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**Fashion: from Attitudes to Poses**

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The theme of this paper is modern movement and its afterlife in images and objects: specifically, the way fashion gesture freezes into the pose. The illustrations can be seen via the links provided in the ‘images’ section at the end of the text, thus obviating the need to include images which are unavailable in print format, either for copyright reasons, or because they are too expensive to reproduce. The digital image bank which is the internet has produced new and easy-to-access afterlives of these images unimagined by their makers, a fact which has facilitated this piece of research thinking both in tems of how I composed it, and how in turn it will be read. But, because technology often fails us, I hope the brief descriptions of each image will guide the reader through what is meant to be a visually-driven speculation, so that, if the digital links are gone, the images nevertheless have an afterlife in texts and fragments. For reference, all of the images can be found, collected together, on the following *Pinterest* account:

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/mickfinch1/fashion/>

My method, in a series of images and words, is to throw gestures up in the air and see how they land, very much in the spirit of Mick Finch’s invitation to the speakers at the ‘Interventions’ Colloquium at the Warburg Haus, Hamburg, in June 2016 ‘to re-actualize Warburg’s thinking within the current context of … digital, image, time and the gesture’. For me, this meant looking at the intersection of time and the gesture, particularly in relation to the idea of ‘the moment’ or ‘the now’, a central organizing principle of fashion, with its emphasis on immediacy (Hroch 2010: 108-126).[[1]](#footnote-1) Indeed, it is partly the ‘nowness’ of fashion time that suggests the possibility of a different historical model for writing its reveals and returns, derived very often from Walter Benjamin’s writing on fashion.[[2]](#footnote-2) In trying to do so here, I purloin some of Aby Warburg’s visual methods from his *Mnemonsyne Atlas*. Warburg grouped his images on boards according to theme rather than chronology. My images, like most of his, are of human bodies, often in motion, and from different periods. Warburg restlessly moved his images around, adding and removing pictures to create new juxtapostions within each category in a sort of montage effect. In this paper I too juxtapose my images, although, it being a written experiment, the images are presented in a linear sequence one after another, rather than all together as Warburg was able to do in his panels*.* The richness and diversity of Warburg’s visual compositions suggest a number of simultaneous relationships that connect like a mesh. Perhaps the hermeneutic possibilities of Warburg’s kaleidoscopic arrangments and rearrangements cannot be matched in a text, albeit an illustrated one, because images and texts do different things. But even if the idea to write the image contains the possibility of failure, it might be a productive failure. Accordingly, I propose the following sequence of images as a kind of multiple montage, in which each picture is charged with something that may also be immanent in another, even though there is no causal or temporal relationship between them. In this way, the paper is a kind of experiment with historical method, in its attempt to posit some non-linear and anti-teleological ways of writing the history of fashion through the juxtapostion of its images, objects and gestures.

There are few precedents for this approach within fashion history, which is a relatively new academic field, and I can think of only two instances where Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* has been drawn on as a method, neither of them in the same way as I propose here. One was by the exhibition-maker Judith Clark in her book and exhibition *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* (Clark and Philips 2010). The other was by the art and architecture historians Alessandra Vaccari and Mario Lupano, whose book on Italian fashion in the time of fascism used Warburg’s ideas in its thematic organization and spatial layout (Lupano and Vaccari 2009). Regardless of these experiments, fashion history, despite its rapid expansion in the last twenty years, remains fairly orthodox in its methods, and, while it has produced many brilliant studies, some other experimental approaches are now due. One exception is Ulrich Lehmann who in 2000 argued that fashion, with its promiscuous recycling of old themes and motifs, provides a model for a dialectical philosopy of history (following Benjamin) that challenges linear narratives, opening the way to the pursuit of ideas and concepts which are proximate to each other, as opposed to a chronological account of fashion (Lehmann 2000).[[3]](#footnote-3) In this spirit, I offer some promiscuous century-hopping, time-travelling both backwards and forwards: I start with a fashion model walking in the park in 1913, I move forward a hundred years to the fashion poses of 2014, then go back in time to the dancers, duellers and divas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before coming to rest again in 1913.

1. **Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Woman walking in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. Photograph, 1913**

In her history of fashion photography, Nancy Hall-Duncan describes some of Atget’s photographs as not quite achieving the status of fashion photographs. They are, rather, ‘fashion gestures’, she writes (Hall-Duncan 1979: 16). Karen de Pertuis opens her paper on the ontology of the fashion photograph in relation to street photography with this observation, and in this paper I pursue her proposition that the street photograph of a fashionable woman is a gesture (Pertuis 2016: 523-543).[[4]](#footnote-4) This image by Lartigue has something of the quality that Hall-Duncan ascribes to Atget’s photographs. It shows a modish woman walking unaccompanied in the Bois de Boulogne. Her dandyish appearance, complete with white gloves and furled umbrella, suggest she may be a fashion model, paid to walk along the pathway known as the Sentier de la Vertu, with its chairs arranged like those of the modern fashion show, in which the *beau monde* sat at fashionable times of day to watch the passers-by. It is the point of departure for my consideration of the images that follow as a riff on the idea of the fashion gesture.

1. **The book *Study of Pose: An Encyclopaedia of 1,000 Different Poses***

For this book, the photographer Steven Sebring worked with the supermodel Coco Rocha, known for her ability to ‘freestyle’ in various poses, to generate a thousand poses. They tried to cover all the poses they could think of, starting from classical poses in art history and then moving on to poses from fields such as fashion, film, and dance. The poses were shot in the round, using a 360-degree rig. The book uses graphic page layouts like this image that borrow heavily from nineteenth-century chronophotographers like Etienne-Jules Marey, and it comes with an interactive 360-degree version for viewing in the round on screens (Rocha and Sebring 2014).

1. **Coco Rocha, fashion model, double page from her book *Study of Pose: An Encyclopedia of 1,000 Different Poses*, 2014**

In fashion histories, pose and gesture have traditionally been included in pictorial histories but they have not been ‘catalogued’ or subjected to other, more rigorous types of enquiry, even though the German dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter has speculated, in a rare academic treatment of fashion modelling and posing, that it would, hypothetically, be possible to produce an atlas of the infinite variety of poses in fashion photography (Brandstetter 2007: 250). That is the novelty of a weighty book like this one from Steven Sebring and Coco Rocha, though it is of course not an academic book. One could, perhaps, further think through these possibilities in relation to ideas such as grammatization, or the cultural memory of the fashion pose, as a way of engendering alternative chronologies and new histories of fashion. To do so would require the conceptualisation of fashion as a performative practice, as much as it is also image, object and idea. In 2017, a special issue of the journal *Fashion Theory*  was dedicated to the pose ([Arnold](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Arnold%2C%2BRebecca), [Faulkner](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Faulkner%2C%2BKatherine), [Pantelides](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Pantelides%2C%2BKaterina), and [Shinkle](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Shinkle%2C%2BEugenie): 2017). There is scope within fashion studies to expand the methodological framework of this approach, for there are obvious overlaps with dance and performance studies, as well as with art history, in the way that movement is staged as a pose in static fashion images.

The qualities of motion and stasis are not, however, mutually exclusive in such photographs: quite the contrary. The Coco Rocha shots shown in this image, like all the images under review in this paper, invoke Giorgio Agamben’s formulation of the nymph who, being an analogue for the image itself, lives in a sort of permanently arrested choreography, ‘a pause that is not immobile but instead simultaneously charged with memory and with dynamic energy’ (Agamben: 2013). [[5]](#footnote-5) For Agamben, the still image is charged with time and motion, and hence can never be purely static. This is the idea that sets in motion the following reflections on the image and pose.

1. **Les Gestes de la Championne, Femina, 15 August 1912**

Moving on, then, to the first of the following montaged images, here is a picture that is freighted with cultural memory, despite its ostensible commitment to ‘the now’. This illustration of a woman tennis champion in action on the court is from a fashion magazine, *Femina,* in 1912. Cartoon-like, her tennis drive is shown in a series of overlapping stills that give the impression of a flow of movement. Like the Coco Rocha shots from 2014 [image 3], this illustration borrows from the nineteenth-century chronophotography of Etienne-JulesMarey and Edweard Muybridge to show the flow of movement broken down into still images that the magazine caption characterised as ‘gestures’. The image is not exceptional for *Femina* in 1912. Unlike the more conservative French fashion magazines, the progressive *Femina*, which had launched in 1900, consistently showed popular dance, sport and opera, alongside its fashion plates, as a series of gestures in abbreviated forms of chronophotography. For in the period before the First World War, the interest in capturing movement in still images of gestures was not limited to fashion photography. Such representations of ‘modern gesture’ also surfaced in images from popular dance and sport which both enjoyed fashionable crazes, for women if anything more than for men.

1. **Etienne-Jules Marey, Schenkel walking, July 1886**

In laying out the content of the magazine as a whole, *Femina* would have selected its images for narrative clarity and legibility, just as in the 1880s Marey had edited his images of, for example, the fencer, showing him first with *epée* upright, followed by the lunge with fully extended arm, choosing what Marey called ‘positions of visibility’ to show a sequence of actions coherently. In this photograph of a soldier marching, the overlapping images retain the distinction of the torso, with only the arms and legs overlapping to suggest movement. Such chronophotographs, which provided the impetus for Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* in 1913, organised the body in ways similar to two new, emerging forms of performance at the turn of the century, the chorus line and the fashion show, which also impacted on *Femina*’s page layouts after 1900.

Here, to return briefly to method, Bakhtin’s theory of ‘genre contact’ as a form of cultural transmission (not unlike Warburg’s idea of the migration of images) can be mobilised to argue that the gesture itself, as well as forms of its visual narration such as chornophotography, has its own ‘organic logic’ regardless of influence or chronology (Bakhtin quoted by Olick 2007:30). Indeed, due precisely to the way it passes so fluently between genres, the gesture is a kind of intermedial genre that is tantamount to a genre in itself. For, as Bahktin argues, ‘A genre possesses its own organic logic which can […] be creatively assimilated on the basis of a few generic models, even fragments’ (Olick 2007:30). He maintains, further, that ‘a genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning’ (Olick 2007:106). ‘In this way, genres reflexively mediate between past and present’, as Jeffey K. Olick argues, and are the culture’s ‘congealed events’ and ‘crystalized’ activity, in the words of Morson and Emerson (Olick 2017: 32). So that Schenkel walking, in this chronophotograph (which is a representation of space and time in one) is one such example of a crystalised activity, whereby modernist movement, in the form of gesture and pose, has an afterlife in the image.

1. **Nijinsky in the Ballets Russes’ *Jeux,* 1913.**

In 1913, the year after the *Femina* image, the dancer Vaslav Njinsky had devised and choreographed a tennis-themed ballet for the Ballets Russes, *Jeux*, a louche performance *à trois* that oscillated between games of love and games of tennis. Its choreography was derived from modern tennis and golf gestures, as opposed to classical ballet precedents. It was performed just a few times in the spring of 1913, and was overshadowed by Nijinsky’s controversial debut of *The Rite of Spring* that was premiered at the same Paris theatre only a fortnight later. Today, *Jeux* is a lost ballet. Its choreography was not recorded. There is, however, a speculative recreation by the dance historian Millicent Hodson and art historian Kenneth Archer, performed first at the Arena di Verona in 1996 and then at the Rome Opera in 2001 with two other Nijinsky ballet recreations. Hodson and Archer based their reconstruction of Nijinsky’s choreography for *Jeux* on a range of sources: original photographs of the dancers in performance; drawings by the ballet’s set-designer Leon Bakst; pastels of the performance by the artist and ballet illustrator Valentine Gross; Claude Debussy’s piano score with Nijinsky’s libretto notes; press accounts and memoirs. Working like archaeologists, Hodson and Archer first fixed steps and positions to musical passages where they could, and then Hodson, drawing on her knowledge of dance history and choreography, completed the intervening passages using a combination of speculative drawing, invention and hypothesis (Gesmer 2000; Robin 2013). Her method, which was far from the orthodox historical one, suggests some of the possibilities of Warburg’s image juxtapositions, and his theory of pictorial migration; it also contains some of the opacity, and possibly subjectivity, of his methods.

The results were met with hostility by some (though not all) ballet critics.[[6]](#footnote-6) The *New Yorker* denigrated what it saw as Hodson and Archer’s over-reliance on a faulty hypothesis about modern movement and morals; firstly, their assumption that for each ballet Nijinsky established a body posture which he used as the basis for the whole dance, and which could be used to reconstruct the ballet ‘in the absence of choreographic evidence’; and secondly, their assumption that the ‘Bloomsbury origins’ of the storyline influenced the ballet’s non-conformist sexuality (The Critic at Large 2001).[[7]](#footnote-7) The anonymous dance reviewer also questioned whether lost movement can be recreated from visual sources, and only grudgingly paid lip service to Archer’s claim that the ballet was a ‘reconstruction after Nijinsky’ and not a reconstruction of Nijinsky’s choreography. Her or his principal criticism, however, was simply that the reconstructions were ‘dud’: stagey, tame and folkloric efforts, which did not stand the test of time in the same way as great modernist masterpieces such as Duchamp’s 1913 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* (The Critic at Large 2001).[[8]](#footnote-8)

Yet, a press interview with Nijinsky the night before the ballet’s premiere in 1913 reveals an urgent sense of modernity, of being ‘up to the minute’, that he sought to capture in his choreography. *Le Figaro* wrote:

The man that I see foremost on the stage, he [Nijinsky] says, is a modern man. I imagine the costume, the plastic poses, the movement that would be characteristic of our time. There are definitely elements of the human body which evoke the period in which they are expressed. When one sees a man today strolling, reading a paper or dancing the tango, one perceives that his gestures have nothing in common with those, for instance, of an idler under Louis XV, of a gentleman dancing the minuet, or of a thirteenth-century monk studiously reading a manuscript. The careful scrutiny that I have made of polo, golf and tennis has convinced me that they are not only a healthy leveller but also a creator of plastic beauty. To this study, I bring the hope that in future our epoch will be identifiable by a style as expressive as those that we admire from the past (Cahuzac 1913).[[9]](#footnote-9)

The *New Yorker* critic attacked Hodson particuarly harshly for having relied on this quotation:

Hodson used everything she could lay her hands on. She read books on tennis; she watched period newsreels. She found a quote from Nijinsky saying that modern man was defined by his dances, “the tango and the turkey trot.” Presto! In went a tango and a turkey trot. What she knew—for example, the bisexuality—she beefed up like mad, from what I can tell. (At the end of her version, the dancers flee as if they were being pursued by the vice squad.) What she didn't know, she filled in, and that's the way the ballet looks. It has no through-line; it goes nowhere. (The Critic at Large 2001)

Yet Nijinsky’s idea of modern gestures that are specific to modern man is important. It is a historical idea of modern gesture, perceived retrospectively, which, paradoxically, sets it in the ‘now’ of 1913: the *jetztzeit,*  or ‘time filled by the presence of the now’, in Benjamin’s term (Benjamin 1977: 263-265).[[10]](#footnote-10) It is the gesture that marks the moment, and that incises it into history, Nijinsky hopes. And perhaps that explains the harsh critical response to the modern re-enactment: because the gestures of 1913 (even if the historian-choreographers got it right, which is moot) no longer look modern to us, any more than the ghostly images of silent film—so vibrantly alive to their early twentieth-century audiences—look modern today.

In parentheses, I’m aware that here I’m conflating pose and gesture, and that they might be differentiated according to Vilém Flusser’s definition, that a gesture is purposive and hence social. It indicates an intention and, as such, is quite the opposite of a fashion pose, which has no ‘purpose’ in any instrumental sense, other than to show off clothes to advantage (Flusser 2014).[[11]](#footnote-11) Nevertheless, Nijinsky’s emphasis on the modern gesture is relevant to the visual taxonomy of posing for an audience. There is clear evidence that gesture makes its way into fashion poses, not only in magazines like *Femina* in 1912, or the 2014 Coco Rocha book, but, equally, in eighteenth-century deportment and dance manuals, via the figures of the fencing master and the dancing master:

1. **Final plate from Kellom Tomlinson's dancing manual *The Art of Dancing Explained* (London, 1735)**

This plate shows the minuet-dancing man whom Nijinsky excoriated as old-fashioned in 1913. Minuet man was, however, bang up to the minute in 1735. Created at a time when people expected to dance their way into society, the image demonstrates the eighteenth-century faith in the power of appearances, in a period in which the aspirations of *seeming* over *being* enabled individuals to forge new social identities through a mixture of talent and technique.Julie Park makes a claim for women in this period that can apply to men too: ‘Being a woman in the eighteenth century was an intensly mimetic and modern project, capturing not what women are, but what women are like’ (Park 2010: 103). In this respect, it should be noted that the image shows not a social dance *per se,* but a lesson. The didactic pattern of the dance is written on the floor, both a trace of where the couple have been and a proleptic image of where they will go, and what they might become. Like chronophotography, the image is a representation of movement in both time and space, and this movement is a social as well as a physical property, in the sense of being an embodied skill that takes an individual into society, as well as space.

1. **François Nivelon, *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737). Figure 5, ‘To Offer or Receive’ (male gesture)**
2. **François Nivelon, *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737). Figure 2 , ‘To Give or Receive' (female gesture)**

And, accompanying a proficiency in dance, here are the instructions for the social gestures that will also take take their makers into society, with their subtly nuanced gender differences. The man bows as he proffers or receives an object, while the woman maintains an upright and rigid stance, as required by her boned stays, and extends a stiff arm as a gesture of giving and taking.

1. **Fashion illustration from *Galerie des Modes* (1787), ‘Grande Redingote à l'Allemande’**

These gestures, like those of the dancing master, made their way into the poses of fashion plates like this one, because eighteenth-century fashion also took its wearers into society. How else were its adherents to better themselves, if not through extravagant displays of buttons, striped stockings, and gold fob watches? And the ways in which these items were carried about the wearer’s person highlight how fashion was also a form of performance in both time and space.

1. **1791 Novelli, The Attitudes of Lady Hamilton**

An important prototype for fashion posing was Lady Hamilton who, from 1787, performed a series of ‘attitudes’ in Naples, first as Emma Hart, the 22-year old mistress of the 57-year-old Sir William Hamilton, art collector and diplomat, and, from 1791, as his wife. Her physical poses were probably derived from classical art though no specific image sources can be identified (Holmstrom 1967: 121). She became a notable figure who attracted the attention of visiting European dignitaries to Naples, and later performed in Dresden in 1800 and in London in 1802.

Her ‘atttudes’ did not consist of static poses but of flowing movements. When Goethe visited Naples in 1787, he was struck by the versatility of her in-motion performances, manipulating her shawls in classical poses. He saw the performance twice, and left a famous account in his 'Italian Journey' dated 16 March 1787:

She lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses, gestures, expressions, etc. that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees what thousands of artists would have liked to express realised before him in movements and surprising transformations — standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose follows another without a break . . . This much is certain: as a performance it is like nothing you ever saw before in your life (Goethe 1787: 131-143).

With modern hindsight, this description is cinematic. The visual flow of movement suggested by this passage, and by Novelli’s illustration, resemble the way in which chronophotography – a precursor of cinema – pictures the body in motion [images 3, 4 and 5]. Goethe’s account, like the Nijinsky interview cited earlier, has the capacity to set the animation in motion in the reader’s head, in a kind of ‘literary montage’ (as identified by Benjamin) that suggests the power of verbal description to evoke the movement that is immanent in a gesture (Benjamin 1999: 860).[[12]](#footnote-12) Gesture, for Benjamin, operates something like Agamben’s idea of the nymph, or the image. It suggests a completed movement that it simultaneously interrups, and ‘oscillates between movement and frozen sign’.[[13]](#footnote-13)

1. **The Gower Family by George Romney (1776-77)**

As a former dancer and artist’s model, Emma had learnt to pose in George Romney’s London studio, to control her talent for mimo-plastic expression and to handle draperies in the antique style. While Goethe praised her ‘attitudes’ when he saw them in Naples, he found Emma Hart herself a ‘vulgar and boring woman’, whereas in performance she was ‘the personification of grace’. Goethe was fascinated by how she could shed her social reality, including the stigma of being a kept woman and a former artist’s model, as she became an idealized representation.[[14]](#footnote-14) As the theatre historian Barry Faulk writes, ‘when Emma strikes a pose, she becomes magically transformed into a type’ (Faulk 2004: 148). In this, she resembles the haughty, silent fashion models of the early twentieth-century, suburban girls who had been trained to walk and pose in what were considered aristocratic gestures, but who were forbidden to speak to clients, which would have betrayed their working class origins.

Important for this paper are two aspects of Emma’s performance: the first is her ability to ‘freestyle’ as it is called today. Emma had at least two hundred poses and moved between them with rapidity and agility, according to her contemporaries. But there is no visual material that corresponds to these verbal accounts. Her attitudes were characterized by swift changes of facial expression and position, and the attempt to fix these shifting attitudes in static pictures was doomed to failure, as can be seen in the next two images (Holmstrom 1967: 119).

1. **Emma, Lady Hamilton. Attitudes. Friedrich Rehberg, engraved by Tommaso Piroli, Rome, 1794**
2. **Emma, Lady Hamilton. Attitudes. Friedrich Rehberg, engraved by Tommaso Piroli, Rome, 1794**

The artist Friedrich Rehberg tried, in twelve engravings by Tommaso Piroli published in Rome in 1794, of which two are illustrated here. They give us the poses but neither the mise-en-scène, which included lighting and other stage effects, nor the drama that eye-witnesses described, the psychic tension of Emma’s fluid, expressive performances, punctuated by dramatic moments of stillness that contained within them the potential for lightning-swift movement (Holmstrom 1967: 120).[[15]](#footnote-15) By all accounts, it was the immanence of her performance which thrilled spectators, and which is so lacking in Rehberg’s imagery. In a period before cinema, her shape-shifting may have seemed gothic and terrifying, even sorcerous.

1. **Nineteenth century tableau vivant with a gilt frame showing a Roman scene (1897). USA.**

The second notable aspect of Emma Hart’s performance is that the early attitudes were performed in a black velvet box surrounded by a gold picture frame, of which no image was made, or at least none that survives. The set-up for Emma’s frame involved theatrical elements such as lighting, costuming and a makeshift stage. It was installed in a secret art gallery which proved so cumbersome that it was not moved upstairs to the better lit public spaces, and Emma’s later attitudes were performed in the living room, and not on a stage, with the lighting manipulated by her husband.

The practice of using a life-size frame, however, survived in nineteenth-century *tableaux vivants* such as this one from 1897.**[[16]](#footnote-16)** The frame highlights for the viewer that the performance is to be understood as a representation: a ‘living picture’ as *tableaux vivants* and *poses plastiques* came to be called in the nineteenth century. The visual novelty of the *tableau vivant* is as an image of frozen movement, and the British art historian Lynda Nead has written eloquently on the visual appeal of the performers’ movements that flowed into position and briefly froze, before flowing on again (Nead: 2007). Thus the *tableau vivant* is a form of cultural recursion, replaying the idea of the image in motion exemplified by a number of images surveyed above: the chronophotographs stretching from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth, and the ‘freestyling’ both of Lady Hamilton’s eighteenth-century shawl dances and of Coco Rocha’s twenty-first century poses. Together they stop and start like a reel of film fed by hand through a projector.

1. **‘Fête de Paris’: fashion show at Wanamaker’s department store, Philadelphia, 1908**

In this American fashion show from 1908 at the upmarket Philadelphia department store Wanamaker, the tradition of living statues crossed over into the very new form of the fashion show. In the picture, published in the store newspaper *The Wanamaker Originator* for 12 March 1909, two live live models stand in frozen poses in two gold frames on either side of the central action. They come alive as they step out of the frame and parade down the central aisle dividing the audience. It is, incidentally, possible that the theatre aisle is the prototype for the modern catwalk.

1. **Pose plastique, c.1900**
2. **Pose plastique, with arms raised, c.1900**

While nineteenth-century *tableaux vivants* tended to reproduce paintings – history paintings or at least works involving large groups – the associated genre of *poses plastiques* that developed in the nineteenth-century theatre aimed instead to recreate the solitary body of classical or neo-classical statuary. *Poses plastiques* were always performed by women, who were always scabrously dressed in ‘fleshlings’: nude-coloured body stockings that simulated the naked body. Replicated in society drawing rooms, the performances were only somewhat more decorous (Uzanne 1898: 128-139).[[17]](#footnote-17) These two images of *poses plastiques* contain a visual reference to the revolving plinth that was a part of nineteenth-century stage apparatus, so that these ‘nude’ actresses could revolve on stage, something that the newly professionalized fashion models of the period replicated, turning on the spot as if they were living statues.

1. **Fashion plates, Margaine Lacroix, la robe sylphide, *Les Modes,* November 1908**

These fashion images show how the pose moves between forms and genres. The raised arm and arched back occurs both in these fashion plates from 1908, and in the *poses plastiques* of the period [images 17 and 18]. Both types of pose from the early 1900s, which seem kitsch today, looked backwards in time to their nineteenth-century theatrical antecedants. Others, by contrast, located themselves in the present, like Nijinsky’s ‘modern’ gestures of 1913 which disavowed the past, or the young Coco Chanel’s very modern stance when photographed at the races in 1909 [image 20].

1. **Chanel at a racecourse in the Midi, wearing a coat belonging to Baron Foy and a tie belonging to Etienne Balsan 1909**

In this photograph, Coco Chanel looks chic and breezy, in her small, neat hat and man’s collar and tie. She makes two quintessentially masculine gestures for 1909: her hands are thrust deep into the pockets of the man’s coat she wears, and her binoculars are slung insouciantly across her breastbone. Both are a sign of effrontery, in a period in which women’s social and economic relationships to men were signalled by their large hats and feminine costumes at such fashionable venues. Chanel, who at this time was a kept woman living in an unconventional household, paradoxically differentiates herself from the elaborately dressed upper-class women at the races by wearing her lover’s tie and his friend’s coat.

1. **Poiret suit remodelled by Wanamaker for US market and photographed on an American model, 1911. Baines Photographic agency. Library of Congress, USA.**

Here a monocled American fashion model with hands in pockets stages the same action but as a fashionable modelling gesture rather than as an act of social defiance. Not only the masculinity of her clothes but also the modernity of her pose postion her as a new woman, a dandyish stance also epitomised by Chanel’s insouciance at the racecourse.

1. **A Chanel model in 1925 at the Paris races**

This anonymous Chanel model photographed at the Paris races in 1925 carries the DNA of the pose which Chanel was reputed to have taught her models: hips forward, shoulders dropped, a slight, barely discernible slouch, and, above all, Georg Simmel’s ‘blasé attitude’ described in 1903, still going strong in 1925 in the fashion model’s typical look of disengaged contempt or boredom, and still current today in, for example Cara Delavigne’s modelling for Chanel shows (Simmel 1903: 329-330).

1. **Coco Chanel and Serge Lifar, early 1930s**

Bettina Ballard, who had modelled for Chanel in the 1920s, wrote in her memoirs:

She has invented that famous Chanel stance that looks relaxed as a cat, and has an impertinent chic; one foot forward, hips forward, shoulders down, one hand in a pocket and the other gesticulating (Ballard 1960: 55).

Here Chanel, boyishly dressed as an androgynous twin to her male companion, though accessorised with a bandeau turban and costume jewellery, propels the 1920s’ ‘flapper stance’ into the 1930s, through the angle of her hips, the casually held cigarette (wrist upturned), and the performative, gestural stance.

1. **Doeillet, fashion plate from the *Gazette du Bon Genre*, July 1921**

The flapper stance made its way into fashion posing in the 1920s, as in this Doeillet fashion plate with its typical fashion stance from 1921: hips thrust forward, shoulders drooping, and hands on hips. Cecil Beaton recalled in his memoirs how the designer Chéruit taught her models this stance:

Chéruit could be heard crying the whole length of the red and gold salons: “Mesdames, throw out your stomachs! Don’t draw in! Bulge! Bulge! Throw out your stomachs!” (Beaton 1954: 164).

1. **“Is the Younger Generation in Peril?”, The Literary Digest, May 14, 1921 ‘Proper and improper ways to dress’**

Or, perhaps, it was the other way round, with the model’s pose informing the flapper slouch. This anti-flapper warning from the American Young Women’s Christian Association in 1921 shows clearly that the perceived offence lay not in the clothes but in the bodily styles of their wearing. Both girls are dressed identically, but the ‘flapper’ stands contrapposto, hands on hips and legs akimbo, in contrast to the upright, neat and symmetrical body language of her morally correct counterpart. And this flapper stance, so excoriated by the moral majority, was nothing less than the generic fashion pose of the period. Writing in 1932, a former American college girl described her youthful aspirations to this style in an article for *Vanity Fair*:

Our gait was necessarily slow, because of galoshes and the ‘college walk’: we marched arm in arm, Leona and I, when we weren’t at the movies, with a drawling slow-motion, sliding as near to the side-walk as we could manage, our flat bellies thrust out before us, our backs arched as for a swan-dive; we almost broke our necks with the effort to hang our felt-lidded heads like blasé flowers. (Slesinger 1934: 26)

These modern gestures and attitudes, exemplified by fashion poses and body styles, have an afterlife in the fashion imagery of the 1960s.

1. **David Bailey for British *Vogue*, 1 April 1962. ‘New York: Young Idea Goes West’. Model Jean Shrimpton**

The British model Jean Shrimpton is captured here in New York by the London fashion photographer David Bailey in a childish, or prepubescent, pose, styled with a teddy bear as if she herself is a doll with hinged limbs. She lounges, with her hips thrust forward, in a milieu more usually the setting for prostitution, but that is not the implication of this fashion photograph.

1. **Twiggy and her Rootstein mannequin, made when she was eighteen, in 1967-8.**

A few years later, another new young model, Twiggy, was cast as a shop window mannequin by the model-maker Adele Rootstein who captured her adolescent slouch. ‘Twiggy never stood erect and no mannequin has ever stood erect since’, said Rootstein. Only a very small number of these ghostly Twiggy mannequins survive today, holding the trace of the 18-year old Twiggy’s posture. The image shows a surviving mannequin on the right, and, on the left, the 18-year old Twiggy in 1967, the year her body was cast, and flanked by several Twiggy mannequins in Paco Rabanne metal disc dresses. The ‘real’ Twiggy on the left wears a tiny mini-skirt suspended from the hip bones, and thrusts her hips so far forward that it creases her skirt, recalling the 1932 *Vanity Fair* description of the two teenage flappers arching their backs and thrusting their stomachs forward as they sidle along the sidewalk with drooping shoulders and necks.

Here in the surviving mannequin, and equally in the image of the 18-year-old Twiggy, the image and the object jump back and forth between fleeting evanescence and the fixity of the object. So the image-object-image nexus is like an archaeology of the moment of change.

In fashion modelling, objects are used to construct the pose. Emma Hamilton used a chair [image 14], a pedestal, an urn, a tambourine [image 13, and compare that to image 12] and several cashmere shawls as accessories; she even used a little girl in her Niobe scene [Image 13] (Holmstrom 1967: 126). Accessories like these are all that are left to us today of such fashion gestures.

1. **Museum of London, parasols in the costume archive, photographed 2014**

And so, finally, what remains, and what disappears, in all of this? The immediacy of Emma Hart’s poses in the eighteenth century is captured only in texts; the type of accessories that animated her performance survive in museum archives, but are curiously dead in themselves. Coco Rocha’s contemporary fashion performance in 2014 seems similarly embalmed, in its tombstone of a book. How does historial and contemporary research reconcile the living, the lived, and the dead? How to make them speak, or touch each other?

Perhaps the answer is to throw up a gesture in the air and see where it lands, as I proposed at the beginning of this paper. But if all that lands is an object, like these historical parasols conserved in white Tyvek covers in the Museum of London archive where they were photographed in 2014, then what? We have the extant dress, we have the parasols, we have some evocative texts by diarists or journalists, but the gestures are mostly lost, or, if they are revived, they look, at best, anachronistic and, at worst, clumsy (the accusation levelled against the Nijinsky ballet recreation) and the question remains: how do we create a memory, or the idea of a memory, in the present? The answer may lie in the quotidian, the ordinary and the instantaneous. The moment is past, but there remains a description from the 16-year old Lartigue (b.1894) of taking pictures such as this one, the image from 1913 that I began with:

1. **Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Woman walking in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. Photograph, 1913**

Lartigue, little more than a boy in 1912 but already a passionate photographer, wrote:

There I am, lying in wait, seated on a metal chair, with my camera all set up. Distance: 4 to five metres; shutter speed: 4 mm; diaphragm stop: that depends on which side *she* arrives. I’m good at judging the distance by eye. What is less easy, is that *she* should have just one foot ahead at the correct moment to press the shutter (which is the most entertaining thing to calculate).

…

 ‘twenty metres . . . ten . . . eight . . . six . . . *click*!’ (Lartigue 1975 : 81). [[18]](#footnote-18)

His shutter makes so much noise that the woman jumps as much as he does.

Is it paradoxical to argue that images like this suggest, on the one hand, historical continuity (Warburg’s famous ‘afterlife of images’, described by Didi-Huberman as the ‘survival’ of gestures [Didi-Huberman 2004: 10]), in texts, drawings, and photographs that freeze the fleeting; and, on the other, the disruptions that come with historical ‘moments’ in particular accounts of modernity, such as Baudelaire’s contrast of the ephemeral and the eternal in his essay on the dandy, for example, or in Benjamin’s claim that ‘The eternal is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea’? (Benjamin 1999: 69)

**Images**

**For reference, all of the images can be found, collected together, on the following *Pinterest* account:**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/mickfinch1/fashion/>

**They can also be found individually via the following links:**

**1 - Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Woman walking in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. Photograph, 1913.**

<https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/506795764303699546/>

**2 -The book *Study of Pose: An Encyclopaedia of 1,000 Different Poses.***

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172023/>

**3 - Coco Rocha, fashion model, double page from her book *Study of Pose: An Encyclopedia of 1,000 Different Poses*, 2014.**<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172043/>

4 -**Les Gestes de la Championne, Femina, 15 August 1912.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309173074/>

**5 - Etienne-Jules Marey, Schenkel walking, July 1886.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764303699572/>

**6 - Nijinsky in the Ballets Russes’ *Jeux,* 1913.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172089/>

**7 - Final plate from Kellom Tomlinson's dancing manual *The Art of Dancing Explained* (London, 1735).**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172097/>

**8 - François Nivelon, *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737). ‘To Offer or Receive’ (male gesture).**

[**https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172158/**](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172158/)

**9 - François Nivelon, *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737). ‘To Give or Receive' (female gesture).**

<https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/506795764303699596/>

**10 - Fashion illustration from *Galerie des Modes* (1787), ‘Grande Redingote a l'Allemande’.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172182/>

**11 - 1791 Novelli, The Attitudes of Lady Hamilton.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172186/>

**12 - The Gower Family by George Romney (1776-77).**<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172192/>

**13 - Emma, Lady Hamilton. Attitudes. Friedrich Rehberg, engraved by Tommaso Piroli, Rome, 1794.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172195/>

**14 - Emma, Lady Hamilton. Attitudes. Friedrich Rehberg, engraved by Tommaso Piroli, Rome, 1794.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172201/>

**15 - Nineteenth century tableau vivant with a gilt frame showing a Roman scene (1897). USA.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172210/>

**16 - ‘Fête de Paris’: fashion show at Wanamaker’s department store, Philadelphia, 1908.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172282/>

**17 - Pose plastique, c.1900.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172291/>

**18 - Pose plastique, with arms raised, c.1900.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172302/>

**19 - Fashion plates, Margaine Lacroix, la robe sylphide, *Les Modes,* November 1908.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172309/>

**20 - Chanel at a racecourse in the Midi, wearing a coat belonging to Baron Foy and a tie belonging to Etienne Balsan 1909.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172315/>

**21 - Poiret suit remodelled by Wanamaker for US market and photographed on an American model, 1911. Baines Photographic agency. Library of Congress, USA.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172328/>

**22 - A Chanel model in 1925 at the Paris races.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172332/>

**23 - Coco Chanel and Serge Lifar, early 1930s.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172344/>

**24 - Doeillet, fashion plate from the *Gazette du Bon Genre*, July 1921.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172349/>

**25 - “Is the Younger Generation in Peril?”, The Literary Digest, May 14, 1921 ‘Proper and improper ways to dress’.**

https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172359/

**26 - David Bailey for British Vogue, 1 April 1962. ‘New York: Young Idea Goes West’. Model Jean Shrimpton.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764309172370/>

**27 - Twiggy and her Rootstein mannequin, made when she was eighteen, in 1967-8.**

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/506795764303698549/>

**28 - Museum of London, parasols in the costume archive, photographed 2014.**

<https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/506795764303699601/>

**29 - Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Woman walking in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. Photograph, 1913.**

<https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/506795764303699546/>

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1. For a discussion on the concept of ‘the now’ in relation to fashion, see Petra Hroch, ‘Fashion and Its “Revolutions” in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades*’ in: Anca M. Pusca, ed, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Change* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 108-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* , trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999). Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on Philosophy of History’, *Illuminations,* ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (London: Fontana/Collins, second impression, 1977), 255-266. For commentaries on Benjamin’s writing on fashion and time, see Hroch, ibid, and Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time: Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (Evanston Illinois: North West University Press, 2006), 25-38. For an application of Walter Benjamin’s writing on fashion and time, including the concept of dialectical images, see Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000). For a similar argument, see Agamben’s discussion of fashion in ‘What is the Contemporary?’ in Giorgio Agamben,  *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39-53. For an application of some different models of fashion time that are enabled by Benjamin’s writing, see Evans, opp. cit, 19-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pertuis concludes her enquiry on whether—or when—a street photograph can amount to a fashion photograph with a word-portrait of a street fashion shot by Neil Libbert from 1960, where she argues for the category of fashion gesture. Pertuis, ibid, 538-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Agamben’s text ranges across several topics, including Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Benjamin’s concept of dialectical images. See too Doussan, J. (2013*), Time, Languge and Visuality in Agamben’s Philosophy*, London: Palgrave MacMillan. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a round-up of some of the more sympathetic critical responses, see Gesmer, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On the Bloomsbury origins of the ballet in the London garden of Lady Ottoline Morrell in July 1912, see Buckle, R. (1975), *Nijinsky*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 341; and Garafola L. (1989), *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, New York: da Capo Press, 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Although the reviewer claims that Duchamp’s picture thrilled audiences in the Armory Show of 1913 in a way that the reconstructed ballets failed to thrill the modern critic, she or he does not give any evidence to substantiate this claim about the Armory Show. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘L’homme que je vois avant tout autre sur la scène, dit-il, c’est l’homme moderne. Je rève d’un costume, d’une plastique, d’un mouvement qui seraient caractéristiques de notre temps. Il y a surement dans le corps humain des éléments qui sont significatifs de l’époque où il s’exprime. Lorsqu’on voit aujourd’hui un homme se promener, lire un journal ou danser le tango, on n’aperçoit rien de commun entre ses gestes et ceux, par exemple, d’un flâneur sous Louis XV, d’un gentilhomme courant le menuet, ou d’un moine lisant studieusement au manuscrit au treizième siècle. L’examen attentif que j’ai fait des polos, des golfs et des tennis, m’a persuadé que ces jeux ne sont pas seulement un délassement hygiénique, mais qu’ils sont également créateurs de beauté plastique. Et à cette étude j’ai rapporté cet espoir que notre temps serait caractérisé, dans l’avenir, par un style tout aussi expressif que ceux que nous admirons le plus volontiers dans le passé.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In Thesis XIV on p.263, Benjamin also writes that ‘Fashion has a flair for the topical’ and reasserts his claim for fashion as a ‘tiger’s leap’ into the past, first expounded in the *Eighteenth Brumaire.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See too pages 82-84 of Susan L. Siegfried, ‘The Visual Culture of Fashion and the Classical Ideal in Post-revolutionary France’, *Art Bulletin,* vol. xcvii, no.1, March 2015, 77-99. Seigfried discusses how social gesture, in the sense written about by Benjamin, informs the pose of the painting she discusses. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ‘Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t *say* anything. Merely show.’Benjamin, *Arcades* (1999), opp. cit., 860. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See p. 49 of Carrie Asman, ‘Return of the Sign to the Body: Benjamin and Gesture in the Age of Retheatricalization’ *Discourse,* vol.16, 1994, 46-64. Nevertheless, Benjamin’s idea of *gestus* is traceable in language as much as in image or stage performance; *gestus* is performative, and the idea grew out of his writing on Brecht. See too Siegfried, opp. cit, 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Goethe describes tableaux vivants in *Elective Affinities* (1809). Emma’s performance was not a tableau vivant, however, but a shawl dance, a type of dance that, because of its fluid manipulation of fabric around the body, became a popular subject for the first film, from the mid-1890s. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This paragraph is particularly indebted to Holmstrom. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Byron Company. A tableau vivant of a Roman scene, 1897. Gelatin silver print. Museum of the City of New York, accession number 93.1.1.18352. An American tableau vivant is described in Edith Wharton’s novel *The House of Mirth* (1905) which is set in the 1880s. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Uzanne described how the ‘cocodettes’ of the Second Empire ‘took an almost fiendish delight in the construction of *poses plastiques,* in which society women donned actresses’ flesh-coloured tights in risqué performances*. Poses plastiques* were a staple of British fin-de-siècle music hall, and the posing craze also swept America at the turn of the century. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. C’est là que je suis à l’affût, assis sur une chaise en fer, mon appareil bien réglé. Distance: de 4 à cinq mètres; vitesse: fente de rideau 4mm; diaphragme: cela dépendra de quel coté *elle* arrivera. Je sais très bien juger la distance à vue de nez. Ce qui est moins facile, c’est qu’elle ait juste un pied en avant, au moment de la mise au point correcte (c’est ce qu’il y a de plus amusant à calculer). […] Vingt mètres . . . dix mètres . . . huit . . . six . . . *clac*!.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-18)