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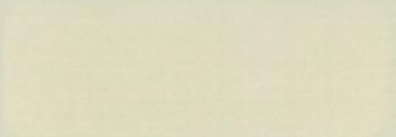
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## WOMEN'S UNDERWEAR IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by  
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Submitted to the faculty  
of History of Art & Design  
& Complementary Studies  
in Candidacy for the Degree  
of BDes Embroidered Textiles

1992





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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Tutor Joe McDonnell and the very patient Library staff of The National College of Art and Design for their assistance in the preparation of this Thesis.





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## INTRODUCTION

'Without foundations there can be no fashion, without fashion there can be no foundation' (5, pg 11).

Fashion is a shape, a continual changing style which, in a sense is governed and controlled by what goes on underneath. One obvious effect of underwear is to impose a shape (silhouette) on the wearer. Undergarments of corsets, bras and girdles possess a history of their own, yet are inseparable from the history of fashion. Effected by society, wars and recession both fashion and underwear bare the changes which they have experienced as a result. All these elements can be experienced, fully during the Twentieth century. The frequent changing styles of the female silhouette vary from the exaggerated curves of the Edwardian era to the long hard line of the Twenties, is just one example of this.

The fashionable form has also been dramatically affected by technological advances in the design of underclothes. The development of man-made fibres and fabrics has led to lighter, more comfortable underwear as opposed to the heavy boning and lacing which was experienced during the Edwardian period.

During the years of the 1980's underwear has emerged in outerwear, holding great sophistication within this inevitable form of style (fig 1). Recession and economic cutbacks are the main reasons why this type of fashion continued into the 90's. Designers realised that minimal use of fabric resulted in maximum profits, hence the 'Minimalistic Look'.







Figure 1. - Design by Vivienne Westwood '92.





It is these ideas and events which I hope to discuss during the following chapters. Having visited the Fashion and Surrealism exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1988, I was intrigued with the works of French designer, 'Jean-Paul Gaultier'. When I looked more closely it became apparent that much of his source material and inspiration came from fifties styled undergarments; hence making a link with fashion and underwear.

Another designer which adopts this attitude within her work is British designer, 'Vivienne Westwood'. Having visited her shop The World's End in 1991 it became apparent why she has been described by the press as an 'English Eccentric'. Her work is based and styled largely on Nineteenth century undergarments, such as the 'Liberty Bodice' and 'Crinoline'.

Within their works Gaultier and Westwood change the appearance of the silhouette by using undergarments as their medium. In a sense their work acted like a rejection of nature and all it stood for. Thanks to such innovators as Gaultier and Westwood, underwear has evolved into an accepted form of outerwear for the fashion victims of the Twentieth century.

Through the designs of Twentieth century underwear we experience the evolution of the modern woman from submissive in the 1900's to self assured by the 90's. I will discuss the reasons for such changes within undergarments. I will also make references to the fabrics used and how they have contributed to the





development in redefining foundationwear into a luxury, lightweight garment.

I will also make reference to stockings and tights as I feel they evolve simultaneously both as underwear and outerwear, therefore helping blur or even abolish the distinction between the two, making such a transition an inevitable part of style.

As undergarments are wide and varied, I have decided to chose just a few items to discuss. These will include the girdle, bra and corset as I feel that it is these particular garments which have contributed to the changes and perception of underwear in the Twentieth century. They are also the ones which have made a dramatic reappearance in outerwear and therefore, fully exploited a fashion statement.





CHAPTER 1

THE HEALTH AND DRESS REFORMERS

SPORTSWEAR, CYCLING AND TENNIS





## CHAPTER 1

Women's dress at the beginning of the 1900's was undergoing profound changes through social circumstance. This was to effect underwear and the way it was perceived. Fashion was heading towards a new simpler style which was to influence how women looked on their underwear. During this time women were to become liberated sexually.

With the dawning of the first decade of the twentieth century came a general growing concern and interest in the health and natural beauty of the body. Dress reformers, Paul Schultze, Naumberg and Christian H. Stratz were all too aware of the effects corsets were having on womens health. Society favoured the "sixteen inch" waist (fig 2A) to which fashion victims responded. Such tight lacing of the corsets resulted in the wearer experiencing dizziness and subsequent fainting. But the corset held a more sinister side to it. The crushing corset hindered the act of child birth as the narrowing ribcage restricted growth often crushing the unborn child (fig 2B). It seems underwear intended to confine and enclose the female thus becoming the enemy of female sexuality, a perverse toy of societies desires holding women at their mercy (18, pg 123, 129).

Luckily a rebellion against these ideals were forming. Increasing participation in sports by women meant that body-compressing corsets which lowered the wearers vitality, rendering them unfit for any strenuous activity, were now an unsuitable undergarment. Women would no longer be bound by the strictures set upon them

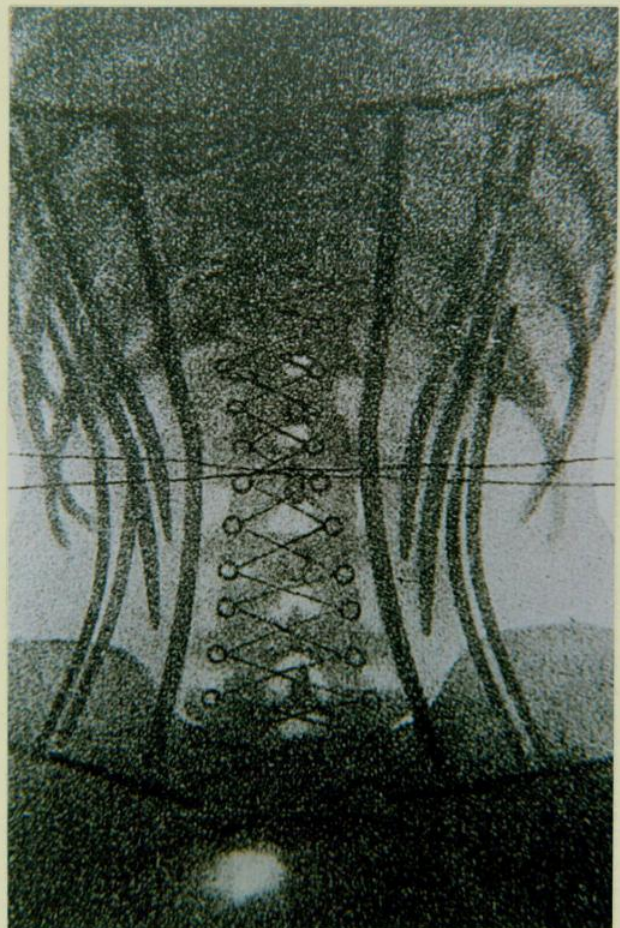


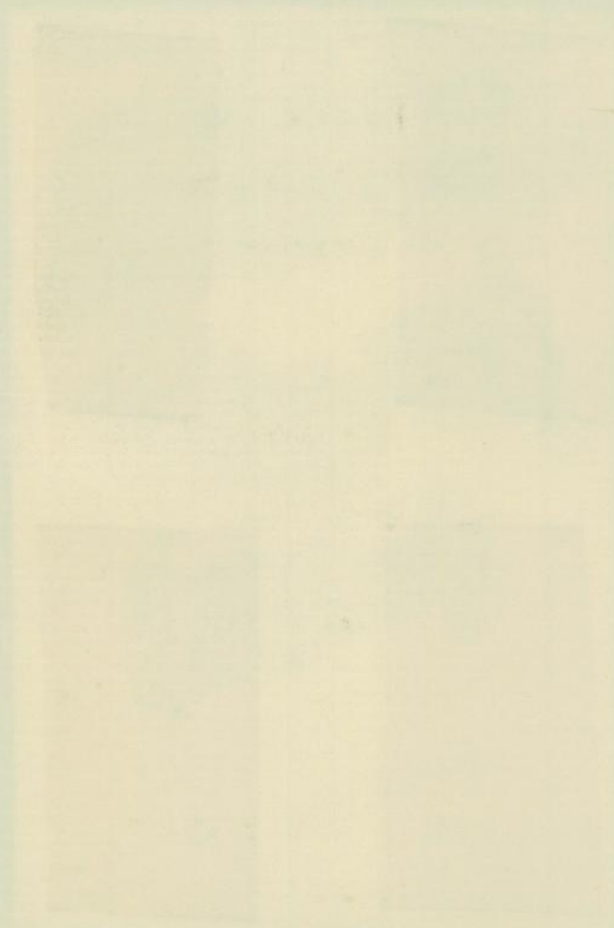
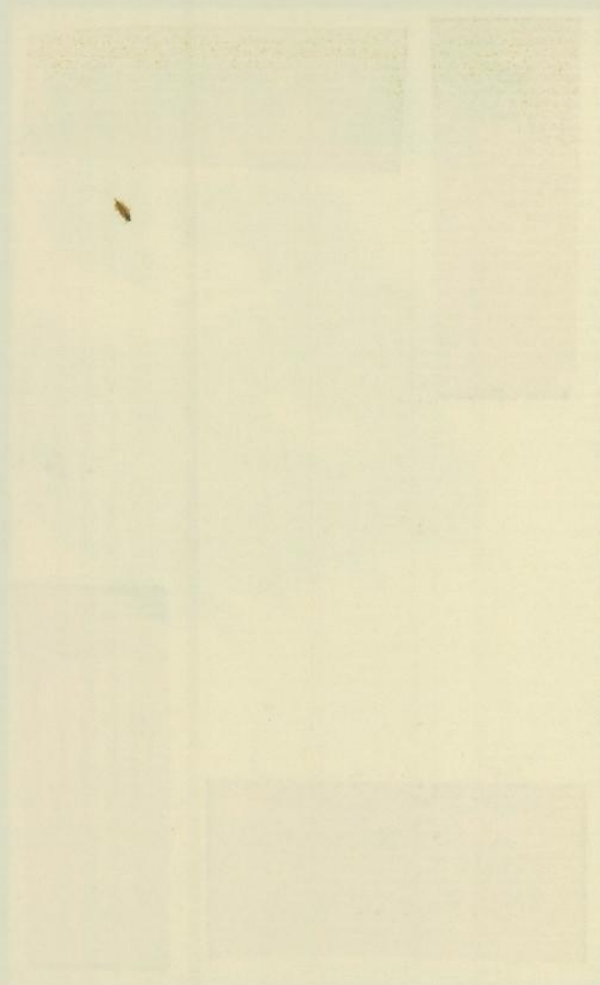




Fig.2a  
The sixteen inch waist,  
circa 1900

Fig.2b  
X-ray of a deformed ribcage,  
circa 1900







by their clothing and instead would adopt a new freedom which was to become an acceptable part of fashion (4, pg 18).

The fashionable sporting activities which were briefly seen during the 1890's were to flourish during the 1900's, as more women were becoming part of a world which for so long had been denied them. The popular sporting activity of cycling was now for everyone yet it held one dilemma for women - what to wear on a bicycle? The answer to this came in the shape of "Cycling Bloomers" (fig 3), adapted from the undergarment of the same name. They overcame the problem of bulky skirts which hindered the act of cycling, often causing accidents when the skirt caught in the spokes of a bicycle wheel. Here we experience underwear being adapted as outerwear a concept to be utilised throughout the Twentieth century.

This idea appalled many women who considered such notions quite immoral, but to the more "avant garde" ladies they were simply looked upon as "sports clothing" (13, pg 88).

It is understandable why so many women found them immoral, as until now the mere sight of a woman's ankle caused outcry and now many were wearing trousers which resembled bloomers! It has been said that the sight of a woman clasping the saddle of a bicycle between her thighs stirred and aroused many an emotion, since dormant in men!

Tennis was another sporting activity which demanded unrestricting garments. Separates were







Fig.3 Lady in Cycling Bloomers.





introduced and layers diminished. Skirt lengths rose slightly, thus freeing the legs and the overall appearance of garments was that of a lighter, looser, unrestricted silhouette. Women's sportsdress had been liberated, and the Edwardian maturity of dress had been transformed into a new youthful style (13, pg 89). However, this liberation, would not be adopted into fashionable outerwear for a couple of years.





CHAPTER 2

THE TEA-GOWN

THE 'S' SHAPED CORSET

PAUL POIRET





## CHAPTER 2

During the first part of the Twentieth century it was not unusual for upper class ladies to change their clothes up to six times in one day. They wore one style of gown when visiting friends, another for carriage rides and another when receiving guests at tea. It is this particular gown which came to be known as the 'Tea-Gown' which I will be referring to. Although it is not strictly correct to classify it as underwear, at the time it held the same alluring qualities attributed to its modern day counterpart - the negligée (fig 4) (16, pg 99).

An essential part of 'Gracious Living', the tea-gown was worn when guests called to tea. This usually took place between the hours of mid-afternoon and early evening; 'at five o'clock they will don the picturesque tea-gown and adopt an air of drooping languor which savours of mystery' (13, pg 88).

Some of the more risqué kinds of gowns included ones made of layers of the lightest crepe de chine, worn with a delicate lace matinee tied loosely with thin ribbon. Worn free of the corset and chemise, the wearer of the tea-gown appeared virtually naked except for the transparent layers which veiled the body.

Echoing sentiments of egyptian costume (fig 5), it was not unusual that the tea-gown became closely associated with the bedroom. Up until 1908, the bedroom was still considered an acceptable place from which to entertain, although for many this custom had





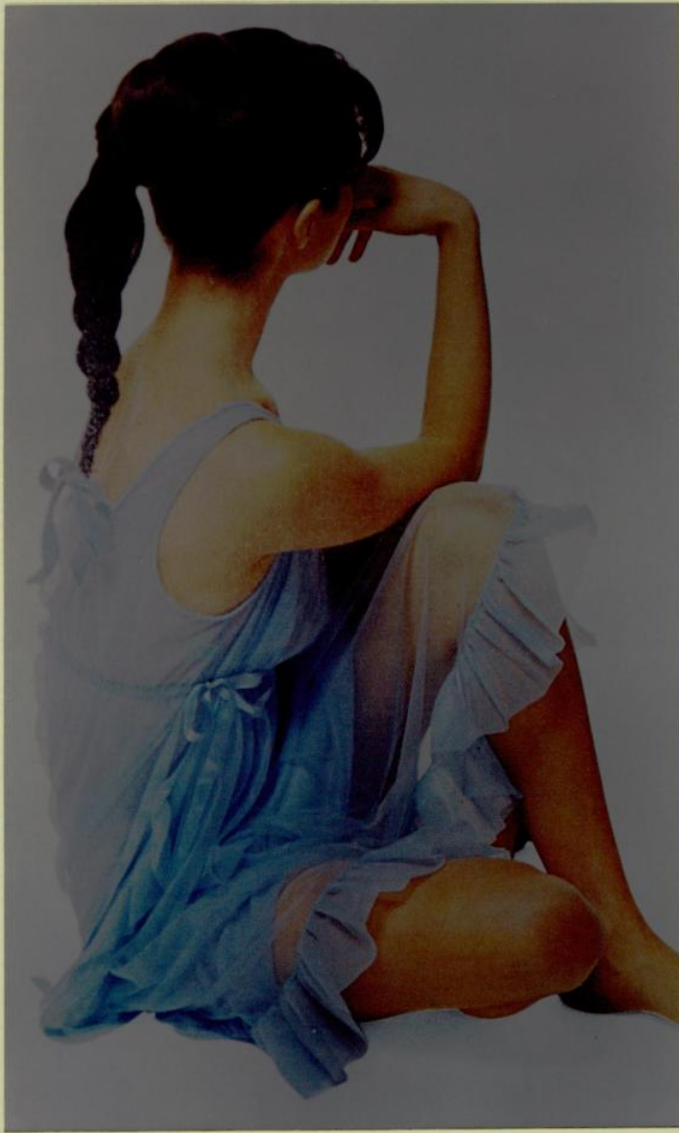
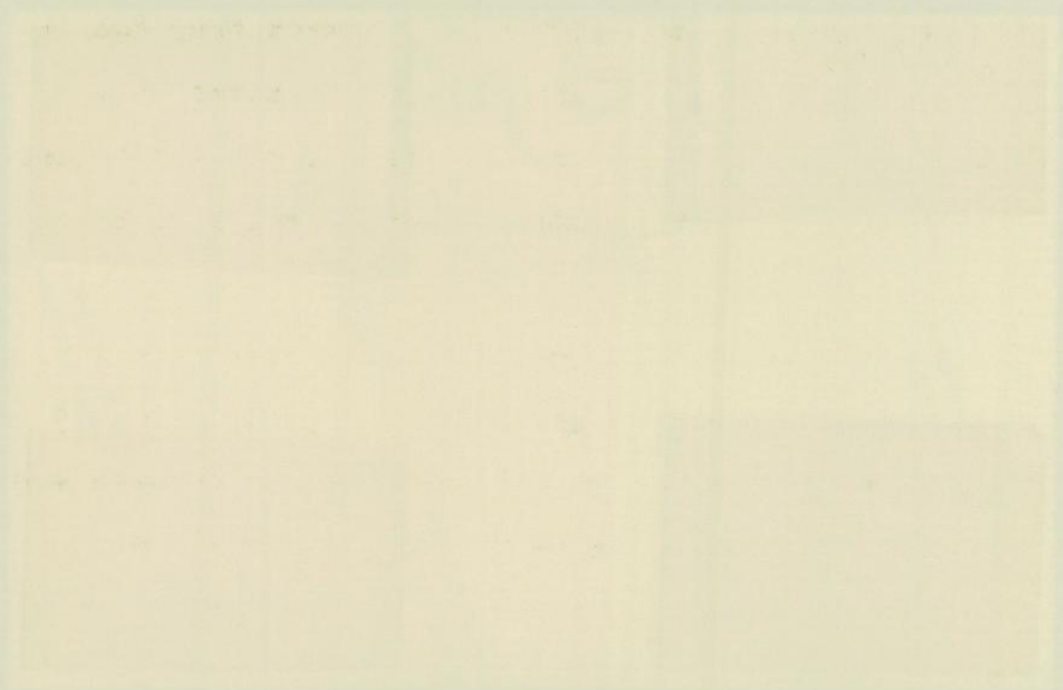
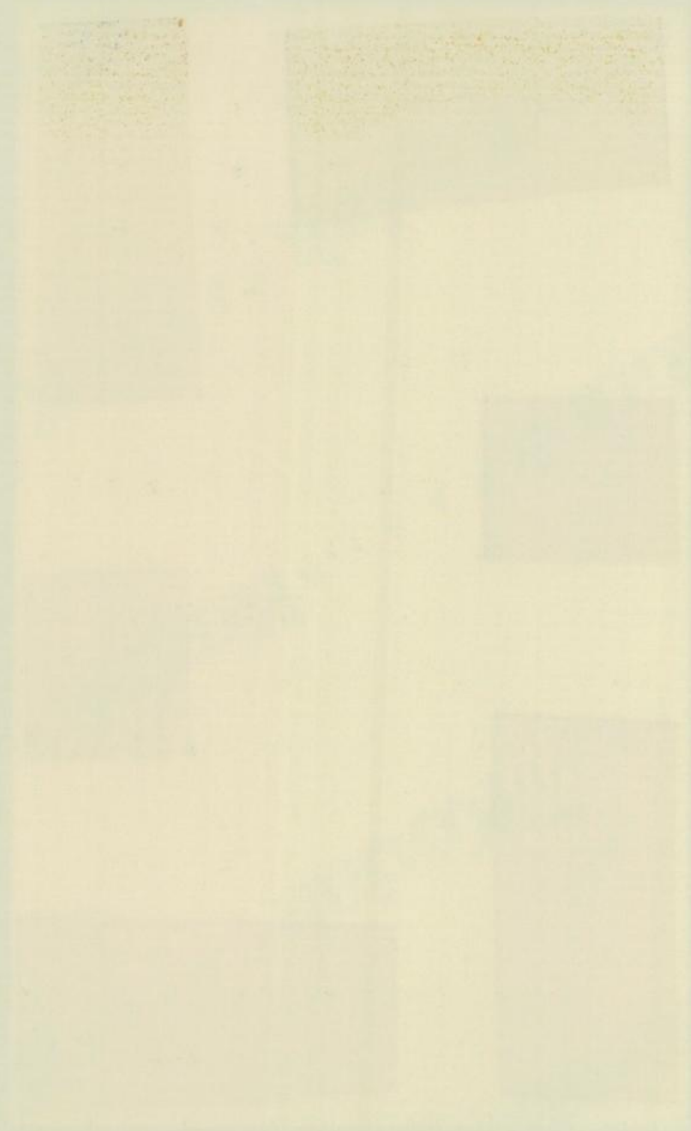


Fig.4  
The Negligee.



Fig.5 Women in Egyptian Dress.





long since died; 'she spent a long time each day in her boudoir in a loose tea-gown without stays, "one feels less pursed up" she would explain' (13, pg 88). A woman in this state, devoid of her underwear, was more easily accessible and sexually exciting than one who wasn't.

Up until now I have only made brief references to corsets which have been around since 1500 B.C. when they were first worn by Cretan women. It was to undergo profound changes during the Twentieth century in its shape and materials with which it was constructed.

#### THE 'S' SHAPED CORSET

During the first decade of the Twentieth century the shape and silhouette of the corset was influenced by the changes experienced as a direct result of the 'Art Nouveau' style within furniture. The silhouette for the new corset of the 1900's was derived from the 'S' bend of table legs and other art decorations of the time (18, pg 131). It became known as the 'S' shaped corset (fig 6). It consisted of two long flat metal stays, usually of steel, which lay over the stomach, flattening it. The bottom of the corset ran to the hips, digging into the groin causing great pain and discomfort (18, pg 131). It fastened at the back and was worn over a chemise (a fine cotton or linen t-shaped undergarment, around since the 15th century) (9, pg 3).

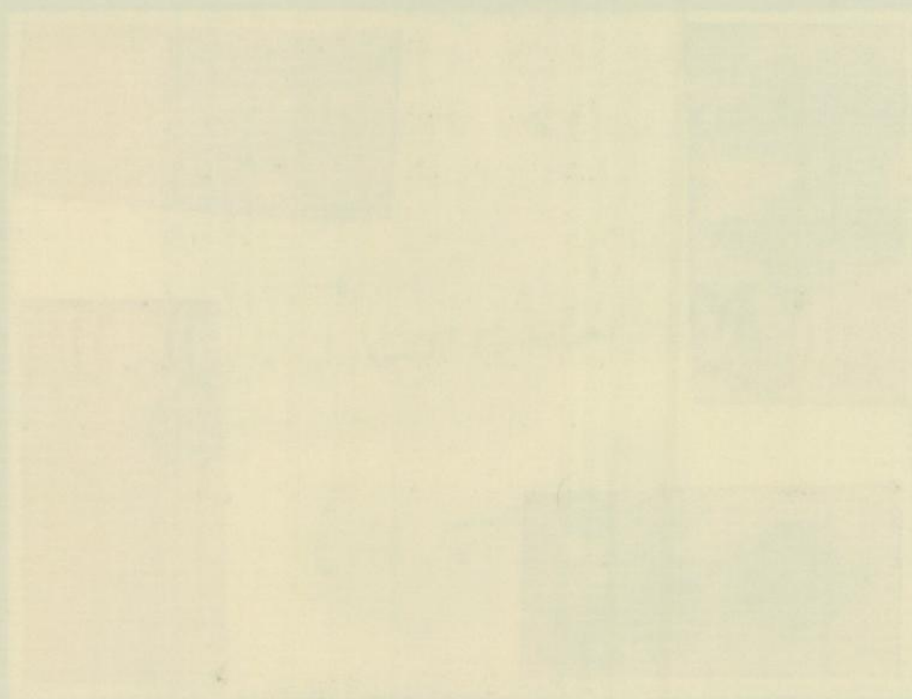
The wearer of this particular corset had a large behind, vertical stomach and a large bosom which







Fig.6 The 'S' Shaped Corset, 1908





was pushed out as far as it could go. In the quest of the 'ideal' waist measurement many women thought nothing of having their lower ribs removed (fig 7) (13, pg 54).

It may seem unusual that the corsets of the 1900's were worn over a chemise and not next to the skin like those of today, but during the 1900's there was a problem with the laundering of corsets. This was due to the fact that they contained metal stays and fastenings which would rust if placed in water. The chemise acted like a protector to the corset, absorbing sweat and body odours, thus keeping the corset relatively clean. This would all change with the introduction of elasticated and rubber fabrics in corsets (5, pgs 142-146).

#### PAUL POIRET 1879-1944

Paul Poiret was one designer who helped contribute in extinguishing the Edwardian figure forever. In 1907 Poiret was designing clothes which dispensed with the nineteenth-century corset. His attack on corsets succeeded where others had failed (7, pg 128). Works by artists, 'Matisse' and 'Roualt' were seen as inspiration for fashion designers who brought new pastel shades found within paintings into the world of fashion. Poiret freed women into falling drapes and sack-like gowns (fig 8). Convincing women to throw away their corsets and lighten their figure, he set about providing them with a new alternative. This came in the shape of a rubber girdle which helped



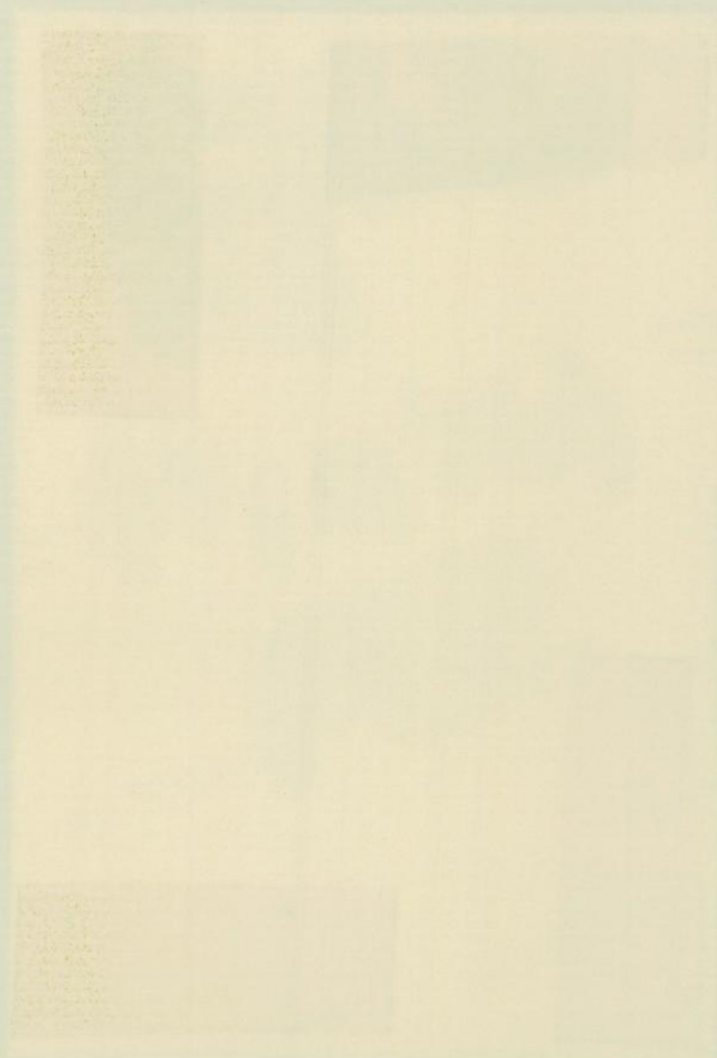




Fig.7  
Lady with lower ribs removed.

Fig.8  
Design by Paul Poiret,  
1912.







retract the hips slightly. He brought a natural shape into the fashions of 1908. Fashionable women stood upright and free. This 'New Look' was the beginning of a style which would dominate during the 1920's (15, pgs 221-223).





CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE WORKING WOMAN

THE "BOYISH" LOOK

GABRIELLE COCO CHANEL

THE KESTOS BRA

ELASTIC AND RUBBER CORSETS

THE ZIP FASTENER

THE NEGLIGEE





## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The war (1914-1918) was to mark a permanent change in womens clothing. It signified the end of an era in fashion. Corsets were replaced by the girdles, first introduced by Poriet, which in time would also be discarded in favour of the brassiere and roll-on. The Chemise<sup>1</sup>, no longer functional would also disappear.

With men leaving their jobs and going to battle, women were now faced with the task of taking their place at work. For an upper class lady, the prospect of driving an ambulance or working as a filing clerk proved to be a potential challenge, which they enjoyed. In order to meet their new jobs with an air of efficiency clothing had to become less fussy and cumbersome. In many cases it adopted a certain "military style" about it (4, pg 44). With women leading more active lives, their underwear was made less restricting and more in keeping with fashion trends. Fabrics in a variety of colours were now all the rage. One advantage the working woman had over her predecessors was that she was now able to pick and choose her own clothes since it was she who was paying for them, so the whims of society and husband were no longer applicable. The new found look which would develop through the post war years would adopt an element of fun if not excitement (fig 9).







Fig.9  
The 'Post War Look'.





The 1920's brought with it the birth of less restricting style in underwear. In the fashion world women were wearing shorter skirts. Dresses adopted concepts and lines found within the works of cubist painters, falling from the shoulder, dropping to the hip. The silhouette was favouring a flatter line, thus the "Boyish Figure" was born (1, pg 264). In order to achieve this new shape the bosom was flattened, waist omitted and thus a newly developed woman. A bandeau (band) of firm brioche ran around the body from the shoulders to the waist and was held in place by straps at the shoulders (fig 10). It was a look with the young in mind (5, pg 126). Lace which until now was favoured on underwear was replaced with colour. Such an item like the bandeau came in no less than fifteen different colours, ranging from the standard black and white to the more exotic colours of cyclamen and vieux rose, a choice which seems far greater than the one offered to us to-day (5, pg 127). In relation to price the underwear of the 1920's was certainly not cheap and high prices were paid for matching sets which were very much in Vogue. It was not unusual to find underwear of lace wool still made by hand.

#### GABRIELLE COCO CHANEL (1883-1971)

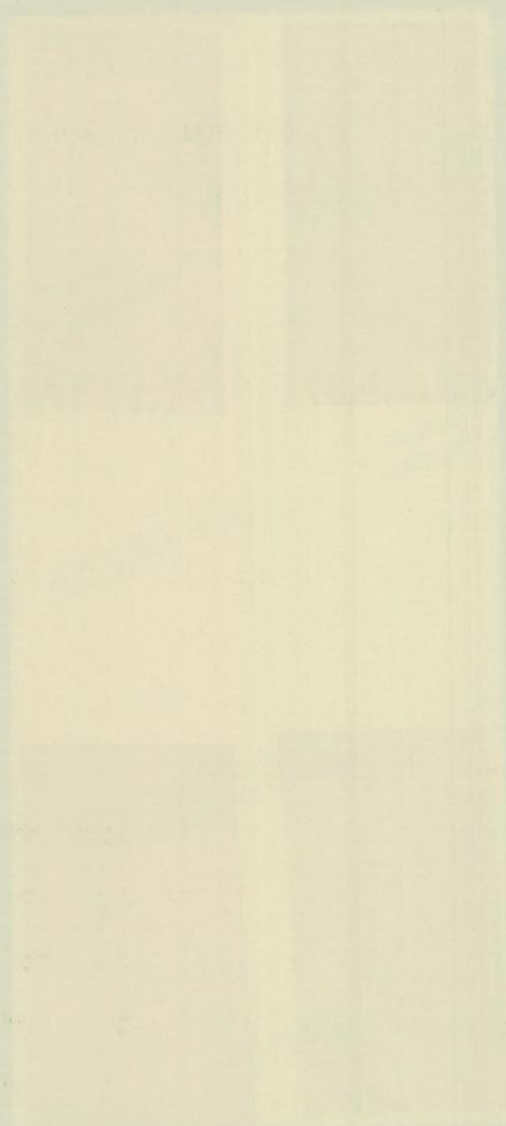
It has been said that Chanel was one of the world's most significant designers of the Twentieth century, determined to rid women of frills and fuss. 'Each





Fig.10  
The Bandeau.







frill discarded makes one look younger' (1, pg 283). Probably best known for her "Flapper style", (fig 11) this particular silhouette became the one attributed to the "Twenties Look". The women who wore it possessed a veiled, rather than clothed body with skirt lengths rising by the minute. This began putting an increased emphasis on bare legs.

Women and designers were becoming more aware of their legs being exposed and began seeking decoration for them. Up until now they had been content to wear black isle stockings (fig 12) made of thick wool and not at all in keeping with the lighter fabrics attributed to the fashions of the time. New colours of nude and tan were introduced into silk stockings (1, pg 29). They gave the illusion of nudity, thus making womens legs "appear" bare like that of little girls. More luxurious ones were decorated with gold and silver embroidery winding seductively around the leg. They were rolled around a garter at the top (18, pgs 156, 168) giving the appearance of a bracelet, like that of a slave. This concept could be attributed to the influence of jazz music (a pre-dominately black sound) which effected the people and their fashion. Women were now adopting symbols and ideas associated with the slave. Artists such as Josephine Baker<sup>2</sup> helped support this, thus making it into a fashion accessory (fig 13).

The rapturous fashions of the Twentieth century were to be short lived. A revolt against the boyish figure was forming and designers were now

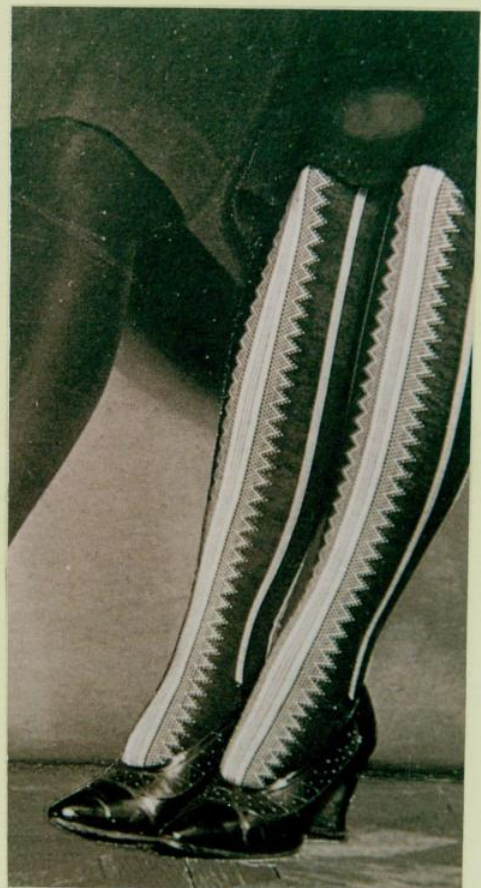






Fig.11  
The Flapper Style,by Chanel.

Fig.12  
Stockings,circa 1920.



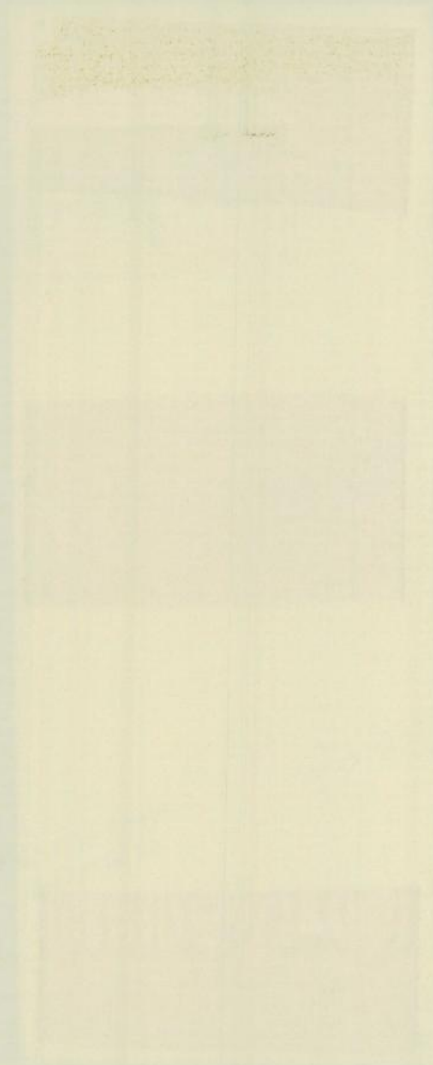
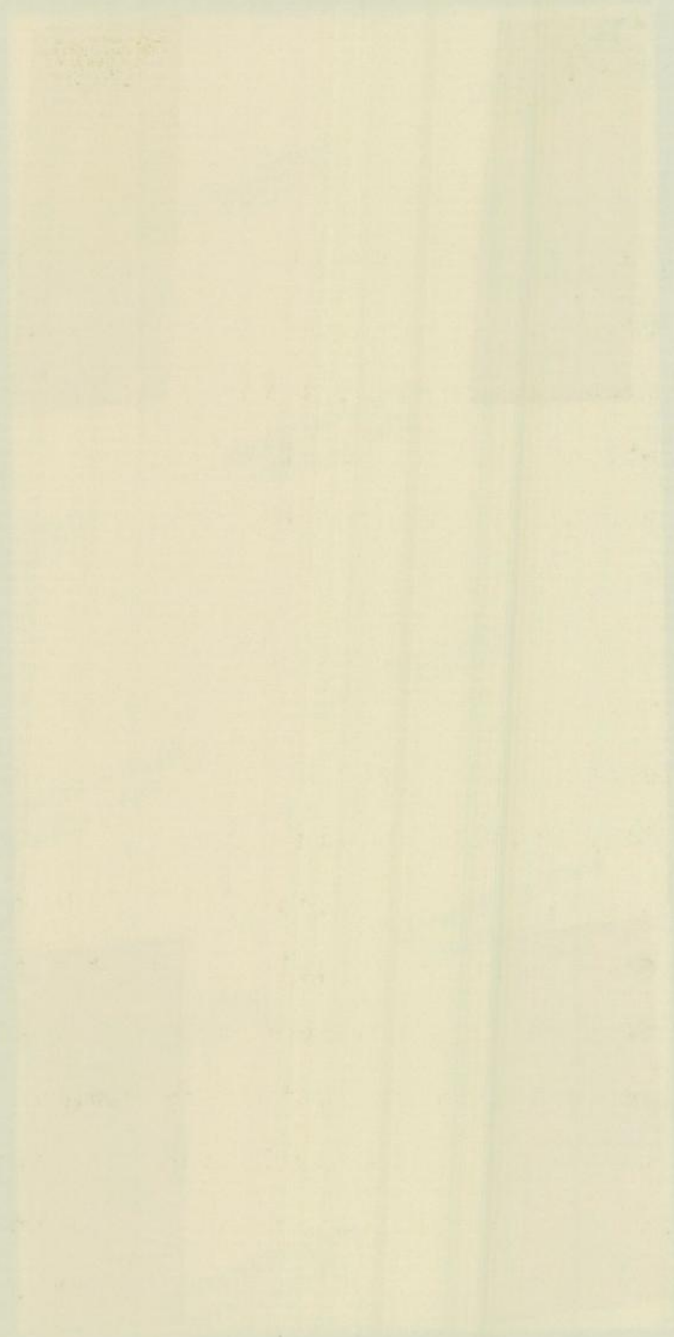






Fig.13  
Stockings rolled over Garter.





looking towards softer, feminine lines. Vogue in 1932 would proclaim: 'Spring Styles Says Curves' (1, pg 260). As Jean Harlow and Mae West<sup>3</sup> were now considered the new 'ideal', busts were uplifted to fit the picture. Fashion developed a streamlined quality through the introduction of 'Bias cutting'<sup>4</sup>, echoing sentiments of the architecture of the time. Waists returned to their natural level, this time with a sense of great maturity and lots of welcomed sex appeal (1, pg 308).

### THE BRASSIERE

The Brassiere, an invention of the Twentieth century gained in popularity during the year of 1925. Although it had been around since 1912 it never caught on. This was largely due to the fact that until now a chemise combined with a corset was considered enough support for any woman. During the 1930's many were custom built and magazines of the time contained practical advise on how to make them at home. There is a lot of speculation as to who actually was the sole inventor of the bra so I have decided to pick just one person who contributed to its development, not at any time attempting to relate the glory of the invention solely to her.

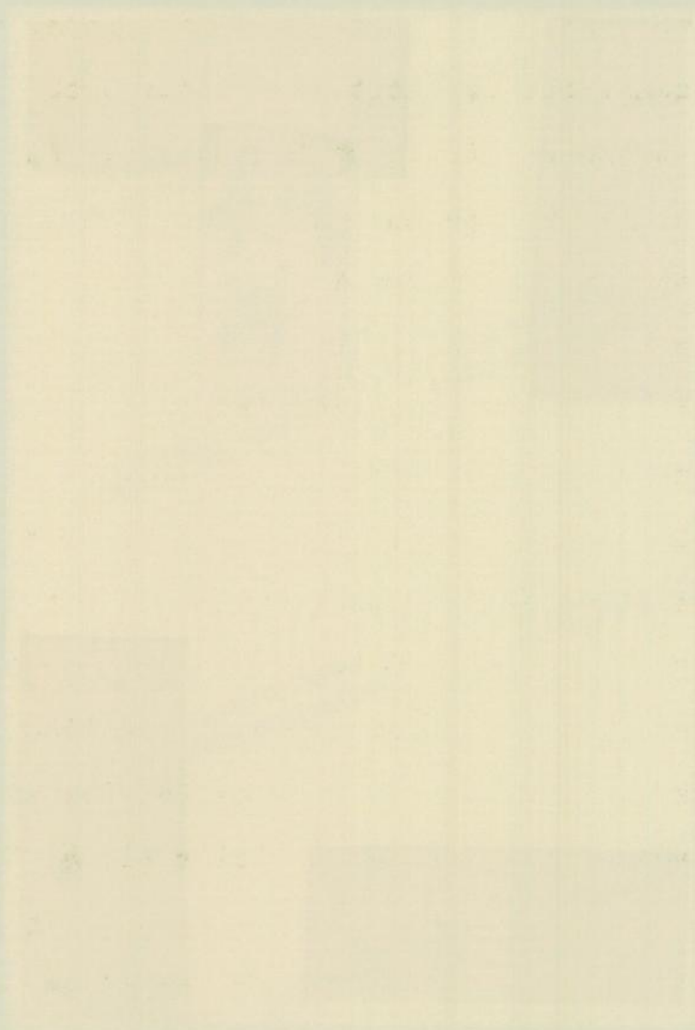
Mrs. Rosalind Klein began making steps towards designing the 'Bra of the Future'. Manager of the Kestos Company, she set about introducing bust cups which separated the breasts for the first time, as up until now breasts had been treated as a whole unit, (monobosom). 'The Kestos Bra' (fig 14) as it







Fig.14 Bra Advertisement, by Kestos.





became known consisted of two triangular pieces of material overlapped and stitched at the centre front. Shoulder straps were then sewn in at the top points of each triangle. From these, elastic was attached and crossed over at the back, fastened under the front of each breast cup by a button. Darts were added to lend more shape and fullness to the bra. Materials with which the bra was made included satin, muslin, and for more special garments like evening wear, glove silk, ribbon and lace were used (5, pg 131).

The fashion of the 1930's were primarily influenced by the "Art Deco" period. This style rejected the angular severities attributed to the Cubists, and instead replaced them with a sleek and streamlined look. It followed the line of the figure closely, hugging the waist and hips, falling into a soft flared skirt. Such a look called for a tailored undergarment with the same qualities (1, pg 308).

The corset manufacturers of the 30's realised that women came in various shapes and sizes. Natural curves were fashionable and a good contoured appearance was all important. "The Berlei Underwear Company" began to set about introducing a "Standard sizing system" (5, pg 130). They realised that for a corset to feel good it must be fitted by a qualified saleswoman (fig 15). Underwear was now being designed with the woman as an individual.

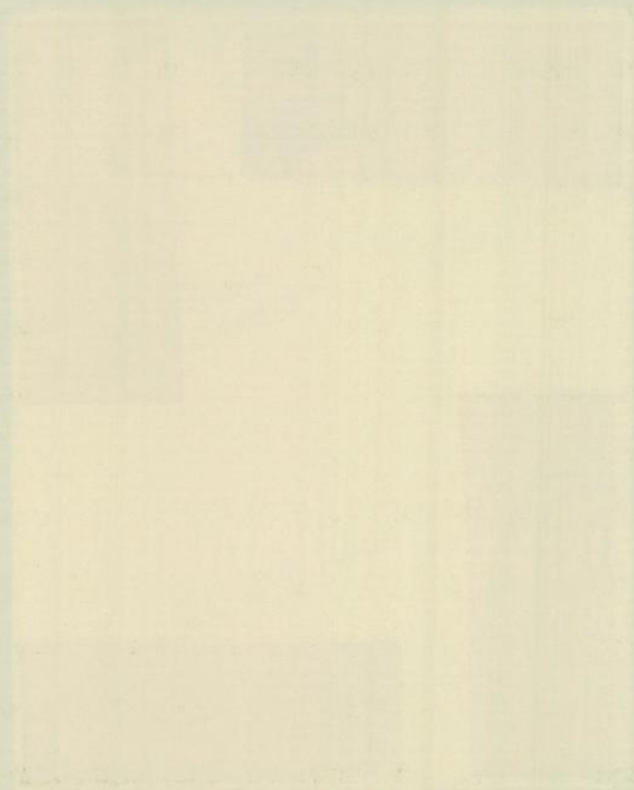
Elastics were introduced into corsets making them more flexible for the wearer. This concept was first introduced into the girdle in the form of rubber. They were softer and more relaxed than







Fig.15 Corset being fitted by a saleswoman.





their predecessors which had been made of steel and whalebone. Thanks to the work of Thomas Hancock rubber could now be turned into elastic .

Through a process of "Vulcanisation", rubber gained the ability to "snap back" when pulled. This process also made it resilient to cold and heat, making the material more workable. Elastic helped produce greater changes in corsetry during the 1930's than ever before. This was due to the fact that for the first time industry had found a way of transporting the latex used to make elastic in its liquid form, from the plantations to the factories. Up until now the latex was hardened into sheets. The length of elastic obtained from such sheets was determined by their size, usually 100 yards long and 36 inches wide. Such shortness of length restricted it's use to girdles during the 20's. Once the latex was transported in liquid form to the factories it was then fed into baths of acetic acid which hardened the latex instantly, forming rows of continual elastic thread which could then be woven or knitted into substantial lengths and widths of fabric (5, pg 247, 149). One of the best known rubber corsets of the time was "Charneux" (fig 16). It was knitted in elastic with tiny perforations incorporated into the design, which allowed the skin to breathe, as rubber elastic caused the body to sweat a great deal. Many women didn't mind this as they felt it enabled them to loose weight without trying!





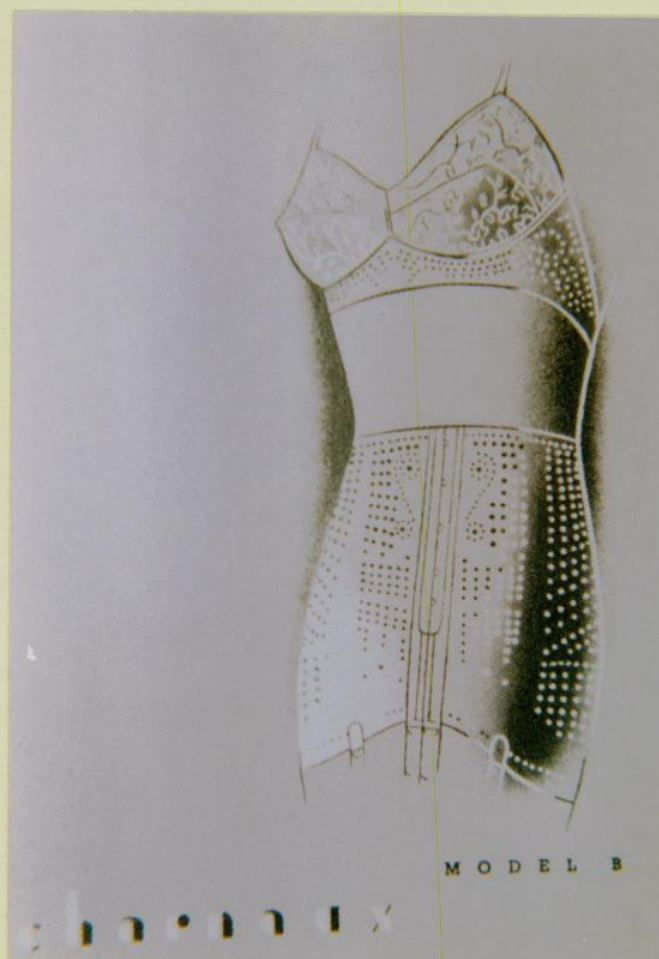
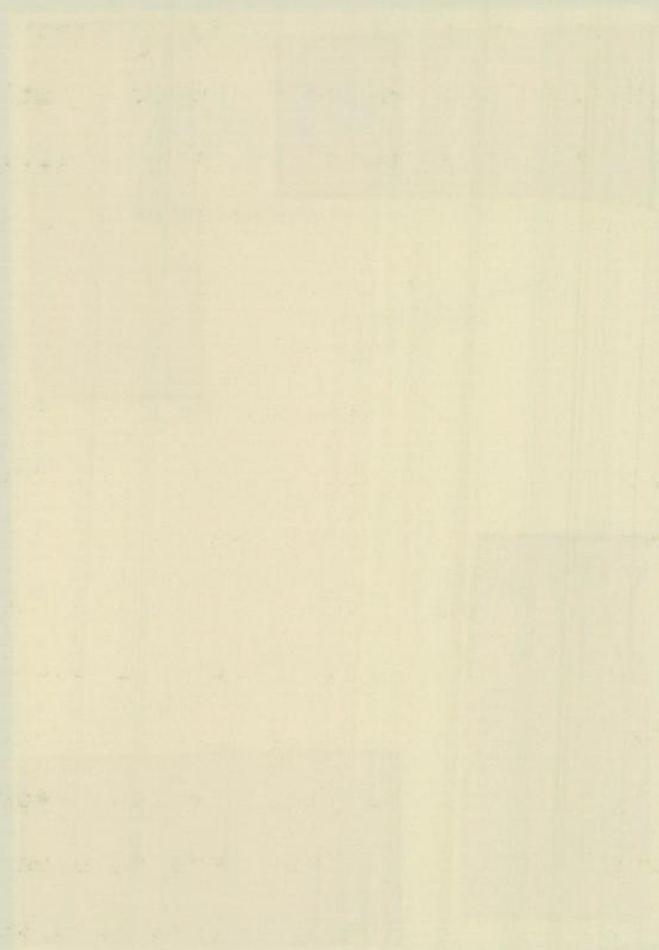


Fig.16 The Charnaux Corset.





## THE ZIP FASTENER

The zip fastener must have seemed like a gift from the gods for the corset wearer, as until now they had to be content with being laced or hooked into them by someone else, as the fastenings were situated at the back. It first appeared in America in 1931 and came to Britain in the form of the 'Lightening zip' in 1933-34 and was used by all leading corset manufacturers by the year 1935. At the beginning, the zip was heavy and fastened with hooks and eyes to keep it closed. It was to be much improved however during the post war years (6, pg 150).

Another corset to emerge during the 30's was the roll-on which has lasted right up until the present day. It originated in Britain during 1932, designed for the lighter figure which needed a little extra support (fig 17). They were made on circular knitting machines in long tube like structures. The elastic was then pulled to special tensions to create different supports within the garment. They gave the bottom a new even curve suitable for dresses to cling seductively around them (6, pg 147). Underwear of the 30's was saying something about the sexuality of women.

In the bedroom women began adopting the top of their partners pyjamas as "nighties" which covered the bare minimum, yet revealed far more. As a result of this, short negligees were introduced for women (fig 18) in smokey colours, voiles, black lace and chiffon. They tied loosely in the centre falling



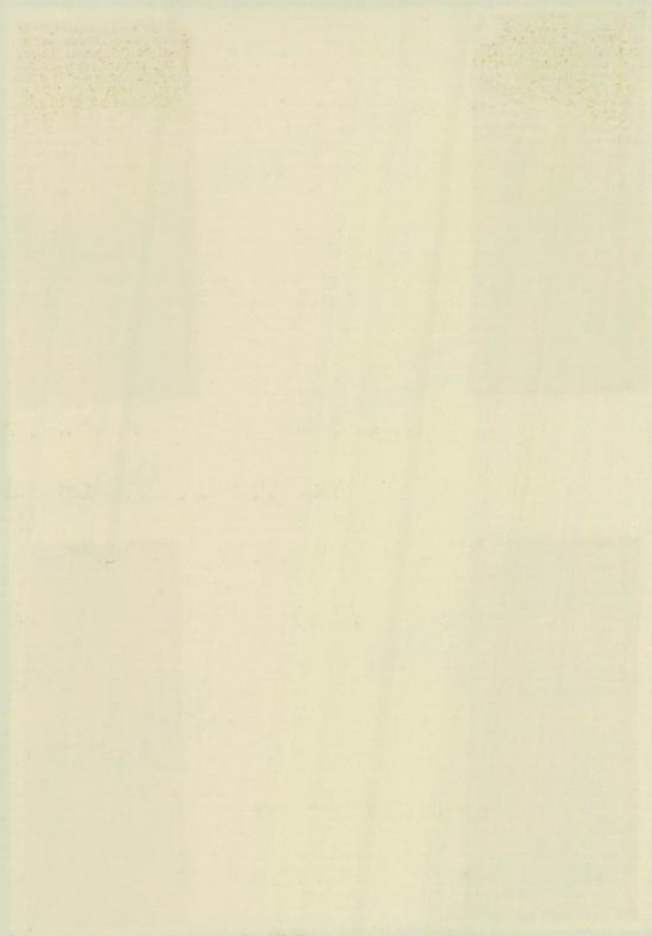




Fig.17  
The Roll-On.



Fig.18  
Negligees.





seductively over the contours of the body which it attempted to shroud (9, pg 15). Until now black lace was associated with respectable ladies or the recently bereaved - now it held a much powerful meaning. It found a new home in the world of sexual regalia holding erotic qualities and was worn by those seeking fun. It attempted to hide the body under a web of flowery trails.

'Chantilly lace<sup>5</sup>' was widely used throughout the Underwear Industry. In 1936 the Berlei Company introduced 'Lastex yarn Lace' and 'Power Lace'. These were laces made in the conventional way with elasticated threads used instead of regular thread (5, pg 147). Lace fabrics could now be stretched around the body, thus giving maximum effect. Fashion before the Second World War was created with women, their bodies and sexuality in mind. During the next couple of years it would experience a halt in its growth, only to re-emerge after the War with a "New Look".





### FOOTNOTES ON CHAPTER 3

1. The Chemise - See Chapter 2.
2. Josephine Baker 1906-75 - American born singer and dancer. Her beauty and vivacious personality made her the ideal woman of Paris. She is said to have been the highest paid entertainer of her time.
3. Jean Harlow and Mae West - Both Hollywood actresses of the Thirties. They were considered the ideal figures of the time.
4. Bias Cutting - Fabric which is cut diagonally across the weft and warp threads. Such a cut enables the fabric to fall into smooth, vertical drapes.
5. Chantilly Lace - Originated in Ile de France. It is a continuous - thread bobbin lace, generally made in black silk. It is worked in thin strips, which are later sewn together.





CHAPTER 4

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS EFFECT  
ON THE UNDERWEAR INDUSTRY

THE NYLON STOCKING AND LEG MAKE-UP

DIOR'S NEW LOOK

THE TORPEDO AND STRAPLESS BRA





## THE SECOND WORLD WAR - CHAPTER 4

During the Second World War many of the Parisienne couture houses were still designing garments. In Britain the story was very different. Having been cut off from Paris, Britain now had to rely on the works and inspirations of her own designers. "Wartime Socialists" believed that the few resources still left should be divided out evenly between all industries. This prompted the Government to introduce a "Clothing Design Brief" which was worked on by English designers, Digby Morton and Norman Hartnell. The brief stressed that minimum fabric should be used and garments be without unnecessary detailing. This idea would also be carried through to underwear. Hemlines were raised to below the knee in an effort to save material (4, pg 82).

Underwear was reduced to a few basic items which included brassieres and small briefs; the "cache sex style" first worn by Parisienne strippers at the Moulin Rouge<sup>1</sup> (2, pg 19), while embroidery and lace detailing were banned, also synthetic fabrics were virtually impossible to obtain. This was because materials such as nylon which until now were used by Underwear Manufacturers were now employed in the making of wartime equipment such as parachutes, camouflage nets and life belts (4, pg 83). Underwear, for the moment, had lost its importance, and sexuality in lingerie was a thing of the past.

Even something as simple as the "Nylon stocking" was virtually unobtainable during the war





years. Only rayon (artificial silk) stockings were permitted, yet these were even hard to find. 'Nylons' were favoured not only for their strength and light weight (fig 19) but also because they retained their original shape quite well. Many women were now forced to go bare-legged, while some overcame the problem by wearing ankle socks. In the efforts to cope with this problem leg make-up was introduced, making the nudity of legs less obvious. Women began painting their legs with "dye" which proved to be a very messy process. Ingenious women painted lines with soft black kohl up the backs of their legs, giving the illusion of seams (4, pg 82).

One industry to survive the perils of war was that of the corsetry industry. Women standing for long hours doing jobs previously done by men realised that they needed good quality corsets to assist their physical support. This need reached the Government in 1944 through the works of the recently established "Corset Guild of Britain" by way of a petition on behalf of British women. As a result of this the corset industry were entitled to maintain certain standards within their garments during the war years (5, pg 155).

#### THE POST WAR YEARS

After the war, Paris was to introduce a new line in fashion designed by "Dior" in 1947. It was introduced on the fashion catwalk as the "New Look" and was immediately accepted with great enthusiasm by women







Fig.19  
Advertisement  
for Nylon Stockings.





of all ages, who by now were tired of the "Military style" fashion which they had been wearing (fig 20). Tiny waists, now all in Vogue, were achieved by wearing a tightly laced corset known as the "Waist Clincher" or "Waspies". Women now wanted to be women, and if that meant recreating the role of the absolute fragile creature more attributed to the Edwardian period they would do so. They helped to reincarnate sexual symbols which had long since died within the female silhouette. Broad large bosoms, tiny waists, ample hips and bottoms (fig 21) were wanted by women and desired by men (8, pg 30, 40).

During the 50's, technology became a dominant force within the modern world as it provided change within the lives of the modern consumer. With dual income families becoming increasingly common many people now had more money to spend on leisure time and material goods such as furniture and clothing (4, pg 100). Women still wore bras, briefs and suspender belts but in a variety of very soft synthetic materials. This lead to a great increase in sales in the lingerie industry, due to the wide variety of styles available. Such styles included; longline bras with matching briefs (fig 22) in brown topaz crepe de chine lined with thin latex in a yellow ochre of french design. Another design which proved very popular was the "Gold set" a direct result of the "James Bond<sup>2</sup>" craze. Women were now following the concepts and ideas set about by movie stars and films (18, pg 206).

As I have already mentioned nylon was introduced into stockings during the pre war years. After the war







Fig.20 Military Styled fashion,1945



Fig.21  
The 'Ideal' figure,1947

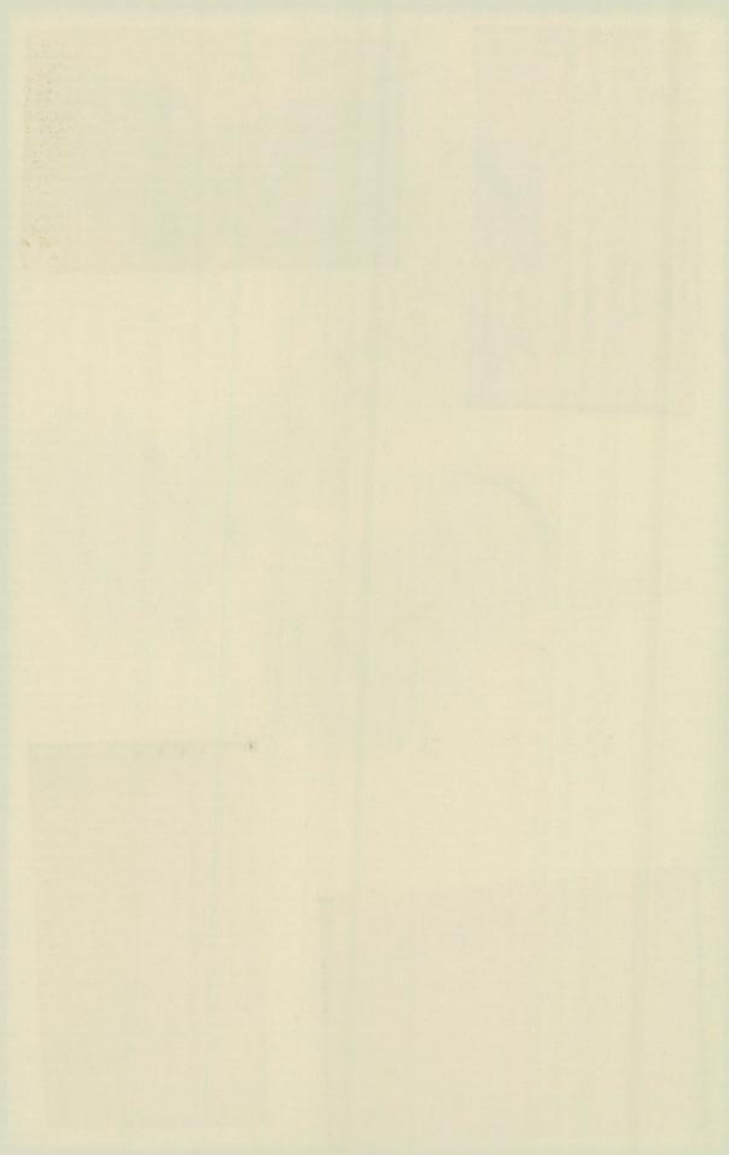
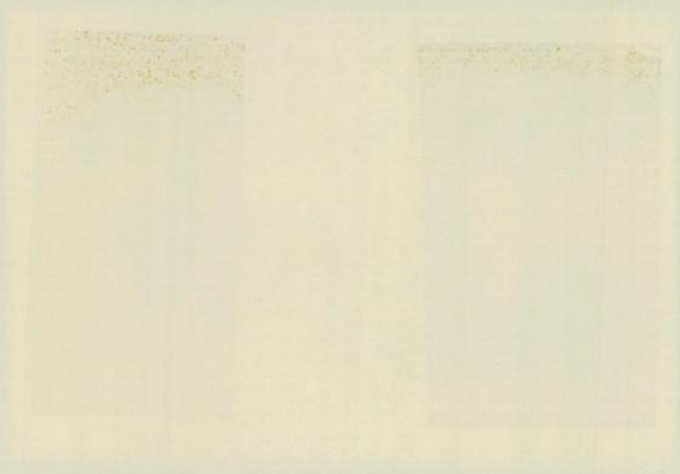
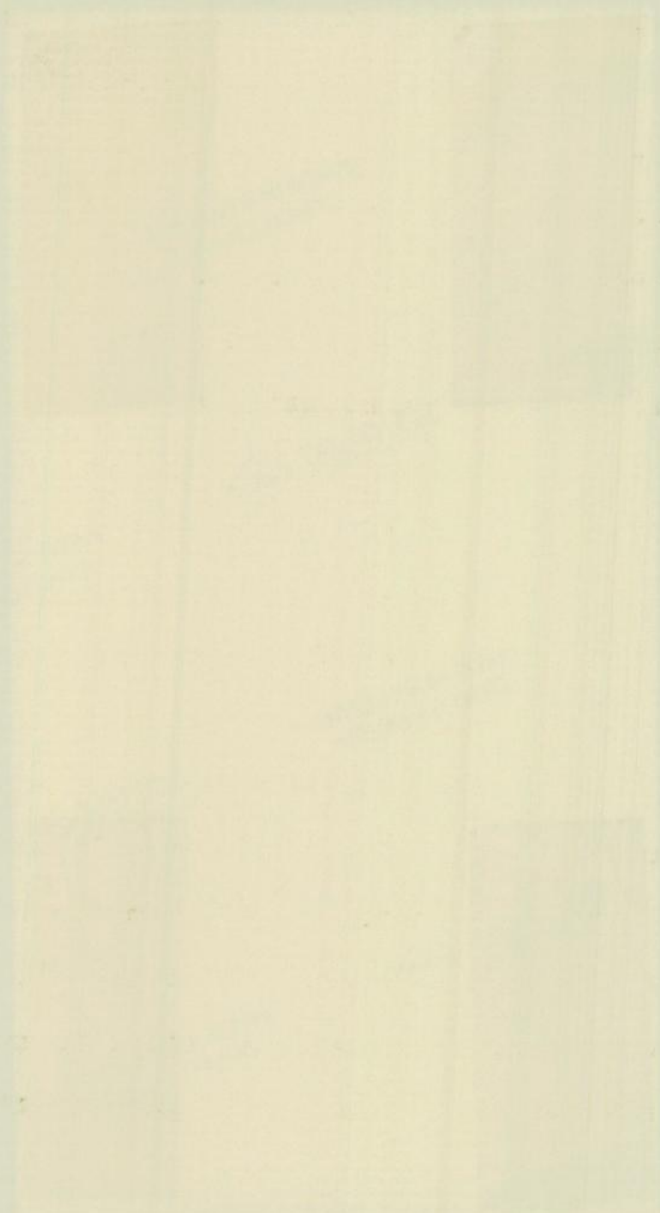






Fig.22    The Longline Bra.





and particularly during the 50's it was introduced into foundationwear. Cotton and satins were replaced with lightweight nylon taffeta and nylon voile. This contributed to glamorising underwear whilst controlling the body shape. Thanks to nylon elastic, foundationwear was now lightweight which greatly pleased the wearer.

During this era breasts were re-emphasised. Women were now seeking a brassiere which would equip them with the "Jane Mansfield"<sup>3</sup> look (fig 23). This was found in the "Sweater Girl" bra (torpedo bra) (fig 24). It aimed to create a high pointed bosom, far reaching any seen before. The bust cups were stiffened with cotton, shaped into sharp angular points and reinforced with circular stitching. "Falsies" were also incorporated into these bras for women whom nature had somehow forgotten (5, pg 162). Now everyone was able to walk around with bosoms the size of balloons - and who was to know if they were real or not!

The strapless bra gained in popularity during the 50's and held similar characteristics to the modern day "Basque" (fig 25). It ran from above the breast down to the waist level. The cups were wired underneath to give maximum lift, and were worn under strapless evening dresses, and remained in vogue for *p.c.* many years (5, pg 157).

By the mid 50's a new generation had emerged in Britain fashion. They came under the heading of the 'Teenager' (fig 26) and were to become a 'great 'tool' for the more contemporary designers of the time.







Fig.23  
Jane Mansfield, 1957

Fig.24  
The Torpeado Bra.





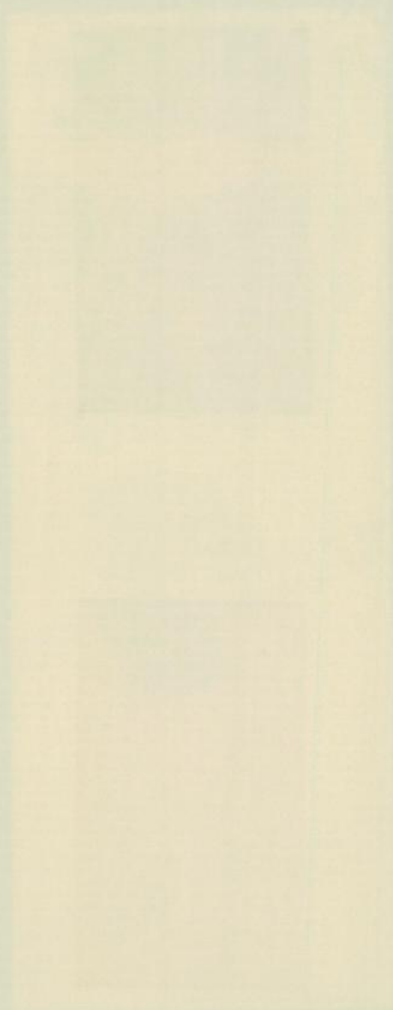


Fig.25 The Basque.



Fig.26  
The Teenager, 1957







They rejected the formal fashion which constantly filtered through from their parents generation, seeking instead some style which would be for them alone. This dream would be fulfilled during the "Youth Revolution" of the 60's.





FOOTNOTES ON CHAPTER 4

1. The Moulin Rouge - Red light district in Paris.
2. James Bond - A pseudonymed film star of the late Fifties and Sixties.
3. Jane Mansfield - Movie star of the Fifties attributed for having rather wholesome mammary glands!

# III

## Conclusion



CHAPTER 5

THE YOUTH REVOLUTION OF THE 60'S

DEVELOPMENTS IN FOUNDATIONWEAR AND  
THE INTRODUCTION OF LYCRA

LUXURY LINGERIE OF THE SEVENTIES AND  
DESIGNER JANET REGER

ANDROGENOUS UNDERWEAR AND CALVIN KLEIN





## THE YOUTH REVOLUTION

The sixties was a time which, I feel, everyone wishes they had belonged to. For the first time in the history of fashion we experience a split along the boundaries of age and not class. Young people sought imaginative and provocative ideas, and reflected this through their clothing. Already by the mid-fifties they had accounted for 50 per cent of all clothes bought. They showed total disregard for the conventional categories of day and evening wear, and instead revelled at the idea of frank displays of the body, as seen in the topless dress (fig 28).

One garment which became a visual assertion of youth identity was the "mini-skirt" (fig 29). With skirt lengths rising to dizzying heights, more and more emphasis was placed on the leg, making stockings into a fashion item. Tights first made an appearance in 1960 and were decorated with bold colours and lively patterns. They were originally worn for reasons of warmth rather than fashion but soon became a necessity when the mini-skirt rose to a level which made a rather noticeable gap between the stocking and skirt unacceptable. It took some time for tights to take over from stockings but once they were accepted there was no turning back (18, pgs 231-235). Stockings and suspender belts became a thing of the past as they no longer had a practical use and would only re-emerge as a sexual vice.

During the sixties the 'Berlei Company' began designing their 'Teen-Form' range. It was a special



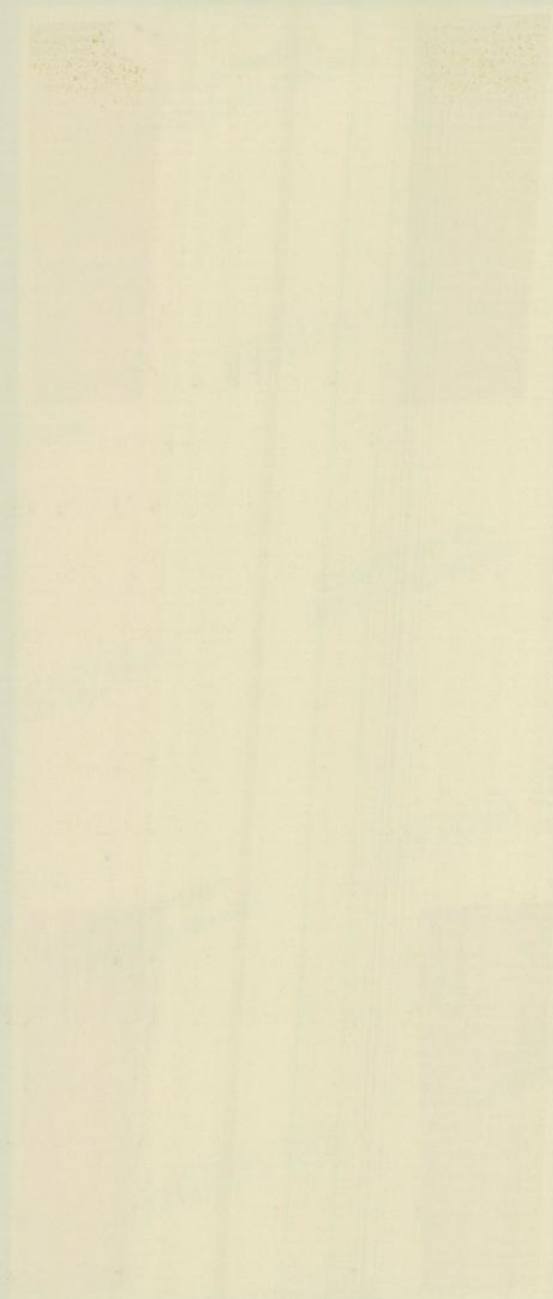




Fig.28  
The Topless Dress, 1966



Fig.29  
The Mini Skirt,  
circa 1965.





range of bras and girdles produced solely for the adolescent. They were lightweight easy to wear garments with a young fashionable look (fig 30). One of the main reasons that this new range could evolve was due to the development of man-made fabrics and its influence on foundation-wear. The new fabric was 'elastic' and contained no natural rubber. It was three times as powerful as rubber elastic and opened up a whole new concept to lightweight controlled foundation-wear.

'Lycra' was just one of these newly designed elastics and is still widely used today. The lightness of the fibre and its special qualities were its breaking strength and resistance to abrasion, made it quite an ingenious development. During the earlier years it was used in net fabrics which came in a variety of deniers (strengths). The proportion of lycra used depended on the amount of strength required. Fabrics containing lycra were supple in quality and texture (5, pg 167). The beauty of lycra was that it could be knitted into fabrics in its bare state, thus opening a new style of fabric construction. Foundation-wear was now moving more towards natural shaping. It aimed to smooth and control the figure by improving on nature, and not relying on artificiality for curving. Where the figure had lost its ideal tautness, foundation-wear aimed to coax it back into its original position! (5, pg 167)

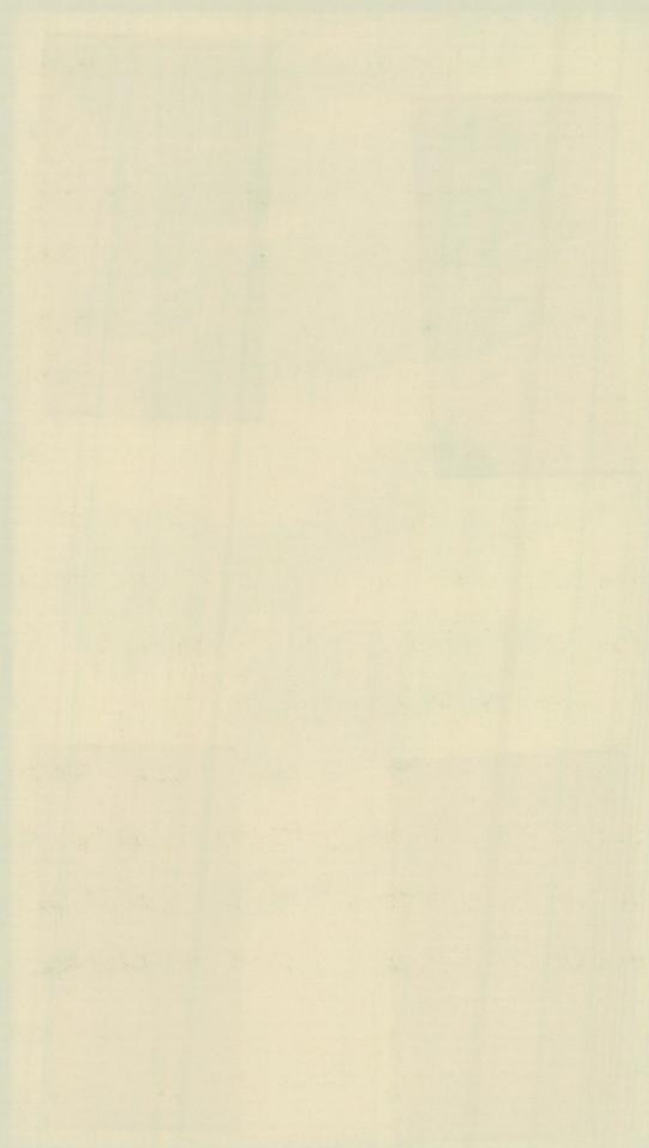
For many women underwear was seen as a form of imprisonment, sexual as well as physical. A unisex







Fig.30  
The 'Teenform'Range, 1960.





style was to develop and gained wide acceptance as it stood for equality of the sexes, which was to be reflected also in society. Women began burning their bras and any other symbol which could be attributed to femininity. Bralessness was in and nipples visible under sweaters only added to the natural nakedness which became a symbol of youth and their culture. Women believed that if they were to wear undergarments again they would do so only if they were functional and simple in design, needing no ironing and easily laundered (9, pg 21). The idea of invisible underwear worried the corset and foundationwear industry who, by now had felt the threat it was having on their business. As underwear sales fell, research was carried out to find reasons why women weren't wearing underwear. Answers varied from underwear making the muscles lazy, to harming circulation. For others, weight and figures were kept in shape by dieting and exercising, leaving no use for girdles and corsets. A girdle was seen as an admission of advancing age or loss of muscle tone and not something attributed to lithe lean bodies (20, pg 106).

For others it was the names of the garments which they detested as they were perceived by their outmoded image. Corset departments were revamped and renamed. Now called "Body garments, innerwear, and under fashions" while girdles with matching bras were called "Bra sets, lingerie sets, and innerwear co-ordinates" (5, pg 173).

By the 1970's fashion became more insistent on comfort than ever before with preferences for soft

CONCLUSION



knitted fabrics, clinging cheesecloth and muslin. Hemlines dropped down to the ankle and the "Maxi" was born, a rejection of the frivolous 60's.

Underwear reverted to the idea of mystery being arousing, with curves making a comeback. The bra burning activities of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 60's, produced in the 70's a delectable collection of floating dresses of delicate transparencies worn erotically over naked breasts. Traditional styled under-garments of chiffon, broderie anglaise, slotted with silk ribbon and edged with lace made a comeback. Romany in style and origin, this concept soon crept its way into dresses and was soon adapted as outerwear (2, pg 128).

Bras were not discarded completely as many women still sought the security which they gave. Instead they were modified. Designed to cradle the bosom gently and naturally, 'Moulded Bras' were introduced (fig 31). They were seamless one-piece bras, invisible in wear, yet carrying out foundation-wears traditional role of improving and supporting the natural figure. Moulding was to become a revolution within lightweight undergarments.

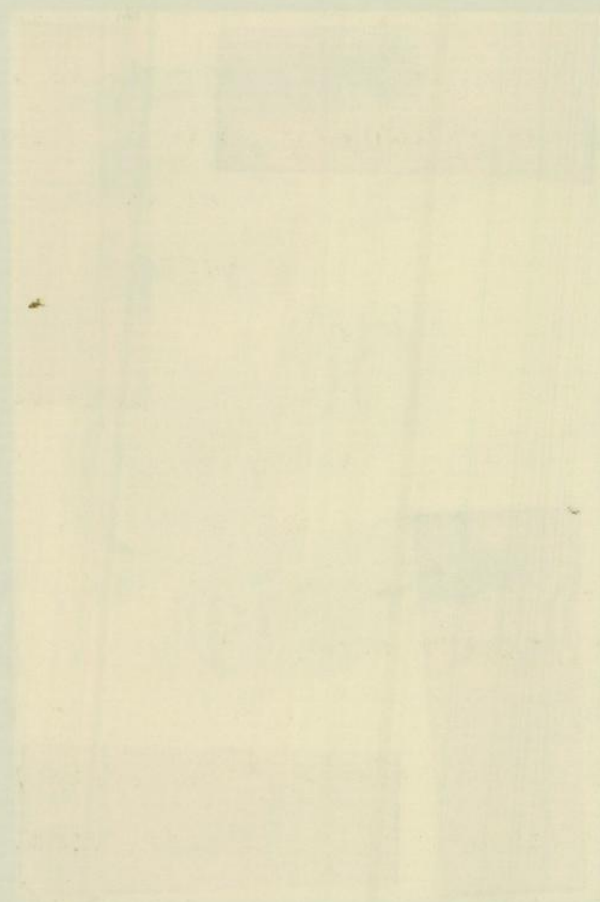
The moulding process involved heating thermoplastic fabrics (properties which could be found in many man-made fibres) at temperatures of up to 400 degrees fahrenheit on body moulds, then cooled to aid rapid setting. This gave shallow moulded shapes, perfect for bras and also panties. The first developments were stiff and uncomfortable but further







Fig. 31  
The Moulded Bra, 1977.





experiments saw the introduction and adaptation of lycra tricot and polyester into this process (5, pgs 168-169).

Lace fabrics held special qualities attributed to femininity during the 70's. Worn close against the skin, it became intimately associated with the body. Underwear was no longer used to hide the fact that women possessed pubic hair and instead, cleverly veiled it with lacy web structures, thus heightening sexual appeal and erotic powers. This dramatic re-appearance of glamorous underwear quickly became associated with the luxury lingerie trade.

'Janet Reger' was one designer who exploited this idea. She designed a range of items including camisoles, cami knickers and suspender belts (fig 32). Some of her designs can be closely associated with outerwear; slips were becoming cocktail dresses, while camisoles turned into party tops. This was to be further exploited by designers during the eighties (20, pg 106).

At the end of the seventies American designer, 'Calvin Klein', began marketing a completely different style of underwear for women. Modelled on men's y-fronts, boxer-shorts and vests, it could be interperated as a diluted form of masculinity (fig 33). Referred to as 'Asexual Underwear' it was designed with both men and women in mind. Womens Wear Daily quoted it as being 'The hottest look in women's underwear since the bikini brief' (13, pg 56) and in many ways it was. It reflected the new ideal feminine body, one that was muscular, slim and very sexy (20, pg 106). This is



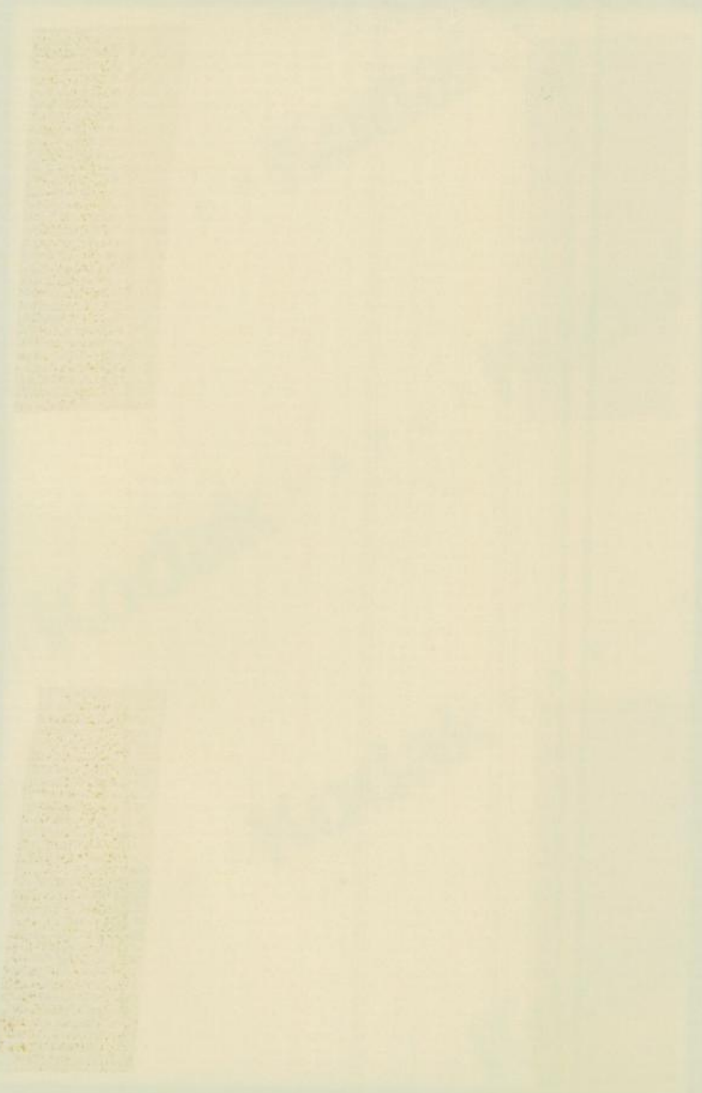
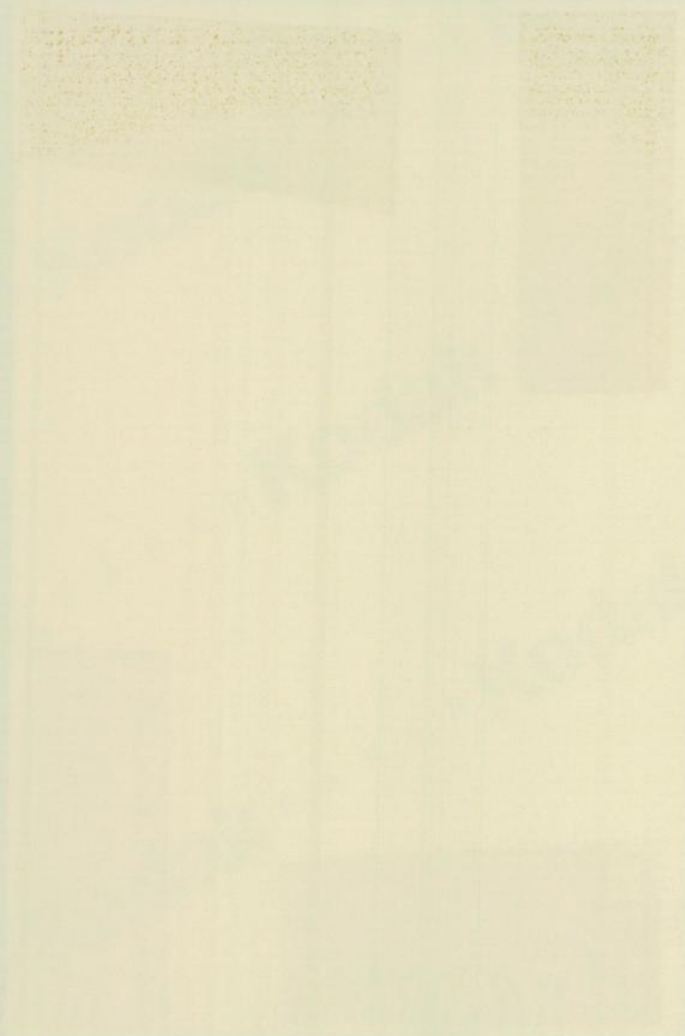




Fig.32  
Underwear, by Janet Reger

Fig.33  
Underwear, by Calvin Klein







one example of how new definitions of sexuality are continually evolving. This 'Androgenous Look' faded in 1985 and was replaced with more classical feminine styles, as women no longer needed to show equality through clothing.





CHAPTER 6

THE EMERGENCE OF UNDERWEAR AS  
OUTERWEAR DURING THE 80'S AND 90'S

JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER AND MADONNA

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD AND MALCOLM McLAREN





## CHAPTER 6

As a result of the punk movement at the end of the 70's, fashion of the 80's and 90's released a new energy, bursting away from the stagnant styles of previous years. A new relationship was forming between the fashion and music industries. Pop stars required a 'Unique' style within their clothing, which designers attempted to build. Such "Pop-Marriages" were experienced by "Jean-Paul Gaultier" and "Madonna"; "Vivienne Westwood" and "Malcolm McLaren" (12, pg 83).

I have chosen Gaultier and Westwood to discuss because of their use and transmission of underwear into outergarments. This concept was used by them during the 80's as a logical answer to Summer heat and hot, sticky nightclubs but in the 90's it held another purpose. Inventive designers such as Gaultier and Westwood were aware of the economic recession which swept Europe. People no longer had money to spend on designer garments so designers responded by producing a range of 'Minimalist' styled fashion. They used limited amounts of fabric, producing open, contemporary fashions based on items such as corsetry and bondage (22, pg 24).

Over the following pages I will discuss the works of Gaultier and Westwood and their contribution to French and British fashion. I will make reference to the way in which they have both used and incorporated underwear into outergarments; both very different in approach yet effective none the less.





## JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER 1952

Jean-Paul Gaultier was born in France in 1952. Always interested in fashion, he presented his first collection at the age of fourteen to his mother and grandmother! At seventeen he began working for Pierre Cardin<sup>1</sup>, staying with him for six months - only to be offered another job by him years later! Finally, in 1976 he began working freelance, designing ready-to-wear garments. For Gaultier, Parisienne labels were exhausted and a new radical approach was needed. Through his work he helped in the breakdown between contemporary, street fashion and high fashion (19, pg 80).

Influenced by the 'Punk Movement' (fig 34) which was happening in Britain, he used and adapted their style of dress into his work. For him, punk dress challenged the idea of what was beautiful and what was reality. His use of such ideas attributed to subculture was, for him, a way of joking at the expense of fashion orthodoxies. Beauty is not a word that springs to mind when Gaultier and his work are mentioned, yet his clothes possess a certain elegance (20, pg 133).

His "Velvet Conical Catsuit" of 1984 (fig 35) is one example of this. Heavily influenced on 50's styled undergarments, Gaultier uses the concept of the torpedo bra (fig 24) as a feature of external wear. It consists of two conical shapes, constructed in velvet and secured by circular stitching. For him, this idea of conical breasts acts as a challenge to

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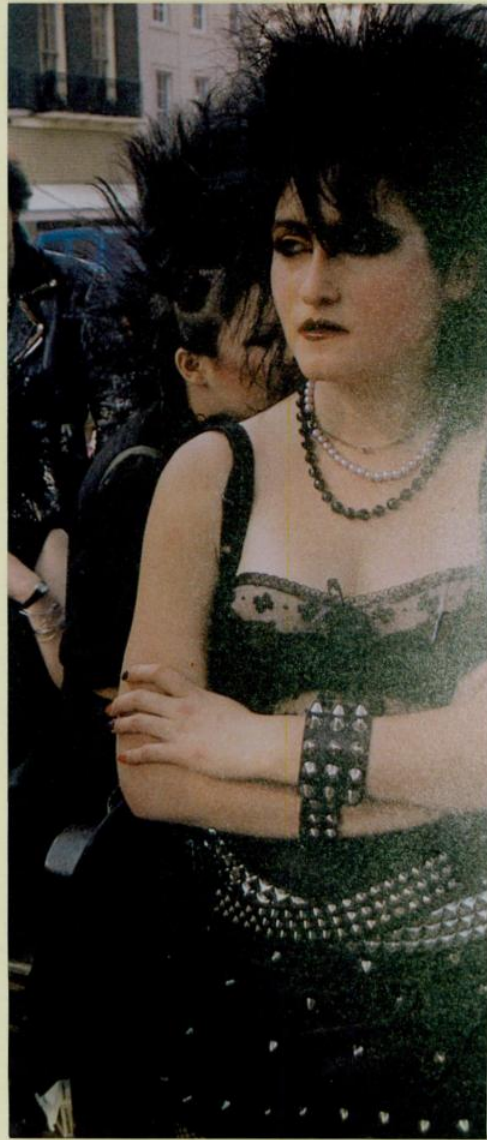


Fig.34  
'British Punk.

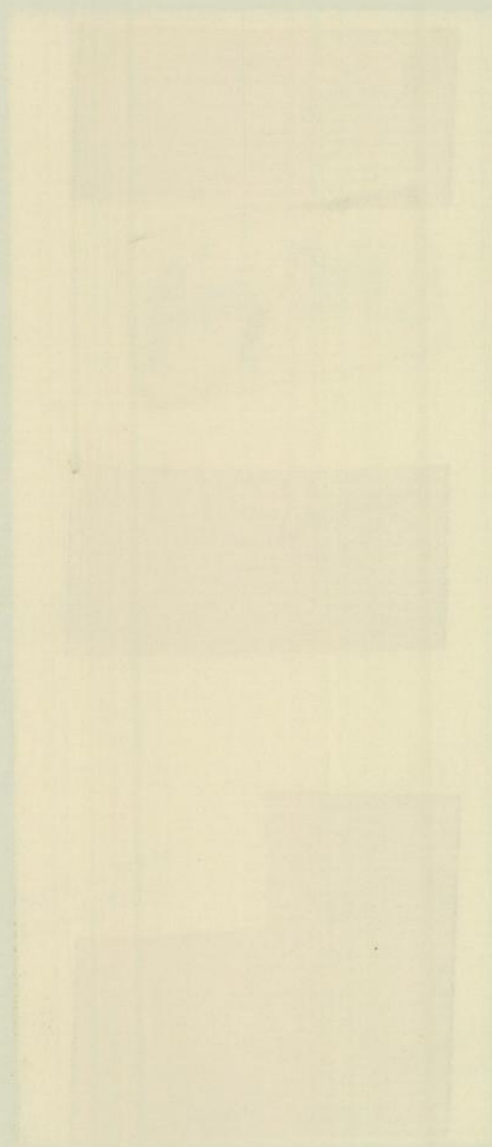
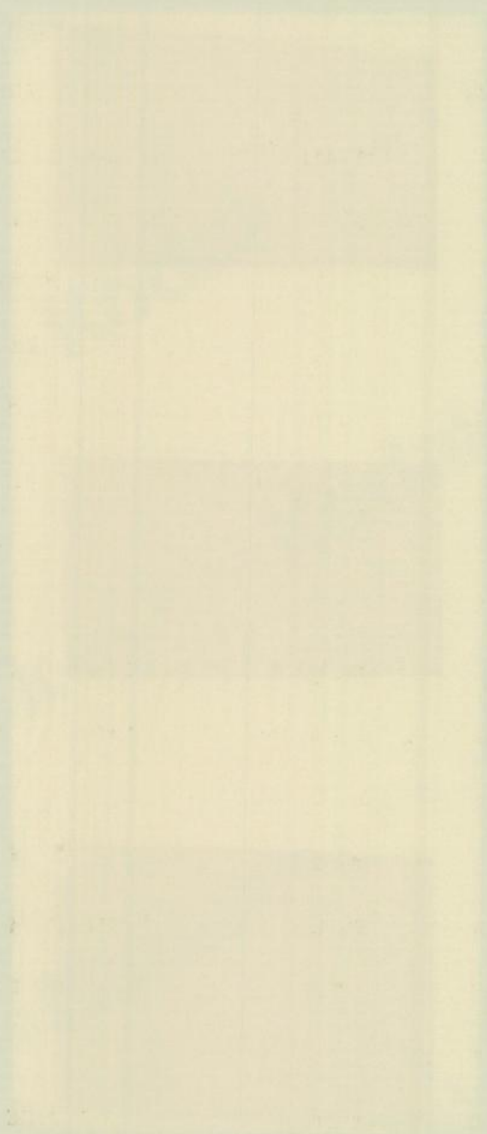






Fig.35  
Velvet Conical Catsuit,  
by Gaultier, 1984





the established notions of sexuality. Gaultier first began questioning this idea when he went to work at the "House of Jean Patou"<sup>2</sup> during the earlier part of the 1970's. A model, with tightly banded breasts was waiting to be fitted for a dress. When Gaultier questioned why this was so she explained that it was to enable the dress to hang properly. Shocked by this form of torture, Gaultier expressed how it was stupid to bind women in this manner. He felt that if women possessed large breasts then they should be shown and not bound to make them small. He argued that it was "Old-fashioned" and contrary to what was reality just because it looked "nice" (28, pg 270). When you analyse Gaultiers argument it becomes apparent that it holds a certain amount of truth. Such binding activities resemble that done by the ladies of the Twenties for the sake of fashion. If fashion is to be improved and perceived as "Reality" it must move forward exploiting new ideas of the time hence becoming "Reality" itself.

For me, Gaultiers work stands as a celebration of women and their ability to possess individual sexuality.

Madonna who claims she was 'Born to flirt' (12, pg 144) is one of the persons whom Gaultier designs for. Her vivacious and overtly sexy personality is what initially attracted him to her. She is to the pop industry what he is to fashion. A woman of the Eighties, she stands as an example of how to make your assets work. Bette Midler<sup>3</sup> has quoted her as





being 'A woman who pulled herself up by her bra straps' (12, pg 144).

On underwear as outerwear Madonna said:

'I have to wear a bra, bras that open at the front are best, but torpedo bras are the sexiest. On my Like A Virgin record cover I'm in a basque. Basques are very restricting. They have ribs that make you feel your suffocating and zip up the back. I wear them because they're very Nineteenth centuryish. They have that svelte look. I like the way it makes my body look. It's very sexual' (10, pg 145).

Although the garments are uncomfortable, for the "Look" and feeling of sexuality Madonna will suffer. Both the bra and bustier have become her trademarks (fig 36) and can be traced back to her early days.

It was during her Blonde Ambition Tour that Madonna wore the designs of Gaultier (fig 37). The garments contained ideas from his previous collections of '84 (fig 35) and '89 (fig 38) combined and transformed into "Elastic" suits of armour. As contrast, he uses delicate with rough; silky materials with hard leather, giving a "Bulletproof" look, verging on a style more attributed to sado-masochism (27, pg 342). This idea was carried even further when breast cones were worn by the male performers. Fetishism and crossdressing are just some of the subliminal messages which constantly filter through Gaultiers work. His use of dress acts as a liberator to society and its attitudes. In order to shock, people must first be made to think - hence becoming a revelation.

The designs for The Tour were strong and sexy





Fig.36 Madonna



Fig.37  
Madonna, by Gaultier, 1990









Fig.38  
Spring/Summer 1989,  
by Gaultier.





which Madonna loved. The influences ranged from the "Baby Doll" theme of the Fifties to the cabaret - "Liza Minelli" style! Out of no less than 1,500 sketches only six were picked.

Gaultier admits that he always uses corsets as a basis on which to build, but strongly maintains that on everyone they look different. On Madonna, well they echo her strong spirited power (28, pg 278).

### VIVIENNE WESTWOOD

During the 80's, Britain experienced a rebirth within the fashion industry. With The London Fashion Week of '83, came the media, who immediately placed all their attention on the young designers. These new found British designers proved that they could sell their "Surrealist Jumble Sale" styled ideas by producing collections designed for the young (12, pg 83).

One of these designers was "Vivienne Westwood". Gathering much of her inspiration from history and past cultures, Westwood combines these elements to produce a fashion which is unique to her. Alongside Malcolm McLaren<sup>4</sup>, they were the forerunners of the punk movement (fig 34) of the late '70's . Her style, seen by some as anarchic, showed a rejection of polite standards of dress (12, pg 234). Fabrics of leather and rubber, attributed to bondage and fetish fashions, featured heavily within her work. It is this "Naughty" instinct that Westwood delights on, becoming, very much her trademark.





In her first showing of her 'Buffalo Girl Collection' in '82 (fig 39), Westwood depicted "hobo" styled women in muddy petticoats worn over padded underskirts. They were accompanied with falling down stockings, while satin bras were worn over more layers of clothing. The bra which she used was "Old-fashioned" in appearance, the type worn by European women during pre-liberation times. She transformed it into a new outer garment for the '80's (12, pg 162). It was at this point that Westwood began speaking less of anarchy and more of womanliness through her clothing. After her collaboration with McLaren ceased she began concentrating more on this idea (9, pg 148).

In 1985 she unveiled her "Mini-Crini" in Paris, (fig 40) and idea involving the mixing of the hooped crinoline<sup>5</sup> of the nineteenth century with the mini-skirt of the sixties. Such a mixture resulted in the illusion of large hips, contrasted against a small waist. For Westwood women should be strong but "appear" feminine, a concept not unlike that of Madonna's. She saw in the crinoline a vitality not yet exploited, (Gaultier would later use the latis work of the crinoline in his designs of '89). For Westwood the crinoline summed up the sheer perversity of women's dress. Restricting and cumbersome, it inhibited the wearers movement, making them into nothing but an object. For Westwood it held the same perverse qualities as those held by bondage; restricting the wearer in order to free the observer. Westwood liberated the crinoline even further by wearing her







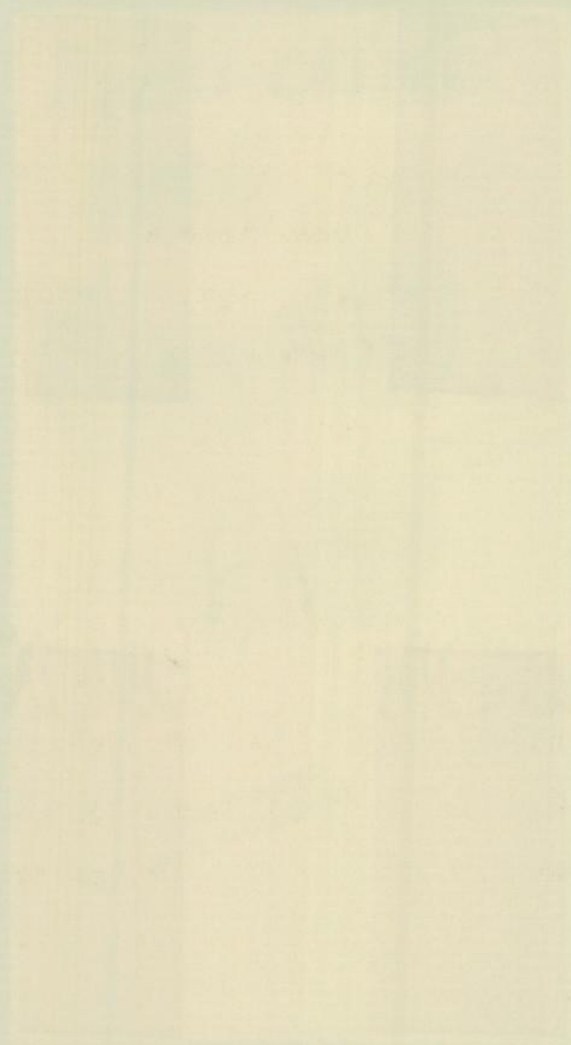
Fig.39  
Buffalo Girl,  
by Vivienne Westwood, 1982







Fig.40  
The Mini-Crini,  
by Vivienne Westwood, 1985.





version while she rode a bicycle! (9, pg 148).

Although it was looked upon by fashion critics as another one of her eccentric designs, less than a year later it was copied by design houses and brought to the fashion high street under the pseudonym of the Puffball (12, pg 149).

Since 1985, Westwood has began concentrating on redefining classic English looks such as tartans and tweeds. She has also exploited typical English garments, one such being "The Liberty Bodice" (fig 41). This particular corset was tight fitting and worn by women and children during the Edwardian era. It has become closely associated with Westwood and her work right up until the present day (12, pg 235).

Often too modern in her approach to design, Westwood finds her ideas reinterperated by other designers a few seasons later, gaining greater financial rewards. So, ignoring the pressures and dictates of the fashion marketplace has proved to be one of her major problems. She consoles herself by describing herself as 'The most modern designer there is' (12, pg 237).

A fashion pioneer of the 80's, Westwood lead her way into the 90's by winning The British Fashion Awards, first in 1990 and then again in '91 (31).

Romanticism and sophistication are the secret to her success. Her collections for the 90's are less gimmicky than previous ones (fig 42). Westwood is one of the few designers who attempts to make the rich look poor and the poor look rich. Her clothes are included





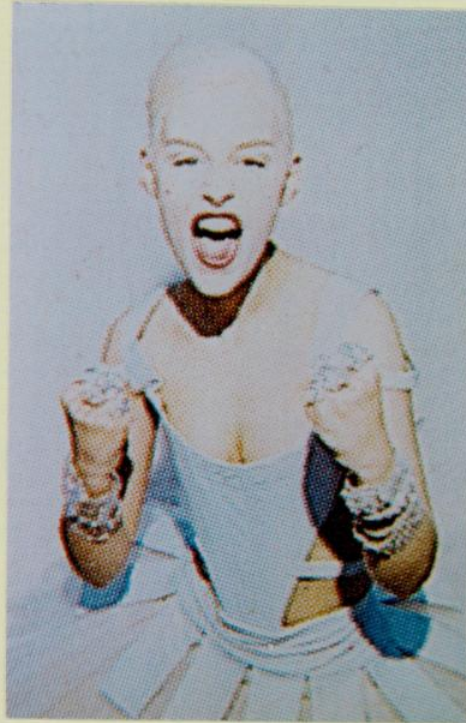


Fig.41  
The Liberty Bodice,  
by Vivienne Westwood, 1988.

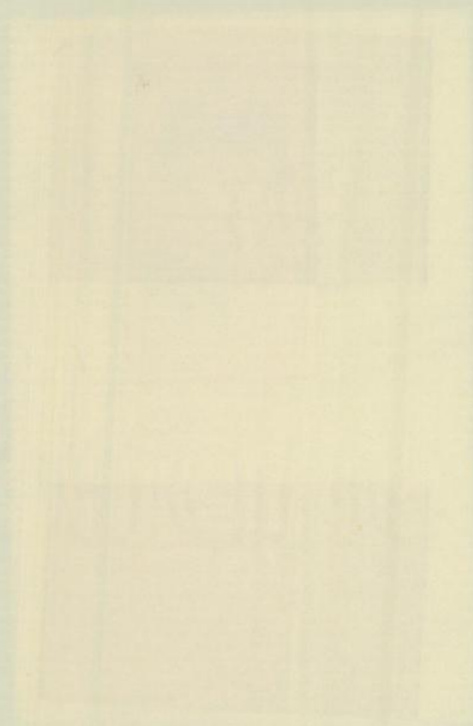
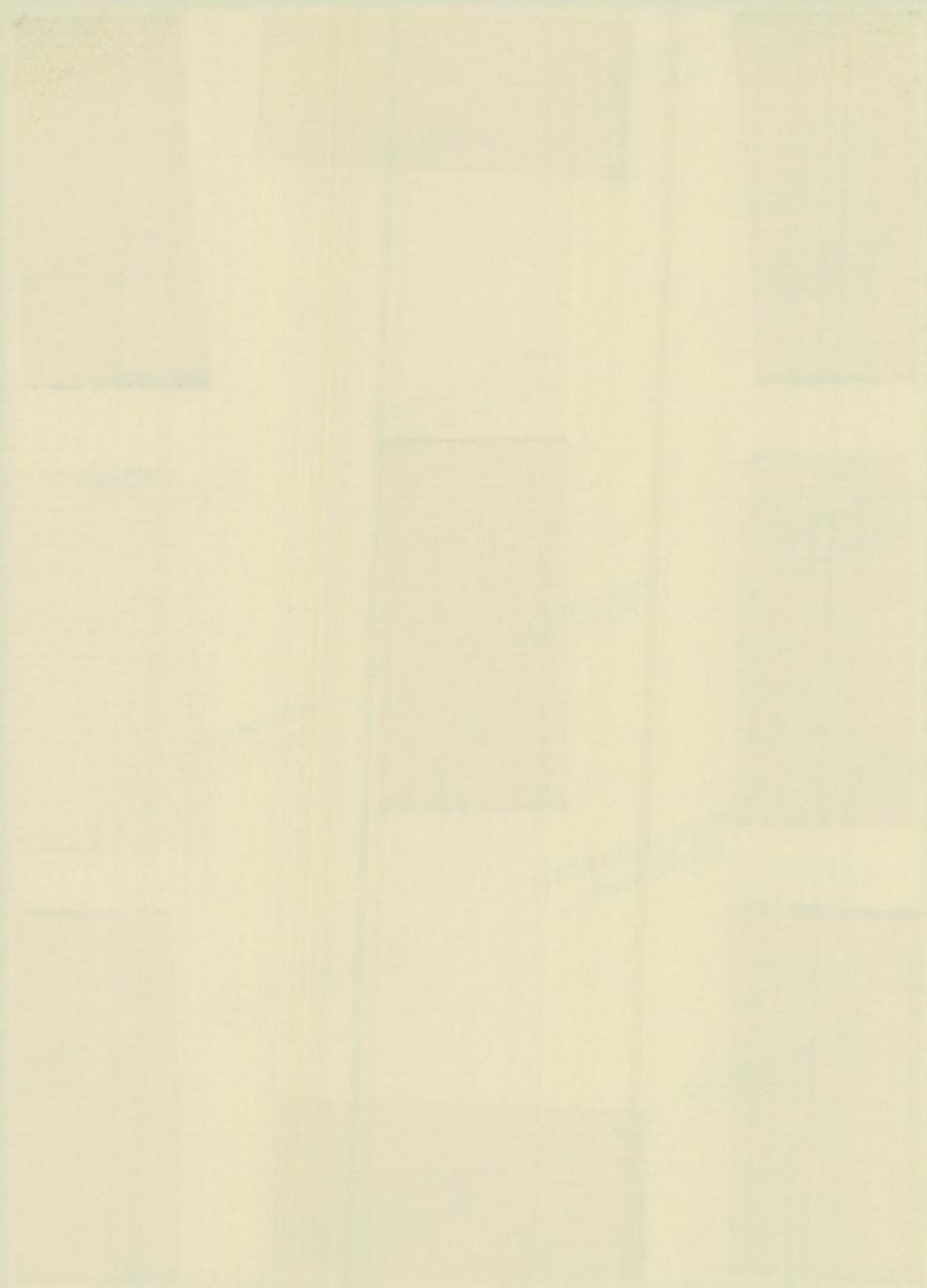






Fig.42

Design by Vivienne Westwood, 1992





in the permanent collection of The Victoria and Albert Museum. For me, Westwood is one of the most influential and creative designers Britain has ever known (31).

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## FOOTNOTES ON CHAPTER 6

1. Pierre Cardin - Born in Venice, Italy in 1922. He moved to Étienne, France, where he spent most of his life. He worked briefly for Dior and in 1947 left to form his own business. He showed his first collection in 1950 and later in 1958, began designing mens-ready-to-wear garments. From there he went on to label the world with his name, ranging from toiletries to bed sheets. In 1979 he entered into a trade agreement with China where factories began producing Cardin clothes.
2. The House of Jean Patou - This was a fashion house set up by Patou in 1919.
3. Bette Midler - American comedienne who made it big during the Eighties.
4. Malcolm McLaren - McLaren was the manager of the notorious punk group The Sex Pistols who made their debut at the end of the Seventies.
5. The Crinoline - This was a series of very full petticoats worn to boost out a skirt. Some contained bands of steel stiffening to add extra support.





## CONCLUSION

Underwear has come a long way from the Edwardian look of 1908 (fig 6). The frequent, changing styles of the female silhouette has developed from the Boyish Look of the Twenties into the current 'Anything Goes' mood of fashion which we are now experiencing. The original function of underwear to protect the outergarments from body odours and sweat, no longer applies as underwear can now be easily laundered.

Technological advances in fibre construction are the main reasons for this, but it has also contributed in another way. With the introduction of such man-made fibres during the Thirties, fabrics have led to the development of lighter, more comfortable undergarments.

It was suggested by underwear historian, Phyllis Cunningham, during the Fifties, that the introduction of new synthetic fabrics in underwear would dispense with its function entirely.

Instead of this happening underwear went one step further in its development, and emerged as outerwear. The definition between the two is now virtually impossible to trace. At one with each other, underwear has taken over and itself been overtaken.

For me, Gaultier and Westwood have fully exploited this transition. They used the idea of underwear, exploited it and turned it into fashionable outerwear, thus severing the line of distinction even more.





So what exactly is it about underwear that makes it such a successful garment? With the technology we have today, surely it could be dispensed with and its function incorporated into outerclothing? I have decided to attempt to answer these questions myself. For me, it's all about how underwear makes you and your body feel. In the words of Madonna 'It's very sexual'. The closeness and intimacy of undergarments has the power to make women feel sexual - at one with their body. If they can feel like this only while wearing underwear, it's a logical solution for designers to transfer such qualities into outerwear.

Society tried to rid women of their underwear during the Sixties only to realise that by doing so you rid them of their femininity. Whether we accept it or not feminine qualities are part of the make of women. To rid them of this you rid them of their identity.

For the moment, underwear has developed into an accepted form of outerwear which can be read as strong yet extremely feminine. Who knows what the future will hold - could the same ideas be adopted into men's undergarments and maintain the same conviction?





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