwent a tribute to Hong Kong and its trade exports. The idea was to host exhibitions under themes so as to promote the new merchandise in their stores. Naturally, the bottom line was to increase sales but though Harrods still holds its original ownership, Harvey Nichols has since been taken over by a Hong Kong company.

1984 seemed to be the peak year of the decade: social activities were endless and any trend-setter was bound to have his/her diary packed with events (e.g. Nightclub parties, charity balls). People had plenty of excuses to dress up and be seen as late night party goers, cafes and cinema viewing became a part of life, not that this does









Princess Diana 1992



not happen now, it was just more of a novelty during the '80's because there was a much more hassle-free atmosphere. '84 was a year for the glam and glitterful.

"It's 1984. The international fashion press is converging on a tent pitched off High Street Kensington ravening to get its teeth into a juicy slice of a revived local tradition - the latest manifestation of a British 'Youth Explosion'. The difference this time is that the youths aren't singing 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand' or 'I am an Antichrist', but have got themselves up on a catwalk and are calling themselves designers". (6)

The wonderful thing about the creative explosion in London, like that of the Sixties was that there was so much to be inspired by. Camden and Kensington Markets in London became the two key inspirations for the youth of the Eighties and led to designer enterprises and partnerships (e.g. Stevie Stewart and David Holah of Body Map).

Such markets were unlike any others in the world. They were respected by all kinds of people - young and old, rich or poor - who new they would be guaranteed to find something of interest there and still do. In fact it was mixed dressing and combining new and secondhand clothes that gave fashionable young Londoners such an individual look.

The demand for clothes during this decade was phenomenal and, as in the Sixties, new shops began to appear almost



1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation and the second section deals with the progress of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the results of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work in the field and the second section deals with the results of the work in the laboratory.

3. The third part of the report deals with the conclusions of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions of the work in the field and the second section deals with the conclusions of the work in the laboratory.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the recommendations of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the recommendations of the work in the field and the second section deals with the recommendations of the work in the laboratory.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the summary of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the summary of the work in the field and the second section deals with the summary of the work in the laboratory.



every week. However, this time it was with a more determined approach and the owners researched the market thoroughly before setting up. Probably the most popular example was 'Next', which saw an appropriate niche in the middle-price, high fashion market and took it.

Profitably, they also catered for those who were too far outside London to shop by introducing an extensive mail order catalogue - 'The Next Directory'. Before long there was a whole range of new retailers designing for the fashionable young. 'Miss Selfridge' and 'Principles' now offer fashionable clothes at very reasonable prices and 'Jigsaw' and 'Whistles' arrived, stocking a range of seasonal collections by different designers.

One thing that aided the fast moving fashion industry during the Eighties was the new technological discoveries (e.g. fax machines and word processors). Communications improved greatly and C.A.D. (computer aided design) systems arrived. These enabled designers to cut hours off time by constructing their patterns on a computer and then instructing it to pass the information to controlled cutters on the factory floor, which can slice through up to two hundred layers of fabric at once.

I suppose what made the fashion business so lucrative during the Eighties boom was the fact that there were still a lot of areas in the fashion market untouched especially with innovative high fashion. If there was one thing that summed up the fashion of the Eighties it was its unpredictability. Nowadays trends can be easily determined







by designers, which I find very unfortunate. During the Eighties consumer demand was out of control and bore no sense of continuity. This I believe is the life force behind the fashion business.



CHAPTER 2

BRITISH FASHION

MARKET OVERVIEW







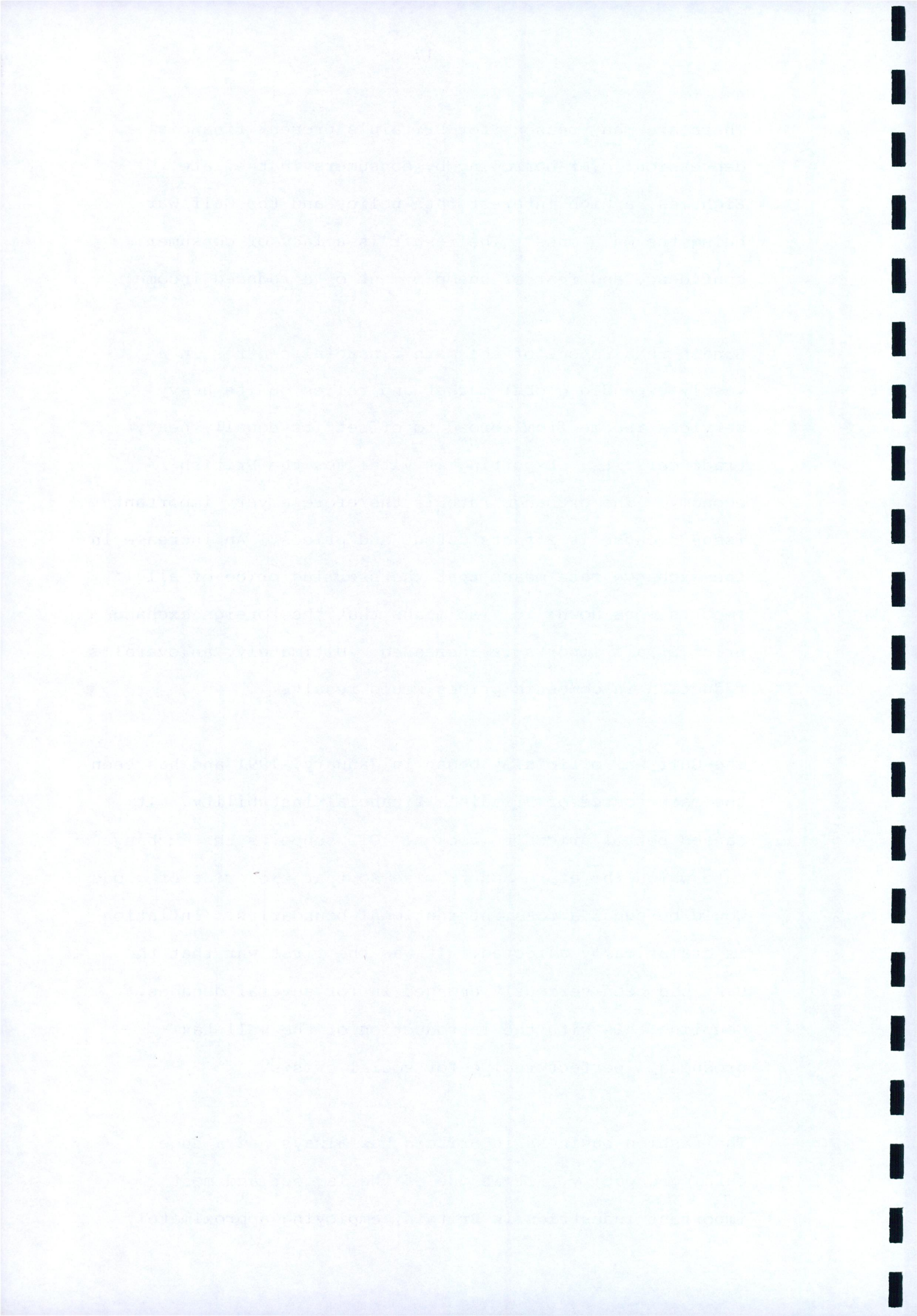
There are many reasons for Britain's present financial depression: over-borrowing by consumers in the late Eighties, a high interest rate policy and the Gulf War being the main ones. The result is a lack of consumer confidence and fear of unemployment or a reduced income.

London remains one of the main financial centres in a vastly expanded global market and relies on its heavy services income from abroad to offset its equally heavy trade deficits. Exporting is vital for the British economy. The exchange rate is therefore a very important issue because it affects output and prices. An increase in the exchange rate means that the sterling price of all imports goes down; it also means that the foreign exchange price of all imports is increased. Ultimately, an overall reduction in domestic prices would result.

The Gulf War officially began in January, 1991 and has been the main source of Britain's financial instability. It caused petrol prices to rocket. Oil supports the exchange rate which therefore had to rise so that the price of goods would be equal across international boundaries. Inflation is dramatically affected. It was the first war that the U.K. had been seriously engaged in for several decades. Coupling this with the introduction of the poll tax produced a perfect recipe for social crisis.

The fashion business in Britain has always had a huge earning capacity. It is one of the largest and most important industries in Britain, employing approximately







200,000 people. However, it is also renowned for its volatility and high risk susceptibility to economic pressure and cultural and social change. It is also highly labour intensive, employing a mainly female, unskilled workforce and consists primarily of small and medium-sized enterprises which tend to be cautious in introducing new technologies.

The Eighties boom left Britain with an unsustainable pattern of production and consumption. The level of production in Britain became below the level of demand, resulting in a trade deficit. The public were also faced with a problem as property values fell. Consumers had been improving their lifestyles while the money was rolling in, but when the property prices fell, the financial system found itself with increasingly bad debts and insufficient collateral to support its outstanding loans. The insurance industry was therefore greatly affected. Credit, especially long term credit, became hard to obtain from the banks. In turn this reluctance to lend intensified the recession.

The foundation of British Fashion has always been defined by two structures. First, the classic, high-quality clothing related to the men's tailoring world, utilising the best natural fabrics such as lambs wool, cashmere and tweed (e.g. aquascutum, burbery). In contrast are the young anti-classic designers, deliberately breaking the rules of conventional taste.

During the Eighties, Britain's young fashion designers







showed the world that they could be more inventive and outrageous than virtually any other country. The British designer shows have always been enjoyed by the world's fashion press up until recent years. The late Eighties saw many designers in pursuit of stardom and therefore taking a more arrogant approach than a commercially aware one.

1987 saw a turning point for most designers when the fashion press and buyers eventually decided they had had enough of the London avant-garde. It was time to get serious about clothes, the British designers had been playing around long enough. Emphasis began to be placed on commercial viability. Although there was plenty of interest in the hype, or eccentricity of the shows, the clothes just were not selling. It was time for the British fashion industry to grow up and meet European standards; designers needed to think of designing investment clothes. It was the beginning of a consumer-led market.

The textile industry has always kept upstream links with the clothing industry, after all, it is its main supplier. As a result of this relationship, the two industries demonstrate very similar features and trends whether they be expansion or stagnation. The textile industry has also seen a decline since 1987, which was a peak year for it. In fact since then output has fallen by almost a fifth, and 56,000 jobs had been lost by the end of September, 1991, almost a quarter of its total workforce. (7)

However, the clothing industry is a lot more vulnerable and expansion tends to be less pronounced and recession more



acute. It is more vulnerable to macro-economic changes since part of its dynamism depends strongly on innovations in the textile industry itself. For example, the textile industry has benefited in recent years from the introduction of micro-fibres and anti-bacterial materials.

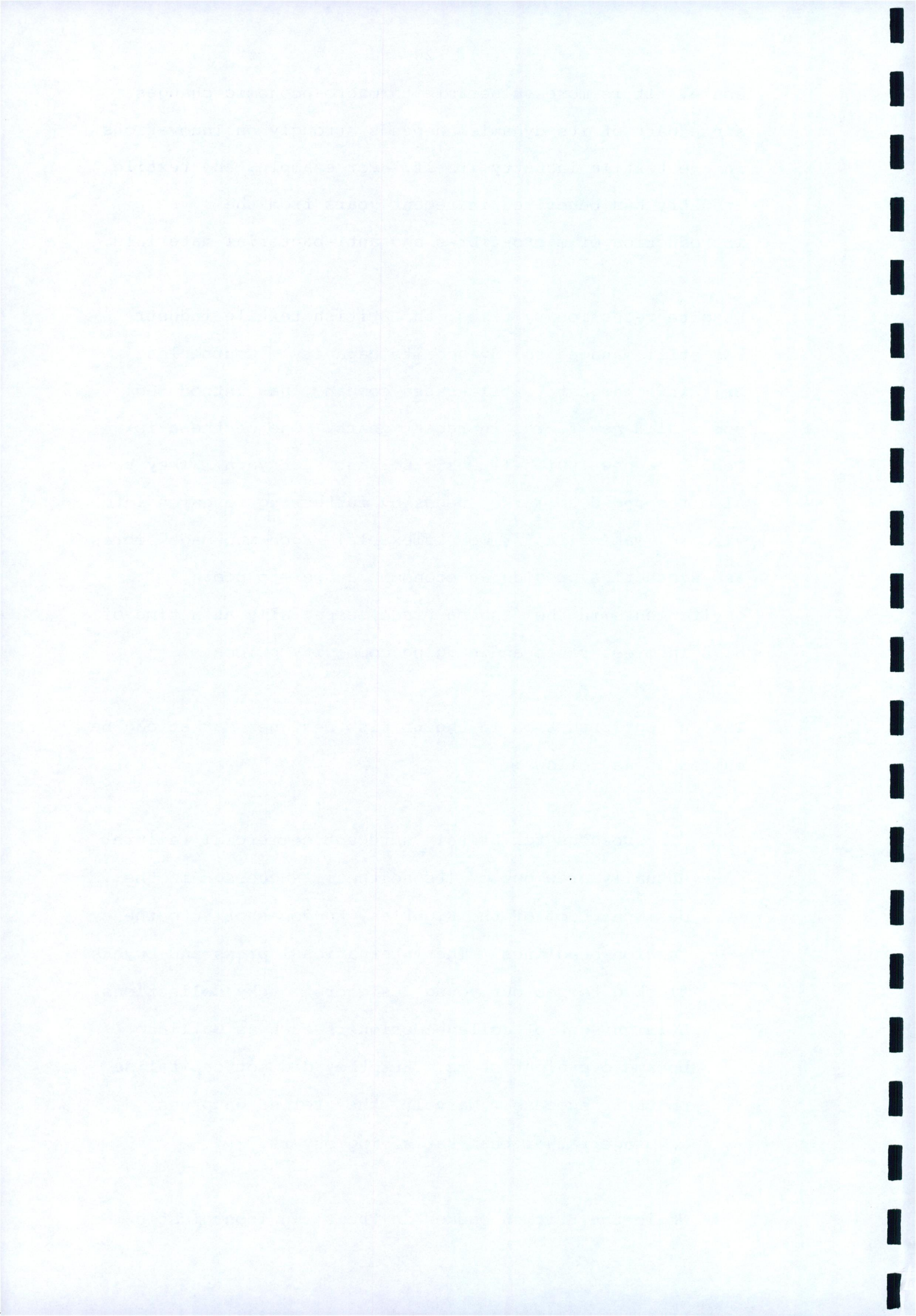
Despite recessionary times, the British textile industry has still managed to advance its capacity. Courtaulds, Britain's largest textile-based company, has introduced some valid new fibres in recent years. One of these is Tencel, a new 100% cellulosic solvent spun yarn. They have also responded to market needs by furthering research into viscose, making it far more flexible. Such man-made fibres and synthetics provide an economic answer to poor environments in the fashion trade, especially at a time of high interest rates and sagging commodity prices.

The current situation in the British Designer Market can be summed up as follows:

"The reasons for Britain's recent commercial failure actually grew out of its aesthetic success. In the designer boom of the Eighties, London shot into the fashion headlines. The international press and buyers flocked to see our young designers' wacky collections. Straight out of college designers such as Galliano became overnight stars. But they did not capitalise on their success. Naively, they relied on press coverage rather than satisfying buyers.

While the British basked in their own iconoclastic







notoriety, the rest of the world kept a close watch on market developments, supplying the demands of increasingly fashion-literate clients. They refined production and distribution, they spent money on new technology and marketing. With sound funds and manufacturing bases, they were able to plunder Britain's original ideas and re-package them under their own labels". (8)







CHAPTER 3

WHY DESIGNERS HAVE MOVED ABROAD?







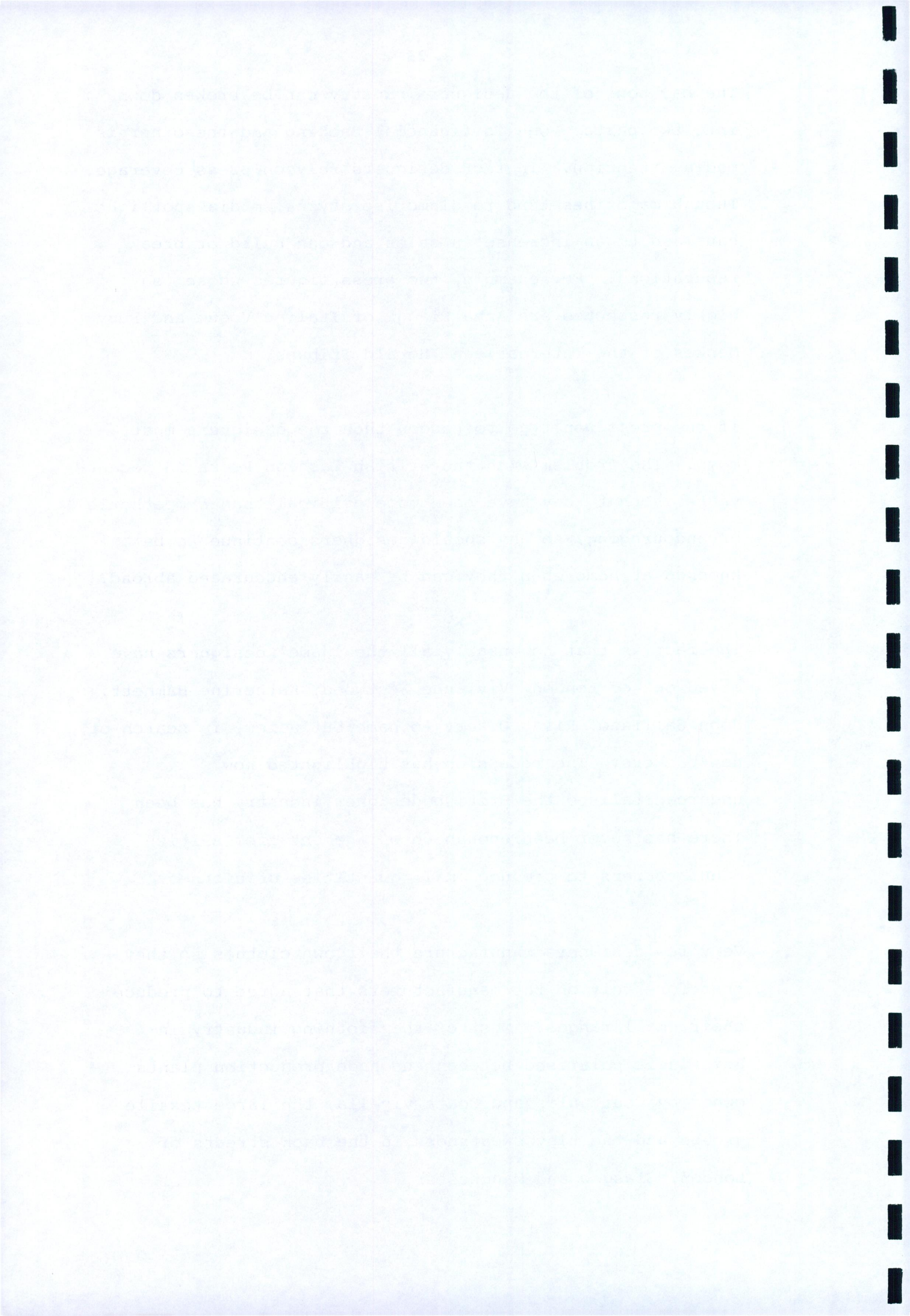
The backbone of the designer industry can be broken down into two parts. One is financial backing and the other is media attention. In fact designers rely on press coverage. Though magazines tend to glamorise styles, media spotlight can lead to an increase in sales and can build or break reputations. For example, two press figures whose 'say' is highly respected are Anna Piaggi of Italian Vogue and Suzy Menkes of the International Herald Tribune.

If the press won't go to London then the designers must move. The problem with the British Fashion Press in recent years is that they have been more critical than sympathetic or encouraging, so why should designers continue to be knocked at home when they can be easily encouraged abroad?

The fact is that now nearly all the 'name' designers have moved out of London, Vivienne Westwood, Katherine Hamnett, John Galiano, Rifat Ozket, to name but a few, in search of new backers. The recession has highlighted how undercapitalised the British designer industry has been. There has never been enough encouragement from British manufacturers to produce small quantities of clothes.

Very few designers manufacture their own clothes so they therefore rely on the manufacturers that agree to produce their small ranges. Most of the clothing industry in Britain is polarised between the huge production plants owned by Courtaulds and Coats Viyella, the large textile groups and the tiny sweatshops in the back streets of London, Glasgow and Manchester.





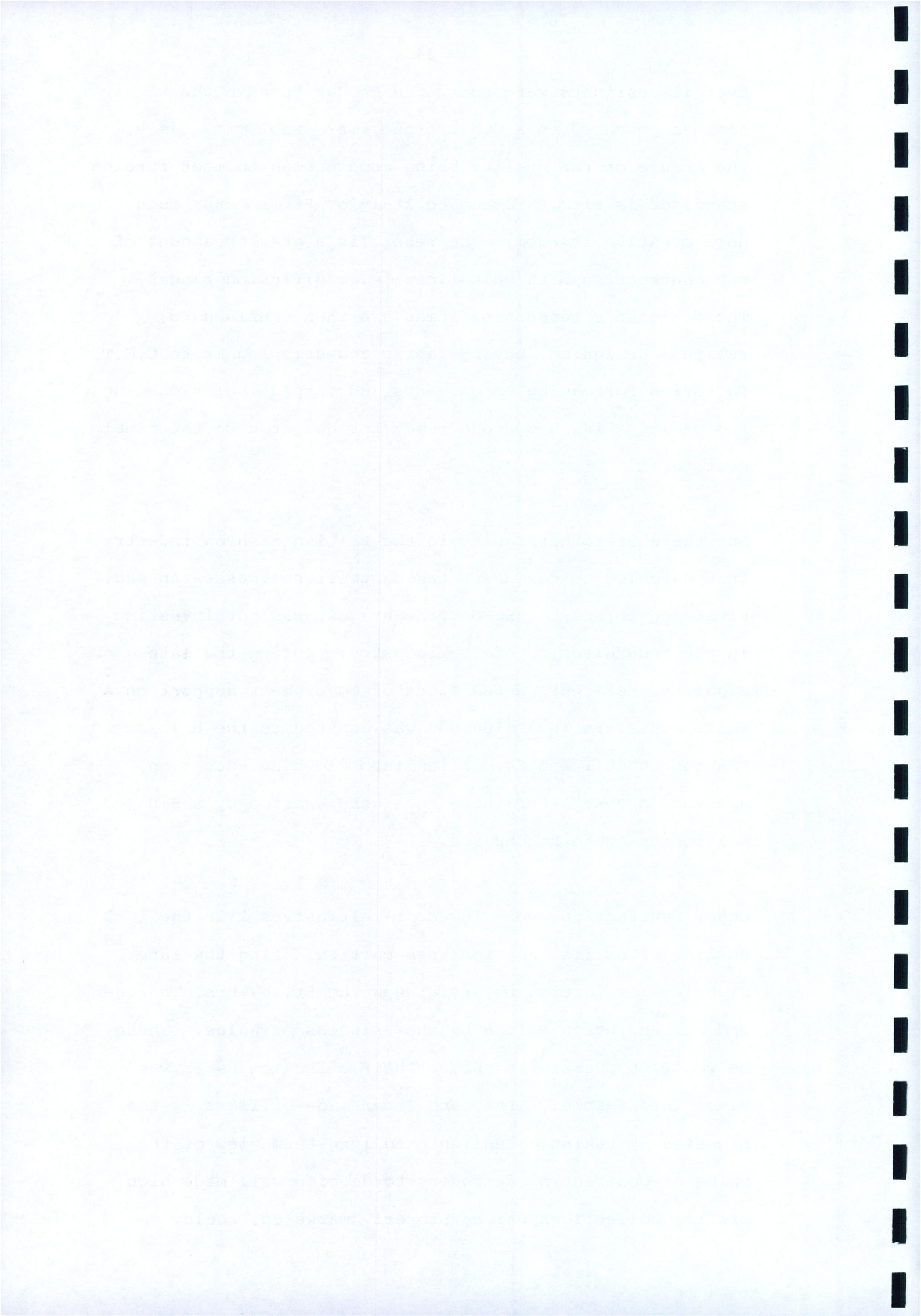


Even if designers were fortunate enough to have their clothes produced on a C.M.T. (cut, make and trim) basis, the chance of the quality being good enough to meet foreign standards is slim. Moving to Italy or Paris means much more creative freedom. The result is a greater amount of sub-contracting with bulk lines (e.g. diffusion ranges). The designer's responsibilities are then confined to selling, designing, buying fabric and shipping it to C.M.T. factories for making up garments and inspecting, ticketing and packing finished goods ready for despatch to the final customer.

But there are other faults in the British fashion industry that have led to designers taking their businesses abroad. First and foremost, the Government just was not investing in the modernisation of the industry. During the late Eighties there were a few signs of Government support on a small scale: in 1987 £100,000 was donated to the British Fashion Council and £4 million into clothing education. However, a year later these sums were dwarfed by a £10 million grant to London Zoo.

Other benefactions were low-cost initiatives like the hosting of British Fashion Week parties during the late Eighties for foreign buyers at Downing St. by Mrs. Thatcher and at Kensington Palace by the Princess of Wales. These helped with prestige although their effect on sales was almost negligible. Italy and Japan made billions in the Eighties by taking an enlightened long-term view of the value of contracting designers to develop well made high profile collections which, properly marketed, could







dominate world markets.

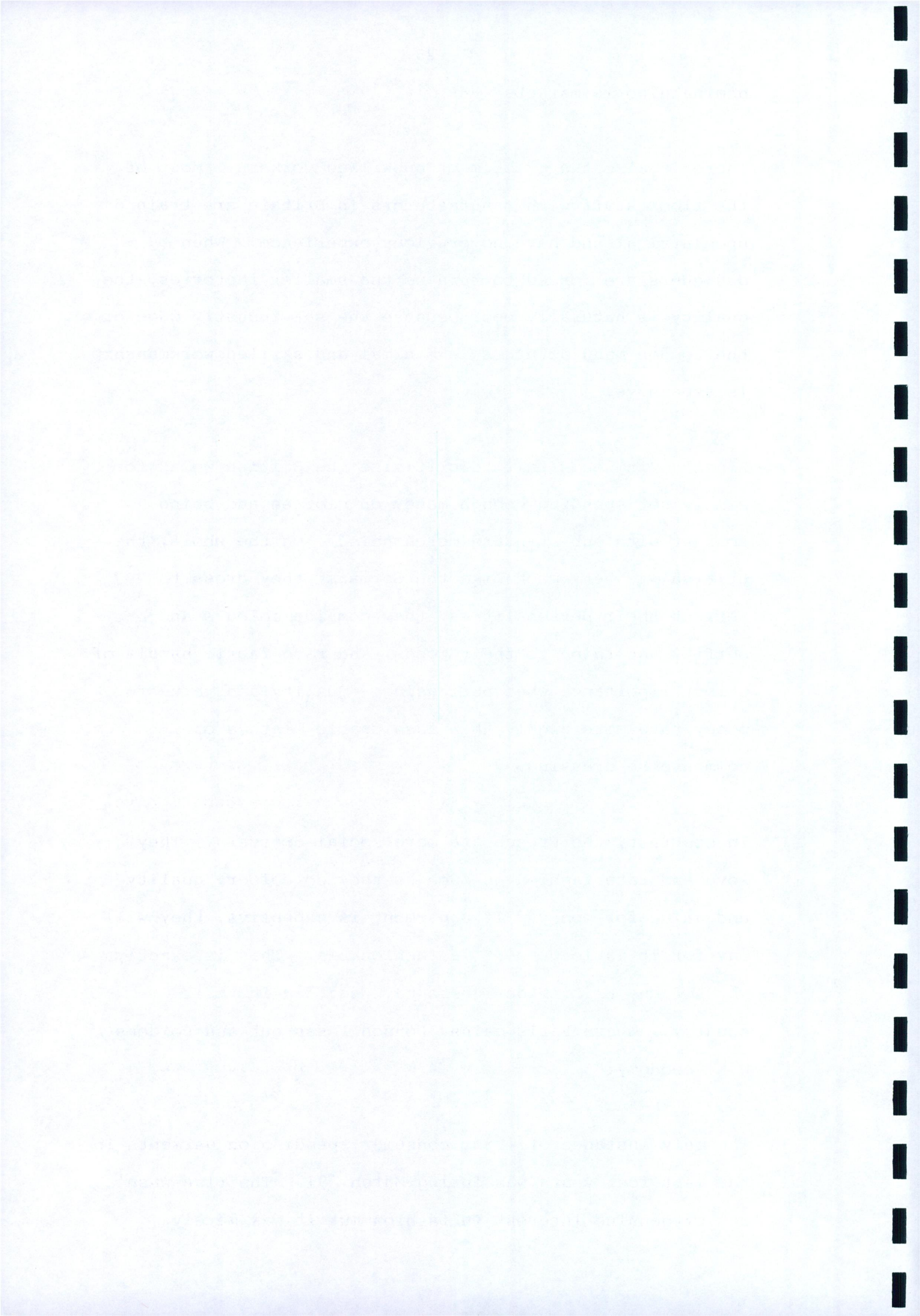
There is also the problem of unskilled workers. Most of the floor staff with manufacturers in Britain are trained upon arrival and have no previous experience. When designers are forced to turn to the smaller factories, the quality is naturally poor because the set industry wage of the London manufacturers is minimal and skilled workmanship is expensive.

Finally, it seems fair to criticise the British woman for simply not spending enough money on clothes and being content with sub-standard merchandise. On the whole, the British are very much like the Germans: they dress to reflect their personalities, they combine colours and outfits according to their moods, and rate fabric handle of utmost importance when purchasing. Quality and value for money rate more highly than fashionable clothes or commonsense dressing.

In contrast, the French are more social dressers. They love and rate fashion as much as they do colour, quality and value for money. If a garment is expensive, they will pay for it as long as it is fashionable. This is exactly why so many British designers have settled in their country. Where Paris gains, London loses out and so does U.K. economy.

The only instance of major consumer spending on garments in the last four years was during March '91. The rise wasn't out of genuine interest in fashion but it was merely







preceding a V.A.T. increase from 15% to 17%, a relatively minor increase. (9)

The British Government was too slow to realise what was happening as the fashion trade slumped further and further and now designers in the high fashion bracket have had to make drastic but strong-minded decisions. A choice to be made, either to stop manufacturing in Britain, or to give up trying to produce and sell clothes themselves and to work on licensing contracts to large foreign manufacturers.

"You can't call yourself a designer on an airy-fairy level. You have to think in terms of product first of all. I have to worry about how I can make sure the customer can have the product at the right time - what interest am I to anybody if I can't deliver, no matter how nice my ideas?". (10)

Katherine Hamnett was one of the first top designers to move to Paris in the interest of her business and to have her clothes manufactured in Italy. As a result she soon became probably the only British designer who was anywhere near the Italians in terms of garments sold per season.

Hamnett has said:

"... Why have the headache? A plain shirt badly made looks like rubbish: well-made like haute couture. In the end, you lose your self-respect as a designer. And not only do they make badly here, they deliver late. I'm going into licensing. I'd rather be dead than trouble-shooting on that level". (11)



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At one stage during the designer shows in March '91, many designers were reduced to designing truly commercial collections, Jasper Conran and Vivienne Westwood being the leaders, with simple tailored dresses and traditional tweeds. The season also saw the realities of the recession highlighted by designers finding economic alternatives to staging a fashion show. Conran used his showroom for his stark, low budget show, Westwood held a tea party, John Galliano chose not to show at all, and Rifat Ozbek made a video.

Jasper Conran was one of a group of designers who knew what was inevitably going to happen, that is, he knew that designers were contemplating a move abroad. He tried to tackle the problem before things got worse and approached the British Fashion Council and asked them to consider a whole move to Paris. This way there would be an official British tent and exhibition space for designers to stage their work and at the same time have the business and the audience that they needed. The B.F.C. refused to encourage the idea and so the designers took fate into their own hands.

After Hamnett's move, others followed and signed deals to have clothes made in Italy or Japan: Keith Varty and Alan Cleaver of Byblos, Betty Jackson, Andrea Sargeant, John Richmond and Mario Cornejo, Workers for Freedom, Edina Ronay, Caroline Charles, Paul Smith, John Rocha and John Galliano.

"It was a market and commercial decision to show in



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Paris, where one can be sure of a captive audience on an international platform ....". (12)

British Designers are getting recognition amongst foreign markets and are facing a whole new form of competition as they move to Paris and show amongst high powered and hugely wealthy fashion houses. Most importantly, designers are communicating with one another more, working together in new productive, realistic ways. Connections have been made with major companies and British Designers have learnt to concentrate on what they do best, to read the minds of their customers and give them what they want.

There is an enormous financial difference between British backers and French or Italian ones. The British have always overlooked the potential of perfume licensing and designer accessories, but the French have not. French backers are willing to lose five or six million francs on launching a new name because they know they can make twice that from the perfume a few years later. Their accessory sales have always been huge for the past couple of decades, thus making them supreme in the licensing of their names (e.g. Chanel, Hermes). The French are one of the main countries renowned for self promotion in the fashion trade.

Even though the bulk of top British designers are now abroad, if they ever do decide to return home they will be a much greater asset to the country than ever before. The main advantage of having communications with major high-powered companies is that they will have acquired an acute business mind and an invaluable sense of



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organisation.

Foreign businesses are much better run than most British ones. Pricing is always carefully watched, no matter how large the budget. Careful scrutiny of yarn, fabric and garment costs enables a designer to be prepared for any cuts that have to be made during poorer times. Closer relationships with the consumer and suppliers are vital; quick responses ensure that technological communications are adequate for more rapid response to consumer needs without holding an expensive stock.

Today, by Spring 1993, virtually all the top designers have moved from Britain to France. Pam Hogg and Joe Casely-Hayford have been the most recent departures. But can they be blamed? If the likes of Galliano and Hamnett had stayed in London, they would undeniably have suffered financially. International buyers no longer feel the need to come to London because fashion in Britain is not taken seriously as a commercial concern.

It seems ironic that the designer shows in Paris during October '92 reflected so many British inspired looks. Belgian designers, Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester, who show in Paris are being very highly acclaimed by the media lately, yet their clothes echo all the styles that covered the pages of British magazines of the late Eighties. Their models wear broken down, recycled garments, a trend started by underground designers like Christopher Nemeth and Richard Tory during the Eighties.







Now the fashion journals display trends towards the revival of the hippy look. Yet the Eastern-bound hippy was originally dressed from Carnaby Street and the Kings Road. They are also writing about a return to the Biba look of the Sixties, another style from British soil.







CHAPTER 4

FOUR DESIGNERS UNDER  
THE MEDIA'S SPOTLIGHT

THEIR MOVEMENTS AND THEIR OPINIONS





Vivienne Westwood 1992



For this chapter I have chosen four of the top designers in British Fashion because I believe their movements have affected the home industry greatly. These are the designers who attract the press and buyers, the ones that have made British Fashion Week since the Eighties one of the hottest tickets in Europe.

Vivienne Westwood:

Vivienne is undoubtedly the most highly acclaimed British Fashion Designer since Mary Quant in the Sixties. Always presenting refreshing ideas on the ramp, she is ranked as one of only a tiny handful of living fashion geniuses. She originally made her mark in the 70's when she collaborated with Malcolm McLaren and created the 'Punk' image. Since then she has been obsessed with underwear as outerwear and historical re-interpretations of dress.

Westwood, despite her more strengthened business acumen now, has never followed any trends and also never took to introducing a diffusion collection like most designers have done. However, she has applied a more mixed version of a ready-to-wear cheaper line. She has taken a closer look at her designs and refined some of the ideas to create a more practical, though similarly designed style that can be reproduced in the factory with relative ease, consisting of a selection of basic garments (e.g. leggings, stretch bodies).

These, toned-down designs have all the traits of her look but yet are a lot cheaper. Instead of distributing these garments separately, she places them alongside her more













Jasper Conran 1993



expensive ones. The result is a price bracket ranging from £10 to £5,000. She is finding ways of expanding her ideas and using them to increase her financial income, as well as spreading the Westwood image. For example, she now has an enormous medium cost accessory range from jewellery to footwear and hosiery which is stocked in 'The Sock Shop'.

Although she has been showing in Paris on and off now for several years, she still remains the strongest ambassador for the British High Fashion Market. In fact Westwood was one of the first top British designers to shown in Paris in Spring 1983 with her 'Buffalo Girls' collection. Since then she has been made very welcome amongst the Parisians and in 1992 Azzedine Alaia invited her to show on his own premises.

From a business point of view, Vivienne Westwood has very little reason to show in Britain. If she did it would be purely for her admirers instead of in hope of gaining new buyers. She does have a lot of demand within her own country, it is only a fragment compared with her sales worldwide. If she were to show during British Fashion Week, it could be of great advantage to the home industry but it is hard to imagine all her European buyers travelling to London just for one show. An act of patriotism would unfortunately result in a substantial drop in sales on her part.

#### Jasper Conran

Conran has always been a great inspiration to me as a designer. He has never been as avant-garde or outrageous







as Westwood or Galliano but has always shown an individual style of cut and colour combination, a true romantic.

He has never been afraid to make his opinions clearly heard, an example of this was when he withdrew from the British Designer of the Year Awards in 1992. He felt that it was pretentious and totally unjust to be giving awards to British Designers for their contributions to the industry when, after all, most of them were either working abroad or had foreign backers.

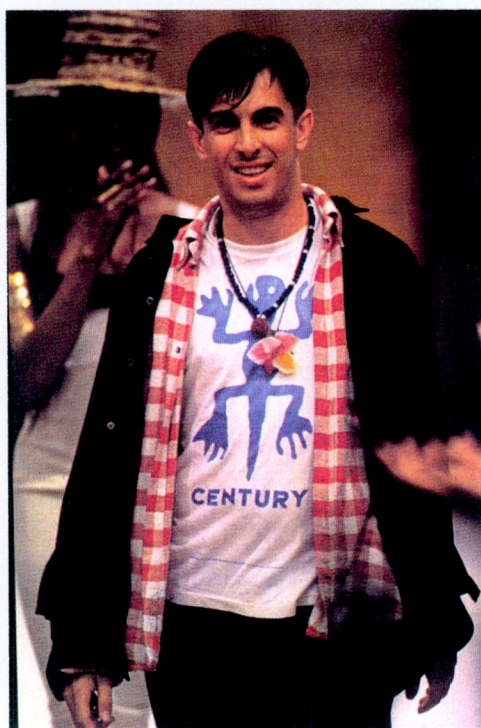
Most of the British Designers made a quiet departure from the country when they fled to Paris or Milan. However, Conran wanted the situation to be noticed exclaiming that:

"The British Fashion Council had created an environment where it was impossible for huge talent to work". (13)

He too has had to adapt to what is now very much a consumer led industry and become a 'businessman'. Fortunately, this has not affected the design content of his work too much. After all, the problem with trying to run a business is that the object or 'product' of the company becomes less focused.

For Conran his move to Paris has brought many openings. In October '92 he started distribution of his first diffusion range, giving him a much wider scope in the market. He is also planning to launch a scent that he has been working on for several years. Like his British companions, he is





Rifat Ozbek 1992



finally starting to do what the French have been doing for years; to expand the designer name as much as possible, and thus enlarge his assets.

I felt it would be quite ironic to include an extract from an interview with Conran from the Fashion Year Book 1985. It is his opinion of the Parisians at a time when British Fashion was booming and he would never have thought of asking them to let him stage his show in the capital:

"I think they're full of shit. It's been said before but I feel that so much has come from England and all those fucking French houses are run on St. Martin's students. When people say 'Oh G ....'s soooo fabulous' just don't give me that shit, I suppose Paris is a pretty city but it's full of shit - their one saving grace is that at least they recognised what was going on in England which no one here managed to do, but the French walked down the King's Road or went to St. Martin's and then capitalised on what they saw. It makes me so cross. They're real pigs. So that's what I think of Paris. The way to deal with Parisians is to treat them like shit before they treat you like shit". (14)

Rifat Ozbek:

Since Rifat Ozbek chose not to show his collections in Britain in 1990 opting for a move to Milan, his business has doubled. Recently he has been stealing the headlines of Italian Press with his ethnic elegance. His fashion shows are now rated as one of the hottest tickets in Milan.



1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study. It discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the study area. It includes information about the location of the study area, the population of the study area, and the characteristics of the study area. It also discusses the data sources used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a detailed description of the study results. It includes information about the findings of the study, the conclusions drawn from the findings, and the implications of the findings. It also discusses the limitations of the study and the need for further research.

4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and recommendations section. It summarizes the main findings of the study and provides recommendations for future research and policy. It also discusses the significance of the study and the contribution it has made to the field.



Over the last three years since his company left Britain he has made a considerable impact on the designer ready-to-wear market. Like most of the British fashion set, he is a pure designer and does not rely on the sales of signature scents or branded goods to increase his sales.

Ozbek was fortunate enough to keep his head above water when the British market took a plunge at the start of what has become a much elongated recession. This is because he has never tried to be as wild and shocking as his companions - Westwood, Galliano and Hamnett. His clothes are vibrant but wearable.

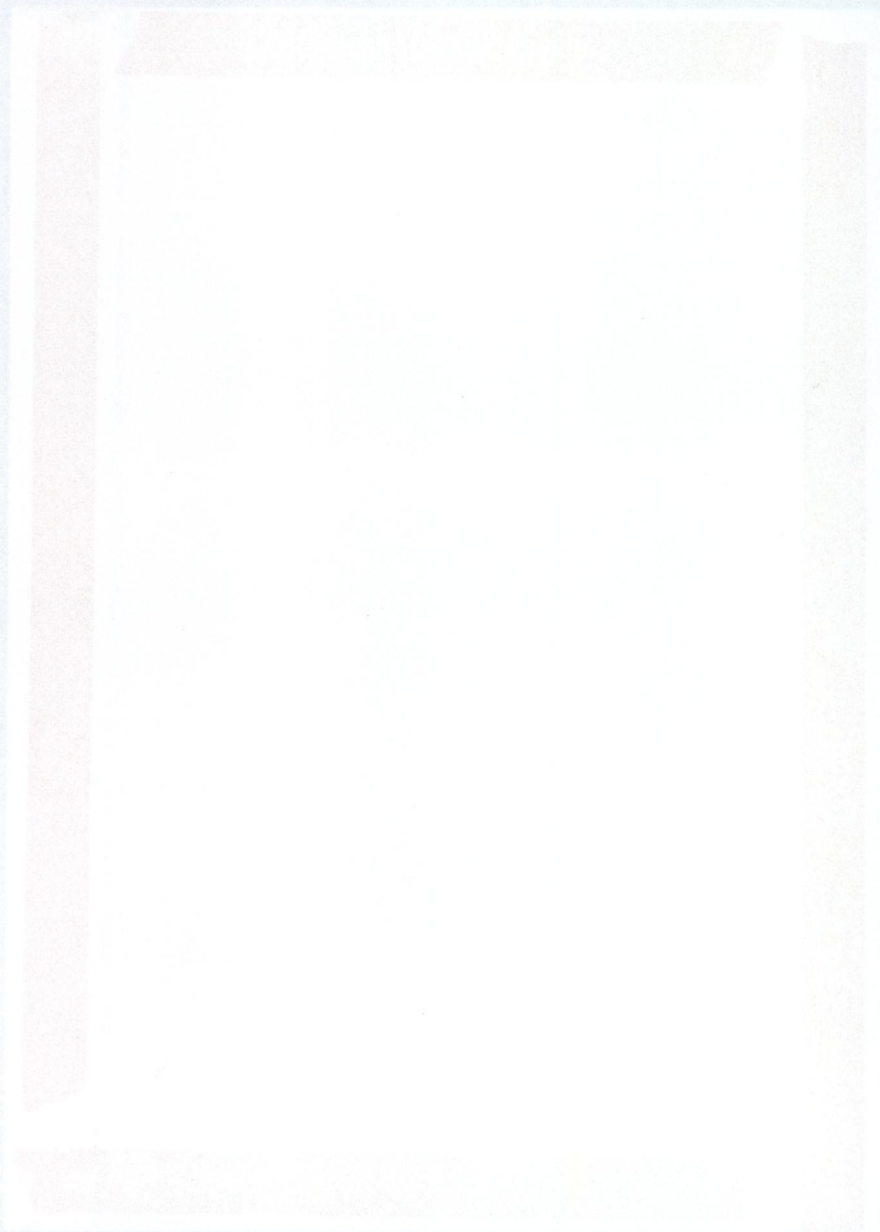
His collections in the past have all been on ethnic themes and usually inconsistent, yet applauded for their originality in colour and opulent fabric co-ordination. In 1992 he was awarded the British Designer of the Year Award for his contributions to the British Fashion Industry. This was debated by some designers, mainly because Ozbek had been showing in Italy and not London. Also, he is backed by the high-powered designer-businesswoman Alberta Ferretti and her company AEFPE in Italy.

AEFPE have been manufacturing Ozbek's signature and diffusion collections since 1990. Originally the idea of being part of a major company terrified Ozbek even though he knew it was time to find a new backer abroad as the recession in Britain intensified. Like nearly all of the British designers looking for overseas backers, Ozbek just wasn't used to dealing with a major company. Now his team have a studio set-up in Cattolica, Italy.













John Galliano 1993



Ozbek's clothes have become a great commercial success and he was quick to widen his horizons three years ago by launching a diffusion collection. He used the themes from his signature collection for 'O for Ozbek', cutting costs by translating them into simpler styles that are best suited to mass-manufacturing, and by choosing less expensive fabrics. Today most of Ozbek's business is in Italy.

John Galliano:

John Galliano was the fashion student's icon during the 1980's and still is. He shot to stardom after graduating from St. Martin's School of Art in 1985, riding on the back of a huge media hype about his designs. He was immediately invited to work in New York but refused, he was determined to stay in London. He took styling to the limits and developed a tendency to make his models look like heroin addicts or bag-ladies. Like most of the show of the really creative fashion designers, his shows have always been a great spectacle.

"Along with Westwood he must be the only designer capable of keeping a deranged edge on British Fashion". (15)

Galliano arose at just the right time when the Eighties Boom was at its peak. Within two years he was awarded the title of 'Designer of the Year'. Now in 1993, he has a diffusion line: 'Galliano's Girl', a jeanswear line: 'Galliano Jeans' and he is in his third year of showing in Paris.



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Before his move away from Britain he said:

"It would be great to improve on what we have, I'd hate to leave here but being a businessman one has to go where the clients are. I'm afraid we're still stuck with an island mentality we must get rid of. London is about youth and we should try to attract Europe's young designers to show with us". (16)

Like all the designers that have had a taste of success abroad, Galliano has got used to a new life that is hard to leave. Britain could never parallel the financial input that the French apply to their fashion industry. Companies are prepared to lose money so as to introduce a new designer. As Galliano is in the media limelight at the moment, he is guaranteed a lot of financial back-up.

Although he has had numerous backers and licensing deals in the past eight years, as well as a portfolio of messed-up business plans, he is at his strongest ever now. He would like to return to Britain but the financial climate is still too unsettled. Besides he has too much going for him now in Paris it would be a major step down if he were to leave.

"It is incredible what I have got now, if I say I want fabric that feels like velvet and smells like wood, it is there on my table the next day. There are girls in the studio who are employed to pace up and down all day testing the crotch on a pair of trousers so that I can see if the fit is right. Everything is professional, it is properly done". (17)



CHAPTER 5

THE NEXT GENERATION



It is not possible to predict what the next generation is going to add to the British Fashion World. However, by looking at the present college system, the decreasing subsidies, and the ratio of graduates working abroad and graduates working at home, one can picture a reasonably poor forecast. In my opinion it looks as though the near future will not hold much.

Every year, increasing numbers of students are being forced to look for work abroad after graduation. In fact it is almost standard practice now to target foreign industries, even if this means working in areas outside a student's main skills. Less young designers are going into business immediately because there are just too many risks. However, colleges are putting a lot more emphasis on preparing designers with better business awareness.

"We send students on work placements so they're getting more business awareness and realising how important it is to have a combination of toughness and professionalism". (18)

It is vital that students now develop strong minds while still within the safe surroundings of their institution. One point that often occurs with design briefs in college is 'Where in the market are the clothes directed?'. It is all very well to respond to a brief with bundles of creative flair provided this is backed up with an awareness of the desired market place. Personally, I find myself a lot more conscious of the type of person I am designing for now. Thankfully this is because I spent a year working



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outside college with different designers. Had I not done so, I would probably be feeling a lot more insecure now, pre-graduation. I had to do that on my own accord, whereas most of the British third level colleges now encourage students to spend time in the industry before completing their studies.

One recent problem that has hit British students in general, during the last few years, is the lack of funds. Since 1986, the Government has been trying to wean students off the welfare system by changing the grant policy and encouraging loans.

"Under Thatcher's Government, students were moulded into objects of derision, as just guzzling taxpayers money during their three years of study. Now in the Nineties the so called extended honeymoon on social security is set to end". (19)

Basically the British Government is weighed down with debt and so has decided to focus its expenditure cuts on higher education. The result is a reduction on the standard grant available, and a set loan amount. This means that students studying away from home, who are not supported by their parents, have to lead a highly economic and often impoverished life whilst in college.

More students now have to work throughout their degrees or look for financial advice.

"The National Union of Students estimated that those



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who started 3-year degree courses in 1992 will occur an average £2,800 debt by the time they leave". (20)

The problem with being in debt at the end of the academic year is that students have to look for work that will guarantee good money so as to pay off their loans during the summer and following months. It is usually quite rare therefore that they will work immediately in the fashion trade because wages would be minimal.

I would imagine that second level students planning to pursue higher education might be turned off by hearing of the financial struggle that their elder brothers and sisters are going through. The problem with studying fashion is that there are a lot of material costs. In order to respond quickly to the ongoing projects that are set, one must have financial back-up. Nobody wants their work to be average and so material costs are very high throughout the academic year, unless of course one can apply low cost creative ingenuity.

A collection of six outfits, usually approximately fifteen garments, can cost up to £1,500 to produce between fabric, yarns and trimmings. Fabrics don't stay in the shops for long and so must be bought quickly, also lack of funds during the last three vital months of the graduation year can slow you down and cause work to accumulate. The only way to meet such financial demands is with parental help or a sponsor.

The key advantage of sponsorship is that it opens links









Nicholas Knightly 1993



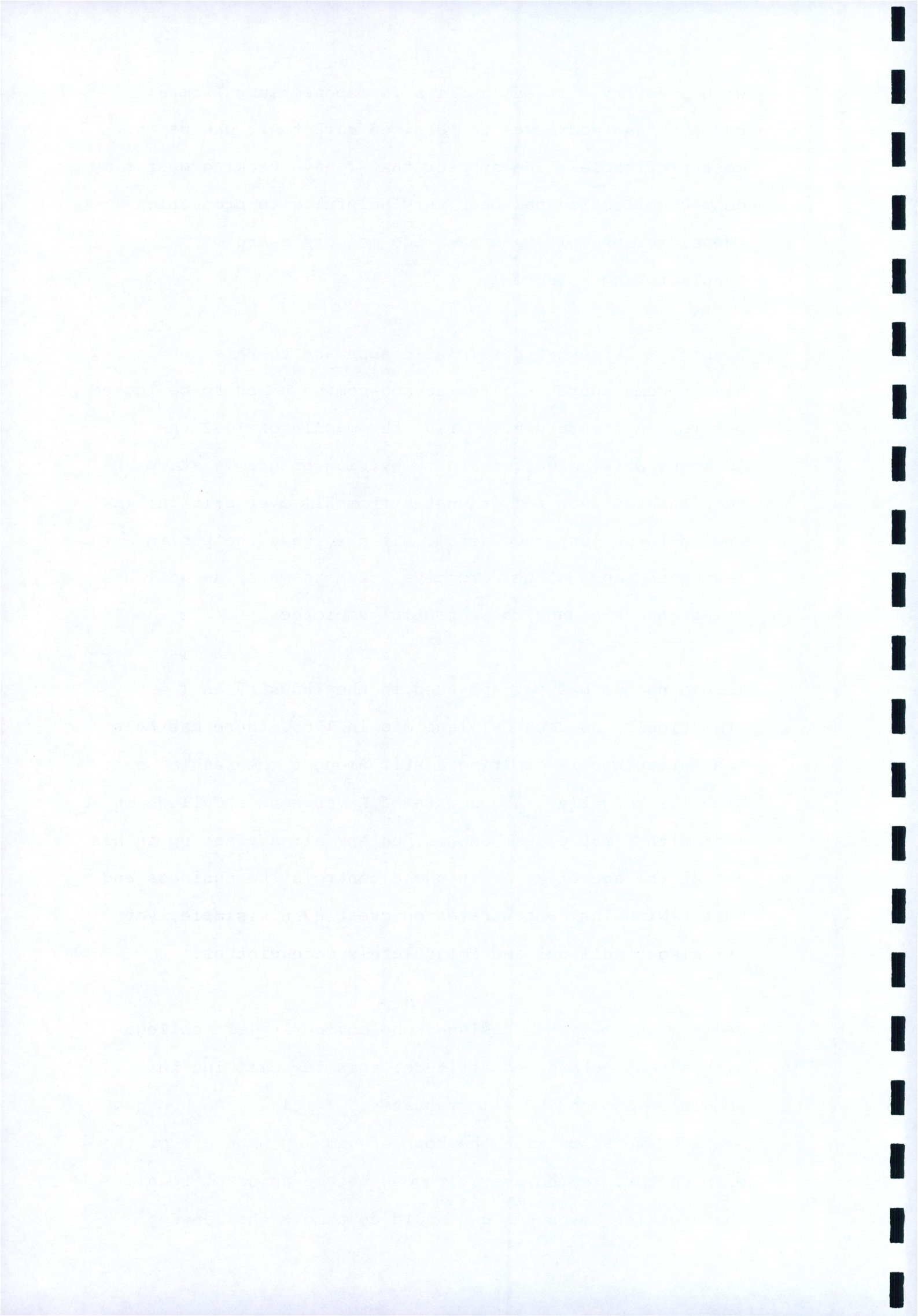
with industry. If one applies for sponsorship from a company that addresses the desired market, it can be the most profitable. The sponsor that I have backing me for my degree collection has been very helpful with production ideas, for example, and has made me more aware of manufacturing potential.

Despite my somewhat pessimistic approach to this subject, I have become aware of a few up-and-coming names to be looked out for in the future. During the middle of 1992 the 'Clothes Show' magazine and television programme stage a huge fashion show for graduates from all over Britain; it proved to be very successful. It also gave the public a chance to see just how creative students were, as well as being an eye-opener for potential employees.

Though no one has yet appeared in the industry as dramatically as John Galliano did in 1985, there has been one person who is creating a stir amongst the fashion set: Nicholas Knightly. A graduate of Ravensbourne College in Kent with first class honours, he has already set up on his own at the age of 24. His uncle controls the business end whilst Nicholas concentrates on creating his simple, yet strikingly well cut and immaculately made clothes.

He is a quick-witted designer who obviously left college with a very determined attitude; this is something that should be adopted by all graduates. Initially he had gone straight to Paris with the hope of working with one of the main couturiers, however, it soon became apparent to him that setting up on his own would be a more challenging







move.

Knightly's character embodies all the qualities necessary for survival in our much changed world of apparel: a knowledge of quality, modern cut and fabric and, in addition, a keen convincing personality and most important of all, commercial awareness.

The progress of this young designer is of particular interest to me because we share a similar approach to design i.e. a combination between couture and ready-to-wear. On presenting his final collection from Ravensbourne, Knightly told a journalist:

"I approached the final project through the eyes of an old British couturier, mixing quality, classicism and forward thinking design. I believe London has a big enough contingency of designers serving the street - fashion market". (21)

Fortunately Knightly's individual style and self confidence has not been threatened so far by entering the top quality high fashion bracket. Since graduation he has already had a sell-out in Harvey Nichols, thanks to buying Director Amanda Verdan, thus introducing him to new buyers both home and abroad not to mention that his success will mean that other young designers entering the market will not be ignored.







CONCLUSION







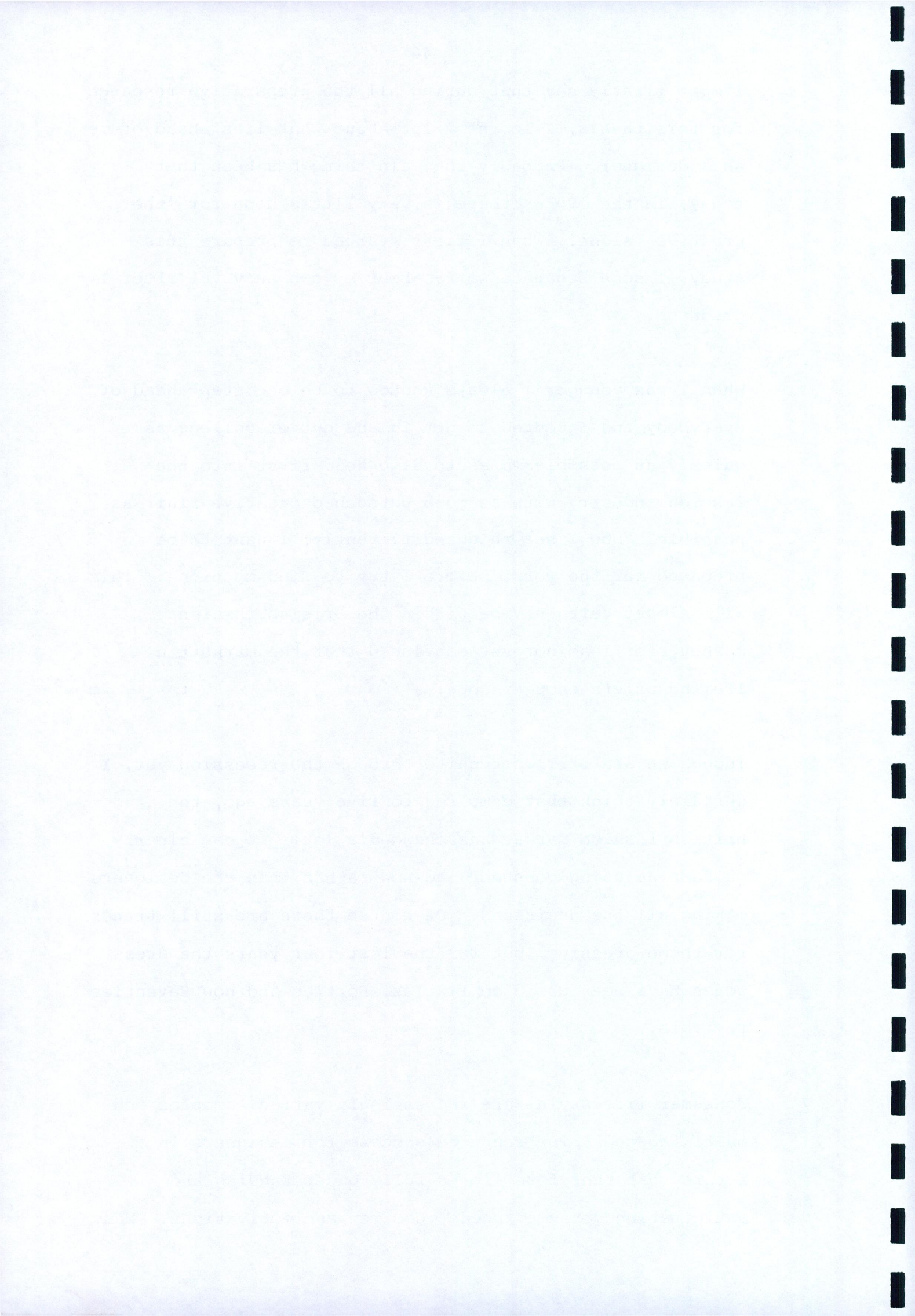
I must firstly say that during all the preparative research for this thesis, I learnt a lot about what lies ahead of me as a designer. Probably the main thing has been that today, in the '90's, there is very little hope for 'the creative' alone. When I first started to prepare this study, I soon began to worry about my own survival after I graduate.

When I was younger I always wanted to be one step ahead of everybody and I wanted to get in and out of college as quickly as possible so as to dive head-first into the fashion industry with as much untouched creative flair as possible. Now I see things differently; I want to be prepared for the worst before I try to find my niche. This will almost certainly be within the British fashion market, for I am not yet convinced that the market in Ireland offers enough scope.

Though we are still not quite through the recession yet, I certainly think that compared to five years ago, the British fashion market has changed a lot. It can clearly be seen as being consumer led now rather than the designers making all the decisions. Of course there are still trends for theme dressing, but for the last four years the dress codes have been based on Sixties, Forties and now Seventies revivals.

Consumer life styles are increasingly varied, complex and multi-faceted. The route to success for designers in future must therefore lie in fully understanding and anticipating consumer needs, desires and motivations. Many







people see the future of the British fashion industry as being bleak. However, I feel that the consumer is now a lot more aware of quality and value, people want investment clothes. I feel the future will therefore lie with good value, high quality, middle-to-upmarket garments. This is where I want to direct my designs.

I also feel that for fashion to succeed in the second half of this decade in Britain, it will have to have a lot more support. The '90's need a promoter, a strong supporter of the fashion system. For example, during the Eighties there was John Packer and Annette Worsley. The latter organised the British Designer Shows which started with an extravagant debut in London's Olympia.

John Packer, who worked for Reid and Taylor, the traditional English classicists organised numerous fashion social events such as huge balls in castles or palaces around Europe. He also had an excellent relationship with the Royals, especially Princess Diana who is a true patriot to the home fashion industry.

If the top designers that are now based in Paris return within the next few years, then I believe they will have a lot to offer the industry as well as the next generation. Personally, I hope very much that this will happen so that I will have a more enlightening atmosphere to work in when I have completed my post-graduate studies.







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