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Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006. xix + 332 pp., figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$ 39.95. ISBN: 978-0-520-24542-6.

Review by Dr. Véronique Pouillard, Columbia University/Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Mary E. Davis's research on the meaningful connections between music composition and haute couture owes a lot of its intrinsic originality to the author's ease in dealing with a wide-ranging multidisciplinary subject. A large part of this research is dedicated to the connections of the musicians with Parisian couture elites. Never shying away from detail and anecdote, Davis delivers a minutely detailed picture. Her report on the interest in neoclassical art, coincidental with a liaison between Gabrielle Chanel and Igor Stravinsky, on which Davis published a paper in *Fashion Theory* last year, proves to be one of the best examples.[1] The author provides the reader with a thorough understanding of the social logics of patronage, and of art and fashion networks. The structure of the book consists of seven chapters without an introduction or conclusion. There is a strict alternation between chapters dedicated to the fashion press and others to the music and fashion insiders. An enjoyable and useful iconographic corpus helps to reveal connections and analogies between musical compositions and haute couture.

The book's first chapter bears upon magazines, music, and modernism. It is mostly dedicated to the background and history of one of this book's main sources: the fashion press. Surprisingly, music magazines for a long time remained close to nonexistent in France. Davis stresses the importance of the fashion press as a means of exploring the musical mainstream culture of the times. She starts her enquiry with a chronological approach to the fashion periodicals, using the seventeenth-century *Mercure Galant* as an opening example. This journal introduced the fashion plate to the market, providing a guide for fashionable living. Davis then delivers a short and original history of the representation of music and music instruments in the fashion press. She uses the fashion press as a source, but also provides new and relevant details on the history of fashion journalism itself, a topic largely under-researched. She is not discouraged by the apparent superficiality of the topic and, on the contrary, shows how some artists covered cultural events for the fashion press, providing useful details drawn from the somewhat unattractive material provided by society columns in the press. Davis' general interest in the history of the fashion press in this book also leads her to an analysis of the pastiche dimension of both music and fashion journals. The works of Stravinsky and others as well as the pages of *Vogue* appear as an illustration of the genre, mixing imitation and non-narrative elements from diverse materials first seen in the layout of the fashion press. Davis introduces the Ballets Russes and their impresario Sergei Diaghilev, a prominent reference of the late 1900s and early 1910s fashion world, that turns out to be one of the main threads of her research. Through the publicizing of the Ballets' stars, like Natalia Trouhanova, and with the support of a network including designer Léon Bakst

and couturier Jeanne Paquin, fashion became one of the distinctive features of the company, while the Ballets themselves became fashion.

Paul Poiret's orientalist fashions, his fame, famous parties, and decline form the core of the second chapter. These episodes are well-known, but here again Davis enters into her subject through its less known features. She recounts Poiret's relations with musical and visual arts beginning with his apprenticeship at the house of Jacques Doucet, who collected fine arts with a predilection for eighteenth-century French paintings and had some considerable connections with the stage, through actresses such as Réjane and Sarah Bernhardt. Poiret opened his own couture house in 1903, substituting a new supple body line to the corset. This silhouette was reminiscent of the Reform dress of late nineteenth-century Germany, but Poiret was nonetheless in the centre of a small revolution.[2] From this neoclassical style, he introduced in 1911 the hobble skirt, and a bit later the *style sultane* worn with harem pants, creating another shock in the Paris press and society. Among Poiret's influences, Davis notes the Greek and Oriental styles, and also the Ballets Russes, especially *Cléopâtre*, *Les Orientales*, *Scheherazade* — all productions that Poiret attended in the late 1900s and early 1910s. In return, Poiret's fashions interested the dance world, receiving visits of Diaghilev and Nijinski in 1910 and designing off-duty garments for the stars of the Ballets Russes and for Isadora Duncan. Davis stresses that Poiret obviously blurred the lines between the stage and the street — or at least between the stage and the daily life of the socialites of his time. This was to be reinforced not only by the parties given by Poiret, like the Thousand and Second Night of 1911, but also by several private music concerts he organized. The eighteenth-century pavilion Le Butard that the designer acquired west of Paris and restored became a favourite place for such concerts, with an emphasis on eighteenth-century chamber music preferably played on early instruments. Davis thoroughly analyses the links between Poiret and musicians, the choices made in the music programmes of his parties, and his involvement with visual arts as well. The case of Poiret founding his own art gallery, the Galerie Barbazanges, is not an unusual one.[3] Moreover, Davis explores the links of the designer with three important contacts. First is the illustrator Paul Iribe, who in 1908 published an album illustrating the *Directoire* collection of the couturier. Iribe combined popular techniques like *pochoir* and a new approach promoting clothes in a relaxed and natural, even if stylized, attitude. Another of these contacts was illustrator Georges Lepape; his *Les Choses de Paul Poiret* in 1911 promoted the couturier's *style sultane*.

And then there came the fashion editor Lucien Vogel, who introduced with Poiret the monthly magazine *Gazette du Bon Ton* (1912-1925), which is the subject of Davis's third chapter, and which would become a milestone in fashion and culture in these times. The *Gazette* sustained artistic and literary pretensions. Its aesthetics patched together Ancien Régime style with avant-gardism in a mix that might well appear postmodern. However, modernism found its way inside of its pages, with reviews of Diaghilev's troupe performances, combined with illustrations by Lepape, Bakst, and others, and above all with the adoption of the codes of Braque and Picasso's cubism[4], culminating with the depiction of the artistic partnership of Madeleine Vionnet and Thayaht (Ernesto Michaelles).[5] But the most striking feature of the *Gazette's* life, in relation to this book's subject, is obviously Erik Satie's links with the publication, especially while writing *Sports and divertissements* (1914), hence bringing modernist fashion and music together, for which Davis provides an extensive musical and aesthetic analysis relating Satie to the composers Bizet and Debussy.

Another chapter is dedicated to the adjacent network of Poiret's sister, Germaine Bongard, about whom Davis delivers a delightful and original picture. Bongard combined a fashion boutique with an art gallery showing the works of modernist painters like Léger, Matisse and Picasso. She dressed the women and wives of artistic intelligentsia of the times, like the wives of Henri Matisse, Juan Gris, Gino Severini, and pianist Marcelle Meyer. Bongard hosted several concerts and gathered prominent musicians, visual artists and writers (Amédée Ozenfant, Satie), binding modernist artistic groups (the Société Lyre et Palette), and salons (the Salon d'Antin), placing the writing of musical works, like Satie's *Trois valse*s, in the context of the Bongard circle.

Chapter Five goes back to fashion magazines, through *Vanity Fair*, whose fashion agenda included the promotion of French art and culture, again with the Ballets Russes, linked with Picasso who married ballerina Olga Koklova.[6] The "new thought" composers, including Ferruccio Busoni, Arnold Schoenberg, Alexander Zemlinsky, Jean Sibelius, and Erich Korngold, were represented in the magazine's pages, but Satie and Cocteau tended to dominate the publication, even with less successful shows like *Parade* (1917). Through an analysis of musical works, Davis emphasizes the influence of music-hall and circus on the intellectual elite, described as the slumming practices analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu, as a mix of high and popular culture including fashion, advertising, popular song, literature, painting and musical composition.[7] The pages of *Vanity Fair* are also relevant for understanding one aspect of the relations between France and America. For example, the magazine reported on France's pavilion at the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco (1915) and its rich events programme, featuring Camille Saint-Saëns. This focus on French fashion and musical culture during World War I is not the least interesting feature of this chapter.

With Satie, Cocteau, Diaghilev, and Stravinsky in the picture, it is not surprising to find Coco Chanel added to the mix. Davis dedicates a whole chapter to the couturière who happened to be in an exceptional position during the 1920s, dressing members of the high society while being a part of it, literally in the centre of a network gathering socialites and artists. Davis depicts her in an original light, reminding us that before becoming an advocate for the modern musical style, Gabrielle Chanel débuted as a music-hall singer, an ambition that she quickly gave up in 1908. Later Chanel became a patron for Diaghilev, while his star composer Stravinsky worked on several compositions (*Les Noces*, *Symphonies d'instruments à vent*) at Chanel's villa. The couturière brought chic into fashion while Stravinsky worked at reinforcing the meaning of the neoclassical in music, under the patronage of Chanel who, for example, contributed to the funding of *The Rite of Spring*. Again, Davis' study brilliantly emphasizes the permeability of both worlds, of arts and fashion or high culture and dress; and of music with dance, painting, and decorative arts. From the case of Chanel set in a wider social context, Davis brings the issues of youth as classicism, neoclassic, and chic into question. In the last chapter, she focuses on *Vogue* and its relation to art, including the magazine's coverage of the Ballets Russes and Stravinsky's stay in the USA in 1916, bringing back some figures forgotten from fashion history. In particular, Davis shares endeavours of musical events coverage by writer Jeanne Robert Foster for *Vogue*. The writer reported on the new plays and operas, mixing musical culture with comments on the dresses worn at the plays and concerts by socialites, likewise Misia Sert and Coco Chanel.

To put Davis' book in a wider context, the link between fashion and art usually involves the relation between dress and visual arts. Considered in its craftsmanship or rather its industrial dimensions, fashion has often been studied in its interactions with art, most writings on art and fashion leading to the concept of anti-fashion. Visual artists working through the medium of fashion often stayed away from or in the margins of, the fashion world and the fashion business, advocating a utopian way of life, or a life revolving around a utopian ideal. This lifestyle meant a rejection of the established fashions of the time and of all of their conformist and mercantile features.[8] One of the best examples of this non conformity is embodied by the artist Henry Van de Velde, who made an advance in rejecting the corset in the 1880s, on the premises of hygiene. Van de Velde, who once gravitated in the circles of Misia Sert, wanted to design his life as "total art". Teaching at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Weimar, he created practical objects and dresses. Many other well-known examples of such links between fashion and the avant-garde can be quoted, as the activity of Gustav Klimt, despite the fact that his involvement in creating fashion is still disputed. The Russian avant-garde and the Italian futurists are other well-known examples of those links between fashion and the avant-garde. Through the intellectual and artistic circles present in this study, one can find new insights on the links between established and art-related, utopian fashions. For example, Tristan Tzara discussed the premiere of Stravinsky's new opera *Mavra* in *Vanity Fair*, explaining that the latest fashions could be seen at the showing, as well as a red "robe à poèmes" (poem dress), embroidered with verses, created and worn by Sonia Delaunay herself. Music therefore appears as a possible tool to challenge the boundaries between the established fashion business (even with a flavor of avant-garde as Chanel's then) and confidential, artistic, even alternative and utopian (anti-)fashions. Besides music, scholars working on the links between fashion and visual arts, fashion and dance, on fashion illustration, scholars will find this book valuable. There are also outstanding elements on fashion during World War I, for example on Chanel in the war years and on Amédée Ozenfant's wartime magazine, *L'Elan*, and its interest in fashion. These should lead to interesting further research.

Despite the fact that Davis does not offer actual conclusions in her book, which in some ways accentuates the empirical side of the study, her thesis is that previously unforeseen connections in both spheres of music and fashion do exist, and that these connections were specific to a particular period. The book ends upon a shift, from Poiret's decline to Chanel's absolute dominance of fashion. Echoing the *Vogue* reports, Davis draws a parallel with music. Despite Diaghilev's efforts, the Ballets Russes did decline. This became blatant during the season of 1922, when Stravinsky succeeded with *Les Noces*. This last work epitomizes, for Davis, a turning point in the development of both modernist music and fashion. Eventually, the alliance of art and modernist music parted ways when the Art Deco Exhibition opened in Paris in 1925. It is however tempting to look for similar cases of symbiotic relations between fashion and music. One can think of their interconnection in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially at the parties held at the French Court, but these belonged to a pre-fashion business era. The links between fashion and music from the 1960s onwards are another case that offers blatant connections between both worlds. However, the cultural and fashion industries underwent such dramatic changes in half a century that the comparison seems daunting. The development of further studies in this field remains highly desirable, even if it seems rather uneasy to find close comparison points.

NOTES

[1] Mary Davis, "Chanel, Stravinsky, and Musical Chic," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 431-60.

[2] Radu Stern, *Against Fashion, Clothing as Art, 1850-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004).

[3] For example, the Belgian couturier Norine, who kept strong links with the surrealist movement and René Magritte among others, was married to art patron P.-G. van Hecke. The couple managed Norine couture house and the art Gallery Le Centaure from the 1920s to the 1950s. See Nele Bernheim, "Couture Norine : Avant-Garde Belgian Fashion, 1918-1952," MA Thesis, New York Fashion Institute of Technology, 2006.

[4] Richard Martin, *Cubism and Fashion* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1999).

[5] On Vionnet's collaboration with Thayaht, see also: Melissa Leventon, *Artwear. Fashion and Anti-Fashion* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco/Thames & Hudson, 2005), 57.

[6] On this topic see Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction, Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

[8] Stern, *Against Fashion*, pp. 2-3.

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