

Clothes in Movement: The rise of the modern, independent woman.

José Teunissen

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Introduction.

Why are the fashion show and the involvement of audiovisual media so crucial for the fashion system? For more than a century every new collection is launched with a fashion show, where models wearing the latest trends move fluidly to music whilst displaying themselves to an audience. Fashion coverage in magazines, television and social media is an essential part of fashion. First of all clothing on a body looks much better than on a hanger. But more importantly, without a show or photo coverage the consumer wouldn't know how to wear/perform the clothes on a dynamic body. Which each new fashion trend a new way of posing and strolling with the right gestures are displayed. Without the fashion show and the pictures in the fashion magazines, this subtle combination of details and the proper way to display fashion on the body would remain invisible. Fashion, in our modern society, needs a body with presence, a body that knows how to move without looking artificial. As such, it is reflecting our modern, democratic society connected to the ideal of unsophistication. By transforming woman's outfit as well as by introducing a completely new way of capturing fashion using new media as film and photography, fashion expressed and underlined the fact that women from the-1910s were taking part in an active, independent, outdoor and public life.

The rise of the Dandy as a start of modern life.

Fashion is much more than just wearing the right look with the right silhouette and the right color. Fashion is a visual art form, with the self as a medium.ⁱ And therefore a performance art where the display of a body in action in public life is an essential element. With fashion we present our social- and individual identity to the world, all captured in the shifting moments of our public appearance. As such fashion is a cultural phenomenon that reflects cultural and social values of specific time periods by different aesthetics. When in the early 1860s the first French couture houses started to design the first made-to-measure outfits they started to use models to show their new creations to customers in their salon. Exactly here starts the modernization of women dress.

However, interest in strolling, performing a dynamic fashionable body, had risen much earlier in the world of men's fashion. Along with the rise of the dandy in the early 1800s the introduction of a culture of parading in the anonymous modern city started –and this stayed in the first part of the century only a privilege for men. This fashionable public performance was radically different from the fashion presentation of the French royal court in the eighteenth Century which was a theatrical, and ritual prescribed event.

Due to the new ideals of Enlightenment and the French Revolution major changes in the social order and public life had taken place. The nobleman and royals had lost their power and the bourgeoisie emerged in the wake of enlightenment, industrialization and democratization. It was no longer one's origin but one's taste and style that could determine one's success in life. For the first time becoming successful in life laid within everyone's personal remit. Showing taste and dressing fashionable as well as conveying interest in art, was now the right way to gain status.ⁱⁱ

The person who took the lead in this new fashion world was the Dandy. Although he lacked a noble background he was very skilled in following the latest fashion with exceptional dedication. He managed to attract admiration from the public audience who assumed his refined looks were a reflection of his soul, impeccable taste and his refined manners. To underline the difference with the extravagant and ostentatious nobility, the dandy chose a sober outfit: a black suit which emphasized his different role (middle class) in society. (Hollander 1994:3-10) More important, it marked the start of a different aesthetic and very different perception of the male body: the suits with a cut based on Greek physical ideals transformed the male body radically into timeless, abstract form only details mattered. It showed a body in ideal proportions whilst underlining the movement. The focus of the new sober fashion, was on small details such as the kind of woolen fabric, the type of collar or tie. And the ideal platform to present himself was the entirely new environment of the urban city. In doing so, the dandy gave expression to a new, modern urban feeling. During the nineteenth century, the city culture - especially in Paris - became more and more focused on the transient aesthetics of daily public life. Newspaper started to write stories about daily novelties such as the department stores and the newly constructed boulevards. City centers as well as the parks became the ideal platform for strolling and parading; for enjoying one selves with gazing: to play of looking and to be looked at. All this turned the anonymous city life into a spectacle for the masses, a reality to be experienced collectively. The fashion performance on the street became an essential part of this modern culture.ⁱⁱⁱ P9 and p202.

Women start to follow men's fashion.

It took until the late 1850s until women's fashion started to enter this new arena of modernity. During 18th and early 19th Century dressmakers used to take dolls with the latest fashion with them when they visited their clients. Visual fashion information hardly existed until in 1770 the very first fashion illustration appeared in the English magazine *The Lady's magazine*. (Holland 1955: 68) It took to the 1830s before the magazine became widely used. By then women could subscribe to a variety of magazines such as *Le Bon ton*, *Le Journal des Demoiselles* and *Le Petites Courier des Dames*. While the first fashion magazine in the 1830s showed illustration of the dandy strolling through the city, the women usually were depicted against the backdrop of a ball or tea visit, sitting still and allowing herself to be admired like in a painting: 125. Women's fashion aesthetics in this period was exposing a heavily decorated body, inflexible and immobile because of the corsets, many underskirts and petticoats. As such it underlined an enormous discrepancy between man and woman, not only in terms of the look of the clothing but also as a performance act. Whilst the man made his casual fleeting strolling through the street of the anonymous, modern city presenting a modern democratic life represented by 'natural' body in action, the woman on the contrary, continued to present herself in a conventional theatrical environment of the house showing of 'status' and the richness of her husband whilst portrayed in a painting or illustration. Where the dandy introduced a new type of appearance, displaying 'personality' and 'a performance of being' women continued to perform 'class' in a conventional way.

By the midcentury, however, women started slowly to appear outside the home in the magazines. They are depicted strolling in a park, walking on the street or doing window-shopping. It is around this time that women slowly start to enter the arena of modernity. (Steele 1985: 117-118) The couturier C.F. Worth, who moved from England to Paris in 1858 to set up the first couture house, took the modern approach to the female body one-step further. Until then women called in their dressmaker to make their clothing having clear ideas themselves how they would like to look. From now, there was a creative spirit at work, personalized by an artist couturier that managed to turn bourgeois women into idealized women, in the same way as painters did with paintings. Women started to hand themselves over to these new couturiers whereas before influential women - such as for example Marie Antoinette in the 18th Century- used to set new fashion trends themselves. Worth displayed his sample dresses on live models. When women came by they could take place in the salon where a model –usually some of his seamstresses – showed the latest

sample dresses. For promotional reasons he also started to send his mannequins on Sundays to the horse races at Longchamps in the Bois de Boulogne. It kick started a new period where women were slowly allowed to enter the public realm independently without their chaperones. With the opening of the first department stores women could go out for shopping or enjoying the shop windows. Parks and boulevards were opened now for women to stroll and parade – and women could take part in sports such as tennis, riding horses or a bicycle in the park. The fashion illustrations in the magazine are reflecting this transition for the 1860s and start to depict women more and more strolling on the street or taking part in outdoor life (O’Hara 1986: 265) (Kinney 1994: 270-314) ILLUSTRATION 1; women on the street)For these occasions women started to wear the very first practical garments such as tailored jacket or a handbag, but no real transformation of the dress took place: woman’s body and movement stayed hidden under the petticoats, layers of underskirts and corsets.

In 1863, Charles Baudelaire published his famous article ‘Le peintre de la Vie Moderne’ in *Le Figaro* where he tried to capture and define this new trend - fashionable women strolling in public life - as an reflection of the new modernity in urban life. In his eyes modern painters should take inspiration of the new, changing fashions that women were presenting on the streets, which reinvented, defined and –permanently kept redefining - the notion of the beauty changing seasonally but also the fleeting and ephemeral aspect beauty as it revealed itself in a single moment. He admired the clever way fashion managed to extract elements from history and translates them into a modern aesthetic where historical and timeless elements naturally blended. Baudelaire referred to the illustrator Constantin Guys and the way he attempt to capture the moment in the street scenes. Guys often caught courtesans and fashionable women on the street just as they were raising their crinoline exposing a foot beneath. At that precise moment, writes Baudelaire, the combination of body, clothing and facial expression created the aesthetic of the modern urban woman.^{iv} Following the dandy, women’s personality, success in life and even her existence became dependent on her ephemeral public appearance and less on her social background. Her personality could not be separated from outfit in an active presence.

‘They – (the women on the street JT) - exist more for the pleasure of the observer than for their own pleasure. She dresses herself with a challenging and barbarian elegance, or she emulates (with a greater or lesser degree of success) the simplicity that would be commonplace in a better world. She comes closer, glides, dances, rolls with a ballast of

embroidered petticoats that serve as both pedestal and balancing pole. She looks out from under her hat, like a portrait from its frame.^v

Interestingly, the dynamic and mobility of the female body, could only be expressed in a few details that could be noticed in passing. Only heaving a skirt or the step of a foot expressed dynamic and action, whilst the majority of women's body stayed hidden beneath petticoats, a crinoline and a corset. At this moment women's fashions still had to undergo an entire transformation process to attain the same level of the Dandy's modern, abstract and dynamic soberness. However, the attractiveness of an aesthetic of a female body in motion was recognized by the journals, newspapers and magazine to be further explored in the decennia to follow.

Stephane Mallarme initiated the fashion magazine *La Derniere Mode* in 1874, where he started to experiment with a new language to capture this new ephemeral fashion. He introduced an aesthetic of a body in movement based on the insight that the street (the spot) had become the place where you could learn the latest fashion. This aesthetic moment did not only include a new color, a new silhouette or a fashion style but more important the right body postures and movements: 'The correct way to hold one's hand is something we have to learn from someone – that is, from someone we see in public spaces.'^{vi} The introduction of the aesthetic moment marked a real culture shift from the static and prescriptive aesthetic described in etiquette books of the 18th Century, which described body postures as part of the right social behavior.

The introduction of a radical new fashion

It took until the early twentieth Century before a radical transformation and modernization of women's dress took place. After having been an assistant at house Paquin and Worth, Paul Poiret (1874-1944) began his own couture house in 1903. Poiret's source of inspiration was Greek antiquity, which he admired mainly because the body remained so beautifully visible through the thin, draped fabrics. In order to show off the draped natural body to its best advantage he eliminated the corset, which brought about a revolution in the approach to fashion and the body. While nineteenth century clothing covered and concealed the body completely, Poiret's clothing was intended to support and accent the body itself. As a result his designs brought about a lively interplay of the female body and clothing, like the interplay that had already been introduced a century earlier between the man and the suit. To underline this new aesthetic, Poiret reduced all superfluous decorations and prints because lace,

embroidery and ribbons drew the attention away from the interplay of the body and the fabric. As such, the couturier marked the beginning of a search for an aesthetic of a body in motion, presented by an active young woman displaying a perceptible body beneath the clothing that emerges while her body moved.

In the same manner as Worth, the designer Paul Poiret took his models to horse races at Longchamps. He introduced a completely different aesthetics, - models wearing long splits in the dresses through which legs in bright colored stockings are visible – which the audience chocked: “Just imagine, we could observe their bodies. Here in Paris the taxi drivers and butchers boys are already accustomed to seeing ladies walking down the street with their long skirts held firmly in their hands, exposing the line and rounding’s of the legs from hip to ankle. The petticoat is ancient history. Legs have become fashionable.”^{vii}

With this new style Poiret marked the moment where women’s body and her movements became visible as part of the aesthetic of a dynamic body. Inspired by the fashion parades that Lucille held in London, Poiret started informal fashion parades in his own salon and in his back garden (Abb. #2) which he recorded on film to use them for his promotional trips to America. His ideal body required a medium that was able to record and capture ‘action, the dynamic of the ‘moment’ and the ‘mobility’ of the body. As he wrote in his autobiography: “I love a simple dress, cut from a light, supple fabric that falls down from the shoulders to the feet in long, straight pleats like slow-moving liquid, just touching the contours of the figure and casting a shadow across the moving form. The fourreau- the princess style – of soft satin reveals the sculptural form of the modern women in her undulating slimness and grace.”^{viii} Not only was a public fashion show – on film and in reality - important to him to underline this new aesthetic, he also introduced a new form of fashion print and a new way of photography. Not happy with the conventional fashion illustration in the fashion magazines Poiret invited in 1908 the artists Paul Iribe and George LePape to make modern sketches that laid more emphasis to the graphic, fluid lines and the silhouette of his designs. (Abb. #3). Beside the photographer Edward Steichen was hired to explore and foreground the clothing texture, transparency, mobility and translucency published in *Art and Decoration* from 1911(Abb. #4). Poiret explored these new media because the ideal body he wanted to show required a different medium, a medium able to record ‘action’, the ‘moment’ and mobility of the body.

As Poiret’s efforts clearly show, they marked the beginning of an aesthetic of a real body in action, a perceptible body beneath the clothing that emerges as the body moves. This meant

that classical poses such as leaning on a parasol was no longer perceived as fashionable. Starting in 1910, the fashionable woman needed to be able to display an elegant body in action, a body that strolled, paraded and sauntered down the boulevards. Therefore, many couture houses followed soon with a public fashion show where models performed for an audience. At the same time magazines started to use photography as an appropriate medium to capture this new dressed body in action. In addition, the newly invented cinema (1895) became an important new source of inspiration progressing to a real communication channel where women all over the world could find the latest fashion examples from Paris.

Film as the ideal medium

The very first fashion film items appear in the cinema's newsreels at the end of 1910. Before that time newsreels were regularly showing documentary street shots of strolling fashionable women. They became so popular that Gaumont and Pathé Frères, the two important film companies of that time, decided to stage their own fashion films. At the start these items were very short, presenting only one dress or one hat, but within ten years they had a length of 10 to 15 minutes, were often hand colored and had an ingenious staging and story. *Despite the War, Paris still sets the fashion for the world.* (Pathé Gazette, 1917) for example presented in 7 minutes a little story of three models who meet in the gardens, in house and in a salon showing a different outfit on each location. *Modeschau in Zoo. Zum besten des Kriegsblindenheims ihrer exz. Frau von Ihne.* (Messter Film 1914/1915) is a very early example, produced in Berlin, presenting fashion from the famous Christopher Drecolle - who had a store in Berlin - where models showed their dresses in a fashion salon. (Teunissen 1992: 44) By far, film was the best medium to capture and showcase the new aesthetic of a body in movement and that was why it so quickly became worldwide very popular. (Teunissen 1992; 31-34) (Abb. #5).

Not surprisingly, the very first film stars such as Asta Nielsen, Lyda Borrelli and Francesca Bertini became inspirational fashion role models in the 1910s further developed and perfected during the 1920s by Hollywood film stars such as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich who became the inspiring icons of fashion elegance.

A practical wardrobe. A wardrobe for an active life

Although Poiret was responsible for the introduction of this radical new aesthetic of a female body in action participating in outdoor and public life, it was Coco Chanel (1873-1971) who

transformed the women's wardrobe into an even more practical, comfortable, simple outfit that became timeless in the same way as the men suit. Chanel opened her first store in Deauville in 1913 where she started to sell hats and beach wear. She introduced step by step a fundamental new ethics and philosophy to the female wardrobe approaching her designs from a female embodied perspective: 'I design for an active woman, for a woman who feels herself comfortable in what she is wearing.'^{ix} Chanel understood the need for practical and comfortable clothing that would support women to lead this active, independent life. Inspired by the male wardrobe – she used to wear clothes of her lover – Chanel introduced cardigans, blazers and jerseys and transformed them in comfortable skirt suits. In addition, she provided her outfits with pockets and practical handbags. A real revolution is the introduction of the *little black dress* (1926, a simple black dress that suited many occasions. Until that moment women had to change five times a day –from a morning dress, to an afternoon tea dress, an outdoor outfit to a cocktail dress and dinner dress. Since this black dress was practical and could be worn differently with accessories (Chanel also introduced fashion jewellery (fake stones) it suited a number of occasions. As such, it became the female equivalent of the men suit. The practical sober, timeless outfits of Chanel strongly contrasted with the oriental look of Poiret that was less practical. During the 1920s Chanel's star rose becoming an icon for timeless and professional chic, whilst Poiret's look started to get outdated because it was too exotic and decorated and = not as practical modest and geometric simple. (Hollander 1994: 132, Floch 1990: 100)

In conclusion

The emergence of the fashion show and the introduction of the new media film and photography marked a radical change in the aesthetics of women's fashion around 1910s. The new aesthetics of a body in motion – launched by the designer Paul Poiret - attained its perfected and crystallized form in the fashion shows and the new medium film. Suddenly fashion could be distributed through 'realistic channels' by means of fashion journals and the use of photography in magazines. As the twentieth century progressed, these magazines developed into influential fashion's communication channels and fashion films became an essential part of the newsreels in the cinema.

The catwalk and the fashion film put the woman in the center of attention before a public that could admire her directly. She could show that she had adopted modern behavior and had

successfully reduced parading to an abstract, pure form: a body in motion that expressed an ideal identity.

As such, the fashion show became an essential reflection of our contemporary culture; it is the place where the ideal individual identity gets its shape. The fashion show contains more than the presentation of a new fashion look, it is the place where our modern identity takes shape reflecting a flexible identity always able to adapt life to new situations and an identity that is no longer representing a fixed origin or social class.^x In other words: in a playful way fashion shows reflect how we can be flexible, mobile and psychologically adaptable, which is since the 1910s essential in our modern communication society.

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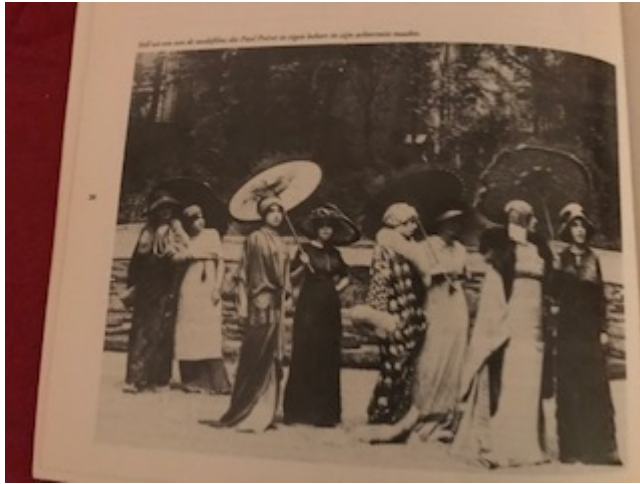
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ILLUSTRATIONS:

Afb 1: Le Journal des Dames et des Demoiselles nr 1749c Paris/Brussels
. 1880



Afb 2: Still fashion film Paul Poiret taken in the backyard L'Illustration . 9 july 1910



Afb 3 Georges LePape Celles de demain uit les choses de Paul Poiret 1911



Afb 4: Edward Steichen, photograph taken in Paul Poiret's fashion house. Art et Decoration.



April 1911

Afbeelding 5: Still uit fashion film. Elegance film 1923. Laatste Parijse mode nr 20. Dutch Filmmuseum



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- ⁱ Hollander 1972, S.9.
ⁱⁱ Bourdieu 1979:258-260.
ⁱⁱⁱ Schwartz 1998.
^{iv} Baudelaire 1992, S. 59.
^v Ibid. S. 72.
^{vi} (Mallarme 1978)
^{vii} (French Vogue 1908; White 1973:3)
^{viii} (Paul Poiret cited in White, p 3)
^{ix} (Floch: 1990, p 112)
^x (Lipovetsky 1994:149)