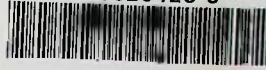


A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF 'MADONNA'

ORLA LANGAN
FASHION AND TEXTILES
4TH YEAR. 1991

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'MADONNA'

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INTRODUCTION

Women are drawn to the woman who is witty, talented, dignified, sometimes vulnerable, sometimes strong; they are disenchanted with the image drawn by men, taken by men, marketed by men, -- the 'dumb blond', the 'sex-Goddess', the 'sweet angel of sex'. (McCann, 1988, p.213)

Mothers of sons see Madonna as a whore, she leads their sons astray with her cheap ideals personified through her tacky dress (see Figure 1). But on deeper reflection, Madonna may be analysed as being more than a 'Boy Toy'. She may come across as a slave of male-desires, chained to her bed waiting for a man to appear; suggesting to the horror of feminists, that it is necessary to have a man in your life but her lyrics are without doubt a feminist anthem:

Don't go for second best, baby
Put your love to the test.
(see Reference 1).

Kupferman says women have always been symbolic; she obviously meant that women have had meaning for men. We are in a sense the language spoken on posters and screens suggesting that woman is an 'image'. Madonna alternatively places a new emphasis on the woman being a 'spectacle' or 'object'. She has created an image, imitated by her followers -- future modern feminists -- an image which inspires women to use their own sexuality without submitting to the whims of men. She appeals to men's sexuality and speculates how they see her as a force whereby they can project their fantasies and desires.

A woman who is overtly sexual is to be feared. We may analyse her 'dress sense' as being phallic symbols which implant in men the fear of castration. The fetish (the male) surrenders this fear of castration by transferring the importance of the penis to another part of the female body, to some article of clothing -- lingerie, high-heeled shoes, corsets. Madonna's image is the epitome of phallic symbolism in dress. Did Madonna really perceive the fact

Figure 1:
Madonna the Whore



that her work would be so scrutinised and analysed? Did she intentionally set out to be the inspiring feminist or was it a result of the press and written analytical articles that formulated her whole image? An image whereby she was perceived as becoming an immediate phenomenon. Maybe she truthfully is a feminist and set out to encourage women to use their sexuality with aggression, and use it as a weapon to implant a sense of fear in men. Perhaps she is chained to her own desire -- and plays on men's sexual fantasies and desires, which exist in everyone's imagination. But that's her prerogative. 'The Material Girl', who began as a Virgin and ended up like a commercial, has become a classic in her own right. It is phenomenal how critics have derived meanings from her work which she may not have intended and how a theoretical analysis may be applied to her work (songs, videos, image) in association with such theories as those composed by Freud and Jung, and other academics.

For many decades the desirable shape held through fashion photos and advertisements had been that of a tall, lean, flat-tummied, leggy, tight-bummed, curveless. Barry Cossey, a model, once a man, now better known as Tula, has played 'her' part or should I say 'his' part in selling the male form as the ideal for females. Men are attracted to the beauty personified by Tula. Woman is thus psychologically brain-washed into believing that man is the ideal form and we should aspire to be so. Madonna accepts her own body and flaunts it in an overtly sexual manner, thus over-riding male chauvinism. A woman who is sexual is to be feared.

MADONNA'S IMAGE

On Omnibus, a BBC 1 Documentary programme, Madonna discusses how she grew up with two images of women, the virgin and the whore. In her videos she often plays two roles, one questioning the other, for example, Like a Virgin. She sings in a seductive, alluring manner. She mixes in her dress the way the 'scrubs' of the Bordello do, and with the crucifix she makes a mockery of the church's view that women are either virgins or whores. The Madonna (Our Lady) is probably the most popular image from Catholicism or Christian beliefs: the image of a mother. Madonna's Catholic upbringing is the foundation of everything she does now. She is perhaps over-riding her Catholic guilt. She rebels against the restrictions of the Catholic church. Her name is controversial and suggests that she is a religious person herself, a saintly figure for people to follow. This is threatening to those who are already part of an established religion. It is difficult after all to follow a religion based on dead heroes -- old feminist theories and ideals, when live heroes take the spotlight -- Madonna has seized back the crucifix for the masses, and made it a fashion icon, thereby using images to evoke feelings.

Feminists have criticised her 'Boy Toy' image. When she first emerged as a young and sexy pop star, people assumed she was stupid and superficial. But later on it became apparent through her music lyrics and videos, that she can control her own career as shrewdly as any man, without wearing the trousers.

Madonna epitomises a woman's right to determine the care and conduct of her body -- to defend it as a realm of absolute privacy on which others have no superior claim. Controversy rages over her body as a visual symbol, surrounding the images she represents. MTV banned her video Justify My Love in December '90, because of its erotic content, which was deemed shocking, since it portrayed the idea that anything goes, is going fast. The battleground behind this controversy was not only concerned with such explicitness, but the

way the mind determines what should or should not be permissible within the public realm -- of defining limits on individual freedom of expression.

Nudity and sex are part of the life of a human being and Madonna has no qualms in displaying her sexuality, and anyone is free to watch her. What critics may claim offensive about her videos, may lie not in her sexuality, but in the hypocritical way she passes off her commercial works as artistic ones. She may be merely a media manipulator. It is also hypocrisy on the part of the viewers who criticise her work as being immoral, yet who watch out of curiosity and perhaps a secret desire to see 'tits and ass'. Our visual habits are strongly rooted in fantasy and denial. We instinctively regard a nude, and Madonna's blatant sexual image, as being immoral and indecent. Why should Madonna's image produce such a phobic response? Because she is the archetypal symbol of pleasure and sexual pleasure is the ultimate loss of control. Madonna offers to the world new voices and new ideas.

Some may find it trivial that so much news was devoted to MTV's decision to ban her video. By arguing whether the video should or should not be publicly aired, Madonna's work was placed on a pedestal and given just as much importance as any other form of art, be it painting, sculpture, etc. We are used to seeing nude statues in parks and galleries. So when we see a nude torso on television, why are we so disturbed?

By the banning of Justify My Love, Madonna brings to our attention the right the public should have in choosing what they 'do' and 'do not' want to see. There is therefore a danger in allowing the television to censor creative expression.

FANTASIES

Klaus Theweleit (1987), German academic and author of Male Fantasies, believes that there are two man-made archetypes: firstly, the 'white woman', who serves the needs of man and is a contented homemaker; secondly, the 'red woman', who disturbs the man's composure, unsettling his masculine image of self-control, and moral strength. Masculinity denies vulnerable and feminine qualities. Theweleit's theory thus bears little relation to that of Jung's theory of the anima and animus archetypes. According to Theweleit, men by rejecting their feminine traits of the female part of their souls, they are in conflict with themselves, in constant fear and anxiety of the revelations of their natures. The denial of tender and erotic feelings establishes the very sense of masculine identity. They try to control these fears within themselves by projecting them onto women. Sex is thus seen as a commodity, an escape route freeing man from concern with commitment, vulnerability and caring in a personal relationship. In a relationship it is acceptable for the male to release their emotional qualities, needs and dependencies, through the form of sex.

The mixture of desire and fear in the male fantasy 'red woman' is evident in Madonna who is hot and sexy yet in total control. In the 1980's, Madonna used Marilyn Monroe's myth. Because Marilyn was forced to act as a bimbo, it was assumed that she was one. She was a male fantasy made for men's pleasure. Madonna on the other hand, 'acts' but she never acts 'dumb'. She may pose as a peep show dancer in her video Open Your Hearts, but her desire for sexual control is defiant and blatant. By using her sexuality to gain control and superiority, she stands apart from generations of 'femmes fatales'.

Justify My Love, Madonna's latest controversial video depicts the erotic fantasies of the singer and her real-life lover, Tony Ward. The video features Madonna on a bed in the Paris Hotel room, with men and women lovers. She strips down to skimpy black lingerie and

writhes semi-naked on a bed with Ward. She fondles and kisses a lesbian, while being watched by a smirking pervert in a cupboard. She proceeds to romp with men and women, wearing chains and crucifixes. She then simulates sex with Ward as he clutches a barbed whip. These fantasies including bisexuality, cross-dressing, sado-masochism, group sex and voyeurism are subconscious parts of many individuals.

Madonna states that:

It is the interior of a human being's mind. These fantasies and thoughts exist in every person. Why is it that people are willing to go to a movie and watch someone get blown to bits for no reason, and nobody wants to see two girls kissing or two men snuggling.

(Irish Independent, 1990, See Reference 2)

Madonna considers her video to be romantic, loving and honest and the celebration of sex. She considers that there's nothing wrong with that. She believes that she is in charge of her fantasies and puts herself in these situations with men.

Femaleness and femininity are constructed as a set of bodily attributes reducible to a sexuality that puts itself on display for a masculine spectator, allowing him space for his fantasies. (McCann, 1988, p.63).

Madonna serves as a 'spectacle', an 'object' for men's fantasies. Men are at their most sceptical when considering characteristics (such as intellect). They feel threatened by Madonna's aggressive erotic image as it contradicts their fantasy image of women. Since Madonna is in charge, she is like the black widow spider, eyeing her prey. She watches how men fall into her web as she appeals to their sexual desires and fantasies. She is the one in control with her life. As she chants in Justify My Love.

Poor is the man whose pleasures depend
on the permission of another ...
(See Reference 3).

Regarding people who gain pleasure in looking at another person as an object, there is a danger of becoming perverted, thereby producing obsessive voyeurs and peeping Toms, whose only sexual gratification may come from watching. But Madonna is indifferent to the presence of her audience, she 'plays' on their voyeuristic fantasies intentionally. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which carries an illusion of danger because one is always slightly out of control. A discreet glance or an appreciative stare from a man are experiences which most women seem to welcome. Women want to be desired. But some women hate to be looked at by men. They feel the indignity of being treated as a sex-object. Madonna appears anti-feminist, but in effect is a modern feminist in that she has made men the object of the female gaze. She is the epitome of the subversion of the male gaze by throwing up all kinds of images and fantasies from voyeurism, sado-masochism and fetishism. Her provocative image allows her to encompass human frailties, whereby the subject (the male) is drawn to her by his desires and fantasy.

The eye is not rational. Men look at women for reasons they cannot explain: out of some deep curiosity mixed with love and sex, with wonder and fear. Men are truly fascinated with women. They will take risks to look at women but will fear that they will be discovered by her as being the voyeur. What do men want when they look at a woman? Only the eye knows. The major problem for women as artists has been to make the transition from observed to observer, and to give up the role of the caring female to become the self-seeking and ambitious protagonist -- which Madonna has succeeded in doing.

CINDY SHERMAN -- MADONNA -- A COMPARISON

when? Cindy Sherman, a contemporary avant-garde artist, created a series of 'Untitled Film Stills' depicting 'the fakeness of role playing as well as contempt for the domineering "male" audience who would read the images as sexy' (Suleiman, 1990, p.193). Critics argue that such images play up to the 'male gaze' for the usual profit. Madonna similarly specialises in mimicry, impersonating imaginary characters of her invention. She acts out the roles to play on our fantasies -- the virgin, the whore, witch, Hollywood goddess and so forth. Her representation of these role identities does not necessarily imply that Madonna is any one of these people. She merely acts the part. She projects these images and gains attention, thus proving how a woman's 'body' can be subjected to the subversion of the male gaze and regarded as sexually provocative, brazen and narcissistic.

Madonna encourages the voyeur as his pleasure comes from the distance which lies between himself and the scene, whereby he can then project his own fantasies. By watching her video Justify My Love, the masses were perhaps outraged, yet secretly pleased and thus ashamed. The viewers may be embarrassed because the voyeur in the video not only witnesses Madonna's romping with her lover, but also our voyeurism in seeing the scene. Madonna sees us and men watching. Her main objective therefore seems to be to tease, trap, discomfort and shock her viewers by outraging their expectations and ideals, confronting them with the limitations of their reason and extorting from them libidinal responses by implicating them in her unholy fantasies. Madonna's sexual habits and preferences, whether straight or perverse, are not the issue. Her video is indicative of how a certain figure of perversion functions in her work and appeals to our fantasies.

Sigmund Freud emphasises that in the case of both men and women the beating (sado-masochism) fantasy originates from an incestuous attachment to the father. The male masochist, like the fetishist, invents a way to remain heterosexual despite his fundamental desire

for the (Father's) phallus. He endows the women who are beating and overpowering him with masculine attributes and characteristics. The sadism and aggression which man may inflict upon women may be to counteract this fear of becoming homosexual at his desire for the father's phallus.

Sherman's pictures force upon the viewer that elision of image and identity which women experience all the time. (Williams, 1986, p.91)

We are perceived to be a particular type of person by what we wear. Black leather tends to rule out girlish innocence, oily overalls are considered tomboyish and unsophisticated, whilst a smart-suit may indicate radical feminism. We can be whoever we want to be by what we wear. Madonna brings forth this message by symbolising all types of characters from the Material Girl, to the Virgin, to the whore. Like Sherman, Madonna creates a particular image and identity which leaves us free to come to our own conclusion about the meaning behind its construction.

Sherman uses frozen images where the personality seems trapped within the image itself. Madonna's act may be a more live and readable performance, but Sherman's photographs capture emotion through the woman's expression which implicates a certain situation and the action and her face registers a reaction. What comes out of the imagined narratives of her work is specifically femininity. It is not just a range of feminine expressions that are shown, but the process of the 'feminine' as an effect something acted on. The emotions indicated in each of her pictures are nearly all suggestive of fear, suspicion, vulnerability, anxiety, or at best uncertainty, epitomising the female as submissive but her vulnerability is always erotic. Just as the Freikorpsmen found women erotic and therefore dangerous.

By God, that woman is beautiful! Her fear makes her stunning,
(Theweleit, 1987, p.76)

Sherman and Madonna are both criticised by the media for indulging in self-images, wishing secretly to be like Marilyn Monroe, posing as a sexy heroine. Madonna believes she is Marilyn reincarnated. Madonna and Sherman appear like patently sexual fantasies and at the mercy of men.

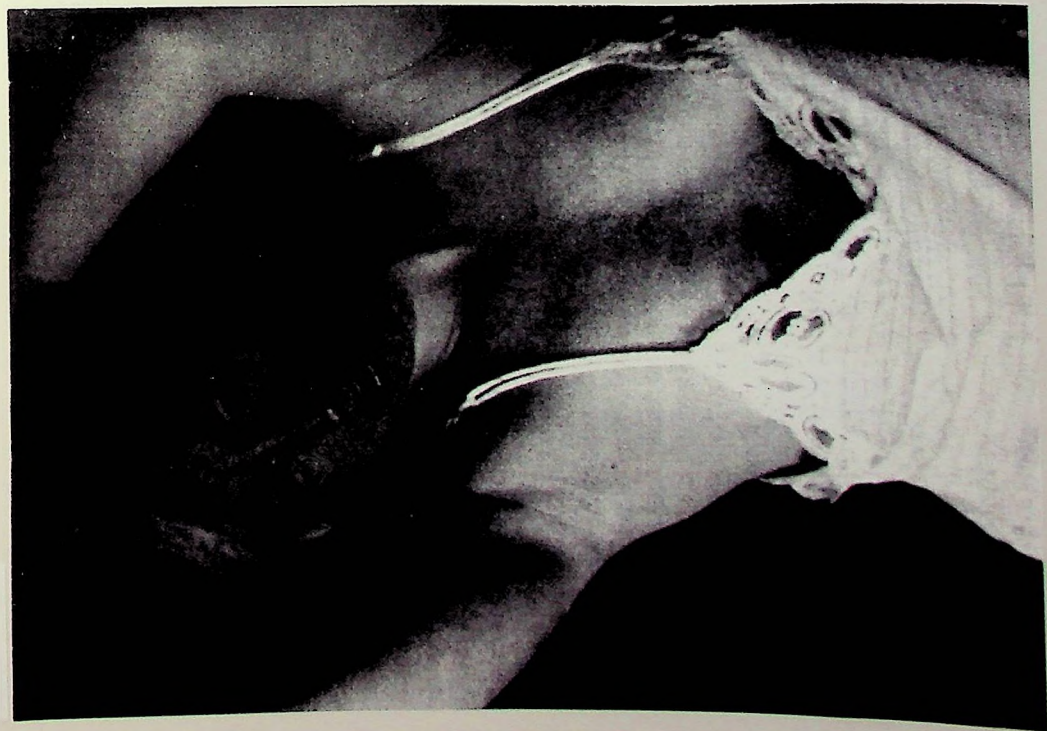
Waldemar Januszczak's review of her retrospective at Bristol analyses Sherman in The Guardian, and shows his ignorance as to what she is about. 'You see her as she sees herself, a small scrawny girl from Buffalo, a mousey blond who dreams of becoming a peroxide scarlet'. (Williams, 1986, p.103). It is below his dignity to treat her as a real artist in control of herself and her work.

The attempt to find the 'real' Cindy Sherman or the 'real' Madonna is unfulfillable, just as it is for anyone and what is even more interesting is the obsessive drive to find their identity.

Critics claim that her most recent works are closer to Sherman herself. Considering Untitled #103 and Untitled #104 (see Figure 2) both images depict a Marilyn Monroe type image. One is more sexy and sexual than the other, which is more boyish and alert, and Sherman wears an old tee-shirt as opposed to a more sexy negligée. But both images are without doubt Sherman, which undermines the idea that any 'one' image is 'her'.

There is an abundance of wit to be found in Sherman's and Madonna's work. Each perform an imagined character and both are the artists responsible for their making. Sherman ends up with some idea of herself as her heroines, frightened, vulnerable, threatened and uncertain; Madonna as being the virgin, whore, dumb blond, etc. They both chose to present themselves (in disguise), Sherman in her pictures, Madonna in her videos. They are both in control, and we can interpret their works as either witty parodies of media images of women, or as a series of self-portraits searching for an identity. All can draw their own conclusions.

Untitled # 103



Untitled # 104



Figure 2:
Untitled #103, Untitled #104

SUBVERSION OF MALE GAZE

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. (Berger, 1980, p.46)

There is nothing a woman can do which does not contribute to her presence, which is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions expressions, attire. A woman continually surveys herself. She considers the surveyor and the surveyed within her.

Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (Berger, 1980, p.46)

Men tend to survey women before treating them: according to Berger in Ways of Seeing, how a woman may act, whatever the direct purpose or motivation, is often read as an indication of how she would like to be treated.

Men act and women appear. Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. (Berger, 1980, p.47)

The surveyor within a woman herself is male, the surveyed is female. It is almost as if women are objects of vision, a sight or an image.

Berger continues by relating how in the early seventeenth century, Charles II commissioned Peter Lely (1618-80) to do a portrait of one of his mistresses. The king was a typical image of the tradition of the European nude art form, where the painters and spectator owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women. The subject -- the woman -- is constantly aware of being seen by a spectator. Nell Gwynne, the king's mistress, passively looks at her spectator staring at her naked body (see Figure 3). The nakedness is not however an expression of her own feelings, it is a sign of her submission to the king's feelings or demands; that is, the owner of both 'woman' and 'painting'. This ideal still structures the unconsciousness of many women today. Women are 'sex symbols',



Figure 3:
Nell Gwynne by Peter Lely

constantly on display for the masculine spectator, allowing him space for his fantasies. Women naturally do to themselves what men do to them. They survey their own femininity like men.

When Manet (an impressionist) painted his Olympia (see Figure 4), an unidealised image of a mundane courtesan, the woman cast in the traditional role is portrayed as questioning that role defiantly. The woman is a prostitute and has no qualms about the fact. She is the subject by her own choice, and is not submitting to the spectator's feelings or demands. Olympia's gaze is symbolic of the feminist approach, whereby the woman no longer feels obliged to behave in the role men expect of them. A psychoanalysis of the above may suggest that men feel threatened by the aggression of the prostitute and see it as a challenge to their masculinity so they strive to dominate her. She asserts her independence of him by displaying an instinct predominantly ascribed to masculinity, and he feels threatened by her. She is thus no longer an object manipulated by his desire.

Madonna, in comparison, displays similar characteristics of sexual aggression, which both threatens and excites the male. She enjoys her own sexuality independently of male opinion. The Olympia, shocking in its unequivocal harshness, subtly sidestepped the question of femininity; when the model concealed her pubic hair by crossing her legs and by placing a self-caressing gesture of the hand at the juncture. With the same freedom, Madonna grabs her crotch and flaunts her breasts, undermining traditional gender roles. The gesture meant simply 'don't mess with me, this is my body'. If Michael Jackson and Mick Jagger are free to grab at their crotch, why should Madonna be criticised? Her message to women is to be fully female and sexual while still exercising total control of their lives. She shows women how they can be attractive, aggressive, and funny, all at the same time.

Madonna is a true feminist. She exposes the puritanism and suffocating ideology of American feminism. According to Judith Williamson, author of Consuming Passions, women have been educated



Figure 4:
Olympia by Edouard Manet

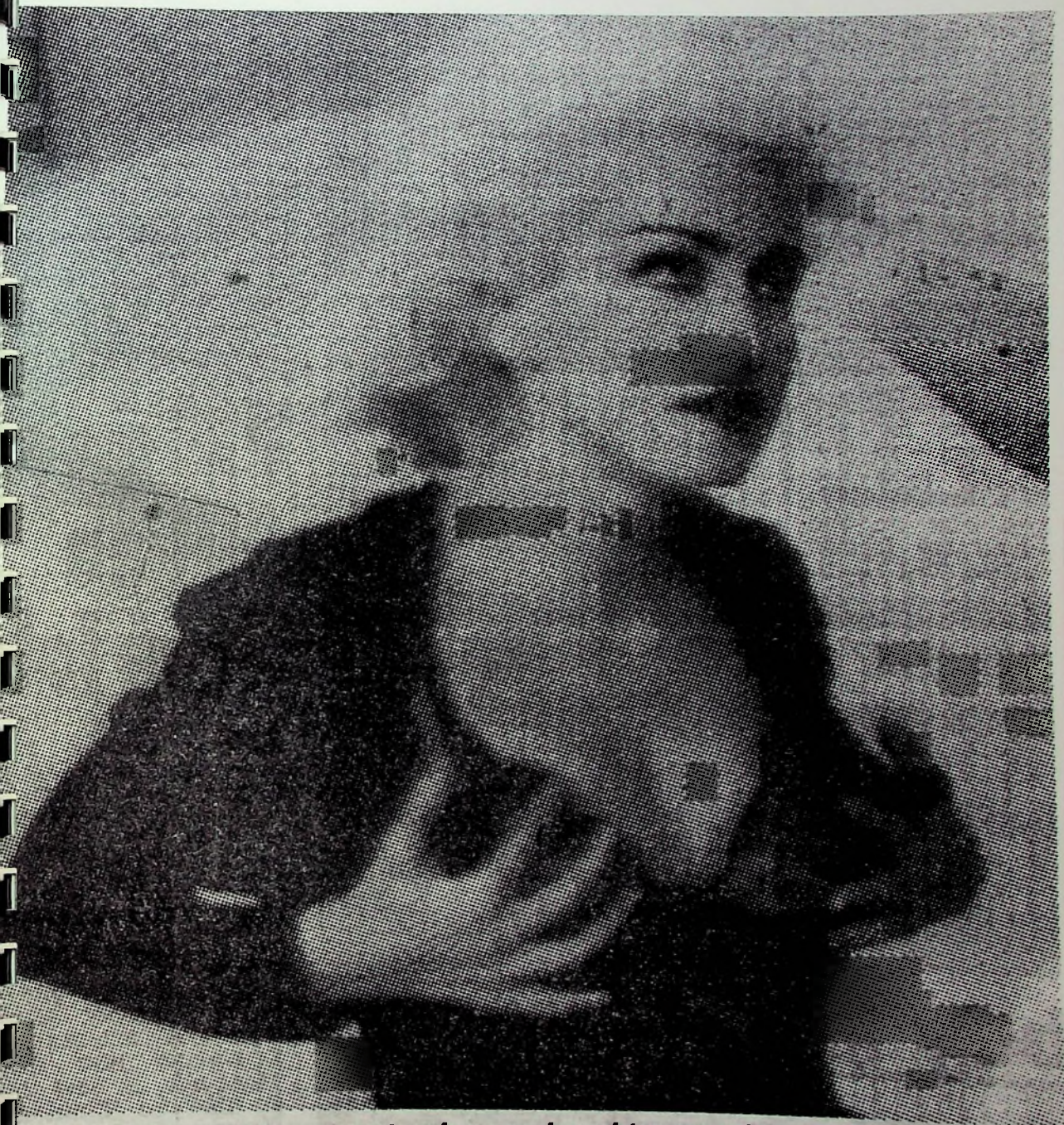
by feminists only to understand the literal, physical meaning of their bodies and to know nothing of their symbolic values. Madonna has turned the tables on sexual chauvinism. Her enjoyment of her sexuality is a constant in all of her media messages (see Figure 5). Feminists often miss the fact that Madonna is not being portrayed as being a sex object. She does not display her body for men, she enjoys her body almost auto-erotically. So far as Madonna is concerned, 'feminism' means the freedom to be sexy as well as sexual. Madonna symbolises modern feminism in terms of her own femininity, as opposed to feminism. Girls don't have to wear 'the trousers' to be liberated.

In her video Express Yourself, Madonna projects both her femininity and her animus archetype in that she is aware of her masculine traits. She behaves as a man in her video, wearing a suit and monacle, and enters that male dominated society. A man did not put the chain around her neck in the video, she did! 'I was chained by my desires'. (Sunday Press, 1991. See Reference 4).

Each individual regardless of their sex, also possesses the characteristics of the opposite sex. Referring to Jung's theory, the anima projects the femininity of the male soul, while the animus expresses masculinity of the female soul. Man see women as either a virgin or a whore. Madonna impersonates a particular role to play on men's sexual desires.

'Some women's yellow hair has maddened every mother's son'.
(Kiely, 1990, p.68)

Blondness is the ultimate sign of whiteness, the most desired of women, the most feminine of women. Women's yellow hair epitomises the image of a whore. This blond bombshell perceived to be either a prostitute or idealised woman is seen as a threat to a mother's influence over her son. Men who fear their mother's dominance, try to liberate themselves, by following perhaps the cheap ideals personified by Madonna. They rebel and are led astray from their mother's apron strings. A theoretical psychoanalysis may categorise



Get 'em off . . . Madonna strips down to her skimpy undies for the hotel romp

Figure 5:
Madonna enjoying her own Sexuality

Madonna as being an outer force which frees the anima (male) from the domineering aspect of the mother.

FREIKORPS AND THEIR FANTASIES

Klaus Theweleit, author of Male Fantasies, discusses in his book, the Freikorps, who were volunteer armies and fought immediately after World War I. He analyses their fantasies and examines not what these men thought about fighting and war, but more especially what they thought about women (in particular, the proletariat working-class woman). Their masculine identity was in fact moulded by their dread of women, in association with their hatred of communism and the rebellious working-class. They hated women, more specifically women's bodies and sexuality.

Women's bodies are the holes, swamps, pits of muck that can engulf. (Theweleit, 1987, p.xiii)

Referring to the aforementioned man-made archetypes concerning the white woman and the red woman, Theweleit defines the red woman as being sexually aggressive and in fantasy always a whore. She shows contempt for the Freikorpsmen and in their fantasy projected by their dread of women. She may possess a gun under her skirt or lead the Freikorpsman down a dark alleyway to doom. It is difficult therefore to distinguish her sexuality from the mortal danger she presents. So when the Freikorpsman kills the red woman, he may at first be repulsed at the crime, but once committed, he once again becomes safe; the world is Utopia and wholly male.

Madonna may in a sense be comparable to the proletariat woman representative of a prostitute, a violent and unfeeling woman yet by her image a threat to man. Soldiers are repulsed when they come into contact with the proletariat. These women, primarily working-class women, considered whores are threatening to men since they are not virgins. The sexual experience they possess and in Madonna's case, the provocative sexual image she portrays, releases a particularly powerful fear within man that woman is in control. Why did the soldiers conjure such images of the proletarian woman as monster? It may be appropriated to the fact that by force of nature, a result of the want for vengeance against the aristocrats,

aristocratic Freikorps and anti-communists: these proletarian women inevitably became devoid of natural emotions and feelings whereby the men felt persecuted by the loss of the once vulnerable female and the virgin archetype (see Figure 6). They subsequently fantasise the proletarian women as the main perpetrators of butchery, intent on mutilating man. By seeing women in this light, men are protected from emotional let-downs and relationships which may weaken their macho masculine identity. By resisting all that is feminine man can counteract his guilt and justify his motives when in conflict with the proletarian woman who is fighting for communism and is purely against the aristocrats.

The novelist Dwinger whose work focussed on the Freikorpsmen fantasies, portrays a scene whereby a cavalry officer (Sir Truchs) while riding out, falls into the hands of a small band of workers, among them a young woman. Declining to throw down his sword, Sir Truchs was shot in both arms and collapses on top of this dead horse. The woman accuses him of being an aristocrat since he is wearing a monacle. Sir Truchs, astonished at this being the main reason for his assassin, watches as the woman pulls a pistol from beneath her apron and shoots him in the stomach. She then jumps onto his face and grinds that symbolic monacle into his eyes with the 'heels' of her rough shoes. On retrieving his body, Captain Werner of the Freikorpsmen suggests:

Perhaps he even fell into the hands of women --
in our time, our century, it has even come to
that. (Theweleit, 1987, p.72)

By the construction of this murder it is evident that the woman castrates the man. It is implicated that the woman is a whore since she is in the company of six men. The weapon she uses to castrate him is initially hidden, the pistol is pulled out of her apron unexpectedly, as if it were a concealed ... penis?

A newspaper journalist reports how soldiers retreated and escaped combat when the fortress of Wesel was about to be attacked by the workers. The men claimed they saw:

Figure 6:
The Fantasized Proletarian Woman



1848. In the corners of the picture are symbolic representations of the republic, communism, the parliament, and the priesthood (repose). The inscription: "You are fools, all you four. Whatever you are looking for, you will find here."

images of severed heads, ears, noses, ... of Spartacist women riding shaggy horses, hair flying, two pistols in each hand ... doomed to an inevitable death at the hands of the Spartacists. (Theweleit, 1987,p.72)

Such a report suggests the elements of fantasy as there were no such things as Spartacist women who rode about on shaggy horses. Such images of armed women are therefore in association with the soldiers' fear of death. The two pistols in each hand is symbolic and the whole image of the 'Spartacist women' formulates the fantasy of a threatening penis.

Madonna, like the Spartacists, presents an image of terrifying sexual potency. It is a phallic, not a vaginal, potency that is fantasised and feared. Madonna grabs her crotch and flaunts her breasts, which imply she is just as equipped as man. The 'penis' is assigned to a certain type of woman, in the case of the proletarian whore, men fear this 'phallus' as an instrument of castration which subsequently supports the theory that these men experienced 'communism' as a direct assault on their genitals [since the proletariat women despised the followers of anti-communism, that is the Freikorpsmen].

When proletarian women fell into the hands of the Freikorps, they were therefore immediately shot, on the grounds that they had hidden weapons under their skirts. One of Dwinger's characters, the rifle-woman known as Marja, proclaimed:

I stand nature on its head. With me, rivers
flow uphill. (Theweleit, 1987, p.72)

Madonna's body has the power to shock and offend, it is her most potent weapon. Like Marja, the gun-slinging whore and communist, Madonna, by theoretical psychoanalysis, is out to castrate and shred men to pieces by her sexuality. It is her imaginary penis that lends her the power to do so. Because Madonna is so appealing to certain men, the fear of being castrated is so deeply embedded within men's subconscious. In particular circumstances, women are

powerful and devious, and thus threatening -- for example, in 'The Old Testament' a woman -- Salome -- demanded the head of John the Baptist.

PHALLIC SYMBOLS -- ALLEN JONES

In her book Visual and other Pleasures, Laura Mulvey discusses the work of artist Allen Jones. She examines his work which epitomises the exhibitionism of women and the voyeurism of men. The imagery projected by his women is in effect that of fetishism.

Fetishism is a perversion or variation of the sexual instinct, involving a desire for only a part of the body or even an article of clothing that functions as a substitute for the loved person. (Steele, 1985, p.30)

Jones displays his figures of women as amazing masquerades, for men alone, subsequently expressing a strange male underworld of 'fear' and 'desire'. The nearer the female figure is to genital nakedness, the more flamboyant the phallic distractions, for example, in Playboy, a girl caresses a dog's head on her lap. Cigarettes, guns, erect nipples and whips are all considered as phallic extensions which divert attention from the female genitals, which are not at all similar to the male organs.

Freud's understanding of fetishism involves displacing the sight of woman's imaginary castration onto objects such as shoes, corsets, rubber goods, belts, knickers, etc. -- which subsequently act as symbols, representing the lost penis, but have no direct connection with it. In his imagination the fetishist conjures up such symbols as being signs of the phallus.

It is man's narcissistic fear of losing his own phallus, his most precious possession, which causes shock at the sight of the female genitals and the subsequent fetishistic attempt to disguise or divert attention from them. (Mulvey, 1989, p.10)

'Tight shoes' and 'corsetry', through rubber goods to leather are fetish objects used as forms of punishment for women without a phallus, which is suggestive of the sadistic aspect of male

fetishism. A whip, which by theoretical analysis, substitutes a phallus. It is on the other hand merely an instrument of punishment. Likewise, high-heeled shoes symbolise a phallic extension and are yet a means of discomfort and constriction. Belts and necklaces, buckles and pendants are all phallic symbols and may suggest bondage and punishment. Madonna's videos are the epitome of the above.

The most effective fetish both constricts and uplifts, binds and raises, particularly high-heeled shoes, corsets or bras, and as a trimming, high neck bands holding the head erect. (Mulvey, 1989, p.8) (See Figure 7)

The spiral-coned corset worn by Madonna is suggestive of a phallic symbol. Stiff and protruding, it is indicative of an erection. According to Sigmund Freud, fetishism involves the substitution of the lost penis, that is, the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and -- for reasons familiar to us -- does not want to give up. For if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger. The boy -- now man -- has failed to accept the fact that the woman has not been castrated -- she never possessed a penis! But because of their belief, woman and man alike, the castrated female uses phallic substitutes to conceal or distract attention from her wound. This, incidentally, haunts and implants fear in the male's subconscious -- that is the fear of being castrated. Madonna puts into practice the use of phallic symbols, for her own advantage.

Women are constant objects of display, being looked at, gazed at and stared at by men. In a sense, women are merely there to flatter men. They are the scenery onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies. Allen Jones's work epitomises woman as a spectacle, with a new objective; 'the narcissistic wound she represents for man.' (Mulvey, 1989, p.13). One of his art-forms formulates the equation: woman = phallus.

The female body, although still bound in a tight corset, with an all-in-one body-stockings has a flamboyant fig leaf over her genitals. (Mulvey, 1989, p.12)



Figure 7:
Madonna as Phallus

Madonna projects her sexuality as a woman. She may be using phallic symbols by the wearing of corsets, high-heeled shoes, knickers, but she does so to inject that fear of castration within men. She is an exhibitionist. The true exhibit is always that which possesses the phallus. It constitutes the male ego if men see women as striving to make the phallus a symbolic presence. If women lack a penis they are made to feel insignificant, which places men on a pedestal -- it is their world. Madonna is a symbolic force in which men live out their fantasies and obsessions. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised, but never becomes the spectator's property. The men in her videos are usually there to satisfy Madonna's own sexual fantasies (See Figure 8). She is just as equipped as the male. The subconscious of the male has two avenues of escape from castration anxiety. That is through investigating Madonna and demystifying what lies beneath her phallic symbols. Since

pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which women could still be regarded as phallic ... (Steele, 1985, p.33).

The second form of escape involves the transformation of Madonna into a fetish herself, so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. There is a strong overlap between the imagery of bondage and the imagery of woman as phallus built into fetishism. Madonna is seen in her full phallic glory by wearing one-piece corsets and bondage gear in leather, consisting of numerous zips and fastening devices. The attire induces a stiff, rigid whole, together with a second slithery skin, caused by the tightness of the garments and portrays a restriction of movement. In Jones's work female bodies and fragments of ladies are re-arranged to produce fantasy male anatomies.

Allen Jones's sculptures of Women as Furniture were shown in a series at Tooth's Gallery, London, 1970, featuring life-size effigies of women, slave-like and sexually provocative, doubling as hat-stands, tables and chairs. They may be indicative of the exploitation of

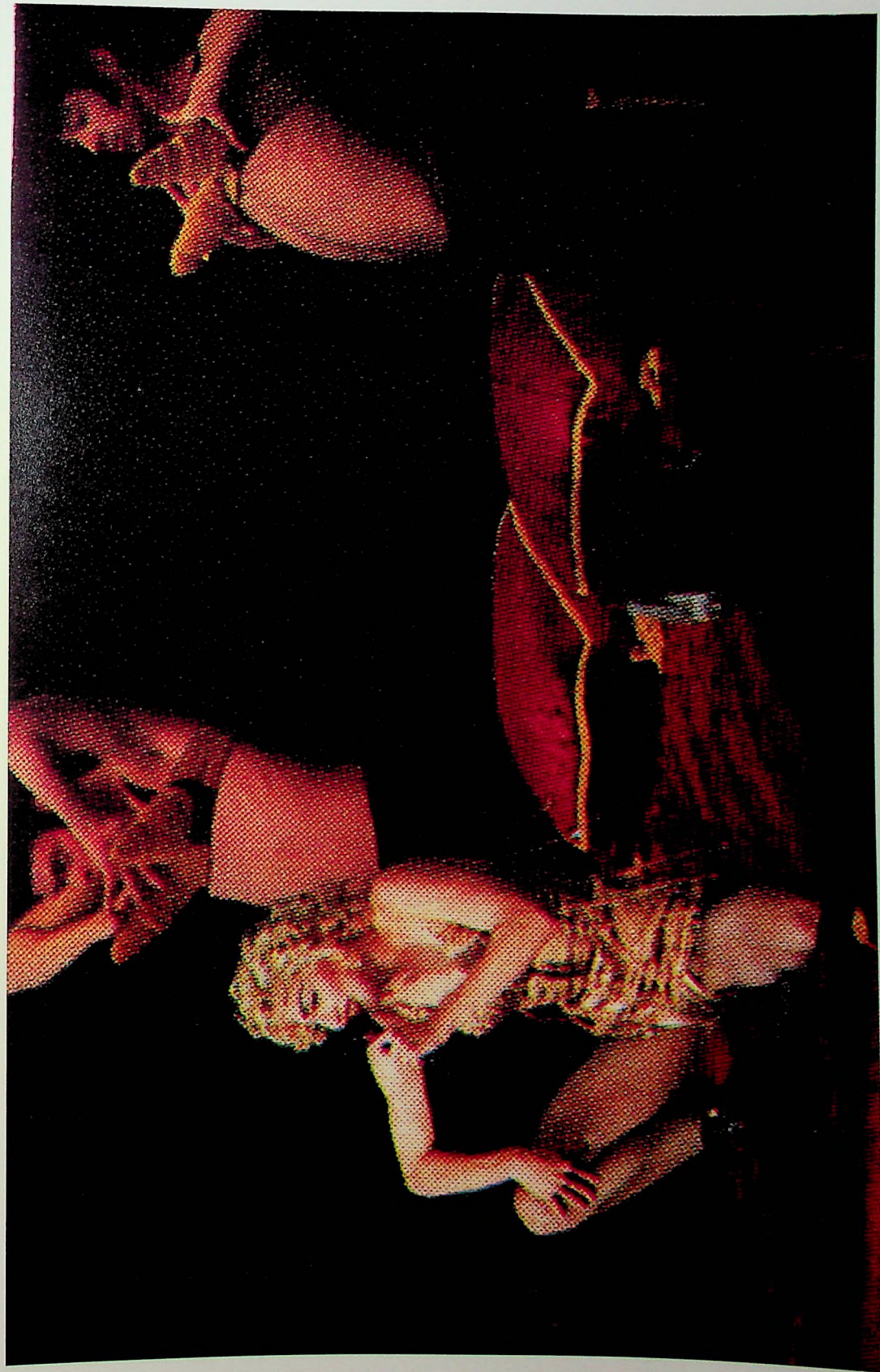


Figure 8:
Madonna on a Bed in Wembley

women's already exploited image, whereby women are used, subjugated, on display. But as proposed by Laura Mulvey, Jones's work is not about women at all, but illustrates his male fears. His work has been an education for women. He is the epitome of the concept of how women have learnt about themselves through these women made by men. In essence Jones is contributing to the women's movement. Through his work he conveys the way he sees women and the way they occupy the subconscious of the male, in terms of love and sex though to fear and desire.

UNDERWEAR AS OUTERWEAR

Designers foresaw the impact of Madonna's Image and were able to capitalise on her trend. The concept of wearing underwear as outerwear, thus became an immediate hit. The allure of underwear worn as outerwear is an affirmation that the human form is the most potent fashion weapon of all.

For centuries designers have probed the past for inspiration. British designer Vivienne Westwood is a firm believer of delving into history, into civilisation for new interpretation of past ideas.

You see potential where nobody ever saw it before, even though the elements were there all the time. This is the creative process and it comes from tradition and technique. Irish Times, 1990, see Reference 5)

Westwood led the way for modern dressing. Despite criticism regarding the 'unwearability' and 'madness' of her ideas, her 1982-83 collection, consisting of bras worn outside clothes, innovated the concept of underwear worn as outerwear, which is so prevalent today. She created the collection in such a way which was not blatantly sexual, as one would imagine by wearing what seemed like your underwear doubled as an outer garment. She revolutionised the theme and gave it the sensuousness it deserved (see Figure 9).

Fashion designers have borrowed the look of innerwear from the fifties. Transparent garments, once sexually provocative and ^{when?} attention grabbers, had become quite the norm. A new look was thus salvaged from the foundation garment of the fifties -- merry widows, waist-clinchers, panty girdles, corsets, mystifiers, all-in-ones, and push-up brassieres. The garments were unrevealing and hard-edged, not very sensuous. Women looked like Joan of Arc, in elastic armour. It took a great deal of effort to remove the finicky hooks and recalcitrant snaps and laces.

INSIDE OUT

Challenging what
works for the
body now,
designers have
restructured
underwear
as outerwear.

Bodysuits,
corsets and
lingerie
emerge newly
minted, often
smothered
in beading
for glamorous
eveningwear
that looks fresh,
versatile and
athletically sexy

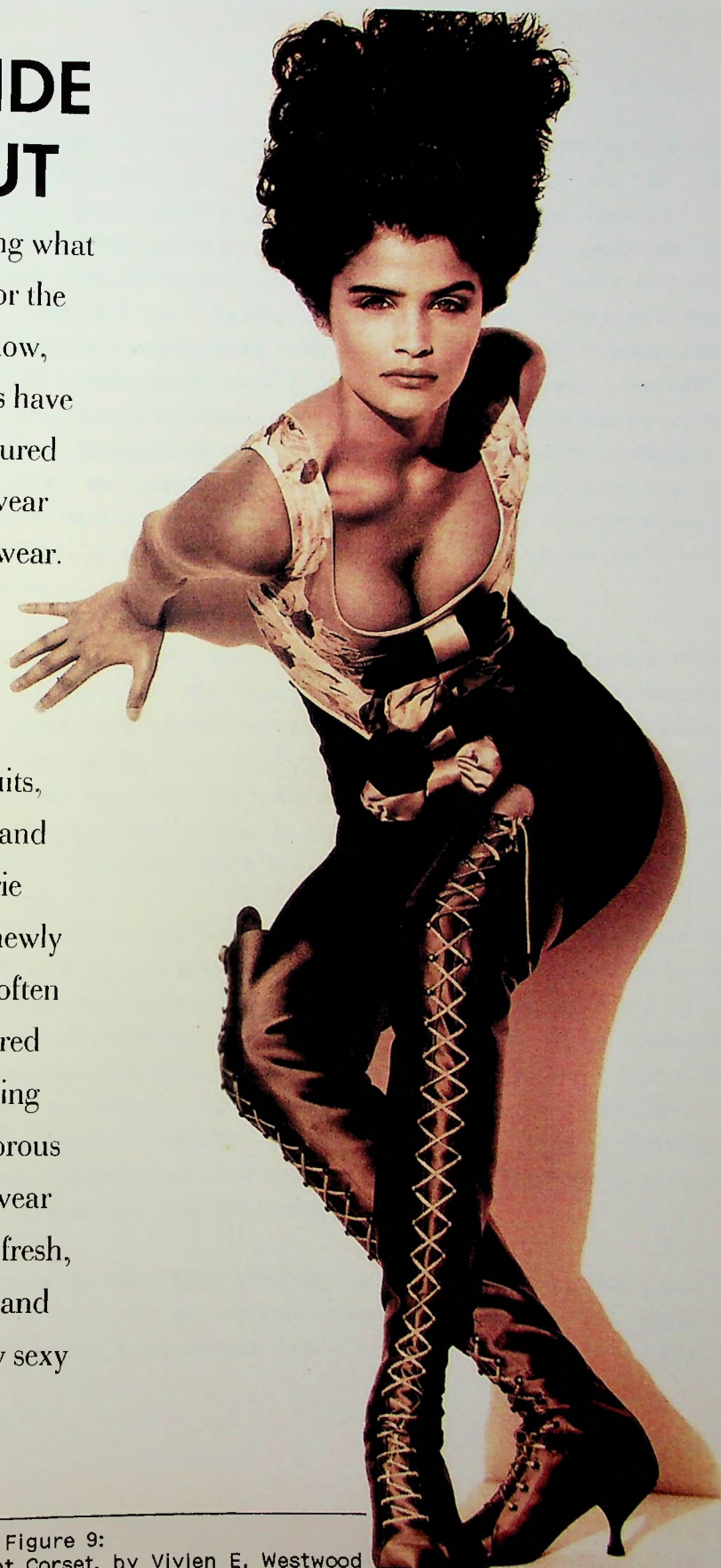


Figure 9:

ak-a-Bow Floral Print Corset, by Vivien E. Westwood

Such accessible, yet inaccessible, characteristics gave underwear a faintly fetishistic air. That fetishistic character has an even stronger impact upon today's innerwear as outerwear concept. The zig-zag stitching, seams, stays, straps, gussets, grommets and garters with elasticised inserts and panels, boning, hooks and eyes, and laces, are the trappings of sado-masochism. Madonna's Blond Ambition Tour outfits laced from breast to crotch and fronted with a pair of breast cones were equivalent to the Torpedo brassiere of the 50's, though somewhat exaggerated. The Torpedo equipped with cups was shaped with circular stitching sometimes with stiffeners in the tips. Her costumes for her Blond Ambition Tour were the most extreme and intoxicating, inspired by Jean-Paul Gaultier's earlier creations 'a spoof of dress', which consisted of six-inch velvet breasts.

Diffusion collections were subsequently created. Designers in the rag trade realised the impact of Madonna's image on her followers, and have imitated her clothes at a mass-market level. Madonna's fans want to be a part of what she represents. She gave the cotton and satin lingerie-esque costumes a bullet proof look and liberated lingerie from the bedroom to the streets. Lingerie's function after all is to flatter the female body and it is no longer shocking.

Another classic, the underwire bra, has emerged as outerwear in a form virtually unchanged since 1945. Black Bustiers and Brassieres reappear each season. Even swimsuits have been affected by the underwear influence by the installing of bra cups, creating a structured body form. Girdles have also been a heavy inspiration. Their perfection was based on the tension and pull of elastic-enhanced fabrics (Lycra was a late fifties' invention). Today, designers are tackling the same set of engineering problems, with seamed shirts, dresses and pants.

Clothing for such body shaping was set by Christian Dior. His new look of 1947 was an impractical and somewhat confining style. It was necessary to squeeze into his tightly fitted bodices, the quêt.



Figure 10:
Futuristic Corset, by Thierry Mugler

piere, which was a laced or hooked corset. Two years later in The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir made a less-than-positive examination of such fashion, calling it 'elegance as bondage'.

Despite the bondage association, interest in foundation garments never slackened. In 1954 couturier Jacques Fath made a curious transposition, creating outerwear that doubled as innerwear, he stiffened jackets and dresses with corset-like boning, making undergarments unnecessary. This hybrid proved to be ephemeral: the stores deboned his garments before putting them on sale.

Jean-Paul Gaultier's adaptation of the concept in 1990 was, however, an immediate hit. When Madonna flaunted a boned bustier underneath a leather jacket, wore corsets and bras and had no qualms about the fact, the look took to the streets instantly. Gaultier mastered the recasting of lingerie as something close to sportswear, which encouraged people to allow their first layer of clothing stand alone (see Mugler futuristic corset, Figure 10). Presently the distinctions between underwear and outerwear are almost obsolete (see Figure 11). The fashionable and fit, the lean and the lithe woman of the 90's will be into body clothes and minimal dressing, a bodysuit and jacket are enough for everyday attire.

Exercise leotards, stretch bodysuits, and antique lingerie are used as evening wear. All encouraging sexual fantasies, but this time for 'women'. Fitness which is such a preoccupation today has created a new underwear designed for 'function' rather than eroticism. The realities of underwear thus lie in function when necessary, unquestionably erotic when not.

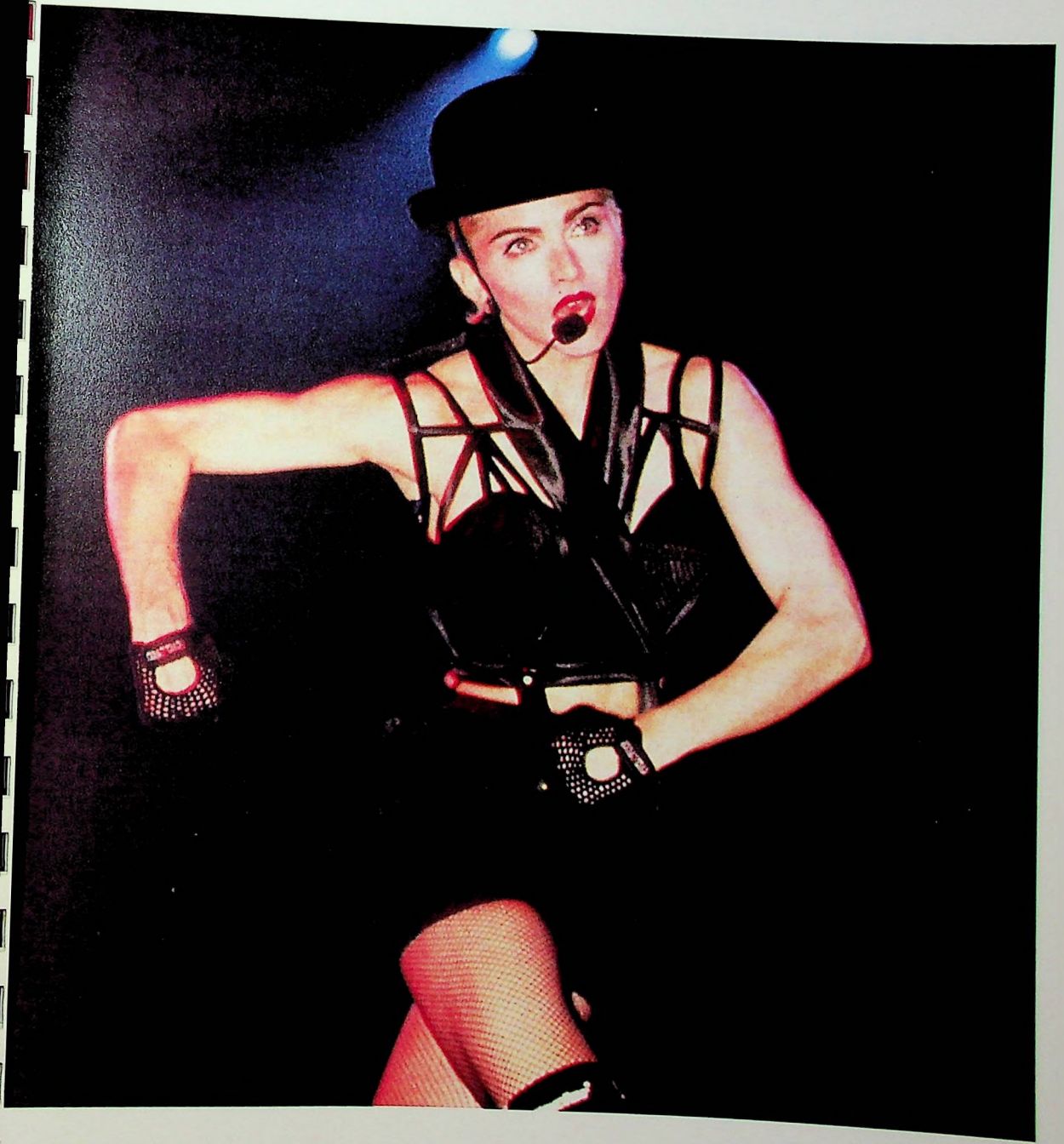


Figure 11:
Bustier Goes Public, by Jean-Paul Gaultier

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, Madonna's attire 'seemed' no better to that of a prostitute. A blatant sex object and a slave of male desire. Her image was cheap and sexually provocative. She may have worn her underwear in the traditional manner, but somehow it managed to reveal itself. Her bra straps would tend to slip off her shoulders to be revealed through her lacy, semi-transparent layers of clothes. But if she was as serious then about her image and what she represented as she is today, she probably considered the notion that clothes stand for 'knowledge and language'. By concealing the body we reveal all of its possibilities. Madonna promoted in the voyeur the desire to remove the outer layer of clothing, which essentially forms a protection and a hiding place for the genitals and makes them seem worthy of discovery.

By concealing the body, clothes excite sexual curiosity and create in the viewer the desire to remove them. (Steele, 1985, p.42)

Madonna may appeal to men's sexual fantasies, but because she is so blatantly sexual and erotic she may implant a sense of shock and embarrassment which will make the spectator (usually male) stop and think how easily he can be drawn to this image, which may also implant in him a sense of fear as he is being dominated by this overtly sexual but powerful woman: thus weakening his once domineering characteristics.

In one of Madonna's earlier videos Lucky Star almost all of the erotic shots are of her belly button. Cropped tops, short hip-minis immediately became a fashion icon, thus determining the belly button as being the most erotogenic zone of the body. Fashion exploits the erotic appeal of physical characteristics. Vogue (March 1990) her more recent video, depicts Madonna wearing a corset, tight-laced at the back, which may imply a shifting of the erogenous zone to the waist and her bustier tops, featured in other videos, highlight the sexuality of the breast.

The back-view of a laced Mainbocher corset designed by Horst in 1938 (see Figure 11) bears a close resemblance to those crippling suits of armour women in Victorian times religiously wore. The corset in question was such an icon of fashion that Madonna parodied it in her Vogue video. This classic vision of a beautifully bound woman is even more poignant than the eye can see, it was produced 'in extremis'. It was 1939 and the Nazis were marching into Paris. It may be said that painful political situations and bondage fashion go hand-in-hand. We may therefore interpret Madonna's reason for showing the image in her video as a reminder of the fight for dress reform and independence. Art historian David Kunzle recently supported the fact that tight-lacing was not an emblem of female narcissism and submission. It was a legitimate form of sexual expression and self-assertion. Women chose to be erotic for their own self-fulfilment, not submitting to men's ideal of how a woman should look -- a form of female emancipation which expressed a sexual and social rebellion and not male bourgeois dominance.

The wearing of a corset has often been associated with both eroticism and morality. For example, 'the strait-laced woman was not loose' (Steele, 1985, p.161). Madonna may be overtly sexual, but she is not available.

Madonna has been deemed a phenomenon not only by fans and popular media, but also by academic critics. What is the nature of her appeal? Everything she has done and said has been scrutinised to a very large degree. It came across in a recent interview that she finds it amusing 'how people grab onto things, turn them inside out, and analyse her videos to make them mean something.' (Omnibus Documentary, 1990, See Reference 6). That's what she is all about: making people think. She has most definitely succeeded. Controversy is practically her second name, whether it is due to her 'Boy Toy' image or the wearing of knickers on the outside. She seems like an absolute presence in culture. Everywhere one looks there is an echo of Madonna.

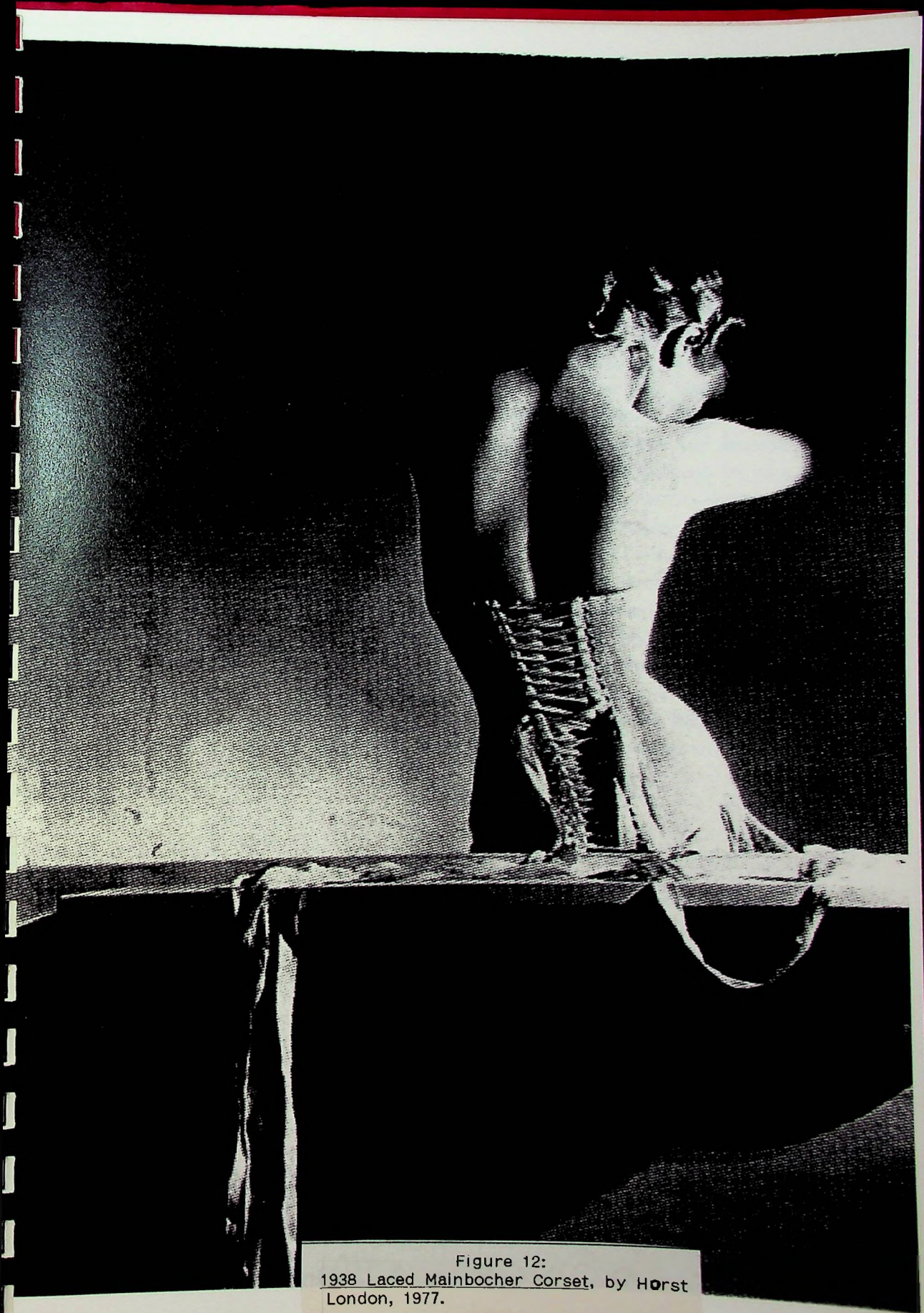


Figure 12:
1938 Laced Mainbocher Corset, by Horst
London, 1977.

In the beginning it was fun and audacious. Now she is far less accessible. It is like there is a machine around her, getting bigger and more powerful. We see more of the things she creates, less of Madonna herself. She is almost like a mysterious energy cell ready to explode in the centre of it all. Is there a human being behind the PR machinery? Is she being exploited, or has she moulded herself into a thinking, acting, singing, dancing role model for self-satisfaction? She is in a sense her own public relations. She causes a stir wherever she goes, resulting in inevitable publicity. She is always one step ahead. She has inspired her followers to believing they can be whoever they want, with a change of hair and clothes. By clothing our body we disguise 'our exposed vulnerable selves'. Costume instills a sense of potency, in the wearer and entices the viewer as well. Through certain types of dress we feel more secure and join a particular social class, while simultaneously announcing our individuality within society at large. The ability to change one's appearance, which Madonna radically exercises, stimulates fresh emotions and behaviour and lets us assume different though temporary personalities which satisfy that need for a variety in life. Madonna constantly changes her image. Feminism says 'no more masks', Madonna says 'we are nothing but masks.' Conveying her ideas through movie star looks, glitzy videos, defiant lyrics, she has become the quintessential feminist of the video age.

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