Homage to Yves Saint Laurent

For a large part of the fashion world, paying an homage to Yves Saint Laurent is also probably feeling nostalgic for an era one fears to be a bygone one.

Beyond the amazing artistic talent of an exceptional creator, beyond his phenomenal intuition to feel the evolution of everyday practices, beyond his ability to side with the ones who make society progress, together with Pierre Bergé, Yves Saint Laurent invented a new fashion economic model in danger today. When claiming he did not want to be as Poiret "an artist in dresses", to draw models for the small financial aristocracy or models for exhibitions in fashion museums, but that he wanted to dress women, he undertook to break with the dominant aristocratic fashion model. This model was radically separating a haute couture for the upper part of the dominant classes, the intellectual and leading elite and a ready-made garment for lower classes. Yesterday the creator top-designer used to dress ministers', finance barons' and industry captain's wives, intellectual or artistic stars, wives of the avant-garde among which he used to live. The middle class used to wear clothes made by small dressmakers inspired by women magazines and offering euphemized models of the expensive and extravagant haute couture creations with references only to general conventions such as the length of dresses that year, the colours in fashion, possibly the general look of the garment. The lower middle class would make itself the same type of garments saving on the quality of fabric or would have recourse to the mass bad quality clothing industry that also made working clothes. As opening Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, as inventing good quality luxury ready-to-wear, symbolically not in the traditional area of fashion -the smart district of the Montaigne avenue-, as moving from the right to the left bank of the river Seine intellectual but more popular and with working people including women, he asserted that fashion had become a mass phenomenon and a right. Not a right to sub-fashion but a right for fully creative fashion offering products of quality, full of images, aesthetic symbols and meanings, a fashion dressing people but also making them dream. Of course Yves Saint Laurent's suits would not be worn by the female workers, but officially for the first time, the creator top-designer was personally and directly aiming at a mass public. Therefore, a new economic fashion model was being installed. Yves Saint Laurent's chance was to have with Pierre Bergé the man who was a remarkable creative manager modest enough to use business to serve the artist creativity.

The duo Yves Saint Laurent/Pierre Bergé started thinking fashion in terms of market, of taste goods mass consumption and invented a model of market fashion breaking with the old aristocratic or elite model. If dressing women with the over blouse of the sea workers Coco Chanel disrupted the fine organization of Paris fashion, Yves Saint Laurent dressed up women as women and working women as executive women. Creativity was no longer the limited world of Haute Couture; it could irrigate the whole pyramid of fashion and all the parts of ready-to-wear industry. But this market model was not submitted to the market. Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé succeeded in building a system in which market was a way of going on with the artistic creation in fashion. Unlike many contemporary creators or stylists who are under the obligation to make profits Yves Saint Laurent was not asked to draw spectacular unbearable dresses just for making people react and get a media cover for selling bags or key rings. But unlike Cristobal Balenciaga who closed his couture house because he did not want to prostitute himself as submitting to the market dictatorship the creative production could go on. Nostalgia we said, nostalgia because the equilibrium of this model in which market does no purely and simply
dictate the constraints of profitability of financial groups to artistic creativity is just a memory, an exception in a transition period leading to the coming power of finance.

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