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THE MISSING-
BODY
PART

THE

University of the Arts London Professorial Platform 2012

MODERN-
IST

Caroline Evans

BODY

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I am honoured to introduce Professor Caroline Evans on the occasion of this Professorial Platform. Caroline has been an inspirational figure in the field of fashion history and theory for the past three decades. Her work in the late 1980s and early 90s on gender and subcultural identities offered a radical rethinking of fashion's place in the broader economies of contemporary style cultures. Directly informed by her teaching of generations of fashion students at Central Saint Martins, Caroline's later research and publications on the discourses of fashion's avant-gardes have informed much subsequent work by fashion academics, journalists, curators and designers themselves, from Brazil to Moscow. The consideration of fashion as an active component of states of modernity has been a consistent thread through Caroline's work and tonight's lecture promises a further, exciting exploration of the theme. Caroline is a highly valued mentor, collaborator and friend and I know you will join me in celebrating her impressive scholarly achievements tonight.

Christopher Breward
Principal, Edinburgh College of Art
Professor of Cultural History, University of Edinburgh

1

MECHAN- IZATION

Motionless, veiled, silent, you would have said she was looking out on them from behind the shadows that veiled her features. Edison touched one of the rings on Hadaly's silver-gloved hand. The android quivered from head to foot: she became once more an apparition; the phantom reanimated itself.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *L'Eve future*, 1886



In the domain of body culture, which also covers the illustrated newspapers, tastes have been quietly changing. The process began with the Tiller Girls. These products of American distraction factories are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics.

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 1927

Saleability itself can become a sexual stimulus; and this attraction increases wherever an abundant supply of women underscores their character as commodity. With the exhibition of *girls* in rigidly uniform dress at a later period, the music hall review explicitly introduced the mass-produced article into the libidinal life of the big-city dweller.

Walter Benjamin, 'Konvolut J: Baudelaire', *The Arcades Project*, 1999

Avec l'Atelier : France, 20 fr.

Étranger, 30 fr.

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Lemina



For the mannequins, these are tiring days, but they never let it show. Smiling, gracious, very feminine, diverse and chameleon-like, they promenade each costume through the salons in an ordered fashion, modelling individually to each client. They pass, advance, stop, turn, continue. Twenty or thirty times they make the same gesture, step, and turn, only to disappear and then reappear some minutes later, dressed in a new toilette that the backstage dressers have hastily put on them.

The fitters betray no haste in their attitude, their gestures, or even their smile, this smile that is required for even the most indifferent remarks, this industrial smile, as one could call it.

L Roger-Milès, *Les Créateurs de la mode*, 1910



The mannequins of the Grand Couturier are like the stallions of the race horse proprietor. He watches over them, he takes care of them, he does not suffer them to get fatter or thinner. Their lives, outside the workshops, are not entirely ... regular? In his own house, he attempts to remedy these disorders. He 'drugs' them, dare I say it, to keep them on form. And, from the beginning of February, he visits the kitchens of his refectory to ensure that red meat is omitted from the midday meal. He submits them to an exclusively vegetarian diet because of their complexions, and to keep intact the freshness of their skin, so that they do not put on any weight. Not everything is rosy in the life of a grand couturier, nor is it in the mannequin's ... there are ... the fines, when one holds oneself badly, when one is noisy, when one is quarrelling with a workmate, when one arrives after nine in the morning ... there are long sessions before the mirrors ... when one is obliged to remain standing for two or three hours, while the 'Grand Couturier' waits for inspiration which does not come ... And it is a patient wait, the arms bare and raised, while the scissors cut and slash the canvas toile, while the dressmaker pins, drapes, unpicks, makes and unmakes those first, uncertain 'foundations' of what will become a marvel of a dress, better than a dress: a dream, a breath, an adorable nothing – and costly ... which others will wear.

Emile Henriot, 'Figures Parisiennes: Le Mannequin', *L'illustration*, 27 December 1913



2

MOTION

Around them, the mute mannequins with waxen smiles come, go and come again, brushing past them, enveloping them with the caress of their trailing garments, tirelessly repeated, intoxicating their imaginations with rhythmic and undulating movements, with seductive poses, with discrete and knowing contortions. ... an entire procession of dislocated mannequins, of snake-women sheathed in venomous outfits who undulate, slowly convulse, their stomachs on display like an offering, with a trailing foot, miming a kind of purposeless tango under the eyes of the female audience.

Sem, Le Vrai et le faux chic, 1914



**She rolls her hips, she advances as if tangoing,
uncoupled, well-proportioned, supple and feline ... she is
'balanced' I'm telling you. She knows how to walk, and her
whole body participates in her walk. There is dance in her,
and it is of her, without doubt, that the poet wrote:**

Even when she walks, one would say she is dancing ...

**Now it is only in Paris that one walks thus. And, in
Paris, it is only the mannequins who know how to walk this
well. And it is as well, for it is their profession.**

Emile Henriot, 'Figures Parisiennes: Le Mannequin', *L'Illustration*, 27 December 1913



I have already seen two hundred dresses modelled in one month. At the dawn of the season, it is a fashion show that instructs while it amuses one. I learnt how stomachs are being worn this year: flat, with the arrogance of a shield, balanced from front to rear, from rear to front. Where are the rolling hips, Spanish or Martiniquais, of the mannequins of 1914? It is a matter of hips! We no longer have anything lateral.

Colette, 'Trop Court', *Vogue*, 1920s

Chanel often took up needle and thread herself, or would cut, fit, and invent hats in paper. She trained her mannequins with all the loving discipline of a Petipa or a Balanchine, teaching them to walk on their toes, with their pelvis thrust well forward. Cocteau has written of Chéruit's mannequins, who were similarly trained at that time: '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!"'

Cecil Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion*, 1954



There's a regular technique to modelling clothes. This is the procedure for modelling a dress: walk in with hands on hips and a coy look for the buyer. Turn around, cross arms in front so that the lines of the back can be seen, walk away. Turn again and walk forward to show the fall of the drapery. Then exit, with a nice smile over the shoulder. This smile, too, is for the buyer—and it is important. Coats are more involved because the lining has to be shown. Fur pieces have to be wrapped along the shoulders, then around the hips, held out in front the way a butler holds a big platter, and then laid on the floor. All very fast, like a scarf dance.

Fortune, 1933



3

THE MISSING- ING PART

The recent floods in Paris are disastrous for the couturiers as this is when commissionaires usually start to buy for export. The few who intrepidly came could only see the clothes in poor light. Thrown over armchairs they made a lamentable show in the poor candlelight. Without means of communication, the majority of mannequins living in the suburbs had to give up coming to work. Shown ‘by hand’, the most sumptuous costumes appeared worn out, which inspired one disillusioned buyer to the melancholy reflection that ‘Mannequins without dresses just about pass ... but dresses without mannequins!’

Le Mannequin d'Hozier, 'Modanités', *Fantasio*, 15 February 1910

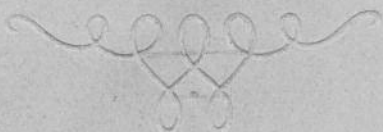


133 INONDATIONS DE PARIS (Janvier 1910). — Rue de Lyon. — LL,

She is no longer a living person. Above all, she is no longer a woman aware of the pleasure of wearing new clothes. Her face is inexpressive. Her lips smile mechanically. When asked ‘What is your name?’ she replies ... She replies, yes, but in the most unexpected way. What is her name? It is *Plaisir d’amour ... Chartreuse ... Rien qu’un moment ... Le premier oui ... Fauvette ... Feuille de rose ... Kamtchatka ... Cinq à sept ... Apollon ...*’ By dint of being made to resemble a prop, by dint of being no more than a sort of harmonious construction serving as a clothes hanger, many mannequins lose their personalities, the better to assimilate the serial personalities that are imposed on them.

Paul Reboux, *La Rue de la Paix*, 1927

W O R T H



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SUR LA CROISSETTE



In the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures seeks to re-appropriate what it has lost while simultaneously recording that loss. An era that has lost its gestures is, for that very reason, obsessed with them; for people who are bereft of all that is natural to them, every gesture becomes a fate. And the more the ease of these gestures was lost under the influence of invisible powers, the more life became indecipherable.

Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 1978



The mannequin slides between groups like a long, glittering shuttle, and throws out threads. A disturbing collaborator, it is on the mannequin that a bundle of efforts converge, of which no-one recognises the importance. The public appreciates the value of the tasks done by others in couture, such as the weaver, the designer, the cutter, the couturier who is in charge of them: when it comes to the mannequin, it holds back, dreams, admires or suspects. Among the modernized forms of the most luxurious industry, the mannequin, vestige of a voluptuous barbarity, is like a plunder-laden prey. She is the conquest of the look without rupture, a living bait, the passive realization of an idea. Her ambiguous profession confers ambiguity upon her. Her gender is uncertain, linguistically. One says ‘this mannequin is charming’, [*ce mannequin est charmante*] and her work consists of simulating idleness. A demoralizing mission holds her at an equal distance from her employer and from the ordinary workers. Is it a laughing matter, to excuse the strange humour and caprice of the mannequin? No other female profession contains such powerful elements of moral disaggregation as hers, which imposes the exterior signs of wealth on a poor and beautiful girl.

Colette, 'Mannequins', *Vogue*, 1925



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Caroline Evans is Professor of Fashion History & Theory at Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design (University of the Arts London) where she teaches and writes on twentieth-century and contemporary fashion. Her forthcoming book *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America* is due from Yale University Press in 2012/13. She is the author of *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (2003), and co-author of *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk* (2004), *Fashion & Modernity* (2005), *Hussein Chalayan* (2005) and *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (2008).

Colophon

All translations from the French apart from p.32 by the author

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