

An Approach Through Painting to XIX Century Fashion Ergonomic Issues

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ABSTRACT

Through times, innumerable attacks to health and social well-being were made in the name of fashion. Since the XIX century doctors and artists have drawn people's attention to the severe damages made to health and to the need to ensure that what one wears, either clothes or accessories, should be comfortable and practical. As a matter of fact, that should be the main concern of those who create and those who wear these products.

Keywords: Ergonomic, fashion, painting, caricature

INTRODUCTION

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Clothing is rarely seen as product design, although in reality it perfectly fits this category; In fact similarly to design products, clothing has, as opposed to art, a practical end-use. Clothing and accessories are developed for a specific target market. The segmentation of the market can be done on age, buying-power, profession, among others.

The main concerns for fashion designers are the same as for a product designer: both professionals develop their creations based on the final use of the product and as function of their end consumer. And as so many other products, some clothing items and some accessories do not follow all the principles that are often considered indispensable to "good design".

Ergonomics, whose objective is the perfection of the relationship between the object and the human body, and that includes the anatomic and even psychological study of the end user, is also part of the fashion designer concerns. Even in previous centuries where ergonomics were not taken into consideration (this word was not even used in relation to design), there were violent reactions against the aggressiveness and the lack of practicality of some fashion design items.

However, neither the diverse professional class related to fashion, nor the critics or even the end users were the first to react against the physical discomfort and against the health damages caused by some clothing or accessories. It were mainly doctors or sociologists and artists the first to react against the fashion tyranny.

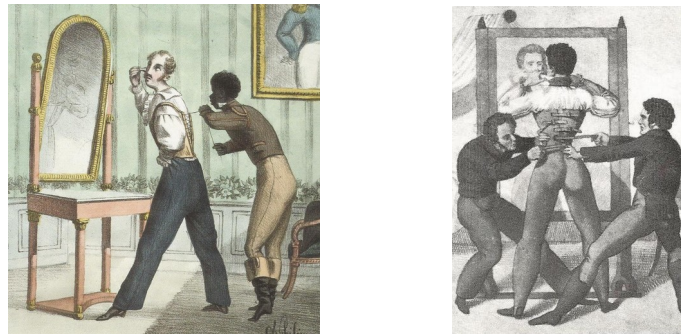


Fig. 1 Images of the XIX century



XVI century

XVIII century

XIX century

1904

Fig.2 Corsets

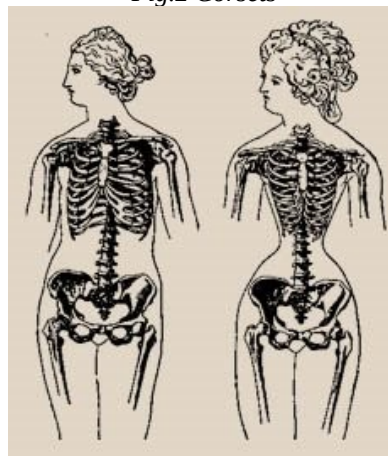


Fig 3 - Effect of the corset on the human body

The violent reactions against this so called tyranny occur for the first time during the XIX century, although women's health in particular, but also to some extent men's health were truly endangered, for centuries. The doctors and hygienists of the eight hundreds protested against amazingly tight corsets, used by both men and women to change their silhouette. These corsets, either masculine or feminine, needed to be dressed with the help of a third person, as they were strongly tightened on the back; this made women's and dandies waists extremely slim. Artists used the caricature as a way of criticizing the exaggerations that this fashion brought.



Fig. 4 crinolines

These facts were reported by artists, who represented in their work a society that they considered was a slave of fashion. They represented unusual situations and often anecdotic ones, of the exaggerations that fashion provoked in the bourgeoisie daily lives and even the complications it caused.

The great volume of skirts in the XVIII century led to the increase of doors' width, in order to allow the ladies to majestically enter a door. The huge wheel that the skirts reach in the second half of the XIX century is quite unhealthy, as women needed to carry on their waist, already tightened by the corset, the weight of several meters of fabric, as well as the innumerable petticoats and the crinoline that gives the silhouette the appropriate shape (fig.4).

These voluminous dresses of the 50's and 60's of the XIX century are also not practical. When, for instance, two ladies met on the street, they must necessarily remain distant from each other, given the volume of the skirts, and as a consequence needed to lean themselves to talk.



Fig 5 – picture of time: decade of 60, XIX Century

When using these voluminous skirts women could hardly sit in an armchair, and even in large sofas, there could only sit 2 ladies, so that their skirts could fit. Moreover, when the wheel is on the back, and although the volume is only present in the end of the lady's back, sitting is also a difficult task. Women's back posture is always incorrect and can even be painful as it's difficult to lean against something, even when sitting in very comfortable seats.



Fig.6 – Jules Goupil, *Confidence*, 1867



Fig.7a e 7b – Claude Monet, *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, 1865-1866

Clothing is created so that ladies can be fashionable. Dresses that are functional or that contribute to the well being of people are hardly ever created. This is even more obvious when it comes to outdoor life, or to clothes developed for fashionable sports. Women of this time leave more often their homes due to a medical indication than for the leaving itself.



Fig.8 - Edouard Manet 1871, *Croquet A Boulogne-sur-Mer*.



Fig.9- Horace Henry Cauty, 1885, *Tennis players*

They go to the beach, play tennis, croquet, badminton and horse riding: however they play these sports with the same clothing as the ones they use for a walk in the city park or for shopping.

In the case of horse riding, the benefit of the outdoor activity is definitely offset by the position women sit on the horse (amazon style) and to the weight of the dresses. Similarly, the time spent at the beach or the sea would have been more beneficial if the dresses that were used then weren't as dysfunctional and inadequate to sun exposure and to their use in water.



Fig.10 Carolus-Duran, 1873, Mademoiselle Croizette



Fig.11 Albert Aublet, 1883, Le trèport

As can be observed, the problematic of ergonomics was not a general concern in the XIX century. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, there were artists and fashion designers, in particular in the last decades of the eight hundreds that denounced this, not only through caricatures, but also by alerting for the potential health damages, and hence contributed to alleviating slightly the situation.

Ergonomics concerns before Ergonomy! Without doubt the situation improved still in the XIX century, it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that ergonomics became an important issue in fashion. Indeed the attacks against health remained for a large part of the XX century and will most likely remain in the XXI century. We see often fashion or aesthetics standing before comfort. In reality stilettos or bras with waistband and metal beads of the 50's or the tight corsets of the 80's and modern days, were and still are an attack against health. Some of these items, objects of design, do in fact disrespect the principles of ergonomics,

Likewise, jeans that are extremely tight may be the cause of some carcinogenic¹ diseases in men as much as very high heels, still considered as an object of seduction, are certainly objects of torture, cause for varicose veins, back pain, among many other problems and are hence defined by many specialists as harmful for public health².

This paper that is focused on the concerns of artists and intellectuals³ of the XIX century about the ill treatments of the human body due to the systematic and constant use of certain clothing and accessories, is also an alert for something that still frequently occurs in today's days. In fact, in our days several fashion design creations continue to oppose the principles of ergonomics and consequently of good design.

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¹ Cancer Studies and Research

² American Osteopathic Association, Albana Orthopaedic Clinic

³ Elizabeth Smith Miller, 1822-1911 and Amelie Bloomer, 1818.1894, defenders of the Women Rights; Charles Frederick Worth,1825-1895, first known fashion designer; Paul Poiret,1879-1944,fashion designer ; William Morris, 1834-1896, English artist (writer, painter);under of Liberty & Co. 1843-1917, English merchant, f; Gonçalves Crespo, 1846-1883, Portuguese writer; Charles Beaudelaire, 1821-1867, French poet.and art critic.