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Paris & New York 1982

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Women and Fashion

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Everyone knows what a "flapper" is. The word conjures an instant visual image of the characteristic look of women during the twenties. The flapper image is much more distinct that any other associated with a single decade in costume history. It seems to have sprung into being without antecedents and to have vanished without descendants—a unique image, outside the course of normal development in fashion. One reason for the sharpness of the twenties look in the mind's eye is self-consciousness about fashion during the period. The look of women, always important in society, seemed significant in a new way, and was being experienced and described as such more consciously than ever before.

After a long period of transitional modification in fashion, the decade was a period of artificially maintained extremes, during which certain new esthetic shifts in dress—changes in line, shape, and color which had begun a decade earlier—became congealed and confirmed in their final extreme version, and formed the basis of "classical" modern female clothing on which susequent modern fashion was to be founded. Although the shapes of dress alter continually and often change back again to old forms, some irreversible changes were admitted to occur during the 1920s—changes of slow genesis which had been in process since the turn of the century, but which seemed, at that intense moment after World War I and before the fall of the stock market, to come

suddenly into focus. Certain views, established centuries earlier, of what women and women's clothes are always like remained in force during the twenties; but a much altered view of the meaning and workings of fashion and of the experience of women came into existence. During the decade slow changes in look, which occurred not much faster than in the 1820s or 1520s, were accompanied by a revolutionary shift in attitude which was much more radical than the visual changes and strengthened their effect.

The change in attitude and feeling accounts for the self-consciousness and self-descriptiveness of the period; there was new knowledge that the way clothes looked was central to the way life was lived. Women's clothes looked different, and people were studying the reasons for the first time. Clothes follow the flux of society, engaging in a constant creative symbolization of its ideals and conflicts. At any moment, women's clothes express attitudes about women held by themselves and by men, and especially about the bargain struck between the sexes concerning the visual expression of their relations. In the 1920s the terms of the bargain were acknowledged to have undergone a radical change. I shall discuss this whole subject in three ways. First, a comment about the evolution of female fashion that led up to the look of the 1920s—what the changes consisted of and expressed. Second, the way new styles and modes in art—painting, graphic, and photographic—conveyed the look of clothing at the time and influenced its perception then and since. Finally, to deal with certain individual women, working and living during the period, around whose names the look of the decade has crystallized.

Two important shifts of emphasis made women's clothes in the twenties radically different from the dress of the two preceding decades, even though the visual changes were gradual. The first difference was the postwar rise of youth as the vehicle of chic, with a corresponding revolutionary shift in the roles of mature and young women in the advance of fashionable dress. The Lady had gone out; the Girl had come in. The first real generation gap seems to have occurred. As often, mothers and daughters were deeply at odds, but this time daughters were winning out for the first time. The other difference was the rise of ready-made clothing, both in fact and on the social scale—not just the expansion of mass-production and standardization, but the *chic* of it.

Conventional modern attitudes about fashionable dress date from the establishment of these principles in the 1920s: that youth is the period of life in which to be in the avant-garde of fashion; and that basic commercial interests solidly and publicly support this point of view. Fashion then became and still remains a legitimate and glamorous

business—dependent on the accurate gauging of fluctuations in youth taste, seen to reflect the energy, hopefulness, even the conformity, in curity, sexual crudity, outrageousness, and defiance of youth. The fa ion business, established in the 1920s on a large scale, thus a simultaneously established extreme youth as a fashionable condition.

Just as exclusiveness and an emphasis on uncopiable individual had characterized the productions of haute couture in the late nir teenth century, the quality of refined maturity had struck the fashio able note until World War I. Fashionably speaking, female youth w seen as a graceless period, gawky and awkward, undeveloped and u schooled, unequipped with sufficient confidence to carry off the serio and elaborate creations of haute couture. Grown women could have t skill and patience to manage complex garments and undergarmer with ease, grace, confident sexual allure, and apparent effortlessne Girls were impatient, wiggly and impulsive, and their figures had r style. Such attitudes naturally promoted the desire to look mature c the part of the young, rather than to look immature on the part adults. Fashion had reflected this viewpoint about femininity for sever decades during the nineteenth century; grown women had a great de of scope in fashion for sexual expressiveness and conspicuous consum tion, while young girls were something of an oppressed minority f which the ideal garments were sexually inexpressive, smaller in physic scope, and comparatively unadorned. When fast rebellious girls or ve rich young ladies did wear ostentatiously elegant dress, it tended imitate the full-blown look of maturity, to push toward that ideal: mo décolletage, more trim, tighter stays. Fashionable mature women di not have the impulse to affect virginal shapelessness, schoolgirl sim plicity, or playful childishness in dress.

Adult male dress was conceived on entirely different principle trimmed and cut according to different esthetic rules and fabrics. Th silhouette and spatial character as well as the texture and layering c male and female dress were entirely different during most of the nine teenth century; the symbolizing method was different in relation to th body. In the 1920s these differences were transformed and remodele into a new relation.

World War I was the greatest influence on female fashion in th 1920s, chiefly because war's aftermath caused such an intensificatio and speeding up of change in women's lives and in the development o ready-made clothing. Other influences had also been at work before th war which determined the direction fashionable looks would take i their intensified form. Even without the war, hair would have been cut breasts would have been flattened, waistlines would have been enlarge

and displaced, and skirts would have been shortened. Female dress in general would have begun to take up less room and have less trim. All these changes had already demonstrably been wrought, at least at the level of high fashion, well before 1918. It was the swift popularization and visual exaggeration of these new elements in fashionable clothes which the 1920s accomplished, especially in the second half, as no decade had done before.

Mid-nineteenth-century feminine dress until the mid-eighties had become increasingly elaborate, colorful and decorative, even theatrical and excessively feminine, tending to stress the hourglass figure, great extent of skirt especially at the back, and great diffuseness of embellishment including the head. Feminine garments took up space and had an architectural structure and complex surface. The woman dwelling inside was inaccessible to the touch and extremely provocative to the imagination. Posture was upright, to support and display the hair and hat; the ribcage was lifted to thrust the bosom into prominence and keep the waist sharply defined above the very rhetorical skirt. Stays defined the correct shape, shifting according to changing mode. Besides trim, there were further extensions such as muffs, parasols, fans, bouquets, and so on.

As such details proliferated, dress-reform movements also arose and subsided. They raised consciousness, but not skirts, until they eventually had their cumulative overt effect in the twentieth century. The long struggle for female emancipation in England and America, also simultaneous with increase in fashionable excess, had lasting resonance in all feminine life. It could be ignored, but not unnoticed. Along with the rhetorical extremes of fashionable female dress in the nineteenth century came an underlying sense of their unseemliness and their preposterousness. Guilt and resentment, such as Freud was later to uncover, lurked under the ribboned and feathered hats and rows of graceful flounces, waiting for their moment.

As early as the 1880s, tailored skirted suits for women had come into vogue for daytime wear. Severe, businesslike, and practical-looking costume became newly chic for idle women for the first time—not just for riding and hunting, but for city wear. A decade later, the knickerbocker bicycling costume and simplified tailored dress for tennis came into fashion, expressing a new ideal of sartorial comfort for active sports. Both these changes were borrowed from the expressive elements in men's nineteenth-century clothing, increasingly severe for business and casual for sport during the course of the century. For women, these simplified garments, however severe or spruce, covered the body closely and were worn with stays and very high collars. Women's perhaps

unconscious emergent desire to be taken seriously required some echoing of the masculine ideal of dress, although fashionable women's lives changed very little.

Formal nineteenth-century male costume was just as physically cumbersome and constricting as female clothing. Trains, bonnets, and whalebone stays were no more problematic than tall, stiff hats, layers of lined and padded woolen tailored garments, mercilessly tight starched collars, and ankle-high, tight-laced shoes. The design of men's clothes however, expressed the sense of physical articulation, and women's did not. Between the sexes, the difference was not of physical ease. But gradually for elegant women the look of severely cut discomfort came to seem preferable to the look of fussy ruffled discomfort, at least for street wear. Meanwhile, late-nineteenth-century female schoolteachers and office workers, plainly dressed often in ready-made garments, were still not setting the fashionable tone. Nevertheless. the ideal of practical and utilitarian-*looking* dress had come into existence as one important strain in the modern development of female fashion.

At the turn of the century and especially during the first decade of the twentieth, a marked reduction of both ornament and overall scope occurred in elegant feminine clothes, along with marked change in the shape and position of corsetting. The bosom was permitted to sink and the ribcage to expand, while the corset descended to grip and mold the hips and thighs, instead of the thorax. Posture, even more exaggeratedly than the outmoded bustle, thrust out the behind. In front; the bosom became very low and ill-defined, overhanging the stomach which seemed to retreat. The back was still arched and the woman led with her bust, as formerly. But even as early as 1911, the fashionable silhouette changed its basic form much more radically by a sharp shift in posture. Suddenly the pelvis came to be thrust forward, the shoulders to slump, the behind to tuck under and the bust to cave in.

This slouched posture became, though not all at once, absolutely standard for fashionable modern female looks, and it has never lost its appeal. The forward-thrusting hip, with hunched shoulders above, has apparently successfully indicated elegance for the entire twentieth century, ever since it was crystallized into images by the artists working for Paul Poiret between 1911 and 1913. At the time it was invented, this look was a signal that stays were no longer essential to define the shape of the torso: the well-defined waist and straight back were abjured for the first time in a century and began to seem tacky; the female body was seen to be most elegant when slumped. An interim fashion around 1910 kept the old posture, but enlarged and raised the waist and very much narrowed the skirt, while keeping hats even larger. By 1913, the

narrow skirts were raised off the ground, hats reduced, and the slump established. Waists became blurry and legs visible.

In all this basic change, corsetting, officially absent, was all the more important because it now had the harder work of seeming not to be there. In the decade before World War I the corset had already become the hip-hugging girdle, made of elastic material with suspended garters to hold up the stockings. A bust-bodice, or brassiere, was worn above. Boning was still used, but to straighten rather than curve the figure. Women now needed help to look long, sleek, and slender, instead of hourglass-shaped. By 1915, the bust was sunken and minimal above a high waistline, and shoulders permanently slumped. The short skirt became fuller again, but shorter still; ankles appeared for good, and dancing became a pastime rather than an occasion. Harem skirts, first invented in 1911 for doing the tango, and causing a great furor, were a brief vogue which gave way to permanently short skirts—by comparison: they exposed the ankle and a few inches of leg. At the same time, the hitherto high neckline was lowered and opened for daytime wear to expose the neck and collarbones. Thus normal female clothing was reduced in the amount of room it took up and the amount of skin it covered well before the end of World War I.

These changes of shape, line, posture, and bulk occurred rapidly between 1910 and 1915, and created an essentially "modern"-looking female image, of which the most important aspect was undoubtedly the visible feet and legs. The new look made the head and feet of the female body come into visual relation with each other, so that the entire composition had to reduce proportionately to look harmonious. All extensions formed by clothing had to be smaller, trimming and headgear had to reduce in scale and scope. Hair was cut off by some, bound close by most. The abstract silhouette, the reduction and simplification—the expressive style was becoming much more analogous to that of male dress. The design was not similar, but similarly allusive and abstracted, instead of fully worked out and embellished—like the difference between Neoclassic and Baroque architecture.

There were two main trends in all this which came into existence before 1920 and lasted until the middle of the decade. In the arena of high fashion in Paris, the trend was exotic, opulent and gaudy, shockingly vivid and erotic under the influence of Paul Poiret, Russian Ballet, and the residue of art nouveau. Erté and other famous decorative artists showed rather menacing serpentine turbanned figures festooned in drapes and dripping with oddly-placed pearls and tassels. Film vamps like Theda Bara in America took over this look. There were also bizarre street-wear versions with ospreys sprouting from hats and dramatic

stand-up collars, worn with smoldering black-rimmed eyes. Simultaneously, a dainty and innocent aspect to feminine looks became possible by creating a childlike image out of the new shapeless body. Mary Pickford exemplified this trend in American movies. The vulnerable neck (now bare), the fluffy curls (now free), together with the short skirt, flat bust and high waist all lent themselves to a new look of attractive immaturity—not the attractions of a ripe young virgin but of a little girl. The implied sexual depravity of the predatory seductress was well matched and perversely echoed by the kind of sexual depravity implicit in the spectacle of the child-woman facing the wicked world in total ignorance of the power of her sex. These were Hollywood extremes; but they were definite elements in the new fashionable image of women even in Paris.

Even before 1918, both these forms of feminine charm had the element of being physically accessible—the bodies of women, whether displayed as weapons or as prey, were dressed in a way to suggest that they could be grasped. The smaller scope of dress, the thinness of fabrics, and the elasticity of undergarments all contributed to this quality, furthered by the advance of couple dancing under the influence of Vernon and Irene Castle. A new use of fur, including whole coats made of it, also contributed to a new tactile immediacy in female dress. The physical distance between the sexes was getting shorter, as was the distance between the concepts of design governing their clothes.

The two exaggerated extremes of attractive female looks, the Child and the Vamp, generated by the new unstiffened leg-baring modes, thus combined before 1915 to challenge the sovereignty of the Lady, who went speedily out of fashion as an exciting sexual object. Mothers trained to be ladies, found that daughters had no wish to carry on the tradition. Some carryover naturally persisted. It is interesting to see how démodé fashion art, using a fuzzy, sentimental, impressionistic technique, conveys this démodé, ladylike spirit in the second-rate fashion advertising of the time, while Erté and others were creating sleek linear abstractions to illustrate haute couture.

Then came the war. Women had to do the work of men, and they wanted and needed clothes that made them look as if they could do it. We have seen that the stirrings of such desires had already been expressed in dress much earlier in the eighties and nineties, in the form of severe tailoring; but they now had an excuse to come legitimately into play. Rich and elegant women, now short-skirted and uncorsetted, also had real work to do, which made practical-looking dress not an affectation but a necessity. Those who did no work had to adopt the look too, simply to look up-to-date. Simple, smocklike garments came into fash-

ion, with big pockets and loose, serviceable belts. A quasi-military look became modish, as it always does in wartime. The trend in female dress was to divide clothes sharply between colorful, bare, soft evening garments (justified by the need to cheer the troops) and severe, practical daytime clothes suitable for driving a truck or working in hospitals. Egrets and chinchilla were now quite out of date for the street. The division between sexy, romantic evening clothes and plain, practical daywear is another modern notion, still in force, whereas during most of the nineteenth century and before the amount of trim, the complexity, and the degree of fragility in both day and evening clothes for women had been the same, although the forms of costume were different.

During the pretwenties and early twenties period of esthetic and moral change, certain assumptions about dress remained which were to vanish in the late twenties. The basis of couture was still exclusive, exquisite, and individual work. Fashionable clothing, although it may have become much simpler and freer, was still carefully made in conventional layers. Loose draperies were mounted on well-constructed linings, and many hooks and snaps affixed the festooning. Short skirts had slips beneath, and underwear was modest. There were still plenty of "ladies," and they still had the money. For them, a good deal of the modernized elegant dress remained sober, complicated, and delicate; gloves and hats were a matter of course. Ladies' maids were still in evidence, and the need for them was still obvious in the look of dress.

By 1920, briskness and practical simplicity for women's clothes were added by the atmosphere of war to the childlike and vamplike look. All three new modes could be visually compelling in the new relaxed postures and gestures already well established in a decade of fashion. They were soon synthesized and combined to create the feminine aspect of the later 1920s—the famous flapper look: part child, part vamp, and part competent good sport. Clara Bow sums it up in the movies. Masculinity was not part of the mixture at all, any more than ladyhood.

After the war, the twenties brought both "girls" and ready-made clothes into high fashion. The thin bodies, flat chests, and impulsive movements once thought to be lacking in any hope of style became the elements of extreme chic, along with the look of simple ready-made garments suggestive of the schoolroom and the tennis court even when they were made of chiffon. In 1921–22, fashionable women's hair was even more frequently bobbed, although Irene Castle had already done it several years before. In 1922, the fashionable waist had dropped to the hipline, although skirts were still just above the ankle where they had been for nearly a decade. Then in 1925 skirts rose to knee level for a short extreme moment; and sank to the ankle again by 1929. It was

during those brief four years that the new feminine image acquired it final perfection and lasting fame. All the "modern" possibilities fo female looks were at last firmly indicated: the visual possibilities fo simple, abstract shapes in the design of women's clothes, analogous t those used in male dress; and the possibilities for reduction in the bul of flesh and hair as well as of fabric, for exposure of skin and indica tions of bodily movements. The late twenties set a standard for all these a standard to which subsequent fashion still refers, despite variations i feminine fashion since then.

Clothes at last took on real simplicity and "modernity," with minima fastenings, underwear, and minimal cut, fit, and trim. The movement of the body were important, especially the legs and feet. Locomotion not just dancing, was emphasized by the new half-exposed legs: the showed, as trousers had always shown, that their owner was goin somewhere. In that sense women were at last the equals of men i expressing this particular aspect of the self-image. Visible leg move ment, whether trousered or stockinged, means deliberate forward mo tion—personal progress.

In this country, stocking manufacture and consumption increased b 500 percent between 1919 and 1929; and 98 percent of the output wa made of silk, a fiber formerly considered somewhat wicked and cer tainly unsuitable for everyday wear. Stockings were also and even mor wickedly flesh-colored, for the first time. Great, moderately priced de partment stores began to flourish in America after the war; and th many young women in the work force who were spending their ow money on ready-made clothes were setting the tone of fashion. Th "poor look" was modish. The air of youth brought with it the air o classlessness, democracy, defiance of convention, and disregard for sa cred old notions of exclusiveness, rank, and privacy as appropriat accompaniments to elegance.

Parisian fashion still depended on the exclusive work of great design ers, not mass production, and Paris was still the fashion capital. Ready made clothes were not chic in Paris until very recently; but the *look* o clothes which could be ready-made became very chic indeed—simpl garments all very similarly cut, as men's had been for a long time. Ye even in America, Paris was looked to as the natural home of rea fashion. Hollywood stars of the decade were dressed by Paris designers and American department stores had salons for imported fashion American designers existed to serve the ready-to-wear market, but thei names were unknown; distinctive American designers emerged later i the thirties.

But in Paris in the 1920s, exclusive French fashion itself had gon

public in a way unheard of before the war. This publicity, which became an essential element in fashion ever afterward, was accomplished in the twenties by an unprecedented alliance between haute couture and the press. Many fashion magazines of extraordinary glossiness and prestige came into existence in France. Showings of designer collections, once attended only by invitation and by private clients, were now publicly advertised and attended by journalists. Prominent women often wore couture models in public places to advertise the designer's work and were dressed free in exchange. Who made clothes for elegant women became news, publicly discussed in a way that would have horrified their mothers.

In this period Paris was also an internationally famous center of the arts. Art and fashion joined forces, now aided by the new art of fashion photography and the new magazines, and later assisted in this country by the popular art of film. The *Gazette du Bon Ton,* which existed between 1912 and 1925, was the first important magazine to unite art and fashion commercially and publicly. Paul Poiret and a group of excellent illustrators had created an abstract, stylized ideal look for the new modish woman as early as 1911, and this image was intensified in the hands of later fashion artists. The influence of painters like Modigliani, who died in 1920, was very strong on such illustrators as Georges Lepape, who illustrated Poiret's first volume of designs in 1908 and continued working for the *Gazette* and other journals. His elegant abstractions, like those of Erté, Benito, and Brunelleschi, were not perpetuating conventional styles of fashion illustration, but drawing upon the new forms of representation learned from Japanese prints, African masks, modern architecture, and serious painters—pursuers of cubism, futurism, and other new trends.

This visual alliance changed the nature of fashion. Fashion illustration in the last half of the nineteenth century had been related to the debased sorts of pictures on candy-box lids, not to the innovations of impressionism or fauvism. Women's fashion was thus implicitly a very minor art, a form of decorative frivolity. With the new link between serious and decorative artists, both of whose work appeared in the new magazines, combined with the advance of photography as an esthetic tool and the emergence of serious artists in the field of stage design and illustration, fashion became a suitable vessel for avant-garde esthetic expression. Fashion designers acquired great prestige—and incidentally, a great number of the best were women.

The connection between serious art and feminine fashion was not simply a matter of designers and artists being friends and influencing one another, but of the association going on in public view through the

press and theatre. Fashion acquired an irreversible public importance modern consciousness; and that is perhaps the most important contrib tion to fashion of the twenties, one which sharpened its image historical consciousness. The art of the couturier achieved the prestige has kept ever since, along with an implicit association with the oth visual arts—not, as at an earlier date, an association with the mo unfortunate aspects of feminine vanity and lack of serious purpose. O result of this association between art and fashion was to make the ide image of woman—however free she was supposed to be in her skim clothes and short hair—into an artificial abstract shape, hard-edge pictorially conceived, and emphatically unnatural. There were ma fashion illustrators on a less elegant level still using the old method the fussy, sentimental, realistic graphic style consistently used for mag zine illustration; but the most sophisticated fashion illustration, Fren or imitation, was abstract.

The abstract trend in modish looks shows up most significantly in t new use of makeup. No sooner were artificial hair and waistlines d carded than artificial faces came in. Kohl-rimmed eyes had come with the vamp in the teens. In the twenties, in addition, lips a fingernails were vivid scarlet patches, eyebrows were thinly drawn lin faces were sharp white ovals (until the vogue for suntan in 1927 ma them sharp tan ovals in summer). The head and neck were meant possible to resemble a Brancusi bust. The torso, although it may ha been uncorsetted, was nevertheless ideally a stiff, unmodulated cylind and the cloche hat made a nonhuman-looking shape out of the enti head. The camera came to aid and confirm this stylization of the fa and body by the end of the decade, although twenties designers st preferred the skilled stylizations of illustrators to the work of photogr phers for purveying the ideal look of their designs in magazines. Th camera was still a bit untrustworthy; and women were still learning ho to dress and move for it. Fashion photography came of age in th thirties, taking over the idealization of dressed looks. Fashion itse became more subtle, fluid, and susceptible to camera-lighting an vision.

A great assist was given to the establishment of a feminine phot graphic self-image by the movies of the 1920s. Operating some run below the level of the artists working for *Vogue* and the *Gazette du Bo Ton,* black-and-white cinematography in this country was beginning govern our perception of ideally dressed humanity. For this functio camera art saw its flowering in silent film art before the end of th decade, in which the stylized dressed body appeared using the stylize expressions, gestures, and movements appropriate to its shape. Sharp

defined black lips and smooth waves of hair went with certain exaggerated facial manners, ways of using the hands, holding the shoulders, and moving the hips. All these, conveyed in vivid black and white, produced conventions for expressing feeling and undergoing experience in what was seen as a "natural" manner. Clothes worn in these films were emphatically designed, conventionalized so as to be understandable at a glance and look natural. The range of color was reduced to the black-and-white spectrum. Contrast, line, texture, and movement had to fill in for color and sound, exaggerated and stylized to seem sufficiently real.

One lasting effect of the new-born cinematic vision of life was the need for slimness. Fashion artists can draw figures as slim as they like; the camera, moving or still, seems to fatten the figure. Movie stars' figures, and ordinary ones conceived in imitation of them, had to become thin to keep their trim look under the camera eye. The modern ideal of slimness we still uphold began not with the discoveries of medical science but with the advance of camera consciousness in the 1920s. Before then, no matter how skinny Erté and Lepape made their fashion figures in the teens, actual bodies were still visually acceptable when quite hefty, as the stills of Theda Bara and others show. By 1925 most admired figures were slim, both in fashionable society and in the screen community.

Slimness was also a part of the revolution in feminine physical ideals which had been in process for a while but which only surfaced in the postwar decade. During the prosperous period of nineteenth-century ladyhood, there was an undercurrent of Romantic idealization of another kind of woman. While censuring her, society loved the image of the doomed Camille, wasted by poverty and disease but still her own mistress—wife to none, daughter to none, free in sexual choice, manager of her own fortunes, and strong-minded and capable of noble sacrifice. This heroine of nineteenth-century romanticism is echoed in the 1920s character of Iris Storm from Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat*—another doomed and frail adventuress. Thin Garbo played both parts, needless to say. This sexually independent woman with such great literary appeal was naturally thin—perhaps neurasthenic, ill, occasionally poor, but also restless, searching, and deliciously nonrespectable. She was a huntress, perhaps feral or sporting, or even virginal like Diana, but certainly not a lady.

Thus besides the rise of sports and gainful employment, the new knowledge of vitamins, and new practical aspirations toward sexual equality in professional opportunity, there were old ideological forces

behind the new slim figure, having to do with the equal claims o female sexuality—its equal strength, its aggressive nature. Sexually predatory women must be naturally thin, since sexually passive ones ar plump; the wicked vamp no less than the healthy tennis player contributed to the new image of desirable thinness. Thinness also implied tha another aspect of female life had to be abandoned along with dependent daughterhood and passive wifehood; motherhood had to go by th board. Bellies, breasts and hips, erotic though they might intrinsically be, were too "healthy" for current tastes. Wantonness now had to find expression in lean serpentine bodies suggesting danger, instead of voluptuous bodies suggesting pleasure.

In 1927 hair was further shortened, and the shape of the skull and neck appeared. This, along with the new free-moving simplicity of dress the air of aggressive sexual challenge, and of extreme youthfulness in feminine style, combined to produce a flavor not of girlishness (which is only a young version of ladyhood) but of boyishness—the famous *garçonne* quality. This mode was energetic and free, also somewhat depraved—one of the underlying characteristics of the "flapper." She was an unfamiliar kind of creature suggesting a naughty schoolboy ready for any kind of perverse experience, especially sexual; independent, adventurous, and daring, but still very much played off against men—rather like a thirteen-year-old male hustler. Real female independence was *not* expressed in the fashions of the twenties. The new look suggested the nonhuman vibrant sexuality of race horses and sportscars: an untamed, challenging organism in need of expert guidance—sleek, swift, and unaccountable—the madcap heiress ready to be subdued by the sheik. In this revolutionary period in fashion history women did not wish to resemble men in any tedious way suggesting responsibility and the management of serious affairs or hard practical work—such "mannishness" had been affected by women seeking emancipation in Victorian times. Speaking through fashion, feminine independence in the twenties was all on the surface, a matter of rhetoric just as pointed as bustles and tight lacing.

Certain women seem to sum up and stand for the look of the twenties in various ways. We mentioned Clara Bow as the one perfectly synthesized successor to the "child" Mary Pickford and the "vamp" Theda Bara. Gloria Swanson and Mae Murray would be among the list of potent Hollywood image models. There were noncinematic figures, however, that appealed to the popular imagination and trained the popular eye. Early in the decade (1922), for example, it was Suzanne Lenglen, the internationally famous French tennis star, who first wore a straight,

sleeveless tunic with a knee-length pleated skirt and a headband. She struck that particular note of absolutely simple sportswear that became chic even in the ballroom and tearoom for the next few years.

In Paris in the middle of the decade, dress designer Sonia Delaunay represented the union of art and fashion by designing clothes as if they were paintings. She was the wife of a painter, and she used the currently geometric shape of the fashionable female body as a canvas on which to apply patches of color in asymmetrical patterns, similar to those painted on canvas by her husband and his circle. This direct juxtaposition, where a clothed body and a painting could be made into similar works of art, was perhaps only thinkable just in that decade. Sonia Delaunay's designs do not represent a real fashion trend; but they illustrate one extreme direction fashion just at that time could take, as it could have done at no earlier time.

The name with the most lasting resonance in the world of 1920s women's fashion is that of Gabrielle Chanel. Apart from her obvious talents, the reason for this is that she was the first couturière able to present her view of women's ideal looks and behavior in her own person. By contrast, Chanel's great contemporary Madeleine Vionnet, who was a modern genius at cutting and draping extremely simple clothes with utmost subtlety, stayed in her atelier and let her creations speak for her on the bodies of other women. Everyone knows what Chanel looked like; she was perpetually expounding and appearing as a living example of her theories. No one knows how Vionnet looked or what she wore, although her contribution to dress design was as important as Chanel's. Chanel combined the basic work of design with a role in fashionable life itself: she was not only a fashionable designer but a fashionable person, and the first couturière to be so. It was partly the postwar phenomenon of café society which made this possible. A complete breakdown of old conventions in social mixing allowed talented people of all sorts to be the accepted social companions of rich and titled people, instead of automatically being considered their servants and inferiors, and condescended to even while being admired.

Chanel was herself an independent, sexually free woman, a beauty, a professional success, intelligent, plebeian, tough, and *thin*. Apart from her designs, she was the first couturière to sell a complete modern image and show how to create it—not just clothes, but an air, a style, a way of combining things. While hobnobbing with the cream of society in France and England, as well as with the likes of Cocteau and Stravinsky, she advocated, adapted, designed, and wore clothes suggestive of working-class comfort and unpretentious ease, not glamorous leisure. She created and made accessible and visible new modern terms

for the old "dandy" idea, best expressed by Beau Brummell in the ea nineteenth century, that clothes while they are being worn should seem to matter at all. This sartorial notion has an enduring and sed tive appeal; it appeals to vanity as no other style of looks can becaus visibly suggests that people are superior to their clothes without hav to display any particular real superiority. Chanel's insistence on l fake jewelry and mundane fabrics like jersey reflects an insistence unpretentiousness, but also a recognition of crudity and coarseness life—not just their existence, but their keen attractions and their abi to form compelling combinations with refined elements. Such a cc bination existed in her own personality, which in itself was such success.

One of Chanel's other great contributions to the modern concept of clothes was the appealing idea that personal beauty is irrelevant fashion. You make something marvelous out of yourself, whatever th is to start with. "There are no ugly women," she is supposed to h said, "only lazy ones." Corollary to this is another compelling idea t youth is also irrelevant, despite the trend of the moment. The kind youthful and simple fashion she advocated could be extremely becc ing to mature faces—her own being an increasingly excellent example she approached middle age. Chanel was French, and women, not b ish girls, have always been admired in France. One reason haute c ture could continuously flourish was that French women still requi suitable clothes, and a segment of the international fashionable wo still had an ideal of mature French elegance. There continued to "ladies" throughout the twenties—adult women with high standards personal elegance and high incomes.

Chanel's spirit of unpretentiousness also took the form of not mi ing being copied. She rightly saw imitation as a sign that a design v good, and she believed that a fashion was not good unless m adopted it. From her haute couture position Chanel was the first Fre designer to encompass and envision the way mass production co become the foundation of modern elegance. Now it is the choice a combination of manufactured objects that fashionable women eng in, and prestigious designers design for many; their clothes are m ufactured, not individually cut and fitted, and their appeal even lies the very scope of their suitability. The standardization of good lo which came about in the twenties and continues through the centu although it was made possible by the advance of manufacturing te niques and fostered by cinema, was originally given fashionable sta partly by the influence of Chanel's views on her generation. Many ot excellent designers of both sexes flourished in the 1920s, and many h

similar conceptions. Chanel is an interesting innovative figure because she made use of her self-image as a living demonstration of her work and ideas; she was her own client and her own mannequin.

In contrast to the movie images of the decade, which appealed to popular taste, Chanel's message was aimed at the top; but one of her first principles was to destroy, among exclusive people, the notion of the exclusive look in dress—the look of having spent a lot of effort, money, and time being fitted. She was interested in what working women wore, what sailors wore, in the clothes of waitresses and seamstresses. She, working at the highest level of couture, caused the look of the youthful working woman to set the tone of fashion for the whole decade—perhaps for the whole century. She represented in her own looks, speech, attitudes, and behavior the essence of "modern" womanhood: feminine and sexy but not especially nice or eager to please, rich by her own efforts, uncompromising. She got where she was not just by talent, vision, hard work, but by using her sexual charm adventuress-style: she did not have a mission to be a great designer; she had lovers who set her up in business. She was an unstoppable combination of talented artisan, adventuress, and business woman—with no desire to hide her origins, methods, or qualities to masquerade as a fine lady even among fine ladies. Her clothes, worn by her or others, reflected this heady mélange. She showed how the new youthful look could be modified to create the image of a mature woman, independent, well at ease in modern adult life.

Femininity, in French mature form, perverse boyish form, or movie form, nevertheless remained unchallenged in 1920s fashions. Women wore dresses and hats, gloves, stockings, and heeled shoes. Schoolgirl-like sweaters and skirts were worn, but dresses were knee-length for tennis and bathing suits were modest. Fabrics were fragile, there were no "easycare" synthetics, and women and men's clothes were still sharply divided in design, but the sexes did achieve a certain equality in the conventional simplicity and physical expressiveness of their dress. All clothes seemed designed for easy movement of arms and legs; clothes of both sexes took up about the same amount of room and stayed close to the body without fitting very tightly anywhere. This nice balance first struck in the 1920s did not last past the thirties—another war and its aftermath had distorting effects on modern fashion. But the balance has been restored and recognized as one of the basic principles of twentieth-century dress. Chanel, who died in 1970 and worked until the end of her life, had a career which demonstrated her prophetic importance. She stopped designing and went into eclipse during the late forties and early fifties when complexly cut and artificially supported

ladylike clothing came back into vogue. The last fifteen years of her l saw the general reestablishment in fashion of her notions of simplic and informality, of separate simple garments with dramatic accessori She went back to designing with enormous success. Chanel and t twenties had established the classically modern female way of looki which we still admire even with all its variations.