NANYANG JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2017

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GENERAL PAPER

PAPER 2:

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INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

This insert consists of 3 printed pages.

Susan B. Kaiser writes about how fashion and identity are closely linked

1   In 2013, Clément Méric, a leftwing activist, and his friends had gone shopping for Fred Perry tops on offer in a summer sale. After leaving the store, they found themselves confronted by far-right skinheads. Méric was punched in the face, fell, and suffered a fatal blow to the head. The French media immediately began to consider whether the tragedy signalled a huge escalation of far-right extremism. As they did, it became apparent that the British clothing line was at the centre of this terrible tragedy by becoming affiliated with the movements on both ends of the political spectrum. It is for this reason Fred Perry sought to broaden its appeal by signing the tennis champion, Andy Murray, and the late singer-songwriter, Amy Winehouse, to model its products, in the hope of removing the political association.

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2   Yet, fashion and clothing have always been closely linked with the human society, the focus of humanities and the social sciences, with identity being one of the most compelling and contentious concepts in the latter. Fashion becomes inextricably implicated in constructions and reconstructions of identity: how we represent the contradictions and ourselves in our everyday lives. Through appearance style (personal interpretations of, and resistances to, fashion), individuals announce who they are and who they hope to become. Moreover, they express who they do not want to be or become. Appearance style is a complex metaphor for identity that includes physical features (for example, skin, bodily shape, hair texture) as well as clothing and grooming practices. Because the latter are especially susceptible to change, individuals are prone to fluctuating and fluid ways of understanding themselves in relation to others within the larger context of fashion change.

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3   An individual's clothing visually articulates multiple and overlapping identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, national identity, personal interests, aesthetic, and politics. Not all of these identities are consciously present at any given moment; power relations influence one's awareness of one identity or another. Privileged identities (such as whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality) are often taken for granted as being "normal" or "natural." But because identities intersect, their representation is seldom simple. From a cultural studies perspective, identities have not only histories but also futures. They come from somewhere, they are complex and contradictory, and they enable us to express who we might become.

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4   Expressing who we are and are becoming in words can be a challenge; appearance style seems to offer a way of articulating a statement that is difficult to put into words - that is, emerging and intersecting identities. In fact, it is easier to put into words who we want to avoid being or looking like (that is, not feminine, not too sleazy, no longer a child) than it is to articulate who we are. The interaction between various identities, which include the interplay between youth versus age, masculinity versus femininity, or high versus low status, among many other possibilities within and across identities, creates ambivalences. Sociologists identify ambivalences as the "fuel" or ongoing inspiration for fashion change.

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5   Although for centuries, clothing had been a principal means for identifying oneself (for example, by occupation, regional identity, religion, social class) in public spaces, the twentieth century witnessed a wider array of subcultural groupings that visually marked their difference from the dominant culture and their peers by utilising the props of material and commercial culture. The "teenage phenomenon" of the 1950s and 1960s made this very apparent by fostering an awareness of age identity as it intersected with a variety of musical and personal preferences - all coded through appearance styles. The social movements

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(civil rights, feminist, gay and lesbian rights) of the late 1960s and early 1970s further accentuated stylistic means for constructing and transgressing racialised, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

6   Modernity, with the attendant fragmentation and dislocation, is then said to have caused the modern fashion consumers to move away from a concern with elaborate artifice toward one of individual expression. Fashion designers then used the runway as a means to feed this newfound desire to be heard. They speak out about the political climate, addressing issues from diversity to women's rights through their design concepts. Fashion is a sponge in terms of what is happening in culture. Fashion takes it in and it comes out in certain ways, and the climate will produce a lot of creativity. Several models at Nicholas K had their looks topped off with black or gold berets. The caps clearly mirrored those worn by the Black Panthers, a militant group that defended minorities during the civil rights movement. The brand's designers said that the '90s was a decade promising communal diversity and unity, and attributed the first step in that change to Nelson Mandela's release from prison. However, Desigual, a Spanish label, made a more subtle statement. Its collection pulled together different colours and materials to communicate diversity. This is because at Desigual, they do not dress bodies; they dress people to allow them to be who they want to be.

7   This year marks the 40th anniversary of the punk movement. In a 2016 January show, fashion icon Vivienne Westwood dedicated the collection to David Bowie, who was punk before there was a word for it and spawned a generation of pop stars who would manipulate the codes of tailoring in their own subversive way. In that season, it was hard to look at the parades of opulent suits and military uniforms that filled the runways without thinking of two of them, namely Prince and Michael Jackson. Scrubbed-up 1980s by-products of the hippy and punk movements, they reappropriated masculine power values through their wardrobes. Jackson's dressmaker Michael Bush once referred to his client's look as "Liberace goes to war". In a world that has lost both Jackson and Prince, menswear has to process what the legacies of these superstars mean to the way men dress. Reactionary times call for reactionary measures, and that military uniforms have been given the fairy-tale treatment in a war-mongering era of Trump and Putin, is not a coincidence.

8   In fashion, you can be certain of one thing: uniforms are never not political. As Mussolini – no doubt a uniform fetishist – noted in 1930, in an inadvertent punk moment decades before it existed, 'Any power whatsoever is destined to fail before fashion. If fashion says skirts are short, you will not succeed in lengthening them, even with the guillotine.'