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EDITOR'S NOTES

Out of the fitting room

Special issue of *Modes Pratiques*. Two or three times a year since 2015, the “staff” of *Modes Pratiques* has met at the Duperré School of Art and Design in Paris to talk. We talk about clothes and fashion, fashion people, fashion scholars, fashion gossip and the like... From the indispensable chaos of our conversations stories emerge, as do thoughts and pro-posals—some whimsical, others fanciful. Many of our ideas remain unfulfilled, abandoned in the fitting room of our ambitions. From this nebulous body of intuitions then emerges what will become the focus of the annual issue of *Modes Pratiques*: its core theme. “Norms and Transgressions” was the theme of the first issue. “Without Fashion” was the second one. This special issue, translated in English, presents a selection of papers published in these two French editions.

Norms, formulated or not, are one of the threads of the way clothes are made, worn, and perceived. Transgressions illuminate their borders. In *Modes Pratiques* n°1, we followed several tracks, among them: bathing etiquette in California in the early twentieth century, crew uniforms, blue-collared clothes in nineteenth-century Paris, drag-queen balls in Paris, dance halls during the 1920's and 1930's, and “Voguing” ceremonies in today's suburbs...

“Can we live without fashion?” asks *Modes Pratiques* Issue n°2. This issue explored frontiers where fashion is ignored, banned, rejected or demonized: times of scarcity during World War I, nudist utopias in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, French feminist wardrobes, Wild Boys escaped from the novel of William S. Burroughs, the Summer of Love in 1967, the clothing regime of Sioux reservations, veil addicts during the French Revolution, and the story of Tarno, a young funk music lover from Nigeria who became an Islamic preacher ...

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Scanning Fashion

an interview of Katerina Jebb by Romy Texier. Paris,
November 2017.

Katerina Jebb and Romy Texier

TEXT

Inside of a dress



Collection Musée Galliera, 2013.

Inside of a shoe, 1996



Comme des Garçons, Isabelle Huppert, 2014



Inside of a dress



Collection Musée Galliera, 2013.

Romy Texier: How would you present yourself?

Katerina Jebb: Sometimes presentable. Sometimes unpresentable. It's difficult to define oneself I think better if left to others. I would present myself truthfully only to myself.

Romy: How come you moved to Paris?

Katerina: I moved to Paris at the age of 26 to pursue experimental photography. I stayed for a few years and then I travelled a lot all over the world. I came back to live in Paris in 2000 because I had a puppy and I didn't want him to live in quarantine for 6 months. The French system allowed animals in who had travelled from other countries and so here I am.

Romy: Fashion photography, documentary photography, artist, in which category do you see yourself in?

Katerina: All and none. It's complicated as they say. I'm not a fashion photographer. Artist is a big title and sometimes I think that I am perhaps an artist because of my obsessions and refusals. If I say photographer it's not strictly true because it is quite rare that I hold a camera. I'm interested in subject matter. The scanner is a very precise medium for me to document the material world.

Romy: How do you create your images?

Katerina: I use my intuition and then I use technology.

Romy: Are you inspired by scientific imagery?

Katerina: Yes. I'm inspired more so by the advancement of science as opposed to the imagery in produces. That said the invention of scientific imagery has saved millions of lives and so yes it's a world with a vision of hope.

Romy: Why abandon the camera, and all the aspects it incorporates in terms of lighting, location, depth...

Katerina: I don't consciously abandon the camera, I use it when I need to use it. I prefer seeing my images come to life reproduced by a digital scanner.

Romy: What relationship do you have toward fashion and clothing?

Katerina: I'm not very interested in fashion, I am interested in origin-ality. Fashion is an immense and powerful machine and I like that it creates jobs and feeds people but I don't like the idea of dictating to the masses how they should dress. My relationship to clothing as evidence or as aesthetic historical artifacts is evolved and passionate. I look at clothes as a way to find meaning. For me clothing is anthropological and so it provides me with a sense of value beyond its material existence.

Romy: What is your relationship to archives, museums, and documents?

Katerina: I've been working with museums and foundations now for 10 years. I started to work with Olivier Saillard at Musée Galliera in 2007 and I have worked on many projects with him. The Balthus Foundation invited me to make a residence there and I have been documenting the contents of Balthus's studio for many years. This

project is ongoing and we will publish a book next year. It's as though I have become an archivist over the years which is fine as it's always an enlightening experience. I'm presently working for The Metropolitan Museum in New York and The Vatican in Rome documenting 170 artifacts and clothing. This body of work will be the exhibition catalogue "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" in 2018.

Romy: Do the clothes that you scan tell a story of the people that have worn them?

Katerina: Physically yes, more than that I cannot say, it's the viewer who construes the meaning or story.

Romy: Are you a collector? of what?

Katerina: Yes. Eclectic phenomena, non-specific subject matter. Rare books, obscure, graphic design documents, strange dysfunctional objects.

Romy: Your personal work is often scans of objects. What's your relationship to objects?

Katerina: Fascination. I like abstract appeal and looking at things which escape an exact definition. You have to ask what it is. I like broken objects, abandoned unwanted things. It's as though they hold sentient powers. We leave behind objects which help to describe us. We inhabit a material planet and we are born to consume. The Object world is inescapable. I love surfaces and organic objects from the realm of nature but I also love artifice so I suppose my visual sensibility can appear conflictual.

Romy: Are objects a way into your subconscious?

Katerina: Perhaps. Artistic output is an unfathomable compulsion. Maybe it's good not to ask too many questions. Making art is often liberating to the creator in a wordless way.

Romy: I was quite inspired for my essay by your scan of Maurice Rheims's book *La vie étrange des objets*. In what way do you relate to this title in your work of scanned objects?

Katerina: *The Strange Life of Objects* as a title really captures me and resonates with my curiosity towards objects. My obsession with

graphic design and spare harmonious composition delivers me to these titles and so that is why I collect rare books. They inhabit another realm and slide slowly into obsolete obscurity and I feel that I want to rescue them from this.

Romy: Is the scanning of isolated objects a way of animating them, giving them life?

Katerina: Of course, it may give them 5% more life or 99% more life depending on the consequent diffusion into the visual landscape. But I give them my attention with intention. It could just be a random exercise. I love to describe what I do as meandering in a shapeless void.

Romy: Would you link your work to Marcel Duchamp's ready made?

Katerina: That would be so pretentious of me to imagine my output in the same sentence as Duchamp's. I could never attain his intellectual brilliance in my upcoming 88 lives. But it is so essential and vital to have men and women that we can look to for spiritual guidance. I make my work with a lot of pleasure and amusement and so I hope that perhaps I share humour with him.

Romy: How do you expose your work? Is there an articulation between the glass of the scan and the glass of the framing?

Katerina: Yes greatly so. Glass is so intriguing and brutal. It is a vital matter. Without glass imagery would have a difficult time existing. It's crucial for me to be able to frame my work and to work closely with my framer. Correctly framed a work can surpass your original intention.

Clothing of le Dauphin, son of Marie-Antoinette



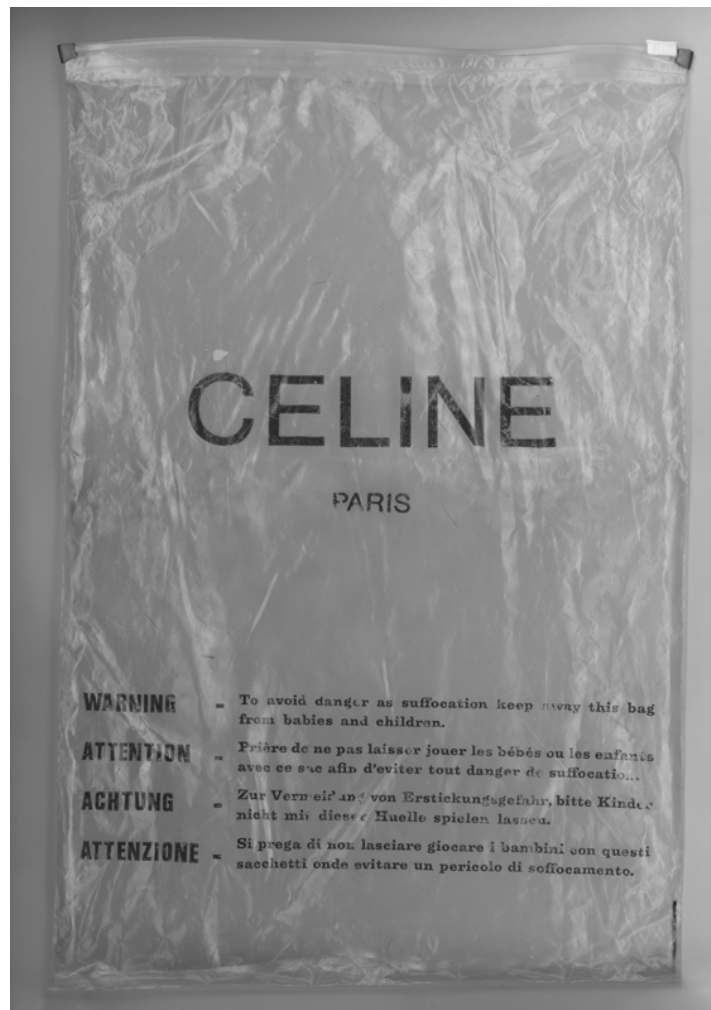
Collection Musée Galliera, 2015.

Dior leopard skin coat



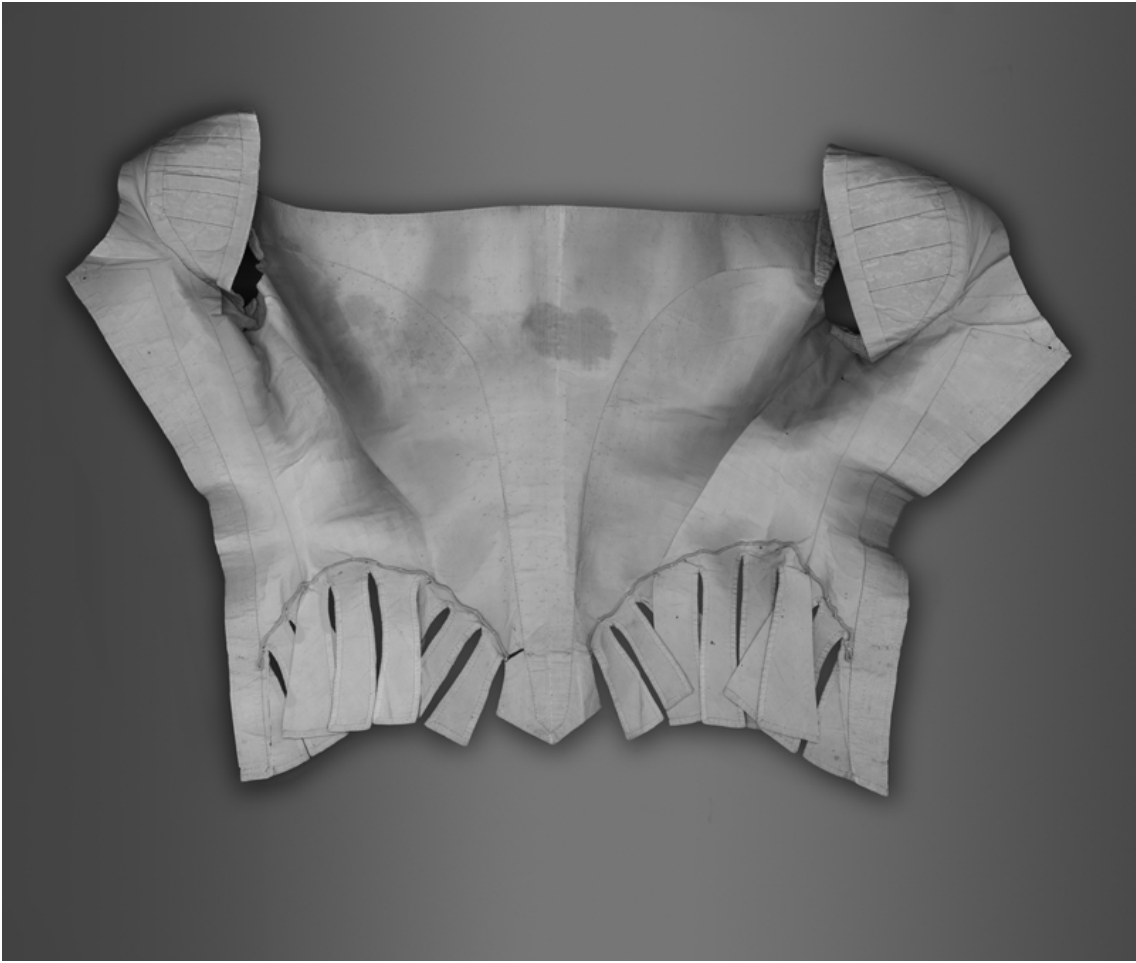
Collection Musée Galliera, 2012.

Empty plastic bag found in the suitcase of Olga Picabia



Comité Picabia, 2012.

Corset of Marie-Antoinette



Collection Musée Galliera, 2016.

Ladies tights, 1996



AUTHORS

Katerina Jebb

Romy Texier

Delphine Baron, “the Queen of Fancy Dress” on Trial

Costume Balls and Social Norms during the Second
Empire

Corinne Legoy

Translated by Julian Bass-Krueger

OUTLINE

“Oh! how lovely the trial of Mme la baronne de Korf against Mme Delphine Baron”

“What is then this event of the day and why so many high emotions among fervent fashion disciples?”

“The bodices were too low-cut: I understand the full gravity of such a reproach made against a bodice.”

“It would oppose French grace and French taste, if couturiers wrote the laws”

“I don’t know if in Russia they still treat their serfs this way...”

EDITOR'S NOTES

In its paper edition, this article is presented with illustrations by Pablo Grand Mourcel. These can be seen in the PDF associated with the article.

TEXT

Young girls dresses are not to be taken lightly.

In 1859, a duel was played out at the Seine civil tribunal; a mere quarrel of unpaid dues between a couturier and her client. But their lawyers turned the trial into a singular conflict of norms

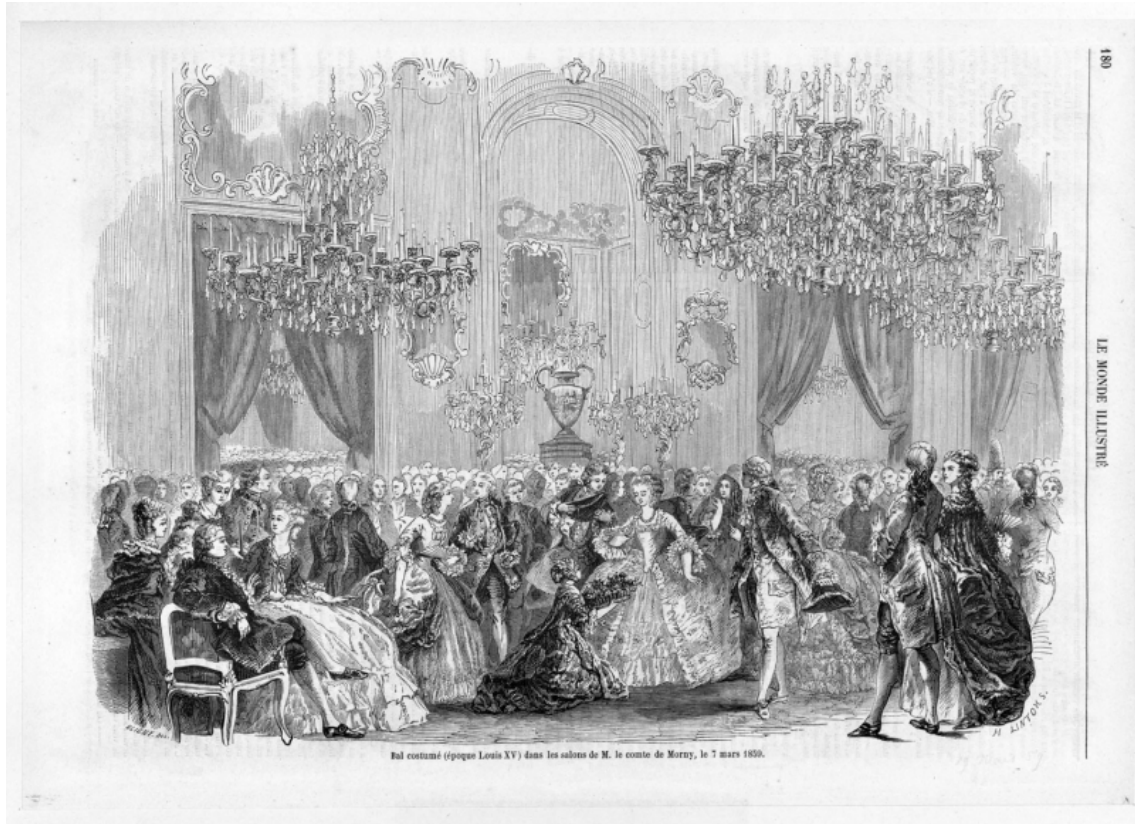
- 1 Sometimes a simple name awakens a dormant history. Such is the case of Gustave-Gaspard Chaix d'Est-Ange, a name stumbled upon during research on masked balls and costume balls in the 19th century. Chaix d'Est-Ange was Flaubert and Baudelaire's lawyer for the momentous trials of *Madame Bovary* and *Les Fleurs du Mal* that occurred in 1857. However, he also unexpectedly appears in the Bibliothèque National de France's catalog linked to a little-known dressmaker, Delphine Baron, in a case that pitted her against the baronne de Korf, represented by Me (Maître) Léon Duval, held on April 6, 1859 at the Seine Civil Tribunal. In *La Tribune Judiciaire. Recueil des plaidoyers et des réquisitoires les plus remarquables des tribunaux français et étrangers*, which published both lawyers' arguments, we see the tangled threads of an fascinating encounter between the French fashion world, a Russian *baronne*, and one of the

most famous lawyers of the time¹ The trial may have seemed like a simple “affaire de chiffons” or “clothing case” (*Le Journal du Loiret* April 11 and 12, 1859). In sum, the baroness refused to pay for the Louis XV flower girl costumes that she ordered for her daughters for the comte de Morny’s fancy dress ball on March 2, 1859, on the pretext that they were “immodest” and delivered too late². She demanded 3,000 francs in monetary damages. The dressmaker, opposing her claim, demanded payment for the provided costumes. The participants, their arguments, and the context, as well as the case’s immediate echo, all combined to upend the *Journal du Loiret*’s reductive description of the affair. Investigating the affair reveals a much richer history than expected: a harsh feud over norms at a time when costume parties were never far removed from the world’s pulse.

“Oh! how lovely the trial of Mme la baronne de Korf against Mme Delphine Baron”³

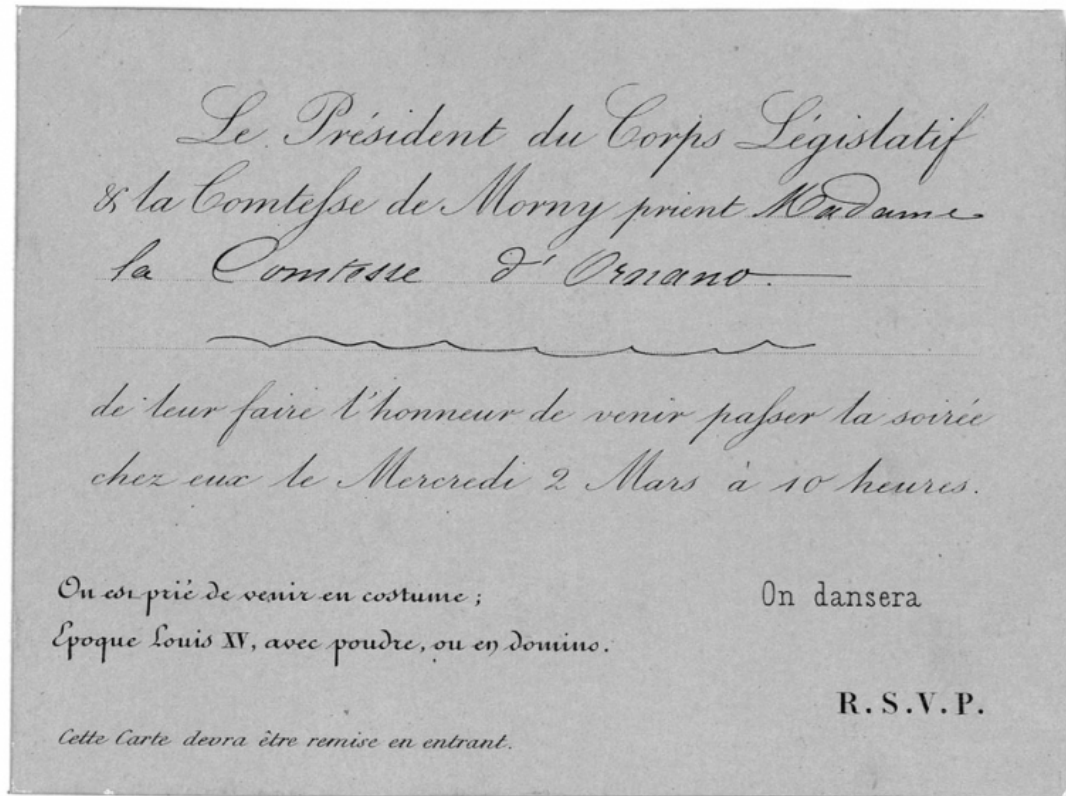
“You know sirs that the end of carnival was marked by a veritable deluge of costume balls: on the 28 of February, the State Minister’s ball; on March 2, the comte de Morny’s; on March 5, the Foreign Affairs ball; and finally on the 7, the impératrice’s; and I’ve only listed the official parties, not to mention the numerous other functions.”

Costume ball (Louis XV era) in the comte de Morny's salon, March 7, 1859.



Drawing by Bligny, engraving by Henri Linton ; page from the newspaper L'illustration. © Private Collection.

Invitation to the comte de Morny's ball.



© Private Collection.

- 2 Chaix D'Est-Ange opened his case with this list, emphasizing the singular festivity of Napoleon III's reign. Costume balls and masked balls weren't a Second Empire invention – they occurred nearly without interruption from the Restoration to the Années Folles. Under the Restoration and during July monarchy, the duchesse de Berry or Marie-Amelie, Louis-Philippe's wife, organized costume balls. Yet, they belonged, with a wearying persistence, to a long tradition of aristocratic court parties. During the Second Empire, masked balls became the consecration of a specific form of politics. The balls listed by Chaix D'Est-Ange were private and organized by the circles of power: ministers, state councilors, ambassadors, Napoleon III and Eugénie. They fed a vertiginous social calendar throughout the period, without direct comparison to what came before or after. During the Third Republic, official costume balls disappeared from the political sphere, if not from its salons. Chaix d'Est-Ange cited several great orchestrators of masked balls, including Fould, Minister

of State from 1852 to 1860, Morny, President of the Corps Législatif from 1854 to 1865, and Walewski, Foreign Minister from 1855 to 1860. Other famous hosts include Persigny, who organized costume balls throughout his second appointment as Minister of the Interior from 1860 to 1863, and Chasseloup-Laubat, Minister of the Navy and the Colonies between 1860 and 1869, both *bon vivants*. Invitations to these balls, well preserved at the Bibliothèque-Musée de L'Opéra de Paris, are precious archives that inform us of social codes regarding parties and of the behavior therein. An invitation addressed by the comte de Morny and his wife to the comtesse d'Ornano for Morny's ball on Wednesday March 2, 1859 noted that guests were expected at the Hotel de Lassay, the Morny's residence, at 10 pm "in costume; Louis XV era, powdered or in domino cloaks." These parties were open to the nobles of the Second Empire, such as the comtesse d'Ornano, as well as to European elites such as the baronne de Korf. Princess Pauline de Metternich, the comtesse de Castiglione, and the comtesse Barbara Rimsky-Korsakov frequently attended such balls, all wearing audacious costumes that often revealed more of their bodies than they masked. For Napoleon III and Eugenie's grand ball on February 7, 1866, the comtesse Rimsky-Korsakov came dressed as Flaubert's Salammbô – in other words, barely covered. Information on the baronne de Korf is, at first sight, sparse. Maître Léon Duval's oral argument gives us only a few clues: she was a "Russian grand dame," "wife of the général baron de Korf," who came to Paris from the Russian court, and lived at the Hôtel Richmond with her two daughters. This information opens several trails. There's nothing surprising with Russian presence in Paris in the wake of the Crimean War, which saw Alexander II break with the isolationism that his father, Nicholas I, had imposed. After a series of political exiles arrived, including Turgenev in 1832 and Bakunin in 1844, others joined – many were artists and traders⁴. These émigrés reconnected with the socialite habits of the Russian élite, who were used to spending part of the winter in Paris. They preferred the Right Bank, particularly the Rue de Rivoli, the Boulevard des Italiens, and the Rue de La Paix. The Hôtel Richmond, on the rue du Helder, was central to this selective and socially significant geography. Moreover, the life and personality of Morny himself further explain these shared sociabilities. He was the Ambassador-at-large to Russia in 1856. In 1857, he married a Russian princesse, Sophie Troubetzkoï. On returning to France, the couple

threw frequent balls and receptions where the notables of the Second Empire mingled with artists and european aristocrats.

Le Moniteur de la coiffure, for the Bulletin of Fashion, New York, volume 21, January 1860. "Historic artistic and fancy costumes from the Maison Moreau, Delphine Baron, successor, drapery, waistcoats and major novelties from the Maison Dubois jeune, shirts, collars and ties from the Maison du Phénix.

S. Hayen senior, millinery from the Maison René Pineau, haircuts and hairdressing by Loisel. Perfumes from Violet, inventor of Thridace soap, purveyor to her majesty the Empress. Paris, rue des Petites Ecuries, 19."

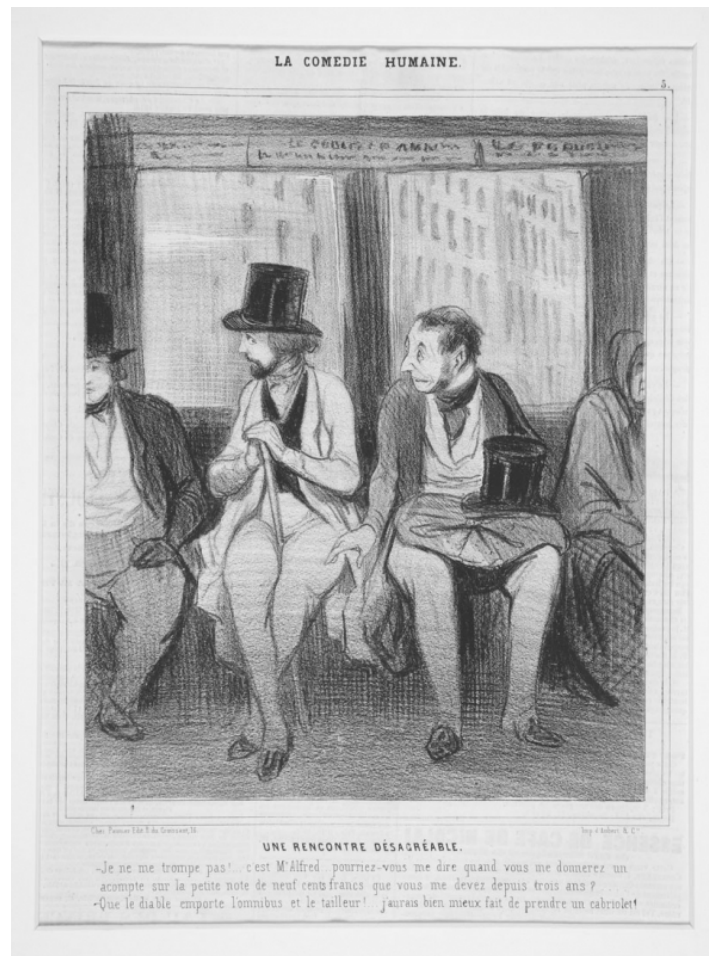


© BnF

- 3 An unexpected witness, however, allows us to draw a more precise portrait of the baronne de Korf. In the case's tangled web, a touch of mystery resides in the discovery of the baronne's great-grandson: Vladimir Nabokov, the author of the notorious *Lolita*⁵. Two of the protagonists of the 1859 affair are thus the writer's paternal grandparents: Marie, one of the baronne's daughters for whom Delphine Baron made one of the incriminating costumes, and Dimitri Nabokoff (1827-1904), then Councilor of the State⁶. Almost a century later, their

grandson related the dispute of 1859 in detail – “an amply grotesque incident” in his words – and shed light on some its major players. Nina Alexandrovna (1819-1895), his great-grandmother, was the wife of a German-born general serving in the Russian army, Ferdinand Nikolaus Viktor von Korf(f) (1819-1895), with whom she had five daughters. The baroness had come to spend the winter of 1859 in Paris with two of them: Olga and Marie, the oldest, born in 1842. Dimitri Nabokov, a family friend and Marie’s future husband, was also there. At the time of the ball, and of her marriage in September later that year, Marie was 17-years-old, the age that draws the utmost maternal and social vigilance. In a commentary both pointed and allusive, Nabokov adds that his “good great grandmother” was “beautiful, passionate, and, sorry to say, far less austere in her private morals than it would appear from her attitude toward low necklines.”⁷ In view of these comments, the biting irony of Chaix d’Est-Ange’s plea resonates: “I don’t have to dwell on the fact that a neckline high enough for the evening, you find too revealing the day after, and that this inordinate love for very high neck lines, that seizes you right at the moment of paying the bill [...] strikes me as suspect.” This introduces a question that we shall return to: what if the case’s heart lies beyond a simple crime of decency and beyond a dress-maker’s betrayal of the imperative modesty of two young girls?

“An unpleasant meeting between a tailor and one of his debtors”



Drawing by Daumier, *La Comédie Humaine*, published in *Le Charivari*, April 3, 1843.
© Private Collection.

- 4 In the battlefield of the civil courthouse, the baronne de Korf came face to face with a figure from an entirely different background: Delphine Baron. Her presence invokes the shadowy world so often forgotten behind the splendor of imperial parties: the *petites mains* (seamstresses) who sewed and embroidered, made the dresses, bouquets, and ribbons that adorned masked and costumed bodies, and the sewing workshops with their constraints and pressures leading up to the feverish eves of the balls⁸. An investigation into the life of Delphine Baron – who, as *La Tribune Judiciaire* states, had “taken the helm, not too long ago, of the famous maison Moreau” – shows that although she is unknown to many today, she was well-known in her time⁹. Advertisements, newspaper articles, dictionaries, and correspondences show that she enjoyed a certain amount

of fame from the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic until her death in July 1895. Yet the *Annuaire des Artistes et de l'enseignement dramatique et musical* signaled her death with a laconic obituary, which reduced her life and career to the status of “wife of:” “Mme Delphine Baron, widow of Marc Fournier, who, from 1851 to 1868, was the director of the Porte-Saint-Martin theater.”¹⁰ More broadly, the “queen of fancy dress”¹¹ is shrouded in silence, stifling the style that she made her own, and practically erasing any memory of her activity. Disparate sources from between 1850 and 1880 testify to a richer history. When she took over the Maison Moreau, in 1856 or 1857, Delphine Baron ended her earlier career as an actress. She was born in Lyon in 1818, came to Paris with her family in 1833, and entered the Conservatoire before debuting at l’Odeon in 1844. In 1845, she married the vaudeville performer Marc Fournier, and entered the Porte-Saint-Martin theater in 1846, where her renown as an actress was established. She was famous enough to for the sculptor Calmels to create a plaster bust of her to display at the 1857 Salon. Her separation with Marc Fournier, in 1856, drove her to leave acting. She bought theater costumes from the famous designer Babin and opened her own fashion house¹². This choice, catalyzed by her acting career, had roots in her family; her father, a grounds inspector (*inspecteur des domaines*) and painter, permitted Delphine and her brother Alfred (himself a sculptor before becoming an actor) to receive artistic training. Thus the young Delphine trained in the art of engraving and, for a time, made a career out of it before entering the theater scene. At Porte-Saint-Martin she continued to draw – with great talent according to her contemporaries – sketching costume designs that she would later execute at her fashion house¹³. She specialized in costumes – for theater, balls, or artists – as well as in fashionable daywear (*toilettes de ville*), with apparent success. In the 1860’s her name appeared regularly in newspapers and fashion columns regarding theater or high society, the journalists lauding her creations. In 1860 *Le Moniteur de la Coiffure* called her “the queen of fancy dress,” poeticizing her most frequent descriptor: that of *grande couturière*. In 1877, her house was recommended to foreigners attending the the Paris Opera’s masked ball, and in 1878, *Le Monde Artiste*, raved about the “marvelous” costumes that she created for a stage play in Rouen¹⁴. Various sources also link her

name to those of renowned artists: in 1863 she rented a Pierrot costume to Theophile Gautier's son and in 1865 *La Petite Revue* links her to Nadar:¹⁵

« Nadar enters the salon where masses of visitors circle around the windows. A hundred voices greet him in a hundred crossing calls.
- Nadar, don't forget that we're expecting you at seven for our Tuesday dinner.
- Nadar, you promised my wife that you'd come to her masked ball tonight.
- Nadar, I need an article from you for my newspaper, about the Amsterdam Ascension [...]
- Yes my children, yes my dears, I'm yours, right away, in five minutes, in eight minutes, in a quarter hour... Henri's expecting me for dinner. Charles, be happy, Delphine Baron just sent me an incredible costume for your ball. Victor, wait for me at five at café Riche.”¹⁶

- 5 The transfer of her fashion house between 1863 and 1871 from the rue Filles-Saint-Thomas to the corner of rue Richelieu (n°112) and Boulevard Montmartre (n°21) indicates a boom in her business. She became more clearly inscribed in the chosen quarter of reputable fashion houses. (This was before haute-couture designated the rue de La Paix and its vicinity as its beating heart.) Apart from the the 1859 affair, Delphine Baron appears several times in the press for conflicts with certain clients. In 1881 she clashed with a singer, Marie Heilbron, who she accused of damaging her reputation by referring to her costumes as “botched” in her letters.¹⁷ In 1886 she underwent a new lawsuit, this time against an actress, Jane Granier, to obtain the payment of over 3,000 francs of breeches. The actress and her impresario were ordered to pay the bill, while a journalist found pretext for irony: “Mlle Granier then has to wear the breeches?”¹⁸

Stereoscopic image. “A wedding under Louis XV’s reign”, 1859. *La photographie: journal des publications légalement autorisées: faits intéressants la photographie, annonces*, Paris, Furne fils et H. Tournier, managing owners, May 1859, pages 3-4: “This little series of stereoscopic pictures that the Maison Furne fils & Tournier has just released is distinguished by the opulence and precision of the costumes (from the maison Delphine Baron), by the elegant composition of the

groups, and, above all, by the processing of the prints, which can be compared favourably with the most accomplished and successful works of English photography.”



© Private Collection

- 6 Delphine Baron encountered a number of stiffers and debtors during her career. Literature has a rich history of portraying this inevitable facet to a tailor's career. In the 17th century Molière created the arguing duo of Monsieur Dimanche, a tailor trying in vain to be paid, and Dom Juan, his devious client. Artists of the 19th century sketched this scene often enough to make it a cliché. Couturiers and non-paying clients were thus inseparably linked through novels, in particular Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*, physiologies, theater, and caricature¹⁹. A good example of this genre can be seen in Daumier's incisive painting – “a disagreeable encounter between a tailor and his debtor” – which appeared in *Le Charivari* on April 3 1843²⁰. If the cliché is an old one, it gained new life in the second half of the century. The dueling pair was no longer just a literary and artistic subject, but a real one that appeared regularly in newspaper columns and legal reports, becoming, in a sense, a duel of the courts. Trials opposing couturiers and clients grew increasingly frequent. And so the accepted norms relating these two worlds – depicted in art as the client's condescension for his tailor, the debtor's bohemian negligence or pecuniary carelessness – was more firmly contested by couturiers who no longer hesitated to take their clients to court²¹. A new context, entailing the rise of harsh commer-

cial stakes, allows us to understand this development. Competition heightened between emerging stores and large established ones; the hierarchy deepened between the emerging sector of “haute-couture” and the flourishing trade of made-to-measure garments.²² At the same time, we see the rise of a social conscience regarding the petites mains and larger figures of the fashion world. All these elements combined to mould the cliché into legal reality.

“What is then this event of the day and why so many high emotions among fervent fashion disciples?”²³

- 7 The subject of the “event of the day” seems simple. The actual case, on the other hand, is rife with complications, entangling a dozen protagonists in a hotel suit: the baronne de Korf; Nabokof, the family friend; seamstresses; the studio’s première demoiselle (head assistant); a rival couturier of Delphine Baron; two bailiffs; some witnesses; and a police officer. We will begin by following Me Léon Duval’s account of the events. Having received the Mornys’ invitation in February, the baronne decided to order three costumes – one for herself from the maison Delille and two for her daughters from Delphine Baron. For her daughters she wanted costumes in the style of Louis XV flower girls and gave the designer an engraving as model. She arranged her order for 9 pm the night before the ball. Her costume arrived in time but those for her daughters were late. They were finally delivered at 9 pm, the same evening as the ball, without the flowers that she asked for, which were promised to arrive 15 minutes later. Here the major grievance arose – the costumes were “immodest,” without taste or style, made of cloth where silk was expected. They disappointed and shocked their purchaser. Delphine Baron was immediately warned and sent two workers to make modifications which “instead of fixing them, rendered them even more unacceptable.” The baronne then sent for Mlle Fournée, couturier of the Maison Delille, who judged the costumes “incorrigible.” At 11 pm madame de Korf decided that her daughters would not attend the comte de Morny’s ball. The next morning matters intensified

when the baronne officially and legally documented her refusal of the costumes. The day after that, Delphine Baron sent a bailiff to her client's hotel to seize 700 francs-worth of goods. Dimitri Nabokok, on the premises, proposed to pay the 700 francs instead: the bailiff refused and ordered the seizure of goods, proceeding "without the slightest civility." A second bailiff was then sent. Instead of diffusing the situation, the second bailiff counseled advised "resisting the seize if one must." A policeman was then called as backup, which permitted the momentary resolution of the affaire. The first bailiff finally accepted to stop the seizure of goods in return for the 700 francs, which were handed to the police officer. Me Léon Duval then demanded that the costumes be returned to Delphine Baron and the 700 francs returned to the baronne, as well as monetary damages.

- 8 Me Chaix d'Est-Ange reacted to this account with harsh mockery: "I don't know if it's because this trial is on the subject of a ball that Mme la Baronne de Korf thought it proper to dress up the facts in such a strange manner." He gave a remarkably different version of the affair, not in its larger arcs, but in the interpretation given to the protagonists' behavior. Both oral arguments, taken together, pit social conventions against the rules of the game (or of the ball), and aristocracy against the fashion world, as well as the Ancien Regime against the new society.

"The bodices were too low-cut: I understand the full gravity of such a reproach made against a bodice." ²⁴

- 9 The first conflict of norms – the apparent heart of the trial – played around the presumed indecency of the costumes that Delphine Baron provided to the baronne's two young daughters. Me Leon Duval declared at the trial's start that the costumes were "immodest," too revealing, and too tight. He thus established his stance on the social norms that codified how young women of good standing were supposed to dress. These norms were dominated by imperative decency and the fundamental virtue of "modesty" that commanded

girls to avoid wayward glances, be inconspicuous, show restraint, and reassure future husbands. The strategy was matrimonial in objective. The archetype of the modest young girl was reinforced in the 1860's when newfound emphasis was placed on the chastity of women in their roles as girls, wives, and mothers²⁵. This fed into broader moral policing under the Second Empire, as exemplified by the Madame Bovary trial. The prosecution, under Ernest Pinard, railed against "the poetry of adultery," with its "lecherous scenes" and Emma's inappropriate lust. This kind of prudishness was often protested. Baudelaire, for instance, jokingly referred to "the grapeleaves of Sir Nieuwerkere," a reference to Napoleon III's Minister of Cultural Affaires who known for covering up naked statues. Astolphe de Custine was equally critical, writing, "Our puritans in black robes obstinately want to make this world a convent for the education of young girls."²⁶

- 10 Dress codes of decency rigorously followed the stages of life: for young women, dresses were to touch the ground and their hair be made up elegantly; for "young girls", skirts could reach the ankles and hair could be braided or pulled into a bun; for little girls, dresses could reveal their boots or pants ("modesty tubes" according to the highly indicative language of the time) and loose hair.²⁷ Sartorial norms were also imposed for balls, which, in the words of the vicomtesse de Renneveill, "had enormous influence on the contingencies of family and social life."²⁸ The goal of dressing for a ball was to seduce while respecting the norms of decency, to show one's social rank without ostentation, to basically discreetly seek a husband. Mothers saw to their daughters' outfits with extreme care. Léon Duval reminded his audience: "a mother must supervise dressing at such a time and have the ability to make modifications." Chaix d'Est-Ange didn't contradict this in his argument, saying, "the bodices were too low-cut; I understand the full gravity of such a reproach made against a bodice; I understand that a bodice betrays its duties when it doesn't fulfill the expectation of modesty that it's tasked with."
- 11 It's only in the 19th century, marked by the legibility of the social body, that clothing is, before everything, a sign an immediate translation of status, age, and sex. Me Duval resumed, "we are in this world, a serious man or a frivolous one (évanoré), a respectable women or a women adhering to all nuances of Parisian society, depending on way that one dresses. What in Latin was called *habitus corporis*, the way

of being, depends on the way we present ourself.” He implicitly stated that for a young girl to expose her shoulders and breasts to the gaze of others would relegate her immediately out of graces of good society.

- 12 Different sartorial norms, however, had been in place for women of the Second Empire. The impératrice Eugénie made low necklines the fashion for ball attire, starting a vogue that stretched from evenings in Compiègne to the Tuileries. At every age, then, a way of dressing, but for every occasion too: low necklines would be indecent for morning wear but were obligatory for the evening dresses of every grande dame of the Second Empire²⁹. It is impossible, then, to read the 19th century in terms of a general prudishness: norms of decency were socially marked but also context based – depending on the activities being undergone, on the time of the day, and on one’s age. These norms also intrinsically fed a particularly fertile erotic imagination focused on what propriety imposed, whether by containing (hair) or concealing from view (ankles).
- 13 Léon Duval’s trial on immodesty led to a number of problems. Chaix d’Est Ange spiritedly picked up on the first, presenting the engraving of the Louis XV flower girl costume as evidence: “it seems that under Louis XV, this is how flower girls dressed, or rather... undressed.” The baronne de Korf’s choice is indeed intriguing since this costume was characterized by a very low neckline and a short skirt. The engraving fits costume code for the comte de Morny’s ball, where the Louis XV era was the theme, but escapes the social codes that Me Duval so firmly recalled. The most interesting aspect of this case lies on another level: that of the application of these sartorial codes to masked and costume balls. Unique to the time, the social function of clothing (distinction and status identification) was thus applied to a universe that a priori ignored it or sought to subvert it. This being said, the idea of a “suspended time” of masquerades – a temporality that allowed one, in all impunity, to break through norms, and allowed deviance that social codes condemn – was not always consistent. The dominant interpretation on masquerades built on this reading finds here a manifest limit: the social sphere and the world of masquerade parties were not fully separate, and the norms of one weighed undeniably on the other³⁰. Indeed, what Duval’s plea shows is the rigidity of views that resisted the separation between the

règles du jeu and social order, and that, even for a costume ball, determined the moral conventions that weighed on young girls. In this sphere, even dressing up could not be fully subversive and costumes had to visibly confirm the wearer's status. Even the very revealing but also very luxurious costumes of provocative aristocrats like the comtesse de Castiglione or the comtesse Rimsky-Korsakov testify to this in their own way: the baring of their bodies was accompanied by a stylistic richness that validated their place in the social hierarchy.

- 14 This paradoxical entanglement of norms that made costume balls spaces of social consolidation, in a temporal order that they were not to not disturb, explains the very strong stratification of these balls, as Léon Duval reminds us. To comte Morny's ball, which required high fashion and utmost decorum, he compared the *bal de l'Assomoir* for which Delphine Baron would have been the ideal couturier and the costumes would have been a perfect fit...for a chambermaid.
- 15 Chaix d'Est-Ange chose to tread lightly on the matter of the intrusion of social codes in costume balls. He reminded us that while trying on the dresses, the baronne hadn't find the bodices too revealing. Plus, one need only re sew a few hooks for the dress to fit less tightly – something so easy to do that it was indeed carried out to tighten one of the bodices which was too wide. It's thus on another terrain that he argued his case – one which opposed the frivolous world of the Russian aristocracy to the hardworking and useful world of dress-making. He displaced the argument to a whole separate battlefield of norms.

“It would oppose French grace and French taste, if couturiers wrote the laws”³¹

- 16 To the crimes of immodesty of the costumes, Mr Duval added what would constitute one of the trial's main points: accusations of deviance and incivility against the maison Baron. The norms on trial weren't just those of the propriety of the two young girls, but those of hierarchy and social relations.

17 “Why did they occupy the sofas with such plebian verve?” With those scathing word, Duval said all that needed to be said on the conception of the world that underlay his case. He sought to reaffirm the social distinction between his client and the dressmaker or, to take a term from the old regime, the aristocracy and the commoners. He accused the workers sent by Delphine Baron of behaving without respect for the baronne de Korf. He employed belittling language that was common for the time and associated “*grisettes*”, or garment workers, with easy women: those “with loose tongues who are far too accustomed to masked balls.” In doing so, he adopted the stereotype of femininity structured around two poles: the one, orderly and placated, that the domestic virtue of the baronne de Korf and her daughters embodied; the other, deviant and improper, typified by female workers or actresses, who had a long tradition of being associated with prostitutes³². From the very beginning of the trial Duval pitted these worlds against each, citing seamstresses as saying “the costumes weren’t too revealing, and they are worn in high society, like at all the theaters on the boulevard.” While shrewdly hinting at Delphine Baron’s past as an actress, he also condemned the foggy normative horizons of women who thought that “high society” was found at the “theaters on the boulevard.” The “boulevard” in question was the boulevard du Temple (which led to Theatre de la Porte-Saint-Martin). The “boulevard of crime,” as it was known, was where melodramas played out nightly, thus giving the street its name³³. The boulevard drew a large public of bourgeois, trying to “slum” it, and artists, who were fascinated by the scene; but the largest public was made up of the working class. (That is, until 1862, when the theaters were demolished under Haussmann’s command.) In the hierarchy of Parisian theaters of the 19th century, the boulevard of crime was an area of “threepenny theater” and of Carné’s *Enfants du Paris*. It was a place accessible to all, mixing theatrics, fairground stalls, street spectacles, popular cafés, and “*bouis-bouis*” (greasy spoons) to quote the prefect of the Seine who had them torn down without hesitation³⁴. For the social elites it was a place of licentious behavior, even depravity, and Duval’s evocation of it permitted him to link fashion workers to perverted coquettes.

18 His arguments and the allusions they conjured served to discredit Delphine Baron’s voice, as represented by Chaix d’Est-Ange, while

relegating the fashion world to a universe neither moral nor respectable. Meanwhile, Duval's case opens another, more fertile, trail that shows how far the stakes go beyond a mere question each party's credibility. After Chaix d'Est-Ange remarked that only an expert appraisal could tell if the bodices were really too revealing, Duval retorted:

An expert appraisal to know if a dress fits well! One might as well have an appraisal to know if a mouche (fake beauty mark) is well placed. I maintain that in these matters, even in a country of equality, ladies are sovereign, and it would oppose French grace and French taste, if fashion designers wrote the laws. That a mechanic might not submit to the judgment of an industrialist for whom he creates a machine, I'll concede. In these cases there are precise known mathematical conditions [...] But in matters of clothing, it's individual taste that decides. [...]

Labruyère said it best: '...only a philosopher lets his tailor dress him.' Indeed an article of clothing can very well fit us, while still being in poor taste."

- 19 Here, Duval defended the role of the nobility as sole arbitrators of taste. This hierarchy had classical and old regime origins and ruled that the client had sovereignty over the dressmakers. The supremacy lay in the client's "individual taste." The tailor was reduced to a "maker" who merely executes a command, and for whom resisting orders would be folly. This is what was at stake at the heart of the trial: the trial was fought over defending the "norm" confining the couturier to executing a costume for which the client brought a model, which was being singularly eroded from 1850 to 1860. Worth, considered the father of haute-couture, had founded his house in 1858. There, he sold his own creations, fruits of his imagination, and showed them on history's first models. It was his job, then, to decide what was worn. Other names, less known today, also played a role in the "coronation of the couturier": Staub, cited by Duval, was the most famous tailor of his time according to Balzac, who immortalized him as Lucien de Rubempré's couturier. Dusautoy, also cited by Duval, was Napoleon III's tailor. Humann, who Gavarni drew for, reportedly told one of his clients, "Do you know why there are so many badly dressed people Monsieur le Marquis? It's because people want to choose their clothes instead of choosing their tailor." These emblematic words

aply summarize what was to play out: the rise of “artists” instead of “makers” and the consecration of couturiers “who wrote the rules”, thus dethroning the aristocracy and contesting its multi-century monopoly on launching trends. This movement came with a new appreciation for the craft of couture. France entered the age of the “*arts du vêtement*”, heralded by the support for and affirmation of reputable *modistes* like Delphine Baron (before the striking masculinisation of “great couturiers”).

- 20 This court case reveals the tensions that accompanied the passage from one normative system to another. It shows resistance to the new model, marked by the disappearance of those old conventions that had contributed to the identity of the nobility. When Duval affirmed that the glory of tailors like Staub came from their clients who, after refusing a number of outfits, ended up accepting one, it signified the persistence of this representation that submitted the couturier to his or her client. The trial of 1859 brings to the light what could have represented, for some, the end of the old regime of fashion. This is the meaning, at heart, of Duval’s words: “when one is naturally noble in this world; I mean naturally by blood, by ancestry, by speech, by education, by *savoir-vivre*, one is at least equal to madame Baron.” This statement is an implicit example of the quasi-defeat of birthright versus talent in this quarrel over definitions of taste.
- 21 Facing this aristocratic defense, one carried out on the premise of the social, moral, and cultural subordination of clothing “makers,” Chaix d’Est-Ange gave another reading. His took into account the social realities of the fashion world to ultimately flip Duval’s argument and show the frivolity and vacuity of the baronne’s milieu. Chaix d’Est-Ange pitted the labor of craftsmen against aristocratic caprice. He first highlighted the feverish hours of a fashion atelier in mid carnival: “Try to picture the activity in the maison Moreau et Delphine Baron at a moment like this: understand how many demands must be responded to, how many specifications must be met; one doesn’t sleep, one doesn’t rest; it is, pardon the expression, a veritable battlefield.” Filled with balls and parties, carnival was one of the busiest times for all fashion houses in the 19th century. Seamstresses worked late nights, often until 11 pm (legislation began to regulate hours in 1892). Chaix d’Est-Ange reminded his audience that

a worker and then the *première demoiselle* were sent to the fitting at 9 pm, only to leave the Hotel Richmond at 10 in the evening. This incessant coming and going defined the production of clothes under the Second Empire, a system which was only interrupted by the advent of centralized department stores. There was the coming and going of “trottins”, young workers tasked with delivering clothes to clients; there was the coming and going between fashion houses and the ateliers providing specific adornments (such as the garlands of roses that Chaix D’Est-Ange reminded had to be specially ordered).

- 22 It was also a time of cutthroat commercial competition, leading the Chaix D’Est-Ange to argue, in order to deny the legitimacy of the opposition’s witnesses, “one has only to present a designer with a dress not made by her hands for her to find fault in it.” The eves of balls became, in the lawyer’s words, veritable “battles to be fought” and the baronne’s demand was blind to this reality. She “demands what? Two new outfits for her daughters; and for what day? For the second of March [...]. Two new outfits at such a time, two costumes to deliver in three days, when already madame Baron had turned away 20,000 francs of orders; it was impossible.” His tone become caustic and ironic when feigning understanding the baronne’s stubbornness: “this despair, I can understand: it’s about going to a ball, going to a costume ball, and going to a costume ball at M. de Morny’s.” He painted a picture of her harassing the couturier until Baron agreed, “vanquished, worn out by her insistence.” The contrast of the two worlds is apparent in Chaix d’Est-Ange’s argument: the vacuity of a ball carried out in deference to aristocratic codes versus the unhappy complacency of an overworked couturier, thanklessly repaid with a trial and with shocking “etiquette.”
- 23 The question of decency thus changed hands in Chaix d’Est-Ange’s defense. At the same time he resolutely undermined the aristocratic order of society as defended by Duval. To his eyes the hereditary nobility that Duval evoked did not hold: Delphine Baron believed she was dealing with a schemer and the baronne’s “strange, colorful language” and the “no less energetic way in which she greeted the *première demoiselle*” reinforced this belief. The language conventions signaling social class, that Duval evoked to highlight the workers’ deviance, were turned around against the baronne. Chaix d’Est-Ange played with this idea of hereditary nobility from the start of the trial,

exclaiming: “one must admit that madame Korf understands business; she commands costumes, doesn’t pay for them, and demands 3,000 francs! She’s born for commerce.” He even dared to counter his opponent’s argument note for note on matters of decency and good taste. He first noted how Delphine Baron took care to make the bodices higher than those in the provided engraving. He lingered, with especially biting irony, on the baronne’s misunderstanding of high-society conventions: “At ten o’clock! That was too late? One only has to note that the invitations stated ten o’clock and that, however much one desires to not miss a second of the ball, coming before ten thirty leaves one to see the chandeliers lit and the parquets waxed. Just because the de Korfs are foreigners isn’t reason enough for them to arrive like provincials.”

- 24 More than in a simple “*affaire de chiffons*”, the trial shows how outlines of a power conflict were drawn in an era in which the nobility began to lose their status of the arbiters of fashion and taste. The trial becomes the site of a class battle. The contrast between the imperial parties and the working class realities that prop them up are clear. The outlines of two antagonistic worlds of thought, each displaying the singular and unexpected politicization of their respective arguments, come into view. Behind the supposed immodesty of two bodices, a conflict of norms plays out: one that pits France – daughter of the Revolution, land of equality, civil law, and rights – against Russia of the old regime, all serfs and knouts.

“I don’t know if in Russia they still treat their serfs this way...”³⁵

- 25 Beyond the conflicting norms of decency and the commercial contentions, the lawyers’ arguments gave the affair a third, political dimension: a conflict between the Ancien Régime and the new society. There are a plethora of references to 1793, to equality, to the Napoleonic code, to the tricolor flag, to serfdom, and to noblemen. Astonishingly, another confrontation of norms played out during the trial: one that opposed a conservative social worldview, as espoused by Mr. Duval, against a worldview of judicial and hereditary equality, as defended by Mr. Chaix d’Est-Ange.

- 26 Duval's case was filled with denunciations of what he presented as fanatic egalitarianism: that of the fashion workers and bailiffs sent by Delphine Baron, who he depicts as violating social hierarchies and mistreating titled elites. "They say that, in a country of equality, the wife of a landowner was never worth more than another, that there were never serfs in France," he stated. To this reoccurring accusation, he added one of incivility: "one fears no one, and [...] ladies can sit on chairs, the sofas being occupied." The trial thus shifts from a crime of immodesty to a crime of contempt for social distinction. This argument was inapt for Me Chaix d'Est Ange, who countered: "whether the bailiff sat on a chair, a couch, or a stool, I admit is difficult for me to defend, since I didn't ask my client's advice, and since I regard it as inconsequential to the trial." It was, however, one of Me Duval's main points. He turned this egalitarian protest into both a diplomatic and a social menace. Not hesitating to dramatize the trial's potential echo, he proceeded: "Misfortune for luxury merchants! Misfortune for designers if we get entangled with Russia!" To his eyes, the stakes had come to encompass the name and reputation of France: "it must not be that abroad they imagine that once the Napoleonic code was established, civility disappeared." He thus repeated a trope, born in an earlier era of anti-revolutionary thought, of how revolutions led to vulgar morals by breaking with the tact and grace of past centuries. At a time of improving relations with the Russian autocracy, for workers to defend an "equal France" was, in his eyes, a dangerous provocation, perhaps even a breach of diplomacy. Furthermore, the menace was social as well as diplomatic: "there was a time when the Châtelet bailiffs were in a perilous state; nobles would thrash them. We thought this poor and for good reason. But this depravity was amply avenged in 93. It must not be that today, it is the bailiffs who thrash the noblemen." For the baronne's lawyer, the danger was clear: the social order was under threat, and its inversion could lead to a carnivalesque state where the nobles were indeed thrashed.
- 27 To counter this argument, Me Chaix d'Est-Ange, chose to denounce the brutality of a Russian aristocracy riddled with arbitrary conventions³⁶. He reminded the court that the *première demoiselle* "was received... I cannot tell you how; I don't know if in Russia they still treat their serfs this way, but in France, there are few noblewomen who would free themselves enough to

take this kind of liberty with language.” The conflict then became one of political cultures, with Chaix d’Est-Ange ironically summarizing:

Madame de Korf didn’t content herself with demanding damages, she also accused the solicitor and the bailiff. In Russia they would have used the knout against them all, but in France the knout doesn’t exist. It’s unfortunate, but it doesn’t exist. While waiting for this regrettable lacuna to be rectified, we must content ourselves with lawsuits. [...].³⁷

- 28 His case led him to pit aristocratic pretense – Nabokoff, “who, assuredly, is a very noble man in Russia” – against the brutal reality underneath, and, by extrapolation, the striking incivility:

Nabokoff proposed to the bailiff, in his words, to ‘throw him out of the window’ and I must admit, I am forced to conclude that the bailiff had the poor taste not to jump; I must admit that he may have displayed some irritation, and in truth it seems to me that many honest men would have done the same.

- 29 Thus Chaix d’Est-Ange threw his adversary’s autocratic tone back at him, resolutely putting the case on the terrain of rights and judicial equality. The conclusion of his defense was unsparing:

there it is men, this trial, from which we can maybe glean a small moral – that when we order clothes, we must pay for them; that the law is made for madame la baronne de Korf as it is made for everyone; that in the end, in France, bailiffs have the right, that we cannot find too exorbitant, to disagree with even someone like Mr. Nabokoff wanting to throw them out of a window.

- 30 Who then won the trial? Me Léon Duval, “the fine swordsman, the master of the sharp epigram” according to *Le Monde illustré* or Me Chaix d’Est-Ange, the young, witty lawyer who that day accomplished “the most beautiful tour de force” possible “on a needle’s point” according to *Le Figaro*?³⁸ ³⁹ In this duel the victory was handed to the baronne: Delphine Baron was condemned to pay 1,000 francs in damages for the seizure of goods against madame de Korf that the prosecutor found so vexing. The victory

however was partial: a second opinion was ordered at the end of the trial.

- 31 The victory also shrouds a mystery: according to Chaix d'Est-Ange the costumes were worn. No sources, however, allow us to confirm or deny this statement. The victory was surely short term; the balance of power that would later shift in favor of couturiers. Le Tintamarre predicted:

a day will come for vengeance. [...] So lawyers, you'll have your mouths shut and Madame Baron will cut the thread of your arguments. Be careful sirs of la Basoche, you who, at a certain time talked so fluently of clothes and costumes; what will you say if you're one day obliged to appear before a tribunal of seamstresses who, judging sovereignly and without appeal, will introduce great changes in the strict costume of your profession [...]. You will no longer be able to declare these poor seamstresses incompetent; and you who pleaded so well for fashion and good taste, you will be forced to submit without so much as a murmur of protest...

- 32 And the end of this little story we hope to have shown to what extent affaires de chiffons crystallize complex norms: how trials such as these reveals the games of power and of hierarchy and the power of social representations, scales of economy, and political representations. We are far from trivial matters and much closer to the spirit of a time.

NOTES

- 1 By J. Sabbatier, Paris, Borrani, 1859.
- 2 Too revealing and too tight.
- 3 *Le Monde Illustré*, 16 April 1859, section "Courrier du Palais."
- 4 Brigitte de Montclos, *Les Russes à Paris au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Paris Museums, 1996.
- 5 Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: an Autobiography Revisited*, 1951. Translated in French with the title *Autres rivages*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961.
- 6 He was, between 1878 and 1885, Minister of Justice for Alexander II and then d'Alexander III.

7 *op. cit.*, p. 56.

8 There are very few works on them apart from Henriette Vanier's, *La mode et ses métiers : frivolités et lutte des classes*, 1830-1870, Paris, Armand Colin, 1960.

9 We display here the first step of research to be expanded on.

10 In the section "Nécrologie de l'année 1895", *Annuaire des artistes et de l'enseignement dramatique et musical*, Paris, Risacher, 1896 (A10), p. 78. This death came one year after a paragraph in *Le Gaulois* on November 12 1894 announcing: "Delphine Baron, now sick, wants to sell her costume store and her material on the boulevard des Italiens".

11 "la fée du travestissement". *Le Moniteur de la coiffure*, January 1860. Literal translation: "Mme Delphine Baron, an artiste of great talent, who heads this house, is without contest the fairy of fancy dress [costume parties]. Under her wand appear the costumes of all centuries and of eras far back in history." p. 1.

12 Couture house or costume house – the distinction is, we must admit, not very clear in Delphine Baron's case. Moreover, the status of costumers in regard to couture houses in the XIXth century is still territory to be explored.

13 Section "Delphine Baron" in *La grande encyclopédie : inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, dir. M. Berthelot et alii, T5, Paris, Lamirault and Cie, 1885, p. 459.

14 April 27, 1878: "The costumes of the maison Moreau are nothing less than marvelous, and never at the Théâtre-Français have we seen such luxury".

15 Letter from Delphine Baron-Fournier to Théophile Gautier from October 24, 1863: she asks for repayment of her 8 franc note and the return of a little Harlequin hat and of a bat missing from a costume that Théophile Gautier's son returned, *Correspondance générale de Théophile Gautier*, T. 8, Geneva, Droz, 1993, p. 191.

16 *La Petite Revue* from Saturday December 9, 1865, section "Intérieur de quelques gens de lettres et artistes", Paris, Émile Voitelain, TIX, November 11 1865-10 February 1866.

17 "Tribunaux" chronicle in *Gaulois*, Wednesday March 16, 1881.

18 Legal Chronicle, *Journal de l'Ain*, November 20, 1886.

19 *Physiologies* were panoramic works common in XIXth century France typified by their caricatures of social mores. See the section "Le Tailleur" in *Les*

Français peints par eux-mêmes, Paris, Curmer, 1842: “If the tailor of a stylish man often sells to his client on credit, if he humbly accepts the conditions of this new Don Juan like a modest Mr. Dimanche”.

20 A drawing that also illustrated Balzac’s *Comedie Humaine*. We can just as well cite another caricature that appeared on November 2, 1839 in *Le Charivari*: “Tailor, you ask me for money, but I don’t make money, I make portraits... Take this, it’s one of your wife that I made as a souvenir.”

21 Maugas, a couturier in vogue during the second empire, indeed obtained, in the winter of 1866, payment for the clothes he gave to the duchesse of Persigny. One can also look at another rift between a couturier and her client in 1870, ending in the obligation of the latter to pay. Of the couturier, Madame Achard, her lawyer declared emblematically: “It’s that madame Achard is not a common modiste [...]. She’s of the new school, and you know this school; the immortal Worth is the head. Meaning that madame Achard is not a simple maker, she’s an artist.” cited by Chloé Antoine, “Le commerce du vêtement et de la toilette au XIX^e siècle. Rencontres de la littérature réaliste et de l’histoire”, Master’s thesis, 2009, Université Lyon-2, ENSSIB.

22 Here again, in the absence of research, we pose a hypothesis: one wonders if the new context which holds for these fashion houses doesn’t equally apply to costumers especially since, as is the case with Delphine Baron, their activity isn’t strictly confined.

23 *Le Tintamarre, critique de la réclame, satire des puffistes*, from April 17, 1859, section “Revue de la mode et des magasins de Paris”.

24 From Gustave Chaix d’Est-Ange’s defense.

25 See Geneviève Fraisse, Michelle Perrot (dir.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, T4, Le XIX^e siècle, Paris, Plon, 1991, p. 304.

26 Cited par André Guyaux, in *Baudelaire. Un demi-siècle de lectures des Fleurs du Mal* (1855-1905), Paris, Presses Universitaires de la Sorbonne, 2007, p. 133.

27 *Histoire des femmes en occident*, op. cit., p. 396.

28 *La Sylphide*, January 20, 1854.

29 *Histoire de la pudeur*, Jean-Claude Bologne, Paris, Hachette, 1997, p. 93 et seq. Also see Philippe Perrot, *Les dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie. Une histoire du vêtement au XIX^e siècle*, Brusulles, Complexe, 1981, p. 168 et seq.

30 This reading, in particular, belongs to Sylvie Steinberg, *La confusion des sexes. Le travestissement de la Renaissance à la Révolution*, Paris, Fayard, 2001.

31 Me Léon Duval's case.

32 On this point besides *L'histoire des femmes*, already cited, one can add the work of Anne Martin-Fugier, *Comédiennes : les actrices en France au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Complexe, 2008.

33 Pieces based on menaced virtue, on outrageous *pathos*, and on crime.

34 As Jean-Claude Yon notes in *Histoire des spectacles sous le Second Empire*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 75-76.

35 Me Gustave Chaix d'Est-Ange's defense.

36 Serfdom, brought up several times during the case, was abolished by Alexander II in 1861. At the time of the trial, then, it was thus still in practice. From 1857-58, the suffering of serfs and the necessity of abolition became a recurring theme in some important french newspapers and journals, particularly in *Revue des deux Mondes*, which launched a fervent campaign in favor of liberal reforms.

37 Knout: whip used in Russia for flogging, in particular for political criminals.

38 *Le Monde illustré* on April 16, 1859.

39 *Le Figaro* on April 9, 1859.

AUTHOR

Corinne Legoy

Université d'Orléans (laboratoire Polen, EA 4710)

TRANSLATOR

Julian Bass-Krueger

Rags and Ads

Patrice Verdière

TEXT

- 1 Selected advertisements published in the magazines *Femina* (1905), *La Nouvelle Mode* (1909) et *Chiffons* (1909). (<https://devisu.inha.fr/modespratiques/231?file=1>)



AUTHOR

Patrice Verdière

Controversy in Los Angeles

City Limits: Bather Arrests in Early 20th Century Los Angeles

Elsa Devienne

Translated by Sabina Fogle and Joanna Baines

OUTLINE

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EDITOR'S NOTES

In its paper edition, this article is presented with illustrations by Elsa Abderhamani. These can be seen in the PDF associated with the article.

TEXT

- 1 On July 17, 1919, Alta Johnson, “a very pretty and young matron”¹ visited the beach in Santa Monica, a seaside town in the Los Angeles metropolitan region, for a picnic with her husband, son and a friend. Realizing they were out of bread, she slipped a short bathrobe over her swimsuit and headed along the city’s streets. This story would certainly have been unnewsworthy, had it not ended with Alta Johnson’s arrest by a particularly zealous police officer, Ben Carrillo, on the charge that her knee-length bathrobe revealed her legs. A municipal ordinance stipulated that bathers wear appropriate city clothing, covering their entire bodies, when crossing the unmarked barrier separating sand from pavement. The ordinance had inspired much debate in the years leading up to Johnson’s arrest, with enforcement depending on the inclinations of local police officers. Following legal advice, Alta Johnson threatened the city with a lawsuit. Indeed, as the local newspaper explained, “scores of pretty

girls walk[ed] on the promenade and [went] back and forth to the apartment houses without any covering at all over their bathing suits.”² Since the rules were constantly broken, argued Alta Johnson’s lawyers, they had lost all meaning. The municipality rescinded its decision and apologized to Johnson, thus ending the controversy, and in the years that followed, bathers were, for the most part, left free to wear their bathing suits on the city streets.

2 Alta Johnson’s story is one in a long list of bather arrests that took place near the beaches of Los Angeles between 1915 and 1919. The prohibition of bathing suits in the city covered Santa Monica and Venice, both independent from the city but integrated in its metropolitan region.³ While some considered these laws excessive, others believed they were essential to preserve proper morals and the decency of women.⁴ Interestingly, these ordinances provoked far more discussion than the stipulations concerning the proper length and shape of bathing suits. By chronicling what Anne-Marie Sohn termed the “erosion of modesty”⁵ on Western beaches in the 19th and 20th centuries, historians have retraced the steps from the unrevealing bathing dress with swimming cap and bloomers, worn by women in the late 19th century, to the famous bikini, invented in 1946.⁶ But this fascination for the progressive shrinking of the female bathing suit has resulted in an overly schematic and teleological narrative, which obscures other developments that, although less spectacular, have had a profound impact on the evolution of public bodily display in the 20th century.⁷ This article focuses on the hidden history of the ordinances that spatially circumscribed bathing suits to the beach or, even more restrictively, to the ocean. As police archives in Santa Monica and Los Angeles are not accessible – the first was destroyed, the second is not open to the public – this article relies mostly on the local newspapers that almost systematically reported these arrests.⁸

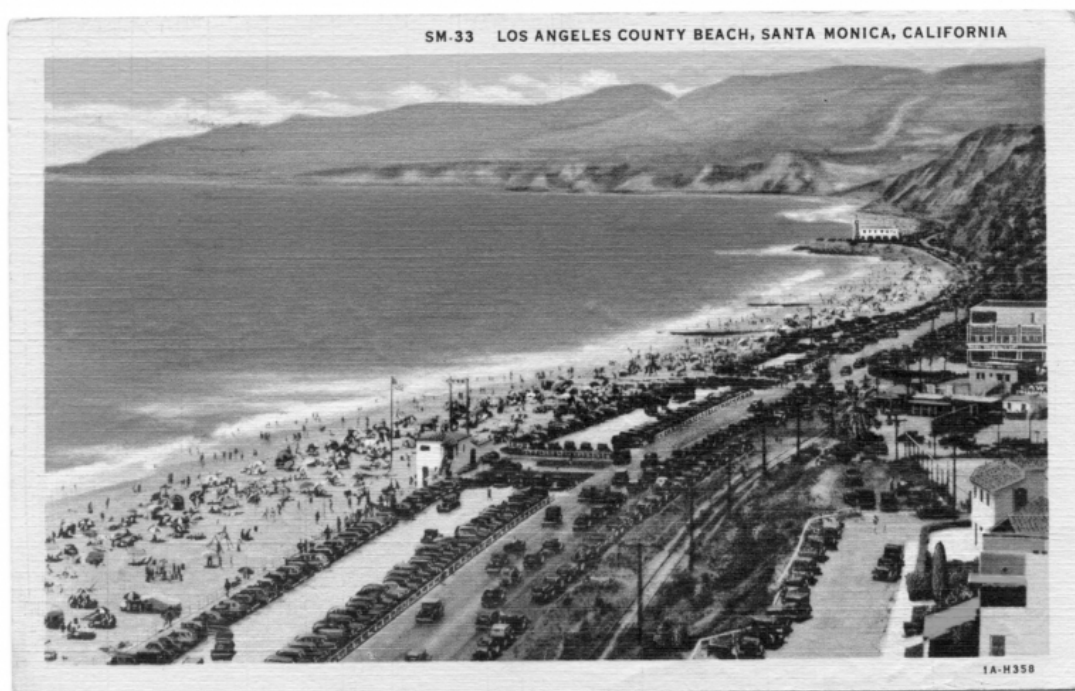
3 The controversy over the wearing of bathing suits on city streets is not dissimilar to contemporary debates regarding other items of clothing and the spatial context in which they are appropriate. From municipal orders established in small seaside towns in the south of France to prevent tourists walking around in their bathing suits, to the banning of shorts and naked shoulders in Italian churches, plus of course the heated debates over the public wearing of veils in France,

controversies about the presence or absence of a specific piece of clothing abound, especially in spatial contexts considered sacred or secular. As Nicole Pellegrin argues, these garments signify “the social division of time and space.”⁹ Because they symbolize differing spaces and times of the year or one’s life, the meaning of items of clothing shifts depending on where and when they are worn. A spatial history of the bathing suit must thus take into account the spaces where it is deemed appropriate, and their boundaries, as well as the manner in which female and male bathers, in their daily habits, challenged these conventions. In this article I consider the spatial restrictions imposed on bathers within an urban context. In Los Angeles, a city that witnessed spectacular demographic growth at the start of the 20th century, alongside intensive agriculture development, real estate speculation and the emergence of Hollywood, the beach was literally *in* the city. Although originally founded inland, Los Angeles had absorbed its shoreline at the beginning of the century, meaning Angelinos could spend their morning working in a busy downtown office and their afternoon sunbathing on one of the metropolis’ vast, sandy beaches, all easily accessible by car or tramway.

- 4 The local authorities were well aware that they could not regulate the beaches like any other urban spaces. As the beach allowed semi-nudity and a partial relinquishing of decency, it represented a potentially dangerous place that required monitoring to prevent the relaxed seashore atmosphere from “contaminating” behaviors and moral standards in the city. But rather than imposing strict regulations on the types of bathing wear permissible – which risked scaring bathers away to competing resorts – municipal authorities in Venice and Santa Monica chose to focus their efforts on maintaining a frontier between the beach and the city. However, a distinction between the two spaces proved difficult to impose. Male and female bathers continually challenged the frontier between the city and the beach, eventually influencing what was considered proper city clothing. Unlike existing narratives on the many “beach battles”¹⁰ of that era, which almost exclusively focus on women, the East Coast of the United States, and controversies over the proper length and shape of bathing suits, this article takes both male and female bathers into account and highlights the role of Southern California in the emer-

gence of a new seaside etiquette. Above all, by adopting a micro-local scale, I bring the invisible frontiers that crisscross urban space to light and the way city-dwellers, in their daily movements, caused these frontiers to move. Finally, this article contributes to the history of beaches in the 20th century which, in comparison with the well-studied 18th and 19th centuries, has been relatively neglected by historians.¹¹

Postcard of Santa Monica beach. In the 1910s and 1920s, beaches in the Los Angeles region were easily accessible by car — as evidenced by the many parking spaces available for visitors — or by tram.



Private collection.

Postcard of Ocean Park beach in Santa Monica. In the background stands one of several amusement park piers that existed along the shore-line.



Private collection

Bathers at Santa Monica beach in 1910. In the early 20th century, women wore large wool dresses and stockings to go swimming; some even wore a swimming cap to cover their hair. Men wore outfits that covered them up from their shoulders down to their knees.



Courtesy of the Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives.

Santa Monica beach in 1908. At the beginning of the 20th century, most visitors remained in their city clothes while on the beach.



Courtesy of the Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives.

The origins of the controversy

- 5 At the end of the 19th century, several beach resorts were created along the Los Angeles shoreline complete with boardwalks, indoor pools, hotels, amusements parks and bathhouses. This was a lot later than similar resorts established in Europe or on the East Coast during the 18th and 19th centuries, therefore Los Angeles's beach towns were developed according to a leisure ethos, devoid of earlier associations with health and hygiene. This meant that in Southern California, for instance, bathing was never a sexually segregated activity. From the very beginning, the Los Angeles shoreline established itself as a mixed-gender leisure space where bathers could enjoy the sensory and visual pleasures typically associated with the seaside. However, like everywhere else in the US, bathing outfits were regu-

lated by modesty laws. In the 1910s, most beach resorts stipulated the precise length and shape of swimsuits. Both women and men were supposed to wear knee-length outfits that also covered their shoulders. In addition, women should wear full-skirted dresses covering their hips and thighs, and on some beaches a swimming cap and stockings were recommended.¹² In other cities, however, such as Santa Monica, laws were deemed unnecessary and bathers were left to their own judgment and sense of decency.¹³ In other words, bathing suit etiquette was enforced either formally or informally through collective pressure. Most importantly, the prescribed outfits were designed exclusively for swimming. In early 20th century photographs of the Los Angeles shoreline, visitors on the beach remain fully dressed. Evidently, as soon as a bather exited the ocean they were expected to head straight to the bathhouse, shower, and change into their city clothes. This expectation was not always met: some bathers would attempt to discreetly change their clothing on the beach, running the risk of being arrested.¹⁴ However, the beach, and to a greater extent, its surroundings, remained spaces where city clothing was expected.

- 6 Around the mid-1910s, this situation changed abruptly due to the combination of several factors. Firstly, the one-piece bathing suit for women – a tightly-fitting outfit of dark fabric, which left the legs bare and enabled the bather to swim far more easily than a dress and stockings – made a notable appearance. In 1907, Australian swimmer Annette Kellerman was arrested for indecency in such an outfit on Revere Beach, a resort near Boston.¹⁵ Secondly, sunbathing and tanning became popular among the American middle and upper-classes during the 1910s in conjunction with the development of tourism in the tropics and the success of outdoor sports.¹⁶ Lounging on the sand after swimming, and presenting one's body to rays of sunlight, became an increasingly common hobby. Finally, the Los Angeles beach communities experienced rapid growth during that period, transforming from small resorts into full-fledged year-round residential cities. Many Angelinos chose to move to the coast and commute between the ocean and downtown. These newly-arrived residents formed the basis of a small local elite – mainly composed of businessmen involved in tourism and city affairs, and

religious leaders – that established itself as guardian of the city's respectability.

Annette Kellerman in her famous one-piece bathing suit (1919). She was wearing a similar swimsuit when she was arrested for indecency on Revere Beach, a resort located near Boston, in 1907.



George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-B2-738-5].

The first arrests

- 7 It was in this context that the controversy over the wearing of bathing suits on city streets emerged. A growing number of female bathers wearing the above-mentioned one-piece swimsuits could be seen walking along the beach, playing ball or lying on the sand. Worse, some male and female bathers dared to venture out into the adjacent city streets in search of something to eat or drink, or simply

to go home, clad in their bathing suits. This behavior, although commonplace today, represented a rupture in a society where the body was never exposed in public. Hostile reactions, particularly from local religious authorities and upper-class women's clubs, multiplied, and arrests began in earnest. The public were so confused about the situation that in 1916, Santa Monica's Police Judge explained himself in the local newspaper: "No one has been arrested or tried or will be because of the kind of bathing suit worn while in the surf or on the ocean front sand." The only bathing suit ordinance that existed, he continued, concerned the necessity of wearing "an outer garment covering over the bathing suit while going through the streets."¹⁷ What happened on the beach was not important, as long as people respected the law in the city.

- 8 Elsa Devienne Controversy in Los Angeles Around the same time, Venice's elite, especially local religious leaders, were mobilizing to enforce a similar ordinance. The first arrests took place in 1914, and ignited such protests the police were temporarily compelled to stop enforcing the law. By the following year, however, police claimed the general atmosphere had changed, when several East Coast tourists, "unaccustomed to seeing people on the streets clad only in bathing suits or lounging about on the beach,"¹⁸ complained to the authorities. Indeed, California beaches had a reputation for tolerating lighter clothing than their East Coast equivalents; in the 1916 Sears, Roebuck & Co catalogue, the most daring women's swimsuits were advertised as "California Style."¹⁹ Venice authorities believed maintaining the town's respectability could be an asset, attracting tourists who valued certain levels of decency. The municipality therefore opted to forbid bathing suits not only from the city, but also part of the beach, stipulating that bathers must "neither lounge nor go east of a point 20 feet east of high tide line" in their swimsuits.²⁰ In other words, they had to put their clothes back on or cover themselves with a bathrobe as soon as they had finished swimming. In Venice, as in Santa Monica, the ultimate goal was to create an impermeable barrier between the city, where social conventions must be respected, and the beach, where authorities had to be more flexible if they wished to attract visitors. But by imposing urban attire even on the sand, Venice attempted to distinguish itself from its rival and neighbor, Santa Monica, and thus win the battle of respectability.

A controversial ordinance at the local level

- 9 These decisions were not taken lightly; in the multiplying and competing beach resorts, enforcement of these ordinances could have a major economic impact. Satisfying everyone, however, proved difficult. Los Angeles' public beaches were frequented by a diverse range of people including wealthy tourists from Boston and New York alongside local factory workers. Moreover, while some East Coast tourists frowned upon revealing bathing suits, others had come to California hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous Bathing Beauties: young, slim actresses who appeared in revealing bathing suits in the burlesque comedies of director Mack Sennett between 1915 and 1929.²¹ Local businessmen were well aware that the seaside imaginary circulated by Hollywood and tourist brochures had a profound impact on visitors' perceptions of the shores. In Santa Monica, after several arrests took place in 1916, the owner of a local bathhouse remarked that it was not prudent to send young bathers to jail because they were wearing fashionable bathing suits in the street, while the city itself was circulating brochures portraying a young woman wearing a similarly suggestive outfit.²²
- 10 Many businessmen supported flexibility in bathing suit regulation. For instance, the Ocean Park bathhouse owner in Venice, believed police were interpreting the law too "literally" when arresting his clients buying refreshments in the store across from the beach in their bathing suits.²³ Frank E. Bundy, one of Santa Monica's most prominent businessmen, worried that reports of the arrests in local newspapers would earn the city a bad reputation among tourists.²⁴ In contrast, local religious leaders were in favor of strict enforcement of the law. Reverend C. Sidney Maddox, pastor of the First Baptist church in Santa Monica, fervently supported the campaign of arrests during the summer of 1916 and organized public conferences on the subject.²⁵ The local elite were therefore bitterly divided over the ordinance and whether systematic enforcement was required.

The impossible enforcement of the ordinance

- 11 From a practical point of view, the ordinance was also difficult to enforce. Authorities faced multiple conundrums: should the boardwalk and piers be considered part of the beach or the city? What about tramways and cars? The ordinance in Santa Monica did not specify the exact barrier point beyond which bathing suits were banned. Most of the time, these questions were handled on a case-by-case basis when public complaints were made to the police. In July 1916, for instance, a 22-year-old woman was arrested while riding along the beach on an electric tram car, for “causing considerable excitement along the front and greatly shocking those who were out to enjoy a quiet walk along the water.”²⁶ The young woman was released without paying a fine, but did have to undergo a reprimand from “the police matron,” a female police officer. Cars presented a particular problem as it was unclear whether the police should consider them public or private spaces. By the end of the 1910s, driving to the beach in one’s bathing suit to avoid bathhouse fees was becoming increasingly common. Most Angelinos saw their vehicles as an extension of private space. A 1924 car accident apparently resolved the issue: the three young women involved, all wearing bathing suits, were allowed to leave the scene without being fined or taken to jail.²⁷ Despite this incident, police appear to have been more determined to enforce the law when women were involved. In July 1916, a 16-year-old man was reprimanded for having walked into a store in his bathing suit.²⁸ One month later, a young woman from San Francisco was arrested and taken to the police station for buying groceries over half a mile from the beach while wearing only a short coat over “a fetching bathing suit of the latest style and cut.”²⁹
- 12 In parallel with these decisions, municipal authorities took measures to create a clear border between beach and city. In 1916, the Santa Monica police erected signs along the shoreline indicating it was forbidden to walk beyond that point while wearing a bathing suit.³⁰ The initiative proved insufficient, however, and the following year a journalist remarked that the boundary, “not indicated by a rope”, was “just as easy to cross as the equator.”³¹ This statement

indicates that many bathers were not conscious of crossing the frontier and that even if they knew of the ordinance, could easily commit the offence by accident. The absence of visual markers that would have clearly demarcated the beach from the city, such as ropes or other barriers, made it difficult for such a law to be enforced. In a similar manner, informal segregation laws on Chicago's beaches were famously broken in 1919 when a raft built by a group of African-American children drifted into the white section of the shore. The ensuing protests by white bathers and eventual brawl sparked race riots across the city.³² The material circumstances and, in this case, the ecological conditions that governed coastal currents, prevented bathers from obeying the law.

- 13 Equipment and staffing issues also compromised enforcement of the ordinance. In early summer in 1917, Venice's Police Chief claimed there were "not enough police in the city to watch all the bathers." Moreover, the police were not equipped to go on the beach or even in the water: "What chance would a policeman have with a bather who took to the water after a chase through the streets?" he lamented in the local paper.³³ In theory, the police could ask the lifeguards for help, but many of these disliked the bathing ordinance. Interviewed by a local newspaper in 1917, lifeguard Charlie Kirby explained his reluctance to enforce the law: he feared that if he did he "might be told to wear an overcoat when on duty."³⁴ As law-breakers themselves, since they wore bathing suits on the beach and its surroundings, lifeguards opposed strict enforcement of the law.
- 14 The many problems municipalities encountered when enforcing the ordinance reflect the difficult task of policing urban beaches. A lack of uniformity in municipal laws along the coastline, the absence of a police force specifically assigned to the beach, and the elusiveness of the frontier between sand and pavement are just some of the factors that explain why the seashore benefited from a different, slightly more flexible, legal regime than the city. Near-constant debates on the manner in which the ordinance should be enforced also indicate that transgressions were recurrent, possibly even daily, occurrences.

Ocean Park beach in Santa Monica, 1915. While some visitors remain in their city clothes, most people present on the beach now wear bathing suits. It is diffi-

cult, however, to locate the exact border between the beach and the city: does the wooden boardwalk (pictured in the foreground) belong to the beach or the city?



Private collection

Panorama of Beach, showing entrance to bath house, Ocean park.



Private collection

The transformation of the beach into a space of idleness and body display

- 15 Offending bathers were not all treated with the same severity. In 1917, when some wealthy Santa Monica residents complained that wearing a high-quality bathrobe over a dripping bathing suit could damage the material, Police Judge King tried to soothe tensions by prudently replying that only those persons “who loiter[ed] about the streets in their bathing suits and evidently [we]re not either hurrying to their homes or hurrying to the beach should be arrested.”³⁵ Police officers were thus encouraged to take into account the behavior and social standing of bathers before making an arrest. King went even further and clarified that the goal of the ordinance was, above all, to “prevent vulgar display of the persons of bathers on the streets.”³⁶ In particular, he denounced those “girls who like to put on bathing suits and lie around on the sand, but who never go near the water” although he also immediately added that some “men, too” were at fault, and they “ought to be ashamed of themselves to be so immodest.”³⁷ In the eyes of the police, then, the ordinance was less about preventing the wearing of bathing suits in the city than regulating bathers’ intention when they went out in such an outfit. If it was just a matter of local homeowners saving time, the police ought to be understanding, but if the bather deliberately paraded their body in the street an arrest was justified. Evidently, what truly lay at the heart of the controversy was the voluntary and deliberate exhibition of a semi-naked body in public space.
- 16 These discourses also signify another major revolution in the history of the beach during the 20th century: its transformation into a space where horizontal immobility and idleness were authorized. This reflected a broader shift in the dominant attitudes of American society to leisure. As historian Cindy Aron explains, upper and middle-class Americans in the 19th century used their vacations and leisure in the pursuit of self-improvement, often at chautauquas, resorts where middle-class men and women attended lectures and meetings on a diverse range of subjects, from religion to the state

of prisons.³⁸ At the turn of the 20th century, the emergence and success of new commercial amusements such as movie theaters, dance halls, and amusement parks contributed to the development of a new mass culture, which challenged prevailing notions of leisure as productive time and celebrated the fleeting sensory pleasures experienced when riding a roller coaster or watching a movie.³⁹ The tensions caused by this new mass culture were particularly apparent in discourses on seaside pleasures: for the most zealous partisans of the Victorian order, bathers broke the law not only when wearing bathing suits in the city's streets but also when they remained in such an outfit despite having no intention of swimming. Religious leaders denounced bathers who paraded along the beach in their bathing suits as "disporter[s], sand lounge[r], and rotten apple[s],"⁴⁰ who "lack[ed] restraint"⁴¹ and belied the hygienic and health justifications of seaside bathing. While the new sensibilities that presided over the "invention of the beach"⁴² emerged in the 19th century, as Alain Corbin demonstrated in *The Lure of Sea*, another major transformation in the history of seaside leisure took place in the early 20th century when the beach gained acceptance as a space where immobility, idleness, and bodily display were authorized. The modern beach – where "disporters, sand loungers and rotten apples" may flaunt their semi-naked bodies – has nothing in common with that of the end of the 19th century, when most visitors sat genteelly on the sand in their dark city clothes.

The end of the controversy

- 17 By the end of the 1910s, proponents of strict enforcement of the ordinance found themselves in a difficult situation. On the opposing side stood the younger generation – men and women enjoying the new mass culture – as well as the local business elite, lamenting the negative publicity the controversy had created for the region. In 1917, the organization of a bathing suit parade featuring young Hollywood actresses riding in automobiles crystallized the debates. By organizing the event, the Venice Chamber of Commerce hoped to compete with the annual automobile parade in neighboring Santa Monica. Venice had planned to hold such an event the previous year, but after local religious leaders protested the presence of actresses wearing revealing bathing suits in the city's streets the idea had been aban-

done. As Reverend Fenwicke L. Holmes pointed out, a street parade of young women in bathing attire – even seated in cars – would be in contempt of the bathing suit ordinance.⁴³ The city council eventually acceded to the Chamber of Commerce’s wishes and authorized the parade.⁴⁴ Evidently, the ordinance carried less weight when set against the need to attract tourists to the city.

18 This decision signaled a major shift in relationships between city council members – primarily businessmen – and local religious authorities. While Reverend Holmes had succeeded in convincing the city council to cancel the parade in 1916, he failed to do so the following year. A few days after the parade, as if to confirm that times had changed, city council members decided to repeal the controversial ordinance and focus policing efforts on male bathers exposing their naked torsos on the beach.⁴⁵ The city mayor, however, ordered the police to ignore the repeal and continue arresting anyone lounging in their bathing suits 20ft east of the shoreline.⁴⁶ The dispute between the mayor and the city council continued throughout the August of 1917, each side voicing their point of view in the local press. According to two members of the city council who acted as “bathing suit censors,” the one-piece bathing suit was the only article of clothing appropriate for swimming and, they insisted, did not diminish women’s respectability. Although the city mayor never entirely changed his position, he did suggest police wait till a second violation to make an arrest.⁴⁷ The debate was eventually resolved by the action – or rather inaction – of the police: not a single arrest was made during August 1917, which the local paper attributed to the unwillingness of police to enforce the law.⁴⁸ Local police officers were all too familiar with the many practical difficulties preventing strict enforcement of the ordinance and given the council’s concerns regarding arrests, evidently preferred to ignore violations. The ordinance gradually faded into oblivion as over the following years, Venice established its reputation as a resort where young women flaunted their bodies in fashionable bathing suits.

19 Meanwhile, in 1918 Santa Monica’s mayor published a declaration reminding residents of the exact terms of the bathing suit ordinance in the local paper. Yet there were portents of the law’s inevitable demise. Firstly, in his declaration the mayor also clarified that the city “d[id] not go in for prudish bathing suits” and that there would not be

any “foolish restrictions”⁴⁹ imposed on bathers beyond the bathing suit ban on city streets, revealing fears among city officials that rigid enforcement of the ordinance had scared tourists away and reflecting the city’s resolve to project a modern image. Secondly, to the relief of local authorities, no bather was arrested during the summer of 1918.⁵⁰ In this context, Alta Johnson’s arrest by Officer Ben Carrillo on July 17, 1919, after a year-long respite, created sensational headlines. The local paper expressed fears the news would reach “uptown papers,” meaning those in the Los Angeles area with a broad readership, and turn Santa Monica into “the laughing stock of liberal minded persons.”⁵¹ Given such negative media coverage of the arrest, police felt compelled to drop the case and, at least in practice, abandon the ordinance. On July 23, 1919, Santa Monica’s Police Chief declared that “the innate modesty of the sex render[ed] any drastic enforcement of the bathing suit ordinance unnecessary.” Although he opposed the “unnecessary display of the person or strolls in the business district without proper outer covering,” he believed it was important to allow visitors “as much latitude as consistent with good taste”, and concluded by declaring “this [wa]s not a Puritan age” and the “old blue stocking ideas of some rabid church people [we]re not in vogue nowadays.”⁵² His statements reflected the widening gap between the attitudes of religious leaders and the business elite. In the end, the city’s need for tourism proved crucial. Moreover, the number of bathers flaunting the ordinance was already too large to stem the tide. In 1919, the one-piece bathing suit “[wa]s omnipresent”⁵³ in the region with many young women wearing it in the city’s streets.⁵⁴ Faced with daily transgressions of the ordinance and the negative reactions to Alta Johnson’s arrest, the city was forced to relinquish its sartorial control of urban space. It was in Santa Monica that Annette Kellerman famously saved a female bather from drowning the following year. The Olympic swimmer used the event to reiterate her support for the one-piece bathing suit and, implicitly, its use both in and out of the water.⁵⁵

In this photograph published in 1925 in a Los Angeles private beach club's newsletter, wealthy club members are relaxing in their swimsuits. 1920s bathing suits clung more tightly to the body and revealed the bathers' shoulders and thighs.



*Mr. and Mrs. Willedd Andrews and Mrs. Vincent Morgan
on the Club Beach enjoying a sun bath.*

"Casadelmar Topics," vol. 1, no 6, August 1925, p. 9, box 9, file 16, California Tourism and Promotional Literature Collection, Oviatt Library, California State University Northridge.

Actress Imogen Ingall on the beach at Playa Del Rey. Palisades.



Del Rey Press, June 15, 1926, p. 7. Fritz Burns Collection, Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

20 Over the next few years the ordinance slowly faded into oblivion. The issue did come up again in the 1920s, but this time in seaside resorts farther away from Los Angeles, such as Newport Beach, which attracted increasing numbers of year-round-residents hoping to turn the beach town into a respectable community with high moral standards.⁵⁶ Aside from a few rare instances, the law was quickly forgotten, and the one-piece bathing suit gained its legitimate place on the beach and nearby areas. Evidence of this transformation was illustrated in the great number of scantily clad actresses photographed on the sands in the early 1920s. One example is a photograph of Imogen Ingalls, a young actress from San Francisco, published on June 15, 1926 in the *Palisades Del Rey Press*. The young woman is pictured on the beach in a wet bathing suit that

clings to her body, highlighting the shape of her hips and breasts. With her bobbed hair, Imogene Ingalls personified the fashionable flapper, a type of young woman who smoked and danced in public in blatant disregard of traditional female behavior.⁵⁷ In just ten years, attitudes to public displays of the body had been drastically revised. It was now considered acceptable, at least for a young actress, to display her semi-naked body in public. Another example of this revolution occurred in 1921, when the first Miss America pageant was held in Atlantic City, and featured the now notorious bathing suit parade.⁵⁸

How these conflicts influenced dress codes in the city

- 21 The daily transgressions by bathers were part of a larger movement – led by the younger generation, eager to partake in all the pleasures the new mass culture could provide, and a new economic elite – which witnessed the decline of Victorian values in the face of competing goals such as unrestrained fun, extravagance, a quest for youth and beauty, and the public exhibition of the body. These small offences not only changed how people dressed at the seaside, but also what they wore in the city; Los Angeles’ renegade bathers participated in the relaxation of dress codes enforced in urban space far from the beach. In 1941, the *Federal Writers Project* guidebook on Los Angeles explained that it was not unusual for “beach costumes [to be] seen on urban streets thirty miles from the sea.”⁵⁹ More broadly, one could make the argument that the casual clothing style so typical of Los Angeles, famously and caustically described by Nathanael West in *The Day of the Locust*, resulted from the eroding frontier between beach and city. In his famous novel on 1930s Hollywood, West mocked “the great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes [...]; the fat lady in the yachting cap [who] was going shopping, not boating [...]; and the girl in slacks and sneaks with a bandanna around her head [who] ha[d] just left switchboard, not a tennis court.”⁶⁰ This athletic and casual style, so characteristic of the city from the 1930s up until today, is indirectly linked to the transgressions of early 20th century bathers. The men and women who, on a daily basis, pushed back the limits of what was

considered acceptable in the city, contributed to the relaxation of social norms in public space and, eventually, to the emergence of a unique Southern California sartorial culture.

Conclusion

- 22 The influence of seaside fashion on Angelinos' everyday clothing choices would not have been possible without the relative tolerance of police towards bathers. Although many arrests were made in the summer of 1916, these decreased rapidly over the following years and the ordinance was entirely abandoned in the early 1920s. Strict enforcement of the law, as I have explained, was virtually impossible. Without a dedicated beach police, it proved too difficult to restrict beach activities and fashions to the sand, especially since excessive policing placed the tourism and leisure economy at risk. Ultimately, the ordinance faced constant negotiations between competing interests, including those of bathers, businessmen, religious leaders and local police officers.
- 23 While the ordinance was quickly abandoned and eventually forgotten, it provides us with a unique window into the social and cultural evolutions that marked the early 20th century. Firstly, the controversy reveals a major, yet often overlooked, revolution in the history of the seaside: it highlights a transformation from the beach of the 19th century, where one dressed as in the city, to our modern version of the shoreline, where semi-nudity is *de rigueur* and the body is perpetually on display. Far from being a smooth process, this evolution generated strong tensions, as revealed by the adoption of laws restricting bathing suits to the strict aquatic area of the shoreline. Secondly, the controversy illuminates the emergence of new social norms of public bodily display in a coastal city such as Los Angeles. From the 1920s on, it was acceptable to reveal certain parts of one's body in the street, on trams and in stores. By making their way into the city, the renegade bathers of Venice and Santa Monica inaugurated a new era in the history of urban public space in Southern California. This evolution was the result of their daily transgressions of the beach/city frontier. By crossing this invisible line, male and female bathers of the early 20th century participated in diluting

sartorial expectations and upset the invisible grid organizing urban space. In doing so, they reshaped the city and its laws.

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AUTHOR

Elsa Devienne

Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La DéfenseEHESS

TRANSLATORS

Sabina Fogle

Joanna Baines

French Theory

Clémentine Mélois

OUTLINE

Clémentine Mélois, *Collection automne/hiver*, Michel Foucault, 2014

Clémentine Mélois, *Collection automne/hiver*, Marguerite Duras, 2014

Clémentine Mélois, Collection *automne/hiver*, Michel Foucault, 2014

Clémentine Mélois, Collection automne/hiver, Michel Foucault, 2014



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automne/hiver, Margue-
rite Duras, 2014**



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AUTHOR

Clémentine Mélois

Cabin Crew Uniforms

The Uniforms of the Flying Crew at Air France, between Rules and Reality, as Told by Those who Wear them

Loïc Perramond

Translated by Alice Vigouroux and Hugues Azaïs

OUTLINE

Recruitment
The uniform as a symbol
Size matters
Training
Rules...
... and daily basis
Choosing
My first uniform
Accessories
Hairdo
Preferences
In an ideal world
In our eyes
Wearing the uniform
What about the others
Keeping the uniform
A few last words
[Portfolio \(https://devisu.inha.fr/modespratiques/235?file=1\)](https://devisu.inha.fr/modespratiques/235?file=1)

EDITOR'S NOTES

In its paper edition, this article is presented with illustrations by Thomas Hayman. These can be seen in the PDF associated with the article.

TEXT

Between two flights, these stewardesses, stewards and chief flight attendants have gracefully answered a few questions about their uniforms and how they feel about them.

Recruitment

Caroline : For the recruitment and the photo of my application file, I was wearing a navy blue suit, as a way to fit to the clothing style expected at Air France. Fanny I was 21, I had gone to the Dames de France and my mother had come with me. She had offered me a

white coat which was a bit short, a navy blue skirt, a satin-soft blouse and a hound's tooth jacket. I had also bought faux leather shoes in which I was unable to walk. As a result I failed my Air France selection. I remember it was not so much because of the shoes than the fact I was absolutely terrified by the stakes and also because I must have looked awfully gauche.

Armelle : For the casting? I was wearing a white blouse, navy blue jacket and skirt. I had tried to find an outfit as close to the uniform as possible and I had bought a kind of floppy necktie. I wore my hair in a bob and I had navy blue tights and pumps. In a nutshell I was Miss Blue!

Sylvain : If I recall that day correctly, I was wearing a grey tweed jacket by de Fursac, anthracite flannel trousers and a light shirt with a black and blue tie still around somewhere.

Sébastien : A navy suit and tie and a white shirt that looked like the uniform to try to fit in what my future employer expected. Only one of the girls in my group had breached that rule and wore a flowered dress with flat shoes, she didn't make it to the end of the day.

Déborah : The day I was recruited, I was wearing an as grey suit with a white blouse. A simple bun, black shoes and nude tights. Apart from the bun, nothing was an obvious reference to a uniform but on second thoughts...

The uniform as a symbol

C. I started working at Air France on a whim, I had never thought I would one day become a stewardess and wearing a uniform was not a career motivation. It was in no way a fantasy!

F. The uniform, the bearing, the make-up, the look.. I had grown up in the country among a traditional, middle-class family so far from the world of stewardesses that it became a dream for me to be one of them. I remember a film with Michèle Morgan and Jean Marais which had impressed me a lot. I don't recall the title... *Les Ailes du désir*? No... *Aux yeux du souvenir*! That film has been sought to inspire proper young girls to become stewardesses. Jean Marais played the pilot, Michèle Morgan the stewardess and they were two

former lovers who met on a flight after a few years separation. The proper young girl I was couldn't help being impressed by such a story!

A. I have always been attracted to the world of stewardesses and their uniforms. I find it very chic, very pretty and it always allows one to quickly get dressed in the morning. One does not lose time trying to figure out what to wear.

Sy. I never had any fantasy whatsoever on uniforms even if I take pride on wearing mine as correctly as possible. I don't see the slightest hint of attraction in it but I would be displeased if I had to wear a tiny red-striped waistcoat as at Austrian, a pea-green V-neck polka dots jumper like at Transavia or even that kind of orange sweat-shirt they sport at Jet Facile! It is always pleasant to feel both at ease and elegant.

Sé. Wearing a uniform didn't make me choose a career path, however it is a symbol of the profession that can be recognised in a blink in any airport around the world. It's a guarantee of trust for customers.

Size matters

C. Our uniforms are not tailored-made. When you gain or lose weight, after childbirth for example, you can play with the sizes and the pieces: a short, long, medium or large 6 item with an 8 or a 10. For some items such as the navy blue dress, I go to a tailor to have the size fit to perfection. It is a personal decision.

F. I finally integrated Air France in 1991 after 3 years with another company. I was 29 and overwhelmed with happiness. We had been asked to try our uniforms and I had received my first allocation, I still remember it! Everything fit perfectly. I never had to have my uniform altered.

A. In 1996 it was still the 'Frégate' dress by Carven with the white collar. I chose a regular 8. I have never needed any alterations. I am 1m75 tall and proudly show off my stewardess size!

Sé. Our uniforms come in standard sizes. I am quite tall so I have the length of my trousers and the sleeves of my jackets lengthened by a

few centimeters. Some of my colleagues have them fitted in Thailand or India.

Training

C. On the first day training we have been taught everything about make-up and hair styles. Indeed they are part of the uniform as we have to remain perfect at all times. 'Respect yourself when you are in uniform' was the leitmotiv during training. I remember the location near Étoile and the professional who taught us the rules and basics about make-up and hairdo. It had an old-school Miss France touch but it was kind of fun. Afterwards we were given a small book containing all the rules we were supposed to follow, which we do, more or less...

A. If I recall correctly, the rules concerning the uniform were described during the 5 week long training. I spent one day at Lancôme on the company expenses. In those days Air France had the means for such treats!

Sy. I don't recall any specific requirements at least personally. A mate I trained with taught me had to do a double tie rack in the bathroom, and nothing else I promise!

D. Our five-week-training consisted in learning the rules on how to wear a uniform and every morning we were reviewed and scrutinized.

Rules...

C. The rules are quite strict, we are the face of the company which is a historic one in the air traffic. No visible tattoo nor piercing of course. Wearing the uniform quickly becomes a part of us, it is the DNA of the flying crews, it is our image.

A. It used to be extremely strict. Not one hair should be out of place, no trinkets and everything that did not fit the image of Air France was strictly forbidden. The rules are more or less identical today and can be found in a small book which describes the way to choose your glasses, jewels, bracelets, earrings, your hairdo, the colour of the nail varnish, which is mandatory, and so on and so forth...

Sy. There is actually a nice booklet that was provided with the latest version of our wardrobe that dates back about fifteen years. But I must admit my ignorance in the subject. The version for male is pretty straightforward. The possibilities for girls are much wider...

Sé. Rules change according to fashion sometimes, which means that we are now allowed to grow a beard. Yet a uniform must look like one to be recognized as such – which means that it must be worn according to established rules. To me uniforms matter as much as the colour of the cabin or the cutlery in terms of marketing and image.

... and daily basis

C. I reckon I do take some tiny liberties with the rules. Are you recording me now? I don't shorten my skirt up to mid-thighs, but when I'm wearing the light blue blouse, I leave the top button open although it is specified that it must be buttoned up, I am quite the rebel! I have to confess it is mostly about comfort, it is very tight. The small friendship bracelets are not allowed and yet I always wear one or two of them... But I swear I never chew gum when I am wearing my uniform. Concerning the make-up and hairdo I always follow the rules. I have worn my hair in a twist ever since I have had long hair.

F. A beautiful image is reflected by the crews at Air France. Indeed, from time to time, some negligence can be noticed and it is my duty as a cabin officer to rectify them. I don't play God Almighty obsessing about the size of a watch dial or complaining about original rims. As long as the overall impression is coherent and they are dedicated to their work it is fine by me.

Sy. There is a small range of possibilities due to the few pieces of the male uniform. I'm not like the ones who get their shirts fitted in Bangkok or like the ones who pack their own coat for the flight. Just like it's not allowed to go shopping in full attire when coming back from a flight. It's also forbidden to wear parts of the uniform with civilian clothes.

Sé. Sometimes I take the liberty to wear a summer leather bracelet or a red wool hat that matches perfectly with the belts of the female crew. In the winter my short crew cut doesn't keep me from the cold and there is no wool hat in our uniform.

Choosing

F. We can wear the items we want for a flight. With our newest uniform we have stopped wearing a red dress like we used to because it was discovered passengers tend to follow the red-dressed staff in case of emergency and not those dressed in blue.

A. We have several items to choose from and it is up to us to decide what to wear. The choice is large for women: short or long jackets, summer or winter suits, tops with or without collars, tee-shirts with round collars or turtleneck and of course the dress or the trousers. The choice is easier for men: shirts with long or short sleeves, straight or double-breasted jackets and trousers with darts or Italian style, depending on their body shapes. They also have waistcoats with sleeves or without and the rules about it are complicated: stewards are forbidden to take the jacket off if they wear the long sleeve shirt, same with the waistcoat. In Business or 1st class, it is mandatory to wear the jacket, with the addition of a red tie or scarf (same for the stewardess) whereas everywhere else blue dominates. In economy class it is up to the chief to allow the staff to take the jacket off.

Sy. The smartest girls sometimes take another outfit so they can blend their navy trousers suits for the outward journey and the sky blue dress on the flight back – how very chic!

D. Each member of the staff is free to choose his favorite uniform for the flight. According to the traditions of the country we are going to, I can either wear a dress or trousers with a long jacket to hide my body a little. We have to adapt and the uniform is a great help.

My first uniform

C. When I started working for the company in 2001, I had an old-fashioned uniform which had not been modified for quite a long time. There was only one item worth wearing, the famous summer dress which came in 3 colours; navy blue, light blue or red. The other pieces such as the 'Frégate' dress was not comfortable with its white collar and its modifiable wristbands. I remember having trouble moving in it whereas our current uniform is much more comfortable and adapted to our work on board.

F. In 1991 the style was classical. I have not forgotten that split skirt, the famous Pompadour-like floppy necktie and that blouse I loved wearing, made of a very thin cotton and given the seal of approval by my grandmother: 'magnificent!' There was also a short winter jacket with visible pockets and of course the famous Louis Féraud summer dresses in faux linen which creased when we seated. We did not dare move in it which is awkward for a stewardess. The colours reminded me of sugared almonds: light blue, pale pink and ivory beige. They could be worn with the collar open, sometimes with a pearl necklace, or buttoned up with the famous floppy necktie that added a touch of chic to the outfit. We looked like candies. I remember the stewardess in chief in charge of clothing telling us it showed 'elegant creases'. She had some nerve!

A. My first uniform was the one from Air Liberté in 1994. It was quite a beautiful one; I and the new uniform arrived at the same time, it had changed from a kind of Ninja Turtle greenish one to a beautiful blue. The jacket was velvet and the buttons golden. Balmain had created it and I loved it. There was also a tiny hat which completed the look. The lovely tops with polka dots were great to wear. When I integrated Air France my main outfit was a 'Nattier blue' suit by Nina Ricci, it was another world altogether.

Sé. My first flight attendant uniform was the one from the army and I wore it with pride.

D. A huge pride to wear the colors of the national company!

Accessories

C. Concerning the jewels, a watch is mandatory but in no way can it be a fashion jewelry. No more than 2 rings per hand and in theory not on the same finger. No visible religious symbol. Earrings must be studs and one per ear only. We have to carry the handbag which is part of the uniform during the rotations besides our luggage and they must be coordinated to Air France colours: blue, black, grey or sometimes red suitcases.

F. the precise rules concerning jewels? No bling, never 6 rings per hand even if one is lucky enough to have a rich spouse. The handbag is mandatory as requested in the uniform book but not everyone

carries one. Some manage to hide it in a Longchamp bag while others do not take it at all under the pretence it is worn out and that they are waiting for their allocation. I must admit it is neither very practical nor very beautiful...

Sy. Recently I asked a flight hostess to take off a very flashy and particularly ugly bracelet. "I've worn it at work for years and my flight instructor never said anything about it. You're the first one to pointed out."

Sé. For male jewellery we are allowed one ring per hand, a watch and on the other hand a silver or gold vintage curb chain, and no leather or wood or fabric (even the ones designed by famous creators). So the Californian surfer look is forbidden!

Hairdo

C. The hair-do is strict: the bun must be perfect at all times but not as strict as at Singapore Airlines where you are required to wear a 6cm-diameter bun. A flawless braid with no rubber band at the top of the braid, it is in the book. No bobby pins unless invisible. And bunheads if you wear one must be navy blue and no scrunchie. No pony tail unlike what can be seen at other companies. No loose hair, that's a given, we are after all in contact with people and we must obey strict sanitary rules.

A. The hair-do has evolved a little: it used to be a strict bun or a bob which had to be above the shoulders and the collar of the jacket. The famous Air France bob! Nowadays we are allowed a braid and the bob can be a bit longer. Mine is currently a bit too long, don't you think?

Sé. If you dream of growing your hair move on! At Air France boys must have a short and clean hair cut and the length of sideburns mustn't be longer than half the length of your ears. I told you!

Preferences

C. About the stewardess image: obviously the former Air France uniforms were more representative. Maybe times were different. Air traffic was still new in the 70ies and a stewardess was unique in that ideal vision. She was most certainly looked out from head to toe, after

all, she was dressed by Dior! I reckon that our current uniform corresponds to our times. Indeed it is modern and practical, it fits everyone, every body type. It is surely less discriminatory than the famous 70ies dresses created by Courrèges . Less 'mummish' than the Louis Féraud suit or the 'Dauphin' suit by Carven, created at the end of the 80ies famous for its huge floppy necktie. Today my favorite piece is the Lacroix summer dress with the red belt tied at the waist even if I wear it less often than the trousers, for practical reasons. Indeed we flight quite a lot on medium haul.

A. Personally, I really liked the 'Frégate' dress by Calven, with its silky white collar and the twin sleeve hems, not to forget the floppy necktie. This item really embodied the image of the stewardess, it was very chic. All that white and blue, that satin, that pearly shine... it is my favorite outfit.

Sy. I rather like what Christian Lacroix designed for us even no it is unforgiving if you care a little about how you look. The trousers fitted cut can be rude on a fifty-years-old who likes wine, beer and burgers...

In an ideal world

C. As you have probably understood by now, my ideal uniform is the suit or the dress. When recruited, and it is quite discriminatory, it was specified that we had to have nice figures. Besides it must be said that Air France is a company where the staff is getting older as there has not been any external recruitment for the last 10 years. The average age is 43 and figures alter with time. The current uniform allows us to adapt to physical changes thanks to the numerous pieces and the large possibility of variations.

F. the ideal uniform...Does it really exist? In fairy tales everything is perfect. In the real world it is not always easy to work at 10,000 meters high in a pressured cabin with jagged schedules and with customers who sometimes forget their manners. I don't know whether I'll be here to witness the new uniform because of my incoming retirement but I am curious to see what will be created.

A. The current uniform by Lacroix is nice. The blue dress with the red belt tied at the waist is very beautiful, very elegant. Too many people

wear the long jacket with the trousers now which is a pity... A small hat could be added as an accessory even if it is not very practical depending on the hair style. After wearing one at Air Liberté I find it the perfect final touch to a uniform.

Sy. Can a uniform be perfect? It should be something that has to remain com-fortable and pleasant to wear because our job on board is also quite physical, and that's under estimated. Banding to load 150 casserole dishes at 2 am in the back galley of an Airbus or wriggling to reach the passenger sat next to the window who doesn't hear you because of his headset on with loudly music at full blast. I don't really know what I would like to wear but I often running to crews wearing vile uniforms: duck blue (KLM), flashy green (Transavia), cherry red (Austrian), curry (Jet Airways)...

D. I would love Karl Lagerfeld for the next collection...

In our eyes

C. Our uniform is quite classical, it doesn't stick out contrary to the one favored at Austrian Airlines which is red from head to toe. Nevertheless it is elegant and well-cut even if according to the location where the items are cut and assembled differences can occur. We can order new items once a year thanks to an allocation. I couldn't say where the uniforms are made, it is not written on the labels but they are not made in France, even if Christian Lacroix, the creator, is French. They are not signed either and a lot of things have been said on that subject so I don't know what to make of it...

F. Even a tad old-fashioned, our uniform is still among the top 5 of the most beautiful ones. I must admit it is not very distinctive, navy blue being the dominant colour. In the beginning, we were nicknamed the Ravens. Anyway, nowadays, some customers are not even aware of the company they are travelling with so the idea of them identifying a uniform... Once a passenger asked me if I was working at the airport after the flight and if I was flying for American companies. You get the picture!

A. Above all, it is a real pleasure to wear it. A uniform represents 50% of the image of a company, wouldn't you agree? I remember when the uniform changed in 2005. Passengers would congratulate us on

board. It looked a bit like a fashion show, there was even a commercial about it during flights. Of course it is also a working tool, easily identifiable .A marketing element of its own.

Sé. Our uniform is sober and smart looking. It is the visual identity of the airline and we represent the image and brand around the world. Therefore is a pleasure to wear it. Besides uniforms can come in handy as the shield in some circumstances.

Wearing the uniform

C. I don't have any particular feeling or pride when wearing my uniform, it is an appropriate working clothing. I do my best to fulfill some criteria and follow the rules. Wearing a uniform shows that we are part of a great company and if some people dream about that, well... Good for them!

F. I am very proud to be part of Air France. I have noticed that I was standing straighter when in uniform.

A. I feel extremely proud. When in uniform I am someone else. I act my part.

Sy. If there is an issue with an unsatisfied customer we have to tell yourself that it is your uniform (which represents what he paid for) that he is mad about and that it is nothing personal. Quite a relief!

D. I wear my uniform with great pleasure because I like my job and I am glad to represent Air France. And I hope not to stop any time soon.

What about the others

C. I am not very good at recognizing other uniforms. There was a time when British Airways had the most famous ones but not for the best reasons. Those girls had to be depressed to have such a ridiculous look. They looked like old retired stewardesses who played at wearing 1940ies costumes. Nowadays, apart from Alitalia with their awfully old-fashioned green and Austrian who favored an all red uniform (even the tights which was pretty horrible) I don't know who is who. I get confused with all the Gulf companies and I am as clue-

less with the Asian ones. But I always check them out. It is quite a game to scrutinize the hairdo and style of a stewardess and a steward from a rival company.

F. It is true that we flight attendants scrutinize each other a lot. So what can I tell you... The Americans are 70 years old and wear slippers. The Spanish and the Italians have casual Friday hairstyles. The Asians hide themselves behind a haughty attitude. The Gulf stewardesses wear as much make up as Sheherazade and the Dutch act like Smurfettes. Our uniform by Chris Cross (aka Christian Lacroix) is by far better cut and far superior concerning elegance and bearing. It is a thing of beauty.

A. Sometimes it is easy as a lot of companies haven't modified their uniforms for years such as KLM with their appalling Smurf blue one. Alitalia also favor a terrible green. China Eastern nearly have the same uniform as us which was also created by Christian Lacroix. His backlash against Air France was due to the making of our uniforms in Eastern Europe with different fabrics being used from the ones chosen by Monsieur Lacroix. That's the reason why he did not signed our uniforms. It had been a tradition at Air France to have the creators signing theirs: Balmain for Air France, Carven for Air France, and before them: Dior, Balenciaga, Courrèges... As I often came across China Eastern in New York, the resemblance is uncanny, mostly from the back.

Keeping the uniform

C. I think we are not allowed to keep them but I am not quite sure... I am not familiar with these rules. I have kept the famous summer uniform I wore on my first days in the company even if I don't have a clue as to its whereabouts to this day. When some items are a bit worn out or when I receive my allocation I throw some of them but I always take the company identifications off, per requested. It is a safety measure: wings, badges, trimmings, buttons when showing the logo of Air France... about everything that makes a suit a uniform. I cut the pieces with my scissors so the rest is useless. If I were to leave the company, I think I would keep a symbolic item, such as the dress because it represents 15 years of my life.

F. As a safety measure, you are not allowed to keep any uniform to avoid them being used by terrorists who could then masquerade as crew members. But anyway...The day I leave, I will keep my uniform out of nostalgia.

A. I would like to keep some of them and I believe we can keep one or two items, can't we? It is not possible? Really? Too bad, it could quickly become vintage or collector...

D. I have kept each and every one of my former uniforms and I would like to keep some more when leaving the company. I am allowed to do so as long as I do not wear them in public...I will have to check with someone...

A few last words

C. I hope to welcome you aboard Air France very soon.

F. I love Air France, I love my job, I love my uniform!

A. I would like to know what you will do with all this information and I am quite curious of the outcome. Anyway it has been nice speaking with you in these wonderful surroundings.

Sé. See you soon on board Air France!

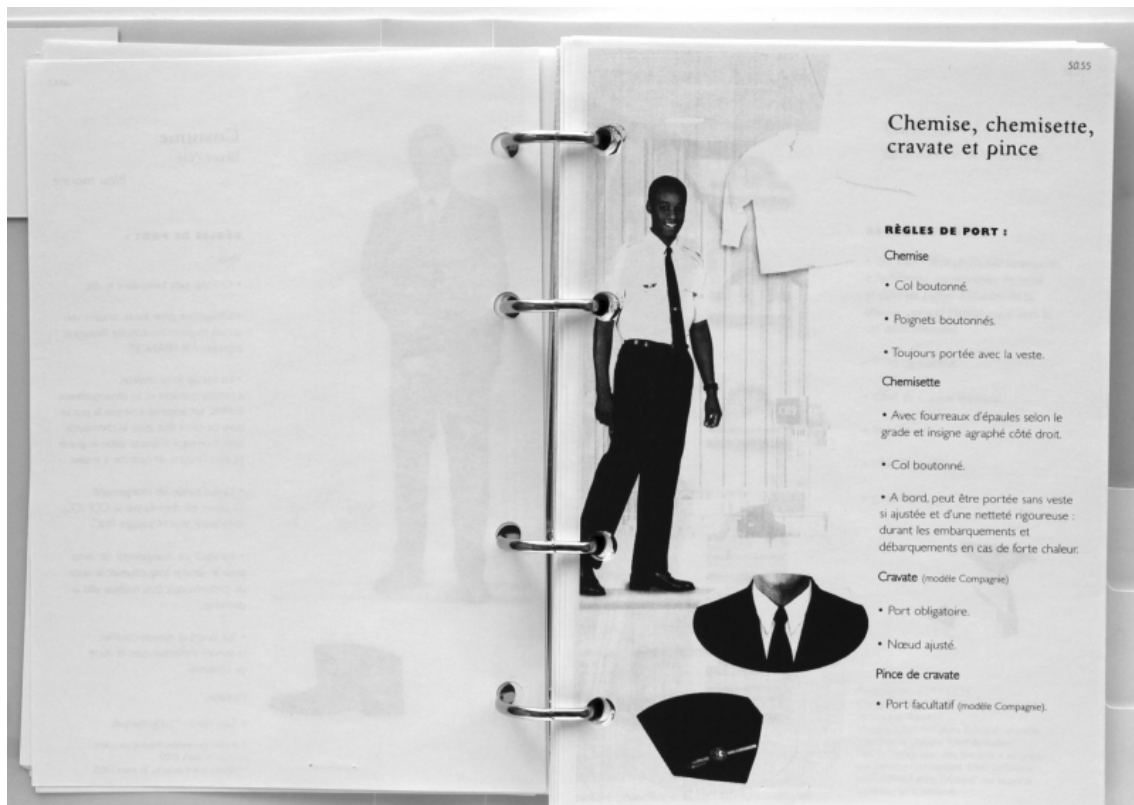
Sy. I've got to dash I have a flight.

D. In a nutshell, to do that job, you'd better not be allergic to navy blue!

Portfolio (#tocfrom232-18)

- 1 Excerpts from the Guide to the Wear of Uniform: <https://devisu.inha.fr/modespratiques/235?file=1>

Chemise, chemisette, cravate et pince



Manuel du port de l'uniforme, Air France. Collection particulière.

AUTHOR

Loïc Perramond

TRANSLATORS

Alice Vigouroux

Hugues Azaïs

The Working Man's Blouse in 19th Century Paris

The Norms of Dignity

Alain Faure

Translated by Alice Parte

OUTLINE

The blouse, from barricade to metaphor
The duality of vestimentary practices
The end of the blouse
Going counter to the norm
Bibliography, museum and movies

EDITOR'S NOTES

In its paper edition, this article is presented with illustrations by Geoffroy Nicolai. These can be seen in the PDF associated with the article.

TEXT

- 1 In the 19th century, working men were a familiar sight in the streets of Paris, an industrial city prone to riots. Journalists, artists, policemen and statesmen all thought they could recognize workers by their appearance, i.e. by their blouse, a long overgarment of plain-woven cloth that fell to the knees. The memory of the blouse has survived to the present day, albeit vaguely, despite the emergence at the turn of the century of “bleus de travail”, a very different type of French work-wear, consisting at the time of a pair of trousers and a fitted jacket. The identification of working folk by their blouse followed the practice – so common in the past and the present as well – of designating a social category other than one’s own by means of a vestimentary attribute and assigning a particular term to it.
- 2 But the blouse’s reputation as a norm in its day must be compared with the actual vestimentary practices of workers, and that is our main intention. Yes, workers wore blouses, but did all workers wear them? Did they wear them every day? What did they wear while working? These are formidable questions, because while our sources shed a bright light on some aspects of this vestimentary history, they leave many others in the dark. For this reason, our discussion will bear exclusively on the working man: there is no garment equivalent to the man’s blouse that is automatically associated with the working

woman and could guide us. Nevertheless, the case seems clear: it would appear that, over the course of the century, the suit, whether for everyday or dress wear, progressively replaced the blouse among Parisian working men, with the “Sunday best” suit figuring as the earliest manifestation of this shift¹. We will not be challenging the accuracy of these facts, but would like to highlight the nonlinear nature, the contradictions and the complexity of this decades-long shift. In particular, we aim to prove that the vestimentary norms in use among workers, although conditioned by occupational practices and limited by material resources, were not imposed by externalities, but dictated by values specific to workers themselves.

The blouse, from barricade to metaphor

3 We are not aware of any representation or written allusion to the working man’s blouse antedating the year 1830 and, more specifically, the barricades of the July Revolution in Paris. It’s as if it took an uprising for the blouse to win recognition among its contemporaries, as if the struggle had opened their eyes. A few blouses figure in heroic accounts published after these events, including the “intrepid fellow wearing a blue blouse and holding a pistol,” whose boldness supposedly prompted the insurgents to take the Louvre². One eye-witness reported having seen, early in the rebellion, troops emerge onto Place de la Bourse led by “a man whose trousers and blouse of white, plain-woven cloth [...] marked him as a mason”³. But the most striking revelation of the blouse is a figure in the painting *Liberty Leading the People* by Delacroix, executed shortly after these events. It shows a man lying on the ground, the only protagonist in the painting to contemplate the apparition of a woman warrior brandishing the tricolor flag, whose hues are repeated in his clothing: a blue blouse, riding up to reveal a white shirt, and a red waistband. The artist painted him in the clothes of a real working man, a foot soldier of Liberty⁴.

4 After 1830, the blouse became a social marker. From then on, people noticed it and called it by name. According to the archeologist Charles Lenormant, wearing the blouse was none other than a remote Gallic custom that had been perpetuated in Auvergne and, in

the space of one generation, had made its way, village by village, to the capital:

“First, it became the outfit worn universally by cart drivers. From the roads, it reached the farms. From the fields, it invaded cities, and many industrial occupations have already re-adopted it under our very eyes.”⁵

- 5 The police and the courts, busy repressing civil disorder and attacks during the July Monarchy, never failed to mention it when an accused wrongdoer wore a blouse, wishing to stress that they were dealing with a worker, a dangerous character. During the big strikes of the summer of 1840, the Préfet de Police became alarmed over the groups of “men in blouses” and “juveniles” hanging around at night at Porte Saint-Denis and Porte Saint-Martin⁶. The “invention” of the blouse as a social marker was followed by an extraordinary inflation in the use of the word in 1848. During the tumultuous months following the popular victory in February, “blouses” were everywhere... in the press, in speeches, on posters, on stage and so forth. More than a style trend, it served to bow at the altar of suffering fellow men, i.e. workers. Louis Reybaud, an economist and social satirist, made fun of these ostentatious and largely hypocritical professions of faith proclaiming an undying love of the working man. “Others went even further,” he added. “They donned the blouse, convinced that they were of the people, because they wore the same clothes. Singular times! Strange ways!”⁷ As a matter of fact, Baudelaire took to the streets “wearing a worker’s smock” to sell *Le Salut public*, the newspaper that he had founded in February⁸.
- 6 Of course, there were plenty of real blouse-wearing workers to be found in Paris. In early June, Victor Delente, a veteran of republican struggles, wrote in his newspaper *Le Tocsin des travailleurs*⁹, that reaction was threatening to take over the Republic. He noted that, at the legislative assembly, “the blouse is so rare that it seems to stand out like a sore thumb,” whereas in February it had been “the uniform on the barricades”. The desire to be in unison with workers inspired the Montagnards – an improvised company of guards set up by Marc Caussidière, a democrat who served briefly as Préfet de Police – to wear “a blue work shirt and red waistband”¹⁰. But donning this “uniform” would eventually backfire for its wearers. During the “June

Days” uprising of 1848, the blouse ceased being “the most stylish, decent and wearable of clothes” to become “the mark of Cain” eliciting “a sentiment of horror and hate”¹¹. And this wasn’t simply a manner of speaking. For the custodians of the bourgeois order, every blouse-wearer was a worker and every worker was an insurgent. These misassociations led to a number of summary arrests and executions, such as that reported by an eyewitness, Louis Ménard:

“On Quai des Tuileries, soldiers from national guard units from outside Paris spotted a man wearing a blouse, arrested him and wanted to shoot him. A member of the lower house snatched the man away and tried to explain that some men in Paris wore blouses but were not insurgents, but no sooner had he left than the man was seized again and shot.”¹²

- 7 Whether adulated or abhorred, the blouse had become not only a sign understood by all, but an entity, a way of referring to class antagonism. The expression “*les blouses*” took on its full force when coupled with another term, “*les habits*”, referring to well-dressed bourgeois in their frock coats of fine wool¹³. On a day in May 1848, several hundred actors, artists, bank employees and shop clerks demanded admittance to the national workshops that had been opened by the government to occupy the unemployed. They claimed that they had previously been turned away “because we wore suits and it went sorely against our habits to don the blouse,” but that they, “like the workers,” were worthy of the Republic’s consideration.¹⁴ Amid street fighters, “*les habits*” designated the democratic or socialist-minded bourgeois that had espoused the workers’ cause and were pulling up paving stones alongside “*les blouses*.” De Maupas, the Préfet de Police at the time of the coup on December 2, 1851, wrote that, on December 3, he had had hostile groups dispersed on Place de la Bourse, subsequent to which “the black suits headed for other points along the boulevards [...] to start new demonstrations and the blouse-wearers made for the Saint-Martin area, where they knew they would meet the bulk of their friends”¹⁵. At that same moment, a student named Chassin, encountering the barricades erected in rue du Temple, felt full of hope: “Fine wool suits are still dominant, but mingled with them are the blouses of real workers”¹⁶. The barricades would be either be mingled or they would not exist at all.

- 8 The labels “*les habits*” and “*les blouses*” would continue to be used to designate bourgeois and workers, thought to oppose each other in every way, engaged in a class war. Journalist and author Jules Vallès constantly dwelled on the opposition between “men in frock coats” and “men in blouses”¹⁷.

Jules Vallès wrote this well-known article, *Le Parlement en blouse*, about 6 de la place de la Corderie-du-Temple, where the International Association of Workers and the Federation of Trade Unions had their headquarters on the fourth floor. Vallès wrote: “The Revolution is sitting on the benches, standing back to the wall, hands gripping the podium! The Revolution in workers' garb! [...] All hail the new Parliament!”



Le Cri du Peuple (p. 150 éd. française) A news headline dated February 27, 1871.

- 9 We could cite many other examples of political and militant texts using this vestimentary metaphor into the 1880s. However, this figure of speech failed to account for the diversity of workers' vestimentary practices and their own feel-ings about their mode of dress.

The duality of vestimentary practices

- 10 The identification of working people with the blouse, in terms of language and imagery, clearly indicates that the blouse was a frequent sight in crowds of passersby and rioters. But where did the blouse come from? Which workers wore it – or did not wear it – and for what purposes?

- 11 The origin of the blouse in Paris is not known. What we do know is that it came into use at the turn of the century. Neither the workers shown in the plates of *L'Encyclopédie*, the last edition of which was published in 1772, nor street vendors¹⁸, wore blouses. One pedestrian in Paris, the writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier, mentioned the “people’s motley garb,” but that doesn’t get us very far¹⁹. Daniel Roche, in his long chapter on what the people of Paris wore during the 18th century, says nothing about the blouse. This item of clothing was simply unknown at the time²⁰. One obvious supposition is that the blouse worn in Paris derived from the country peasant’s blouse. The latter supposedly originated in the application of “bleu populaire”, a cheap dye made from indigo, to plain cotton or mixed fabrics, long used in many French regions to make garments for work or long wear, such as the blouse²¹. Was the worker’s blouse the urban version of the peasant’s work blouse, which was usually blue²²? At any rate, in the 19th century, the word “blouse” would retain a certain ambiguity due to the bastard origins of the garment itself. The first known representations of the blouse in Paris, whether on stage or in writing – prior to its revelation in 1830 – were of the peasant’s blouse²³. In 1880, Jules Vallès wrote *Les blouses*, a serialized novel inspired by a dramatic 1847 uprising in the town of Buzançais: in this case, the insurgents were country folk²⁴. Mention might be made, too, of the blouse-wearing MP Christophe Thivrier, who became the talk of the town when he took his seat in the lower house – having been elected as a socialist at Commeny in 1889 – wearing a fine blue blouse, like a “rustic”²⁵. With the blouse, had the country come to Paris?
- 12 The answer is no. Blouse-wearers in Paris were not always country folk having migrated to Paris for the building season to ply their trowels on construction sites, far from it. The well-known masons from Limousin are the first to come to mind²⁶. Granted, masons wore blouses, white blouses, as one can see in the drawing by Henry Monnier. This was also the outfit worn by house painters, according the following allusion to a crowd of workers standing around the Paris City Hall in hopes of being hired: the workers were “dressed in white trousers and blouses of the same color”²⁷. They wore white... unless they wore blue, as Pierre Vinçard, a dependable guide to the world of the Parisian working man, asserted in 1849 in describing the typical outfit worn by the house painter:

“There’s nothing so picturesque, yet nothing simpler: his work garments consist of trousers of whitish cloth that he dons at the workshop to protect the pants that he wears underneath, a blue work shirt and a large cap of striped cotton.”²⁸

It should be noted, however, that house painters were not seasonal workers, nor was their blouse an item of rustic garb. Furthermore, not all construction workers wore the blouse. Vinçard reported that many carpenters habitually wore “a corduroy jacket and trousers, earrings, a compass in the right-hand pocket and a wide-brimmed hat”²⁹. Throughout this century of major projects in Paris, where works were underway on a nearly continuous basis, the mason’s or painter’s blouse and the carpenter’s corduroys were a common sight in the street. But we have yet to mention an essential fact: the blouse was also a work garment worn in ateliers and factories. While very little is known about this particular aspect of the history of labor, there can be no doubt that certain workers wore the blouse to work. This might seem surprising, given the presence of machines and the unsafe working conditions of the day. Adolphe Boyer, a worker and thinker, denounced the hazards represented by the crowded work spaces at industrial establishments, especially those that were mechanized:

“Step carefully in walking these narrow aisles! Make sure not to get dizzy! For if you trip and your clothes are caught in the gears, you will infallibly be dragged between them and ground or crushed by huge cylinders! This happens all too often to workers or apprentices, caught by their work blouse.”³⁰

The Mason



Alain Faure Taken from *Les industriels, métiers et professions en France, avec cent dessins par Henry Monnier* by Émile de La Bédollière (Paris, Veuve Louis Janet, 1842, 231 p.). In the chapter on masons, one reads: "Go out very early, at six o'clock in summer and eight o'clock in winter. Head for a house under construction which – thank God! – is not a rare sight in Paris. You'll see a regiment of workers arriving from every direction, wearing a blue or white blouse for some; a coarse canvas jacket for others; with one pocket bulging with a packet of tobacco, a well-seasoned pipe (usually clay) and a red-checked cotton handkerchief; trousers of blue plain-woven cloth or cottonnade; enormous, sturdy shoes into which not even the lowly stocking is admitted. The outfit is topped off with a wool cap or an item of headgear that one suspects to be a hat beneath all the flecks of diluted plaster or yellow mud left by stone-cutting. This item is also deformed by taps on the head given in friendship or anger."

Engraving by Chevauchet after a drawing by Henry Monnier.

- 13 So why did workers choose to wear the blouse? For the sake of convenience, in spite of the hazard? Because it was cheap? Was it a matter of imitation? Did working class spirit have its own dress code?

- 14 Whatever the reason, the “mason from Limousin” phenomenon falls short as an explanation, because not all construction workers wore the blouse and not all blouse-wearers worked in the construction sector. The working man painted by Delacroix was an “ordinary” worker. How is it that the blouse was flaunted by some and ignored by others? To make progress on this point, we need to ask ourselves what workers wore outside working hours, what clothes they wore to go out or for Sundays and holidays... There can only be two reasons for donning the blouse *at all times*, whether on the job or out on the town: poverty or pride.
- 15 Poverty. Over and over again, workers said: “It’s all I’ve got to wear.” The only wardrobe that a worker could ever hope to own consisted of “a very poor hat, two blouses, two pairs of cotton trousers, two shirts and one poor pair of shoes”³¹. Poverty was so severe that, according to tailors in 1848, some workers made do with a plain blouse when they went out and “went barefoot”³². Leather workers in 1867 observed that renewing their wardrobe was out of the question: “[owning] a single item of clothing is the only way to balance [our] low budget”... and it is not hard to guess what that item would be³³. And poverty was attended by all sorts of humiliations. Norbert Truquin, a worker visiting in Paris in 1848, wrote that he could only visit the city’s museums and monuments when dressed in a frock coat “because people wearing blouses were not permitted to enter”³⁴. Proper attire was required. And then there was pride: “I am a worker and wear working man’s clothes.”
- 16 Reports attesting this sentiment came later and were indirect. English worker delegates to the 1867 international exposition in Paris often expressed astonishment at the sight of their Parisian brothers wearing the blouse in the street or at an open-air concert at Les Tuileries:

“Our London workman (myself included) would feel ashamed to go into society unless he could wear a suit similar in appearance to his employer [...], but the Parisian I met with everywhere would be attired in a good pair of black trousers and vest, with a watch in his pocket, over this a clean blouse, and a cap, evidently proud to own himself one of the wage class.”³⁵

The typography worker



Engraving taken from Théotiste Lefevre's book *Guide pratique du compositeur d'imprimerie*, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1872-1873, vol. 1, p. 3 (first edition in 1855).

- 17 Living in exile in London, Jules Vallès was surprised to see that “artisans” did not wear blouses, attributing this to misplaced pride. “They don’t wear blues. When they pass you in the street, you’d never know that they are workers.” On a different note, we might quote Denis Poulot, an employer observing worker mores, who denounced certain workers that “flaunted the blouse,” proof of what he called “Sublimism”, i.e. arrogance and class hatred.

“In an omnibus, wagon or public vehicle, if you see a character who thinks he’s entitled to be rude and answers your timid observations by retorting: ‘It’s because I’m wearing a blouse or not wearing gloves!’[then you are dealing with a] sublime worker!”³⁶

- 18 But pride could take other forms as well. A worker could have a mixed wardrobe, i.e. a blouse for everyday wear and a special outfit for dress occasions. Some workers even had a reputation for being real dandies, such as the qualified tailor, who never went out without their white vest and black suit³⁷! For initiation ceremonies, the master artisans belonging to “Devoirs du Tour de France” guilds all wore dress coats or frock coats³⁸. The joiner Agricol Perdiguier, a joiner and public figure of the day, recommended that workers avoid wearing the blouse for it was always “dark” and “dirty”, placing workers in “a separate class” and “subalterizing” them³⁹. He encouraged them to wear “dress clothes”, an expression used by the activist bookbinder Victor Wynants⁴⁰ in discussing the admission fee to the 1855 international exposition in Paris, initially lowered to 20 centimes on Sundays to attract workers⁴¹:

“Workers attended in dress clothes. It was only their right to do so. Didn’t this event celebrate products that they manufactured? But no doubt too many workers came, or perhaps the organizers responsible for assessing the effect of this measure did not see enough blouses. A new order soon shifted the lower rate from Sunday to Monday on the pretext that workers had not taken advantage of this so-called “favor”. To do so, they’d have had to take a day off from work in order to *visit on Monday!*”

- 19 In other words, the organizers were convinced that any visitor not wearing a blouse had to be a bourgeois, whereas a great many workers had made a point of wearing their Sunday best to the exposition. This vestimentary misunderstanding was rooted in disdain.
- 20 From this time on, many workers owned two sets of clothing. A carpenter in 1846 drew up a detailed budget for a married friend that owned “work objects” (work pants and work shirts, but no jacket) and “dress objects” (including a frock coat and an elegant hat)⁴². Ten years later, one of the first monographs by the economist Le Play, focusing specifically on a carpenter, mentioned his “work garments” (consisting mainly of three work shirts) and his “Sunday best” (a winter coat of fine black wool, fine wool pants and a black silk hat as well as a “blue suit,” worn only rarely)⁴³. The inventories drawn up by local magistrates listing the possessions of those who died in May or June of 1871 (probably victims of “the Bloody Week”), as well as the

claims for compensation submitted by those who suffered losses due to the Siege of Paris and civil war, reflected a variety of situations. One marble worker had owned nothing but a blouse, a carpenter's outfit and a work jacket, but a cold glazer in rue de la Folie-Méricourt claimed losses worth 420 francs for his "work clothing" (three pairs of overalls and three work shirts) as well as a frock coat in fine black wool and three pairs of trousers, including two made of fine wool, and two dress vests⁴⁴.

- 21 This type of smart wardrobe would have been owned by the more well-to-do workers. Since their strike in 1845, carpenters were paid five francs a day⁴⁵, a very handsome wage at the time. As for the carpenter in Le Play's monograph, he was a *gâcheur de levage* or worksite foreman. The point is that these workers elected to wear their work garments only when on the job. Other workers for whom financial resources were not an issue continued to prefer wearing the blouse during off-hours. This explains why, at meetings of the editorial board of *L'Atelier*, a well-known working-class newspaper of the 1840s, some editors would be "wearing blouses, the others frock coats"⁴⁶ and why, in a court case in 1855, bronze foundry workers accused of violating the strike ban appeared in attire "ranging from blouse to black suit, worker's cap to felt hat."⁴⁷
- 22 For any self-respecting worker, there was a choice to be made: wear the blouse or wear a suit.

The end of the blouse

- 23 In the next part of our chronicle, we will be focusing on the disappearance of the working man's blouse in the public space, whether for Sunday or work-a-day wear. How and why did this trend towards the social uniformization of self-presentation emerge?
- 24 That workers stopped wearing the blouse is indisputable. At the turn of the 20th century, dozens and dozens of picture postcards of workers leaving (or entering) factories in and near Paris show that the days of the blouse were over⁴⁸. While a few blouses might be spotted here and there – looking more like long aprons – the great majority of workers wore a disparate outfit of jacket, vest and trousers, more or less the worse for wear, topped by a cap. A straw Panama hat or a

watch-chain emerging from a vest pocket might add a touch of elegance. What indicated the wearer's social class, more than the garments themselves, was their poor quality and the degree of wear and tear. This trend had already struck many outside observers. In 1887, Denis Poulot deemed that workers had gained in dignity over the past twenty years. By way of proof, he remarked that, at a conscription lottery held at the city hall of the eleventh arrondissement of Paris, only "five or six, at most" of the 1,400 conscripts wore blouses.⁴⁹ Another observer of the public space felt that "progress" in "worker attire" had been attested by the simple fact that, on February 17, 1905, only three out of 105 workers were wearing blouses on Place Saint-Gervais, where masons gathered in hopes of being hired⁵⁰. In 1907, a policeman on duty at Place de la République on May 1 (International Workers' Day), witnessed the arrival of many demonstrators dressed "fairly coarsely" albeit "properly"⁵¹. The "blouse-wearers" – to borrow the term used by the Préfet de Police, de Maupas – had changed their ways.

Front page of *L'Ouvrier en meuble*, May 1, 1912, a publication put out by the National Furnishings Federation.



Drawing by Paul Poncet.

- 25 Naturally, it became even more de rigueur for many workers to dress well on Sundays and holidays. On this score, we could cite nearly all of the monographs of the day, especially those written by Le Play's disciple, the economist Pierre Du Maroussem⁵². By this time, bowler hats, top hats, cravats and patent leather shoes were being added to fine wool frock coats and suits to complete the look. Writing about their childhood before World War I, many equated fine Sundays with fine attire:

"There were also marvelous days on which we all set off for Suresnes in an excursion boat. I can still see my father in his alpaca jacket and boater hat, my mother in a white bodice with leg-of-mutton sleeves and a bell skirt."⁵³

- 26 The father of the woman speaking here was a house painter and her mother a factory worker.
- 27 Many authors pointed out that working-class budgets had seen an increase in spending on clothes. One went so far as to declare that “it costs more to buy clothes than to rent lodgings”.⁵⁴ It is doubtful whether this claim could be made for Paris. The amount spent on clothes by a working-class couple appears to have been lower than the annual rent for a more or less decent place to live (about 400 francs circa 1900). While proletarian clothes imitated the wardrobe of real bourgeois, they could not compare in terms of quantity, quality or value. Nor should we forget the mass of those whose finances prohibited them from donning finery once a week. The family of a tanner on the Bièvre River, who had become a ragpicker due to a shortage of work, never went out on Sundays. The reason, we are told, was “a lack of money and clothes clean enough to make an honorable appearance amidst a population in their Sunday best.”⁵⁵ In “This Misery of Boots”, published in 1912, H. G. Wells pointed out that those without wearable shoes were cut off from the rest of the world⁵⁶. Some parents used this reason – in good faith or not – to justify their child’s absences from the communal school: “The father did not have the heart to inflict this humiliation on his child before more well-to-do schoolmates”⁵⁷. There was a school fund to provide shoes for the poorest pupils, but there was no “Sunday best” fund to help poor families take the excursion boat to Suresnes without shame.
- 28 The fact remains that workers were spending more on clothing, contradicting one of Engel’s “laws” of consumption whereby this expense item would remain constant in a working-class family budget⁵⁸. Above all, the effect was to “standardize” the appearance of workers. For Sunday wear, the bourgeois dress code was gaining devotees. On other days of the week, workers were increasingly donning cheap ready-made garments, which is what really killed off the blouse.
- 29 The manufacture of ready-made clothing was one of the silent revolutions of the 19th century. What counted wasn’t machines, but the idea of attracting a new clientele by setting fixed, low prices and calling on the endless supply of cheap laborers working at home⁵⁹. A

new clientele? Vendors of secondhand clothing rapidly gave way to “merchant-manufacturers of new clothes”. At first, they specialized in cheap new garments that copied bourgeois attire. One of the pioneers in this sector, Pierre Parissot, started out in 1824 by manufacturing “work outfits” – blouses, work shirts and overalls – but very quickly switched to “full suits at low prices” so that customers could “afford to wear new clothes.” As a result, his business, La Belle Jardinière, prospered and others followed suit⁶⁰. The blouse market was not sufficient in itself, but blouse-wearers seeking distinction belonged to the new clientele.

- 30 At the end of the 19th century, the vulgarization of “Sunday best” dress and the purchase of low-quality jackets and trousers for everyday wear marked a victory for the industrial garment industry. Early in the century, the “good clothes” that many workers liked to wear still probably came from traditional secondhand channels⁶¹, but there can be no doubt that, after 1860 or 1870, the merchant-manufacturer had become the clothier of choice for the poor classes, to the point where they abandoned the blouse for everyday wear. This would have to be confirmed by a detailed analysis of the quantities produced and prices⁶², but clearly the business of supplying garments to the working classes was booming. One factory worker named Lebrun was able to change his Sunday suit every year for 25 francs.⁶³ An advertisement for the blue-collar co-operative store La Bellevilloise claimed that, in the “new products” section, madeup “suits” started at 20 francs and trousers for 5.75 francs. If a co-op member wished to have garments made to measure, he would have to pay at least twice as much⁶⁴. A 1907 survey on undergarments reported that wearing an undershirt, whose price had dropped from 5 francs to 1.95 francs apiece, had become commonplace among workers⁶⁵. The fact that the poor could own a change of clothes and dress like everyone else was hailed by Liberal economists as the biggest benefit of the garment industry:

“Most assuredly, a manufactured garment cannot compete with a fine bespoke suit supplied by a tailor [...] It replaces the rags or those almost ridiculous clothes that a great many peasants and workers were wearing twenty years ago. Today, one cannot go to an school for adults or a large gathering of workers without being struck by

this happy transformation of their manner of dress, due in part to the garment manufacturing industry.”⁶⁶

- 31 Furthermore, this “happy transformation” was also thought to reflect a change in attitude. According to a major garment manufacturer:

“Workers that used to be clothed in coarse, plain-woven cloth or mended rags are now able to wear a suit. This manner of dress has become familiar to him, elevates him and obliges him to respect himself.”⁶⁷

- 32 The days of “Sublimism” were over.

- 33 Buying on the installment plan, which suited the working man’s budget, contributed the most to the rise and triumph of garment manufacturing in the second half of the century. Initially used experimentally and on a small scale by clever merchants, the purchase of clothes on credit⁶⁸ made the fortune of specialized businesses, the most famous of which was the one started by Crespin. The customer paid a portion of the value of the desired object, went to pick it up at the store, then paid off the balance in small installments, recorded in a credit notebook⁶⁹. In 1872, Crespin established a store on Boulevard Barbès that was subsequently rechristened Magasins Dufayel, whose catalogues tempted low-income families by making it easier for them to present well in terms of their personal appearance and their home. Today, it is hard to conceive of why this scheme was such a tremendous success. According to the Bonneff brothers, who were Socialist journalists, everyone was buying on credit in certain working-class buildings. In order to pay for exceptional or current expense items, an entire generation was willing to turn over, not without risks,⁷⁰ a portion of its savings to the powers behind the scenes of the garment industry.

- 34 The success of stores offering installment plans was often attributed by contemporaries to their highly aggressive sales tactics. It was thought that they would do anything to land new customers.⁷¹ At the same time, customers let them get away with it. The garment business offered a solution to all those that had previously had to “make do” with wearing the blouse, to their great humiliation. For workers advocating the suit, the resulting uniformization of dress was not a

disadvantage, on the contrary. In 1872, a former director of *L'Atelier*, a typographer named Leneveux, wrote that dress should not serve to categorize citizens and further commented that:

“No doubt, wealth will always be recognizable in a close examination of apparel, due to the fineness of the fabrics and clothing. However, regarding the overall effect of the first impression, it will injure none if, for all and sundry, the same broad principles apply to the entire outfit.”⁷²

- 35 It suffices to read certain reports by Parisian workers-delegates to world fairs in the United States to observe how greatly they were struck with the dignified attire of the American worker:

“It must be admitted that the American worker presents better [...] When the work day is over, he dons his greatcoat and hat; in the street, there is nothing to distinguish him from the richest of bankers [...]. This increases the dignity of the individual worker in the eyes of all onlookers. It is therefore our most sincere hope that the regrettable tendency to dress negligently, unfortunately so widespread among the French working class, will give way to the simple but proper dress of American citizens, convinced as we are that decent attire elevates a man and conveys his intrinsic value more effectively.”⁷³

- 36 This perspective makes it easier to understand the success of a man like Dufayel. The idea of donning “proper” attire at the end of the work day is especially noteworthy in that it implied changing clothes at the workplace. Many workers yearned to be able to wash the dirt from their hands and face and change out of their work clothes before leaving their atelier⁷⁴. In 1867, the workers in charge of melting used type expressed the view that all print shops should have a changing room in which personnel could leave their clothes⁷⁵. Others spoke of the need to “bathe” and “change clothes” in order to “present themselves to the world,” but did not know how they could manage “on such a low wage”⁷⁶. A few establishments did possess such installations. Since the Second Empire, the big gasworks in Paris had provided a wash room where workers could wash and leave their clothes.⁷⁷ In another instance, according to the workshop floor plan, an upper-floor jewelry business on rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau