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A Modern(ist) Mode: Fashion, 1910, and the Limits of Modernism

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Abstract

Since the British Association of Modernist Studies conference in Glasgow, December 2010, which considered Virginia Woolf's famous assertion that "on or about December 1910, human character changed", there has been a resurgence of interest in modernism's origins. Developed from a paper given at this conference, this article interrogates the modernist construction of chronological limits, examining why such limits were imposed. Engaging with Woolf's statement, it considers her claims from a hitherto unexplored angle – from the perspective of modern fashion. Focusing on the 1910/1911 season, and Paul Poiret's revolutionary catalogue illustrated by Georges Lepape, it asks firstly whether Woolf's claims can be substantiated, and secondly, and more importantly, whether limits themselves are a critically useful way of ordering and interpreting the past.

Keywords: *modernism, fashion, 1910, Paul Poiret, Virginia Woolf*

It is notoriously difficult to define the chronological limits of modernism. Critics and commentators both at the time and since have struggled to identify the single turning-point, epoch or 'evental site' that transformed the old, traditional world into a new, modern one. Perhaps the first to attempt to demarcate the new order – however imprecisely – was Charles Péguy; writing in 1913, he declared that the "world has changed less since the time of Jesus Christ than it has in the last thirty years", dating a split to the early 1880s (1945, 77). Six years later, Henry Adams offered a more precise date: for him, it was 1900, in particular, the Paris Great Exposition, that left his "historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new" (1919, 382). In 1921, Wyndham Lewis, writing in *The Tyro*, argued that

We are at the beginning of a new epoch, fresh to it, the first babes of a new, and certainly a better, day. The advocates of the order we supersede are still in a great majority. The obsequies of the dead period will be protracted, and wastefully expensive. But it is nevertheless nailed down, cold, but with none of the calm and dignity of death. The post-mortem has shown it to be suffering from every conceivable malady. (3)¹

D. H. Lawrence agreed, although he dated the 'Great Divide' a few years earlier than Lewis; in *Kangaroo* (1923), he wrote that "in 1915 the old world ended" (220). Finally, and perhaps most famously, Virginia Woolf asserted in 1924 that "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (2008, 38). Clearly, even at the peak of what we now term 'modernism', there was a profound uncertainty as to the origins of

¹ Lewis later refined his account, identifying the "Men of 1914": Lewis, Eliot, Pound and Joyce, as the specific progenitors of this cataclysmic cultural change. See Lewis, 1967, 249-251.

both the modern movement and the modern era². What is interesting about these accounts, however, is less the contradictory nature of the chronological limits they impose, but rather the fact that they felt compelled to impose these limits at all.

Evidently, these commentators did not just naively believe that there could ever be a clear, *singular* break between the new and the old: as the above quotation from Lewis demonstrates, even if tradition was nailed to the slab, like T. S. Eliot's "patient etherised upon the table" (Eliot, 1969, 13), it did not mean that the old ways had altered overnight. Woolf was equally pragmatic; in "Character in Fiction", she stressed that she was "not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that." But, as she goes on, "a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910" (38). However "arbitrary" or playful Woolf's statement is, though, what is clear is that she, like so many of her contemporaries, felt that the world had changed discernibly in the early twentieth century, and that it was possible, or even desirable, to identify the moment at which that change took place. Although the specific events or impetus for identifying the change as happening in these particular years (1900, 1910, 1915) has been endlessly debated (in the case of Woolf and 1910, the death of Edward VII and the accession of George V, the Dreadnought Hoax, the two general elections, the first Post-Impressionist Show in November and increased suffragette activity), little attention has been given to the impulse to impose a Great Divide in the first place³.

The modernists were not the first to construct divisions between eras, but the desire to do so seems symptomatic of the wider modernist practice of establishing and policing boundaries between themselves and others. Chronological boundaries, between them (the Georgians, Imagists, modernists) and the past (the Victorians, Edwardians, traditionalists) were just one of many limits erected by the modernists: between them and commerce, them and mass culture, them and the popular, them and women (with a few notable exceptions) and them and racial others. Like all of these boundaries, the limit between the new and the old was permeable, contested and contradictory. As opposed to the Futurists, who "intend[ed] to destroy museums" (Marinetti, 2003, 4) and "Throw the old masters overboard from the ship of modernity" (Mayakovsky [1915], qtd. in Lawton, 2005, 298), the Anglo-American modernists had a more ambiguous relationship with tradition. T. S. Eliot explored this complex relationship in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), arguing that tradition, despite too often only being used in a "phrase of censure", is actually often responsible for producing the best, "most individual parts" of a poet's work (Eliot, 1999, 13-14). Yet, while Eliot acknowledges the importance of tradition, at the same time he recognises that if tradition is blindly followed and reproduced, no new work of art can emerge (14-15). Tradition, then, must go beyond mere repetition; it must comprise a "historical sense", a

perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling

² A distinction here needs to be made between the modern movement, or "modernism" and the modern era, or modernity. Briefly, "modernity" here denotes the state of culture or society as a whole, and is closely connected to the Industrial Revolution, capitalism, urbanisation and advances in technology. Modernism, on the other hand, refers to the literary and artistic movement that derived from, and critiqued, modernity.

³ For a discussion of the artistic, political and social changes in 1910 that inspired Woolf's famous statement, see, in particular, Goldman, 2004, 36-39; and Stansky, 1996.

that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (14)

It is this sense of history that makes a writer both “traditional” and “most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity” (14). For Eliot, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone”; in short, one cannot have the new without tradition (15). Thus, although figures such as Eliot and Ezra Pound may have rejected the recent traditional (Victorian and Edwardian) legacy, they did not shirk from conjuring up models from a more distant past, inserting ancient, medieval and Renaissance elements (among others) into their work in order to ‘Make it New’. For them, ‘newness’ was often inspired by and derived from encounters with the ancient past. In fact, some of the more reactionary modernists – specifically Eliot – seemed to simply utilize newness in order to contrast it with a mythical past; *The Waste Land* (1922), in particular, can be read as a lament for the medieval feudal system. Consequently, in order to appear ‘modern’, the modernists had to constantly reiterate where – and why – the split came between new and old, identifying which was which and which was better. The question of the chronological limits of modernism, then, is a question of the limits, or the ontology, of the new. Yet ‘the new’ is difficult to define except in relation to what has come before: it is by dint of its difference with the past that art or thought or “character” appears new. As a result, for the modernists, a large part of defining what was new was establishing what was old.

Ironically, then, for a supposedly avant-garde movement (although Peter Bürger would himself impose limits between modernism and the avant-garde)⁴, the modernists were just as concerned with imposing and maintaining limits as they were with pushing and challenging them. Aside from the need to construct the past in order to remain ‘new’, various contextual factors seem to explain the modernists’ apparently counter-intuitive impulse to assert and challenge boundaries, in particular, anxiety over new scientific and metaphysical theories of space and time. It is significant that these accounts of the origins of modernism date from the 1910s and 1920s, the period in which Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson were at their most influential⁵. The influence of their theories of ‘psychological time’ on the modernists cannot be underestimated: uncertainty over – and, indeed, the loss of – the idea of external, objective, *shared* time led to an increased desire to construct collective epochs that could anchor experience. Their designation of concrete dates as unequivocal historical turning points seems characteristic of the broader modernist desire to find a “way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot, 2005, 167).

Whatever the influence of these metaphysical anxieties, though, anxiety was by no means the motivator behind the Great Divide. There was money, power and prestige in defining what was new, especially if one defined oneself as its source. To be viewed as a progenitor of the modern meant increased sales (within a niche market), increased cultural authority and an enhanced, and lasting, reputation. Lewis’s famous phrase ‘Men

⁴ Bürger makes a distinction between modernism and the avant-garde based on their different approach to the relationship between art and life: the avant-garde wanted to integrate art and life, whilst modernism wanted art to remain autonomous. (see Bürger, 1984).

⁵ Henri Bergson’s works became available in English for the first time in 1910 and 1911; Bergson himself visited England for a series of lectures in 1911. See Gillies, 1996, 28-38. Einstein rose to prominence a little later, but his theory of “Relativity kept new ideas of “psychological time” in the forefront of general interest in the 1920s”. (see Stevenson, 1992, 108).

of 1914' is a case in point: by naming himself alongside Joyce, Eliot and Pound, Lewis ensured a place in literary history which arguably outweighs his contributions to literary modernism. Seen from this perspective, the modernist impulse to construct the limits of the new (and place themselves at its advent) appears as just one of their many methods of self-promotion and publicity⁶.

Snobbery was also a factor; as Andrzej Gasiorek argues, the “Anglo-American modernists were guilty of appalling snobberies” (2010, 179-180). Much of the time, the modernist imposition of limits seems little more than a way of dissociating themselves from others they disliked; this was certainly the case for Pound, who refashioned Imagism into Vorticism following the former’s perceived dilution into ‘Amygism’ in Amy Lowell’s *Some Imagist Poets* (1915). Woolf was equally disparaging; in “Character in Fiction”, for example, she dismisses the work of several Edwardian novelists but reserves particular malice for Arnold Bennett. The modernists hated Bennett; not only was he a Northern, middle-class, middlebrow author but he was also an outspoken critic of the myth that writers were unconcerned with sales. (Bennett, 1917, 242-244) Consequently, Woolf’s essay (originally published in 1923 as “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”), reads more like a personal vendetta against Bennett than a reasoned account of how Georgian literature differs from Edwardian literature. On the concrete differences between the two, Woolf is remarkably vague; she identifies that the “Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use” but does not say what modern ‘tools’ should be used instead (49). Admittedly, the modern movement was still quite new but if Woolf was writing in 1924, or, at the earliest, 1923, modernism’s *annus mirabilis* (1922) had already been and gone. In many ways, modernism had reached its peak and yet Woolf still could not identify its specific characteristics, apart from its violation of grammar and disintegration of syntax (51). Indeed, even works by writers that did attempt to present human character in a new way (Joyce, Eliot and Lytton Strachey) still constituted “failures and fragments” (52-53). Ultimately, as was so often the case in modernist criticism (and manifestos), it was easier for Woolf to identify what the Georgians (or modernists) were opposed to rather than what they hoped to achieve; easier, in short, to demarcate and delimit modernism’s field through exclusion as opposed to a positive characterisation of its attributes. Limits gave the modern movement its content; not only did they impose order on a chaotic world but they also aided the movement’s self-promotion, self-marketing and self-definition.

Yet the modernist imposition of chronological limits was not completely arbitrary and self-serving; as explored above, the modernists felt (or at least claimed to feel) that there had been fundamental cultural changes in the early twentieth century. In order to consider the extent to which the Great Divide had any basis in fact, it is necessary to examine the exact nature of the perceived changes. In “Character in Fiction”, Woolf gives one concrete example of how human character changed in the modern period: the case of her cook. “The Victorian cook”, she writes, “lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable”, whereas the “Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat.” According to Woolf, the new, Georgian cook demonstrated that “All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature.” (38)

⁶ For more on modernist self-promotion and publicity see Jaffe, 2005.

While these changes in politics and literature have been studied in detail (Goldman, 2004, 33-39; Stansky, 1996, 151-173; Bergonzi, 1970, 34-35), the cook herself has received little attention. Yet it is her actions that embody this perceived change in human relations, in particular, her borrowing of the *Daily Herald* and her asking advice about a hat. It seems significant that both of these objects derive from a commercial mass culture⁷. They speak of a newly democratized culture – for the first time, members of all classes and professions were united in their reading matter and their dress. As Mary Hammond (2006) has argued, the democratising effects of popular publishing in the early twentieth century cannot be underestimated, but arguably fashion was able to better reflect – and to directly influence – any changes in human character that occurred “on or about December 1910”. Modern fashion was itself a product of change: technological advances, Suffragism and the changing status of women, urbanisation, mass production, department stores and avant-garde art all contributed to the design, price, availability, circulation and popularity of dress. Fashion not only embodied changes in human character but it also inspired them: it altered how women moved, lived, interacted and related to each other and their environment.

Indeed, modern fashion seems the ideal vantage point from which to consider whether Woolf’s construction of 1910 as the boundary between old and new had any empirical basis; the 1910/1911 season arguably marks the emergence of fashion as a truly modern – and perhaps *modernist* – idiom. Prior to 1910, fashion was largely exaggerated, restrictive and cumbersome. Although the hoops and bustle of the Victorian era declined in popularity following the turn-of-the-century, Edwardian dress was heavy, uncomfortable and radically restricted movement. Corsets were still worn, as were very large hats. Aesthetically, dresses were in conservative pastel colours, often with elaborate ruffs, patterns and lace trimmings. Dress was a display of wealth; prior to mechanisation, garments had to be ordered directly from a dressmaker or tailor and were handmade.

In the 1910/1911 season, however, fashion changed. Designers, in particular the couturier Paul Poiret, placed an increasing influence on simplicity of cut and form, on brighter colours, bolder patterns and lighter fabrics. In the words of Woolf, these new fashions did not constitute a “sudden and definite” change; rather, they were the culmination of several crucial technological, social, economic and artistic changes in the years leading up to 1910. New technologies and methods of production led to new styles. Mariano Fortuny’s famous “Delphos dress” from 1907, for instance, had a revolutionary design. It was made from just one piece of fabric that “hung from the shoulders to the ground in finely pleated silks” (Bowman, 1985, 78). Such designs paved the way for the rejection of the corset, a looser shape and lighter materials. Similarly, innovations in printing meant that bold, standardized patterns, such as those from the avant-garde Wiener Werkstätte, could be transferred to fabric more cheaply, easily and with greater precision than before.

In terms of the fashion industry itself, better communication, transport and production methods, as well as increased consumer demand, led to the establishment of department stores in major cities and mail-order catalogues (Olian, 1995, ii). This revolution in ready-made clothing made fashion accessible to women of all classes; it was perhaps this change, more than any other, that enabled Woolf’s cook to ask advice

⁷ Sara Blair briefly alludes to the connection between the newspaper, hat, and mass culture in “Character in Fiction”, but she does not fully examine the significance of these objects. (see Blair, 1999, 164).

about a hat. The fact that the “Georgian cook” could afford a similar hat to her mistress would have altered “human relations”: if, as Georg Simmel argued in his 1904 essay “Fashion”, dress is a marker of wealth and class (1957, 541), then more equality in dress must have impacted upon the hierarchical relationship “between masters and servants”. That is not to say that women of all classes could afford the *same* clothes: couture garments (like the ones by Paul Poiret explored below), for instance, would have had a limited circulation amongst wealthy, upper-class Parisians. And yet Poiret’s designs did have a wider reach: as Claude Lepape and Thierry Defert argue, “Poiret set the fashion not only in Paris but in London, New York, Berlin and St. Petersburg.” (1984, 38) Again, “the fashion” here means the wealthy upper classes, but the mass-market soon produced such convincing reproductions of Poiret’s designs that he had to “limit the number of dresses produced to editions” (Troy, 2003, 195). Perversely, Poiret’s original designs led to a proliferation of mass-market copies. Consequently, for the first time, almost all women had access to similar *styles* of dress. The modern fashion industry can thus be seen as a great leveller of class at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Aside from technology, social changes also influenced fashion. Rapid urbanisation and the increased popularity of sports such as tennis, cycling and golf created a need for clothes that allowed greater movement. Heavy fabrics were thus replaced with lighter, softer ones. Similarly, corsets, hoops and petticoats were not practical for playing sport or moving around the city. Such restrictive garments had been a site of contention since the 1880s: in 1881, the Rational Dress Society devised a “Rational System of Underclothing” which promoted the use of chemises and bodices rather than a corset and a divided skirt to be worn under “usual dress” (Cunningham, 2003, 67). Other groups, such as the Rational Dress Association and the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union also campaigned for dress reform, but the outrage and ridicule such garments caused in the press alienated all but the most politically-engaged women. Publications such as *Punch* regularly depicted the ‘New Woman’ as masculine, brash and unattractive, wearing trousers, a shirt and tie and smoking. Women were thus looking for a mode of dress that rejected restrictive garments but still retained some femininity and respectability.

Into the breach stepped Paul Poiret, the self-styled ‘prince of Paris fashion’. According to Lepape and Defert, his “loose flowing garments [...] freed women from the tyranny of the corset” (1984, 37). Whether this rejection of the corset was motivated by politics or not is hard to say; Poiret simply believed that elaborate underwear “spoiled the line of [women’s] clothes” (Lepape and Defert, 1984, 37). Poiret, like many designers of the period, privileged purity and simplicity of line. In the wake of Adolf Loos’s 1908 essay, “Ornament und Verbrechen”, translated into English in 1913 as “Ornament and Crime”, European design was moving away from the fussiness of Art Nouveau towards rationalism and functionalism. In Paris in 1910 there was an influential exhibition of “modern decorative art from Munich” (Battersby, 1974, 62). The “simple lines”, “sparse decoration” and “medley of bold colours” “astonished the Parisians” (Hibon, 2003, 91-93). Poiret was also familiar with the work of the Wiener Werkstätte, who explored a similar aesthetic. He purchased many of their fabrics on a visit to Josef Hoffman in 1910 (Woodham, 1990, 21). Poiret was so inspired that he opened his own school of decorative arts in Paris in 1911, *La Maison Martine*, in which he encouraged untrained young women to produce “naive designs” for fabric (Woodham, 1990, 19).

This emphasis on naivety was part of a wider trend of exoticism that prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Fauvists, Expressionists and Cubists were fascinated by tribal art. French and German artists such as Picasso, Braque and Kirchner decorated their studios with African art and “exotic motifs” (Elger, 2007, 28), incorporating the emphasis on simplicity and the palette of bright colours into their own art. Thus, the naïve designs used in primitive African, South American and Eastern art became, conversely, a signifier of modernity.

This taste for the ‘exotic’ culminated with the Ballets Russes’ series of “Oriental” ballets, *Salomé* in 1908, *Cléopâtre* in 1909, and, most successfully, *Schéhérazade* in 1910. A critic writing in the late 1920s described *Schéhérazade* as a “whirlwind of colour which succeeded in sweeping decorative art, fashion and theatre into its vortex and away from the greyness of good taste” (Veronesi, 1968, 75). The use of the word “vortex” is significant; it must surely have been influenced by Pound’s popularisation of the term in *Blast 1* (1914), in which he described the vortex as “the point of maximum energy”, a point which sucked in the “energized past” and transformed it into the “NOW” (Pound, 2009, 153). It is not hard to see why the critic described *Schéhérazade* as a vortex; designed by Léon Bakst, the costumes were nothing short of revolutionary: opaque and even transparent materials, emeralds, reds, golds and oranges, harem trousers for men and women, uncovered breasts and turbaned hair. The Ballets Russes began a vogue for the Oriental in fashion and interiors that lasted from 1910 to the outbreak of the First World War (Bowlt, 2010, 104); as a result, the Ballets Russes has been cited as *the* catalyst for the radical change in fashion in 1910 and 1911 (Battersby, 1974, 62; Veronesi, 1968, 75-76). As Cecil Beaton wrote, “A world that had been dominated by corsets, lace, feathers and pastel shades soon found itself in a city that overnight had become a seraglio of vivid colours, harem skirts, beads, fringes and voluptuousness.” (qtd. in Bowlt, 2010, 107). To say that the Ballets Russes were solely responsible for the change in fashion is overly reductive, though. It was out of all the various influences discussed - technological advances, urbanisation, popular sport, Suffragism, functionalism, Cubism, exoticism *and* the Ballets Russes - that the most important collection in modern fashion appeared, *Les Choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*. Published on 1 March 1911 in a limited run of a thousand copies, this catalogue revolutionized both fashion and fashion illustration.

Firstly, the garments themselves. Poiret’s designs marked a radical break from the heavy, fussy designs of the Edwardian era. Although this was not Poiret’s first collection (he published his first catalogue, illustrated by Paul Iribe, in 1908), it was these designs that launched his modern aesthetic. Inspired by German functionalism, he placed a renewed emphasis on simplicity, such as in this elegant “Design for a white dress in the “Hellenic style”” (Fig. 1). Like the literary modernists, Poiret recycled the old in order to make his designs new: this dress, with its tubular shape and high waist, can be seen as a modern reinterpretation of the Greek chiton or peplos, wide rectangles of cloth that were draped around the body and fastened at the shoulder with pins and a belt at the waist (Lillethun, 2011, 16)⁸. Clearly, such a design eradicated all need for corsets or hoops and would have been considerably lighter, generating more freedom for the wearer. Poiret coupled his new streamlined silhouette with bold, abstract patterns taken from the Wiener Werkstätte or from his own *La Maison Martine*, such as this

⁸ In his essay on fashion, Simmel anticipated the modern vogue for Hellenism, commenting that “fashion repeatedly returns to old forms” (1957, 557).

geometric red, white and blue pattern (“Design for a high-waisted dark red dress”, Fig. 2) and this startling floral motif (“Trois robes neuves”, Fig. 3). Here, and throughout the catalogue, Poiret’s designs are notable for their daring use of colour, either in patterns or alone. He was the first to use shades that had been made fashionable by the

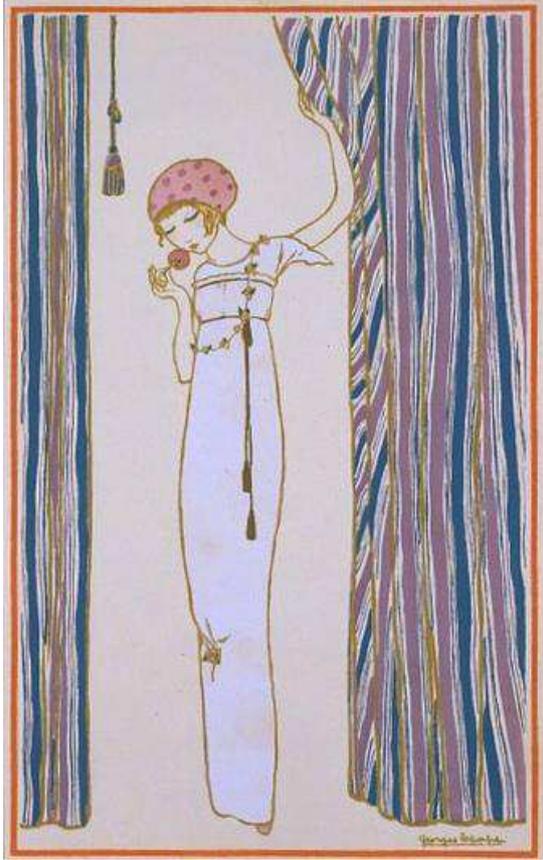


Fig. 1. Georges Lepape. “Design for a white dress in the “Hellenic style””. In *Les Choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*. April 1911. Callotype, letterpress, line block and stencil. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

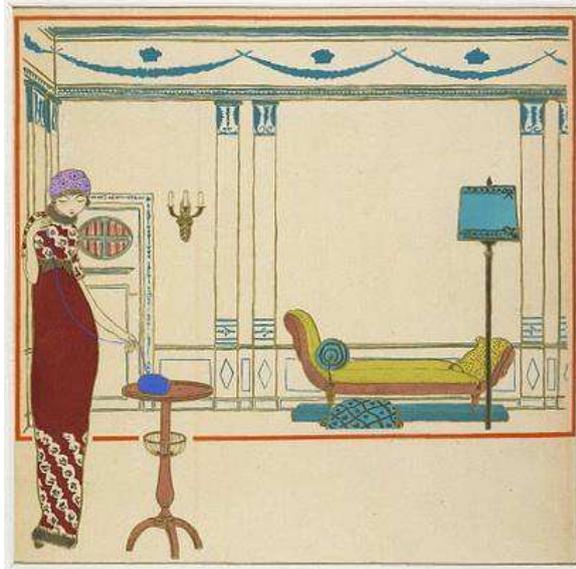


Fig. 2. Georges Lepape. “Design for a high-waisted dark red dress”. In *Les Choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*. April 1911. Callotype, letterpress, line block and stencil. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 3. Georges Lepape. “Trois robes neuves”. In *Les Choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*. April 1911. Callotype, letterpress, line block and stencil. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Ballets Russes in everyday wear. Further inspired by the Ballets Russes and the vogue for all things ‘Oriental’, Poiret introduced extravagant turbans as a fashionable alternative to the large hats of the previous seasons (as can be seen in Fig. 3) and, most radically of all, harem pants as an alternative to skirts. In one drawing in the catalogue, entitled “Women of Tomorrow”, the illustrator Georges Lepape shows four women wearing trousers in everyday situations such as gardening and playing tennis. Remarkably modern, even today, Poiret was ahead of his time with harem pants; as Mary E. Davis has noted, there was a public “outcry” about the pants, with critics denouncing them as a “dangerous appropriation of male prerogatives” and a “racially based challenge to the French status quo” (Davis, 2006, 31-32). The Oriental design “suggest[ed] dangerously unrestrictive value systems, loose moral codes, and sexual availability” (Davis, 2006, 32).

Viewed today, however, what is perhaps even more striking than Poiret’s designs is the style of illustration itself. Before 1910/1911, Victorian and Edwardian depictions of dress were simple, realistic and functional: little more than advertising. Models were positioned to display the garments to the best advantage, against a non-obtrusive background that would not detract from the dresses. There were exceptions: Iribe’s 1908 catalogue for Poiret introduced colour and exotic locations into fashion illustration, but the depiction was still realist and still centred around the garments. In contrast, in Georges Lepape’s illustrations, the background is often more interesting than the garments themselves. In the 1911 catalogue, models are sketched against an array of colourful, exotic backgrounds, such as a box at the opera (Fig 3), ornamental gardens or a couturier’s salon (Fig 2). One image depicts a woman in a simple Hellenic dress (similar to the dress in Fig 1) reclining on a mass of pattern cushions, creating a scene reminiscent of a luxurious Oriental harem; another depicts a model in a canary yellow dress holding a powder-blue parrot and accepting a gift from a black slave child in harem pants. In many of the images, the surroundings and illustration are actually more modern than the dress itself. Lepape was not the first to depict women in such a stylized manner – his work was clearly influenced by Aubrey Beardsley’s daring, often erotic illustrations from the 1890s – but he was the first to translate this Japanese woodcut-inspired style of illustration to the world of fashion. Again, technological changes made such novelty possible: new innovations in printing allowed Lepape to use a palette of brighter colours than previously (Lepape and Defert, 1984, 42).

It was not just Lepape’s use of colour that distinguished the 1911 catalogue from its predecessors: these illustrations are particularly revolutionary as it is often not even possible to see the dresses fully. In Figure 3, the dresses in the foreground are only partially visible: two are seen only from behind and are partly obscured. All that is visible of the woman in the mirror is her turban. In one of the images, a garden scene at night, two models stand with their backs to the viewer; in another, one of the models is leaving the frame entirely, revealing only the fur collar and the train of her deep red opera coat. For Lepape, it appears, the atmosphere and overall composition of the plate was more important than the garments themselves. With this catalogue, then, fashion illustration moved away from a realistic depiction of dress for advertising purposes to a self-consciously artistic depiction of modernity. Lepape privileged style over content in his search for a new mode of representation, one that could better express and depict the “maelstrom of modern life” caused by urbanisation, mechanisation, capitalism, mass communication and scientific revolutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Berman, 1982, 16). The 1911 catalogue thus represents one of the first

attempts to produce a new way of expressing and interpreting the material, everyday experience of modernity. Like the literary and artistic modernism of this period, Lepape's drawings articulate a shift from representation towards abstraction, a shift that was occurring concurrently in literary and artistic modernism (it seems no coincidence that Wassily Kandinsky, the 'father of abstract art', finished his first abstract painting, *Bild mit Kreis*, in 1911).

Whether the 1911 catalogue marks a chronological limit, however, is entirely subjective; clearly, there *were* discernible changes in fashion in 1910 and 1911 – both in terms of dress itself and its circulation and depiction – but it is uncertain whether this catalogue can be described as a turning point. Fashion, after all, is “concerned only with change” (Simmel, 1957, 557); fashion as an idiom was – and is – primarily concerned with the creation and redefinition of the new. It is not just influenced by change; it is a *medium* of change. The 1911 catalogue could thus be seen as just one change in an incessant series of changes. That said, the designs did have a lasting influence; indeed, it could be argued that Lepape's illustrations constructed the modern aesthetic. This vibrant, streamlined and precise style of illustration became the pre-war standard, as is evident in the illustrations of artists such as Georges Barbier and Robert Pichenot. It became an arbiter of the pre-war *Zeitgeist*; a break with the staid Edwardian era and the beginning of something truly modern. Evidently, fashion illustration was not wholly responsible for Woolf's perceived shift in “human character” but it played an important part in depicting, constructing and disseminating this sense of the new. Alongside innovations in other forms of art and life, illustration contributed to the public perception of a new epoch. As early as 1863, Charles Baudelaire recognised that fashion plates did not just depict an era but were an active part of the representation and construction of an “age” (1995, 2). Having observed that old fashion plates are often greeted with “laughter” by subsequent generations, he argues that this feeling of rupture with past styles creates an impression of the present as a separate and distinct era (2). Similarly, for Simmel, fashion “occupies the dividing-line between the past and the future”, forming and manifesting a sense of the present (1957, 547). This sense of a present divorced from the past is crucial for fashion; in order to maintain consumer demand, it is necessary for the fashion industry to regularly construct and impose limits between the new and old, or, which amounts to the same thing, the fashionable and unfashionable. This limit between the fashionable and unfashionable applies not just to garments but to people too; as Simmel wrote, “fashion depends [...] upon the distinctions with which it separates the given circle from others” (1957, 558). Consequently, the study of fashion in 1910/1911 reveals not only the artificiality of chronological limits and the concept of the ‘new’, but also their commercial potential. Although fashion itself resides on – or even outside – the outer limits of modernism, both fashion and literary and artistic modernism utilized boundaries in similar ways and to the same effect: to create the appearance of novelty, thus boosting sales and popularity. Like modernism, fashion pushed but also imposed boundaries, defining itself through exclusion.

Indeed, the very fact that the modernists created a divide between themselves (art) and fashion (commerce) speaks of the modernist reliance upon limits to differentiate their output and attract a niche audience. There are more similarities between modern fashion and literary and artistic modernism than the modernists would have acknowledged: both reacted to and helped shape modernity. Fashion perhaps was less critical or self-reflexive than literary or artistic modernism, but fashion had the

advantage of directly influencing lived experience. In particular, fashion illustration altered the way women saw themselves. Lepape's highly stylized female models defined what it meant to be a modern woman. The modern woman had short hair, heavy eye make-up and red lipstick. Although perhaps an aesthetic change, women were given licence to experiment with their appearance and to explore the relationship between their look and their personality. Changing their appearance at this time was more than just an aesthetic decision; it was a powerful rejection of the Edwardian status quo. The clothes themselves played an important part in this rejection too; as already explored, garments such as the harem pants were associated with the dangers of masculinity and the Orient. Women that chose to wear them chose to embody these dangers, again signalling themselves as modern women. Speaking of Poiret's Cubist-inspired patterns and designs, Richard Martin argues that it "could only be an act of faith in the new to be able to wear a garment that so [...] advanced the new aesthetic and culture of Cubism" (1999, 17). If fashion is seen as a way of externalizing one's 'self', then wearing these modern fashions would have been a big part of how women expressed their modernity. Moreover, Poiret's designs also helped women embrace a modern lifestyle. His loose, comfortable garments made activities such as sport, cycling or driving possible. For the first time, women could fully negotiate the speed and terrain of the modern city. Fashion changed the way that women interacted with and experienced modernity.

It seems significant, then, that Woolf alludes to fashion in her closing remarks on the new, Georgian Mrs Brown: "You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capability and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; *wearing any dress*; saying anything and doing heaven knows what." (54, my emphasis) Freedom and equality of dress are here signifiers of modernity, denoting both a changed "human character" and a changed depiction of it in modern fiction. It is unlikely that Woolf had fashion in mind when she dated this change in human character to December 1910, but the changes in fashion in the 1910/1911 season do add currency to her "arbitrary" statement. Nevertheless, it seems counter-productive to begin this article by interrogating the modernist use of limits, only to end by imposing another limit between pre-1910 (traditional) and post-1910 (modern) fashion. Such a limit is in danger of homogenising both periods, levelling out differences, advances and regressions. For these reasons, critics such as David Bradshaw (2003, 2), Bernard Bergonzi and Helmut E. Gerber have attempted to abandon the use of limits, preferring instead to view the "advent of the Modern Movement as a series of foci or nodes, centred around influential individuals or groups, between which connections can be traced" (Bergonzi, 1970, 20), or as a slowly evolving transition (Gerber, 1960). Following Gerber, perhaps 1910 can most usefully be seen as a key point in an ongoing, uneven transition from one age to another. Yet even the concept of an 'age' requires limits, no matter how loosely they are applied. However reductive and restrictive limits are, it is necessary – and even desirable – to maintain them – not only for their practical use in history and criticism, but also for what they reveal about how individuals and societies have attempted to order history and experience, and why. The study of modernism – and fashion – is to some extent a study of limits, of their questioning, imposition and definition. As long as their permeability, artificiality and instability is acknowledged and examined, limits are still of use. A healthy criticism of limits is surely preferable to the rejection of limits altogether.

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Mod modern(ist): moda, 1910 și limitele modernismului

Începând cu decembrie 2010, la conferința Asociației Britanice de Studii Moderniste din Glasgow, care a analizat faimoasa afirmație a Virginiei Woolf că „în decembrie 1910, oamenii s-au schimbat”, a existat o resuscitare a interesului de a afla care sunt originile modernismului. Pornind de la o lucrare prezentată la această conferință, articolul aduce în discuție posibilitatea stabilirii unor limite cronologice fixe în ceea ce privește modernismul. Pornind de la afirmația Virginiei Woolf, articolul analizează afirmațiile scriitoarei dintr-un unghi neexplorat până astăzi (acela al modei). Centrându-se asupra anului 1910-1911 și asupra catalogului revoluționar al lui Paul Poiret ilustrat de Georges Lepape, articolul explorează posibilitatea de a considera sau nu definitive afirmațiile Virginiei Woolf și, în plan secundar, întreabă dacă stabilirea însăși a unor limite este un mijloc critic de ordona și de a interpreta trecutul.