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The Modernity of *la Mode:*

A History of the French Revolution Through the Lens of Fashion, Culture, and Identity

by

Bithy R. Goodman

A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council

For Honors in History

April 17, 2012

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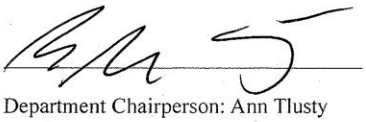

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Abstract

In my thesis, I explore the cultural history of the French Revolution and its relation to the modern era which ensued. Many historians have studied the French Revolution as it relates to culture, the rise of modernity, and fashion. I combine the unique histories of all three of these aspects to reach an understanding of the history of the French Revolution and fashion's role in bringing about change. In the majority of literature of costume history, discussion of fashion surrounds its reflective properties. Many historians conclude fashion as a reflection of the broader cultural shifts that occurred during the Revolution. I, on the other hand, propose that fashion is an active force in bringing out cultural change during this time. In exploring fashion as a historical motivator, I examine the aesthetic world of fashion from 1740 to 1815, the modern system of cultural dissemination of fashion through particular historical heroes, and the rise of "taste" and its relation to modern identity. Through aesthetics, culture, and identity, I argue that fashion is a decisive force of culture in that it creates a visual world through which ideas form and communicate.

Introduction

Modernity, Fashion, and the French Revolution

The year is 1781. The French Revolution will not begin for another six years. Yet, a revolution of sorts is already under way:

> [T]he lively and unserious outlook that distinguishes the Parisians, this distractedness, this turn of mind is unique to them. Or, if it is not these living particles that set their minds vibrating and thus give rise to ideas, surely their eyes, perpetually struck by this infinite number of arts, of trades, of jobs, age, and learning to see the meaning of things at an age when the senses are constantly stimulated: things are broken, filed down, polished, fashioned. […] The everactive [people of Paris] file, flatten, melt, tear things apart, put them together, recombine them. How can one's mind remain cold and inactive, when, every time one passes in front of a shop, the sound of some craft that alters nature stimulates it and wakes it from its lethargy?[1]

Although several years will pass before the Tennis Court Oath, the Storming of the Bastille, or the formation of the National Assembly bring the French Revolution into full sway, Mercier's observant questioning of the sights, textures, and sensations of the world around him reveal the already-occurring revolution: the revolution of the mind, of culture, and of the aesthetic world.

One of the more important cultural changes following the French Revolution occurred in the realm of aesthetics. Due to the role of France and its chief rival Britain in setting long-term global trends, Revolution-era aesthetics—such as that of art, architecture, and the body—and the culture with which it associates became influential worldwide quickly through trade, conquest, and diplomacy. Of these aesthetics, one of the most significant proved to be the fabric of bodily protection and visual communication—dress. The French Revolution marks the birth of

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[1] Louis-Sebastian Mercier, *Panorama of Paris, Selections from* Le Tableau de Paris *by Louis-Sebastian Mercier*, Jeremy D. Popkin ed. and trans., (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 30.

modernity, and it also marks the birth of modern fashion. That is not to say that dress culture did not exist before the Revolution. However, the history of clothing before the modern era focuses on the aesthetics of the small, elite fashion culture which existed in the French court system—with historical emphasis on the infamous Marie Antoinette—and among the upper classes of England.[2] The era of the French Revolution and the shifts ushered in with regard to fashion and society distinguishes Fashion as a modern phenomenon. Moreover, the advent of modern fashion with the French Revolution has broader cultural implications in relation to dissemination of cultural values and to modern identity.

The period of the French Revolution beginning in 1789 and lasting through the fall of Napoleon in 1815 marks the beginning of the Long Nineteenth Century and the emergence of modern Western culture. The experiences of this period created global, structural shifts in economy and industry, politics and society, and cultural values, and Europe and the Americas entered into what has become known as the age of modernity. "Modernity" is a broad term describing the historic era that began to take form after the Early Modern period and for which the French Revolution provided a catalyst. The structure of modernity includes, with a degree of heterogeneity, such phenomena as capitalism and consumerism, individualism, nationalism, political liberalism, and urbanization, and the ethics that surround them. Modernity also holds implications for art, popular culture, and education. As such, modernity does not embody a concise definition, but encompasses a wide range of conditions and ideas that are associated with the Western world and its influence.

French Revolution and Napoleonic historians universally recognize the French Revolution as the pivotal moment which has defined the path of modern Western society. In

[2] Keith Eubanks and Phyllis G. Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 5th ed. (New York: Fairchild, 2010), 266.

explaining the French Revolution and its place in the complex history of Western modernity, Ferenc Feher defines the Revolution as "the creation of a universal framework […that] has remained the master narrative of modernity."[3] Even in the midst of the Revolution, observers recognized the significance of this historical event. Political journalist William Augustus Miles realized the weight of the Revolution as early as 1792, writing,

> The French Revolution, like the shock of a tremendous earthquake, has been felt from one extremity of the globe to the other. It has opened to the intellectual world a new train of ideas […] which must eventually produce throughout the vast continent of Europe an entire change in the manners, opinions, and customs of men."[4]

As Miles predicted, "the manners, opinions, and customs" of individuals and of culture did change in ways that would not have manifested so quickly and deeply had the Revolution not abruptly ushered their impact.

Like modernity, fashion embodies a complex set of conditions and ideas. The term "fashion"—or *la mode* in French—is a relatively modern concept in that it involves degrees of consumption and urbanity present in the age of modernity. Whereas dress involves merely aesthetic and material characteristics, the study of fashion entails more complex social and cultural implications. Also, fashion denotes rapid stylistic change versus the gradual transformation of dress in previous periods.[5] According to sociologist Georg Simmel, "fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of […] the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change."[6] As this definition of

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[3] Ferenc Feher ed., *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990), 5.
[4] Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988),19. Originally found in *The Correspondence of William Augustus Miles on the French Revolution 1789-1817.*
[5] Sandra Niessen, "Interpreting 'Civilization' Through Dress," *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* vol. 8 (2010), http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/ (accessed Sept. 18, 2011).
[6] Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (1957):543.

fashion refers to the concept of the "individual" within a social system of cultural signification, the emergence of fashion denotes a distinctly modern foundation.

France and England

Despite divergent paths of political development in the modern era (England had "their revolution" in 1688), France and England have shared a cultural and economic history that began long before the French Revolution. Although their relationship often consisted of a competitive nature, Frenchmen and Englishmen influenced each other when it came to what was fashionable. For the most part, English and French dress has shared a similar aesthetic. An aesthetic of dress is not only the visual representation of the surroundings of one's environment, but "an *aesthetic* also denotes a group's ideal of what is beautiful in form and style; it is their collective taste."[7] As such, the term defines the relationship between the visual, textural forms of an environment and the cultural values with which they associate.

In Eighteenth-Century England and France, visual demonstration of status and noble rank determined fashionable dress. For the French, the court culture which centered on the king established fashionable culture, whereas in Britain aristocrats who were more removed from the monarch adopted and determined fashion. Despite this subtle difference in elite culture, France and England shared patronage of fashion culture in their respective aristocracies. Also, their aristocracies maintained similar conceptions of luxury as it related to fashion. Tastes in French and English fashion were driven by luxury. In his 1771 *Theorie du luxe*, George Marie Butel-

[7] Penny Storm, *Functions of Dress,* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987),288.

Dumont defines luxury as such: "Things are either necessary or superfluous; and that which is superfluous is Luxury."[8] Dumont's argument was not to paint *luxe* in the light of ostentation, but rather to illustrate its qualities of convenience, promoting the upper sorts' privilege of living a more comfortable life. Dumont's articulation of *luxe* finds likeness in the definition of luxury in England. Furthermore, in the ever-increasing social mobility of the middle-class in the Eighteenth Century, luxury and fashion distinguished the upper sorts of England and France.[9] Yet, because of the increasing purchase power of both English and Frenchmen of lower social standing, anxiety spread both on the island and on the continent of "the End of excessive Luxury, [for,] there being nothing can make Noble Personages so much despise Gold Trimming, than to see it upon the Bodies of the lowest Men in the World."[10] Thus, both the English and French held similar notions and anxieties over what they knew to be the definition of fashion.

0.1 British satire of French, Macaroni fashion, 1774

Meanwhile, a dual detestation and fascination of fashions existed between England and France. On the one hand, British and French observers recognized inherent differences in their manner of dress. While English styles held the reputation of showing more modesty and austerity, French fashions were more formal and fanciful, as the stereotype of the British Macaroni conveys.[11] In 1722, a

[8] Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations* 82 (2003): 93.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Commentary of an English traveler to Paris in the mid-eighteenth century. Quoted in Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29.
[11] Peter McNeil, "'That Doubtful Gender': Macaroni Dress and Male Sexualities," *Fashion Theory* 3 (1999). The emergence of Macaroni fashion was an eighteenth-century English phenomenon of which young men in their 20s and 30s wore very elaborate, flamboyant clothing and wigs based on French styles.

Three British gentlemen in a country scene (1761-1766)

(Figure 0.1)

French visitor to England observes how, "The dress of the English is like the French but not so gaudy; they generally go plain but in the best cloths and stuffs."[12] The French and English fervently adopted styles of the other. By the 1770s, "Anglomania" in France and "Francophilia" in England had taken force. As part of *les modes à l'anglaise*, French fashion adopted styles based on English sporting wear (see Chapter 1).[13] Likewise, the English copied the large panniers of the *robe à la Française*. Contemporaries fully acknowledged the mutual relationship between English and French fashions, such as Mercier, who laments,

> Just now English clothing is all the rage. Rich man's son, sprig of nobility, counter-jumper shop clerk—you see them dress all alike in the long coat, cut close, thick stockings, puffed stock with gloves, hats on their heads and a riding-switch in their hands. Not one of the gentlemen thus attired, however, has ever crossed the Channel or can speak one word of English. […] No, no, my young friend. Dress French again.[14]

While anxiety persisted over the loss of a distinctly French culture in France and English culture in England, the styles and their cultural significance had profound implications for the Anglo-French relationship to fashion before, during, and after the Revolution.

Not only did France and England share a cultural and aesthetic relationship, but they also shared a crucial economic relationship. Before the Eighteenth Century, England and France had a long trade history. The history of trade across the Channel presents a telling indication of the

[12] Steele, *Paris Fashion,* 29.
[13] Ibid, 36.
[14] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 148.

unique economic past of France and England. For centuries, the Channel acted "not so much a fixed political border, [but] as a permeable space that [enabled] the transnational exchange and transmission of goods, peoples, and ideas."[15] At the dawn of the Revolution, lucrative trade between the two countries proved essential to their economies. In the Eighteenth Century, despite high British import duties, trade flourished, often in the form of smuggling.[16] Trade across the Channel relied on luxury items like French silks and lace flowing into England and English cotton and textiles crossing over to the continent. In 1812, lace, silk, and leather goods comprised 62.5 percent of the total export value.[17] Even during the Napoleonic Wars, when Napoleon made it illegal to engage in trade with the British until 1810, economic interaction as well as cultural ties persisted in the form of smuggling.[18] This persistence highlights the gravity of Anglo-French relations. Furthermore, England and France were key players in determining global economic and consumption trends. Due to the industrialization taking place in England and due to the revolutionized social hierarchy of the French Revolution, England and France set the stage for global consumerism among all classes of society.[19]

Also, while the French Revolution was indeed French, it was not an isolated event, but had a remarkable impact on the world and a particular impact on its British cousin. While not directly involved, British observers had a keen interest in the French Revolution based on its political, military, and cultural implications. Reactions to the Revolution ranged from the extreme of Edmund Burke's condemnation in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) to the opposite extreme of Thomas Paine's liberal interpretation in *The Rights of Man* (1791).

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[15] Gavin Daly, "English Smugglers, the Channel, and the Napoleonic Wars 1800-1814," *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007): 31.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid, 32,35.
[18] Ibid, 39.
[19] Niessen. "Interpreting Civilization Through Dress."

Whether reactions supported or condemned the events of the French Revolution, English observers did share the common experience of watching the Revolution progress. In his exploration of the language of history, Barton R. Friedman presents the paradigm of France and England in an interesting, if off-beat, way by describing France as a theatre and England as its audience:

> Englishmen debating the revolution in France are weighing revolution themselves. Watching scenes unfold across the Channel, they are like a theater audience, controlled by what Herber Lindenberger calls the audiences' 'double view': they sympathize with the actors in the conflict, even while keeping their distance.[20]

This unique English experience of the French Revolution, while not the same as it was in France, implies an intimate relationship with the Revolution that would determine English thought and global history of the Revolution. In both England and France, these experiences and relationships with the Revolution had monumental implications for experimentation and dress behavior. And, as noted before, England's subsequent industrial and imperial dominance and France's cultural and ideological dominance in Western Europe account for the focus on these two countries in the development of modern fashion.

Fashion: More Than a Reflection?

Moreover, the modern foundation of fashion in the French Revolution deserves serious historical consideration. As anthropologist Emma Tarlo insists, the study of dress "can reveal much about society, history, politics, culture, and, above all, the way in which people seek to

[20] Barton R. Friedman, *Fabricating History: English Writers on the French Revolution,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 20.

manage and express their own identity."[21] Fortunately, in more recent years, the extensive works on French Revolution fashion by historians such as Aileen Ribeiro, Valerie Steele, Cissie Fairchilds, and others, as well as cultural studies of the Revolution by Lynn Hunt, Daniel Roche, and Simon Schama, just to name a few, have shed light on the significance of this topic as it relates to history and modernity. However, as does Tarlo, many of these historians limit the definition of fashion to a reflection of culture. For instance, Aileen Ribeiro prefaces her *Fashion in the French Revolution* with her claim that,

> With the French Revolution came for the first time, intrusive politics, a greater awareness of class differences, and a restless need for change and for self-expression—all ideas which were *to be reflected* in dress, that most sensitive of social barometers. This book will explore the ways in which social and political trends *were reflected* in dress.[22]

Ribeiro and other French Revolution fashion historians refer to fashion's significance as a reflection, a mirror, a symbol of history and cultural values. Even contemporary writers of fashion take this stance. Responding to observers who deem fashion as frivolous and even dangerous, the October 1, 1786 issue of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, one of the first fashion periodicals, asserts that "we believe, in truth, that it is an injustice to treat her [fashion] with such harshness. We see her constantly seize upon all remarkable events and appropriate them and consign them to her annals, to make them eternal in human memory."[23] According to this journal, the sole function of fashion lies in its reflection of ideas and events, which makes it an important historical indicator.

This conception of fashion as a visual reflection of historical and cultural phenomena is not incorrect. Indeed, one of the most fundamental functions of fashion is to act as a tool of communication. Just as words symbolize and reflect certain meanings, clothing symbolizes a

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[21] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1996), 1.
[22] Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution,* 19.
[23] Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 187.

cultural meaning that is widely recognizable to both the wearer and observer. In this way, the essence of dress is its symbolic communication.[24] As such, fashion proves a useful tool for exploring history and culture and does act as a reflection. At the same time, as complex as it is, there are limitations to this conception of fashion. Fashion exists not only as a reflection of cultural history, but it actually defines cultural history. While the study of fashion does comprise a subset of history, it also has a symbiotic relationship to history in that it influences and creates cultural shifts. Fashion both reflects and in part determines culture and the individual's relationship to culture. Through a study of cultural dissemination and identity of fashion and taste, fashion proves to be an active historical force, rather than just a mirror. And, the modern origins of this shift in fashion's historical role find foundation in the French Revolution.

0.3 Fashion Plate of empire gown, *Ackermann's Ladies Book/Repository of Fashion*, 1813

[24] Storm, *Functions of Dress*, 102-121. This definition describes the basics of Fashion Theory from which all fashion theorists work. Since Georg Simmel's work on Fashion Theory in the 1950s, a whole body of work on Fashion Theory has formed describing the complexity of how this system works.

Method of Development: Chapter Overview

The various relationships between people and fashion invaded and affected multiple aspects of life during the French Revolutionary period. The first of these relates to the world of aesthetics. The French Revolution not only altered how people viewed the world politically, but it also changed the way people saw it visually and physically. In 1791, Susannah Hill describes this sensation when she writes:

> At a period when the Kingdoms of the earth are shook upon their settled foundations—when Kings are humbled to the dust by those they are born to govern…is it not very wonderful that the physical economy and organization of the human body should, in many instances, experience something of sympathetic and similar revolutions.[25]

As Hill and others assign physical importance to the changes of the Revolution, an understanding of the aesthetic changes that took place throughout the course of this era proves essential. The change from the corseted bodices and excessively wide skirts of heavy, ostentatious brocades of Eighteenth-Century fashion to the simplistic, loose gowns of lightweight muslin—and the visual effect on the body—did not occur overnight, but rather experienced several transitions in this short amount of time. Drawing on extensive visual research, I will discuss the many transitions from the *robe à la Francaise* to the symbolic fashions specific to 1789-1799 to empiric gowns and

0.4 French sack-back gown, 1770

[25] Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, "The Affective Revolution in 1790s Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, (2001): 34.

their various modifications. As dress is highly visual and tactile, an exploration of the physical implications of these aesthetic changes on the body is pertinent.[26]

The Revolution and its aesthetic changes in dress are important motivators of popular culture. An understanding of just how dress motivates and disseminates through culture comprises a defining characteristic of dress in history. Moreover, the shift in the process of cultural dissemination—which initially emanated from the English and French aristocracy and then to more republican individuals, prints, and concepts—defines a modern mechanism by which French Revolutionary fashion moved culture. Since works like *Citizens* by Simon Schama and *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French* Revolution by Lynn Hunt, focus on the history of the French Revolution has developed beyond the traditions of Albert Soboul's Marxist and Francois Furet's Communist interpretations into an understanding of a cultural revolution.[27] This "cultural revolution" which Schama and Hunt begin to explore necessitated the emergence of public opinion and multiple cultural players, rather than merely the royal courts, as factors in Revolutionary France and England.

As such, my second chapter will explore the emergence of various fashionable individuals and groups, fashion publication, and fashion concepts as they relate to the modern Fashion System. This system consists of an intricate set of fashion players that emerged from various corners of society, such as feminist circles, national art, and the public. A key player in this explosion of public opinion, fashion journals bursted onto the scene in great number.

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[26] Due to the scope of this project, I have chosen to narrow my focus to female fashion, although men's fashion also experiences monumental changes during this time.

[27] Simon Schama, *Citizens,* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1989). Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution,* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984). Albert Soboul wrote on the Revolution from the late 1930s until his death in 1982 and still stands as one of the most prominent French Revolutionary historians in the Marxist tradition. Francois Furet was a pioneer in the revisionist school of historians and wrote on the Revolution in terms of communism and totalitarianism.

Fashion periodicals appeared in France and England in the years directly preceding 1789 and were readily accessible to the growing population of literate readers—both male and female. These journals, such as the widely popular *Cabinet des modes* which Jean Antoine Lebrun founded in Paris in 1785, included painted fashion plates and periodicals on fashion, beauty, and conduct.[28] While the advent of a wide fashion readership constitutes the most revolutionary signifier of meaning, opinion leaders too held sway over the signification of culture. As the Eighteenth Century approached its end, opinion leaders followed and influenced the trajectory of the Revolutionary. Initially, opinion leaders, like Marie Antoinette, Rose Bertin, and figures of the English nobility, emanated from court culture and determined fashion culture on the basis of their hierarchal power. As the Revolution progressed, these leaders lost their sway and republican figures of the Revolution, such as the *sans culottes*, Théroigne de Mèricourt and Jacques Louis David, gained precedence. Yet, as the values of the Revolution shifted, so too did the influence of these figures as fashion groups, like the *Merveilleuses* and followers of taste, issued forth as the leading signifiers.

These voices of fashion had implications for political culture and identity within this framework. Not only was fashion an outward expression of republicanism in its "personal freedom, equality, mutual respect, and common action," but it is also affected and promoted the adoption of a democratic, middle-class ethic.[29] It did so through the dual conformity and individuality about which Simmel writes and by physically distinguishing old ways of dressing as congruent with old socioeconomic structures. Also, as a part of culture, the French Revolution saw the foundation of a modern identity, to which French and English fashion contributed.

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[28] Catherine M. Sama, "Liberty, Equality, Frivolity! An Italian Critique of Fashion Periodicals," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, (2004): 37.
[29] Joshua I. Miller, "Fashion and Democratic Relationships," *Polity* 37, (2005): 9.

Fashion observers reconceptualized taste in terms of society and the individual's position within the social context, which helped assign a visual appearance to a new social order based on self-worth. And, while fashion took part in determining and materializing external social values, it also took on an internal nature. Fashion had always been a personal matter, but in the sense that the body always represents a societal value, such as luxury. Yet, fashion-of-taste internalized fashion on a strictly individual basis. It did so by shifting focus onto the natural human form, by encouraging individual pleasure, and by associating fashion and the body with art. Thus, through the creation of this dual force of social differentiation and individuality, fashion actively redefined and solidified views on identity. Chapter Three will provide an in-depth understanding of just how taste developed this modern identity, and thus served to develop modern culture.

Through these discussions of the changes in the aesthetic fashion world of England and France, cultural dissemination of fashion through various Revolutionary figures, and the formation of modern identity through taste, I propose fashion as an entity that not only reflects, but actively contributes to the development of modernity and culture of the French Revolution.

Chapter One

Survey of Sartorial Transformation 1740-1815

> Here, lighted lustres reflect their splendor on beauties dressed *à la Cléopatre, à la Diane, à la Psyché*; there, a smoky lamp sheds its oily beams on a troop of washerwomen who dance in wooden shows, with their muscadins, to the noise of some sorry scraper. I know not whether the first of these dancers have any great affection for the republican forms of the Grecian governments, but they have modeled the form of their dress after that of Aspasia; bare arms, naked breasts, feet shod with sandals, hair turned in tresses around their heads by modish hairdressers. […] The flesh-colored knit-work silk stays, which stuck close to the body, did not leave the beholder to divine, but perceive, every secret charm.[30]

In the winter of 1794-1795 the Terror has only just ended and its sense of horror has radiated from Paris and the countryside to England and the rest of Europe. Despite the volume of bloodshed and the lingering shock, Mercier's scene of Paris reveals a much different picture. In his description, Louis-Sebastian Mercier paints a lovely, almost magical picture of Paris—a picture of the simple, average Parisian woman. This whimsical, sensual portrait of the city and its inhabitants is not merely political, social, or economic. It is also highly sensory and relies on aesthetic imagery. The lens through which observers like Mercier portray the Revolution finds its basis in the visual imagery of this new Europe.

Nobility and commoners, Parisians and Londoners, country-folk and city dwellers absorbed the aesthetics of this new Europe. It enlivened their minds to a world where the average citizen, not just the court, determined social values and where individuality blossomed. Yet, in order to achieve a thorough understanding of these implications of dress during the French Revolutionary period, knowledge of the aesthetics of dress both before and during this time proves essential. Clothing of the 1740s through the 1810s underwent dramatic transformation,

[30] Louis-Sebastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*. Found in Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution,* 126-7.

with a pivotal shift in the 1770s and 1780s. The fashions and its transition from the Rococo to Anglomania and finally to Empire styles both reflected and shaped the changing social climate.

Rococo

1.1 Sack-back gown, hand-sewn silk and linen, 1760s

Despite the monumental differences of revolutionary fashions from those that preceded them, they do show a progression from the Rococo period from which they follow. Subsequent to the period of Baroque of Louis XIV's court, the style of Rococo lasted from 1740 until 1789. Rococo consists of a slight refinement compared to the heavy, extravagant properties of the Baroque style. After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, styles slowly developed cleaner lines and less volume, while they still maintained elaborate decoration and richness of fabric.[31] Less oppressive, but still quite extravagant, Rococo epitomized luxury, with its heavy silk brocades, abundant lace, and many layers so as to give the appearance of multiple lines and textures across the body. Both the Baroque style of Versailles culture and the style of Rococo served the

[31] Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 266.

function of communicating wealth within the court and in a broader social context. It also served to convey the human body as a work of art.[32] The ideal of this particular work of art—the body—conveys an "illusion of movement, profuse ornamentation, and high relief in inverse proportion to the reduction of space."[33] As such, these styles of the 1740s-1770s are confined and controlled, yet complex. Fabrics of soft, pastel yet colorful prints and intricate, elaborate embroidery express this complexity. Intricate patterns featuring shades of blue, pink, and yellow[34] were standard, although women occasionally donned colors as dark as navy blue. The strict standards of bright, ornamental patterns and stiff, oppressive structure defined Rococo fashion before the signs of their liberation in the 1770s.

Furthermore, "fashionable" women of wealth preferred heavy silks and expensive laces, which gave the body a physical sense of overwhelming heaviness and pleasure in luxury. In her *Autobiography and Correspondence*, Mary Granville articulates this sense of luxury and artistry in describing the dresses of "Jane," Duchess of Queensbury:

> They were white satin embroidered, the bottom of the petticoat brown hills covered with all sorts of weeds and every breadth had an old stump of a tree that run up almost to the top of the petticoat […] worked with brown chenille, round with twined nasturtians, ivy, honeysuckles, periwinkles, convolvuluses, and all sorts of twining flowers […] Many of the leaves were finished with gold and part of the stumps of the tress looked like the gilding of the sun. I never saw a piece of work so prettily fancied.[35]

For Granville, later known as Mrs. Delany, the materials of the garment are just as important as its shape. The fabric physically imparts a sense of richness and elegance to the garment and its wearer. Since silhouettes changed only slightly from one decade to the next in the Eighteenth

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[32] Jean Starobinski, "Rococo and Neoclassicism," *Revolution in Fashion, 1715-1815*, Amy Handy ed., (Kyoto: Kyoto Costume Institute, 1990), 11.
[33] Ibid, 12.
[34] Yellow became very popular during this time. Whereas in previous decades it marked the color of heresy, it now satisfied the European fetishism of Eastern culture, seeing as it was the color of royalty in China. The Kyoto Costume Institute, "The Kyoto Costume Institute Digital Archive," Wacoal Corp, http://www.kci.or.jp/archives/digital_archives/index_e.html (accessed Feb. 3, 2012).
[35] Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 15-16. Originally found in Mary Granville's *The Autobiography and Correspondence,* Ed. Lady Llanover, 1861.

1.2 Open-robe style *robe à l'Anglaise* with removable stomacher, 1760s

Century, trimmings often determined a garment's value and the wearer's sense of fashion. Granville's description furthermore connects the notion of contrivance with what she believes to be the beauty of the Duchess and her garment. By referring to the Duchess's appearance as a "piece of work," she implies that both clothing and the dressed body are works of art which both luxurious textures and the reproduction of natural elements enhance. In this way, the rich fabrics and heavy detail are fundamental to the Rococo vision.

Silhouettes of the 1740s that support this aesthetic of dress include the voluminous and highly structured "sack-back" gown, or *robe à la Française*, which features large pleats in the back extending from the shoulder to the ground (see Figure 1.1). A variation of this appears with the "open robe," which was a popular style in which the bodice stayed open and the petticoat became exposed.[36] Since the bodice of the garment did not close to cover the front, equally elaborate "stomachers," triangular coverings which tied either to the bodice or corset, became a customary fashion item. As stomachers gained more popularity, upper-class women went to great expense to flaunt them; they sustained the demand for the embroidery business made up of mostly female laborers. Many working-class women supported themselves and their families as skilled laborers; such skill required hand-stitching flowers, lace, and ribbons (*eschelles*) in elaborate patterns.[37] Fashionable ladies of the upper-classes also wore these detailed stomachers with the style of gown known as the *robe à l'Anglaise*, which fitted closely in the back, unlike the sack-back. Despite the national origins their names, both the *robe à l'Anglaise* and the *robe à*

[36] Rosemary Harden, *Fashion Museum Treasures*, (London: Scala, 2009), 14-15.
[37] Eubanks and Tortora, 281.

la Française remained popular in both England and France, with slight modifications, through the 1780s.[38]

Yet, the execution of these styles differed in England and France. In the 1750s, Rococo still dominated fashion. However, due to English tradition of a more rural aesthetic, in England the fanciful nature of Rococo underwent refinement as a climate of modesty and practicality persisted. As such, the *robe à la Française* and the mantua—a distinctly English style featuring an open bodice with the train and sides of the gown pinned in the back to create back-fullness—appeared for formal use only.[39] As a substitution, for everyday dress English women adopted what they called a "nightgown." These gowns had a tighter fit in the bodice and demanded less draping. In response to new trade patterns between the British and their Eastern colonies, these styles incorporated the use of cotton muslin, which, although exotic and expensive at this time, gave the gown the appearance of ease and lightness—an aesthetic in dress which had not been seen in the heavy silks and satins of women's wear. By the 1760s, this manner of dress became the norm in England. Thus, while English and French styles did not differ drastically, English dress maintained a simpler aesthetic.

1.3 *Robe à l'Anglaise*, Canada 1750-1775

[38] Ibid.
[39] Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2002), 138.

Rococo Undergarments

1.4 Chemise underneath corset and panniers, 1730-1760

In Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela*, the domestic servant Pamela describes in great detail the crucial difference between the shifts she has inherited from her mistress and those she herself can afford. Of the "half a dozen of her shifts" that Pamela receives, she notes that "The clothes are fine silk, and too rich and too good for me, to be sure."[40] With a certain degree of social consciousness, she realizes that she must be "at once equipped in the dress that will become my condition […] So, I got some pretty good Scotch cloth [a rough wool], and made me, of mornings and nights, when nobody saw me, two shifts."[41] Through Pamela's fuss over undergarments, Richardson reveals the significance of underwear as it relates to the shape of the body and the social wearer. While external appearance accounts for a great deal of dress, what lies beneath largely determines the body in clothes.

[40] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, (New York: Croscup & Sterling, 1901), 9
[41] Ibid, 40.

"Underwear" for women during this time consisted of several layers. These layers not only protected clothing from the body,[42] but also altered the perception of the body's physical form. The first layer was a "chemise," also known as a "shift," which functioned as a kind of under-dress, reaching to the knees and almost falling off the shoulders. Often lace lined the edge of both the neck and the full sleeves. Chemises were a staple of female dress among all classes. Depending on the socioeconomic status of the wearer the garment was made with linen or wool, as Pamela so vividly portrays.[43]

1.5 1775-1780 corset of cotton, linen, and whalebone

Whether of wealthy or of moderate income, all women wore tightly laced corsets, also known as stays, over the chemise. These both narrowed the waist, raised posture, and lifted the breasts. Corsets have a long and complex history of their own in terms of structure and give a telling account of history. Corsets of the Eighteenth Century were constructed from coarse materials, like wool, but sometimes covered in dress fabric, in which case they formed part of the bodice.[44] Animal bone, such as whale, lined the rigid cone-shaped panels, creating a stiff structure.[45] Women laced these garments with string and eyelet holes both in the front and back. These corsets did not achieve the hour-glass shape with which corsets are

[42] Standards of hygiene in the Eighteenth Century were relatively low compared to modern hygiene. Even upper-class men and women did not practice regular bathing or frequent laundry. As such, preservation of clothing was a concern of all strata of Eighteenth-Century society and layers of underwear helped in the struggle to maintain outer garments.
[43] C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 55.
[44] Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 58.
[45] Valerie Steele, "Corset," *Fashion A-Z. Berg Fashion Library* (2010), http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com (accessed February 2, 2012)

often associated in terms of Nineteenth-Century shapes, but rather achieved the effect of an elongated, V-shaped torso.

Up through the 1770s, corsets complimented the shape of excessively wide *panniers*, or the hoop petticoat, which reached its ultimate width in the 1740s, often extending three feet from either hip. Panniers gave the illusion of wide hips and grew to reach disproportionate sizes. Although hoops remained fashionable for roughly 50 years, they received a variety of opinions. In his 1781-1788 *Tableau de Paris*, Louis-Sebastian Mercier praises the illusion "of the skirts, puffed, panniered, crinolined, which lend a pleasing likeness of flesh to women who are naught but bones."[46] Mercier does evoke a somewhat sarcastic tone, whereas many blatantly protested the artificiality of the structure. One of many critics, Joseph Addison published in the English periodical, *The Tatler*, a parody trial which puts the panniers in the role of the defendant. The prosecutor, Addison, takes keen notice of the spatial and visual aesthetic of the hoop petticoat:

> […] upon the closing of the Engine, the Petticoat was brought into Court. I then directed the Machine to be set upon the Table, and dilated in such a Manner as to show the Garment in its utmost Circumference; but my great Hall was too narrow for the Experiment, for before it was half unfolded, it described so immoderate a Circle […] I then enquired for the Person that belonged to the Petticoat, and to my great Surprize, was directed to a very beautiful young Damsel […] My pretty Maid, said I, do you own your self to have been the Inhabitant of the Garment before us? […] and she told me with a Smile, that notwithstanding it was her own Petticoat; and that she wore it for no other Reason, but that she had a Mind to look as big and burly as other Persons of her Quality.[47]

[46] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 65.
[47] "Addison on the Hoop-skirt on Trial," *The Commerce of Everyday Life; Selections from* The Tatler *and* The Spectator, Erin Mackie ed., (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 483.

While Addison finds objections in the "big and burly" appearance of the hoop petticoat, his main point of contempt lies in the reality of its size and the space it occupies. Indeed, the panniers did have the effect of creating a body that pervaded physical and social space. In thinking about dress and the body, Joanne Entwistle theorizes that in order to "understand the relationship between dress and the body one must acknowledge the very private visceral nature of dress which imposes itself on our experience of the body […and] the experience is also is about the relationship of dress to the social world. It tells us that our dress does not only belong to our bodies but to the social world as well."[48] In understanding the aesthetic qualities of panniers in this way, their effect appeared physically restrictive, yet they also gave the body a sense of power in size. Furthermore, the width of the hoops enabled the invasion of social space and social relations by the female body. At the same time, the hoop, along with the other items of under- and over-dress made dressing a tedious chore which required a large, complicated assortment of garments and contraptions. Despite these complications, these cumbersome undergarments would remain a part of dress until the Revolution.

1.6 French *robe à la Française* with pannier, 1775-180

[48] Joanne Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," *The Fashion Reader,* ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 138.

Rococo Revision: 1770-1789

While the years following the Terror eventually mark the most drastic change in dress of this era, these characteristic styles of the Eighteenth Century were beginning to undergo transformations before 1789. In 1770, Marie Antoinette of Austria entered the French court and married Louis the Dauphine, later to be coroneted Louis XVI in 1774. For better or for worse, Marie Antoinette established herself as a fashion icon. Some notable changes during Marie Antoinette's reign occurred with hairstyles, especially in regard to height. As more people gained purchasing power by the end of the century, members of the middle-class and even some commoners donned the high-maintenance wigs that were previously an aristocratic staple. In response to anxiety over social mobility, wig size among the upper-classes began to grow vertically in the 1760s and by 1775 they reached extreme heights.[49] As hip width decreased, hair height increased with both natural hair-styles and wigs. A 1778 issue of *La Gallerie des Modes* published a fashion-plate that "has presented us with the toilette of the head" (see Figure 1.7).[50] Both the image and the use of the word "toilette" imply extreme maintenance and cost of this hairstyle, which a 1768 issue of *London Magazine* describes as "a foot high and tower-wise."[51]Also, at the peak of its height, such hairstyles came to include additional adornment of jewels, ribbons, and other various trinkets.

1.7 1778 *La Gallerie des Modes*

[49] Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 284.
[50] Vyvyan Holland, *Hand Coloured Fashion Plates, 1770-1899*, (London, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1955), 46.
[51] Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 284.

1.8 The Ladies Contrivance or the Capital Conceit, 1777

Despite the wide acceptance of this fashion, hair height, like panniers, received its fair share of criticism. Men and women alike condemned the impracticality of such hair styles. Miss Bath satirizes the recent hair trends in her cartoon, published in 1777, so as to illustrate women who follow such trends as idiotic and vain (see Figure 1.8). The juxtaposition of the two carriages and their respective passengers draws attention to the vanity of the woman with the modified carriage and illustrates the other as an example of sensibility. However, despite this common view shared by Miss Bath, excessive hair height continued to be fashionable through the 1780s.

Consequently, a contradictory trend toward decreasing volume, both in hair and in dress, took root in the early 1780s. The use of elaborate hats diminished and the balance of hair transitioned from vertical to horizontal volume. Although the use of wigs remained, preference for natural hair rose as its weight shifted from the top of the head to the sides in a style known as the *à la herisson,* or "the hedgehog." The dressing of hair still required long hours and attention. Yet, the curls of the

1.9 1788 Portrait of Antoine-Laurent and his wife, Marie-Anne-Pierrette Paulze in a *chemise de la reine* and *a la herisson* hairstyle. Painted by Jacque-Louis David.

hedgehog gave the wearer a more natural appearance. In 1788, Mercier wittily observes that,

> I had meant to speak of that *coiffure* known as the 'porcupine,' but it was gone before I could set it down, and the 'baby's cap' [a hat which fit much more closely to the head] reigns in its stead. How impossible it is to fix a likeness to anything so fleeting! As for the headdresses, the chief styles recently have been the English Park, the Windmill, and the Grove; […] But since, with these erections on their heads, our women found it impossible to get in or out of any reasonably sized vehicle.[52]

His observation sheds light on the importance of hairstyle and on the rapid pace at which they changed.

Both the external-most accessory—hair—and the under-most accessory—underwear—experienced transformation during these few years before the Revolution. In terms of underwear, the chemise and corset did not alter much during these years, but the hoop petticoat disappeared as weight shifted from the hips to the rear. By 1775, members of court reserved panniers for specific court functions and the "false rump" took its place in daily-wear. The false rump was a large padded roll, filled with either cork or stuffing, and belted around the hips. While this silhouette is not natural by any means, it did allow for easier movement than did the hoop petticoat. However, like the hoop petticoat, the false rump drew enemies. A poem published in the *Universal Magazine* in 1776 jokingly warns male suitors:

> Let her gown be tucked up to the hip on each side,
> Shoes too high for to walk or to jump,
> And to deck the sweet creature complete for a bride,
> Let the cork cutter make her a rump.
> Thus finished in taste while on Chloe you gaze,
> You may take the dear charmer for life.
> But never undress her, for out of her stays,
> You'll find you have lost half your wife.[53]

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[52] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 63-64.

[53] Found in Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 61 and in Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 282.

Even while styles of the decade before the Revolution achieved more natural lines than did clothing in previous years, many, such as the author of this poem, condemned the deception of the female figure to be a result of the dress "dictated" by the invisible hand of fashion. The satirical cartoon, *The Bum Shop,* which focuses on a woman without the false rump surrounded by several dressed women, depicts these garments and the behavior with which they are associated as ludicrous and unnatural (see Figure 1.10). At the same time, many associated a degree of eroticism with these garments. Nonetheless, this innovation in undergarments continued to support the silhouette of female dress until the Revolution.

1.10 *The Bum Shop,* 1785

However, as consumers increasingly began to dictate fashion, in the 1780s fashion did achieve a higher degree of sensibility.[54] As "Anglomania" invaded France, French fashion consumers developed a taste for the sobriety of English dress. For instance, the "*chemise à la reine,*" which resembled the chemise in its lightweight and casual aesthetic constituted what was now called "undress." Undress served a similar function as the English nightgown to provide a form of informal, private dress in the domestic realm.[55] After its initial appearance in 1770, women relegated this dress to the home. However, after Marie Antoinette produced scandal and then popularized this style in 1783, the fashion entered the public world.[56] By 1787, "all the Sex now, from 15 to 50 and upwards appear in their white muslin frocks with broad sashes."[57] These "frocks" included layers of lightweight white muslin. Although this material does not evoke the extravagance of the silks and satins of previous gowns, it was expensive, as merchants had to import it from India. While the gown maintained some fullness, the volume of the *chemise à la reine* differed from the *robe à la Française* as fullness radiated from the natural waist or the rear. The simplicity and ease of the garment gave the body the appearance of comfort, informality, and softness, while still maintaining a degree of luxury. With its clean lines

1.11 1783 Portrait of Marie Antoinette in a *chemise à la reine,* by Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun

[54] Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods," 93.
[55] Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England,* 44.
[56] When the portrait of Marie Antoinette by Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun appeared at the Salon in 1783 it caused controversy over its informal depiction of the queen (see Figure 1.11). Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution,* 34.
[57] *London Magazine.* Found in Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe,* 228.

and novel fabric, this style expressed and contributed to both an appreciation for neo-classicism and a fascination with Eastern cultures. Thus, in many ways, this style identifies as a predecessor of Revolutionary fashion.

Other styles of the 1780s show a transition toward simplicity and informality as well. Such is the case with the "polonaise," which consisted of a petticoat[58] underneath an overdress. The skirt of the overdress was bunched up and looped with rings attached to the skirt.[59] This style appeared in fashionable dress from 1770-1785. While silks and satins made up these garments, they did not feel nearly as heavy as the brocaded *chenille* silks of earlier years. They incorporated much less additional lace and embroidered adornment, but rather derived their fashionability from smooth, clean lines. Considering the trend toward more tapered silhouettes, textiles with smaller floral designs, spots, and stripes which did not overwhelm the new shape of the body became popular for their simplicity.[60] Although the garment does evoke an element of complexity in its volume and layering, it actually reaches a level of simplicity compared to the excessively wide panniers and long trains of the recent years prior. With the polonaise skirt, length shortened and lightness increased. Also, women had the option of wearing this style looped up or not, giving the wearer greater choice and versatility. In addition, as English dress adopted a

1.12 1775 English polonaise of silk and linen

[58] The term "petticoat" during this time referred to layers of skirt that were or were not visible on the external body.
[59] Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume,* 283.
[60] Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 232.

rural aesthetic and as Anglomania invaded French culture, garments resembling English riding wear became popular. Whereas in previous decades aristocratic women dressed in riding habits strictly for riding and sporting, the years preceding 1789 saw the emergence of the informality with the riding habit—the ensemble of a petticoat worn with a hip-length jacket (called "caraçao" or "Redingote" jackets), and a waistcoat. These garments relieved the body somewhat from previous restrictions. Describing this greater ease of bodily movement, Lady Polworth writes in 1777 to her mother that,

> I liked the form which I think smarter and more convenient than a Nightgown; and it goes to see places or with the addition of a Hat and Cap that suits it even makes Visits on the Road or in a morning with great Success. I had some notion that after so many weeks traipsing at Tunbridge another morning apparel could never be useless.[61]

Lady Polworth evokes both the idea and the feeling of comfort and practicality as important considerations of fashion. And, indeed the consideration of the body's comfort accounts for the popularity of this style, as it also demonstrates a developing motivation for personal dress. These garments, which were most often made from linen, resembled men's country-dress and also evoked the aesthetic of the lower sorts, as jackets and skirts were "the staple wardrobe of the working woman throughout the century."[62] As such, the popularization of the riding habit introduces the development of the influence and participation of the middle, lower, and working classes

1.13 Modes de 1789 Fashion Plate featuring caraçao jacket and skirt

in fashion, as well as the simplicity of fashion associated with this development.

Common Clothing and "Dress of the People"

That is not to say that the common classes had not formed a clothing culture at all before this point, for clothing does not exist without a cultural context. However, their clothing culture had a different relationship to the world of fashion. Fashion of the Eighteenth Century developed largely out of aristocratic anxiety over increasing social mobility among the middle and working classes. According to Richard Steele's "Proposal for a Sphinx-Shaped Museum of Fashion" in the 1712 *The Spectator*, fashion developed when "We considered Man as belonging to Societies; Societies as form'd of different Ranks, and different Ranks distinguished by Habits, that all proper Duty or Respect might attend their appearance."[63] At the same time that fashionable dress maintained the function of distinguishing rank, "every one who is considerable enough to be a Mode [someone who sets the fashion], and has any Imperfection of Nature of Chance [i.e. birth], which it is possible to hide by the Advantage of Cloaths,"[64] had the possibility of fulfilling a degree of social mobility through dress. Thus, while common classes did not dictate fashion the middle and lower classes were not removed from it either. This paradox embodies the complex, unique relationship between the common people of the Eighteenth Century and their dress.

In terms of aesthetics, clothing of the non-aristocratic class did not differ greatly in silhouette or style. Rather, the main visual difference between "high fashion" and the dress of everyday people existed in the quality of the materials. Women of all classes owned roughly the same garments, the difference lying in quality and quantity. Silhouettes generally trickled down

[63] "Steele's Proposal for a Sphinx-Shaped Museum of Fashion, *The Spectator,* 399.
[64] Ibid.

from the court to the lower classes, with the middle class often as an intermediary. In his study of the burned clothing of the May 1789 fire in Brandon, England, John Styles finds that the disparity between the clothes that wealthy villagers of the town lost versus those that poorer residents lost "lay in numbers, quality, and value. This was true irrespective of whether our focus is outer garments, undergarments, or accessories as an examination of women's gowns and shifts, men's shirts, and men' and women's handkerchiefs lost in the fire demonstrates."[65] Whereas the clothing of the wealthy families had consisted of silks, cottons, linen, and lace, the clothing of the poorer families consisted of mostly just linen and wool, though the items remained, for the most part, the same.

As such, the middle-lower classes participated in fashion. The luxury and opulence of the materials in clothing determined whether or not the wearer characterized a "fashionable" person, regardless of class. Two garments of the same silhouette but different textile composition could convey opposing degrees of *la mode*, such as in the satirical engraving, *In Fashion: Out of Fashion* (see Figure 1.14). Both women are matching in that they wear stockings, false rumps, petticoats, polonaise-style overskirts, *fichus* (the neck piece) and brimmed hats. But, the juxtaposition of the rich and poor materials of their comparable wardrobe pieces designates one as a woman of-fashion and the other as a woman degradingly out-of-fashion. The acquisition of such materials of fashion depended on class and wealth. However, the woman "in

1.14 In Fashion: Out of Fashion, 1787

[65] John Styles, *The Dress of the People*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2007), 32.

fashion" could likely be a depiction of a middle-class female. Often, wives of wealthy merchants, lawyers, and even artisans dressed in gowns of fabrics equally as extravagant as their aristocratic competitors. In 1786, a German resident of London notes the increasing power of the middle class to purchase goods when he writes, "In former times, people of some consequence and fortune, thought themselves to appear very decently, if they had every year a new suit of cloaths, but at the present three and more are annually required by a man in a middling station of life who wishes to make what is called a decent appearance."[66] As the wealthy middle-class accumulated spending power, the body of the nobility and the body of the Third Estate came to appear more and more similar, and the aesthetic difference of their dress disappeared. Moreover, as the Revolution neared, middle-class consumers no longer sought to copy the rich aesthetic of aristocratic fashion, but asserted their own prominence through their own aesthetic of dress. This aesthetic occurred with the introduction of a level of subtlety in dress, as previously noted with the *chemise à la reine* and simpler textile prints. These emphasized a more subdued and sensible, yet still pleasing, appearance.

The growing middle class as well as the majority of English and French populations, the working class, proved to be participants in Eighteenth-Century dress culture. Although a modern mass fashion culture had not come to fruition yet, the masses of Eighteenth-Century England and France were not absent from developing fashion culture. Styles before the Revolution trickled from the top down. The aesthetic of common dress reflected an emulation of fashionable dress, the wearer's ability to consume, and practicality for working purposes. One way by which members of the lower classes obtained rich garments was second-hand means. Mercier describes second-hand clothing markets in Paris where "Skirts, panniers, loose gowns are there in piles,

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[66] F.A. Wendeborn, *A View of England Toward the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (1786). Found in Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England,* 94.

from which you may choose. Here, a grand dress worn by the dead wife of a judge, for which the wife of his clerk is haggling; there, a young working girl tries on the lace cap of a great lady's lady-in-waiting."[67] The practice of buying and selling used-clothing enabled working-class women in the city to sport the recent, yet out-dated fashions of aristocratic dress. Also, toward the end of the century, servants began to adopt more regal dress. They either inherited clothing from their mistresses or, if their mistresses were wealthy enough, they received their own liveries—a kind of servant uniform specific to each household.[68] In 1734, the *Universal Spectator* complains that "A laced coat, waistcoat or trimming are so common that they are indifferently worn by the Master and the servant, nor is it easy to distinguish the Chambermaid from the Mistress."[69] While this complaint is perhaps exaggerated, often the distinction between mistress and maid, in terms of dress, was slight. In *The Absent Minded Lady*, a servant tends the feet of her upper-class mistress. While the servant does differ in her serving apron, her dress appears similar in texture and form as her lady's. In Richardson's novel, Pamela's mistress, both before and after her death, "has always been giving [Pamela] clothes and linen, and everything that a gentlewomen need not be ashamed to appear in," such

1.15 The Absent Minded Lady, Claude-Louis Desrais, *Gallerie des Modes*, 1778

[67] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 72.
[68] This practice became more common throughout the century as aristocrats and wealthy middle-class masters displayed their wealth by dressing their servants well. Many saw this as an extreme phenomenon of conspicuous consumption.
[69] *Every One a Witness; The Georgian Age*, A.F. Scott ed., (London: Martins, 1970), 79.

as the "half a dozen of her shifts, and six fine handkerchiefs, and three of her cambric aprons, and four Holland ones," that Pamela receives.[70] Thus, as wealthy members of the middle-class accumulated incomes with which they could consume and as gently-used clothing trickled down to some urban residents and servants, fashionable dress sometimes did cross class boundaries, visually subverting the distinction of rank associated with fashion.

However, more often, especially in country, the majority of women did not assume the extravagant dress that defined fashionable clothing. They donned the same basic styles as were popular in wealthier classes, but in coarser materials of solid colors. In his *Rural Reflections*, Englishman George Robertson describes rural farm dress as "in all cases comfortable, though seldom gaudy. Almost everything was made at home […] all made from their own fleeces, or from their own home-made lint."[71] As common people, especially in the country, produced their own linen, wool, and other such materials, their dress exhibited less transformation throughout the century. At the same time, their clothing maintained the general shape of fashionable dress, such as the farm girl's *robe à l'Anglaise*[72] (see Figure 1.16). The average woman's costume consisted of stockings, chemise, corset, petticoat, and gown or skirt

1.1 *The Reaper*, by George Stubbs. 1785

[70] Richardson, *Pamela,* 3, 8-9.
[71] *Every One a Witness*, 86.
[72] The expense and weight of the extra draping of the *robe à la Francaise* account for its absence in lower and working class dress.

and jacket. The only distinctions in the actual garments of common dress versus fashionable dress, rather than just their materials, occurred with the use of the apron for labor and domestic work, as well as the absence of panniers. Nonetheless, many women both in the cities and countries attempted to mirror the effect of the hoops that they saw in the upper-classes by layering multiple petticoats to achieve a perception of width.[73] Yet, despite these variations, the body gave the same general impression in common dress as it did in fashionable dress in that all dress emphasized hip width and controlled volume on the body. Furthermore, common dress typically comprised an aesthetic more along the lines of informal undress.[74] Though their clothes were simplistic and coarse, the majority of people in England and France did not dress poorly. In 1784 François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld observes of his visit to Dover, England that, "all classes of people—peasants from neighbouring country, servants even—were well clad and remarkably clean."[75] However, although peasants and laborers appeared, for the most part, decently dressed, they still did not yet partake in the determination of fashion.

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Stylistic change 1789-1815

Summer 1789: In her 1801 memoir, noble Scotchwoman Grace Dalrymple Elliott recounts her escape from Paris to the French countryside on July 14, 1789:

> The mob obliged everybody to wear a green cockade for two days, but afterwards they took red, white, and blue, the Orleans livery. The streets, all the evening of the 14th, were in an uproar; the French Guards and all those who were at the taking of the Bastille were mad drunk, dragging dead bodies and heads and limbs about the streets by torch-light…Such were the dreadful scenes of that day![76]

[73] Diana de Marly, *Working Dress*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 47.
[74] Ibid, 49.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of My Life During the French Revolution,* (The Rodale Press, 1955), 14-15.

In her reflection of the outbreak of the Revolution and the storming of the Bastille, Elliott's primary observations do not mainly concern the dress of the Parisians. Yet, as most observers of the Revolution in France and England do, she cannot help but refer to revolutionary garb. Moreover, of the garments mentioned from 1789 to 1794 the cockade appears most often. And, as Elliott points out, dress became a key player as soon as the Paris riots quickly transformed into a Revolution. The cockade, also called a *bonnet rouge*, was standard on the heads of free men of Ancient Rome.[77] For its symbolic quality, many French men and women alike adopted this hat to both express and inspire patriotism. As early as the Autumn of 1789, women fervently sought to display the accessory, such as Madames David, Moitte, and Vien, "who sympathized with recent events, and so dressed themselves in white, stuck tricolor cockades in their hair and publicly donated their jewelry to the National Assembly."[78] The emblematic *bonnet rouge*, as well as the tricolor scheme and striped prints, comprise the most notable garments of the Revolution.

1.17 Close-up or Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, (1830) wearing the cockade

[77] Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans, 1789-1794," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1981):290.
[78] Ibid, 292.

However, after the initial outbreak of the Revolution, the *bonnet rouge* became associated with male dress. More often, women of France donned working-class garments, like clogs, skirts and aprons, and mob caps—a simple, round head-covering of basic cloth. Overall, dress until 1794 appeared similar to the English riding habits of the 1780s. The "uniform" of women of all classes, especially in Paris but also in the countryside, was an adaptation of working class dress so as to rid of aristocratic vestiges. This form of dress included bedgowns—jackets flared out at the hip—skirts and petticoats, aprons, and neckcloths.[79] Across class boundaries, these pieces consisted most frequently of cotton in striped, solid, or small prints, reminiscent of the *chemise à la reine*. While they maintained the same shape as the 1780s silhouette, one distinction was the slightly more military flair that women adopted. Although the efforts by committees in the National Assembly, Legislative Assembly, and National Convention to develop a national uniform, with designs by Jacques-Louis David, never came to fruition, women took it upon themselves to display revolutionary symbols in their attire. Whether with red-white-and-

1.18 Francoises Devenues Libres [French Women Who Have Become Free], 1791

1.19 Women's mules with revolutionary cockade, 1792

[79] de Marly, *Working Dress,* 80-82.

blue color schemes[80], with feathers and military-inspired headwear, or with collars and notions[81] reflective of army uniforms, women often adorned themselves with these symbols of patriotism.[82] At the same time, from 1789 to 1794, clothing developed a degree of sobriety so as to avoid counter-revolutionary suspicion. While the visual impact of the pro-revolutionary festivals and the propaganda of Grecian fashions which appeared on the Supreme Being cannot be overestimated, the more common trend of sobriety peaked in 1793-1794 as the Reign of Terror swept through France. So as to evade suspicion of treason by the Revolutionary Tribunal and due to famine and economic upset, bodily adornment diminished almost as if it had entered a state of fear itself. In the Prison of Sainte Pélagie in August of 1793, Madame Roland vividly describes the country's (and Europe's) growing anxiety and makes implications of the resultant physical outlook of the world:

> The miseries of my country torment me; the loss of my friend unnerves me; an involuntary gloom chills my soul and chills my imagination. France is become a vast Golgotha of carnage, an arena of horrors, where her children tear and destroy each other….Never can history paint these dreadful times or the monsters that fill them with their barbarities…or the glutting of eyes with scenes of cruelty, or foaming with impatience and rage when the sanguinary scenes are retarded….Robespierre triumphs and meanwhile famine rears its head; pernicious laws discourage industry, stop circulation, and annihilate commerce; the disorganization becomes general; and those devoid of shame erect themselves in the fragments of national prosperity.[83]

Madame Roland suggests the aesthetic disorientation of the world around her at the hands of the haunting visual and psychological impact of the Terror. Within this context of heightened passion, bloodshed, chaos, and quite literally terror, dress remained the one facet of daily life that

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[80] This color scheme, because it consists mainly of primary colors, is visually stimulating. The sensory perception of this color combination explains its common use to excite and incite emotion, such as republican pride.
[81] Buttons and trim.
[82] Also important to note, women wore their hair unpowdered and in a natural, untamed appearance.

[83] Madame Roland, *Private Memoirs of Madame Roland,* Edward Gilpin Johnson ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1901), 110-112.

(1.2a) Engraving of Charlotte Corday before her execution, 1793. *(1.2b) Marie Antoinette Leaving the Revolutionary Tribunal*, Paul Delaroche, 1851. Despite their differences in social status and political involvement, Corday and Marie Antoinette, both guillotined in 1793, are hardly distinguishable by their dress.

women and their families could keep simple and unassuming, at best, and merely pieced together, at worst. From richly adorned cockades and *bonnet rouge* to a rather traumatic downturn, fashion during the first stages of the French Revolution experienced a fast, yet meaningful transformation.

Yet, after the Terror ended in the winter of 1794, the revolution in France had reached a monumental point in its progression that shook both France and England to its core and forever changed the way the world looked. The Directoire period lasting from the end of the Terror in the Winter of 1795, to the First Consulate in 1799, and through the Napoleonic Empire in 1804 until his defeat in Waterloo in 1815 mark the most transformative, provocative changes in the way fashion looked. Although the Terror continued to haunt Europe, the catharsis that it unleashed, as well as technological innovations in fabric, fostered the transition from the oppressive silhouettes of previous years to the tubular, straight-lined, flowing gowns reminiscent of Grecian art. These widely popular styles included a raised, underbust "empire" waistline,[84] the use of a straight-lined, unrestrictive corset or only a chemise, gathered lightweight cotton and

[84] This innovative waistline, versus the previous waistlines at the anatomical waist or hip, created a sleeker, more uniform line down the body.

muslin, and muted colors, if any color at all.[85] They also revealed a fair portion of the bust, as necklines often achieved an extremely low cut.[86]As imagery of "good republicanism" shifted from despotic Rome to the open democracy of Ancient Greece, Greek busts and statues influenced women's dress, giving their bodies a completely different, far more natural shape which left them both highly exposed, but more capable of bodily movement. In the heart of the Directoire period, Madame Thérèse de Tallien depicts the understated elegance and movement of the *Merveilleuses*[87] in the *robe à l' Athenian* when she recounts how her dress

1.21 English *Robe à l' Athenian*, 1800

> consisted of a plain robe of India muslin, draped in the antique style, and fastened at the shoulders by two cameos; a gold belt encircled her waist [underbust], and was likewise fastened by a cameo; a broad gold bracelet confined her sleeve considerably above the elbow; her hair, or a glossy black, was short and frizzled all round her head, in the fashion then called *à la Titus*; over her fair and finely turned shoulders was thrown a superb shawl of red Kashmir, a dress at that period extremely rare and highly in request.[88]

Madame Tallien's references to the gold detailing and cameos, her "glossy black" hair and her "fair and finely turned" shoulders imbibe her language with a light poetic quality, which captures well the visual and tactile reaction of both the wearer and observer.

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[85] Eubanks and Tortora, 314-315.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Meaning "the marvelous ones," these younger women fashioned themselves in the most extreme forms of Directoire dress, almost to the point of nudity.
[88] Found in Helen Ingersoll, "Costumes in the Time of Napoleon," *The Monthly Illustrator* 5

1.22 Portrait of Thérèse Tallien, c. 1794-1795, Jacques-Louis David. Madame Tallien dresses in the style of *les Merveilleuses* and dons a Kashmir shawl

Furthermore, Madame Tallien mentions the adornment of "a superb shawl of red Kashmir," an item which was growing in fashionable taste during the Empire period as a direct result of British imperial endeavors and Napoleon's conquest in the Orient and the Middle-East. Other trends to enter the scene of fashionable "exoticism" were turbans and the overwhelming use of cotton. As early as 1792, Nancy Woodforde, the niece of country parson James Woodforde, records in her diary that at a ball with "Bells ringing; Music playing; Guns firing, and Flags flying, Miss Pounsett had a new Dress on for the occasion which was I think very smart, a White Silk Waist, Book Muslin train, Pink Silk Coat, Tiffany sash, and Turban Cap with Feathers."[89] Woodforde finds the "smartness" of these new styles to lie in its fashionability and playful air. At the same time, as she later mentions, English weather is cold and damp; and, French weather does not differ greatly. As such, fashionable, lightweight cottons and even cashmere shawls did not prove suitable for the environment.[90] Subsequently, the "spencer," a short jacket reaching the

1.23 English cotton gown with velvet spencer, 1818

[89] Nancy Woodforde, "A Diary for the Year 1792," *Woodforde Papers and Diaries*, Dorothy Heighes Woodforde ed., (London: Peter Davies, 1932), 55.

[90] In the Directoire period, "muslin fever" became a winter epidemic as women exposed themselves to the cold with little protection from their lightweight muslin dresses. Eubanks and Tortora, *Survey of Historic Costume,* 316.

new fashion waistline, and its longer alternative, the "pelisse," both supported the line of the Empire silhouette.[91] With a resurgence of Anglomania in France in 1797, these jackets became a winter staple in England and France.[92]

Although this silhouette eventually gained the addition of fuller sleeves, more decoration, and tighter corseting into the Nineteenth Century, this basic Grecian style remains iconic of the Directoire and Empire periods. As fashion progressed through the Napoleonic Empire, this style remained fashionable and helped to create a modern fashion culture in its accessibility, simplicity, and wearability. On a level never witnessed before, these fashions, both in their silhouette and material, transcended class and wealth. Observing the southern peasants of France, Baron Charles-Joseph Trouvé, an anti-Jacobin noble supportive of the Revolution, notes in 1803 that,

> Although the Revolution had an impact on the diet of the country people, this impact was even more marked on clothing. They seem to have more interest in clothing their bodies than in feeding themselves. In the old days, rough woolen cloth, or homespun linen, was their finest apparel. They disdain that today; cotton and velveteen cloth are the fabrics they desire, and the large landholder is often confused with his sharecroppers because of the simplicity of their clothing.[93]

In his aesthetic observation of everyday people and the impact of the Revolution, Trouvé suggests a seemingly subtle, yet monumental distinction in their dress. Before the Revolution, dress of the ordinary European consisted of the closest, cheapest materials, which was enough to satisfy them; after the Revolution they more often desired and obtained the ability to consume, not just dress, but fashion. Moreover, they not only desired and consumed in efforts to move up

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ingersoll, "Costumes in the Time of Napoleon," 252.
[93] Baron Charles-Joseph Trouvé, "On the French Revolution (1803)," *The French Revolution and Napoleon; a Sourcebook,* Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee ed., (London: Routledge, 2002), 203.

the social ladder, but they also made their own, unique mark on fashion, as the surprise of the landholder at “their simplicity” demonstrates.

Bodily adornment broke loose from its elitist dictation on extravagance and luxury and came to embody the very personal, yet social experience of taste. That is not to suggest that fashion of the French Revolution, or even the French Revolution itself, completely turned social relationships on their head. But, the study of these aesthetic changes does offer a complex view of fashion and social history: it no longer trickled down as it did with Rococo fashion, but it embodied a series of dynamic power-relationships, thus moving and even determining history. Exactly how does an appreciation of these aesthetic transformations lead to an active conception of fashion? And, how do these changes in something as simple as clothing not only reflect, but also determine the ever-complicated cultural relationships of the modern world? Much of the answer lies in this sensory transformation. It furthermore lies in an understanding of the players of fashion and how they shaped culture.

Chapter Two

The Fashion System and Visual Meaning

> Here we remembered how much Man is govern'd by his Senses, how lively he is struck by the Objects which appear to him in an agreeable Manner, how much Cloaths contribute to make us agreeable Objects, and how much we owe it to our selves that we should appear so.[94]

Early on in the Eighteenth Century, journalist Richard Steele recalls a conversation in a tavern that led him to ponder the grasp that clothing has over the minds of men. Although he bemoans the authority that fashion has over the mind, he implies the significance of fashion's inherent communicative nature. In thinking about dress as a form of communication, much like a language, Penny Storm argues that, "for dress to be a language, it must be conventional enough to allow a mutual understanding of its symbols. Accurate communication relies on a core of mutuality in understanding the meanings of each symbol whether it is a word or an item of dress."[95] In order for this mutuality in understanding to occur, dress must contain a cultural meaning from an external source before it can send an active message.

As Marie-Jean Caritat de Condorcet voices in 1793, this was part of a larger transformation:

> Men found themselves possessed of the means of communicating with people all over the world. A new sort of tribunal had come into existence in which less lively but deeper impressions were communicated; which no longer allowed the same tyrannical empire to be exercised over men's passions but ensured a more certain and more durable power over their minds; a situation in which the advantages are all on the side of truth, since what the art of communication loses in the power to seduce, it gains in the power to enlighten.[96]

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[94] "Steele's Proposal for a Sphinx-Shaped Museum of Fashion," *The Spectator,* 397.
[95] Storm, *Functions of Dress,* 103.
[96] Found in Roger Chartier, *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution,* Lydia G. Cochrane trans., (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991), 32.

Implicit in his philosophy, by 1797 people had begun to feel the scope of the Revolution's consequences. Although he does not directly refer to the communication of fashion, the dramatic declaration of Marie-Jean Caritat Marquis de Condorcet conveys the profound impact on the world by the spread of information. This spread of ideas through expanding modes of communication undoubtedly includes the communication of fashion. The "power to enlighten" through communication, of which this French philosopher speaks, implies the transfer of powerful meaning. Since dress contains the power to carry ideas, spread these ideas, and have an impact on minds, dress proves itself to be an active force.

Clothing has always sent cultural messages, and cultural signifiers have always existed. However, the era of the Revolution is distinct in that it marks a period of change in those who assigned meaning. Whereas the royal courts remained the sole assigner of cultural meaning in dress for many centuries before the Revolution, multiple external sources assigned meaning to clothing leading up to and after the Revolution. As such, the Revolutionary period denotes the development of The Fashion System, and thus suggests fashion's role in developing a modern mode of cultural communication.

The Fashion System, as defined by Grant McCracken, defines a modern system of dissemination of cultural meaning. According to McCracken, this system "serves as a means by which goods are systematically invested and divested of their meaningful properties…[and] has more sources of meaning, agents of transfer, and media of communication" than one single source.[97] This system, while it refers to all goods, inevitably assumes a role in fashion culture. Roland Barthes, George Simmel, and others classify this system of cultural dissemination as

[97] Grant McCracken, "The Fashion System," *The Fashion Reader,* 2, Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun ed., (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 132.

distinctly modern due to its particular sources of meaning and agents of transfer. Fashion journalism comprises one of the primary sources of meaning and agents of transfer. As fashion journalism was born of the Revolution and comprises an element of modern culture, and as the modern Fashion System does not exist without it, the System proves to be particularly modern. The fashion journalism during this time evolved into the means by which "deeper impressions were communicated."

Furthermore, McCracken defines "opinion leaders," fashionable individuals whose influence arises by "virture of birth, beauty, celebrity, or accomplishment," as another source of "power of enlightenment".[98] In the years before the Revolution, these opinion leaders, such as Marie Antoinette, Rose Bertin, and Queen Charlotte, centered around court. However, during the early years of the Revolution, that status of opinion leaders, like Théroigne de Méricourt and Jacques-Louis David, arose from their role as revolutionary heroes. As the Revolution progressed and as Napoleon consolidated his leadership, "hot societies"—groups of people that "live in a world that is not only culturally constituted but also historically constituted"—drove change in the cultural meaning of fashion.[99] The *sans culottes*, the *Merveilleuses*, and the taste of Napoleonic style comprise some of these hot societies that allowed fashion its driving force. The communication of these three agents—publication, individuals, and groups—in the Fashion System entailed not only new cultural, political, and economic meaning, but a new, modern form of distribution. As Daniel Roche articulates, "The reign of diversity and change could then begin since new means of communication allowed a new universe of symbols to be propagated and a

[98] Ibid, 135.
[99] Ibid, 136.

new ideology to be spread, by projecting them in the materiality of things."[100] This projection through clothing embodies fashion's active nature.

Court Culture and Fashion Journalism

The heightened visual literacy of the Revolution played a vital role in the transference of cultural meaning in fashion. This visual literacy emerged and thrived through the spread of fashion dolls, engravings, and fashion journals. According to McCracken, a distinctly modern element of cultural dissemination of fashion is the influence of advertising, most notably in the form of magazines and publications. He elucidates how this process works when he explains that,

> In the medium of a magazine or newspaper, the same effort to conjoin aspects of the world and good is evident, and the same process of glimpsed similarity is sought. In this capacity, the fashion system takes new styles of clothing or home furnishings and associates them with established cultural categories and principles.[101]

In this same way, print culture plays a monumental role in the cultural signification of modern fashion. And, although print was not a completely new phenomenon in the Revolutionary years, this particular rise of the fashion press resulted from and drove the cultivation of modern culture that arose during this time.

Yet, before a Revolutionary fashion aesthetic and its association with print emerged in the 1780s, fashionable dress emanated from the English aristocracy and the French court culture. Fashionability was not grounded in natural taste, as it was in later periods, but was grounded in

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[100] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 471.
[101] McCracken, "The Fashion System," 135.

the wearer's ability to occupy a space of power. This space included both physical distance and luxurious textures. The body literally transformed into a display of wealth and status. The more space and texture the body could absorb, the more *culture* the body conveyed. The aim of Rococo dress was purely decorative and self-indulgent. It was also meant to evoke a world of pleasurable sensibility and refined extravagance.[102] At the same time, this world bordered the line of decadence, so much so that self-indulgence and over-indulgence became one and the same. Poet and social critic, Alexander Pope scrutinizes this leader of fashion culture—the court—and the weight of its impact in his 1712 poem, "The Rape of the Lock:"

> Then gay Ideas crowd the vacant Brain;
> While Peers and Dukes, and all their sweeping Train,
> And Garters, Stars, and Coronets appear,
> And in soft Sounds, *Your Grace* salutes their Ear.
> 'Tis these that early taint the Female Soul,
> Instruct the Eyes of young *Coquettes* to roll,
> Teach Infants Cheeks a bidden Blush to know,
> And little Hearts to flutter at a *Beau*.[103]

Pope criticizes the excessive lavishness and artificiality of court appearance. Yet, the decades following Pope's poetry experienced the height of such fashions and the attainment of their ideals.

2.1 European porcelain fashion doll, circa 1760

[102] Jun I. Kunai, "One More Desire: Fashion Leaders of a Dramatic Era," *Revolution in Fashion, 1715-1815*, Amy Handy ed., (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 118.
[103] Alexander Pope, "The Rape of the Lock," *The Rape of the Lock,* Cynthia Wall ed., (Boston: Bedford, 1998).

With this height, the 1730s saw the emergence of elaborate fashion dolls—miniature models dressed in court attire—all across Europe. These dolls were not the toy dolls that we know today, but rather a visual means by which fashion transferred from the courts to the cities and eventually to the countryside.[104] The shops on Paris' rue Saint-Honoré manufactured large quantities of the dolls, which were composed of wax, wood, or porcelain and either appeared as gifts or in shop windows.[105] Throughout the Eighteenth Century, Paris remained the primary exporter of these fashion dolls, although London streets often produced dolls clothed in the English fashions.[106] The dolls enabled court fashion to spread all over Europe. The styles which these dolls portrayed emanated from court styles, yet all levels of European society developed a taste for them "by means of dolls which are sent thither and in a short time the provincials are dressed like the gaudy doll which is sent from Paris and London."[107] This social commentator of the time expresses an air of frustration at the absurdity of the dolls' widespread influence among his contemporaries. At the same time, his frustration indicates their timely decline with the Revolution.

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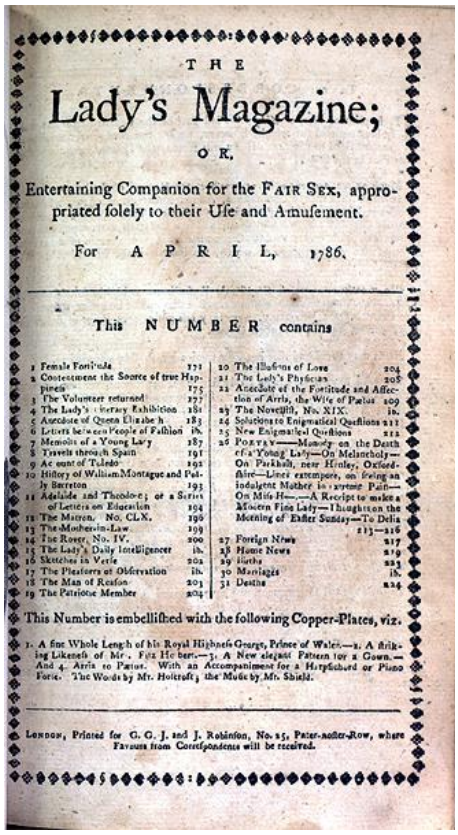
[104] Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe,* 62.
[105] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 475
[106] Such as the many dolls sent to Empress Elizabeth of Russia in 1751, which were all produced in England.
[107] Originally from the 1773 *Lady's Magazine.* Found in Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 62.

Perhaps because of the uproar in the streets of Paris, but more likely because of the growth and eventual domination of print culture, the Revolution saw the disappearance of fashion dolls. Oddly enough, however, these dolls that mainly represented court fashions set the stage for a world of visual fashion literacy. Leading up to 1789, a print culture in both England and France exploded, creating an avid demand for fashion engravings and periodicals. In terms of visual dissemination, fashion plates soon took precedence over dolls. Their production required far less expense, time, and labor. As such, they reached a wider audience in a timelier manner. As early as the 1780s, Mercier comments on the popularity of magazines and popular readership:



THE

Lady's Magazine;

OR,

Entertaining Companion for the FAIR SEX, appropriated solely to their Use and Amusement.

For APRIL, 1786.

This NUMBER contains

1 Female Fortitude 171
2 Contentment the Source of true Happiness 175
3 The Volunteer returned 177
4 The Lady's Literary Exhibition 181
5 Anecdote of Queen Elizabeth 183
6 Letters between People of Fashion ib.
7 Memoirs of a Young Lady 187
8 Travels through Spain 191
9 Account of Toledo 192
10 History of William Montague and Polly Barreton 193
11 Adelaide and Theodore; or a Series of Letters on Education 194
12 The Matron. No. CLX. 196
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15 The Lady's Daily Intelligencer ib.
16 Sketches in Verse 202
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18 The Man of Reason 203
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20 The Illusions of Love 204
21 The Lady's Physician 205
22 Anecdote of the Fortitude and Affection of Arria, the Wife of Paetus 209
23 The Novelist, No. XIX. ib.
24 Solutions to Enigmatical Questions 211
25 New Enigmatical Questions 212
26 POETRY——Melody on the Death of a Young Lady—On Melancholy—On Parkhall, near Henley, Oxfordshire—Lines extempore, on being an indulgent Mother in extreme Pain—On Miss H——A Receipt to make a Modern Fine Lady—Thoughts on the Morning of Easter Sunday—To Delia 213—216
27 Foreign News 217
28 Home News 219
29 Births 223
30 Marriages ib.
31 Deaths 224

This Number is embellished with the following Copper-Plates, viz.

1. A fine Whole Length of his Royal Highness George, Prince of Wales.—2. A striking Likeness of Mr. Fitz Herbert.—3. A New elegant Pattern for a Gown.—And 4. Aria to Patrio. With an Accompaniment for a Harpsichord or Piano Forte. The Words by Mr. Holcroft; the Music by Mr. Shield.

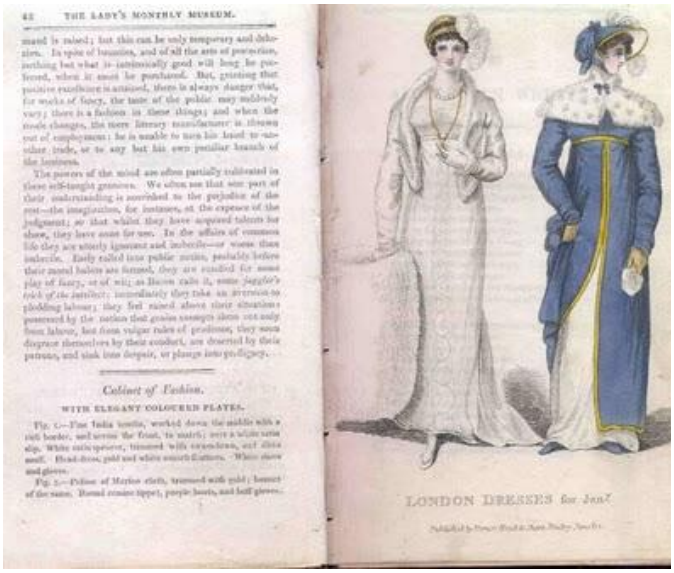
LONDON, Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, No. 25, Pater-noster-Row, where Favours from Correspondents will be received.

2.2 Content page of *The Lady's Magazine*, April 1786

> Fashion has changed: no one looks for anything but *small formats*; these little books have the advantage of being able to be pocketed to furnish relaxation during a walk, or to ward off the boredom of travel, but at the same time, one must carry a magnifying glass, for the print is so fine that it requires good eyes.[108]

[108] Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution,* 91

Despite their sudden esteem and degree of casualty which Mercier sarcastically examines, fashion plates (engravings) and magazines were not a completely novel phenomenon. With the first publication of *Mercure de France* in 1672, France saw the publication of sporadic plates. Similarly, the English *Tatler* and *Spectator* of the first half of the Eighteenth Century spread fashion news, although its main scope was society-at-large and not just fashion. However, the scope of their influence changed in the 1770s with the British *Lady's Magazine.*[109] This publication was the first to publish monthly fashion plates—hand-colored and reproduced images of fashionable women donning the latest trends in a recognizable social setting. The magazine not only published prints, but also published detailed descriptions as well as cultural and political news, reviews of theatre performances, and moral guidance. The publication printed the written text which referred to the adjacent image, thereby following a user-friendly format for readers. The writers of the magazine sought to present every reader, from town to country, "with every innovation that is made in the female dress but to avoid the fleeting whimsies of depraved Elegance."[110] *The Lady's Magazine* received wide acclaim by female readers who lingered on every word and image.



2.3 Page from *The Lady's Magazine*, directly referring to *Cabinet des modes*

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 63.

Soon, French publisher François Buisson followed suit with his publication of the widely popular *Cabinet des Modes* in 1785, which became *Magasin des modes nouvelles francaises et anglaises* in 1786 and then ran under the title *Le Journal de la mode et du goût* from 1790 until 1793. In an almost philosophical tone reminiscent of *Encyclopèdie*, the magazine featured both male and female writers and catered to both men and women. These magazines, as well as others like *Chronique de Paris* (1789-1790), *Journal des dames et des modes* (1797-1832), *Tableau general du gout, des modes et costumes de Paris* (1797-1799), *Gallery of Fashion* (1794-1822), and others, comprised a minor literary category and sought to keep its readers informed of the active evolution of the trends of *la mode*, while also reminding its readers of *la mode's* cylical nature. Moreover, they linked notions of gender, politics, nationality, consumption, and modern taste with the images they proposed. For instance, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* proposes in 1786 that *la mode* not only follows a fixed law, but that it also shares a dynamic relationship with current events and its political and economic underpinnings:

2.4 "Costume Parisiens," *Journal des dames et des modes* (1819)

> *La Mode*, whom detractors have called flighty, inconstant and frivolous, is, however, fixed in her principles; and we believe, in truth, that it is an injustice to treat her with such harshness. We see her constantly seize upon all remarkable events and appropriate them and consign them to her annals, to make them eternal in human memory. What great events, what feats of our warriors, of our magistrates even, has she not made public?[111]

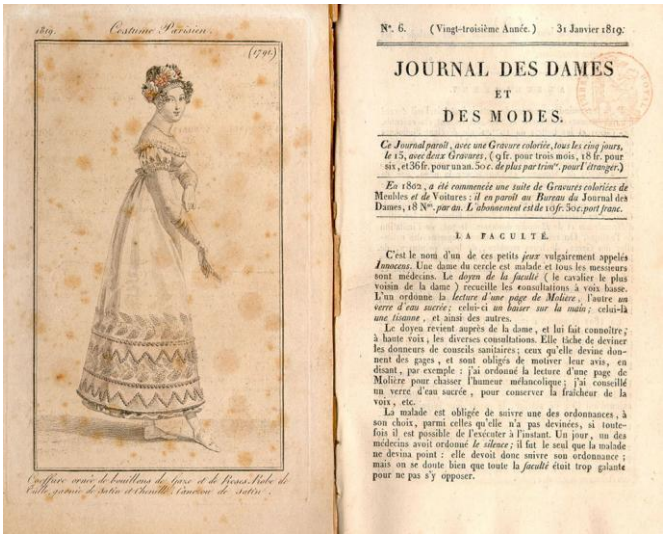
[111] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 956.

As this journal articulates, these little journals were of no little consequence. For, although these journals and prints were not radically original, their popularity was. The rise in the reception of fashion literature brought to fruition the idea that, "reading is endowed with such power that it is capable of totally transforming readers and making them into what the texts envisage…Borne by the printed word, the new ideas [associated with visual, sartorial change] conquered people's minds, molded their ways of being, and elicited questions."[112] And, even in their own time, the writers of these journals fully recognized their responsibility in assigning cultural meaning to fashion and their relationship to the historical force of fashion.

Moreover, the world of fashion publication existed not only as a source of meaning, but they also acted as an agent of transfer of this meaning. This transference occurred, first and foremost, due to the rise in literacy rates and to the ease of access to these sources.
In Paris from 1700-1749 period to 1750-1799 period the number of engravers nearly doubled from eleven to twenty, while the number of plates more than quadrupled from 229 to 1,275.[113] And, from 1710 to 1785, France saw the birth of 20 new journals at a rate of one every five years. While most did not last long, the ones that did last at least a year or longer and continued to publish once a month reached a broad readership over which they had great exertion.[114] The female readership of fashion journals included "not only the *gens de qualité*, but also the *bourgeoisie*, *marchandes de modes*, *couturiéres*, and *grisettes* of Paris."[115] All levels of society, whether rich or poor, had varying access to the publications and read them with fervor. A distinct indication of the increased journal readership is the increase of the literate population; from 1686 to 1786, the female in France literacy rate rose from 14 percent to 27 percent, a near double in

[112] Chartier, 68.
[113] Roche, *The Culture of Clothing,* 477.
[114] Ibid, 480.
[115] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 951.

size.[116] At the same time, this rise in literacy cannot completely shed light on the number of subscribers to fashion magazines, for subscriptions depended on the cost of the journal and people of lesser means, especially in the countryside, often shared subscriptions with neighbors.[117]



2.5 "Costume Parisien," *Journal des dames et des modes,* (1791). Pages like this that included both images and text allowed for a literate and illiterate readership.

Furthermore, not all readers were subscribers, nor were they all literate. Many of the illiterate "readers" either looked closely at the images, developing an image-based literacy, or were read to by those who could read. Also, a surge in public libraries, as well as the recent practice of booksellers allowing potential customers to browse without purchasing, enabled non-subscribers, whether literate or illiterate, to read fashion journals. As such, the transference of cultural meaning in fashion crossed literacy boundaries. Likewise, in 1787, after the initial publication of popularized English and French magazines, Mercier notices that not only did the authority of journals cross literacy and class boundaries, but it also crossed national boundaries; of the "Parisian and Londoner Compared," Mercier writes:

> the spirit of philosophy, which considers the good of the world as a whole before that of any one nation, strikes a balance between these two opposing national prides, and gives each his due, without attempting to allot the palm to either. The exchange of ideas is the best and most fruitful commerce of all; greatness and learning springs from this, rather than from the bloody soil of battlefields.[118]

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[116] Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution,* 69.
[117] Jones, "Repackaging Roussueau," 951. For instance, *Journal des dames* and *Cabinet des modes* were less expensive, and so had a middle-class subscription base, while *Journal des savans* and *Le Mercure galant* where among some of the costlier journals.
[118] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 156.

Although literacy, class, and nationality are not invisible factors in the dissemination of cultural meaning in fashion, the general phenomenon of fashion publication and fashion readership remains a testament to a the development of a modern form of assignation and transfer of meaning. This mode of visual language and the transference of cultural signification which arose during the Revolutionary era only begins to demonstrate fashion as a historical motivator.

Opinion Leaders: Old Regime to Revolutionary Heroism

Unlike fashion publication, individual opinion leadership has had a long tradition of assigning fashion with cultural meaning. McCracken notes that in the past the opinion leaders stem from a "conventional social elite," whereas in more modern societies some of these individuals influence consumers through their "cultural innovation."[119] The difference between *ancien regime* and Revolutionary opinion leaders did not lie in their degree of influence. Rather, the differences stemmed from their origins in the modern, republican political culture and in the ideals they assigned to fashion. Their foundation in Revolutionary ideals of modernity makes these opinion leaders distinctly modern.

When court culture reigned over fashion, individual opinion leaders emerged from court. Perhaps the most famous historical fashion leader, Marie Antoinette, identified as the epitome of Eighteenth-Century fashion (see Chapter One). From the time of her marriage to Louis the Dauphine in 1770 to their coronation in 1774 until the official dissolution of the monarchy in September 1792, "Marie Antoinette preferred the title of 'Queen of Fashion' to that of 'Queen of France,'" a court lady notes.[120] Crucial to her image as a fashion icon, her *marchande des modes*

[119] McCracken, "The Fashion System," 136.
[120] Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 26.

[fashion merchant], Rose Bertin proves equally significant. After building her prestige as a *marchande des modes* among Russian, Swedish, Spanish, and Portuguese aristocracy, Bertin solidified her career as the Queen's primary fashion merchant from 1775 through the Queen's captivity in the Tulières.[121] Bertin helped to create Marie Antoinette into a fashion authority. Combining her personal life with her career, she transformed both the Queen and herself into fashion icons. Together, the two had considerable sway both in determining the aesthetics of fashionable dress and the habits of fashionable spending. From within the Court of Versailles, Marie Antoinette's lady-in-waiting, Madame de Campan, observes Rose Bertin and the Queen's command over fashion and how the two were,

2.6 *Portrait of Queen Marie-Antoinette with Rose*, oil on canvas, (1783), Louise Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun

> naturally imitated by all women. They wanted to have immediately the same outfit as the queen, to wear the flowers, the garlands to which her beauty, which was then in all its radiance, gave an infinite charm. The expense of these young ladies was extremely increased; mothers and husbands grumbled about it, some thoughtless women contracted debts.[122]

[121] Clare Haru Crowston, "The Queen and Her 'Minister of Fashion': Gender, Credit, and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France," *Gender & History* 14 (2002): 98.
[122] Madame de Campan, *Mémoires de Madame Campan, première femme de chambre de Marie-Antoinette*. Found in Crowston, "The Queen and Her 'Minister of Fashion,'" 108.

2.7 *Mademoiselle Rose Bertin, Dressmaker to Marie-Antoinette,* Jean-François Janinet (French, Paris 1752–1814 Paris).

Madame de Campan, while she recognizes the pair's persuasion over the populace, expresses an understated tone of dissidence at the fact. In her dissidence, de Campan unknowingly indicates the decline of Marie Antoinette's and the Old Regime's cultural prestige.

And indeed, in January 1787, as fashion publications began to take precedence of cultural assignation, the influence of Marie Antoinette and Bertin sharply fell when rumors of their debt surmounted.[123] While the debt of the entire French nation did not lie in the court's fashion expenditures, contrary to contemporary belief, Marie Antoinette did spend 138,000 livres more on gowns, jewelry, and on various dealers (although mostly Bertin) than her allotted 120,000 livres for fashion expenses, causing some debt to the royal treasury.[124] The reality of this debt, reflected in the nation's debt, brought an end to overly extravagant spending and display of fashion associated with Bertin and the French queen. Through their trajectory as fashion figures, Marie Antoinette and Bertin were highly politicized in their fashion, accounting for their status as signifiers of fashion culture.[125] Whether their connection with fashion received acclaim or condemnation, their fashion histories mark not only their own political careers, but the evolution of cultural values in Europe.

[123] Ibid, 92.
[124] Philip Mansel, *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2005), 71.
[125] Weber, *Queen of Fashion*.

2.8 *Queen Charlotte*, oil on canvas. Thomas Gainsborough (English, Sudbury 1727–1788 London). This portrait of Queen Charlotte appears much less fanciful than does the portrait of Marie Antoinette (2.6).

Whereas the influence of the fashion of the English court did not encounter such highs and lows as the French court's did, the English monarchy did embody a degree of importance in designating dress with meaning. In England, leading up to and during the time of the Revolution, Queen Charlotte (r. 1744-1818) had influence over fashion. Although Marie Antoinette maintains a higher degree of fashion fame, even in modern popular imagery, the Queen of England did have reign over the more conservative fashion culture of aristocratic England (see Chapter One). While Marie Antoinette imparted an aesthetic of pomp in fashion, Queen Charlotte imparted a sense of modesty in English dress. This modesty, which was not entirely to the credit of Queen Charlotte, made an impression on English and French Anglomania fashions. Although the English court was not without aristocratic comforts, the queen "had never loved dress and show, nor received the smallest pleasure from anything in her external appearance beyond neatness and comfort," as Queen Charlotte herself admits of her taste.[126] Queen Charlotte's disinterest in large, heavy garments finds foundation perhaps in the more rural setting and seasonal mobility of the English court. For, in the 1760s, she completely did away with the daily encumbrance of hoops and relegated them to court functions.[127]

[126] Fanny Burney, *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (Frances Burney)*, Muriel Masefield ed., (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1931), 132. Burney worked as the Queen's dresser's assistant from 1786 until 1791.
[127] Mansel, *Dressed to Rule*, 59.

Mrs. Delany, an Eighteenth-Century fashion figure in her own right, depicts the Queen's fashion prestige with the permeation of the Queen's personal simplicity in her own dress when she describes that to the Princess of Wales' birthday party, she wore, "a flowered silk I have bought since I came to town, on a pale deer-coloured figured ground; the flowers, mostly purple, are mixed with white feathers. I think it extremely pretty and very modest."[128] The juxtaposition of references to rustic imagery, light colors, and rich detail reflect the dual influence of the Queen Charlotte's courtly authority over fashion and personal modesty. At the same time as Queen Charlotte maintained her status as an agent of fashion, the English aristocracy as a whole proved influential in assigning fashionable dress with cultural significance. In her *Autobiography*, Mrs. Delany suggests this broader realm of courtly influence in her repeated mention of figures like Lady Chesterfield, the Duchess of Queensbury, and Lady Montagu, among others. Thus, the power of these fashion figures, as well as that of Queen Charlotte, Rose Bertin, and Marie Antoinette, finds authority in the court.

At the same time, a more country-oriented aesthetic had entered fashion at the dawn of the Revolution. And, during the early phases of the Revolution, opinion leaders burst onto the fashion scene not from court, but from the Third Estate. The revolutionary zeal of these leaders, such as Théroigne de Méricourt and Jacques-Louis David, determined their influence over the aesthetic and the cultural significance of patriotism, rustic simplicity, and republicanism in clothing.

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[128] Mrs. Delany, *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany*, 1, Sarah Chauncey Woolsey ed., (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879), 338.

As soon as the brick of the Bastille fell to the ground, stripping of aristocratic fashion surged through France as Théroigne de Méricourt led the movement toward *sans culottes* fashion. Belgian-born in 1762, Méricourt had a well-developed sense of democratic idealism and reached her height of fame as a Jacobin feminist advocating active female involvement in politics and in battle.[129] Her active involvement in the politics of the early phases of the Revolution established her as an active leader of fashion. Referred to as "the sweetheart of the Populus,"[130] Méricourt imparted her own feminist, militaristic aesthetic into the dress of the time. Backed by the women of the *sans culottes*, her personal dress quickly identified as the new fashion of the Revolution, and the women of Paris and of the countryside followed her lead. In 1808, former Constituent Assembly representative Regnaud de Saint-Jean-d'Angely described her aesthetic, as she "dressed as an amazon…Sometimes she would wear men's clothes and cajole the coquettes of the area, and sometimes she would wear those of her own sex and appear on the arm

2.9 *La Femme du Sans-Culotte*, (1792)

[129] Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 27.
[130] Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Théroigne de Méricourt: A Melancholic Woman during the French Revolution,* Martin Thom trans., (London: Verso, 1991), 155.

of some whippersnapper."[131] Although shocking, Méricourt's cultural innovation in the form of dress inspired many to dress like her as it proved culturally meaningful and diverted from tradition.

2.10 *Françaises devenues libres*, (1789). Many believe this engraving to be an depiction of Méricourt, as the figure takes the masculine stance of the revolutionary feminists.

Furthermore, her alleged involvement in the assassination plot of Marie Antoinette only boosted her visual influence among the populace.[132] This act and its support by many French women overtly symbolized not only Méricourt's threat over the Queen's life, but also her threat over the Queen's authority of fashion. However, her involvement in this symbolic plot also led to her demise. On January 15, 1791, Austrian troops arrested the revolutionary for her leadership. While she underwent maddening torture at the hands of the Austrians, her popularity among the people and their dress remained, as the royalist paper *Le Journal general* scornfully writes:

> As as we lightheartedly,
> Our ditties sing,
> Around the girl's neck,
> Is the executioner's string.
> Weep, then, unhappy Populus,
> For your mistress is no more.[133]

The poem against Méricourt's favor not only expresses the range of her inspiration among the people, but it is also highly suggestive of the Revolution's bodily authority.

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[131] Ibid.

[132] Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 27.

[133] Roudinesco, *Théroigne de Méricourt*, 55.

As Méricourt deteriorated into madness and as feminism lost sway in the Revolution, this fashion leader and her particular *sans culottes* aesthetic lost precedence.[134] Fear of female power and the potential effects on the domestic sphere centered on images of women dressed in masculine attire. As the power of feminist conviction declined, member of the National Convention and artist Jacques-Louis David stepped in as the political leader of Revolutionary fashion. Realizing the cultural importance of the visual world, from its formation in late 1792 the Convention representatives discussed a growing favor toward institutionalized republican uniform. As the Revolution progressed toward the point of totalitarian control over the personal lives of French citizens, the Committee of Public Safety authorized David to create designs for such a uniform with the goal of the display of his engravings all over France. As a leader of the *Sociéte populaire et républicaine des artes*, David willingly accepted the proposal and soon became the fashion and cultural leader of the Revolution until the fall of the Revolutionary Tribunal and Robespierre.[135]

2.11 Plate from *Journal de la mode et du gout* (1790), featuring militaristic and color detail, inspired by Méricourt's dress

[134] Symbolic of the path of her fashion leadership and its political implications, as Méricourt fell into madness she refused to wear clothes and insisted on going about nude.
[135] Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty," 299-302.

2.12 *Costume of a Civil Official*, Jacques-Louis David, (1794)

In his designs of military uniforms, menswear, and womenswear, David drew upon symbols of French patriotism, such as the red-white-and blue color scheme, the cockade, and *sans-culottes* styles, as well as classical imagery. David's designs persist to be the most overt propaganda of the Revolution and soon, "Part of this dress [was] already adopted by many; but I have only seen one person in public completely equipped with the whole; and as he had managed it, his appearance was rather fantastical," as the Scottish physician and Paris resident John Moore notes in 1792.[136] Like Moore, David realized his own impact when he expressed to the *Comité de sûreté générale* that "the artist ought to contribute powerfully to public instruction…by penetrating the soul…by making a profound impression on the mind…Thus…the traits of heroism and civic virtue presented to the regard of the people will electrify its soul and will cause to germinate in it all the passions of glory and devotion to the welfare of *la patrie* [the fatherland]."[137] And, through the Terror, David maintained the passion and glory of the Revolution through street and festival appearances of his idealistic costume. Even after David lost popularity, the drapery and classic imagery of his costume designs maintained their cultural significance and continued to influence fashionable dress.

[136] Ibid, 300.
[137] David L. Dowd, "Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 15, (1951), 537.

Furthermore, this revolutionary zeal and the aesthetics of the revolutionary opinion leaders were not isolated in France, but reverberated in England. In England, the French Revolution was not solely a French event, but had significant cultural and visual implications for the fate of England. French Revolution historian Lynn Hunt writes, "The French Revolution released a kind of seismic affective energy, not only among those who witnessed it firsthand, but also further away from its epicenter…In the words of poet Robert Southey, 'what a visionary world seemed to open upon [us]...nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race.'"[138] This energy of the Revolution served to accelerate the fashion democratization that began in England in the 1780s[139] and imparted a newfound sense of bodily and social liberty in English dress. Such is the case with the 1790s style of the 'Newmarket frock', which ignored expression of social status, but rather claimed wearability based on ease of movement.[140] The frocks were even "decorated with a great number of green, red or blue capes," reminiscent of farm dress and Revolutionary symbolism.[141] Likewise, English dress had a reciprocal effect on French dress with the invasion of Anglomania in France in the 1780s and again in 1797. Witness to the Champ de Mars uprising, British poet Helen Marie Williams seizes upon this reciprocal relationship of English and French aesthetics when she marvels how "wherever we journeyed, liberty seemed to have run like electric fire along the countries, and pervaded every object in its passage," including dress.[142] In this way, whether emerging from the English and French courts or from the fervor of the Revolution, opinion leaders carried heavy political and cultural

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[138] Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, "The Affective Revolution in 1790s Britain," 497.
[139] This democratization had a reciprocal effect on French fashions leading up to and through the Revolution (see Chapter 1)
[140] Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 203.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 45.

significance in both their ideals and their appearance. In this way, they crossed social, political, and national borders in their cultural signification of fashion.

Hot Societies; Their Entrance in the Napoleonic Court

2.3 *Liberty Leading the People*, (1830), Eugene Delacroix. This iconic painting retrospectively illustrates the kind of energy that the Revolution released.

With the end of the Terror and the ensuing reverberation of horror that captivated Europe, emotion shook in the hearts of every European as the path of this Revolution no longer seemed so clear. The movement in France now personified a destructive life of its own creation, out of the control of the culture from which it sprang. After witnessing the Champ de Mars revolt and the ugly reality of the Revolution, Williams grieves the loss of its early promise:

> Ah! What is become of the transport which beat high in every bosom, when an assembled million of the human race vowed on the altar of their country, in the name of the represented nation, inviolable fraternity and union—an eternal federation! This was indeed the golden age of the revolution—But it is past!—the enchanting spell is broken, and the fair scenes of beauty and of order, through which imagination wandered, are transformed into the desolation of the wilderness.[143]

[143] Ibid, 50.

Williams did not stand alone in her disillusionment of the Revolution; many lamented the end of beauty in a world which had just suffered a previously unimaginable degree of overt violence and paranoia. However, after the Terror had dissipated with the execution of the fallen Robespierre, a cathartic passion let loose and Europe emitted a breath of new life. As English poet William Blake relates, after the contagious terror of what he describes as the hell that was the Terror, the flames of its destruction did not burn creative energy, but rather awakened a heightened sensory perception of the world. Blake writes of this lively force that swept across Europe:

> I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds hovering on the sides of the rock; with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence, now perceived by the minds of men, and read by them on earth:
>
> How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
> Is an immense world of delight, closed by your sense five.[144]

The awakening of the senses which Blake vividly depicts let loose dynamic intellectual, scientific, and artistic movements. The visual world of dress and the development of a universal fashion taste played a considerable role in this new sensory culture.

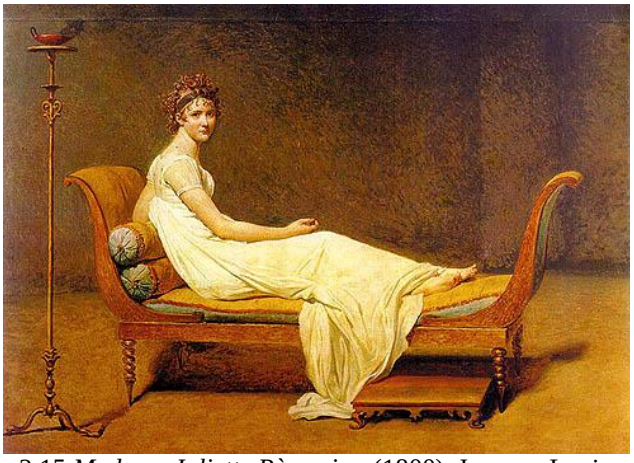
2.14 *Les Merveilleuses et les Incroyables*, (1795)

Although a refreshing sense of freedom and passion captivated Europe, skepticism of the power of individual authority remained strong. Consequently, individual opinion leaders lost precedence in the new fashion culture.[145] Rather, culturally radical groups, "hot societies," determined the meaning and transference of fashion and the body. Although Early Modern history does give

[144] William Blake, "A Memorable Fancy (The Five Sense)," *Romanticism: An Anthology* 3, Duncun Wu ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 208-209.

evidence of radical groups that had influence over fashion, such as the Puritans in England, the hot societies of the post-Revolutionary period take on a more modern connotation as their cultural innovations consisted of shock-value or progress. In addition, hot societies of the modern era find their basis in regular change, rather than static tradition.[146] Such are the characteristics of the group signifiers of the post-Revolutionary era—the *Merveilleuses* and the society of taste.

After 1794, the influence of the *sans culottes* in popular culture became obsolete, and the most notable hot society became the *Merveilleuses*. Young, fashionable, often nameless women of Paris who embraced a lighthearted, carefree attitude comprised this group that sprang into the forefront of society in the Spring of 1793. They and their male counterparts, the *Incroyables*, parted with the vestiges of aristocratic dress, such as heavy brocades, oppressive hairstyles, and, for the women, corsets and *panniers*.[147] Nonetheless, they did not completely shed tradition.



2.15 *Madame Juliette Rècamier*, (1800), Jacques-Louis David

Their loose, lightweight gowns of sheer muslin and elegant drapery built on the aesthetic of Neoclassism that had been developing since the 1780s and on the classical imagery of artists like David. However, their dress was radical in that its tubular silhouette contours the natural curves of the body and in that it exposes

[145] Writers and publishers of fashion journals are indeed opinion leaders. Despite the diminished notoriety of individual opinion leaders, they remained popular because they did not directly associate with politics, as Méricourt and David did.
[146] McCracken, "The Fashion System," 136.
[147] Akiko Fukai, "Rococo and Neoclassical Clothing," *Revolution in Fashion, 1715-1815,* Amy Handy ed., (New York: Kyoto Costume Institute, 1990), 116.

much more of the skin. The image of the *Merveilleuse* and her Directoire fashion flourished in fashion magazines and through a resurgence of portraiture. Ladies like Madame Juliette Récamier and the notable Thérèse Tallien, as well as women more ambiguously identified as "young woman" or "*un salon parisien sous le Directoire*," posed as the subjects of the radical fashion.[148] Prints, engravings, and paintings of these style icons abounded in the streets of Paris and across the Channel. Toward the end of the Directory period, Mercier notices that there exists "Not a *petite maîtresse*, not a *grisette*, who does not decorate herself on Sunday with an Athenian muslin gown, who does not draw up the pendant folds on the right arm, in order to drop into the form of some antique or at least equal Venus *aux belles fesses.*"[149]

Mercier's keen observations illustrate the avid acceptance of *Merveilleuses* fashion in Paris. Nevertheless, although this hot society emanated from Paris, its fashions transcended into the countryside and into England. One concerned English observer worries that in his homeland the extremities of the *Merveilleuses* "shocked every modest woman; and it was not thought proper to look at them in the presence of gentlemen," and considering the favor of these revealing gowns he wonders "how this delicacy wore away and how soon is

2.16(a) "Ball dress" print from 1801 copy of *Journal des dames*

2.16(b) Reproduction of "Ball dress" *The Lady's Magazine*

Notice the additional material and raising of the bust in the latter.

[148] Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution,* 128-133.
[149] Found in Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution,* 128-129.

truly surprising."[150] The degree of shock, as well as the Classical allusions and bodily freedom, comprise many associations with taste of the new fashion, both in France and England.

Yet, despite this shock in England, the style did not mark the first sights of Classical imagery in English dress. Nevertheless, the Neoclassical inspiration in English dress did undergo a radical transformation with the adoption of the new gown. Regency women quickly embraced the fashion of the *Merveilleuses*, relishing its understated elegance and bodily freedom. In England, where taste had long been more conservative, tailors raised the bustline and added fullness to the gown to alleviate over-exposure and immodesty.[151] But, despite these variations, English women identified with the clean, simple line of the garment, thereby embracing the influence of this hot society.

Although the *Merveilleuses* and their fashion dominated fashion culture through the Directory, their dominance did not thrive without criticism. While passersby and cartoons often joked of mistaking these young ladies for prostitutes, more serious criticism revolved around concerns of indecency. Fears of fashion's violation of the realm of modest domesticity mounted among the public and especially in new journals, like the *Journal de Paris*, which asks in 1798, "Haven't you seen at spectacles, balls, in society, a crowd of figures, who are neither marble nor bronze, even more nude than these statues?"[152] Although this particular commentator voices a somewhat sarcastic tone, many critics voiced their concerns through the question of health. Doctors, social observers, and writers often scoffed at the *Merveilleuses* and their followers, arguing that "these Athenians will die from tuberculosis in a few years for having danced in Paris in the month of January, as if they were dancing in the month of August on the banks of

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[150] Found in Marion P. Bolles, "Empire Costume: An Expression of the Classical Revival," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 2 (1944): 193.
[151] Sacheverell Sitwell, *Gallery of Fashion*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1949), 2.
[152] E. Claire Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 200.

2.17 Muslin gown with sleeves and shawl (1800)

Eurotas."[153] While evidence does not indicate a rise in the death rate of young girls during the Directoire period, the multitude of these health concerns exemplifies one of many ways in which the fear of female immodesty manifested.

Throughout to the Directoire period and into the Empire Period, protestations to these fashions on account of health and propriety did not go unnoticed as the conservatism of Napoleon's regime dictated a modification of the radical form of dress. As Anglomania swept through France in 1797, as the extreme dress of the *Merveilleuses* frequently proved impractical, and as Napoleon consolidated his power in France, the high-waisted, body-revealing gown transformed into a more decorative garment with more coverage. To accommodate the gown and its new-found bodily freedom, women often paired them with spencers, fichus, pelisses, or cashmere scarves. When Napoleon declared himself First Consul in 1799, the trend toward conservatism in dress elicited the Napoleonic regime as the new hot society of fashion. In fact, the high waistline of female dress came to identify as the *empire* waist, taking its name from the Napoleonic Empire. However, the hot society proved not to be the Napoleonic court, but its value of *taste*.

[153] Ibid, 201.

In women's dress, the Empress Josephine's image inspired fashionable women in England and France. On the other hand, her influence did not have the same quality of awe and captivation as did Marie Antoinette's in previous decades. More often, the extravagance of Josephine's dress caused concern by the public and even by her husband, who would often lament that, "It is quite enough for me to have your personal debts to pay, without being compelled to make presents to my aides-de-camp, in order to prevent your rag-merchants from proclaiming all over Paris that their wives owe them money,"[154] drawing reference to the debts the Josephine incited among her fashion followers.

2.18 Gown belonging to Empress Josephine, muslin, lace, and crystal detail (1810)

Despite Napoleon's objection to his wife's collection of luxurious fashions, he closely identified his own image with an aesthetic of splendor. However, the image of Napoleon's court, based on dual aristocratic formality and republican discipline, rested not only on luxury, but also on refinement and practicality in dress.[155] As such, the Napoleonic court exuded a more complicated command over fashion than the court of Louis XVI did. Especially after Napoleon's marriage to his second wife, Marie-Louise in 1810, the prestige of Napoleonic fashion, found more of its authority in republican virtue and taste than in luxury. Although the impression on fashion of the Napoleonic court dress proved extremely influential, "[fashion] plates began to be produced with the sole object of

[154] Miss Pardoe, *Episodes of French History; Consulate and the First Empire*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 219.
[155] Mansel, *Dressed to Rule*, 92.

showing the clothing worn by persons of taste," and not by those in the court.[156] In addition, , the settings of fashion plates more frequently took place outside the court, and instead of titles like "Courtly fashions" women read titles like "A Woman of Taste."

Subsequently, taste became the name of the fashion game. The changes in fashion print and in the Napoleonic court promoted an emphasis on an inherent fashion *taste* of each individual wearer, versus the outdated goal of *imitation* of court dress. Taste contributed to fashion democratization in that it stresses an innate quality and sensibility of its wearer, regardless of wealth or class.[157] Taste does not discriminate, but emanates from the wearer's personality. As such, it defines an intrinsic virtue grounded in nature. Eventually, it evolved into the legacy of Napoleonic fashion as it moved into the Nineteenth-Century[158] and accounted for the principal meaning of dress. Emerging partly from Napoleonic virtue, this newly formed concept of taste and its association with nature, rather than class, became the primary topic of fashion journals, the primary opinion leader, the hot society, and the cultural meaning of dress. In this sense, the culmination of Revolutionary fashion into one simple concept, taste, acts as a driving cultural force of fashion and history.

2.19 Fashion plate from *Gallery of Fashion*, (1794)

[156] Holland, *Hand Coloured Fashion Plates,* 27.
[157] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 950.
[158] Mansel, *Dressed to Rule*, 94.

From the cultural assignation of court fashion and its opinion leaders, such as Marie Antoinette, Rose Bertin, and Queen Charlotte, to the advent of fashion publication and print culture, to the rise of hot societies, like the *Merveilleuses* and the Napoleonic Regime, and to the development of taste as a key fashion concept, The Fashion System proves its reciprocal relationship with political culture. First, French and British court culture's reflection of status through the luxury and space of its fashion comprises its preeminence over political meaning of Eighteenth-Century fashion. Moreover, the emergence of Marie Antoinette and Rose Bertin in France and Queen Charlotte and the rural aristocracy in England as not only political leaders, but key fashion leaders distinguishes their cultural fashion significance. Likewise, print culture and its evolution are telling of fashion and its influence in the political heat of Revolutionary society. And, as the Revolution began and swept through France and reverberated in England, political and fashion leaders arose out of revolutionary feminism, in the case of Méricourt, and republican policy, in the case of David. The popularity of their personal fashion aesthetic and their relationship with culture demonstrates their importance in assigning cultural value to the clothing they wore and inspired and in developing a modern system of cultural dissemination. Finally, the sartorial prominence of hot societies of the post-Revolutionary period and their contribution to democratic ideals of taste distinguish them as crucial political and fashion players.

Thus, diverging from court dominance, fashion publications, opinion leaders, and hot societies comprise the modern Fashion System. They affected the modern culture that emerged from the Revolution by assigning meaning to fashion and by transferring this meaning through their aesthetic. Yet, what are these meanings? The meaning lays, most notably, in taste and the formation of modern identity.

Chapter Three

Taste, Identity, Culture

> The opinions of men, with respect to government, are changing fast in all countries. The revolutions of America and France have thrown a beam of light over the world, which reaches into man. The enormous expense of government has provoked people to think by making them feel; and when once the veil [of monarchy] begins to rend, it admits not of repair.[159]

In 1791, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*—rebuttal to Edmund Burke's *On the Revolution*—instantly becomes a definitive political literature of the Revolution. His defense of the growing French movement sends both France and England into a debating frenzy. In stating his case against Burke, he insists that aristocratic vestiges be at once shed by both Englishmen and Frenchmen. While his insistence is figurative, France and England do take his advice in a literal sense. Whether or not Paine realized the implications of his comparison, he inextricably links the world of sensation with the world of ideas. Ideas, according to Paine, cause revolutions. But what causes and spreads ideas? Sensations. Before an individual begins to think, she must feel. As the veil of monarchy "begins to rend," aristocratic clothing faced its own deterioration; as the veil of republican dress, with its free-flowing drapery and purity of hue, superseded the vestiges of the aristocracy, so too ideals of a new era began to take form. Paine's conception of the "beam of light," with the power to move minds quite literally found foundation in dress and the sensory world.

[159] Thomas Paine, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine,* Philip S. Foner ed., (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 320.

Fashion players like Marie Anoinette, Rose Bertin, and Queen Charlotte, revolutionary heroes, the Napoleonic court, and especially fashion publications comprised some of the various sources of this "light" from the pre-Revolutionary era to the end of Napoleon's reign. Their influence reached far and wide and crossed all class boundaries in one way or another. After reaching an understanding of the sources of light, the light itself takes form in "taste." As hinted in previous chapters, the notion of taste accounted for these players' influence on the cultural signification of fashion. Taste is, in many respects, the foundation of fashion in that it imparts a garment or object with a certain degree of desirability. It is the vehicle through which these fashion players assign meaning to fashion. Because it depends on the desire of the consumer, taste both reflects and shapes cultural ideals of a particular society.

Modernity is one of the most significant cultural ideals which shares this reciprocal relationship with taste. While most of Paine's readers associate the Revolution with the history of Western government, the Revolution was a pivotal moment in cultural history. Modern identity, as a part of this cultural history, underwent a deep, transformative evolution which is undeniably connected with Revolutionary fashion. The construction of modernity and personal identification within modern culture is bound in paradox: it relies on individual pleasure and differentiation, yet also entails the development of the individual into a new kind of conformative being. This individual and social being both rely on a degree of consumption based not on Eighteenth-Century idealism of status, but based on a democratic ethic.[160] These paradoxes and their perpetuation through revolutionary fashion follow the trajectory of taste.

First, leading up to the Revolution, taste reached a definitive classification as a cultural ideal. Following a recognition of the problematic nature of Eighteenth-Century taste, a more modern notion of taste and its relation to the body formed. Although the Eighteenth-Century

[160] Sheryl Kroen, "The Political History of the Consumer," *The Historical Journal* 47, (2004): 714.

ideal of *luxe* [luxury] and the subsequent ideal of *goût* [taste] contrast, the transition from one to another follows a culturally significant trajectory weighted in politics and social structure, much like the Revolution itself. Furthermore, various players of the Fashion System inevitably assigned fashion objects with taste. In addition to fashion publications, the *sans culottes, Merveilleuses,* and especially the Napoleonic regime assigned taste as a culturally significant fashion motive. Paradoxically, these groups could not have done so had aristocratic players, such as Marie Antoinette, not paved the way for taste. At the same time that these figures shaped taste, taste also shaped them.

Also, its emergence right before the Revolution not only established the Fashion System, but it also established modern identity. Taste as a cultural concept developed and thrived as Eighteenth-Century ideals of aristocracy and primogeniture declined. As taste does not consist of a clear-cut nature in the same way that luxury does, this new ideal of fashion defines the "essential opposition between the two motives of decoration and modesty as the most fundamental fact in the whole psychology of modern clothing."[161] This definition embodies the modern peril of identity: the struggle between the social self and the individual. Furthermore, the styles emerging from the Revolution and their representation by figures of the Fashion System reflect this condition of modern fashion and modern identity. Thus, with the materialization of modern taste, modern fashion identity was born.

The birth of modern fashion and the aesthetics with which it is associated personify a connection between modern identity and democratization. Dress is highly political by nature. The political nature of dress was nothing new with the development of taste in the pre-Revolutionary years. Rather, the political nature of dress experienced a profound transformation

[161] J.C. Flugel, "The Fundamental Motives," *The Fashion Reader* 2, Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun ed., (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 171.

with taste. The emphasis on taste as the ideal of fashion created "this new class of self-declared citizens, whose sober, frugal 'inconspicuous consumption' differentiated them from their foppish, wasteful, aristocratic counterparts, and because of this, explicitly entitled them to rule by the early Nineteenth Century."[162] At the same time, taste carried on the tradition of social demarcation. It did so by transforming the value of social distinction from birth to rank and by maintaining a degree of fluctuation in fashion based on the trickle-down nature of dress. As taste maintained the function of social distinction, it also transformed the significance of this distinction, thereby further transforming identity. Moreover, while taste remained very much in a social sphere of competition, it also involved a degree of individuality. By focusing on the natural human form, emphasizing the importance of individual pleasure, and by shifting the connection between the body, fashion, and art, fashion contributed to the development of the modern individual. Thus, by shaping both modern identity of the individual in modern society and in a democratic society, fashion and ideas about fashion determined the connection between modernity and culture, thereby driving the history of the era. Yet, before the historian can begin to understand the ways that fashion of taste cultivated modern identity and culture, the historian must first define taste. What is taste and from where did it emerge?

What is Taste?

The construction of identity through clothing was not a novelty of the French Revolution. Rather, the novelty of Revolutionary clothing, besides the Fashion System, consists of the sartorial cultivation of modern taste. By the Revolution, the taste revolution had already been born of Enlightenment. In his 1790 philosophical treatise on aesthetics and reason, Immanuel Kant articulates a coherent definition of taste:

[162] Kroen, "The Political History of the Consumer," 714.

> A judgment of taste is based on a concept. But this concept does not allow us to cognize or prove anything concerning the object because it is intrinsically indeterminable and inadequate for cognition; and yet the same concept does make the judgment of taste valid for everyone, because the basis that determines the judgment lies, perhaps, in the concept of what may be considered the supersensible substrate of humanity.[163]

Through his flowery, philosophical language, Kant discerns a basic notion: within each object lies an inherent quality of taste. For Kant and the culture from which he sprang, the object, in this case a garment, does not exist without a degree of taste. For the social observer, taste defines the object's essence. The existence of taste comprises an objective truth; yet, the degree of taste with which an object associates is a largely subjective judgment. These dual objective and subjective qualities of taste stem, respectively, from the mere existence of taste as a fact and in the equal capacity of each observer to make her own, distinct judgment. Regardless of power or status, each beholder possesses an equal power to determine the tastefulness of a garment. While the existence of taste in an object remains its essence, the wearer maintains the freedom to hold a personal opinion about what the essence is. While fashion leaders or writers may guide or sway this opinion, the essence of taste is ultimately subject to the individual.

At the same time, this essence is not entirely definable. Part of the indefinable quality rests in individual subjectivity of taste. Since many individuals may share or deny judgments of taste, its quality can never truly reach a consensus. Moreover, the very concept of taste does not subsist in a concrete form. Taste is elusive by nature. As such, human knowledge and intuition inevitably fail in a complete determination of a particular taste. Mercier describes the nature of taste in less philosophical terms than Kant when he explains that the concept is the "True politeness [which] has conquered the false…the outcome of common sense, neither embarrassing nor embarrassed…without tactless candour or intolerable concealment…[it depends] not on

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[163] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, J.M.D. Meiklejohn trans., (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 57.

preposterous set rules, but on a natural and reasoned inclination to please."[164] Mercier sees taste as a natural outcome of reason. And, like Kant, he agrees that taste is neither overt nor fixed, but it is subtle and intangible. Likewise, by explaining it in terms that the average Parisian, Londoner, townsfolk, or country woman would understand, Mercier elucidates the universality of taste which Kant defines.

Universality, natural inclination, substrate of humanity. These qualities of taste compose a nature so simplistic, and yet so revolutionary. These modern concepts both bred the Revolution and outlasted the Revolution. By the time a preference for taste emerged with the simple, lightweight chemise gown in Le Brun's 1783 portrait, without its "preposterous set rules," it proved incongruous with the Eighteenth-Century reality of taste (which really was not taste at all.) Even a decade before Marie Antoinette's portrait contributed to the sartorial realization of taste—only to be realized even more with the post-1794 empire-waisted gown—fashion commentators lamented a divide between taste and fashion:

> Fashion said one day to Taste,
> You must be crazy about me,
> Because I make you shine everywhere
> By the forms that I vary.
> "Stop kidding yourself," he responded sharply.
> "You have no right to my thanks:
> I mean it;
> You make everything extravagantly,
> And nothing with discernment.
> Do you offer us agreeable forms?
> Never. Everyone takes pleasure in your wildness.
> But I find you unbearable.
> You always do everything in excess.
> By you bad taste circulates…"
> Taste would have depicted all her faults,
> If Fashion hadn't departed in anger.
> She declared herself his bitter enemy,
> And since that time she has set all our heads a-spinning.[165]

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[164] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 92.
[165] "Taste and Fashion—A Fable," *Almanach historique et raisonnè,* (1777). Found in Jones, *Sexing La Mode,* 73.

According to this satirist, Eighteenth-Century standards of fashion, whether circulated in the court or among the most common of wearers, find their sources in excess and madness. While the writer does not yet grasp an answer to the problem of Eighteenth-Century taste, he does reach an understanding of the problem: luxury.

With its aesthetics of heavy silk brocades, demanding physical presence of the panniers and wig heights, and layer upon layer of expensive French lace and embroidered detail, *luxe* defined the ideal of Eighteenth-Century culture. In his effort to define and provide reason to all world phenomena in the mid-Eighteenth Century, Denis Diderot ponders in the *Encyclopèdie* that,

> We rightly say, of an infinite number of objects, that they are luxuries; but what is this luxury that we attribute so unerringly to so many objects? Here is a question that can be answered with satisfactory precision only after those who apply the word *luxury* most accurately have a discussion that they have not had, are not perhaps even in a position to have.[166]

Like many of his contemporaries, such as the writers of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, Diderot comes to the simple conclusion that *luxe* defines "an excessive sumptuousness, be it in clothing, in furniture, or in dining."[167] From Diderot to the common dictionary to the average European, *luxe*, by definition, denoted a degree of extravagance.

3.1 *robe à la française*, 1760
This courtly fashion reveals the height of eighteenth-century extravagance.

Yet, the "veil of monarchy" which Paine condemns embodied so much more than mere "sumptuousness". Unlike taste, luxury embodied not a natural inclination to please and flatter oneself, but a

[166] Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods," 89.
[167] Ibid.

desire to assert status through bodily presence. Since the body consumes a greater physical space than status or social agency alone, the courts of the Eighteenth-Century utilized this bodily manifestation of space through fashion to claim social standing. On the meaning of Rococo symbolism, Jean Starobinski describes this basic, yet transitional ideal as "the new lifestyle [of the mid-Eighteenth Century], where traditional rules of etiquette were to weigh less heavily, the great aesthetic categories, under supervision of the Academies, still succeeded in imposing their law."[168] In an age when aristocratic authority increasingly diminished its veil slowly but surely receded, a show of luxury on the body become ever more essential for the maintenance of social order. In Beaumarchais' 1778 play, *The Marriage of Figaro*, the sexual ruses of the characters, on which the plot focuses, rest in their ability to play "dress-up" and disguise themselves as nobility with the use of costume. By the end, Figaro laments the illusion of aristocratic appearance; he denounces the Count with his politically driven criticism that,

> Because you are a great nobleman you think you are a great genius. Nobility, fortune, rank, position! How proud they make a man feel! What have *you* done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born—nothing more! For the rest—a very ordinary man![169]

As Figaro, and his audience for that matter, wonders how the Count can successfully fool his subjects and sexual conquests, he concludes that the success lies in "the midst of ceremony," otherwise defined as *luxe*.[170] However, by the Revolution, this assertion of status through the veil of aristocracy no longer proved successful. Yet, before that point, for those without Figaro's personal wealth, evidence of social and personal respectability proved nearly impossible. The most effective manner through which to not only reflect, but assert social dominance was through the feeling of luxury.

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[168] Starobinski, "Rococo and Neoclassicism, 14-15.
[169] Beaumarchais, *The Marriage of Figaro,* John Wood trans., (London: Penguin, 1964), 199.
[170] Ibid.

And, as this notion of *luxe* in dress presented a problem to the changing political climate that valued the self-made man, like Figaro, "Fashion became the *de facto* answer to the problem which none of the Eighteenth-Century writers on taste could solve: that is, how to find a commonly agreed, aesthetic standard …based upon universal and unchanging rules."[171] Whereas *luxe* demonstrated a rigid definition of identity, the much more complex, elusive *goût*—which both Kant and Mercier characterize—established a much more complex, elusive, and modern identity, which neoclassical fashion not only reflected, but constructed too.

Modern Fashion, Modern Identity

With the advent of modern culture and its various complexities, the fashion with which modern culture associates also contains many complexities. Although the complexities of modern fashion arose out of Revolutionary fashion, they did not form an explicit concept until the Twentieth Century. In the 1950s, Georg Simmel popularized the basis of modern fashion theory. Simmel defines fashion as the individual manifestation of the ultimate contradiction of modernity. He argues that the dualistic nature of fashion as "the demand for social adaptation…and the need for differentiation" comprises "the vital conditions of fashion as a universal phenomenon in the history of our [human] race."[172] Simmel's development of this fashion theory, which finds foundation in the rise of taste, is inherently twofold. It implies the need of the individual to assert social standing and some kind of social superiority, whether that superiority denotes work ethic, birth, or accomplishment. At the same time, the motivation for tasteful fashion fulfills a highly personal (and modern) desire of individual pleasure. This

[171] Jukka Gronow, "Taste and Fashion: The Social Function of Fashion and Style," *Acta Sociologica* 36 (1993): 94.
[172] Simmel, "Fashion," 543.

pleasure differentiates each person from society, helping the individual form her own unique identity. And, this motive of pleasure demands precedence for the sake of pleasure itself. Taste's contribution to this modern theory of fashion has roots in the aesthetic changes of the period and proves fashion as an active historical force.

The Social Being

3.2 *Empress Josephine*, by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, 1805
The Empress poses in a dignified manner with her shawl artfully on display.

> Women are less extravagant in talk; you no longer hear the words 'delicious,' 'astounding,' 'incredible' in every sentence, instead there is a sort of affected simplicity, which admits no extremes, whether of admiration or displeasure; distastes and trivialities are greeted with the same exclamation.[173]

In his observations, Mercier recognizes a dual force of modernity and fashionability. At the same time that Mercier articulates that fashion, whether in mannerisms or in dress, expresses two

[173] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 62.

dualistic forces, he also observes that fashion in the 1780s diverges from Eighteenth-Century extravagance. However, the tenets of taste did not completely disengage all tradition of eighteenth-century motivation of *luxe*. *Goût* was revolutionary not because it entirely deviated from *luxe*, but because it enhanced upon and complicated its meaning. Before the complexities of *goût*, the ability to consume luxury fashion goods found meaning in "a society of orders in which a steep hierarchy of rank (*grands*, nobles, bourgeois, artisans, farmers, peasants, and so on) corresponded to an equally steep hierarchy of appearance."[174] While taste was not as steeped in this society of orders as was luxury in the Eighteenth Century, taste was not without a hierarchy of appearance. Such is the case with the cashmere shawl, which appeared in France and England as a popular fashion item during Napoleon's 1798-1799 Egyptian campaigns.[175] Whether made of genuine cashmere or imitation material, this style epitomized taste. As French and British manufactories began to reproduce the shawls for mass consumption, their popularity grew and women of all classes began to refer to themselves not as "well dressed," but as "beautifully draped."[176] Whether the garment constituted a "Kashmiri" shawl, a "Parisian" shawl, or a "provincial" shawl, all women could don the delicate, flowing, and malleable garment over their empire gowns.[177] Its simplicity, ease, and universality allowed the garment a high degree of taste.

Yet, the degree of taste with which the shawl shined on the female body did not separate itself completely from the purpose of "decoration." According to Simmel, Flugel, and other sociologists, the purpose of decoration as a motive of fashion lies in the social communication of the wearer; this communication inevitably entails social status and wealth.[178] The social

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[174] Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods," 89.
[175] Hiner, "Lust for *'Luxe*," 76.
[176] Bolles, "Empire Costume," 195.
[177] Hiner, "Lust for *'Luxe,'"* 78.
[178] Anne Boultwood and Robert Jerrard, "Ambivalence, and Its Relation to Fashion and the Body," *Fashion Theory* 4, (2000): 303.

significance of the shawl demonstrates this form of communication. According to fashion historian Better Werther, "an 1806 inventory of the Empress Josephine's possessions evaluated her 45 shawls at 36,000 francs, a Rubens at 1,500 and a Leonardo *Virgin and Child* at 1,000."[179] If the Empress's own personal value of the wealth of her shawls does not indicate their societal value, than the material itself does. Cashmere is costly (especially by Revolutionary-era standards), handwoven textile which required expensive importation from the East. As such, they were "a dress of that period extremely rare and highly in request," according to Madame de Tallien in 1799.[180] As such, a "hierarchy of appearance" maintained a facet of taste through the quality of material of the shawl. Although all women attained the ability to don one, the Kashmiri, Parisian, and provincial quality of the garment became a demarcation of status.

However, where the social value of the shawl and other costly garments differs from Eighteenth-Century values is that the goal of demarcation shifted from rank to the ability to consume. As aristocratic authority fell from favor and the Revolution lifted the political veil, sartorial demarcation focused on show of economic productivity, rather than show of noble birth. Although the French silk industry experienced some devastation during the years of the French Revolution, the luxury market did not disappear with the French Revolution, but thrived; the growth in demand of industrial labor in the luxury industries of northern, northeastern, eastern, and southern France—which resulted in the industrial employment accounting for roughly 13 percent of the total population—exemplifies this general boom.[181] Yet, since distaste for aristocratic dress dominated England and France, the social value of self-earned wealth, rather than status, fed the luxury market.

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[179] Hiner, "Lust for *'Luxe,"* 78.
[180] Ingersoll, "Costumes in the Time of Napoleon," 253.
[181] Olwen Hufton, "Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 9, (1975): 4.

3.3 *Gallery of Fashion*, 1800

Unbound from the restrictions of sumptuary laws—which contained the purpose of separating the aristocracy from the lower sorts, but which lost authority as spending power grew among all class levels—a woman of fashion maintained the ability to keep up with trends through her wealth, rather than her noble rank.[182] An indication of this general shift appears in fashion magazines that more frequently depicted women of everyday street or country style than women of the court. Some critically challenged this element of taste as frivolous and unworthy of the wealth it circulates, such as fashion periodical critic Elisabeth Caminer Turra who laments fashion as "a futile matter in itself, but which is an essential part of luxury and of interest to commerce."[183] While Caminer express grief over the reality that fashion relates directly to a show of wealth and to industriousness, others praise this association. A writer for the *Toilette des dames* associates accumulation of tasteful fashion with the success of a wealthy household:

> Women who are attentive to their dress and who give assiduous attention to what they wear carry this same exactitude into their domestic affairs and into the care of their families. Young women who neglect their appearances and who are little occupied with the cares of fashion thereby manifest a disorderly spirit little equipped to occupy the details of running a household, little taste, little amiability; they will be negligent in all things.[184]

Implicit in his argument is the proper accumulation and maintenance of wealth. For, the duty of a good mother and wife consists of a display of her family's wealth, not lineage, on her person. And, since chemise and empire gowns were easy to maneuver in terms of physical movement

[182] Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth* Century, Richard Bienvenu trans., (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 87-92.
[183] Sama, "Liberty, Equality, Frivolity!" 393.
[184] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 965.

(such as that of a working woman), yet could include varying degrees of luxury in material and trimming, the garment directly enabled the perpetuation of this cultural signification of taste.

Although the cashmere shawl did not fade from fashion in the nineteenth century, and even maintains prestige in twenty first-century fashion, another indication of taste as a mark of social distinction is its ever-changing temperament. Building on Simmel's sociological theory, Jukka Gronow postulates of fashion that, "it has been typical to think that fashions unite members of a social class while demarcating classes from on another;" yet she adds to this duality the idea of how taste moves.[185]

> The dynamics of taste pattern has been understood to result from the fact that once the lower classes have succeeded in adopting a new style or mode of social conduct, the upper classes have hastened to abandon it in order to find new styles to mark their superiority and distinctiveness.[186]

According to this theory of taste, fashion fluctuates based on the need to distinguish status, whether that status is based on rank or wealth.

Eighteenth-Century *luxe* continually transformed. It constantly changed in order to assert the waning political power of the aristocracy. The ever-widening hips and every-growing hair of eighteenth-century courtly fashion evolved toward the goal of consuming more physical space. Furthermore, Eighteenth-Century trappings constantly changed for the sake of superfluity, as the extremities of texture and size demonstrate.[187] Social distinction became associated with and driven by the motivation of size. In 1754, *The Connoisseur* observes that female fashion constantly reinvented itself in an effort of the nobility to maintain, with the body, a political space, as "at one time [the hoop] was sloped from the waist in a pyramidal form; at another it was bent upwards like an inverted bow, by which two angles, when squeezed up on each side,

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[185] Gronow, "Taste and Fashion," 95.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods," 93.

came in contact with the ears."[188] Even has the hip-width of the panniers decreased and the volume transferred to long trains in the 1750s and 60s, change in fashion occurred in relation to the "superiority and distinctiveness" of *luxe.*[189]

Similarly, fashion of taste maintained a steady evolution. In 1789, the *Magasin des modes* remarks that the novelty of fashionable items gives them their popularity:

> Assuredly, the hats which we presented last year were prettier than those in this issue, but one must say, at present they are gone; and if these new hats, although uglier, are preferable, it is because they are more novel, because they are *de la mode*.

Goût fluctuated just as *luxe* did in the Eighteenth Century. While many contemporaries insisted that the reason for this fluctuation had changed since the fall of aristocratic fashion, citing the desire for tasteful fashions or a natural cycle as reasons, the purpose of social demarcation continued to be a reason for fashion fluctuation. However, the nature of this social demarcation which determines continual innovation did transform. The continual changes in fashion for the purpose of social distinction no longer focused on volume and extravagance, but changes occurred along a trajectory of establishing not noble rank, but wealth and individual worth. By maintaining some tradition of the Eighteenth Century of clothing as social distinguisher; and yet by changing the ideal of this social distinction from rank to merit, taste and clothing had a direct impact on Revolutionary society in that it enlivened new values of social rank. Because clothing created a sensory world through which these changes manifested and formed, the clothing of taste served to both reflect and perpetuate revolutionary ideals of changing social values and shaped the social identity of its wearers.

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[188] Kimberly Chrisman, "Unhoop the Fair Sex: The Campaign Against the Hoop Petticoat in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, (1996): 13.
[189] Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe,* 144.

The Individual

In contrast to the significance of the social value of tasteful fashions, one of the most significant of these changes in fashion focused on the status of the individual as its own, elevated entity. One of the defining characteristics of modernity that emerged from the French Revolution was the birth of the individual as a distinct social, political, cultural unit.[190] And, contrary to the purpose of taste as a mark the wearer's position in society, whether that occurred in the rigid hierarchy of the Eighteenth Century or the more capitalist society of the Revolutionary era, the essence of taste occurred in individual pleasure. Although the individual can never be fully considered apart from a social context, the revolution of taste was indeed revolutionary in that it claimed prestige on behalf of the individual and her internal desires. Simmel's theory of modern fashion and its connection to taste is twofold. On the one hand it assumes fashion as an inherently external form of communication of cultural prestige; yet, on the other hand, it "suggests that clothing fashion is the result of an endogenous, self-contained process characterized by the sequential adoption of clothing styles by successive social classes."[191] This element of taste, which also finds weight in the politics and social structure of the time, implicates taste as a true form of fashion because it includes an intrinsic, human quality removed from the influence of societal perceptions and cultural norms.[192]

As Rousseau and Enlightenment theorists developed conceptions of the individual, as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* classified that individuals are entities with "natural and inalienable rights," and Napoleon emerged as a leader as a triumph of his own merit, fashion

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[190] Feher, "The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity," 5.
[191] Chrisopher M. Miller, Shelby H. McIntyre, and Murali K. Mantrala, "Toward Formalizing Fashion Theory," *Journal of Marketing Research* 30, (1993): 144.
[192] Ibid.

too contributed to the development of the individual as a cultural theme.[193] For the majority of the Eighteenth Century, a notion of the individual was not fully developed, either in a broader cultural context or in fashion. In 1712, Addison articulates a vague conception of individual motivation for fashion in terms of "Greatness." According to him, the rhetoric of nature and the purpose of individual fashion find a strong connection; the fluctuating nature of fashion rests in its physical largess of the wearer and finds reflection in nature:

> By *Greatness*, I do not only mean the Bulk of any single Object, but the Largeness of a whole View, considered as one entire Piece. Such are the Prospects of an open Champion Country, a vast uncultivated Desart, of huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and Precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters, where we are not struck with the Novelty or Beauty of the Sight, but with that rude kind of Magnificence which appears in many of those stupendous Works of Nature.[194]

For the majority of the eighteenth-century, the individual's representation of this physical greatness, which "has a kindly Influence on the Body, as well as the Mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten Imagination, but are able to disperse Grief and Melancholly," accomplishes these functions of individuality only in regard to the individual's social grouping.[195] This mirror of the individual's body to naturally dominating landscapes links individuality in dress with the individual's social domination.

And, while the forms of taste beginning in 1794 did continue to embody natural forms, they were quite different in their aesthetics and contrasted with previous notions of individuality. While the association between the individual, nature, and fashion remained, the Body became the ideal image of this association with nature. Rather than Mountains, Precipices, or Waters, taste modeled individuality off of an appreciation for the human form. Imbibed with implications of democracy, simplicity, and naturalism, the ideal of the Grecian body with its soft curves, light

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[193] *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, Nineteenth Century Europe: Sources and Perspectives from Hsitory,* Michael S. Melancon and John C. Swanson ed., (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 4.
[194] "Addison on the Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 390.
[195] Ibid, 389.

form, and relaxed ease of movement became the inspiration for the close-fitting, yet loose silhouette of the Directory and Empire periods. The extremely personal space of the body and its connection to the Grecian ideal of *la belle nature* further individualized fashion by turning fashion into an ever-more personal matter. The development of a deeper connection between the individual, nature, and fashion fostered a respect for the body, as sheer, lightweight fabrics of muslin and gauze were "more calculated to display, than veil the contours of their person," as a male observer notes in 1806.[196] This ideal of fashion and the styles it produced gave women license to don garments that highlighted the natural features their own bodies with chemise gowns, Grecian drapery, and internalized confidence.

Moreover, this shifted focus from an oppressive worldly nature to a personal bodily nature liberated the wearer and her body. Many saw and felt this transformation to a highly physical degree. By 1798, observers and reporters felt this liberation as they ushered in a new era of bodily freedom:

> The breast, free of any obstacle, free from defects [like hoops and corsets], attains the degree of growth and perfection necessary for the use to which nature destined it. Nature appears to prescribe the positioning of belts on Grecian gowns below the breast rather than at the waist, because a woman's bosom, which has the duties of maternity, requires a salutary support.[197]

As *L'Arlequin, ou Tableau des modes et des gouts* suggests, the notion that fashion should reflect the natural human form implies a degree of individual comfort. Unlike the "tactless candour and intolerable concealment" of aristocratic trappings, taste encouraged the display of natural form that allowed the proper physical development of the wearer's own body.

[196] Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 200.
[197] Ibid, 197.

The shift from the nature of Greatness to the nature of the Body demonstrates a pivotal moment in the appreciation of the individual form. Nonetheless, the Grecian body is not completely natural. Although it was based on nature, *la belle nature* still comprised a contrived ideal. The adoption of this aesthetic idealized the statuesque, straight-lined woman—a form with which few are biologically endowed. Toward the end of 1794, Mercier recalls how all women of taste "have modeled the form of their dress after that of Aspasia; bare arms, naked breasts, feet shod with sandals, hair turned in tresses around their heads by modish hairdressers, who study the antique busts."[198] Mercier's account reflects a dual mix of idealistic and natural beauty, thus turning nature into an ideal. By connecting idealization with nature and the body in this way, fashion now imparted a new focus on the body of the individual.

3.4 *Madame Charles Maurice de Talleyrand Périgord (Noël Catherine Verlée, 1761–1835)*, oil on canvas, 1808.

The natural figure of her body is clearly visible through the sheer fabric of her gown.

Furthermore, this ideal and its manifestations in dress served to develop a modern sense of individuality on the basis of pleasure. According to his consideration of taste, Kant reasons that one of the motivations of taste has no reason, but exists merely for the sake of itself. In his understanding of taste, he argues that, "Beauty is the form of finality in an object so far as perceived in it apart from the representation of an end."[199] Taste does not have an end, but is an end in itself. In this way, taste for taste's sake boils down to pleasure. And, in accordance with

[198] Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution*, 124.
[199] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 17.

Simmel's modern fashion theory, this pleasure centers on the individual.[200] With its air of delicate simplicity, physical comfort, and varying affordability, the aesthetic of neoclassical fashion aimed to please its wearers. Some critics regarded this interest in pleasure as frivolity, such as Caminer who mockingly insists that fashion is the manifestation of the

> desire to mix what is useful with what it pleasing, and it must be a truly good fortune to be able to say she is preparing an idleness for them that could *enchant* their minds, *leave some trace* in the depth of their hearts, and likewise give real value to a momentary distraction.[201]

Caminer finds that a justification for the momentary distraction that is fashion lays in the illusion that personal fulfillment through fashion has value. However, the development of individuality did exist in this very notion of personal fulfillment. Preceding the outbreak of the Revolution, this cultivation of individuality through personal pleasure reached realization in a 1785 issue of *Cabinet des modes*:

> Fashions are then less the fruits of satiety and of disgust, as the poets say, than they are the children of natural grace. Everyone wants to acquire the radiance with which people of taste shine; each person believes that it is their clothing which lends them this glow.[202]

The personification of fashion as the "children of natural grace" transforms fashion into a possession deeply personal with both physical and emotional attachment. In this way, fashion became an entity about much more than external communication; it became an entity of the individual. The understanding of fashion in modern terms not only resulted from this connection, but it also actively nurtured this connection. As such, individual pleasure both led to and resulted from the cultivation of neoclassical taste.

Yet, despite the acknowledgement of this cultivation of individuality, others, like Caminer, found other faults. For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that this "art of pleasing" degraded women, contributing to their objectification as creatures of men's desires; she

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[200] Gronow, "Taste and Fashion," 95.
[201] Sama, "Liberty, Equality, Frivolity!", 402.
[202] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 960.

furthermore charges women with the blame of allowing themselves to submit to such objectification.[203] Moreover, others perceived fashion as the failure of clothing and adornment to enhance one's God-given qualities, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who insists that "One can shine by one's clothing, but one can only please with one's person…The true triumph of beauty lies in shining by oneself [and so] love of fashion is in bad taste."[204] Whether or not Wollstonecraft's or Rousseau's points prove valid, an element of truth of the empowerment of the individual did take shape through fashion. Whatever the external response to a wearer of fashion, her internal response often consisted of not only a sense of pleasure, but also a self-elevation. This self-elevation and marker of individuality proceeded from the association between the body and art.

Pre-revolutionary and neoclassical fashions were not the first to stress the body as an art form. Rococo fashion did associate fashion and the body with art. In accordance with Rococo paintings and architecture, Rococo fashion stressed that art should "pleasantly deceive the eyes" by altering the body's appearance and masking its natural form.[205] The appearance of illusion and grandeur embody the relationship between art and the fashion body. In a 1746 diary entry, Mrs. Delany poetically illustrates the art of illusion when she recounts of "Miss Carpenter, Lord Carpenter's daughter [that] the prize of beauty is disputed with her by Lady Emily Lenox. She is indeed '*Like some tall stately tower;'* and the other is *'some Virgin Queen's delicious bower*."[206] The artistry of these ladies' bodies relies on their resemblance to grandiose structures, whether

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[203] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Carol H. Poston ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 61, 64.

[204] Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 945.
[205] Starobinski, "Rococo and Neoclassisim," 10.
[206] Mrs. Delany, *Autobiography,* 340.

natural or not. In this way, rhetoric of art and fashion assumes that a beautiful body appears as a structure that is greater than the human form and as a form that fools others.

On the other hand, the association between art and the neoclassical body took on a much more internalized rhetoric. Not only were "Our dressmakers are painters, and our hairstylists are artists," but individuals took on an even more personal view, "saying [that] they are making themselves into *Greeks* or *statues*, and that they *drape* themselves."[207] Through reading fashion literature, by consuming fashion goods, and by instilling them with personal meaning, women and girls, such as the ones that voiced this opinion, carried on the notion that "the art of fashion was an art of expressive individuation."[208] The experience of fashion and the body-as-art strongly associated with the physicality of Greek art. And, just as the purpose of art is to affect the soul, so too did fashion-as-art. Empress Josephine reveals the experience of many when she professes that, "The flowing lines and the shawl show the movement of my heart. My dancing heart and my breasts held in this bodice are for you, my love." The poetic quality of her profession of love to Napoleon illustrates the deep, personal connection between the wearer, fashion, and her consideration of herself as an art form. This fostering of personal artistry to such a personal degree, as well as the fulfillment of individual pleasure and association of nature and fashion through the body, both defined the dual nature of modern fashion and directly contributed to the development of modern individuality.

Identity comprises only one of many aspects of culture. And, the dualism of the social versus the individual self comprises only one of many aspects of identity. Gender, nationality, economic status, education. These entities play a crucial role in the determination of identity and take on characteristics of modernity as well. Yet, these qualities start first and foremost with the

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[207] Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 205-206.
[208] Ibid, 205.

external and internal self. The condition of modern identity is only the starting point of understanding modern culture. For this reason, questioning modern identity and its relation to fashion calls to mind many questions. For instance, the historian may ask how social values changed the course of the French Revolution, or how the French Revolution changed social values. As a cultural phenomenon of modernity and the Revolution, fashion and taste inevitably play a role. Through their neoclassical aesthetic and systematic fluctuation, they not only formed a modern value of social distinction based on personal merit in a consumer society—a transition from the previously held value of rank and birth—but they also perpetuated this social value through sensation. Taste also developed a concept of modern identity in a reverse manner: through individuality. The notion of the individual as its own entity with rights and freedoms was inextricably tied to politics, culture, and taste. Through taste, the individual developed the right to its natural form, the right to the pursuit of pleasure, and the right to personal beauty. In this way, the individual gained the right to individuality. Thus, through the cultivation of the social and the individual self, fashion cultivated a sense of modern identity. And, in this way, fashion of the French Revolution was not merely *determined by* revolutionary concepts, but it *determined* revolutionary concepts; for, as Paine says,

> The mind, in discovering truth, acts in the same manner as the eye acts in discovering objects; when once any object has been seen, it is impossible to put the mind back in the same condition it was in before it saw it.[209]

[209] Thomas Paine, *The Complete Writings*, 320.

Conclusion

The study of fashion history is not a revolutionary concept in itself. Countless works have been dedicated to fashion history, and, more specifically, to the fashion history of the French Revolution. However, for those outside the realm of fashion history, the notion of fashion as a decisive force of history does not regularly occur. At the same time, a fascination with historical costume persists. Even in popular culture, the hoops, corsets, and wigs of Eighteenth-Century luxury, especially those of Marie Antoinette, maintain a high degree of fascination. These trappings of aristocratic fashion retain the impact of both awe and wonder for the modern observer. They simultaneously impart an air of oppression and grandeur and a feeling of fancy and frivolity, as they seem so far removed from the vestiges of modern culture. And yet, they are not.

In looking at the outward progression of these aesthetics from Eighteenth-Century Rococo to Revolutionary fashions to Napoleonic styles in both France and England, it initially appears to make a sudden jump. The elongated, lightweight fashions of the Directoire sharply contrast in comparison to the outrageously wide, heavy fashions of the period directly previous. However, upon closer inspection, the transition from the abundantly large silhouette of the *robe à la Française* and *robe à l'Anglaise* to the smoothly voluminous *chemise à la reine* to the eventually body-contouring *robe à la Titus* reveals that the progression follows a logical trajectory. Furthermore, the study of these sartorial transformations and the times at which they occur reveal that they often occur before their respective cultural transformations. For instance, the revolution in fashion really began in the 1770s with the decline of panniers or in 1783 with Marie Antoinette's valorization of the simplistic chemise gown—before the official Revolution of 1789. In such cases, the aesthetic transformation established an aesthetic precedent which

precedes and then sets in motion the cultural or political shift. In this way, fashion becomes a dominant force that drives cultural change.

At the same time, to fully grasp how the aesthetic world influences culture, the historian must delve beyond this aesthetic world. For instance, the historian must explore just how cultural meaning disseminates through the visual world. This process occurs through the prestige of fashion players and the development of the Fashion System. The Fashion System is a modern phenomenon of these aesthetic transformations that occurred not in the formation of a link between fashion players and culture, but in that the origin and reception of these players changed. More often, rather than leaders of court culture, universally read publications, revolutionary figures, or radical groups who emerged from the public sphere took precedence. The increased multitude and acceptance of these characters, such as Thèroigne de Mèricourt or the fashion press or the concept of taste, entails the Fashion System and its impact on the development of not only modern fashion, but of modern culture as a whole.

Knowledge of the sartorial transformations of the Revolution (Chapter One) and the means by which their cultural significance transferred (Chapter Two) only form a part of the equation. The revolution in fashion occurs, most importantly, in the actual meaning of these shifts in fashion and cultural dissemination. This meaning boils down to modern identity (Chapter Three). Like the stylistic shifts and their dissemination through culture, modern identity proves to consist of complexities and complications. The chief complication is its dual nature of social assertion and individuality. Aesthetics affected the facet of social assertion in identity by maintaining its general purpose in fashion, but also by changing the implications of social values. Revolutionary fashions warranted the tradition of social distinction through dress, but changed the value of social distinction from rank and nobility to self-worth and consumer capabilities.

Simultaneously, fashions of the Revolution cultivated a modern sense of individuality through the evocation of nature, pleasure, and art. Although the components of social and individual identity are at odds, one does not exist without the other. This idea epitomizes the modern condition of identity which fashion took part in creating. In this way, fashion proves that, while it is a mirror which reflects the surface of culture, it is also a lens through which to understand the formation of culture.

Undeniably, modern popular culture shares a fascination with fashion and its distinct history. Time and time again, adaptations of Richardson novels shown on the big screen, biographical films of Marie Antoinette featuring Hollywood casts, and Jane Austen screenplays set in Regency backdrops resurface with popular acclaim. These films and their popularity are not merely plot-driven. To the modern audience, this history and its culture maintain prestige in their imaginative qualities. These qualities consist largely of an aesthetic fascination which assumes a degree of separation between the historical costume and the modern audience. Yet, it is the close connection between these fashions and their modern audience that accounts for curiosity. For, fashion of the French Revolution played more of a role in shaping modern culture and identity than common perception allows. That is not to say that fashion is the only or the most important historical phenomenon that shapes culture. But, perhaps through an understanding of how fashion creates and imitates history through its formation of an aesthetic world, fashion may become a part of the bigger historical picture, rather than just a reflection of this picture.

"Ah! What relics!!!" "Oh! What foolish new fashion!!!"
1797

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