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**National College of Art & Design  
Faculty of Design Department of Textiles**

# **Not Just a Handbag**

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1999**

Not Just a Handbag

Over 100

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## Introduction

**The handbag/purse is an inexhaustible fount of mysteries and metaphors. It is the modern transcription of the classical Pandora's box; a place for irrepressible curiosity, for secrets never unveiled and insidious penalties. And if in their depths these secrets also involve feminine psychology and sensibilities, it is also true that they offer excellent opportunities for industry that unstoppable divulger of ideas and reveller of an interminable corollary of accessory products. (Mazza, p.31, 1997)**

I have always been fascinated by the secrets hidden away in people's handbags and intrigued by the image women portray when carrying their handbag. My studio work consists of an exploration of current designer market trends, design, and production of a range of bags which will fit into this market. Through my thesis research I hope to explore the notion that there is more to a handbag than meets the eye, therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the many intriguing facets of the woman's handbag and to look at how the fashion and accessories industry have approached their marketing of this essential accessory.

Chapter One is a study of what the handbag implies psychologically about its owner through its exterior and interior qualities. It also investigates the possibility that the handbag is a weapon of seduction which aids a woman in her battle with the opposite sex.

Chapter Two explores how people have become thirsty for a new breed of designer, beyond the boundaries of fashion designers and high street mass producers. I explore the birthing of the designer-maker and how this craftsperson fits into the world of fashion and craft discussing how they have contradicted the current design ethos of the handbag being an integral part of fashion.

Chapter Three considers how the fashion industry uses various marketing ploys such as: labelling with status brand names or monograms, one-off and seasonal trends. The chapter proceeds to look at the most successful of these marketing ploys: the use of





advertisements which are made available in glossy fashion magazines to women all around the world, spoiling them with endless choice variation.

The majority of my research stems from primary sources, and a limited amount of books addressing topics about the handbag in our society today. Due to the recent surge of popularity surrounding handbags, not a week goes by without media coverage and discussion about this wonderful accessory. I look to magazines such as Vogue and the Sunday Times Style which deal with this topic so well and so often. I also interviewed Orla Kiely who began her studies here in the National College of Art and Design, and is now one of the most sought after handbag designers in London. In order to understand the many processes involved in mass producing handbags I visited the largest and most established Irish handbag factory, Monarc Leather Goods, which produces a total of three-thousand handbags per week. Then I ventured to London to see the latest and most talked about handcrafted handbags of Nathalia Hambro, whom I interviewed over the phone about her recently published book *The Art of the Handbag*. In order to gain a full understanding of current designer trends I then delighted in looking, touching and photographing the endless variations available in London's Sloan and Bond Street boutiques. This most enjoyable form of market research, known better as "shopping," is a continual source of inspiration for my studio and thesis work and I benefit greatly from regular visits to Grafton Street.



## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE HANDBAG

The handbag alone can say a lot about its carrier both through exterior and interior qualities and in the way the owner carries it. Handbags may indicate female qualities of mystery, sensuality, seduction, modesty and many more.

### EXTERIOR QUALITIES

The handbag is a fashion statement, telling people around us who we want to be and what image we want to convey in a public situation. Meneguzzo refers to the bag as a self portrait:

**Self portrait, because the bag forces us into a choice, a choice of everything that characterises us both as a person and as a member of a group, a society, a tribe, for the near future. The suitcase or any travelling container is a portrait of what we are and what we want to be.**  
(Mazza, 1996, p.144)

It acts as a small exhibition of a woman's identity, announcing codes of conduct and answers question about the frame of mind of its carrier.

Does she not care less? A plastic bag. Is she glamorous? Highly decorative bag. Is she game? Back Pack. Is she busy? Briefcase. Is she a mother? Nappy bag.

The size of a handbag can also tell a lot about its carrier; for example, a big bag could point to a disorganised person who needs to carry a lot around with them or a small bag could indicate that the person is neat and organised. All exterior elements of a handbag work together to tell stories about the person who carries it.

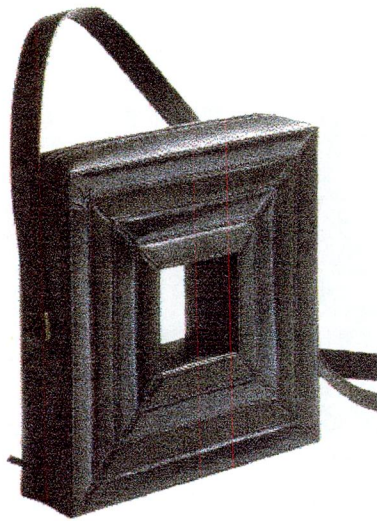
Feng Shui, the ancient Chinese art of placement, states that different shapes of handbags carry different vibrations. Sarah Shurety of the Feng Shui Company explains these meanings:



The shape of the triangle carries a certain tension. Think of love triangles and the Bermuda Triangle. A person carrying a triangular handbag is looking for movement and growth and are possibly not entirely happy with where they are in life. By contrast, a moon-shaped bag is generally used by someone quite esoteric. It is associated with a spirituality which is more relaxed and easy going. A square handbag is probably owned by a relatively conservative person, someone who is steady and most importantly a person who is good at completing what they set out to achieve. (Shurety, 1998 Fact Sheet 7)

Shurety then goes on to say how the colour of the handbag can also signify characteristics:

Red is the colour of life, blood, happiness and passion whereas blue represents someone conventional, spiritual and conservative. Black is the colour which absorbs the most and represents money. While a mixture of brown and black signifies being quite steady, down to earth and grounded. (Shurety, 1998, Fact Sheet 7)



*Fig 1, Black, Square handbag*



*Fig 2, Brown, Triangular handbag*

If we apply the beliefs of Feng Shui to the handbags above, the handbag in Fig. 1 would refer to the type of character who is conservative, steady, good at completing what they set out to achieve and represents money. However, the handbag in Fig. 2 represents someone who has tension, looks for movement and growth and who is not entirely happy in life, but is down to earth and grounded.

While Feng Shui offers a rather simplistic view which ignores subtleties of design and fashion trends it is interesting to consider it in passing. However, one could easily speculate about the different trends or styles on the market today which refer to very different types or 'tribes' of women in our current society. I have chosen five bags, to represent five of the major trends as I saw them in London, August 1998, with particular



Fig. 1. Diagram of the order number

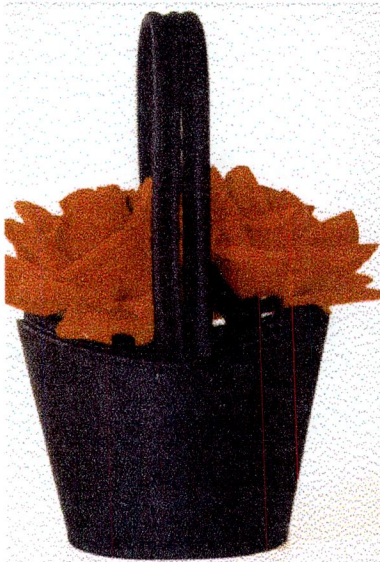
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reference to designer, daywear bags, which I photographed. I Offer possible interpretations as to who might by each bag and what kind of person it would appeal to.



*Fig 3, BOHEMIUM Handbag by Nathalie Hambro*

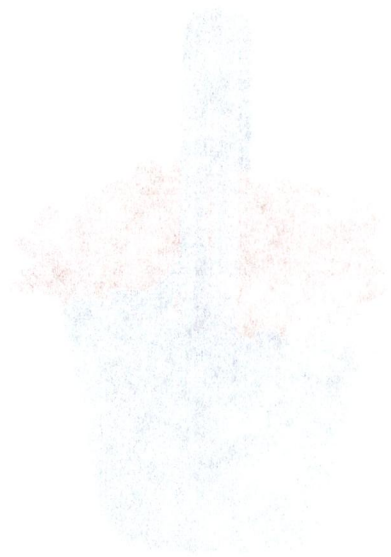
This handbag would appeal to someone who may be quite extrovert. The unusual tomato coloured felt with contrasting large blue stitching and ball bearing flap are definitely original and would appeal to someone who is looking for an accessory which is unlike any other seen before. The warm tactile quality of the felt soft edges and hand-crafted nature of this bag could easily refer to someone warm, kind-hearted and easy to get along with.



*Fig 4 , ECCENTRIC Handbag by Lulu Guinness*

This handbag shaped in the form of a flower pot is very special; it would obviously appeal to a woman who loves flowers. Its dainty size would only accommodate someone who didn't need to carry a lot around with her. Due the fact that satin has a low level of durability, this bag may appeal to a person who wants a bag for every occasion, who would possibly only use this bag every so often, for special occasions. The whole idea of having a handbag shaped like a flower pot is rather bizarre and may appeal to an eccentric and fun loving person.







*Fig 5, PRACTACLE Handbag by Todd's*

This rectangular black leather bag would lend itself to someone with simple taste. Its large size, shoulder strap and zip top would appeal to someone who thinks sensibly and practically. The strap leaving hands free, the zip as a safety measure and large size which would accommodate many necessary things to aid her during the day. It is even tall enough for an umbrella. The features such as the distinguished curved top, subtle Todd's label and middle seam offer status. One could imagine this bag would appeal to many business women due to its practical nature, pleasing shape and non-descript colour.



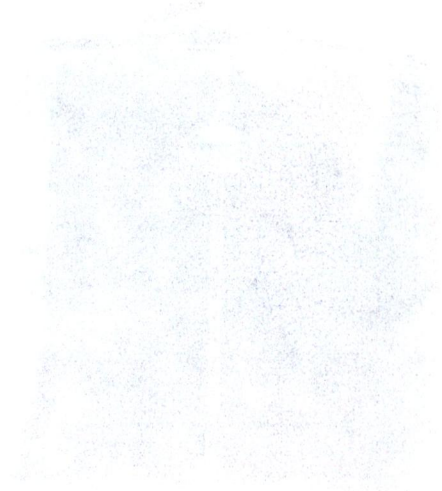
*Fig 6, VINTAGE Handbag by Philip Tracey*

The quirky nature of this clasp framed bag which embodies ideas of the 1920s would appeal to a more adventurous female who wants to portray a vintage or retro image. The embossed patent leather and the monogram clasp also give her status. This bag would appeal to someone very established in her own taste, who enjoys combinations of past and present fashion.



*Fig 7, FURRY Handbag by Pallant*

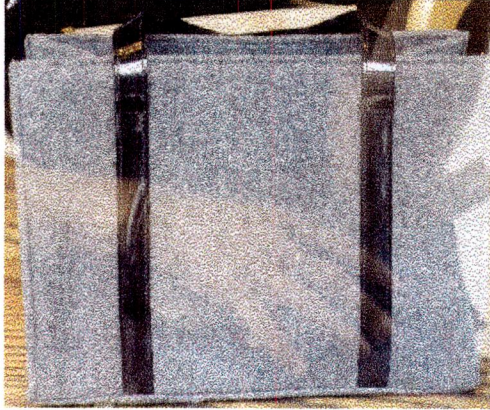
This bag and many like it proved very popular during the past two seasons; this is due to the nature of the fabric used, which is fur. This particular fake fur bag with leopard print would obviously appeal to a dedicated follower of fashion, willing to buy anything furry or jungle-like. It refers again to a fun loving person, who doesn't take life too seriously, the warm strokeable nature of the bag suggests that its owner is



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feline, like a cat, and likes a lot of attention. One could imagine the *Spice Girl* nicknamed Scary Spice carrying a handbag like this.

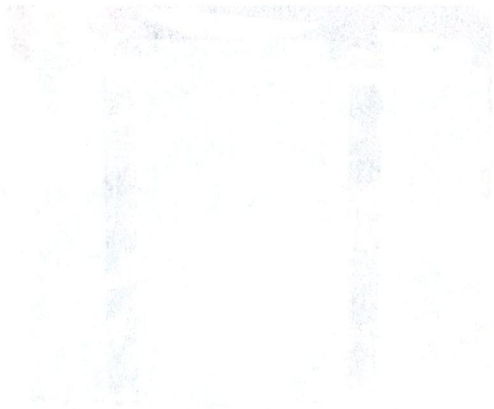


*Fig 8, GREY Handbag by Concinnelle*

Mr O'Donahue, manager of Monarc Leather Goods, stated that: "The grey wool bag was his biggest seller this year." This was probably due to the fact that grey is this season's colour, and a grey bag will match the majority of clothes in its owners wardrobe. This person is obviously aware of seasonal colours and buys according to

what will match everything else. She obviously likes to blend in with mainstream fashion and keep her identity quite anonymous and low key.

One could speculate that each of the five bags shown above represent five very different people, and a comparison could be drawn to the saying: 'Like owner, like dog'; like owner like bag. However, in the free society we live in today it would not be strange if one person owned all five of these bags, or a mixture of them. For example, a woman could carry the practical bag shown in fig 5 to work, go shopping with the Bohemian bag shown in fig 1, and visit her mother-in-law carrying the grey handbag in fig 8. By doing so she would also sport all three of these personality types. Therefore it is safe to say that by looking at the exterior of a woman's handbag one can speculate about only a small part of her personality.



Another important issue when examining the exterior of someone's handbag is how she carries it, whether dangling from the index finger, clamped underneath the arm, thrown over the shoulder or looped around the wrist. This season has seen the introduction of a new method of handling one's bag, you wear it strapped to your body. It seems to come as a climax to designers involving the bag as an integral part of fashion; these bags act as part of an overall garment. One thing which comes to mind is that these bags will actually have to fit the body unlike the average handbag. Perhaps shopping for a bag will become as difficult as finding a garment you like which actually fits you! Will they only be produced in sizes 10 – 14?

One may speculate that this fad has evolved from military and sportswear influences which fit into current ideas of comfortable wearable fashion. Magazines have been instigating this new trend with headings such as 'hands-free-bags', 'hands up,' etc. This approach to carrying one's bag has many good points and according to Linda Watson; "Strapped to your torso, the body bag cannot be left in the back of a cab." (Watson, p.53, Jan 1999).

The standard handbag has a logical sequence of events: dress first, bag later. This season, it is the other way around: bag first, then the clothes to fit around it. A plain, unfussy base seems essential, e.g. a plain white shirt or body stocking. Dolce & Gabbana produced a single pleated pocket, strapped diagonally across the body and secured at the waist, worn over a plain white tee-shirt. Miu Miu produced khaki pockets, placed at different angles, strapped around the waist and shoulder, in true military style worn over a plain shirt. These bags act as companions to whatever is being worn and act as strong fashion statements. According to Watson,

**Prada has spearheaded the move from accessory as added extra to star player. A cross between a haversack and a money belt, the new accessories are being worn in such a prime position, they subtly but surely dominate everything else. (Watson, p.53, Jan 1999.)**

One may speculate that perhaps some day the bag will act as a superior element in the world of fashion; perhaps people will go shopping for dresses to accessorise their new wardrobe of bags.



## INTERIOR QUALITIES

Perhaps the inside of a woman's handbag can give us more of an idea of who she is. The qualities of the handbag are in many ways parallel to a house because of its exterior and interior qualities. You can sometimes tell a lot more about a person's character by entering their house than looking at the outside of it. There is a television programme based on this theory called *Through the Keyhole*, in which a panel try to guess who lives in a house, by looking at the interior.



The handbag is like a small, mobile house which we use to carry our belongings around in.

Designers of Maison Moschino based one of their designs around the idea that the handbag is similar in nature to the house. They produced a bag in the shape of a house, as shown in fig 9 which even has a front door. This concept of carrying a small house is almost nomadic in concept and would allow its carrier to feel very at home wherever she may be. Morozzi claims that the bag is:

*Fig 9, Handbag by Maison Moschino*

**an architectural blueprint. The bag is not an object but a construction, destined, like the house, to accommodate a life. The difference is only a question of scale: the house accommodates life in its entirety; the bag contains only episodic traces-signs that refer to a way of life, habits, passions and inclinations, like the furniture in a residential interior. (Mazza, 1997, p.54)**

Big cities are often full of women referred to as the "bag ladies." These women, who are usually homeless, tend to carry their possessions around in plastic bags, constantly adding





to their collection what they find on the street. They literally carry their homes around in their bags.

People often carry too much in their handbags not realising the damage they are causing to their backs. Style advisor Carolyn Barwell, from *Harpers and Queen* states: "In an ideal world, all that we really should need are keys, money, lipstick and a diary." (Barwell, 1998) She suggests that women should have one make-up bag at home and another in the office so that when moving between the two you only have a lipstick and perhaps a cover-up. "Alternatively, lots of Beauty Houses now produce compacts which contain everything that you need: Lipstick, eyeliner and eye-shadow." (Barwell, 1998) Apparently the key is to think of ways to cut down on weight and break the habit of keeping everything with you. Barwell refers to this as "leaving your security blanket at home." (Barwell, 1998)

Whatever you decide to put into your handbag is down to personal choice and freedom, as no one else will get to see inside. The bag is often referred to as an object of intrigue. The objects inside are hidden away in secret from everyone. A good example of this is from the fantasy movie *Mary Poppins*, in which a magical nanny appears with a strange carpet bag, apparently empty, but anything may emerge from it:

**Then the shape, tossed and bent under the wind, lifted the latch of the gate and they could see that it belonged to a woman, who was holding her hat on with one hand and carrying a bag in the other.**

**By this time the bag was open, and Jane and Michael were more than surprised to find it was completely empty.**

**"Why said Jane, 'there's nothing in it!'"**

**"What do you mean-nothing?" demanded Mary Poppins."**

(P.L.Travers, *Mary Poppins*)

When the wind changed direction Mary Poppins packed her carpet bag and left.

In Italian to pack a bag is called "making a bag." Before leaving the house a process of elimination takes place. It is often the necessities that are thrown in at the last minute such as keys and money. However, it is the objects which remain at the bottom of the bag that may tell a better story of the owner, for example, a train ticket, a voucher, a love letter or a shopping list. Women often feel embarrassed when customs officers rummage through their intimate belongings when they check their bags.



This idea that the handbag contains something very secretive, intriguing or surprising has been used a lot recently by designers and the media. In November of this year at the MTV award ceremony in Milan, instead of the presenter revealing the name of the winner from an envelope, each one was hidden from view in a specially designed handbag, held by the presenter. This encouraged a sense of suspense and tension until the name of the winner was taken out of the handbag and read out.

Fashion designer John Galliano often employs the help of Howells an artistic director, to



help build ideas and concepts around his fashion shows. For one show Howells came up with the novel idea of sending out the invitations in evening bags, as shown in Fig 10. The exterior of these dinky bags were decorated in bold animal prints clasp framed. However the interest lay inside the funky exterior. Howells had them filled with cigarette stubs, party poppers, lipsticks and paper money from the Weimar Republic with Galliano's face stamped in the middle. Apparently the contents was then sprayed with cheap sickly perfume.

Fig 10 , Invitation for Galliano's Fashion show, (Vogue, 1998, p.78)

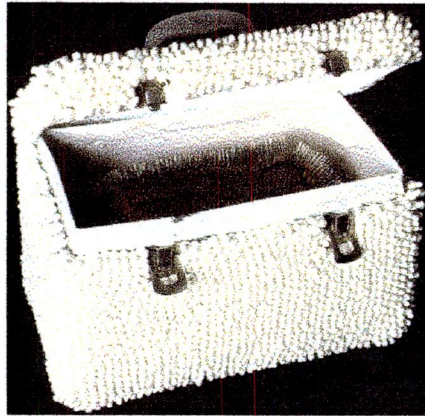
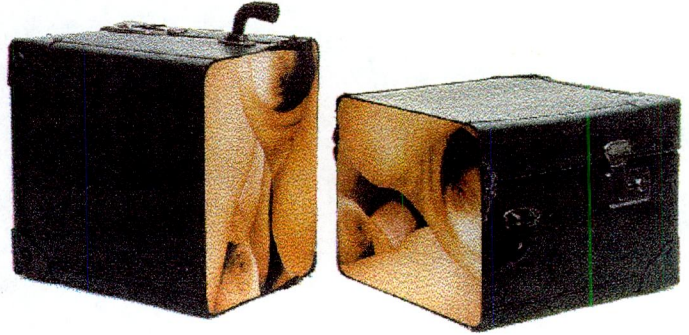
In 1996 Samuelle Mazza set up an exhibition in La Triennale in Milan. He invited artists from all over the world to explore the bag and all its associations from fashion to function. One section of the exhibition was entitled "Self Portrait in a Suitcase," in which artists and designers were invited to literally display their personality inside a suitcase. The variation in style and ideas was incredible. Some people portrayed light hearted and fun images, for example (Fig. 11) which portrays the warm glowing living room of a pianist, Others portrayed quite sad and disturbed images, as fig 11 shows a white case with the



*Fig 11 , Suitcase by Paola Risoli Turin 1994*



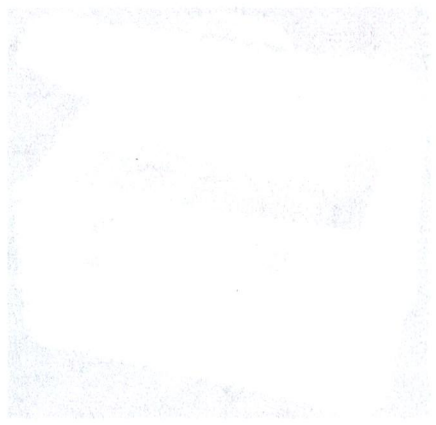
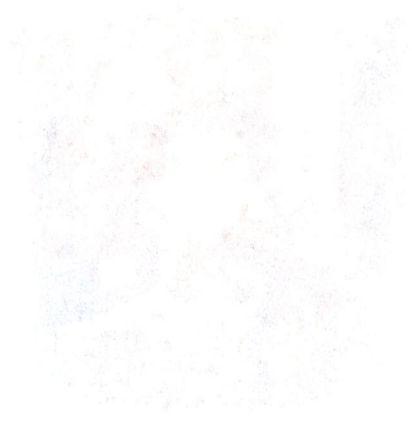
*Fig 12, Suitcase by  
Luisa Rabbia*



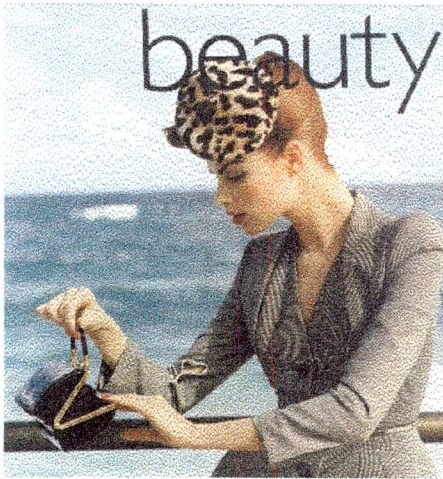
*Fig 13, Suitcase by  
Enrico Borghi*

of a hair brush inside. Others displayed a sexual approach, e.g. (Fig.12) a suitcase cut in two halves with the interior acting as a canvas for body parts. The ideas and response to this concept were endless

These ideas, however, were not entirely original, as in 1941 Marcel Duchamp finished his *Boite-en-valise (Box in Valise)* which was based around a similar idea. It was simply a summary of his entire life in a little suitcase measuring forty centimetres. It contained sixty-nine Lilliputian reproductions of the artist's work of forty years, made portable in an overnight bag.



Personalities can also be identified by what people carry around with them on a daily basis. In January's 1999 edition of *Vogue*, they had a beauty page aimed to promote beauty products. It had a very interesting article based around the theme *You are what you put in your handbag*. They interviewed a selection of celebrities to spill the beans and reveal what secret beauty products were hidden in their designer handbags. They stated that; "You can learn a lot about a woman by the contents of her handbag." (*Vogue*, p.61, Jan, 1999)



*Fig 14, Beauty*

The three people interviewed in figs 15-17 showed the contents of their handbags which gave away certain clues about their personalities. It is easy to see by looking at fig.15 that Anjelica Huston is quite status conscious as she carries a **silver plated** mobile phone around, a keen communicator, she needs the use of her address book and a note pad also. We can also tell that she is a smoker and perhaps someone who likes to remain anonymous by hiding her identity behind black sunglasses, or merely has light sensitive eyes. The contents of Penelope Tree's handbag in fig.16 is quite individual. The rosary beads and small piece of rock indicate that she is into Eastern religion, and probably a very spiritual person. The fact that she has 'keys to a safety deposit box' adds a sense of mystery to her personality and invites us to imagine what might be hidden in her safety deposit box. Karen Mulder (Fig.17), on the other hand, seems to be a very selective person who only carries the bare essentials in her handbag: a lipstick a compact and a comb. However, the name of the compact, *Estee Lauder After Hours*, provides us with evidence that she is equipped for an evening out.



*Fig 15, Anjelica Huston*

Black Valentino, Leopard lined handbag.

Containing: a silver plated mobile phone, lipstick, mascara, notepad, an address book, packet of *Marlboro* cigarettes and a pair of black sunglasses.



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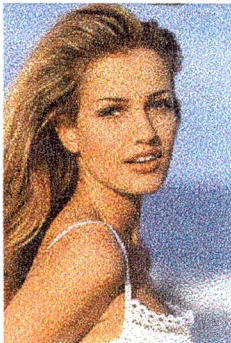
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*Fig 16, Penelope Tree*

Armani handbag

Containing: Buddhist rosary, a small piece of rock, lip balm, lipstick, *Issey Miyake L'eau D'issey Eau de Toilette*, keys to a safety deposit box, filofax, passport and a facial rescue remedy.



*Fig 17, Karen Mulder*

Chanel handbag

Containing: lipstick, *Estee Lauder After Hours Compact* and a comb.

#### THE HANDBAG IS A WEAPON OF SEDUCTION

The handbag has always been associated with the female, it adds to the list of objects women possess that men do not. Today the handbag is used as decoration as much as it is used for convenience and function. According to Flugel, "The essential purpose of decoration is to beautify the bodily appearance so as to attract the admiring glances of others and fortify one's self-esteem" (Flugel, p.20, 1955) It has been argued for this reason that the handbag act as an object of desire which intrigues the opposite sex, Casadio highlights the idea that the handbag arms a woman with fascination:

**If we apply a logical process of equivalents, then the suit, purse, and high heeled shoe become a uniform tailor made to the feminine anatomy and feminine characteristics, intended to arm a woman with fascination. But also, to increase her potential for power, for success in the dialogue battle with the opposite sex.**

(Mazza, 1997,p.29)

The handbag is a fashion supplement displayed by a person in communication with other human beings. According to Barthes, "Each society or subgroup, has its own rules regarding which body modifications or supplements should declare gender roles" (Barthes, , 1980 p.17). The handbag clearly declares the gender role of the female in society today and it is used as an integral part of fashion to adorn and attract the opposite



sex. They carry a high level of eroticism, attracting the male by intriguing him and arousing his curiosity. According to Casadio,

**Crossing one's legs becomes metaphorically insidious when the foot, shod in a low cut, pointed shoe, culmination point for the erotic gaze gliding from knee to heel, begins to undulate forward and back. It is a kick, perfectly aimed and knowingly deferred, always ready to be loosed like a lance or an arrow, as soon as anyone we are dealing with forgets the danger involved and attempts to approach beyond the limits of safety. Similarly the purse generated a codifiable series of behaviours, plainly feminine, intended to erect a regular iron curtain.** (Mazza, 1997, p.29)

It is not the clothes hanging in a wardrobe that catch a man's attention, it is a combination of the clothes, the woman who wears them, and how the fabrics enhance her gestures. Similarly, the handbag can draw attention to female gestures. A shoulder bag can flatter a straight back and slim waist, while a clutch bag can highlight graceful movements of the arm and hand. Casadio writes about how she remembers the importance of learning how to carry her handbag while growing up: "In those years, knowing how to carry a bag was equivalent to having taken classical dance lessons." (Mazza, p.28, 1997)

According to Mazza, some of his inventor friends have become so aware of the relationship between a woman and her handbag that they are working on a remote control with a photosensitive cell. "It can be attached to a bag and make it autonomous... like a satellite around the body." (Mazza, p.9, 1997) However, the thought of a handbag floating around a woman's body may take away from the security of having something to hold.

Cinema has drawn attention to this physical bond between a woman and her handbag, using the handbag almost as a prop in the game played between male and female. The handbag has been used in this way by many great female actresses and personalities including; Simone Signoret, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, etc According to Casadio, "The handbag has acquired full standing in the list of narrative motifs linked to encounters, whether chance or not, in the literature of the novel and film." (Mazza, p. 30, 1997) A typical scenario would have been an actress pretending to leave her handbag in a taxi beside her date, so that he would have to run after her with it, giving her the excuse to invite him in for coffee, to thank him for his trouble. Another act which was used numerous times was when the actress would open the flap of her handbag to subtly check her makeup before her date arrived. These handbags with hidden mirrors were very

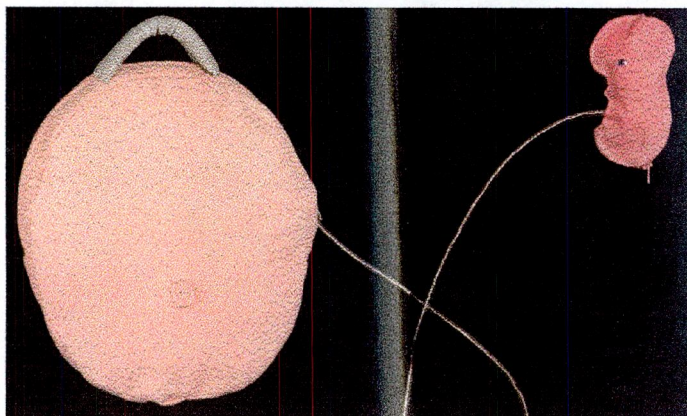


popular in the 1930's to 1940's. They enabled women to check their face and hair or powder their noses without going to the ladies. Another good use, sometimes used in film was that they could look in these little mirrors to check out who was approaching from behind. If they saw someone who they wanted to meet they simply dropped their handbag at his feet. According to Casadio:

**From Alfred Hitchcock to Brian De Palma, but also from Vincent Menelli to Luis Bunel, or Martin Scorsese to Quentin Tarantino, the cinema has immortalized many ways of dropping a purse by intent, always near somebody whose acquaintance one wants to make.**  
(Mazza, p.30, 1997)

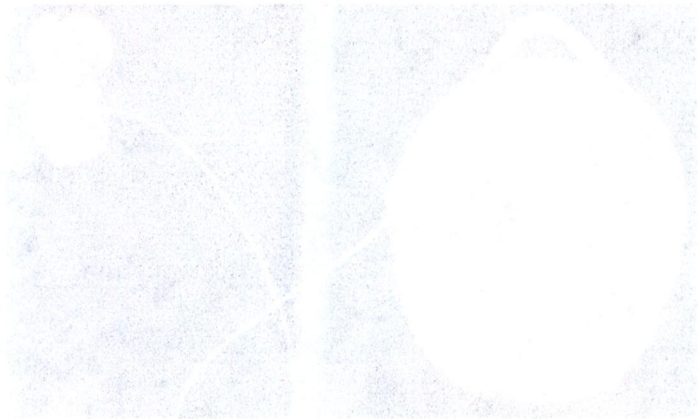
The handbag was also used as a security measure and a weapon to fend off attack. If the actress was embarrassed, wanted to avoid eye contact or wanted to stall the conversation, all she had to do was look or rummage inside her handbag for some unexplainable object which she couldn't find.

The handbag is a declaration of femininity it embodies ideas and concepts which lend themselves specifically to womanhood. According to Barthes; "Each society or subgroup of a society, has its own rules regarding which body modifications or supplements should declare gender roles; to our knowledge, all make their declarations" (Barthes, p.17,1980) In our society today the handbag is a supplement which declares female gender roles. In Fig.18 designer Chiara Passigli has made a handbag in the shape



of a woman's tummy. When unzipped, a little fabric purse in the shape of a foetus appears, attached to the lining of the bag with pipping to represent the umbilical chord.

Fig 18 , *Mama Purse* designed by Chiara Passigli, 1996.





Other designers have reinforced the feminine nature of the handbag by creating handbags in shapes of the female anatomy. For example in Fig.19 Capra has created a handbag in the



*Fig 19, Crazy Purse by Marisa Capra*

*Fig 20, Smart Bag by Fran. Montinaro*

shape of a woman's chest, creating a humorous and shocking effect. Montinaro (in Fig 20) has created quite a dramatic and frightening image of a female's head, pulling her hair up as a handle and unzipping her head to reveal a black lining in place of her brain. Both are very clever ideas which bluntly exploit and compare the female anatomy to the female qualities of the handbag.





## CHAPTER TWO: DESIGNER HANDBAGS HIGH STREET REPRODUCTIONS AND DESIGNER -MAKERS

The role of the handbag has dramatically changed over the past century. As women became more outgoing and independent they needed a different handbag for each occasion, co-ordinating with the different colours and styles in their wardrobes. Designers have provided endless variation in size, shape, colour, and function. One can now choose from three different sectors of the market: designer, high street or the latest development designer-makers.

Handbag making is a very intense labour trade which it involves skilled pattern makers, pattern cutters, stitchers and a wide range of specialised machinery and expertise. According to Mr O'Donahue, factory manager of *Monarc Leather Goods*, production of one handbag can take up to eighty five separate operations in its manufacture. Due to the advances in technology, particularly sewing machines and leather skiving machines, it is obvious that mass production is the quickest and easiest option in the handbag industry. According to Bernard,

**The twentieth century has repeatedly been characterised by cultural , social , design and art historians as the age of 'mass'. 'Mass-production', 'mass-consumption' and 'mass media' have all been quoted as the defining characteristics of western society since 1900, and from the perspective of fashion history claims have been made that the specific nature of mass society has been unavoidably, if problematically imprinted upon its clothing and its attitudes to dress and identity. (Bernard, C,p.182, 1995)**

Due to high labour costs in Ireland, Mr O'Donahue also highlighted the fact that, bag makers have turned to areas like Hong Kong and Korea where labour is cheap. South America too is entering the field, and is capitalising on its combination of cheap native leathers and cheap labour.

However, Bernard makes the point that a cult of 'the designer' revolving around ideals of couture and 'high fashion' or strong subculture identities ensured the survival of older hierarchies based on notions of quality, style and individuality...." (Bernard, C, 1995, p.183) When the hype and excitement of mass production had calmed down, people began to look to fashion houses such as Dior and Chanel for original styles and individuality.



During the 1970's there were also a lot of handbags handmade by individual designers whose freedom from the limitations of mass production enabled them to experiment with designs and materials. Due to the high costs of these materials they were catering predominantly for the luxury end of the market.

It is the designers at the experimental end of the market that are providing the high street mass producers with ideas which could be reproduced using cheaper fabrics and cheap labour. An example, this season, winter 98', has seen designers such as Orla Kiely, Jackson's and Maison de la Fousse Fourrure experiment with handbags made from real furs and sheepskin with slim leather handles as shown in Fig 22. This idea was made immediately available on the high street. Shops such as Barrets, Top Shop and Wallis are producing bags in fake furs and mock sheep skin with slim leatherette handles as shown in Fig 21.



*Fig 21, Fake fur and leatherette Handbag by Wallis £25.*



*Fig 22, Rabbit Fur and leather handbag by Jackson's £205.*

1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

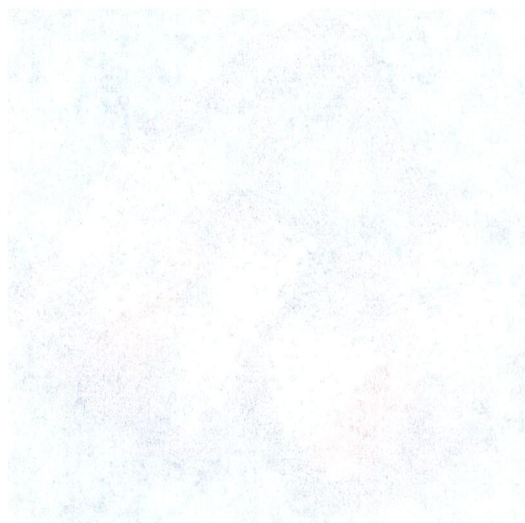
This winter has seen a refreshing alternative to the option of designer or high street bags. Models have been seen carrying hand-crafted bags, an approach to bag making which has been celebrated by an exhibition in the Crafts Council London called *Satellites of Fashion*. It may have shocked some to see such a fashionable item as the handbag in the Crafts Council Gallery, or plastered across the front of January's edition of *Craft* magazine. According to Hoggard, "This marks out a new breed of designer-maker" (Hoggard, 1999, p30) It seems that at the end of this long decade of designer brands such as Prada and Gucci, people are looking to the original ideas and quirkiness of these designer-makers. People are thirsty for the energy generated by pure unadulterated creativity. The exhibition included artists such as Emily Jo Gibbs, Asta Barrington, Nathalie Hambro and Sarah Crawford. According to Hoggard "All these designer-makers are pushing the boundaries of craft and fashion through their innovative use of materials."

Perhaps the most talked about of these designer-makers is Nathalie Hambro who recently launched a collection of hand-crafted, limited edition handbags. Her handbags are all unique. She uses extraordinary and unlikely materials such as high quality industrial metal; as shown in fig 23: felt, fine straw, PVC and horsehair. She also designs handbags exclusively for the couture house of Balmain in Paris. When interviewing Hambro, one thing which struck me was the enthusiasm shown for her own designs. She boasted of the fact that she loved to make things and nothing was more satisfying than executing her own ideas. Perhaps it is Hambro's love of craftsmanship and interest in peculiar fabrics which sets her apart from mainstream fashion designers. She explains the inspiration behind the handbag shown in fig 23.

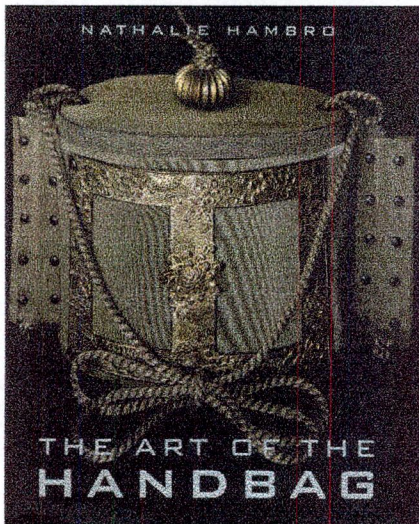


**For this design I found inspiration from a samurai's ceremonial armour. The bag has an intriguing juxtaposition of textures: sturdy industrial metal flirting with precious silk tasselling. The tassel has a leather double knot on one side and a reef on the other. (Hambro, 1998, p.68)**

*Fig 23 Tassel bags by Nathalie Hambro*



Hambro's recently published book, shown in fig 24, stresses the importance of her work to her personally. She states, "I hand-crafted my bags first and foremost for myself, to

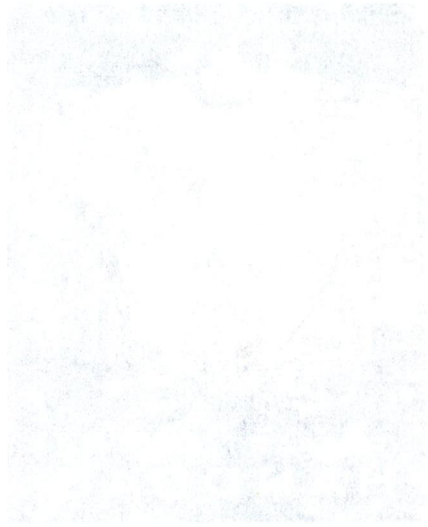


satisfy a deep sense of work ethic." (Hambro, 1998, p47) This refreshing attitude to design sets itself far from the sights of mainstream fashion designers endlessly designing for the needs of other people according to what is fashionable at that particular moment in time. She sees 'accessorising an outfit as the final punctuation of our sartorial message' and definitely believes that there is more to a handbag than meets the eye!

*Fig 24 Nathalie Hambro's Book, The Art of the HANDBAG*

One could speculate about the title of the exhibition which housed the works of these 'designer-makers'. 'Satellites of Fashion' it suggests that these handcrafted bags are related to fashion in some respects but are not part of the overall fashion rat race. Designer-maker Sarah Crawford admits: "I have no idea about fashion," (Hoggard, p35, 1998) This idea of the handbag not being a part of fashion but rather a 'satellite in orbit' contradicts the mainstream- designer ethic which has over the past years worked hard to include the handbag as an integral part of fashion.

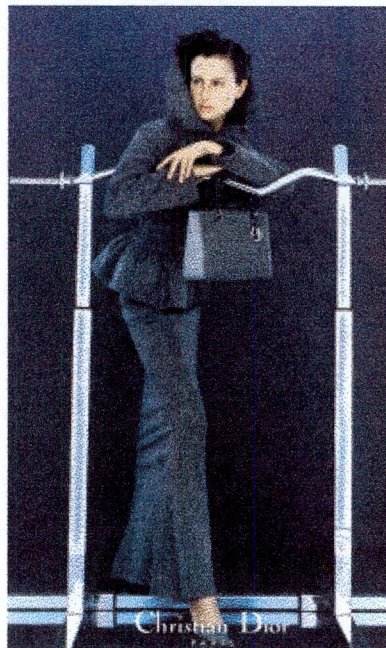




## THE BAG AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF DESIGNER FASHION

Mainstream designers see the handbag not as additional object but an essential ingredient in the world of designer fashion. Over the past decade we have seen an increase in the popularity of accessories. This rise has initially stemmed from competition between designers who have bought into the idea of selling the 'overall look' to their customer. This idea was initiated by top designers who were committed to marketing the 'overall look.' For example taking care of perfume needs, make up, jewellery, hats and in 1955, the quilted leather bag with gold chain, Chanel pioneered the ethic that all elements of an image should be sold together to create an image manufactured by the designer. Dior, Gucci and Prada, to name but a few, followed in Chanel's footsteps and created accessories which blended in with their overall image.

Couture designers such as Vivienne Westwood, Nicole Farhi and Jasper Conran carried the idea a little further by having evening bags exclusively made from the same fabrics as their beautiful evening dresses. This craze extended to shoe designers who developed their range of matching shoes and bags. Eventually the high street adopted this marketing principle also. Outlets like French Connection, Gap and Warehouse, who were all initially clothing retailers, branched out offering accessories as part of their commercial range.



*Fig 25, Christian Dior's overall look for winter*

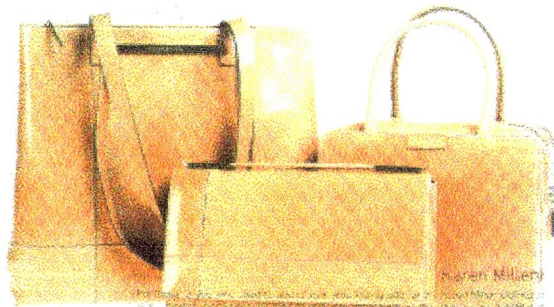
*(Vogue, December 1998 p.201)*



Christina Lee's portrait for Power

Due to the competitive nature of designers it didn't take long before they were all offering the consumer an overall look. Mulberry and Laura Ashley offered the country girl look; Dior, with a mysterious intriguing look as shown in Fig 25; Prada and Gucci, the minimalist, successful business woman look; Chanel, an attitude look; etc.

Designer and High street Handbags are no longer additional objects but are essential ingredients which contribute to the 'overall look' or image styled by the designer. A recent example of a designer who entices her customers to buy into her look is Karen Millen, an English designer who encourages 'the groovy girls to join her club'.



*Fig 26, Bags by Karen Millen.*

**“Karen Millen, The full collection can be found on the first floor of Brown Thomas along with the highly desirable accessories and handbags. The domain of power women, party animals and groovy girls, it's time to join the club,”** (Curtis, April 1998, dSide p.21)

This enables the consumer to **buy into** a look by spending less on a handbag rather than purchasing a garment for an extortionate price. Therefore, they can adopt the look by spending less. However, this initial purchase will give the consumer an appetite for the entire image, encouraging them to return for other elements of the overall look and creating more sales opportunities for the company as a whole.



### CHAPTER THREE: MARKETING PLOYS

Through various methods and marketing ploys the industry has manipulated and raised the profile of the handbag as a consumer desirable. Through this process the handbag has gained great status in the world of fashion and improved its ever increasing popularity through the power of advertising.

#### STATUS HANDBAGS

Designers pushed this idea of women buying into their look by prominently displaying their name or logo on the body of their handbags. This enabled the customer to make a clear, explicit, statement about her high status regardless of what she was wearing.

Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Gucci and Prada followed the brand image strategy which Chanel instigated in the early 1980's. Her black quilted shoulder bag with gold chain was "...the biggest money spinner for Chanel since the launch of No.5." (Jones, Nov 1998,p.13)

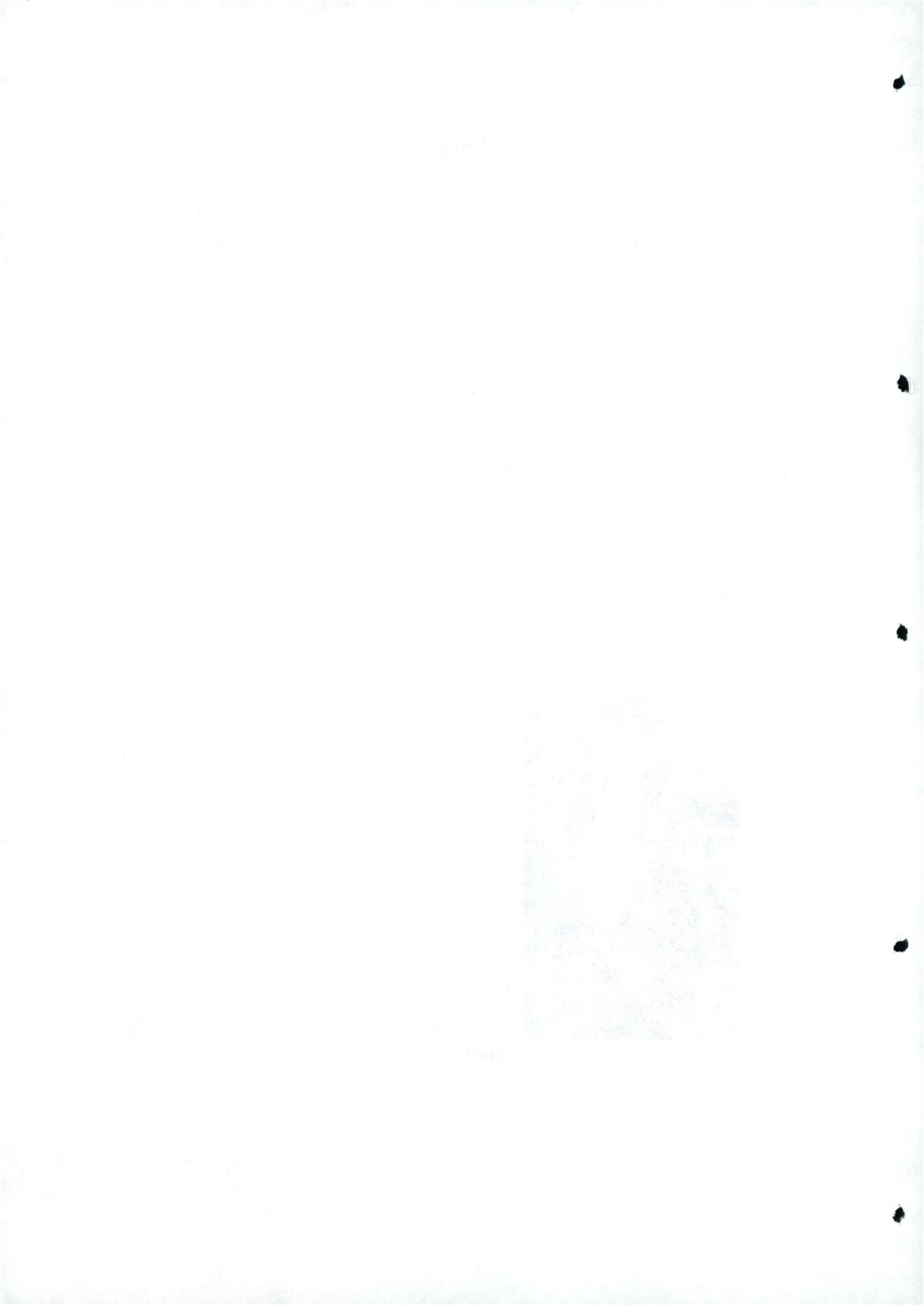
This month Liz Jones in the *Sunday Times* addressed the very delicate current issues



surrounding the status handbag. Chanel designed a shoulder bag in 1955 (fig 27 ) to liberate women from the tyranny of carrying a bag. According to Jones, the bag was soon carried by superstars such as Brigitte Bardot, Jane Fonda and Jackie O who was carrying one to match her pink Chanel suit when JFK was assassinated. (Jones, Nov 1998, p.13)

However, by the end of the 1990's so many fakes had been produced that the status handbag of Chanel has become a bit of a common joke. Jones even takes it as far as saying 'even *Dorian* from *Birds Of A Feather* has one.'

*Fig 27, Joan Collins sporting the Chanel Shoulder bag*





Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel's head stylist, has come up with a new model (Fig 28), named the 2005. It is made from aluminium and covered in leather tweed or jersey with a very obvious double C, Coco Chanel logo displayed in an aluminium circle on the side of the bag. It caused controversy based upon the fact that it wasn't a shoulder bag to liberate the hands, as Chanel intended, but a handbag. However, the new Chanel bag, nick named the "pebble," remains a status symbol which people will recognise because of its logo.

*Fig 28, The new Chanel handbag, £900,*

*(Jones, Nov 1998, p.13)*

"Chanel is unlikely to lose much sleep. Last week there was already a waiting list of more than 100 for the bag. Noel [Gallagher] is getting Meg one for Christmas, Naomi Campbell claims it's useful as a pillow on the plane." (Jones, Nov 1998, p.13)

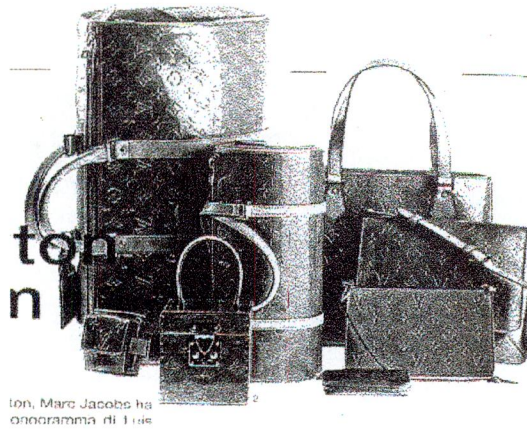
One could speculate that Lagerfeld is not only contradicting the ideals of Chanel, by designing a handbag which demands the effort of being hand held, but he is also contradicting the direction bags are taking in current trends. Vogue states that the key trends for Spring Summer 1999 are "Hands -Free bags" (Vogue, Feb 1999, p40) Designers such as Ralph Lauren, Etre, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Helmut Lang and Marni, etc. sported these hands-free bags to co-ordinate with the simple silhouettes of 1999 while Lagerfeld continued to make his individual statement with the awkward round shape of the 'Pebble.'

Marc Jacobs, the American who has recently become head designer for Louis Vuitton created his first collection of bags as shown in fig 30, using patent calfskin in iridescent shades of beige and sky blue. The designs were contemporary and enveloped the ideas of both hands-free and hand held bags. In a recent interview with the magazine *Accessories* he indicated the importance of Louis Vuitton's status monogram.





“The Louis Vuitton monogram is like an icon. I quite liked the idea of rendering it visible



and invisible at the same time in a glossy, youthful, contemporary manner.” (Jacobs, *Accessories*, Sept 1998, p 36) Towards the end of the ‘nineties we are witnessing a more subtle approach to the branding strategy. It is obvious that designers still want us to carry

Fig 30 ,Louis Vuitton bag collection

around their label but in a more discrete and

less tacky manner. Perhaps this subtle approach was influenced by Prada who chose a very minimal and simplistic approach to design, teamed with a small Italian logo. Their designs were said to have evoked thoughts of modern industrial design. The same could be said for Gucci who provide us with powerful but simple shapes and ideas recognisable by the double G logo or more recently, GUCCI, made in Italy. Another approach which aided Gucci’s brand awareness was the famous bamboo handle created in 1957. It became almost more significant than the double G logo, and well known as a Gucci trademark. This bamboo handled bag is still available and successful today, forty one years later, influencing the designs of Kenzo who released a mock crock bag with bamboo handle this season.

Another creative and subtle approach to displaying the company logo on handbags is by incorporating the initials into the functional metal fittings. Christian Dior hangs separate metal letters DIOR from the handle fitting where they cluster together in quite an abstract manner. Fendi have produced a diamond buckle in the shape of their double F monogram to



fasten their flapover mesh baguette range as shown in fig 31.

Fig 31 ,Fendi Baguette bag fastened with diamond Logo Buckle. (Vogue, October, 1998)

The 1993-1994 program is like an eye for an eye. It's the best of both worlds.



## EXPORTS

“I see this love affair with established **labels** throughout my travels in the **Middle East** – the more logos, gold buckles, braid or trim the better.” (Di Giovanni, *Vogue*, Oct 1998, p.305)

In *Vogue*'s October issue journalist Janine Di Giovanni went to Dubai where she reported about women from the Middle East and how they have been thriving on the lucrative market for international designers since the 'seventies. “Everyone thinks that underneath the *abaya*, these women are fat and ugly but they pull them off and they are slim. And they love clothes. Chanel, Chanel, Chanel. They can't get enough Chanel.” (Amal, Oct *Vogue*, 1998, P.305)



Chanel currently has three boutiques in the Middle East with plans for more. They don't design a specific line for Middle Eastern women but respect their religious boundaries which are against anything too short or too transparent.

However, they do enjoy experimental designs and have recently become interested by Alexander McQueen, now designing for Givenchy. According to Di Giovanni, they are actually quite daring and like the eccentric mix and madness of the “English naughty boy,” referring to McQueen. In general they are very influenced by English people and their way of

*Fig 32 , Arabic woman shopping at Chanel  
In Dubai (Vogue, Oct 1998, p.303)*

life. They even have an expression which means ‘beautiful like the English’. This is a great invitation for English designers to clothe them in the latest of their English trends.



Mulberry opened its first boutique in Dubai this year. Abdul Rahaman, the Director General of Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, officially opened the boutique and to celebrate they had a cake baked in the shape of a brown crocodile-skin Mulberry bag. According to Di Giovanni, one guest said she wouldn't have missed the Mulberry opening for the world: "I come because I love fashion, all the women in the Gulf love fashion. I have never been to Bond Street, but here we have everything we need."  
(Di Giovanni, Oct Vogue, 1998,p.306)



*Fig 33 ,Abdul Rahman cuts the Ribbon of Mulberry's Boutique in Dubai (Vogue, Oct 1998, p.304)*



*Fig 34, Celebration Cake baked in shape of Mulberry handbag*



The Mulberry example is one small indicator of the success of designer labels and the success designers exporting their products have achieved.

Orla Kiely, who studied in the National College of Art and Design, has been designing and producing handbags under her own label for almost four years. Within this short space



of time more than forty stores across Japan alone stock Kiely bags. She also exports to the US and continues her range in department stores in Britain, Ireland and the US. She recently attended the Celtic Festival, which takes place in Tokyo each year to encourage Irish and British designers to sell to the Japanese market. Entry is by invitation only. The Celtic Festival is only one example of how interested Japanese retailers are in British and Irish designers. According to Kiely, 'The Japanese are great. If they see something they like in big stores, they'll come

Orla Kiely

to you.' (East, 98, p.14) Kiely believes that the key to her success is simple yet functional and well thought out design. She confessed that for the majority of her designs she creates bags that she would carry herself. She also said that the majority of her time is spent researching the market and predicting what people are going to want next.

Fig 35 , Bags by *Orla Kiely*

## ONE-OFFS / SEASONAL TRENDS

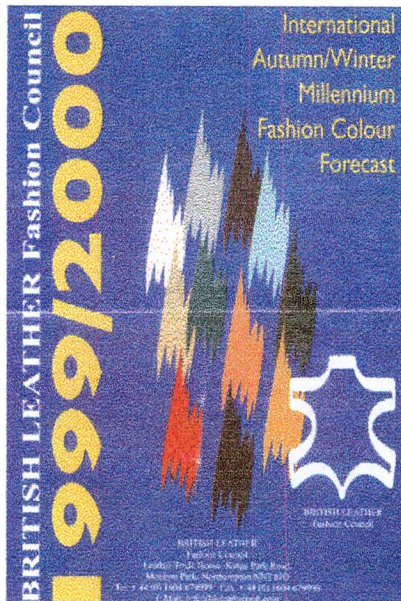
Have you ever had the feeling that if you don't buy that beautiful handbag you spotted yesterday it will be gone tomorrow? This painful but pleasing pressure which forces people into a state of spur of-the- moment buying has been very well structured and thought out in order to benefit designers and merchandisers.

Both the media and the market have established a system which deals with this seasonal 'concrete notion of the now' (Breward, 1995, p184). The British Leather Council, based in Northampton, provides accessory designers with international fashion and leather forecasts which are issued approximately one year in advance at the beginning of January



to you. (E-mail, 05/14/14) Kielty believes that the key to her success is simple yet time-consuming.

and June. This service provides an early and authoritative guidance for the global leather industry from the leather producer to the designer. In today's increasingly competitive marketplace this ensures that the system is unified. An example of a fashion forecaster which many bag designers may use, is the British Leather Council who have already designers guidelines as to where they should source their colour palette from for their Autumn/Winter 1999/2000 collections.



### Autumn/Winter 1999/2000

**Two conflicting themes will take us into the winter season. The first is austere and simple. Total looks will be expressed through dark and sober greying tones, paying much attention to detail and use of fine materials. In complete contrast, the second is a celebration of lively hot colours ready to explode into unconventional garments made from unusual materials. We look with anticipation and excitement towards a year of promise and fulfilled dreams. Expect overnight change, great inspirations and transformations. Winter 1999-2000 will be the start of a new future, having much to live up to.**

*Fig 36, BLC, July1998, Press Release*

Designers combine this colour information with new shapes and forms which will suit the fashion silhouette of that season. Fendi is a good example to highlight the urgency of one off, seasonal trends. Fendi has recently come to the fore in the world of bag designs due to the success of their 1998 model, named the baguette bag, because of its long horizontal baguette like, shape.

According to Celia Mitchell, Fendi Account manager at Harrods, the baguette, based on a vintage design from the archives, has sold out all over the world. Fendi underestimated demand and stores reported customers resorting to desperate measures in order to get to the top of the waiting lists. Some customers tried offering bribes to the staff to leapfrog the queue. (Stringer, Sunday Times Style, Dec 1998, p.10)



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

“I bumped into Normandie Keith and commented on her beautiful Fendi beaded baguette which she promptly emptied of its contents and gave to me. Who needs waiting lists when you have great mates?” ( Matthews, Sunday Times Style, 15 November 1998, p.3)

However, buyers who are so desperate to purchase this wonderful Fendi Baguette in order



to have the latest look are just a little too late. In October 1998 Fendi produced a brand new bag, born from the same aesthetic. It is a smaller and more curved version, called the ‘croissant’. It was first sighted hanging from the wrist of super model Naomi Campbell.

“ Though Naomi was dressed head to toe in skin-tight denim, all anyone could look at was the exquisite red suede croissant swinging from her skinny wrist. It was small, it was cute and, best of all it was brand, spanking new (SundayTimes Style, December,1998, p.10)

*Fig 37 ,Kim Stringer with Baguette and Croissant Fendi bags*

The ‘croissant’ will be available in the UK as of February 1999 and consumers are so anxious that they will miss this next trendy ‘one off’ that orders have been placed already. In the words of Kim Stringer, “The croissant offers a crumb of hope to all those well-heeled women who failed to get their teeth into a baguette.” (Stringer, *Sunday Times Style*, November 1998, p.10)



## HANDBAGS IN ADVERTISING

Handbag advertisements occur in specialist accessory magazines and fashion magazines which are available to women all over the world. The popularity of accessories over the past decade has greatly increased due to a wider range of choice and stimulation of desire through media coverage and magazine advertisements.

## IDENTITY

Media images provided by magazines dictate fashion in our ever changing culture today. It has been said that the power of photographic imagery in magazines is powerful enough to confirm a woman's personal identity. According to Breward,

**Alongside other social institutions such as the family, school, the Church and other media, women's magazines contribute to the wider cultural processes with define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time. In this exchange with the wider social stricture, with processes of social change and social continuity, these journals help to shape both a woman's view of herself and society's view of her....but these periodicals are about more than women and womanly things, they are about femininity itself, as a state, a condition, a craft and as an art form which comprise a set of practices and beliefs... everyone born female is a candidate for their services and sacraments... here is a very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular formula world-view of the desirable, the possible and the purchasable. (Breward, p.195, 1995)**

This complex and crafted system of advertising is probably the most successful marketing ploy of all time. When shopping for a handbag the idea of buying something sensible to cater for one's specific needs takes a back seat to buying the latest and most fashionable design, in the season's colour. According to Wills, "When anything is wanted on the grounds that it is fashionable a rational basis seems farther to seek." (Wills, p.159, 1983) It is the job fashion publications such as Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar and Cosmopolitan, to guide people and advise them what's new and how to wear it effectively. According to Perna, "Fashion publications are the least expensive and render the most complete fashion information service." (Perna, p.119, 1990)

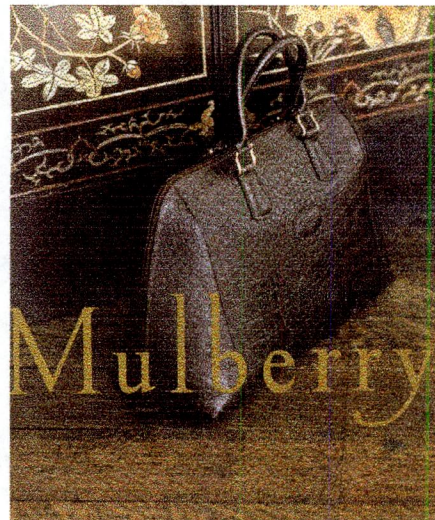


The buyers, forecasters and advertising staff work together to achieve an effective presentation and, more importantly, a profitable result. The fashion forecaster provides background information, catch phrases and buzzwords and the general mood and feeling of a season. According to Perna,

**The art style, copy flair and layout must always be consistent with the corporate stance and compete alongside the adds of retailing rivals. The goal is to be memorable by virtue of its distinctive personality. Good advertising campaigns exploit the merchandise benefits inherent in the buyer's selection to the fullest.** (Perna, p.224, 1990)

The process of creating and producing a promotional advertisement is so complex and time consuming that it usually begins three to eight months before the actual product/handbag is available for purchase. Often the success of a product hinges on the advertising campaign, therefore it is considered a priority in the budget.

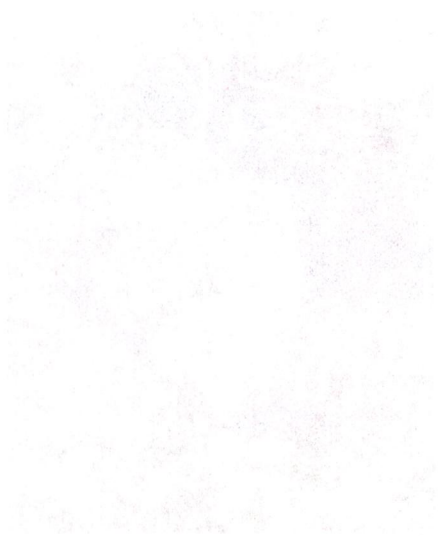
#### THE MOOD AND IMAGE



*Fig 38 , Mulberry Advertisements, Nov, 1998*

An approach often used in handbag advertisement is the use of an overall mood or image to sell a product as discussed in Chapter Two. The consumer can buy into this overall look by purchasing one element of it such as the handbag. It is the advertisement which convinces the consumer of the image they are selling. According to Perna, the theme is of great importance: "The fashion director holds seasonal training sessions to explain the complete fashion picture from the skin out and from head to toe, highlighting the seasonal





promotional theme.” (Perna, p.225,1991) Mulberry use the ‘country girl’ theme to promote their handbags. For example, the curly haired girl in fig 38 wrapped in earthy coloured tweed, with a glowing healthy complexion, gives an instant impression of nature, and life away from the city. This theme runs through all their advertisements as shown fig 30 where the handbag sits on old wooden floor boards, propped up against a pannelled wall papered in traditional farmhouse wallpaper. According to Wills, this thematic approach is typical:

**In fashion photography, the world is usually photographed as a décor, a background or a scene, in short, as a theatre. The theatre of Fashion is always thematic; an idea is varied through a series of examples or analogies. (Wills, p.310, 1987)**

## FANTASY



*Fig 39 , Louis Vuitton Advertisement, November 1998.*

Fantasy is used in many of handbag advertisements, creating images and scenes which are not true to life or every day scenarios. This encourages the consumer to use her imagination, picture herself in that situation or dream of having that product. Some advertisements push these ideas to the limits and create scenes which are almost pantomime-like. Wills describes this approach as, “Mockery,...the woman is caught in an amusing attitude, or better still, a comic one; her pose, her expression are excessive.” (Wills, p.302, 1987) Louis Vuitton have recently opted for this dramatic approach to advertising their handbags. The scene created in fig 39 depicts a woman fighting with herself, or perhaps her twin, over the latest Louis Vuitton handbag. She is dressed in



Fig. 10. (a) and (b) are the same as in Fig. 9. (c) is the same as in Fig. 9.

agreen top which ruffles at the neck like a clown's outfit. Her makeup is also painted in a quirky manner with white foundation, bright red lips and dark eyes; her hair then explodes into a mattress of red fuzz. This outrageous scenario draws the eye to the object of desire, the handbag, which they are fighting over. According to Wills, this angle of fantasy in advertisement highlights the product which is the only object of reality in the picture: "Everything which is not the garment, is exorcised, rid of all naturalism: nothing plausible remains but the garment." (Wills, p.303, 1987) He then goes on to say that this approach 'does not suppress meaning; it points to it with a finger.'

#### BUZZWORDS AND CONCEPTS



*Fig 40 , Tanner Krolle Advertisement, Dec, 1998.*

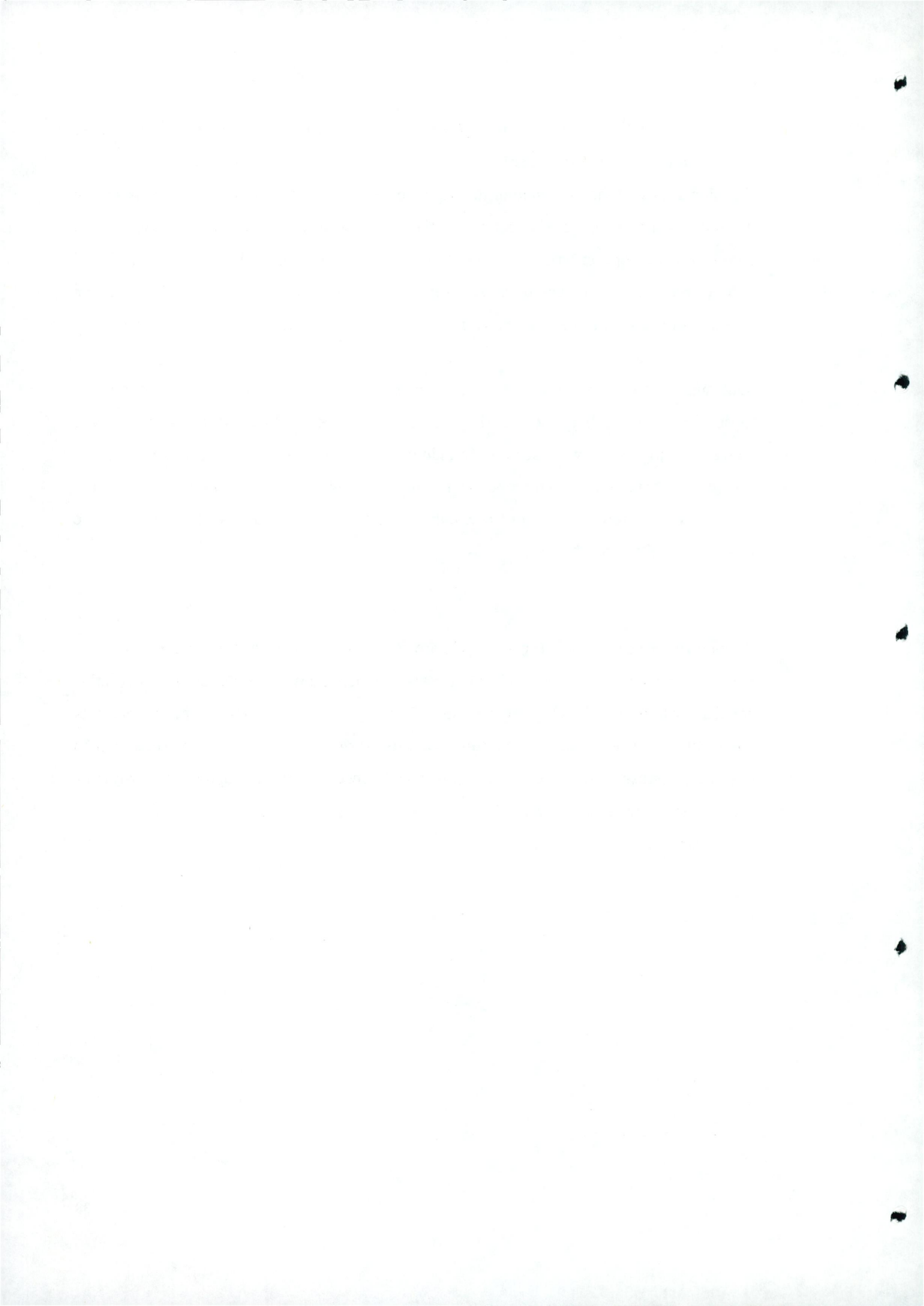
Concepts and buzzwords are often used in handbag advertisements and are used to encourages the consumer to ponder over the add, trying to figure it out. A good example of this approach is the recent campaign of *Tanner Krolle* fig 40. The clever advertisement provokes the consumer to question its meaning, which is never really answered. This encourages the consumer to look out for the next edition in search of another clue. The advertisement takes up two pages, the left side showing a simple but clear photograph of

Front Treatment, Inc. 1908

the handbag, stating the information about where the handbag can be purchased (Tanner Krolle, 38 Old Bond Street, Harvey Nichols Leeds, Harrods Egyptian Room.) However, the interest lies on the right side of the page where a photograph of the same bag is shown in x-ray form to reveal the object inside the handbag, in this case a pistol. Below this picture a small caption written in a faint but readable font states: 'Private Property Since 1856'. Each advertisement portrays a different handbag design with a different object inside, for example a shell or a baby doll.

One suggestion for the meaning of this concept is that it is inspired by similar ideas to those discussed in Chapter One, that the nature of the handbag exterior intrigues and entices one to wonder what secrets are hidden inside. Morozzi sums up this concept by saying that, "The house accommodates life in its entirety; the bag contains only episodic traces-signs that refer to a way of life, habits, passions and inclinations, like the furniture in a residential interior." (Mazza, p.54, 1997)

If this is the concept which Tanner Krolle are using then perhaps the sequined evening bag in Fig 32 , which contains a pistol, suggests that the female who purchases and carries this handbag will be literally 'out for the kill.' This suggestion also stems from the idea that the handbag is a '**weapon of seduction**' (discussed in Chapter One) which, according to Casadio, increases "her potential for power and success in the dialogue-battle with the opposite sex." (Mazza , p.29,1997)



## CONCLUSION

By carrying out this investigation, it has been established that in our culture today the handbag is not purely functional, it offers many psychological hints about its carrier and attitudes of modern day society.

The handbag may indicate feminine characteristics of mystery, modesty and sensuality. Its contrasting exterior and interior qualities can be compared to that of a house, the difference being a question of scale. The true character of a person may be revealed by what is contained inside her handbag. According to *Vogue*, 'You are what you put in your bag'. It also acts as a weapon of seduction and an object of desire, which arms a woman with fascination and aids her in her battle with the opposite sex.

It is clear that the handbag plays an important role in a women's life, which provides the handbag industry with a very high demand and wide market. Over the past century designers have skilfully mastered this industry to meet with the needs of women around the world. Accessory sales have escalated as a result of the various marketing ploys which have changed consumer attitudes. However, this year has seen the birth of a new breed of designer, the designer-maker. Nathalie Hambro, an instigator of this new direction, has brought to our attention the importance of 'hands on creativity' which highlights the importance of enjoying the creative process of handbag design. Designer-makers have challenged the idea that the handbag is an integral part of the fashion system by referring to it as a 'satellite' of fashion.

It will be interesting to watch the development of these designer-makers and monitor how they will compete or fit in with the booming success of mainstream fashion designers and mass producers who have mastered many marketing ploys to increase the popularity of accessories. Consumers can now buy into the overall designer look or image. After all, it is easier and cheaper to go out and buy a Gucci handbag than a Gucci dress. Name branding or labelling a handbag with the designer's name or logo has given women a feeling of status and has benefited company sales, as did the idea of seasonal trends which created a feeling of "the now" and encouraged spur-of-the-moment spending.





Perhaps the most successful marketing ploy of all is the complex and crafted system of advertising . The media provides consumers with a wider range of choice, and encourages them to buy the latest handbags on the market. This manipulation of consumer craving is tempted through use of photography. Some advertise the overall mood or theme in order to promote their product, enticing consumers to buy into their image. Others promote images of fantasy, encouraging the consumer to imagine herself in that situation with that handbag. Some skilfully base their photographic images around the psychological implications of the handbag, intriguing the inquisitive eye and conveying the idea that there is a lot more to the handbag than functional values!

Through researching and writing this thesis my studio work has benefited immensely. Not only have I gained a better understanding of current trends and the designer market, but I have fuelled the body of my designs with the notions suggested in Chapter One that 'you are what you put in your handbag'. I am currently working on three collections: hands-free bags, tote bags and handbags. All three collections have a running theme based on the words of Morozzi, "The house accommodated life in its entirety; the bag contains only episodic traces- signs that refer to a way of life, habits, passions and inclinations like the furniture in a residential interior" (Mazza, 1997,p.54) The bags are eye-catching in terms of shape and colour but when opened the lining fabric depicts photographic images of objects which refer to different people's personalities. Monarc Leather Goods have kindly agreed to make up some designs for my end of year degree show which has given me great insight into the nature of design for mass production. I also plan to create a few bags myself in order to fully enjoy the pleasures of the hands-on creativity described by Nathalie Hambro.

I conclude by saying that there is more to a handbag than meets the eye and without a doubt it is "NOT JUST A HANDBAG."



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