First International Cristóbal Balenciaga Conference Proceedings

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum
Getaria. October 1 and 2, 2020

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EUSKO JAURLARITZA GOBIERNO VASCO
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ORAIN GIPUZKOA
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Scientific Committee

MIREN ARZALLUZ
Director
Palais Galliera, Paris

DR. ANA BALDA
Lecturer
School of Communication, University of Navarre

DR. AMALIA DESCALZO
Lecturer
ISEM Fashion Business School, University of Navarre

GASPARD DE MASSÉ
Chief Archivist
Balenciaga, Paris

DR. LESLEY E. MILLER
Senior Curator of Textiles and Fashion
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

CAROLINE EVANS
Lecturer
Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London

DR. ALEXANDRA PALMER
Curator Head of Fashion
Royal Ontario Museum

VALERIE STEELE
Director
Fashion Institute of Technology Museum, New York

IGOR URIA
Director of Collections
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, Getaria

DR. PAOLO VOLONTÉ
Lecturer
School of Design, Politécnico di Milano

Foreword

The Cristóbal Balenciaga museum is turning 10 years old. It was inaugurated 11 June 2011 in the coastal village of Getaria, Gipuzkoa, where the master of haute couture was born 23 January 1895, and also where he was buried after passing away 24 March 1972. In addition to the close geographical bond with the beginning and end of one of the most successful and respected careers in the history of fashion, the museum is a special place for many different reasons.

It is located inside a modern-architecture, 9,000m2 building in a rural setting, a fishing village of hardly 3,000 inhabitants. Its steep streets, sheltered port, and monumental church have scarcely changed since the days of Cristóbal's childhood.

This is an institution promoted by four public entities: the Ministry of Culture, the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, and the Getaria Town Hall, who all understand that Balenciaga's influence goes beyond borders and that fashion is industry, but also culture and, on occasions, heritage.

This is a d'auteur museum (it was the first devoted to a fashion creator) whose collection is not based on the creator's archive itself. Rather, over time, it has received donations and loans from former clients and collaborators, until obtaining over 3,500 textile samples from a broad period of time, including atypical pieces from Balenciaga's early years in his professional career.

This is the only institution that is permanently specialised in keeping, researching, and sharing the technical and artistic legacy of this creator. Every day, every year, with each exhibition, publication, and event. This is its mission, its raison d'être. This complex task is easier said than done. Why is it so complex?

Balenciaga is one of the great names in fashion history. But behind this name, we discover a reserved, stringent person who was always true to himself, private and uninterested in fame. As such, he is not an easy man to get to know. His career was considerable. In 1917, he opened his first business in San Sebastián. He continued with the inauguration of another three in Madrid, Barcelona, and Paris in 1933, 1935, and 1937, respectively. In these cities of two different countries (and as such, with different commercial, tax, and labour laws), he conducted his work. He did so throughout the fifty-two long years that his professional career lasted, until 1968, when he announced that he was closing all his branches. What is more, his business career was not free from difficulty; after surviving two world wars and the Spanish civil war, he claimed his position as one of the creators of the Golden Age of haute couture and of Paris as the world fashion capital.

For Balenciaga, this extensive professional endeavour entailed immense creative effort: launching at least two collections per year, under the standards of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, to which he formally belonged since debuting in Paris, was an exacting task. Yet he became even more demanding, working based on his high trade standards, which prioritised fashion based on technical perfection.

Moreover, Balenciaga worked to be innovative in a competitive, commercial, and creative context, and at the highest level. Chanel,

Vionnet and Christian Dior, for example, were some of the fashion firms on Paris' haute couture stage. Balenciaga came up amongst them, growing firmly established and shining with his own lines, collection after collection, with noteworthy internal, slowly-evolving coherence. In the words of his colleague and friend, Hubert de Givenchy, "he was revolutionary, without waging a revolution." His creations were the result of understanding the ideal of beauty and elegance and dictating them to the world, "two collections ahead of the rest," as stated by *Harper´s Bazaar* in March 1955.

This condensed biography summarises Balenciaga's main reasons, long career, extraordinary production, complex historical context, and his very private personality. As such, learning more, learning better, learning about certain moments in his lifetime, learning about Balenciaga's context in contemporary fashion at different points around the globe… in short, learning what has yet to be learned, or was provided by publications by Marie Andrée Jouve, Lesley Miller, Pamela Golbin, Miren Arzalluz, and others who study fashion history, is a truly arduous and complex task.

Fortunately, however, the museum is not alone in this mission. Since Maison Balenciaga closed, along with Cristóbal's official active life, we have witnessed a progressive process of granting heritage status to his work. Collecting (which began even before he stopped producing), interpretation (in many different exhibitions, since the first in Zurich in 1970), dissemination and debate at events (the first we are aware of in Pittsburgh in 1959), academic research, and even fiction in film and literature, have expanded knowledge. But this also expanded the legend around his figure and career, leading to the misleading sensation that everything to be said about Cristóbal Balenciaga has already been said, or that everything that has been said is true.

However, there are many gaps, questions, and queries we must ask, document, and corroborate. It is true that, as time passes after certain events, research grows more complicated because certain direct sources have vanished. However, and at the same time, other new sources in archives and libraries have opened. Moreover, new technologies provide for other kinds of analyses. We have a broader context and greater objectivity to raise new interpretations of Cristóbal Balenciaga's contribution to fashion history.

With this idea in mind, and given that creating new corroborated, objective, and truthful knowledge about Cristóbal Balenciaga is an integral part of the museum's mission, on the 125th anniversary of his birth, we put out an international appeal to the academic and museum world. We sought to bring those that share our objective together and establish the areas of interest we believed merited further exploration. And the response was magnificent. We received over 40 communication proposals from different countries all around the world, demonstrating that academic interest in the creator from Getaria is still alive and universal.

In starting up and conducting the process prior to the conference, our Scientific Committee's work was essential. Their efforts to select

the communications, based on previously agreed-upon criteria, that best fit the lines of research set forth in the Call for Papers, that contributed original focuses to open new fields of study, whose quality of research was remarkable, etc., was no an easy task. For this reason, this international panel of experts deserves our express gratitude.

As such, the programme designed for the conference was the result of an objective selection process, but also of certain circumstances we cannot ignore, since the pandemic that hit the world in 2020 had direct consequences on our area of work. When COVID-19 burst on the scene, it blocked access to certain information sources and made it difficult to access others. It delayed schedules, increased the workload in academic and museum circles and, from one day to the next, added a new digital gene to our DNA. In this light, the effort to present both the communications and the articles upon which they were based is doubly worthy of mention.

From the museum's point of view as promotor of the conference, the health crisis forced us to evaluate different scenarios and take fast decisions, given that this forum had been designed in its traditional format as a physical meeting place for debate amongst the academic and museum community. With travel made impossible by the pandemic's serious consequences, we were either forced to delay the event, postponing it without a specific date in a context of uncertainty, or to seek out an innovative alternative to move forward with Cristóbal Balenciaga's 125th anniversary and pay tribute to everyone who had made the effort to participate. In April 2020, as half the world came out of mandatory confinement, between the uncertainty and general perplexity of this new circumstance, we decided to move forward and try our digital hand, all while unable to study any precedents or learn from previous practise. We therefore had to act as pioneers in a field unfamiliar to us. For this effort, I want to thank the museum team, who went above and beyond in their ability to adapt. From one day to the next, they mastered this new format.

With it all, this digital, bilingual conference moved forward, and participants shared their communications 1 and 2 October 2020, just as initially planned. 2,465 people from all around the world registered (43% from Spain, 21% from other European countries, 17% from Mexico and South America, 14% from Canada and USA, 5% from Asia and Oceania). At its peak, the audience reached 890 people on the channel in Spanish and another 950 in English as they followed the broadcast. These indicators, along with results from the evaluation survey conducted afterward, with an average score of 9.52 points out of 10, lead us to confirm that results far exceeded our expectations.

The objectives that the museum sought in this first edition (to awaken academic interest in Balenciaga by opening new spaces for research and building a community around him) were fully achieved. What is more, this event proved the existence of new and promising fields of research, to learn more and better about the man, the creator, the businessman, and his epoch.

Therefore, satisfied with these results and certain that this forum will be periodically followed by others, making this a must-attend

appointment on the agendas of everyone interested in Fashion History, we are pleased to present this publication, which includes the conference speakers' articles. This will be followed by others, promoted by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, to contribute to knowledge of the man and his work. With this intent, our website → www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com provides a space for dissemination that we are inaugurating with the publication of these proceedings. Moreover (given the interest shown after holding the conference and the reception of many requests to do so), the different publications put forth by the museum over the course of its 10 years of existence will also be available here. The museum acting as a publisher was a huge effort for our institution, which is worthy of being shared.

The conference proceedings we are presenting here include all the articles shared, except for four of them. As planned from the beginning and in collaboration with *Fashion Theory*, a selection of articles, extended and developed following the quality standards for which this academic journal is known, have been published in May 2021 in a special issue. As such, although duly mentioned in these proceedings, these four are available in the referred publication. In this regard, I would like to thank Valerie Steele, chief editor of Fashion Theory, for hosting the issue, and its editor, Ana Balda, for making this important contribution to the conference.

I also wish to thank Alexandra Palmer for her enlightening opening lecture which is also included in this proceedings. Lastly, I can only express my sincere gratitude to all who participated with research proposals and presentations at this conference, despite the different situation caused by COVID-19, including those whose proposals could not be included in the programme. Without their interest, work, and contribution, true knowledge and research cannot exist. I would like to reiterate the museum's shared commitment to all of them to keep working, along with this blossoming community and to promote rigorous study of Cristóbal Balenciaga's person and legacy.

MIREN VIVES
Head of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum

Guest Lecture

The Elusive Balenciaga

ALEXANDRA PALMER
Nora E. Vaughan Senior Curator, Textiles & Costume at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), responsible for over 44,000 artifacts in the collection of western fashionable dress and textiles. She has curated numerous exhibitions and among her publications are worth mentioning: *Christian Dior: History and Modernity, 1947–1957* (Millia Davenport Publication Award 2020), *Dior: A New Look, A New Enterprise 1947–1957* (Millia Davenport Publication Award 2010), and *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s* (Clio Award for Ontario History 2001). As editor, her work includes *The Modern Age: The Cultural History of Fashion* (2016); *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (2005) and *Fashion: A Canadian Perspective* (2004).

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Fig. 1
Cristóbal Balenciaga by Gyenes

> *He insists even the threads of interlinings match up precisely*
> ("Eye on Balenciaga": 1)

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972), is recognized as a master of cut and design and one of the most documented couturiers of the 20th century. Yet despite the extensive body of literature, he continues to intrigue designers, historians and the public who repeatedly attempt to capture the elusive qualities of the man and the designs. His creations were "regarded by other couturiers as Frank Lloyd Wright's early designs are by architects. The Balenciaga silhouette […] accepted as structurally sound and right for the times as the skyscraper" (Brett 1969: 9).

There have been at least 33 international museum exhibits over the past forty years dedicated to the work of Balenciaga. Christian Dior is the only other single fashion designer who has had as many single focused exhibitions.[1] The very first was in 1970 at Bellerive in Zurich, that led to Mrs Vreeland's exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, *(The World of Balenciaga,* 1973; Monti 2021). Balenciaga remains a popular subject and money-maker for museums, as seen in the spate of recent exhibits, such as *Balenciaga Paris*, Musées des Arts Decoratifs, (6 July to 28 January 2007), *L'Oeuvre au Noir*, Palais Galliera/ Musée Bourdelle, (March 8th to July 16th 2017) (Saillard 2018), and the Victoria and Albert Museum traveling exhibition *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* (27 May 2017 - 18 Feb 2018) have demonstrated (Figure 2).

Interestingly, many of Balenciaga's fashions are difficult to exhibit. What made Balenciaga so sought after by copyists, clients and press was his technical expertise, and the details of the cut and construction. The most lauded designs were often the most technically difficult garments that are considered classics and worn by his elite and dedicated clients. A black cloque evening dress is beautifully cut, but on a static museum form misses the aerodynamics of the in-between dynamic movement and ease of the garment on the body. It is a challenge to encourage museum visitors to focus on cut, and the matte black cloth soaks up the light, obscuring the details (Figure 3). Such, seemingly simple dresses are easily dismissed on display without didactics that offer a closer investigation of the complex design-thinking that the dress embodies. Details can best be seen in edited photography or a cropped museum image.

DEVISING THE ELUSIVE

Opening his Paris salon in 1937 placed Balenciaga in the centre of fashion vortex, with international press eagerly demanding information about the man, the designs and business. While it was acknowledged that he "has emerged somewhat from his obscurity" he remained notoriously unhelpful ("Spanish Rhythm": 61). Balenciaga, consciously, devised his elusiveness. Fashion editors picked styles for photo shoots and reported on the collections, but Balenciaga held tight control over sketches of his work. He vetted sketchers and

1 There have been over 50 exhibits dedicated only to the work of Christian Dior since 1987. Thanks to Soizic Pfaff for this information.

Fig. 2
Cristóbal. Fashion and Heritage held at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum (29 February 20- 5 April 21)
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa. Unzurrunzaga

Fig. 3
Cloqué evening dress with precision cut elliptical overskirt and curved horizontal centre front dart. ROM 994.229.8. Gift of Mrs Gerald Gray from the estate of Mrs O.D. Vaughan
©The Royal Ontario Museum. ROM

sketches. He did not like 'pretty' and invariably chose "what was not intended on the sketch submitted. A faulty outline—one sleeve unintentionally widened at bottom…" ("Eye on Balenciaga": 1). It was said he expected even sketchers who worked for him to learn couture techniques including ironing and sewing in order to understand the designs ("Eye on Balenciaga": 1). Mexican illustrator Bouret, Alfredo Gonzalez, recalled that the mannequins "would just stand there and shrug and assume a bored expression. There was nothing nice about them" and they made it difficult to make a fashion drawing and the result was "a basic description of a dress […] what Balenciaga wanted, of course" (Hume 2003: 14).

Postwar, in order to report on his work and house, the fashion press frequently compared Balenciaga to Christian Dior, the other most celebrated and influential couturier of the period (Join-Diéterle 2007, Miller 2017). The two were often pitted against each other each season, like prize boxers in the fashion ring, going round, after round. Cecil Beaton's interpretation of Dior and Balenciaga in *The Glass of Fashion* (1954: 52), compares their work in terms of high art, writing:

> *If Dior is the Watteau of dressmaking—full of nuances, chic, delicate and timely—then Balenciaga is fashion's Picasso. For like that painter, underneath all his experiments with the modern, Balenciaga has a deep respect for tradition and a pure classic line* […]

But couture is not all like the practice of fine art that is never evaluated in terms of the selection of a frame, a pedestal, or the look of the gallery. The surroundings are not considered part of the art. "Couture is intensely visual. From conception to the final

runway […] today dressmaking has been a kind of performance art (Pierre 1976: 192). Couture presentations are evaluated in terms of the look and construction of the clothes, but also crucial is how they are presented on a living mannequin, the movement, styling, accessories– the complete look. Even before presentation, a couturier has to have an approved, suitably elegant salon in order to be accepted into the Chambre Syndicale.

Beaton positions Dior as an historicist and Balenciaga as a modernist, yet they both were both, historical and modern. There are similarities between them:

— Both opened their Paris houses as mature men in their forties working within the haute couture system, fulfilling the demands of designing seasonal collections with new designs per season covering day to evening wear. The size and production of the houses differed, as seen the spring 1951 collection when Balenciaga showed 176 models, and Dior an astonishing 308 designs (Archives Nationales, Paris F12.10504).
— Both generated "whispers" about the young three or four "young men who are actually doing more work on the new collections" in the design studios. Dior gave assistants his basic idead that they executed, while Balenciaga did the actual cutting of the first model ("Paris …late news": 45).
— Both were the leaders of Paris haute couture in terms of prestige, high prices and sales, together accounting for 60% of couture sales to USA in 1957 ("Paris …late news": 45).
— Both purchased textiles from global sources and were involved in the discussions and complex arrangements with the French government subsidy for couturiers to encourage them to use French manufactured textiles, sales that brought in, on average, nine million dollars to the economy. ("Paris …late news": 40; "Subsidy Loss…": 1).
— Both dressed the international elite.
— Both were the most important sources for copyists.
— Both received the Legion d' Honneur, Dior 1950, Balenciaga 1958.
— Balenciaga was a disruptor, Dior was not. In 1956, when Balenciaga changed the dates of presenting his collection to the press to one month after the couture showings, it was a passive-aggressive move that disrupted the established system. He challenged buyers and press to attend his shows at great inconvenience and expense. In a rare statement Balenciaga explained that he was "fed up with fashion editors who know nothing about fashions, telling buyers what and where to buy" (Jarnow & Judelle 1966: 95).

THE SPANISH CROWN IN PARIS

Balenciaga's aloof behaviour fascinated, and conspired to make access to the man and his designs more valuable and exclusive. The atmosphere of his house was said to be "as silent as a morgue" (Hume 2003). Lack of information made reporting difficult and one method was to repeatedly describe Balenciaga, and his Paris designs, in terms of his Spanishness (Figure 4). The Spanish Balenciaga has been well studied by Marie-Andree Jouve (1997), Lesley Miller (2017: 19-37), Saillard et al (2018), Hamish Bowles (2010, 2011), Eloy Martinez De La Pera et al (*Balenciaga and Spanish Painting* 2019), and Ana Balda (2019). A fellow Basque, Miren Arzalluz, has carefully detailed his years in Spain, before Paris, in a cultural biography (2011).

The reticence of Balenciaga to engage with the press created a tantalizing atmosphere of mystery. Before the war Carmel Snow's, *Letter From Paris* for *Harper's Bazaar* described her farewell to a "city deserted… You can walk for miles without seeing a child… Balenciaga, as usual, was not in evidence. I don't think that anyone has ever seen him in person…" (1939, October: 108). The next season the magazine reported that:

> *Although almost every woman, directly or indirectly, has worn a Balenciaga, it is curious that almost no one knows anything about the man himself. Until February, not one of his customers had ever seen this talented young Spaniard. A victim of crushing shyness, he fled the press, the photographers, and his admirers until they began to wonder whether there really was a Balenciaga at all* ("Spanish Rhythm": 61).

Fig. 4
Worn by Montrealer, Pola Spiegel, a "Black Spanish lace over black taffeta, with a pouf to do the the work of ruffles" wrote *Harper's Bazaar* in the September 1951 issue. ROM 2002.40.1.1-2
Gift of Mrs Pola Spiegel

These leitmotifs explain, and excuse, his outsider attitude towards the Paris fashion system. It was the antithesis of Christian Dior who wrote biographies, constantly entertained the media, and sent out detailed cut and paste-like notes for press printed in his fashion show programmes for each collection (Palmer 2019: 63-5, Palmer 2018: 95-259).

Balenciaga's privacy and inaccessibility garnered him religious reverence. His house was compared to a spiritual order, the man was called a monk, or even the King of an independent kingdom ("Balenciaga Elegance": 18). Givenchy described a Balenciaga fitting with religious zeal, comparable to the transubstantiation of the Host, saying it was like "watching a miracle" ("Balenciaga. Fashion Changer": 202). Jewish, American copyist, Jerry Silverman, remarked that "Going to a Balenciaga collection was like going to church" ("They Remember Balenciaga": 16). However, making clothes is not miraculous;

it requires years of making mistakes to hone the skills of cutting and sewing detail skills, discovering how to handle different materials. It is learned work that takes practice and repetition.

Anny Latour underscored the inaccessibility and sobriety of the house stating that it was "impossible to get an interview with the chief. Impossible to learn anything about his origins. It is as though the shadow of the Spanish Inquisition lay over the invisible maestro" (1958: 259). She went on to describe his "icy coldness" towards all journalists that she recognized as "just as effective as the loud beating of advertising drums" (Latour 1958: 259). It is unlikely that this was initially a deliberate marketing strategy, perhaps due to him being "a victim of crushing shyness," however, it worked well for him ("Spanish Rhythm," 61; Brett: 9). It guarded his privacy and allowed him uninterrupted time to think and work on design with few distractions (Figure 5) .

A similar, but more deliberate and staged, approach was taken up at the end of the twentieth century by Martin Margiela, a fellow tailor who was also very absorbed in the craft and generated press through his absence. By harnessing anonymity, Margiela forced the press and buyers to focus on the clothes, just as Balenciaga had done. Both also presented their collections on un-sexy mannequins, and Balenciaga taught his models to "adopt a distant attitude towards clients" (Balda 2015: 201). Most unusual at the time, his designs were remarkable because they were presented on mask-like, "unglamourous" and "disagreeable" mannequins who did not smile, and walked as if they were "unhappy victims of the Spanish Inquisition" (Figure 6) (Hume 2003; Pierre 1976: 192-3). Margiela went as far as to cover the faces of his mannequins. Too, Balenciaga's mannequins carried the number of

Fig. 5
Balenciaga working in his Parisian atelier
© Balenciaga Archives. Thomas Kublin

Fig. 6
Model posing with the number of the dress she is wearing. Winter collection 1963
© Balenciaga Archives. Thomas Kublin

Fig. 7
Suit by Balenciaga. 1967

the model that served as basic information on the design, unlike Dior who dramatized his collection and catered to the press by naming each line and dress to evoke occasions and locations as Lucile and Poiret had done (Latour 1958: 259, Palmer 2018: 95-259). Balenciaga's unapproachable, and rarefied, positioning of his collections demanded more work from the press and clients, who had to become part of the Balenciaga club of connoisseurs to see, understand and gain information on the clothes. Similarly, Margiela's unexplained numbered lines require an insiders' connoisseurship to decipher.

TEXTILES & CONSTRUCTION

Balenciaga's interest and preference in textiles is well known. When not designing in "Spanish" black, he was recognized for his use of bold colour and rich embroideries, some of which he is credited of creating himself ("Eye on Balenciaga": 1, 7; Salinas 2021). Lesley Miller explained he did not take the couture subsidy (2007: 65).

The French textile industry and government subventions is a history of complex negotiations, relationships and the changing world order in the late 1950s, particularly with American buyers, imports and the many actors vying for business in the couture sector (Dubé-Senecal 2020). Between 1950 to 1963 Paris couture houses could receive a yearly subsidy from the French government came from a tax levied against French fabric firms. To qualify, a couture house had to agree to buy approximately 80% of its textiles from French producers. The portion of funds received depended on how much fabric was actually used, and ranged from $300,000-$600,000 (Jarrow 1965: 95). Instead of taking this financial support that was significant for smaller houses, Balenciaga preferred to have the freedom to select from any international supplier, such as Abraham in Switzerland (Pallmert, Keller, and Wälchli 2010) and Donegal tweeds, and West of England wools ("Balenciaga Was Pied Piper In Setting Trend for Suits": 21). Victoria de Lorenzo (2021) has identified more than ninety textile suppliers during the period 1947-1968.

Balenciaga worked with classic silhouettes and structures. He was known for his pencil thin skirts that were not easy to wear. He used corsets to make his strapless looks. In 1954 he worked with Andree Lefaucheur designing a one-piece corselet, a long line bra-girdle combination with two bones at the front and back, to make the waistline "much loser" by flattening the midriff to give women a straighter line ("For Dior, Balenciaga Mannequins": 1). He was interested in volume and worked and reworked the same forms for years. He made a mark with big sleeves, particularly the melon sleeve

Fig. 8
1967 double cloth, two-piece suit made in Salvatore's atelier. This example was purchased as a bonded model from Holt Renfrew in Toronto by Dolores Backhauser. ROM 2008.102.1.1-2. Gift of Miss Dolores Backhauser

of 1947 that he continued to manipulate, as well as the 1951 free-form demi fit—shaped in front and loose in the back that resulted in the 1957 straight chemise. Balenciaga was obsessive and compulsive. Maintaining his privacy allowed him to focus his intense interest in problem solving textile manipulation to design.

Balenciaga had an unusual breadth of technical expertise. He was a tailor who understood how to manipulate a wool textile by ironing, padding, stitching, but he also could drape and worked with *flou*—a very different skill. An impeccable wool suit was worn by Dolores Backhauser of Toronto (Figure 7-8). When handling the suit the weight and thickness of the wool is surprising. It is a double cloth with a pink and green plaid that is only visible at the hem when you raise the silk lining. The skirt is gently eased into a shaped yoke to create a slim line. It is a soft wool with a big hand—lots of body—a seemingly unwieldy textile that is unlikely candidate for a suit and more commonly used for a blanket or coat, because it sculpts. It is also warm for winter, and perhaps too hot for the North American climate and central heating. It is almost as though Balenciaga took up this challenge with this textile and made it because he could—and he proved he was in charge of the cloth and cut.

COPIES & COPYISTS

Selling to copyists was the financial backbone of the couture. Balenciaga's influence on fashion was seen in the "short, full-back coat" he introduced in 1953 that became a "universal" fashion for between seasons and "the set-away neckline [...] that replaced the

Fig. 9
Shannon Rodgers for Jerry Silverman black and white wool two-piece sleeveless dress in the style of Balenciaga, with button detail at side waist and hem, c. 1965. KSUM 1983.1.662 ab

traditional neck-hugging jacket collar" (Brett 1969: 7). The system of cautions—the cover charge for commercial clients seeing a collection in a house—was connected to the purchase of models. Balenciaga and Dior's fees were the highest as they were the most influential designers of the period and manufacturers made the largest profits from selling hundreds or thousands of versions their styles. The couture depended on these buyers that sustained their business and simultaneously worked hard to mediate and control the age-old problem of piracy (Palmer 2019: 55-71). In 1965, Balenciaga barred all Italians from seeing his showings, after he caught an underground copying ring that, immediately after his collection, sold toiles to New York ("Paris Turns The Other Chic": 11). Balenciaga was always ready to limit circulation at the expense of less sales.

The very successful American copy company, Jerry Silverman, explains the significance of Balenciaga as a style source (Figure 9). In 1959, Silverman launched a line designed by Shannon Rodgers called, *La Petite Parisians*, to fill a gap in the market. It focused on women whose height was 5'4," a "diminuette" (Reynolds, 1960). The clothes were made with a short waist, something they learned from Hattie Carnegie, a very successful high end American copyist and retailer, whose little suits they tore apart and studied (Sheppard 1964). They offered well-fitting American clothes with a French touch at prices that the "average American woman could afford." By 1962, the line was described "as young as springtime and each dress is ageless in its beautiful silhouette [...] so flattering to every figure and every age woman" ("La Petite Parisienne": 13). Balenciaga was a particularly important source for Silverman, because, as one reporter opined "... if only the young could try on the incredible coats, they would learn that

due to the construction they could be worn by a woman 5 feet 11 and 5 feet 4 if the hem changed" (Emerson 1968: 18).

Silverman and Rogers became one of the "great success stories of 7th Ave, and within five years was a six-million-dollar business based on the idea that the $70 dress was "a marvellous price" (Sheppard 1964: 3E). They realized that the line for line copies made so famous by Orbachs and Alexanders were out of date. They understood that "you can't make a $1500 dress for $50 line for line—its gone by the boards (Sheppard 1965: 15). Instead, they redesigned the clothes with "a gist of Paris […] just a faint, far off message" (Sheppard 1964: 3E). They traveled through Europe like a "sponge" five times a year to "put Paris through a strainer," buying up to 100 dresses. (Sheppard 1965: 15). They would look for the newest designers and trends from Balenciaga, Givenchy, Cardin and La Roche and also from lesser known designers. On one trip, they bought only ten Paris couture designs and 14 dresses from other designers such as Belinda Belville in London. They liked another Spanish designer, Elio Berhanyer, from whom they purchased and adapted designs for Bergdorf Goodman's, Miss Bergdorf Shop (Sheppard 1964: 3E).

The business model was innovative and relied upon a keen eye by Rogers to synthesize and recall details seen in the presentations. In February 1964 Silverman and Rogers left Europe the morning after a big Balenciaga opening in Paris. Balenciaga was after all, "the dictator whose every new seam sent women, department store buyers and other designers rushing to copy it" (Deppa 1968: B15). They had manufacturers in New York standing by for their return and "burned the midnight oil" so that their Americanized version of Paris were ready immediately (Sheppard 1965: 15). Six days later a crowd was gathered at their New York 7th Avenue showroom to see their Paris collection, even though the imports they had bought would not arrive for two more weeks. What the buyers saw was Silverman and Rogers distillation of the clothes. Rogers would make sketches from memory and pull out key elements that became the basis of the line. They brought out a little collection every six weeks, an innovation in production and sales that today is the basis of fast fashion brands (Sheppard 1965: 15). When they finally received the three new Balenciaga's they had purchased, they saw similarities to his past collections with the same body and lower neck but they still "crawled in between the seams of the new collection" to forensically examine the models (Sheppard 1964: 3E). They translated a violet wool Balenciaga sheath dress into an easy slim skirt and a short waist-hugging jacket that revealed a wide leather belt beneath. By 1964 they had sold 25,000 adaptations of a single, simple sleeveless Balenciaga dress they had bought a few years before, and it was still going strong in a new fabric (Sheppard 1964: 3E). This explains why in 1966, *Women's Wear Daily* complained that "Balenciaga is beginning to look like a play about himself" ("Balenciaga" :1), and by 1968 *The New York Times* reported that the best thing about a Balenciaga collection was its "familiarity" (Emerson 1968: 18).

Fig. 10
Envelope dress of silk gazar by Abraham. 1967

Fig. 11
Balenciaga's 1957 "sack" or chemise dress caused an up roar by its seemingly-simple shape that hung from the shoulders and disregarded the waist

ELUSIVE STYLE & CLIENTS

The Balenciaga style was seemingly simple, but technically complex because he worked his designs to reduce seams making a simple line. Emanuel Ungaro (1933-2019), a tailor in the studio for three years, said, "Balenciaga was very modern. He invented the modern couture" (Charney 1999). The modernism was experimental, a process of design that haute couture supports. *Vogue's* Bettina Ballard praised Balenciaga whose every collection was a "veritable nest of new ideas. But since his style is a bold one, since it is always in advance of the others, it is merciless on anyone who chooses the wrong dress, and he is nothing that makes a woman look more unattractive than a Balenciaga model inelegantly worn" (Ballard 1960: 129). The modernist, sculptural and pared down designs are most associated with Balenciaga today, but were not the clothes that women wanted at the time. The American fashion consultant, Tobé, went as far as to say, "The average American woman wouldn't wear an original Balenciaga if you gave it to her" (Roscho,1963: 148).

Balenciaga's extreme designs such as the trapezoid wide winged cocktail dress made of Abrahams gazar did not sell well. It is a study in cloth; a science experiment in gravity and structure (Figure 10). The 1957 chemise or sack dress caused real problems for copyists who saw a simple line they could manufacture cheaply and reap great profits but it was a failure (Figure 11). The radical design caused huge ripples and financial losses in the garment industry. It devastated belt manufacturers and lingerie manufacturers who had to rethink slips, bras and girdles (Roscho 1963: 185). But Balenciaga's work was such an important influence on other designers that they defended him and

Fig. 12
Brown napped wool two-piece suit with curved vertical darts in the side front and shoulder in the jacket and slim skirt from the wardrobe of Hope Skillman. Fall 1949. ROM 958.85.1a-b. Gift of Hope Skillman Inc. ROM 958.91.4

blamed "middle aged women, who looked like sausages in the straight casings" and who had sullied and misunderstood the sack (Roscho 19663: 189). Norman Norell targeted the ignorance of women who were wearing an old shape under a new fashion, saying they "didn't really know how they were supposed to look. They wore them too long […] they used an uplift bra so that instead of falling against the body, the dress was pushed away" (Roscho 1963: 192). He explained it was a commercial failure for manufacturers because it was difficult to make properly and ready to wear firms "turned out cheap, ugly designs" with only two seams. The dress was considered too rarified for the average woman, manufacturer and was only appropriate for cultured fashion connoisseurs.

It was mocked by a Cold War journalist who that claimed a Russian trade union newspaper wrote that the well-dressed Russian could wear it to the May Day parade, because it could be worn straight from work in the factory without worrying about it not fitting well (Roscho 1963: 192). But because Balenciaga had designed it, there could be nothing wrong with the design. Balenciaga's distain for the average woman and manufacturers is in sharp contrast to Christian Dior who introduced new silhouettes and simultaneously, arranged licenses and manufacturing arrangements to accommodate the bra and girdle industry ensuring that women could have help in adopting new styles (Palmer 2019: 89-113). Balenciaga did not stray from his design aesthetics and if the public did not appreciate, were not ready, or misunderstood his ideas, he offered no explanation or assistance.

The most elite socialites were the bone fide Balenciaga clients who are best known because they lent their wardrobes to exhibits or donated to museums that validate their good taste and expenditures

(*The World of Balenciaga,* 1973; Walker 2006; *Mona Bismarck,* 2006). They have been important actors in making and sustaining the image of the master fashion designer. They are the ones who successfully negotiated the "fierce Madame Vera, whose reputation as a dragon proceeded her" (Hume 2003). Reportedly, one Balenciaga client, Mona von Bismarck, was so depressed upon hearing of the closure of the house in 1968, that she did not leave her room for days (Miller 2017: 124). Carmel Snow, a client and fashion editor for *Harper's Bazaar*, was very engaged with, wore and gave over many pages of the magazine to his work (Snow, Aswell, 1962: 164-7). These were the women who are held up and credited with having the sophistication and culture to truly understand and wear Balenciaga properly.

Balenciaga was, however, worn by career women. For two of them, their Balenciaga suits were important staples in their wardrobes, and a marker of their success in business, particularly at time when it was difficult for women to dress and be taken seriously professionally. American, Hope Skillman (1908-1981), a contemporary of Balenciaga, became one of the first women executives. She was a textile designer and stylist, who opened her own cotton textile manufacturing company in 1942, and first employed only women. She was an advocate for women's rights and became President of the New York Fashion Group, a professional association of 5000 women working in the fashion business (Krismann 2005: 494; Waggoner 1981, D.21). She donated an eight-year-old, two-piece 1949 Balenciaga day suit to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1957. It was part of her working professional working wardrobe. The abrasion on the textile records the repeated wear. Interestingly the order was

Fig. 13
1965 navy wool suit purchased as a bonded model from Holt Renfrew in Toronto, by Barbara McNabb and worn for her professional life as a magazine editor. The linen collar is detachable so easily washed. Worn with a boater style hat and turquoise gros grain gloves or alternatively, white with navy polka dot gloves. ROM 2001.39.1.2
Gift of Miss Barbara McNabb

Fig. 14
Wool suit by Balenciaga. Summer collection. 1967

Fig. 15
In 1968 Balenciaga designed the uniforms for Air France hostesses. The winter uniform was in navy blue wool twill, and the summer uniform in pink polyester

modified from the original distinctive tweed textile, and is in a less distinctive, and more wearable, camel-coloured wool (Figure 12).

Barbara McNabb was an editor for an import and merchandising magazine, and one of the first female business editors in Canada. Her navy wool Balenciaga suit from the fall 1965 collection was normally beyond her means. She purchased it much reduced as a bonded model, an opportunity she said was "a god-send" because wearing the suit gave her "some substance and position." She wore it with white gloves and a hat in a similar style to the one presented by Balenciaga, and if feeling "jaunty" she wore it with polka dot gloves (McNabb 1991). It too is well worn and well loved. While Barbara McNabb was delighted with a suit and faux collar, instead of a blouse, the more physically active and younger working woman wanted different things from their work clothes. The vogue for lady-like elegance and maturity was overtaken by the look and action of youth (Figure 13-14).

THE FLIGHT TEST

In 1969, at the end of his career, Balenciaga designed the Air France stewardess uniform that had to function on long trips and different climates, as in the "jet age clothes that travel well are of prime importance" (Figure 15) (Brett 1969: 8). Miller noted that this was his "longest-lived designs in production, since they were used and reproduced from [...] 1969 until 1978" (2017: 131). However, the designs were not successful for those who wore them; Balenciaga was for the "grand dames of fashion such as Marlene Dietrich or the Duchess of Windsor," not the air hostesses who would have much preferred a Catherine Deneuve-look by Yves Saint Laurent with long tunics and wide trousers. The only modern touch they felt was the long boots option. They were unhappy with the designs that were impractical, and they complained about it to their union. Out of 77% who answered the poll only 2.89% liked the winter uniform and even less liked the summer version. In particular they did not like the pockets inset in the seams of both skirts that they thought made them look like kangaroos. They did not like the summer raincoat that was shorter than the two-piece underdress. The summer outfit showed

Fig. 16
The 1965 Sari dress by Cristóbal Balenciaga, in brocaded silk by Leonard, beaded and sequin trim by Lesage, was a big success for Balenciaga and copyists, including Jerry Silverman of New York
© Balenciaga Archives. Jean Kublin

Fig. 17
Detail of the sari dress by Balenciaga
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa. Paredes

too much stomach. It was too revealing when they raised their arms as there was no blouse under the short-sleeved top, and they were not permit to wear aprons, nor remove their jackets ("Balenciaga Styles Flunk Flight Test": D15; Miller 2017: 135). The *Los Angeles Times* said he flunked the flight test (1969, Jan 12, D15). The Balenciaga style was suitable for ladies who were served, not women who were serving others or themselves.

THE KING ABDICATES

In 1968, at age 60, Balenciaga recognized that fashion and haute couture had shifted gears. When the house of Balenciaga closed, the headlines ran "The King abdicates," "Quits the Fashion Throne," and there was concern about who would replace the Pied Piper (Deppa 1968: B15; "Balenciaga Was Pied Piper…": 21). The clientele who could afford and wanted his expensive, elegant clothes for mature women was dwindling. Importantly, that year his sales reportedly dropped $40,000 as the vogue for new youthful styles keep the ready to wear copyist away (Deppa 1968: B15). By this time Americans were restless with his "re-runs" and while it was agreed that the collection was likely the best technically, the presentation with models who "march in and out of the salons like little soldiers," was not emotionally exciting. Buyers went to see but bought little as they were looking for younger clothes (Emerson1968: 18).

Unlike Chanel, who famously said she wanted to be copied, Balenciaga did not, but Balenciaga's were everywhere. A 1964 report on a New York party noted it was filled with "Balenciaga's adaptations

to burn [...] dancing around the room" (Sheppard 1964: 3E). That year Baby Jane Holzler, a member of the Warhol scene, reported that she did not buy Balenciaga's sari dress, "[...] because everyone in town bought it. It was the most beautiful dress in Paris" (Figure 16-17) (Bender 1967: 157; Miller 2017: 40). It was considered "a complete new look for Balenciaga [...] unnoticed expect by Shannon Rodgers and Jerry Silverman who never miss anything" ("This Is A Complete New Look": 1). Balenciaga clothes were considered the apogee of elegance but, as one writer said: "Elegant was never sexy: the clothes were like architecture, costly and permanent" (Pierre 1976: 293). By the late 1960s there was a growing feeling that Balenciaga's simplicity for simplicity sake was on the way out. The simple snob dress was being challenged, by the "something" dress with a little dash of "frou fou" ("After Balenciaga-What?": 1). Balenciaga bowed out of international fashion, and carefully staged his exit to ensure he remained elusive.

Fig. 18
Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal.
Exhibition view

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Biographical Aspects

How He Saw Himself: A Material Culture Approach to Cristóbal Balenciaga's Personal Style and Life-Story

BEN WHYMAN
Manager. Centre for Fashion Curation, University of the Arts London.
→ b.whyman@fashion.arts.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents material culture analysis of Spanish fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga's wardrobe of clothing in the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa's collection. It compares the public persona of a fashionable and conservatively attired European man in the early- and mid-20th century, with the clothing housed in the Museum's store. The public presentation of self and his private identity are, in Balenciaga's case, intriguingly different and worth analyzing in light of the accepted biography of his life.

The designer's clothes in the Museum's collection are very different in style and tone than that of the crisply-tailored, conservative presentation that the designer publicly portrayed during his life. Other than two formal dinner suits and a monogrammed dress shirt, the wardrobe is made up of casual styles of masculine dress. These offer a counter-narrative of a casual, informal approach to Balenciaga's personal dressing that few would have witnessed in his lifetime.

Through undertaking Material Culture research of Balenciaga's personal clothing, other narratives emerge. There are distinct similarities in design between clothing Balenciaga wore—and I posit, perhaps had his atelier staff alter or make for him—and designs he created for his female haute couture clientele. New lines of enquiry materialized, regarding his approach to designing for the masculine and feminine body, and how Balenciaga constructed his identity within his professional, public world, and his private life.

The author argues that the clothes of one pson and the biographies of those objects, including the materiality (wear and tear), and, in Balenciaga's case, comparing and contrasting his design work with his personal wardrobe, offers researchers information about someone's life-story that wasn't known before. This analysis enhances our understanding of character, identity and behaviors. This paper presents an approach to material culture that reinforces the importance of studying the clothes worn by people like Balenciaga, as much as paper ephemera and oral history, in constructing life-stories. It privileges the fashion object as biographical evidence.

KEYWORDS

Biography of Object
Materiality
Material Culture
Balenciaga
Menswear

Cristóbal Balenciaga's personal style manifests in the formal photographs of himself he had taken and made publicly available via media outlets such as fashion magazines and newspapers. In crisply-tailored suiting, white shirts and small knotted ties, shirt cuffs perfectly exposed at the sleeves of jackets, hair smooth and swept back from the forehead, he presented himself in an austere style in keeping with a conservative presentation of masculine identity in mid-20th century Europe. Images captured in the workroom show Balenciaga protecting his attire with smart white work coats.

What follows positions this media presentation and perception of Balenciaga as the formal, austere gentleman who did not engage with the public, offering instead a counter-narrative by analysing pieces of his personal clothing in the collection of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, Getaria. The majority of this collection was donated to the museum by the family of Ramon Esparza, Balenciaga's personal assistant for many years. One of two dinner suits was donated by the son of Marquise de Llanzol, one of the designer's close friends. Other than the two formal double-breasted dinner suits and a monogrammed dress shirt, the designer's clothes in the museum's collection are very different in style to that he chose to publicly portray himself in. Sporty blousons and polo shirts offer a narrative of a casual, informal approach to Balenciaga's dressing that few, other than his closest friends and family, would have witnessed. These garments present a very different story than that previously understood by the media and public of Balenciaga's personal style. This very personal wardrobe contains 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.

This research begins to paint a portrait of Cristóbal Balenciaga using these articles of his personal clothing as a canvas. Following recently-completed PhD research, where I explored the biographies of objects, masculine attire and material culture, I propose that garments worn by subjects like Balenciaga can offer fashion historians and life-writers original insights into the lives of subjects. As the research progressed, through conflating findings from analysis of his clothing with textual analysis (visual and literary analysis undertaken concurrently: see Berger 2008, Sontag 1979, Rose 2002, McKee 2003, Banks 2009, Mitchell 2012), a second and intriguing narrative emerged. The evidence strongly pointed towards Balenciaga using his couture atelier staff to alter or make his clothes for him—perhaps even he himself altered and made them. Going by the physical construction of some of his clothing in the Museum's collection, Igor Uria (Director of Collections at the Museum) and tailor Alan Cannon-Jones (who I worked with to analyze these garments), both assert that there is a strong case to be made for the designer utilizing his staff's tailoring skills, or his own, as a way of dressing himself. Uria also noted that the design of some cotton jersey knit polo shirts in the collection worn by Balenciaga were strikingly similar in design as garments he had designed for his female clients. Other than a slightly altered neckline, the pattern pieces for these male and female garments look almost

identical. This revealed an avenue of research which, in the current climate of limited movement, will require further analysis in the future. But it offers a rich seam of insight into Balenciaga's approach to his design work for the female body, and his perception of his very personal masculine identity that will be explored further in this paper.

One of the key areas of evidence was revealed in the materiality (the wear and tear) of the garments Balenciaga wore. It has been often described how we use clothing as a barrier, and an invitation, to our lives, in ways different to other objects we surround ourselves with. As we move through our everyday life, the body and clothing rub against each other, leaving marks, stains, patination, the imprint of physical presence, a tangible record of biography (see Baert 2017). Clothing takes on our physical shape and form through this proximity to the body. Dress literally and physically absorbs our DNA, betraying our embodied presence on and within the object. In this way, clothing is different to other personal and material things that we live with that often have established biographies, including letters and diaries (stamps, dates and addresses situate place; written documentation of events) and photographs (visual representations of people in different contexts and spaces). Clothes act as an immediate and connective tissue between our bodies and our lives (Grosz 2009: 126).

Materiality is one of the key elements of this discussion. Materiality can be defined as the constituent parts, the stuff and fabric making up an object, and its state of repair: in this sense, materiality is evidence of the relationship between the wearer and the worn. Materiality of surfaces of cloth provides further insights into the biography of 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. Surface studies has recently developed as a line of enquiry within the academic field of material culture. Theorists including Joseph Amato (2013) and Giuliana Bruno (2014), offer productive modes of thinking around surfaces. Key imperatives in this field is the surface and the way it reveals use, indicated through abrasion, tears, fading and wearing away. The coexisting nature of textures, forms, skin, surfaces and other surrounding objects influence our interpretation of them. Artist Janis Jefferies uses the notion of 'laboured cloth' (2007), and theorist Elizabeth Abel has used the term 'materialized memory' (2013). Both are useful in describing the materiality found on, and in, worn clothing. They are evocative metaphors with which to encounter our feelings and responses towards clothes: from the production, to everyday use, perhaps altered, and then discarded (or donated to a museum).

What can constructing biographies of a subject's clothing reveal, that wasn't known before? Claudia Mitchell's notion of the importance of investigating the 'dressed stories' of someone's life (2012: 43) is relevant to this discussion. In 1928 Woolf reflected in her novel *Orlando*: 'Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us' (2003: 92). Given Woolf's self-reflective acknowledgement (nearly 100 years ago) of

the power of clothes to impact on our lives, this paper encourages biographical researchers to approach a subject's clothing as evidence of their lives. The questions raised by this perspective are those that I posed to test my hypothesis; the hypothesis that the clothes could reveal something about Balenciaga's life. How did he wear his clothes? What could the materiality of the garments reveal? What could analysis of the paper ephemera and associated archives surrounding his life reveal that, combined with analysis of his clothes, might amplify our understanding of his life, desires and choices? My aim was to present the rich evidence clothing as material artifact offers life-stories. Balenciaga's clothes revealed that he wore them often, going by the materiality of cloth. This not only suggests that he cared for his clothes or that they were often well constructed from good quality cloth. But, through the creases at the inner elbows and knees, combined with the visual evidence and literary descriptions of him, there was another route into understanding his life. This methodology proves that Balenciaga was using clothes as a construction of a number of different identities—private and public—with which to present how he saw himself to the world.

A key method used for this research was material culture analysis (MCA: see Prown, 1982, 2001) of Balenciaga's clothing. When conflated with textual analysis and oral histories traditionally used by life-writers, MCA of the objects surrounding someone's life, including their clothes, offers more nuanced, reflective evidence of a subject's life-story. The types of clothes someone wore, how they wore them, what colors and textures they chose to wear on their bodies, enhances our understanding of that person's character, identity and behaviors. This paper privileges the fashion object as biographical evidence.

For those interested in biography (dependent on methods used, described as life-writing since the 1970s) and fashion history, Balenciaga is an elusive character to describe. The public portraits of him, those he chose to present to the world, and the descriptions of him in the press, describe the reclusive and reserved man and designer of haute couture (Blume 2014: 82, Miller 2007: 14, see Balda 2020). Growing up in a family of humble means, he was deeply religious and conservative and had little formal education (Blume 2014: 6). In his private life, he preferred simplicity and austerity. This paradox between simplicity and austerity in his private life is in contrast to the bright and bold colors and silhouettes he occasionally utilized in haute couture designs for his female clients. Working so intimately with clients' and models' bodies to construct garments, I questioned whether Balenciaga's perception of his own body and choices in his own clothing was influenced by his design work. What did he choose to wear, or have made for himself? What textures and colors did he wear, and why? Were there overlaps between his personal, private style, and his design work for his clients? How did Balenciaga see himself?

This paper proposes a metaphor, using his clothes as the lens, through which to view Balenciaga's life, his choices, and, perhaps, elements of his design work that has not been brought to light before. Commonly utilized in life-writing and a key method in this research,

informed assumption is a classic biographical device with which to construct literal and visual portraits of a subject (see Schlereth 1985, Campbell 1996, Kopytoff 2005, Jenkins 2009, Caine 2010). But it needs to be used assiduously in the construction of a life-story. It is hoped that what is revealed in this paper respects the memory of Balenciaga, whilst posing questions about his life that convey original insights into his perception of himself.

BIOGRAPHY OF OBJECTS

To contextualize elements of my argument, and to couch small vignettes that I will present describing the beginnings of the biography of some of the clothes Balenciaga wore, it is productive to examine anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's theories underlining the value of things beyond production or commercial aspects, which reinforces the primary theme of the biography of objects. Kopytoff's writing in Arjun Appadurai's seminal publication, *The Social Life of Things* (2005) establishes the importance of analyzing objects when viewing lives. He describes how the biographies of objects can reveal what might otherwise remain obscured (2005: 67). Kopytoff related how doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in an object's "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its useful "life" (Kopytoff 2005: 66-7)? Kopytoff describes how objects with difficult biographies, such as the life of an object that follows a different trajectory to one we expect—for instance, Balenciaga's casual clothes in the Museum's collection—are as challenging to analyze as a difficult life. Presumptions and assumptions reveal our cultural, aesthetic, historical biases and judgements, our convictions and our values (Kopytoff 2005: 67). He notes how practitioners bring assumption (informed or otherwise) to the task of building the biography (2005: 67-8). We presume that all lives are made up of multiple stories—personal and private, public, familial, psychological—and, through the biographical process, we discard and prioritize narratives to suit our personal narratives as researchers. As Kopytoff notes, biographies of things cannot but be similarly partial (2005: 67-8). Sociologist and psychologist Sherry Turkle reinforces this idea when she says: 'objects have life roles that are multiple and fluid' (2007: 6). Objects carry biographies, not only of sale and resale value, previous owners, the resources that have been used to maintain it, but also a social value such as the owner's background, judgements, and why they chose this object over another.

This broader understanding of objects like Balenciaga's clothes informs and augments existing knowledge of his life; so too, a deeper understanding of how someone wears their clothes can suggest potential avenues of research and exploration for the researcher. Analyzing how someone wears their clothing is productive to interrogate when considering the proximity of dress to the body. Susan Pearce expands this narrative when she states:

> The emotional relationship of projection and internalization which we have with objects seems to belong with our very earliest experience and (probably therefore) remains important to us all our lives. Equally, this line of thought brings us back to the intrinsic link between our understanding of our own bodies and the imaginative construction of the material world… (1992: 47).

The narratives embedded in the everyday clothing worn by subjects such as Balenciaga are usefully analyzed and critiqued by Kopytoff's theories around the biography of objects. Acting as a lens through which their lives can be viewed, clothes become mute witnesses to someone's life (Prown 1982: 7, Hodder 1994: 393). The aim is to scrutinize their biographies more rigorously and thoughtfully, using a broader range of methods and material with which to do so. As well as establishing biographies of pieces of Balenciaga's clothing using primary and secondary research, it is equally important to evaluate how literary and visual material is "mapped" by the researcher onto MCA research when augmenting a life-story. My approach when analyzing material objects was, as Hoskins (1998), Lee (2008), Caine (2010) stress, as considered and critical an evaluation of facts and information as humanly possible.

Continuing this line of thinking, of the emotional as much as the physical relationship to the objects we physically surround ourselves with, this paper presents a series of mini-vignettes based around different garments Balenciaga wore, as a way of building a portrait of the man through his clothing. Where possible, textual analysis is conflated with MCA and slow looking (Lee 2008, Mida and Kim 2015) of the clothes he wore, to build a very personal picture.

DINNER SUIT

Balenciaga's fascination in crafting cloth to fit a body is evident in his tailoring for women. For his personal clothing that he wore in public, he favoured expertly-made tailoring to dress his own body, with some subtle twists. The Museum's collection houses two dinner suits of his—one deep navy, the other black—that he would have worn for the few public events he attended. They are classics of their type. This black suit, from 1947, is expertly cut and tailored (CBM2002.60. Figures 1a-1b). At this point in time, materials were still scarce after World War 2 and rationing in many European countries continued, including Spain where this suit was made (going by the label text). The tailor who made this suit worked with material that may not have been first choice in quality, but the overall effect is still elegant.

Fig. 1a-1b
Balenciaga tuxedo jacket (composite image), CBM 2002.60
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection

When analyzing this suit using MCA, the size and form of Balenciaga's physical body literally begins to take shape (Figure 2). There is a dart covered by the lapel, shaping the front panels of the jacket. The tailor was working the design and material jacket to cover a fuller chest through shaping and shrinking the cloth with the steam iron, padding and darting. The trousers are also expertly tailored. An 'invisible' buttonhole at the top of the fly is made by a little gap in the seam, a very elegant solution to keeping the trouser shape and line. Pinking shears (scissors with a zig-zag cutting edge) are used to cut the edge of the fly (a good pair of pinking shears are expensive, and the best tailors use them). The edges of the material inside the trousers are over-sewn by hand. Silk tape runs down each outer-leg seam, stitched by hand. Like the jacket, white cloth is used instead of black for internal elements like pocket bags (again, likely due to cloth rationing at the time of making). The front pockets show signs of abrasion, but the back pockets look little-used, if at all. At the trouser cuff, canvas is used to keep the material stiffened and in place. When I showed photographs of this stiffening at the cuff to Cannon-Jones, he noted he had not seen this before on a men's tailored garment. Is this Balenciaga and the tailor carefully managing the cloth to avoid the hem flapping around his ankles? It is a question for further research.

Fig. 2
Balenciaga tuxedo detail, Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection

The ensemble is tailored beautifully. It presents a picture, going by the sizing (jacket nape to back hem measurement: 72 centimeters or 28 inches), waist measurements (83.5 centimeters or 32 inches) and inside leg measurement (83 centimeters or 32 inches, which is long in comparison with the other trousers in Balenciaga's wardrobe, but suggests a long line to the fall of the trousers over the shoe, which is fashionable for masculine dinner suiting), of someone who was

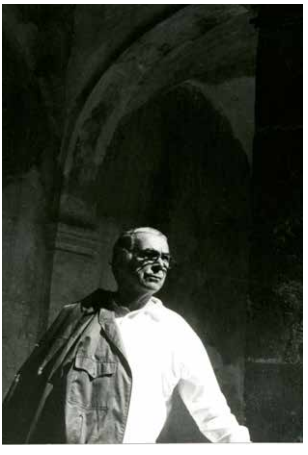

Fig. 3
Detail of blue blouson, Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection CBM 2000.90
© B. Whyman 2020

Fig. 4
Image of Balenciaga in private
© Calparsoro, 1965

Fig. 5
Detail of blue blouson with hand-stitched hem detail, Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection
© B. Whyman 2020

mid-height for a man (around 5 feet 8 inches), with a large chest and, in 1947 at the age of 52, a relatively slender waist for a man of his age.

Balenciaga's designs for women were formal and elegant. His public presentation of himself was also formal, conservative and austere, going by this dinner suit. But exploring the majority of his wardrobe of personal clothing at the Museum, this is not the picture that emerges. The majority of his clothes reveal alternative aspects to his personality. They are informal, casual styles and cuts, textured cloths—jersey knit polo-neck tops, a casual blouson, walking trousers, leisurewear, everyday clothing worn in his private life. The few photos I could find of Balenciaga in informal, casual clothing reveals a different perspective of his character.

PRIVACY

Is this blue cropped zip jacket in the Museum's collection (CBM 2000.90. Figures 3) the same jacket worn in this image (Figure 4)? It is tempting and tantalizing to imagine so. Through MCA, it was evident the blouson was not particularly high quality, but there are hints of alteration that suggest Balenciaga was asking someone to alter things like this ready-to-wear garment to be shaped to fit his body: a hem to be taken up or a seam to be amended. A hand-stitched hem along the inside bottom of the jacket is finely done, in complete contrast to the machined make and finish of the rest of the garment (Figure 5). (Figure 5)

The garment has the appearance of a travel jacket, made of light weight material and easy to slip off and on. The brass zips of this jacket are set in "edge to edge" (the edges of the material are measured and stitched to align with each other, covering the zip when closed). The collar is very simply constructed. The materiality of the jacket is evidenced in general wear and tear on the cloth and sweat stains

across the centre back of the garment. Interesting details such as the storm vents at the cuff (a small triangle of material with an arrow head finish set in to the aperture of the sleeve to prevent water penetrating the gap in the material) suggest Balenciaga was comfortable in simple clothing but with strong design detail.

Is one of the following white cotton jersey knit tops the same top Balenciaga was wearing in the earlier photograph of him in private (Figure 6)? Again, it is tempting to imagine how close we could be to matching an actual garment from the Museum's collection with a photo of him wearing it. Interestingly, discussing with Igor Uria at the Museum some ideas around these simple jersey tops of Balenciaga's, what he has noticed in his own research is that the shape and pattern of the garment is very similar to a garment worn by Mrs. Rachel Mellon (CBM 2014.194)—the only difference being a different neckline. Was Balenciaga copying garments that he designed for woman, and having them made by his atelier staff for himself? The white and blue cotton-knit tops Balenciaga wore are not mass-produced, and although it is not out of the realms of possibility that elements of the top could have been made in a factory, there are other indicators that suggest another story. The collar of the blue top is hand-stitched, setting the bulky layers of material at the neckline neatly in place. Making an informed assumption, I believe this classic polo shirt design was used by Balenciaga for his female clientele as a way to dress them in the style they demanded for elements of their private lives, whilst at the same time, dressing himself in a classic masculine casual garment in his private life.

Fig. 6
White cotton jersey knit top
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa
collection CBM 2000.104

Adding another layer of suggestion to the narrative, designer Hubert de Givenchy noted that there were occasions when Balenciaga would take him back to the atelier to "undo the sleeves" of his clothes in order to make them fit better (Blume 2014: 201). Balenciaga had a strong sense for tailoring, evidenced in his personal wardrobe and in his design training and influences (Miller 2007: 51). He had the technique and skills to be able to alter and make clothes. Givenchy also believed that Balenciaga's clothes were made in Spain (Blume 2014: 201). This adds to the already rich narratives around how Balenciaga dressed himself and strongly suggests that workers in his Spanish ateliers (Madrid or Barcelona) were altering and making his clothes—or that he was altering and making his own clothes as they worked on his designs for female clientele.

Balenciaga is reported to have said to Givenchy: "be natural, be simple, be honest, don't make complications" (Blume 2014: 139). When analyzing these reported statements by the designer, and conflating them with MCA of his simply-designed clothes in the Museum collection, we begin to build a story of someone who thought,

Fig. 7
Jumbo cord trousers
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa
collection CBM 2000.97
© B. Whyman 2020

Fig. 8
Detail of jumbo cord
trousers – cuff detail
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa
collection
© B. Whyman 2020

and dressed, purposefully at ease, but also someone who was thinking of design almost from an androgynous perspective—dressing his female clients and himself in strikingly similar garments that were simple, honest and easy on most body shapes (sex and gender). It opens up further exploration of Balenciaga's approach to design

MATERIALITY

Balenciaga was interested in the materiality of texture, evident in the materials he chose to dress many women in, and evidenced in the clothes he chose to wear in his private life. These seemingly innocuous camel-colored jumbo corduroy trousers of Balenciaga's in the Museum's collection (CBM 2000.97. Figure 7) have presented a number of questions about his choice of casual dress, and also who he used to alter, and even make, garments for him. These trousers further reinforce the idea developed by Uria, Cannon-Jones and myself that he was using his atelier makers to alter his clothes, or making them himself.

The inside of the trousers is where questions arise (Figure 8). When I first analyzed the seams, it was startling to see the machine overlocking and many of the seams stitched using contrasting-colored, deep blue thread. Cannon-Jones and I talked through some ideas as to why this might be. He noted that what I presumed to be overlocked edges to the cloth, in fact turned out to be a careful zig-zag stitch along the edge. Given many tailored and couture edges are finished by hand, there are conundrums that require further investigation.

Fig. 9
Walking trousers
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa
collection CBM 2000.98

The trouser cuffs appear to have been taken up. The inside leg is nearly 30 inches, suggesting an average stature as previously described. The waist measurement is '42' as indicated by the sticker still attached to the trousers (suggesting they were seldom worn). '42' refers to the Italian measurement, doubled it comes to an 84 cm or 32 inch waist circumference. The zip is plastic, the pocket bags are nylon, both inexpensive. The style of the front pocket is described as "Frog Mouth," and the back pockets are narrow welted. The color and quality of the cord itself is luxurious. Balenciaga effectively worked with color in the atelier, and going by these trousers, was not averse to using color in his own wardrobe to draw out his own character through his clothing.

These walking trousers are shaped similarly to what would be known in Scotland as "Dreich" walking trousers (Dreich being a vernacular Scottish term for bad weather) (Figure 9). Again, in discussion with Cannon-Jones, he believed these trousers may have been made in Balenciaga's atelier given the type of material used, and the hand-finishing in parts of the construction. Details include cinched and buttoned cuffs, white cotton pocket bags and vintage military buttons keeping the fly opening together. The fabric is a nubby linen, airy for walking in a mild, but not cold climate (which would suit the milder climates of France and Spain).

It is interesting to consider how these trousers may have been used by Balenciaga. There are signs of wear and tear. He may have been a walking enthusiast, but regardless they suggest someone looking for clothing that was easy to wear, in nature, on holiday, away from the busyness of his ateliers in France and Spain. And again, just perhaps, the workers in his ateliers were altering his clothing to fit him. Was he repairing, altering or even making some of these garments himself? Further investigation is required regarding the cloth used for his garments in the Museum's wardrobe, like these trousers and the jumbo cords. Are these materials evident in Balenciaga's designs for his female clientele at the time of making? The evidence already presented, of contrasting and hand stitching and the finish of the jersey-knit polo shirts, suggest a man more interested in moving and relaxing in his private spaces than showing a stylish persona when he was with his closest friends at his holiday homes—even if those garments were made of couture—quality materials.

BUTTON HOLES

A white bib-front shirt by Bel y Cia of Barcelona with the monogram "CB" embroidered in pale grey on the front left panel (CBM 2000.95. Figure 10) holds particular interest from a biographical perspective.

Fig. 10
White shirt by Bel y Cia, Barcelona
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection CBM 2000.95

Fig. 11
White shirt button detail by Bel y Cia, Barcelona
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa collection

Operating since 1842, the Bel y Cia company prides itself on fine quality clothing, tailoring and shirt-making. The material is fine cotton, soft to the touch, not the crisper, stiffer cotton often used for formal dress shirts. The shape of the narrow yoke (a pattern piece that sits across the top of the back) is unusual, with a point at the centre bottom, rather than a straight line which fits differently across the shoulder blades. There is a button at the bottom of the placket to button to the trousers, to help keep the shirt tucked in when worn. This is a particular style of buttoning popular in the 1940s and '50s (Figure 11).

It is the closure of the buttonholes at the cuffs that are of interest. Someone—was it Balenciaga himself?—turned a formal French cuff into a more informal button cuff by crudely hand-stitching the holes closed, and adding a button to the cuff. This is in contrast to Balenciaga as the formal, besuited enigma, who sought perfection and quality in his work. A cuff is something that can be "on show." But, even though this is a finely-made shirt, was even this high quality of shirt something considered informal by Balenciaga, something to be worn in private, and crudely altered at the cuff to suit a more leisurely lifestyle, where he was not seen in public, and therefore did not need or want to prescribe to established and formal masculine dress codes? What is clear is that even in his informal, private world, he desired quality, even if it was sometimes altered with contrasting threads, or hastily stitched together by hand.

Given these prompts, there are more questions that require answering from the early stages of this research and there are many different lines of enquiry that could be explored. In suggesting that Balenciaga was at times designing for himself as much as his female

clientele (the simple androgynous jersey-knit tops), it would be productive to explore questions such as the dating of his garments and the designs for clients he was working on at the same time. What places did he visit, what colors and shapes, inspired his designing at the time he was making and wearing his clothes? The signs that he was having his clothing made and altered, perhaps even by himself (he had, after all, the skills to do so), in his atelier prompts a discussion surrounding his relationship with his ateliers in Paris, Madrid and Barcelona. It would be useful to further interrogate this line of enquiry, exploring Mary Blume's research of his relationship with his workers. I believe Balenciaga asked his atelier staff to alter and make elements of his own wardrobe. I believe, given what I have described and evidenced in the garments analyzed, that he was a man who liked his clothes to fit just so, was willing to purchase something that met his liking for interesting textures and fabrics, and knew he could ask his atelier to alter things for him. I also suggest that, if he designed something he liked for his female clients (the androgynous polo top) he would ask that a copy be re-sized to fit his own body.

What has been evidenced throughout this paper is the primacy of the object in the biographical narrative of someone's life-story. As proof, what we wear on our bodies captures small, subtle details that can reveal large amounts of information and insight for biographical researchers to work with. Objects become, as I previously quoted Abel, 'materialized memory'. The user is the constructor of original, personal narratives; the researcher then interprets, analyses and uses informed assumption of those objects from their own perspectives for evidence of a life lived. This highlights the intimate relationship between object and biography—the life of the object and the life of Balenciaga, who wore or surrounded himself with these things—and the researcher's ultimate aim (to present as objective a life-story as possible).

I am taking poetic license with this interpretation, but that is often what biographers and life-writers do. They use informed assumption when considering the unknown, the immaterial, or the unexplained elements of someone's life—just like in fashion studies and material culture studies, when we study garments in collections such as this. But I would assert that these "gaps" in the telling of someone's life is when informed assumption is most useful when constructing a life—often, it is all we've got. It creates a rich environment to imagine just what was going on inside Balenciaga's mind.

I contend that using clothing as a way of "filling in," or, to use perhaps a more useful term in this context, "fleshing out" the biography of objects that surround someone's life, in this instance the clothes they wore, we come to new insights about their life-story, their patterns of behavior, their physical body (size, shape, height), their choices in clothes, wearing particular combinations of clothes and ensembles. It is these decisions, these choices of clothes—the colors and textures Balenciaga chose to wear—that can reveal more about his very private, personal biography.

Highlighting the uniqueness of the everyday object, such as Balenciaga's informal, casual clothing, the proximity of dress to

the physical body and the complex relationship we have to those things taken for granted in our daily lives, amplifies how impactful the everyday object can be in a construction of identity. It is this accessibility, or lack of, that poses challenges to the material culture and biographical researcher. As previously described, the clothes Balenciaga wore do not contain all the information about their histories I would need to retrieve and construct a life-story. But, through MCA of the garments, I found new information (sizing, alterations, amendments that may have been made by Balenciaga himself), insights into his character (his preference for more casual, everyday clothes in his private life, and how they were altered or made for him), and new questions to ask of their lives (Balenciaga's presentation of his public and private persona) that I would not have had if I had relied solely on textual analysis and oral history.

Throughout this paper I have often couched my questions within other, more personal questions and conundrums presented by Balenciaga, including what decisions he made about his dressed appearance and personal choices in relation to other aspects of his life. This, amidst a lifetime of dressed preferences, adoption and rejection of masculine fashions, and selection and refusal of what to wear. Combining MCA of clothes with textual research enabled me to inject proposals for new ideas into exploring Balenciaga's life-story and how he saw himself.

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Balenciaga and the American Fashion Editors Who Shared His PrivateWorld: Bettina Ballard, Carmel Snow, and Diana Vreeland

JULIE EILBER
Independent Researcher/Journalist. Her practice-based research includes pattern-making and reconstruction of twentieth century designer garments. Ms. Eilber is currently writing a biography of American designer Claire McCardell. In 2017 she presented a workshop on the history and practice of mending at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. → julieeilber@aol.com

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ABSTRACT

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-WWII American fashion market.

Though a third editor, Diana Vreeland, did not 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 U.S., both as a designer and an artist.

This article shares glimpses of the private world of Balenciaga through the eyes of these three editors, and illuminates how his personal charm ensured his lasting legacy in the U.S. It seeks 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?

KEYWORDS

Bettina Ballard
Carmel Snow
Diana Vreeland
Cristóbal Balenciaga
Haute Couture

INTRODUCTION

> *One February night fourteen years after we had first met, I found myself in a wagon-lit that lay like a sleeping dog in the foggy Gare de Lyon…As the whistle blew, a figure stepped into the train calling a last stream of instructions in Spanish to someone on the platform. The figure was Cristóbal Balenciaga* […] (Ballard 1960: 104).

With these words, Bettina Ballard, Paris editor of American *Vogue*, cracked opened the door to the private, cloistered world of designer Cristóbal Balenciaga. By then, in 1951, he was considered one of the greats—if not the greatest—practitioner of modernist draping, tailoring and *haute couture* (Miller 2007: 51; Golbin 2006: 72). Christian Dior famously gave him the moniker "the master of us all" (Horyn 2006), and his friend Coco Chanel paid him the compliment of being the lone couturier skilled at both design and craft. "Only he is capable of cutting material, assembling a creation and sewing it by hand," she said. (Miller 2007: 16). Perhaps the most renowned fashion editor of the era, Diana Vreeland, called him, "…the greatest dressmaker who ever lived. If a woman came in in a Balenciaga dress," she said, "no other woman in the room existed" (Vreeland 2011: chap. 16).

Though his international clientele included a very broad interpretation of "the elite"—everyone from aristocrats and royalty to American dime store heiresses—Balenciaga was notoriously shy of the press (Miller 2007: 14-19; Blume 2012: 117). During his lifetime he gave only two known published interviews, both granted after he had closed his houses and retired. (Balda 2020: 4). Explanations given for his reticence have ranged from his "crushing shyness," his perceived difficulty in explaining his work to the masses, or his unwillingness to trash fellow designers (Golbin 2006: 44; Miller 2007: 14). The more pragmatic answer may be simply that he didn't want his designs to be stolen by copyists, who were eager to knock-off the latest Paris style for the mass market. Indeed, in 1956, he and fellow designer (and former protégé) Hubert de Givenchy embargoed the press from viewing their collections until one month after they had been presented to the buyers (Ballard 1960: 118-119).

All of this secrecy during his lifetime has given Balenciaga a posthumous mystique that, on the positive side, has allowed the quality of his work to have the last word. However, though he may not have spoken to the press on the record, he did expend a great deal of effort charming two of the most powerful and influential editors in the American fashion world: Bettina Ballard of Vogue, and Carmel Snow of Harper's Bazaar. Their memoirs give us a glimpse of a man so reticent that Snow referred to him as "the monk of the *couture*" (Blume 2012: 82). And Ballard noted: "the more journalists plead for stories, for clothes to photograph, the more the entire house of Balenciaga draws itself into its shell" (Ballard 1960: 118). This begs the question, was his attention to these editors based on true friendship, or was it a shrewd public relations move to guarantee stealth press coverage in the important American market?

Diana Vreeland, editor at *Harper's Bazaar* and later *Vogue*, didn't have as close a personal relationship with Balenciaga as the other two, but in the end, her reverence for his designs led her to create the museum exhibit at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art that would canonize Balenciaga's legacy in the American collective memory. All three editors put Balenciaga on the map—and kept him there—in the U.S.

BETTINA BALLARD

In 1934, the formidable editor in chief of Vogue magazine, Edna Woolman Chase, tapped a young, enthusiastic writer from California to join her editorial team. In that era, Vogue, under publisher Condé Nast, breathlessly covered society and fashion, with editorial geared, as he said, "not merely to women of great wealth, but more fundamentally, to women of taste" (Ross 1992: 7). After a year of tirelessly writing copy for the "Shop Hound" column and assisting photographers such as Edward Steichen and TonI Frissell, the young woman, Bettina Ballard, had the good fortune to be dispatched to *Vogue*'s Paris office. She possessed, in Chase's words, "an easy pen," she was the only one in the office that spoke French, and she was industrious in a very American way. Like many *Vogue* readers, Ballard was one of those aspirational strivers with more taste than money. So, when *Vogue* gave her a ticket to Paris, she hopped on the boat and didn't looked back (Ballard 1960: 4-13).

Ballard's 1960 memoir, *In My Fashion*, remains a warm, gossipy tribute to the international fashion industry and the many players that she knew well, including Dior, Chanel, and her good friend Cristóbal Balenciaga (Figure 1). She met him in 1937, the year he became established in Paris, and she was immediately taken by his "instinctive, spontaneous charm" (Ballard 1960: 104). She described him as,

> […] *a gentle-voiced Spaniard with fine pale skin the texture and color of eggshells and dark hair that lay thick and glistening in wavy layers on his well-shaped head. His voice was like feathers, and his intimate, quick smile had never been used to express anything but true pleasure…* (Ballard 1960: 104).

During their friendship of more than 20 years, Ballard got to know a restless yet focused genius who both lived for, and was tormented by, his work. She described a man who was "capable only of intimate friendships, the kind that had no complicated social machinery to keep oiled." To her, "the simplicity of my friendship with Cristóbal was very comforting" (Ballard 1960: 104).

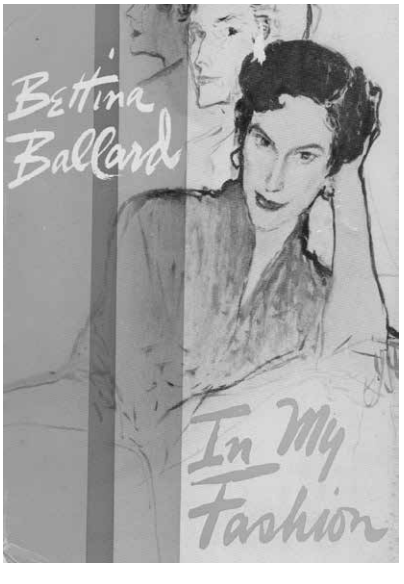

Fig. 1
Cover art of Bettina Ballard's 1960 Memoir *In My Fashion*

Her 1951 trip with him, to his house in San Sebastian, Spain, was a spur of the moment idea on his part, in response to the "deep letdown" he experienced after showing a collection. At one point, she had found him alone in his studio after a show, ripping apart a garment, even though the collection had been a great success. As she recalled, "the press had stomped on the floor and yelled 'bravo.'" But his retort was to tell her: "It's not right—it's never right the first time" (Ballard 1960: 105).

When she and Balenciaga arrived at the Spanish border from Paris that February afternoon, he took the wheel of an old Citroën, which he drove "like an expert racing driver." Arriving at his house, she described an enveloping environment, with:

> […] *warm fires casting their flames on the highly polished floors and furniture… we set the massive, highly-waxed table with beautiful Spanish silver, we ate strong Spanish food, drank strong Spanish red wine, and talked until we unwound our Paris tenseness and went off to our rooms to sleep* (Ballard 1960: 106).

During that same visit, Balenciaga whisked her away in the Citroën to visit his home in Madrid—a flat over his couture house named "Eisa." She describes it as "austere" yet notes, with humor, that because her friend was an avid antique collector,

> […] *the long hall from the salon to the bedrooms was piled high with Spanish tables and commodes, like a well-polished antique shop. My small room had three commodes piled one on top of the other. "I keep buying things and forget to send them to the house in San Sebastian," Cristóbal apologized* (Ballard 1960: 109).

She describes the fittings that took place in the apartment, for clothes that she had ordered for herself in the atelier downstairs, as a tug of war between Balenciaga and his tailor:

> […] *the tailor, Juan, who was just recovering from a heart attack, would come up, bringing my suits. No sooner would he get to work meticulously with pins than Balenciaga would come in, half-shaved, razor in hand, and start tearing the suits apart. Poor Juan would clutch his heart and watch all the stitches of the day before being ripped out* (Ballard 1960: 109).

In the end, the tailor gave Ballard her finished suit a half hour before she was leaving, and she threw her coat over it so Balenciaga couldn't take it apart again.

Over the course of their friendship she witnessed the growth and trajectory of his career, and by 1960, she observed that he was a man with too much time on his hands. His couture houses at that point were well-oiled machines that needed little more than four months a year of his attention. Yet his restlessness and hypersensitivity caused him bounce from one residence to another, spending time in "his


PARIS SHOWINGS CONTINUED

EDITOR HAS TO DO QUICK CHANGE ACT

AT BALENCIAGA, Bettina arrived at 9:15 a.m. to select clothes, wearing a Balenciaga suit. Back seat of her hired car holds spare coats and hats which were originally bought from other houses she will visit.

Fig. 2
Bettina Ballard outside of Balenciaga's salon during the Paris collections, wearing a Balenciaga jacket.
Life Magazine, March 5, 1951

seventeenth-century pink brick house" in the French countryside, although "he finds it sad after a very few days." He rarely spent time in his Barcelona flat, and was so obsessive about the details of his Madrid renovation, that he most often ended up sleeping elsewhere. His travels generally involved going to Switzerland to visit the doctor who cured his sinus infections, and to soak up the sun (Ballard 1960: 112 - 113).

Ballard wrote that he was most at home in his Paris flat, tastefully decorated with the antiques he hunted, but having "no pictures, no music, no books." When she visited him in Paris, she recalled him "embracing me with a warmth that erases any time that has elapsed," then having him fuss with her clothes. "He finds it very normal that I should appear in a ten-year-old coat of his but completely abnormal for me to wear a Dior dress" (Figure 2). When he went to work, he would go in and out of the back door of his atelier, and "he never appears in his couture salon, or sees his doting customers." (Ballard 1960, 113-114).

Though they spent a lot of time together over the years, the question remains: was theirs a true friendship, or marriage of convenience that benefitted the journalist who needed access to the great couturier, and the designer who needed coverage in the U.S. market? As she noted in her memoir, she befriended him before his first Paris collection, and "I was anxious for his success, because he was my new friend. I hardly thought of it from *Vogue*'s point of view" (Ballard 1960: 110).

Though Balenciaga was covered by American *Vogue* as his star arose and he became established (Golbin 2006), likely it had more to do with his genius as a designer than it did with his friendship with Ballard. From her accounts of their warm history of socializing and travel, starting from her days as a young writer and continuing well into her career and marriage, certainly she believed that they were good friends. As for Balenciaga, it appears, from her description, that he felt a true fondness for her and enjoyed her company. She described his social life as a "small circle of intimate friends who accept his simple way of living, his sudden impromptu invitations, and his need for affection" (Ballard 1960: 111). And for more than 20 years, she was a part of that select circle.

CARMEL SNOW

If *Vogue* Magazine was considered the society dame in pearls, then *Harper's Bazaar*, under editor in chief Carmel Snow, was the brash, modern American girl, unafraid to be active and to live with verve and style. Photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe, who helped give *Harper*'s its color-soaked, vibrant look, called Snow "the greatest magazine editor ever," who "was responsible for making the *Bazaar* in those days much more interesting, and less conservative, than *Vogue*" (Dahl-Wolfe 1984: 21) (Figure 3).

In her 2005 biography of Carmel Snow, *A Dash of Daring,* author Penny Rowlands describes her as an independent, headstrong girl, daughter of an entrepreneurial Irish widow who was too busy barreling into U.S. society to be much of a mother. After Carmel lived through convent school, her only other stab at education was at the Art Students League, where she posed for painter Robert Henri, befriended other artists, and enjoyed an energetic bohemian life (Rowlands 2005: 25).

But soon enough, her formidable mother conscripted Carmel to work in her upscale dress salon, where she reluctantly catered to New York's high society. Attending the Paris collections, she learned the art and architecture of fashion by sizing up and memorizing designs to be knocked off by her mother's workroom. Ultimately, she was rescued, according to her, by Condé Nast himself, who sent the 30-something shopgirl to work at *Vogue*, where she learned her trade and made her mark (Rowlands 2005: 50-54). By 1932, she was ready to jump ship and become fashion editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, bringing with her a shrewd eye for talent. She soon recruited an up-and-coming stable

Fig. 3
Carmel Snow (second from left) at a 1952 Italian fashion show by Fontana. Original press photo

of writers, photographers, and artists who catapulted "the *Bazaar*" into the modern era (Mooallem 2017). Her longtime secretary once said, "she had a way about her that drew the best from everyone. She inspired them" (Rowlands 2005: 501).

When Balenciaga opened his Paris house in 1937, according to Bettina Ballard, it was Carmel Snow who first recognized his genius. It took "her wise experienced fashion eyes to understand and to push the talent of this unknown man from his very first collection" (Ballard 1960: 110). Snow herself recalled the "severe elegance" of his clothes that made his style "too new, too different, to be widely appreciated on its first appearance" (Snow 2017: chap. 12).

Vogue and *Bazaar* both featured Balenciaga's fashions during the late 30s—when Paris itself signaled sophistication and glamour in the U.S.—but his spare designs were considered too avant-garde for backwater American tastes (Golbin 2006). Then World War II stopped Paris fashion in its tracks. Once the ocean liners ceased crossing the Atlantic, French fashion was no longer available stateside, so the U.S. magazines started promoting American designers instead (Arnold 2009: 136-137). Though Balenciaga's company, unlike many other couture houses, was able to stay in business during the war, only a few of his designs reached American editors, dispatched from his shop in Madrid, which was part of neutral Spain (Blume 2012: 61).

By the time France was liberated, Balenciaga's Paris customers had changed from wealthy socialites to just about any woman with money, due to the economic toll the war had taken on Europe. Bettina Ballard recalled visiting his salon, now with yellowed paint and dingy curtains, and spotting noisy "fancy-hatted women with hard, vulgar voices," who paid cash with thousand-franc notes. The designer, known for his refined clientele, admitted that he had been reduced to selling to women who made their money in the black market (Ballard 1960: 200). It was in this era of deprivation that Carmel Snow received an invitation to meet the reclusive designer. In her memoir, she described dining at his Paris apartment until two in the morning, calling it "enchantment all round." Like Ballard, she was his guest at his house San Sebastian, which, to her, was "as remote and simple as his personality" (Snow 2017: chap. 16).

Soon after, word started getting around the fashion world that, with Carmel's marriage gone cold, her friendship with Balenciaga was really an unrequited crush on her part. Janet Flanner, a writer for the *New Yorker* who was based in Paris, gossiped that "Carmel was really daft on him" (Rowlands 2005: 398, 480). Snow herself recalled a rosy incident in Spain, where he took her out rowing, "when we talked with an intimacy and mutual understanding that I have experienced with very few people. Ours is an intuitive relationship that simply ignores the language barrier" (Snow 2017: chap. 16). Before long, she was his devoted champion. She began to wear his designs almost exclusively and bragged that one famous style of jacket was created just for her. "I think he took pride in the way I wore his creations" she later wrote (Snow 2017: chap. 16).

By the early 50s, her mania for him began to cross the line, and, for an editor with so much power in fashion, it bordered on unethical. She pushed him into a visit to the U.S. to promote his fashions, but he was so uncomfortable in the spotlight that Ballard described it as "a sad failure" (Ballard 1960: 112). Undeterred, Snow convinced him to hire an unsuitable executive to promote his perfumes in the western hemisphere. Givenchy later described the move as "almost destroying his line" (Rowlands 2005: 441).

Yet acting in her role of editor, she performed a true favor for him, when a radical new silhouette he had conceived landed like an unexploded bomb in the early 50s (Figure 4). As she recalled,

> *Buyers and editors looked aghast at Balenciaga's collection of "unfitted suits"* […] *you could feel the hate in the room* […] *I was seated as usual in the front row, and I stood up. I began to clap, slowly, deliberately, loud. I didn't start a demonstration for Balenciaga—then—but when I turned over the Paris issue of Harper's Bazaar to Balenciaga's collection, the fashion world began to pay attention* (Snow 2017: chap.16).

Fig. 4
Balenciaga "smock top" showing the designer's controversial loose silhouette. *Life* Magazine, March 5, 1951


SMOCK TOP by Balenciaga is exception to general rule of fitted waist, is sure to be popular with expectant mothers.

Still, it's hard to believe that someone as worldly as Carmel Snow would have fantasized about having a true romance with him, considering he had been openly living with his male partner for more than a dozen years. Indeed, she later wrote in her memoir about his "French associate… who's early death was a great personal loss to Balenciaga." (Snow 2017: chap. 16).

And her affection for him may have been enhanced by her fondness for cocktails and other illicit substances. Her tendency to nod off during the collections was laughed off in that era, and her niece recalled that in Paris she lived on "martinis, French pastries, and Vitamin B injections" (Rowlands 2005: 398). But looking at it through a 21st century lens, it's clear that by the late 1940s she was sliding more and more deeply into the alcohol addiction that would play a role in ending her career (Rowlands 2005: 463-464). And in that era, "vitamin shots" were code for an injectable cocktail which often included amphetamines (Rensberger 1972). The addictive shots temporarily gave wings to the fashion, literary, and political power crowd, among them her friend, author Truman Capote (Palmer 2013).

So rather than a romance, it's more likely that Carmel Snow was in love with Balenciaga's talent and fame but was too high to recognize her own possessive and fawning behavior (Snow 2017: chap. 16). Regardless of how she felt about him, though, she was an editor first. As designer Geoffrey Beene recalled, "she made up her own mind about everything; she was a woman of her own beliefs" (Rowlands 2005: preface). And she and Balenciaga were known to quarrel--for a while she was banned from his shows over

Fig. 5
Diana Vreeland in her office at *Harper's Bazaar,* 1953. Original press photo

his fear that her magazine would scoop his fashions. Yet he and Snow always managed to make up and find *rapproachement*. (Rowlands 2005: 402). As for Balenciaga, he was so averse to promotion and so guileless in his personality that he once told Givenchy "I have never in my life told a lie" (Blume 2012: 67). Like Snow, he had been introduced to fashion at the knee of his dressmaker mother, after losing a father at an early age, so he may have felt a personal connection with her (Rowlands 2006: 398). However, as a *Vogue* editor recalled: "she never let him alone. Given that he was a shy reclusive man, this kind of exhausted him after a while. It drove him crazy" (Rowlands 2006: 399).

But with rationing and deprivation in France continuing well into the postwar era, Balenciaga and the other couturiers were very dependent on the wealthy American market that just was reopening to Paris (Blume 2012: 67-72). So his friendship with Carmel Snow may have been driven, at least in part, by the coverage that she could guarantee him in *Harper's Bazaar*.

DIANA VREELAND

And finally, a few words about Diana Vreeland's role in assuring that Balenciaga's legacy lived on in the U.S. (Figure 5)

Vreeland, as a young socialite in 1936, was famously discovered one night when she was out dancing at the St. Regis Roof Garden, spotted by the sharp eye of Carmel Snow, who liked her style. Snow gave the neophyte a job, and Vreeland's reign as fashion editor at *Harper's Bazaar*, then *Vogue*, went on to be the stuff of legend (Dwight 2002: 47). As photographer Richard Avedon once said, "Vreeland invented the fashion editor. Before that it was society ladies who put hats on other society ladies" (Vreeland 2001: 73).

She didn't have a chance to become well acquainted with Balenciaga, since Carmel Snow jealously kept the Paris collections for herself (Rowlands 2005: 390), and she even prevented Vreeland from meeting the designer during his ill-fated visit to New York (Stuart 2012: 162). Nevertheless, Vreeland was an unabashed fan of his designs. As she recalled in her memoirs, with her typical hyperbole, "one never knew what one was going to see at a Balenciaga opening. One fainted. It was possible to blow up and die" (Vreeland 2001: chap. 16). She considered his garments to be "miracles of tailoring" (Dwight 2002: 136).

After she was pushed out of her role as *Vogue's* editor in chief in 1971, Vreeland found herself at loose ends, needing a job to provide income and relevance (Dwight, 2002: 187-188). Around the same time,

head curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who traveled in her social circle, approached her to take over the moribund exhibits at their Costume Institute. She hesitantly signed on for one year (Stuart 2012: 268-270).

She was brought in not as a curator—she didn't have the academic background—but as someone "flashy" to create "blockbuster" exhibits, as a director of the museum, Philippe de Montebello, later recalled (Vreeland 2011: 228). Once on board, she installed herself at the Hotel Crillon in Paris and commenced with her typical zeal and work ethic. When her first idea for an exhibit—the clothing of the recently departed Duke of Windsor—was kiboshed, she deftly swerved to a new topic: Balenciaga (Dwight 2002: 202). The designer had only passed away a few months before, four years into his sudden and restless retirement. Vreeland first heard about Balenciaga closing his couture house while staying in CaprI with the much-married, best-dressed, and financially loaded Mona Bismarck. According to Vreeland, Bismarck "didn't come out of her room for three days… I mean, it was the end of a certain part of her life!" (Vreeland 2011: chap. 16).

Vreeland hit the ground running with the exhibit, getting a head start with the help of curators at the Museum Bellerive in Zurich, who had held their own tribute to the designer several years earlier. From there, she worked the phones and twisted the arms of well-dressed and well-born European women who were hoarding his designs in their closets. (Stuart 2012: 272-273). Inspired by Balenciaga's designs and his Spanish heritage, Vreeland immediately started shaking up the status quo at the Met by asking for abstract, faceless mannequins and Spanish works of art to intermingle with the fashions. She declared that Balenciaga's perfume would be sprayed in the gallery, and dug up photos and films to be shown. As the opening approached, she marshaled an army of socialites, *Vogue* colleagues, columnists, even the designer Halston, to throw their weight behind the exhibit. (Dwight 2002: 205-206). In the galleries, she dimmed the lighting and boldly displayed a suit of Spanish armor in the middle of the garments. (Stuart 2012: 275). Bernadine Morris of the *New York Times* described the exhibit, which opened in the spring of 1973, as starting with evening dresses from the late '30's dawn of Balenciaga's career and concluding with his final work—a 1972 wedding dress he had come out of retirement to make for Generalissimo Franco's granddaughter. The reporter noted the unusual mannequins "of porcelain or steel" that Vreeland pioneered, displays of beaded jackets inspired by bullfighters, "grand-entrance ballgowns with hemlines dipping like flamenco dancers' costumes" as well as "loose and floating 'baby doll' dresses and austere chemises" (Morris 1973).

Even though Balenciaga had only retired a few years before, culture and fashion had changed so radically that several designers attending opening night remarked that his work seemed dated. As the *Times* noted: "women today are more interested in comfort and convenience than grandeur." Halston, however, was inspired. "It's the height of elegance. It's the most important statement of the century" he said (Morris, 1973). As for Vreeland, she was more than satisfied with the

quality of the exhibit, and she wrote to Mona Bismarck, "the show is a total success" (Dwight 2002: 207).

Even though she'd stepped on a few toes in the staid museum world—and would continue to do so—she knew she'd found her footing in a new career, and she remained at the Met until her retirement. As for Balenciaga, it was Vreeland's editorial eye and curatorial power that ensured his legacy in the U.S. No longer would he be considered a couturier whose time had passed, and, thanks to her, his once-radical designs were transformed into enduring sartorial art. As Vreeland noted on opening night, "people would tell me fashion started in the streets, and I would say I always saw it first at Balenciaga" (Morris 1973).

CONCLUSION

These three powerhouse women: Bettina Ballard, Carmel Snow, and Diana Vreeland, not only introduced Cristóbal Balenciaga's genius to the U.S., they ensured that it would never be forgotten.

Bettina Ballard, the outgoing American who entranced him as a young editor, remained a true friend and confidant for more than 20 years, until her untimely death from cancer at 56. Her memoir still gives readers the most realistic and personal view of him as a designer and a man.

Carmel Snow, the gifted editor, was the first to spot Balenciaga's talent, and she championed his work throughout her career. Though her alcoholism became a sad footnote to her reign at *Harper's Bazaar*, she remains a force that changed fashion journalism for the better, and she was a loyal friend to Balenciaga.

Though she did not know him well, Diana Vreeland gave Balenciaga his due as an editor during his lifetime and celebrated his work posthumously at her groundbreaking exhibit at the Met. Inspired by his work, she fundamentally changed the way that fashion was presented in museums.

As for Cristóbal Balenciaga, how did he really feel about these unique and talented women? While it appears he was a good friend to Bettina Ballard, and he tolerated the influential Carmel Snow socially, his true motivation behind these relationships still remains as private and enigmatic as the designer himself.

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Cristóbal Balenciaga in his maison in the Avenue George v in Paris

Balenciaga
Creator

1927: A Wedding Dress Attributed to Cristóbal Balenciaga

RUTH VALENTÍN
Conservator at Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum

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ABSTRACT

Cristóbal Balenciaga began his business career by opening his first workshop in San Sebastián in 1917. This was the point in which he began to capture the influence of Paris fashion through garments acquired from different French haute couture houses, such as Madeleine Vionnet, Jeanne Lanvin and Chanel. This 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. The donation included an ivory-colored crepe satin wedding dress from 1927, which was produced at the workshop in San Sebastián. Although the garment was unlabeled, the donor herself stated that the dress was genuinely the handiwork of Balenciaga. In the year 2018, the foundation decided to proceed with its extensive study, treatment, and restoration of garment works from the 1920s—a period from which very few garments were preserved.

The main objective of the aforementioned project was to study, preserve, and restore the garment works to the best condition possible. In addition, the project aimed to shed light on an unknown garment which clearly reflected the couturier's touch. The garment works themselves reflected new examples of Balenciaga's charm and quality. In this research, I aim to show the influences that Balenciaga incorporated from Parisian fashion, by observing Vionnet's impacts on his designs.

KEYWORDS

Balenciaga
Paris
Vionnet
Dress
Conservation

INTRODUCTION

Cristóbal Balenciaga's legacy lives on his creations which can be found all over the world to this day. However, compared to the other phases of the couturier's career, his early works are much less known. Some of these are kept at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria as part of the extraordinary heritage he created over the course of 51 years of professional activity. These garments have been collected by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation since its inauguration in 1998.

Today, the knowledge we have about Balenciaga is mostly attributed to the donations and contributions from the people who had contact with him or appreciated his works, as well as from photographic materials and investigations on his personality. With this study, I aim to shed more light on the early phases of his career.

In 2005, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation received a donation in the form of several garments including what might have been a wedding dress, which featured fragments of ivory-colored silk and countless loose silver sequins. In April 2019, the donor, Pilar Zulueta Picavea, explained in a telephone interview with the Collections Director of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, Igor Uria, that these clothes belonged to her mother, Carmen Picavea Echevarría, and it was indeed a wedding dress. The dress itself was produced by the house of Balenciaga in San Sebastián. She also mentioned that both her mother and her grandmother, María Echevarría, continued to purchase clothes from Balenciaga after a period of exile in France (Zulueta 2019).

Other than the wedding dress, the donation consisted of three other pieces of clothing, one of them bearing the Balenciaga label which seemed to be from the couturier's career phase in Spain. His career in Spain began in 1917 when he opened his first business at Vergara Street 2 in San Sebastián. Collaborating with the Lizaso sisters in 1918, he created a new company under the name of *Balenciaga y Cia*, which lasted for 6 years. In 1924 he terminated the company and started his business alone which was located on Avenida de la Libertad 2 under the name of *Cristóbal Balenciaga* (Uria 2018: 20). With his own establishment, Balenciaga earned a great reputation among a distinguished clientele, including Queen Maria Cristina who was one of his most important clients (Arzalluz 2011: 22). Balenciaga's sacrifice and effort paid off and, consequently, his business grew prosperously. So much that, in March 1927, he opened a new establishment under the name of *Martina Robes et Manteaux* at Oquendo Street 10. The establishment, however, was renamed *EISA Costura* a few months after its opening (Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum 2018: 32). This valuable information allowed the museum to investigate other garments which were being kept. This investigation revealed that one of the unlabeled dresses was a 1928 creation by Jeanne Lanvin whose crafting was entrusted to Balenciaga (Uria 2018: 26).

In addition to the donated garments, Pilar Zulueta provided several photographs of her mother and aunt, in which Carmen Picavea

Echevarría was wearing a Balenciaga white chiffon dress with floral decoration. This photograph was taken at a bullfight organized by the Press Association in San Sebastián, where she lived in 1925. After several inquiries by the foundation together with the commendable collaboration with the *Patrimonie Lanvin Paris*, it was confirmed that said dress was a garment acquired by Balenciaga in Paris: to be more exact, Jeanne Lanvin's 1925 *Prairie* model. It was then replicated and sold at his establishment in San Sebastián. Both became clear examples of how the couturier often went to Paris around those years—possibly between February and August—to attend the presentations of the collections of other French haute couture houses, where he was inspired to develop and apply the designs to his own creations (Arzalluz 2011:22).

After analyzing and identifying each of the donated garments, the designer behind the wedding dress remained as an unsolved mystery. This was due to its poor condition as well as the absence of any label. It was uncertain whether it really was a Cristóbal Balenciaga creation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To undertake this important challenge, I began with the contextualization of the garment. I started looking for all the available information about the family and the marriage between Carmen Picavea and Enrique Zulueta. Carmen Picavea Echevarría was the daughter of Rafael Picavea Leguía, a renowned Basque businessman and politician. Her mother—who was married to her father in 1894—was María Echevarría Zuricalday, the daughter of the prominent industrialist Federico Echevarría.

Thanks to his ties to the Echevarría family—who was the leading industrialists in the Vizcaya area—Rafael Picavea began to stand out as a businessman. Together with his father-in-law, he founded companies in different industries, such as mining (*Echevarría-Picavea*), banking (*Banco de Vizcaya*), press publications (*La Papelera Española*) and electricity (*La Cooperativa Eléctrica de San Sebastián*). These establishments were only a few examples of the extensive business success achieved by the entrepreneur (Elorza 2011: 143).

Another example of Rafael Picavea's field of interest was printed media. In 1903, he founded the newspaper *El Pueblo Vasco* in San Sebastián and the illustrated magazine *Novedades.* The former transformed the press due to its innovations in printing, reports, and featuring distinguished contributors like Baroja, Maeztu, Urcola and Gil Baré (Elorza 2011:144).

Rafael Picavea and María Echevarría were married with five children; María (who would then marry Antonio Elósegui, Marqués de Elósegui), Rafael (who was single and dedicated to the world of graphic arts), José Antonio and Manuel (who died before the age of 18), and finally Carmen, who would then marry Enrique Zulueta with whom she had three children (Elorza 2011: 143).

When the Civil War broke out in Spain in August 1936, Rafael Picavea received a warning to stay in Bilbao and not return to San Sebastián for his safety. Thus, he chose to flee to France as he was targeted by the anarchist militias due to his political connections. He departed for the neighboring country on a German boat from the Urdaibai Estuary, fleeing from Spain with his grandchildren, his wife, and his daughter Carmen in October of the same year (Delgado 2011: 86). Despite the exile, Carmen Picavea and her mother María Echevarría continued to be clients of Balenciaga. Therefore, it was concluded that the set of donated garments consisted of the garments that Carmen Picavea was able to gather before her exile, which were then kept until her death in 2003.

All the historical sources that revolve around the family confirmed their social importance in Gipuzkoan circles. Therefore, it was necessary to carry out a journalistic investigation into the family's connections to the media and political spheres, and to look into the existence of news about the wedding in the newspapers published at the time. The search was focused on different newspapers from 1927 which were kept at the periodical archives of the Municipal Library of San Sebastián. The first article that I found was featured in *La Voz de Guipúzcoa*, which was a newspaper published in San Sebastián. It was written in the *New Homes* section that:

> *The Zulueta-Picavea Wedding. Yesterday at 11:00 a.m., taking place in the church of Santa Maria, the beautiful and charming Miss Carmen Picavea was officially wed to the young and cultured lawyer Enrique Zulueta. The church and its surroundings were flooded by the well-wishers who desired to see and admire the beautiful bride; adorned with her dress of crepe satin and silver lamé trimmed with fine silver lace* ("Enlace Zulueta-Picavea," *La Voz de Guipúzcoa:* 6).

The article confirmed that the wedding took place on May 27th, 1927 and included a description of a dress that matched the donor's statement. Knowing the date of the ceremony, I continued my investigations and searched in the newspaper archives with the aim of finding photographic documentations of the wedding. Unfortunately, the family had no photographs of the wedding; and consequently, neither did the museum.

During the search, I found several articles about the wedding in different newspapers of San Sebastián, more specifically in *La Constancia* and *El País Vasco*, in which some key information about the dress worn by the bride was obtained. In the society section of *La Constancia*, the following text was written:

> *At twelve noon, the wedding of the distinguished Miss María del Carmen Picavea to the young and cultured lawyer Enrique Zulueta took place… the bride's beauty was enhanced by a lovely dress of crepe satin, adorned with silver lamé…"* ("Enlace Zulueta-Picavea," *La Constancia*: 5).


ASCO
SAN SEBASTIAN
Sábado 28 de Mayo de 1927.
Fundador: Rafael Picavea.
GRAN MUNDO
Enlace Enrique Zulueta - Carmencita Picavea

Fig. 1
A photograph of the bride and the groom published in the newspaper *El Pueblo Vasco*
© Municipal Digital Library of Donostia

However, the article in the newspaper *El País Vasco* was somewhat more extensive as it also described the accessories worn by the bride. Quoted from the article: "The bride, who wore a striking silver lamé dress with lovely Brussels lace, stunned the public with her grace…" ("Enlace Zulueta-Picavea," *El País Vasco:* 3).

The wedding was of such significance in select social circles that several national papers gave considerable press coverage to the big event. One of the papers was *El Sol* from Madrid, who mentioned the wedding in the *General Information on Spain* section of their paper ("País Vasco. Una boda": 5). But the article that undoubtedly contributed the most to this study was that of *El Pueblo Vasco*, whose founder was the father of the bride. In this paper's 28 May, 1927 publication, the wedding appeared on the front page, more specifically in the *Great World* section along with a photo of the couple alongside the groom's younger brothers. This cover photo was taken by Willy Koch, an illustrious photographer of the era (Figure 1).

This article not only provided a picture of the wedding, but it also provided the information we were looking for:

> *The classic question: how did the bride look? Beautiful, with a satin crepe bridal gown trimmed in silver lamé. On her head, an orange blossom flower crown, and a Jewish veil, made of authentic Brussels lace. Her marvelous ensemble, the work of the master Balenciaga, honored the great couturier* (Gil Baré 1927).

Thus, all these articles confirmed that:

— The wedding outfit consisted of a veil made of Brussels lace decorated with a flower crown made of orange blossoms, which unfortunately could not be preserved.
— The descriptions of the dress matched the garment which was donated to the museum.
— It was one of the engagement gifts given by Enrique Zulutea to Carmen Picavea.
— And most importantly, she claimed that it was created by Cristóbal Balenciaga in 1927.

STUDY AND ASSESSMENT OF THE GARMENT

In order to carry out a complete study of the craftsmanship, the state of its conservation had to be improved so that an in-depth analysis of its crafting would be possible. To be able to do so, I carried out an organoleptic study revealing the following defects:

— The silk was heavily worn out due to its age and to the dehydration that it had suffered, causing its fibers to tear in the handling process.
— There were many creases, possibly from having been folded in several ways over the years.
— In addition to the tears produced by these folds, many of the dress' tissues were missing in the skirt, waist, back, and chest areas. Since the body and the girdle are attached to the sides of the skirt, the joint area of the two is one of the most deteriorated parts.
— There were hardly any remains of what was once a decorative front twist, created by crossing two pieces of fabric at the height of the hips, of which a scarce 1.5 cm of the seam was preserved.
— When unfolding all the crepe fragments, it was revealed that there was a complete loss of the left sleeve and the right cloth of the girdle.
— The skirt's lining which was made of organza had large vertical tears and a loss of fabric. However, the train was in good condition, its main fabric intact except for a small stain. The lining was also in good shape, except for a small tear.

A further intrinsic damaging factor affecting the garment was the ponderous weight of the train; not only was this caused by the amount of fabric, but also by the large number of metallic sequins which added enormous weight to what was once a fine and delicate fabric. It should be noted that the decreasing resistance of the fibers together with the weight had caused the skirt to detach. The sequins came off very easily due to the deterioration of the threads. There was also a lack of lining in the body and girdle, which sped up the loss of fabric. However, the skirt remained in better condition.

We knew that the conservation treatment required to restore the garment was not going to be easy. This was due to the lack of information about the craftsmanship as well as the complexity of its crafting. Therefore, to be able to undertake such a treatment, it was necessary to carry out a restoration study on clothing with similar characteristics, which would reinforce and confirm our treatment proposal based on the least possible intervention, as well as following the criteria of legibility, durability, and reversibility.

In order to reconstruct the dress in the best way possible, our work was focused on recapturing the strength that the silk had lost. To strengthen it, we placed a crepe satin support which was dyed to match the tone of the dress. In addition, we followed the direction of its weave and construction. To carry out this process properly, the garment's patterns were carefully removed. Normally, all the silk supports are sewn together using restoration lines. In this case, however, to avoid both silks coinciding and creating tension, the seams had to follow the weave and be placed at irregular distances to coincide with the natural, bias-cut fall of the crepe.

To reintegrate the sleeves which were not preserved, the exact pattern of the original garment was taken. From the pattern, we recreated new, identical sleeves from crepe satin to fulfill the

purpose of a proper presentation. The sequin decoration was one of the processes that required the most time and dedication. They were reinserted and reinforced with stitching throughout the restoration process.

To authenticate the materials needed for restoration, I had the benefit of the invaluable assistance provided by the Restoration Service of the Provincial Council of Álava; conducting a study of materials analysis using optical microscopy. The analytical results confirmed that both the lining and the main fabric were made of silk. The fine thread for the needle work which featured two ends with an "S" twist were made of cotton. The faceted sequins were made of copper laminated with silver for more shine. This was proven by the edges of the sequins being copper instead of silver, possibly caused by the stamping process. They also showed diagonal marks caused by the mechanical lamination process. While studying the metal, we also detected the presence of what seemed to be varnish. Its function was to prevent the darkening of all the sequins. Normally, sequins would immediately darken after they come to contact with atmospheric gases, alternatively present carbonates or sulfites, which is typical for copper degradation. We detected this kind of copper degradation on some of the sequins.

And finally, after three months of hard work, we now have a complete wedding dress which makes it possible for us to continue with our study. We are now able to appreciate the fact that the dress is based on straight lines, and yet it features a constructive complexity that is truly worthy of haute couture. It consists of twelve bias-cut pieces; eight of which complete the body, four of which complete the skirt as well as the train with a rounded end. Measured from the part in which the skirt is attached to the girdle, the train is exactly 249 cm. The dress also features a bodice lining made of 11 fragments of crepe satin, and a skirt lining made of organza.

Its decoration is based on a combination of vertical, diagonal lines converging at the central twisted pleat on the front waist. These lines extend towards the back and go around the body. There are two vertical, sequined bands that fall to the back. At the hips, these bands become three. They extend at different heights toward one point, therefore evoking a ribbon. Each and every one of the cloths that are preserved show their original seams: meticulous and fine.

The dress has a V-neck with a crossed opening at the back, allowing flexibility when donning it. It is made of a single almond-shape piece featuring a lateral opening, which forms a kind of yoke due to its superimposition of the sides. It also covers the vast majority of the front body and part of the back yoke. The body of the dress is formed by two straight side seams and it has long sleeves with tight fitting on the wrists with six round buttons covered in silk, joined by thread loops. The sleeves are part of the same piece that starts from the back yoke and forms the entire back of the girdle. The girdle is placed at the waist. It is formed by two pieces joined at the front waist on top of the central twisted pleat, which makes the skirt shorter in the front, longer on the sides, and extends into a long, rounded train in the back. Most

of the seams are hidden behind the sequined bands, only being visible on the train, sleeves, and hem (Figure 2).

INFLUENCES

Since the beginning of his career as a couturier in 1917, Balenciaga had been able to make himself one of the most sought-after haute couturiers among the Gipuzkoan elite. This was due to San Sebastián being the summer residence of the royalty and aristocracy at the time. Although there were not many examples of his work from this period, those that were preserved showed his great technique and the French influence; the presence of bias-cuts, the embroidery on tulle, and the use of geometric cuts in the patterns (Uria 2019:21).

Starting from the year 1918, Balenciaga began to acquire dress styles and patterns from Paris. An advertisement in the newspaper *El Liberal*—the 1918 edition which was preserved in the Newspaper Library of the National Library of Spain—confirmed that *La Maison Lanvin* announced the opening of its exhibition in Las Ramblas in Barcelona, where it would then present a new winter collection (1 November: 4). At the same time, Lanvin announced the houses of haute couture in Spain where his creations could be acquired, among which was the house of Balenciaga.

Fig. 2
Bridal gown after restoration, exhibited at the exhibition *Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal*

This was merely one example of the relationship that he maintained with different fashion houses in France. Therefore, it could be concluded that Balenciaga absorbed many of the trends and influences of the neighboring country which he would then reflect on his own creations. That was the reason why this process of research and contextualization of the dress had to be focused on the study of historical archives from magazines and newspapers of the era, especially in the years of 1926 and 1927, to search for the French influence that could have inspired him when making the aforementioned wedding dress. From these sources, I was able to find many similarities between Balenciaga's designs and the two great couturiers of the 1920s: Jean Patou and Madeleine Vionnet.

JEAN PATOU

Both Balenciaga and Jean Patou were innovators at the time, seeking to change the female silhouette within fashion. Patou developed creations with silhouettes using geometric lines and made use of lighter materials. And above all, he stood out with the development of his sports line, which opened a new space within the French haute couture by providing comfort to women (Pouillard & Zanon 2019: 3). In the 1920s, his fashion house established itself in the world of haute couture by providing dresses to well-known figures, such as Marie de Lubersac at her wedding to Count Aymard de Nicolaÿ on April 7th, 1926 ("Marriages": 2). This design appeared in *Vogue Paris* on July 1st, 1926. Quoted from the sketch's caption:

Fig. 3
Drawing of the wedding dress designed by Jean Patou in 1926
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> *Mademoiselle de Lubersac, who has just got married to Count Aymard de Nicolaÿ, wore on her wedding day a white panne dress, matching her gorgeous figure. The front part of the skirt was formed by two marked peaks, with a belt embroidered in fine pearls and diamonds, just like the ribbon descending from the dress shoulders. A Jean Patou creation. Pearl headpiece by Panizon* ("Comtesse Aymard de Nicolaÿ": 12).

The brief description indicated that the decoration descended from the shoulders and circled the waist. The sketch also showed a V-neck style. The upper part of this dress is remarkably similar to the wedding dress we

received, which is supposedly a Balenciaga creation. However, the lower parts are vastly different (Figure 3).

MADELEINE VIONNET

There is no doubt that Vionnet had, in fact, a big influence on Balenciaga. It can be proven by how Balenciaga applied geometric cuts, simplicity, and bias-cuts to his own creations. Though bias-cuts already existed in the beginning of the 20th century, the technique was only used in the linings of bodices. Eager to learn more about the technique, Vionnet discovered the endless possibilities it offered. She applied it to create innovations such as unlined dresses and eliminating the corset by proposing a new form of clothing which would still enhance the beauty of feminine figure.

The foundation of her creations was based on proportions applying the theory of symmetry. This meticulous technique allowed mobility and a perfect balance with the aesthetic rules inspired by the garments of ancient Greece: a single piece of fabric covering the entire body, which resulted in beautification of the feminine figure. She was a strident advocate of the idea of a genuine classicism yet modern due to the simplicity of her designs (Golbin 2010:24).

Vionnet was a great international fashion leader who was known for her use of crepe, large cloths, bias-cuts, elaborated geometric cuts, and simplicity. And yet, the construction of the design was always so complex. It was also observed that decorations made of metallic bands as well as regular use of draping were present in Vionnet's designs. This trailblazing trend was covered by international media such as the *Daily News* (New York), in which we found the following publication:

No designer more profoundly reveals the effect of this urge than Vionnet. The severe, reserved manner in which she develops her creations has yielded this spring to the feminine influence in styles, and the simplicity of her models is translated into subtle and graceful effects. Diagonal lines with a rippled skirt, surplice effects combined with front fullness, scarf collars and graceful draping. Such are the characteristics of her frocks for afternoon and evening. ("Graceful Effects…": 23).

All these innovations developed by Madeleine Vionnet inspired Balenciaga and, consequently, he embodied the style and technique in many of his creations. A clear example would be the wedding dress we received; one can observe the use of crepe together with the mastery of bias-cut using large cloths. The pattern cuts played a fundamental role as a decorative element; hidden by the sequin bands enhancing the geometric shapes on which the construction of the garment was based.

Vionnet was constantly present in Spain between 1920 and 1927. The first national journalistic reference that I located was *La Maison Vionnet* 1920 edition, in which an advertisement mentioning the presentation of her collection was published. The presentation took place in the city of San Sebastián, more specifically in Hotel Savoy from the 1st to the 15th of September (*La Época*: 2). Her visit

to Balenciaga's hometown might have been one of the first contacts between the two couturiers at the beginning of Balenciaga's career.

In the following years, there were more presentations of Vionnet's collections which appeared in the months of February, March, and September at the Palace Hotel in Madrid (*El Imparcial* 1921: 3) as well as one presentation in Seville (*El Imparcial* 1924: 5). With these examples, it was clear that Madeleine Vionnet became a household name in national fashion at the time.

Thanks to several investigations carried out by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum and the archives of the Decorative Arts Library of Paris, I was able to verify that Balenciaga visited *Maison Vionnet* in 1924 (prior to the construction of Carmen Picavea's wedding dress) and in 1927 (the year it was constructed). This information was verified with several purchasing documents, confirming that the commercial relations between the two couturiers were constant during those years, and that Balenciaga acquired various patterns of different styles from Vionnet. The records also indicated that in February and March 1927, he visited *Maison Vionnet* and bought a dress each time.

I tried to look for the style which inspired Balenciaga to create Carmen Picavea's wedding dress, but Vionnet's sketches, which were in the digital archives of the Historical Library of the City of Paris, did not resemble the dress. However, as I continued my research on the same collection as well as the prior years, I found two modes which were relevant to my research:

— *Model 4345* which was presented in the 1926 summer collection. It featured crepe with a golden metallic decoration that converged in the central part of the body and finished with a pleat. The body was made up of an almond-shaped piece. It had a V-neck and was twisted at the back, from which two crossed pieces of fabric fall to the knees. This construction of the body, a solution for the back, together with the decoration, drew us back once again to the style of Balenciaga in the wedding dress ("Vionnet. Model 4345").
— *Model 4541*, however, was presented to the public a year later in the 1927 summer collection under the name *Lucienne* ("Vionnet. Model 4541"). We found this same design in the French edition of *Vogue*, where it was accompanied by the following description:

> *It can be said that in Vionnet's collection, it is a kind of mystery, that from a crepe de chine, a jersey and crepe satin a dress has arisen. Such a thing has happened with this white satin dress whose draping is formed by a double section of fabric that crosses at the center at its front. The overall effect is one of wondrous simplicity. There is no other dress in the whole collection that characterizes Vionnet´s style in a better way.* ("Vionnet," *Vogue Paris*: 17).

By analyzing both styles, it could be assumed that Balenciaga adopted the Model 4541 to create the wedding dress (Figure 4). It was noticeably clear that the central twisted pleat and the fall of the skirt of the two couturier's garments were remarkably similar. We still haven't found

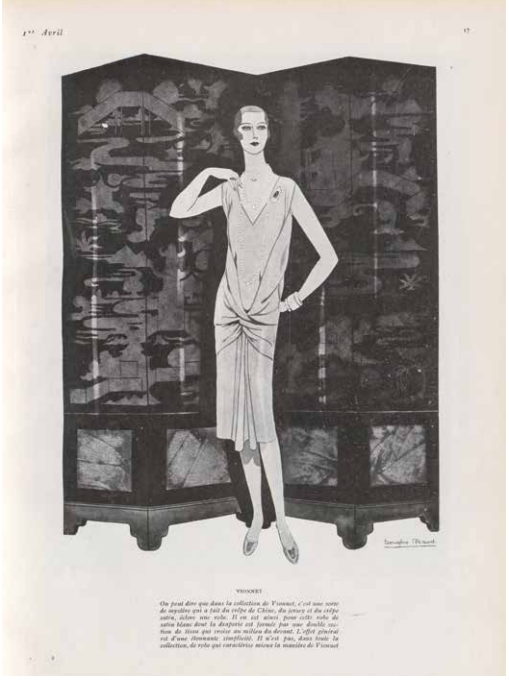

Fig. 4
Sketch of Madeleine Vionnet's Model 4541 (1927)
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out how the rear part of the said dress was crafted, but in the previous work (Model 4345), we could see that Vionnet executed this type of construction by creating a one-piece body which extended towards the back using the large pieces of fabric to facilitate the bias-cut technique. I believe that the Model 4541, together with the techniques that Balenciaga learned and developed due to his regular trips to Paris, instilled the creative concepts in his mind. Thus, he was able to construct the wedding dress that was worn by Carmen Picavea.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of this research was driven by the missing label of the wedding dress. I wanted to confirm the identity of the couturier behind the dress, since the donor's statement and the accompanying garments suggested that we might have received an incredibly unique, never-seen-before handicraft which was created by the great couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga.

It is well known that all the garments produced by the *Casa Balenciaga* always included a label with his name. In this case, however, neither a label nor any remnants of a label being sewn were found. It was hard to believe that it had not been preserved, since the delicate alternations made on the wedding day had been maintained to adapt to the bride's neck area. Nonetheless, thanks to the search for sources in digital catalogs from different museums—both national and international such as *Museo del Traje* in Madrid and the MET in New York—we were able to confirm that the wedding dresses of the 1920s always featured a slip, and normally the label would be placed in there. It was because crepe is a material that hugs the body. If it had not been done that way, the label would have been visible.

The press played a key role in identifying the couturier behind the dress. They published a lot of news about weddings as well as important social events of the 1920s. The press coverage was essential to shed a light on this study. In this case, they not only described the bride's dress, but also confirmed that the creator of this elegant garment was indeed Balenciaga himself. Therefore, we can proudly state that the garment in question is incredibly unique, as it is currently the oldest dress produced by the house of Balenciaga that we know of.

In this research process, I was also able to discover and confirm Vionnet's great influence on Balenciaga. And finally, this thorough study allowed me to understand more about the couturier and how he adapted all the influences which would then shape his own creations over time and allow him to distinguish himself as one of the greatest figures in haute couture history.

The main objective of this study was always to offer a contribution—however small—to our knowledge about Cristóbal Balenciaga and his very extensive career. At the same time, this study showed that there are more great works by one of fashion's premier figures from the 20th century that remain to be discovered. Now, I can proudly state that almost a century after its production and unveiling at an important social event of a bygone era, I am incredibly pleased to have taken part in identifying and upholding this Balenciaga wedding dress as the oldest known to date.

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Cristóbal Balenciaga: Master of Geometric Design

BERTA PAVLOV
Professor at George Brown College, Center for Arts, Design & Information Technology (Toronto, Canada) where she teaches Advance Pattern Drafting and Digital Pattern Design. Patternmaker and technical illustrator over 30 years in the Toronto Fashion Industry. Royal Ontario Museum, Departmental Associate, Textiles section of Arts & Culture (2019-2024). Awarded Veronika Gervers Research Fellowship 2020. → bpavlov@georgebrown.ca

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ABSTRACT

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, Madeleine Vionnet.[1] 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 examines 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, showing how Balenciaga mastered the geometry of cut in both the *flou* (dressmaking) and *tailleur* (tailor) ateliers.

KEYWORDS

Cristóbal Balenciaga
Madeleine Vionnet
Rom
Geometric Design
Digital Pattern

1 Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) known for her bias cut designs. "One of the first couturiers, in 1912 she opened her own modest house on Rue de Rivoli and in 1923 opened the House of Vionnet on the Avenue Montaigne" (Blume 2013: 20-21).

INTRODUCTION

Vionnet believed that "The couturier should be a geometrician," (Kirke 2012: 7) and Catherine Join-Diéterle discusses Balenciaga's liking for geometric shapes, especially the sphere.[2] Yet, there are key differences. Vionnet's geometric and bias designs are visually explicit and understandable, where as 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 produced 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-exemplified in the four-sided cocktail dress, or "envelope dress"[3] a cylindrical shape, cut on bias, and created in his signature stiff, black gazar silk.[4] 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 taffeta into a voluminous, balloon hem dress (ROM 2002.48.1.1.3), as well as wool crepe and silk satin cut on the bias in a rectangular-looking dress (ROM 994.229.22.1). Some of these more radical designs and the repeated sculptural geometric explorations developed by Balenciaga are revealed through an examination of the exquisite examples of his work in the Royal Ontario Museum permanent collection.

This 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. The development of the circle is explored by using the mathematical calculation of the Pi formula[5] used by Balenciaga to achieve some of his iconic capes in both day coats and evening ensembles. Toiles are assembled and fitted for the comparative analysis. This paper offers a glimpse into the thought processes and techniques of the brilliant designer and shows why and how Balenciaga had such a tremendous influence in haute couture on a worldwide scale.

Geometric shapes may be simple but they can be manipulated in complex and artful ways when used in patterns and designs. This is why Balenciaga's techniques make him a master of geometric designs. Given the admiration and friendship Balenciaga had for Vionnet, and her influence on his work, the first section will delve into a comparative analysis of the two couturiers' style.

There have been many books and articles beautifully written on Balenciaga and Vionnet and some of which are referenced in this research. Betty Kirke's book *Madeleine Vionnet* published in 1991 was a fitting tribute to Vionnet's complex patterns and design style and thus it has provided valuable information in the comparative study of the two couturiers.

2 The sphere shape was one of Balenciaga's commonly used geometric shapes and highlighted in a comparison to Christian Dior designs by Catherine Join-Diéterle (2011: 152).

3 The *Envelope Dress* is an iconic Balenciaga design that is derived from the sphere shape and the bias cut as highlighted in Mary Blume (2013: 89) and *Balenciaga in Black* volume (2017: 79).

4 Gazar silk was a special textile used in many style variations and made for Balenciaga by Abraham, a Swiss textile manufacturer (Miller 2007: 30, 106, *Balenciaga in Black* 2017: 78).

5 *Pi* is the ratio between the circumference and the diameter of a circle.

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, established in 2011 in Getaria, is truly an homage to the Basque designer. The catalogue references of his collection and including sketches with his notes provide an insight into specific details of measurements and placement on a female form. Also of reference is the extensive information compiled in Marie Andrée Jouve's book *Balenciaga*. It is a complete and elegantly organized volume that illuminates the special and complex couturier's collection from his Paris years from 1937 to 1968. It also reflects and highlights the influential artists' work that inspired Balenciaga in his designs. Whether it be the paintings of the artist Francisco de Zurbarán and his depiction of religious vestments with voluminous capes worn by monks and nuns or the beautiful textiles and draping of Francisco de Goya to the ruffled collar on the seated Harlequin in a Pablo Picasso painting. Just like the artists beautiful painting and the shapes and form that bring the art to its full glory, so too was Balenciaga's skill in perfecting the geometric cut and shape of the textile into a structural design that captured the attention of so many distinguished clients on a global scale. The Balenciaga elegance and innovative designs had also captured the attention of Toronto's social elite in the 50's and created a demand for his luxury brand. Alexandra Palmer in her book *Couture & Commerce*, published in 2001, highlights some of the women who wore these Balenciaga designs. The dresses and suits are part of the ROM's permanent collection and used in this study analysis.

Indicative of Balenciaga's Spanish background Hamish Bowles book *Balenciaga and Spain* based on the de Young Museum San Francisco exhibition in 2011 also expands on the Spanish artists and culture that so influenced Balenciaga. Highlighted are such pieces from his collection with the passementerie embroidered bolero jacket on the cover and the flamenco style dress in black silk taffeta and lace. Many references have been made to Balenciaga's craftsmanship and in Lesley Ellis Miller's book *Balenciaga* she writes of a conversation in which Balenciaga states "a good couturier had to be an architect, a sculptor, a painter, a musician and a philosopher," and makes reference to the fact that Balenciaga was one of the very few couturier that could sketch, drape, cut and sew and therefore fully understood the complete evolution of the design (Miller 2007:30).

All the literature referenced in the study has given insight into Balenciaga's innovative design style and what influences helped shape every aspect of the design from the textiles and embroideries to the buttons he selected. It is clear that these factors helped and shaped his fashion philosophy. What were not always evident at first glance are the subtle details and the inner structural lines and cut of the garment and how they relate to the geometric shape. This study will endeavor to shed some additional insight as to why Balenciaga was a Master of Geometric Design.

METHODOLOGY

For the study analysis, the Royal Ontario Museum Cristóbal Balenciaga permanent collection, (1937-1967) that consists of dresses and suits, will be studied. Each of the books referenced contains one or more of these exact models. Also, as a comparative study analysis, the ROM's Madeleine Vionnet's silk dress (1925) is the model that will be referenced.

The study requires patterns and toiles for fitting in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the techniques used by Balenciaga and the comparison with the Vionnet dress. The steps and processes in the analysis of each design model involve:

— Photographing all inner and outer details
— Detailed sketching of all details and cut of the textile
— Careful documenting of measurements and relevant information used in the atelier
— Developing the technical sketches, including all relevant measurements and details on Adobe Illustrator
— Developing the 2D digital pattern and including all grain lines as original. Software used: *Pattern Aided Design (PAD)*
— Printout of the digital pattern and cutting the toile
— Reconstructing the toile
— Fitting the toile on the Judy or mannequin
— Documenting the geometric attributes

ANALYSIS OF VIONNET'S SILK DRESS AND BALENCIAGA'S SILK BLOUSE

For the first section of the analysis, I selected pieces that were of similar textile, unlined with no interlining or interfacing. The ROM's Madeleine Vionnet silk dress presented a very unique opportunity to study the design and cut of the textile and the sewing techniques used in the atelier. As an additional side note, it is a very rare Vionnet dress and the silk is in a fragile state and therefore great care had to be taken when measuring. The Balenciaga selected model was a silk blouse (1960), both silks are of comparative quality. The data will be organized in a chart format to maintain clarity in the design details.

VIONNET'S SILK DRESS. ROM 994.229.232
(Figures 1, 2)

— The textile is a silk crepe de chine
— The dress pattern is made of two main pattern pieces 1-front and 1-back, 2-underarm gussets and 2-bias bindings for the neckline finish and back neck stay. The belt was added due to the fact that the dress had belt loops sewn at the side seams.
— Both front and back are cut on the warp lengthwise of the silk textile as illustrated in the attached pattern.

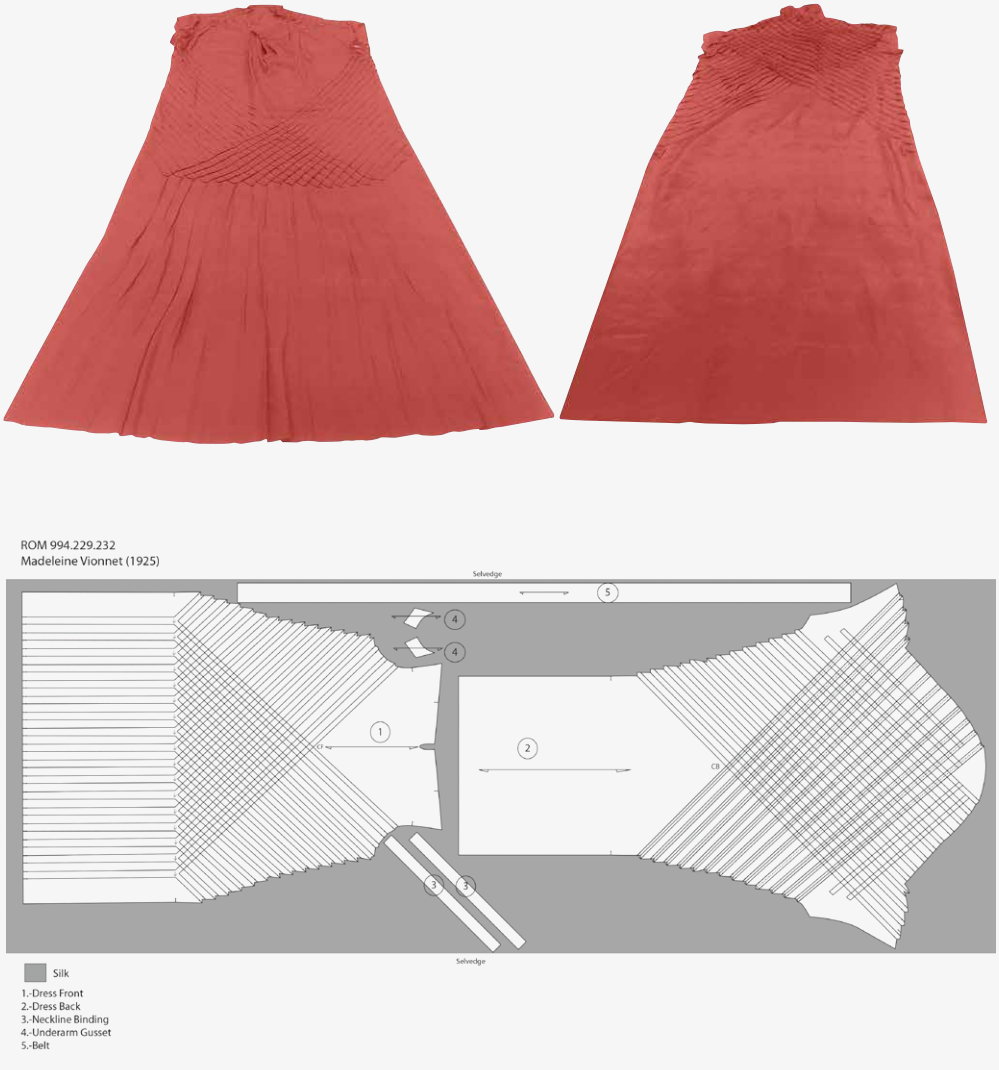

Fig. 1
Madeleine Vionnet silk dress.1925
ROM 994.229.232

Fig. 2
Digital dress pattern of the
Madeleine Vionnet silk dress.
ROM 994.229.232

— Back includes the pleated drop shoulder that extends to the front to form the balance of the front shoulder and sleeve area.
— The neckline is finished with a narrow bias binding and the dress style has an over the head entry.
— The main geometric attribute of this dress is the careful manipulation of the crisscrossing pin-tucks that form the rhombus grid which creates the bias stretch.
— The front grid sequence consists of 17 pin-tucks on each side of the front that crisscross and intersect at the exact point to form the soft drape of the pleats
— The back follows the same geometric rhombus grid but continues from the side front grid to the upper back of the dress with the same crisscrossing grid and forms the soft pleats in the neckline and drop shoulder location of the dress
— The toile tested provided essential insight into the sewing of the 6mm pin-tucks as each must be sewn on an exact 45° angle and careful calculation of the grid sequence was essential to maintain the center front exacting rhombus grid pattern. The center front triangular formation of the rhombus grid was an additional geometric attribute of the design
— The reproduction of the original dress pattern revealed a precision design of the rhombus grid which intersects to form the soft drape and the bias styling that Vionnet is known for.

For the second section, it was important that the analysis include the image of the Balenciaga wool bouclé ensemble that the blouse was a part of. The perfectly shaped rounded neckline of the blouse along with the bracelet length sleeve of both the jacket and blouse is indicative of the classic Balenciaga suit style. The two beautifully embellished passementerie buttons on the front jacket were another detail of his Spanish elegance and bold geometric shape.

BALENCIAGA'S SILK BLOUSE. ROM 966.120.7.C
(Figures 3, 4, 5)

— The textile is a very light silk crepe georgette and silk satin peplum waist yoke.
— The blouse pattern consists of a clever origami style one piece, which includes the front, back and sleeves of the blouse. There are 2-waist yoke peplums, a narrow bias binding for the neckline inner finish and 1-center back panel that forms the 7-buttonhole openings.
— The main blouse pattern piece was cut on the warp lengthwise of the silk, and center backs are on the textile selvedge. Due to the translucent quality of the silk the main blouse body has been doubled. The center back buttonhole panel is also cut on the selvedge. The yoke silk satin peplum is paired and includes the center front seam and the center back is on the textile selvedge as noted in the attached pattern.

Fig. 3
Cristóbal Balenciaga suit. 1960. ROM 966.120.7.A and silk blouse. 1960. ROM 966.120.7.C

— The main geometric attributes are a complex and clever combination of shapes. The design evolution starts from the basic square and takes on circular and triangular forms with a transformation to a single rectangular piece as noted in figure 4.
— The waistline shaping is formed with a series of pleats consisting of three on each quarter of the waistline. Important to note that the pleats are placed on a slight angular fold that conform to the female form. The silk satin yoke peplum hovers over the abdominal line and is only finished with a hand overcast stitch to avoid bulk.
— The toile provided an essential insight into the exact waistline angular fold of the pleat placement. The underarm darting cut out creates an exact 45° angle and is an essential part of the design that enables a bias movement to the sleeve underarm.
— The center back 2cm buttonhole detail was a clever use of the textile selvedge. It also created a clean finish of the buttonholes and avoided any thread fiber distortion of the shear silk textile.

BALENCIAGA AND VIONNET KEY OBSERVATIONS

Although the two design styles were unique to each of the couturiers' style, there were similar attributes such as the selection of the silk textiles to achieve the soft drape of the design. Both knew how to manipulate the design with a limited amount of pattern pieces to create their complex design silhouettes. Additionally, the essential and careful placement of the design bias used by both, Vionnet being the 45° precision stitching of the pin-tucks to create the bias grid, and Balenciaga's bias achieved by the 45° precision placement and cut

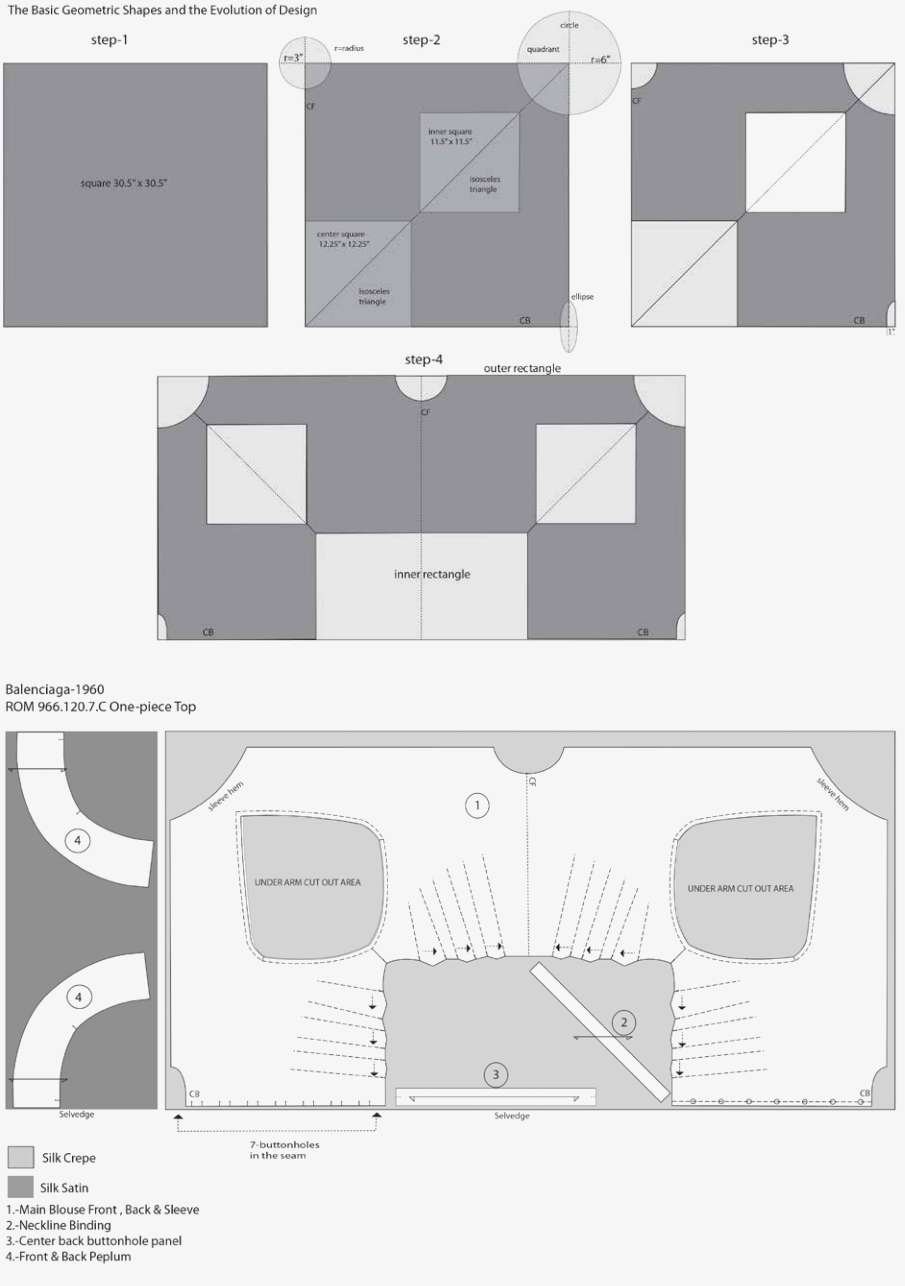

Fig. 4
The digital patterns of the geometric evolution of the blouse design ROM 966.120.7.C

Fig. 5
The completed blouse pattern and possible placement on the silk textile ROM 966.120.7.C

Fig. 6
Cristóbal Balenciaga wrap silk blouse. 1962. ROM 2009.127.1.4
© Berta Pavlov

of the underarm triangular darting used to create movement and shape. Vionnet also used the stitched pin-tucks on the front of her dress for the grid formation and front pleat drape. Balenciaga used the waistline pleats of the blouse for the waistline formation and soft waistline drape. A key observation of Balenciaga's design is the design evolution and all the hidden geometric shapes that are used in the technical design development of the beautiful Balenciaga blouse. Variations of this Balenciaga blouse were also included in the later collections, as the black crepe piece, photographed by Karen Radkai for *Vogue* in October 1963.

Another example of Balenciaga's skill of articulating the drape of the textile into soft folds is the ROM's silk wrap blouse (Figure 6). This style shape was masterfully developed with elongated trapezoid back panels; the front side extends to the back with triangular extensions that create a natural bias in the drape when wrapped. It is important to note that the wrap blouse style facing on both the front and back did not include any interfacing. Clearly Balenciaga wanted the textile to maintain the fluidity of the silk in the drape. It was also noted in both the original and the toile that when the front and back were joined at the side seams, the shape formation was of a perfectly rounded outline, a perfectly planned geometric design detail. The triangular insert and extension in the pattern design detail was also used in Vionnet's design details and highlighted in Betty Kirke's book *Madeleine Vionnet,* in chapter five. This wrap style variation has also been included in the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum CBM 16.2012.[6]

GEOMETRIC GRIDS

Just as important to Balenciaga and his design style was the embellishments used in his collections. The ornate buttons used by Balenciaga on his jackets and coats have always been unique and are emblematic of his style. A further examination of some of these unique buttons in the ROM's permanent collection of the designer's jackets and coats, it is clear that Balenciaga's attention to detail and influences were also a part of the innovate buttons used on his designs. The example of the oversize passementerie embellished buttons seen in the red suit jacket (ROM 966.120.7.A), were a main focal point of the jacket design (Figure 3). The buttons were sewn onto the jacket only as an accessory; the actual closure to the jacket was the inner snaps on the front. Further analysis revealed that the passementerie braid was in a radiating grid formation and in fact was made up of two circles within the grid design. Additional passementerie button

6 CBM16.2012 silk wrap blouse. August 1964. (EMSIME https://apps.euskadi.eus/emsime/catalogo/titulo-blusa-de-raso-de-seda-beis/objeto-blusa/ciuVerFicha/museo-93/ninv-CBM%2016.2012).

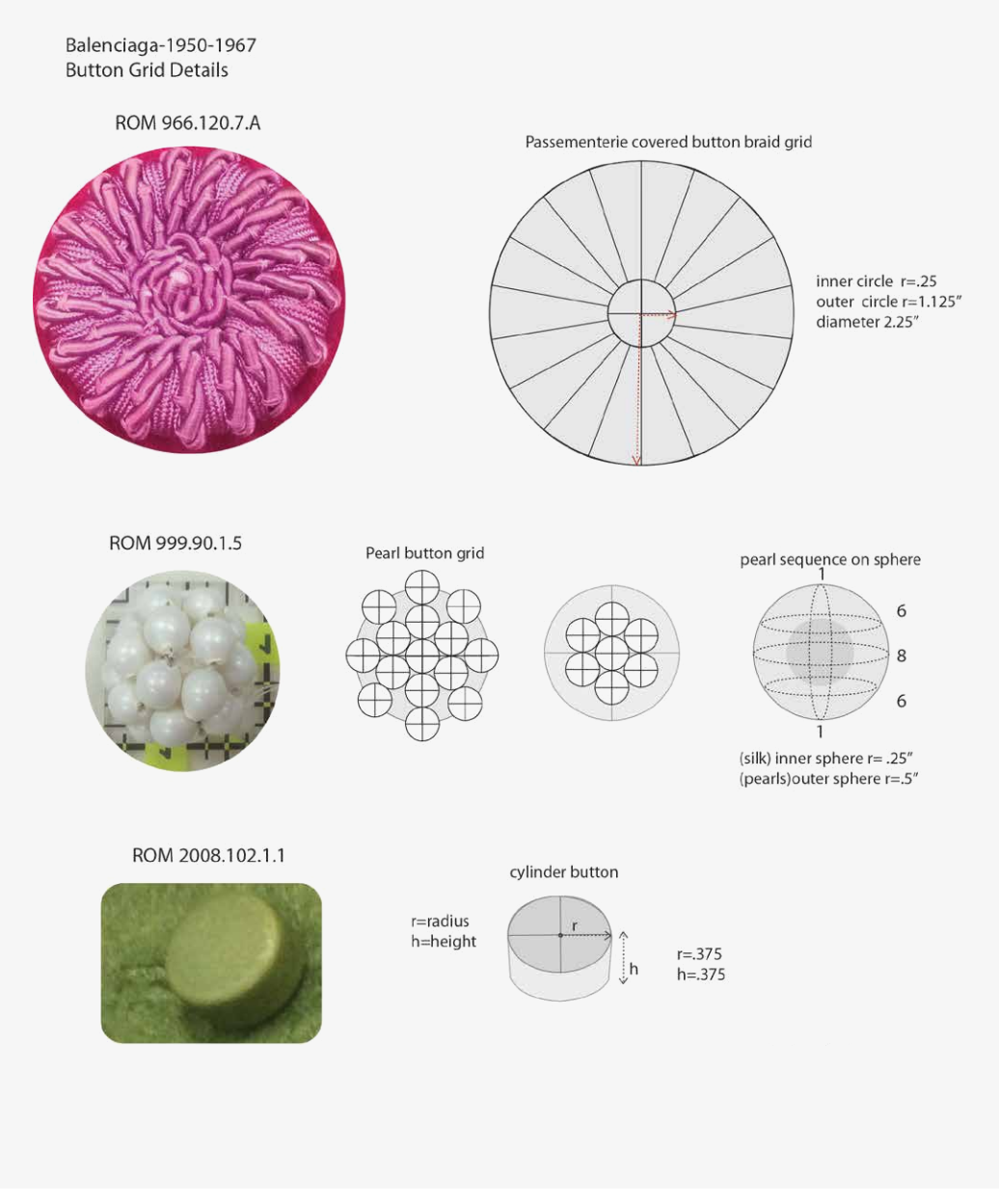

Fig. 7
Button grid diagram used to create the buttons ROM 966.120.7.C, ROM 999.90.1.5, ROM 2008.102.1.1
© Berta Pavlov

Fig. 7a
Cristóbal Balenciaga jet beaded, silk velvet dress. 1962. ROM 2014.62.56
© ROM

examples can also be seen on a suit jacket in the book *Balenciaga in Black* (Saillard 2017: 43). The second button analyzed was the pearl buttons (ROM 999.90.1.5); the buttons were a unique style that evoked elegance and most certainly a key focal point to the coat they belonged to. The pearl beads used to form the buttons were 5mm and they were in a sphere grid sequence that covered another inner sphere which was covered in beige silk. The finished diameter of the button was 1-inch. The third button (ROM 2008.102.1.1) was in a cylindrical shape that had been dyed to match and had a ¾ inch or 2cm diameter. The three buttons were all geometric in the design details and have been documented in figure 7.

The Balenciaga geometric design of the button style did not only include the buttons, he also combined unique geometric embroidery techniques around the bound buttonholes. This unique buttonhole design example can be seen on a black silk ottoman coat.[7]

Additional and subtle geometric grid patterns can also be found in the ornate embroidery and beading patterns used in Balenciaga's eveningwear. One of these examples is a beaded and passementerie cording embellished black silk velvet dress in the ROM's permanent collection (ROM 2014.62.56) (Figure 7a). The geometric patterns are clusters of jet beads and sequence in oval and rounded shapes. The dress is framed with circular yokes that are exquisitely embellished with the passementerie cording. The dress is a superb example of the careful attention and planning that went into every detail of Balenciaga's designs.[8] (Figure 7a)

CAPES AND THE CIRCLE CALCULATION

The elegance and nobility of the cape has been used by Balenciaga with his innovative use of textiles, style and length variations. The sculptural form of the capes and the textile selection was an essential element to how the cape was going to drape on the intended design. Balenciaga's range of textiles used in various cape styles was varied from such textiles as; silk gazar, silk cloqué, silk faille, shot-silk, white mink fur and wool crepe. Some of these notable cape examples have been beautifully captured in timeless photos such as the shot-silk flounced cape of 1963 by Tom Kublin (Jouve 1989: 250) and the black silk gazar cape of 1967 by David Bailey (Bowles 2011: 74). Another indication of the religious influence in his design of cape styling can be seen in Leslie Ellis Miller's book *Balenciaga,* where artist Francisco de Zurbarán portrays a monk in his religious vestments, wearing a white double cape with hood, and the comparison with the Balenciaga

7 The Spanish influences are seen and combined with the geometric design in the triangular embroidery design used in the bound buttonholes seen in this black silk ottoman coat (Bowles 2011: 114).

8 ROM 2014.62.56 beaded silk velvet dress, jet beads by Mesrine. 1962. Also, in *Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation* 2011: 238-241, *Musée Historique des Tissus (Lyon)* 1985: 86-88, *Kutxa Fundazioa* 2001: 61, *Museo Nacional de Escultura* 2000: 54.

Fig. 8
Cristóbal Balenciaga wool crepe cape and the silk & wool crepe dress. ROM 994.229.22.2
© ROM

silk gazar evening cape designed in his modern styling. Balenciaga was by no means the only designer to use capes in his collections —Vionnet was also known to use the cape style in hers, however, he expanded the range in both the textiles he used and the multitude of design variations.

The Balenciaga double wool crepe cape in the ROM's permanent collection was carefully analyzed in order to understand some of his techniques and the calculations used to achieve the geometric shape of the design style (Figure 8). The cape was part of an ensemble which consisted of a sleeveless dress in wool crepe and a contrasting ivory, silk satin bodice yoke. Important to note that this main dress pattern in the wool crepe was cut on bias with the front and back as a combined one-piece pattern that included various deep darting to shape the waistline. The dress bodice yoke which consisted of the front and back one-piece in the silk satin was also cut on the bias. The soft shoulder gathering created a beautiful shoulder curve and as an accent piece each shoulder has a silk satin bow, also cut on the bias. The details of the dress are important in order to understand the design of the cape: the fact that the dress had the drop shoulder from the yoke style and the added accent pieces of the bow detail, made it impossible to wear a conventional suit jacket and, therefore, the cape was a perfect addition to the ensemble. The cape is a unique design due to the fact that it is made up of two joined half circles that make up one circle (Figure 9). It is of varying lengths and the under-cape has cylindrical sleeves that transform from the under-cape. Also of note to the cut of the under-cape is the lower darting that radiates from the hem and aids in the reduction of the circumference of the circle shape. What distinguishes this particular cape is that the shape has also been carefully molded to contour the neck shoulder area with the use of radiating dart placement from the neckline. Each of the cape's upper and lower cape pieces is fully lined. The neckline is finished with a narrow bias band that fastens in the front with a snap closure.

The complexity of the double cape presented a unique opportunity to retrace and test the technique and measurements used by Balenciaga. The method would involve using *Pi* to calculate the circles required for this unique style. Once the required circles are calculated, the dart placement and reduction are applied to achieve the same circumference of each of the original capes. The process and calculation can be seen in figure 9. The cape toile revealed that the Pi calculation worked and assisted in determining an accurate sleeve location on the under cape. Essential to the dart placement was also the slight curve of the dart legs and center back seams in order to achieve the cape fit. Also of note was the use of the wool crepe in the original double cape, which created a cascading drape that was impossible to fully achieve in the cotton toile. This proves the point

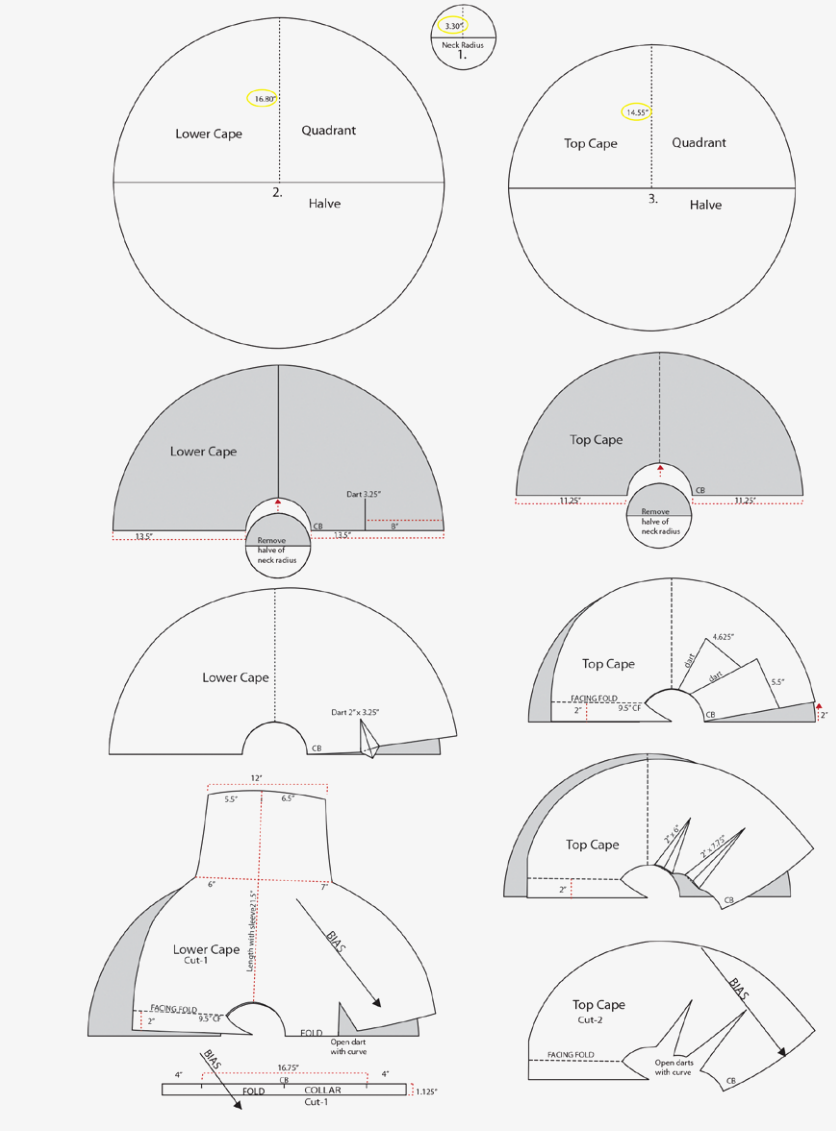

Fig. 9
The digital cape pattern development and the example of the Pi calculation ROM 994.229.22.2
© Berta Pavlov

that Balenciaga's expertise at textile selection was all part of his skill in mastering design.

THE RADICAL CUT AND SHAPE OF THE EVENING DRESS

Among the unique pieces in the ROM's permanent collection are the breathtaking eveningwear dresses that are a symbol of the Balenciaga Spanish influence and elegance. One of these exquisite pieces is the black silk taffeta and lace with an asymmetrical bubble hem (Figure 10). In many of the books and articles on Balenciaga, this is one of the dresses most likely included in the images within the pages and specifically in Hamish Bowles book *Balenciaga and Spain* (2011: 145). The outer graceful beauty of the dress almost doesn't do justice to the inner workings of this astonishing dress. Every detail of the design, textile cut and sewing was carefully planned out. The inner structure of the strapless dress bodice is seamed at the waist and has an under corset that includes seamed bust cups and back darts. The boning used in this style is a wooden ¼ inch boning which gives it some light inner support. The lace is masterfully worked in both the cut and invisible seam connection of the lace which has carefully placed triangular godet inserts that enable the dress to fit over the curves of the body. Between the outer lace and the cascading asymmetrical bubble skirt is a taffeta underlining that has five triangular godets of varying lengths and widths to accommodate the asymmetrical design. This under skirt also has an intricately placed lace border that is all invisibly attached by hand stitching. The underlining from the waist to the middle panel is on the bias and the middle panel has hair canvas to support the voluminous lower bubble of the skirt. The triangular godet inserts are also used in the middle section. Also of note is the full circle of the lower bubble skirt that is gathered in the light taffeta and creates the voluminous and iconic skirt structure that Balenciaga is known for.

The importance of this dress is in the hidden geometric design. There were multiple triangular inserts on three different layers which included all three types of triangles; the equilateral triangle, isosceles triangle and the scalene triangle. The additional point was that the skirt bubble is made up of two circles and doubles again for the gathers, hence the voluminous design detail.

FIT AND GEOMETRIC DESIGN SHAPE

A further analysis of a Balenciaga linen suit from his early years in his Parisian atelier (1937) reveals some of his earlier design and fit techniques (Figure 11). The jacket is a collarless, soft shoulder with a kimono sleeve style that includes an underarm gusset for movement. The jacket has a six button, center front closure and the fit is a sleek fit that hovers over the waistline. The jacket has a partial cotton lining that extends six inches above the hemline of the jacket. This was

Fig. 10
Cristóbal Balenciaga evening wear dress in silk taffeta and lace. 1951. ROM 2002.48.1.1.3 (1951)
© ROM

clearly meant to be worn in the spring/summer season due to the linen textile selection and the light beige color. The full-length skirt was of particular interest as it provided a unique insight into the fit of a one-piece upper skirt that included the front and back. The extensive eight darting contouring around the waistline created a perfect fit when tested in the toile as seen on the mannequin in the original suit. It was clear from the fit that the placement of all the triangular darts had been very carefully placed to mold to the waistline and its exact measurements. Equally important to the fit was the back waistline that had been lowered by 1.25 inches, or 3cm, and contours to the curve of the back (Figure 12). This was also seen in my Christian Dior research with his treatment of the back waistline in the skirts and dresses with seamed waistlines.[9] The lower skirt flounce was a three-quarter circle that was shaped to conform to the upper skirt, with raised and rounded center back shaping at the seam connection. The center front also had a center slit with a wide nine inch facing on each side of the center front slit opening as seen in the pattern figure 12. The full flounce of the lower skirt created a beautiful cascading drape. The design was created for ease of movement given the fact that there is a center front slit and a raised center back. This style is additional evidence that Balenciaga carefully took all aspects of the design, fit and movement into his design plan. At first glance the skirt looks like a simple silhouette, however the pattern and toile revealed a beautiful combination of technical skill in both design and fit.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing the enormous body of work that Balenciaga achieved in his career and trying to capture all the elements that gained him the reputation as one of the twentieth century's greatest fashion designers requires one to reflect on which element of design set him apart from all other great designers. This study focused on the element of the geometric design and techniques used by a great master, Cristóbal Balenciaga, and attempted to do justice and pay respect to his brilliant work.

The first portion of the research was a comparison of Madeline Vionnet and Balenciaga's design styles and techniques and revealed that there were direct similarities between both couturiers, but Balenciaga expanded further into the geometric design style with his origami style blouse and the geometric shapes revealed.

The research further revealed that hidden within the structural shapes of the Balenciaga designs were the fundamental geometric pieces that enabled the astonishing designs of Balenciaga. To this point all of the models studied had these identifiable attributes and proved to be essential components of the structural design. The

9 Christian Dior research of fit analysis, patterns & Technical Sketches by Berta Pavlov (Palmer 2018): *Zigomar Suit* (56, 57), *Pamplune Dress* (60, 61), Invitation skirt & bodice (231), *Cachottière* bodice, skirt & stole (167), *Delphine Dress* (236, 237), *Isabelle Dress* (36-39), *Venezuela Dress* (259). Video of the research of the *Delphine Dress* ("Decoding Dior's Delphine," ROM, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp5Fnzoft4E).

Fig. 11
Cristóbal Balenciaga linen suit example of the one-piece skirt fit and matching kimono sleeve jacket. 1937. ROM 991.147.10.2

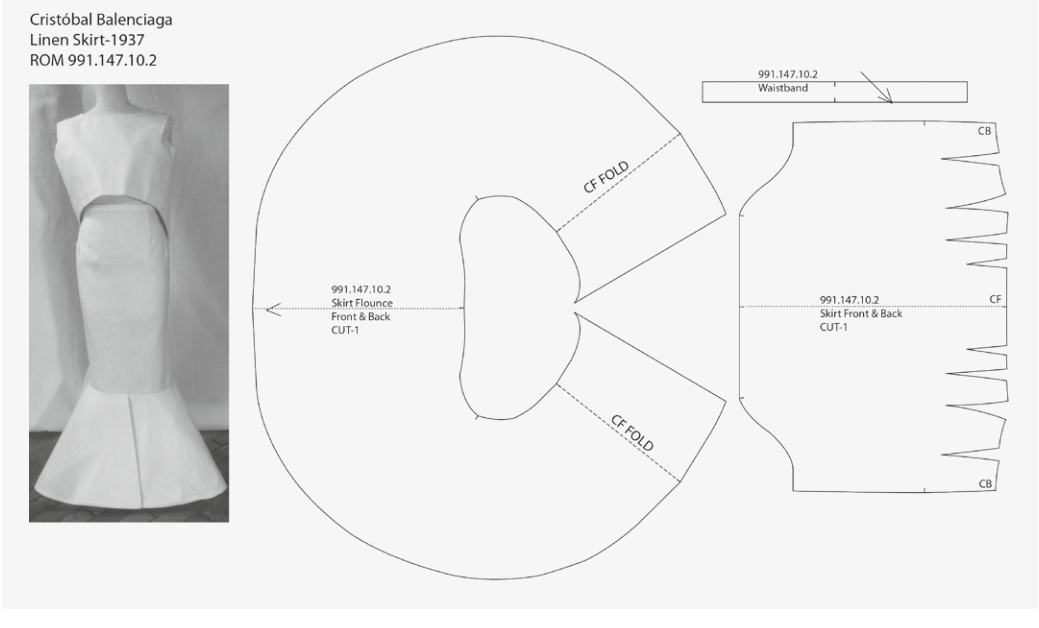

Fig. 12
The toile of the linen skirt ROM 991.147.10.2, the toile of the wrap blouse ROM 2009.127.1.4 and the digital pattern of the skirt ROM 991.147.10.2

examples of the unique double cape with the transforming sleeve style revealed the calculation of the circle and the darting. The radical cut of the taffeta and lace evening dress revealed the hidden structural shapes of triangles and circles.

The research revealed the importance of the selection of the textiles that Balenciaga used in his design style and shows that this was a requirement that enabled the structural geometric shape and drape of the designs.

Throughout the research of Balenciaga and his work, much of the literature on his life describes him as a quiet and reserved individual, completely devoted to his work. In Mary Blume's book she makes note of the 1962, April issue of *Vogue* and the four-page spread of his collection, simply titled "The Balenciaga Mystique."[10] Researching Balenciaga's geometric design, one appreciates his level of undivided attention to detail and the intensity of his concentration when developing his designs.

Although the research analysis of Cristóbal Balenciaga's geometric design style reveals that there were details and shapes similar to those of Madeleine Vionnet, the techniques and design style of Balenciaga made him unique and forever an influence in fashion design.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the Scientific Committee for the opportunity to represent my research at the First International Cristóbal Balenciaga Conference; it has been a great honor.

10 The mention of the 1962 *Vogue* article titled "The Balenciaga Mystique" highlights his collection that had subtle and minor changes but always held the interest of his customers. The focus & dedication to his skill and not a lot of time for interviews (Blume 2013: 5).

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Cristóbal Balenciaga in his Paris maison

Intuition beyond Japonisme: Balenciagas's Relationship with the Aesthetics of Emptiness

ANA ESTHER SANTAMARÍA is Assistant Professor at Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid, where she teaches Fashion History and Art History in Degree Programs on Design and Fashion Management, Integral Design and Image Management, and Landscaping. She holds a PhD in Art History from Universidad Complutense and a Diploma in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage from the ESRCBC of Madrid. → ana.santamaria@urjc.es

SERGIO ROMÁN ALISTE is Assistant Professor at Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid, where he teaches Art History in Degree Programs on Integral Design and Image Management, Fundamentals of Architecture and Fine Arts. He holds a PhD in Art History from Universidad Complutense. His research focuses on the cultural relationship between Asian and Western art in the last centuries. → sergio.aliste@urjc.es

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ABSTRACT

This approach to Balenciaga's work builds on prior studies that analyze the relationship between the Basque couturier and Japanese influences, to focus on a new interpretation of the notion of emptiness. From the perspective addressed in this article, such emptiness is apparent in Balenciaga's creative approach as well as with the result obtained in the garments, where the space between design and figure is one of the author's hallmarks. The chronological scope of this text coincides mainly with the period of his establishing himself in Paris, where he created the primary collections which are the subject matter of this interpretation.

KEYWORDS

Balenciaga
Japan
Japonisme
Emptiness
Silence
Handicraft

THE MARGINS OF INTUITION

The word "intuition" relates to this text in several ways. There are namely three aspects concerning intuition, all of them closely tied to the figure of Cristóbal Balenciaga and the harmony observed between some of his works and the aesthetical principles of East Asia between the 1930s and the 1960s. The first aspect is related to Balenciaga's idea of mastery, a notion widely spread since the consolidation of the couturier from Getaria in Haute Couture, through to today when he is fully endorsed by critics and the historiography of fashion. The master's proficiency of the craft, understood as the deep knowledge of the diverse techniques, as well as of the intrinsic skills of the craft, involves making creative decisions which appear to be vacant of any reasoning procedure. The astonishing leap that allows for the intuitive process with regard to the past manual experience (Sennett 2008, 211) explains many of the findings and new solutions attributable to the master Balenciaga. The interpretation suggested in the following lines is based in an obvious way on the generality of this initial concept of the word *intuition*, although it inevitably rests on the other two more specific concepts that are set forth below.

The second concept of the word is the one shown in the heading of this text. This connotation of the word "intuition" has a strong connection with the previous one, but with a bias towards the artistic forms. Any formal connection of an artistic source with a stimuli recipient is usually encompassed within the hackneyed sketch of influence. The term "influence" indicates a one-way—and oftentimes hierarchical—transfer of forms and ideas, and its use by the artistic historiography or the cultural critic, which when done in an insisting or automatic way can contribute to creating fictitious dependency relations and to obscuring the true nuances of the relationship between the agents (Baxandall 1985, 58-59). In this respect, Japaneseness is understood as a great set of inspiration and imitation forms coming from Japan and welcomed by the Western world between the XIX and XX centuries, and turns out to be a perfect example of a process historiographically labeled as *influence*. The spectrum of relations within the Japaneseness label covers a wide range of arts. Japanese woodcut (*ukiyo-e*) and decorative painting made a decisive impact on impressionist and symbolist paintings, and on the graphic arts of *art nouveau*. On the other hand, the ornamental Japanese arts were especially important for the updating of design in Europe, just as Nipponese architecture was important for the spatial revolution and the simplicity of shapes from the Modern Movement of architecture. Likewise, Japaneseness did not leave anyone indifferent in the fashion realm, and both the textile designs and the ornamental elements received influence from Japan. We are presented here with another intuitive insight from Cristóbal Balenciaga, since, although the formal interest in the Japanese aesthetics in some segments of his work seems obvious, the connection with the Japanese aesthetic goes beyond any possible imaginative approach starting from the end of the 1940s and, especially after the creation of the Barrel Line. On the other hand,

handicraft will lead the couturier to accomplish solutions dissociated from an orientalist stance, and still strongly in tune –and even anticipatory– with the new design wave in Japan originating from the traditional kimono.

The aspects related to this breakthrough, from influence to intuition in regard to the *Japaneseness* label, will be tackled in the following section. And it will lead to the third aspect of intuition, which will be linked to the symbolic presence of emptiness and emptying in the last section, where the way in which Balenciaga's designs are also a representation of a profound ethical and aesthetical alignment with his position, as a creator committed to delicate and silent crafting, will be tackled. In the Japanese realm, intuition is an essential concept for the practice of *zen*, in the sense of being an instant understanding where no reasoning procedures intervene.

The second European postwar period, the time when Balenciaga was consolidated as a master of Haute Couture, was also the dissemination context of those concepts from Japan towards the West, where they had an extraordinary impact on visual and performing arts, music and design. This text will conclude by highlighting that, the possibility that both the dissemination of *zen* philosophy and aesthetics in the West during the postwar period, and Balenciaga's personality, artistic practice and personal profile might have had a connection, has gone unnoticed. Notwithstanding, Balenciaga's proverbial silence might be ambivalent here: it may hinder finding any proof of interest on the part of the master in those aesthetical values from Japan linked to the practice of *zen*, or it may show his alignment with them from a Christian spiritual perspective, almost monastic in many senses, as we will try to prove.

RESONANCE OF AN ABSENT KIMONO

As the catalogue *Orientalism*: *Visions of the East in Western Dress* (Martin and Koda 1994: 73-74) rightly states, the emergence of Japanese products, designs and artworks in the West was quite sudden, unlike what happened in other areas of Asia, as a result of the abrupt opening of Nipponese ports in 1854. The Japanese arts landed as a big wave in Europe, which has been noted for some time with regard to the famous Katsushita Hokusai image.

In the very same fashion, as almost a century earlier, Bernard Rudofsky used kimonos as a symbol and a metaphor for the global approach to Japan (1965), the iconic garment was also the core of many of the approaches to this Land of the Rising Sun that amazed and stunned Europe from the 1960s onwards (Fernández del Campo 2001). The presence of the kimono starred in the visual representations of the *ukiyo-e* woodcuts, especially in the coveted interior scenes of artists such as Kitagawa Utamaro or Utagawa Kuniyoshi: every figurative composition with a remarkable presence of the human figure was always dominated by kimonos, especially in the erotic woodcuts, which made visible their usually hidden parts. But it was also the

center of the most anthropological curiosity that took place through the advent of the Meiji Era photography (1868-1912), and which pushed the representation of a Japan in change but that, according to what the European spectator wished to see, utilized the kimono again as an expected icon of Japaneseness. Item collections also included this type of Japanese garment, which was even used as attire by French artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec or Vuillard (Colta Feller 1975: 78), or as a model's outfit in paintings, as is the case of Whistler, Merrit Chase, Stevens, Monet, Renoir, Marquet, Camoin, Derain and Matisse, among others.

However, the imitative nature given to this garment in general, on many occasions nearly caricature-like, often led to the distortion of its relationship with the model. The historian Ángel González has outlined how the jumbled, volumetric and ornamental representation of the kimono in *La Japonaise* (Camille Monet in Japanese Costume), painted by Claude Monet in 1876, turns out to be less representative of that intended Japaneseness than the version painted by Matisse in *La Japonaise au bord de l'Eau* (1905). In it, Matisse represented his wife on the edge of a water stream, dressed in Japanese attire hardly distinguishable from the white of the canvas, which establishes an apparently empty or absent space. The garment is traversed by waves of color which simulate the undulating and organic reflection of the kimono on the water that Mme. Matisse is looking at: "What she wears is not the kimono, but its reflection, that leaves the stirred surface of the water to hang on the Japanese woman's body […]. Actually, the reflection on the water of Mme. Matisse's kimono turns out to be more Japanese than the kimono itself" (González 2007: 139). We will see how this visual intuition from Matisse, when placing on the garment what the model seems to be seeing in the reflection, deepens into the vitality of an emptiness much more connected to the Japanese practices in arts, embedded in nature and life. It is this intuition which marked the approach of Balenciaga to that alleged relation with Japan: a subtle and interiorized link with regard to the model, and more embedded in how to proceed as a creator than in the formal references. Subtle, but surprisingly consistent with the fundamental aspects of the Japanese aesthetic, and interestingly not much with the tradition itself, but with the updating of that cultural background in contemporary Japanese design, even moving ahead of it.

The recent text from Juan Gutiérrez for the exhibition catalogue of 2019 in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid remarks that from the beginning this intuition of the oriental underlies Cristóbal Balenciaga's work beyond its aesthetics, even when he interpreted the Spanish tradition (Gutiérrez 2019: 23). It refers to the words of Pauline de Rothschild in the catalogue of the Balenciaga monographic exhibition in the Metropolitan in New York (1973), about the firmness, austerity and finesse in the Basque couturier's use of color, where she compared the creator with Chinese traditional painters (de Rothschild 1973: 20). Many, in fact, are the scholars who have noticed the presence of Eastern elements in Balenciaga's art pieces. Miren Arzalluz captures in her work *Cristóbal Balenciaga: The Making of a Master* (2010) the

key elements for the couturier's training as a master of Haute Couture, and among them she carries out the most comprehensive analysis to date of his relationship with Japaneseness, on which many of the subsequent interpretations rely here. The author highlights the role of two main authors in her research, which constitute two ways of understanding the assimilation of the oriental stimuli, and which globally represent almost a form of pouring of the Japanese influence on Parisian fashion until the 1930s: firstly, with the contributions from Paul Poiret (1879-1944) and, then, those of Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975).

Paul Poiret was astounded by the oriental aesthetic. His contributions, although they were in line with the fashion language of his time, kept a strong romantic bias and they did not fully dispose of the exotic feel, an element which can be read as a full and self-indulgent assimilation of the oriental culture's aesthetical premises. In other words, he did not abandon the traditional Western view of the oriental world, nor the idea of luxury and reverie. These elements, after the Great War, were transformed into a decaying opulence which did not match the new criteria established in fashion, to which Poiret failed to adapt. However, there is an obvious turn of the screw in the introduction of the harem pant, aimed at liberating the female silhouette and also at the reinterpretation he made of the Japanese kimono through some of the coats he crafted by 1910 (Bayón 2013: 158). Regarding the kimono, he studied its construction in depth (Arzalluz 2010: 242) and established new canons in the Western female silhouette.

The second key figure in the assimilation of Japanese shapes in fashion was Madeleine Vionnet, who served as an important element in Balenciaga's craft development and a paramount mentor in relation to the appreciation of oriental sources. The master from Getaria learnt pattern design from her; the direct work on the manikin with the material, exploring the capabilities of the fabrics and, finally, his interest in the kimono's possibilities in the revolution of Haute Couture shapes (Arzalluz 2010: 245-248).

Experts agree that there are two distinct periods in the career path of Cristóbal Balenciaga. The first was that of his formative period, which is captured in Arzalluz's text and covers from his first steps in the profession up to the year 1936, when the Basque couturier left Spain as the Spanish Civil War broke out. Up to that moment, the couturier had learnt the craft. He often traveled to Paris and observed the innovations that the masters were producing. Numerous studies describe how Balenciaga reached his mastery of technical skills: through a disciplined internalization process of copy and imitation. It is well-known, thanks to Arzalluz's research, that during his trips to Paris in his first period, he used to buy the best couturiers' pieces, which he used to thoroughly deconstruct later in his workshop to examine how they were made. This resulted in the fruitful instruction, especially regarding the secrets of pattern design, that he received from his admired Vionnet, whose friendship also accompanied him throughout his life (Balda 2013: 83).

The process of copy, imitation or repetition is fully linked to his training in a wide range of arts. However, it is remarkable that Balenciaga managed to go beyond just copying by using a technique that liberated his own handcraft from being over-attached to a strict learning process of mere imitation. This is a way to proceed that reminds us of that of the painting masters from Oriental Asia that Pauline de Rothschild had already referred to. One of the most rooted principles in Chinese paintbrush art lies in the copying of old models, not being a loyal imitation of the formal appearance as it was established by painters in the past, but with an ambition to convey the spirit in the same way as the masters, from a deep knowledge of stroke rhythm (Cheng 2008: 142). Rhythms that are inseparable from the deep knowledge of the craft that, during his childhood, Balenciaga assimilated in his mother's workshop.

The second period, which takes place during his stay in Paris and until his retirement in 1968, is marked by a strong Spanish emphasis, something the specialists in this field also agree on. It is as though all the sediments of his native cultural traditions had resurfaced after being away from his homeland, a point that has been fully demonstrated in numerous existing research publications. Cristóbal Balenciaga moved to Paris when the Spanish Civil War broke out, as Ana Balda has pointed out, due to the uncertainty and the danger that the conflict caused and also because the French capital was the unquestionable epicenter of fashion at that moment, and there he would have all the means to continue with his profession (Balda 2013: 35). Despite leaving the country, the Basque couturier did not go into exile, and spent long periods in Igueldo, Madrid, Barcelona or San Sebastián (Gutiérrez 2019: 24).

However, Balenciaga could be deemed as an exiled man when looking at this period as a transforming sort of exile inherent to the artistic craft. But this claim must not be seen as a painful banishment, since Balenciaga's exile can be considered liberating. It could be compared to the exile described by Milan Kundera when referring to Věra Linhartová. The Czech writer left her native country in 1968 and moved to Paris, a place alien to her roots, unknown and, therefore, open to every possibility. Linhartová chose the place where she wanted to live and the language she wanted to speak. She went into exile to fulfill her aspiration of speaking another language and living abroad (Kundera 2009: 129-131).

Likewise, the language in which Cristóbal Balenciaga wanted to express himself was that of his own creations. A work that reflected his undeniable Spanishness and that germinated during such an indisputable exile where the greatest creators lived permanently and that was established as a homeland. And that place's walls, in the case of the couturier from Getaria, were made of the matter of silence. At this point an important detail should be mentioned; a characteristic that is crucial to understanding other issues that will be tackled later. Silence was one of Cristóbal Balenciaga's key personality traits. There is objective data provided by many people who met the couturier from which it becomes apparent that he was an extremely reserved

individual, although he never became a complete loner (Balda 2013: 51). And also, that, when he worked, he remained mired in absolute silence. A silence that, with respect to subsequent research, has caused unease among those studying his life since they often clash with this mutism: "This is evidenced by the fact that there are no biographies about him, nor are they expected" (Gutiérrez 2019: 24). However, this silence becomes eloquence when applied to his creations, especially, as has been noted above, the works belonging to the latter part of his life.

SILENCE AND THE THINKING HAND

Silence is also a spiritual practice, and Balenciaga was profoundly religious, an attitude that he also applied to his craft, which he developed with the eagerness that the mystical order conveys. Silence in Christian prayer is aimed at an inner emptying which can also be found in the practice of *zen*. Although the seeming distance between the *zen* Buddhism postulate and the Christian religiousness postulate in Balenciaga becomes evident, there are two connecting paths between the Japanese meditation practices and the context Balenciaga fell within. The first path is related to the penetration of Japanese aesthetical theories linked to *zen* in the European context of the second postwar period. Balenciaga became friends with Eduardo Chillida and Joan Miró, and both were familiar with the Oriental Asian aesthetical premises.

The other path relates to the connection that, since the sixteenth century, was established with Japan through the Society of Jesus. This relationship was intermittent until the nineteenth century, when the Nipponese country opened to the West and the evangelization of that territory began again. However, the work of many Jesuits was not limited to preaching the Christian faith, and during the twentieth century they started to show a true interest in Japanese culture, its customs, its philosophy and its literature, establishing cultural bridges in parallel with those established in the artistic realm. Hugo Enomiya-Lasalle, a German priest from the Society of Jesus, strove his whole life to generate a common meeting point between *zen* and Christianity since 1929, the year he arrived in Japan, and he published numerous books on the matter. Following some of Lasalle's postulates, Fernando García Gutiérrez, who was a Jesuit and was trained as a Tokyo art historian, has written profusely about the cultural and spiritual connections between the Western World and Japan. Both thinkers agree on connecting the *zen* practice of emptying with the need to "make room for God within oneself," (García 2009: 268-270), so that emptiness can lead to plenitude, an interpretation that is fully in tune with the Taoist principles present in the Chinese landscape aesthetic (Cheng 2008, 68). Emptying opens a transformative space which allows for the mutation of opposites, and which would ultimately allow, by applying the aforementioned oriental notions to that spiritual path, the inclusion of God into oneself (Enomiya-Lassalle 1986: 141-43).

The words that Robert Pieplu, a spiritual guide for Balenciaga, wrote for the catalogue on the retrospective that the Metropolitan of New York dedicated to the couturier in 1973 now become clarifying. The French priest directly linked Balenciaga's religious aspects to his creative work, delving deeper into the subordination of all other aspects to the harmony imbued by the presence of God in the individual:

> *For him, clothes were supposed to reveal the deep harmony, beauty in its purest form, the reflection—beyond all distortions—of the Creator which everyone hides more or less in his inner self. […] To serve this harmony, everything was subordinated, not only the shape of the model but the color, the fabric itself, the variation of ornament.* (Pieplu 1973: 12)

In Balenciaga's creation, the will of emptying can be subtly sensed, of leaving out the unnecessary, which can be clearly seen in the couturier's artistic progression that, in his last stage, got rid of any trivial element in order to work with the essential. He loathed shallowness as much as he loved silence. The absence of word is also an emptiness from which he worked and that even became, as Ana Balda has observed, one of the essential materials of some of his creations from the more mature stage of his career: "not only did he work with silence, but he carved it into fashion" (Balda 2013: 148).

There are many types of silence; the abbot Dinouart already spoke of this, and silence is an art in itself. There are rhetorical, assertive, political, or sardonic silences, there are even silences associated with wisdom or foolishness. There is also a silence that helps find retreat and that exorcizes distracting thoughts. This state of deep concentration is also present during handicraft. It is not difficult to imagine that state of absorption in the master from Getaria, who always worked with his hands. Working with one's hands, as he did, is also a sort of meditation where any element alien to the mental dimension has no place. In the *Balenciaga y la pintura Española* exhibition's catalogue we come across a quote from Emanuel Ungaro that happens to explain a fundamental hint for the argument suggested. At the time of the interview, Ungaro claimed that the creative genius of his mentor stemmed from intuition rather than intellectuality. Balenciaga was not an intellectual (Golbin 2019: 52). He was an artist that based his work on the art of doing, in fact, he would reprimand his apprentice for his attachment to drawing—a tool bound to the scope of creative thinking—and encouraged him to throw himself into the mastery with the hand: "You must do, always do, truly do... Reimagining everything along the way" (51).

Balenciaga's artistic stance clashes with one of the axioms born from Renaissance artistic theory, the preeminence of intellectual work over handicraft and the relevance of drawing as the only mediator between the idea and the final execution. Giorgio Vasari was one of the main promoters of the term *arti del disegno*, an intellectual notion and, therefore, one superior to the crafting mechanical arts from which

the artist wanted to free himself in the context of the Renaissance (Kristeller 1986: 197). It is then that the traditional split in the West between art and craft starts a journey of no return that continues to this day, a division that never existed in the oriental arts.

The notion of the couturier from Getaria, in tune with the idea of an almost medieval workshop, is fully consistent with his signature idea of mastery (Golbin 2019: 51). The master is not necessarily the sublime creator but it is always he who exerts the mastery involving full commitment to the craft in a workshop, at least in the traditional conception. Balenciaga's formative period between San Sebastián and Paris coincides with a boom of the traditionalist tendencies in Europe from thinkers such as René Guénon and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, both greatly influenced by the united arts conception in Asia, that is: a way of understanding artistic activity as intrinsically handmade in its creation mechanisms (Coomaraswamy 1977). For Ananda Coomaraswamy, the contemporary world was a window to new opportunities to reassemble all that had been split (East/West; craftmanship/fine arts; use/pleasure), since post Renaissance Europe had completed its distancing from Asia due to its excessive stride for intellectual individuality and shallowness (Coomaraswamy 1934: 2-4).

The origin of these approaches, even though they were nurtured from Asian conceptions (in this case mostly Indian, to a lesser extent Chinese), fully inherited the utopian postulates of the British Arts & Crafts Movement, which arose from the crisis in the process of manual skill transmission from generation to generation caused by industrialization. This paradigm shift was also key to the development of philosophers linked to pragmatism, such as John Dewey, and phenomenology, Gaston Bachelard (a craftsmen's son) or Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and has regained strength in more recent thinkers, such as the architect Juhani Pallasmaa or the sociologist Richard Sennett. The references from these thinkers to the retrieval of manual and sensory labor do not only clarify many of the existing testimonies on Balenciaga's praxis at the workshop, they are also explanatory of how traditional creation patterns from Asia have merged into some Western modernity segments, with Balenciaga being a high exponent.

Juhani Pallasmaa referred to the hand and manual learning as follows: "Acquiring a skill does not primarily stem from verbal learning, but from the direct skill transfer from the master's muscles to those of the apprentice through a sensory perception act and body mimesis" (2015: 12). The orientalist Lafcadio Hearn also noticed, when he saw Japanese craftsmanship for the first time towards the end of the nineteenth century, that it was the ancestors who guided the authors' expert fingers in their manual labor (Hearn 2002: 40-41). It is, in essence, an activity of talking silence, because of its unconscious shadowing of complex steps and internalized responses, which can hardly be verbalized or conceptualized.

Balenciaga retired in 1968, a time when Haute Couture had started to fade due to the advent of *prêt-à-porter*, a new scenario where the design or the notion of concept in collections prevailed over other values, such as detailed construction or the prominence of the

materials. In the artistic field of the late 1960s, the breeding ground was ready for the development of the profound conceptualization that dominated art in the coming decades. This conceptualization meant that the manual construction of the pieces and the work's material presence gave way to the "intellectual and poetic acuities fascinated by the unthinkability of the item; the void, the most difficult to grasp" (Ruiz de Samaniego 2006: 75).

Balenciaga´s creations stood out, in addition to the presence of manual labor, in the eloquence of the materials he used. He pushed the fabrics he worked with to their expressive limits. Without disregarding the thorough architectural construction work, which he carried out instinctively, his dresses can also be regarded as direct images taken from the matter, where the visual qualities do not outshine the presence of the tactile. "Sight names them, but the hand knows them" (Bachelard 1994: 8). The dreaminess caused by Balenciaga's garments is also tactile, probably as a result of his own tactile work method with the material, which Bachelard expresses as follows: "The hand also has its dreams and hypothesis. It helps to know the matter in depth, and therefore it helps to dream it" (1994: 165).

SILENCE AND EMPTINESS

The creating activity, according to Chantal Maillard, can be understood in two different ways. The first is part of the creative genius' "divinizing" attitude and the other is a "poetic" attitude, related to the ability to listen, the wait, the ability to pause in order to find the rhythm of the craft rather than performing a conceptual appropriation of it. Focusing on the "to be" of things (Maillard 2008: 30) requires avoiding thought distractions, to get rid of any interference alien to what it is being done, in essence, pursuing stillness. The poetic creation, then, is a creation accessible to "people who have sometimes been able to achieve stillness" (34-45).

Pursuing stillness involves an inner emptying that is materialized by means of the tool of silence. Silence, says Alain Corbin, is "the inner place where the word emerges" (Corbin 2016: 7), the privacy where creation arises, something inherent in many artists' work. Marcel Proust had his Boulevard Haussmann apartment walls wrapped in cork and red velour and locked himself up there to write *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Joan Miró sought such silence in the contact with nature that his house in Palma de Mallorca offered, to then get to "work uninterruptedly with a growing vitality" (Cabañas 2000: 48). And so many others that need sound absence to enlighten their creations. The word in Balenciaga took shape in his garments, also arisen from silence. Silence in the workshop, silence while *doing*, and also silence on the runway, where models walked with no background music, "turned around and left in silence" (Golbin 2019: 48). Another aspect stressing such silence is the fact that the couturier did not name his collections. All of these are aspects specific to an ascetic or monastical attitude that, again, point to an alleged proximity to the aesthetic emanating

from *zen*, where silence, the everyday nature and the appreciation of materials are essential (García 1998: 59-60, 2009: 270-71).

It is also true that artists work in specific contexts that leave a mark on their production. Balenciaga became friends with, among others, Joan Miró and Eduardo Chillida, artists who worked the Japanese emptiness aesthetic into their creative process. However, there is an irrefutable fact: the existence of the artwork remains present beyond the moment when it was created. Balenciaga's dresses speak today from the museum's exhibitions and, although there is nothing new about saying that pieces of art speak beyond the temporary limits they fall within, sometimes the power of a piece as a document in itself is forgotten. And although there is no documentary proof that Cristóbal Balenciaga was initiated in the Japanese aesthetic—beyond formal matters or the pattern designing he learnt, especially, as Arzalluz pointed out, from Madeleine Vionnet—some of his creations are valuable testimonies in and of themselves and can be read from this perspective as the aesthetic category of emptiness.

In 1990, Eduardo Chillida built a sculpture named *Homage to Balenciaga*. Both kept a remarkably close relationship that arose from the friendship between Cristóbal and Juana Eguren, the sculpturer's maternal grandmother and a customer of Balenciaga's. She helped Balenciaga when he moved to Paris, an act of kindness that was returned by the couturier when the young Eduardo Chillida moved to the French capital towards the end of the 1940s. Chillida's sculpture consists in two large metal blocks whose central feature is, drawn through emptiness, the silhouette of a female body. It is the body that is absent, not the dress textile matter; the empty hollow of the body understood as a window of possibility.

The mastery of the interior space of the attires became apparent, especially, starting in 1947 with the *Barrel Line*. The *Balloon* skirt, the *Tunic* silhouette, the *Sack* dress or the *Four-Sided* dress abounded in this research into emptiness between body and fabric. It is known that Balenciaga's dresses do not squeeze their customers' bodies, and they have been compared with a sort of shell within which the body could move freely. And, in light of Western doctrine, these issues have also been interpreted as far as they erase the female body's significance. The history of female clothing in the Western world has always been geared to exerting an action on the body, generally oppressive and contouring. However, emptiness in Balenciaga's creations is established as the place for the body that does not exhaust the body itself but adds an extra space between such emptiness and the apparel. By no means does the existing emptiness between the body and the garment diminish the expressiveness of the former. Instead, it offers an interstice where the body reveals itself. In Eastern Asia, this emptiness quality has always been related to the active capability and the flexible possibility of being.

In this case, that interstice space can be connected with the Japanese traditional idea of *ma*, a concept which is difficult to translate but is often applied to architecture and can be understood as space, interval, relation, or even pause. In Japanese abodes, this concept can be applied to both the element's relation within a diaphanous space, and

the distinction, and at the same time homogeneity of atmospheres, or the flexible relation between the inside and the outside of the dwelling. Pauline de Rothschild stated that Balenciaga's garments bear resemblance to bug shells, but even more so with Japanese drama costumes (de Rothschild 1973: 23). A shell hides what lies within just as Japanese drama costumes do, namely the *nō*. It grants all the expression of the corporeality and body language despite the fact that one cannot see the figures due to the clothing's volume, not even that of the face, as it is covered with a mask.

In the case of Balenciaga, the expressiveness of the female figure has not disappeared; it shows mightily because the body has been liberated. Its expressive possibility cannot be judged on the basis of its visual quality, even though the Western visual predominance is undeniable, as Chantal Maillard puts it, "art is, for the oriental, active contemplation, penetration into the item until its inner rhythm is grasped, the rhythm that makes of the object what it actually is" (Maillard 1993: 14). In other words, no expressiveness can be taken away from the body because we cannot see it.

In the case of Japanese traditional architecture, a large part of its aesthetic conceptualization and its active use of emptiness does not come from its own local art theory, but from the theoretical-practical readings that Western contemporary architects, such as Walter Gropius or Bruno Taut, made of it (Vives 2017: 199). Likewise, Balenciaga contributed an interpretation, not a theoretical or conceptual one, but one derived from pure praxis and manual activity that, originated remotely from the kimono, was able to connect with the true heart of Japanese aesthetics. This is evidenced by Balenciaga's absent success in Japan, through the models that Dior "copied" and launched there in 1954, as Balda has pointed out (2013: 272), or by the fact that emptying the space between garment and body, aside from the formal relations with the traditional kimono, has been one of the backbones of Japanese contemporary fashion, from Yohji Yamamoto to Issey Miyake (Satsuki 2014: 244). That approach was already present, in similar terms, in Balenciaga decades earlier.

Zen painting does not stop at the outer details of the described object, the essence is in the interiority that cannot be seen. As Fernando García Gutiérrez put it, the role of emptiness is played by clouds, which cover all in vagueness. And if David Bayley or Helmut Newton photographed silence (Balda 2013: 148), Nick Veasy wanted to disclose in 2016 the essence of that silence, the mystery of inner emptiness in Balenciaga's attire. The couturier structured his dresses through the mastery in the cut, never padding the garments. Veasey's radiographies reveal how the specific elements—whalebones, pins, buttons—float over the inner emptiness and vagueness. That emptiness that was once the silent prelude of a female body. Maybe if Eugenio D'Ors spent three hours in the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria today, he would devise a new category for the Basque man's creations, which seem to fly and remain standing at the same time. Manuel Outomuro's photographs also show them in such a way, where the attire, stripped from the body, announces the absolute triumph of emptiness.

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Study and Material Characterization of the Embroidery Threads Presented at the Bolero Jacket la Perse from the Collection of Kunstmuseum Den Haag

CÉSAR RODRÍGUEZ SALINAS
Head of the Fashion and Textile Conservation Department
at the Kunstmusuem Den Haag (The Netherlands)
ORCID 0000-0002-9694-2275 → crodriguez@kunstmuseum.nl

NADIA ALBERTINI
Embroidery designer and archivist at Maison Hurel (Paris, France)
ORCID 0000-0003-0027-8494 → albertini.nadia@gmail.com

LIVIO FERRAZZA
Science Conservator at the Instituto Valenciano de Conservación,
Restauración e Investigación de Bienes Culturales (Valencia, Spain)
ORCID 0000-0002-4357-2979 → livio.ferrazza@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Kunstmuseum Den Haag (hereafter KMDH) in the Netherlands holds one of four known La Perse Cristóbal Balenciaga jackets made in 1946. Previously owned by the opera singer Else Rijkens (1898-1953), the bolero-style jacket is richly hand-embroidered and constructed from white satin silk in the front and a contrasting black crepe silk in the back. The jacket has a matching toque, and a black crepe silk evening gown is visible under the two white satin silk bands at the front of the bolero, completing the set.

La Perse is now considered one of the most emblematic pieces that Cristóbal Balenciaga made after the Second World War, with its rich hand-embroidery traditionally attributed by different fashion experts to the Lesage atelier. Through international collaborations between museums, conservators, curators, and cultural research institutions, this research will suggest that this attribution is inaccurate. The jacket has been part of the KMDH collection since 1956, but conservation issues with the embroidery motifs were not identified until 2020. Conservation research and historical interpretation were carried out in close collaboration between KMDH and the Instituto Valenciano de Conservación, Restauración e Investigación de Bienes Culturales in Spain (here after IVCR+i). The resulting data, collated with comparisons with embroidery samples found at the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris (hereafter MAD), as well as the assistance of the Balenciaga archives and of the historical embroidery house Hurel, leads to the conclusion that the embroidery work was made not by Lesage but by the notable embroidery house Rébé.

KEYWORDS

Cristóbal Balenciaga
La Perse
Fashion conservation
Haute Couture
Lesage
Rébé
Embroidery

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Balenciaga Entrepreneur. International Links

Balenciaga and Denmark. Balenciaga and Modernism. In Search of Balenciaga

KIRSTEN TOFTEGAARD
Curator at Designmuseum Danmark and keeper of the museum's Dress and Textile Collection

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ABSTRACT

In Denmark, two events marked the welcoming of Parisian fashion after the Second World War and the Liberation of occupied Denmark in May 1945. A charity event in November 1945 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 mention was made of any dresses by Balenciaga (*Politiken* 1945, November 9, 10; *Nationaltidende* 1945, November 9).

In January 1946, the *Designmuseum Danmark* (then the Danish Museum of Decorative Arts) hosted one of several versions of the traveling 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."[1] Small scale dresses from thirty-nine Parisian fashion houses were shown, including all the great couturiers, among them Balenciaga, who contributed with four models (Blume 2014: 72).

Through the lens of the women's magazine *Tidens Kvinder*, which at that time was the magazine of choice 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 some indications of the influence and dissemination of the Spanish born couturier, Cristóbal Balenciaga, in Denmark during a time period of twenty years after the Second World War. Did Balenciaga's fashion ideas manifest themselves in Danish fashion at all and how were his ideas perceived by fellow Danish couturiers?

The twentieth century was characterized by Functionalism and Modernism within craft, design and architecture. Which impact had Modernism on Balenciaga's design and how were the modernistic principles reflected in his dress making from the 1940s until 1968?

KEYWORDS

Cristóbal Balenciaga
Haute couture
Danish fashion
Danish fashion press
Modernism

1 The precise title of the exhibition in Denmark was 'La Mode Française'—with the famous dolls from 'Théatre de la Mode' dressed by 'la Couture Parisienne'. Copenhagen: Kunstindustrimuseet, 1946. (Blume 2014: 72).

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH APPROACHES

The years immediately after the Second World War marked the Spanish born couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga's international breakthrough in Paris as one of the most influential fashion couturiers of the twentieth century. Balenciaga was born in the North of Spain, in the Basque country, in a small fishing village named Getaria. He managed fashion houses in San Sebastian, Barcelona and Madrid before settling in Paris in 1936, opening his Parisian fashion house in 1937.

Danish couture was centered around Copenhagen as the capital of Denmark.[2] The earliest salon from 1913 was the couture salon at the department store *Magasin du Nord* in Copenhagen. In the heyday of Danish couture in the 1950s, several other Copenhagen department stores had established couture departments, among those were *Illum*, *Fonnesbech, Jac. Olsen*, *Crome & Goldschmidt*, *Westerby* and *Modepalæet* (The Fashion Palace). Already from the end of the 1930s, the so-called "The Three Big B's," Holger Blom, Preben Birck and Uffe Brydegaard, had their individual, couture salons in Copenhagen. Both before and during the heyday of Danish couture in the 1950s, especially "The Three Big B's" worked with costumes for Danish theatre and film. Many affluent women living in, for instance Jutland, took no trouble in traveling to Copenhagen if they wanted to purchase a couture model from a couture salon.

In the 1940-1950s, Ejnar Engelbert was the well-reputed couturier at the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord*, designing for the salon under his label "Ranje," which was sold together with reproductions of foreign couture mainly from Paris.[3] In 1960, after more than thirty years as head of the salon, Engelbert was succeeded by Mr. Smith (*Bikuben* 1960, 1: 11).

No Balenciaga dresses have survived in Danish collections—the two most important museum collections being the collection at the National Museum of Denmark and the one at Designmuseum Danmark. The former has a material culture approach with the Danish user in focus, whereas the collection at Designmuseum Danmark has both a national and an international craft and a design perspective. Because of the absence of Balenciaga dresses, it has not been possible to link material studies to other research methods.

The purchasing system of buying, importing and reproducing Parisian couture for local clients around the world is described and documented in Alexandra Palmers *Couture & Commerce. The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. Although the focus is on the Canadian market, the traffic of couture models is more or less the same for Denmark, however on a much smaller scale.

The area of Danish couture and the impact of foreign couture in Denmark, before Danish ready-to-wear in the 1960s became an international success, have had very little coverage in literature apart from a chapter in a recent publication *Paris Fashion and World War Two. Global Diffusion and Nazi Control* edited by Lou Taylor and Marie McLoughlin (Toftegaard 2020: 182-201).

2 The word "couture" is used for high-end made to measure Danish dressmaking. Danish couture was executed in establishments, couture salons, patterned on the model of Parisian couture salons. Denmark is a small country with no big difference between regions when it came to couture and fashion.

3 "Ranje" was Ejnar spelled backwards.

Very little source material regarding Danish couture salons from the 1940-1960s have been kept in Danish archives. Fourteen sketch books from the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord* have been preserved, now at the *Magasin du Nord* Museum.[4] Made by the employees from the couture salon, the sketch books contain drawings made by memory after attending Parisian fashion shows from 1951 to 1962. However, the books are not in consecutive numbers, and there is no evidence of books before 1951 or after 1962. Nothing reveals when the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord* started to purchase Parisian models for their own clients and when the trade ceased. The couture salon at *Magasin du Nord* closed in 1976. No similar books from other couture salons, either the private ones or from other department stores, have been preserved.

Personal ongoing research about Danish couture during several years, often in connection to collecting fashion and dress at Designmuseum Danmark, has resulted in conversations and interviews with different parties in the Danish fashion environment.[5] However, the focuses in these interviews have not been on Balenciaga in particular. Approaches using oral history must be treated as memories of life experience (Taylor 2002: 242-247).

Among Danish women's magazines, *Tidens Kvinder* is the most important source regarding the taste and preferences of affluent elite women.[6] The magazine contained features with photos of fashion for daytime, afternoon and evening wear most often from abroad. In general, fashion reports prior and during the war were intended to be more informative and inspirational rather than providing commercial examples of available ready-made or couture garments to order. This tradition continued in the 1940-1950s. It can be argued that this way of communicating fashion news is an early version of a part of the fashion system as referred to by Grant McCracken. On the one hand the image and written text function as a presentation of a designer or a fashion house and as such acts as an advertisement. On the other hand, it does not tell where to buy the garment, nor at what price. Furthermore, it is essential to take into consideration, that the fashion editor and/or journalist is acting as a distant "opinion leader" and as an accomplished gate keeper. On behalf of the readers of lesser standing they make choices and take part in disseminating some couturiers' designs and to exclude other designers (McCracken 2014: 135-137).

Another magazine has served as a source and a cross reference in connection to the sketchbooks from the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord*. *Bikuben* (translated: *The Beehive*) was the house magazine for the staff at *Magasin du Nord* and at the department store's branches in several towns in Denmark. Although a staff magazine, the ten volumes issued each year were supplying the staff with a considerable amount of fashion news, from both the couture salon and the increasing domestic ready to wear production (Figure 1).

Because of the lack of "Real Clothing" as referred to by Roland Barthes, the study is reduced to research approaches as "Image-Clothing" and "Written Clothing" (Barthes 2014: 132-134). Although,

4 In Danish, the books were called "facon bøger," translated into English as "shape books."

5 Conversations and interviews conducted by the author are recorded and transcribed, but not published.

6 *Tidens Kvinder,* published from 1919 to 1969, was established by the Danish Women's National Council. During this period, the magazine differed from other women's magazines aesthetically as well as in content and price. *Tidens Kvinder* (*The Age of Women*) was around 40% more expensive than family-oriented magazines, as for instance *Hjemmet* (*The Home*) and *Hus og Frue* (*House and Wife*). Every volume had features about royalty and celebrities, foreign or Danish, and the magazine wrote about beauty products and interior design. Before and during the Second World War, the role of the woman in Tidens Kvinder was staged and idealized, and neither housework, nor paid employment were expected to be of any interest to the reader. This changed in the 1950s, where the magazine's content was also aimed at women from the middle class (Richard, 2005).

Fig. 1
"New Look Old Fashion," Collage of drawings from the couture salon, Bikuben 1948, September, Volume 8

as stated by Roland Barthes, photography and text are two separate structures in the presentation of clothing and fashion; they support each other in delivering simultaneously coded messages, for instance the sartorial language and in photographs silhouettes, lines, colors and structures, all of which are translated and understood by a fashion-conscious public.

TIDENS KVINDER

Because of the limited access to news from Paris during the Second World War occupation of Denmark by the Germans, Danish readers of the women's magazine *Tidens Kvinder* had been acquainted with fashion from North America and Sweden. When Paris fashion occasionally reached the Danish public, it most often came through Swedish journalists and magazines. After the Second World War, news from Paris was resumed. However, the magazine continued to be loyal to the sources from Sweden and America. In December 1947, a feature in *Tidens Kvinder* dealt with fashion from the department store Nordiska Kompaniet in Stockholm. They too, as with many department stores around the Western World, were purchasing couture models from Parisian fashion houses to reproduce, such as the long evening dress with a jacket in black wool designed by "Balenziaga" (Tidens Kvinder 1947, 32: 12-13). Regarding fashion news from London, the fashion editor longed for the quality of fabrics from Great Britain. British coats and suits used to be especially popular with the readers (Tidens Kvinder 1948, 31: 16-17). Little by little British fashion also returned to the magazine's columns.

However, the readers of *Tidens Kvinder* got a small introduction of Balenciaga in 1945, where some fashion news from Paris reached the magazine through a Swedish reporter. In March 1945, the war was still on in Denmark. A small drawing together with drawings of garments made by Paquin and Lelong showed a black blouse and a blue skirt—though the drawing is very sketchy.

In October 1947, the couture salon at the department store *Illum* advertised in *Tidens Kvinder* a black strapless evening dress from Balenciaga together with another evening dress from Dior.[7] It is said that the couture salon at *Illum* attracted customers from the aristocracy, that means old money, whereas the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord* was attended by customers with new money. However, this is entirely speculation and undocumented as no records of customers have been handed down from any of the couture salons. However, it could be that the customers at *Illum* showed more interest in fashion from Balenciaga. In 1966, when *Illum* celebrated their seventy-five year anniversary the head of the couture salon presented customers with a

7 The photo is in black and white. The model wearing the Balenciaga dress is seated, so all in all it is difficult to give a more precise account of the dress.

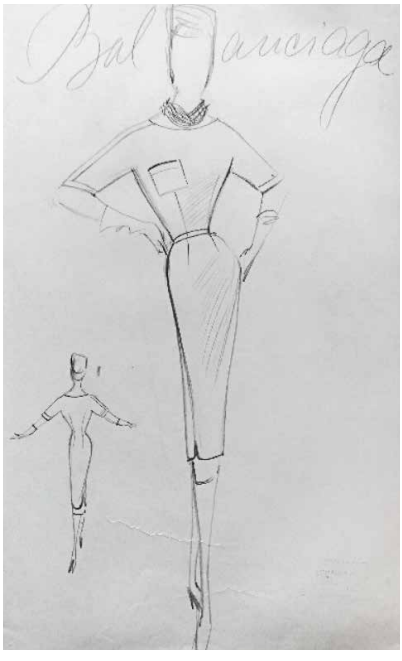

Fig. 2
Drawing from the sketchbook at Magasin du Nord Museum. The drawing of a day dress is one out of six made by Xenia for the autumn-winter collection 1956

Balenciaga black day dress, double breasted from neck to hem with a white organdy collar with a bow (Tidens Kvinder 1966: 16: 31). The dress was the only model from Balenciaga, and it was introduced together with garments from Balmain, Dior and Patou.

THE SKETCHBOOKS FROM THE MAGASIN DU NORD'S COUTURE SALON

Many Danish fashion-conscious women could afford neither a full made-to-measure wardrobe nor a single model from the fashion house of Balenciaga. Perhaps an affluent woman could afford an adaption from a Parisian fashion house executed in one of the department store's couture salons. As from many other countries, both on the continent and abroad, a group of employees from different couture salons in Denmark, mainly from the big department stores in Copenhagen, twice a year went to Paris to get inspired and to buy garments to reproduce for the Danish couture salon clients.

Those who attended a fashion show in order to decide which models they were going to purchase for their entrance fee, as a precaution (Palmer 2001: 76) were not allowed to sketch during the show. The number of drawings for each season comes to around a hundred. Of course, this number does not reflect the number bought by the department store for reproducing at the couture salon. The last directrice at *Magasin du Nord* couture salon, Anna Margrethe Simonsen, estimated that only a small group of eight to ten garments from selected houses were bought each season to replicate for Danish costumers (Simonsen 2008).

According to the sketch books, a group of employees attended the autumn/winter fashion show by Balenciaga in 1956 (Figure 2). Xenia the seamstress made the sketches of six models, four day and afternoon dresses, one cocktail dress and one evening dress. Apparently, none of the sketched models were in accordance with the four models by Balenciaga represented in the *Magasin du Nord*'s house magazine *Bikuben* for the autumn/winter season 1956. Two of the dresses were made in brocade; a short evening dress in blue brocade with a low-seated bow with a train at the back of the dress, and an evening gown in black and gold brocade with an open petticoat lined in black silk satin, underneath a *fourreau* in the same black and gold brocade. The third dress contained some of the transformative qualities which Balenciaga later employed for instance in the *Chou-Dress* from 1967; the wide, short evening cape in black taffeta could be transformed into a skirt. Underneath the cape, invisible in the photo, was a short décolleté golden evening

Fig. 3
Models for the spring-summer collection at the couture salon at Magasin du Nord. Two models by Balenciaga: The model "Rose-rouge" with the huge rose-pink stole. On page 41, at the top left corner the other Balenciaga model. Bikuben 1956, volume 3, 40-41
© Bikuben

dress. Only one model was in accordance with the opinion of Mary Blume, who stated that most of the attention by the professional buyers was focused on Balenciaga's coats and suits (Blume 2014: 124). In *Bikuben*, the four models by Balenciaga were followed by one model from each fashion house; Balmain, Dior and Nina Ricci.[8]

However, *Bikuben* displayed photos with Balenciaga models from the spring/summer collection the same year, 1956. No drawings in the sketchbook indicate a visit to Balenciaga in early spring 1956. The models by Balenciaga in *Bikuben* were a cocktail dress in what looks like red silk together with a huge rose-pink stole, the model named "Rose-rouge." In the text the size of the stole an exceptional and unusual color scheme was emphasized (Figure 3). Another model was a strapless evening dress of mat purple faille with a long *fourreau* underneath in floral crepe satin in purple, grey and white. The Balenciaga models adapted for the department store's costumers that season were presented together with models from Balmain, Dior and Madame Grés (*Bikuben* 1956, 3: 40-41).

In the 1950s, the two fashion houses, Balmain and Dior, were the recurring fashion houses from which *Magasin du Nord* couture salon bought models for reproducing to their local clients. If *Magasin du Nord*'s couture salon made two copies of the same model for two separate customers, they made sure not to choose the same fabric twice (Simonsen 2008). One of the few coincidences of a preserved dress and a drawing from a sketchbook is a green and white summer dress by Nina Ricci (1883-1970) from the spring/summer collection 1959 (Figure 4). The dress was given to the museum by a friend and long-time donator Mrs. Helle Lassen, who was previously married to a former director of Designmuseum Danmark, Erik Lassen. As a young woman, prior to her marriage, Mrs. Lassen acted as a young and beautiful ambassador for the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord*. She was able to buy couture models for a very reasonable price (Figure 5).

THE TASTE OF DANISH WOMEN

Perhaps those Danish women who could afford an original Balenciaga model preferred a garment from another Parisian fashion house. Several volumes of *Tidens Kvinder* suggest that Danish women had a traditional and conservative taste in fashion. Furthermore, they also had a convenient and practical view on

8 The photos in Bikuben are in black and white and small: 7x5 cm

Fig. 4
Drawing made by Mrs. Magda, the directrice at the couture salon, from the sketchbook at Magasin du Nord Museum. The drawing of a day dress is a design by Nina Ricci, spring/summer collection 1959

Fig. 5
A Nina Ricci model from the couture salon at Magasin du Nord, now at the collection in the Designmuseum Danmark, DMD 232a-b/1993

clothing—skirts and blouses being named as "the Danish national costume" (*Tidens Kvinder* 1950, 45: 4). *Modepalæet* (*The Fashion Palace*) wrote: "It is not enough to follow foreign fashion slavishly. We must adapt to fashion from abroad in a form that suits our climate and our living conditions" (*Tidens Kvinder* 1946, 36: 29).[9]

Both advertisements and the fashion editors of *Tidens Kvinder* were focused on the Danish climate, and the unstable Danish weather probably played its part in the attitude towards clothing. "London fashion with reason and fantasy - We have always loved the simple good garments in British fashion because they suit our climate. They do not melt in rainy weather and they stay in shape to the last thread" (*Tidens Kvinder* 1946, 41: 14-15).[10] This is not far from the notion expressed by Alexandra Palmer, that British tweeds were "suitable for Canadians due to their conservative design and reputation for quality and durability" (Palmer 2001: 97).

In spring 1958, a survey in the staff magazine *Bikuben* among the shop assistants talked about the customers perceptiveness of the newest clothing trends. The *A-Line,* the *Shift Dress* and the *Baby Doll* were willingly accepted, whereas the sale of the sack-dress was making slow progress and the customers demanded belts to go with the dresses (*Bikuben* 1958, 4 : 59, 63).

Danish fashion-conscious women and Danish couturiers idealized Paris fashion, which was "made to flatter and charm" (Blume 2014: 149). If the Parisian fashion houses visited by the staff at the couture salon at *Magasin du Nord* were representative, names like Balmain, Carven, Dessès, Dior, Fath, Givenchy, Madame Grès and Nina Ricci would constitute Danish women's favorite houses. Already in 1952, couturiers who designed fashion for a younger clientele such as Pierre Cardin were included (*Bikuben* 1952, 7: 104). As a matter of fact, this selection reflected quite well the choices made by the fashion editor of *Tidens Kvinder* for the magazine's columns.

9 Danish: "Det er ikke nok slavisk at kopiere de Modeller, Udlandet viser. Vi maa adoptere Verdensmoden i den Form, der passer til vort Klima og vore Livsvilkaar."

10 Danish: "London-Mode med Fornuft og Fantasi - vi har altid elsket de enkle, gode Ting i engelsk Mode, fordi de passer til vort Klima – de smelter nemlig ikke i Regnvejr, og de holder Faconen til sidste Trevl."

Especially Balmain stood high in Danish women's favor. Balmain's very feminine, though slightly more conservative fashion attracted Danish women. However, it probably also had to do with Balmain's First Assistant since 1951, the Dane Erik Mortensen.[11] The directrice at *Magasin du Nord*'s couture salon, Mrs. Margrethe Simonsen, gave an account of why they were especially fond of visiting Balmain. They were met with great courtesy and readiness to help which also included pointing to the right fabric manufacturer and embroiderer for the evening dresses. They were even told if any of the rival couture salons had bought the same model. For the price of attending one fashion show they could afford to buy three models from Balmain instead of only two from, for instance, Dior. This had probably everything to do with Erik Mortensen. Furthermore, they felt especially proud when Erik Mortensen praised the execution of a Balmain adaption made by *Magasin du Nord*'s couture salon. When asked, she had no recollection whether the couture salon bought a paper pattern or a toile (the design made up in muslin, Palmer 2001: 77) from the couture houses (Simonsen 2008).

Christian Dior was on the top of the list of Parisian couturiers favored by Danish women, but also by *Magasin du Nord*'s couture salon. In Denmark, Dior's New Look in 1947 was considered with equal portions of fear and delight. When there was an outcry over the New Look, not only in Denmark but around the Western world, voices were raised against the lavish use of textiles when Europe still suffered from a shortage of quality textiles and the reluctance to be dictated to by fashion (Jackson 1998: 8, Lang and Lang 2011: 128-131). The fashion editor at *Tidens Kvinder* from 1948 Sonja Bernadotte wrote: "Dior's models have now become rather simple. He was the one who introduced the "catastrophe" with the new silhouette—willingly, the other fashion houses leaped in - and now Dior has become the most discreet of all the couturiers of today" (*Tidens Kvinder* 1948, 20: 16-17).[12]

On the 25th of February 1957, Christian Dior visited Copenhagen and *Magasin du Nord* and was greeted as the king of fashion. The truth was that Parisian couturiers seldom passed by Copenhagen. Ejnar Engelbert had the opportunity to show Christian Dior his own models made for the couture salon. It was a great honor when Dior asked Engelbert to name Dior's favorite model of Engelbert design after him (*Bikuben* 1957, 3: 36).

In the 1940-50s, Danish couture, which came from both couture salons in the department stores and private couture salons, not to mention a large group of smaller workshops of dressmakers and tailors, could not be considered as original fashion on the hole. Although the garments, most often were attractive and beautifully executed, fashion ideas came mainly from Paris couture. In Denmark there was no tradition for considering fashion as an independent branch of applied art, but there was a long tradition for the craftsmanship. An advertisement from a department store Jac. Olsen summed up: "Paris dikterer, Jac. Olsen lancerer" (Tidens Kvinder 1951, 37, 41: 27, 3).[13]

11 In 1982 after the death of Pierre Balmain, Erik Mortensen inherited the fashion house.

12 Danish: "Diors Modeller virker nu efterhaanden helt enkle. Han var den, der begyndte at lancere "Katastrofen" med den nye Silhuet – de andre Huse er nu villigt sprunget til – og nu ende det med, at Dior nu snart er den mest diskrete af Modeskaberne af i Dag."

13 In Danish it is a rhyme. Translated into English: "Paris dictates, Jac. Olsen introduces."

BALENCIAGA'S COUTURE DESIGN SEEN BY THE OUTSIDE WORLD—AND IN DENMARK

The world of haute couture enables fashion designers to cultivate their own particular philosophy of design, and to develop continuity from one collection to the next. For Balenciaga, there is an unbroken movement in the development from the *Barrel Line* of 1947, the *Semi-Fitted* look of 1951, the *Balloon Skirt* of 1953, the *Tunic* of 1955, the *Sack Dress* of 1957 and the *Baby Doll* of 1958. This continuity along with superb quality in fabrics and craftsmanship, is one reason why haute couture gives a much more timeless impression and has a longer useful life. Naturally, Balenciaga was not impervious to current fashion trends, however, already after 1945, his ideas and tailoring still reflected far more strongly his personal style (Join-Diéterle 2007: 146). How did the fashion-conscious establishment in Denmark perceive Balenciaga as designer of couture?

The Danish couturier Preben Birck had an eight-year background of working with Poiret, Patou and Molyneux in Paris. Balenciaga had only just arrived in Paris when Preben Birck, in 1937, returned to Copenhagen 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 (Birck, after 1965: 14). Fellow couturiers in Paris respected Cristóbal Balenciaga deeply. Coco Chanel remarked that Balenciaga was the only true couturier because he was able to design and construct, cut and assemble and sew a dress from start to finish—he was a true craftsman. Christian Dior said that he was "the master of us all" and finally Hubert de Givenchy called him "the architect of haute couture" (Arzalluz 2010: 11).

In a special fashion volume of *Tidens Kvinder* in the autumn of 1950, the fashion editor, Tove Castenskiold, recognized Balenciaga as one out of six of the most influential couturiers in Paris, the other five being Marie-Louise Carven, Jean Dessès, Christian Dior, Jacques Fath and Edward Molyneux (*Tidens Kvinder* 1950, 42: 5). However, in Denmark, not all comments on Balenciaga were rose-colored. It is a well-known fact that Balenciaga gave very few interviews and he did not talk much about his ideas and motives. This attitude of reserve or modesty fueled many speculations and many assertations. For instance, in this ambiguous attitude of Tove Castenskiold—on the one hand complaining about the difficult access to news from the fashion house of Balenciaga, calling Balenciaga sulky and his dresses nun-like, while on the other hand claiming that Balenciaga had the gift of grace regarding fashion. Tove Castenskiold was not the only journalist referring to Balenciaga with references to the religious catholic universe; Carmel Snow, the legendary editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar* from 1934 to 1958, frustratingly said: "The monk of the couture still refused to appear" (Blume 2014: 82).[14] To Balenciaga, discretion was of the uppermost importance (Join-Diéterle 2007: 143).

14 This remark refers to the designer traditionally taking the applauds after a fashion show. Balenciaga never did that.

Among fashion students in Copenhagen, Balenciaga was not an unknown name. In the beginning of the 1960s, two Danish students at the School of the *Chambre Syndicale* in Paris and a former student at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen managed, with the help of contacts at the Spanish Embassy in Paris, to attend a Balenciaga show in Avenue George V. They still remember the show as one of the most inspirational events for their future Danish fashion careers (Hornsleth and Lassen-Nielsen 2004).

BALENCIAGA AND MODERNISM

Several researchers have successfully documented Balenciaga's inspirational sources. Besides historical dresses, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, and historical or contemporary dresses reproduced by painters, inspiration came from traditional garments from the Spanish culture, such as features from the bull fighter's costumes, the flamenco dress, the manilla shawl and the mantillas (Miller 2017: 38-47, Arzalluz 2010: 193-235). Even the inspiration from Japanese traditional clothing as adapted and translated by one of Balenciaga's great examples, the couturier Madeleine Vionnet, and as reproduced in Japanese paintings have been compared with some of Balenciaga's most innovative designs (Arzalluz 2010: 236-270). However, as Lesley Ellis Miller correctly points out—Balenciaga did not live in a vacuum, he was part of the historical process (Miller 2017: 58), and after the Second World War Balenciaga's age was Modernism.

The modernist breakthrough in the early twentieth century was driven by a desire to break with tradition. The future should be based on new technologies, machine power and scientific research rather than looking to the past. The principle which the early modernistic movement emphasized was "Form follows function." The fact that function defined the form was connected to the widespread use of machine and the idea of removing of ornamentation.

It is difficult to accept that fashion and dress are excluded from much literature about Modernism. The design historian Judith Attfield explains: "The dominant conception prioritizes the machine (masculine) over the body (feminine). It assigns men to the determining, functional areas of design—science, technology, industrial production—and women to the private, domestic realm and to the 'soft', decorative fields of design. It places form in the feminine realm where its role is to reflect the imperatives of the 'real'. According to this kind of aesthetic theory then, form (female) follows function (male)," and she continues "... a hierarchy was built up around types of objects which give importance to industrial design and the 'machine aesthetic'—i.e. the more obviously masculine—while considering areas such as fashion as trivial and synonymous with 'feminine' " (Attfield 2010: 49, 51).

In the book *The New Look. Design in the Fifties*, Lesley Jackson adopts the term "New Look" inextricably associated with Christian

Dior's spring/summer collection *Corolle* to apply not only to fashion but to the new aesthetic movement within applied art and modern design in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. She includes fashion in her book, but she does not succeed in explaining why fashion should be included in this design movement from the fifties. The first wave of this new movement, called organic Modernism, had a strong effect on the form of three-dimensional design and architecture (Jackson 1998: 7-9).[15]

Modernism has certain characteristics, which many writers have agreed upon: function, form, material, and machine versus handicraft; and mass production versus one-off pieces. The question is, should design be excluded from Modernism if it embodies the "soft," the "bodily" and the "feminine"? One must not forget that the design industry often draws on the experience of the craftsman. As J. Edgar Kaufmann writes in his essay *What is Modern Design?*: "As a mean of experiment and of making preliminary models for the machine, handicraft has also proven its value in a whole new area of work." He also notes what the machine products cannot show: "individuality and a warm human touch" (Kaufmann 2016: 158).

Balenciaga's haute couture represents the "soft," the "bodily," the "feminine," the "individuality and a warm human touch," the handicraft —all this, but also function, form and material. Although haute couture was highest in the hierarchy of fashion—at least in the 1950s—admired all over the world because of the outstanding craftsmanship and heavily supported by the French state, it was not considered worthy to be mentioned in texts about Modernism and its characteristics.

Regarding function, Lesley Ellis Miller writes that Balenciaga's day clothes were not unnecessarily difficult to put on and wear. The shape of his clothes suited different female figures and provided the wearer with ease of movement and room for breathing (Miller 2017: 60). These functional qualities can be translated into "form follows function" within haute couture, if we take a step aside and understand and interpret "form follows function" in a much more literal way and without the commonly used design theory in Modernism. Today we perceive the qualities of dressing easily by ourselves as absolutely necessities. As a modern woman in the 1950s and 1960s, this functional practice would undoubtedly have been appreciated.

Several characteristics of international Modernism aligned with Balenciaga's design philosophy: the emphasis on materials, techniques and processes. The refinement of techniques and sewing processes, the testing of fabrics and material to their extremes, and the minimalistic principle of cutting away every superfluous detail and decoration to attain the simple sculptural form. In consequence, Balenciaga's clothes could be perceived as almost plain. The Danish furniture designer Arne Jacobsen said that "The time of ornaments has passed. Now it is the rhythm that matters, the rhythm and the proportions" (Grøn, Larsen, Poulsen and Dahlkild 2020: 12).[16]

Because it is commonly accepted by many design theorists and designers that form associates with the "feminine," form must hold

15 In Denmark we name the first period of the international movement "Functionalism," and the so-called new movement in aesthetics at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s "Modernism."

16 In Danish: "Ornamenternes tid er forbi. Nu er det Rytmen, der betyder noget, Rytmen og Proportioner."

Fig. 6
Chairs designed by the Danish furniture architect Arne Jacobsen (1902-1971)
Photo: Pernille Klemp

a lower rank than the other characteristics of Modernism. The recognized German-born American, Bauhaus-educated textile artist and weaver Anni Albers had in her book *On Designing* from 1971 another hierarchy in her interpretation of Modernism: "This complete form is not a mixture of functional form with decoration, ornament or an extravagant shape; it is the coalition of form answering practical needs and form answering aesthetic needs" (Albers 2016: 170). The lower status of form is remarkable considering the international breakthrough of Danish Design or Danish Modern around the 1950s. Danish furniture was recognized to be at the outpost of the avant-garde, in spite of being inconsistent with several of the principles in Modernism. There was not a total break with tradition, it was not a question about mass production for the most celebrated furniture, rather a small and expensive production, and to put it controversially—it was more a question of form than function (Figure 6). Like the suits and coats of Balenciaga, which could be considered almost plain, much of the Danish furniture was—however striking in design - understated and subtly designed (Olesen 2018: 7, 10).

Danish furniture designers were obsessed with simple constructions and perfect joints, tried and tested to perfection. Balenciaga developed an obsession with creating the perfect sleeve—"With Balenciaga it all started with a sleeve" (Join-Diéterle 2007: 146), which is a challenge in every garment construction.[17] Craftsmanship is considered to be one of the DNA's of Danish Design (Olesen 2018: 7-10) as it is in all haute couture (Palmer 2001: 18-19).

CONCLUSION

"God's hidden harmony." (Blume 2014: 199)[18]

The first time the name Balenciaga was heard in Denmark was through Swedish fashion channels in spring 1945 in *Tidens Kvinder*. Already, in January 1946, Balenciaga participated in the traveling exhibition "Theatre de la Mode," in Denmark hosted by the Danish Museum of Decorative Arts.

Balenciaga was admired and recognized among fellow couturiers in France and by couture designers in Denmark. Balenciaga also received admiration from the fashion editor of *Tidens Kvinder*, although she

17 Cited from *Dépêche commerciale*, 1939 (Flory 1986).
18 The quotation is the words of Father Robert Pieplu at Balenciaga's funeral March 29, 1972.

could not hide her great disappointment regarding the difficult access and sparing news from the fashion house.

His insistence on following his own design philosophy without necessarily following the mainstream fashion trends was not appreciated among Danish customers, who had two views on fashion. Either the convenient, practical and functional view, or the conservative, traditional, ultra-feminine casually flirtatious idea of fashion which upheld the romantic myth of the couturier and his couture (Palmer 2001: 78). Apparently, there was not much prevalence of Balenciaga's fashion in Denmark.

Very little knowledge has been handed down of the dissemination of Balenciaga's fashion ideas in department store's and private couture salons. With the little knowledge at our disposal so far, we can establish that the couture salon in *Illum* was the first to introduce Balenciaga in autumn 1947 and following it up, at least, in 1966. The couture salon in *Magasin du Nord* presented fashion at both seasons in 1956 but no reports of this initiative were repeated up until 1968, when Balenciaga closed his fashion houses in Spain and in Paris.

In conclusion, very little dissemination of Balenciaga's fashion garments took place in Denmark. As far as this research goes, it can be concluded that neither the money nor the huge interest was present in Denmark.

Although Balenciaga never spoke of his inspirational sources, several similarities link Balenciaga to Modernism. Craftsmanship and pure form link Balenciaga to Danish Design. Practical experience in the workshop with materials, tools and technology, with form, function and color makes the designer conscious and in charge of the design process. The designer can explore the capacity of materials, silhouette and construction in the workshop. The craftsmanship prepares the way for experimentation and innovation. In Denmark craftsmanship was still respected. Industrialism reached Denmark fairly late, and when several other countries had abandoned craft-based production in favor of industrial manufacturing, workshop-based handicraft production on a small scale was maintained in Denmark; this goes for several branches within Danish applied arts and distinguishes Danish design from the design of neighboring countries.

Balenciaga was trained in his craft already as a young man and he was totally dedicated to haute couture (Join-Dièterle 2007: 142). Working with haute couture meant for Balenciaga a constant experimenting with visual and sculptural shapes and exploring new technical solutions. He developed tailoring techniques and new constructions to experimental forms. In order to strive towards greater simplicity and purity of form, he took the art of cutting and sewing to perfection. In the hands of Balenciaga, craftsmanship was a powerful tool together with new materials, often developed together with a fabric manufacturer. Balenciaga had a close working relationship with the tailor and cutter of the fashion house. All these characteristics conform to many of the well-known Danish furniture architects, who had similar relationships to cabinetmakers. For Balenciaga

craftsmanship was pivotal. Without comparison at all with Balenciaga when it comes to avant-garde fashion design, the Danish couturier Erik Mortensen nonetheless took pride in his craftsmanship, as did the staff at *Magasin du Nord*'s couture salon.

We do not know if Balenciaga visited modernist exhibitions with either applied art or fine art; in 1937 Balenciaga settled in Paris and today it seems unthinkable that he did not visit the *World Exhibition* the same year. Furthermore, he could very well have visited the *Triennales* in Milano in the 1950s.

Today, we can still recognize the avant-garde in Balenciaga's couture. In the collections from 1967, Balenciaga surpassed himself by producing three examples of clothing design with striking form, the four-sided *Envelope-Dress,* the *Chou-Dress* with an enormous black ruffle around the face—the ruffle could be lowered to the shoulders—and finally the coal scuttle bridal gown.

Many haute couture houses started to design ready-to-wear in the 1960s, the industrial version of clothing production. Balenciaga's colleague, Yves Saint Laurent, arrogantly argued that Balenciaga was "insufficiently influenced by life" (Blume 2014: 176). It is true in the sense that Balenciaga never did succumb to ready-to-wear—the mass production of Modernism—unlike Christian Dior who had already combined the position as a couturier in Paris and a designer of luxurious ready-to-wear in New York as early as 1948 (Join-Diéterle 2007: 143).

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

GUILLERMO LEÓN RAMÍREZ MARTÍNEZ
Independent researcher. Fashion designer. Master's degree in Design Studies. PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies. Passionate researcher of haute couture. Fashion History teacher.
→ @guillermoleonlb

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ABSTRACT

Despite the passing of time and the distance, the myth of Cristóbal Balenciaga continues to grow. The Master's legacy has touched many people and many places around the world. One of those places is Mexico.

The aims of this work are to examine the influence of Balenciaga in Mexican fashion, to find more clues about the relevance of this legacy around the world and to find people, whether workers, clients, friends or others, who helped to spread his style.

Without a doubt, Cristóbal Balenciaga is one of the most important designers in the history of haute couture. His creative and commercial influence has had, and continues to have, a great impact in many countries, including Mexico.

KEYWORDS

Balenciaga
Balenciaga and Mexico
Mexican fashion
Fashion exhibitions

To my aunt Maya, the first woman in my family who told me about Balenciaga. To Maria Apolonia and Artemia, my grandmothers, whose fondness for sewing accompanies me to this day.

THE SPIRIT OF CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA IN MEXICO

While a student in the field of design, I never found the courage to open and read the first book about the history of fashion that caught my attention. I still remember the title: Balenciaga. That name, along with the size of the book demanded a certain respect. It's been many years since I first saw that book. Since then, I have read many "Balenciagas" and got to know many different stories about this particular designer, from the Balenciaga that he forged himself, to that of the manager and master of his collaborators, to the one that is presented each day by his museum in Getaria, and to the one that is presented by the French Chamber of Haute Couture. Each one transmits a different aspect of his life or goes into more details of an important part of his work.

A while ago I decided to indulge in the pages of that first book. It was there where I discovered a Mexican illustrator named Alfredo Bouret, and could finally see what the curator and researcher Ana Elena Mallet stated some time ago: this Mexican illustrator worked for Balenciaga.

Despite the passing of time and the distance, the myth of Cristóbal Balenciaga continues to grow. "The Master" has touched many people around the world with his legacy. It can be said without a doubt that one of the places that still has a relationship with him is Mexico. What is the link between Cristóbal Balenciaga and Mexico? Where could we find the testimonials of this relationship? How does this link materialize to become part of Balenciaga's legacy?

The aim of this work is to examine the influence Balenciaga had on Mexican fashion, to find more clues about the relevance of his legacy around the world and to find people, whether they be workers, clients, friends or others, who helped to spread his style.

MEXICO AND INTERNATIONAL FASHION

In 2016, two exhibitions were held in Mexico highlighting the relevance of fashion design. The first of those two, "El Arte de la Indumentaria y la Moda en México," gathered the story of only 75 years of the history of fashion in that country. During the exhibition, the curators, Ana Elena Mallet and Juan Coronel showed how the dresses and fashion are a part of the national culture. They "proposed that the tension between tradition and modernity and the encounter of cultures—even in instances of conflict—can be forces of innovation" (Meléndez Escalante 2018). Thanks to that exhibition and some other previously done investigations, the names of some great Mexican designers from the XX century like Tao Izzo, Armando Valdés Peza, or Manuel Méndez came back to life.

A year before that there was another exhibition under the name "Hilos de Historia" in the National History Museum in Mexico City. In this exhibition, each piece was carefully selected to show how the dresses can also have a biography and that is the reason why they became part of Mexico's cultural patrimony (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia 2017: 7). The interest aroused by this exhibition lengthened its duration and left a mark that showcased the impact that clothes and fashion, with respect to material and popular culture, have on this world.

The second exhibition was held in the Modern Art Museum and was named after the designer himself. There was something unusual about the fact that a Mexican museum showcased the work of a fashion designer. That, in and of itself was enough to show the increasing interest that Mexicans had for fashion and design.

The knowledge that emerges from an exhibition sheds light on other hidden aspects of the subject, such as "the constant fluctuation in the notion of identity, added to the recognition of the contributions of a multiplicity of people, their visions, aspirations and practices" (Meléndez Escalante 2018: 1-7). In this case, both exhibitions coincided with the publication of research about fashion in Mexico, as well as revaluing previously done works that told the history of the designers. Thus, as of 2016, there was a growing interest in Mexican designers, mainly those whose careers had developed abroad. Some examples are listed below:


Moda!
SECCIÓN G
Reforma
Sábado 11 de mayo del 2002
AURORA BORLES
Diseño de IMAGEN
Las galas de Galindo
EL GRAN CAMBIO
Algunos logros
Acuarela de recuerdos: toda una vida

Fig. 1
"Las Galas de Galindo." *Reforma Moda* Cover, 11 May 2002
© *Reforma Moda*

"Before 1950, Tao Izzo already had an important career as an illustrator and fashion designer. Internationally he was known as the costume designer for Dolores del Río" (Ramírez Martínez 2017: 79-85). He worked in New York as a modeler in the studio of Elizabeth Arden, alongside the Spaniard Antonio Castillo. Later he moved to Paris where he worked with Robert Piguet before he retired from fashion in 1951. Around 1955 he arrived in Mexico where he developed a fruitful career in fashion (*St. Petersburg Times* 1951: 14).

Armando Valdés Peza had worked as a poster artist and costume designer in Hollywood. After that, he returned to Mexico and became the head designer of María Félix (Ramírez Martínez 2017: 70).

After working as an assistant for Manuel Méndez, a Mexican modeler, Enrique Martínez migrated to Paris in 1977 to train in design and art. "He was hired by the House of Hubert of Givenchy to become part of his design team. After some time, he was promoted to first assistant of this prestigious fashion house." (Navarro 2002: 63). Five years later Martínez came back to Mexico to open his own fashion house (Figure 1).

Fig. 2
Alfredo Bouret for Balenciaga

Luis Galindo, a renowned Mexican fashion illustrator, sent his sketches to The House of Dior in Paris. It was the decade of the '50s and he thought he could get to work with one of the top modelers of that time. To his surprise, Christian Dior answered back telling him that he would like to meet him. (Aguilar 1998: 6G). When Galindo finally arrived at the meeting, he found out Dior had passed away, however with his portfolio of illustrations he reached Mlle. Chanel, who hired him to give her private illustration classes. Gabrielle Channel would walk down her famous mirrored staircase while telling him: "¡Mexican, come this way and teach me how to draw" (Aguilar 2002: 1G). Approaching the end of his life, he would remember those drawing lessons among color pencils and champagne glasses: "Mademoiselle Chanel did not call me Luis; she called me 'Mexican'. She removed her gloves and hat before she started to draw" (Aguilar 1998: 6G). But Galindo did more than that. He was also the teacher of Madame Grès, illustrated for Pierre Cardin, and collaborated constantly with the newspaper *Le Monde*. Although he never illustrated for Cristóbal Balenciaga, it is mentioned that he showed his drawings to "The Master" and the latter decided to keep them (Aguilar 2002: 4G).

A MEXICAN ILLUSTRATOR ALONGSIDE BALENCIAGA

While searching for the trajectory of Mexican designers for "El Arte de la Indumentaria y la Moda en México," Ana Elena, co-curator, found the name of Alfredo Bouret (Meléndez Escalante 2018: 1-7). (Figure 2)

Born in Mexico City, Alfredo Bouret said he could not remember a moment in his life where he was not holding a pencil (Proctor 2018). From Chanel to Balenciaga, he illustrated some of the creations from the golden age of French haute couture. These illustrations appeared on the pages of the French and English editions of *Vogue* magazine. Later, as a designer, women belonging to the British royal family wore his creations.

The work of Bouret received homage at the "Fabsolute: the fashion illustrations of Alfredo Bouret 1940s-1960s" exhibition at the RMIT Gallery in Melbourne, Australia. This exhibition was open and running from the second day of march in 2017 to the fourteenth day of April of the same year (RMIT Gallery 2007). Lex Robert Aitken donated his collection of fashion illustrations by Bouret to the RMIT Archive in 2008.

Bouret was one of the few illustrators authorized by the House of Cristóbal Balenciaga to draw his collections before they were

presented to the public. This was probably thanks to Michel de Brunhoff, the editor in chief of the French edition of *Vogue*, who appreciated his talent.

Bouret was astonished the first time his presence was required at the *le Dix* salon (this is how the number ten was known at the Jorge V Avenue by the people in the fashion business).

Despite the monastic and dry atmosphere at the Balenciaga house or the unusual characteristics of the models of this fashion house (some of them seemed to be not so young, unusual in the profession, and were perceived as having an attitude of boredom), Bouret came to illustrate, in the middle of the empty rooms on the third floor, the recently finished models of the Master (Hume 2003: 10-14). He rarely met Cristóbal Balenciaga, who barely spoke to him. Balenciaga never asked to show him any of his sketches (it is said that Balenciaga did not like "magazine cartoonists"). Bouret assumed he liked what he saw published on the pages of *Vogue*, as season after season he was called upon to illustrate his collections (González de Durana 2016: 54-55).

In his work as an illustrator, the economy of lines gives a great impact to the final result, his handling of the line "confident and delicate, raw and elegant all at once" (Esquer 2018) is identifiable, along with his signature, in the drawings he did for *Vogue*. The rise of photography in fashion magazines led him to change his professional horizon in 1962. Without leaving pencil and paper behind, he began to design his clothing line. His brand, called *Mexicana*, was based in London and his style found inspiration in his native country (RMIT Design Archives). In 1969 he moved to Sidney and opened a second boutique *Mexicana Bazaar*. He stayed there until the year 2013 when the death of his partner Lex Robert Aitken, an interior designer became too much to bear. After this loss, he moved to Vancouver.

Fig. 3
Alfredo Bouret portrait, 1957. Photography by Thomas Kublin

To this day, the archive of his illustrations can be found spread between the Library of the University of Sidney, the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences of Australia and the RMIT University Design Archive in Melbourne, Australia. Bouret remembered Balenciaga dressed in his white robe "similar to a doctor," and above all "the atmosphere (...) was icy and silent as a morgue" (Hume 2003: 10-14). Alfredo Bouret can be seen illustrating in the salons of the number 10 on Jorge V Avenue in the photograph that Thomas Kublin secretly took with his Rolleiflex. The same one that was published 20 years after the death of Cristóbal Balenciaga (Hume, 2003: 10-14) (Figure 3). His memory also remains in the short film documentary produced by the Fashion Group International of Sydney "Alfredo Bouret Retrospective" in 2005 (Shaw 2005).

Fig. 4
Manuel Méndez sketches from his Mexican collection, ca. 1963

MANUEL MENDEZ "THE MEXICAN BALENCIAGA"

If there was a designer in Mexico who understood the concept of "internalized elegance" it was Manuel Méndez. His career in fashion started in 1961 when he was left in charge of his aunt's fashion house. Without having any knowledge of haute couture, he decided to learn the craft of couture from some pieces belonging to a friend from de House of Balenciaga (Ramírez Martínez 2017: 102). He analyzed these dresses from the outside to the inside to understand how they were made and designed.

From there he learned that in order to design a piece of clothing a good idea was enough. This idea could then become the whole *leitmotiv* of the collection (107). His trade as a dressmaker and tailor led him to be known in Mexico as the Mexican Balenciaga (Hernández 1997: 3G). The purity of his lines, attention to detail, and his strict eye for the placement of the sleeves made his garments recognizable in *El Salón Internacional* at *El Palacio de Hierro* retail store. In the words of Manuel Méndez: "(To become a designer) you must have a desire to learn, to develop a sense of proportion, of color, of textures, to play with them: to also develop the satisfaction of seeing (Figure 4). Many of the high-end dresses that are made here in Mexico are someone's else fantasy. It is beautiful to make that fantasy come true" (Redondo 2002: 23-28).

BALENCIAGA AND MEXICAN WOMEN

"In what way does the" Balenciaga style "affect the change in women's taste in Mexico in the mid-20th century?" Asks Sylvia Navarrete Bouzard (2016: 11-15) in the pages of the catalog dedicated to the Cristóbal Balenciaga Exhibition in Mexico. The answer is a little obvious to anyone that knows the cultural closeness that Mexico keeps with Spain. There is also the fact that "the massive emigration of Spaniards to Mexico, which intensified due to the Civil War; a good part of them make their fortune and alternate with the wealthy classes of the adopted country" (12). It comes as no surprise that the empathy for the Spanish dressmaker who was triumphing in Paris caused his style to spread in Mexican high society at a time when Mexico was seeking its place in the panorama of international modernity. According to González de Durana (2016: 54), it is possible that many women belonging to Mexican high society would have acquired a garment designed by Balenciaga in a department store in New York, such as *Bloomingdale's*. There is also the possibility that some of them traveled straight to Paris or Spain to get one.

We find some remarkable examples of the women that wore a Balenciaga. In 1958, the Mexican actress María Félix wore in the film "La Estrella Vacía" (Davidson and Muriel 1960) haute couture wardrobe signed by Jean Patou, Christian Dior and, of course, by Cristóbal Balenciaga. The actress had an obsession with high-end garments, but especially for French fashion. The latter was manifested in all the garments in her wardrobe, which carried the signature of great designers such as Guy Laroche, Givenchy, and Hermes. The trapeze line coat designed by Balenciaga in which she appears photographed at her home in Mexico City around 1960 stands out.

Rosita Arenas began her career in cinema alongside Pedro Infante in the movie, "¿Qué te ha dado esa mujer?" (Rodríguez 1951). From there, her work during the Golden age of Mexican cinema led to collaboration with the director Luis Buñuel in the movie "El Bruto" (1953), and with the actor Mario Moreno, *Cantinflas* (Delgado 1953). Thanks to her rise as an actress, she began filming in Spain. It was there that she met, and later married, the actor and Spanish aristocrat Jaime de Mora y Aragón. During her time in Madrid, she met the designer and Spanish dressmaker Asunción Bastida, who suggested she acquire some Balenciaga pieces. Between the years 1957 and 1959, Rosita Arenas built a collection of pieces from the dressmaker, the only Spaniard from whom she bought dresses. As a guest at the Cannes Film Festival, she wore Balenciaga (Arenas 2020).

According to Julio Chávez, who was the head couturier of a great number of Mexican singers and actresses between the decades of the 40s and the 80s, during a forced stay in Santo Domingo in 1968, the singer Flor Silvestre would have had in her possession garments designed by Christian Dior, Jacques Fath, and Cristóbal Balenciaga. Her rushed return to Mexico forced her to leave her baggage behind. The same one that probably had all those dresses (Chávez 1991: 141-146).

Guadalupe Marín, better known as Lupe, used to be dressmaker and the first wife of the famous artist Diego Rivera. The first time she went to Paris was in the decade of the 30s. There she met with André Bretón and Élie Faure who, like many French, were astonished with her beauty (Poniatowska, 2015: 184-189). Lupe Marín admired women's style in France and she was quick to copy and adopt it. Although we cannot assure that in her portrait by Diego Rivera she was wearing a Balenciaga, her style could indeed have found the influence of the Master through the search for simplicity and the enhancement of the most flattering aspects of the body.

Tamara de Lempicka's ashes were spread in the Popocatepetl, but her hats, signed by Balenciaga, are now part of the "Rodrigo Flores" collection, the most important in Latin America in terms of fashion and clothing. She was a fashion fanatic. It is said that Christian Dior himself "asked her permission to copy a hat that she designed by herself" (Güimil 2020). Among all of her garments, there were pieces signed by Vionnet and Schiaparelli (Fertré 2018). According to Rodrigo Flores himself, the hats were found in the residence of Tamara de Lempicka in the city of Cuernavaca, the place where she spent her final moments. After her death, the hats passed into the hands of the antiquarian who bought them. These pieces were exhibited in 2016 in the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City.

The connections between Mexico and Balenciaga do not end there. Beatriz Lopez Ostoloaza de Tamez, better known as "Trixie," wrote some articles about him for the *Excelsior* newspaper (Camarillo 20: 60-63). While Gloria Rubio Alatorre, "known as Gloria Guinness (...) (was) the Mexican woman who was most photographed in fashion magazines with "Balenciagas" (González de Durana 2016: 54). There is also the collection of approximately fifty dresses carrying the signature of Balenciaga that belongs to Maite y Bibiñe Belausteguigoitia. This collection of garments took 20 years to become what it is. She started collecting in the 40s and finished by the 60s (55). A part of the correspondence that they exchanged with the EISA sewing house is kept in the historical archives of the Universidad Iberoamericana Torreón, including a letter, addressed to Mrs. Belausteguigoitia in which she is informed: "that it will be the last year that there would be a collection belonging to Balenciaga because he was going to retire from the fashion business" (EISA Costura). Of course, it is impossible to forget Sonsoles de Icaza y León, Marquesa de Llanzol. Those names are better known for understanding the figure, life, and work of Cristóbal Balenciaga. Their father was Francisco Asís de Icaza y Beña. He was born in Mexico City in 1863 and was a member of the novo hispanic aristocracy (56).

CONCLUSIONS

The ties between Balenciaga and Mexico are undeniable. The legacy of the Basque couturier has reached far beyond European frontiers. His modernity, the mystery of his trade, the charm of his simple

and defined lines, and the idea of not having to be thin, with an unattainable figure, to dress his creations, have been the maxims that have allowed him to endure in the memory of our generation.

The connection we have in Mexico with Spanish culture allows us to affirm how much of Balenciaga's legacy we preserve. From designers to fashion stylists and journalists, we have found in his design philosophy a method to emulate and an example that we sometimes follow or break with, but that ultimately defines our fashion design. As did Balenciaga, in Mexico sometimes designers look towards our roots, our remote past, or the great masters of our art. Like him, sometimes we turn to innovation and fantastic shapes, with difficult commercial solutions, that challenge our craft. Like other parts of the world, what we can decipher in his work, in his trade as a designer and artist, allow us to enrich our creative and technical methods. Surely if we look at the archives of garments that may prevail among the people mentioned here, or the heirs of their assets, we could find so much more information that can tell us more about the designer, the couturier, or the person. The exhibition on Cristóbal Balenciaga held in Mexico City allowed us to open a line of investigation that, until now, seemed impossible or remote.

History is neither immovable nor static, sometimes it wakes up and moves to let us construct new stories, "nothing that has happened is to be considered lost in history" (Benjamin 2008, 306). Following this line, there is still a lot more to learn and tell from the relationship between Mexico and Balenciaga.

We can say then that, like everything that Balenciaga built around himself, his connection with Mexico is also a secret, as Judith Thurman wrote: "a Balenciaga is more important for what it hides than for what it shows.(…)(his) secrets (are) perfectly sewn to never be revealed" (Thurman 2006).

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Exhibition showcase with a reproduction of the clock from the maison Balenciaga in Paris

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

VICTORIA DE LORENZO
Phd candidate at the University of Glasgow with a Lord Kelvin–Adam Smith scholarship → v.delorenzo.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Textile converter Garigue (founded in 1947 in London, United Kingdom) and manufacturer Agnona (established in 1953 in Borgosesia, Italy) both became, shortly after their foundation, notable haute couture woolen suppliers. The House of Balenciaga played a crucial role in their success. This paper will analyze the history of these businesses and the marketing strategies they employed in order to gain the favor of Balenciaga, an alliance that became a profitable strategy in itself. These two case studies will contribute to the scarce literature on the textile suppliers whose products informed Cristóbal Balenciaga's creations.

KEYWORDS

Cristóbal Balenciaga
Garigue
Agnona
Balenciaga's textile suppliers
Haute couture

The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article has been published in the I International Cristóbal Balenciaga Conference special issue of *Fashion Theory* journal.

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

LIZ TREGENZA
Fashion and business historian. She currently works as a Collections and Learning Curator for Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service and previously worked as a lecturer, teaching at a number of British universities. Liz runs her own vintage business and has written two books on vintage fashion. → @liztregenza @advantageinvintage

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ABSTRACT

Cristóbal Balenciaga is widely recognized 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. The majority of London wholesale couturiers' garments were copied or adapted from Parisian haute couture. They modified these designs to meet ready-to-wear manufacturing techniques, producing high-quality garments targeted at a middle-class consumer. By focusing on two silhouettes introduced in the late 1950s; the sack and baby doll, this paper discusses how these firms translated Balenciaga's designs. The sack, in particular, was rapidly adapted by London wholesale couturiers who managed to successfully modify it for the ready-to-wear market.

By drawing on a range of source material, including original garments, newspaper and magazine editorials, this paper will evaluate how Balenciaga's design aesthetic was translated by wholesale couturiers for consumption by a middle-class public in the 1950s.

KEYWORDS

Wholesale Couture
Cristóbal Balenciaga
Frederick Starke
Copying
Haute Couture

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Balenciaga's Legacy

Contemplating a Legacy: Cristóbal Balenciaga and the Work of Nicolas Ghesquière

GABRIELA MUÑAGORRI MENDIOLA
University of the Basque Country / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the relevance of the designer Nicolas Ghesquière with respect to the work and legacy of Cristóbal Balenciaga. To this end, it first analyzes Ghesquière's biography and career at Balenciaga. In the second section, it delves into the way in which Ghesquière develops his work based on his conception of Balenciaga's legacy. To give a concrete example, the third section describes and analyzes the Balenciaga Spring 2008 Ready-to-wear collection. This section also delineates the fashion design practice that Ghesquière developed at Balenciaga. These three sections come together to make it possible to specify the aspects of Balenciaga's work that Ghesquière has used to propel the former's legacy into the future.

KEYWORDS

Balenciaga
Ghesquière
Legacy
Dress
Process

INTRODUCTION

Nicolas Ghesquière, a designer at *Balenciaga,* developed a personal vision of fashion that is directly linked to the style of Cristóbal Balenciaga. This is so much the case that examining Balenciaga's legacy requires taking into account Ghesquière's vision. To understand and present this vision, Suzy Menkes' observations about Ghesquière's collections, shape, and attitude when designing products (Menkes 2001) are of note; they have also been decisive for understanding Ghesquière's idea of Balenciaga's legacy. In this regard, Hamish Bowles pointed out in 2001 a significant change in Ghesquière's work (Bowles, 2012). In addition, Pamela Golbin's view of Balenciaga's work began to vary after the *Balenciaga Paris* exhibition at the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* (*MAD*, 2006).[1] Thereafter, Golbin no longer saw any evolution in Balenciaga's work, but rather noted the presence of a kind of "debugging" process of elements that were present in his work from the beginning (Friedman 2006). Finally, it is important to mention the conversations that Marie-Amélie Sauvé had with Ghesquière after leaving *Balenciaga*,[2] which allow us to better understand Ghesquière's relevance for Balenciaga's legacy.

In recent years, Balenciaga and his legacy have been studied from various perspectives. One focuses on the diverse origins of the references Balenciaga drew on in the process of creating garments. For example, references to his surroundings in Getaria (colors, fishermen's costumes and their way of dressing, etc.) have been highlighted by Harold Koda (Portocarrero 2008, 04:22-04:55). In addition, the early influence of Gabrielle Chanel's clothing has been underlined (Jouve 1988: 96, Arzalluz 2010: 117-118). It is also important to consider references to religious iconography that Balenciaga integrated into his garments. These references were identified by journalists in the 1960s (Uria 2020: 131, 132), examined in a variety of studies (Jouve 1988, Balda 2016: 64-68) and recently reviewed by Andrew Bolton (D'Arcy 2018). Some studies have observed references to Spanish popular clothing (Jouve 1988: 343), while others have identified themes related to the use of specific technical elements in Balenciaga's design process (Gutton 2012, Uria 2016: 40, 45-46). Among them, Gutton claims that, while designing his famous 1967 bridal look,[3] Balenciaga repeatedly "expanded" on and "extrapolated" a piece of a Basque fisherman's hat (Gutton 2012: 25:31). Another recent study has examined Balenciaga's work in light of Judith Butler's notion of performativity (1990), specifically using it to examine the design process of Balenciaga's bridal look of 1967. It argues that during the creative process of that look, Balenciaga subverted the meaning and function of the *Sueste*,[4] a hat worn by Basque fishermen (Figure 1). Although probably not Balenciaga's goal, it must be seen as the direct result of his creative process while working on the bridal dress and headdress. This process also resulted in Butlerian abstraction, both open to the future and containing references to Chanel's work, which Balenciaga studied, and to the work of Andrè Courrèges, whom he, in turn, influenced (Muñagorri 2019: 321-322).

1 Golbin was Head of the Fashion and Textiles Department at MAD when this exhibition was organized with Ghesquière's active collaboration.

2 After leaving *Balenciaga*, Ghesquière talked about this period in five conversations he had with *Sauvé*. These conversations took place from December 2012 to March 2013. They are grouped together in the first issue of *System* magazine, which was founded by Sauvé (Wingfield 2013).

3 Photographs of the bridal look, taken by David Bailey were published in *Vogue*. "Balenciaga's Marvels of Form. The Brides Dress. The Cape Dress: All Bias Ovals." (*Vogue USA*, 1967, July: 80-81). Thomas Kublin also took photographs of the same set for the *Balenciaga* house.

4 Hat used by fishermen on the Basque coast to work. STM San Telmo Museoa has an original model made of waxed cotton taffeta, which it cataloged as a work garment. (San Telmo Museoa Archive).

Fig. 1
Gregorio González Galarza, *Basque Fisherman* (1882), Crystal / jelly, Inv. No. F-005175

Against this background, the present study will analyze, in the first section, Ghesquière's biography and career at *Balenciaga*. The second section explores Ghesquière's relationship with Balenciaga's legacy. The third section presents a concrete example, by describing and analyzing the *Balenciaga Spring 2008 Ready-to-wear*[5] collection, in order to finally summarize and discuss the relevance of Ghesquière's work at *Balenciaga* with regard to Balenciaga's legacy. Methodologically, quantitative analysis of biographical data and Ghesquière's work at *Balenciaga* enables the qualitative analytical investigation found herein. Related data and information were consulted in articles, videos and photographs, all of which were found on the Internet, as well as in newspaper articles and magazines, and in research collected in exhibition catalogs and books.

Ghesquière's professional path and career at Balenciaga

Ghesquière never formally studied fashion design and had a career that was atypical for a European fashion designer of his generation. His training started with early internships at French fashion brands and with professional experience. Ghesquière's early fondness for drawing and interest in fashion design, which his parents supported, facilitated his first internship at the young age of 14.[6] After a very brief academic experience at *Studio Berçot*,[7] Ghesquière wished to work with Jean Paul Gaultier and, in 1990, he started a two-year internship at *Gaultier* (Rawsthorn 2011).

Gaultier became one of Ghesquière's earliest references. According to Ghesquière, at *Gaultier* (1990-1992)[8] he "learned" by observing everything related to the work of a fashion designer: backstage at shows, original garments, Gaultier's way of working and his process. Years later, Ghesquière mentioned aspects of Gaultier's "work" that continued to interest him. First of all, his style, the result of a "mixture" of "indecipherable references," was perfectly suited to his time. Secondly, Ghesquière valued the search for "strange combinations of ideas" implicit in his work (Rawsthorn 2011). And finally, Ghesquière was interested in Gaultier's vision of "really free" and ethnically indefinable women, a view clearly influenced by the clothing habits visible on the streets (Bowles 2012).

When he started working for *Balenciaga* (1995), Ghesquière was an anonymous designer. His job consisted in designing collections for the Asian market, for which he tried to learn about the history of fashion by searching for contemporary collections with connections to Balenciaga's work. At this stage, he identified similarities between the "minimalists of the 1990s" and Balenciaga's work. Specifically, he mentioned connections with the "works" of Helmut Lang and Jil Sander (Rawsthorn 2011),[9] thus pointing to two qualities in his work: (1) Ghesquière's work is particularly research-based and (2) he had an early interest in more abstract garments with refined lines.

In 1997, as the creative director of the *Balenciaga Ready-to-wear* line, an unknown Ghesquière presented his first collection (Steele 2012:

5 Hereafter, abbreviated, *P-V 2008*.

6 Before coming of age, Ghesquière spent a brief period at *Agnes B* and a longer period (1985-1987) with Corinne Cobson (1956-2006). When Ghesquière finished his compulsory studies, Cobson offered him a paid position that allowed him to defray the cost of his studies in fashion design.

7 Private fashion design school founded in 1954 in Paris by Suzanne Berçot.

8 According to Rawsthorn (2011), at *Gaultier*, he carried out an internship that lasted two years, from 1990 to 1992.

9 For Ghesquière, both designers represent minimalism in fashion from the 1990s.

87). Initially, his job was to replace Josephus Thimister (1962-2019) until the owner group could close a deal with either Yohji Yamamoto (1943) or Helmut Lang. Ghesquière especially looked forward to the possibility of working as Lang's assistant because he appreciated the latter's vision for *Balenciaga,* particularly his idea of presenting only 50 haute couture pieces per season and not doing shows (Rawsthorn 2011). However, after negotiations with Yamamoto and Lang were unsuccessful, Ghesquière became *Balenciaga*'s creative director.

Ghesquière held the position of creative director at *Balenciaga* until the end of 2012. As an unknown designer who did not consult the archive, he drew a vision for *Balenciaga* based on experimentation with elements and aspects from Balenciaga's work and from other origins.[10] During this period, he related the "abstraction" of Balenciaga's garments with both architectural and organic forms (Friedman 2006). In 2001, Menkes tagged him as the most "intriguing," "original" and "sought after" creator with a "creative artist attitude." Regarding his collections, Menkes specifically emphasized two aspects: (1) novelty despite being full of "explorations" of elements from Balenciaga's style (form, volume, ornament), and (2) an "abstract" reflection on the "iconic house's" style without basing it on the archive (Menkes 2001).

In 2001, Ghesquière was allowed access the *Balenciaga* archive (Friedman, 2006).[11] The support and structure from *Balenciaga's* then new owners also made it easier for Ghesquière to integrate elements and aspects of his vision that he previously had not been able to develop (Wingfield 2013). The *Edition* capsule collection, first introduced in 2004, was an important result of his dialogue with these new owners and of access to the archive. With this collection, *Balenciaga* began to sell reproductions of Balenciaga's original garments. Thus, this collection refers to Lang's vision for *Balenciaga* and the ideas developed by the young Ghesquière in this collection also contain references to his idea of Balenciaga's legacy.

Access to the *Balenciaga* archive and observations of previous construction techniques, silhouettes, and especially fabrics and colors, added a new dimension to Ghesquière's work (Bowles 2006, 2012). Ghesquière discovered an unknown Balenciaga by identifying extraordinary aspects of the original designer's work, such as gazar fabric, a globe shape and diamond construction (Bowles 2012). Starting in 2001, Ghesquière did not limit himself to studying and learning about Balenciaga's work in the archive. Together with his team, he began to search for items to add to the archive. By visiting exhibitions where Balenciaga's garments were displayed, he discovered new aspects of Balenciaga's work, like "its radicality" and "modernity" (Rawsthorn 2011).[12]

In 2006, Ghesquière supervised the selection of 160 original Balenciaga pieces for the first monographic exhibition dedicated to him in France.[13] The exhibition also featured a selection of garments from collections designed by Ghesquière. In this context, it is necessary to take into account not only Ghesquière's vision, but also Golbin's opinion of the exhibition. For Ghesquière, the exhibition

10 According to Menkes, in 2001 there were 600 pieces of clothing at the bottom of the archive (Menkes 2001).

11 Until 2001, *Jacques Bogart Group* owned *Balenciaga*. From that time until Ghesquière's 2012 departure, the *Gucci Group* took over. During the first years of this new stage, the Gucci Group was managed by Domenico De Sole and Tom Ford.

12 *Balenciaga: Spanish Master* curated by Hamish Bowles, at the initiative of Oscar de la Renta. (*Queen Sophia Spanish Institute* in New York, NY, 2010).

13 Exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, under the title *Balenciaga Paris*.

represented the direct connection that exists between the "heritage of the house" and the "reality of the brand." Golbin's reflection on the exhibition was that the reality of the fashion industry truly surfaced, showing how a "signature" "becomes a brand" (Friedman 2006). Furthermore, Ghesquière's active participation in this exhibition implies that his selection of garments represents both his vision for Balenciaga's work and for Balenciaga's legacy. In this sense, it is significant that while, for years, Golbin thought that there was evolution in Balenciaga's vision, in 2006, she began to stress that both Balenciaga's technical and aesthetic vocabulary were already set from the very beginning of his career, thus stressing that Balenciaga's work involved a depuration process (Friedman 2006).

From 2000 to 2012, Ghesquière received numerous awards and recognitions.[14] Almost a year before his departure from *Balenciaga* was announced (November 2012), he began constructing a new team in order to change the way he worked. At that time, Ghesquière was convinced that every fashion designer of his generation must combine two aspects— the commercial vision of a great brand like *Armani* with the work of a great craftsman like Azzedine Alaïa (Rawsthorn 2011).

Ghesquière and Balenciaga's Legacy

Ghesquière's relationship with Balenciaga's legacy is not linear. The professional background that he acquired at *Balenciaga,* and the range of possibilities that access to the archive offered him, transformed this relationship. After accessing the archive, Ghesquière's relationship with Balenciaga's work became a more complex investigation that enriched and filled his vision with nuances and concrete elements. This change also involves Balenciaga's legacy because it enabled Ghesquière to connect elements and aspects of Balenciaga's work with that of other designers.

Until 2001, Ghesquière operated with iconic elements and aspects of Balenciaga's work, as well as with the influence identified as Balenciaga's legacy on contemporary designer collections. After 2001, observation and technical study of specific pieces, and the learning process that this implies, began to transform Ghesquière's work. Both phases are fundamental, but the second is especially enriching because Ghesquière added elements, details, and nuances of Balenciaga's work to his vision. At the same time, observation and technical study of garments pushed Ghesquière to establish connections between different aspects of Balenciaga's work and legacy.

Before accessing Balenciaga's archive, Ghesquière and his collections at *Balenciaga* won endorsement from the international press and from the industry, as well as garnered commercial success. Because of this, perhaps, Ghesquière was prepared to access the archive and to explain his relationship with Balenciaga's work. Before 2001, Ghesquière had not perceived Balenciaga's work as a set of goods or heritage, but observed it in order to investigate further (Menkes 2001). During this first stage, he elaborated his own vision

14 "Avant Garde Designer by VH1/Vogue Fashion Awards" (2000). Appeared on "The 2006 TIME 100" most Influential People list. "Aguja de Oro" Award for Fashion Design 2007, awarded by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Spain. (*BOE*). Accessories Council Excellence award for Designer of the Year 2008 ("Coming up.").

with iconic and recognizable elements from Balenciaga's work, as well as aspects he identified in the minimalism of the 1990s with designers like Lang and Sander. In this sense, before 2001, his relationship with Balenciaga's work and legacy was conditioned by several matters, including the facts that (1) Ghesquière's work consisted in designing ready-to-wear collections for a fashion brand that carries the name of a twentieth-century fashion icon and (2) Balenciaga's garments are fundamentally one-of-a-kind haute couture pieces that Ghesquière could not directly observe or study. Thus, he formulated a vision of Balenciaga's legacy from jumbled bits of information whose origin and meaning are difficult to reconstruct.

Another dimension that determined Ghesquière's relationship with Balenciaga's legacy is related to his will to create his own style at *Balenciaga*. In this regard, on the one hand, Ghesquière conceived of design as a research and learning process in order to transform ideas and define garments (Wingfield 2013). Technique was one of the first aspects of Balenciaga's legacy he aspired to use in his work. By using haute couture technique, Ghesquière transferred a core aspect of Balenciaga's work and legacy to ready-to-wear garments and collections. On the other hand, Ghesquière sought to create his own style with references to Balenciaga's work and elements from various origins. Finally, Ghesquière had a clearly defined vision of women and an image for *Balenciaga* from the very beginning. He wanted to project a strong, self-confident and austere woman to directly impact contemporary fashion (Bowles 2012).

As of 2001, Ghesquière was able to identify and connect characteristics with technical and aesthetic aspects in Balenciaga's work. This was the result of a complex design process that included both technical study of original garments, as well as research, experimentation, and the materialization of designs. During this period, Ghesquière started to understand indecipherable characteristics of Balenciaga's work, as well as aspects of the history of the House that he was previously unaware of. He also noted how much he admired that, "Clients had to enter into the spirit of Balenciaga" (Menkes 2001). During this time, he also discovered characteristics of Balenciaga's work mentioned above, as well as "the power of color," and the importance of fabrics and "technical rigor," which Balenciaga maintained until the end of his career (Bowles 2006).

Later, in 2012, Ghesquière connected this spirit with a type of beauty he saw in Balenciaga's garments, which he defined as "strange" and difficult to understand (Bowles 2012). In this context, Cecil Beaton and Janie Samet's explanations surrounding the different aspects and origins of the beauty found in Balenciaga's garments are important. Beaton proposed that Balenciaga's garments were "strangely more daring" than his French contemporaries, although they could be perceived as conservative (Beaton 1954: 313). Samet commented in a similar vein regarding a Balenciaga bridal dress worn by Queen Fabiola of Belgium (1960).[15] This bridal dress, she noted, acted as a kind of protection and as a "strange obstacle" between man and woman (Portocarrero 2008, 33:19-34:33), elements

15 See Uria (2020: 129-133).

and characteristics that were new and strange to Balenciaga's contemporaries. At the same time, they also foretell the coming together of the "strange beauty," "radicality" and "modernity" that Ghesquière so appreciated. The garments' formal and material characteristics provoke a new relationship between garments and the women who wear them. These garments do not mark the body's shape and are "structures" whose volume provides a new experience for both the wearer and the observer. On the other hand, they also provide a novel experience in that they are comfortable and facilitate certain movement. In this sense, Balenciaga's garments do possess qualities of the first ready-to-wear garments. Therefore, it can be argued that the "strange beauty" and "modernity" that Ghesquière observed in Balenciaga's garments are based both on their formal aesthetics and haute couture technical work, as well as on the relationship they establish with the body. This involves a physical relationship in which the garment does not oppress the body by marking its forms, but rather delimits an open space around it. In this way, Balenciaga's garments project volume in physical space, which was strange and new at that time. Furthermore, they implied a significantly new experience for women in the social space.

In this sense, Igor Uria's reflections on Queen Fabiola of Belgium's wedding dress are of note. According to Uria, this dress "initiated a style" that was followed up both in Balenciaga´s various workshops, as well as in those of "contemporary designers." In addition, two press articles emphasized the dress's simplicity and monastic inspiration (Uria 2020: 131-132).

Another aspect of the "strange beauty" to which Ghesquière referred is related to his idea of what is unique in fashion, i.e., its originality and abstract dimension. He explains this idea when answering a question about the importance of originality:

> There are two things. There's being conscious of the origin, being able to define its origins. But then originality can also be completely abstract and undefinable. It also means being different, and that being different is often the result of an inexplicable association. I personally like both aspects (Wingfield 2013).

The first part of his answer implies that, in general, there are garments that maintain and express their origin because original elements are repeated during the design process. Regarding Ghesquière's research into Balenciaga's work, this implies that he recognized the origin of certain elements. In fact, one of the influences that Ghesquière identified in some of Balenciaga's garments refers to "monks' cloaks" painted by Francisco de Zurbarán (Rawsthorn 2011).

The second part of Ghesquière's answer involves garments with new and indecipherable aesthetic and technical elements and characteristics. These garments are the result of design processes that transform and combine elements in such a way that they cease to refer to their origin. In terms of Ghesquière's relationship with Balenciaga's work, this involves the following aspects: (A) Ghesquière appreciates

this kind of originality in Balenciaga's garments when he sees them as having a kind of "strange" beauty, (B) the "radicalism" and "modernity" that Ghesquière appreciates in Balenciaga's work consist in the fact that his garments continue to have indecipherable elements. In fact, for Ghesquière, the indecipherable is also definitive, encouraging his research and work around the abstraction of Balenciaga's last period.

The use of haute couture technique pointedly characterizes the work and collections that Ghesquière designed at *Balenciaga*. Especially from 2001 on, it became a technical and aesthetic element of his style and of *Balenciaga*'s image. As previously mentioned, Ghesquière was interested in transferring haute couture technique to ready-to-wear collections from the beginning, but it is not until 2001 that this element became relevant in his collections. Given this, it is important to mention that Ghesquière identified the use of haute couture technique in the works of two designers who knew Balenciaga's work first-hand. Ghesquière mentioned that Courrèges and Emmanuel Ungaro's (1933-2019) garments were haute couture rather than ready-to-wear as they were classified in their day. Ghesquière was convinced of this because they both had worked with Balenciaga (Wingfield 2013), implying that, for Ghesquière, Courrèges and Ungaro's ready-to-wear garments were also part of Balenciaga's legacy. It additionally implies that Ghesquière's notion of Balenciaga's legacy contains the works of ready-to-wear designers who observed Balenciaga working during his last active period (Jouve 1988: 78-80). Therefore, they were undeniably influenced by Balenciaga in a very broad sense.

The *Edition* capsule collection represents Ghesquière's most concrete application of his study of Balenciaga's original garments and of the house's history. In fact, said collection was conceived of as a "tribute" to Balenciaga because it involves searching, selecting, undoing, and studying haute couture garments to design them for production and marketing in a new context (Rawsthorn, 2011). Additionally, the decision to release the *Edition* pieces was made when Ghesquière and his team realized that clothing created by Balenciaga had to be dressed to come alive (Friedman, 2006). Therefore, this collection is part of Ghesquière's vision for *Balenciaga* and his view of Balenciaga's legacy.

Shortly before leaving *Balenciaga*, Ghesquière noted that he did not consider himself to be the continuation of Balenciaga. Rather, he considered himself a designer who had tried to propose collections with influences and elements from Balenciaga's work, but suited to a new era (Bowles 2012). Even so, after his time at *Balenciaga*, Ghesquière declared that his style ended up being identified with the brand rather than with himself (Wingfield 2013). To the question of his legacy,[16] Ghesquière answered as follows:

> I see it as a sort of mission accomplished. They needed someone like me over those last few years to re-establish themselves and to reinstall the interest and prestige the house deserved. I think when I first started, I wanted Balenciaga to one day regain its reputation as an opinion leader

16 According to Wingfield (2013), *Sauvé* asked Ghesquière this question on behalf of Tom Ford.

> in fashion, whilst simultaneously expressing my own signature. I feel like I've had this marvelous schooling—having never actually attended fashion school—and at Balenciaga, I was lucky enough to learn on the job… (Wingfield 2013).

After fifteen years, Ghesquière considered his work at *Balenciaga* to be part of Balenciaga's legacy. At *Balenciaga*, Ghesquière managed to express his vision of ready-to-wear clothing as rooted in the history of fashion. This is so for two reasons: first, because he elaborated his vision while learning by studying and researching elements of Balenciaga's work and, second, because he combined new elements with Balenciaga's iconic work.

BALENCIAGA SPRING 2008 READY-TO-WEAR COLLECTION

Ghesquière called the *Balenciaga Spring 2008 Ready-to-wear*[17] collection *The Flowers* because it was dominated by floral patterns. He considered it an "ultra-radical" collection due to the number of repetitions it contains (Wingflied 2013). Still, repetition has a very broad meaning because it also involves both Balenciaga's work and Ghesquière's earlier and later collections at *Balenciaga*.

The origin of this ready-to-wear collection is found in *Balenciaga*'s archive (Blanks 2008, 0:30-0:38). At the same time, it represents Ghesquière's vision for *Balenciaga*. In the *Edition* capsule collection from the same season, *Balenciaga* sold reproductions of the iconic 1967 bridal dress and headdress.[18] This implies that Ghesquière and members of his team studied the garments from this bridal look to design and adapt production to a new context. Therefore, it can be argued, on the one hand, that technical study of Balenciaga's garments contained a decisive learning process that was then applied in the design of ready-to-wear collections. On the other hand, Ghesquière combined technical and aesthetic elements from bridal clothing and elements of Balenciaga's work with references to other origins.

Later, Ghesquière once again used references and elements from these bridal garments, as well as from the *S 2008 Ready-to-wear* collection. Specifically, in the *Balenciaga Spring 2012 Ready-to-wear* collection[19] patterns and colors dominate and several garments refer to Balenciaga's bridal look. Both collections share repetitions that involve Ghesquière's previous work, Balenciaga's work, and the collection as such. At the same time, there are notable differences, exemplifying how Ghesquière introduced new references to Balenciaga's work. The specific material Ghesquière used to study Balenciaga's bridal look remains unknown, but one could reasonably suggest that he relied on material such as original garments, as well as photographic material and other information. Despite their similarities, these collections are very different.

One of these materials may have been the 1967 *Vogue* magazine editorial mentioned previously. The two looks found in this editorial

17 Hereafter, abbreviated, *S 2008*.
18 In photographs from the associated advertising campaign, actress Jennifer Connelly wears a reproduction of the bridal headdress combined with garments from the ready-to-wear collection. The photographs were taken by David Sims.
19 Hereafter, abbreviated, *S 2012*.

represent the formal abstraction, simplicity and technique of Balenciaga's last period. For this study, what the editorial text mentions and omits is significant.

The text of the *Vogue* editorial that reproduces two photographs of said bridal look offer a written description that highlights technical and aesthetic aspects of Balenciaga's garments *(Vogue USA* 1967: 81). In fact, the text stresses that the lower parts of the garments are shaped like a skewed oval, but it does not identify that shape's origin. This is significant for understanding and uncovering Ghesquière's work as a process in transformation for three reasons: (1) the *S 2008* collection contains no clear reference to the *Sueste,* but rather references Balenciaga's bridal look, (2) the *S 2012* collection contains a visor-like hat that is similar to Balenciaga's bridal headdress and, finally, (3) in general, the garments from the *S 2012* collection are more practical and functional in the sense that they are easier to wear on the street than the dresses from the *S 2008* collection. Against this background, the *S 2012* collection seems to reflect the development of Ghesquiere's research around the bridal look and Balenciaga's work. That is, Ghesquière was able to observe new material and assimilate hypotheses about the influence of fishermen's outfits on Balenciaga's work, etc. In addition, he was able to identify aspects that interest him, such as the bridal look process in which Balenciaga combined elements from origins that were considered opposite at the time (Muñagorri 2019: 316-322).[20] In this context, it is relevant to take into account the views of Beaton and Golbin mentioned above. Beaton observes that Balenciaga's dresses always contain elements from previous dresses (Beaton 1954: 314); Golbin stresses that Balenciaga, throughout his career, repeats technically and aesthetically refined elements (Friedman 2006).

Ghesquière devised the *S 2008* collection as "a whole" made up of sets, "simple silhouettes" full of prints (floral patterns) and dresses that he described as "real structures." In order to "build" these structures and give his silhouettes a stone-like "homogeneous texture," he used the same type of fabric (Blanks 2008, 2:09-2:26). The extremely short dresses from the collection are textile structures with strange volumes and dimensions that are much smaller than those of the bridal look. The most representative elements in the collection that come from Balenciaga's work include the floral prints that Ghesquière used for the first time, haute couture technique, color, structured and voluminous garments, and monochrome tones for select outfits.[21]

The *S 2008* collection is made up of very short one-piece dresses and dresses made up of various outer garments. Almost all the tops in this collection are shorter in the front than in the back, like Balenciaga's headdress and wedding dress. All the dresses, except the trousers, repeat the relationship with the body that Balenciaga proposed in the bridal look, but in smaller volumes. They are, however, structured garments that do not hinder movement. Due to their structures and volumes, all the dresses delimit open spaces around certain areas of the body that are important for movement. Ghesquière projects ready-to-wear dresses as "structures to be built" with haute

20 According to Muñagorri, in 1967, a men's work hat and an haute couture headdress would have been understood as opposites.

21 Photographs from the Balenciaga Spring Ready-to-Wear 2008 show. (Mower 2008).

couture technique. This technical transfer enables a new dressing experience. It is difficult to know what level of comfort women who wore the Balenciaga wedding dress experienced, but it certainly involved a new physical and visual experience. However, it is possible to determine the experience engendered by the *S 2008* dresses, thanks to statements from Raquel Zimmerman (Blanks 2008, 0:48-0:54).

The most significant differences between the looks in the *S 2008* collection are based on variations in elements, for example, in prints and color. Although floral motifs predominate (24 in total), the collection also contains embroidered fabrics with floral motifs, vichy prints, and monochrome fabrics. Almost all the dresses have sleeves and shoulders.

Regarding the transfer of haute couture techniques, significantly, the floral motifs and vichy prints do not fit into the seams. This decision fills the garments and the collection with contrast and, in this way, underlines the dresses' strong and striking character. This technical resource also implies the following: (A) using haute couture techniques in a way that, in Balenciaga's time, was considered a misuse, (B) converting a technical feature into an aesthetic one, and (C) transforming an element (floral motifs) from Balenciaga's work without thereby annulling it. Although this element characterizes the collection, it is not a new one for Ghesquière. Earlier (*Spring 2003 Ready-to-wear* collection), Ghesquière used printed fabrics with colorful figurative motifs and did not fit them at the seams, although without as much emphasis on this feature.[22]

Even so, in the *S 2008* collection, Ghesquière continued researching, experimenting, and combining elements from Balenciaga's work to develop his vision of *Balenciaga*. With new floral prints, *Balenciaga*'s image gained colors that refer to Balenciaga's work. At the same time, using haute couture technique and a new conception of dress in his work also implied developing an idea that was found in a garment from the *Autumn-Winter 2001-2002 Ready-to-wear* collection.[23]

In addition, as in previous collections, the dresses and outfits from the *S 2008* collection refer to the image and agility of science fiction female characters and sporty looks (Menkes 2001, Rawsthorn 2011, Bowles 2012). In this sense, Zimmerman's experience is worth taking into account. She claims feeling powerful thanks to the strong forms and softness of the floral prints (Blanks 2008, 0:48-0:54). Her experience indicates that the garment's strength is based on a combination of supposedly contrary elements. These dresses are structures with strong comfortable shapes and volumes that cover the body without hindering movement. At the same time, the floral prints not only add color to the looks, but also create an evidently soft sensation. Finally, models' typically very high-heeled footwear is mentioned. High, thin heels hinder and condition movement, making it uncomfortable, while the shoes in this collection support the instep and therefore facilitate walking.

As mentioned above, the garments and looks from the *S 2012* collection, which Ghesquière designed, once again refer to Balenciaga's work and bridal look.[24] In relation to the *S 2008* collection, several

22 Look nº 12. Balenciaga Spring 2003 Ready-to-Wear (Mower 2002).

23 Short black dress with rounded volume at the hips. Look dressed by the model Sam Rollinson. Photography © Patrick Demarchelier. ("The Archive of an Era…" 2013).

aspects stand out: (A) Ghesquière uses different types of fabrics, including rigid, fluid, light and fine, (B) many one-piece or multi-outerwear dresses are longer and looser than those in the *S 2008* collection, (C) there are less elaborate floral prints, (D) in general, the garments have much more movement, (E) despite the obvious differences, the length of some garments may refer to Balenciaga's bridal dress, (F) the collection is made up of contrasted looks, and (G) it contains a large hat that clearly refers to Balenciaga's bridal headdress without being a reproduction of it.

The hat in *S 2012* is a stiff, wide-brimmed accessory, like Balenciaga's bridal headdress. It looks like an oversized visor with the helmet piece reduced to a small portion that only covers the forehead. At the same time, the narrow piece that wraps around the head seems to affix the accessory to the head. Due to and despite these changes, the hat shares features with both Balenciaga's headdress and a common visor.

The similarities and differences between these two Ghesquière-designed collections demonstrate several points regarding his relationship to Balenciaga's work and legacy: (1) over the years, Ghesquière investigated, studied, discovered, experimented, repeated, mixed and sometimes transformed elements from Balenciaga's work, (2) until the end, Ghesquière discovered, introduced and related references and elements from Balenciaga's work, and (3) his work at *Balenciaga* implies a deep learning process about both Balenciaga's work and legacy.

Balenciaga and Ghesquière's work and practice are similar, but not the same. Little is known about Balenciaga's creative processes. Ghesquière, on the other hand, has talked about his, which is unusual for a fashion designer. These statements are important for several reasons. Firstly, they facilitate an understanding of, and expose his creative process at *Balenciaga*, shedding light on how he conceives of Balenciaga's legacy. Secondly, they make it easier to imagine other creative processes. In this sense, Ghesquière conceived of and used drawing as a fundamental tool in the design process; with it, he experimented, transformed, and shaped ideas and designs, as well as enjoyed pursuing it aimlessly (Wingfield 2013). However, little is known about Balenciaga's use of drawing. In fact, for Jouve, he drew little and "like a child" (Jouve 1988: 73).[25] Even so, several "sketches" from Balenciaga's last period (Jouve 1988: 199) have an indefinable and "strange" beauty. Thus, Balenciaga's drawings may represent an important avenue for future research not only in order to better understand similarities and differences with respect to Ghesquière's works, but also to expand research on Balenciaga's legacy.

24 Balenciaga Spring 2012 Ready-to-Wear Fashion Show (Phelps 2011).

25 According to Jouve, the various visual materials reproduced in *Balenciaga* belonged to the house archive (Jouve 1988). Ghesquière was also likely to see this type of material in the archive.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing Ghesquière's biography and career at *Balenciaga* leads to the conclusion that Ghesquière had a unique learning process. In 1995 he became aware that his interest in Balenciaga's work refers mainly

to the influence it exerts, i.e., its legacy. This is the basis from which his vision as creative director of *Balenciaga* emerged. Starting in 2001, Ghesquière began to focus on concrete, characteristic elements of Balenciaga's work. Thanks to access to the Balenciaga archive, i.e., the chance to study an unknown side of Balenciaga's work, Ghesquière's vision for *Balenciaga* was enriched with new nuances and features that refer to both Balenciaga's work and his legacy. Yet, from there, the relationship that Ghesquière established with Balenciaga's legacy is not linear, but rather is related to his design process and work at *Balenciaga*. In 1997, Ghesquière started expressing his own vision for *Balenciaga*. Studying Balenciaga's work enabled Ghesquière to combine and transform ideas, shapes and garments during his own design process.

Analyzing Ghesquière's *Balenciaga Spring 2008 Ready-to-wear* collection as a specific example leads to the conclusion that Ghesquière should be considered a decisive part of Balenciaga's legacy. This is mainly due to how he applied references to Balenciaga's work in his collections. Ghesquière's vision for *Balenciaga* embraces study and an insightful understanding of Balenciaga's particular beauty, radicality and modernity, as well as his technical rigor. It also embraces a specific transformation of technical haute couture elements within his vision of the *Balenciaga* woman. Like Balenciaga, Ghesquière designed garments that afford women a new image and dress experience within the social space. Ghesquière's garments project a new and complex beauty that lends a novel experience to the observer as well.

With respect to Ghesquière's work at *Balenciaga*, the present paper shares Menkes' argument that his creative work should be seen as an exploration of Balenciaga's style. That is why it is important that, for Ghesquière, drawing is a fundamental tool for investigating and transforming ideas and designs into material realities. Ghesquière's vision for *Balenciaga* contains two types of originality. The first type refers to garments with decipherable beauty and with elements that have an identifiable origin. The second type of originality is found in abstract and indecipherable garments. It is the latter kind of originality and beauty that attracted Ghesquière more than anything else. In fact, this type of originality was not only present from the beginning of Ghesquière's leadership at *Balenciaga*, but also and importantly allowed Ghesquière to project Balenciaga's work into the future through his own work.

To fully capture the breadth of Balenciaga's work and legacy, there is no doubt that Butler's words offer a new analytical approach for understanding the complexities of design processes at different levels and times in the fashion industry. In this context, the question of design processes' performative dimension is crucial. Still, more research is needed to understand how this might apply to Ghesquière, which inevitably leads to reflection on one of his greatest influences, namely Balenciaga's work and legacy.

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Zurich, 1970. The Exhibition *Balenciaga: Ein Meister Der Haute Couture*

GABRIELE MONTI
Associate Professor at IUAV University of Venice
ORCID 0000-0002-0181-3674 → monti@iuav.it

REFERENCE
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ABSTRACT

This article takes a new look at *Balenciaga: Ein Meister der Haute Couture*, the exhibition held at the Museum Bellerive in Zurich from May 31 to August 16, 1970. By exploring the materials preserved in the museum's archives (now at the Zurich University of the Arts), the study sets out to reconstruct this retrospective dedicated to Cristóbal Balenciaga and to consider its relevance to the museology of the Spanish creator. Examining these archival materials provides an extraordinary opportunity to reflect on the history of fashion exhibitions, on the genealogy of these three-dimensional artifacts and on the practice and discipline of fashion curating. How do we decide whom and what to show? How do we construct a museum collection that represents fashion? To address these questions, this article analyzes not only the exhibition project, but also and above all the decision-making processes that preceded and shaped this exhibition in particular. *Balenciaga: Ein Meister der Haute Couture* was an exhibition produced in an institutional dimension which saw a close connection between the museum and the school of applied arts. At the root of this project lay the intentions of a school of fashion design: this allows us to think about the relationship between the design of fashion and the languages used in exhibitions of and for fashion.

KEYWORDS

Cristóbal Balenciaga
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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Aldamar Parkea 6
20808 Getaria – Gipuzkoa – España
T +34 943 008 840
info@cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com
www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com