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Department of Textiles
(Woven)

The T-shirt - A Global Garment of the 20th Century

by
Sandra Gibney

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Introduction.

The role of the T-shirt in the 20th century is the subject for analysis in this thesis. While its original basic role is to provide low-cost, functional clothing for both men and women, of all shapes and sizes, its actual achievements and further potential are infinitely greater. If, in the future, there was no other source of information about the latter half of this century, except T-shirts, it would be possible to devine not only many of the habits and outlooks of the wearers of these T-shirts, but also numerous aspects of the societies in which these wearers lived. These ideas are discussed in this thesis, which can be divided into three general sections; a discussion of the T-shirt itself, the relationship between people and their clothing, with particular reference to the T-shirt, and the role, both practical and symbolic of the T-shirt in society.

The T-shirt is truly a garment of the 20th century as it represents many of the contradictions of this age. It is 100% American in origin and a U.S. company **Fruit of the Loom** is the largest producer of T-shirts and leisure wear at the moment, yet it is a completely global garment worn by people of all races and classes in every country in the world. It is a low-cost, mass produced commodity yet is often used as the basis for expensive, limited edition designer or art T-shirts. Designed to be disposable, T-shirts are nonetheless collected by museums and galleries, both as objects of design and also as social and historical 'documents' of 20th century culture and society. These aspects are among those referred to in Chapter 1 where I will discuss the T-shirt as a garment and try to determine its position in the echelons of dress.

The T-shirt is a symbol of youth. This does not necessarily mean that it is worn only by the young, as it has been adopted and loved by all ages. But the fact remains that whether due to its association with the teen-idols of the fifties - Brando and Dean, the personifications of wild, rebellious youth - or just the nature of the garment, as a casual, disposable item of active clothing that allows complete freedom of movement and expression, the T-shirt has never lost its youthful connotations. In Chapter 2, I aim to chart the early rise to popularity of the T-shirt, from its inception in the late 19th century as an undervest, until the 1950's when the T-shirt began to gain recognition as an outer garment of significance. This is bearing in mind throughout, the prevailing circumstances and attitudes that resulted in the T-shirt's youthful association.

In Chapter 3, I will be discussing the relationship between people and what they wear. The fact that this relationship exists is undeniable but, it is debatable as to whether the personality of an individual affects the clothing that they wear or that clothing affects the personality. I intend to examine the way in which clothes, and in particular, the T-shirt, can not only help to portray an individual and their personality to others, but also help that individual to define themselves.

The final chapter is devoted to the analysis of the printed T-shirt and will be continuing on the exploration of the previous chapter, with of course, particular relevance to the printed T-shirt. As well as referring to the printed T-shirt as a reflection of personality and its use as a type of personal diary, recording aspects of an individual's past interests, views and outlook, I will be examining its role as an historical and social document, recording almost every aspect of human existence since its rise to popularity in the early 1950's. While these recording and documenting functions are in themselves important, they are quite passive, and in an attempt to discuss the active qualities of the printed T-shirt, I shall be exploring its role in political expression and activism, using as examples the work of two designers, Katharine Hamnett and Vivienne Westwood, and their treatment of the printed T-shirt.

Due to the lack of written information on the T-shirt, in my research I have studied contemporary texts on clothing, society and theory and have related these specifically to the T-shirt in an attempt to analyse the garment. Also of considerable use was the information given to me by representatives in the areas of production, printing and collecting, which helped to give a firm, practical basis to my research.

I would like to point out that, although there are now many varieties of T-shirt, with long sleeves, collars, buttons and various other additions, for the purposes of this thesis, what I refer to throughout, is the original T-shaped T-shirt only.

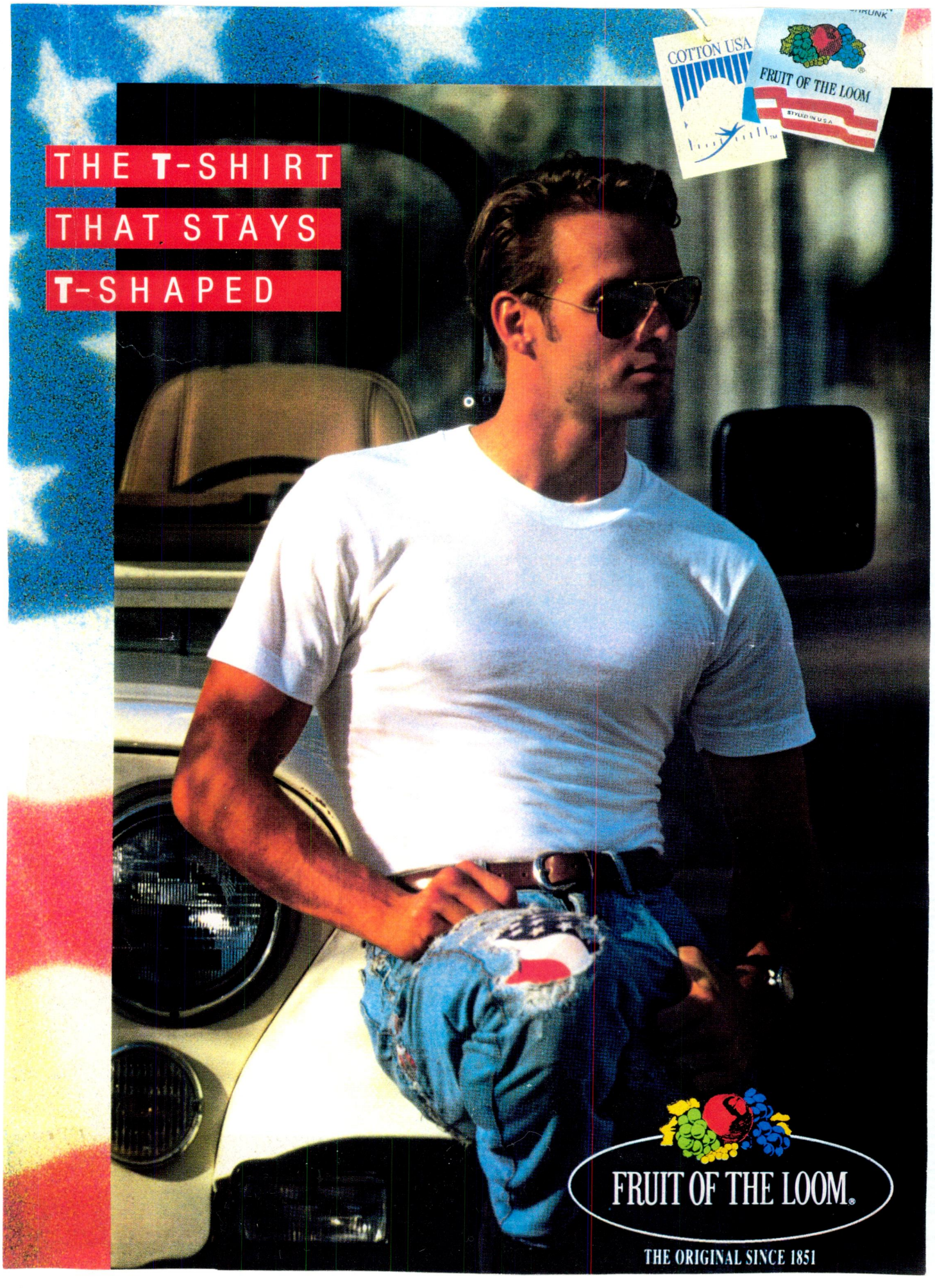
Chapter 1:

The T-shirt began as a lowly American undervest, now it is the subject of collection in its many forms, by museums and galleries of dress and costume. In this chapter, I intend to study the T-shirt as an item of clothing and explore how a single garment can hold so many positions in the echelons of dress.

The T-shirt is one of America's greatest ever clothing exports, adopted and loved by men, women and children from all corners of the globe. The United States has managed to maintain its position as leader in casual and sports wear since the fashion scene moved there briefly from Europe during World War II. This is probably due to European designers' general lack of interest in this area until recently, but nevertheless, even before the war, the States were ahead of the rest of the world in mass production and ready-to-wear clothing. The American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, along with the commercial availability of sewing machines, had a major part to play in this situation, as women went to work in designated centres to make necessary uniforms for the soldiers. Another benefit of this concentration of workforce was the development of a standardised sizing system, something that was previously unheard of, which was soon refined for the civilian market. (Horn & Gurel, 1981, p.403)

Fruit of the Loom became one of the first registered companies in the U.S. in 1871 having already existed for twenty years previously. It is now the biggest manufacturer of leisure wear in the world and controls every aspect of production from choosing the yarns, knitting, bleaching or dyeing the fabric, to constructing and delivering the final garment. The European agency of **Fruit of the Loom** was established in Buncrana, Co. Donegal in 1986, and now employs over 2,300 people, using 650,000lbs of yarn per week to produce over one million garments. (Figures supplied by Fruit of the Loom) Senior executives both there and in the States insist however, that demand for their product is growing at such a rate that a further development plan is under consideration - which could bring employment to as many as 6,000 people. This is definite proof of the success of the American manufacturing system and the constantly increasing popularity of the T-shirt. (Fig. 1.1)

-Fig. 1.1; (overleaf) Fruit of the Loom and the T-shirt - both styled in the U.S.A. .....


THE T-SHIRT
THAT STAYS
T-SHAPED
COTTON USA
FRUIT OF THE LOOM
STYLED IN U.S.A.
FRUIT OF THE LOOM®
THE ORIGINAL SINCE 1851

-Fig. 1.2; .....But worn all over the world.

But the T-shirt's popularity is understandable and justly deserves its title of "global garment of the 20th century". (Gordon & Hiller, 1988, p.6) Its classic design, simplicity and style make it truly democratic, worn by men, women and children of all figures and sizes, in all corners of the world, (Fig. 1.2) while its comfort, versatility and practicality remain unsurpassed. Above all, it is the T-shirt's low-cost and disposability that seem to be the key to its overwhelming success. The concept is simple - a garment so cheap that it is possible to buy many in different colours, patterns and motifs that can interact with the rest of a person's wardrobe, providing a variety of looks from leisurely to casually elegant. Disposability is particularly important in the area of the printed T-shirt, as sometimes a slogan or image outdates and loses significance long before the garment has reached the end of its life span. Therefore, since they are designed to be thrown away, T-shirts can remain completely current and up-to-date.

Although the T-shirt is designed as a functional piece of clothing, originating as a meagre undervest, in the past few years it has become increasingly recognised as a valuable item of fashion. An article in VOGUE, commenting on the infiltration of items of utilitarian clothing into the highest places of international fashion, describes how

> only months ago, the fashion-conscious would have turned up their noses at the very sound of the word casual; it seemed somehow sloppy and formless, anathema to the shaped-up, sharply tailored, office-obsessed discipline of the eighties. (Vogue, Sept. 1989, p.3.)

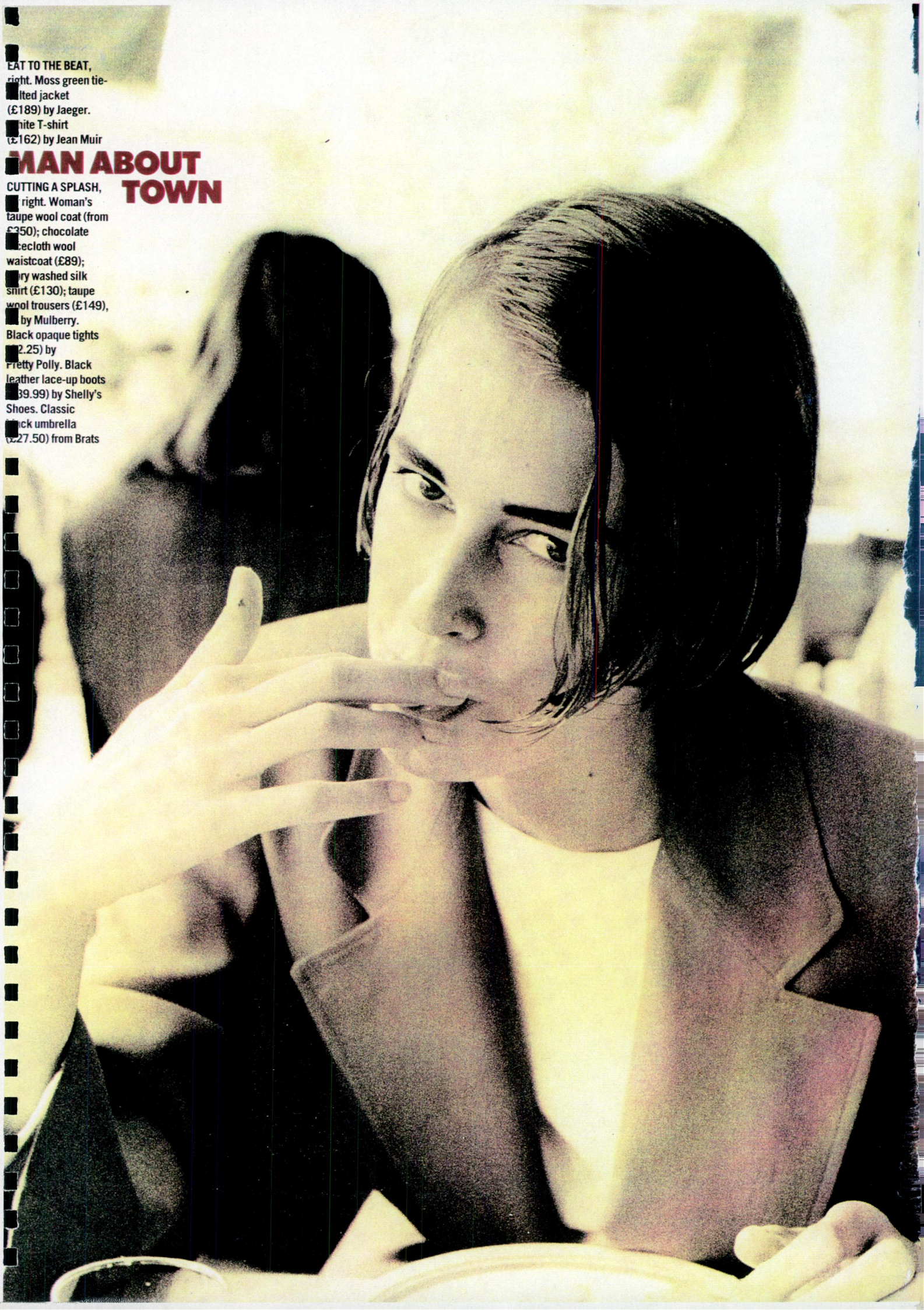
But now, as Michael Kors is quoted as saying in this same article, these functional garments are indicative of a "softer, less uptight, more casual attitude" in general.

However, I feel that there is a major contradiction between the humble origins of the T-shirt, and the new designer T-shirts that have begun to appear of late. Designers seem to have recognised the fact that, similarly with perfume and other accessories, the T-shirt is a commodity to which they can attach their name. Therefore, although the style and cut remain the same, the added prestige that the label attaches to the garment, increases its cost infinitely, with T-shirts such as that by Jean Muir (Fig. 1.3, overleaf) priced at £162, which seems to be in direct opposition to the intended disposability of the T-shirt. But then this situation comes full circle again with the wide spread emergence of bootleggers. They in turn, mass produce copies of these designer-labelled T-shirts at incredibly low prices, for those who desire the designer logo without the designer price, which once again returns the T-shirt to its original throw-away concept.

MAN ABOUT TOWN

EAT TO THE BEAT, right. Moss green tie-belted jacket (£189) by Jaeger. White T-shirt (£162) by Jean Muir

CUTTING A SPLASH, left. Woman's taupe wool coat (from £350); chocolate ceecloth wool waistcoat (£89); dry washed silk shirt (£130); taupe wool trousers (£149), all by Mulberry. Black opaque tights (£2.25) by Pretty Polly. Black leather lace-up boots (£39.99) by Shelly's Shoes. Classic black umbrella (£27.50) from Brats



When however, does a T-shirt move from being an item of clothing to an item of fashion? Most T-shirts seem to lack one of the major features that characterise 'fashion', this being "its cyclical nature, that is, the gradual rise, high point, and eventual decline in the popular acceptance of a style". (Horn & Gurel, 1981, p.218.). Designer T-shirts, whether this refers to T-shirts that are the result of the creative expression of the designer, such as Katharine Hamnett's political protest T-shirts, or those that merely bear a designer's label, such as Chanel or Jean Muir, do often follow this general pattern but for the greater part, T-shirts have undergone no major shifts in popularity, remaining instead at a constant level of favour for the past thirty years. It is for this reason that I maintain the T-shirt has become a contemporary 'classic' garment, being "so universally accepted that it gradually crystallises into a conventional norm of dress". (Horn & Gurel, 1981, p.219.)

The only other form of dress that comes to mind as being a 'classic' and yet embodies the same attributes as the T-shirt are the denim jeans. Both of these garments originated as functional, low-cost work wear that could be afforded by anyone. This is unlike many of the other, so-considered timeless classics, such as the Chanel tweed suit. The originals of these classics are too expensive for most people to buy so it is really the mass produced copies of these styles that have earned the status of 'classic'. Therefore, it is the direction of the T-shirt that distinguishes it from other classics - whereas items such as the Chanel suit originated as select designer garments which were then seized upon, copied and mass-produced for the public, the T-shirt began as a mass produced garment which was then seized upon and utilised by designers.

One of the first T-shirts appeared in the Victoria and Albert Museum Dress Collection in 1983 as part of an ensemble by British designer Margaret Howell. (V. & A.., 1984, p.172.) (Fig. 1.4)

Fig. 1.4; Day outfit by British designer, Margaret Howell.

To appear in what is probably the most important collection of dress in the world is a welcome sign of growing recognition, however tentative, for the T-shirt. Unfortunately this T-shirt was only exhibited as a small part of the overall outfit, but since then the Department of Textiles and Dress have been actively collecting T-shirts, both as elements of complete ensembles, and also as objects of focus in their own right. To date they have acquired ninety seven T-shirts, the bulk of which have been collected since 1983, and this number is steadily increasing. According to the Department, their T-shirts are collected under three general categories; slogans, established designers and street style, and with this rough guideline they have amassed T-shirts from Vivienne Westwood, The Cloth, Biba, Warehouse, Katharine Hamnett, Versace, Ozbek, Galliano, Helen Story, Stussy, Greenpeace, Lynx and Amnesty International, to name but a few. In fact, recent interest is such that in November of this year ('94) the V. & A. will be launching a major new exhibition of street style, in which, of course, the T-shirt will be playing a sizeable role. (Phone conversation with Dept. of Textiles rep., 14-2-'94.)

As with many other collections of dress around the globe, a lot of the clothing on show in the V. & A. is only representative of a tiny fraction of the population - those of the higher classes who could afford such latest styles. It is self-admittedly "an unashamedly elitist display" (V. & A. 1984, p.8.) and whether you refer to the doublet and hose from 1604, reputedly worn by James I, (Fig. 1.5) or to the evening ensemble by Schiaparelli from 1938, what you are looking at is a reflection of fashion that had no relevance what so ever with the majority of people at that time. Perhaps they represent the aspirations to fashion of their age, but for the greater part all they represent are the ideals of a few, unattainable by the majority. The serious collection of T-shirts marks a turning point in this situation. It is a garment that is mass-produced and worn by people from the highest to the lowest classes. No other single item of clothing has so far successfully matched the T-shirt in its low-cost luxury. The complete versatility and availability of the T-shirt has guaranteed itself a place in the majority of people's wardrobes, therefore making it more truly representative of the everyday dress of the past twenty or thirty years, than any other garment, whether designer-original or mass produced. However, it is not merely representative of the dress, but also an embodiment of the changes of lifestyle and ideology of this age and it is perhaps for this reason that the T-shirt is now acknowledged in authoritative collections such as that in the V. & A., where it can be found alongside the clothing of the gentry and aristocracy of previous ages.

-Fig. 1.5; Doublet and hose, reputedly worn by James I in 1604 - would not have had much relevance to the clothing of most of the population.

As I have discussed in this chapter, the T-shirt is not just an item of clothing, it can also be considered as an item of fashion or an example of classic design. But no matter what category it is discussed under, the basic premise of the T-shirt is its mass production and disposibility. In fact, in this sense, the T-shirt is an embodiment of the direction of design and manufacturing in this century. Design, whether referring to fashion, industry or graphics, has become increasingly functional - a complete rejection of all the frills, flounces and excess decoration of the past. Simplicity, practicality and efficiency seem to be the keywords as everything is pared down to the bare essentials. The T-shirt fits exactly into this picture. It has been revolutionary, even from its humble origins when it provided a radical alternative to the existing cumbersome underwear for men that consisted primarily of the all-in-one suit. Its whole basis was simplicity. It was light-weight, shortsleeved, and disposable - and in those early years of the century, served as an indicator of the direction that not only fashion, but design as a whole would travel in the future. It is these early days, of both the century and the history of the T-shirt, that will be under discussion in the next chapter. I intend to examine the progress of the T-shirt from under-wear to outer-wear while noting also the different attitudes that developed towards the garment.

Chapter 2 :

In this chapter, a brief history of the T-shirt is discussed in order to show its development, concentrating in particular on the period from its inception at the end of the 19th century to its initial rise to popularity in the mid 1950's. This particular phase is quite important because, in my opinion, it is here that a fundamental association was borne between the T-shirt and the idea of youthfulness that has continued to exist to this day.

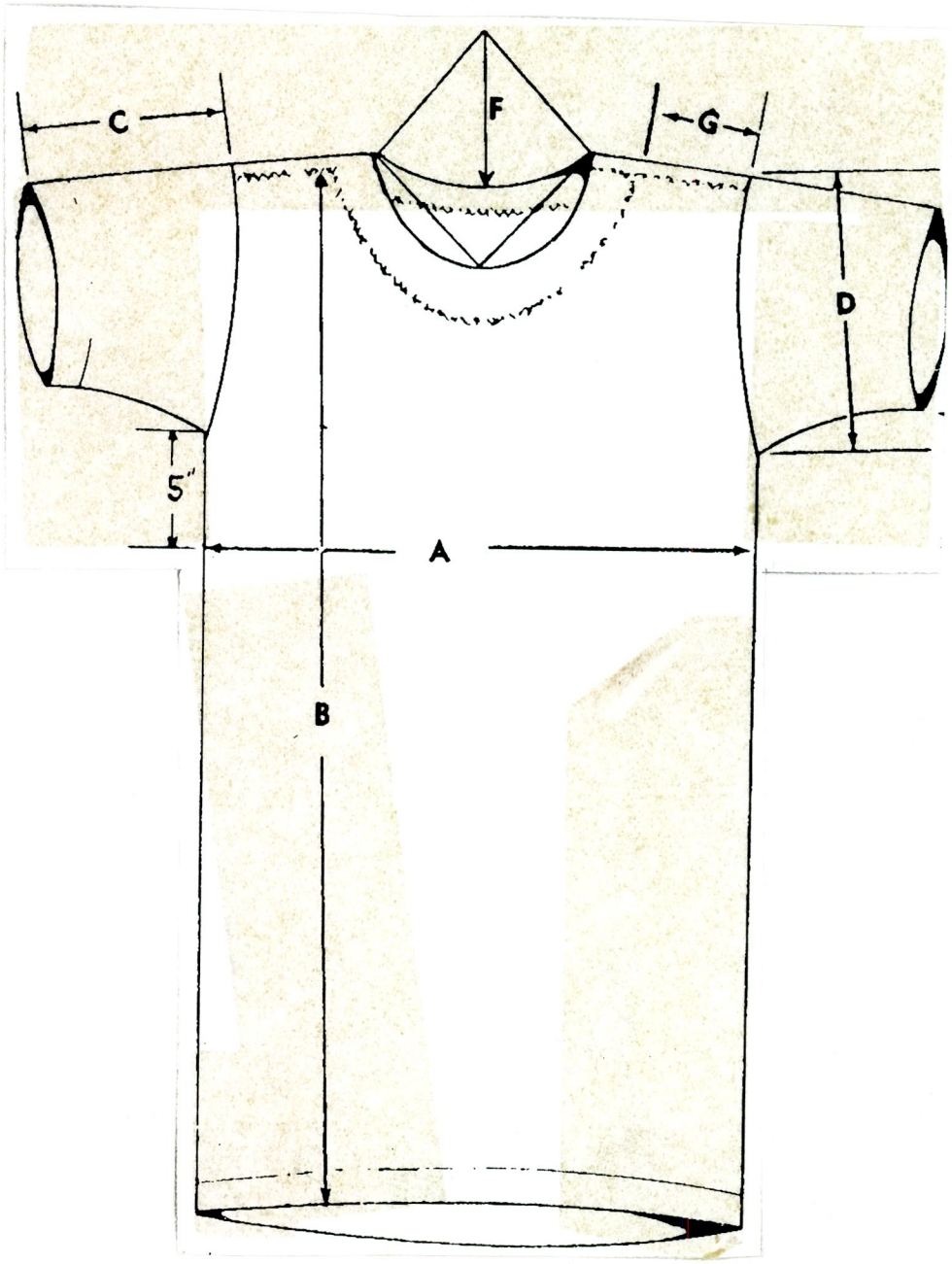
The T-shirt Book by John Gordon and Alice Hiller provides valuable information about the early history of the T-shirt and describes how the T-shirt, as we now know it, was first documented in the 1899 uniform regulation of the U.S. Navy.

> The Navy T-Type was described as 'lightweight flat knit, white cotton undershirt, high neckline, 5" sleeve with 3/4" hem, 3/4" band of self material stitched around the openings, 7/8" hem at bottom'. (Gordon/Hiller, 1988, p.7.)

However, in this, its first official appearance, it was as a humble vest and remained firmly under layers of decent clothing. And so the T-shirt remained for many years as the rather daring underwear of Navy personnel and a handful of adventurous unconventionals who preferred it to the "shirts and drawers" that most men wore. (Gordon / Hiller, 1988, p.6.) (Fig. 2.1)

It was when America joined the Second World War in 1942 that the story of the T-shirt really began. Eleven million new recruits meant eleven million new homes for the T-shirt in its unassuming role as a regulation undervest. After the war, when these soldiers returned to their homes, their vests came too, providing them with the top half of an ideal ensemble for digging the garden, painting the house, in fact for any occupation that required something light-weight, comfortable and cheap. As yet the T-shirt was still considered quite a lowly garment, but at least it had emerged briefly from under the shirt and tank-top and was becoming recognised as outerwear in its own right.

The dawning of the 1950's marked the emergence of a new air of restlessness, agitation and unease when young people were becoming increasingly disenchanted with a society that was based on middle-age, middle-class values and rules of conformity. They felt bored, stifled, even alienated by the prevailing codes of dress and conduct that endorsed hard



-Fig. 2.1; Diagram accompanying the 1955 U.S. Army's Specification for the 'Quater-sleeve' undershirt.

work, discipline, prudence and responsibility. There were few outlets for recreation, excitement or release of pent-up frustrations, even fashion provided no thrills with clothing for young people merely adaptations of their parents' respectable, sombre wardrobe. As Johnny Stewart, in his book Rockers! describes;

> In a society which demands uniformity and judges quite literally by appearances, the conventional suit perfectly expresses the values endorsed by the middle class..... Sober and unassuming, it constrained the body while also camouflaging its underlying physical shape. Uncomfortable and solemn, it projected the respectable aura of solid bourgeois prosperity. And the universal adoption of this uniform, however inappropriately, by men and boys of every class and social background vividly indicates the way society as a whole had been penetrated by middle-class values." (Stewart, 1987, p.10.)

-Fig. 2.2; The conventional suit of the 1950's - the staple of the average male's wardrobe.

Suddenly, rock and roll in the shape of Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and Little Richard burst onto the scene, wowing young people with its loud and racy new music. This acted as a type of catalyst because within a rapid succession of events, the concept of the teenager was born and a new era begun. Almost immediately an entire feast of new films were emerging, with varying storylines based on the same basic theme of the angst-ridden, alienated, rebellious teenager. Movies such as A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) and Rebel Without a Cause (1955), while trying to portray teenage life, also proved incredibly influential on the young audience. The film, The Wild One (1953) was particularly notorious and was actually banned from public screening in Britain for fifteen years. But censorship failed to stop the infamous exploits of Johnny, as played by Marlon Brando, from filtering through to the youth it was supposed to be shielded from. Brando was undisciplined, tough, wore T-shirts, jeans and a leather jacket, smoked cigarettes, drank copious amounts of alcohol and rode a motorbike, both off-screen and as Johnny. (Fig. 2.3) He became a hero to frustrated teenagers everywhere - and the T-shirt "gained rebel status overnight". (Gordon / Hiller, 1988, p.7.) The T-shirt became a badge of youth resistance against the conformities of society - a small symbol of the greater rejection. It took on the dual role of expressing the young people's disassociation from their parents and the values they represented, while also defining themselves from the rest of society. (Fig. 2.4)

Dick Hebdige, in his book, SUBCULTURE - The Meaning of Style, discusses at length this phenomenon of dissatisfied youth groups and explores their appropriation of objects as symbols of their discontent. In this way, they can issue their challenge to society without being directly confrontational. As he explains, their dispute is "expressed obliquely, in style". (Hebdige, 1988, p.17.)

> Style in subculture, is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus".(Hebdige, 1988, p.18.)

But as with many revolutionary style statements, after a short period it became quite fashionable to wear T-shirts and by the end of the fifties, practically all connotations of defiance were forgotten. However, it still remained firmly as a young person's garment. The T-shirt became symbolic of youth - it was new, modern and unconstraining, and symbolised the new freedom and vibrancy that these post-war teenagers were now enjoying.

-Fig. 2.3; Marlon Brando -
-Fig. 2.4; (overleaf) - the role model for the rebel teenager of the '50's.


Party spirit
in the air?
Keep
refreshing
Seven-Up
7up
JENNINGS
ELDORADO
STAR
JACKPOT
BAR BAR BAR
JACKPOT

Traditionally, the greatest status symbols were those concerned with wealth. Perhaps this was due to the prevalence of a very distinct class system, where there was an obvious divide between the 'have' and 'have nots', with those of the higher echelons of society using their clothing, homes and possessions to indicate their wealth, importance and distinguish themselves from the masses. But since the Second World War however, there seems to have been a distinct shift in public attitudes and priorities. Wealth, which was previously the great divider of society, and the measurement on which personal worth was gauged, has lost much of its effect since a higher standard of living for the majority of the population has blurred many of the class system distinctions. This has prompted the development of other values in society. While the divisions of class may be slowly disintegrating, the dichotomy continues between the 'have' and 'have nots' of other commodities, creating new divisions of status and therefore new trappings to indicate this status. I believe that one of the most desirable status's that has emerged over the past forty years has been that of youth.

The rise in popularity of the status of youth, while possibly linked in some way with the post-war baby boom in Europe and America, can be connected with an increased consumption of the media, within this same period of the last forty years. The public infatuation with youthfulness is omnipresent. Whether in magazines, movies or music videos, every channel of public communication is praising the virtues of the unwrinkled face, unsagging body, freshness and vitality. Of course this new status has its covetable symbols as well - one of which must undeniably be the T-shirt. The T-shirt has somehow never lost its association with youth since the influential days of 1950's Hollywood, when its advocates included James Dean and Marlon Brando. Low-cost, durability, comfort and colour variety have continued to make the T-shirt the staple of the young person's wardrobe.

This, of course, is not restricted to the young. The direction of fashion and clothing of the past four or five decades has been in marked contrast to the historical aspects of dress. Traditionally, clothing was very 'adult' orientated. Children were treated like miniature adults and wore miniature versions of their parents clothes. But in the past forty years, fashion has become increasingly based on a celebration of youth, so now it is more likely that a parent will emulate their children's dress of T-shirts and jeans, than the other way around, which has been the historical norm.

This can also be equated with the popularity in sports, health consciousness and leisure, in the same time span of the last four or five decades. Since World War II, there has been an increase in free-time in all classes of society. With an enlarged workforce and increased mechanisation, the length of the working week has become progressively shorter. This, combined with a higher standard of living and larger expendable income has produced a remarkable rise in leisure time. Perhaps it is as a result of this, that sport and recreational activities have become so immensely popular in recent decades. Certainly, education from schools and the media in general have highlighted the role of exercise for well-being and health. The pursuit of the fit, beautiful body seems to be an indication of this society's attraction with youthfulness. Therefore, the T-shirts that are worn by both sports people and armchair enthusiasts alike are symbolic of not only their desire for fitness and vitality, but also of the unending quest for youth.

As I have discussed in this chapter, for almost the first fifty years of its existence, the T-shirt remained as an undervest, invisible to the world at large. But its eventual appearance as an outer-garment coincided with one of the most significant social developments of this century - the emergence of youth culture. It is arguably this reason that can primarily account for the lasting association between the T-shirt and youth, as young people appropriated the T-shirt as a means of uniting themselves into an identifiable group while defining themselves from others. This idea of defining oneself through clothing is also the basis of the next chapter, where I shall be discussing the relationship between people and their clothing, exploring various theories on the subject and relating them particularly to the T-shirt.

Chapter 3 :

Using some of the current theoretical ideas on codes of dress, I intend to discuss, in this chapter, the relationship between people and what they wear. To do this I have explored some of the contemporary texts on clothing and society and have tried to relate them to the area of the T-shirt in particular, examining the way in which the T-shirt can not only help to portray an individual and their personality to others but also help them to define themselves.

Psychologists, behaviourists and sociologists have been attempting to explain and understand human interaction in society for centuries - how and why do people respond to their physical surroundings and each other in such individual ways even though all human beings are essentially the same? An explanation for this is the "Symbolic Interaction Theory", one of whose proponents is George Herbert Mead. Mead maintained that the proper functioning of a society depends upon the interaction of a vast network of symbols. These symbols, he argued, are learned through communication with others and are responsible for stimulating and provoking behaviour. Many of these symbols are conveyed verbally, but quite a considerable amount are communicated visually, as for example through gestures and, more importantly, clothing. (Mead, 1934.) It is through clothing that the bulk of our initial information about a person is devined since the brevity of most encounters prevents more indepth insight, and what could reflect more about an individual than a T-shirt? While the simple fact of wearing a T-shirt, whether plain or otherwise, can impart so much information such as frame of mind or disposition, the wearing of a printed T-shirt, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, can reveal unlimited elements of a person's character. While open to misinterpretation, it is this information that marks the first step of further interaction, if any.

> With briefest visual perception, a complex mental process is aroused, resulting within a very short time, 30 seconds perhaps, in judgement of the sex, age, size, ...of the stranger, together with some estimate of his temperament,.....friendliness, neatness, and even his trustworthiness and integrity. With no further acquaintance many impressions may be erroneous but they show the swift totalizing nature of our judgements. (Allport, 1937, p.500.)

Not enough emphasis can be placed on the importance and effect of clothing, in society in general , and on the individual in particular. While it is true that what a person wears can communicate aspects such as social status, self confidence, individuality and to an extent, reflect their personality, it can also be said that clothing enhances the personality quite considerably. Because clothes play such a major role in our overall visual appearance, it is only natural that we should consider them part of our character. (Fig. 3.1) As Lois M. Gurel states in the book The Second Skin , "since most people think of their bodies with clothes on, clothing becomes part of the body image". (Gurel/Horn, 1981, p.141.) The author goes so far as to say that clothes can become extensions of the body itself. As she explains, a person can often absorb the characteristics of the article in order to augment that feature in their own nature.(Gurel/Horn, 1981, pp.137-138.) For example, the wearing of a T-shirt not only displays but increases the wearer's casual ease, freedom and mobility - the wearer brings life to the latent properties of the garment.

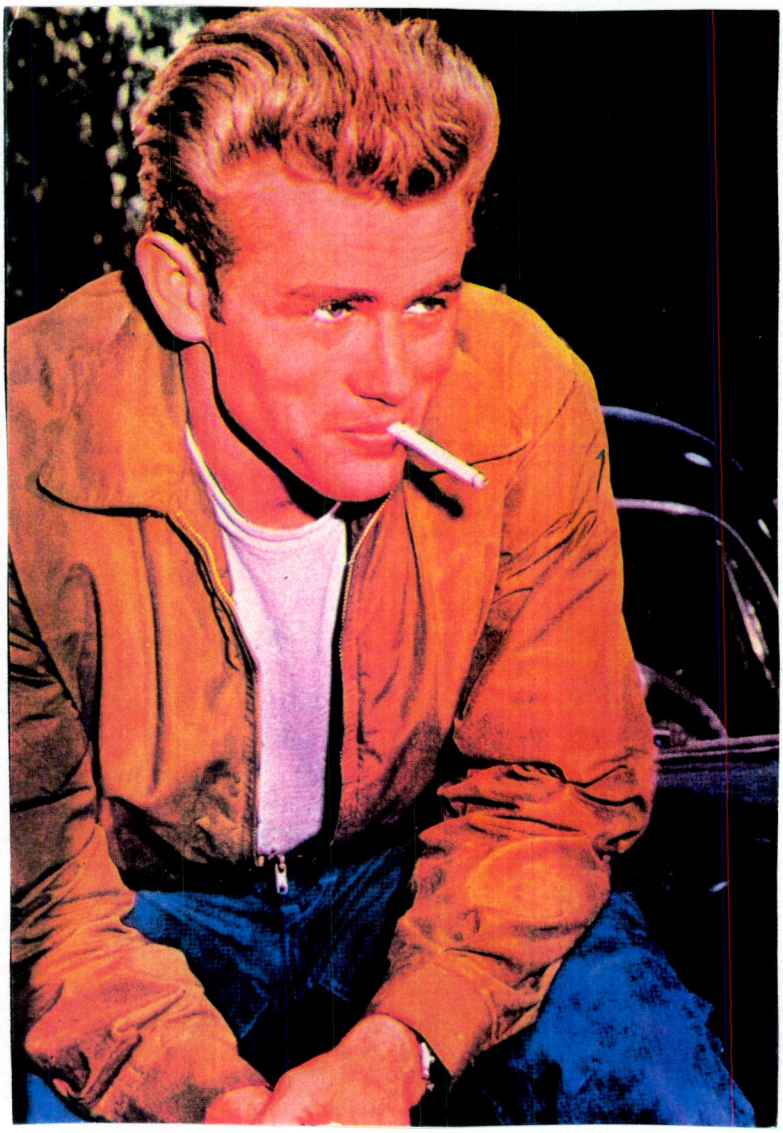
-Fig. 3.1 ; "Because clothes play such a major role in our overall visual appearance, it is only natural that we should consider them part of our character."

Many theorists have tried to analyse this ambivalent relationship between the wearer and their clothes, studying whether personality influences clothing, or vice versa. Experts such as Charles H. Cooley and Mary Shaw Ryan, in their studies of human nature have, for the most part, divided the character into different 'selfs', Ryan for example, having divided her subject into the "somatic self" and the "social self".(Ryan, 1965, p82-83). The "somatic self" she claims, represents our physical characteristics and how we feel about them, while the "social self" refers to our individuality, social interaction and the roles we assume in response to varying situations. These different selves and roles, of course, need different and appropriate clothing in order to identify themselves to the rest of society and project the desired image to the intended recipients.

> .....So in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, ...and are variously affected by it.
> A self idea of this sort seems to have three principals elements: the imagination of our appearance, to the other person, the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of feeling such as pride or mortification.....The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves; but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind."(Cooley, 1902, p.152)

In spite of differences such as age, gender or race, humans in general are all of the one mould and are visually quite similar. It is here that clothes play such an important role as each person attempts to portray their inner individuality and unique character while reinforcing their identity as separate from all others. But apart from its public role, clothing is also significant for personal development. The human spirit and personality is such an elusive concept that development of self awareness and understanding is difficult without some way of making this concept more tangible. Clothing provides a physical and visual means for the emergence and evolvement of the personality.

The T-shirt is such a simple and basic garment yet it is one of the most powerful means of non-verbal communication and a major disseminator of meanings and ideas. Even plain T-shirts can speak volumes. The pristine, white T-shirt has a reputation and image that doesn't require words to vociferate. Worn with a pair of jeans and an attitude, it conjures up images of youth and rebellion. It is an embodiment of the excitement, romance and devil-may-care attitude that marked its rise to glory in the fifties. With no words or pictures to detract from its purity and strength, it remains symbolic of the heroes of its age, James Dean and Marlon Brando - the strong, silent idols of a generation of movie-goers. (Fig. 3.2)



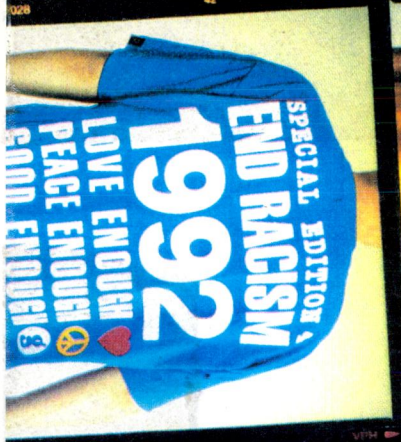
-Fig. 3.2; James Dean - the plain white T-shirt still embodies the spirit of the Rebel Without a Cause.

In considering the amount that a plain white T-shirt can communicate, the unlimited possibilities of the printed T-shirt begin to become apparent. (Fig. 3.3) It is one of the greatest means of silent communication of this century. Many anthropogists such as Ted Polhemus and Lee Drummond of McGill University in Montreal, refer to the wearing of printed T-shirts as a "New Primitivism", drawing parallels between this form of apparel and tribal customs, such as body painting, piercing, tattooing and scarification. Each of these rituals produces a silent language of symbols that declare allegiances, status and other such information, and are legible to others within the tribe. Ted Polhemus in his book Body Styles goes into considerable detail and gives interesting accounts of the varying rituals and habits of adornment in different tribes of the past and present. He compares and contrasts these customs with some of our own in (so-called) developed societies and points out many of the similarities between our cultures.

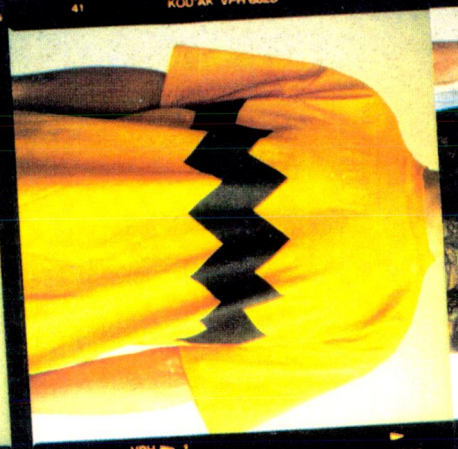
> .....Our ancestors began to adorn themselves in distinctive ways in order to advertise which tribe they belong to.....In this way the individual gained a sense of camaraderie and group solidarity through his or her distinctive adornment uniform while the society gained greater cohesiveness through the enforced conformity of appearance. (Polhemus, 1988, p.32)

This is much the same as the way in which printed T-shirts work, each T-shirt symbolising part of the wearer's identity. Personally, I think that the emergence of this "New Primitivism" in the past few decades is not as accidental as perhaps first imagined. This past century has seen the greatest population explosion in human existence, with an estimated yearly rate of birth at approximately 80 million. (Carberry/Mooney, 1990, p.22.) The vast majority of this population are living in large, impersonal communities, where very little human exchange takes place, and I believe that one of the reasons for the popularity of the printed T-shirt is its ability to break down a few of these barriers of impersonality and promote some form of social interaction.

This chapter has been a discussion of the relationship between people and their clothing, and in my exploration, I have made particular reference to some contemporary theoretical ideas on dress and society, and attempted to use them in the analysis of the T-shirt. Clothing is often more effective in portraying an individual than any verbal means of communication could hope to be. It creates a visible persona of who we are, or maybe, more to the point, who we would aspire to be. This idea of clothing as a non-verbal language is developed in the next chapter, where I concentrate on the printed T-shirt - perhaps one of the most articulate items of clothing ever created. I shall be discussing the uses of this forum, as well as its role both in a passive and active sense in society.



cial Edition 4 by Gimme 5, available at Bond, 10 Newburgh eet, London W1 and Fly at The Garage, 350 Kings Road, don SW1.



Charlie Brown zig zag by Dan Peterka (enquiries on 0787 269900).

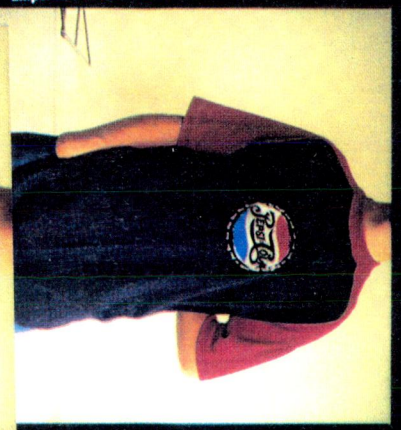
Pre-Raphaelite by Soviet, available at Way In at Harrods, Knightsbridge, Cruise, 39-43 Renfield Street, Glasgow, Emporium, 99 Deansgate, Manchester.

Mother Earth logo, available from Acid Jazz Merchandising (enquiries on 071 379 9818).

Underground Resistance (glow in the dark) from Unity Records, Beak Street, London W1 (071 734 2746).

hs by Karen Savage, available at Sign Of The Times, ington Market, 49-53 Kensington High Street, London W8 uiries on 071 938 4343).

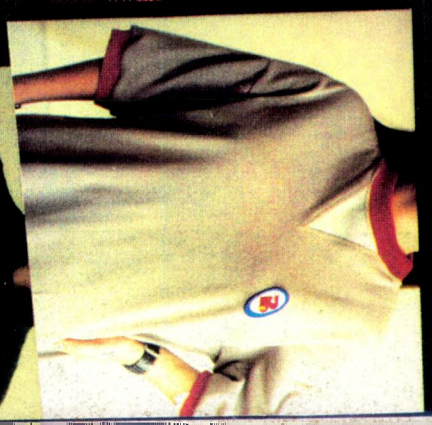
Rubber by Hamish Morrow, available at Jensen & Morrow, 14 Ingestre Place, London W1 (enquiries on 071 434 1318).

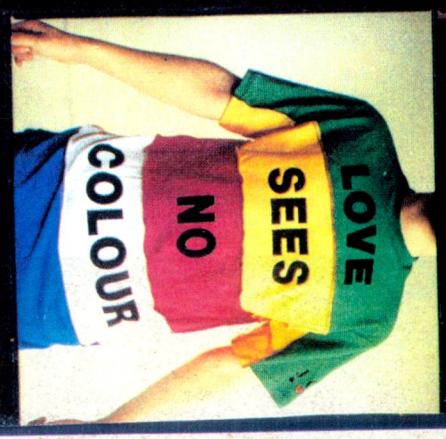


Pepsi logo by The Duffer Of Saint George, available at The Duffer Of St George, 27 D'Arblay Street, London W1.

Everything Is Queer by Anand (enquiries on 071 737 0482).

Barbie by Pallas, available at Sign Of The Times, Kensington Market, 49-53 Kensington High Street, London W8.





Towelling Unity by Box Fresh, available at Fall Out, 310 Bethnal Green Road, London E1, Well Gosh, Silver Arcade, Leicester, Red Square, Unit 8, Middlesbrough (enquiries on 071 287 2267).

Unity logo by Box Fresh, available at Fall Out, 310 Bethnal Green Road, London E1, Well Gosh, Silver Arcade, Leicester, Red Square, Unit 8, Middlesbrough (enquiries on 071 287 2267).

Target by Paul Smith, 41-44 Floral Street, London WC2.

Apple Mac logo from Apple Mac dealers nationwide.

String Ts by Jackie Vital, available at Mash, 73 Oxfor London W1.

Lifejacket print by Colin Harvey, available at Rap, 60 Neal Street, London WC2, Geese, Cross Street, The Royal Exchange, Manchester (enquiries on 061 832 4235).

Marble wash denim print by Sportful, available at Covent Garden Cycles, London WC2.

Baseball shirt by Passager, available at Mash, 73 Oxford Street, London W1.

Chipie hominy grits, available at Chipie, 65 High Street, London NW3, Langley Court, London, WC2, 13 Old Bank Street, Manchester and Unit 9B, The Italian Centre, Glasgow.

Stripes by Hang Ten, available at Bond, 10 Newburgh S London W1, Slam City Skates, 16 Neals Yard, London W

ea Culpa Tunic (enquiries to Gregg Faye on 071 262 8190).

Secondhand Adidas from Oxfam (branches nationwide).

Levi's logo, available from Levi's stockists nationwide.

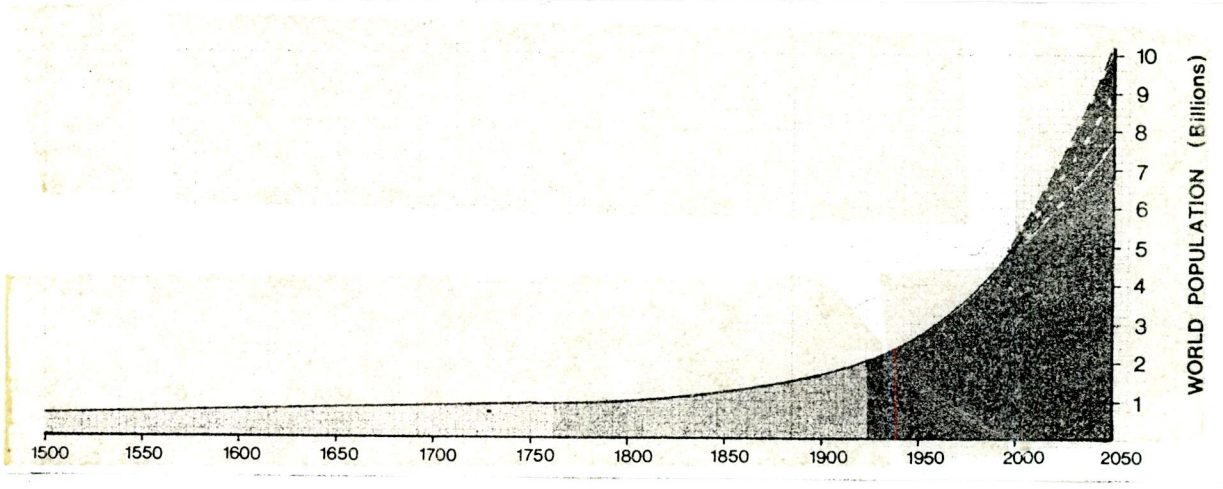
Beckaro logo, available at Palladium, Stoke-On-Trent, Richmond Classics, Bournemouth, Graduate, 30 James St, London W1.

Cycling flames by Benzini, available at Mash, 73 Oxford S London W1.

Chapter 4 :

T-shirt printing today is a flourishing business. One Dublin company that I visited produces a minimum of 2,000 printed garments per day and a quick browse through any one of the industry's magazines will give a rough idea of the numerous amount of such companies that are in operation. This hints towards the huge scale of the printing industry for which a great demand exists. And in saying this I have referred only to large scale printing companies, not to be forgotten are the multitudes of small enterprises that have been established in the past few years, producing limited editions of hand painted or 'alternative' printed T-shirts. The decline in popularity of the printed T-shirt still appears to be far from sight, but what are the reasons for this extraordinary success? This is the question I would like to approach in this chapter, examining the reasons for the popularity of the printed T-shirt and from this, establish the role it plays, both in a passive and active manner in society.

One explanation for the favour the T-shirt enjoys could be the dramatic population boom that has occurred in this century. Apart, of course, from the larger market that this would naturally produce, this phenomenon could also be explained through the ideas in Chapter 3 - the use of particular clothing to express and define oneself from the masses.



-Fig. 4.1; World population growth 1500 - 2050. (estimate) (Carberry/Mooney, 1990, p.60.)

As The Times stated, in an article in 1987 quoted by Carberry and Mooney;

> The world's population reached 5 billion recently. While you read this sentence it increased by ten. Every minute the world population grows by 150, every day by 220,000 and every year by 80 million. It took until the year 1800 for the population to reach 1 billion. In 1950 it was three billion. It passed four billion 13 years ago. A century from now it will be 10 billion. (Carberry/Mooney, 1990, p.60.)

At present the world's population is in excess of 5.5 billion (World year book, 1993, p.284. Actual figure quotes 5.48 billion in 1992) and a vast percentage of these people are living in large impersonal communities such as towns or cities. When confronted with the situation of having fleeting contact with perhaps hundreds or even thousands of unknown faces every day, it can become impossible to tell a person's character or identify a similarly-minded individual without having some clue through their appearance or dress. This is where I think the printed T-shirt plays a vital role. Within an instant, you have some small clue to an aspect of the T-shirt wearer's personality, whether through a brand logo, a humorous quip, the name of a rock band or even a political slogan - a silent message to the world. As Ted Polhemus, in his book "Body Styles", states;

> .....Modern society is highly pluralistic. Whereas all the members of a tribe or a traditional peasant community are likely to share similar world views, attitudes, beliefs and ideologies, the inhabitants of modern cities and suburbs (and this applies almost as readily to Third World cities such as Nairobi or Belem as it does to New York or London) have little in common except the weather, the problems of public transport and long queues in the supermarket. Such heterogeneity in world view and 'personality' must be advertised 'up front' if like minded people are to have any hope of finding each other in the metropolis. (Polhemus,1988,p.70.)

This is not to say, of course, that the entirety of a person's identity can be devined through what they happen to be wearing on a particular day. It can be so easy to 'pigeon hole' a person according to the first impressions their clothes can give and forget that their character has more than just one-dimension. A person who wears an ANTHRAX T-shirt doesn't necessarily have to be a greasy, heavy metal, knife flicking, lager lout, but could instead be a vegetarian, pacifist, charity-worker who just happens to like the band ANTHRAX. But the fact still remains that through the very action of wearing a particular printed T-shirt, the wearer is linking themselves with what is displayed on their chests.

The printed T-shirt can unite individuals, most of whom would not even know of each other, into identifiable groups through the wearing of T-shirts with similar subject matter or logos. (Fig. 4.2) This also defines them from the masses and from other groups. The T-shirt can denote alliances and differences, or in the words of Ted Polhemus , it enhances the awareness of "camaraderie and group solidarity", while at the same time, maintaining the " cohesiveness" of the group in general. (Polhemus, 1988, p.32.)

The success of the printed T-shirt can also be accounted for by mankind's eternal irresistible need for 'trophies' or 'souvenirs' of his endevours. The T-shirt, unlike most trophies doesn't have to collect dust on a shelf, or be nailed to a wall at home, but instead can be worn with pride and displayed to the world at large. This further separates it from other forms of trophy or souvenir that are dead or inanimate, because the printed T-shirt interacts with people when worn so it becomes a living document. In a way 'trophyism' can be linked with a search for certain status, since the wearing of a souvenir T-shirt is a means of gaining recognition, belonging or approval from others while distinguishing the wearer from those without.

A feature that appears to be unique to the printed T-shirt, and sets it apart from practically all other forms of documentation, is the way it is used for commemorating not only events of national or international significance, but also of local or personal importance. (Fig. 4.3) In fact, practically every single aspect of human existence has found itself represented to some degree on a T-shirt, due to the way in which they can be quickly and easily printed in bulk in response to any situation or event. In the future, a study of the printed T-shirt could provide invaluable insights into the everyday life of the latter half of the 20th century. An insight far more incisive and significant than many other forms of written or visual evidence. The point is that the printed T-shirt has found its way into every facet of human life, aspects often considered perhaps too unworthy and insignificant for official recognition. T-shirts bearing advertising, political slogans, off-beat humour, references to personalities and figures of stature, rock groups, festivals, major events, concerts, current affairs, the list is extremely long to mention in detail, suffice to say that each printed T-shirt becomes a testamony to a tiny slice of life and history, while the very fact that it is being worn, validates the contents on the front while linking the message with the wearer.

-Fig. 4.2; "Camaraderie and group solidarity" - heavy metal style.
-Fig. 4.3; The T-shirt records aspects of life, no matter how trivial they seem on a global scale.

FLEADH

Mean Fiddler & THE MODERNS NEW COMPANY

PRESENT

FLEADH LONDON

SUPORTED BY

12TH JUNE 1993

FINSBURY PARK

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3RD/4TH JULY 1993

TRAMORE RACECOURSE
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FLEADH

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SONIC BOOM!

SAT. 11·00 TILL 3am

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ALTERNATIVE DANCEFLOOR

LEIXLIP

Salmon

FESTIVAL

Like a diary, printed T-shirts are a document on cotton of an individual's personal history. In some cases, a reflection of world events of the not-too-distant past, but unlike the version that might be found in future history books. Instead, each account is coloured by particular personal interest. The printed T-shirt is a record of what is of relevance to average everyday people and what bears immediate importance to their lives, no matter how trivial it may seem on a global scale.

The printed T-shirt is an ideal form of expressing and enhancing the personality of an individual, as well as being an excellent document of local and global affairs and interests. Yet this particular role, while important is quite passive, merely being used as a means of displaying and recording information. Increasingly however, in the past two to three decades, the T-shirt has become more progressively active, particularly in the areas of political, social or moral affairs, providing a silent, yet dynamic platform for the concerns of any individual. (Fig. 4.4)

In the initial development of the printed T-shirt in the early 1960's, most of the images and logos were fun, frivolous or completely nonsensical, but as that decade drew to a close the further possibilities of the T-shirt were just beginning to be realised. It soon became a major instrument in the effort to transform a world in drastic need of change. During the 60's and 70's, printed T-shirts were used to protest about affairs as diverse as the Vietnam War, environmental pollution, women's liberation, equal rights and cruelty to animals. Every oppositional stance could find its representation emblazoned on the front of a T-shirt. Yet these political T-shirts, never really became popular with the public at large, worn primarily by handfuls of committed campaigners. It was in the 1980's however, that 'political' became 'fashionable', and the T-shirt broke unprecedented ground. Two designers in the 80's, while both exploring completely different avenues of experimentation and evolvement, developed mutually beneficial relationships with the T-shirt. Their association highlighted the T-shirt as a fashionable garment, while the T-shirt proved to be a perfect medium for their conceptual, design and political requirements. These designers are Vivienne Westwood and Katharine Hamnett. The chief difference in their use of the T-shirt was that while Katharine Hamnett's messages to the world were clear and decisive protestations, Westwood used a more subtle approach, which was equally as powerful.

De gauche à droite : Nadja Auermann, Claudia Schiffer, Yasmeen Ghauri, Claudia Mason, Helena Christensen, Vera Atcholl, Naomi Campbell, Patricia Hartmann, Karen Mulder, N'Goné Sy, Georgianna Robertson, Heather Stewart-Whyte, Brandi Quinones, Yasmin Lebon, Stephanie Roberts.

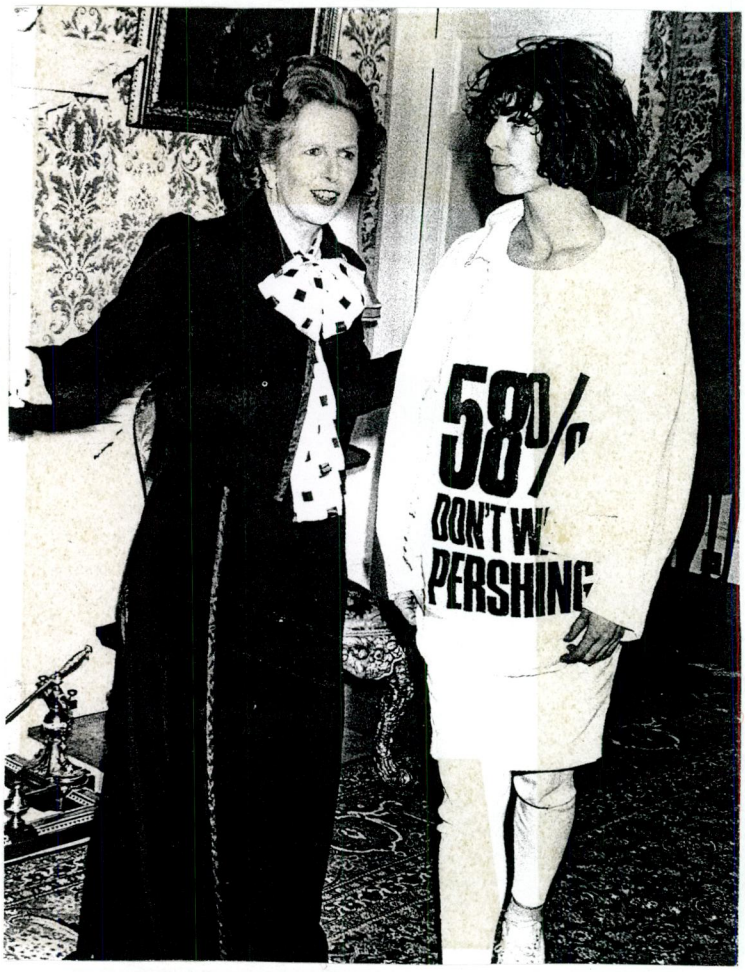
-Fig. 4.4; N.E.L.S.O.N. M.A.N.D.E.L.A.

Vivienne Westwood had two distinctive approaches to her use of the T-shirt. To begin with, she used torn T-shirts as a symbolic assault on the system of production and consumption but then her treatment became increasingly graphic and aggressive. She dealt with issues such as bigotry, intolerence and used subjects in a sensationalist way, often just to test public opinion and open-mindedness. She sold T-shirts bearing images of the Moors Murderers and the Cambridge Rapist, designed especially to be deliberately provoking, confrontational and offensive. Her aim was to find and attack, using the T-shirt as her forum, the sensitive points of society.

Westwoods most publicised T-shirt was that bearing the image of a homosexual cowboy, for which she and others were prosecuted for wearing. (Fig. 4.5) This seemed to be too much for the conservative general public to bear, even though, as the designer was to say, it was merely a reflection of a small segment of society. As Westwood has described in McDermott's Street Style: "If you want to do things that are shocking and perverse the motifs already exist, there are plenty of photographs of men in leather and stockings". (McDermott, 1987, p.26.)

Katharine Hamnett followed a different method of T-shirt presentation, believing that her messages and ideas on peace and the environment were worth printing directly, and uncompromisingly, straight on to the T-shirt. According to the designer, "I thought I could get the generation who buy my clothes to think along the same lines as I do by having them wear a T-shirt that says 'STOP ACID RAIN'. (Gordon/Hiller, 1988, p.82.) Hamnett's commitment to fashion, ecology and the peace movement were combined in her 1983 and '84 treatment of T-shirts, which, unlike Westwood's subtle yet outrageous style, were a pure, aggressive, non-verbal bombardment on the senses.

Her giant sized protest T-shirts, with sober messages in stark black letters, shot to fame in March 1984, when she was photographed visiting Margaret Thatcher, wearing one with the slogan '58% DON'T WANT PERSHING'. (Fig. 4.6) Suddenly, it was fashionable to be political. Hamnett's T-shirts were sold in expensive, up-market stores yet they were deliberately designed to be easily copied. The logic behind this plan was ingenious and explained by the designer in an interview in Blueprint. She worked upon the theory that people will often wear an item of clothing just because they see it worn by others they desire to be like. By selling her protest T-shirts through exclusive outlets, they would be bought and worn by the rich and famous.



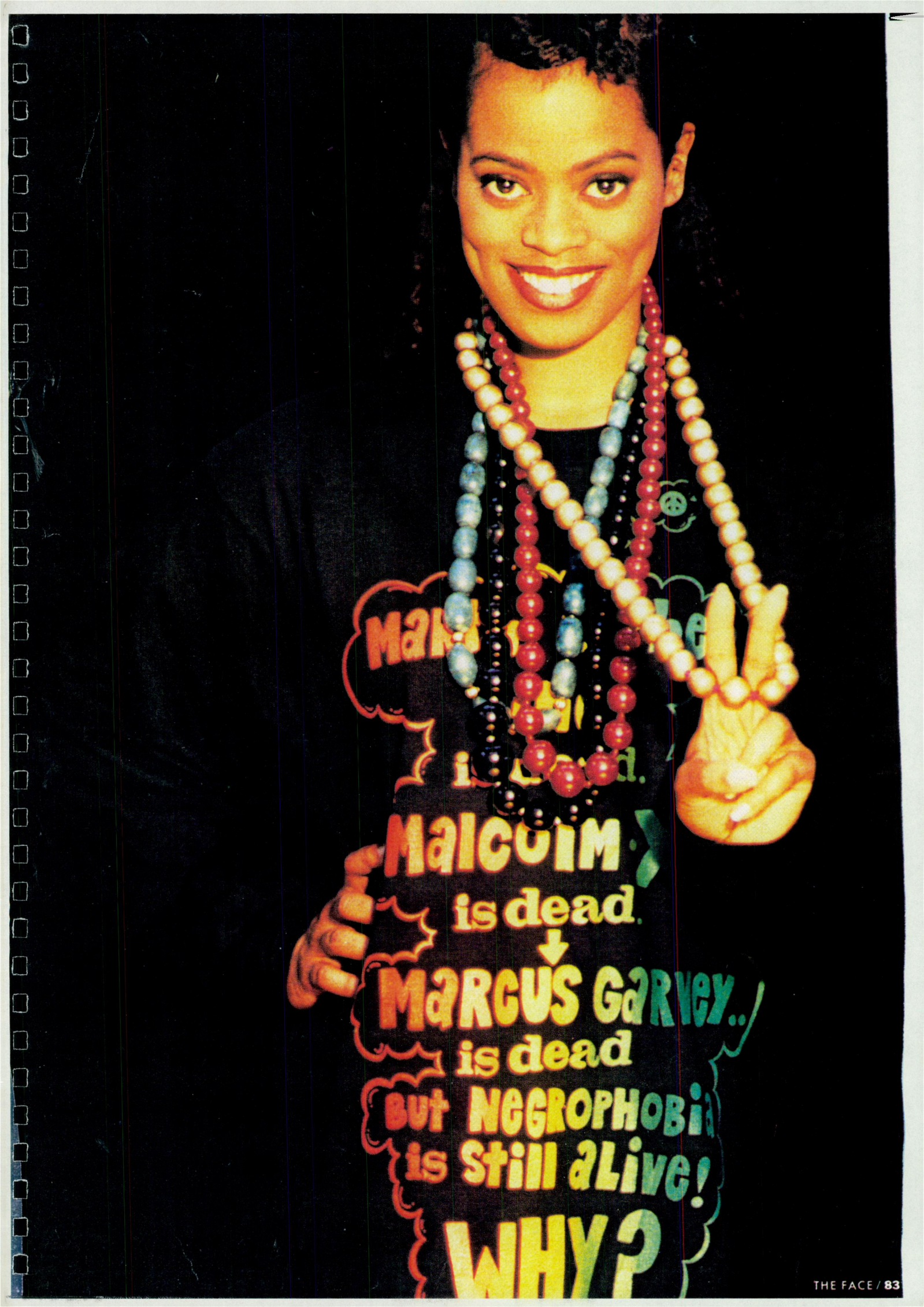
-Fig. 4.5; (previous page) Vivienne Westwood's controversial T-shirt.
-Fig. 4.6; The photograph that launched Katharine Hamnett's protest T-shirts.

Then, not only would the designs gain coverage in news stories and fashion articles, hence spreading the message conveyed on the shirt, but they would also be picked up by the plagiarists and mass produced in cheaper versions for every high-street fashion store. This ultimately spread Hamnett's message about peace and the environment through every level in society. Of course, the slogans on the copied T-shirt became more and more light-hearted but Hamnett's originals remained serious and thought provoking - 'WORLDWIDE NUCLEAR BAN NOW', 'EDUCATION NOT MISSILES', 'CHOOSE LIFE'- combining "the impact of tabloid headlines with the passion of a hellfire preacher". (Gordon/Hiller, 1988, p. 82.) The simplicity and purity of her designs were explained by Hamnett herself.

> They're designed so that wherever you see them you can read them. By the time you've actually finished reading the slogan its too late, the message is already in your brain. It's designed to be subliminal.....If the government won't represent the people, the people must represent themselves. And if they can't actually make a stand at least they can wear one.(Blueprint, Oct,1984, p.11.)

This chapter has served to highlight the various roles of the printed T-shirt, whether as a passive document of opinions and events or as an active means of public representation. But for whatever function the printed T-shirt is used, its silent loquasity is undeniable and provides a valuable and much needed forum for those who, due to perhaps powerlessness, insecurity or inarticulation, have previously been denied a public voice. (Fig. 4.7)

-Fig. 4.7; The T-shirt provides a public voice for those who had previously been denied one.


Malcolm
is dead.
Marcus Garvey..
is dead
but Negrophobia
is still alive!
WHY?

Conclusion :

There are very few books written on the subject of the T-shirt, and the majority of these, if not all, are novelty picture books with little analytical content. This was one of the reasons for my choice of direction in this thesis. It was not intended to be a technical description of the various processes involved in the construction or printing of a T-shirt. Neither was it a record of the entire history of the garment, but instead it was a collection of ideas based on different perceptions of the T-shirt. The T-shirt was often seen as just a common, everyday article of clothing, but this view overlooks the many important physical and symbolic aspects of the garment. As well as being one of the most democratic and popular items of clothing, the T-shirt is unsurpassed in its ability to hold and transmit information about people, their views and their society, while also symbolising the changes in lifestyle and ideology that are the essence of the late 20th century. The use of related literature on clothing, society and theory was found to be valid also in the study of the T-shirt and has proven invaluable in the analysis of this garment.

There are no definite conclusions in this thesis, the multi-faceted nature of the T-shirt contributes to this. But my aim here was not to arrive at any particular end but instead, highlight and discuss these ambiguities, that are inherent in the T-shirt.

I believe that the future is very positive for the T-shirt. Simplicity, practicality and efficiency, which are the major characteristics of the garment, have also been the keywords for the past few decades. Due to the streamlining of mass production and the increasing necessity of energy efficiency and use of natural resources, their significance will not only continue but augment considerably in the decades to come.

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