



Cleavage Festival



"Now, here is an interesting research project" I thought as I read a recent article about fashion in the days of the European Royal dynasties and their expanding empires. The article highlighted the fashion industry which at the time was subsidized by the aristocracy, but gradually gave way to popular fashion that adapted the more attractive designs for sale to the general public. A portion of the article was devoted to the prevailing custom followed by the ladies of that time, of baring their breasts or wearing dresses with 'adventurous' cleavage.

Cleavage, in anatomical terms intermammary cleft, exposure in our society is nothing new. With the exception of some periods in our history where recently arrived immigrants adhered to rigorous dressing codes where not even ladies forearms or ankles could be exposed, fashions have stayed in tune with European customs. At times, like the swinging twenties, daring décolletage was swiftly acquired by American women. Soon after, Movies provided the ideal stage for imaginative and insinuating décolletage where cleavage played a most important role.

In short, cleavage in its many variations has been with us for some time. It really has no season; a theater play in Broadway in the middle of Winter is as good a excuse as any to exhibit the latest in daring displays. Naturally, Spring makes the entire adventure more comfortable. Good cleavage is present at every major formal dinner, award winning ceremony, prominent wedding – or divorce – and those events of news value and popular appeal.

The more significant date is that of the Hollywood Oscars, a cleavage festival that rivals in attention and perhaps wonder, major popular rites like those in the river Ganges, the trek to Mecca and the Pope's blessings in Saint Peter Square. The difference is a trivial one. But a most alluring and important one. Or two.

In symbolic terms, cleavage observation, analysis and rating, answers to an atavistic response of every one's lactation experience. Males continue to be attracted to that miraculous life-giving source and the pleasure it conveys. While



cleavage can create lasting fetishisms, it is more subtle and imaginative than areolae worshipping and the excitement created by the movement of breasts

Entire industries, media emporiums and eager paparazzi await the week of the Oscars with great anticipation and anxiety. The obvious purpose is nothing more than the record for posterity the cleavage that every one of the actresses participating in this ritual has to present to the public, the TV cameras, the eager paparazzi and the other participants.

Why is this? What sort of strange compulsion produces this uncontrolled desire to exhibit enticing cleavage? Is it just a narcissistic rash? A dash of exhibitionism? A token of gratitude to industrious designers or just a serious desire to show that there is something to show?

"Did you know that breast exposure was almost an exclusive Continental custom a couple of centuries back?"

Of course I knew it. Exposing ladies breasts is nothing new. In the Middle Ages, women thought nothing of parading with their breasts "au naturelle". Except of course during the rainy season, during the winter and during those windy autumn days. The article quotes an excerpt from a book written by a curious French academician of the 17th century:

"I missed those pairs of round and firm breasts that our Parisiennes parade for the benefit of humanity. I missed them by having had to spend several weeks in the American colonies. Used as I was to Paris, Florence and London and the display of breasts everywhere on the continent, I felt deprived the moment I arrived in Philadelphia at the beginning of summer. I am beginning to understand the nature of the repression that assails the male colonists "

Among the interesting references is the one about the fact that Queens and courtesans, relatives, mistresses and other ladies in court, started the fashion of baring their breasts as a titillation message not limited to their social environment but also to the populace. This custom, popular in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, had its own versions; in some royal courts both breasts were revealed while in others, only one was given the privilege of attracting those lascivious looks. Janet Jackson could uncover both platforms in those days and no one would pay much attention.

The fashion in those days also dictated that court ladies and courtesans wear extremely low cut décolleté fashions that revealed breasts and, sometimes, nipples. Painters of that era avoided portraits of ladies showing their breasts, except in few instances. Queen Mary II of England, wife of William of Orange, has been portrayed baring her breasts in several woodcuts (1689-1694)



But not all ladies went the bare route. Some discovered that a great deal of interest could be gained when breasts were pressed together to create an enticing cleavage. Observers at the time associated the interest –and in some cases obsession – with women's breast as an atavistic reminder of our breast feedings days and the pleasure that was derived by mother and child in the performance of the act. In the end, the cleavage turned into another form of enticing men to look but not to touch.

More from the French author:

"Except in some African tribes and some of the Polynesian islands, breast exposure is generally limited to the feeding of babies. Breasts are seldom exposed in celebrations and popular events. The American colonists are deeply religious and consider any sort of display of a person's body – except hands, face and arms – as signs of moral turpitude and an invitation to carnal adventures. Women dress with long skirts, blouses that extend from the neck to the wrists and cover their heads with a variety of hats, scarves and veils. There is no way to admire the breasts of those healthy young colonists who are aware of their concealed charms and the curiosity that they elicit."

Back to the Oscars and cleavage. It is obvious that the idea is to show as much as can be displayed within varying levels of propriety and discretion. The cleavage is after all a result of delicate fashion engineering. Let us analyze.

Here I must observe that the cleavage question has been simplified in the last decades thanks to those marvelous silicone compounds and other materials used as implants. This technique – now almost as common as wearing earrings, can transform the most plain frontal surface into a most attractive and defiant profile.

The cleavage masters, now an essential adjunct to the couturier, the image consultant, the make up artist and the hairdresser, possess a variety of techniques whereby breasts can be maneuvered in such a way with the aid of a little tightening here or a bit of looseness there, that the desired cleavage can be produced. It is important to note that cleavage is nothing but the junction of two moving masses that provided sufficient motion to create the illusion of volume, shape and texture. There is an undeniable attempt at titillation where the more daring profiles stimulate and fulfill the imagination of the viewers.

"What do you do as a first step in creating an exciting cleavage for one of your clients" I asked a cleavage master.

"It is easy. The most important thing is consistency. Whether as a gift of nature or a surgical miracle, consistency is the key to decent cleavage; arranging the available raw material into converging areas is fairly simple. After all, what is desired is a simple conjugation of profiles that oppose each other and yet retain



their individual freedom. A properly created cleavage environment is just the tip of the iceberg and generally leads to imaginary levels of admiration and even desire."

"Is it easier to work with artificial or natural breasts?"

"Strictly a mathematical proposition. In plain words it is a matter of density, volume and skin effect. You have to take these into account when you design the appropriate cleavage. Keep in mind that the appearance of cleavages that seem about to dissolve and lead to total exposure, is strictly pre-arranged. That is the dramatic part of the exercise. It adds expectation and mystery. That is also where the proper tension on the supporting pieces of clothing is important. Modern textiles with their unique properties allow for designs of great mechanical versatility. The same applies to the lining of the dresses as they have to provide the necessary support and containment."

"One last question. How do you know which is which? I mean artificial versus natural?"

"I am not going to answer that. I invoke the Fifth!"

Cleavage Festival Part II



I have been asked to develop a part two to the original story, Cleavage Festival. Cleavage Festival has had a very good reception, not limited to English language publications. My problem with Part II is that a French version is required and my French, while sufficient to help me with lectures and buying medieval manuscripts, is not quite up to a full article.

The Part II of Cleavage Festival begins this way:

"Marco, I need to talk to you right away. Please drop whatever you are doing and get your cleavage, if you can produce one, to my office asap!"

I had not finished hanging the telephone when I heard a roaring sound coming from the house next door.

We shall leave the rest for next week. I am a firm believer in doing later what can be postponed until tomorrow. the best labor-saving device ever created. See you next week. Marco Miranda Sr.