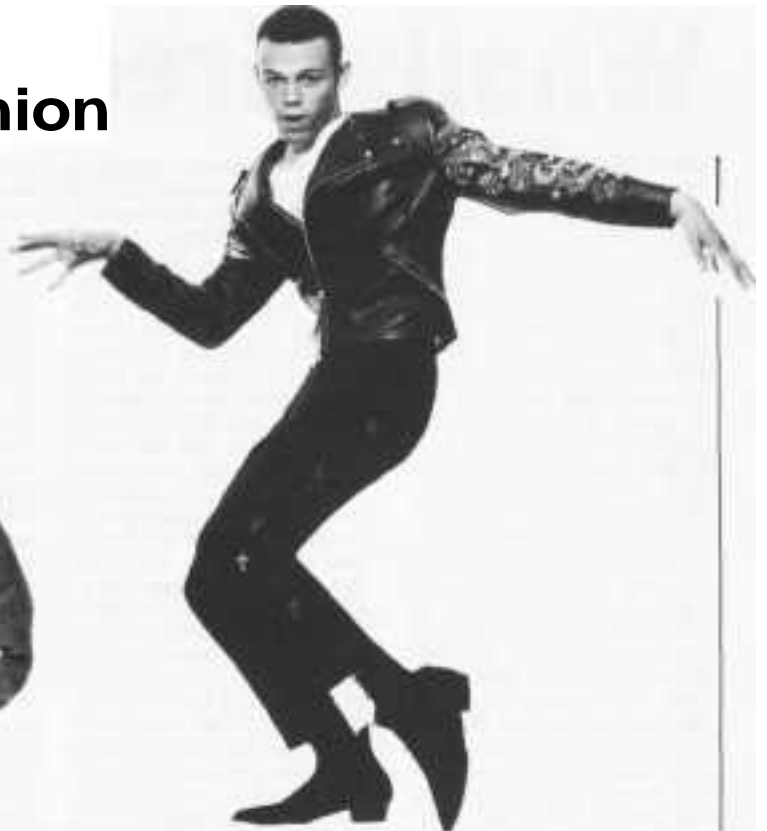


Charlotte du Cann on dressing for safety

## The Depths Of Fashion



This December (between 7 and 10), London's Olympia is the setting for the first 'Clothes Show Live'. The show is testament to the phenomenal popularity of the BBC's latest fashion programme.

But for all its sartorial splendour, fashion does not fit happily into the small screen. Like those holiday programmes which reduce each country and culture they visit to a bland pulp, the fashion programme manifestly diminishes the excitement of the real thing.

But then *The Clothes Show*, like the rest of Britain, does not really admire the real thing. Its popularity is due to the fact it endorses native parochialism and puritanism ('fashion is as fashion does') and provides the viewer with a wardrobe that is useful rather than aspirational. In spite of 10 years of Thatcherism, we still have a deep-rooted distrust of spending a lot of money on clothes, and anything that smacks of conspicuous consumption is treated with the wariness of a Luther fingering some papal velvet.

*The Clothes Show* takes its format from *Blue Peter* and its visual style from Marks & Spencer. It is genuine family entertainment and guaranteed not to shock anyone's grandmother. (Which is, after all, what fashion does best.)

Anything that *is* shocking is smugly contained and sanitised. Punk, had it featured on

*The Clothes Show*, would have merited a knowing nod and a joke warning ('we don't advise anyone to try the safety pin through the nose').

Nothing kills style quicker than a microphone. Which is why anything in the least part visionary, intelligent or radical is better illustrated in a magazine where it is left alone and not explained in words of one syllable.

Even the awesome talents of Ms Vreeland could not cope with the nasal questioning of Jeff Banks ('why exactly do you think pink is the navy blue of India?') or indeed his answers ('Ms Vreeland has declared that everyone should think pink this spring so we have sent Selina down to Brent Cross to try the new colour out').

Visual ideas, particularly in Britain, do not spring from acquiescence, but revolt against the order of the day. They are based on the disaffection of the individual against the status quo. To illustrate this needs a certain courage and arrogance, something which *The Clothes Show* with all its genteel good intentions cannot really provide.

*The Clothes Show* is about belonging, fitting in and believing that all earthly treasures are found somewhere in a shopping mall, where freedom is consumer choice (and good value for money). Mrs Thatcher must love it.