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Constriction – Construction, a short history of specialised wearing apparel for athletic activities from the fourteenth century to nineteenth century

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Abstract: During the twentieth century, clothing permits a real freedom of bodily movement. However, when examining past athletic activity, we must take into account the period approach to the body: liberty of movement is at the same time controlled by morality, gestures and clothing. The French term “tenue” initially referred to behaviour, but since the end of the eighteenth century concerns the manner of dressing, and later by extension, the “dignity of conduct”. In the past times concerned with “sporting” activities such as the HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts), physical appearance is affected by rules of etiquette imposed by morality and civility. From the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, each period offers a different overview of the dress standards in relation to the different approaches to corporal identity, and the constriction first necessary for military activities becomes indivisible from the moral and physical construction. As a practitioner of the 21st century, the question raises about our relationship, not only with our bodies but also with past cultures. As demonstrated by some concrete examples, if it is desired to fully approach the ancient practices, it is therefore necessary to also adopt the garment, in the same way as the accessories.

Keywords: constraint, construction, clothing, morality, body, dance, fencing, arming clothes

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, clothing has permitted an incredible freedom of bodily movement. With few exceptions, like structured tight-fitting support garments or stiletto-heeled shoes, we participate in a cult of comfort and convenience. Comfortable everyday wear inspired by sportswear occupies a large place in our wardrobes and is considered as fashionable outside of athletic activities. We find it difficult to adapt to physical constraint, even just thinking about it makes us feel

uncomfortable: we are attached to our freedom of movement. In this context, sports activities generally require special, specifically adapted clothing reflecting the physical liberty that is an integral part of our contemporary culture. New textiles and innovative clothing designs are constantly being created to bring greater ease of movement.

However, when examining athletic activity in the past, we must take into account a very different approach to the body: liberty of movement is at the same time controlled and constrained by morality, gestures and clothing. In considering historical physical activities and also in recreating the practices, it is essential to identify the parameters of the relationship based on constriction and construction that people of the past had with their bodies.

The first subject of this paper is the question of dress standards. The French term *tenue* initially referred to behaviour¹, but since 1798 concerns the manner of dressing, and later by extension, to ‘dignity of conduct’². Today the term describes as much a set of clothes and accessories as the manner of behaving in accordance with etiquette and good manners. The historical connection between garments and the body is illustrated through its combined meanings of behaviour and dress standards. To understand this relationship, an overview from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century presents for each period the dress standards in relation to the different approaches to corporal identity. Understanding *tenue*, the combination of correct comportment and dress has important implications for reconstituting historical activities like dance and martial arts. The second subject discussed here is the manner in which the body is managed through constrictive and constructed wearing apparel, and its social implications.

II. DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF ‘*BONNE TENUE*’

Constricting the body begins at the end of the Middle Ages with the appearance of armour. From the sixteenth century onwards, the term *constriction* signifies the action of reducing the diameter of an object through exerting a circular pressure³. Examples of wearing apparel that use constriction include neckties, garters and corsets. The term is derived from *constrain*, indicating tightening, pressure, cramping but also the notion of hindered and restrained. When speaking of ‘restraining oneself’ it implies a personal voluntary effort to adopt an attitude or perform an action⁴. The general definition of constriction corresponds perfectly to the action of armour on the human body. The

¹ For horse riding during the 16th century, for marines in 1680. ‘tenir’, in *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 2000), vol. 3, p. 3791.

² *Ibid.*.

³ ‘Constriction’, in *Le Littré*, online: <<https://www.littre.org/definition/constriction>> [accessed 15.05.2017].

⁴ ‘Contraindre’, in *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales* (hereafter referred to as CNRTL), online: <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/contraindre>> [accessed 15.05.2017].

breastplate fits tightly to the waist like a corset, the arm and leg defences are moulded to the wearer's body shape, and yet the weight of the complete armour must permit ease of movement. The person wearing armour is necessarily restricted and held in place to a certain degree, yet this constraint is acceptable in view of the physical activities to be carried out. The evolution of the male silhouette is directly linked to the use of armour from the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, when it disappears as a utilitarian object. Wearing armour is in itself a form of bodily constriction, creating an effect on the movements and activities as well as responding to the technical requirements of military or athletic equipment.

A parallel concept to constriction is *construction*, a term applied to a garment that builds a structure around the body, forming specific articulations and divisions related to a range of movements. Wearing armour requires a doublet, which is a constructed garment. The cut of the pattern for a doublet is designed to accommodate only the necessary movements possible when wearing armour. The narrow waist restrains the softer parts of the belly to allow maximum space for movement within the lower breastplate while the chest area is heavily padded to absorb shocks. The upper arm and elbow have full rotational movement though the shoulders are rigid with padding. The doublet, developed as a constructed arming garment goes on to become a visible part of civilian fashion. Wearing constrictive armour requires the functional construction of a padded foundation garment, but when the doublet is adapted for wear by civilians, the construction of the body employs the military stature as a fashion.

Construction has more than a physical effect: both construction and constriction of the body can also refer to a kind of moral construction of society, in which the idea of *bonne tenue* can be seen in the concept of 'the clothes make the man'. We can see how the construction of clothing, influencing how the body is shaped and the overall appearance of a person thus confers a perceived moral judgment based on appearance - a well dressed person, by virtue of their appearance is also assumed to be a morally correct person. All daily activities, at all social levels, are then conditioned by this multilevel view of the body.

II.1. From a unified body to a divided body

Around 1300, men's clothing created a straight silhouette without a clear division between the upper and lower body⁵. The body is treated as a single unit; its joints are concealed in order to maintain a single, harmonious straight vertical line. During the 13th century, a 'straight neck' was mentioned as one of the characteristics of the physically accomplished subject, but the description of a knight remained general, emphasizing overall vigour: "Large, straight, with a well-built body, easy-going in worldly affairs". Strength is the primary attribute, evoking a powerful chest and shoulders. Books about table manners, such as *Le Chatoiment des Dames* from the late

⁵ Bartholeyns, 'Pour une histoire explicative du vêtement', p. 216.

13th century, or even *Le Mesnagier de Paris* at the end of the 14th century, are examples of the reflection of this taste for a harmonious and straight body. Poor posture and elbows on the table were also denounced as inappropriate behaviour while dining. They prescribed restraint and condemned gesticulation. It is still not a question of a physical constriction by the clothing, but more by good morals being used to ‘construct’ the body of a human being as a social and civilized entity through distancing from the status as an ‘animal’.

From the middle of the fourteenth century onwards the technical evolution of armour, the torso is protected by a steel cuirass, which gives it an hourglass shape. In order to avoid injuries caused by the pressure of the iron breastplate against the body, the torso and the waist were protected and shaped by the doublet. In French, a doublet is called a *pourpoint*, from the Latin *perpunctum* indicating piercing by stitching⁶. The English word ‘doublet’ is of French origin, meaning something folded or layered.

This piece, made of several superimposed stuffs, quilted together and which a silk or cotton wadding inserted between, technique from which it takes its name, is in fact the indispensable complement of the armour under which it is worn [...]. The doublet denotes a man-at-arms, the omnipresent and valued figure of medieval society, and the profound transformations that affect the masculine clothes during the 14th century testify to the strength of this model⁷.

Conditioned by these technical elements of doublet construction, as described by Odile Blanc, the men’s silhouette asserts itself. Chronicles dating between 1330 and 1360 testify the complete transformation of the masculine clothing. Ordinary everyday clothes adopt a military style, attested by inventories mentioning ‘arming doublets’ and ‘civilian doublets’⁸. The doublets shape brings about a sexual differentiation in the garment for both men’s and women’s wear, visible in the progressive accentuation through the adjustment of the upper part, which now closely follows the body’s curves. “Focusing on the fitting of the garment to the body, the upheaval of 14th century

⁶ The word ‘pourpoint’ (doublet) comes from *perpunctum*, past participle of the latin *perpungere* (punching). See ‘Pourpoint’, in CNRTL, online: <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/pourpoint>> [accessed 15.05.2017].

⁷ “Cette pièce faite de plusieurs étoffes superposées, piquées⁷ ensemble et entre lesquelles s’insère une bourre de soie ou de coton, fabrication d’où elle tire son nom, est en effet le complément indispensable de l’armure sous laquelle elle se porte [...]. Le pourpoint désigne donc l’homme d’armes, figure omniprésente et valorisée de la société médiévale, et les transformations profondes qui affectent les habits masculins au cours du XIVE siècle témoignent de la force de ce modèle” (English translation by the author). Blanc, ‘Le pourpoint’, p. 1.

⁸ Anthore Baptiste, ‘Entre armure et dentelle’, p. 32.

clothing has made sexual identity more explicit⁹.” The silhouette changes from a unified body shape to one where a clear division is visible between the different parts of the body.

During the first third of the 15th century, men’s garments begin to reinvent the body’s volume by amplifying masculine stature¹⁰: “The garment operates to subtract, to add, to model, making itself sometimes mask, sometimes substitute a constantly reinvented body¹¹”. At this time, armour has evolved and no longer requires the breastplate to have a domed chest shape, but the tight waist is still necessary.

From this time on, the garment imposes a real constraint on the body, and due to this constraint the narrow, constricted waist now constructs the masculine silhouette. Men’s bodies are constrained by the clothes that structure the silhouette. Continually wearing binding garments deforms the body, leaving visible marks on the skin, for example as shown on Saint Sebastian on the frescoes of Lanslevillard in Savoy¹².

II.2. The courtier’s body shape

In the following century, new demands reflect a change in sensitivity. New nobility is established on the effacement of the chivalrous world and etiquette appears, as well as different precepts with regard to the behaviour of the body. A new look appears, focused on the body and its posture. It is the passage from treatises of courtesy to treatises of civility, including the *Treatise of Pious Civility* by Erasmus in 1530; books which detail the new propriety of the body by insisting on the assumption that the attitude reveals a person’s ‘background’.

The period of the Renaissance marks, in Europe, the transition from the Middle Ages to the so-called modern era. It crystallizes a change in the way of living and thinking about mankind and the world. Clothing, considered as the *corps du corps*, is the product of cultural transfers between the different populations and social groups in Western Europe. The courtier, a socio-cultural type that appeared with the rise of the court

⁹ “Portant l’accent sur l’ajustement du vêtement au corps, le bouleversement vestimentaire du XIVe siècle a rendu l’identité sexuelle plus explicite” (English translation by the author). Bartholeyns, ‘L’enjeu du vêtement au Moyen Âge’, p. 251

¹⁰ The masculine silhouette is no longer S-shaped but has an enlarged stature, a slender waist, thin and endless legs, elongated by pointed shoes. Blanc, ‘Pourpoints, gilets et corsets’, p. 112.

¹¹ “Le vêtement intervient pour retrancher, ajouter, modeler, se faisant tantôt masque, tantôt substitut, d’un corps de mode sans cesse réinventé¹¹” (translation from French to English by author). Blanc, *Parades et parure*, p. 73.

¹² Located in Savoy, the frescoes of the Chapel of Lanslevillard illustrate the life of Saint Sebastian. The southern wall shows San Sebastian cured of his wounds, and the body of the saint is painted transparently under his clothes. We can clearly see the mark of the tightening of the waist by the daily wearing of the doublet.

society¹³, is in fashion. He owes himself to being at once a man of nobility and a man-at-arms¹⁴.

Under the influence of Humanism more gracious shapes were preferred to those with emphasis on physical force and prowess. Under the influence of Spanish fashion, clothing expresses both the art of war and elegance, while the popular sixteenth century books of manners recommend restraint: close fitting clothes confer the impression of dignity and nobility.

“The constraint of the Spanish style body, to paraphrase Montaigne, which thus defines the feminine silhouette of fashion, is more widely accepted, to the point of marking the bodies of women and men with the wearing of a stiff black coat until the beginning of the 20th century¹⁵ “. The new, more constricted stature emphasizes the vertical aspects and the arched back. The courtier's clothes are there to help him to be recognized as such, even before he speaks or moves. When books of manners mention clothes, it is no longer about cleanliness or modesty, but more concerned with forms. The garment needs to be adjusted, so that it should fit the body¹⁶. Undeniably, in order to wear perfectly fitting clothing, the posture must also be perfect.

The middle of the 16th century saw the appearance of the first whale boned corsets or stays¹⁷ moulding the chest and the back according to a defined form. The women use corsets “letting themselves be so tightened and tied in the body of their robes, so that they feel very uncomfortable: to show that they have a beautiful waist¹⁸.” It is also the appearance of the “busk¹⁹”, a “whale bone²⁰” that women put “from under their bust, in the middle, to stand more straight²¹”. The Venetian ambassador to France describes,

¹³ A phenomenon which began in the 13th and 14th centuries. Paresys, ‘La prééminence par la distinction des apparences’, pp. 361-377.

¹⁴ Bailbé, ‘Le courtisan au temps d’Henri III et d’Henri IV’, p. 306.

¹⁵ “La contrainte du corps bien espagnolé, pour paraphraser Montaigne qui définit ainsi la silhouette féminine de mode, est acceptée plus largement, au point de marquer le corps des femmes, jusqu’au début du XXe siècle, et celui des hommes avec le port du raide habit noir” (translation from French to English by author). Paresys, ‘Corps, apparences vestimentaires’, n.p.

¹⁶ Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo, ovvero de’ costumi*, 1558 (ed. Scarpa), pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ The pair of stays found in the grave of the Pfaltzgräfin Dorothea Sabine von Neuberg, dead in 1598, is one of the older stays preserved. See Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion*, p. 47 and pp. 112-113.

¹⁸ “(Elles) se laissent tant serrer et estreindre dedans le corps de leur robe, qu’elles en sont tresmal à leur aise : pour montrer qu’elle sont de belle taille” (translation from French to English by author). Henry Estienne, *Deux dialogues du nouveau langage françois italianizé*, p. 54.

¹⁹ “busque” (English translation by the author). Ibid.

²⁰ “os de baleine” (English translation by the author). Henry Estienne, *Deux dialogues du nouveau langage françois italianizé*, vol. I, p. 252.

²¹ “par dessous leur poitrine, au beau milieu, pour se tenir plus droite” (translation from French to English by author). Ibid.

in 1577, the French women at court have “inconceivably narrow waists: they swell out their gowns from the waist downwards by whaleboned stuffs and vertugadins, which increase the elegance of their figures. Over the chemise they wear a corset or bodice, that they call a 'corps pique' which helps to show off the form of the bust”²². Men also had stiff and heavy garments, and doublets were very often reinforced with boning just as were women’s stays²³. Their narrow waistlines were padded to hold their V-shape line, until being exaggerated into the famous “peasecod belly” in the last quarter of the 16th century. From this moment, in reality, clothing no longer follows the shape of the body that it covers but imposes its own. Even for the human body, the geometrized form is privileged.

Stays, collar, shoulder pads, waistline, *hauts-de-chausses*: the garment emphasizes the junctions between the body and the trunk, and the body seems all ‘in limbs’²⁴. Regardless of the discomfort induced by the garment, the constriction imposed on the limbs, at the waist, on the back, it forces the body to conform even more to the construction of the courtier’s figure imposed by sociability. In the degree that man becomes civilised and distant from his original animal state, his body also becomes distant from its natural silhouette.

II.3. The cult of straightness

In the seventeenth century, the trends started in the previous century are systematized. On the one hand, corporeal rectitude is increasingly present in books of pedagogical literature, such as those of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, Madame de Maintenon, and others²⁵. On the other hand, the body’s postures are now technically described in the medical literature as well as in the military or fighting treatises. For example, the posture of the arms and the legs are observed: it is essential to make them relax by holding “them in their natural position without constraint”²⁶. Thus neither the arms nor the legs should be crossed, nor should they be moved about unnecessarily. And the technical treatises on fencing insist on attitude as an element of propriety: “In order for the body to be well situated it must be kept straight and unconstrained with bold action, turn the

²² Bullough, Shelton, and Slavin, *The Subordinated Sex*, p 194.

²³ See the overview of the occidental fashion showing how each generation has used garments to shape itself in the image of its own individual wishes in Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion*.

²⁴ “(Tout) en membres” (English translation by the author). Paresys, ‘Corps, apparences vestimentaires et identités, n.p.

²⁵ The result of a long tradition, the publication of treatises of propriety culminated in the reign of Louis XIV: more than 150 treatises on good manners appeared between 1651 and 1700. See Comtois, *Corps dressé*, p. 2.

²⁶ “en les [tenant] dans leur position naturelle sans contrainte” (translation from French to English by author). Anon., *Traité de la civilité nouvellement dressé d'une maniere exacte*, p. 40. Quoted in Comtois, *Corps dressé*, p. 33.

face towards the adversary and then put the right foot forward in a natural way^{27c}. The use of weapons becomes a true school of civility and self-control. Formalism integrates practice sessions, which have finally become codified performances: for example, blade is not engaged in fencing without being saluted, with these types of reverences becoming extremely codified²⁸.

The upright posture is fostered to avoid at all costs the torso from collapsing. The belly is pushed forward, the lower back arched and the shoulders set back. The shoulders stiffen as the body arches. The exercise must be modest and moderate, for violent movements lack nobleness. The pedagogy of posture would be the guarantee of a mastery of the movement more than it would benefit from it. The exercise consists of repeated positions and not of dynamic displacements. For example, dance serves more to moderate dangerous passions than to provide physical exercise. The pedagogy is made of fixation, blockages. The notion of 'maintaining' makes sense in this scheme. Accordingly, we could hypothesize that the valorisation of controlled gestures using the geometry and clothing on the body - thus schematizing the succession of gestures and postures, as in fencing, dancing or in engravings - has largely contributed to the mechanistic representation²⁹ of the human being³⁰.

Garment construction follows the constraint of the postural requirements of the time. The doublet remains the basic type of attire, which becomes wider at the end of the 17th century and thereafter is called a 'jacket'. The 'justaucorps' made its appearance, worn over a jacket, through this jacket becomes an undergarment. Uncut and without seams at the waist, the *justaucorps* is fitted only by pleats at the back seams, while the sleeves are made according to the shape of the arm and secured on the shoulder blade, forcing the wearer to throw his shoulders back. With time, the jacket is reduced in length and loses its sleeves to become the "gilet" or waistcoat. Men as well as women, still use whalebones for structuring their clothes, to which is added the constraint of a rigid collar as noted in doublets such as the one dated 1650-1665 and conserved at the National Museum of Scotland³¹, or a reinforced torso, like the one preserved at the

²⁷ "Pour que le corps soit bien situé il faut le tenir droit et sans contrainte avec l'action hardie, tourner le visage vers l'adversaire et ensuite avancer le pied droit d'un pas naturel" (translation from French to English by author). Philibert de Latouche, *Les Vrais principes de l'épée seule*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ As Molière caricatures it in the first act (scene 2) of his comedy *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. See Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, p. 179.

²⁹ Mechanism is the belief that living things and being are like complicated machines : they are composed of parts without any intrinsic relationship to each other. The source of thing's activities is not the whole, but in its parts or in an external influence on the parts. See Descarte, *Le Traité de l'homme* (1648), which inspired La Mettrie, *L'Homme machine* (1748).

³⁰ Dubourg Glatigny, and Vérin, *Réduire en art*.

³¹ Doublet, embroidered linen, whalebone, England, ca. 1650-1665, National Museum of Scotland, online: <<http://www.nms-mode.co.uk/embroidered-men-s-doublet/>> [accessed 15.05.2017].

Victoria and Albert Museum, dated 1620-1625³². Whalebone and buckram are frequently used to stiffen these garments, and the doublet serves as a male corset more or less until armour becomes obsolete in the second quarter of the 17th century.

During this period, Francis Glisson³³ advises the wearing of a corset or stays, not only to correct anatomical anomalies but also, or even more importantly, to support each part of the anatomy against collapse. The French term for fully boned stays is *corps*, which translates as body, hence the English use of ‘a pair of bodies’ to indicate the two sides of the stays. This perfectly and practically explains Erasmus’ statement in the sixteenth century of ‘*corps du corps*’ indicating a body shaped garment for use on the body. The English word corset, derived from the French *corps*, can be seen as the ‘body’ that will construct the shape of the human body, while the corset maker is also referred to as a *tailleur de corps*, or maker/shaper of the corset/human body. In an atmosphere of increasingly rigorous morality, wearing a corset is justified for exerting squeezing and constraints in regards to the body. It is a question of referring as much to aesthetics as to duty and honesty. The role of compression is no longer only aesthetic but formative both for the body and the soul, and the wearing of corrective corsets becomes a familiar preventative measure for the children of the dominant classes. Thus, the son of Louis XIV wears “a stitched corset with whale bone, to hold his waist straight³⁴”. Children received adult clothes early³⁵; boys stop wearing stays and dress in adult style men’s clothing, but girls and women continue wearing them, though men have their doublets firmly lined with cardboard to fix the silhouette and hold the jacket³⁶. With the usage of corsets and whale-boned ‘bodies’ for preventative measures, the construction of the body then passes into a state of established constriction - supported as much moral rules as by medical advice. Clothing, by the use of corsets, imposes a physical restriction directly linked to the moral restrictions, a state of mind that the body always has to be the embodiment of.

³² Doublet, leather, silk, linen and whalebone, England, 1620-1625. V&A Museum inv. T.146-1937.

³³ English anatomist and physician, 1599-1677.

³⁴ “un corps piqué de baleines, pour luy tenir la taille ferme” (translation from French to English by author). Aubineau, *Fragments des Mémoires inédites de Dubois*, p. 39.

³⁵ “C'est extraordinairement à l'âge de cinq ou six ans, qu'on change en Europe l'habillement des garçons. On leur ôte alors la robe d'enfance pour les revêtir d'une marque plus virile. On leur fait porter un habit & des culottes.” Jacques Ballexserd, *Dissertation sur l'éducation physique des enfants*, p. 144

³⁶ This can be seen on X-Rays of 17th century clothes at the Victoria and Albert Museum. See North, Tiramani, Braun, Costigliolo and Thornton, *17th-Century Men's Dress Patterns 1600-1630*.

II.4. The body between quest for freedom and virility

Boned stays continued to be worn by girls and boys during the following century³⁷. In the paediatric manuals of the 17th and 18th centuries, “remarks on swaddling clothes made rectitude an implicit and accepted notion”³⁸. In 1767, we can read about the ‘hardness’ of the stays to be worn: “The stays that are given to the boys are not of excessive hardness during the first year, they are then fortified more and more as they grow older”³⁹. Garsault also mentions, in his book about *L'Art du Tailleur*, the stays, which matched the boy's first underpants, “which is laced on the front” with “a button attached to the belt of the pants to support it”⁴⁰. But other voices are raising, denouncing the manner in which, “for the delicate children, were constructed corded or boned stays, which made heavy stays, thick and inflexible, which did not allow the movement of muscles of the spine, contained the waist, and held all the parts in continual pressure”⁴¹.

From childhood to adulthood, the same reflections touch the definition of the correct position. Thus, correctness is important in military discourses of the eighteenth century. Under the influence of Prussia, the army of the 18th century appreciated correctness and jerky movements, showing nervousness and therefore the effectiveness of the troops, a true aesthetic fascination taken up in the French ordinances until the early 1770's⁴². The years 1750-1760 give little space to individual morphology and tend to

³⁷ Child stays, front length 14,6 cm, waist 45,7 cm. Linen, whalebone, silk ribbon, United-States, ca. 1770-1790. Philadelphia Museum, inv. 1988-15-1.

³⁸ “(Les) remarques sur le maillot faisaient de la rectitude une notion implicite et admise” (translation from French to English by author). Vigarello, ‘Posture, espace et pédagogie’, p. 39.

³⁹ “Les corps que l'on donne aux garçons ne sont pas d'une dureté excessive pendant la première année, on les fortifie ensuite de plus en plus à mesure qu'ils avancent en âge” (translation from French to English by author). Joseph Raulin, *Traité de la conservation des enfants*, p. 257.

⁴⁰ “[I] se lace sur le devant” avec “un bouton attaché à la ceinture de la culotte pour la soutenir” (translation from French to English by author). François-Alexandre-Pierre de Garsault, *L'Art du tailleur*, p. 45.

⁴¹ “on construisait pour les enfants les plus tendres, des Corps de cordes ou bien forts en baleine, ce qui faisait des Corps pesans, épais & inflexibles, qui ne permettait point aux muscles de l'épine, de contenir la taille, & retenait toutes les parties dans une pression continuelle” (translation from French to English by author). Etienne Doffémont, *Avis tres-important au public. Sur différentes especes de corps & de ceintures, d'une nouvelle invention*, pp. 10-11.

⁴² Guinier, *L'Honneur du soldat*, (online). In order to reinforce the vigorous and nervous effect of the soldier, he is sometimes even provided with false calves. In England, the ordinance of 1757 shows that “Les soldats et les sous-officiers ont l'obligation de revêtir leurs guêtres avant de s'habiller ; de manière à éviter les plis, un faux mollet y est introduit qui remplit la cavité entre le creux du genou et le mollet”. Mollo, *Trois siècles d'uniformes militaires*, p. 50.

exaggerate the postures. The chest must project, the stomach pulled in, shoulders back and the lower back arched in order to straighten the body⁴³.

From the middle of the 18th century onwards, however, hygienic criticism was increasing, the state of nature was contrasted with the drifts of civilization, and theorization against corporal constriction began to be openly discussed. We can note for example that in the army of the second half of the Enlightenment, correctness is also beginning to be questioned; men such as Baron de Bohan condemn any attempt at perpendicular straightening of the back as strictly contrary to the double curvature of the backbone, and changes were made to the ordinances. His postulates are based on Bohan's study of walking in 1781. In his opinion, the soldier needed to hold his torso not in strictly straightened position but slightly inclined while marching and at ease, thus changing the posture from immobility to dynamic. But it was still considered necessary that the infantryman do exercises for standing up straight⁴⁴. The recruits were accustomed “to carry their heads straight and tall; to stand straight without bending the back, to put the stomach forward, to make the chest protrude, and retract the spine”⁴⁵. But in the treatise, this straight position evolves from a conception where the chest was pushed forward and the belly was held, to a more nuanced notion, finally, where rectitude, always primordial, is now more based on analyses that privileged “anatomy”. Of course, this doesn't mean “freedom” of movement. The soldier becomes something which is moulded, a calculated constraint slowly runs through each part of the body, becomes its master, bends the whole, makes it perpetually available, and this constraint prolongs itself in the automatism of habits; in short, the constraint gives a peasant the “aspect of the soldier”⁴⁶.

Overall, the 18th century *justaucorps* seems to follow this evolution of conception between construction and constriction. It no longer so stiff and as quilted, and seems to give some freedom to the male body, especially at the waist, but the chest is no longer emphasized. Practically the preponderant idea remains that the “more the bodies are well modelled [...], the more they will be able to support the chest, the lower abdomen, & the kidneys, & by a necessary consequence of preventing the leakage of a staggering waist”⁴⁷. So wearing stays by boys, as well as girls is not abandoned, even if is known

⁴³ Guinier, *L'Honneur du soldat*, (online)

⁴⁴ Vigarello, *Le corps redressé*, (online).

⁴⁵ “Plus les Corps sont bien modelés [...], plus ils seront capables de bien soutenir la poitrine, le bas ventre & les reins, & par une conséquence nécessaire de prévenir les fuites d'une taille chancelante” (translation from French to English by author). Ibid.

⁴⁶ “(On a) chassé le paysan”, “[on lui a donné l'] air du soldat” (translation from French to English by author). Ordinance of the 20 march 1764, quoted in Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, (online).

⁴⁷ “Plus les Corps sont bien modelés (...), plus ils seront capables de bien soutenir la poitrine, le bas ventre & les reins, & par une conséquence nécessaire de prévenir les fuites d'une taille

that “squeezed like that, [a human being] will have a short and laborious breath; the dilation of the lung being insufficient”⁴⁸. Among clothing conserved at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, respectively dated 1780 and 1787-1795 and presented in the catalogue *La Mécanique des Dessous*⁴⁹, we realize how quickly ostensibly stiff, stitched and quilted clothes returned to define a well held and geometrically correct masculine silhouette.

Between the above mentioned modifications concerning the relation to the body, and the persistence of the necessity of support, there is still an evolution in the construction of the body. The body is no longer only viewed in an immobile state and the correctness of a staged pose like it was in the seventeenth century. The idea of bodily constriction passes at the same time from aiming for a physical and moral static movement to visible dynamism. The constructed body then becomes capable of momentum, and the constraint remains in order to valorise the rapidity of the body and gestures. Man has a potential for action and his clothing must signify it.

As a result of the new tendency to dynamism and action, during the 19th century the focus is now on the slenderness of the waist, and this becomes the reflection of both the demands of bourgeois for severity and the lightness of dandyism. Brillat-Savarin sees his belly “like a formidable enemy”⁵⁰, and the Viscount de Granville sums up the new trend: “Insist, order, threaten if necessary. Wide shoulders, ample and floating basques, tight belt. That is my rule. It also seems that it is generally practiced around me”⁵¹. The man’s silhouette has an enlarged bust, the effect of which is reinforced by the wide cuffs of the frock coat and the waistcoat, but also the padding is also reminiscent of the medieval doublet, while the waist is tightened so as to enhance the bust and the hips.

The silhouette evolves in the 19th century at the same time as a new world is invented. “The profile is decisively recreated. The physical model of the aristocracy is

chancelante” (translation from French to English by author). Etienne Doffémont, *Avis tres-important au public. Sur différentes especes de corps & de ceintures, d'une nouvelle invention*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ “si pressé, [un être humain] aura une respiration courte & laborieuse ; la dilatation du poumon n'étant pas suffisante⁴⁸ » (translation from French to English by author). Jacques Ballexserd, *Dissertation sur l'education physique des enfants* p. 105.

⁴⁹ Bruna et al., *La mécanique des dessous.*, (online).

⁵⁰ “comme un ennemi redoutable” (translation from French to English by author). Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*. Quoted in Perrot, *Le Corps féminin (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)*, (online).

⁵¹ “Insistez, ordonnez, menacez s'il le faut. Epaules larges, basques ample et flottantes, ceinture étranglée. Voilà ma règle. Il me semble aussi qu'on la pratique assez généralement autour de moi” (translation from French to English by author). Vicomte de Granville, *Histoire du journal la Mode*, quoted in Maignon, *Le Romantisme et la mode*, p. 90.

subverted”⁵². We pass from a masculine silhouette where the rule is a pushed forward belly and pushed back shoulders, a posture seen as suitable to confer “nobility”, this changes to a straight and reinforced bust, with a restrained and compressed belt, and shoulders stuffed with outsized pads. This new type of constriction aims for a construction of a new body illustrating the new “bourgeois” ethic. But actually, Erasmus’ idea of the clothing considered as the *corps du corps* still rules the way people think about their clothes: a necessary constriction to structure the appearance they desire to display.

No matter which period is examined the adage holds true, ‘clothes make the man’, and the body of the human being is inseparable from his clothing. Over the centuries, the dressed body “gives an idea of the capacities of the mind”⁵³. It is put on display, by the constriction and the constraints, as the construction of one’s mind. From the end of the Middle Ages to the 19th century, the link becomes as stronger as clothing illustrates not only good morals but, continually increasing with time, a good physical health. The treatises of civilities as well as the military regulations always suggest adopting the so-called *bonne tenue*, in all the meanings of the term: good posture and therefore the right clothing.

III. FROM GOOD POSTURE / CORRECT CLOTHING TO GOOD PRACTICE

From the end of the Middle Ages to the 19th century, fashion and clothing pass through several waves of evolution directly related to technical innovations in the military and sports (evolution of the armour, fighting technics, etc.). But as these innovations reach ‘civilian’ fashion, we notice that etiquette evolves at the same time. The constriction necessary for military activities becomes indivisible from the moral and physical construction. The silhouette is modelled on the moral precepts that structure society, seeming to swallow up technological necessities to transform them into cultural imperatives.

When viewed in relation to period from the end of the Middle Ages to the 19th century, the practice of physical activities (dance, fencing, horseback riding, etc.), which aim at the experimentation of techniques, the question raises about our relationship, as a practitioner of the 21st century, not only with our bodies but also with past cultures. We will look at some concrete examples to demonstrate this.

⁵² “Le profil est recomposé. Ce qui est décisif. Le modèle physique de l’aristocratie est subverti” (translation from French to English by author). Vigarello, *Le corps redressé*, (online).

⁵³ “[III] donne une idée des dispositions de l’esprit” (translation from French to English by author). Didier Erasme (translation Bonneau), *Savoir-vivre à l’usage des enfants*, p. 29

III.1. The body “armed” for the dance

There is therefore an unusual link between the armour and the feminine corseting, and arming clothing history informs us that the corset originated for men’s fashions. This makes it the perfect illustration of the paradox between constriction and construction that we wish to emphasize here.

In general, wearing a corset is considered negatively by most people. Criticism of corsets occurs from when it was invented in the 16th century⁵⁴, and scholars of the subject even acknowledged in the 18th century “the stays would become useless if (...) the ladies would like to dress their waist for their health, more than for the eyes”⁵⁵. From the beginning, there have been many legends, and we still speak today of broken ribs or perforated organs, but this generally refers to anti-corset hygienist’s and propagandist’s sermons. Everyone, however, seems to agree that it is impossible to breathe correctly while wearing a corset, which is questionable when examining almost three centuries of daily wear for this type of garment, and especially the practice of physical activities of society life.

For centuries, women, in addition their daily activities, have danced, sometimes vigorously, wearing a corset or a pair of stays that modelled posture. How would it be possible to perform Baroque dances without stays? Stays structure the bust and refine the waist while giving it a cone shape, but it also push the shoulders backwards, accentuating the curve of the back and the forward swinging of the chest. Without stays, no good posture! In the middle of the 19th century, the waltz also requires endurance and breath, and women were wearing a corset and a crinoline for dancing.

Historic balls are today an activity practiced by many amateurs, who usually dress in ad hoc outfits for the occasion. For the ladies, the question of the corset is the one that arises first, and it would be interesting, in the near future, to conduct an investigation among the circles of practitioners of these balls in period costume, in order to investigate on practices, but also on physical impressions.

Since this paper is only a first step in this direction, statistical data has not yet been collected, but we were able to question a practitioner of 19th century balls about the associated historical clothing.

This practitioner participates mostly in Second Empire balls, where polkas, mazurkas, gallops, waltzes, quadrilles are danced, choreographed and recreated by the dance

⁵⁴ Fernand Butin reports Ambroise Paré’s words : “De mille filles villageoises, on n'en trouve pas une de bossue, à raison qu'elles n'ont eu le corps astreint et trop serré”. Quoted in Butin, *Considérations hygiéniques sur le corset*, (online).

⁵⁵ “les Corps deviendraient inutiles, si [...] les dames se proposoient plutôt d'habiller leur taille pour leur santé, que pour les yeux” (translation from French to English by author). Etienne Doffémont, *Avis tres-important au public. Sur différentes especes de corps & de ceintures, d'une nouvelle invention.*, p. 6.

teacher and Master of Dance. A ball usually begins at around seven in the evening and ends between midnight and two o'clock in the morning, to which it is necessary to add the preparation time (the corset is one of the garments that is worn from the beginning, not too tight at first to be able to get used to it, to let it take the form of the body, before being able to tighten it just before the ball), then the time to change in 21st century clothes. This makes a total of eight to nine hours wearing the corset for someone who is not accustomed to it in their daily life, including six hours of dancing (each dance representing an average of an hour and a half of non stop movement). The dances in question are fairly distributed between slow and fast, the gallops being the faster, like certain waltzes or polkas ("polka schnell") although the majority are slower. The quadrilles are normally walked, but as a quadrille can last up to eight minutes without stopping, with complex figures, and in fact can be quite physically intense.

From her own experience, the practitioner interviewed said she did not really feel she is wearing a corset. Beyond the aesthetic aspect (taut stomach and slender waist), she even affirms that dancing without a corset hurts her back more than with the corset. During the faster dances she needs perhaps a little longer time to catch her breath, but according to her it does not create difficulties. She explains that she is able to dance during an entire ball without feeling pain with a corset, and by contrast that when she is dancing without a corset, after a certain duration she needs to wear a dorsal belt in order to continue the exercises.

Still, according to this practitioner, the corset keeps the body in a position that is not supposed to hurt her, of course this depends on if the corset measurements are right and if it is well cut, with well positioned bones in order not to compress the body. According to her, a corset must maintain but not compress and the wearer has to feel the construction but not suffer a negative constriction. And when we asked about whether she considers it is the same thing practicing these dances without and with corset, she replied that it is psychologically different for her. Dancing without corsets represents for her the lessons, means being attentive, learning and being in the present. With a corset, this means that she is at a ball, not actually in the present anymore, but rather in a timeless parenthesis, where dancing becomes a pleasure to share. The construction felt by the practitioner through the constriction of the corset helps her to identify different mental states. The structure of the corset helps the posture; the posture helps the practitioner to feel right in the period practice.

III.2. The body "armed" for the *volta*

In European history, there is even a historical dance that can't be danced properly without period stays: the *volta*. This 16th century dance "source of our waltz"⁵⁶ resembles

⁵⁶ "servant d'origine à notre valse" (translation from French to English by author). Desrat, *Dictionnaire de la danse historique*, p. 370.

the *gaillarde*⁵⁷. According to the *Dictionnaire de Trevoux*, it is a dance “in which the man turns several times his lady and helps her to make a jump or cabriole in the air. [...] It is a kind of *gaillarde* that was danced like the *tordion* on a ternary measure and turning the body”⁵⁸. This dance was in fashion in the courts during the second half of the 16th century. It had many detractors. It so shocked the local population that on the last day of March 1542, the Parliament of Provence took a decision “relating to the defence of dancing [...] the *volta*, under pain of whipping”⁵⁹.

Thoinot Arbeau gives a very precise definition and indicates the way to dance it in his *Orchésographie*:

*Quand voudrez tourner, laissés libre la main gauche de la damoiselle, & jetez votre bras gauche sur son dos, en la prenant & serrant de votre main gauche par le faux du corps au dessus de sa hanche droite, & en même instant jetterez votre main droite au dessous de son busq pour l'aider à sauter quand la pousserez devant vous avec votre cuisse gauche. Elle de sa part, mettra sa main droite sur votre dos ou sur votre collet, & mettra sa main gauche sur sa cuisse pour tenir ferme sa cotte ou sa robe, afin que cueillant le vent, elle ne monstre sa chemise ou sa cuisse nue*⁶⁰.

Indeed, as we can see from the painting of a ball at the court of Valois painted by Louis de Caulery at the end of the 16th century⁶¹, or from an anonymous painting of the same period representing Queen Elizabeth I dancing⁶², the main step of the *volta* consists of raising up and turning the partner by holding her with one hand around her waist and with the other one grabbing the lower end of the busk. Thus the dancers have a relatively new bodily proximity in the history of western dance, and the gesture of grasping the busk in the pelvic zone takes on an erotic meaning that can be easily understood. In the film entitled *Elisabeth, the Golden Age*, one of the few contemporary and technically correct performances of this dance, is performed on-screen by Elisabeth “Bess” Throckmorton and Sir Walter Raleigh. Most of the time, in fact, this dance is performed without proper stays, which consequently prevents its good practice. Without stays and a busk, and men can only grab their partner by the waist to lift them. This removes all the bodily proximity that made the success of this dance in the 16th

⁵⁷ Kassing, *History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach*, p. 82.

⁵⁸ “dans laquelle l'homme fait tourner plusieurs fois sa dame et l'aide à faire un saut ou cabriole en l'air. [...] C'est une espèce de *gaillarde* qui se dansait comme le *tordion* sur une mesure ternaire et en tournant le corps”(translation from French to English by author). Desrat, *Dictionnaire de la danse historique*, p. 370.

⁵⁹ “relatif à la défense de danser [...] la volute, sous peine de fouet” (translation from French to English by author). Monteil, *Histoire de France aux cinq derniers siècles*, t. III, , p. 130.

⁶⁰ Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, p. 75.

⁶¹ Louis de Caulery, *Bal à la cour des Valois*, vers 1582, Rennes, musée des Beaux-Arts.

⁶² Anon., *La reine Elisabeth I dansant avec le comte de Leicester*, v. 1580, Penshurst Palace, Kent.

century. A correct experimentation and practise of the *volta* -without a busk and without stays- is impossible. This 16th century dance needs a good body structure, which means a good clothes structure, as it was the norm during the period. The practitioner has to accept the constriction/construction of 16th century stays to be actually able to attempt learning and practising.

III.3. The body armed to move

The necessity of wearing the right clothing for dancing can also be applied to the practice of fighting and fencing. Moreover, although they seem totally opposed, “the arts of war and of grace [...] have long been closely linked”⁶³ and “the Art of Dance has always been recognized as one of the most honest and necessary methods to form the body, and to give it the first and most natural dispositions to every kind of exercise, and among others to those of arms”⁶⁴.

Fencing is seen as a practice to straighten out bodies, an activity that “breaks, unties, clears them and makes them skilful”⁶⁵. Fencing is part of an aristocratic culture of appearing, which unites mastery of gestures to the search for natural behaviour. A double requirement that is found also in the courtier’s civility⁶⁶ and is found in various other arts such as dance and horseback riding⁶⁷. Distinguished by restraint, by the control of movements and the correct position of the limbs, the body of the courtier is opposed to that of the peasant, who has disordered gestures. This conception of gracefulness leads many writers to insist on the need to release the soldier through activities that seem to be effective, such as fencing, racing, dancing or wrestling⁶⁸.

The constriction of the garment and the manner in which it imposes its posture on the practitioner also directly influences breathing, an element that is important in the practice of fencing. The doublet’s slender waist, with the historically correct level above

⁶³ “les arts de guerre et de grâce [...] ont longtemps été étroitement liés” (translation from French to English by author). Jaquet and Kiss, ‘L’expérimentation du geste martial et du geste artistique’, (online).

⁶⁴ “l’Art de la Danse a [...] toujours esté reconnu l’un des plus honneste et plus necessaire à former le corps, et luy donner les premieres et plus naturelles dispositions à toute sorte d’exercice, et entre autres à ceux des armes” (translation from French to English by author). From the *Lettre patente*, 1661, p. 3-4, quoted in *ibid.*, et Kougioumtzoglou-Roucher, *La genèse du vocabulaire de la danse classique au XVIIIe siècle : « La belle danse » (1661-1701)*, vol. 3, p. 63.

⁶⁵ “les débouffe, les dénoue, les dégage et les rend adroits” (translation from French to English by author). Desfugerais, *Mémoire sur différents sujets*, Paris, 1774, quoted in Vigarello, *Le corps redressé*, (online).

⁶⁶ See Castiglione, *Le Livre du Courtisan* et la question de la *sprezzatura*, ou désinvolture nonchalante.

⁶⁷ Guinier, *L’Honneur du soldat.*, (online).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the navel and not at the current lower level on the hips, conditions the level of breathing. The breath does not come from the belly, but more from the pectoral level. The air blown out during the action will not be exhaled in the same way as with a loose garment. The majority of fencing gestures push the breath with the upper body and contracting the stomach area: where, without constraint, we breathe naturally with the belly, the doublet allows helps the breath to move to the chest more naturally.

The fact that modern period dress forces the shoulders back also alters the fencing techniques. Previously, with the practice of the two-handed sword or the sword with the shield, the body was leaning forward, in a dynamic posture where the chest was strained and the shoulders projected towards the opponent. With the new modern fencing, the chest is clear and the rib cage is open, but above all, the arm changes axis, rises and opens, giving the fencer the classic pose that we know today, as we see it illustrated in the watercolors of *L'Ecole des Armes* written by Domenico Angelo, published in 1763⁶⁹.

Here the issue can be addressed of the construction/constriction of the body for many other physical activities. Just as women have practiced fencing while wearing corsets, as evidenced by many photos of the early 20th century for example, they also rode horses while being corseted. It was recognized as necessary to be comfortable while practicing these sport activities, but the corset itself was not seen as a problem: it was only considered that it had to be adapted for the activity. As it can be seen in Garsault's work, with the stays for horseback riding⁷⁰, but also with 19th century models⁷¹; these corsets are shorter than normal, leaving the chest also freer, in addition to the garment called a "summer corset". They are not yet called "sports", but this happens at the very end of the 19th-early 20th century with Ferris and his "Athletic Corset Waist"⁷².

Actually, the great quest for practicality and freedom in the women's wardrobe was not focused on corseting, apart from during the French Revolution and at the beginning of the 20th century, but more on trousers. For horseback riding, cycling, going to the beach, etc. the women did not desire to abandon the corset, but instead sought to wear trousers, a behaviour that men did not accept. Showing a woman's legs and buttocks was considered exceedingly indecent, and it is finally thanks to the bicycle that women were able to appropriate this practical garment, traditionally a symbol of male freedom.

⁶⁹ Domenico, *L'école des armes avec l'explication générale des principales attitudes et positions concernant l'escrime*.

⁷⁰ "Il diffère des autres en ce que le bas du devant est fans grandes basques, & arrondi depuis les petites basques jusqu'à la pointe en A de peur que le bas du corps ne les gêne attendu qu'elles font naturellement pliées en avant fur leur selle de plus, le devant est ordinairement lacé B jusques vers le tiers C : on le fait très-mince de baleines." François-Alexandre-Pierre de Garsault, *L'Art du tailleur*, p. 45.

⁷¹ A corset for horse riding, illustrated in the Harper Bazar in 1888, with a thin waist, but able to be left open some centimeters in the back.

⁷² Or the "Good Sense Corset Bicycle waist" of 1897 by Ferris.

Trousers become a symbol of eroticism and freedom for these corseted women, so much so that they start wearing them even when they are not bicycling, as men were wearing doublets even when they did not have armour.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the past times concerned with “sporting” activities such as the HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts), physical appearance is affected by rules of etiquette imposed by morality and civility. Civility, through bodily restraint, seeks to reach the soul of the honest man since, as Antoine de Courtin indicates, “the body is so closely bound up with the soul [...] that it's true to say that the soul itself quite moves only by the movement of the body”⁷³. The representation of the body in the treaties of civility testifies to the shaping of the modern individual. In order to reconstruct the history of the body, we must take an interest in the immediate world, “a world varying with material conditions, ways of living, exchanging, making objects, a world also changing with culture [because] our gestures [...] are made by collective norms⁷⁴”, whether it be the way of walking, playing, training, etc. Several constraints codify the behaviour and regulate the maintenance, the expression and, of course, the clothing.

European Historical Martial Arts, “commonly called HEMA by users, are a form of living history, aiming to re-create gestures and martial techniques that could have existed in the European area”⁷⁵. The notion of gesture is important, as Daniel Jaquet and Dora Kiss have pointed out, in terms of fencing and dance⁷⁶, and deserves special attention in practice. In this “process of deconstruction-reconstruction of the gesture”⁷⁷, some HEMA practitioners reject competition, for example, because it risks “spoiling” recreated gestures⁷⁸. It is interesting to note that these gestures can also be considered “spoiled” by a non-adapted outfit. It seems clear that “the kinaesthetic sensation [...]

⁷³ “le corps est si étroitement lié à l'âme, [...] qu'il est vrai de dire que l'âme elle-même ne se meut presque que par le mouvement du corps” (translation from French to English by author). Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens*, p. 97.

Quoted in Comtois, *Corps dressé*, p. 24.

⁷⁴ “un monde variant avec les conditions matérielles, les manières d'habiter, celles d'assurer les échanges, de fabriquer les objets, [...] un monde variant avec la culture aussi (car) nos gestes (...) sont fabriqués par les normes collectives” (translation from French to English by author). Corbin, Courtine and Vigarello, *Histoire du corps*, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁷⁵ “appelés couramment AMHE par les usagers, sont une forme d'histoire vivante, visant à re-créer des gestes et des techniques martiales ayant pu exister dans l'aire européenne” (translation from French to English by author). Tuailon Demésy, ‘Les re-créations de gestes martiaux’, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Jaquet and Kiss, ‘L'expérimentation du geste martial et du geste artistique’, (online).

⁷⁷ “processus de déconstruction-reconstruction du geste” (translation from French to English by author). Tuailon Demésy, ‘Les re-créations de gestes martiaux’, p. 34.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

exclusively peculiar to the person who feels it”⁷⁹, according to Guilemette Bolens, is necessarily different according to whether one wears a contemporary garment adapted to the sporting practice, or a garment of the time of the activity practiced. Consequently, “the amplitude, the extension or the speed of a gesture”⁸⁰ will also be different. If it is desired to fully approach the ancient practices, it is therefore necessary to also adopt the garment, in the same way as the accessories.

All this depends of course on the approach of each practitioner and the objective of the practice. For a simple physical training, the garment will not matter much since it will be above all the body being tested by physical effort. But when it comes to “experimentation”, we need to experiment on both gesture and mind of the practitioner of the past. To test this, we need to accept the constriction/construction of the body with the correct clothing, to experience the right posture. We think it more correct to adopt the correct clothing, allowing the good practice and the experimentation of the right sensations.

Everyone often agrees that in the practice of medieval fencing, for example, a reconstructed weapon must be in accordance with the characteristics of period and technique for correct practice and effective research in this domain. On the other hand, it is often thought that the clothing doesn’t need to be as precise as the weapon, armour, etc. This is often because we are afraid to be constrained, to be held tight, to be hindered in during practice. We forget that for centuries people have moved, practiced, and so on, wearing clothes that we see today as binding. Proof that these clothes had to be “practical” and not “disabling”, and that if others did it in the past without suffering beyond measure, we can just as well experience it without fear today.

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