

MARIANO FORTUNY

THE HOUSE AND THE FABRIC¹

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Draped in the background of the Fortuny family history is, for the most part, fabric. One could start by discussing the tent obtained by Mariano Fortuny Marsal, father of the very Mariano Fortuny Madrazo considered in this text, when he went to live in Morocco [fig. 1]. The Barcelona council had posted him to Rome in 1859, in order to ‘create a record of the Catalan people’s participation in an endeavour of such national character’, as María de los Santos García Felguera has noted. This endeavour was the Hispano-Moroccan War, and the task was to paint four large and three medium-sized canvases “of the most memorable events of the great struggle”². Fortuny accepts the proposal, and he requests for his trip, as well as an assistant, ‘spectacles, a tent, four woollen blankets for keeping myself and my assistant warm, a couple of folding chairs, a small table’. Charles Yriarte, who accompanied him, says that instead of living in a palace ‘as beautiful as the Alhambra’, he preferred ‘to mix with the Africans and go to the places they would get together, dressed as one of them, filling sketchbooks with notes in pencil and watercolour, which he would go on to use for the rest of his life’. ‘We offered Fortuny hospitality’, he writes, ‘but what he needed was the cubbyholes where the defeated would get together, an impression of the street, the spectacle of oriental life, its most characteristic goings-on. During his stay in the city he lived outdoors, busy collecting the details which would help him when painting his first important canvases’. The painter’s interests didn’t necessarily seem strange to the chronicler. The text in which he gathers these observations, amongst others, was published in 1886 and is called *Memories of Morocco*, but it was originally titled *Sous la tente*³.



Fig 1.
Our tent, watercolour and ink, Museu Comarcal de Reus.

² María de los Santos García Felguera, “¡Matad a todos los testigos! Contra la pintura de Historia”, *Anales de Historia del Arte*, n.º. 3, Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 1991-1992, pp. 261-276. For this episode of his biography, see also Carlos González López y Montserrat Martí Ayxelá, *Mariano Fortuny Marsal*, Barcelona, Ediciones Catalanas S.A., 1989, I, pp. 32 and ss.

³ Charles Yriarte, *Sous la tente. Souvenirs du Maroc. Récits de guerre et de voyage*, Paris, Morizot, 1863. Some of his impressions can also be found in Charles Yriarte, *Fortuny*, Paris, Librairie de l'Art, 1886, p. 8.



Fig 2.
The Fortuny y Madrazo Family and a group of friends
in the gardens of their house in Rome, c. 1873-1874.
Photograph. Fortuny Museum, Venice.

⁴ See Carlos González López and Montserrat Martí Ayxelá *Op. cit.* II, “Óleos y acuarelas. Temas Orientales”, pp. 34 and ss.

⁵ Charles Yriarte *Fortuny... Op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

In Morocco, Fortuny Marsal painted many tents⁴ and, when back in Rome, he installed one in his garden [fig. 2]. He didn't manage to finish the gigantic canvas of the ‘Battle of Tétouan’, which measured nine metres by three, so he kept it for himself. His desire to have it displayed impelled him to move into a larger work-space, in 1863. There are images of that place, in which the photographer captures how the walls and the floor, the entire space, were completely covered in fabric. Yriarte, who saw it, says “Les murs nus lui font horreur, Fortuny couvre tout l’atelier de brillantes étoffes”⁵. There is material strewn over the chairs, possible arrangements for paintings. And the human figures are tiny, some barely visible due to the overabundance of fabrics covering them: from the subject, laying on the floor, being painted - perhaps the model for *Dead Kabyle* of 1876 - to the person standing on the right, who, incongruously, covers her head in a closed space [fig. 3].



Fig 3.
Fortuny Marsal's workshop in Rome, 1872.

THE HOUSE

His wife, Cecilia Madrazo, was a great collector of fabrics. Henri Régner, chronicler of Venetian life of the late-19th and early-20th Centuries, describes her: “Madame Fortuny would confess, all the time, of her love of antique fabrics, for even the tiniest remnant thereof, escaped from the ravages of time, evokes its splendour intact. She made her first acquisition in Spain: an antique velvet, whose purple with blood-red undertones is decorated with detonated grenades. This was the first of many acquisitions, and she gradually accumulated a marvellous collection”⁶. It was a collection full of velvets, which fascinated Régner, such as “an admirable velvet from the 15th Century, in dark blue, decorated with exquisite arabesque prints; a velvet in a strange blue, muted, deep and pure, like the very suit of the night itself”. He also tells of “heavy velvets from Venice, Genoa, from the East, sumptuous and delicate, spectacular or more plain, with vast foliages, with figures or leaves, velvets which perhaps dressed doges or caliphs; behold the brocades in powerful tones, the silks with subtle nuances; behold the decorations of the church and the adornments of the court [...]; some evoke the form of the bodies that wore them, others in long or broad pieces, some but scraps, in minimal fragments; and all of that, with the friction of invisible wings, swooping together, piling up, in the large room, getting darker and darker as the night draws in”⁷.



Fig 4.
Cecilia Madrazo and María Luisa Fortuny Madrazo in the Palazzo Martinengo, Venice.

6 Henri de Régner, *La altana. La vida veneciana*, Editorial Cabaret Voltaire, 2011, p. 117.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119; I have corrected Geneva to Genoa, due to an error in the original translation.

8 For more regarding Cecilia Madrazo's collection of fabrics see Eloy Martínez de la Pera Celada in *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo: inspiraciones. Catálogo de la exposición celebrada en el Museo del Traje*, Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, 2010, pp. 20-21.

9 Edgar Allan Poe, “Filosofía del moblaje”, in *Ensayos y críticas*, Madrid, Alianza ed., 1973, p. 214.



Fig 5.
Cecilia Madrazo and María Luisa Fortuny Madrazo in the Palazzo Martinengo, Venice.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “El interior. La huella”, *El libro de los pasajes*, Madrid, Akal, 2005, p. 244.

¹¹ Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, “Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme”, in *Archives d’anthropologie criminelle de Médecine légale et de psychologie normale et pathologique*, t. XXIII, Ed. Masson et Cie, Paris, 1908, pp. 439-470.

¹² I have not found references to this kind of decorative element in Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs. Décoration intérieure de la maison*, Paris, Renouard, 1881; Henry Havard, *L’art dans la maison (grammaire de l’ameublement)*, Paris, Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1884 and Spire Blondel, *Grammaire de curiosité. L’art intime et le gout en France*, Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1884.



Fig 6.
Mariano Fortuny Madrazo, Scorcio alla Misericordia, 1900.

Piles of fabric, again. Cecilia Madrazo’s passion undoubtedly inspired the staging of her death⁸, prepared by her son: a tribute in which the corpse is bundled and wrapped in that which she held such esteem [fig. 4]. The fondness for fabrics was, in the 19th Century, a widespread infatuation. Poe associated it with Spanishness itself: he wrote that the abundance of curtains in Spain “suits this nation of executioners”⁹. Benjamin, extrapolating the spirit in the same way, but rather the spirit of the times, wrote about a house on the Rue d’Anjou in Paris, describing its adornments with a gloss: in 1860 it contained “rugs, portières, mantling, double curtains”, and he claimed that “the age of caves has been succeeded by the age of drapes”¹⁰. Being a female infatuation, it would be studied by Gaëtan de Clérambault, Lacan’s teacher, in both parts of his *Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme*, resulting from the diagnoses of women possessed by the unstoppable and forbidden passion of touching stolen fabrics¹¹.

In the photo of Cecilia Madrazo sitting in the hall of the Palazzo Martinengo in Venice, the fabric hanging on the ceiling is somewhat enigmatic [fig. 5]. She lived there from 1888, not only with her children but also with the familiar piles of material that can be seen in the background. Bearing in mind that this ceiling fabric is not mentioned in any of the three famous texts that formalise the grammar of decoration in the second half of the 19th century, it would appear to be subverting the rules and principles, the norms¹². Fabrics are not usually arranged like this in interiors, as if they formed a canopy, looming over the room in its height.



Fig 7.
James Lee Byars does the Holy Ghost, Venice, 1975.



Fig 8.
El Anatsui, *Palazzo Fortuny*, Venice, 2007.

Perhaps it can be considered a manifestation of the Venetian ‘textile culture’, that microcosm of textiles of which Marcel Proust speaks: “palaces covered up, just like a sultan’s wife, in veils of chiselled stonework”¹³. Mariano Fortuny Madrazo, in some of his superb panoramic photos, captured this fabric-draped image of the city, such as in the image of the Scorcio alla Misericordia in which the clothes, hung out to dry, upholster the houses’ façades [fig. 6]. Many artists have elaborated on this perception. In 1975, the Biennale opened with ‘James Lee Byars does the Holy Ghost’, the unfolding of an enormous sheet in the Piazza de San Marco [fig. 7]; and in 2007 El Anatsui hung a huge curtain or tapestry made of tin scraps, but with the appearance of fabric, in the façade of what is now known as the Palazzo Fortuny, the very Palazzo degli Orfei in which Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo would live when he left the family home [fig. 8].

The ceiling fabric gives the room a certain theatrical appearance which should not be overlooked, given the artist’s set designs for *Tristan and Isolde* in the Scala de Milán, or the work he carried out for the Countess of Béarn’s theatre¹⁴ [fig. 9].



Fig 9.
Mariano Fortuny Madrazo, design for *Tristan and Isolde* in La Scala, Milan, 1901, second act.

¹³ Marcel Proust, Cfr. in *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo: inspiraciones... Op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁴ For more regarding his work as a theatrical designer, see María del Mar Nicolás, *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, entre la modernidad y la tradición*, Madrid, Fundación Universitaria Española, 2007. For Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo’s twentieth century decorative projects which he tested first in the Venice Lido and in the Spanish pavilion in the Venice Biennale, and which he would later repeat - in which instead of papering the walls or covering them with fabric in the conventional way, he used enormous curtains hanging from ceiling-mounted rails - see Guillermo de Osma, *Mariano Fortuny: His Life and Work*, London, Aurum Press, 1980, pp. 155-156.



Fig 10.
6. Boucher, *Odalisca*, 1745.



Fig 11.
Francesco Guardi and Giovanni Antonio Guardi, *Scene in a harem*, 1742-1743.

15 Charles Yriarte, *Fortuny... op. cit.*, p. 26. Ángel González García has highlighted the compositional functions of the hanging material in the paintings of David. See 'Algunos avisos urgentes sobre decoración de interiores y coleccionismo' in *Roma en cuatro pasos seguido de Algunos avisos urgentes sobre decoración de interiores y coleccionismo*, Madrid, Ediciones Asimétricas, 2011, pp. 84-85.

16 Regarding the early formation of Fortuny y Madrazo in Paris and his link with the Eastern painters, see the thesis by María del Mar Nicolás, *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, entre la modernidad y la tradición... Op. cit.*, and her text in *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo: inspiraciones... op. cit.*

Fabric suspended in the air, on the other hand, does appear frequently in painting. Yriarte describes it, referring to one of his father's paintings (namely 'Réception d'un modèle à l'Académie'), as follows: the scene takes place in the palace of the Austrian embassy in Rome, in which 'A la hauteur des chapiteaux des colonnes, pour ajouter encore à la richesse, il a laissé voltiger dans l'air, comme le'eût faire un décorateur pour une fête, des draperies splendides qui viennent s'attacher aux fûts'¹⁵. This image is very frequent in oriental-themed painting of the 18th Century, such as Boucher's *Odalisque* [fig. 10] or the Guardis' harem scenes, to name but two well-known examples [fig. 11]. It is more like an artifice - an extension of the classic curtain, perhaps - than an imitation of reality.

The decorating of the Palazzo Martinengo would have brought to life, perhaps, a pictorial fantasy related with the Orient. When Madrazo's widow and their children moved to Venice, that which had only been visible in paintings became real¹⁶. This is an interesting point - paintings can in fact be nourishment for domestic interiors, not just illustrations thereof. Mariano Fortuny, in his own Palazzo Orfei, also hung fabrics from the ceiling of his study and, furthermore, he painted it this way [fig. 12].



Fig 12.
Fortuny Madrazo, interior of the Palazzo Orfei, Fortuny Museum, Venice.

To rejoin one of the trails we were following beforehand, a fabric hanging from the ceiling evokes the tent. In the Madrazos' house in Venice, the ceiling fabric functions as an indoor tent. There would have been one of the Arabian tents which his father had so adored, and which many artists and architects of the 19th Century had appreciated. There are many texts dedicated to this shelter, essentially ephemeral, primordial, portable, anonymous and universal, no architect required. The writer Pietro Selvatico, for instance, took the concept to Venice. In his city guidebook, when writing at length on the origin of the pointed arch, he stated that this form derived from the nomadic architecture of the Arab peoples, particularly their tents. In the façade of St Mark's Basilica, he also observes how the "arco inflesso si piega appunto a guisa della tenda araba"¹⁷.

Bringing the tent indoors creates an interior which evokes the exterior. The covered street which reappears in painting – this time as a recording of reality – has entered the house. They are the fabrics which offer protection from the sun, in streets and patios in southern cities, as can be seen in the *Jewish Wedding* of Delacroix [fig. 13] or Francesco Ballesio's *Carpet Merchant*, or in the visions of the 19th Century travelling English painters such as Robert Talbot Kelly or William Prinsep [fig. 14].



Fig 13.
Delacroix, *Jewish Wedding in Morocco*,
1837-41.



Fig 14.
Robert Talbot Kelly, *Refreshments in an Arab street*, 1902.

¹⁷ Pietro Selvatico Estense, *Sulla architettura e sulla escultura in Venezia*, Venezia, Paolo Ripamonti Carpano, 1847, p. 95 y 246. For more 19th century texts on tents, see the multiple references offered by Gregory Cowan, *Nomadology in Architecture. Ephemerality, Movement and Collaboration* (2002) <http://gregory.cowan.com/Nomadology/>

18 Marcel Proust, *A la sombra de las muchachas en flor*, Madrid, Alianza, 1987, pp. 536-537.

19 Guillermo de Osma, *Op. cit.*, p. 20. On p. 86 he makes reference to the idea that Fortuny's dresses are painters' dresses. He also analyses the influences of painters like Albert Moore, Frederick Leighton, Edward Burne Jones, Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema and William Godward.

20 Vid. María del Mar Nicolás, *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo... Op. cit.*, pp. 112-113: The motifs on Fortuny's fabrics all have a print; that is, those fabrics "whose colour decoration does not come from the weaving of threads, but rather resulting from the focussed application of one or several colours on normally monochromatic materials".

21 Guillermo de Osma, *Op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

Mariano Fortuny Madrazo would have been capable of more than just creating and bringing to life fabrics which, until that point, had only existed in the artistic territory of the interiors that he decorated. He did the same for dresses which had only been seen in paintings. Proust believed the same: Elstir, to be exact, tells Albertina, regarding the fabrics she had so longed to see, that 'one used only to be able to see them in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of the old churches'. However, 'I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has rediscovered the secret of the craft, and that in a few years' time women will be able to parade around, and better still to sit at home, in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned with Oriental drawings for her Patrician daughters.¹⁸ Indeed, before painting the fabrics that he used in his dresses, Fortuny painted those which could be seen in the paintings he copied, by Tiepolo, Rubens, Velazquez, Carpaccio, Titian and Tintoretto. The Delphos gown, which I shall return to shortly, is a painter's dress¹⁹. Because of this, and also because of the techniques used for decorative motifs, such as printmaking, a pictorial technique²⁰. As a painter, furthermore, Fortuny knows the female body, and so he is well positioned to create the ideal, rational dress which would be promoted, from the 19th Century onwards, by groups such as the National Health Society in England²¹.

With the ceiling fabric, and the sensation of the outdoors that it evokes, the inhabitants of the Palazzo Martinengo were perhaps making up for the secluded nature of their residence. It is curious to note how the photographic and verbal testimonies of the time, referring to life between these walls, always suggest enclosure, a life very much led indoors. The photo of the patio, for example, captures a soulless place; better to stay inside than venture out. Again,

this is what Henri de Régnier insists. He speaks of the ‘strictly closed way of life therein’, and of ‘a particularly sedentary life.’ Regarding Mrs. Fortuny and her daughter, he says that ‘they barely leave the palace. Do they not even go down to the interior patio that I saw upon entering, where, on the damp slabs, melancholic pigeons coo melancholically?’²² The folds of the fabric, those which I have already mentioned, would ripple on the surface, and this movement would also enliven the stillness of the isolated life in the room. Fabric, in many of its forms (curtains, drapes) is a dynamic element of interior decoration. Mario Praz, who has discussed this topic at length, expresses this when he describes the famous watercolour of the living room of the Royal Palace of Naples, during the reign of Murat, and which was in his collection: he speaks of the ‘numerous and undulating folds of the satin, which made up the oriental-style curtain in the entrance of the room’. He says how that movement is lost in the painting: ‘the drapes are poised and motionless in the room’s watercolour.’²³

On the other hand, an indoor tent creates an interior in which contact with fabric is more intense. The sensation, again similar to that which is provoked in many oriental-themed paintings, such as in Constant’s odalisques, is of a textile shelter, the proximity of fabric and skin, and heat. The parallel between fabric and skin has, again for Mario Praz, decorative effects, and this is how he brings together the impressions of those who visited Carolina Murat in the chamber of the aforementioned Royal Palace, a chamber ‘furnished with exquisite taste; draped in white satin, and the folds of the delicate silken texture harmonised admirably with the white and pink of the sovereign herself’²⁴. Dressing the house’s ceiling, as well as its walls, windows and floor, makes the idea (also noted by Benjamin) of a kind of cover become clearer,

²² Henri de Régnier, *Op. cit.*, p. 117.

²³ Mario Praz, *Historia ilustrada de la decoración. Los interiores desde Pompeya al siglo XX*, Barcelona, Noguer, 1965, p. 42.

²⁴ Mario Praz, *Ibid.*

associated with the need to invent decorative artifices. ‘Covers and protectors were invented, cases and holders, to such an extent that everyday objects barely left any trace’²⁵. Fortuny Madrazo’s dresses are also covers, but for the body.

If the indoor tent suggests anything, it is the non-tectonic condition of the weight-bearing wall hangings: in Fortuny’s interiors, walls and ceilings are fabric. This is why the Palazzo Martinengo could also be considered the embodiment of another kind of ‘textile culture’, in addition to the Venetian one. This was what Gottfried Semper claimed, the writer who, in the mid 19th Century, proposed that architecture’s origins lay in textiles. If for Semper the ‘true essence’ of architecture is not tectonic, but rather the delimitation of space, what this leads to, and what I have been building up to, is the non-weight-bearing objectification of walls. It would suppose, therefore, a highlighting of the objectification in all limits, starting with the floor (the carpet), continuing to the wall (the curtain, the tapestry), and ending at the ceiling. Let us leave the floor, for now, and the ceiling, which we have already discussed, and let us consider the wall for a moment. Here is the curtain, which, partly, supposes the presence of the fold and its extension (again, suggested in Fortuny’s dresses). The curtain is division, it encloses spaces, but also, as in the case of Fortuny, the wall is a fold which functions as a backdrop upon which paintings are hung, upon which the models are situated. As María del Mar Nicolás has shown, it was something which was used in different interior design projects, such as the decoration of Consuelo Vanderbilt and Dina Galli’s luxurious houses, or the games room at the Hotel Excelsior, as well as proposals for museums²⁶.

²⁵ Mario Praz, *Op. cit.*, p. 24. Vid. Walter Benjamin, “El interior. La huella”, *Op. cit.*, p. 239.

²⁶ María del Mar Nicolás, *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo... Op. cit.*, p. 71.



Fig 15.
Mariano Fortuny Marsal, *The painter's children in the Japanese room*, 1874.

On the wall, along with the curtain, is the tapestry. Semper also spoke about their relationship: “The tapestry was still the wall, the visible delimitation of space. The exterior walls behind the tapestry, often very solid, were necessary for other purposes that had nothing to do with the concept of space, but rather security, resistance, more durability and other similar things”²⁷. For Mariano Fortuny Madrazo, that which we could call the ‘primary or founding tapestry’ would be the first portrait of his father, a charming painting made for his grandfather Federico de Madrazo, passed on to his mother Cecilia and then on to him and, finally, following his wishes, it was donated to the Prado Museum by his wife Henriette²⁸ [fig. 15, 16].

In this painting we see an already familiar ambiguity between the interior and the exterior, which can be seen even more clearly when contrasting the final version with the still-preserved previous drawings, in which the colocasia plants are in an indoor/outdoor setting, impossible to specify [fig. 17]. And we also find a kind of decoration which is derived from and inherently bound to woven forms: there are butterflies on branches which give the wall a lightness and which would reveal their true non-tectonic condition, their condition as a place for imagination and fantasy, widely used as a decorative resource in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century²⁹.



Fig 16.
Mariano Fortuny Madrazo and his mother.



Fig 17.
Federico Madrazo Marsal, *Preliminary sketches for The painter's children in the Japanese room*, 1874.

²⁷ Giovanni Fanelli and Roberto Gargiani, *El principio de revestimiento*, Madrid, Akal, 1999, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ José Luis Díez, “Los hijos del pintor en el salón japonés”, in *El siglo XIX en el Prado*, Madrid, 2007, pp. 308-314. See also Francisco Javier Pérez Rojas, “Pensemos que todo empezó en el salón japonés”, in *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo: inspiraciones... Op. cit.*

²⁹ The images that Fortuny places upon the material in the background of this painting have nothing to do with the structure of the fabric. We could say that they are ‘anti-materialist’ images radically Semperian or Rieglian; essentially artistic. In this sense we would have to defer to Riegl: Semper “wouldn’t have wanted the free creative will of the artist to be replaced by a purely mechanical and material imitative impulse”. *Op. cit.*, p. 9. From among these light and dreamy tapestries, I have selected those from the apartment of Fritz Land and his wife Thea von Harbou, actress and writer, author of *The Indian Tomb* and scriptwriter of *Metropolis* and *Doctor Mabuse*.



Fig 18.
Loos, interior of his house on Giselastrasse 3, 1903.

30 Giovanni Fanelli y Roberto Gargiani, *Op. cit.*, p. 7. This key principal in Semperian theory, which refutes that form derives from technique, reappears in history of art theories and in the Viennese architectural culture from Riegl to Hans Seldmayr, and it goes through texts and work by Adolf Loos, Berlage y Otto Wagner.

31 Adolf Loos, "El principio del revestimiento", en *Escritos I (1897-1909)*, Madrid, El Croquis ed., 1993, pp. 151-157. Benedetto Gravagnuolo *Adolf Loos. Teoría y obras*, Madrid, Nerea, 1988, p. 50.

32 Giovanni Fanelli and Roberto Gargiani, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

With tapestry, we return to Semper's 'materialism' and to those who, using this as their starting point, continue the tradition which postulates the separation of cladding and architectural structure, the myth of a space-delimiting covering, whose main feature is lightness and to which the structure is subordinated, being a mere support³⁰. This covering could be fabric: in *The Principle of Cladding* Loos paraphrases, point by point, Semper's thesis. The first task of the architect is to create warm and cosy spaces through the use of rugs on the floor and on the walls³¹ his wife Lina's bedroom, at number 3 Giselastrasse in Vienna in 1903, would be the perfect materialization [fig. 18]. The second task is to invent the structure which keeps these textile elements in their correct position. 'And this is how, following these steps, man has learnt how to build. At first, it was cladding.' In the living room of the same building at number 3 Giselastrasse, the lowered ceiling around the fireplace is achieved by using small, false wooden rafters and nailed shafts, with white linen sails hanging between them³² [fig. 19].



Fig 19.
Loos, interior of his house on Giselastrasse 3, 1903.

THE DRESS

Semper also pointed out that ‘in all Germanic languages, the word ‘wall’ (*Wand*) has the same root and largely the same meaning as ‘clothing, clothes’ (*Gewand*), which recalls the ancient origin of its meaning, i.e. the closing of a space.’ From these words we can deduce, paraphrasing Horace, a definition of clothes as architecture, as an essential living space³³.

These clothes are also seen in painting: the kind of clothes that cover, again, so many characters in oriental-themed pictures, clothes that give shelter³⁴. They are also in Gaëtan de Clerambault’s photographs of Moroccan women completely covered in fabrics, making apparently meaningless gestures, unfolding – in the words of Aurora Fernández Polanco – an enigmatic “mimicry of drapes” [fig. 20]. We could consider their dresses as the minimal tent. Or also as a clothes-house, following James Lee Byars and his ‘Dress for 500’, a snaking fabric worn by five hundred people in New York City in 1968: the movement of the piece and the action shares a certain nomadism with the tent, as well as the portability of the shelter. It would also be the minimal illustration of the words of Bachelard in ‘Poetics of Space’: “All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home”³⁵. And is there any space more closely inhabited than that which our clothes give to us?³⁶



Fig 20.
Photograph taken by Gaëtan de Clerambault.

³³ Giovanni Fanelli and Roberto Gargiani, *Op. cit.*, p. 262. I am not referring here to the Semperian connection between clothing and architecture, which takes as a starting point the ambiguity of the German term *Bekleidung*, that which “argues for the strong yet ambivalent analogy between covering the body with a dress and covering a building with textile-derived adornment”. For more on this, see Joseph Rykwert, “Al principio fue la guirnalda y el nudo”, *Arquitecturas Bis* 10 (1975), p. 15.

³⁴ Two examples: *Fête du Prophète au cimetière de Blidah*, by Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1900) and *Fumée d’ambre gris*, by John Singer Sargent (1880).

³⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965, p. 28.

³⁶ There is another minimal delimitation of the inhabited space that is worthy of consideration and deeper exploration, another space in which the relation between inhabitation, the body, and fabric is staged, and which was also made public in representations of 19th Century interiors: the bed. Not the canopy bed, that would add little to the ideas of delimitation essential to spaces related with tents, but rather the unmade bed. The beds in the paintings of Delacroix and Menzel, beds which, as Roberto Calasso says, create the marvel of ‘the absence of the figure and at the same time the imprint of bodies’. See Roberto Calasso, *La folie Baudelaire*, Madrid, Anagrama, 2011, p. 149.

37 Marcel Proust, *En busca del tiempo perdido. Por el camino de Swann*. Madrid, Alianza ed., 1996, p. 166.

The peculiarity of Fortuny's Delphos gown is the continuity of the fabric. It is an anti-corset dress. To appreciate the difference, it is worth reading the description of the corseted body in Marcel Proust's character of Odette: "[...] as for her figure – and she was admirably built – it was impossible to make out its continuity (on account of the fashion then prevailing, and in spite of her being one of the best-dressed women in Paris) so much did the corsage, jutting out as though over an imaginary stomach, and ending in a sharp point, beneath which bulged out the balloon of her double skirts, give a woman the appearance of being composed of different sections badly fitted together; to such an extent did the frills, the flounces, the inner bodice follow quite independently, according to the whim of their designer or the consistency of their material, the line which led them to the bows, the festoons of lace, the fringes of dangling jet beads, or carried them along the bust, but nowhere attached themselves to the living creature, who, according to the architecture of their fripperies drew them towards or away from their own, found herself either strait-laced to suffocation or else completely buried"³⁷. Fortuny's dresses allow us to admire the body in a way which Odette's dresses preclude: they allow the body to be admired in all its continuity. A continuity which free-thinking women like Eleonora Duse, Sarah Bernhardt or Isadora Duncan permitted themselves to enjoy; the dress which gave Hartley's Hilda the freedom to dance, and fly.

It is also possible here to be swept along again by some derivations of Semper's reasoning, in terms of the textile roots of architecture. Fortuny's Delphos gown would be the textile version that Adolf Loos was proposing for buildings, a covering without the sensation of being sewed in; a plaster-like covering, which could be understood as a continuous surface, without stitches. A seamless covering, perhaps even holy, if we think about the most characteristic seamless garment, Christ's holy tunic. "Plaster", says Loos, "is a skin. Limestone is structure. Despite their similar chemical composition, there is a great difference in the use of these two materials. Plaster is more kin with leather, with tapestries, with cladding materials and with barnishes, than its cousin, limestone³⁸." Fortuny's Delphos gown wraps the body, as tight to the skin as hair: the sensation is similar to that of many prints and drawings by Fortuny Madrazo, in which hair and clothes become merged, or hair appears as a cape or an outfit [fig. 21].

Furthermore, Fortuny's pleated fabric is not a one-way or rigidly vertical pleated fabric; as María del Mar Nicolás has observed, the way it is made generates "a surface of both irregular and permanent folds and waves, similar to a lock of human hair, highly ductile and of great artistic beauty"³⁹. For this type of fold, the Delphos gown is a kind of dress that could be characterised as a second skin. In fact, it was an obscene dress, that could not be worn with underwear (this is why Fortuny invented the additional overdress in which so many of the models appeared). Also, in theory, it was used for private functions at home, and only emancipated bodies like those of the aforementioned dancers and artists, or of free-spirited North American millionaires like Mrs. Condé Nast, dared to wear it outside, in the open air, demonstrating its transparency and allowing the body to be exposed in all its beauty and imperfection [fig. 22].



Fig 21.
Mariano Fortuny Madrazo, *Profile of woman with large hairpiece*.



Fig 22.
Mrs Condé Nast in a Fortuny gown.

38 Adolf Loos, "Cuestiones de arquitectura vienesa", in *Escritos II* (1910-1932), Madrid, El Croquis ed., 1993, p. 17.

39 María del Mar Nicolás, *Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo... Op. cit.*, p. 111. Vid. Nadine Vasseur, *Le plis*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2002.



Fig 23.
Model in a Fortuny gown.

⁴⁰ Ángel González García, “Sombros”, in *El resto. Una historia invisible del arte contemporáneo*, Madrid, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao – Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000, p. 311.

⁴¹ Regarding the distinct technical aspects of Fortuny’s work with material, as well as the thesis cited above, see Lucina Llorente Llorente “El artista artesano”, in *Mariano de Fortuny y Madrazo: inspiraciones... Op. cit.*, pp. 195-243 y Guillermo de Osma, *Op.cit.*

⁴² Semper barely considers other fabric, groundbreaking and associated with primitive constructions like felt, a material which, of course, is not weaved: it is manufactured via the accumulation of fibres. Harry Francis Mallgrave, ed. *Gottfried Semper. Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2004, esp. pp. 190 y ss.

This is because Fortuny’s Delphos gown is a dress that exists because of the body. It does not exist without it. It is stored rolled up – it takes up very little space, it does not need to be ironed, and it is as easy to transport as the portable tents discussed above –, and it is not just the idea that the body creates the dress, but also that every single body creates a different dress. There are no sizes: in some way, it could be considered a materialization of the desire for heterogeneity that so characterises the modern period. Following Baudelaire’s observation that “each epidermis produces its own hair”, Ángel González García has written on the modern task of opposing all that which seeks to impose homogeneity: the classical ideal of beauty, for example⁴⁰.

Fortuny’s Delphos gown is made of pleated silk⁴¹. There is no interweaving at all, and in this regard it would go against Semper – in the textile origin of architecture as told by Semper, the fabric is interwoven, because it is essentially a substitute for nature, as shown in the famous passage in which he explains that “from the interweaving of tree branches there was a leap to the interweaving of raffia palms, for mats and blankets. From there, material was developed with plant fibres, and so on, successively. The most ancient decorations are those made via weaving or knot-tying”⁴² [fig. 23] .

The weaving in Fortuny's pleated silk is not evident. Choosing this fabric, from a decorative point of view, establishes that the Delphos gown rejects any kind of further adornment that could result during the process of weaving the differently-coloured threads; it has already been said that the decorative elements come from printmaking. Nor is there any embroidery. The decoration is in the folding, a perfect adornment from both sides, unlike embroidery: those who know how to embroider also know that it must be perfect even when inside-out. The folding evokes the skin, as we have already stated, and it evokes the sense of touch. Regarding Hilda, who we mentioned earlier, with one of Fortuny's Delphos gowns in her hands, Hartley said: "Knowing that she would never be able to open it all up, she was happy just to slide her fingers between the grooves and ridges of the pleats, feeling the resistance of that which had been so tight." Pleating is also an invitation to touch. And just as the affinity between architecture, cladding and clothing stretches the field of the arts and dilutes the boundaries between genres, it is with this all-encompassing invocation of synaesthesias that I bring this text to a close.