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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

First International
Cristóbal Balenciaga Conference

Book of Abstracts

This publication contains the abstracts of the papers which will be presented at the First International Cristóbal Balenciaga Conference, to take place online on 1 and 2 October 2020.

These papers represent a selection of sixteen proposals, from among the forty received, made by a Scientific Committee of recognized experts in the field according to the double blind method. The objective was to guarantee the presentation of rigorous, quality papers and to place the study of Cristóbal Balenciaga in the field of academic research.

Given the importance of Balenciaga, the selected proposals come not only from the field of fashion history, but also from other fields of study such as, for example, economy, communications, and the arts considered in their widest sense.

Supplying Woollens for Cristóbal Balenciaga: A Comparative Analysis of the Commercial Strategies of Garigue and Agnona (1947-1968)

Edmund Garigue (1916-2005) established his company Garigue in 1947 in London (United Kingdom); Francesco Ilorini Mo (1916-2002) founded Lanificio Agnona in Borgosesia (Italy) in 1953. Between 1947, when Garigue was founded, and 1968, when Cristóbal Balenciaga retired, both Garigue and Agnona specialised in fine sheep woollens from South Africa and Australia, mohair and cashmere. Agnona also offered camelid, alpaca, and the most precious fibre of all: vicuña. Garigue and Agnona are still commercially active today. Furthermore, the former continues to supply the House of Balenciaga. For both companies, Cristóbal Balenciaga was not a mere client. He was a figure who legitimised them and gave them access to haute couture commercial circles. This is indicative of the level of recognition that Cristóbal Balenciaga's textile skills enjoyed over other couturiers. If Cristóbal Balenciaga approved, the rest followed.

It is the evolution of Cristóbal Balenciaga's silhouettes that has led the scholarly research into his work to date. Investigations into Cristóbal Balenciaga's use of textiles have tended to be approached as an element that was subsidiary to his development of shape. However, the qualities of cloth (material, colour, texture, suppleness, etc) informed his creations in an essential way. It was his deep knowledge of textile materiality and the skills of his trade (tailoring, pattern-cutting, etc) that enabled Cristóbal Balenciaga to contribute exquisiteness and ergonomics to the fashion market ('the ease of Balenciaga').

For this purpose, Cristóbal Balenciaga relied on more than ninety textile suppliers during the period 1947-1968. Seventy-four of these were wholesalers, manufacturers (Agnona) or merchant converters (Garigue). Due to the preciousness of silk, as well as its extensive history

within the study of luxury consumption, it is silk suppliers such as Ducharne, Abraham and Staron that have been discussed most frequently in the literature. Explorations of Cristóbal Balenciaga's textile suppliers' specifically bilateral and/or from commercial point of view are even scarcer. Given the role textiles played in the creative and commercial aspects of Balenciaga's business, this scarcity needs to be addressed.

This paper will illuminate the commercial and personal relationships that Balenciaga (and his team) established with his suppliers, and vice versa: what were the marketing strategies that suppliers used to gain the favour of the *maison*? From oral sources, archival documents and objects from Agnona, Garigue and the Balenciaga archives, this presentation will offer a comparative analysis of these two woollen textile suppliers. The interest in these companies lies precisely in the fact that they lacked a legacy on which to build a narrative of tradition, nor were they French. They were excluded from the stimulus of the financial support that the French government offered to those couturiers who used more than ninety per cent French-manufactured fabrics in their work. By examining the specific cases of Garigue and Agnona, this paper will focus on the strategies established collaboratively by Cristóbal Balenciaga and two of his suppliers whose relationship to the *maison* proved crucial to their success. How they managed these strategies, and what Cristóbal Balenciaga gained from each partnership, will be the two core questions of this presentation.

Balenciaga and the American Fashion Editors who Shared his Private World: Bettina Ballard, Carmel Snow, and Diana Vreeland

Cristóbal Balenciaga, the notoriously private designer who shunned press coverage, nevertheless developed deep, intimate friendships with two highly influential American fashion editors, Carmel Snow of *Harper's Bazaar* and Bettina Ballard of American *Vogue*. Their attachment to him, in tandem with his genius as a designer, ensured that his designs were promoted in the crucial post-ww II American fashion market.

Though a third editor, Diana Vreeland, didn't have as close a personal connection with the designer, the posthumous Balenciaga exhibit she mounted (at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) rescued her career, put her on the map as a curator, and ensured Balenciaga's legacy in the USA, both as a designer and an artist.

The sources for the paper will include memoirs, biographies, periodicals, and photos from the era, which will illuminate Balenciaga's private world through the eyes of Ballard, Snow, and Vreeland. It will seek to answer the question: beyond being a master of haute couture, was Balenciaga also a master of stealth public relations, by entrancing these three women?

Paris-based American *Vogue* fashion editor Bettina Ballard entered Balenciaga's inner circle in the late 30s, and was taken by his "instinctive, spontaneous charm" that led to a friendship of more than a dozen years. Her accounts of traveling with him to his home in San Sebastian, Spain, and being entertained in his Paris flat, illuminated the quiet, secluded life of a complex genius, and ensured coverage in American *Vogue*.

Balenciaga's longtime friendship with legendary *Harper's Bazaar* editor in chief Carmel Snow, which le tout Paris rumored to be an unrequited

crush on her part, nevertheless inspired her to champion his look in the States, and to wear his designs almost exclusively. Her adoration of the designer, and astute eye as an editor, led her to come to his rescue when his groundbreaking collection of "unfitted suits" was bombing with the other editors and buyers.

Diane Vreeland, editor in chief of *Vogue*, had less of a personal relationship with Balenciaga, and Carmel Snow was rumored to have endeavored to keep them apart. Yet Vreeland's reverence for his designs inspired her to curate the exhibit at the Met's Costume Institute that would canonize Balenciaga's legacy in the American collective memory.

The paper will share glimpses of the private world of Balenciaga through the eyes of these three editors, and illuminate how his personal charm ensured his lasting legacy in the USA.

The Spirit of Cristóbal Balenciaga in Mexico. Borderless Spanish Haute Couture

The myth of Cristóbal Balenciaga keeps growing through time and distance. The Master has touched with his legacy many people around the world, one of the places that has a relationship with him, is Mexico.

In 2016 two exhibitions took place at Mexico City making a difference about the relevance of fashion designers. In May, *El Arte de la Indumentaria y la Moda en México* (The Art of Costume and fashion in Mexico) opened, it was a sample of the last 75 years of Mexican fashion. In October, The Modern Art Museum at Mexico City housed the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga. Both insights in fashion increased the knowledge about the way fashion evolved in that country and the relationship with Mexican and European designers. For example, Tao Izzo worked at the *atelier* of Robert Piguet, Enrique Martínez at Givenchy, Armando Valdés Peza was a costume designer at Hollywood, Luis Galindo was the private fashion illustration teacher of Gabrielle Chanel and Alfredo Bouret drew exclusively for Balenciaga.

Which is the link between Cristóbal Balenciaga and Mexico? Where can we find evidence of this relationship? How does this link may become part of Balenciaga's legacy?

Exhibition Curator Ana Elena Mallet found the connection between Bouret and Balenciaga, her research showed how Bouret's illustrations were part of the communication strategy of the House of Balenciaga. Those fashion drawings appeared into both French and British *Vogue*, and now all of them are part of the designer's heritage.

The aims of this work are to examine the influence of Balenciaga in Mexican fashion, also find more clues and names about the

relevance of his legacy around the world. Transversely find other people, (workers, clients and friends) who helped to spread his style.

Alfredo Bouret was not the only Mexican with a close relationship with Balenciaga, women of the Basque family Belausteguigoitia exchanged written correspondence with him -which is now at the Archives of the Museum Arocena at Torreón, Coahuila- Olga Tamayo was a client of Balenciaga, just like Mexican actresses Rosita Arenas and María Félix. The first wife of Diego Rivera, Lupe Marín, was a close friend of Balenciaga; as a dressmaker herself she made few dresses that remind of his style. Time after that, Manuel Méndez, exclusive designer of the retail store "El Palacio de Hierro", learned the craft of *couture* from some clothing labeled by The House of Balenciaga, property of one of his friends.

Without any questions, Cristóbal Balenciaga is one of the most important designers in fashion history, his creative and commercial relevance has a great impact in many countries, one of them Mexico.

Zurich, 1970

The paper recovers *Balenciaga: Ein Meister der Haute Couture*, the exhibition held at the Bellerive Museum in Zurich from 31 March to 16 August 1970. By exploring the materials preserved in the museum's archives, this study intends to reconstruct the very first retrospective dedicated to Cristóbal Balenciaga and consider its relevance in the museology of the Spanish creator. Given the media power of Diana Vreeland, we are accustomed to attribute to the exhibition she curated in 1973 at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York a sort of primacy: *The World of Balenciaga* is in fact considered simultaneously the first blockbuster retrospective on a great creator, and the first exhibition dedicated to Cristóbal Balenciaga.

However, if we focus more closely on the 1973 exhibition, and carefully read the exhibition checklist, we can find a very interesting object, a loan by the Bellerive Museum in Zurich: "one toile muslin pattern in three pieces for the one-seam coat, 1961." As Richard Martin and Harold Koda recall in the catalog of the exhibition they dedicate to Vreeland in 1993: "Vreeland was analytical [...]. In presenting the 1961 Balenciaga beige-and-black plaid wool coat made with a single seam, Vreeland accompanied the coat, a tour de force of tailoring, with its muslin pattern, thus demonstrating the thinking and process of the garment's structure [...]."

The words of Martin and Koda attribute depth to Vreeland's work, too often dismissed as superficial and spectacular; but they also show how the choice to expose this constructive X-ray of Balenciaga's work is connected to the intentions of the Zurich exhibition. This method was partially recovered in *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, the recent exhibition curated by Cassie Davies-Strodder at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 2017; for this exhibition, objects

from lesser-known museum collections, such as that of the Swiss museum, were explicitly borrowed to give space to unpublished elements of Balenciaga's creative history. Strongly desired by entrepreneur Gustav Zumsteg of the Abraham company, the 1970 exhibition reminds us of the importance of the relationships between haute couture and the textile industry, and allows us to reflect on the space that the latter had in the set-ups, and therefore on the curatorial practices that look at fashion as a design discipline made of multiple authorships.

Questioning the archives of the Bellerive Museum means reconstructing the museology developed around the figure of Cristóbal Balenciaga, seeing the exhibition organized in Zurich as a first step towards the curatorial actions undertaken later – also considering that the exhibition traveled in 1972 in San Sebastian, in 1973 in New York (as we have seen) and in 1974 in Madrid. The translation of the original exhibition in the following stages and the consciously partial dimension of the curatorial gesture, which illuminates some aspects without though pretending to be exhaustive in analyzing the themes of the exhibition, are elements that emerge from the conversation with the archives of the Bellerive Museum. Finally, these issues also allow to unpack the process of design of the 2018 exhibition *Cristóbal Balenciaga. Fashion and Heritage - Conversations* at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria, which involved the exhibition-maker Judith Clark with an articulated intervention specifically dedicated to the museology built around Balenciaga's work.

Contemplating Legacy: Balenciaga – Ghesquière

The paper will analyze similarities and differences, on the one hand, between the dress and the wedding headdress of Balenciaga, photographed by David Bailey (born 1938) and published in the American edition of *Vogue* in July 1967, and, on the other hand, some garments and accessories from the Balenciaga fashion brand collection designed by Nicolas Ghesquière (born 1971) for the season “Spring-Summer 2008”. This analysis aims to determine and discuss the type of fashion design practice that creates new clothes or accessories after reviewing the legacy of Balenciaga from new social contexts. It is, therefore, to understand the practice of fashion design and creation as a process that reviews, integrates and transforms from contemporary view.

Starting from two previous studies (Muñagorri 2017; Muñagorri 2019), the analysis carried out in this communication will be methodically based on three aspects: (1) The notions of “transfer”, “repetition” and “displacement” proposed by Judith Butler (born, 1956) will be applied to describe the way in which Ghesquière used elements and characteristics of the master’s creations in the creation of the Balenciaga collection. (2) The sense in which Butler posed subversion as a “repetition process” that generates a new life in a new place. (3) The use of Butlerian ideas for the analysis of fashion and clothing makes it possible to revise and contextualize some proposals of Roland Barthes (1915-1980) in the contemporary framework.

The purpose of this communication is to present and propose a discussion of the following aspects: (1) The novelty of the creations of the fashion designer is not the result of the diversity of influences, but of the “way” in which he uses and “combines” elements of different origin. (2) The new dimensions of Balenciaga’s legacy before the collection designed by Ghesquière.

Exploding Fashion: Cutting, Constructing and Thinking Through Things

The presentation reports on the findings of the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council funded research project Exploding Fashion (2018-2020) based at Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London). The project is led by Professor Caroline Evans as Principal Investigator, with O'Neill as Co-Investigator.

The project brings historians, curators and practitioners together in the archive to explore a previously opaque part of the fashion design process, pattern-cutting.

It pulls focus on the pattern cutter, an essential maker and technician in the fashion design process whose role is essentially unacknowledged in design histories and unfamiliar to consumers.

Like an exploded-view drawing, the project offers a visually-led exploration of the fashion design process. Together the researchers 'explode' dress in the archive, reverse-engineering it by making 2D patterns, 3D toiles and 4D digital moving images of historical garments by Madeleine Vionnet, Charles James, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Halston and Comme des Garçons, to understand how they were made and once moved on the body.

The project thus combines 'thinking through making' with conventional archival research methods to offer new narratives and different ways of writing fashion history, beyond the traditional parameters of the field. Exhibition curation is central to its methods, enabling a spatial and motile display of the objects and processes under investigation. It therefore offers new ways to understand the importance of the making-process to fashion design, and shows how fashion innovation is produced out of the alchemical, conceptual and technical transformation from the flat into the round. It brings traditional ways of making into dialogue

with new ways of visualising, illuminating haute couture and prêt-a-porter methods for a visually-driven, digital age. The findings of the project will result in a forthcoming exhibition and publication.

The presentation will focus on a Balenciaga dress design from 1958 selected at Palais Galliera, Paris. The black crêpe de soir cocktail dress owned by Madame Weil was acquired in 1998 along with three other dresses. The finished dress design raised a number of questions relating to its conception and design, due to the lack of contextual resources it could be connected to such as sketch, pattern, toile or spec sheet. It led to a similar but later dress design, labelled "Nina, février 1966" including corresponding black toiles from the Balenciaga Archives, Paris. The reverse engineering of the dress design and its digital visualisation reveal the back of the dress as a focal point when worn.

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Cristóbal Balenciaga: Master of Geometric Design

Through the careful manipulation of the pattern and cut of the textile both Balenciaga and Vionnet were known to be perfectionists, and as a young student, Cristóbal Balenciaga met and was influenced by Madelaine Vionnet. Similarities have been drawn between the two couturiers, particularly their use of the bias cut, but what has not been explored is how this is based on pure geometrical calculations for both the geometric shape and exacting degrees of the bias cut to form the Balenciaga fit.

This paper will examine a few select examples of Balenciaga's complex geometric and bias manipulations to demonstrate how, in the post-war era, he understood and extended Vionnet's approach to cloth. Importantly, by showing how Balenciaga mastered the geometry of cut in both the *fou* (dressmaking) and *tailleur* (tailor) ateliers.

In the opening statement of Vionnet by Betty Kirke, she wrote that Vionnet believed that, "The couturier should be a geometrician", and Catherine Join-Diéterle, discusses Balenciaga's liking for geometric shapes, especially the sphere. Yet, there are key differences. Vionnet's geometric and bias designs are visually explicit and understandable, whereas Balenciaga's bias cut is subtle, and in some cases, it is skillfully hidden under seaming and folds as he, brilliantly, extends these design techniques into his tailoring. Balenciaga also created some of his geometric designs by the creation of a one-piece origami-style folding technique that make his designs look simple but disguise a very complex pattern and cut. An example of his deceptive cut has been well-explained in the four-sided cocktail dress, or "envelope dress" a cylindrical shape, cut on bias, and created in his signature stiff, black Gazar silk. But, what has not been examined are some of the more radical and not obvious ways that

he subtly explored and manipulated geometric design to create sculptural forms. He masterfully manipulated light-weight fabrics, such as silk paper taffeta into a voluminous, balloon hem dress (ROM 2013.73.10.1) as well as wool crepe and silk satin cut on the bias in a rectangular-looking dress (ROM 994.229.22.1). Revealed are some of these more radical designs and the repeated sculptural geometric explorations developed by Balenciaga through an examination of ten exquisite examples of his work in the Royal Ontario Museum.

The analysis is based on an in-depth study of the anatomy of the designs through careful, analytical sketching and measuring to develop a 2D pattern in a digital format in order to discover the exact, and surprising, geometric attributes of the selected designs. Recreating and documenting all aspects of the creation – from pattern development to the assembly of a design—not only documents, but clearly reveals, a Vionnet-type of exercise in geometry. Explained is the development of the circle using the mathematical calculation of the Pi π formula used by Balenciaga to achieve the development of some of his iconic capes used in both day coats and evening ensembles. Developed are toiles that are assembled and fitted for the comparative analysis. This paper offers a glimpse into the thought process and techniques of the brilliant designer and physically explains why and how Balenciaga had such a tremendous influence in haute couture on a worldwide scale.

Study and Material Characterization of the Embroidery Threads Presented at the Bolero Jacket *La Perse* From the Collection of Kunstmuseum Den Haag

Strongly influenced both by Spanish and Basque cultures, Cristóbal Balenciaga often reinterpreted iconic costumes, such as the heavily embellished bolero jackets typically associated with bullfighters outfits. Through the detailed study of one of these jackets, one worn by the famous opera singer Else Rijkens, we will carry out the research to be presented during the First Cristóbal Balenciaga International Congress.

The Kunstmuseum Den Haag jacket, named *La Perse*, being the central character of the research, we will analyze the nature and quality of the materials used for the making of the embroidery, comparing them with the time during which the work was finished.

Multiple aspects of this jacket will be addressed during this collaborative research: from the historical and technical point of view carried out by Nadia Albertini to the interpretation of the different analytical research aspects carried out by the scientist conservator Livio Ferrazza at Instituto Valenciano de Conservación, Restauración e Investigación (IVCR+i) or Art-Lab in Madrid (Spain).

The collection of this rich data allows us to better understand the way this piece was conceived by the mind of the master Cristóbal Balenciaga in close collaboration with the embroidery atelier Rébé.

Intuition Beyond Japonisme: Balenciaga's Relationship With the Aesthetics of Emptiness

This paper deals with Cristóbal Balenciaga's relationship with Japanese arts, both in a plastic and design-related sense, and in its aesthetic dimension. There is already a sufficiently enlightening set of studies on the importance of Japanese sources in Balenciaga's work: studies that range from the broad perspective offered by the exhibition *Orientalism, vision of the East in Western Dress* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994) to Miren Arzalluz's recent study on *Japonisme* and influence of Vionnet in Balenciaga (*Cristóbal Balenciaga: the Forge of a Master*). This communication is aligned with previous studies to enlighten an inspiration not only technical and formal, but aesthetic with respect to some Japanese artistic principles that began to be known in the West in a second wave of Japanese stimuli, less formalistic than the first nineteenth-century *Japonisme*, and more focused on abstract concepts such as emptiness.

In this sense, the hypothesis of this communication defends the existence of previous Japanese sources, based on the influence of *kimono* and the plasticity of *ukiyo-e*, but stresses that the strength of Balenciaga's more orientalist designs can only be the answer to a deeper knowledge of Japanese thought, in perfect harmony with the first conferences and publications on Zen that began to arrive in Paris in the years before World War II, but especially the knowledge of the active value of the void that began to be known in Europe particularly in the late forties. This fact allows the application of methodologies to study the aesthetic principles of emptiness already applied in post-war European Fine arts, and others already used in contemporary architectural design influenced by the Japanese, such as the concept of *ma* or interval.

With regard to the development of this paper, both the sources of study known in Europe from the thirties and forties will be taken into account, as well as Balenciaga's interaction with artists in post-war Paris also influenced by the art of East Asia.

Balenciaga and Denmark. In Search of Balenciaga

In Denmark, two events marked the welcoming of Parisian fashion after the Second World war and the Liberation of Denmark in May 1945. A charity event in November was launched for the benefit of the people in France including two days of fashion shows. This was a landmark within the Danish fashion world as it was the very first live glimpse of Parisian fashion in Copenhagen since 1939. Around seventy dresses were on parade, though, according to the press, no dresses by Balenciaga were shown.

In January 1946, the Designmuseum Danmark (then the Danish Museum of Decorative Arts) hosted one of several versions of the travelling exhibition 'Theatre de la mode' with great success. In Denmark, the exhibition put together by the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne was called 'La Mode Française'. Small scale dresses from thirty-nine fashion houses were shown, including all the great Parisian couturiers, amongst them Balenciaga.

Through the lens of the women's magazine *Tidens Kvinder*, which at that time was the chosen magazine for affluent Danish women, and drawings from the couture salon in the big department store Magasin du Nord, accompanied by oral history, this paper will try to track down the influence and dissemination of the Spanish born couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga in Denmark in a time period of twenty years after the war.

In a special fashion issue in the autumn 1950, the fashion editor in *Tidens Kvinder*, Tove Castenskiold, recognized Balenciaga as one (of six) of the most influential couturiers in Paris. The Danish couturier Preben Birck (1906-1992), one of the so-called 'the Three Big Bs', had an eight-year background of working with Poiret, Patou and Molyneux in Paris. Balenciaga had only just arrived in Paris, when Preben Birck

returned to Copenhagen in 1937 to establish his own couture salon. Though he did not witness the beginning of Balenciaga's Parisian career, he later considered him to be the most influential couturier not only to foreign creators, but also to other French haute couture colleagues.

In the beginning of the 1960s, two Danish students at the School of the Chambre Syndicale in Paris and former student at the School of Applied Arts in Copenhagen managed with the help of contacts in the Spanish Embassy to attend a Balenciaga show in Avenue George V. They still remember the show as one of the most inspirational events for their Danish fashion careers to come.

However, it was not all rose-coloured regarding Balenciaga in Denmark. To my knowledge, no dresses have survived in Danish collections. Perhaps the Danish women had a much more convenient view on fashion – skirts and blouses being named as 'the Danish national costume' – perhaps they could not afford creations from Balenciaga.

Add to it all the ambiguous attitude of fashion editor Tove Castenskiold – on the one hand complaining about the difficult access to news from the fashion house of Balenciaga, calling him sulky and his dresses nunlike, on the other hand claiming that Balenciaga had the gift of grace regarding fashion.

Copying a Master: London Wholesale Couture and Cristóbal Balenciaga in the 1950s

Cristóbal Balenciaga is widely recognised as one of the leading twentieth century couturiers. His dynamic designs redefined fashionable silhouettes internationally. This paper will consider the impact of his designs in Britain, focusing upon how London wholesale couturiers copied, adapted and took inspiration from his garments. This paper draws on a range of source material, looking particularly at original garments and newspaper and magazine editorials.

Wholesale couturiers existed in an interesting position in the fashion market. The majority of their output was copied or adapted from Parisian haute couture garments, however the garments were modified to meet ready-to-wear manufacturing techniques in Britain. Such fashion manufacturers were renowned for their high quality garments and largely targeted a middle class consumer. Within this paper one of the key considerations is how such designers either translated or attempted to replicate Balenciaga's craftsmanship. Were such firms simply creating the 'look' of haute couture pieces? Or did they replicate any of the complex construction too?

Balenciaga was widely admired by London wholesale couturiers. Ann Gibbs (Jaeger), Jean Allen and Frederick Starke all regarded him as their 'favourite' couturier. There were multiple reasons for this, however certainly this related to the apparent simplicity and more obvious elegance of Balenciaga's designs. Gibbs suggested, 'buy a coat from him and you've got a fashionable line for years. I'm still running one that I bought from him five years ago. I can't drop it—people keep asking for it.' Starke agreed suggesting that he was drawn to Balenciaga's designs because he 'doesn't make a violent change every six months. It's an evolution.' One of the key foci of this paper will be the sack dress introduced by Balenciaga in

1957. This design was rapidly adapted by London wholesale couturiers, but with mixed success. This paper will consider why this design was subject to such opposing press opinions and which London wholesale couturiers did manage to successfully adapt it for the ready-to-wear market.

Despite the popularity of his designs it should be noted that copying from Balenciaga was an expensive outlay for wholesale couturiers. His shows were amongst the most expensive to attend in the 1950s and it was therefore essential that designers got their money's worth from the garments they purchased to copy. Most wholesalers would use the purchased model to create one 'line-for-line' copy- a garment almost indistinguishable from the original and also a number of garments which were loosely based on the original model. A 1959 article in *The Times* suggested that Dorville had purchased just one Balenciaga suit and this had been used as the inspiration for a coat, a dress and two suits. This process of translation and adaptation will be carefully considered within this paper. Overall this paper will help to demonstrate how Balenciaga's design aesthetic was consumed by the general public in the 1950s.

1927: A Wedding Dress Attributed to Cristóbal Balenciaga

Cristóbal Balenciaga began his business career in 1917, when he opened his first workshop in San Sebastián. It was here where he began to interpret the influences of Paris fashion, through garments acquired from the different French *haute couture* houses, like Madeleine Vionnet, Jeanne Lanvin and Chanel. His great mastery of technique was something he subsequently applied to the crafting of his creations.

In 2005 the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation received a donation of a set of garments dating from the late 1920s, which included a wedding dress from 1927, produced at the workshop in San Sebastián: an ivory-coloured crepe satin piece with an asymmetric hem and silver sequin trim. Though lacking a label, it was ascribed to the designer, according to testimony by the donor herself.

Due to the piece's poor condition and deterioration, it was missing fabric and presented aged fibres. Despite its poor state, the Foundation's protocol is to accept and safeguard every piece related to Cristóbal Balenciaga, as they are considered of great cultural and stylistic value. In 2018 it was decided to proceed with its exhaustive study, treatment and restoration.

The main objective of this project was to study, preserve and restore, to the best condition possible, a unique work from the 1920s, a period from which very few garments are preserved. Another aim was to bring to light an unknown piece clearly reflecting the artist's hand and revealing the contribution of new constructive techniques, as the effort lent credence to its attribution to the designer. The project was also able to reveal the nature of the materials used, the technique employed to craft them, and their perfect finish, confirming the piece's exquisite and unique quality, never seen before. In the piece we find influences from Parisian fashion, as it rose to the level of the era's highest *haute couture* standards.

Cristóbal Balenciaga's Personal Style: a Material Culture Approach to His Life-Story

Cristóbal Balenciaga's personal style is evident in photographs of the designer. He presented himself in crisply-tailored suiting, white shirts and small knotted ties. Hair swept back from his forehead, the cuffs of his shirts were perfectly exposed at the sleeves of his jackets. In the workroom, he protected his clothes with smart white work coats. The style is austere and in keeping with a suave presentation of masculine self in mid-20th century Europe.

This paper positions this public presentation and perception of Balenciaga amongst pieces of his personal clothing in the collection of the Balenciaga Museum, Getaria. Other than a formal double-breasted dinner suit and a monogrammed dress shirt, the designer's clothes in the museum's collection are very different in style and tone than that publically portrayed. Sporty blousons and polo shirts offer a narrative of a casual, informal approach to Balenciaga's dressing that few would have witnessed in his lifetime. Trousers, shirts and jackets made of fluid linens, hard-wearing cotton jersey, nubby boucle and chunky corduroys; open-neck shirts and cropped jackets with zips. These garments present a very different story than that previously known of Balenciaga's personal style.

Materiality (the wear and tear) of surfaces of cloth also provides insights into the biography of these objects. Subtle signs of use, the fading of cloth and the stains of life and time suggest other lines of enquiry into someone's life.

I argue that this type of material (the clothes of one person and the biographies of those objects, including the materials they are made from) offers researchers information, beyond paper ephemera and oral histories, about someone's life-story. This enhances our understanding of character, identity and behaviours. This paper presents an approach to material culture that reinforces the importance of studying the clothes worn by people like Balenciaga, as much as the paper ephemera, in constructing life-stories. It privileges the fashion object as biographical evidence.

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