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The Fashioned Body

Fashion, Dress and Modern Social
Theory

Joanne Entwistle

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Fashion, Dress and Social Change

In order to understand fashion it is necessary to consider what sort of social conditions are necessary for its emergence and what place it occupies within modern culture. Fashion has been embedded within the culture of Europe for many centuries, a feature of European modernity which, while seemingly trivial, 'touches on every issue – raw materials, production processes, manufacturing costs, cultural stability...and social hierarchy' (Braudel 1981: 311). As well as analysing the particular social conditions for its emergence, it is also important to consider how fashion has been thought and written about since it has attracted the attention of many writers, intellectuals, moralists, clergymen and historians who have discussed, criticized and often condemned fashion and in doing so, given us some idea of its place within the unfolding modern society. Fashion has been accorded significance in the development of class: as Fernand Braudel argues, 'subject to incessant change, costume everywhere is a persistent reminder of social position' (1981: 311). In particular, it has been seen to play a part in the challenge to old hierarchies and power structures made by a newly emerging capitalist class. Sump-tuary laws and discourses on luxury and taste illustrate the threat fashion posed to the old aristocratic order which saw its own power and influence diminished by the *nouveau riche*. Fashion has also been seen to articulate gender and sexual difference, gradually becoming associated with femininity and frivolity; a fact which may go some way to explaining why it has been attacked and condemned as well as marginalized within much social theory.

This chapter aims to give an historical account of fashion but not in terms of a straightforward chronology of fashionable dress as there are plenty of histories which give a detailed account of fashion changes over time. Instead, the chapter focuses on the recurring themes in the literature on fashion, exploring the relationship between fashion and social change, as well as suggesting how the body and its relationship to dress has been understood at different times. In order to do this some chronology is needed to explore the social, industrial and technical conditions required for the development of fashion at particular times. It is also necessary in order to situate debates about fashion, dress and the body within their historical context, to examine what historical circumstances frame these discourses at particular moments.

Fashion and Social Change

Before embarking on this historical excursion it is necessary first to consider what constitutes good fashion history, and indeed, to reflect on the relationship between fashion and society. Common sense dictates a link between the two but precisely how is it formed? What sort of society produces a fashion system or systems? What historical, social, technological and cultural conditions are necessary for the continual development of fashion? And what of fashion's relationship to the surrounding culture – does it, as some would argue, move with and reflect the *Zeitgeist*?

To a social theorist interested in the uses, meanings and practices of fashion and the relationship of fashion to everyday dress, fashion history is a source of some disappointment. Traditional accounts of fashion have tended towards description as opposed to analysis or explanation. These histories focus on the details of dress, the development of the buttonhole, the changing shape of the corset, the dropping and raising of hemlines, in order to provide a chronology of fashion and fashion change. Christopher Breward (1994), who is critical of such histories, argues that they neglect the context and meanings of dress. However, he does suggest that criticisms levelled at such histories are sometimes unwarranted and perhaps unfair. Fashion history arose out of art history as one means of authenticating paintings and this explains the emphasis on chronology and the attention to detail. He also notes that such rich and painstaking detail often provides invaluable documentary evidence. However, he argues that fashion needs to be placed in the context of historical, technological and cultural change and this requires going beyond the terms of aesthetics.

Breward (1994) is also aware of the problems of historical evidence used by historians of fashion, namely, visual and literary representations. While sculpture, paintings, engravings and literary texts are important sources of information, one needs to be careful when connecting the dress they describe with the prevailing culture. The interpretation of historical evidence requires sensitivity to the fact that representations of fashion and dress are not neutral descriptions. For example, paintings of royalty and gentry in their finery present idealized versions of dress, flatter the sitter and generally provide a representation of him or her congruous with their status and power. Representations of peasants might idealize peasant life, as in Romantic literature and painting, or might portray them as idle or debauched, as in the paintings of Brueghel.

A further problem that needs to be addressed when considering the relationship of fashion to society is that of causation. As argued in chapter 2, when fashion histories do try to explain and analyse fashion change there is a tendency for the historian to ask 'why' questions and seek out the causes of fashion by reference to some all-inclusive force: the *Zeitgeist*, the 'shifting erogenous zone', emulation. Of these, theories of emulation have been the most influential and have become very much embedded within accounts of fashion (McKendrick et al. 1983, Veblen 1953, Simmel 1971). For this reason, such theories will be given greater attention in the following chapter (and in chapter 7).

The question of why fashion changes as it does is answered by some authors with reference to *Zeitgeist* (e.g. Ditcher 1985). This approach argues that fashion responds to social and political changes, reflecting and reproducing these changes. However, there are numerous problems with this approach. One problem is that such accounts tend to over-simplify fashion which focuses on those styles that seem to correspond with social change while neglecting styles which do not. However, dress often fails to mirror social climate, as Bell (1976), Wilson (1985) and Steele (1985) argue. Valerie Steele suggests that fashion 'has an internal dynamic of its own that is only very gradually and tangentially affected by social change within the wider culture'; she goes on to say, 'fashion is not a power unto itself, but the principal dynamic of fashion is an internal one... Roots of change in fashion precede the great event – be it the French Revolution or the First World War' (1985: 5).

Events such as wars might contribute to an understanding of how and why certain styles get adopted on a wide scale but they do not explain how such styles originated. Fashion does not directly or simplistically reflect the times; the fact remains that it is always and everywhere situated within a society and culture. How then can one

analyse the relationship between fashion and social and cultural life in a way that avoids the problems discussed above? There are a number of significant questions to consider: what stimulated the development of fashion in Europe and what conditions have served to promote its spread to more and more of the population? To put it another way, what, if anything, can fashion tell us about the society in which it emerges? Can it shed any light on the forms of social order in modern society, for example, formations of class and gender or other forms of identity in modern society? **Given that clothing is intimately linked to the body, what is the relationship of fashion styles and fashion change to changing notions of embodiment and changing discourses on the body, appearance and identity?** There are no simple answers to these questions precisely *because* fashion is embedded within culture and cannot be isolated as an independent variable. Indeed, one further problem with fashion histories is that they are often prone to isolate fashion change from the rest of the society in which it is found. A sociological approach to the study of fashion is one that situates it within context and looks at the social, political, technological discourses and practices surrounding it, as well as at the prevailing aesthetic discourses framing it. Breward (1994) provides an excellent account of fashion which situates it firmly within a range of social and cultural developments, as does Steele (1988). The following summary and analysis of fashion owes much to their insights. In addition, numerous histories of consumption have brought together economics, politics and culture to suggest some of the ways in which the idea of fashion and the extension of fashionable commodities became an important feature in the development of modern European consumer culture. This literature focuses primarily on the eighteenth century, when a 'consumer revolution' is said to have occurred. However, the idea of fashion goes back much further and we will begin by discussing its emergence in medieval society.

The Beginnings of Fashion

Stylistic innovation has not always existed in Europe and it is by no means universal even today, despite the efforts of global capitalism to extend the reaches of its markets. Very particular social and historical conditions promoted the emergence of fashion and these conditions cannot be said to exist in all places at all times. The development of medieval and Renaissance court society, the expansion in trade across the globe, the emergence of new social classes, and the growth of city life, all played a part in the development of a system of dress based

upon continual change. While pinpointing exact dates is always difficult, if not impossible, it is possible to identify a number of general periods as significant in the development of fashion. One can go back as far as the fourteenth century to find the first traces of fashion although 'one cannot really talk of fashion becoming all-powerful before about 1700' (Braudel 1981: 316) and it is not until even later that fashion could be said to be widely available to all, working classes included. However, the *idea* of fashion may have been around longer: the medieval historian Orderic Vitalis (1075–1142) condemned what he saw as the foolishness of fashion, arguing that 'the old way of dressing has been almost completely thrown over by the new inventions' (in Braudel 1981: 317). Braudel argues, however, that Vitalis was probably exaggerating since the shape of clothes 'did not fundamentally alter' during this period and it was some centuries later before fashion as we would recognize it developed. One important contrast between the dress that emerged in medieval Europe and that worn by the 'ancients' is between 'fitted' and 'draped' clothes. Modern clothing falls into the first category and requires stitching, while dress in ancient civilizations was generally made out of simple lengths of fabric tied in elaborate ways. The draped cloth would have hung from the shoulder or the waist and was considered a mark of civilization: indeed tailored clothing was considered 'barbaric' in Roman times (Laver 1995).

The key to the emergence and development of fashion seems to be social change: fashion emerges in societies which have some social mobility rather than a fixed and stable class structure. For Braudel, as for other historians and writers on fashion (Bell 1976, Breward 1994, Wilson 1985), a society that remains stable is less likely to exhibit changes in dress than one which sees social mobility. It is for this reason that feudal society in Europe did not exhibit fashion as we know it today. As Braudel puts it, 'if a society remained more or less stable, fashion was less likely to change – and this could be true at all levels, even the highest in established hierarchies' (1981: 312). So, for example, in ancient China the dress of the mandarin remained constant from Peking to Szechuan for many generations (Braudel 1981) while the kimono hardly changed for centuries in traditional Japanese society, which Braudel describes as 'conservative'. Steele does not entirely agree with this argument: 'far from having "ancient" and "unchanging" costumes, many eastern cultures were characterized by intense (if restricted) fashion competition' (1988: 19). However she concedes that in both east and west during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the choice of clothing was restricted according to rank and that the movement of fashion was kept in

check because of a resistance to movement in hierarchical societies. It would therefore seem that limited stylistic change might occur in ancient societies but fashion in the modern sense of constant stylistic change exists only where there is more fluidity in the class hierarchy. Thus, as Steele argues, 'from the fourteenth century onwards, in both the courts and cities of Europe, there was an inexorable movement toward fashion-orientated behaviour' (1988: 19).

The fashionable society for Braudel is the society which desires to shape and modify the world, breaking with tradition and seeking the new. Innovation, which he argues is 'the source of all progress', stems from a 'restlessness which may express itself in such trifles as dress, the shape of shoes and hairstyles' (1981: 24). However, he does not see fashion as 'trivial', but notes that 'the future was to belong to the societies fickle enough to care about the changing colours, materials and shapes of costume' (1981: 323). This restlessness could be found initially in Italy, probably the birthplace of fashion 'where it is closely associated with the rise of cities – and with the rising middle class' (Steele 1988: 17); this according to Steele (1988), was part of a broader cultural Renaissance, although the court in Burgundy and France acquired important positions within the world of fashion around the same time (Bradley 1955). The demise of the feudal system during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries more or less coincided with the emergence of new merchant classes, whose wealth stemmed not from inherited land, but from trade, often on an international scale, with a concomitant effect on the promotion of fashion. It would seem that during the fourteenth century there was a sudden change in dress styles, particularly for men, and a speeding up of style changes among the nobility. Between 1300 and 1500 men's and women's dress continued to become looser and simpler, but there was also the beginnings of fitted dress, pulling in tighter to the body (Breward 1994). Around 1350 the tunic worn by upper-class men shortened dramatically and, together with tight hose on the legs, revealed more of the male form than ever before, much to the dismay of the old and the conservative, who considered it scandalously indecent (Braudel 1981). The chronicler Guillaume de Nangis notes how 'men, in particular, noblemen and their squires, and a few bourgeois and their servants, took to wearing tunics so short and tight that they revealed what modesty bid us to hide' (in Braudel 1981: 317).

This style of dress seems to have originated from military dress, which had developed a short plate of armour over the chest in place of long chain mail (Steele 1988). Women's dress also changed, fitting closer to the body and becoming quite elaborate, while a low *décolletage* provided further cause for outrage. The fact that clothing is by its

nature close to the body, the 'mere flesh' that is the seat of desires and longings both gastronomic and sexual, has not surprisingly given rise to much religious condemnation over the centuries. The body in Christian teachings is the source of distraction from Godly thoughts and is to be mortified and chastised into submission. Luxurious dress, dress which reveals parts of the body, and changing fashions which attract the eye and distract the soul, are therefore condemned, particularly, by the Puritans of the Reformation. Fashionable dress has therefore been a matter for much moral discourse and, with the development of more modern notions of sexuality, is increasingly condemned as sinful. However, although seeming to deny the body, as Breward (1994) argues, asceticism draws attention to the body (hence also bodily desires and sexuality) in a similar way to the cut of cloth, except that the emphasis is negative as opposed to positive. (For further detail on the debates about dress, sexuality and gender, see chapters 5 and 6 below.)

Throughout the fifteenth century, dress became more and more exaggerated: large hats, long sleeves and long, trailing gowns. However, while the standard narrative of the birth of fashion tends to consider the link between the end of feudalism and the emergence of a new class system, Breward (1994) cautions us from taking this for granted. This kind of descriptive history comes from representations depicted by and for the rich and places a high degree of emphasis upon status. Thus, argues Breward, if one can say that a moment for the birth of fashion can be found in the fourteenth century it describes the emergence of fashion only for the very rich; 'what is missing from such a narrative is any explanation or description either of variety within such a system' when it is likely that other systems of clothing continued 'which while not dominant in terms of wealth and status, must have presented similar shifting codes and styles' (1994: 23). In accounts of peasant dress, it is the functional rather than the symbolic aspects that dominate, although Breward also draws attention to the concern with colour and quality.

Numerous social, cultural and technological changes encouraged the development of fashion for the elite. Breward notes how the manufacture of garments from preparation of raw material to alterations in garment was largely in the hands of women until the late Middle Ages. This arrangement was broken down by the emergence of male-dominated guilds and systems of apprenticeship for weavers and other textile workers which laid the foundations for the development of fashion. This proto-capitalist organization moved the production of clothing out of the home and 'preceded speeding up of fashion change in the following century' (Breward 1994: 30-1).

Thereafter, female labourers were consigned to unskilled production and would, in later centuries, find themselves in 'sweated' working conditions (see chapter 7).

The expansion in the trade of cloth as well as numerous technological developments, such as the spinning-wheel, also helped to stimulate fashion in Europe, increasing the choice and availability of different sorts of fabric. The Crusades of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought Europe into contact with Eastern civilizations, and there was considerable excitement about the new silks and furs. According to Said (1985) the European encounter with the 'exotic Other' played an important part in the formation of the identities of both Occident and Orient over the next few centuries, as well as shaping the destiny of many countries whose natural resources were plundered for cheap raw materials and commodities which would become increasingly common in the households of Europe. Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, trade routes criss-crossed Europe and beyond, carrying silk and cotton from Italy and wool from England to different corners of the continent. This expansion in world trade played its part in the establishment of fashion: 'the dramatic evolution of fashion from the mid fourteenth century is certainly resonant with the heightened language of commerce and a new material worth that arguably takes clothing into the sphere of a "modern" fashion system' (Breward 1994: 22). Italy of the fourteenth century with its trade in silks and cotton could be described as 'proto-capitalist': according to Steele (1988), the structure of Renaissance city-states in Italy enabled the development of fashion and helped to disseminate it in a way that would not be possible in a remote place. Breward further argues that the fashionable body is closely associated with the growing city 'as focus of social interaction and display and an allied sense of cosmopolitanism' (1994: 35). (The relationship between fashion and city life is examined in chapter 4.) In addition to the newly emerging city, the court also provided a platform for fashion and the court society, most notably in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, and was to take on particular significance in the setting of fashions.

Class, Status and Power in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, power across Europe became increasingly concentrated on the courts, which sought to tame and co-ordinate territorial domination. While court societies

developed, there was a progressive reduction of violence and factional fighting as power became increasingly monopolized within the hands of noblemen and, more importantly, monarchs:

royal courts were centres of national power, arenas where the struggles and alliances between monarchs and nobility were played out. Increasingly, as kings tried to reduce the military might of their most powerful subjects and as nobles came to accept humanist ideas that valued learning and taste as much as martial prowess, courts became centres of culture and refinement. (Brewer 1997: 4)

The courts played an important role in the 'civilizing process' by engendering new codes of corporeality. The 'animalistic' functions of the body were progressively constrained: codes and rules were developed for eating and sleeping and even for defecating and reproduction, functions which had previously been openly conducted and discussed, but were now increasingly 'hidden away' as they became subject to shame and embarrassment. Life at court demanded greater emotional control than had existed in early medieval society and instituted more and more finely differentiated codes of behaviour. This development is detailed by Norbert Elias in the first volume of *The History of Manners*, entitled *The Civilizing Process* (1978). Elias's evidence is taken from the writings of various fifteenth- and sixteenth-century social commentators, in particular Erasmus, whose popular treatise on manners 'On Civility in Children', published in 1530, details the sorts of body management required at court. The prohibitions he records about eating, sleeping and other such matters (don't blow your nose on the tablecloth; don't throw your bone in the communal pot after gnawing at it and so on) shed light on some of the ways in which ('uncivilized') bodies must have behaved at the time and illustrate the sorts of constraints increasingly imposed upon bodies over the course of the 'civilizing process', a process which for Elias (1978) is never ending.

During the shift from medieval to Renaissance court society the body increasingly became the bearer of social value, carrying information about a person's social status. The court societies of this period enjoyed relative social mobility: a courtier or knight could catch the eye of the king and curry favour by illustrating good taste, manners and deportment. As Elias puts it:

To keep one's place in the intense competition for importance at court, to avoid being exposed to scorn, contempt, loss of prestige, one must subordinate one's appearance and gestures, in short oneself, to the fluctuating norms of court society that increasingly emphasise the

difference, the distinction of the people belonging to it. One *must* wear certain materials and certain shoes. One *must* move in certain ways characteristic of people belonging to court society. Even smiling is shaped by court custom. (1978: 231–2)

In such a society as this, based on relative social mobility, new relationships between clothing, appearance and identity emerged and fashion played an increasingly significant role in the life of the court. According to Breward, the pervasiveness of fashion had direct impact on the emergence of the individual's 'sense of self-knowledge': in late medieval society 'the body was prioritized as the dwelling place of the soul' (1994: 34). Increasingly, in the court, and also in the city, appearance was used as a 'classifying tool', a means of marking out class distinctions in which dress played a crucial part. Notions of 'good taste' and refinement were emphasized and embodied in the courtier 'in his manners and elegant comportment – the gesture of a hand, the subtlety of a bow, a witty remark – but also in the objects with which he surrounded himself' (Brewer 1997: 4).

For Breward (1994), this courtly society and the fashions emerging out of it, emphasized symbolic display which put the body at a distance from the clothing worn. Beneath acres of elaborate fabric the body was hardly visible: clothes caught the eye because of their richness and grandeur, not because they revealed the body. 'The existence of skin and the concrete conception of the body were largely forgotten in the presence of the coverings of wool and fur... The envelope assumed the role of the body' (Vigarello in Breward 1994: 34). The relationship between body and clothing is also described by Sennett (1977), who argues that up until around the mid-eighteenth century the body of the court aristocrat was something like a mannequin (see below). Well-established conventions of dress would indicate one's position within the class structure or one's membership of a guild, rather than articulating individuality or inner feelings. Thus, elaboration, artifice or even unnaturalness came to characterize styles of dress that put the body at some distance from the clothes.

The spread of fashion during the Middle Ages was very uneven. Only the rich could afford to participate fully in fashion and this created some uniformity in dress among the elite across Europe, although cultural variations did also emerge. Peasant dress changed little, but affluence among merchants and traders enabled them to participate slightly in fashion. From Italy, fashion spread to the court of Burgundy, the most splendid in Europe, prefiguring the stature of Versailles (Steele 1988). The Burgundian dukes under the house of Valois (1364–1477) were far wealthier than their counterparts in

Versailles or Paris and this was reflected in dress. Certain colours, in particular red and purple, were restricted to the ruling class, although this was progressively challenged. Such sumptuary laws indicate the link between fashion and social class: fashion not only emerges in societies with looser class structures, but itself becomes a site of class conflict:

by the fourteenth century, status had come to be based less on the traditional standard of birth than on visible and acquirable markers of social identity, such as civic offices, land holdings, houses, household furnishings, coats of arms, seals and apparel. As a result, the regulation of these material status signifiers came under increasingly greater scrutiny. (Sponsler in Emberley 1998: 46)

Sumptuary laws aimed to regulate consumption from food to clothing and took a number of forms, ranging from Acts of Parliament to proclamations from monarchs and local ordinances. Beginning in the Middle Ages with Edward III (1327–77) almost all monarchs in Britain until the seventeenth century introduced some legislation on consumption (Emberley 1998). Thus as Slater notes: ‘the *ancien régime* inherited a feudal idea, if no longer quite the actuality, of a social structure comprising fixed and stable status: a world in which social position is ascribed by birth and is fixed as part of a cosmological order’ (1997: 29–30).

Increasingly during the late Middle Ages and through the Renaissance, those at the top end of the class structure sought to police and regulate fashion, while those lower down periodically challenged or simply flouted such regulation. Among the motivations behind sumptuary laws was a concern to preserve class distinctions, enabling identification of persons at a glance. They also served to preserve certain commodities for the wealthy, restricting symbolic displays of wealth to the property and land-owning classes. In addition, sumptuary laws attempted to restrict the import of luxury goods from abroad and so protect the interests of merchants at home. However, these laws do not describe what people actually wore and it is difficult to know to what extent such laws were enforced or followed. What they show is the competing interests at work in the area of consumption and how class and status had become matters of concern requiring political intervention. As status became more fluid and more accessible, it follows that clothing became the target of political elites attempting to regulate such status. For this reason, ‘clothing laws are crucial texts in the dynamics of social change and social control in late medieval England’ (Sponsler in Emberley 1998: 46). Fashion tells a tale of class struggle, albeit heavily mediated. Many condem-

nations of fashion can be explained as reactions by some intellectuals towards the breakdown of traditional order and the loss of their own power and status as the *nouveaux riches* became able to purchase the same signifiers of status without the inherited right to do so.

Over the course of these centuries concern about fashion was expressed not just in terms of extravagance, which had previously been seen to break down the social order of the classes, but also with the breakdown of moral order. In her analysis of sumptuary legislation on furs, Julia Emberley argues that 'the hierarchy of furs and social positions created by these regulatory acts also influenced notions of sexual propriety among different classes of women and contributed to the construction of feminine and masculine genders and sexual differences between men and women' (1998: 9). In terms of sexual morality, the distinction between the 'respectable' and the 'fallen' woman was particularly significant. A British parliamentary ordinance of 1355 attempted to police this distinction, forbidding prostitutes to wear fur. It read: 'no known whore should weare from henceforth any hood, except reyed or striped of divers colors, nor furre, but garments reversed or turned the wrong side outward upon paine to forfeit the same' (in Emberley 1998: 54).

Fashion in the Renaissance Court

While medieval Europe became increasingly fragmented, different centres of fashion rather than a single capital came to be developed (Steele 1988). In particular, fashion began to take on a distinctly nationalist character, with styles of dress becoming associated with different European courts. Italy maintained its importance as the home of the Renaissance but after 1492 and Columbus's discovery of the Americas, Spain became particularly influential in political and economic terms and also, not surprisingly, in terms of fashion. England under Henry VIII had grown in importance as a trading nation and this new prosperity served to enhance her status abroad. Catherine of Aragon and her entourage are credited with introducing the Spanish farthingale skirt to the English court and it was worn by all but peasant and working-class women. However, this transmission of fashions from abroad was sometimes commented upon and sometimes seen as a problem. The English dramatist Thomas Dekker (c. 1570–1632) commented in his *Seven Deadly Sins* that

the Englishman's dress is like a traitor's body that hath been hanged, drawn, and quartered, and is set up in various places; 'his cod-piece is

in Denmark, the collar of his doublet and the belly in France; the wing and narrow sleeve in Italy; the short waist hangs over a Dutch butcher's stall in Utrecht; his huge slops speak Spanishly'... And thus we that mock every nation for keeping of one fashion, yet steal patches from every one of them to piece out our pride. (quoted in Braudel 1981: 321)

The simile of the 'traitor's body' in this quotation highlights a concern that the consumption of goods from abroad threatened the body politic of the nation; it was treachery against the trade interest of one's own country. As Slater puts it, 'the health of the body politic is represented by the healthy household of the sovereign. Consumption will tend to deplete this wealth by drawing on imports' (1997: 176). This mercantile line of thought is not surprising given the importance of trade to England at this time. London had established itself by the mid-sixteenth century as a major trading port, which developed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and therefore also as a centre for consumption and style.

As such cities as London and Paris grew wealthier – and, indeed, as the population of cities increased – it became more and more difficult to know the class of people one met. By the same token sumptuary laws became ineffectual: how can one know when a person is dressing above his or her station in a city of strangers? According to Sekora (1977), sumptuary laws responded to fears about breakdown of economic order or morality if members of the lower classes consumed goods above their basic needs or station in life. Breward (1994) notes that there is some evidence to suggest that by 1560 the concerns of clergymen and moralists about the breakdown of order was having an effect on the enforcement of sumptuary laws. This contrasts with accounts of unbridled fashion consumption during the same period but for Breward these two accounts are not in contradiction – sumptuary laws were always difficult if not impossible to enforce and suggest the prevalence of fashion rather than its suppression. If, as Breward suggests, there was some attempt to enforce such laws more vigorously in the sixteenth century, this would suggest that fashion had indeed become more widespread and therefore more threatening.

The nature of elite modes of dress at the end of the sixteenth century is encapsulated in the notions of elaboration, excess and artifice. Great importance was attached to appearance and its manipulation in the Renaissance and there was an emphasis on art and creativity in the construction of outward appearance. The style of dress for men and women 'polarised into aggressive masculinity, accentuated at the shoulders and throwing emphasis on to the narrow

hips, muscular legs and padded codpiece, contrasted with an angular femininity, exemplified through a balanced, symmetrical pairing of bodice and skirt' (Breward 1994: 44).

Men's and women's clothing was elaborate and stiff – for both sexes the neck was particularly encumbered with stiff white collars. Slashing and embroidery could be found on all wealthy male and female garments. This style remained the same until the early seventeenth century though changes in cut and colour made fashions 'seem to take on their own self-contained momentum' (Breward 1994: 52). These minute details in dress seemed to preoccupy the Elizabethans. Clothing was governed by complex codes both hidden and blatant which could be decoded only by those with genteel refinement: 'the importance of overt and indirect symbolism in dress to Elizabethans across the social scale is difficult to over-estimate' (Breward 1994: 63). Dress was not about individual choice but 'recognition and comprehension of a complex set of formal visual codes' (1994: 65). For example, there was a highly developed language of colours in heraldry and coats of arms were one means of marking out family status. For Breward, the overriding emphasis on the symbolic and the high degree of artificiality and elaboration in elite dress lend an archaic quality to current perceptions of Elizabethan dress, derived mainly from paintings. In portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, for example, her dress is so elaborate as to obscure the body altogether:

the exaggerated sleeves and the gigantic skirt efface between them all other indications of a human body... the effect of the richly lined oversleeves is of a sumptuous casing which, without attributing to the Queen anything so specific as broad shoulders (she had, indeed, no *bones* at all), extends the dimensions of the figure to make of the arms an anatomically improbable, embracing, encompassing semi-circle. (Belsey and Belsey 1990: 11)

The body is lost in the clothing which bears little relationship to it; the line and contours of the limbs almost completely obscured.

Historical evidence from portraiture and etiquette books has isolated the mid- to late sixteenth century as 'a significant moment of change in relation to attitudes towards individuality and a new sense of self' (Breward 1994: 69). According to Greenblatt, 'in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as manipulable, artful process'; although the word 'fashion' had long been in use 'as a term for the action or process of making, for particular features or appearance,

for a distinct style or patter...it is in the sixteenth century that "fashion" seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self". This fashioning 'may suggest the achievement of... a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving' (1980: 2). Greenblatt cites the poets and writers of this period, such as Spenser and Shakespeare, as embodiments of the new self-fashioned gentleman. In manuals on etiquette and manners one finds further evidence of a new concern with the body, its decoration and deportment: the



Miniature of Queen Elizabeth I by Nicholas Hilliard (1547–1619), showing how the body was a mere mannequin to the heavy and elaborate clothes which obscure and abstract it. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

'gentleman's body emerges as a totality to be continuously and minutely governed according to principles of grace and decorum' (Bryson 1990: 141). Such fashioning was not restricted to men: Elizabeth I was particularly artful in her construction and representation of herself as a great, almost mystical being, a virgin queen and mother to England. Indeed, as Greenblatt notes, her ability to turn her 'potentially disastrous sexual disadvantage' (1980: 167) into a cult of secular virginity is evidence of her extraordinary ability to fashion her identity. George Gower's portrait of her at the time of the Spanish Armada is among those to proclaim 'the sovereignty and the right to rule: the splendour of her appearance, her vision and her *self*-control are evidence of the majesty and the authority which inhere in the person of the Queen' (Belsey and Belsey 1990: 15).

Moralists complained that overt concern with fashionable dress indicated vanity and unfettered individualism incompatible with class and duty. This was more marked in the city than in the country, where traditions were more likely to encourage people to 'know their place' in the social hierarchy. Contemporary pamphlets and treatises focus on declining standards in metropolitan centres and illustrate the sorts of concern expressed by some in the sixteenth century about fashion and sartorial display (Breward 1994). For example, excessive interest in clothing is singled out by some writers as a moral problem that upsets the 'natural' order of things, both the 'natural' hierarchies of class and the moral propriety of a good, God-fearing society.

Judaeo-Christian attitudes towards the body have also left an indelible mark on the progress of fashion. Nonconformists from the time of Martin Luther to Oliver Cromwell reacted against what they saw as the excesses of Rome and condemned sartorial extravagance. The sombre clothing of the Reformation continued in Protestant countries, particularly in Holland, and was carried to the New World, where it was embodied in such religious communities as the Shakers. However, with the growing influence of Spain, the Spanish style, dark, formal and highly elaborate, swept through much of Protestant Northern Europe as part of the Counter-Reformation. It was adopted by most European courts; the marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip II of Spain in 1554 ensured its widespread adoption in courtly circles. There were many who resisted the style as wicked and excessive, objections being at their strongest in Germany.

During the final decade of the Elizabethan period another feature developed, that of naturalism in dress. People sitting for their portraits in the 1590s 'are beginning to want to see themselves depicted less as symbols and more as vehicles of human emotions and feeling'

(Strong in Breward 1994: 68). This is manifest in the sitters' untidy appearance and a preference for pastoral settings which 'signifies most of all . . . the ability of clothing to reflect a new sense of "private self" as much as it symbolised public status and history' (1994: 69).

Fashion in the Seventeenth Century

The seventeenth century was one of massive political and religious upheaval. The Thirty Years' War exposed the tension between Catholics and Protestant states which struggled for dominance not just in Europe, but the colonies abroad. The reign of Charles I represented the 'English apotheosis of . . . Renaissance kingship' (Brewer 1997: 5). The court was as rich and extravagant as it was large and sprawling and was the focus of rituals, displays, ceremonies and tableaux, some of which were performed by the king and queen themselves before an audience of courtiers (Brewer 1997). Male and female clothing was rich and elaborate – the padding, starch and drapes of varying textures from velvet through to lace obscured the body. The contrast between this and Oliver Cromwell's rule is sharp and the Civil War is often seen as a clash of straight-laced Puritans and Roundheads and flamboyant Cavaliers and Royalists. The Puritans under Cromwell swept away the luxurious and decadent styles of James I and Charles I and introduced sombre, undecorated dress: face patches, for example, were banned. In their ideology, moral rectitude was closely linked to plain dress and can be seen most clearly in the austere style of the Quakers. However, these are simplistic characterizations and it makes more sense to look at wider social and political changes, in particular the evolution of the private sphere and developing ideas about the individual which informed attitudes to appearance and consumption. According to Campbell (1989, 1993), the Puritans, while seemingly anti-fashion and anti-consumption, brought about a change in attitudes which helped to promote modern hedonism and consumption, thereby stimulating the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century.

The return of the monarchy with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 did not see the restoration of calm, but continuing religious and political strife. Charles II tried to emulate his father's opulent kingship and even looked to emulate the splendour of Louis XIV in France, but his court was 'a weak copy of the extravagant absolutist regime across the Channel' (Brewer 1997: 8). Dress remained opulent but elements of informality crept into both male and female dress. Gender divisions were lessened by the similarity of some

aspects of dress: deep lace collars, long hair dramatically curled and high heels were worn by both sexes. The most distinctive development in male dress was the integration of doublet, jerkin and breeches into a unified whole, the tunic or coat; and a similar integration of female dress took place in the final decades of the century in the form of the mantua – based on night-dress – which linked the top or bodice to the skirt to make an entire gown (Breward 1994). These developments served to make the line of clothing more fluid and the body's contours more apparent.

As the balance of power shifted towards Holland and France, dual fashion paths developed in the French court and the Dutch bourgeoisie. The Dutch carried the stark black and white Catholic style of the Spanish into the next century – transforming it into a Protestant, bourgeois and urban style, suited to Calvinist religious ideology (Steele 1988). This style extended to the nineteenth century, becoming the 'uniform' of the bourgeoisie all over Europe, part of an attempt to redress the excesses of the aristocracy. Although the stark dress of the Dutch continued to dominate some parts of Europe, during the mid-seventeenth century the French court emerged as a powerful force in fashion. The court of Louis XIV established France as the supreme trend-setter among the elite in Europe, a position retained by that country until the mid-twentieth century. Although only five when he ascended the throne in 1643, 'when Louis came of age he ushered in an era of unprecedented extravagance and splendour, and Paris very shortly became the fashion capital of the world' (Bradley 1955: 193). Luxury, excess and elaboration, along with splendid texture and colour, were to become the style of Versailles, not only in terms of dress, but in the architecture and interiors of the grand palace itself. Louis XIV, known as the 'Sun King' for his emblem of the sun and snake, was aware of the symbolic nature of clothing. As early as 1665 he recognized the potential importance of fashion to French industry: various attempts were made to protect French textiles from the rival luxury fashion industries in Italy and Holland, in particular, the promotion of silk weaving in France to challenge that of the Italians (Steele 1988); the heavy duties on foreign fabrics and precious metals along with incentives to help French manufacturers also served to stimulate the French fashion industry (Yarwood 1992). However, as Steele puts it, 'economics alone does not explain the shift from international Spanish black to modish French fashion' (1988: 23); more important than state support, argues Steele, was the power of the French court, consolidated by the marriage of Louis XIV to the Spanish infanta, Maria Theresa, in 1660 and leading to the triumph of French

Baroque splendour in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While black and white remained dominant in other parts of Europe, particularly among Spanish noblemen and Dutch and English Puritans, sumptuary legislation in Louis XIV's court kept fashion in check and established complex codes of etiquette: clothing was restricted and regulated, gold and silver trimmings, for example, being reserved for the king's family and some favoured courtiers. Despite the rigid rules, which actually slowed down the pace of change in fashion, the styles of the French court were copied across Europe. In these days before the fashion magazine, fashion dolls transmitted the latest court fashions and acted as 'ambassadors'.

In contrast to the over-elaborate and formal style of court dress, often slow to change, a more genuinely modern fashion was emerging in the city of Paris (Steele 1988). Thousands of tailors worked to produce clothes for court but towards the end of Louis' reign, younger princesses and ladies revolted against the court style in favour of the new styles originating in Paris. Steele notes how on one occasion in 1715 the Duchesse d'Orléans and the Princesse de Conti presented Louis XIV with the newest fashion from Paris, to which he gave his approval. On the King's death that year, however, fashion came to be determined between individual ladies and dress-makers and this served to accelerate the pace of fashion. Nevertheless, with such figures as Mme de Pompadour and Mme du Barry and later Marie Antoinette as fashion setters for courtly, aristocratic dress in other European courts, the French court retained its prestige. The dominance of French, especially Parisian, fashion remained unchallenged until the mid-twentieth century.

Dress, Class and Social Identity in the Eighteenth Century

Compared with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century court society, the society emerging in the eighteenth was increasingly urban in style. London came to occupy an important place within the imagination, which is not surprising given that 'one in ten English people lived there; one in six spent part of their working life in the metropolis. Ten times larger than any other English city, it dwarfed the other British capitals... and with nearly 750,000 inhabitants at the mid-century, was the largest city in western Europe' (Brewer 1997: 28). The eighteenth century was an era of great sociability, when cities 'developed networks of sociability independent of direct royal control, places where strangers might regularly meet' (Sennett 1977: 17).

One might encounter others in the new pleasure gardens of Paris and London, or in the new streets that were developing for pedestrians, or in the numerous coffee bars and cafés where one could spend hours reading, chatting or simply observing others. Coffee-bar clubs like the influential Kit-Cat Club flourished between 1690 and 1720, encouraging regular discussions on literature, art, theatre and politics (Brewer 1997: 40). John Brewer notes how 'the Kit-Cat Club exemplifies the shift that took place in the early eighteenth century from court to city, from raffish courtier to polite man-about-town' (1997: 41). This shift can be perceived in the changing style of portraiture introduced into England at the time by Godfrey Kneller, who painted the portraits of the Kit-Cat Club members. 'There is none of the grand self-absorption of the court portrait; these are men engaged with society' (1997: 41–2).

'Society' became an object of attention and discussion for an increasing number of urbanites as well as the gentry in small provincial towns. Members of 'society' would go visiting, promenading and shopping, in settings ranging from pleasure parks and gardens, such as the Vauxhall or Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens, to theatres, exhibitions, grand shops, masquerades and balls held at assembly rooms across the country. These settings had their 'season' – Bath and London were visited at different times in the social calendar by the gentry living in the provinces. Although these activities were primarily the focus of attention for a small privileged set, activities such as promenading, once the preserve of the elite, were taking off as popular pastimes among wage labourers in the big cities, and the theatre, once a restricted form of entertainment, opened up to a wider audience than ever before (Brewer 1997). As Brewer notes, one's ability to participate in such cultural activities depended not just on having the price of a ticket, but on looking 'respectable'.

Patterns of consumption began to change with the increase in wealth and many historians have argued that there was something of a consumer revolution during the eighteenth century (Brewer 1997, Brewer and Porter 1993, Campbell 1989, McKendrick et al. 1983, Slater 1997, Weatherill 1993, 1996). With incomes rising 'it is likely that many had surplus disposable income; as this translated into higher consumer demand, growth in manufacturing was stimulated' (Porter 1990: 205–6). The commodities purchased were likely to be beyond necessity: table linens, silverware, pottery, clocks and furniture, along with personal adornments such as bonnets, parasols, handkerchiefs, gloves, perfume, watches. This expansion in consumer goods, alongside an expansion in 'society', opened up more opportunities for social display. The audiences at public settings

'made publicly visible their wealth, status, social and sexual charms' (Brewer 1997: 69) and the new consumer durables became a popular means to transmit such charms.

It is no surprise then that around this time the idea of emulation came to preoccupy social theorists and has since been put forward as an explanatory model to account for the consumer revolution in the eighteenth century (see in particular McKendrick et al. 1983). Theories of emulation propose that fashions start at the top of the social ladder and percolate down as the 'lower orders' consume elite fashions in an attempt to copy or emulate their 'betters'. Emulation was seen by contemporary philosophers and moralists as a problem since it was said to disrupt the natural or cosmological order of the universe wherein status is fixed and ordained by God. As the modern society of commerce swept away the old agrarian order, it brought with it new sources of status not dependent upon land and blood but money. New social groups – merchants, industrialists, the new middle classes – could afford to purchase, 'above their station', luxury items once exclusive to kings and nobility. In the eyes of traditionalists, this was seen as 'a form of sin, rebellion and insubordination against the proper order of the world, and represents moral, spiritual and political corruption' (Slater 1997: 69; see also Sekora 1977). Discussions about luxury, the control of sumptuousness illustrate this preoccupation with maintaining the boundaries of class and status in the face of change. However, while emulation is seen by some intellectuals as a sin and therefore a problem, it comes to form the basis of modern sentiment. Emulation for Adam Smith (Smith 1986) is the source of modern virtue since it is through the selfish pursuit of riches and status that the general wealth of a nation is increased. Moreover, for Smith, emulation encourages greater sympathy and sociability among people.

Emulation theories have since formed the backbone of many discussions of the eighteenth-century consumer revolution and they remain a dominant explanatory framework for understanding fashion ever since. For Slater, emulation is not a single theory but part of a vocabulary of modernity, 'a pre-occupation for western modernity from its start' (1997: 157). The idea of emulation, also known as the 'trickle-down' model, has been proposed by different theorists as an explanation for the extension of fashion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (McKendrick et al. 1983, McCracken 1985, Veblen 1953), although Braudel (1981) also links it to the very origins of fashion in the fourteenth century. Veblen (1953) and Simmel (1971) are two of the commonly cited proponents of this framework and they both refer to fashionable dress in their accounts (see chapter 2).

In providing a neat and tidy account of fashion and fashion change, emulation has been immensely popular. However, emulation as a concept is very problematic. For one thing, this theory assumes rather too much based on little or no evidence (what is 'human nature' after all and how can we prove emulation to be 'natural?'). An example of how difficult it is to establish emulation as the basis for consumption can be illustrated by examining one 'fact' commonly noted by social commentators in the eighteenth century to support the idea, namely, that of the lady's maid who wore the grand clothes of her mistress. The maid in her finery was seen by some as a problem, an illustration of naked social ambition on the part of the maid to climb the social ladder or be mistaken for a lady. However, the sight of a servant girl's grand clothes may not, however, be traceable to her desire to emulate her mistress, as thought by some social commentators in the eighteenth century. First it should be noted that it was common practice for a mistress to pass 'hand-me-downs' to her female servants and these gifts would have been seen as part of her wages (Fine and Leopold 1993). Second, it is also true that maids often sold on clothes bequeathed to them in wills in the lucrative second-hand clothing market, 'the preference for cash (from selling hand-me-downs) over the pleasures to be had from keeping and wearing the master's old clothes' suggesting 'a definite limit to the allure of emulation', according to Fine and Leopold (1993: 126). Even when the clothes were kept and worn, Colin Campbell argues that we cannot assume this as evidence of emulation; to do so is to assume intentions which are not apparent in the mere act of wearing the fancy clothes. Indeed, even if emulation is the intention, he argues, we do not know what it is exactly she is emulating and why. In other words 'to dub an activity "emulative" is in this sense merely to begin the process of understanding' (Campbell 1993: 41). There may be a whole range of reasons why a maid would wear the clothes of her mistress, as Campbell notes:

does the maid's intention to compete with her mistress in the style and opulence of her dress merely imply a desire to rival her in fashion-ableness or does it stem from a more general ambition to be considered her social equal? Is she seeking, through this emulative conduct, to impress her fellow servants, her family and friends, her mistress, any strangers she meets on the street, or indeed herself? Does this striving to impress stem from envy of her mistress, from a need to boost her own feelings of self-esteem, or from naked social ambition? (1993: 41)

The flaw in this theory for Campbell is that it confuses consequence with intention. It also illustrates the problem with reading dress of

others from a theoretical distance. As argued in chapter 2, theories of fashion tend to abstract it from the social context, resulting in general statements about fashion/dress without testing these against actual practices. In other words, they are reductive: too much is assumed on the basis of too little evidence. Fashion and dress in such theorizations are divorced from the body and from the practices of dress in daily life which are complex and over-determined. Other critiques of emulation theories point to its mechanistic view of social class and status (Slater 1997) and its assumption that only the elite innovate, when certain evidence would suggest that working-class styles can in fact 'bubble up' to become the latest style (Partington 1992, Polhemus 1994, Wilson 1985). Further problems arise from the lack of specificity in the theories: it is hard to identify who the 'elite' trend-setters might be at any one time – are fashions set by court, king and aristocracy, or by the new bourgeoisie? If the former classes for the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, why would the new bourgeoisie take over in the nineteenth century, as is sometimes claimed? Campbell (1989) argues that the increased propensity to consume came from the bourgeoisie not because of a desire to emulate the aristocracy, but because of a change in attitudes towards consumption. Indeed, he suggests that far from being emulators, the middle classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were setters of taste: empirical work on probate inventories shows a greater concern with fashion in households of urban tradesmen than landed gentry living on great country estates (Weatherill 1993, 1996).

Emulation theories fail to explain fashion and why the idea of 'fashion' and 'fashionability' extended through so much of the population in the eighteenth century to encompass all aspects of life (and lifestyle, although this concept is a twentieth-century one). Art, literature, music, interior décor, along with dress, styles of hair and make-up, were caught up in the universe of fashionable society of the eighteenth century. 'Society' was overtly concerned with fashion and the urban and provincial gentry would have kept their eye on what the 'fashionable set' was doing, where they were going, how they decorated their houses, and what they were wearing. Indeed, 'provincial towns put on London airs' and developed their own equivalents to the pleasure gardens of Ranelagh or Vauxhall, or the theatres of Drury Lane (Porter 1990: 223–4). In the literature of Jane Austen and in the diaries of rich ladies, concern with fashion is overt. Anna Margaretta Larpent, wife of Chief Inspector of Plays in the Lord Chamberlain's office, represents one such cultured lady (Brewer 1997). She took her refined activities, such as reading, art, theatre and concert going, very seriously as part of an overall project of self-

improvement and, although she might protest at the superficiality of some of those she encountered – ‘how horrid is the life of (too many) people of fashion, one might forget they had souls’ – but as Brewer notes, ‘this did not prevent her from pursuing these pleasures’ (1997: 70). Indeed, as he argues, ‘in this culture of display, vanity, pride and greed as well as the finest clothing were on show’ (1997: 73). Even those who professed not to care all that much about fashion, such as Elizabeth Shackleton (1726–81) of Alkincoats in Lancashire, were interested to know of the latest London styles in dress and interior décor (Vickery 1993). It was not just women who were caught up in the consumer revolution, although commentators at the time and historians of consumption since have tended to assume this. Affluent men of fashion would have done their share of shopping, buying their own snuffboxes, handkerchiefs and gloves as well as supervising the purchase of large consumer goods for the home such as furniture (Vickery 1993).

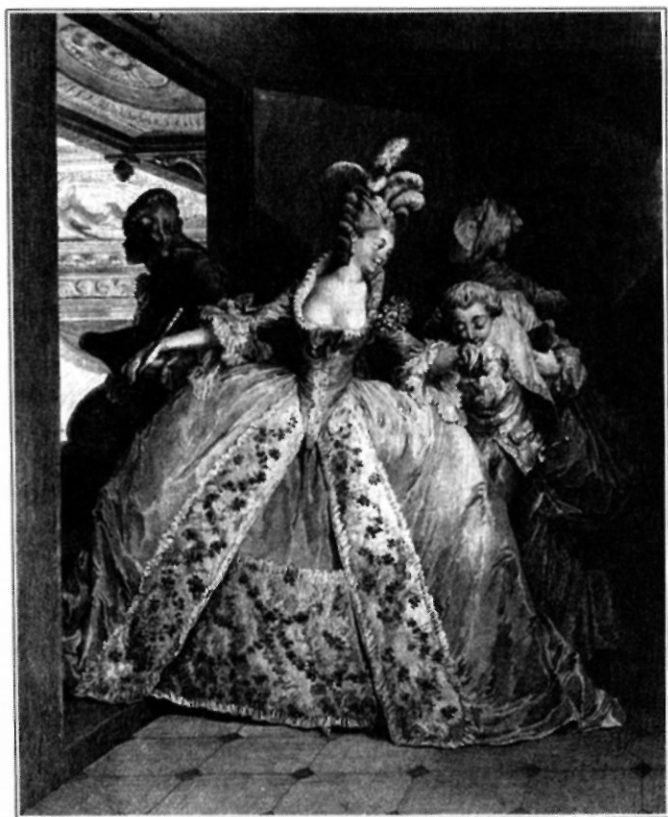
According to Porter (1990) and McKendrick et al. (1983), advertising helped to fan the flames of the new consumer revolution, although it alone cannot account for the spectacular explosion of demand for new commodities, which must reflect a change in attitudes towards consumption (Campbell 1989; Weatherill 1993). Campbell argues that the birth of consumer culture came with the birth of modern hedonism among the Puritan bourgeoisie. This is far removed from the ethics of envy and imitation that traditional histories and theories of emulation emphasize. As discussed in chapter 4, modern hedonism involves the use of the imagination to control external stimuli. This produces both the longings and dissatisfactions associated with modern consumption. Modern consumerism, according to Campbell, is ‘anything but materialistic’; the ‘basic motivation is to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination’ (1989: 89). So as Breward (1994) suggests, the servant girl dressing like a lady encodes goods with dreamlike properties and escapism rather than envying the style.

None of these new modes of sociability entirely swept away old privileges or hierarchies of class and status – indeed, the increased affluence for some served to heighten the division between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ (Porter 1990) – but they did see a progressive challenge to such hierarchies. Sumptuary laws provide a good example of the contrast between the old and new order: while the laws remained on the statute books, few arrests were made since ‘people in very large cities had little means of telling whether the dress of a stranger on the street was an accurate reflection of his or her standing in the society’ (Sennett 1977: 66). Sennett provides further evidence of the

contradiction between the desire to fix class identity and the impossibility of doing so. The new social classes, not just merchants and traders, but those in offices of government and private finance, occupied an ambivalent position: their identity was not underpinned by tradition and they could not be located within the existing class hierarchy. So while laws on dress were unenforceable, attempts were made to 'bring order to the mixture of strangers on the street' (1977: 66) with the establishment of costumes for different occupations. However, these too were unenforceable since people had no way of distinguishing impostors, given that people would take to the streets wearing the costume of a particular profession or guild whether they belonged to it or not. It would seem that 'whether people were in fact what they wore was less important than their desire to wear something recognisable in order to be someone in the street' (1977: 67). So a shipping clerk going for a walk wearing the dress of a butcher is wearing a costume and in doing so is observing a convention. 'Codes of dress as a means of regulating the street worked by clearly if arbitrarily identifying who people were' (1977: 68).

How did the clothing of this period relate to the body? For much of the eighteenth century, public dress for aristocratic men and women was highly elaborate. For women, skirts were full and long, sometimes slashed to reveal the petticoat, and richly decorated with ribbons, jewels and buttons. The dress worn in public was as elaborate for men as for women: breeches and waistcoats in luxurious fabrics such as velvet, brocade, taffeta, satin or damask would have been decorated with lace or embroidery and would have been brightly coloured in apple-green, wine – red, orange and violet. Ribbons and garters would have adorned the costumes of both men and women and make-up and patches worn to add lustre to the complexion. However, as Sennett notes, while such finery attracted attention to the wearer, it 'did so by the qualities of these adornments as objects in themselves, and not as aids to setting off the peculiarities of his face or figure' (1977: 69). The body, he suggests, was like a mannequin. Men and women wore wigs, which, along with large and ornate hats would have totally obscured the natural shape of the head and would have been the real focus of attention, not the individual beauty of the face. The surface of the body operated in a similar way – the increased exposure of women's breasts over the course of the century was intended as a showcase for the jewels worn around the neck.

As public life expanded, with many more occasions for sociability than before, there was a significant change in the relationship of the body and dress. Whereas in the seventeenth century, dress for the



Les Adieux, after Moreau le Jeune, c.1777. Eighteenth-century fashionable dress was elaborate and excessive. Dressed for the opera, this fashionable woman has to pass through her opera box sideways to accommodate her large skirt. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

elite was elaborate at all times, whatever the occasion, by the mid-eighteenth century a division had opened up between public and private dress. 'On the street . . . clothes were worn which recognisably marked one's place' while in the private realm clothes were 'more natural [and] the body appeared more expressive in itself' (Sennett 1977: 66). A common metaphor to describe this division between public and private, and one that Sennett draws on, is the stage: in public one was 'on stage', playing a role which might or might not be 'authentic'; at home, one was 'backstage' and could relax, wearing loose dress and concentrating on 'comfort'. For women, this might mean wearing a *négligé*. In public, a different standard of bodily

presentation was demanded and dress played its part in this performance, marking out roles, conventions or status which might or might not relate to the actual status or identity of the wearer. This performance was accepted for what it was – a more or less convincing appearance, as that of an actor's might be. As Sennett suggests:

at home, one's clothes suited one's body and its needs; on the street one stepped into clothes whose purpose was to make it possible for other people to act as if they knew who you were. One became a figure in a contrived landscape; the purpose of the clothes was not to be sure of whom you were dealing with, but to be able to behave as if you were sure. (1977: 68)

Conventions of dress, speech and interaction in the eighteenth century were taken as straightforward social conventions, not as symbols behind which lies some inner truth (as they are today). For Sennett, this element of playfulness with one's public appearance and identity is a positive thing, enabling one to be artful and expressive and enjoy open social interaction. Indeed, Sennett argues that people are more sociable when there are tangible barriers such as social conventions between them. However, when one treats things as symbolic, as embodying a hidden meaning, the playfulness of conventions is lost and so too the freedom it allows in terms of sociability. 'Human beings need to have some distance from intimate observation by others in order to feel sociable. Increase intimate contact and you decrease sociability' (1977: 15). Such a concern with inner reality results in a more psychological view of the other, a questioning of the inner reality of the other often leading to mistrust. The result is that the public arena is considered to be 'dead public space' and leads to a search for truth and intimacy which ultimately results in a retreat into the private sphere. Sociability, enjoyed in and of itself when governed by social conventions, is consequently viewed as unsatisfying and without meaning. Sennett is therefore critical of the Romantic concern with authenticity which invaded the public realm in the nineteenth century and in doing so, he argues, it diminished the possibilities of an active and artful social life. (Discourses on authenticity inspired by Romanticism and the rise of bourgeois individualism are discussed in chapter 4.)

As Sennett's focus is primarily on Paris, he does not draw attention to the differences in styles of dress across Europe. In England, a country style of dress became popular over the course of the eighteenth century; this was distinctly informal compared with the elaborate dress of the French, still heavily influenced by the formality of the court. The *habit à l'anglaise* grew in popularity in France towards the

end of the eighteenth century, possibly reflecting the current republican admiration of liberal England. Ironically, the informal English country style was in fact adopted by the English aristocracy in the eighteenth century (Steele 1988). Tensions between the older formal French style and the English country style had repercussions both in France and abroad. In France, the 'Macaroni' style (as in the song 'Yankee doodle-dandy') became associated with the ultra-modern young noblemen in France; this style spread to England, where it was adopted by some of the more conservative aristocracy. The fashion was foppish, elaborate and considered effeminate; some condemned its tight short coat as obscene. The Macaroni style was censured in France on the grounds that a country with such feeble people who sported it could not defend itself. Partly as a result of this condemnation and growing nationalism, the fashion in men's dress changed as people began to see sober dress as a reflection of patriotic values, country and city (as opposed to court) life and enterprise (as opposed to gambling and frivolity) (Steele 1988).

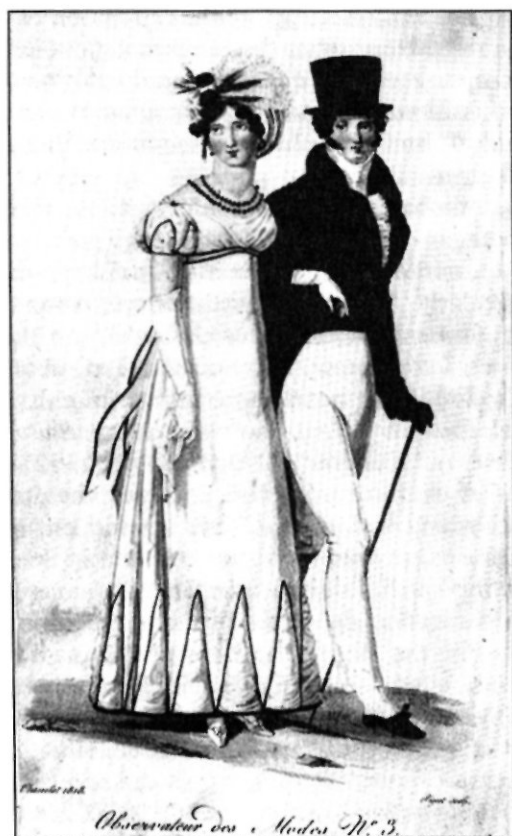
During the eighteenth century the city emerged as an alternative space to the court for fashion (Brewer 1997). Rules of court gave way to urban society and city life. This expansion of industrialization and the city coupled with the growth in the urban bourgeoisie continued into the nineteenth century, undermining the power and privilege of the aristocratic elite. Such a dramatic shift in power and such sweeping social changes brought with them changes in the relations between public and private life, the effects of which we are still feeling today. Romanticism, with its powerful critique of industrialization and urbanization, became an increasingly popular antidote to the new modern life. As discussed in the next chapter, this helped to upset the balance between public and private life that had been carefully maintained in the eighteenth century and to promote new relations between appearance and identity.

Fashion from the Nineteenth Century Onwards

Fashion thrives in a world of social mobility, a dynamic world characterized by class and political conflict, urbanization and aesthetic innovation, so it is not surprising that fashion flourished in the nineteenth century, when social upheaval reached a new zenith with the French and the Industrial Revolutions. The frenetic pace of change continued into the early twentieth century, most notably in further social and political unrest that culminated in the two world wars. As the term 'modernity' captures the idea of a society in dramatic

transition, it is equally applicable to the accelerating rate of changes in fashion during this period. Thus as Breward notes, 'if there is one major theme amongst many in which... a discussion of Victorian clothing can be situated, it is this problem or idea of "modernity"' (1994: 146). Wilson also draws on the concept of modernity to consider fashion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because it 'seems useful as a way of indicating the restless desire for change characteristic of cultural life in industrial capitalism, the desire for the new that fashion expresses so well' (1985: 63). Modernity invokes a number of developments: industrialization, the growth of capitalism, urbanization, the rise of privatised individualism and the development of 'mass' culture, to name but a few.

Capitalism emerged out of revolutions which shook western Europe in the first few decades of the nineteenth century: in Britain it took the form of a social revolution sparked off by industrialization and fuelled by bourgeois individualism and liberalism; in France, it took the form of a bloody political revolution which threw off the shackles of the *ancien régime*. In both cases, a new capitalist class emerged to challenge preconceived ideas of power and wealth: their wealth was tied to factories, capital or merchandise rather than land or blood and brought them into conflict, at least in status terms, with the old aristocracy and nobility. Except in France, for the most part the challenge was fought out obliquely less with swords than through symbols, of which dress was one of the most significant. The nineteenth century was an era dominated by 'capital'; 'new money buys landed estates, it can wear the clothes of court and "society", it can indulge in the leisure pursuits of the aristocracy' (Slater 1997: 70). In the history of European fashion so far, trends had been set by the royal and aristocratic dress worn at court, but by the late eighteenth century, in both Britain and France, changing fashions had come to be set by the new bourgeoisie. Steele notes how, after the Revolution of 1792, women's dress became increasingly that of 'undress', with new lines from the Directory (from 1795) to Consulate (1799–1804) and Empire (1804–15) inspired by classical design (1988); such dresses as chemises were possibly also influenced by French colonial involvement in the Caribbean, where women wore simple straight dresses. The common story that the Revolution brought about the fashion for the chemise is too simplistic. According to Steele, the simplicity of this dress compared with the over-elaborate Bastille style do not correspond neatly: the chemise had in fact made appearances *before* the fall of the Bastille. One portrait shows Marie Antoinette in a simple dress which caused outcry at the time and was removed from public view. The portrait was painted by Elisabeth



English walking dress, 1807, showing the classical straight lines of the Regency period. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Vigée-Lebrun, whose own style of dress was simple (she hated the elaborate court dress at Versailles). After the pared-down elegance of Regency fashions, women's dress became ever more fussy with 'Romantic' dress: a profusion of lace, frills and ribbons. By the mid-nineteenth century, skirts were wide and heavy, the crinoline cage being introduced in the 1850s. Men's dress changed comparatively little, though it lost much of its decoration and the dominant colours were sober in contrast to the commonly worn pinks, reds, mauves and yellows worn by eighteenth-century aristocratic men. Discourses on fashion draw attention to the sharp distinctions between men's and women's dress during the nineteenth century, when women became increasingly associated with 'frivolity'. The

standard history has tended to equate the restriction of women to the family with the restriction of her dress of whalebone corset and cage of crinoline, accepting without qualification the notion of a masculine renunciation of fashion. The story is, of course, more complex than that (see chapter 5) but the striking image of the Victorian period is one of marked gender division.

Industrialization changed the nature of fashion: the development of new technologies for producing clothes, such as the sewing machine, was spurred on by new demands for cheap mass-produced clothing, particularly for men. Furthermore, wars stimulated a demand for uniforms and new industrial work (on the railroads of the United States, for example) demanded cheap, strong clothes. To this day, men's clothing remains more industrialized than women's, which has remained modelled more on *haute couture* than mass production (Fine and Leopold 1993, Leopold 1992). This shift in the production of clothing to factories altered the structure of the fashion system, which had hitherto been based on a 'putting out' method. As discussed in chapter 7, this resulted in the emergence of the sweatshop, the harsh, inhumane and often dangerous factory.

Increasing urbanization also helped stimulate fashion, providing an expanded stage for the display and transmission of clothing, and providing a useful cloak of armour for city life (see chapter 4). The increasing anonymity of the city brought with it new possibilities and new problems: new opportunities for social encounters, particularly for late nineteenth-century women, who were able to visit 'respectable' places such as department stores and cafés in the city. It also brought with it problems on both a macro- and a micro-level: fears about social order grew with the expansion of the city and some intellectuals expressed fear at the emergence of a 'mass' society, an anonymous and sometimes violent 'mob' society. There is a close link between the burgeoning new capitalist class and Romanticism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement which both prioritize the individual and celebrate individual isolation, as well as seeking refuge in the imagination as a place apart from the horrors of modern life. Romanticism privileged a peculiarly privatized individual whose retreat and isolation enabled him to find 'himself' in among the debris of modern life. These developments placed a new emphasis upon the self and stimulated the rise of privatized individualism.

How do all these developments relate to fashion and dress? In such a world as this, fashion takes on new significance; it is the means by which people negotiate their identity, move through the city unnoticed (or noticed, depending on the style) and comes to serve almost as 'armour' protecting the individual. Fashion can be

used to give oneself impressive 'individual' identity, while simultaneously being capable of signalling commonality since it enhances uniformity. These dualisms, between conformity and individuality, between private self and public appearance, introduce themes which have dominated debates about fashion and dress. A further dualism, between artifice and authenticity, has played a significant part in academic debates about fashion as well as informing a 'common-sense' understanding of fashion: does fashion conceal the 'authentic' self and serve as 'artifice'? This questioning stems from a Romantic concern with self and authenticity.

While fashion was a protective 'armour' for some, it was a tyrannous, irrational force for others. The growth of dress reform movements during the nineteenth century led to the fashionable dress of the day being condemned, on various grounds. These movements were often associated with political campaigns, such as socialism or feminism, which were set on eradicating social and political inequalities. Many of the reform movements advocated the devising of a 'uniform' as one way to encourage equality; as the 'tyranny of fashion' encourages competition between individuals, it should be eradicated. Fashion was criticized by some (e.g. Veblen 1953 and Flügel 1930) as frivolous, useless, unnecessary or just plain ugly. Veblen's functionalism led him to see fashion as essentially useless; it was also tyrannous to women who were constrained by heavy and elaborate dress. As discussed in chapter 5, other dress reformers were associated with feminism and called for women to wear trousered dress rather than heavy skirts (Newton 1974). However, it was not just female dress that was criticized: Flügel was associated with the Men's Dress Reform Movement and argued that men's dress was similarly constraining and oppressive.

The belief in a progressive style of dress is very much a product of late nineteenth-century faith in progress and Utopia, and, in some cases, science (Newton 1974). Some dress reformers were concerned with health and hygiene and many were associated with 'water-cure' medicine and advocated looser dress on the grounds that it was more 'hygienic' and 'natural' (Luck 1992, Newton 1974). The Aesthetic Movement in England reacted against what its adherents considered the ugliness of fashion and advocated a more 'natural' style of dress. A certain strain of Romanticism runs through these attitudes to dress and it relates to the simplistic view of the body and 'nature'. Aesthetic dress, as worn by those associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, assumed that a 'natural' form of dress could be devised when in fact no dress is ever 'natural' since whatever its shape or form, it is always an expression of culture and represents an attempt to modify the body in some



Photograph of Jane Morris (wife of William Morris), wearing Aesthetic dress 1865. In contrast to standard Victorian female dress of the day, Morris wears her dress without a corset and a profusion of skirts and decoration. Posed by Gabriel Dante Rossetti. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

way. One final point to note about dress reform, however, is that not all dress reformers were progressive (Kunzle 1982, Steele 1985). Some were actually conservative, for example those who opposed the corset in the nineteenth century on the grounds that it damaged women's reproductive organs and thus her child bearing capacities.

This chapter has looked at the development of a modern fashion system and at how fashions have changed in response to a complex range of social forces. The simplistic assumption that fashion reflects the spirit of the times has been challenged but this is not to say that fashion is unaffected by shifts in social life. When considering how

and why fashions change, it is not enough to isolate a single spirit or feeling associated with the times and look for modifications in dress that might correspond. Dress is tied up to social life in more than one way: it is produced out of economic, political, technological conditions as well as shaped by social, cultural, aesthetic ideas. Fashionable dress does depend to some extent on particular social and economic circumstances, as discussed in this chapter. However, the forms of dress are not reducible to the social or economic.