

S.U.N.Y. FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

✓ FASHION ENNOBLES EVERYTHING;
FOOD MOTIFS IN 1930S FASHION DESIGN

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BY
EMMA KADAR-PENNER
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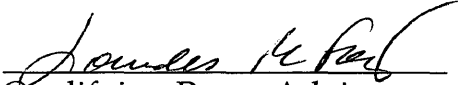
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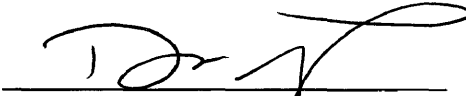
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Emma Kadar-Penner

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts


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ABSTRACT

Fashion and food. Perhaps these two words seem at odds given the current criticism of the fashion industry's idealization of a starved-looking, waifish body. However, a survey of twentieth- and twenty-first-century fashion and dress textiles reveals the prodigious incorporation of food motifs in fashion design over the last century. In this paper I will address the following questions: What is fashion's attraction to food? In what ways are fashion and food related (e.g. through the senses; as products for consumption; as expressions of wealth and luxury)? Does the appearance and popularity of food motifs correlate with historical and/or cultural events? Does the presence of food as a subject or reference in textile and fashion design relate to changing ideals and representations of the fashionable body?

The sheer number of food-related fashion makes it impossible to address the subject comprehensively. For this reason, this paper will be limited to one decade – the 1930s – chosen because of the overwhelming number of relevant objects from this time. Fashion photography, both advertising and editorials, are also a rich area of investigation. In these contexts, food motifs were not always present directly, as an element of textile or fashion design, but rather fashion models were styled with food, as if the edibles were fashionable accessories, or placed in social settings where food was being purchased or consumed. I will consider these images in order to contribute to a more complete picture of how fashion editors, photographers, and advertisers understood and represented the relationship between fashion and food at a time when the phenomenon was especially prevalent.

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For Jayson
And for the K-P's

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion and food-perhaps these two words seem at odds given the current criticism of the fashion industry's idealization of a starved-looking, waifish body. However, a survey of twentieth- and twenty-first-century fashion and dress textiles reveals the prodigious incorporation of food motifs in fashion design over the last century. In this paper I will address the following questions: What is fashion's attraction to food? In what ways are fashion and food related (e.g. through the senses; as products for consumption; as expressions of wealth and luxury)? Does the appearance and popularity of food motifs correlate with historical and/or cultural events? Does the presence of food as a subject or reference in textile and fashion design relate to changing ideals and representations of the fashionable body?

The sheer number of food-related fashion makes it impossible to address the subject comprehensively. For this reason, this paper will be limited to one decade – the 1930s – chosen because of the overwhelming number of relevant objects from this time. Fashion photography, both advertising and editorials, are also a rich area of investigation. In these contexts, food motifs were not always present directly, as an element of textile or fashion design, but rather fashion models were styled with food, as if it were a fashion accessory, or placed in social settings where they were consuming food. I will consider these images in order to contribute to a more complete picture of how fashion editors, photographers, and advertisers understood and represented the relationship between fashion and food at a time when the phenomenon was especially prevalent.

The nature of this topic necessitated several research methods. First, primary source material, in particular contemporaneous fashion publications and texts about food, put fashion design and gastronomy into context. Second, a formal analysis of actual surviving objects is integral to a comprehensive study of this subject. Where objects were not readily available for first-hand study, I have examined photographs of garments and accessories in museum collections. Third, an understanding of philosophical and theoretical texts that relate to consumption, production, and representation is necessary to deepen the research, especially in order to contextualize the relationship between fashion and food in a scholarly way.

My research revealed that there is a lack of scholarship addressing this topic. Joan de Jean's *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* is one of the few books that directly addresses the connection between food and fashion. However, de Jean's study is primarily concerned with Louis XIV's deliberate establishment of France as the capital of luxury, bringing French fashion and gastronomy to the rest of the world. This is an incisive investigation, and will inform my understanding of the relationship between fashion and food, yet it is not an object-based study and its scope is limited to the seventeenth century.

The topic is worthy of investigation based on the sheer number of dress textiles, fashion designs and images that incorporate food motifs. Evidently, designers over the past century have understood food subjects and patterns as relevant to the mood of their era, and, in this way, these objects have a story to tell about the history of fashion and, in a broader sense, of culture. The nature of this association deserves further study and will

illuminate other related areas, including the time- and culture-specific fashionable body, the dynamic relationship between textile and fashion design, and the impact of historical context on design. This topic also reveals the superficiality of the judgment that food and fashion are diametrically opposed in order to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their inter-relationship.

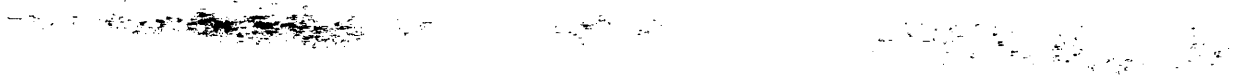
Historical Precedents

“Today we want everything to be French. French clothes, French dishes, French furniture.”¹ This phrase sounds as if it could have been uttered today, but was actually written in 1687 by Christian Thomasius, a German lawyer and philosopher. And indeed it was true: France under Louis XIV had become the center of luxury goods and both food and fashion were central to the King’s effort. This had not always been the case and was the result of a deliberate campaign by the Sun King and his minister of finance, Jean Baptiste Colbert, to mold France into a cultural and mercantile superpower. By encoding his ideas into policy and law, Colbert ensured French citizens would unquestioningly follow the King’s tastes, buying the same luxury goods used at Versailles. Colbert made sure that all the products the King “considered essential to the promotion of his image as the wealthiest, the most sophisticated, and the most powerful monarch in Europe would be produced in France and by French workers,”² a policy that kept imports low and exports high. In effect, Louis XIV and Colbert’s efforts created the first economy driven

¹ Christian Thomasius, from a speech titled “How One Should Emulate the French Way of Life” (1687), quoted in Joan deJean, *The Essence of Style: How The French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour*, (New York: Free Press, 2005), 4.

² deJean, 8.

by fashion and taste, standards that transcended borders, both geographic and social. Rules of dress included strict codification of appropriate court attire; most famously declaring that *les talons rouges*, or red heeled shoes, could only be worn by aristocrats in the King's favor. The Sun King was equally consumed with regulation of food preparation and presentation. An illustration from 1699 codifies meat service, demonstrating the incredible detail that went into how food was to be 'properly' consumed. The image depicts the order of placement of each meat dish on the table and above, written in the King's handwriting, it reads, "these arrangements are perfect" (fig. 1). People all over the world paid attention to, and imitated as closely as possible, what was being created in Paris. And to a large extent, they still do.



The Romantics & Taste

Both fashion and food are matters of taste, so it is important to understand how this rather ambiguous term is defined. As a "gustatory mode of aesthetic experience,"³ taste flourished in the nineteenth century under the Romantics. Romanticism validated emotion (as opposed to the reason espoused by Enlightenment philosophers) as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. Emphasis was also placed on the subjective and the individual, inevitably leading taste to become bound up with identity and personal preference.⁴

³ Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), 16.

⁴ William Vaughan, "Romanticism," *Oxford Art Online*, (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T073207>, (accessed November 22, 2013).

Taste for food and for fashion separates human beings from other living beings. Anthropologists confirm “humans are virtually the only creatures in the world that observe rules about what is eaten, how it is prepared, and with whom it is to be eaten.”⁵ The same applies to dress; we cover ourselves in beautiful fabric and elaborate jewelry for physical protection but also in order to adorn our bodies, the only living beings to do so.

In the Age of the Romantics, taste came to exist beyond the philosophical; it became a part of commerce as well. The first department stores date to the mid-nineteenth century and the centralized and democratic shopping center quickly became a widespread form of consumption. An increasing number of products lined newly minted shelves, allowing each person to exercise taste and personal preference. Even earlier, after the French Revolution, the restaurant had also expanded, changing from the male-dominated taverns frequented primarily for drinking, to the establishments we know today: elegant places where food was consumed by both men and women, dressed appropriately for the occasion. The culture of taste had become the business of taste. Interestingly, prior to this boom in commerce and mass production, food representations in fashion tended to be relegated to objects from the private sphere. Pockets and aprons embroidered with garden berries provide some of the earliest examples of food motifs, but these items were made and worn in the home and served as a testament of a woman’s gentility and home-making abilities. The nineteenth century ushered in new phases of commercialism that helped unite people through the bonds of shared ideas about consumption, bringing taste out of the home and into the public sphere. This new

⁵ Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 190.

consumption correlates with the deliberate production of manufactured fashion objects that incorporated food motifs, a trend that continued and grew in the twentieth century and beyond.

Surrealism

Nearly one hundred years after the birth of Romanticism, surrealism arose as an important artistic and philosophical movement. While the two movements may seem worlds apart, surrealist thinkers and artists were clearly influenced by, and their ideas grew out of, Romantic ideas about the power of the imagination and an interest in the expression of the inner world.⁶

The surrealist movement was born in the 1920s, following the Russian revolutions of 1917, huge events that dismantled Russia's Tsarist autocracy and led to the establishment of a Communist Bolshevik government. The surrealist movement was the result of a particular juxtaposition of a radical political perspective coupled with a rejection of bourgeois materialism and its staid tastes. The artists and bohemians of Paris found themselves playing a vital role in moving society towards political revolution, an improvement from the marginalization they had felt in bourgeois society.⁷ The budding surrealists went to some lengths to trace their origins, and we find them paying homage to the visions and sensibilities of the radical cultural critics who preceded them, demonstrating that the connection between fashion and art, and even fashion and food, had historical roots. For example, in his novel, *The Poet Assassinated* (1916), Guillaume

⁶ T.Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophic Quest*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 203.

⁷ Helena Lewis, "Surrealists, Stalinists, and Trotskyists: Theories of Art and Revolution in France Between the Wars," in *Art Journal* (Vol. 52, No. 1, Spring, 1993), 61.

Apollinaire (1880-1918), who coined the word "surrealism" in 1917, created a fantastical vision of women's fashions:

But tell me: what are the ladies wearing this year? I've just arrived from Italy and I'm not up to date. Please tell me about it.

This year, said Tristouse, fashions are bizarre and common, simple and full of fantasy. Any material from nature's domain can now be introduced into the composition of women's clothes [...]

Nut shells make pretty trimmings, especially if they're mixed with hazelnuts. Dresses embellished with coffee beans, cloves, cloves of garlic, onions and bunches of raisins, these will still be perfect for social calls. Fashion is becoming practical and does not scorn anything. It ennobles everything. It does for materials what the Romantics did for words.⁸

Apollinaire's poetic flourish did not describe actual garments, but it would serve as an inspiration to the surrealists of the following decade, Apollinaire gave absolute priority to the value of the imagination over reality. The poet and art critic had set the stage for the modernism of the twentieth century yet to come by characterizing fashion as democratic, having the ability to gracefully and artistically incorporate, amongst the endless possibilities of the imagination, foodstuffs as embellishment. Apollinaire's words presage the eventual surrealistic incorporation of food motifs into fashion design.

⁸ Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York; Chicago; San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1947), 84.

CHAPTER ONE:
SURREALISM AND FASHION

In the 1930s, as the world struggled amidst the effects of economic depression, fashion ignored these conditions: “Fashion in the thirties was historicist, romantic, and fantastical – surrealist. It was a complete negation of what was going on in the world.”⁹ Many historians and critics have explored the connections between this artistic movement and the fashions of the decade. Interestingly we find journalists and designers of the 1930s using similar definitions: by the mid-1930s fantastical prints and accessories were contemporaneously reported in light of a cultural appetite for all things Surrealist. This is of interest given Surrealism’s relatively obscure beginnings in the 1920s as an underground and radical artistic movement. Surrealism had become fashion design and magazine fodder. In 1936, *Vogue* attempted to define Surrealism, the “movement of considerable cultural importance,”¹⁰ for its readers. The author explains that “through the study of dreams and the exploration of the subconscious, the Surrealists intended to...discredit reality...proclaiming the dream-world the only field worth exploring.”¹¹ However, by 1936, Surrealism has moved from obscure art form to a popularized and commercialized movement. “In the same way in which the influence of an art school is always felt: it percolates downward. What is a snobbish scandal today, is an accepted

⁹ Andrew Bolton quoted in Calvin Tomkins, “Anarchy Unleashed: A Curator Brings Punk to the Met,” *The New Yorker* (March 25, 2013), 60.

¹⁰ “SURrealism or the Purple,” *Vogue* (November 1, 1936), 61.

¹¹ “SURrealism or the Purple,” 129.

style tomorrow, and a merchandised style the next day.”¹² Fashion has always been happy to snap up that which surrounds it, so long as it can be commercialized, merchandized, and consumed

Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) is the designer most recognized for a consciously surrealist approach to fashion design. Indeed, Schiaparelli was surrounded by artists who inspired her to work outside of the limitations of commercialism. As she herself recognized, artists such as Christian “Bébé” Bérard, Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dali, Marcel Vertès, Kees van Dongen; and with photographers like George Hoyningen-Huene, Horst, Cecil Beaton, and Man Ray gave one a sense of exhilaration. One felt supported and understood beyond the crude and boring reality of merely making a dress to sell.”¹³

As if consciously paying homage to Apollinaire, many of Schiaparelli’s surrealist-inspired designs incorporated food motifs, perhaps the most iconic being an evening dress decorated with a Dali-designed lobster and sprigs of parsley, included in the marriage trousseau of the Duchess of Windsor, who modeled it for Cecil Beaton in *Vogue* (fig. 2). Evidently, a powerful social circle surrounded, and promoted, the dress. The print certainly conveyed sexual undertones, especially given the placement of the crustacean on the lower front of the skirt, and considered in light of fashion’s consumption of surrealist imagery and ideas. Perhaps the undercurrent of sexuality (modeled on the famous divorcée) contributed to the commercial success of the dress;

¹² “SURrealism or the Purple,” 131.

¹³ Elsa Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life: The Autobiography of Elsa Schiaparelli*, (London: V&A Publications, 1954, 2007), 69.

after all, these fashion objects were produced and reproduced in the marketplace to be sold for profit.¹⁴

The lobster on the Duchess of Windsor's evening dress was striking and appealing to consumers and “percolated down” from the haute couture into ready-to-wear fashions that were also featured in the fashion press. The sea served as the perfect backdrop for many ‘fashionable fisherwoman’ editorials that appeared in 1930s fashion magazines, both for photo shoots and fashion illustrations. The fantasy of a simpler way of life was promoted: “Get some of the salty tang of fishing villages into your beach clothes this summer. Borrow from peasants and *pêcheurs*—not enough to be theatrical, but enough to be pictorial.”¹⁵ This editorial featured bathing suits, including a Lastex suit by Hollywood with “ridiculous pastel lobsters, pink ones and blue ones, cavort[ing] merrily over the white satin.”¹⁶ In a “Summer’s Catch” editorial, from a May 1937 issue of *Vogue*, models sported *couture* and ready-to-wear garments while gallivanting by the seaside, farcically imitating peasant life. Placed within this context, an illustration of a linen and knee-length version of Schiaparelli’s lobster mixes surrealist connotations with the language of fashion marketing (fig. 3): “Lobsters stir Schiaparelli to interest. Here a huge one sprawls over her linen beach dress, fishwife fashion. The big hat is no more than an inverted lobster-basket.”¹⁷ This editorial captivates because of its dissonance: a woman wears a Schiaparelli dress while fishing for octopus.

¹⁴ Dilys Blum, *Shocking!: The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2003), 135.

¹⁵ “Salt of the Sea,” *Vogue* (May 15, 1937), 93.

¹⁶ “Salt of the Sea,” 94.

¹⁷ “Summer’s Catch,” *Vogue* (May 15, 1937), 86.

The fact that at least two versions of the lobster dress were featured in American *Vogue* further emphasizes the design's commercial potential. The spirit of surrealism was in the air, and was quickly incorporated into fashion design. In her autobiography, Schiaparelli herself wrote of the unlikely success of her other, equally surrealist-inspired, designs, in particular her *trompe-l'oeil* sweaters: "Trying courageously not to feel self-conscious, convinced deep within me that I was nearly glamorous, I wore it [sweater with *trompe l'oeil* bow] at a smart lunch—and created a furore [sic]...All the women wanted one, immediately."¹⁸ Clearly Schiaparelli had successfully tapped into, perhaps more than any other designer of the decade, the popular imagination and the desire for fashion that ignored the difficulties of the life that surrounded them and was "just for fun."¹⁹

Like Apollinaire before them, as discussed above, the surrealists placed the imagination at the center of their movement for personal and political liberation. In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, André Breton, the theoretical leader of the surrealist movement in France, explained its power: "imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake."²⁰ Breton and his surrealist comrades believed that a place of such freedom would stimulate creativity in a way not permitted in a material world dominated by the tyranny of reason. Consequently, in their creative quest, the surrealists devised and promoted any and all

¹⁸ Schiaparelli, 42.

¹⁹ This phrase was used by *Vogue* to describe an illustration by Schiaparelli, done for the cover of the March 15, 1938 issue. The illustration depicted a hat that was topped with a nesting hen, an idea that was at once surrealist and also "just for fun."

²⁰ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Trans. R. Seaver, (The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 5.

methods of artistic production that demonstrated some capacity to dispel deeply ingrained principles of reality, if not the reality principle itself.

One particularly important method for stimulating creativity was the playing of “surrealist games.” The theory was that games allowed participants to establish new conventions “outside the discourse of naturalism that encloses material reality...As such they have the power to open up unprecedented courses of action and modes of representation.”²¹ This impulse to “open up” new modes of representation was now present in the contemporary world of fashion, evident in the food-related garments and accessories of the period. An excellent example of this impulse is a Schiaparelli dinner jacket from 1941, which reimagined carrots and cauliflowers as buttons, in effect creating a new function and look for these otherwise everyday, and as such, banal vegetables (fig. 4).

Schiaparelli’s food buttons are a signature example of her use of fantastical design elements.²² However, the historic-political context in which the jacket was designed also deserves attention. The jacket was designed in 1941, during the French Occupation, when rationing, of both food and fabric, was an everyday reality. The design of this jacket references these political themes in an imaginative way, a potent reminder that the surrealist manifesto was both artistic and political in nature.

One of fashion’s favorite games was the fancy-dress party, where socialites, actresses, designers, and other artists participated in what were, in effect, costume parties.

²¹ Susan Laxton, “The Guarantor of Chance: Surrealism’s Ludic Practices,” *Papers of Surrealism* Issue 1 (Winter 2003), 11.

²² This jacket reflects Schiaparelli’s interest in whimsical and humorous buttons although she may not have designed it. Schiaparelli left France in the spring of 1940 and during her absence she left head designer, Irene Dana, in charge.

Such parties were especially fashionable in Paris in the 1930s, and the leading couture houses often designed and produced the costumes. These costumes, while existing outside of the dominant fashion system, also influenced the fashions of the period, helping designers reimagine the possibilities of everyday fashion design. Fancy-dress parties were significant social events and, as such, were reported in fashion magazines. These elaborate games of dress-up did not necessarily require large amounts of money and “by taking a tour throughout the variegated counters of any big store, with fancy dress written on the mind, and five dollars in the pocket, it is possible to find innumerable materials that can be misused with effect.”²³ As expressions of creativity, fancy-dress costumes often, in this period, included surrealist themes. For example, Miss Consuelo Villa was photographed in *Vogue* in her original headdresses, including one that splashed imitation broken eggs around her face. The reference to surrealism seems overt as many surrealist artists used the egg as a central image in their work, sometimes as a metaphor for the beginnings of life, or as Dali explained, as a reference to “intra-uterine memory.”²⁴

Humor

The surrealist impulse in fashion comes in part from a desire to infuse humor and wit into garments and accessories. Contemporary fashion journalists wrote of Elsa Schiaparelli’s desire “to slip a little humor into her collections... [her designs are] only for

²³ Cecil Beaton, “Suggestions for Fancy Dress,” *Vogue* (December 15, 1937), 37.

²⁴ The Dali Museum, “Eggs on the Plate without the Plate,” http://thedali.org/exhibits/highlights/eggs_on_the_plate_without_the_plate.php (accessed February 2, 2014).

those who don't take life too seriously."²⁵ The garments that have already been discussed, surrealist as they may be, are also witty and humorous. It is a woman who does not take life too seriously, a woman who would fasten her Schiaparelli jacket with vegetable buttons. Similarly, the humor of the lobster print is elevated by Dali's desire to smear it with mayonnaise for the *Vogue* photo shoot.²⁶

Schiaparelli's use of humor, irony, and her attraction to the sometimes bizarre juxtaposition of disparate elements, was fuelled by her disinterest and self-admitted ignorance of traditional fashion design and the craft of dressmaking. In her autobiography, *Shocking Life*, Schiaparelli writes (in the third person) of this freedom:

Schiap decidedly did not know anything about dressmaking. Her ignorance in this matter was supreme. Therefore her courage was without limit and blind. But what did she risk? She had no capital to speak of. She had no superiors. She did not have to report to anybody. The small freedom was hers... The garret became increasingly crowded, the designs more and more daring.²⁷

In Schiaparelli's work, food motifs were a part of these daring designs, and are therefore potent examples of the designer's fearless approach to her métier.

Humor in fashion can be called a modern phenomenon, by and large relegated to the twentieth century and beyond. Its emergence in fashion may well be attributed to the twentieth century idea of the self and a new individualism where women and men, as noted by a *Vogue* journalist in 1936, "don't ignore the current trends, naturally, but somewhere, somehow, they flaunt a streak of independence. They season their costumes to look like themselves, with their own... touches of whimsy, gaiety, poetry, or downright

²⁵ "Second Report of the Paris Openings," *Vogue*, (March 15, 1937), 63.

²⁶ Blum, 135.

²⁷ Schiaparelli, 46.

madness.”²⁸ A *Vogue* editorial that year titled “Comic Relief” explained the subtle humor of many of the collections: “A flicker of fun has sneaked into prints. Anything from silly pigs to comic elephants wander into the designs.” To be sure, you have to look closely to decipher the form; at a distance, they pass for respectable dots.”²⁹ This editorial features many animals and household objects, but also includes a dress scattered with strawberries (fig. 5).

Humor in fashion design was not always humor for humor’s sake. Often it appeared as a reaction against social anxieties about real-world issues. In the 1930s, the effects of the Great Depression were still being felt and food motifs in fashion were a way for people to defy the day-to-day hardships and difficulties. For example, a watermelon-printed men’s tie from 1935 was used “to invite a sense of fun and whimsy in a time when most of the world was suffering from economic depression and the rumblings of war”³⁰ (fig. 6).

Subtle Food Motifs

Some of the food-related fashion designs of this period are subtle, and almost unnoticeable. These tend to be in the form of repeat-printed fabrics, with small-scale fruit motifs that function almost as abstract patterns (figs. 7-8). An afternoon dress by New York designer Sally Milgrim appeared illustrated in *Vogue* in 1935; the cherry-printed fabric is abstract and fluid, imitating the lines of a watercolor painting. The design took the cherry theme further than the print, incorporating “black patent leather cherries [to]

²⁸ “They Express Themselves,” in *Vogue* (June 1, 1936), 71.

²⁹ “Comic relief” in *Vogue* (April 15, 1936), 91.

³⁰ “Necktie” on <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/156791>, accessed January 29, 2013.

hold the girdle fast, and the full sleeves are trimmed with appliqued cherries picked out of the actual fabric”³¹ (fig. 9). In other instances, food motifs appear as subtle trims, as in the case of an Alix evening dress (fig. 10) where “garlands of red currants trail down the skirt.”³²

Accessory Design

Berries were a common food motif in accessory design of the 1930s. Cartier used coral to create beads in the shape of berries and “strings them, three deep, on a fine mesh platinum rope,”³³ to decorate a bracelet. A similar use of coral berries also decorated a scarf pin from the same collection. The article explains that the small, delicate shape of the berry suited the coral material and served as a welcome pop of color on a black tailored suit (also pictured in the article). Berries also served as modest decoration on leather gloves. An editorial titled “Bare Arms, Short Gloves,” featured a suede pair by Hermès, “from knuckle to wrist (where they break off abruptly), they’re embroidered with minute bunches of red and green cherries, and red and green silk outlines all the seams.”³⁴ The prim berry motif, and the editorial’s styling (women with their heads thrown back, holding pin wheels and flowers in the air) promote a youthful and girlish image.

The 1930s were a decade of creativity in millinery, in which unusual shapes and humorous trimmings were embraced. As relatively small, and sometimes removable, accessories, even traditional dressers could dabble in humor with their headwear choices.

³¹ “Breaking the Ice,” *Vogue*, (February 15, 1935), 65.

³² “What America Brought Back From the Paris Collections,” *Vogue* (April 1, 1939), 58.

³³ “New Jewels,” *Vogue* (February 1, 1936), 105.

³⁴ “Bare Arms, Short Gloves,” *Vogue* (June 15, 1938), 68.

Unsurprisingly, Schiaparelli used millinery as a medium to convey her wit and irreverence. One hat, from her Fall/Winter 1939 collection uses fruit to celebrate the harvest season with piles of red currants and cranberries, deep crimson cherries and grapes, acorns, and fall foliage adorning the crown (fig. 11). Another hat, from the same collection, uses celluloid grapes as decoration, sandwiched between large green leaves. The fruit and leaves are realistic and look as if Schiaparelli had found the grapes at a fruit stand and then simply plopped them on a head. The suppleness of the silk leaves gives the hat its form, and so the fruit becomes the constructing material, not just the decoration (fig. 12). This hat belonged to Millicent Rogers (1902-1953) a socialite and fashion leader, who probably would have paired this food-related accessory with a more demure couture outfit, the type of humorous irony that Schiaparelli continually incorporated into her work.³⁵

Schiaparelli was not the only designer using fruit as headwear decoration. Caroline Reboux³⁶, a top Parisian millinery firm with a more restrained style than the surrealist designer, “rediscovered fruits” and produced a toque covered in currants, evoking a Persian jewel.³⁷

So many fruit decorated hats appeared in 1939 that *Vogue* felt compelled to publish a fashion editorial about the phenomenon, titled “Fruit from Paris.” It included four vibrant illustrations by Carl Erickson of three hats by Suzy and one by Agnès (fig. 13). The captions, written in flowing cursive alongside the images, described the hats in

³⁵ Metropolitan Museum of Art, label text for cocktail hat by Elsa Schiaparelli, metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/156634 (accessed December 20, 2013).

³⁶ Caroline Reboux (1837-1927) continued as a firm, after the death of its namesake in 1927.

³⁷ “Caroline Reboux,” *L’Officiel* No. 175 (March, 1936), 27.

surrealist and lifelike terms: “Suzy’s apple-growing hat” and “Suzy’s strawberry-patch of leaves and berries.”³⁸

Another hat, arguably more artwork than fashion, titled “Ceremonial hat for eating Bouillabaisse” dated 1936, was made by the British surrealist artist Eileen Agar. The cork hat, decorated with assorted shells, coral, star fish, bark, sea urchin, and a large fish bone, was worn by the artist well into her final years (fig. 14). The title of the piece elevates the hat from mere fashion accessory to ceremonial work of art, in so doing proving that accessories (and clothing) can represent more than surface body adornment. Agar also made overt the connection between fashion and food, in this case a hat made specifically for eating traditional Provençal fish stew. Upon the artist’s death, the Victoria & Albert Museum inherited this hat, a gift that was particularly valuable as a rare example of a surrealist-inspired fashion object, linking it to other rare examples by the likes of Schiaparelli and Salvador Dali.³⁹

³⁸ “Fashion: Fruit from Paris,” *Vogue* (May 1, 1939), 80-1.

³⁹ Marion Kite, “Ceremonial hat for eating Bouillabaisse: Eileen Agar 1936,” *Conservation Journal* (January 1995, Issue 14), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-14/ceremonial-hat-for-eating-bouillabaisse-eileen-agar-1936/> (accessed March 2, 2014).

CHAPTER TWO:

FOOD IN FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

During the 1930s, not surprisingly, food also penetrated the realm of fashion photography. Food often appeared in fashion imagery, sometimes to create a mood and scene, or as isolated props. For example, an Edward Steichen photograph poses models, in Saks Fifth Avenue and Vionnet dresses, with a variety of fruit and vegetables, apparently referencing eighteenth century porcelain figurines (fig. 15). In the nineteenth-century, these figurines were commodified as “bibelots” and were displayed in china cabinets, however they were originally used as decoration for the dining table, meant as a form of entertainment for diners during long, multi-course meals.

Picturing nature’s food next to beautifully crafted dresses makes the image strange, dissonant, and yet compelling. The jarring contrast of these disparate elements stimulates the imagination to reconcile the artifice of fashion with its historical and artistic relevance. In an edition of *Nord-Sud*, an influential poetry and art journal started by Pierre Reverdy⁴⁰ (1889-1960) and Guillaume Apollinaire, Reverdy commented on the imaginative power of this kind of discord:

The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant

⁴⁰ The connection between art and fashion design of the period is reinforced by the romantic relationship between Pierre Reverdy and Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, which became a friendship that last over forty years. Prior to his death in 1960, Reverdy wrote a poem for Chanel.

and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality.⁴¹

The juxtaposition of fresh produce with high fashion, living models and carved porcelain statues recalls ancient philosophical dualism, such as life vs. death, and real vs. artifice. Yet something about the relationship, as Reverdy writes, is true. Both the food and the fashion are ephemeral, destined to decay. The result is an image with “emotional power,” something the editor seems to have understood given the lack of copy, an editorial silence unusual for a period more typically associated with wordy flourish. Evidently, the editor preferred to let this incongruous fashion image speak for itself.

Gender And Lifestyle

Fashion magazines were not only concerned with clothing, but also with lifestyle advice for women, their target audience. Food served a critical function in this mission since the wife governed the domestic realm and women were defined by their work in this area. Food helped editors emphasize gender roles, allowing images to speak volumes about domestic life, and serving as a complement to articles about women’s social and cultural positions. Sometimes food imagery could replace copy since, as a recognizable sign, it served as a cultural short hand for editors. Instead of having to explain when it was appropriate to wear a certain style, a photograph of a woman food shopping in a day suit, or serving dinner in a simple dress, explained dressing rules to readers in a subtle and persuasive way. Some editors took this one step further, stating outright when a particular design should be worn: “The perfect breakfast is a matter of more than food. It

⁴¹ Pierre Reverdy, *Nord-Sud*, (March 1918), quoted in Andre Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972), 20.

might include Paquin's chiffon oversheet...further charms are Paquin's beige lace bed-jacket lined and bordered with blue chiffon"⁴² (fig. 16).

In *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*, Ellen Lupton uses material cultural theories to argue that, over the last two centuries, the self has become an increasingly manufactured object, defined by the products we use and buy. She writes, "manufactured goods are connected intimately to the minds and bodies that use them...The self emerges out of material things, which appear to take on lives of their own."⁴³ As objects and products, food and fashion fall into this category as "highly condensed social facts."⁴⁴ Both are more than biological necessity; they are windows into social and material contexts.

An article by Daisy Fellowes (Hon. Mrs. Reginald Fellowes *née* Marguerite Séverine Philippine Decazes de Glücksberg) (1890-1962), socialite, heiress, and in the early 1930s, Paris editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, entitled "Home Sweet Home," illustrates Lupton's ideas. Fellowes describes, and gently regulates, the details of a woman's (and wife's) home life. She instructs her readers on the details that should be attended to in order to be a proper "lady of fashion." The rules, as laid out by Fellowes, include everything from home décor, to hobbies, and of course, food and cooking:

She thinks of bright colors that will set off her beauty; but she is also concerned with rounding off Romeo's sharp curves with downy ease—his large arm-chair, his handy book-self plan an important part in the general scheme. Her thoughts like to linger on the kitchen or kitchenette. She pictures herself at the beginning of another thrilling day sitting opposite Romeo and looking incredibly trim and neat, although she has just prepared an appetizing meal. The same setting with a becoming dim light

⁴² "Breakfast at its Parisian Best," *Vogue* (February 15, 1931), 63.

⁴³ Ellen Lupton, *Mechanical Brides*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 7.

⁴⁴ Marijke van der Veen, "When is Food a Luxury?" in *World Archaeology*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Feb., 2003), 405.

would serve for late supper after the play, when Juliet hums snatches of the theme song as she dishes up the Welsh rare-bit and other surprises from the chafing-dish.⁴⁵

Daisy Fellowes's entire article, and countless others that appear in fashion publications of the period, is replete with social rules and material facts that serve to shape the lady of the house's behaviors and define her in relation to her husband and her things.

The Fashionable Body

Fashion, in order to exist in the world, needs a body to shape it, a body to give life to its silhouette. In this way, fashion magazines are not only concerned with the clothes they promote, but also with the shape of the body underneath. Articles concerning beauty, diet, and exercise are abundant in these publications, a trend that continues to this day. When discussing the body, of course conversations about food also come to the fore. A 1932 article celebrates eating: "This is no time for a lean look. You've got all of 1933 in which to get that slim figure back again. In the meantime, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you diet."⁴⁶ However, this advice was short-lived, since the long, bias-cut dresses of the 1930s hardly left room for bulging stomachs. The following year, in an article entitled "The Body That Clothes Are Made For," *Harper's Bazaar* put a different spin on the fashionable body: "There is no place to hide in the new spring clothes. This year you have to right what is wrong with you or swallow your pride and brazen it out with your none too beautiful figure. There is no help coming from Paris."⁴⁷ And so it is

⁴⁵ Daisy Fellowes, "Home Sweet Home," *Harper's Bazaar* (December 1933), 56-57.

⁴⁶ "An International Food Conference," *Harper's Bazaar* (December, 1932), 38.

⁴⁷ "The Body That Clothes Are Made For," *Harper's Bazaar*, (May, 1933), 79.

no surprise that a few months later, the same magazine also gave practical advice to women for how to achieve the new shape, in an article about the Hay Diet.⁴⁸

In the 1930s, indeed throughout the course of the twentieth century, the ideal body has been so slender that food has been a heightened object of desire for the fashionable woman. Like the two sides of a seesaw, too much food means less fashion and vice versa. This period and the body that fashion magazines represent and promote reveals the beginning of the fraught relationship between food and fashion that have only become more critical in the latter part of the century and into the twenty-first.

Social Life

The daily life of an *haute couture* house, brimming with busy and productive workers, was beholden to the kitchen. Many of the largest and most reputable houses included lunch in their employees' monthly salaries, allowing for a more efficient workday. Further, couture houses tended to be located in high-rent districts of Paris, where cafés and restaurants were too expensive for most workers to afford. Those who did not receive a company lunch would, as the French song says, eat a piece of bread and share it with the sparrows in the Tuileries gardens.⁴⁹ An article, sponsored by *La Société du Gaz de Paris*, took the connection between food and the *couture* even further by elaborating on the nasty side-effects of non-gas cooking in a *couture* house, including the

⁴⁸ "Glorifying the Hay Diet," *Harper's Bazaar*, (September, 1933), 62-3.

⁴⁹ Jacqueline François originally recorded the song, with music by Paul Durand and lyrics by Henri Contet.

deterioration of garments caused by dust and unhealthy fumes.⁵⁰ Food had the power to fuel the fashion machine, but also to destroy it.

For the buyers and journalists who congregated at least twice a year in Paris, doing business with the *haute couture* also meant experiencing Parisian food culture. It is no surprise that the people who made the fashion world go round were simultaneously nourishing their physical needs in the restaurants and bistros of Paris. *Harper's Bazaar* elaborated on this side of the industry, in an article that focused on the throng of international buyers as they descended on Paris for the collections:

Even after the collection, when they “bend an elbow” convivially together, buyers don't give themselves away. However, general reactions begin to leak out. In the looping that goes on after the night collections, to Brick Top's, to Ciro's, up to Montmartre, after talking talking talking, some of the opinions become generally known, and by dawn any of the clever stylists in Paris are in a position to cable confidently home to the houses they represent that the Fords of the year are going to be Lanvin's “Sauvage,” Schiaparelli's Number 5, Patou's “Harmonie,” Vionnet's...

As the week goes on the worry and the rush begin to get them. They don't take cocktails any more. They haven't time. The rich food has ruined many digestions, and bottles of soda-mints and Bell-Ans are carried round in purses. The Chinese chiropodist of Paris is constantly on call.⁵¹

The life of a buyer, madly running about the Paris shows, was a social one. Decisions were made in tandem with other buyers, conversations about the season's best sellers exchanged over food and drink. The author asserts that there is a connection between emotions and food, but also between the business of fashion and the bodies of those who engage in it (fig. 17).

Like any other objects of material culture, food and fashion can also be expressions of luxury. The rich and famous, socialites, and other tastemakers, often grace

⁵⁰ “Le Restaurant du Personnel d'une Maison de Couture,” *L'Officiel*, No. 129, 1932, 50.

⁵¹ “Ten Days in the Paris Madhouse,” *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1933, 116-17.

the pages of fashion magazines, pictured in designer garb at exclusive luncheons and dinners. Restaurants have long served as the backdrop for the social life of the fashionable elite, prompting Edmond Bory de Saint-Vincent's to assert: "Food is no longer simply a matter of gastronomy. It is now a matter of fashion."⁵² A restaurant's food often has less to do with its popularity than its fashionable guests: "a restaurant is a fantasy – a kind of living theater in which diners are the most important members of the cast," said Warner LeRoy, owner of Tavern on the Green.⁵³

Fashion and the Language of Food

Roland Barthes, in *The Fashion System*, described the fashion journalist's impetus to interpret fashions for readers: "Fashion and literature in fact utilize a common technique whose end is seemingly to transform an object into language: it is description."⁵⁴ However, unlike literature, magazines describe garments that are actualized, and are visible to their readers. So fashion language must transmit something the image cannot. In this *Vogue* image (fig. 18), the garment is photographed in black and white, making the color invisible. The editors write that it is, in fact, a "strawberry red linen dress," while another dress by Jane Régnier (fig. 19) is captioned as "banana yellow crêpe romaine." Food serves as effective shorthand because of its accessibility as a cultural sign. If you are a human being reading a magazine, then you also have an image,

⁵² Mimi Sheraton, "Couturiers Dabble in the Art of Eating," *The New York Times*, (November 9, 1977), 74.

⁵³ Mimi Sheraton, "Tavern on the Green. A Creation to Appeal to All the Senses." *The New York Times*, (July 9, 1976), 14.

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 12.

and even an idea, of the sweet plumpness of a red strawberry, or the soft yellow of a banana peel.

Even when the image is published in color, the language of food can still shape the reader's interpretation of the image. In these cases, the language gives us a feeling of when and where to wear this garment, helping to locate the object within a real-life context (fig. 20). In a *Vogue* editorial titled "Pineapple: slicing through summer fashion," the connotations of the fruit, allow the author to explain when and where a fashionable woman might wear her pineapple-hued garments: "Somewhere this ought to figure in every smart summer clothes-plan some clear, cool, light-to-bright shade of the new pineapple yellow in all the collections. What it means to a wardrobe besides freshness, flattery: a new pastel way of dressing (for town, particularly)...that will be a basic fashion fact by the end of summer."⁵⁵ The language of food endows the object with functions, which the image cannot manifest on its own, emphasizing certain aspects of the object through the image of a fruit. As Barthes succinctly puts it: "Fashion text represents as it were the authoritative voice of someone who knows all there is behind the jumbled or incomplete appearance of the visible forms."⁵⁶

Conclusion

In the 1930s, fashion and food intersected in many ways. Sometimes food appeared directly on the garment or perched atop the head, often invoking surrealist metaphors and witty references, but at others appearing as diminutive motifs, subtle patterns, and dainty accessories that imitated fruit to enliven conservative dressing. In this

⁵⁵ "Pineapple: slicing through summer fashion," in *Vogue* (April 15, 1955), 111.

⁵⁶ Barthes, 14.

decade, amidst the economic hardships of the Great Depression and the rumblings of a Second World War, fashion incorporated surrealist whimsy in response to difficult times and food motifs fit perfectly into this new and more lighthearted approach to fashion design.

Fashion magazines embraced food references as a medium to convey other messages as well. Food appeared in fashion photographs, in lifestyle articles, and in hostess advice columns as a sign of femininity and a symbolic shorthand for gendered expectations, ideas that were prevalent in the larger culture, but were reinforced in these fashion publications.

Clothing and food are intertwined on the most basic level. Both are required for human survival and both, therefore, are extremely important utilitarian elements of material culture – they are also social products that help us define each other and ourselves. Fashion, communicative and expressive, was able to pick up on this relationship and broadcast it, and continues to do so to this day.

The surrealist impulse for fun in fashion is prevalent. Contemporary designers continue to explore the possibilities of witty food motifs in their work. In an interview, hat designer Piers Atkinson spoke of the motivation for including cherries and other recognizable fruit in his work: “I think it’s my sense of humor...the unexpected and amusing. It’s funny – and the sexual connotations we can make with fruit and vegetables as seen in the 80s airbrush posters of cherries, bananas, are endless.” The designer has often come back to the cherry motif in his headpieces, reconfiguring this particular edible more than any other food reference. This, Atkinson explains, has a cheeky, sexual undertone: “Two shiny, plump globes in close proximity and destined for the mouth...the

suggestive aspects of this fruit are undeniable” (fig. 21). For some, fashion is a fun and creative outlet, not something to be taken too seriously. Atkinson’s hats, and the fruit they incorporate are about “a sense of celebration and fun [that] is a more adult approach to the world. Teenagers can keep the goth angst, I think us grown-ups need to realize we can have all the confidence, humor, and fun!”⁵⁷

In this paper I was only able to focus on one decade of the twentieth century and knowingly omitted many other examples of the incorporation of food motifs into fashion design, which a subsequent researcher would do well to explore. From the seventeenth century examples of domestic embroidered fruit motifs on private garments such as pockets and linens, to the twenty-first century, where a postmodern aesthetic has launched a frenzy of Pop Art-inspired wearable pizzas and hamburgers (fig. 22) fashion continues to produce examples of its fascination with, and love of, food.

⁵⁷ Piers Atkinson, interview by author, November 3, 2011.

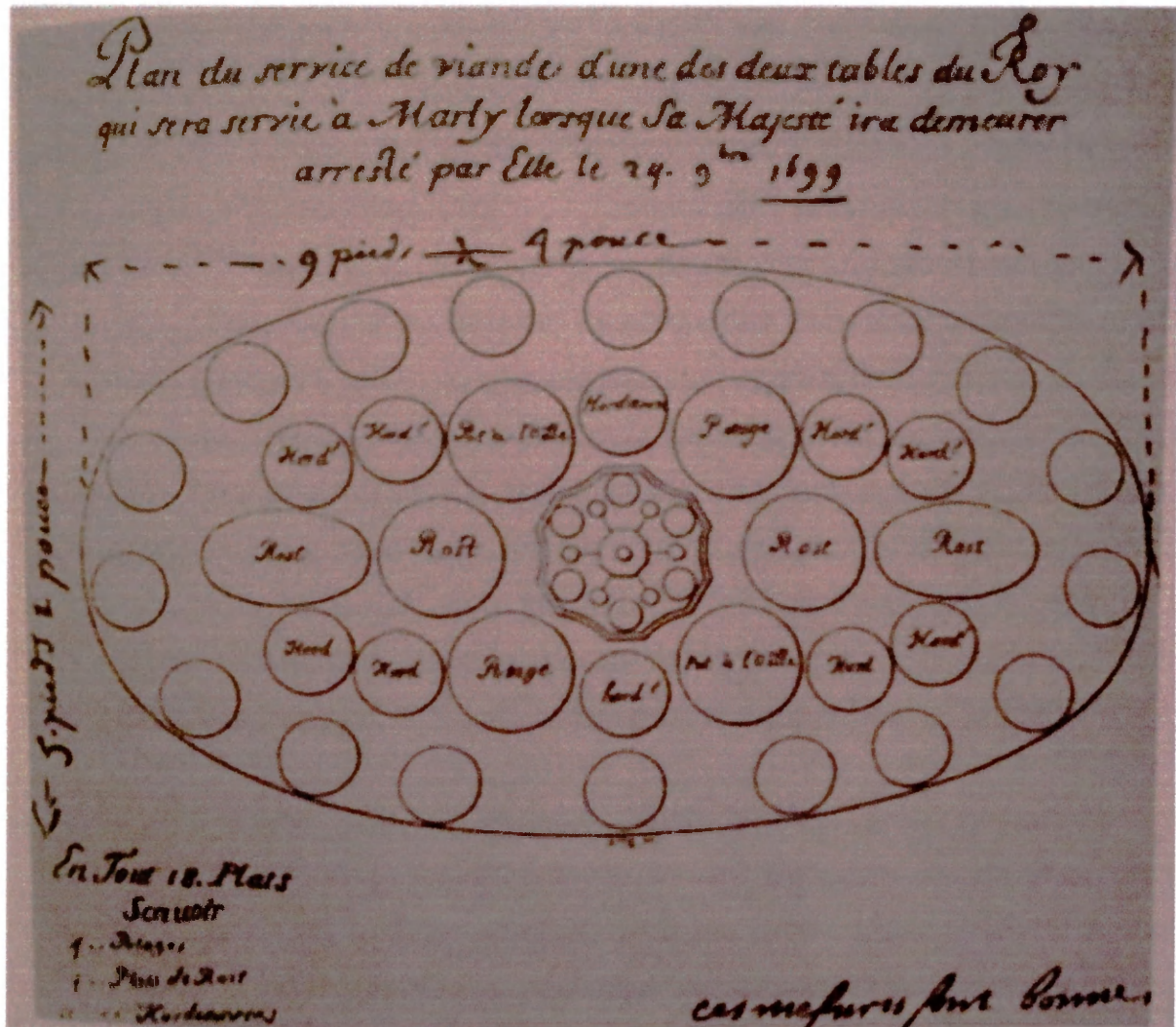


Fig. 1. Drawing of the proper presentation of meat service dated 1699 with signed approval by Louis XIV.



IN THE GARDENS
OF THE
CHÂTEAU DE CANDÉ



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Fig. 2. The future Duchess of Windsor posing in Schiaparelli's lobster dress – the dress currently belongs to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. *Vogue*, June 1, 1937. Photograph by Cecil Beaton.



Fig. 3. Elsa Schiaparelli's daytime version of the lobster dress, bottom left. "Summer's Catch," *Vogue*, May 15, 1937.



Fig. 4. Elsa Schiaparelli, Dinner Jacket, 1941. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



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Fig. 5. The second dress from the right “is a black crepe dress scattered with strawberries. Russeks.” The illustration below shows the print in more detail. *Vogue*, April 15, 1936.



Fig. 6. Necktie, 1935, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 7. Jane Régný, "Folatre" evening gown with embroidered cherries. *L'Officiel*, No. 140, 1933.



Fig. 8. "Absinthe yellow apples bestrew Lelong's 'Carillon,' a black crepe de Chine dress. Four ears punctuate the uppish velvet crown of Agnès's hat." *Harper's Bazaar*, June 1933.

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Fig. 9. Milgrim dress printed with cherry motif and trimmed with cherries picked out of the fabric. *Vogue*, February 15, 1935.



ANDRÉ CURRY

ORGANDIE CAPE-DRESS FROM PARIS. Alix makes an aerial costume of white silk organdie with one of those new short capes—last-century and immensely touching. (A bride might adopt the idea for herself and her bridesmaids.) Underneath, a delicate dress with three thicknesses of organdie billowing the skirt. Garlands of red currants trail down the skirt. Boucheron jewels

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Fig. 10. Alix dress trimmed with red currants. *Vogue*, April 1, 1939.



Fig. 11. Elsa Schiaparelli, Fall/Winter 1939. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 12. Elsa Schiaparelli, 1939. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 13. "Fashion: Fruit From Paris," *Vogue*, May 1, 1939



Fig. 14. Eileen Agar, Ceremonial hat for eating Bouillabaisse, 1937. Victoria & Albert Museum.



Porcelain fragility in organza.
 First, an embroidered peasant dress and Old World kerchief;
 Saks-Fifth Avenue, New York and Chicago.
 Second, Vionnet's hand-painted dress; Henri Bendel

Fig. 15. Models posed as porcelain sculptures in dresses by Saks-Fifth Avenue and Vionnet. Photo by Edward Steichen. *Vogue*, May 15, 1937.

FEBRUARY 15, 1931

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**Breakfast at Its
Parisian Best**

• The perfect breakfast is a matter of more than food. It might include Paquin's chiffon oversheet with a floral motif, inserts of Turkish point, and a blue border, a pillow-slip to match, and a satin bedcover repeating the pattern and colours; Saks-Fifth Avenue. Further charms are Paquin's beige lace bed-jacket lined and bordered with blue chiffon (Saks-Fifth Avenue), the linen breakfast cloth, from Hélène Yrande, with Turkish point and monograms, and Pui-forcat's modern silver breakfast set, with handles of precious wood

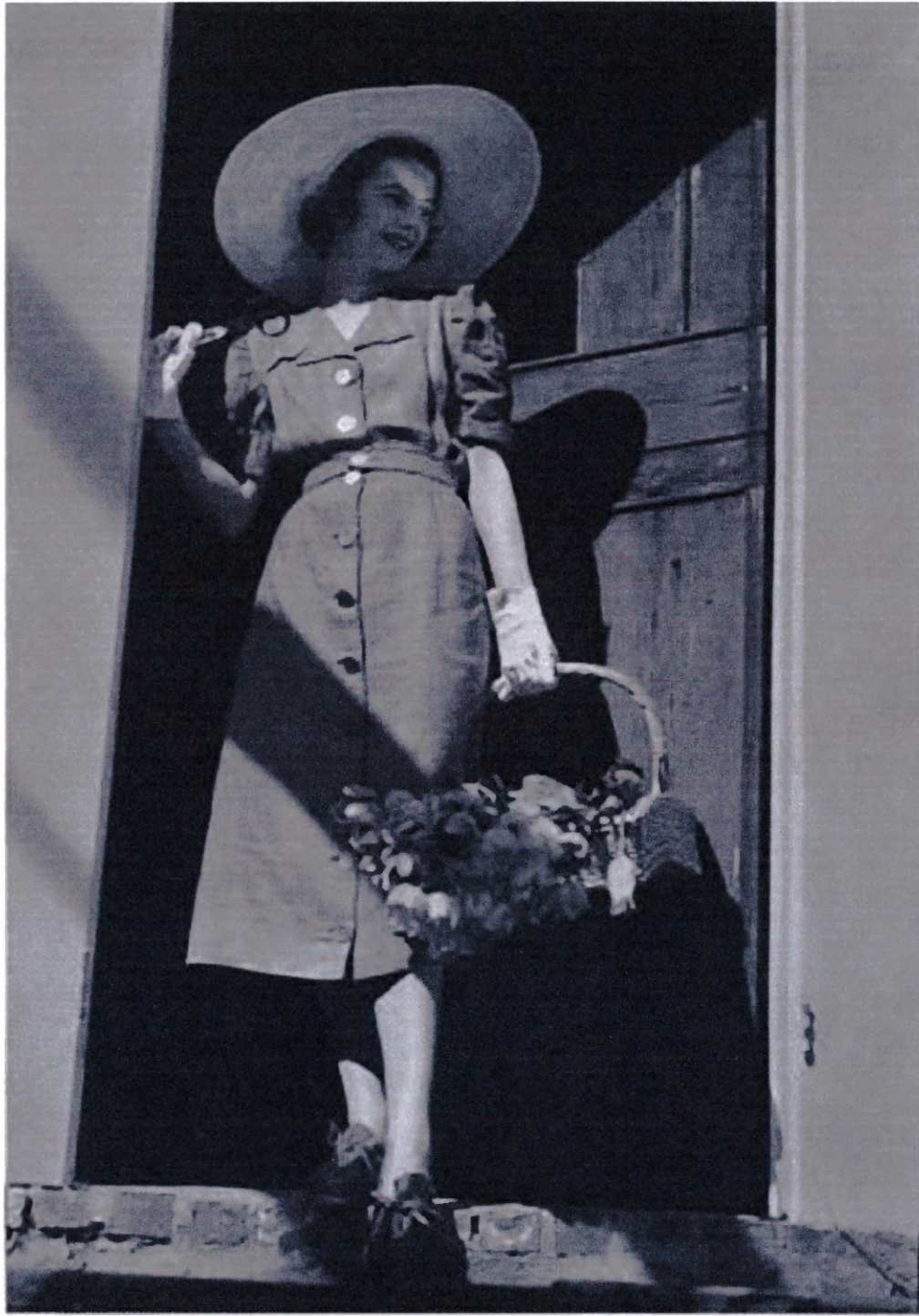
PAQUIN—SAKS FIFTH AVENUE • HÉLÈNE YRANDE • PUIFORCAT

Fig. 16. How to eat breakfast fashionably, like a Parisian. *Vogue*, February 15, 1931.

Midnight supper after the press opening of the brothers Worth.



Fig. 17. Buyers unite at a "Midnight supper after the press opening of the Brothers Worth." *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1933, photo by International.



STRAWBERRY RED PEARL CLOTH - A DRESS FROM LANE TO BRIDING - PHOTOS BY LONZ AND BAYLOR

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Fig. 18. This black and white dress is described as “Strawberry red.” *Vogue*, May 1, 1935.



The new asymmetric décolletage makes its appearance in the dress shown above, Jane Régny's "Florence", in banana yellow crêpe romaine. A rever that ends in a scarf covers the right shoulder, while a shoulder strap appears on one side only. With most of the interest in evening gowns centering around the top of the dress, the asymmetric décolletage is one of the newest types.

Fig. 19. This Jane Régny design is described as being made in "banana yellow crêpe romaine." *Vogue*, Feb 1, 1932.



Fig. 20. "Pineapple: Slicing Through Summer Fashion," *Vogue*, April 15, 1955.



Fig. 21. *Vogue* editor-at-large, Anna Dello Russo, in a Piers Atkinson cherry hat.



Fig. 22. Jeremy Scott, 'Pizza' dress, Fall 2006.

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