CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Creativity at Work:

Music and Dress in West Europe

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Abstract

Music and dress have played a significant role in the civilization process in West Europe. Both being aesthetic fields meant to be performed and put into play by human gesture, they have proved to be efficient tools for cultivating the movements, postures and gestures of the body. The material, cut and shape of the dress has manipulated the body to move in certain ways, as have rhythms and expressions in music. Significant for West Europe has been a duality between spirit and body, causing a division between high culture and popular culture, that has been reflected in the way music and dress has been used as display of 'civilization' from the early Middle ages to the Nineteenth century, and the way fashion and pop music subsequently has been perceived as ephemeral, irrational or even immoral. Following the democratization process, music and dress from early to late modernity has formed a unique liaison in youth culture, with the notion of image as a unifying concept. Here dress, gesture and pattern of movement emphasizes the underlying bodily gestures indicated by the sounds and rhythms in various music styles, and in this way encapsulates the identity of the individual participating in the many-fragmented taste groupings in society. In the same sense, dress and music have worked as a gate-opener to society for ethnic European outsiders like gays or working class, or non-Western immigrants, that could define their position in society through expressing themselves in hybrid subcultures.

Keywords

Civilization, youth culture, Image, Body, Gesture, Music

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Music and Dress in West Europe

Music and dress have played a significant role in the civilization process in West Europe. Both being aesthetic fields meant to be performed and put into play by human gesture, they have proved to be efficient tools for cultivating the movements, postures and gestures of the body. The material, cut and shape of the dress has manipulated the body to move in certain ways, as have rhythms and expressions in music. Significant for West Europe has been a duality between spirit and body, causing a division between high culture and popular culture, that has been reflected in the way music and dress has been used as display of 'civilization' from the early Middle ages to the Nineteenth century, and the way fashion and pop music subsequently has been perceived as ephemeral, irrational or even immoral. Following the democratization process, music and dress from early to late modernity has formed a unique liaison in youth culture, with the notion of image as a unifying concept. Here dress, gesture and pattern of movement emphasizes the underlying bodily gestures indicated by the sounds and rhythms in various music styles, and in this way encapsulates the identity of the individual participating in the many-fragmented taste groupings in society. In the same sense, dress and music have worked as a gate-opener to society for ethnic European outsiders like gays or working class, or non-Western immigrants, that could define their position in society through expressing themselves in hybrid subcultures.

Music, dress and movement

Both music and dress are put into play by human gesture. Dress influences patterns of movement of which the garment is only a representation, through material, cut and shape. Similarly, a score needs to be performed or played for the intended sounds to be heard or experienced. The physical dimension of music is essential because the listener's gestures and movements are affected by the sounds and rhythms he or she hears. Furthermore, a dimension that interlinks dress and music – or at least dress and sounds – is the fact that certain types of dress give off sounds when the wearer moves. The swishing or creaking sound of leather or rubber gives an auditory dimension to e.g. fetish wear, while the rusteling sound of e.g. tafetta underlines the feeling of wearing something luxurious. The most famous example of this is the frou-frou dresses of the late 19th century.

So both music and dress are experienced and performed through and by our bodies, and in this respect these aesthetic fields differ from art, architecture, film, literature or theatre, that are experienceed in a more contemplative way, in which the body is not necessarily involved. Together music and dress gives an insight into the history of body movements and gestures. Music and dress are also significant for socializing processes, where our pattern of gesture and movement is influenced by the cut and shape of our clothes, and the way we

listen and move to music. This is not something particularly European, but there are certain particularities in the way in which the body has been manifested through dress and music in this geographic area. To fully understand the relationship between music and dress in West European culture, it is necessary to look at the development of European courts and cities, and the way the rulers of these centers perceived themselves as as 'civilized' as opposed to the 'non-civilized' cultures encountered by traders and crusaders, as well as military music, the romantic music of the bourgoisie period in the 19th century, and the modernist movement and later on the youth culture of the 20th century.

Early European Courts: Music and Dress as display

Traditionally, music has been defined as the most spiritual of arts, since it cannot be seen or touched. Dress on the other hand has been central to codes of moral behaviour and to complex issues of etiquette, and considered a craft rather than an art. The high status of music in the hierarchy of the arts is also to do with the physical or technical aspect of music, as described by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (570-500 B.C.E.) who counted music as one of the *septem artes liberales*, because of his perception of music as being related to the mathematical sciences. French musicologist and pedagogue Johannes de Grocheo (app. 1300) divided music into the genres *musica vulgaris*; 'popular music', and *musica composita*; 'composed or constructed' music. Grocheo also distinguished between courtly and popular dance, where the first is described as more 'ethical'. This dualism was reflected in the different genres of the courts and cities. Court music was a representation of the ruler of the court, while music in the cities was entertainment. Church music was also of course 'serious' music, while the lower classes listened to simple ballads, jigs and folk tunes. An important part of the display of the courts was military music, that both on the battle field and in the courts served to underline the power of the ruler and his army. The fanfares were played on trumpets or other brass instruments, often with percussion, and the melodies were rather simple appegios or sheer noises, depending on the context.

These divisions, that continue to influence West European music today, was reflected in the dress of the 14th century as well. The courtly dances were more like processions than what we would call dance today, and they were performed wearing the typical elongated, *poulaine* shoes, that could be up to three times as long as the foot, and extremely difficult to walk in. The serious character of these processions was underlined by the resemblance to church processions. The courtly dances were not meant to be entertaining, they were exercises in conduct and their purpose was that dancers should absorb the appropriate culture and aesthetics through the movements. The restriction of body movements and the complicated dances were seen as having a

particularly ethical value, in that *"the complication of the dance occupy the dancers so much that they don't think ugly thoughts"*, according to Grocheo. During the Renaissance, the women at the courts wore *pianelle*, a platform shoe that developed into the Venetian *chopines*, which could be as high as 30 inches. The shoes required two servants to help her walking. In these ways the wearers of such exaggerated footwear in courtly circles demonstrated their high status and morals, while at the same time, the lower classes were dancing barn dances with bare feet, at least in the summer months, with the purpose of having fun or finding (sexual) partners.

This period is widely acknowledged as an origin of fashion in West Europe, and it certainly supports the later perception of fashion as irrational and impractical.

At the epitome of courts in the fifteenth century, that of the dukes of Burgundy, members wore new styles which, amongst other methods, were distributed via fashion dolls to other European courts. The sharp distinction between 'serious' composition music intended for contemplation, and the more lively popular music intended for dancing, is similar to the duality of dress in the same period as well, which reflects issues of etiquette and moral behaviour in the ways that dress could restrict movement and, particularly in terms of women's dress, balance between covering and revealing the body.

While the composition of music over the next centuries developed from works for modest groups of musicians and singers into being highly complex scores for big orchestras, the courts and their methods of displaying their wealth and power grew more complex as well, and music and dress remained essential parts of this display. This can be seen in the Elizabethan court in England in the sixteenth century, where the favorite entertainment were 'masques', musically accompaigned theater, in which the stylized, visual part of the play was most important. The lack of interest for the individual and the focus on stylistic features led to the camouflaging of the body in the typical courtly dress of the time. By contrast, the development of opera as favorite court entertainment in France and Italy during the seventeenth century reflected the self-perception of the court as being the centre of the universe. The libretto performed by the singer and the center-perspective painted scenery all pointed to the divine ruler, best exemplified by Louis XIV, king of France (1643-1715), known as 'the sun king'. Louis XIV invented five ground positions for the court dances, positions held between dance steps, that were developed from the fifteenth century's 'posa', and the sixteenth century's 'posture', and anticipated the later fashion 'pose'. High heels, ruffles, wigs and stiff silk garments emphasized the superiority of the ruler and his court, which was further expressed in a mannered fashion in dance, gesture and etiquette. Both men's and women's garments were very revealing and emphasised the shape of the body; tight breeches and silk stockings in the menswear and the revealing décolletages and tight corsets in the womenswear revealed the shape of the womens torsos. And just as in the earlier European courts, the impetus was on restricting the body through dress and etiquette.

The rise of the bourgeoisie; status and gender

Even though the bourgeoisie rose as the power of the courts faded, cultural status was still demonstrated by strict control of the body.

Although romanticism, the dominant aesthetic movement in the 19th century, which was a reaction against natural science and the growing industrialism, involved a yearning for nature, this was more spiritual and symbolic than literal. In fact, the body became even more taboo in this period. With the civilizing process and the accumulation of highly complex rules of etiquette, music and dress remained major civilizing tools, replacing court etiquettes with even stricter ones, that very rigidly dictated what to wear and when, and how to move and behave. The democratization process opened up possibilities for social mobility, and this demanded a powerful navigating tool for the upper classes, so that they could maintain their position. One of the important things that happened was the seperation of public and private spheres, with men dominating the public and women the private sphere. This gender polarization was reflected in both music and dress. Public music was performed in the big theatres or concert halls, at soirées or in salons, while private music was performed at home. The ability to play music became an asset for bourgeois women increasing their accomplishments and their value in terms of marriage, and playing music in general became a middle- and upper class phenomenon.

Home music-making was closely associated to the evolution of the piano; its mechanical components made it easier to mass produce than hand-made instruments. The price of pianos had decreased considerably during the eighteenth century, and with the parallel dissemination of printed scores, the phenomenon of home music-making grew rapidly. At this time, most of this music were light piano pieces made for 'the fair sex'. They consisted of rather uncomplicated chords spread out in arpeggios for the left hand, and singable melodies for the right, or simple compositions for piano, song and transverse flute. It later developed and blended in with the music played at private soirées or in salons. Here, more complicated music was played by the great virtuosi of the time, like Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849). The music here could be extracts from the repertoire in the concert halls, the so-called salon editions, or compositions for smaller ensembles, that were performed for an audience hungry for spectacular effects. The music played in concert halls were much more complex compositions like symphonies made for bigger orchestras by composers, who because of the development of l'art-pour-l'art (art for art's sake) were now considered geniuses. The biggest romantic genius of them all was Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), but operas by Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) and later on, Guiseppe Verdi (1813-1901) were also very popular.

Typical ballroom dances included Viennese waltzes, introduced by Johann Strauss I (1804-1849) and his son Johann Strauss II (1825-1899).

The gender differentiation of dress mimicked the hierarchy of music. Quizzing glasses and monocles were in high demand, and were used not only to admire and identify tiny details, but also to perform a sign language made out of subtle gestures, that worked perfectly as a means of communication across the balconies during concerts. The suit, worn by dandies like George 'Beau' Brummell, became the new menswear fashion in the early nineteenth century. With its discrete tailored details, the suit was perceived as a complicated architectural construction made on the basis of calculation and reason, reflecting the growing interest in natural science. By contrast, womenswear was continued to be more changeable.The basis of the women's dress, the corsets and crinolines, were made by men, while as *merchandes* and *modistes* women would take care of decoration, embroideries, colors, and materials. While menswear was focused on style, womenswear was focused on fashion. In short, a gender division similar to the one that characterised music also prevailed in dress.

Modernity and modernism: Cleaning up and moving on

By the end of the nineteenth century, the diatonic (harmonic) tonality of romantic music and the complex etiquette rules of the bourgeoisie were questioned, and 'the aesthetization of the ugly' as introduced earlier by poets like Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) started to appear, introduced by avantgarde architects, artists, composers, fashion designers, and the like. It was time to clean up the romantic, historicist references, as architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933) described it in his famous essay "Ornament and Crime" in 1908.

Central in the rise of modernity was the term 'ennui' or boredom as described by German philosopher and art- and literature critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) notably in the essay entitled "Boredom and Eternal Return" (1927-1940). Here he defines 'ennui' as something existential in modernity, exemplified by the dandy or the flaneur, the modern man who strolls about in the city where he is being looked at and looks at others in fleeting encounters, feeling empty and bored because of an overload stimuli. The female counterpart to the flaneur is 'la passante', the mystical anonymous and beautiful woman who also strolls through the city and is observed in glimpses by the flaneur before she disappears again in the roaring city. Similarly the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) describes in his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) modern citizens as persons being forced to adopt a blasé attitude, to protect their nervous system from being overwhelmed by the chaos and many stimuli of the big cities. Both Benjamin and Simmel saw fashion as a typically modern phenomenon becausee of its changeability.

Indeed both music and dress was increasingly produced and consumed according to the logic of fashion, in the sense that the demand for the new grew. Along with art, dress and music came to function as diversion that could temporarily stop people from being bored or feeling empty, and the audience craved for the avantgarde to provide still new scandals to shock them.

The first moves towards modernist music took place when composers started to challenge the diatonic tonality with the use of chromatic (disharmonic) tonality.

Even if modernism is rarely associated with the popular, the inspiration for this actually derived from the widespread interest in Asia and in folklore, and the chromatic melodics derived from folk songs from the Balkans and Russia. A composer that was to promote both fashion and music with orientalist influences, was the Russian Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) who in 1913 presented his composition *The Rite of Spring* with the Ballet Russes in Paris. Stylistically what Stravinsky did was to 'glue' small pieces of music together, resulting in a highly complex rhythmical and tonal structure. Though this cut-up technique was later to be looked upon as visionary by electronic musicians in the late 20th century, he was not fully acknowledged by his fellow modernist coallegues. Still, the Ballet Russes encapsulate everything modern in this period. The famous costumes and scenery made by painters and designers Léon Bakst and Alexander Benois setting trends with its vivacious colors, orientalist inspiration and movement-friendly shapes. French Fashion designer Paul Poiret (1879- 1944) took the credit for removing the corset from womenswear, but it was actually his inspiration from the Ballet Russes and exotic dancers like Isadora Duncan or Mata Hari that gave him the idea.

Fashion was also influenced by the strictly modernist notion of the new composers, such as the Austrian Arnold Schönberg who fathered the twelve-tone technique. They pleaded for an uncompromising clean-up of all previous aesthetics and logics of composing. While menswear had been modernized more than hundred years earlier with the suit, womenswear only now started the same process, even if vague attempts had been made earlier. And, in similarity to the development of the men's suit, the main improvement was that women now had freedom of movement, with artistic and reform such as like the Delphos-dress made by Spanish artists and designer Mario Fortuny (1871-1949), creations of Paul Poiret, or later with French fashion designer Coco Chanel's (1883-1971) dresses in soft materials. It became possible to dance to the popular music of the time, played on the gramophone or on the radio. Ragtime music was introduced from America in the 1910s, and the development of ragtime into swing or jazz defined the beginning of pop music.

20th century and youth culture: The hit, the star, the image

The contrast between popular music and high-brow composition music, whichh underlies, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno's contempt for the 'culture industry', resembles the contrast between *musica composita* and *musica vulgaris* made my Grocheo in the middle ages. Indeed the dualism between high and low culture runs through West European history. However, from the beginning of the 20th century, pop culture grew increasingly dominant, especially in music, but also to dress. This large-scale cultural reorientation has been asscoiated with a a growing orientation towards youth and a polarisation of class and taste groupings.

The German 'Körperkultur' (body culture) movement in the 1910-30s, with its fixation on youth, sports and health, paved the way for the youth cultures that emerged after World War II in Europe. Unfortunately, worship of the young and strong body was closely associated with the aesthetics of communist and fascist ideologies of the time like, and music and dress was used as PR for political regimes, with soldiers marching in step and disciplined gymnasts made artisticly shaped formations to march music, as shown in the films by Leni Riefenstahl.

After the war, American influences became so dominant, that it is hard to distinguish an independent West European popular culture until the mid-1960s. Basically, the American style and music were copied. In the 1940s the Afro-American or Mexican-Americans 'zoot-suiters' or related French 'zazous' wore oversized suits with a distinctive long jacket made of bright colored fabrics. Not only were they the first subculture to emerge from the lower classes, the clothing they wore was also important in another sense, in that it allowed space for the wearer to engage in physically demanding dances like the Jump Blues or the Lindy Hop, to the popular Big Band jazz of stars like Duke Ellington. The 1950s brought the pop star phenomenon, epitomized by American singer Elvis Presley (1935-1977), and he and his fellow 'rock'n'rollers' from Memphis wore stage costumes inspired by the zoot-suiters. The hit songs of the new idols were played on radio and records, and it was often dance music. American college-fashions imitated the dress worn by the rock'n'rollers: with wide trousers with lots of pleats for the guys, skirts with lots of width for the girls, and flat shoes with soft soles like basketball boots or 'creepers', the youngsters could perform dances developed further from the zoot suiters dances, such as the jitterbug.

This close and unique liaison between music, dress and movement continued and still continues in popular culture, not least because of the concept image, constructed by pop stars in how they dress, behave and perform their music. This image is imitated by their fans, who distinguish themselves from other taste groups in this way. This cultural mechanism of inclusion and exclusion was relatively simple in the 1950s, but has since developed to a highly

complex democratic means of expression, that has created visibility in society for marginal groups such as immigrants, gays and the working classes in general. Even if many of these subcultures originated outside Europe, mainly in North America, they have been transformed into European hybrids. For example, an Afro-American subculture such as hip hop has proved to be a good framework of expression for many different groups of European youth. So-called Euro-Muslims have adopted hip hop culture in terms of both fashion and music, creating a hybrid genre with mixed Arab, European and American music samples and lyrics, and a specific Muslim-European style where for instance Muslim women mix traditional Arab scarves with American hip hop fashion. Also ethnic Europeans, especially working class youth, are using hip hop to create a hybrid of their own.

What is essential in the liaison between music and dress in youth cultures is the way that the fashions of particular taste groups or subcultures express the rhythms in the music that they listen and dance to, using dress shape and fabrics to emphasize bodily gestures indicated by the music. Examples could be the zoot suit or American college fashions, but also the narrow dresses and stilettos worn by girls for the stylized and controlled dances in the early 1960s like the twist; the heavy Doc Martens' boots and tight jeans for the 'pogo' punk dance in the 1970-80s, the track suit and sneakers worn by electric boogie dancers in the same period, or the high Buffalo boots, tight blouses and wide trousers worn to fit the robotic dances performed by techno-ravers in the 1990s. Also stage performances by the various music idols are closely coordinated in terms of dress, music, movement and posture, which is obvious in the way that designers and pop stars have worked together, like Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto and David Bowie in the early 1970s; Anthony Price and Bryan Ferry or Vivienne Westwood and the Sex Pistols in the 1980s; Jean-Paul Gaultier and Madonna in the early 1990s, or Hedi Slimane and Pete Doherty in the 2000s. Also sponsorship deals between fashion brands and pop stars became common as image building became more professional from the 1990s onwards.

Typical West European examples are groups that pick-up from the 'civilized' or controlled body language with links to European cultural history. These includee subcultures like the English Teddy Boys and mods in the 1950s and 1960s with their Edwardian style dress; the controlled and robotic moves and sounds from German bands like 'Kraftwerk' in the 1970s; the punks in the 1980s or the indie-rockers in the 1990s, both originating from England. Musicologists talk about the white 'rock hegemony' in popular music, personified by a line of consecrated rock stars- or groups. This 'list of kings' in rock history includes many nationalities, though especially American or English. Examples from England could be the Beatles or the Rolling Stones of the 1960s, the Animals or the Yardbirds of the 1970s, the Smiths or the Cure in the 1980s, the whole Britpop movement in the 1990s and indie rock groups like Babyshamples or Franz Ferdinand in the 2000s. Specific for these bands are not only a very close relation to fashion, because of their style and image, but also a strong cultural orientation towards England and West Europe, as opposed to

America.

Producing music and dress in the 21ˢᵗ century

In the early twenty-first century fashion and music cycles have accelerated into a multi-centered system where subtle details indicate the difference between taste groups and styles. This complexity has contributed to music and fashion being accepted as 'serious' subjects by academics. Popular music has mostly been studied as a hub for subcultures in cultural studies, while fashion and dress have been researched from many established academic disciplines. The question of how to analyze the 'meaning' of dress and music has proven difficult for various reasons. First of all, the relation between object and meaning is not as fixed as in language; the 'meaning' of a blue dress can vary according to context, just like the 'meaning' of a melody in a minor key is not necessarily sad or melancholic. Also, the emergence of laptop composers who -- not being trained musicians -- do not necessarily relate to traditional harmonics or rhythms has been a challenge for music analysis. All in all, the 1990-2000s meaning-based reading have given way to habitus-related readings of music and dress as gesture and bodily practice.

Music and fashion creators and users are at this point bricoleurs who like djs mixing 'classic' and 'new' styles into an image that fits the taste group they belong to. This does not lead to many new styles, but a vast number of hybrids. Individuals can easily participate in different taste groups, which makes the spectrum of styles and groupings immense. Some styles attract more individuals than others, while some exist like parallel small centers, made possible by the internet. Distribution systems have developed here, especially in terms of promotion and sale. Web logs, fan sites, magazines, trend sites, virtual worlds etc. have contributed to a much more complex picture of what is 'hot' or trendy than the one existing in the twentieth century.

There are, however, distinct differences in the way that the music and the fashion system work. Fashion production demands many employees to produce, distribute, market and sell a collection. Small-scale production is undertaken in boutiques in larger cities, but it is not possible to distribute worldwide without the ability to mass-produce. Fashion production also works in a rather cannibalistic manner when it comes to copying. The collections of the most famous designers are openly copied by cheaper labels or sub labels within the same brand, and 'classic' styles of fashion are reproduced freely without any notable consequenses. So even though fashion designers have appropriated the artists' signature by placing labels in his dresses, fashion designers are not perceived to offer the same level of artistry as music composers are.

The music industry has been very efficient in protecting composers from being copied simply because most laptop-composing is based on a cut-up

technique where sounds, beats and small rhythm sections called break beats are recorded from existing music and played in sequences, in this way creating new compositions. Laptop-composers can work very small-scale with relatively cheap technical equipment, that in terms of production and quality can match earlier professional sound studios, and this has changed the distribution of music. The number of independent labels within all sorts of genres have made it possible to release music worldwide without the big management of a major record label, because taste groups meet and talk and find their favorite music on the internet. Also, even if it was an established tradition to release a record (which is approximately ten songs regardless of media) or EP (which is approximately four songs, it isn't necessary with the internet as sales-platform, because many consumers buy music in MP3-files, often only one song at a time.

However, the way music and dress become 'hits' and subsequently may become 'classics' or 'evergreens', is very related. Musicologists have pointed to the fact that many music genres goes through a transition phase from being dance music to later becoming listening music, and in this way it can move from low culture to high culture. For instance jazz – and later rock'n'roll - was first considered wild and uncivilized, then later in the twentieth century was taught in conservatories and played in concert halls. Just like fashion classics that in the time they were created caused a furore, while now they are displayed and honored in museums. But most of them are simply forgotten. As musicologist Timothy Warner puts it (Warner 2003, 124) *"Pop music and fashion do not wear out they go out"*.

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