

SOUL to SOLE







creative product design : the shoe

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SYNOPSIS

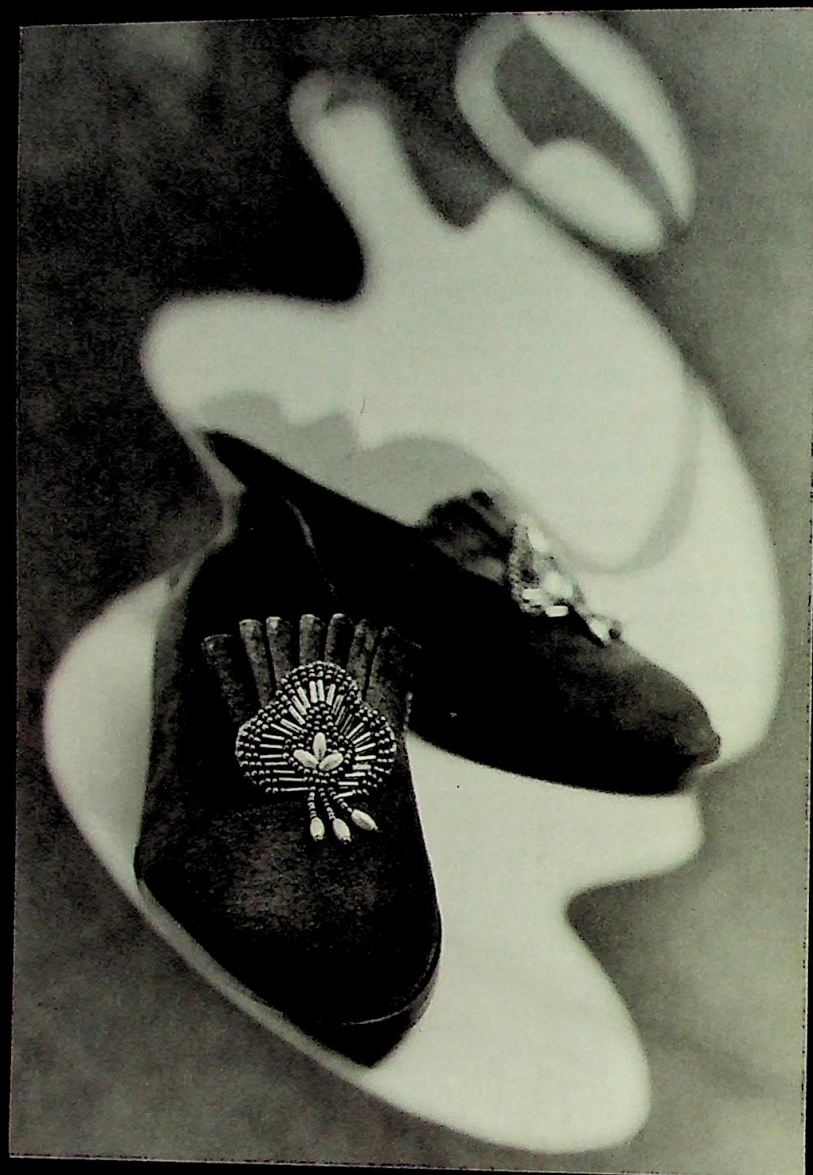
The main aim of this thesis was to examine the shoe as an example of creative product design.

Firstly, it assesses the impact fashion has on the design of shoes. The concept of fashion versus practicality is explored in an effort to determine whether the two apparently divisive elements can be juxtaposed successfully.

Secondly, the design developments that occurred due to mass production are considered. The supposition that mass manufacture often involves a deterioration in quality is discussed. Finally, whether the craft of shoemaking itself suffered as a result of the new developments; and the implications that mass production held for the buying public, are examined.

Thirdly, the achievements of principal designers are examined with particular reference to design innovation and the use of materials. During research, it became apparent that the old designers have provided inspiration for many contemporary designers. An interview with a contemporary shoe designer bears this out and may explain the resurgence of the study of shoe design in the eighties.

The final chapter does not relate to design but deals with the psychological aspects of the shoe, in so far as what the shoe communicates to the observer/wearer are examined. Ultimately, the factors contributing to the evolution of shoes as a cult object are discussed.



INTRODUCTION

In most product design, a well designed object is judged by the criterion that form follows function - the elegance of line, its suitability for intended use, and the judicious use of colour renders the most effective design.

This thesis deals with the shoe as an example of product design that seems to, in many cases, ignore this dictum and get away with it.

Many shoe styles have sacrificed the 'elegance' of line to incorporate bizarre shapes which delight or dismay the onlooker as the case may be. As regards suitability for intended use, many more have been outrageously impractical yet have enjoyed tremendous popularity. The use of colour, in some cases, has been anything but 'judicious' employing a multitude of colours that can affront the visual senses of even the most sincere aficionado.

It is intended to prove that shoes are one case in point where the dictum should be read as form follows fashion as opposed to form follows function. It is one of the few areas of product design where fashion is paramount, superseding function in all but the most utilitarian applications that are specifically job-related.

Secondly, it sets out to prove that the transformation from a craft industry to mass manufacture benefited the shoe industry bringing with it creativity and new materials; thus enabling the general public to be 'well-heeled' in a literal sense if not an actual financial one.

The third premise that the thesis deals with is the 'symbolic interactionist perspective in sociological terms' (Kaiser, (1983:127) otherwise described as the way in which individuals respond towards objects on the basis of what these objects say to them.

Primarily, shoes like all clothes, are for sex-attraction purposes. 'people get dressed to get laid,' (Katherine Hamnett, interview, 1988) Some shoes whisper sexual intent, others positively scream, depending on your personality - the shoe is a vehicle for such displays.

CHAPTER ONE

Solely for Fashion? - fashion versus practicality

'Fashion intelligence is a rarity' (McDowell, 1989:202) This author is inclined to agree but regards it nonetheless as a very necessary ability for a good designer. To be sufficiently attuned to the zeitgeist of the moment is essential to understand and actuate what is to follow. If this still can be combined with the ability to produce a limitless flow of ideas there lies tremendous scope for a designer irrespective of his or her discipline.

By observing the changes in other aspects of social design, architecture, product design, the graphic arts, and more recently cars, it is possible to see how fashion is part of an integral whole and not as some tend to think, clothes alone.

(Wilson, 1969 :2)

Unfortunately, this 'zeitgeist' has become inextricably linked with fashion in clothing because that is the area where it is most instantly appreciated or deprecated as the case may be. But as can be understood from Wilson, the fashion we wear is merely the final link in a sociological chain:

Fashion begins its change firstly in music, which concerns a relatively small percentage of people. It is then picked up and unconsciously interpreted in architecture, which is a transference from appreciation by the ear to that of the eye, concerning a larger percentage of the population. Then, because architecture, especially in homes and offices, demands a matching interior [most product design enters here], it increases its influence to an even bigger proportion which includes most of us, and changes the things we live with. Cars and transport of all kinds add their demands at this point and govern the shapes and lengths of the clothes we wear. Finally, although fashion designers will deny that they are last in the sociological cycle, the accumulation of all this creates a demand for clothes to match the world we live in and the kind of life we must lead within it. (ibid.: 3)

Although this may appear to exhibit somewhat tenuous connections and be over simplified it does contain a great deal of truth and has been explained in great detail by costume historians like James Laver and Aileen Ribeiro. But of course, this transition and interpretation of fashion does not occur in clothes as quickly as Paris or Milan would have us believe. Instead, it occurs by gradually absorbing the extraneous influences and finally manifests itself in the clothes and shoes we wear.

To fully expand this argument in different design disciplines would take considerably more than one thesis; but in shoe design this correlation between the 'spirit of the age' and fashion can be more easily identified.

The Plantagenet years 1154 - 1399 are constantly made reference to in the history of costume.

These are the years of extravagance, colour and decoration...building had now reached magnificent proportions. This was the perpendicular period of design and it was during those years that the ever-present parallel between architecture and clothes was at its clearest (ibid p. 69)

It was at this time that the pointed toe in shoes reached its famous and excessive extremes. The pointed steeples of architecture paralleled with the design of all clothes and shoes of the time. The excessively pointed shoe known as the 'poulaine' came into fashion at this time.

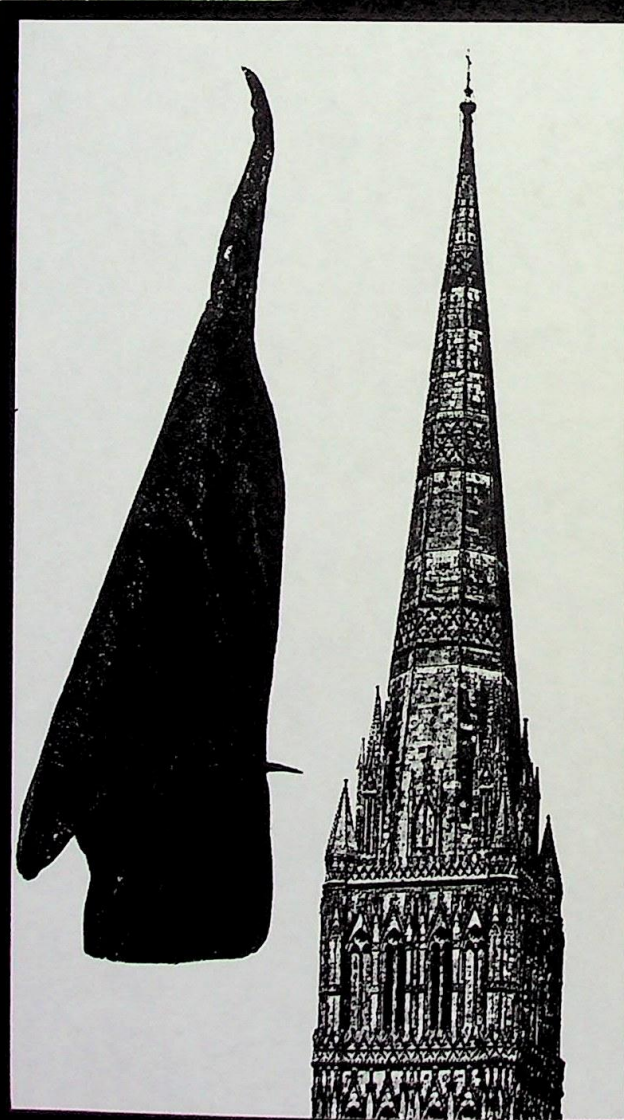
Shoes became an indication of one's social position, the highest in rank wearing the longest toes. Kings and princes could wear toe points two and half feet long; (!) nobles, two feet; knights eighteen inches; the very rich a foot long. Lower orders were restricted to six inches. (Ledger 1985 :50).

Even though the style enjoyed immense popularity it was not in the least practical. It was long and tapering and compressed the toes greatly. History blames the death of Duke Leopold of Austria on this shoe.

It is said that at The Battle of Sempach on Lake Lucerne in 1356, when Duke Leopold of Austria was



'poulaine'



killed by the Swiss, that the knights, having dismounted before going into battle, were forced to strike off the long points of their shoes with their swords before they could advance.
(Ledger 1985 :51)

A comical scene no doubt albeit not for the Duke. But it does emphasise that practicality has rarely been the major consideration ^{for the medieval or renaissance} with the favoured classes, for whom appearance has been paramount.

Churchmen condemned the shoe as being lewd and provocative. The long toe was clearly phallic, even more so when padded with horse hair and curled up at the tip. A philanderer would enjoy

sliding a foot under a woman's skirts as he sat opposite her at table, or with his friends on the street corners, wagging his toes suggestively as the girls walked by.

(McDowell, 1989 : 27)

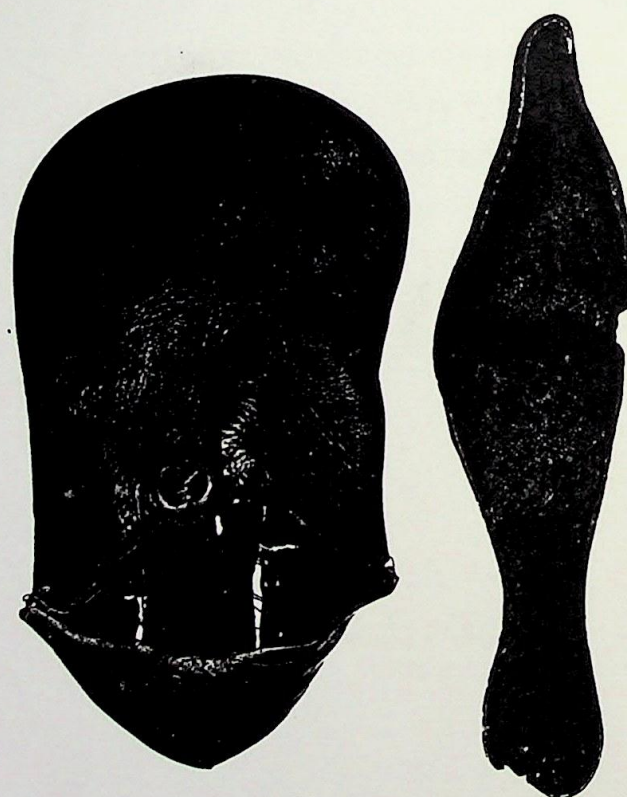
A Papal Bull was issued in 1368 condemning the poulaine as a scoffing against God and the church. Pope Urban V (1362-1370) censured religious leaders for wearing them; but words from the hierarchy had little effect. In fact the fashion became even more exaggerated. Then Parliament took over and decided to pass an act to regulate wearing apparel in accordance with rank and wealth.

Long pointed toes were forbidden to those with an income of less than £40 a year.

(Ledger 1985, :48)

In the end, the poulaine became far too common for the fashionable. Even young boys had adopted them. The transience of fashion made the swing away from the narrow - style to a style of the complete opposite. Its place was taken by the broad-toed shoe so familiar in Holbein's paintings. 'The pendulum swung wide and shoes, clothing and architecture went "square" (ibid: 58)

Although comfortable it certainly lacked glamour. Referred to with names such as 'the duck's bill' and 'the cow's mouth'



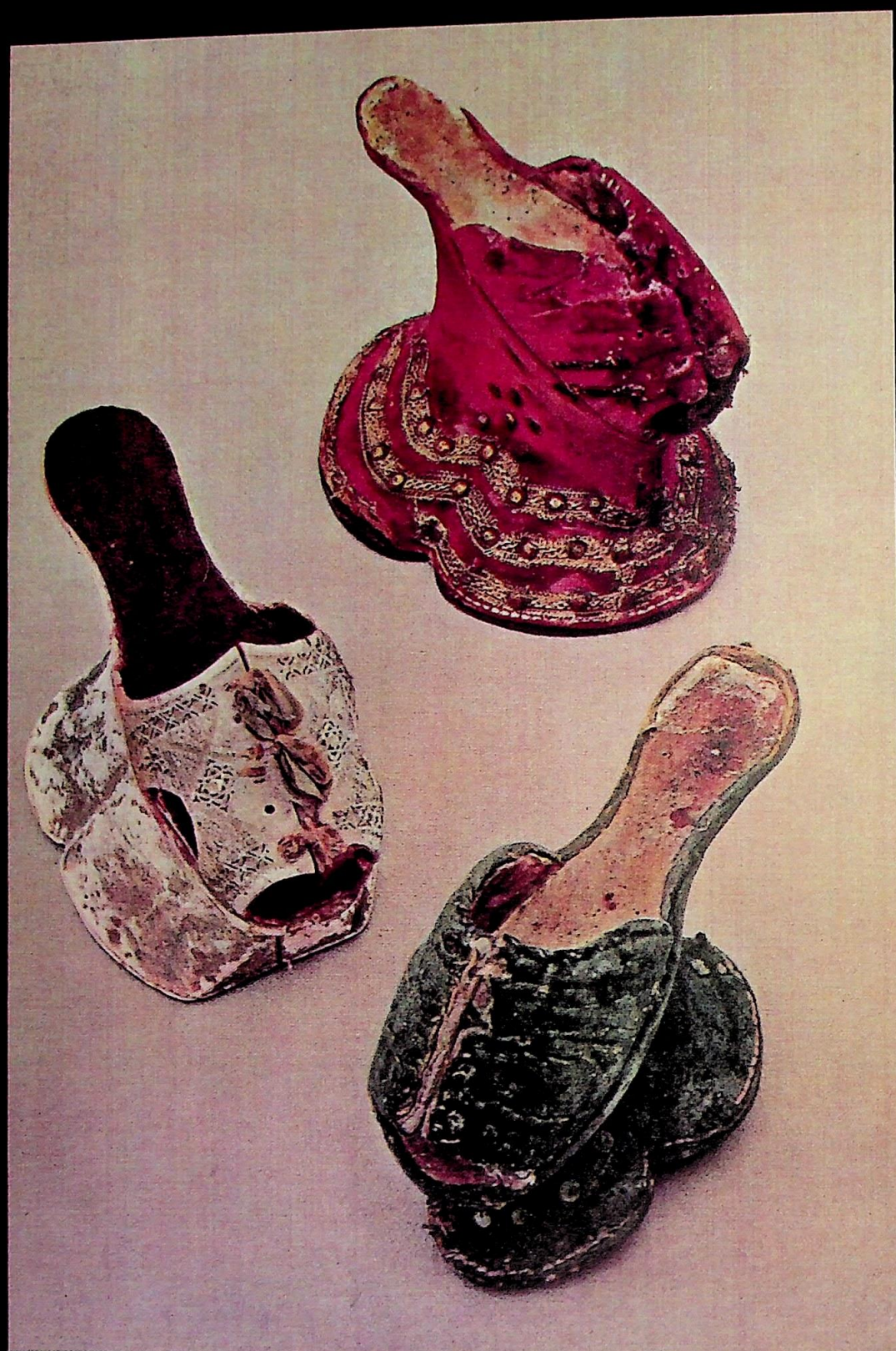
diff shoes soles from 15th century

didn't do much to add chic but because it was completely different in fashion cycle it found favour.

This repetition can again be noticed in our own century. In the fifties and early sixties the thin silhouette of the evening sandals by Perugia and 'winkle-pickers' of the sixties were replaced by the platform sole of the seventies. While the poulaine was one of the more controversial of male modes, Venice in the early sixteenth century produced the most extreme style of female shoe ever seen - the chopine. Chopines were shoes incorporating pedestals of cork or wood and some were shaped like a hoof. Others had broad tops and bottoms and looked like hour glasses. They varied in height from circular blocks a few inches tall to columns up to 24 inches. Leather or fabric shoes or mules were affixed to the top of these stilts. The stilt was often covered in kid or velvet in various bright colours. It was suggested by some to be the invention of jealous Italian husbands. It certainly entailed very cumbersome movements thus making any illicit liaisons very difficult. Needless to say the church did not rush to condemn this particular style. On the contrary the church approved of these shoes because, being so high, they did not encourage ease of movement of any kind - especially dancing - and consequently they reduced the 'possibility of sin' (Girotti, 1986:139)

Economic growth and development imported the idea of the chopine from the East. It seems certain that the Turks already used high wooden bridge - shaped clogs to accede to the baths.

The chopine brought to the notice of Europe the advantage of raising the foot from the ground. It was evident that this realisation was to have far-reaching consequences. The history of footwear is inextricably linked to the history of transport and for every century except our own, the commonest means of travelling from one place to the next was



'chopines'



Louis XIV and his red heels

by walking or riding. The need to elevate the foot from the dirt of the streets and roads brought the overshoe known as the 'pattino' or patten into use. It was a more practical counterpart of the chopine and was widely used well into the middle of the nineteenth century. Early pattens were made of a shaped wooden block of up to two inches in height into which the foot, wearing a shoe, could be placed. This construction enabled people to walk without sinking into the mud. This was especially appropriate since looking at the vast majority of women's shoes that have survived from the past, it becomes clear that they were not worn out doors without protection. Many are in rich satins and brocades and often elaborately embroidered; certainly not strong enough to withstand the dirt of the streets on their own.

The attempt to find the solution to the problem of being raised above the dirt but in a more elegant manner with the patten or chopine, led to the introduction of heels into Europe during the reign of Elizabeth in Britain 1558 - 1603.

The heel spelled the demise of the concept of shaping each shoe to the foot, ie. of having a right and left shoe. Shoemakers found it uneconomic to make the enormous quantity of lasts required to produce shoes which would have a heel and also be shaped for the foot. Special lasts had to be devised so that the heel did not unbalance the shoe. Cork, wood and leather in layers were used to build up heels. It was to be many years before the correct position that gave the foot the support it needed was devised. And the shaped shoe disappeared until the nineteenth century, when the development of the pantograph made it possible to make mirror-image boots in quantity.

New developments in fashion always diffused down initially from the royalty in previous times. During the reign of Louis XIV fashion enjoyed an extremely high profile. Like most of the royal heads of Europe, Louis XIV adopted red as

David Bowie aka ziggy



Glam-rock at its peak



The allure of the high heel

the colour of kingship: his wooden heels were covered in red leather. Red heels were one of the few seventeenth century fashions to appear in England before being seen in France. 1660 portraits of Louis XIV show him wearing shoes with broad vamps* and high red heels.

For two hundred years, every conceivable type of heel was tried by both sexes until it became an almost exclusively feminine feature in the early 19th century.

In the 1970s, music led the way in a new radical style in the guise of glamorous rock artists like David Bowie. In 1973, he 'presented a radical attack on the way in which dress encodes and prescribes gender'. (Evans, 1989 :51) He embraced masquerade and artifice with heels that were always glamorous, high-heeled and platform-soled. Apart from that brief period however high heels have been linked exclusively with femininity. High heels are one of the greatest causes of discomfort to women. If they are worn continually from adolescence on, they deform the muscles of the feet and legs so that it becomes even more painful and difficult to walk in flat soles.

Obviously, practicality has little to do with female high heels. They are essentially about allure. Despite the fact that they make standing for any length of time painful, walking exhausting and running absolutely impossible they have become an essential part of woman's costume in the 20th century. One female author describes fashionable footwear as 'a strategic weapon'

The strategic device of high shoes has been employed to make sure that once you have caught a woman she cannot run away again, and even if she stays around she cannot keep up with you....The halting, tiptoe gait they produce is thought provocative - perhaps because it guarantees that no woman wearing them can outrun a man who is chasing her. (Evans, 1989: 226,227)

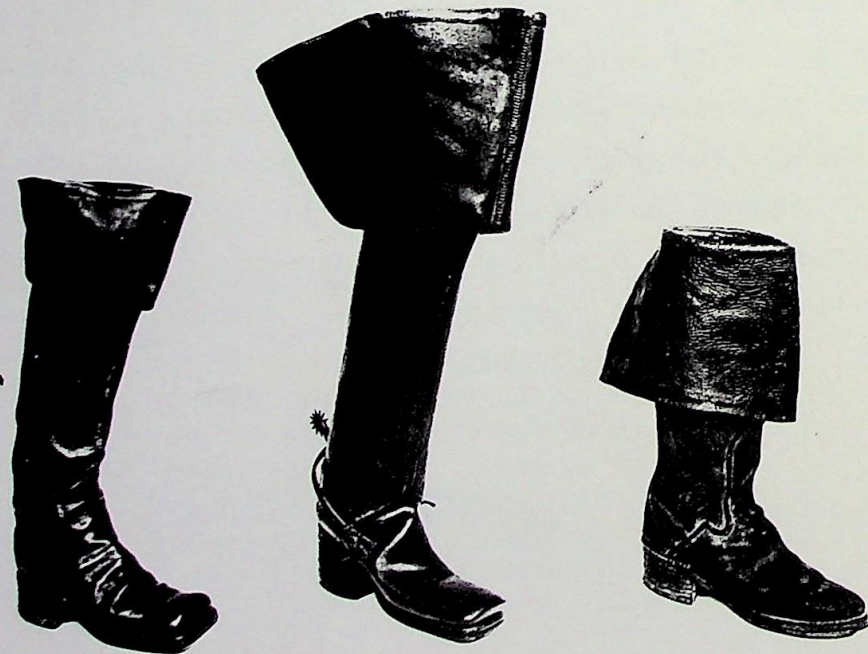
* vamp: upper covering front of the foot up to the base of toe joint.

She does pronounce, however, that 'all these devices have been perceived as beautiful, not only by men but by women.' Colin McDowell has no question on the subject. He emphatically declares that 'This discomfort has been happily ignored by women' (McDowell, 1989: 11). Of course, it is true that the discomfort produced by heels has been ignored albeit not 'happily' and it is rather an indictment on the part of the shoe industry since fashion is essentially about allure that consumers should still regard 'sexiness' with a 'lack of comfort' in the context of the high-heeled shoe. (Research survey, 1983 :137)

So can the shoe be practical and fashionable at the same time? When horse-riding was a common mode of transport it had a considerable effect on the design of men's heels. High heels for men helped keep the foot in the stirrup and aided control of the horse during hard riding. They could not be functional if the heel was too narrow and tapering, as it would be liable to snap; and if it were too high, walking was difficult. So male high heels were a response to a practical need; they had to be dual-purpose, suitable for riding and convenient for walking. These reasons were responsible for the shape of men's boots most of which had high heels until the middle of the 19th century when, with improved coach design and the development of the railways, there was less demand for a boot designed to be pre-eminently for riding.

As a result, for the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries boots were the glamour footwear for men. Although they changed shape, were sometimes higher and sometimes wider, their messages did not alter. Boots were macho. The male boot is the best known form of machismo footwear and consequently has always been considered fashionable by men. The cowboy boot is a direct descendant - its aggressive character of hardy toughness reflecting a kind of 'strut' and 'swash buckle personality' (Rossi, 1989, 114).

16th, 17th century boots



The cowboy boot has always been associated with the nomadic rebel and found its way into popular music, time and again especially among guitar players. The decorated cowboy boot enjoyed a massive resurgence in high street popularity in 1989. Cited as the 'epitome of cool' (Elle : 102) and described in terms of 'brutal leather' (ibid :102) the boot remains one of the most savagely sex-ridden of all male footwear styles - chauvinistic, flamboyant and aggressive. The urban cowboy threatens to replace the traditional cowboy in the iconography of heroism, however. Instead of a horse, he rides a motorbike. Motorcycle boots are usually knee high, heavy and leathery, frequently with wide and thick straps, heavy soles and loud heels they convey an image of being:

hostile, ruthless and challenging, which is precisely the image the wearers wish to transmit.
(Rossi, 89 : 114)

Paradoxically enough, these boots seem to be very fashionable and yet very comfortable, this author is 'reliably' informed.

It would appear then that even in the domain of footwear men have been able to secure the best compromise - comfortable, practical footwear that is essentially fashionable. The (timberland boot and the elegant conservative Oxford style so popular with men are further examples of this. They have remained in fashion and have become timeless classics. Of course, it's not because men are more sensible, it's simply because their audience - women, show far more good will, and are more forgiving than most men.

Women are not so fortunate. One type of practical footwear that has proved very popular with girls [but not women] in the last decade has been the Doc Marten boot. When it first came onto the scene, worn by girls, some men would view them derisively with accusations of being butch or lesbian etc. The Doc Marten boot is comfortable to be sure and fashionable but unfortunately directly borrowed from men.

decorated cowboy boot



Because of this, its effect is ambivalent. On the one hand it

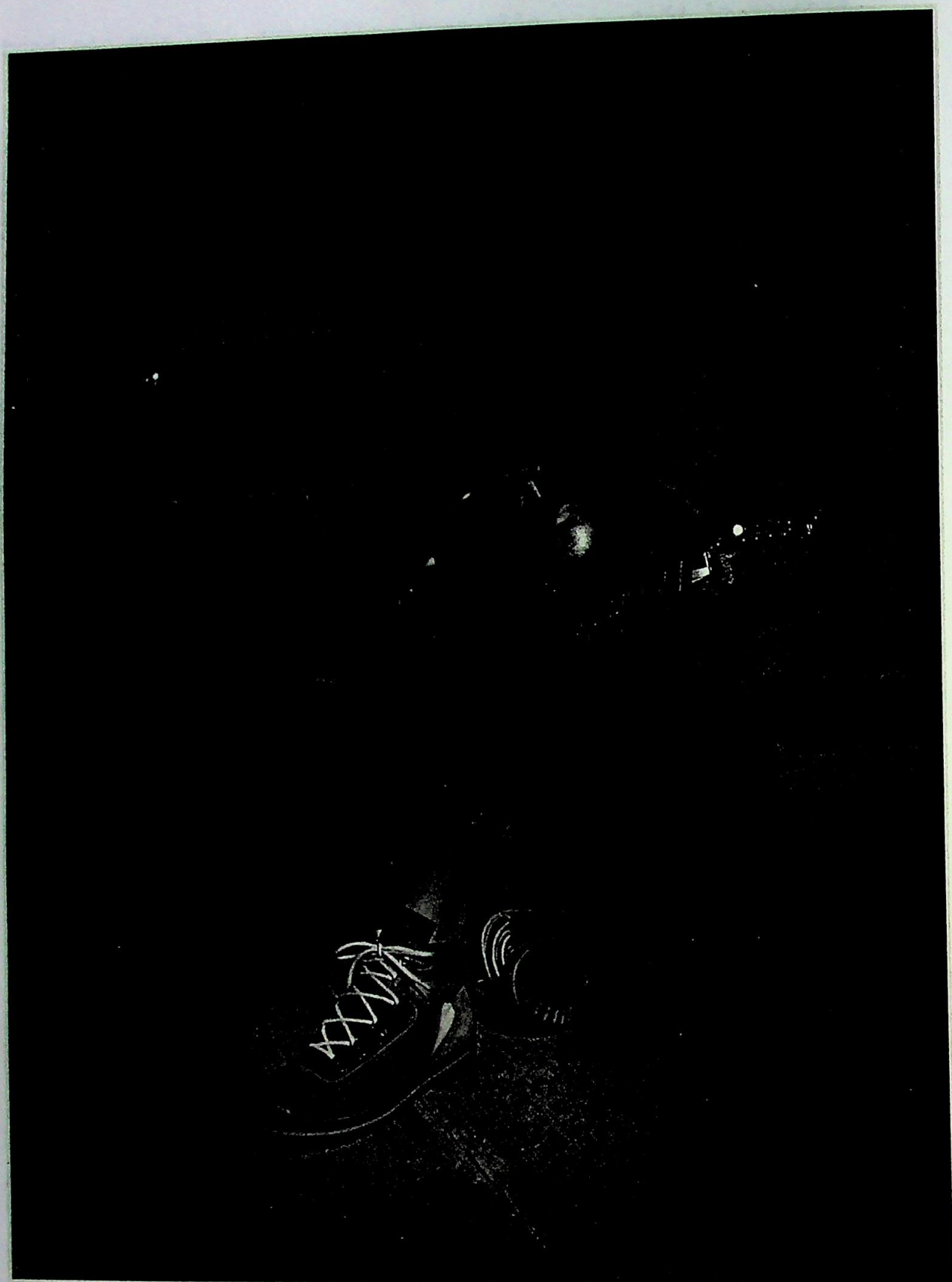
- tempers the message of feminine frailty and vulnerability [?] with a degree of toughness and self-reliance

(McDowell, 1989 :210)

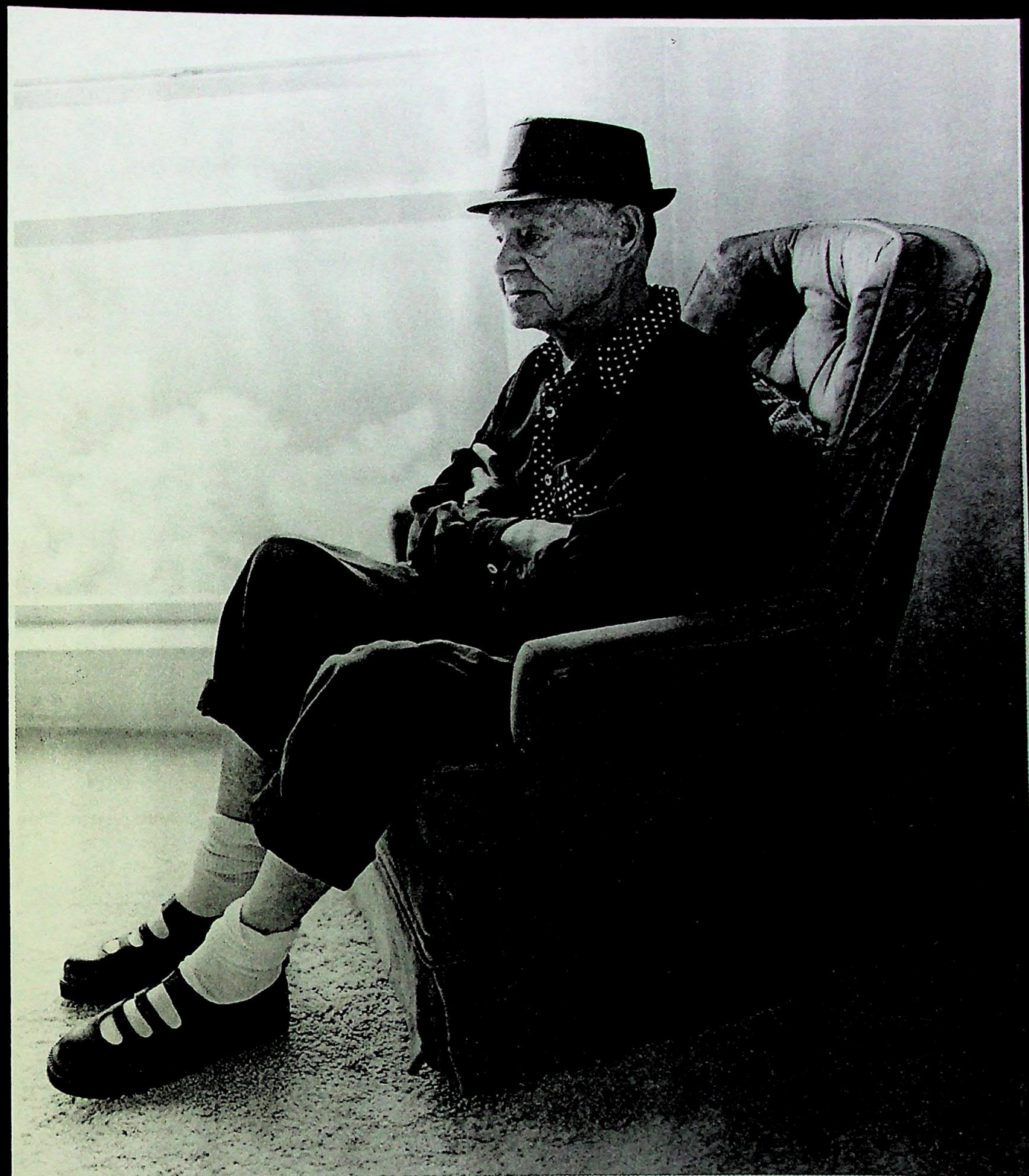
On the other, it now conveys ironic anti-feminist messages. It has been 'tamed' into an almost universal fashion accessory thus making it lose its original aggressive associations. Consequently, it has been usurped by young girls who want to be 'one of the boys' but of course without posing a threat to them.



The Doc Marten



fashion and comfort men getting it right: timberland **bt.**



slip on shoe:

CHAPTER TWO

Soled Out - craft gives way to mass production

From craft to factory:

Shoe "design" is a twentieth century innovation. It was not until the early 1990s that the shoe design as such came into being, and not until very recently indeed that young people studied shoemaking with the intention of entering the fashion world as shoe designers.

(Manolo Blahnik, 89, shoe designer)

The 'craft' of shoemaking resisted the Industrial Revolution except for a brief interlude, for about a hundred years.

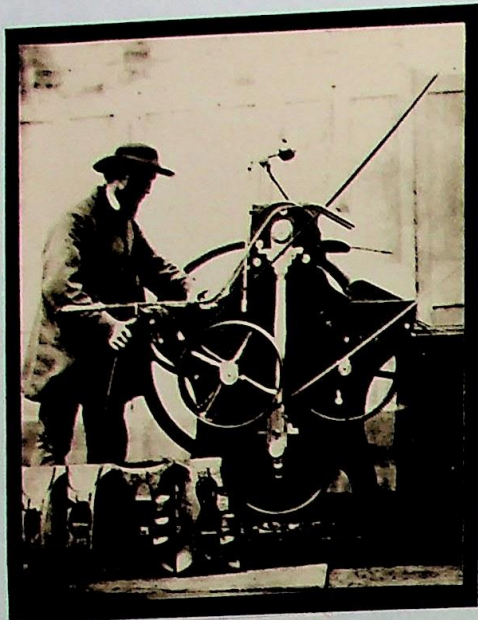
The interlude occurred when it grew critical to keep the Napoleonic army well shod when it tried to invade England.

In her book, Put Your Foot Down Ledger describes the events of the first mass manufacture

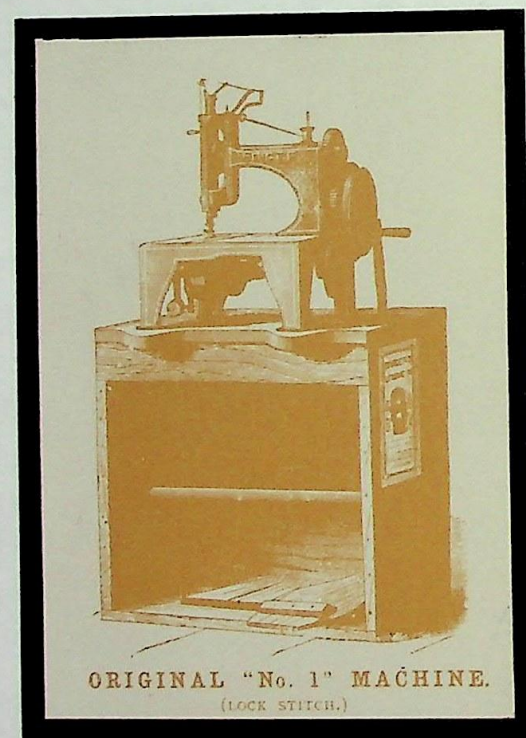
The government had appealed to Sir Marc Isambard Brunel (1769-1849) who had already helped the navy by designing machinery for ship-building, to design a machine for making shoes speedily. He evolved a press with clamping plates the shape of the sole, between which the leather was pressed and cut out by knife or die, thus eliminating the time-consuming job of handcutting. He also invented a rolling machine and a punching and rivetting machine. The sole leather was clamped onto a last and a plunger with an awl or punch at the end leavened down to make nail holes. Nails were placed by hand into the holes and as each nail was driven in, an awl made another hole for the next nail. *A ref.*

By 1812 he had a factory working at Battersea, with a production line of machines making '400 pairs a day in nine different sizes by 16 different processes'.

(Baynes, 1979:10) The government took all his production but when the Napoleonic wars ended in 1815, he was left with a stock of 80,000 pairs of boots which they refused to accept. In due course he was committed to prison for debt! What happened to his original machines is not known, but they sound so similar to those which appeared later that some must have survived to be copied.



closing machine



one of the first sewing machines

After the war, handsewn shoemaking once again reigned supreme. During the wars that spread through Europe sporadically the Americans had time to find new prosperity by developing small factories. In 1794, the first retail shoe store was opened in Boston, but it only opened on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The adapting and developing of the upper closing machine to sew on soles took place in America first but patented in England in 1859. The machine made a chain-stitch which penetrated the complete bottom of the shoe, holding the 'lasting margin' of the upper sandwiched between inside and sole. Within a few years the machine had more or less assumed its modern form and a machine for sewing turn shoe soles was patented, soon to be modified to sew in welts. It could then do in a few seconds what had previously taken the handsewn shoemaker an hour.

Also in America, Thomas Blanchard conceived the idea of adapting the lathe for making shoe lasts. He was granted a patent and wooden lasts were made in bulk. Wood was used for last making until 1950 when plastic came onto the market.

In 1832, the first set of diagram patterns for cutting uppers of shoes was made in New England. Shoes had always been cut out on rough measurements and their fit depended upon the skill of the cutter and the maker. The actual cutting itself is simple enough.

The skill lay, and still lies, [in common with dress design] in the placing of patterns on the skin to obtain the minimum wastage between them, together the correct quality, correct thickness and tightness [skins must be cut "tight to tow" to prevent over stretching]

(Thornton, 1970 :8)

With the use of diagram patterns, shoes fitted better, for each pattern was based on a specific set of measurements.

The most difficult problem however was to find a mechanical way of lasting the upper, and from the 1880s onwards there



clarks: pattern laying



assembly



sample room

has been a whole succession of patents aimed at reproducing the handsewn man's pulls, twists and pleats. The advent of new materials and the use of heat and moisture has made it possible to simplify the process still further in recent years. Today, the majority of shoes have their soles stuck on and not stitched, obviously making for great advancement in speed.

A revolution took place in 1846 when Ellas Howe, Jr of Massachusetts was granted a patent for a sewing machine suitable for leather. This did away with hours of women's drudgery and ranks as a great invention to man[woman]kind. In 1885, the sewing machine was adapted to stitch shoes and do away with revettings, nailing or pegging.

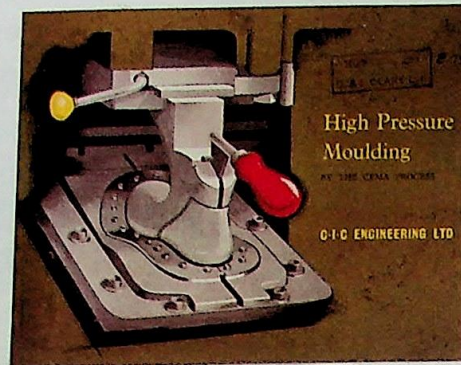
Alongside the changes in methods there were changes in materials used. The material which was to have the most profound effect on traditional leather shoemaking was rubber. It wasn't until during Charles Goodyear's experiments that an accident revealed that the material could be put to use in clothing.

He spent nine years in dire poverty when one day he was working with a mixture of crude rubber and sulphur and a small amount dropped onto the red hot stove... and presto... he'd discovered how to use it. He called the process vulcanisation after the God of Fire. (Ledger 1983: 125)

The rubber industry began to boom and boots and shoes required elastic gussets in their uppers, rubber soles and heels. There were rubber adhesives for sticking components together, and protective overshoes or galoshes of rubber.

The rubber soled plimsoll developed from these innovations, although the direct vulcanisation of rubber soles did not assume major importance until after the Second World War, nearly a century later.

The introduction of non-leather soles, the attachment by adhesive and eventually the direct moulding and attachment



moulding machine

of soles in a vulcanising press had dramatic effects on the industry. All the operations after lasting had been previously a consequence of the use of a stitched-on leather sole and nailed on heel. These became unnecessary when replaced by a premoulded, one piece rubber sole and hole which is stuck on. As a result whole departments disappeared completely and the making rooms were reduced considerably in size as the range of stitching and ancillary machines have been displaced. By far the greater number of shoes are now made with stuck-on soles than with stitched ones. Now the whole lower part of the shoe can be injection-moulded on with a synthetic such as polyurethane and other more advanced materials.

New advances in materials had the most profound effect on the sports shoe industry. The sneaker or trainer is perhaps the most powerful and lasting shoe design of the 20th century. According to McDowell: 168

the word "sneaker" was first used in 1875 and it referred to the early croquet shoe which had been developed in the United States using the newly invented vulcanising process to make rubber soles for the white canvas uppers.

In the late eighties sneakers and sports shoes of all types proliferated on the streets; they have become the footwear of the decade being promoted all the time of course by trends in world music. Hip-hop rap and House music have greatly contributed to the massive surge in sports-shoe sales. Run DMC broke new ground by being one of the first groups to be sponsored by a footwear company.

Citing the reason that they needed money for touring they brought out a hit single entitled 'My Adidas' in 1987. Athletic footwear manufacturers were quick to recognise the massive market potential of the rappers audiences. Adidas responded by sponsoring the band, of course, and as a result the inner-city youths comprising mainly African-American,

Hispanic and Asian now account for 30% of sales in the ath-leisure field.

The worldwide obsession with sport and its roll-on effects is highly likely to be the catalyst for all clothes design in the next decade. In fact designers like Rifat Ozbek and John Galiano are introducing sportswear to the catwalks this season. The invention of the modern running shoe can be attributed to Adolf Dassler, who began making shoes in 1920. By 1936, his shoes were internationally acknowledged as the best and 'were worn by athletes the calibre of Jesse Owens' (Milton, 1983: 21)

He added the three stripes of leather, to improve the strength of the shoe. It was to be the first modern adidas shoe we know today - 'Die Marke mit die drei Streifen!' (Addidas logo). In 1948, the Dassler business split and it was re-formed as two separate companies: Addas [which became known as adidas] and Puma. Both firms remain in the forefront of the immense running shoe business.

As sport demands lighter products, new advancements in technology occur here most rapidly. Today's affluence is making the consumer more demanding of the technical performance, as well as the aesthetic qualities. Most high performance sports shoes have plastic soles. The design of the sole is a major technical task, however, involving materials selection, advanced moulding techniques, adherence to the most demanding criteria, and of course a critical requirement to stay up with, or preferably ahead of, prevailing fashion trends. This emphasis on fashion brings product development times to just a few months, and as a result it can impose great restrictions on a designer. The following story, related by 'Atochem', a leading materials research and development organisation, illustrates the importance of fashion in this area.



leisure hits the catwalks (Galliano) and street fashion

- A certain moulder was experiencing problems producing two-colour sole mouldings at 50p/pair demanded by the shoe manufacturer, and wanted an extra 5p/pair. Instead, the manufacturer demanded a cut in the price to 48p/pair. Next day, however, after a meeting with his marketing people, the manufacturer phoned to demand that the soles be supplied with three colours, instead of two. The moulder quoted 100p/pair anticipating some negotiation. To his surprise, the manufacturer agreed immediately, saying that so long as the moulder could produce the finished soles by a certain date next month, he could have his full asking price.

(Engineering plastics :26)

This serves to show that the appearance of the sole is a very significant matter in the production of an athletic shoe. In fact, this development of coloured soles has been taken up by Clarkes also, for high street retailing. It was not until very recently that Clarkes stocked their coloured sole range known by the name of 'Bubbles'.

Other British sports shoe manufacturers are now producing athletic footwear with soles made from three different thermoplastic materials, and in many different colours. Most use thermoplastic elastomers (TPEs). A process known as overmoulding is required for TPEs. For each sole assembly, a number of inserts are moulded in different colours and materials are necessary. When cooled and finished, these are placed within the final mould cavity, in recesses designed to take the exact shape of the freshly moulded inserts. After the mould is closed, retaining the inserts in position, another grade of polymer is injected into the mould in the normal way.

With good mechanical design, and careful selection of materials, the inserts can be made to bond perfectly with the main body material, giving brightly coloured inserts with different properties from the parent material.

In this way, engineers can translate the stylist ideas into a finished sole, and improve the performance at the same time. If, for example, the sole needs to be more rigid across the width of the foot than it does along the length, then the insert can be designed with slots running from side to side, giving increased rigidity in that direction, but permitting great flexibility along the length of the sole.

On the other hand, if one part of the sole needs to be hard and abrasion resistant, and another should be soft and yielding, then this can be achieved simply by making two inserts from different materials.

Thus, it seems realistic to say that more changes have taken place in shoemaking during the last 100 years than during the previous 1800, and more in the last 30 years than in the previous 100.
(Thornton, 1970 :7)

Shoes can be produced much quicker, with less manual skill, and with cheaper materials and fewer machines. New technology has brought considerable benefits to the consumer. More durable shoes and price restraint are probably the most important ones.

The price of shoes no longer betray our income group, for the titled lady is quite likely to have bought hers in the chain store while the shop assistant bought hers in Paris. We no longer have to make them last for years, because they are relatively less expensive now and we can discard them for a new fashion without a pang of conscience.
(Wilson, 1969 :313)

CHAPTER THREE

The Distinguished Sole : platform for creativity

Two years ago, the work of one of the greatest of all shoemakers was bestowed the unique honour of being exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In the catalogue that was published to coincide with the exhibition entitled The Shoe As Art Roy Strong describes in his forward:

Salvatore Ferragamo was a superb craftsman - "The shoemaker of Dreams". His inspired creations and ingenuity of design heralded a new stylish age in the world of international fashion.

Strong (Centro-Di :1987:11)
Having been fortunate enough to attend the exhibition, and being able to examine Ferragamo's output in detail it is easy to realise what a genius he had been. Since his death 27 years ago his name is still synonymous with exquisite shoes.

Further research brought this author to Florence last summer. Ferragamo's name is equally synonymous with Florence since after the war he became one of the prime instigators of the 'Made in Italy' promotion that revolutionised fashion and enabled Tuscany to achieve fame for its leatherworking. The Pitti Palace in Florence is Italy's first costume gallery. It includes a historical survey of the shoe which ends where the Ferragamo exhibition starts thus providing a necessary background to the understanding of his achievements.

By attending lectures in anatomy he gained a perfect understanding of the foot's mechanical principles. he conducted endless experiments which culminated in disputing all the theories and methods previous shoemakers had used.

I need only say that in consequence of those experiments I constructed my revolutionary lasts which, by supporting the arch, make the foot act

1990

Salvatore Ferragamo

SPRING SUMMER COLLECTION

24 OLD BOND STREET

LONDON

FIRENZE

MILANO

ROMA

NAPOLI

GENOVA

TORINO

BARI

CAPRI

ZÜRICH

BARCELONA

NEW YORK

PALM BEACH

HONOLULU

VANCOUVER

TORONTO

TOKYO

OSAKA

KOBE

HONG KONG

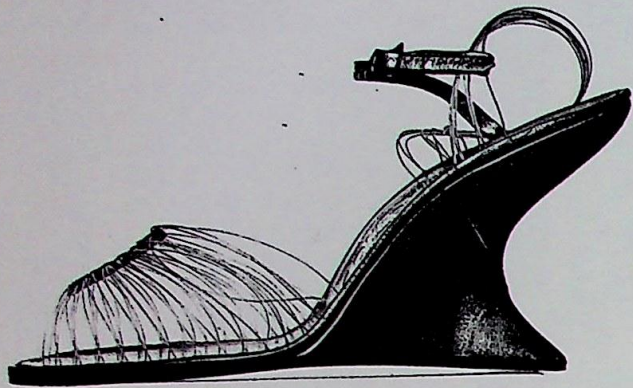
SINGAPORE

SEOUL

KUALA LUMPUR

TAIPEI

SYDNEY



- 21 -

like an inverted pendulum. The metatarsal joints and heels are freed of all body weight, and the shoe thus guide the equilibrium of the body. Because space is provided under the metatarsal joints to house the ball of the foot when it bends and so allows the joints to drop back as it steps, all friction between foot and shoes is eliminated. (Ferragamo, 1957:71)

Previous to this, shoemakers had only provided support to the ball of the foot and the heels - omitting the arch, as 'nature has designed it'. (ibid. 70) Ferragamo, subsequently supported the arch using a thin piece of steel inserted into the sole to raise the arch. Using this new principle Ferragamo was able to fulfil the fantasies of fashionable females everywhere from places as far-flung as Florence to Fifth Avenue - fashionable shoes with a faultless fit! In addition to this he invented the 'F' shaped heel; and the 'invisible' shoe, a sandal whose upper was formed of a single strand of nylon passed back and forth over the width of the foot. The 'invisible', a concrete image of the ethereal, became the most celebrated shoe of its time, in perfect tune with Dior's diaphanous dresses.

The shortage of good quality steel after the war used by Ferragamo as described above was the factor that led him to his most famous invention - the 'orthopaedic' shoe. To compensate for the lack of shanks* and to make the shoe strong enough he 'decided to fill in the space between the heel and the ball of the foot' (ibid: 143) He filled in the space with pieces of Sardinian Cork and thus created a new silhouette. He picked a suitably eminent Duchess to wear them first and within weeks the new style shoe christened the 'wedgie' became his most popular style. Although he patented the style its popularity spread so rapidly that within less than two years after its invention '86 per cent of all shoes made in the United States had wedge heels.' (ibid:145). The scarcity of hides also spurred him to use othercommon place materials such as hemp, cellophane and

*shank: the metal insert between the sole and insole

especially raffia which was made locally by Florentine artisans.

In fact, Ferragamo's work with new and exotic materials demonstrates part of his ingenuity. He constantly explored materials that had never before been used in shoemaking; some of which nowadays would drive conservationists into a frenzy:

I have used satins and silks, mirrors and feathers, the skins of ostrich, antelope, kangaroo, leopard, lizard, python, crocodile, water snakes, sea-leopard and even more weird and strange reptiles. (ibid :214)

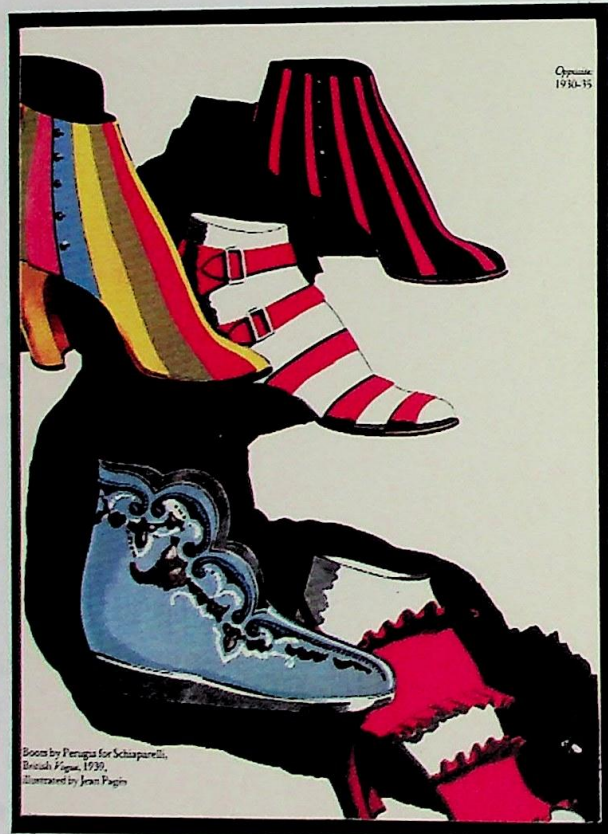
But it is primarily his innate sense of colour and inventive shapes that has earned him the title of 'Shoemaker of Dreams'

Devotees to his shoes have testified that they represent a zenith in terms of fit, comfort and function, but beyond that they are supreme works of art which came in pairs. (Centro Di: 1987:23) Whereas Ferragamo never described himself as anything other than a shoemaker, the first shoe 'designer' in the accepted sense is considered to be Andre Perugia. Born of a French mother and an Italian father [no doubt, distinct advantages in terms of style and craft] he opened his own shop in his home town of Nice when he was only 16. He emerged to be a quintessential designer unlike Ferragamo who was a ceaseless technical innovator. Perugia's shoes are a delight to the eye. They are perfectly poised and ultra stylish. Some of them have the same visual and tactile appeal as the best sculpture - they are so carefully scaled and perfectly balanced.

He had left his father's business after serving his apprenticeship because they had very different approaches to shoemaking. The son wanted to get much more involved in style and the design of the shoe; the father wished to continue his habitual style which sold well. The boy's



Perugia coiled heel shoe 1953



'Schiap' boots 1953, by Perugia

shoes were noticed by the fashion designer Poiret who was enjoying enormous success in the years preceding the First World War. Poiret invited Perugia to exhibit in his fashion house, but war broke out, so it wasn't until 1920 that he [Perugia] opened his establishment in Paris.

The bulk of his time was spent producing high quality shoes for the United States but it was his fantasy shoes that brought him the most publicity. The exquisite shoe with the coiled heel dated 1953 [but could be eagerly bought this season!] combines an elegance of shape with startling originality.

He designed stylish ankle boots for Schiaparelli and in 1931 he designed the fish shoe inspired by Braque. In this pair, as a decorative device the heels [which were in the 'new' material perspex] were filled with water in which swam live miniature goldfish!

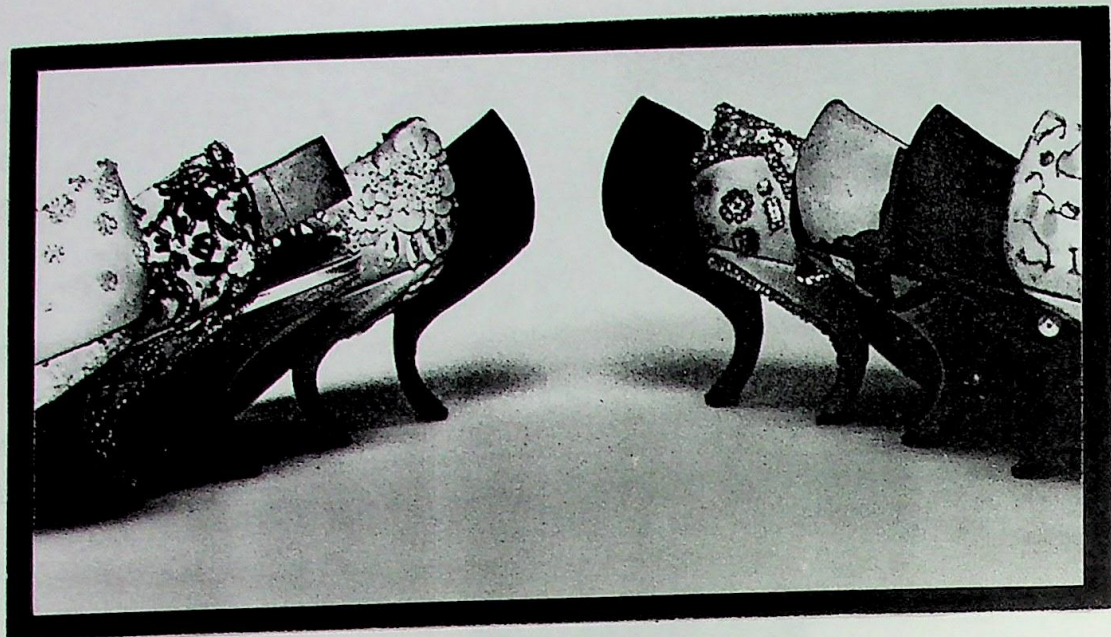
Another Frenchman who shot to stardom in the 1950s was Roger Vivier. Vivier's shoes are always immediately identifiable.

- a shoe designer, in the correct sense of the title, is both and artist and a technician
(Thornton 1970 :3)

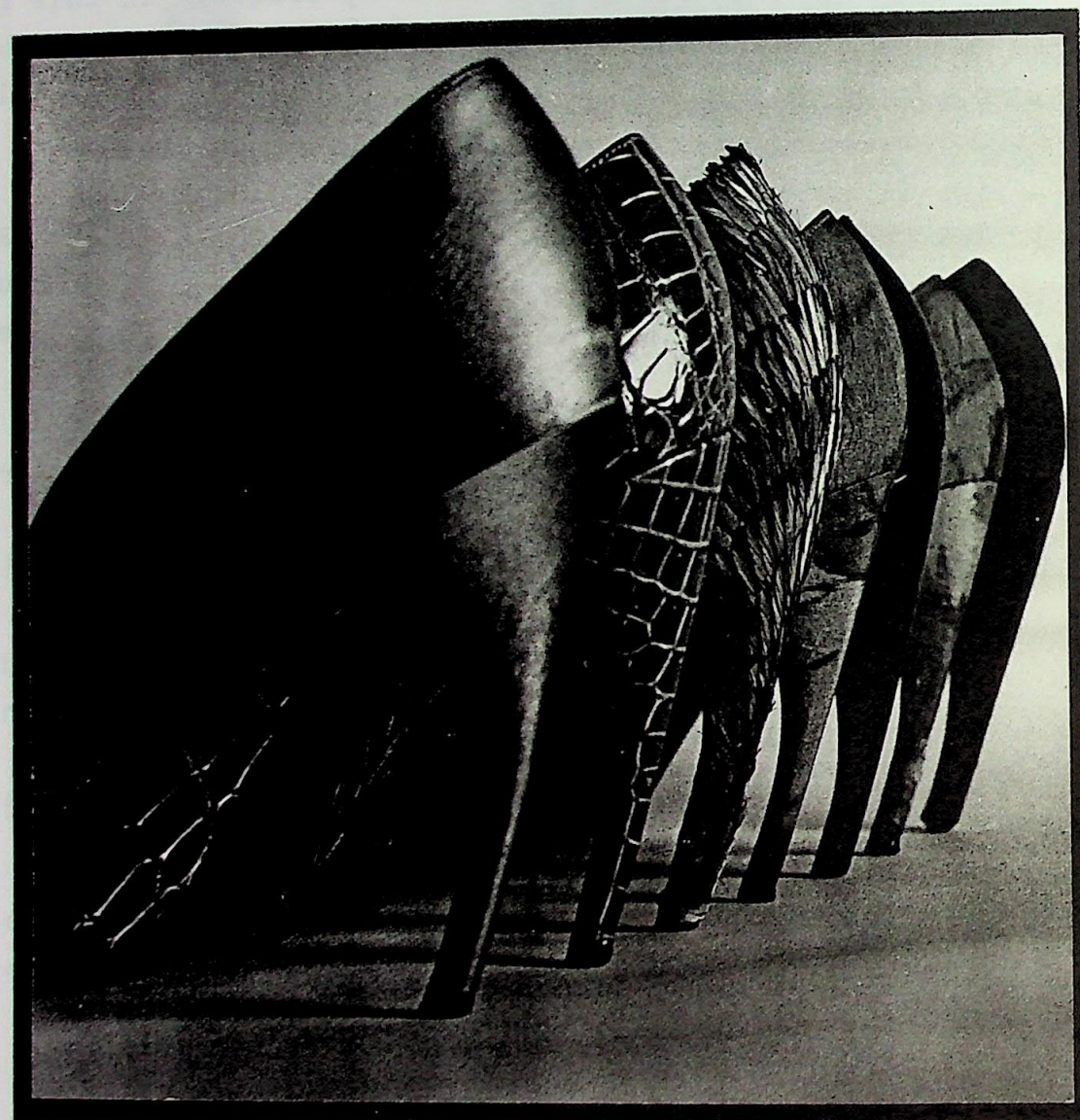
Vivier manages to combine mechanical precision with a beautiful harmony of form. He started to study sculpture in the Ecole des Beauxarts in Paris but left, without graduating in order to design shoes for his friends. His shoes seem to reflect a sculpture's discipline. His contributions have been the 'comma' heel, square toe and 'choc' heel [slanting away from the arch]. Many fashion experts, including Diana Vreeland claim that

Vivier has created the most beautiful shoes of the 20th century. (Vreeland, 1986)

The best of the contemporary shoe designers that came to the forefront of fashion during the eighties constantly make reference to these earlier designers in their work and

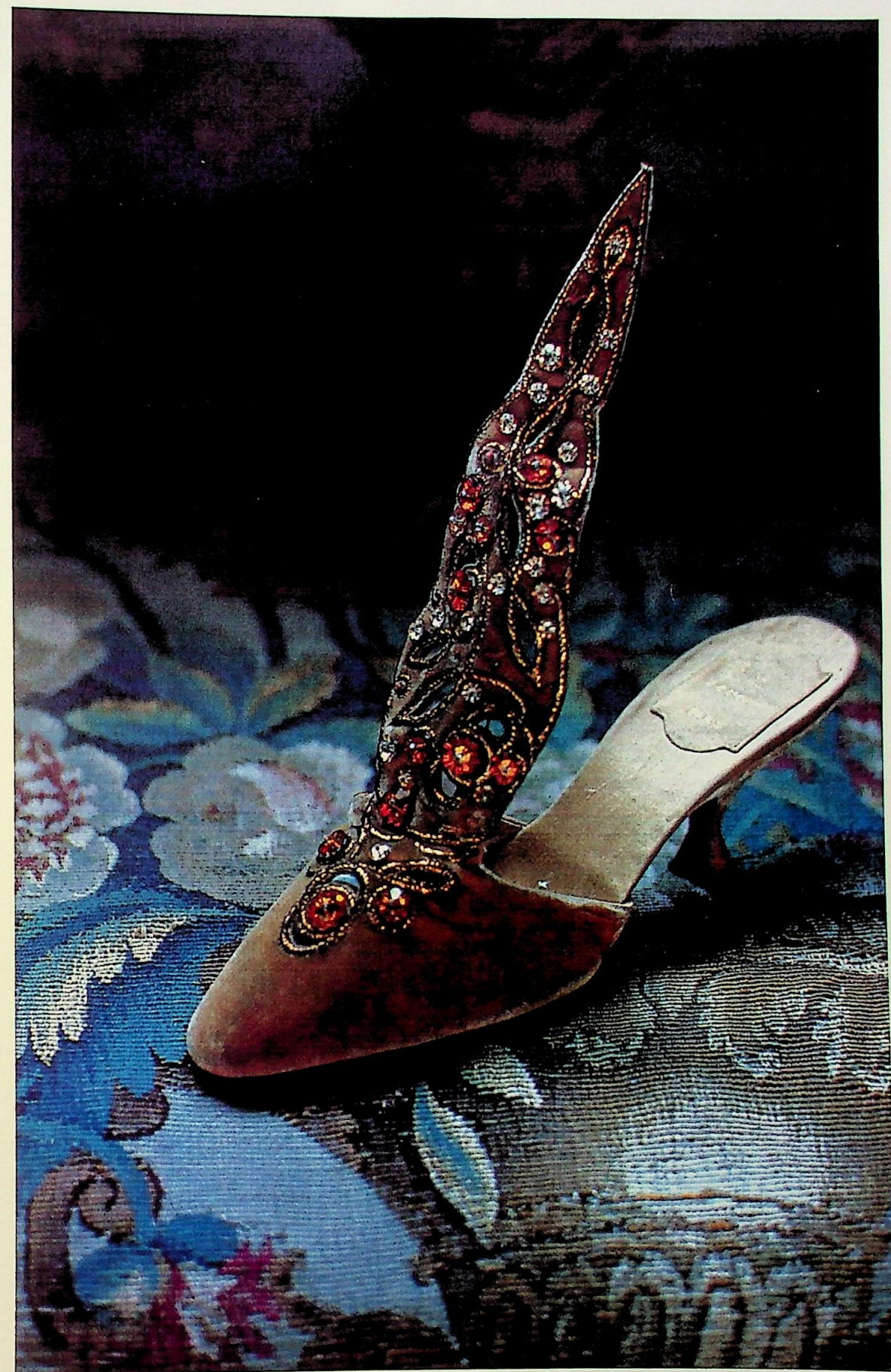


Comma heel,



choc heel,

Vivier Shoe 1964



techniques. In an interview with Emma Hope she says of Ferragamo:

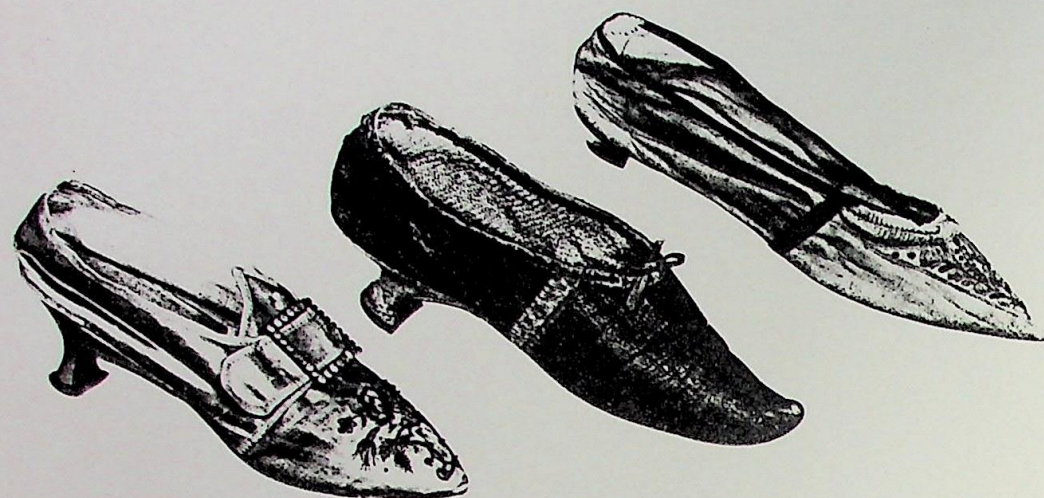
His influence goes deeper than mere imitation. It inspires one to cut patterns in unorthodox ways and experiment with new materials. I covet the beautiful quality and fit of his shoes and admire his resourcefulness. (interview, author 1989)

Although she works on a comparatively small scale, Emma Hope has done much to salvage the reputation of British shoe design; which according to June Swann, doyenne of shoe history and keeper of the Northampton shoe museum until recently,

certainly does not compare with the design of foreign shoes... The fact that shoe design doesn't have a high status in the British fashion industry is another discouragement (Baynes: 1979 :30)

Hope trained at Cordwainer's college in Hackney but originally wanted to learn her trade by working as a pattern cutter 'but couldn't find a factory willing to take her on'. In 1984 she raised £2,000 grant from Manpower paid at the rate of £40 a week. With a further £1,000 [a present from a relative] she managed to produce her first collection of fine, fanciful shoes at a small factory in East London. The 3,000 pairs Hope produced last year sold wholesale for £40 a pair. The turnover for 1988 was £180,000.

Her first shop is in Islington, paradoxically a Labour dominated constituency. She considers securing a 20 year lease a 'lucky coup since I manufacture luxurious and expensive shoes!' Many of her shoes are in voluptuous fabrics - watered silks, brocade tapestry, satin or velvet with extended chiselled toes and Louis style. Much of her inspiration is historical - drawn from trips to the Northampton and Victoria and Albert museums. She successfully manages to capture the spirit of historical shoes but presents them in a contemporary way, thus avoiding the trap that many designers can fall into - that is, campy reinterpretations of certain periods in history.



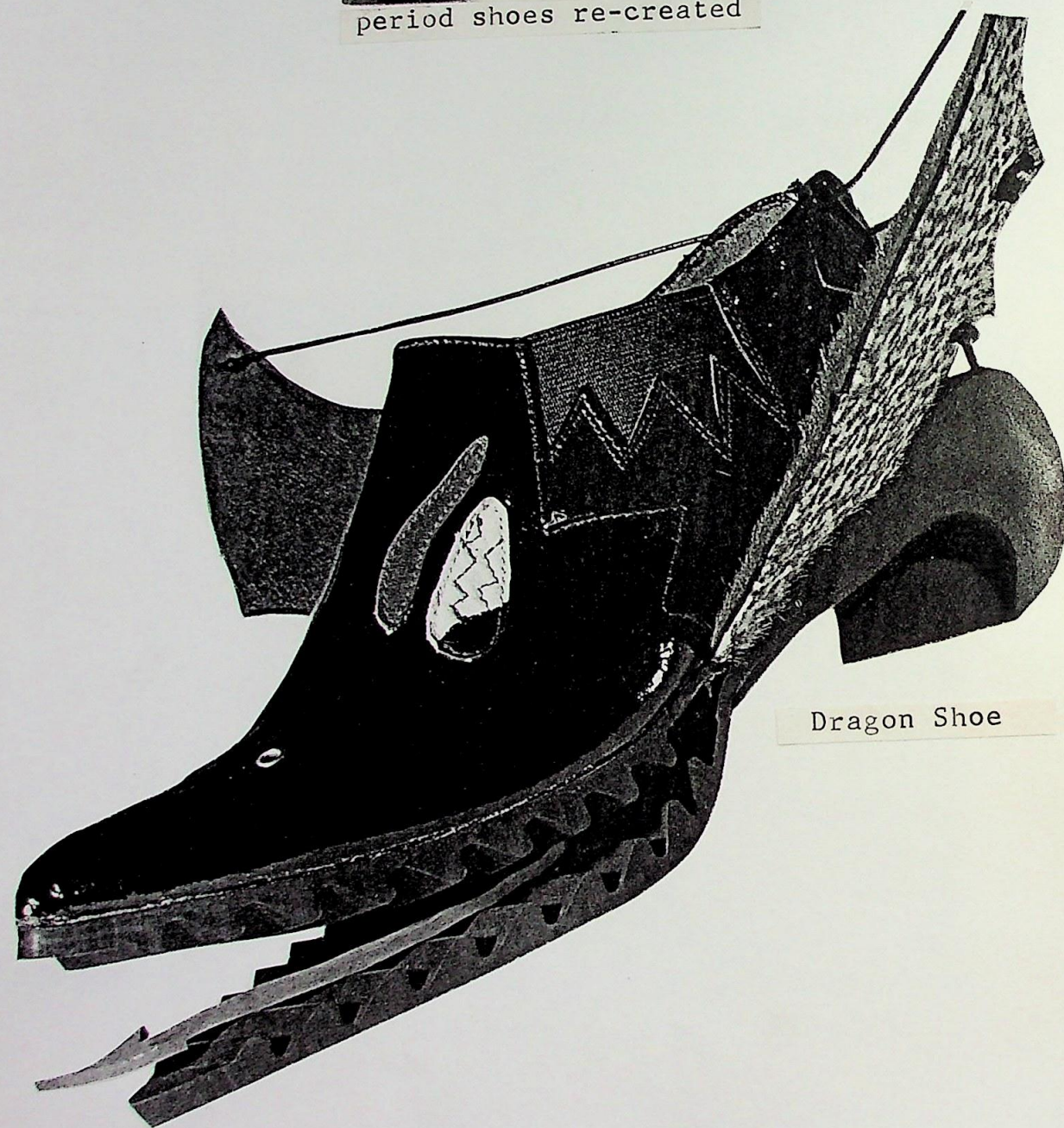
Emma Hope derives inspiration from history





Calzados Sandra's re-created period shoes, complete with handmade stitched soles: (here) 18th-century-style leather; (below) 15th-century Henry IV style.

period shoes re-created



Dragon Shoe

Many current shoe designers re-create period shoes very successfully. Like Emma Hope they enjoy working with as many dress designers as possible.

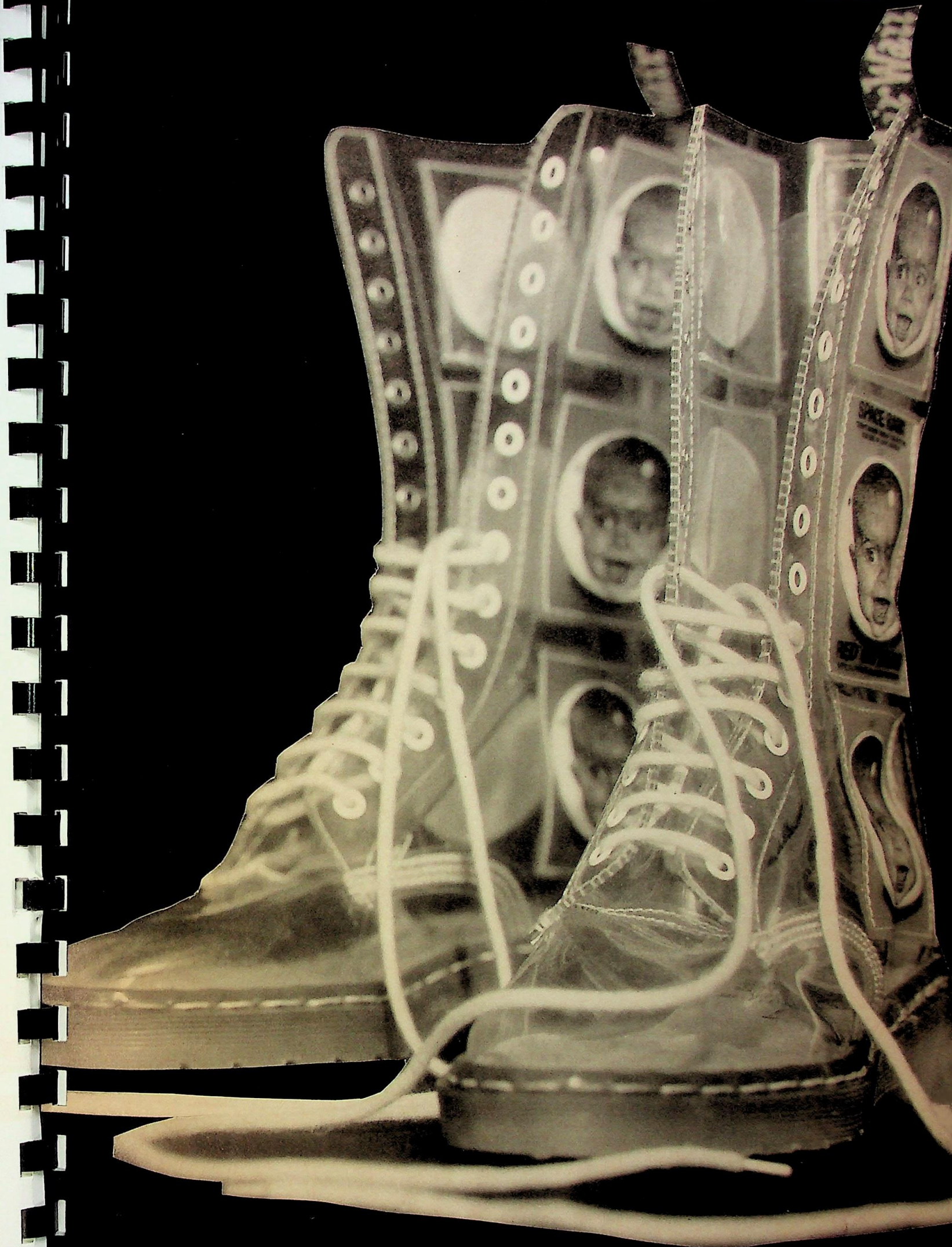
What I do is influenced so much by the clothes people wear, so it's great to work with designers. It really does trigger things off. (Hope, 1989)

Among the designers she has worked with are Betty Jackson, Jean Muir, John Flett, Laura Ashley, English Eccentrics and Joe Coady-Hayford.

Ten years ago two young entrepreneurs Dave Fortune and Mike McManus opened an independent shoe shop on the Kings Road under the name of 'Robot'. For the entire decade Robot has remained a firm favourite among shoe enthusiasts. They will always be regarded as the people responsible for popularising the Doc Marten sole; - They hit on the idea of taking the Doc Marten sole from the workwear range and pairing it with a fashion upper. They combined the Doc-Marten sole with fluorescent colours and brought in punk creepers. The shoes were an instant success and very innovative. They have sold shoes all over the world and their biggest clients today are in the USA and Japan. Their next range is called the 'swordfish' range. They describe it as 'probably the most radical looking shoe we've done for a long time. Its a new shoe altogether (interview : Clothes Show Mag: 71) It will be interesting to see if it is as much a departure as the Dragon Shoe by Red or Dead featured in Design Magazine June 1989, described as:

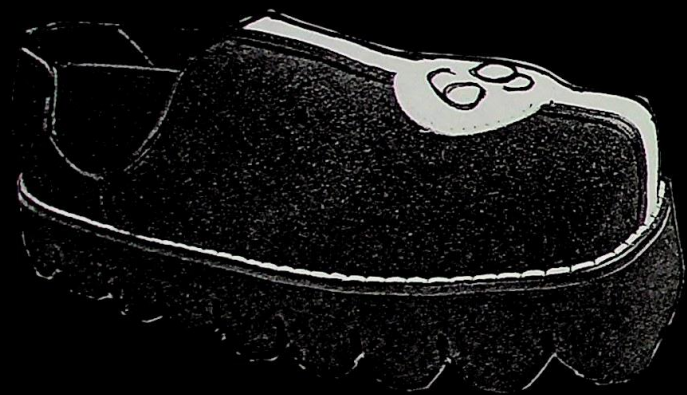
definitely not made for walking and the wings don't walk either....the Dragon shoe was made only to show what's possible. (Design, June 1989)

Obviously, there lies great design potential afoot for the shoe designers of the future!



Doc Marten 1990 style: transparent upper

Winkle pickers, 1950s.



Brothel Creeper 1989 style.



'Designer' anarchy shoe.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sole-searching: motives for wearing shoes

Human attitudes to boots and shoes have always been complex. Shoes are used as vehicles for displays of personality, they can reflect fashion and class consciousness, they can be aggressive and sexy or retiring and casual.

Whether the messages sent out by the shoes are positive and aggressive or negative and passive they reflect psychosexual attitudes about ourselves or about what we want to transmit to others. (Rossi, 1989: 69)

The device of non-conformist dressing has been used countless times in the 20th century by disenchanted youths. It is always reactionary and it is especially powerful as a deliberate gesture of detaching the wearer from the mores of society. It also saves the wearer from anonymity. Postwar alienation felt by the youth of the 1950s led to the creation of the 'Ted'. Although the whole appearance of the Teddy Boy quickly became a uniform the most noticeable aspect of the craze was his shoes. Almost always made from suede, they usually had enormously thick soles which earned them the name of 'brothel creepers'. Their name spells out the sexuality of the shoe and their message was one of aggression and unsubtle masculinity.

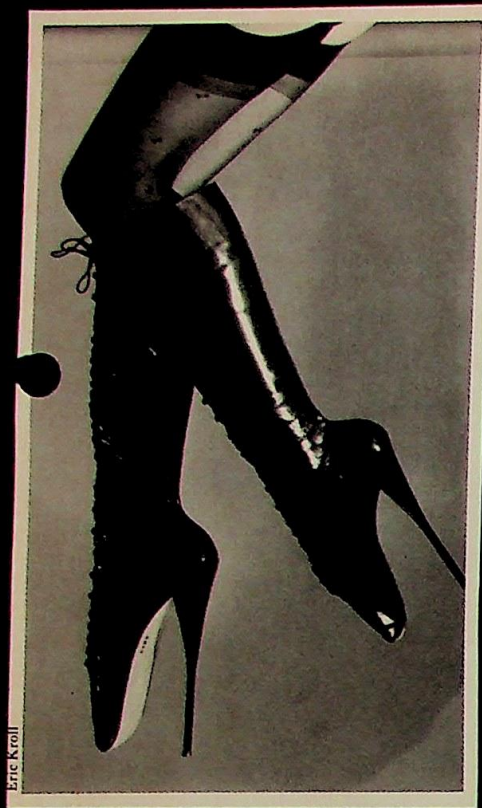
The 'winkle-pickers' favoured by the Mods were in direct contrast to the Teds footwear. The Mods dressed precisely and the winkle-pickers elongated toe added to the overall 'sharp' effect. The appear of the shoe, like its ancestor the poulaine, lay in the sexuality of the pointed toe.

The ability of clothes and shoes to render alien was reiterated in the 1970s by punk. The potency of punk stemmed from appearance, just like its predecessors. The message this time was complete anarchy.

Shoe by A. Pfister



"To some people there is something sexy about putting a foot into a shoe, it would be looked on as purely sexual"



'Thigh-scrapers' for the dominatrix.



Rossi also states that 'we wear shoes chiefly for sex-attraction purposes', and moreover, 'people "read" us by our shoes'. (ibid. 72) and this link between sex, the foot and the shoe can be attributed to the ancient Chinese custom of binding the female foot in their early culture. Fashion is essentially to do with allure and it is axiomatic that the tiny foot, ~~the tiny foot~~ remained central to the Chinese culture because it was at the centre of the nation's sexuality.

However, a tightly constrained foot has a place in Western sexuality also. Boots which compress the foot and shackle the ankle are frequently seen as having aphrodisiac properties. In conjunction with high heels they have long been synonymous with femininity.

The shoe, especially the high-heeled shoe, combines male and female sexuality in a way which many men and women find irresistible. (McDowell, 1989 : 52).

Dominatrixes and transvestites particularly love glamour footwear in shiny black leather and skin-tight boots reaching to mid-thigh are stock-in-trade requirements for highly-charged exotica. Perugia said in the 1950s that

almost every woman is not only conscious of her feet but sex-conscious about them,

(Rossi, 1989 : 82)

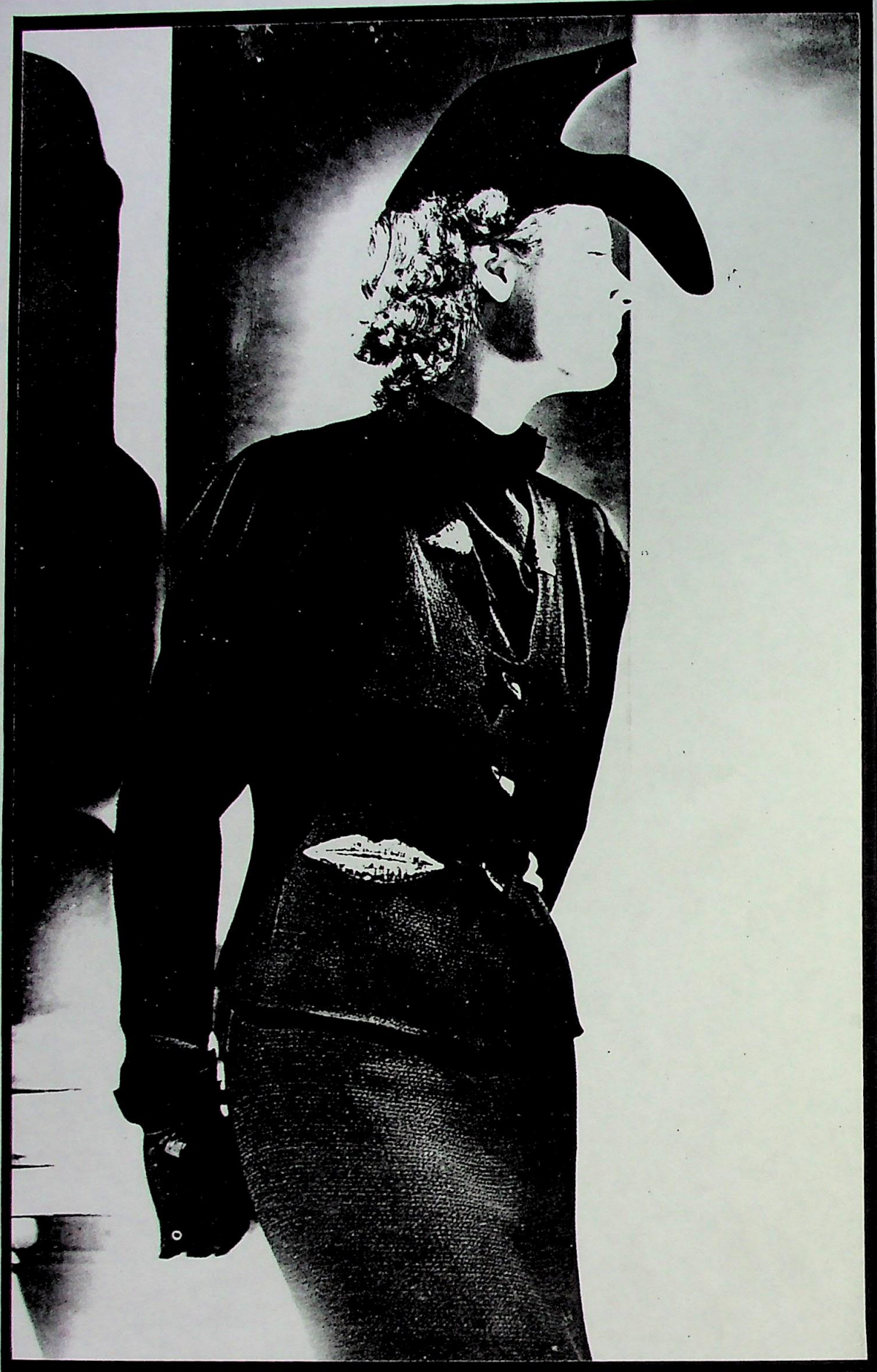
He felt that the creative shoemakers duty was to add to the foot's sensual powers by imaginative shoe design.

The shoe as a fetish object is not new. Flugel (1930) pointed out in his book The Psychology of clothes

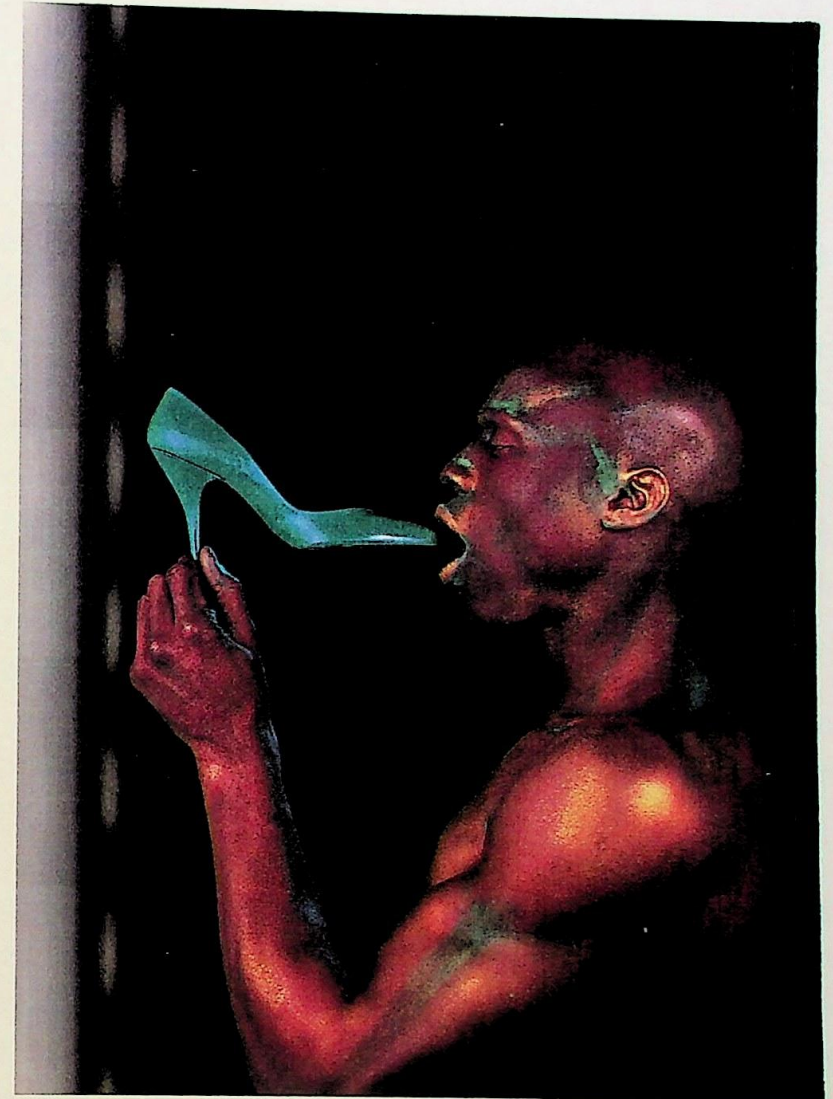
- Of all the forms of erotic symbolism, the most frequent is that which idealises the foot and shoe.

The celebrated designer Elsa Schiaparelli's work is imbued with an appreciation of the fetishistic function of dress. In the shoe-hat ensemble the associations of the pocket/mouth/vagina play against those of hat/high heel/phallus. The piece presents an interface of multiple fetishistic possibilities.

It is alleged that Leopold Von Sacher Masoch, from whom the term Masochism stems gave to two women friends the right to whip and stamp on him without his reacting, on the contrary, kissing the shoe that performed the act. And Robert Mapplethorpe's photograph taken in 1985 takes the shoe fetishist's desire to kiss and lick his partner's shoes to its final conclusion.



Shoe-Hat; Schiaparelli.



Robert Applethorp photograph, 1985

CONCLUSIONS

As a product, the prospect of designing shoes in shapes that offer nothing more than a basic protection for the foot, held little attraction for the creative shoemakers of the past or indeed, contemporary shoe designers.

As a product, the shoe is much more susceptible to the vagaries of fashion than other products. By taking just four examples it can be seen that fashion has been responsible for the most outrageous, the most damaging, the most urbane and the most aggressive of styles. The 15th century shoe known as the chopine was very outrageous; its platform soles often raised the wearer two feet in the air. The stiletto is the most damaging shoe in history - not only to the wearer's feet and posture but also to the environment. It exerts two tons of pressure at the point of contact and was responsible for splitting pavements when it was first introduced - Fortunately, since modified. The shoe made of brushed pigskin is the most urbane. The Hush Puppy which although unexceptional in character as such enjoys remarkable success with the middle-class American male. And lastly, the now ubiquitous Doc Marten which when first introduced was associated with violence, extreme bigotry and crude nationalism.

As a product, the shoe's consumer market spans all sections of society. The fashionable shoe is no longer a preserve of the rich. The impact of mass manufacture has rendered the fashionable shoe as an essential accessory rather than a desirable one, and has meant that the predilections of the lower income consumer can be catered for. In common with all well designed products a shoe can enhance the quality of life!

As a product, the shoe provides a canvas for the exploration and creation of fantastical shapes and this opportunity has

been consistently exploited throughout the history of footwear up to the present day. This area of product design is rich in innovation and ingenuity.

As a product, the shoe is one of the most potent conveyors of social communication. It can express social and historical phenomena, distinction and status, and often emits signals containing covert and overt sexual connotations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Paul Caffrey for his help in getting the contents of this thesis into a logical order and for his valuable suggestions for the final text.

I would like to thank Frances McDonagh who assisted me in my research by generously donating books and other reference material.

And Eimear Fogarty who "traipsed round every shoe shop" and costume gallery in Italy with me in the pursuit of information.

And my sister, my flatmate, who now dislikes "anything even remotely connected with shoes". (J. Horan, Arts Student, 1990)

And Mrs. O'Brien for typing

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