

REVOLUTIONARY APPEARANCE OR THE REVOLUTION OF APPEARANCES

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The fact that one of the essential elements in the French Revolution, *the sans-culottes*, were named after an article of clothing, is of no small interest. A matter of dress, a pattern of behaviour, a way of life, symbolised a political ideal and a desire for fundamental social change. For both the supporters of the Montagnard policy of direct action and their opponents, extreme revolutionary appearance was reflected in a revolution of appearances, which for the former was fundamental and for the latter superficial, and on this point historians of dress are no less divided¹. It is important that elements of material culture be given their rightful place in the history of the Revolution, but it is also necessary to see how the relationships between clothing, fashion and the revolutionary events have always been placed in an equivocal perspective. The costumes of the Old Régime are commonly supposed to have disappeared with the Revolution, and the era of freedom of dress to have begun with it. Henceforth, fashion and consumption were to speed up their processes and generalise the sign language of the new dress in terms of codes elaborated by the conquering bourgeoisie, anxious

to assert its legitimacy by endowing it with practical alibis, with endless moral and aesthetic pretexts as if to make a guilty gratuitousness innocent².

The years 1789-1794 are thus indicated as the fundamental breaking point with the past and the Revolution as the event which founded the change.

The problem of continuity should perhaps be questioned today as regards appearances, as has occurred for other historical fields such as the political, social and economic³. Perhaps the revolutionary years should also be considered in their true specificity to discover how events were really connected to century-old habits of dress, to recent transformations and immediate

¹ J. Quicherat, *Histoire du costume en France depuis les temps les plus reculés, jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1875, pp. 595-648; F. Boucher, *Histoire du Costume*, Paris 1965, 3rd ed. 1987, pp. 333-350.

² P. Perrot, *Les dessus et les dessous de la Bourgeoisie, histoire du vêtement au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, 1981, p. 19.

³ F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, Paris, 1907, pp. 233-245.

changes⁴. *La mode révolutionnaire*, revolutionary fashion, the apparent revolution of appearances, was at the crossroads of two movements, that of the old days where the traditional order aimed at underlining class differences and at excluding any claims for change, and that of the new times, where economic and social dynamics attempted to wipe out class differences, but by creating emulation between individuals, only ended by indirectly increasing them.

When the Revolution broke out, the hierarchy of appearances was a powerful element in society, and only within its limits could the whims of fashion play. In a France that was 80 % rural, the towns set the pace and Paris animated the main changes. In the anti-egalitarian world of the Old Régime, as in economy and Christian morality, the defences of social status imposed principles of control and immobility on the signs of costume: *the habit makes the monk*. The established forms of both female and male peasant dress, the rough nature of rural and domestic textile products, the stiffness of popular clothing, with its sober colours evoking those of the earth, were the features of a way of dressing that left little room for fantasy.

Our villagers are somewhat primitive as regards fashion, and one can see old paintings of the Louis XIV Wars where the peasant men and women are wearing clothes that are little different from those you see them in nowadays...

The economist Jean Baptiste Say wrote as late as 1828.

In this stable society, fashion was not ignored, it permeated slowly, keeping pace with local economic improvement, with the influence of the towns spreading by means of the fairs and markets; and from village, in countryside and wooded areas, the endless pedlars hawked their wares, their packs containing lace, cotton handkerchiefs, chintz shawls, tortoise-shell combs, pins, pocket mirrors, assorted caps, collars, ribbons, laces, needles, brushes, blessed beads, pictures and songs, almanacs, calendars, and manuals of self-improvement, manners and the art of elegant expression⁵. Through accessories and detail, through the copying of models arriving from the towns, through the flirting of young village men and girls showing off on Sundays and holidays, at balls, dances, celebrations and other festive social occasions⁶, the mechanisms of consumption and the need to be different spread changes which were in themselves modest, but sufficiently innovative so as to generalise in their turn a new interpretation of the models, their adaptation, together with a basic change in behaviour. Moreover, the irruption of fashions and novelties into the provinces and countryside was only made possible against

⁴ J. Quicherat, op. cit., pp. 620-640.

⁵ L. Fontaine, *Le voyage et le mémoire, colporteurs de Poisans au XIX^e siècle*, Lyon, 1984, gives the essential bibliography and describes the mechanisms of circulation in the 19th century. There is no equivalent book in France to that of M. Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England, Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1984.

⁶ N. Pellegrin, *Les bachelleries, organisations et fêtes de la jeunesse dans le Centre Ouest, XV-XVIII^e siècles*, Poitiers, 1982, pp. 180-185.

the background of an apparently unchangeable order and one where, in any case, the fundamental features of costume did not change⁷. In-depth spread of change was only possible in terms of minor modifications; it started with a detail, with the small modification within an established pattern⁸. Village societies, in this aspect as in others, were not completely immobile; in her way, fashion held sway there also.

It was in the towns, however, that the most important transformations took place. Social mobility, the constant struggle for positions of social distinction – the same mechanisms at work in *The Court Society* and in *The History of Manners* – very early on created the business of appearance in urban society, and fashion was an important aspect of this⁹. Townspeople's dress was the most direct evidence of the hierarchy of place and clearly distinguished, in the eyes of the traveller or the observer, the bourgeois from the peasant, the poor man from the aristocrat on their daily rounds. Forms of dress were comparable for all levels of society, but the social differences were to be seen in accumulation – from which stemmed the possibility of changing attire –, in the quality of fabrics, the range of colours, the cut of the cloth, and ornamentation, in the costliness and variety of accessories. In short, it was those little distinctive details which go to make up fashion and express the truly complex language of dress, that confirmed acquired position and set off the pretensions of the innumerable social and cultural intermediaries peopling the urban scene¹⁰.

A close examination of wardrobe in Paris reveals how the hierarchy of appearances and, at the same time, its contamination, worked¹¹. Hierarchy can be illustrated by the amount of money each social category invested in its clothing around 1789: on average, L6000 for the nobility, which would be equivalent to more than 250 *setiers* of wheat at the La Halle market; L100 only for salaried workers, equal to 4 *setiers* of wheat. Social rank would also be emphasized by the range of choice of garments in the wardrobe, where colours, the numbers of items of dress, quality and quantity, provided a sufficient basis for distinguishing one class from another. Clothes gave each individual a social and personal identity, revealing and defining his or her background, role and walk of life in society. L.S. Mercier and Rétif de la Bretonne listed these signs of distinction in the town's appearance. The doctor, lawyer, barrister, the professional man, the churchman, would be recognised by their black gowns, the aristocrat and the wealthy financier by the quality of the material, the embroidery which increased the value of their

⁷ G. Lipovestky, *L'Empire de l'Ephémère, La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*, Paris, 1987, pp. 35-36.

⁸ E. Sapir, « La Mode », in *Anthropologie*, Paris, 1987, p. 186.

⁹ N. Elias, *La Civilisation des mœurs*, Paris, 1973; *La Société de Cour*, Paris, 1974.

¹⁰ D. Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris*, Paris, 1981, English translation, Berkeley, London, 1987.

¹¹ D. Roche, *L'économie des gards-robés à Paris de Louis XIV à Louis XVI, Communications, Parure, pudeur, étiquettes*, 1987, pp. 93-117.

garments, the lace ruffles, ribbons, diamond or gold buttons. In this microcosmos of the truly privileged in fashion, the men vied with the women in the elegance contest, dressed in silks, in rare and costly cloth, in soft velvets, printed calicos, in ornate fabrics with intricate patterns. They offered themselves to the eyes of all, giving society around them, to its poorest members, the idea of a different world, and even the feeling of watching a show. This theatricization of the aesthetic effects of dress, in its continual self-renewal created fashion, illustrating aristocratic splendor – an economy of prodigality – and at the same time, a capacity for initiative, a desire for individual affirmation and a force of change which went beyond costume¹².

It was the spirit of this society, ordered on inequality, which showed itself in public for the last time on the day of opening of the Estates General. Louis XVI had obliged the deputies to wear the costume of their rank and state, and the procession of the orders remains as the symbol of the dress of the Old Régime. The ecclesiastics walked at its head in the apparel of their rank, the purple of the cardinals and the scarlet of the bishops mingling with the somber robes of the religious orders and the black habits of the secular clergy. The nobles followed, displaying the luxury of their elegant attire and their gold-threaded mantles, «parading the greatest pomp», the protestant Rabaut Saint-Etienne was to write. Last came the Third Estate entitled to a black suit, a simple cloak, and a hat without ornament. The contrast between this austerity of dress and the ostentation of the privileged clearly revealed the political significance that costume and fashion had assumed; «the magic of magnificence had lost its spell; extravagance no longer inspired respectful astonishment»¹³.

For at least a century, in fact, the field of appearances had been subject to a large number of changes, and two interconnected revolutions had modified behaviour. The first was the linen revolution and the second was the rapid expansion of dress consumption. Since the 17th century, the conquest of linen had imposed on the one hand a new model of cleanliness and on the other hand the need for display to demonstrate one's position as part of the world of civilised manners and culture, and this fact profoundly affected standards of appearance in all social classes¹⁴. The whiteness of one's linen, the marked differentiation between under and over garments, and the necessary renewal of one's body linen, were marks of moral cleanliness, enhancing one's presentation in the eyes of the world. Fashion took full advantage of this major transformation of costume, imposing quality, ornamentation and signs of distinction. Choice lace and fine muslins distinguished the fashionable court lady from the common women who could not afford

¹² G. Lipovestky, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

¹³ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 2, 6-14 Mai, 1799; P. Perrot, op. cit., pp. 36-37; J. Starobinski, 1789, *Les emblèmes de la raison*, Paris, 1973, pp. 12-15.

¹⁴ G. Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale, l'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age*, Paris, 1985; D. Roche, «L'invention du linge au XVIII^e siècle», *L'Ethnologie Française*, 1986, 3, pp. 227-238.

such refinements. No one, however, was free from these new dictates, « for if one's clothes are clean and above all one's linen is white, it is of no importance whether one is magnificently dressed or not » (Antoine Courtin). The urban bourgeoisie found a clear expression of their compactness in the refinement of their linen as, by combining the austerity of their costume with the cleanness and luxury of their linen, they conciliated their principles of economy with display of their specificity both as compared to those above them and to those below them in the society¹⁵. The revolutionary event, *the controversy between silk and cloth*, as Balzac wrote in the *Treaty on Elegant Life*¹⁶, brought out the importance of these contrasts.

In the same way, the evolution of customs in dress multiplied the effects of unrest and social heterogeneity. In urban populations the range of clothes had increased, even among the less well-off, over the previous century; in addition, fabrics had changed and the thick, durable woolen cloths – to stand up to wear and tear – which were impervious to the demands of fashion, were replaced by light materials and ephemeral cottons. Colours also changed: women first, then men, abandoned the somber for the bright, with a wide range of colours in a variety of shades and patterns. The wind of fashion, which quickly made clothes out of date, blew throughout society, and from innumerable directions: masters gave their old clothes away to their servants, valets and maids stole garments and trimmings (in pre-revolutionary Paris the theft of clothing was ten times greater than that of food), old-clothes dealers and the like purloined, cut up and re-sold thousands of second-hand clothes which then went their various ways. There thus came into being a society which was already in part governed by large-scale consumption, not only directed to satisfying immediate needs, and by a freedom of expression in dress despite its non-equalitarian principles¹⁷.

Paris, the fashion Mecca of Europe and the world (London lagged far behind), had sparked off an irresistible trend. Her haberdashers, her drapers, her dress and linen merchants, tailors and dressmakers, shoemakers and milliners worked for wealthy and elegant customers. But their skill and refinement left their mark on the whole of society. Relics of former opulence and lost coquetterie can be found in notaries' inventories or in the official registers of the Morgue¹⁸. The influence of current fashions can be seen in the descriptions of garments: *robe à la polonaise*, *robe chemise*, *habit de zèbre*, *veste à la hussarde*, as in colours: *roussette* (pale red), *canari libéré* (free canary), *mauve tourterelle* (dove mauve), *gorge de pigeon* (pigeon's throat), *bleu oeil de roi* (king's-eye blue), *lie de vin* (wine lee), *brun puce ou*

¹⁵ Ph. Perrot, « Pour une généalogie de l'austérité des apparences », *Communications*, 1987, 47, pp. 157-180.

¹⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. XII, Paris, 1981, p. 226.

¹⁷ D. Roche, *La Culture des apparences, Essai sur l'histoire de la culture matérielle*, forthcoming publication.

¹⁸ R. Cobb, *Death in Paris*, Oxford, 1978; D. Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris*, op. cit., pp. 165-201.

merdoie (puce or dung brown). The taste of Parisian men and women became more refined, their perception softened; aesthetical standards spread from the fashionable world to the lower levels of society; the street scene lost its contrasts, the distinguishing signs of social status became less marked; everything was changing according to the canons of taste which were interpreted in thousands of ways, as elegant men and women were in turn imitated and copied by an even greater number of followers. The feverish search for novelty, which led Parisians to extremes of dress (denounced by moral observers)¹⁹, gave rise to a new attitude, which was more individualist, more hedonist, but at the same time more egalitarian and freer.

Behaviour and manners had also adapted to the improvement of appearance which in a way was the overturning of a whole way of being. All the social categories were caught up in the speeding up of the rhythms of change and renewal. A glimpse of the rare perfection which had been reached in the refinement of dress can be caught in the fashion journals which then flourished in France and Europe²⁰, where « artlessness », « simplicity » and « lack of ceremony » were the order of the day in elegant circles. The fashionable silhouette lost some of its dignity and stiffness and became suppler, lending itself to English or exotic influences, both in men's and in women's dress. Observers agreed in denouncing the triumphant confusion of manners. The more serious and moralistic of them read in these changes the signs of probable catastrophes and imminent calamities « for by ceasing to respect the public, they ignore all social degree »²¹. Even before the Revolution, fashion had become a political matter.

The ills of France began with the deficit, proclaimed the pamphleteers and writers of *political pornography* who illegally distributed critical pamphlets and booklets²². The Queen and the Court played in this concert of denunciation a role apart. Marie Antoniette wasted enormous sums of money on clothes, and spent on jewellery, frivolous trimmings and extravagances, money which would have fed hundreds of starving people. Théveneau de Morande attacked the *ministry* of Rose Bertin, the Queen's favourite modiste, clearly indicating the real targets of his accusations. To the traditional moral critique and the contestation of luxury from an economic point of view²³ were now added the voices of those systematically

¹⁹ L.S. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Amsterdam, 1781-1788, 12 vol., t. 2, p. 214, t. 6, p. 213.

²⁰ C. Rimbault, *La presse féminine de Langue française au XVIII^e siècle*, Thèse de 3^e cycle, University de Paris I (unpublished); A.M. Kleinert, *Die frühen Mode-journale in Frankreich*, Berlin, 1980; J. Hellegouarch, « Quelques termes relatifs à la mode féminine au cas de la Révolution de 1789 », *Cahiers de Lexicologie*, 33, 1978, II, pp. 105-131.

²¹ Ja de Segur, *Les femmes, leur condition et leur influence dans la Société*, Paris, 1803, vol. III, quoted by A. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe, 1715-1789*, London, 1984.

²² H. Fleischmann, *Les pamphlets libertins contre Marie Antoinette*, Paris, 1908, pp. 41-61; R. Darnton, *Bohème Littéraire et Révolution*, Paris, 1983.

²³ C. Borghero, edited by, *La polemica sul lusso nel settecento francese*, Torino, 1974.

denouncing the scenes and holders of power. Depicting a Byzantine tableau of ecclesiastic spending, the pamphleteers exploited an ancient, classical denunciation of the effects of fashion to attack the ethical legitimacy of the Régime. The bizarre inventions of the royal modiste, imitated by everyone, gave rise to great expenditure which the Queen

has not been able to hide from the King, and which the latter has checked and criticised with all the strength of a good husband, careful of his income and somewhat averse to seeing it frittered away on fripperies, tulle and feathers

wrote Théveneau de Morande confirming in his Memoirs what Madame Campan had said²⁴. The *toilettes* of the Nobility, Marie Antoinette's extravagance, and the manners of dress of the aristocracy were henceforth the object of discussions which became without opposition more heated, because of aristocratic eccentricity which did not end when the age of simplicity replaced the age of fantasy. In fact, the return to nature and modesty were not a source of saving. Madame Eloffe's bills bear this out²⁵. At the same time the language of dress instigated by the fashion industry spread political allegory and topical interest. The American War and its victories lent themselves to this trend, giving rise to *bonnets à la Belle Poule*, Boston Hats, Philadelphia jewellery, as did other events – theatrical, where *bonnet à la Suzanne* recalled *the Marriage of Figaro*, or scientific with hats *à la Montgolfier* or *au Paratonner* (lightning conductor). The idiom of elegance, within the reach of everyone, was in the years from 1780 to 1790 so exaggerated that people became inured to frivolity and the cult of novelty and individuality. Criticism and discussion lasted throughout the revolution; at the beginning with a sharpness reinforced by the visible contradiction between the dress system of the Old Régime, which was still legal, and the *de facto* affirmation of equalitarian principles not yet consecrated juridically by the act of the Convention of 29 October 1793 (8 Brumaire, Year II). From this moment, standards were to be stronger than the law; until then, people might marvel at the effects and follies of Fashion which revealed the privileged classes to themselves and to others. But new manners and sensibilities had already infiltrated everywhere, and clothing and fashion were henceforth elevated to a public question.

The first moments of the revolution were soon to bear out these facts. Habits did not change overnight; the clothes worn during the years of crisis were generally those of the Monarchy as far as the rich were concerned, and even more so as regarded the poor, who had no more means than before to renew their wardrobe. Dress underwent modifications rather than profound transformation, and it was in the interplay of these successive changes that symbolic, idiomatic manifestations of political battles of clothing arose. These

²⁴ E. Langlade, *La marchande de modes de Marie Antoinette, Rose Bertin*, Paris, 1911, pp. 170-171.

²⁵ De Reiset, comte de, *Le livre Journal de Madame Eloffe*, Paris, 1885, 2 vol.

developments invested structures where evolution had already begun before the Revolution. In any case, events at first left fashion undecided and slowed down her pace.

In July 1789 the journal *Le Cabinet des Modes* ceased to appear on a regular basis, and in August the editor wrote:

Until our affairs are stabilised, it will be almost impossible for us to issue our journals at fixed dates... We can only say that for the moment, which we hope will not be of great duration, fashions will not vary so much as they did before the onset of our misfortunes.

In September, 1790, they were finally able to announce to their readers that

colours and forms of dress, bonnets and hats are changing with an inconceivable rapidity. Everything is following the Revolution and is influenced by the general unease.

All the traditional centres of distinction and influence, the accepted objects of imitation such as the Court, High Nobility, foreign taste (especially English and Oriental), the centre points of creation and circulation, were now disorganised and giving way to the direction pointed by events and inspired by new motifs, deriving more from the realm of political philosophy than that of current events, as the latter had long been accepted by creators of fashion. Basic cut was that of pre-Revolution days, but details, accessories, ornaments, colours and way of wearing the clothes quickly absorbed the new slogans. The new look also spread more rapidly and deeply in menswear than in women's dress, especially in refined circles. This fact transpires from the issues of the *Cabinet des Modes*²⁶, which in 1790 became *Le Journal de la Mode et du Goût*, edited until its demise, in 1793, by Lebrun Tossa. It was the most important publication, together with more short-lived journals for female readers, such as *Etrennes nationales des dames*, *Les Evenements du Jour* and *La Feuille du Soir*. It had a wide readership and was imitated abroad in Germany, Holland, England and Italy. From the Year II until 1797, when two or three fashion journals reappeared, we have no testimony of fashion in print²⁷.

Three trends followed each other in this period, according to political fluctuations and the evolution of public taste: firstly, Neoclassic taste dominated fashion; then the ideals of equality held sway and dress became a subject of controversy, with the subject of uniforms at its centre; and lastly habits of consumption settled down, with the new authorities and new rich influencing taste in favour of the English and old styles. There was no real break between the three phases, for political influence on dress remained a common feature up till the 19th century.

²⁶ S. Levu, *Le Journal de la mode et du goût, étude d'un journal de mode pendant la Révolution*, Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Paris I, 1983.

²⁷ C. Rimbault, op. cit.; A. Kleinert, op. cit.

From journalistic columns – though not necessarily in people's wardrobes – and from eye-witness and artistic accounts of dress, it is clear that at first it was « *neo-classicism* » which lit and animated political reform. The return to the natural with its praise of simplicity, the exaltation of Rome and virtue, which painters and sculptors had already depicted before 1789, flourished in men's and women's wear alike. It must be pointed out that Lebrun Tossa and his fellow writers did not have to invent the fashion: it invented itself and lived a life of its own outside the pages of their journals. They did observe the phenomenon, however, commented it and described its trends in the manner of former fashion writers who knew that « in Paris a fashion rarely lasted more than three weeks or a month without changing »²⁸. The constant fluctuation of distinctive codes did not slow down once disruption of habit had ended and the readjustment of clothing economy to the new disposition of clientele had come about²⁹. In short, « customs became purified »; « luxury was out » and the illustrations and comments of the *Journal des Modes* presented the patterns of the new etiquette³⁰. Costume dress changed rapidly, comfort was the order of the day and nature its inspiration. Loose jackets, *déshabillé*, corsets revealed, shawls and modest caps dominated women's dress in accordance with the marked change in their life styles; no longer governed by rules of court ceremonial or the need to keep up with aristocratic standards of elegance, women were now on show, they were mobile in the freedom of *public space*. Going about on foot called for new outfits and a new look.

Many women are perfectly aware of the advantage of not wearing the same headdress for two days running, and so they alternate hats and caps, knowing that thus they are more eye-catching and attractive³¹;

and so traditional habits of dressing to please adapted to the new need for an active life, as women's presence in the streets, in assemblies and entertainments became the rule.

At the same time, female dress became more masculine, taking over the overcoat, *le pierrot*, and adding wide flowing cravats, collars, and – with feathered caps *à la chasseur* (huntsmen's caps) or *à la houzarde*, *à la cavalière* – a casual style inspired by riding attire, influenced overcoats, gloves, headdress and hairstyles between May and June 1791. Fashionable men also simplified their style of dressing; they abandoned their cornered hats and wigs were less in vogue; they wore cloth frock coats with swallow tails, satinette breeches and top boots. The range of recommended colours narrowed and was less bright; colours became very sober between 1789 and

²⁸ *Journal de la mode*, 20 Decembre, 1786, no. 4.

²⁹ D. Roche, *La culture des apparences*, op. cit. Ch. 10 and 11; on Parisian economy of dress.

³⁰ S. Levu, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

³¹ *Journal de la mode*, 20 septembre 1792, no. 21.

1792. Jewellery was less sumptuous. Shoestrings replaced buckles. On the whole, in a mixture of somewhat stiff sobriety and austere manners, of bucolic and popular pretention, the political trend in dress fully bore out the pre-revolutionary proclamations of simplicity, as far as both men and women were concerned. « Liberty has brought the classical taste for purity back to France », the *Journal de la Mode et du Goût* was able to announce.

Patriotic virtues were first set off in dress with the discarding of ornaments and the display of simplicity in costume, but were later to be seen in more positive ways, in the choice of new colours, new style and new accessories. Fashion writers took up their pens again to show that there was room for various levels of interpretation in this transformed world, and that there were ways of getting round the new conventions in dress. On the one hand, events accelerated change and brought to the fore attempts at democratisation and civic utopias. On the other hand, a real anti-revolutionary fashion existed, displayed in the pages of the fashion journals, and when they were silenced, in the extravagances of dandies and the *jeunesse dorée*. The revolution in appearances clearly presented only the appearance of Revolution.

Patriotic manifestations set in motion a movement which brought in its wake the unification of colours and styles of dress. The observance of a colour harmony has always been essential to the invention of fashion, and it is known that there is a general acceptance of limits which greatly exceed that of the readers of the fashion press³². After 1789, colours became the symbolic expression of support for the new principles. In July, 1789, *green* was the sign of the union of the Parisian rebels. Then *black* became the expression of support for the Third Estate. The national colours of *white*, *blue* and *red* were everewhere on display in July 1789 as the affirmation of a new political awareness. The *Journal de la Mode* in 1790 listed all the various shades of red – *nakara*, *scarlet*, *purple*, *poppy*, *crimson*, *violet*, *pink*, *rose*, which, when wore with white and blue, were « entitled to be called patriotic colours ». The cockade was another sign marking hats and caps with the three colours. Madame Eloffe, Marie Antoinette's modiste, sold thousands of them in her Paris shop³³. The association of black with the harsh, glaring revolutionary colours and stripes, enabled people to parade their revolutionary stamp. As time went by, beneath the superficially neutral language of the journal may be noted political shifts and reticences³⁴.

In spring 1791, women were said to have gone mad for yellow and black, which they placed as ribbons of a pouffe of white gauze baptised *à la Contre-Revolution*. On June 20 1792, they wrote of a bonnet circled with violets with a yellow heart: « All this is symbolic, and women of quality are fully aware of its meaning ». On September 20, they state that

³² D. Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris*, op. cit., pp. 190-195.

³³ Comte de Reiset, op. cit., p. 1131, p. 438, p. 441.

³⁴ S. Levu, op. cit., pp. 36-49.

women of distinction are wearing black with yellow, not simply to set a new fashion, but for a secret reason that is well-known in Germany.

There thus existed a political language of fashion with explicit and, even more, implicit reference to the Old Régime and the Counter-Revolution³⁵. In 1792 we may note a *robe à la Reine*, Louis XVI hairstyles, caps with « royal » bands, a short haircut *à la Reine*, an *Anglo-German* man's suit, a *yoyo belémigrant* which a poem clearly indicates is a game for emigrés – it went with clothes that were trimmed with black and yellow. Generally speaking, Lebrun Tossa and his team used a double language. On the surface, in their descriptions of garments and choice of colours, they maintained the appearance of revolutionary fashion and a way of dress which conformed to the current vogue for simplicity and equality:

It is clear that our new government was bound to create outstanding fashion; in fact, here we have it; dictated by equality, it consists of the greatest simplicity,

they wrote on 20 November 1792. On another level, an interplay of more or less explicit references hark back to lost distinction and a secret attachment to the past. In a way, fashion journalism was unable to detach itself from its old clientele and found it difficult to conform to the new values in appearance. Thus, their insistence on the search for an equalitarian simplicity was simply a confirmation of elegance, wealth and distinction. The imperatives of fashion remained those of a differentiation through a choice in material, a hierarchy in types of cloth, a capacity for rapid renewal. Its language continued to be in part a language of class and its games the demonstration of a profound political uncertainty. The *Journal de la Mode et du Goût* was caught between two worlds, that of the distinctive tones of Court Society, and that of the individualised consumption, more extensive and at the same time uniform, of the new bourgeois political and social élites, to whom they tried to impart the art of living. Its closure in February 1793 was as much the result of the political caution of Lebrun Tossa, an opponent of the Mountain, as of this fundamental contradiction, later to be resolved under the Directory and the Consulate after the brief interval of episodes of revolutionary dress of Years II and III.

Very soon the *true patriots* began to display accessories, badges and trophies to proclaim their civic allegiance. Military dress, the uniform of the National Guards and then that of the volunteers, became an object of fashion. Not everyone could afford it, as, with the equipment, it cost more than 80 Livres, but the glass maker Ménétra and many other master craftsmen and bourgeois in Paris and the towns could not resist and appropriated it for their civic victories. Men and women who did not adopt military dress often gave their everyday wear a military touch, with inspiration from the national uniform in their caps *à la chasseur*, coats *à la houzard* and habits of *cavaliers*

³⁵ S. Levu, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

patriotes. This echo of military dress in civilian society highlights the political stake in the question of the Uniform for the armies in the debates of the assemblies. The issue took an important turn after 1790 when the troops' dress changed in significance: from being the symbol of power, the sign of obedience to a challenged and tottering order, it was rejected and travestied. At the time of the Nancy mutiny, the officers of the regiment *Mestre de camp général* noted that

there were men disguised in every way, soldiers, musicians who had made themselves unrecognisable by their general disguise³⁶.

The upsurge of national and patriotic spirit was accompanied by the rejection of the old signs. The soldiers tore off their buttons, unpicked tucks and decorations with their distinctive colours. It found its model in the dress of the Gardes Nationaux and the volunteers.

The political upheaval took place at the end of a century of attempts to standardise the uniform of the royal army, with the final triumph of the white-grey which, as the author of the section on military dress in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* remarked, was « the national colour because it was the colour of the monarchy ». The army dressed in white was the army of the traditional sovereign; but after the Revolution, white denoted the enemy of the Nation, and national colours became the means for the reintegration of the military into society. The subject of uniform was one of the main elements at stake politically in the discussion on the *amalgam*, and in the unification brought about by reorganisation of the armies. It also revealed the strength of the different tendencies which still divided army branches and units. It became the guarantee of essential new bonds between the nation and the army but, at the same time, it contributed to the particularism of the military and in many ways played a political role. An egalitarian, republican policy was bound to question the functionality of the uniform and its symbolic role. In his report on the *Reorganisation of Our Armies* in Year V, Roche was one of the most active in the debate. But in open debate, civilian opinion in favour of the removal of traditional insignia from the uniform yielded to military will, defending the privilege of the branches and corps. Technical demands won the day over political ones, economic problems prevented the general adoption of an egalitarian national uniform, despite the intervention of the Convention's committees and the representatives on Mission. From the end of the Year II, the question of uniform, which united all the material and symbolic elements of the evolution of appearances in revolution, revealed the deep contradictions which had taken root between civilian society and that of the military, whose separateness had only briefly been checked³⁷.

³⁶ M. Franck, *L'uniforme des armées de la Révolution, aspects idéologiques et pratiques*, Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Paris, I, 1981.

³⁷ D. Roche, *La culture des apparences*, op. cit., chapter IX.

The new social order made dress everywhere the expression of public commitment, and everyone conformed to it in his own way, either to proclaim a political standpoint or to show, in slight but deliberate choices, his individuality and spontaneous independence. A complex relationship sprang up between the demands of fashion and its various followers, now ranging from the elegant world to the poorer sections of society. The feeling of festivity and the use of uniforms made costume a symbolic terrain for display that was dear to the revolutionary imagination, caught up in vital transformation³⁸.

Liberty dictated a general rejection of hierarchic signs, and favoured an affectation of popular simplicity. Equality reinforced the adoption of these new attitudes. For the majority, the language of dress no longer corresponded to needs only, but became the expression of political aspirations and social transformation. In other words, after a few months or years, a large part of the population became used to this rhythm of change – imposed less by necessity than by imperatives external to the common and usual rules governing the system of dress – as defining man's place as citizen and individual within the body of society. The years of Revolution thus witnessed the acceleration by another dynamic of the process of generalised consumption. Everyone's dress was radically affected by this, as is borne out by the registers of the Parisian Morgue which show the empirical use of clothes by the popular classes, who combined coloured garments with re-adapted uniforms, with unmatching military buttons, fringes and glorious scraps and tatters of royal and republican uniform³⁹.

After 1791, when one social and political crisis followed another, costume innovation followed the course of events, benefitting from the new public effects of powerful symbolic action. A new extremist costume became the rallying-cry of the sans-culottes who made of it their statement of revolutionary faith, a medium to proclaim their vigilant patriotism and to denounce their opponents. The history of the revolutionary years is full of anecdotes on this subject, illustrating how the new fashion had authenticated the break with the past. In the same way that the Girondin Dumouriez had scandalised Louis XVI and the last of his court by wearing shoes with strings (and not buckles) in the King's presence, the crowd later forced the monarch to put on the red cap⁴⁰. The dress of the true patriot as depicted in the painting by Sergent for the 1793 Salon, in Berthault's engravings or in Lesueur's water-colours, marks the extreme limit of the spontaneous clothing revolution. The national costume put forward by David in the spring of 1794 fixes the limit reached by leaders. Both attempts translate the ambiguous ideological will to create a costume of revolution.

³⁸ M. Ozouf, *La Fête Révolutionnaire*, Paris, 1976.

³⁹ D. Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris*, op. cit., pp. 191-193; R. Cobb, *Death in Paris*, op. cit., pp. 22-23, pp. 70-86.

⁴⁰ J. Quicherat, op. cit., pp. 627-628.

The opera-comique actor Chenard immortalised the sans-culotte costume in a painting by Boilly: wide trousers, with a flap held up by braces, short jacket à la *Carmagnole*, the red cap, a greenish, cloth greatcoat. Chaumette added the clogs countrypeople wore. The revolutionary women, with Théroigne de Mericourt and the militants of the popular societies dressed as *sans-culottes lasses*. Counter-revolutionaries spoke of them as buffoons in trousers, and laughed at their carnival look, but the enthusiasm of some swept others along with them, and the costume became the rule, at least in public life and the street demonstrations. The popular societies dreamed of creating and enforcing a national costume, the same for everyone. Politicians, club members and artists conjured up an utopian adventure in dress which was to remove all the obstacles of division and bring the triumph of transparency. *La société populaire et républicaine des arts*, an offshoot of *La commune des arts*, in October 1793 threw open the debate on the new costume and on the regeneration of dress. Public discussion and pamphlets ensued, François Xavier Mercier, printer and man of letters, published *How shall I dress? Political and philosophical reflections on French dress and on the need for a national costume*⁴¹. The aim of this dress revolution was to create a new man, to regenerate the population, to abolish once and for all the signs of the past in people's appearance. Everyone, town dwellers, countrymen, was to wear the same, egalitarian dress, and it was to be healthier, more pleasant and more comfortable. There was no longer to be any difference between civilian and military dress, and the Convention encouraged artists to present plans to improve the nation's way of dressing and to adapt it to republican morality. David's creations, presented in May 1794, were not appreciated by all, but the Convention did not approve of public deviations from the chosen language of costume.

The majority of the Convention members were openly opposed to the red cap which Chabot – and sometimes Marat and others – insisted on wearing during the sessions in imitation of the members of the General Council of the Commune. These divisions, of which Michelet was well aware, show that political partisanship expressed itself in the logic of appearances. Thus Robespierre, tacit representative of the upright bourgeois, took care over his dress, was always neat and tidy in powdered wig, cravat and white linen, ever confident of his distinction and command over the tumult of the Assembly. Like other, or most, representatives, he remained faithful to the classic dress of the 1780s; on the 8th June 1794, at the Fête de l'Être Suprême, he wore a cornflower-blue coat over nankin breeches, a wide silk sash in national colours, and a hat decorated with a tricolour plume⁴². His dress was only revolutionary in its details. Robespierre's elegant but discrete tone contrasted with that of Marat, who cultivated a plebeian ramshackledness; he received visitors in a dirty, open-necked shirt, a red

⁴¹ Paris, 1793.

⁴² F. Boucher, op. cit., p. 342.

kerchief on his head, with greasy hair and without stockings. In the Convention, he wore the costume of a *Friend of the People*; flouting convention, he dressed very causally, wrapping himself in his greatcoat with stripped lapels, with a worker's cap or shapeless peaked hat. Marat invented the art of political provocation in dress which helped to establish his image and made him very popular in the *sections* of Paris. In Danton, we find a third example of the connection between affected appearance and political attitudes. In pursuit of elegance, the lover of fine attire as well as good food and pretty women, he had a *nouveau riche* air, wearing colorful clothes, in rich fabrics and lace; he combined the effect of elegance with a plebeian negligence in his appearance as Tribune of the people. The difference in the behaviour of these three men, who made such varied choices from the classical range of dress, though making no fundamental innovations in detail or style, represents a significant variation of deeper attitudes and speaks a political language.

Today we know which was the winning side, but it must not be forgotten that the days of popular ferment of the Years II and III were a moment of exceptional importance that will never be witnessed again in history. It was the statement of an ideology which drew its strength from the defence of vital existential freedom, from behaviour in which the furious and precarious rage to be different, to be new, was manifest. Revolutionary Fashion must be understood within the context of revolutionised fashions, through the attacks of the bourgeois and those of the *reactors* after Thermidor, by reading the careful notes of the numerous foreign travellers in Paris, who were fascinated by the theatricallity of the *sans-culottes*' display of dress. Their careless and disordered dress; their red caps, «reserved for leaders and evoking the headdress of convicts»⁴³; the long trousers, which were the clothing of workers, were not merely an extremist fad. These were authentic values, but also those of protest deployed in a crucial moment of history and they expressed a culture of different liberty. Their dirty linen, grime, aggressive clothes, their greasy and untidy hair, their black wigs worn sideways, all proclaimed the values of the «Fragile Life» of plebeians as opposed to those of respectable people, in an idiom which was not that of moralizers⁴⁴. Their Liberty also embraced a sensual choice of colours and fabric, and a talent for the re-appropriation of the trimmings of luxury, which they came across in junk shops or by stealing. Revolutionary elegancies of the time were the ephemeral apotheosis of revolutions in dress; it was a brief blaze that the immediate observer could not appreciate, but which was the eruption of the deep transformations which had slowly been building up over the 18th century. Later revolutionaries were to make a different use of appearances and conventions.

⁴³ F. Boucher, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ A. Farge, *La vie fragile, violence, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1986, pp. 239-240.

Reaction of costume exploded after the 9th Thermidor, when the fops and dandies proudly displayed their refined elegance to offset the careless dress of the terrorists or the reserve of patriots⁴⁵. In the scuffles, black collars fought against red collars. The reappearance of the luxury which the war and political instability had severely limited, favoured a return to normal, the play of fashion coming from above. The bizarre taste of the dandies and exquisites, proclaiming itself through a passion for old styles and anglomania, marked a definitive political change.

The Revolution did not revolutionise dress, it merely speeded up processes which had long been set in motion; it sparked off clear but shortlived attempts at change, in the spirit of a definitive break with the past. On the one hand, the revolution moved the population, in all strata of society, towards a more simple way of dressing, without interrupting that trend towards greater comfort and ease in both men's and women's dress which already existed. In fact, it tended towards uniformisation. But, on the other hand, with the Revolution, dress took on a more ideological significance, speaking more clearly for the wearer and at times becoming the symbol of a political dignity. The Revolution did not manage to overcome the class barriers of dress, but emphasised the deep bond which united the social classes in the culture of appearances, through a system of permanent circulation of values, perpetuated beyond the socio-political break. The Revolution did not revolutionise appearances, but it did politicise their language for a time; it speeded up the processes of imitation in the desire of the new classes to distinguish themselves from the lower ones in their social rise. It proved that nothing in fashion is frivolous.

⁴⁵ M. Mole, *Souvenirs d'un témoin 1791-1803*, Paris, 1943, p. 58. « I had seen again the costume of these young people that the pamphlets of the time called "jeunesse dorée", "jeunesse thermidorienne" or "de Fréron". Their costume consisted of a tress of hair held up by a comb at the back of the head a collar and green or black trimmings on a straight black suit, long and wide, and known as "habit querri" ».