

I am at a party at the New York Stock Exchange, surrounded by a bunch of burly guys looking at me like I'm the prize in a rugby tournament, and I suddenly remember Heidi Brownstein. Heidi wrote a paper during our junior year at Penn about fashion after the French Revolution. Turns out, wrote Heidi, that Parisian women affected what they imagined to have been the style of ancient Athens: see-through togas.

Why Heidi? Why now? Because I'm sheathed in see-through D by DKNY stretch organza and not much else. Like most women, I'd realized that transparent fashion was going to be the rage for spring, so I decided to go on an early dry run. Could an out-and-about New York girl wear these things?

Looking up, I see the three Dartmouth scrum types point at me with their Heinekens. "Nice outfit," says one. His pals guffaw. I learn the first transparent-clothing lesson: It's a look that requires sophisticated venues.

My second outing is better chosen: the Reader's Digest Christmas party, a more mature event, to which I sport a

Several days later, my brother drops by while I'm preparing for my next adventure. "Where are you off to?" he asks, noting my toffee-colored Ann Demeulemeester one-shoulder sheath. "Dinner with Dick Morris?" I glare at him as I rush out the door, protected from the elements by Penn sweats, and head off to meet Lawrence LaRose, coauthor of the book *The Code: Time-Tested Secrets for Getting What You Want from Women—Without Marrying Them!*

Code Man waits for me at the bar. I breeze past with a wave and head to the loo. Two Barnard coeds chat by the mirror, applying dark purple and silver lipstick. Their conversation grows quiet as they hear me thrashing about in the stall, stripping off my sweats. Minutes later I emerge, assuming a pose of haughty elegance. They stare. "Wow," says Coed #1, "that dress is smokin'." "Cool," sighs Coed #2.

Gratefully, I accept a glass of wine from Code Man. He gives me the once-over. "Nice dress, sweetie," he says. Ah, Code Man approves. He tells me I'm wearing just the sort of outfit a Code girl would wear (doesn't this mean the kind of girl you don't have to marry?).

I move around the room as Code Man monitors. At night's end, we compare notes: I begin to see patterns. *Straight men, reaction #1:* surprise, then unbridled lust. *Reaction #2:* shock, then, "I would kill my girlfriend if she wore that." *Gay men, reaction #1:* "Fabulous!" *Reaction #2:* "Does she really think she can wear that?" *Straight women, reaction #1:* shock, then envy, followed by sleazy Manhattan-bimbo jokes. *Reaction #2:* surprise, then enthusiastic thumbs-up. *Gay women, reaction #1:* surprise, followed by nodding affirmation, followed by impassioned support. *Reaction #2:* disgust that I've single-handedly made it impossible for women to escape enslavement by upper-middle-class middle-aged men.

Labeling the responses allows me to ditch the fear. I become more confident

in my transparency. After all, these clothes are beautiful. Stunning even. Opaque steel-gray is confident; transparent steel-gray is beguiling. Sky-blue is pretty, but transparent sky-blue is sublime. Transparency equals mystery. And I like it.

I decide to really go for it. I am about to embark on my final sortie: Bret Easton Ellis' infamously rowdy annual Christmas bash. I am wearing a Ter et Bantine sequined halterdress over my own cream-colored thonged teddy.

I arrive a tad early and immediately spot Heather, my agent. She is wearing a transparent garment, too! No way! It's a see-through black turtleneck, but she's covered it up with a black tunic. I overhear a model-looking type say of my getup, "The thonged teddy is too much." Her modelizer-looking date demurs: "The thonged teddy makes it!"

The next morning, my best friend calls for a postmortem. Turns out that she, too, had gotten the urge, wearing a semitransparent white Gucci dress for her night on the town. Coincidence? Or a vindication of those poor French Revolution fashion martyrs? Liberty! Equality! Transparency! ■

clear thinking

A week of parties.
A closetful of transparent dresses.
One intrepid woman makes
the season's new look her own.
By Kate Bohner



Sheer madness: Writer Kate Bohner shows it off.

black Philosophy di Alberta Ferretti number. I feel protected by my flesh-toned body stocking, but keep in mind that, in the world of transparency, people respond to you as if you're naked whether you deliver the goods or not.

I walk into a sea of professional women, their eyes boring straight through me as I approach a table covered with name tags. Suddenly I panic. Quick, I figure, grab someone else's. HEATHER SCHRODER, INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE MANAGEMENT. Aha ... my agent. I snatch her tag and search for a lapel. There's something else you should know about see-through frocks: no lapel. I stick HEATHER on my stomach and head straight for the bar. "Bourbon," I hiss. The bartender gives me a supportive nod. "I think it's going fine," he says with a sly smile. But I find myself trying to avoid all eye contact, like I do on the subway. I hurriedly leave the party, and find it's sleeting outside. I have nothing but a wispy wrap between me and the elements, and suddenly I remember the point of Heidi's paper: pneumonia. In 1792, toga-clad *Parisiennes* dropped by the *douzaines*, some of the modern era's first fashion victims.