

**Immovable force: The survival of Parisian *Haute Couture*, 1940-1944**

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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**ABSTRACT**

French *haute couture* is an industry that has withstood the test of time. From its inception in 1858 at Charles Worth's innovative and groundbreaking shop, *haute couture* has become the most highly respected and revered segment of the fashion industry for its intimate understanding of design and craftsmanship. *Couture* is characterized by exquisite fabrics and intricate hand sewing techniques used in unique and original made-to-order designs for private clientele.

*Couture*, along with the vibrant spirit generated by the chic women in France, was almost extinguished as the Nazis infiltrated Paris in the summer of 1940. Throughout the occupation, Nazi officials continually attempted to collapse French industries or infiltrate them in a way that benefited their war effort.

In a time where art and culture were overrun by occupying forces across Europe, it is essential to understand those things that were able to withstand the oppression. In discussing German foreign policies, art and cultural ideals, and strategic economic and political maneuvers in conjunction with the view of Parisian *haute couture* concerning national identity and culture, I aim to present a compelling argument for *couture*'s strength and longevity as well as its role as both a cultural and economic powerhouse. The distinct tradition of Paris' role as the capital of fashion, the skilled workforce built and engrained into French industry as a result of this tradition, and Nazi conceptions of French civilization formulated from German ideas of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* worked in harmony to empower Parisian *couture* to survive the oppression of the Nazi occupying forces. By placing fashion, ideologically led by the *couture* industry, as a central component of French cultural identity, I introduce new analysis of often-cited materials.

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

French *haute couture* is an industry that has withstood the test of time. From its inception in 1858 at Charles Worth's innovative and groundbreaking shop, *haute couture* has become the most highly respected and revered segment of the fashion industry for its intimate understanding of design and craftsmanship. *Couture* is characterized by exquisite fabrics and intricate hand sewing techniques used in unique and original made-to-order designs for private clientele. The *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, established in 1868,<sup>1</sup> is the world's authority on *haute couture*. The *Fédération* sets strict guidelines for designers, allowing only a select few to join the approved *couturiers* each year at an annual review. The *Fédération* encourages “the development of innovation in design and technique, the maintenance of a high standard of hand-sewing skills and finishes, and the personalized fitting of garments.”<sup>2</sup> Following World War II, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* implemented more rigorous standards to coincide with the aforementioned annual review. *Couturiers* had to create original designs on their own premises in which they employed at least twenty staff members. Each *couture* house must create at least seventy-five designs annually, shown in two seasonal shows (Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter) on at least three mannequins (or models) employed by the house. The semi-annual shows took place in the *couture* house salons.<sup>3</sup> These standards, as well as the annual review, remain in place. Today's recognized *haute couturiers* consist of sixteen designers, three of which, Chanel, Dior, and Schiaparelli, contributed to the solidification of Paris' stature as the

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<sup>1</sup>The *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* was absorbed into the *Fédération Française de la Couture due Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et Des Créatures de Mode* in 1973. In 2017 it was renamed the *Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode*. Lesley Ellis Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, (London: V&A Publishing, 2007), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 16-17.

fashion capital of the world, through its most trying times, during the Nazi occupation of World War II.<sup>4</sup> At its outset, while the genuinely unique one-of-a-kind suits, day dresses, and gowns were indeed expensive, the founders of *couture* intended for the idea of style, exemplified in well-made garments, to permeate through all classes and types of women. Today, *couture* gowns and designer clothing are the most expensive items one can buy. In their publication for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Haute Couture*, Richard Martin and Harold Koda describe today's *haute couture* industry as “an aesthetic essay in which cherished and extraordinary skills continue to be practiced in service of a late modern age. It remains a discipline of ultimate imagination, unaccountable to cost, with the paradox of being the fashion most cognizant of its ideal clients. It is, as it began, a dream of quality in an era of industry and its succession.”<sup>5</sup> The simplistic beauty in the detailed craftsmanship and quality presented in *couture* garments presents women with the opportunity to represent their ideal selves. It is this aim for perfection in style that characterizes French cultural identity related to dress, rooted in the ideals and traditions of *couture*.

Fashion historians Michael and Ariane Batterberry state in their book *Mirror Mirror*, “Dress, our most enthralling gesture of self-elation, is also a means of self identification, and as if by divine law we identify ourselves as members of our society by assuming its ‘costume’.”<sup>6</sup> Geraldine Howell further defines dress in her text, *Wartime Fashion: From Haute Couture to Homemade, 1939-1945*, as “all the clothing worn at a particular time...[it] includes those garments worn both out of necessity, often as a consequence of limited income, and/or

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<sup>4</sup> Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, “Haute Couture,” <https://fhcm.paris/en/haute-couture-2/>.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Martin and Harold Koda, ed., *Haute Couture*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *Mirror Mirror: A Social History of Fashion*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1977), 10.

practicality.”<sup>7</sup> Since the inception of *couture*, dressmakers, especially the French *couturiers*, had the authority to establish appropriate dress for the period. Paul Poiret, known as “The King of Fashion,”<sup>8</sup> worked for the original *couture* house, the House of Worth and opened his own *couture* house in 1903. Poiret says of fashion in 1914,

This art has little in common with money. The woman whose resources are limited has no more cause for being dowdily dressed than the woman who is rich has reason to believe she is beautifully gowned...the rich woman can satisfy her least caprice in a most haphazard fashion, the woman of average means, simply because she is actually forced to think about her wardrobe, is more apt to realize what is suitable to her and what is not. She learns how to choose and what to select. She learns the art of dressing well.<sup>9</sup>

*Couture*, Poiret argued, was an ideal that all women should strive to achieve even if they could not afford the designer garments. To him, women should pay attention to trends and emulate them as best as possible with her resources to achieve the proper aura and elegance of a French woman. To do so showed knowledge of the culture and pride in oneself as “living examples of decorum.”<sup>10</sup>

As industry became more mechanized, the artistry of *couture* stood out even more. The expertise and craft of skilled trades were illuminated in the handcrafted garments further. Along with the industry’s rapid modernization came what Elizabeth Hawes, an American dressmaker, referred to as “a parasite on style.”<sup>11</sup> She is referring to fashion, differentiated from style in that “style is that thing, which being looked back upon after a century, gives you the fundamental feeling of a certain period in history...Style doesn’t change every month or every year. It only changes as often as there is a real change in the point of view and lives of the people for whom it

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<sup>7</sup> Geraldine Howell, *Wartime Fashion: From Haute Couture to Homemade, 1939-1945*, (New York: Berg, 2012), xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Poiret, *King of Fashion: The Autobiography of Paul Poiret*, trans. Stephen Haden Guest, (Paris: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1931; London: V&A Publishing, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Poiret, “Paul Poiret on Dress,” in Florence Hull Winterburn, *Principles of Correct Dress*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1914), 238.

<sup>10</sup> Poiret, “on Dress,” Winterburn, *Principles of Correct Dress*, 245.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, (New York: Random House, 1938), 6.

is produced”<sup>12</sup> while fashion “persuades millions of women that comfort and good lines are not all they should ask in clothes. Fashion swings the female population this way and that through the magic expression ‘they’ are wearing such and such this season and you must do likewise or be ostracized.”<sup>13</sup> Fashion dictates the fast-moving trends of each season exemplified in ready-to-wear, the United States’ dominating industry from the 1930s to today. Today’s scholars have similar definitions of “fashion” as Elizabeth Hawes did. Susan B. Kaiser says fashion is “a social process in which style narratives are collectively ‘in flux with time’” and is a “negotiation and navigation through the murky yet-hopeful waters of what is to come.”<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Geraldine Howell defines fashion as “popular clothing of often limited in longevity, created by a range of both predictable and less predictable cultural forces.”<sup>15</sup> It is the type of clothing that is bought with expendable income and worn out of choice rather than necessity.<sup>16</sup> The Batterberrys state, “to be fashionable is to ‘keep up’, to dare to move ahead adventurously, but in good company.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, Martin and Koda say it is “the modern entity composed of novelty and synergy with personal and social needs.”<sup>18</sup> To all of these scholars, fashion is a fast-moving, ever-changing organism that does not fully encapsulate the premise of *couture*.

Above both fashion and style, according to Elizabeth Hawes, is *chic*. To be *chic* is a balancing act that results when a woman has “positive style, a positive way of living and acting

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<sup>12</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Kaiser further differentiates fashion by defining style and dress. Style is one’s agency in the “construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may or may not be in fashion at the time of use.” Dress is simply any form of body modification or body supplement.; Susan B. Kaiser, “Fashion and Culture: Cultural Studies, Fashion Studies,” in *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); 1, 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Batterberry, *Mirror Mirror*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Martin and Koda, ed., *Haute Couture*, 11.

and looking which is her own.”<sup>19</sup> The term *chic*, a fresh and vibrant term used to describe stylish elegance throughout the first half of the twentieth century, has origins dating back to the 1600s. It is unclear whether *chic* is French in origin, stemming from the word “chicanery,” meaning, “legal quibbling, and sophistry,” or from the German word for “skill or tact,” “shick,”<sup>20</sup> however, for fashion, the latter is more likely. A variation of the word, “chicard,” ironically, was used in the mid-1800s to describe someone who was “stylish and anything but bourgeois.”<sup>21</sup> The term, however, took on a bourgeois tone as it became more and more closely associated with *couture*. As posited by Hawes, the concept of *chic* is the “natural result of French dressmaking and the leisurely life”<sup>22</sup> and the foundation of what she refers to as the “French legend.”<sup>23</sup> This legend is the feeling of pride and importance surrounding *couture* upheld by the craftspeople, time, and money placed into the industry.<sup>24</sup>

*Couture*, along with the vibrant spirit generated by the *chic* women in France, was almost extinguished as the Nazis infiltrated Paris in the summer of 1940. Throughout the occupation, Nazi officials continually attempted to collapse French industries or infiltrate them in a way that benefited their war effort. Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, was drawn to art, history, and culture, as were many other Nazi officials. This reverence for art meant the Nazis trod lightly in Paris. Because of this, the craftsmanship and skill of the *couturiers* were cultivated in a way that allowed the industry to continue to flourish during the occupation, though not without its struggles, making it unique to the remainder of the artistic movements in occupied nations. Jost Hermand points out in his book, *Culture in Dark Times: Nazi Fascism, Inner Emigration, and*

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<sup>19</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Kristen Bateman, “The History of the Word ‘Chic’: Tracing the timeline of fashion’s most over-used and abused adjective,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, February 24, 2015; 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Bateman, “The History of the Word ‘Chic,’” 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 22.

*Exile*, that “we have long since gotten used to the fact that the various forms of so-called high culture have become marginalized in that they continue to exist but no longer have any instrumental function a nation’s collective consciousness. The meaning of culture today, therefore, includes neither esteem for older masterpieces nor an attempt to come to terms with select remainders of what was once viewed as avant-garde, elite art.”<sup>25</sup> The cultural shift toward mass media, consumerism, and marketability Hermand alludes to is precisely what the National Socialists aimed to avoid in their prescribed goal of cultural superiority.

Historians of Nazi Germany often analyze the party’s economic and industrial goals or write about the party’s interest in arts. Jost Hermand’s *Culture in Dark Times* provides a thorough analysis of National Socialist’s cultural-political preconditions and objectives and the effects these notions had on literature, painting and sculpture, music, film, and theater. Laurence Dorléac’s *Art of Defeat: France 1940-1944* and *And the Show Went On* by Alan Riding are two other cultural investigations solely focused on the arts. *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation 1940-1944* by Allan Mitchell, *Paris in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation, 1940-1944* by David Pryce-Jones, and *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich* edited by Robert Gellately all offer compelling investigations of the German occupation in Paris, however, any focus on textiles and clothing, beyond the mention of ration coupons and shortages of raw materials, is often ignored. The focus of these texts is on politics, agriculture, war machines, and fine art. While some fashion historians write about the forties, it is often in the context of specific designers or trends.

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<sup>25</sup> Jost Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times: Nazi Fascism, Inner Emigration, and Exile*, trans. Victoria W. Hill, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), xi.

The most complete and comprehensive review of French *couture* during the Nazi occupation is Dominique Veillon's *Fashion Under the Occupation*.<sup>26</sup> Veillon describes the cunning maneuvering of Lucien Lelong on behalf of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* and all *couturiers* in France. She also does an excellent job describing the changing fashions and how they represent French people's resistance, however, she underplays the actual value of *couture* to the French national identity and economy. Not only did Parisians believe they were superior in terms of *couture*, but American women and German women alike also desired to emulate the grace and elegance French *couture* conveyed. Women across the globe acknowledged the importance of *couture*, as did Hitler and the Nazi party. They also recognized its economic benefits and cultural relevance. I. Maselli recognizes the lack of scholarship on the subject of French *couture* in the forties and the importance of Veillon's work:

For many years, the development of French fashion under the occupation was considered a taboo subject. In publications on the history of French fashion, the period 1940-1944 is often ignored, or described superficially, as if no collections had been presented, and fashion had not evolved. Most texts only refer to *couture*'s opposition to being moved to Germany. Until the Nineties, France had not come to terms with the defeat and the humiliation of collaborationism. Any reference to fashion during those years was considered offensive, unacceptable, a scandal. The first detailed study on the subject was published in the Nineties entitled '*La mode sous l'Occupation*' by Dominique Veillon: the author describes the extraordinary creativity and resistance of some *couturiers*, the great diplomatic ability of Lucien Lelong, as well as more critical matters such as rationing and collaborationism.<sup>27</sup>

Veillon's crucial examination of *couture* during a controversial time in history paved the way for other scholars to approach the subject. Irene Guenther's book, *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* is an exciting approach to dress in the period. Rather than focusing on Parisian *couture*, arguably the most critical industry related to textiles and clothing of the period, she investigates "attempts by the Nazi state to construct a female appearance that would serve in

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<sup>26</sup> Dominique Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, trans. Miriam Kochan, (Paris: Editions Payot, 1990; New York: Berg, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> I. Maselli, "Lucien Lelong and the *Théâtre de la Mode*: the Preservations of Haute Couture during Wartime," in *Almatourism: Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, no. 09, (2018), 136.

many ways. It would mirror official gender ideology, create feelings of national belonging, contribute to the nation's identity, promote a German cultural victory over France on the fashion runways of Europe, uphold and extend the governmental policies of economic autarky, anti-Semitism, and Aryanization and support plans for a Nazi-controlled European fashion industry."<sup>28</sup> The conclusion made in this study and further research on National Socialist cultural ideals and practices is vital to understanding the interactions between the occupiers and the defenders of *couture*.

In a time where art and culture were overrun by occupying forces across Europe, it is essential to understand those things that were able to withstand the oppression. In discussing German foreign policies, art and cultural ideals, and strategic economic and political maneuvers in conjunction with the view of Parisian *haute couture* concerning national identity and culture, I aim to present a compelling argument for *couture*'s strength and longevity as well as its role as both a cultural and economic powerhouse. The distinct tradition of Paris' role as the capital of fashion, the skilled workforce built and engrained into French industry as a result of this tradition, and Nazi conceptions of French civilization formulated from German ideas of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* worked in harmony to empower Parisian *couture* to survive the oppression of the Nazi occupying forces. By placing fashion, ideologically led by the *couture* industry, as a central component of French cultural identity, I introduce new analysis of often-cited materials.

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I begin by discussing the *couture* industry in the inter-war period (1920 to 1938) when France thrived in the aftermath of a detrimental but triumphant victory in the First World War.

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<sup>28</sup> Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, (New York: Berg, 2004), 13.

Even the effects of the Great Depression were delayed and not as severe in France as they were in other parts of the world, especially Germany. *Couturiers*, like Lucien Lelong and Marcel Rochas, were able to expand their businesses amid the Great Depression. Exploring the most influential designers of the period and their work, especially partnerships between designers and artists, such as Elsa Schiaparelli's creations made in conjunction with Salvador Dali, offers important insight into the artistic and handcrafted characteristics of the trade. In this section, the intricacies of the industry and how it differed from ready-to-wear markets and other fashion markets across the world gives the perspective needed to understand Paris as it moved into World War II.

Next, it is vital to analyze the Nazi Socialist Party's political, social, and cultural practices to create an image of German culture and compare it to Paris as a cultural center to be both revered and destroyed. A brief analysis of the chapter from Norbert Elias' "The Civilizing Process" on *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* provides historical insight into the formation of German national identity connected with other Western ideas of culture and civilization. The cultural politics and foreign policies of the Nazi regime explain how France was treated differently in relation to other Western European occupied countries.

While individual designers, such as highly credited couturier Lucien Lelong, did not defeat the Nazi's attempt to control the *couture* industry alone, it is important to analyze their contribution, or lack thereof, to the industry's resistance to the occupiers and their interactions with the public in terms of presentations of collections, statements, imagery created in the media and in the collections following the occupation. Chapter one, "The *Couturiers*," discusses designers, their movements, and business activities during the occupation and how their efforts added or detracted from *couture*'s continued success. While a privileged group, in terms of

finances, social status, and visibility, the group of *couturiers* evaluated in this study can offer key indications about the feelings of most participants in the industry. They serve as a voice for their customers, their employees, and for Paris.

Chapter two, “Challenging *Couture*,” further scrutinizes the repercussions of Nazi occupation on the economic, social, and cultural facets of the *couture* industry. *Couture*, as salvation of Paris, will shine through in this analysis as the small glimmer of hope that was left surmounted the isolation and limited materials intended deplete the industry and the spirit of France. The industry is so ingrained in Paris that the Germans realize it is an immovable force, steadfast in its place as the embodiment of part of the French culture. Additionally, I introduce discussions of French femininity and German masculinity as defining factors of culture, referencing Norbert Elias’ foundational text, “Sociogenesis of the Antithesis Between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in German Usage.”

In chapter 3, “Surviving Occupation,” the end of the war came and the *couture* industry and the *couturiers* that survived the occupation, struggled to remain afloat. Some designers’ final efforts, along with the world’s desire to quench their thirst for truly *chic* clothing, allowed Paris and *couture* to breathe again. Life was restored to the French people as their sacred industry remained, battered and bruised, but intact. All cultural superiority and economic significance was not lost.

While a seemingly dramatic heroic story in which good conquers evil, the survival of *couture* exemplifies the strength of national spirit and cultural identity mixed with industry leaders and crafts people’s artistic and economic drive leads to everlasting prominence. The cunning political maneuvering of Lucien Lelong and other *couturiers* in occupied Paris would have been in vain if the French institutions surrounding *couture* were not there, as well as the

international presence and prestige associated with it. Beyond good taste and style in clothing, *couture* is a pride in craftsmanship, national character, and tradition that results in an elegant, empowered, and *chic* woman.

### **Spirit of Couture during the Inter-War Period**

1858 marked the beginning of the modern fashion industry; designers, no longer dressmakers, emerged as recognized luxury brands. Nancy Troy discusses the origins of *couture* stating, “Haute couture was developed and promoted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by dress designers who regarded the commercial world with disdain. These men and women carefully constructed their personas as great artists or discerning patrons of the arts for whom the banal and potentially degrading aspects of business were beneath the elite status to which they aspired.”<sup>29</sup> The garments produced by this new breed of dressmaker were for a new clientele. Elizabeth Hawes describes the “only two kinds of women in the world of clothing.”<sup>30</sup> The first type of woman “buys her clothes made-to-order...[she] frequents Molyneux, Lanvin, Paquin, Chanel, in Paris...the made-to-order lady can shop and dress to her entire satisfaction...she pays, yes. But it’s worth it a thousand times. Her clothes are her own and correspond to her life as she understands it.”<sup>31</sup> The other woman buys her clothes ready-made. She is subject to the dictates of fashion.<sup>32</sup> It is the former woman, the woman who puts time and money into perfecting her wardrobe, towards which *couturiers* cater. The luxury associated with the industry allowed it to place itself above regular commercial activities.

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<sup>29</sup> Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion*, (New York: The MIT Press, 2003), 192.

<sup>30</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 4.

*Couturiers* such as Jacques Doucet, Jeanne Lanvin, and Paul Poiret followed Charles Worth's path, creating elegant designs and pushed the boundaries of style. As the new *couture* industry flourished, more and more designers made their mark. After World War I, France saw a boom in successful *couture* businesses that transformed the industry. Pre-war *couturiers* were notable for transforming the dressmaking industry into one of high fashion. During the inter-war period, *couturiers* redefined dress. As noted previously, true style indicates the aura of the period and only changes when there is real social change. During World War I, women experienced more freedoms in society and more opportunities to work. This societal shift led designers, specifically Paul Poiret and later Coco Chanel, to free the woman's body by removing the corset and other structured undergarments from women's daily attire. The *garçonne*<sup>33</sup> look became the ideal for women of the period.

Not only were *couturiers* on the up-and-up, but at the time, Paris was "the capital of civilization, the place where all the refinements of civilized life reach[ed] other's fullest expression..."<sup>34</sup> according to Valerie Steele's *Paris Fashion*. In this regard, the use of "civilization" refers to pride in the nation because of progress made for the West and humankind, a definition adopted by Norbert Elias in his comparison of Western ideals of civilization and culture.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, the differences in the French and German definitions of these two terms led to the success and survival of *couture*. The *couturiers* of inter-war France shifted the industry's dynamic in a way that gave it the strength to withstand trials and tribulations. The growth in the number of *couture* houses supported further integration of auxiliary industries, such as textiles, embroidery, and trimmings, into France's economic makeup.

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<sup>33</sup> The *garçonne* style consisted of a straight boxy silhouette with little accentuation of the figure.

<sup>34</sup> Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*, (New York: Berg, 1998), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Norbert Elias, "Sociogenesis of the Antithesis Between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in German Usage," in *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 6.

In between the World War I and World War II, women experienced changes in their social status and expectations of their duties. Not only did many countries give women the right to vote in some capacity during this period,<sup>36</sup> but more and more women left home. They entered the labor pool, especially in the wake of their obligatory role as the factory workforce during the Great War. In *couture*, women designers monopolized the industry. Jeanne Lanvin remained open during and after the war and Madeleine Vionnet, who had closed her *couture* house during the war, opened again in 1919.<sup>37</sup> Maggy Rouff, Madame Grès, Coco Chanel, and Elsa Schiaparelli all opened their *couture* houses in Paris during the inter-war period.<sup>38</sup> Aside from these prominent women, several male *couturiers* opened their fashion houses during this time as well. These include Marcel Rochas,<sup>39</sup> Mainbocher,<sup>40</sup> Robert Piguet,<sup>41</sup> Jaques Fath in 1937, who closed shortly thereafter to serve in the French army during World War II,<sup>42</sup> and Cristóbal Balenciaga, who emigrated from Spain to Paris seeking refuge from the Spanish Civil War in 1937.<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Hawes reflects on the origins of the new designers taking over Paris. She says, “All that is necessary to be a French designer is that one work in France...The French believe in

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<sup>36</sup> 1917 – Canada (limited to war widows, women serving overseas, and women family serving overseas; 1918 – Austria, Canada (expanded to include women over 21, those “not alien born” and those who met provincially determined property qualifications), Denmark, Germany, Hungary (limited to women over the age of 24 who were literate), Poland, United Kingdom and Ireland (limited to women over 30); 1919 – Belgium (municipal level), Czechoslovakia (local/municipal level), Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden; 1920 – Czechoslovakia (universal suffrage), United States; 1925 – Italy (local elections); 1928 – United Kingdom (qualifications made equal to that of men); 1931 – Portugal (restrictions regarding level of education), Spain; 1934 – Portugal (suffrage expanded); French women do not receive voting rights until 1945.; August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).; Bonnie G. Smith, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).; Jone Johnson Lewis, “International Woman Suffrage Timeline,” About.com, Retrieved 25 October 2020.; Ruiz Blanca Rodriguez and Ruth Rubio-Martin, *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens*, (Boston: Brill, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Caroline Reynolds Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, Inc., 1985): 48-59, 160-165.

<sup>38</sup> Maggy Rouff opened in 1928. Madame Grès opened in 1934. Coco Chanel opened in 1910. Elsa Schiaparelli opened in 1928.; Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*: 212-215, 150-155, 120-137, 196-203.

<sup>39</sup> Marcel Rochas opened in 1920.; Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 222-2267.

<sup>40</sup> Mainbocher opened in 1929.; Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 166-173.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Piguet opened in 1933.; “Collections: Musée suisse de la Mode,” Musée suisse de la Mode, Switzerland.

<sup>42</sup> Jérôme Savignon, *Jacques Fath*, (New York: Associate Publishing, 2008), 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 22.

their souls that all dress designers are French, and work in Paris... So, among the French designers one finds Molyneux, who is French to the French, British to you. There is Schiaparelli, a great French designer, born Italian. There is Main Bocher, born in the U.S.A and there are, of course, designers born and bred in France.”<sup>44</sup> The pull of French *chic* drew designers, some of today’s most legendary icons, to Paris. While each offered a new view on fashion and aided in the industry’s success, Elsa Schiaparelli, Marcel Rochas and Coco Chanel, in particular, created a new facet to what it meant to be a couturier, crystalizing image of *couture* in Parisian culture during the 1920s and 1930s.

Elsa Schiaparelli was an Italian woman who married Count William de Wendt de Kerlor of Switzerland. The couple moved to New York to start a family. A strained marriage led Schiaparelli to move her and her daughter to Paris in 1922. After success with her black and white bow sweater, Schiaparelli opened a *couture* house in which she offered French women clothing that was adventurous, daring, and interesting. She worked closely with artists, especially the Surrealist Salvador Dali, to create unique prints, artwork for advertisements, accessories, and window displays. Her work with Surrealism and artists introduced a new role for *couture*. Clothing became a forum in which artists and designers partnered together to showcase the trends in the arts and fashion. Schiaparelli’s unique artistic quality introduced into the world of *couture* elevated the industry further into the realm of high art and further away from commercial business and ready-to-wear.<sup>45</sup> Her wild presentations of fashion pushed the limits and boundaries of what was considered acceptable for women to wear. Her garments were often

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<sup>44</sup> Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 15-16.

<sup>45</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers.*; Marylaura Papalas, “Fashion in interwar France: The urban vision of Elsa Schiaparelli,” in *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 2, (2017), 159-172.; Jennifer Sweeney-Risko, “Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics,” in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Penn State University Press, 2015), 309-329.

too playful or too avant-garde for the traditional French woman to wear, but younger, more adventurous clients wore her creations proudly. Her collections attempted to give women a voice in a time in which they were being displaced from their new role of power and responsibility they held as being both provider and caretaker as drafted men returned home from service. The draft included all men, so women of all classes stepped into the role of provider, previously occupied by men; whether it was managing a business and family finances or participating in manual labor in the factories, women across classes shared the experience of displacement as soldiers returned home and assimilated back into the civilian labor pool. Schiaparelli gave women a voice that could not be ignored.

Marcel Rochas, a Frenchman, opened his *couture* house in 1925 shortly after designing his first wife's wedding gown. At the age of twenty-three, he became the youngest celebrity couturier. Like Schiaparelli, Marcel Rochas had a fondness for art and utilized it often in his work. He used colorful prints and palettes inspired by his favorite painters of the period. He used art as an inspiration to create optical effects and was the first to work directly with fabric manufacturers to ensure his artistic vision came to life. His youth, his bourgeois status, and his charming character allowed him to participate in the upper echelons of society. His reputation grew and he gained celebrity status as a couturier.<sup>46</sup> Coco Chanel rivaled his status as she climbed the societal ladder.

Coco Chanel, born in Paris in 1883, was orphaned at a young age and grew up with nuns at the Catholic monastery of Aubzaine. After some time as a singer, Chanel received funding from her lover, Etienne Balsan, to open a hat shop. From there, with funding from another lover, 'Boy' Capel, she was able to expand her business into a thriving *couture* house, producing some

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<sup>46</sup> Sophie Rochas, *Marcel Rochas: Designing French Glamour*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2015).

of the most innovative and classical designs we still recall today. Her brand also pushed boundaries of what was considered acceptable for women to wear, but differently than Schiaparelli. Chanel, often considered more refined, strove to provide her clients with comfortable, easy, practical clothing, often borrowing ideas from menswear. Pushing the boundaries of style in this way was another comment on women's shifting roles in society to encompass more masculine duties. Chanel created simple yet ingenious pieces for womenswear, such as the little black dress, that have become staples in most women's wardrobes. Chanel also introduced the two and three piece suits for women in her signature tweeds as well as the boxy cardigan jacket. She narrowed the hems on her garments, solidifying the voice of the designer in how their garments were to be worn, as clients no longer had the fabric allowance built into the garment to adjust the length to their liking. More than this, however, Chanel was able to shift the image of the couturier. Along with Marcel Rochas, Chanel was one of the first and best celebrity designers.<sup>47</sup>

Up until Charles Worth departed from tradition, dress making was like any other artisanal craft. Often dressmakers were local, and their neighbors were their clients. Worth changed the dynamic of this exchange by creating and designing specific gowns that would be sold as they were designed, rather than tailor-making dresses for clients. Though Worth changed the dressmaking profession's functionality and image, it was still considered a job for those of lower social standing. Coco Chanel and other *couturiers* of the inter-war period, though none better than her, created public personas that allowed them to become part of high society. As Chanel worked her way through the fashion industry, from milliner to couturier, she also climbed the social ladder because of the connections she made along the way. These relationships, with

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<sup>47</sup> Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, ed., *Chanel*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005).; Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 120-137.

Balsan, Capel, and especially the Duke of Westminster and Edward VIII, Prince of Wales, allowed her to remain in the public's eye. Through her personal style and attitude, she began selling a lifestyle rather than simply clothes. Women across the world wanted to capture her cool, confident, and effortless energy through their clothes and actions. Fashion historian Bonnie English notes, "more importantly, because bourgeois culture was on display, it allowed for greater divergence of thought regarding what constituted popular culture and how social process structured lifestyles a determined 'taste' in consumer goods."<sup>48</sup> Chanel was the embodiment of her brand and other *couturiers* looked to her as they sought to expand their business. Soon designers launched perfume lines, makeup products, accessories, and hats matching their garments to create an entire wardrobe for clients to indulge in.<sup>49</sup> The display of style and society through the celebrity status of *couturiers* magnified the national identity the French associated with *couture*. As Elizabeth Hawes noted, being born in France did not define a French couturier, rather, the act of establishing oneself in the capital city and promoting French culture through clothing made one French. As *couturiers* gained celebrity status, they embodied and showcased the ideals of what it meant to be French.

Well-to-do women flocked from all over the world to Paris to experience *couture* for themselves. Twice a year, *couturiers* held fashion shows in their salons, showing the latest designs, after which, clients placed orders and returned for fittings at later dates. Along with loyal clients, editors for fashion magazines from across the globe attended these shows to quickly and diligently relay the newest hottest fashions. *Vogue* noted that those who attend openings "like to be the first ones to see something new" and experience the collections that are

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<sup>48</sup> Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: From Catwalk to Sidewalk*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 17.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, ed., *Chanel*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005).

“something that a couturier designs, mannequins show, fashion magazines report, and buyers buy...which eventually reaches you...It sounds like a simple supply-and-demand story, but it actually has a superb theatrical confusion about it that gives it excitement.”<sup>50</sup> Not only did women want to see the clothes, but they also wanted to see the *couturiers* themselves. The ‘celebrity factor’ that Rochas and Chanel possessed drew in more customers to both their houses and their fellow *couturiers*. *Vogue* took a moment to highlight how each couturier interacted with their customers and their collections during the presentation of models of the Spring openings of 1938,

Chanel...stands on her mirrored stairs and peers intently through her glasses at the models as they appear on the gold stage—as if she were seeing them for the first time...Schiaparelli stays behind the scenes, looking at every mannequin over before she goes out...Lelong always sits on an uncomfortable high stool in the doorway, buzzing a button to give the next mannequin her entrance cue so that the collection never lags or goes too fast...Vionnet sits very straight on a backless chair in her small salon, adjusting the girls’ dresses as they enter...Alix [also Madame Grès] stays in the dressing room, and finishes her most beautiful last-minute dresses on the mannequins...Molyneux modestly sits in a corner of his first salon, with friends, and shows remarkable agility in escaping after the collection...Madame Lanvin receives her guests at cocktail time...Maggy Rouff gives a late party with every one in full evening dress, and orchestra in the distance, and bowers of flowers.<sup>51</sup>

To experience a collection and the couturier’s work was “pleasurable excitement”<sup>52</sup> that buyers and clients looked forward to each season.

Following each opening season, *Vogue* summarized what American buyers brought back to the United States for clients of department stores and for manufacturers to produce ready-to-wear versions. Ready-to-wear garments are mass produced using industrial machinery. These garments can range in quality depending on fabric choice and construction method. Customers of ready-to-wear garments are limited to the edicts of fashion and may or may not find what they

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<sup>50</sup> “Paris Collections: Inside Out/More Black...More White in the Paris Collections,” *Vogue*, March 15, 1938, 84.

<sup>51</sup> “Paris Collections,” *Vogue*, March 15, 1938: 84, 163.

<sup>52</sup> “Paris Collections,” *Vogue*, March 15, 1938, 163.

truly want or need in their wardrobe. After the Spring 1938 collections, editors highlighted items from every major designer including skirts and dresses from Chanel, Molyneux, and Vionnet, white gowns from Alix,<sup>53</sup> black dinner suits from Schiaparelli, and Lelong's new grass-green wool coat.<sup>54</sup> While several wealthy Americans, such as Greta Garbo, participated in the *couture* industry as loyal customers, more often than not, the American market for French *couture* dealt with copies (legal or otherwise) and adaptations sold in high end tailor shops and department stores, as well as lower cost retailers. As tensions throughout Europe rose and the fate of the world was unknown, the future of *couture* hung by a thread.

Four weeks after the Munich Pact was signed, Parisian *couture* houses held their mid-season openings as usual. *Vogue* reported, "They are triumphant evidence of the Gallic spirit, that can be charming in the shadow of disaster and practical in the most dramatic moments."<sup>55</sup> Time and again, the *couture* industry fought to remain a vital industry for the French economy and, more importantly, a cultural backbone for the French to adhere to. In 1939, after the official declaration of war by both England and France, *Vogue* advertised that French women remained elegant in their new wartime economy. Sections such as "Vogue's Eye on War-Time Fashion 1939-1914" encapsulated the similarities in the wartime periods while reminiscing, somewhat fondly, on the dramatic and interesting changes in fashion that came out of the Great War and were hopeful that the same could happen in 1939. The articles "London Life—Under Arms" and "Paris Life—Under Arms" showed American readers that these other world powers were functioning almost normally. By highlighting the changes in fashion and women's lives, the editors acknowledged the shifting society. However, they identified the women's courage and

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<sup>53</sup> Alix and Madame Grès are the same woman. She began to go by Madame Grès when she opened a *couture* house on her own. The name Alix was still associated with her former *couture* house in which she was no longer a partner.

<sup>54</sup> "Bringing Home French Prizes," *Vogue*, April 1, 1938, 69.

<sup>55</sup> "Paris Mid-Season Openings," *Vogue*, December 1, 1938, 83.

duty to their country, encouraging American readers that life will move on, fashion is still prevalent, and trends are changing.<sup>56</sup>

The most important update in wartime fashion news as French and British troops awaited a German attack was the answer to, ‘What happened to the *couture* houses?’

At the outbreak of hostilities, many couturiers closed their door temporarily. Heads of houses reported for military duty, assistants and tailors were enlisting, little sewing-girls were evacuating Paris with their families. But after the first upheaval, *couture* doors are opened again...For no one underestimates the importance of keeping women workers employed and France’s exportation going...*couture* hopes to start producing on a new scale to meet war demands. The industry of France must not suffer too greatly; the morale of the French employees must be preserved, and a living wage assured...The morale is so strong, so determined that even insurmountable difficulties will probably not quench the creative French spirit.<sup>57</sup>

*Vogue*’s November 15<sup>th</sup> issue of 1939 confirmed the strength of the “creative French spirit”<sup>58</sup> by printing the latest war time fashions and in the December 1<sup>st</sup> issue of 1939, the mid-season collections were printed, reported on, and purchased for American shops as usual. The mid-season collections in *Vogue* “Determined that French fashion shall go on, the couturieres have made a magnificent, valiant effort.”<sup>59</sup> The *couture* industry did not miss a beat and even rallied behind the war effort to make uniforms and accessories to accommodate the army and the French people’s new lifestyle, such as gas mask bags.

As the Nazis marched on Paris, however, the consequence of occupation was unclear and frightful. Women’s Wear Daily published a letter from Lucien Lelong on July 16, 1940. It stated,

Couture Plans Indefinite, Lucien Lelong Wireless: The following wireless was received this afternoon by Women’s Wear Daily from Lucien Lelong, president of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, direct from Biarritz, in reply to cabled inquiry sent Monsieur Lelong a few days ago: “Everything was organized to make a winter collection at Biarritz with normal openings and deliveries, but under present circumstances it is impossible to actually make any definite plans. Captain Molyneux has gone to England, Schiaparelli is en route to New York, Balenciaga has left for Spain and Robert Piguet and Marcel Dormoy are trying to return to Paris but it is unknown if

<sup>56</sup> “Vogue’s Eye on War,” *Vogue*, October 15, 1938.; “London Life—Under Arms,” *Vogue*, October 15, 1939.; “Paris Life—Under Arms,” *Vogue*, October 15, 1939.

<sup>57</sup> “Paris Life—Under Arms,” *Vogue*, October 1, 1938, 111.

<sup>58</sup> “Passed by French Censor,” *Vogue*, November 15, 1939, 58.

<sup>59</sup> “The Mid-Season Collections,” *Vogue*, December 1, 1939, 87.

they have succeeded. Madame Lanvin, Paquin, Heim, Patou and I are at Biarritz while Madame Alix is near Biarritz. There is no news from the others. We want to go back to Paris as soon as possible and then be able to make our plans according to conditions as we find them there. We are and will remain full of courage.<sup>60</sup>

The arrival of the Nazi occupiers caused a vast majority of Parisians to flee. The Nazis took over the city and life as the French knew it quickly changed.

### **Nazi Occupation: Cultural Policies**

As a result of the French victory in World War I, harsh reparations were demanded from the Germans. Some historians speculate that the level of compensation was so high, not only to cover the cost of the most recent war, but as revenge for the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. The conditions of the Treaty of Versailles included Alsace-Lorraine returned to French control, slashing of the German military, and enormous financial requirements paid to the French. Additionally, the French occupied the east bank of the Rhine river where large deposits of coal and iron could be found, resources imperative to the German industrial economy.<sup>61</sup>

When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, it was well-known that his platform was based on ignoring the Treaty of Versailles. Matthew Stibbes' chapter in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich* noted that "in terms of German domestic politics, National Socialism has often been characterized as a movement of militarist extremism, racist refusal to recognize Jews and other ethnic minorities as fellow citizens, uncompromising hostility toward the Weimar 'system', and violent rejection of the Versailles peace settlement."<sup>62</sup> Germany began

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<sup>60</sup> "Couture Plans Indefinite, Lucien Lelong Wireless," *Women's Wear Daily*, July 16, 1940 in Pamela Golbin, ed., *Balenciaga Paris*, (Paris: Les Arts décoratifs, 2006), 44.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon Wright, "The Quest for Normalcy, 1919-1931," "The Era of French Hegemony, 1919-1933," "Economy and Society in the Postwar Decade, 1919-1931," "Depression Politics, 1931-1936," *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 321-362.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew Stibbe, "The Weimar Republic and the Rise of National Socialism," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, ed. Robert Gellately, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 19-20.

to rearm and re-militarized the Rhineland in 1936. The French and British did not respond harshly because the harmful effects of the treaty were clear. Furthermore, the French were not bothered by the show of aggression from Germany because they believed their strategy of surrounding Germany with allies pinned the nation and contained Hitler. The Four Power Agreement (1938), however, began to divide the alliance, giving Germany the Sudetenland, an industrialized chunk of Czechoslovakia. The goal of appeasement by the French and British was to avoid another war. The economic devastation and magnitude of loss of life<sup>63</sup> resulting from World War I was still fresh in many people's minds and affected daily life.<sup>64</sup>

While the policy of appeasement in the Four Power agreement gave part of Czechoslovakia to Germany, Russia backed out of an alliance with France in favor of Germany. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), a non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia, effectively removed Russia from the side of the French. The only ally remaining was Poland, a small country that was not militarily strong. Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 sparked the beginning of World War II, bringing France to the forefront of fighting yet again.<sup>65</sup>

As Hitler and the Nazis advanced across Europe, their goal was to achieve cultural hegemony under Arian German authority, which they imagined as "Aryan". Domestically, the Nazi Party succeeded in channeling the contradictory emotions and cultural anxieties stirred up during World War I and shaped these fears of German inferiority into a new radical nationalistic version for Germany and Europe.<sup>66</sup> Detlev Peukert succinctly identified the rise of National

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<sup>63</sup> 1.4 million Frenchmen died which equated to 3.5% of the population and included 10% of working age men. Additionally, one million men were badly maimed, effectively removing them from the workforce as well.; Alan Riding, *And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, "Crisis and Collapse, 1936-1940," *France in Modern Times*, 363-382.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, "Crisis and Collapse," *France in Modern Times*, 363-382

<sup>66</sup> Stibbe, "The Weimar Republic" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, ed. Gellately, 20.

Socialism in Germany in his book, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*. He said,

German national socialism emerged...when the conjunction of hectic processes of social modernization, profound economic upheaval and the disintegration of the political system led to a complex sense of crisis, particularly among the disorientated new and old middle classes, the unemployed, the declassés, and a younger generation deprived of secure prospects for the future. The response...took on utopian reactionary features as well as ideas from the prevailing cultural pessimism and from schemes for reform based on social biology.<sup>67</sup>

For many Germans, the fascism proposed by the Nazis offered a way out of extreme economic hardship and the possibility for a better future.<sup>68</sup> The future for those who opposed German authority was grim. A confidential report from the World Jewish Congress dated October 14, 1938 says, “At present and for the near future, France can scarcely be regarded as a great power anymore and will do whatever England wants. The sole hope for a change in English policy, a coalition between England, Russia, and France with the moral support of the united states of America, for only a bloc of this kind can still successfully resist the aggression of the countries ruled by dictatorship.”<sup>69</sup> As Germany achieved military successes, one after another, Nazi progress toward a dominant German culture was underway.

Frederic V. Grunfeld says in *The Hitler File: A Social History of Germany and the Nazis 1918-45*, that “the Nazi movement was nothing if not an utterly serious and determined attempt to create a new culture for Germany, a culture specifically designed to help the nation become the dominant power in Europe.”<sup>70</sup> Also, an in-depth analysis of German activities during the Third Reich, presented in *Germany and World War II Volume V/I*, suggests that “the objective of

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<sup>67</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson, (Cologne: Bund-Verlag GmbH, 1982; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 245.

<sup>68</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> World Jewish Congress, “Confidential Report by the World Jewish Congress,” (October 14, 1938), Susanne Heim, ed., *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933-1945*, Vol. 2, *German Reich 1938-August 1939*, (Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019), 313-314.

<sup>70</sup> Frederic V. Grunfeld, *The Hitler File: A Social History of Germany and the Nazis 1918-45*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 249.

German propaganda was the cultural suppression and domination of the occupied nations and the establishment of a position which would ensure German influence beyond the duration of the war. In addition to military and economic hegemony in their sphere of power, the Germans also aspired to the establishment of permanent cultural hegemony.”<sup>71</sup> Hitler’s belief in the Aryan race as the bearers of culture fueled his ideology regarding culture and the arts. He divided the human race into three types of people, disregarding the origins and diversity of people and simplifying the groups to: *Kulturbegründer*, *Kulturträger*, and *Kulturzerstörer* (creators of culture, bearers of culture, and destroyers of culture).<sup>72</sup> The root of these terms, *Kultur*, as dictated by Norbert Elias, “refers essentially to intellectual, artistic and religious facts, and...refers to human products which are there like ‘flowers of the field’, to works of art, books, religious or philosophical systems, in which the individuality of a people express itself...the German concept of *Kultur* places special stress on national differences and the particular identity of groups.”<sup>73</sup> These foundational ideas for the National Socialist movement formed among 17<sup>th</sup> century middle-class intellectuals who struggled against the courtly upper class of German nobles. Elias concludes by stating that “the German antithesis between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* did not stand alone; it was part of a larger context. It was an expression of the German self-image. And it pointed back to differences of self-legitimization, of character and overall behavior, that first existed preponderantly, even if not exclusively, between particular German classes, and then between the German nation and other nations.”<sup>74</sup> The shift in placing *kultur* between Germans and

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<sup>71</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part 1, *Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power: Wartime Administration, Economy and Manpower Resources 1939-1941*, Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel, ed., trans. Dean S. McMurry, Ewald Osers, Louise Willmot, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 349.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Zentner, “Hitler’s Worldview,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, Christian Zentner and Friedmann Bedürftig, ed., trans. Amy Hackett, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 427.

<sup>73</sup> Elias, “*Kultur* and *Zivilisation*,” 6-7.

<sup>74</sup> Elias, “*Kultur* and *Zivilisation*,” 30.

themselves and Germans and other nations was a transformation in political ideology amplified by the reparations demanded following World War I. The extent to which right-leaning political thinkers pushed these ideas were further than ever before, particularly by basing essential spiritual differences firmly in race.

The severity and consequences of the Treaty of Versailles set the stage for the shift in ideology, producing a strong German national identity. The ideal German community, or *Volksgemeinschaft*, had two aims produced by the National Socialist policies formed from the ideas of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*. The first was “its ‘internal’ aim...to engineer the conversion of a society of fractured traditions, social classes and environments into an achievement-oriented community primed for self-sacrifice; its [second] ‘external’ aim was to segregate and eventually ‘eradicate’ (*ausmerzen*) all those who, on real or imaginary grounds, could not be allowed entry into the *Volksgemeinschaft* – ‘aliens’, ‘incurable’ political opponents, the ‘asocial’ and the Jews.”<sup>75</sup> The French were not “aliens” or “incurable political opponents. Rather, they offered an opportunity for the Germans to assimilate French cultural practices into National Socialist ideals and regurgitate them as aspects of Germanness.

By occupying and conquering Europe, and eventually, ideally, the world, the Germans would have the ability to establish their concept culture as predominant and start “‘a mighty cultural revolution’ which would bring about the ‘new artistic Renaissance of the Aryan man’.”<sup>76</sup> Art encompasses not only traditional methods of painting and sculpting but also music, literature, and theater. In France, *couture* had a significant relationship with the arts. Not only was *couture* a significant export industry in France, which contributed dramatically to the nation’s economic resources, but it was, and still is, a creative outlet reflective of the culture of the country it is

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<sup>75</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 209.

<sup>76</sup> Grunfield, *The Hitler File*, 249.

produced in. *Couturiers* partnered with artists and created costumes for theater and film. Its integration in the arts was of added interest to the Germans, however, it did not hold the same prestige. Joseph Goebbels' interview about the relationship between Germany and France states,

Germany is not concluding a "chivalrous" peace with France. Germany does not consider France and ally but a state with which old accounts will be settled in the peace treaty. In the future, France will play for Europe the role of an "enlarged Switzerland" and will become a tourist destination potentially being allowed to produce fashionable products... Any form of government that seems suited to restore France's might will be prevented by the Reich. In Europe, Germany has the only say.<sup>77</sup>

While aspects of French culture were admired and desired by the Germans, their "inferiority complex toward a culture that for the previous two centuries had dominated Europe,"<sup>78</sup> as Riding terms it, created tensions among the Reich on how to treat France and deconstruct its cultural superiority. Dorléac prescribes roles to Germany and France in their strenuous relationship, describing them as a domestic couple in which "the division of labor [was] strictly set out: in the perverse couple born of defeat, France would play the female part, the passive and nurturing matron who could be distracted from her troubles by fashion,"<sup>79</sup> and Germany would take on the masculine role, adhering to duties of labor, economics, and leadership.

As the war progressed and more countries experienced occupation, marked differences in the treatment of certain nationalities is noted. Dieter Pohl offers a simplistic analysis of such differences in his chapter, "War and Empire," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*. The steps to "Germanization" are the expulsion and expropriation of undesirable sections of the population out of the newly occupied region, the settlement of ethnic Germans, and racial

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<sup>77</sup> Directive given to the German press, quoted in Eberhard Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa: Die deutsche Frankreichpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), No. 46, 87; published in French as *La France dans l'Europe de Hitler*, trans. Denise Meunier (Paris: Fayard, 1968), No. 46, 87, published in Laurence Dorléac, *Art of Defeat: France 1940-1944*, trans. Jane Marie Todd, (France: Editions du Seuil, 1993; Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 6,

<sup>78</sup> Riding, *And the Show Went On*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Dorléac, *Art of Defeat*, 7.

selection, discriminating against Jews and Eastern Europeans. When establishing governments in the occupied territories, the Germans considered many aspects of the region. Annexed territories received full, functioning German governments, reminiscent of the Reich in the homeland. In the remainder of the occupied territories, the Germans incorporated military governments that had muddled communication with official non-military government personnel. Pohl's analysis reveals that Eastern European countries were subject to more violence. As the German prejudice against these people was deeper and more severe, the military personnel that made up the occupying regime were quick to use violence to solve problems. The Flemish, Dutch, and Scandinavian people were considered to be of German descent and were treated as displaced German people. They received the rights and respect of Germans that lived in Germany and Austria. The Western European occupied countries received propaganda encouraging citizens to assimilate to the new order. Most of these country's populations fit the mold of the ideal race and were not treated nearly as harshly as the Eastern European groups. In particular, the French were regarded as almost equal to that of the German people in terms of intellect and cultural dominance.<sup>80</sup> While the ultimate goal was to subdue French culture, the Germans did not want to obliterate it like many other conquered nations but assimilate it under German control and authority, giving the illusion of German origins. Hitler viewed the French as strong and untrustworthy as they were the "traditional enemy" of Germany.<sup>81</sup> Additionally,

The cultural emanation of France was regarded as a threat to German intentions and was therefore to be forced back by multifarious and intensive cultural propaganda from the Reich, for which the military victory and the prerogatives of an occupying power were thought to provide favorable conditions.

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<sup>80</sup> Dieter Pohl, "War and Empire," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Robert Gellately, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 257-265.

<sup>81</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 92.

German cultural hegemony did not only imply guidance and supervision of the mass media by the propaganda agencies. It also included the endeavor to orientate the occupied countries' cultural life, in so far as they were allowed any, towards Germany.<sup>82</sup>

The cultural opportunities and rich history of France excited greedy Nazi officers. Many of them, considering themselves to be artistically inclined and knowledgeable, understood the importance of culture and “competed vigorously (and at times ferociously) for authority in this sphere.”<sup>83</sup> Plundering the occupied regions for art that satisfied the Nazi ideals of correct and appropriate reflections of culture allowed the regime to fund their own art and architecture projects to further create a German cultural image that aligned with Nazi expectations. Hermand notes that the “goal was to return to the basic Aryan preconditions for what was truly German...[in which] creative Germans could once again feel that the blood of their noble ancestors pulse through their veins”<sup>84</sup> accompanied by a rigorous exclusion of alien influences to establish a German-consciousness. By assimilating French art and culture, it is deemed not ‘alien’ and can become part of the German national identity.

With strong support from the German people, the Nazis moved forward in implementing their foreign policies which “carried a double meaning: on one hand, the pursuit of Germany’s national interest on the level of power politics among other states, and on the other, above all the realization of the revolutionary NS goals, notably in the conquered territories.”<sup>85</sup> The pursuit of power politics exemplified in the strategic military movements across Europe resulted in occupying Poland, Denmark, and Belgium and initiated the next stage in the plan of creating a

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<sup>82</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 363.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, “Architecture and the Arts,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Robert Gellately, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 153.

<sup>84</sup> Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Bernd-Jurgen Wendt, “Foreign Policy,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, Christian Zentner and Friedmann Bedürftig, ed., trans. Amy Hackett, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 282.

hegemonic German culture. In the summer of 1940, the long awaited meeting of German and French forces finally occurred.

Initially, the French were generally optimistic in their ability to hold off a German invasion, but the Germans devastated the French. The German's updated technology and innovative military tactics allowed them to march through France with surprising speed and air power to occupy the country. During the occupation, the French citizens were forced into the worst parts of the country. Simultaneously, the Germans moved into the best and annexed the northern part of France to Germany, following the traditional plan of "Germanization" experienced by many other countries throughout Europe. In the southeast of France, the French established the Vichy government under Marshal Petain. Petain and the Vichy government maintained that France fell because of its democratic forms of government and extravagant indulgences and moved to implement an authoritarian government through a National Revolution. The social hierarchy was reestablished. The intellectual and moral perversions of the French young people were cured. The Vichy government continued to heed to every German demand because without the permission of the Germans, France would cease to exist. Petain's goal was to preserve French sovereignty at all costs. In Paris, the center of the occupied zone, *couturiers* followed the same ideology and refused to let the heart of French culture die. In such unprecedented times, the French people responded in a variety of ways, occasionally heroic, sometimes contemptible, and more often somewhere in between; the *couturiers* were no exception.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE *COUTURIERS*

The nation is an imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign; imagined because one never knows all of the members of the group, yet in the mind, each is in communion with the other; limited because even the largest nation has finite boundaries, beyond which lie other nations; and sovereign because the people rule themselves. Benedict Anderson's ideas of the imagined community have become particularly prevalent in times of war as groups unite against opposing forces, often fighting for the place in which they live. National identity and fervor are heightened in times of struggle. Anderson posits that a shared ideology in the form of self-government, language, and perceived culture form community relations by allowing people to identify themselves as the same as one another. For the French, *couture* was an industry that was seemingly ingrained in the nation's shared culture. Though not all could afford costumes from *couturiers*, every Frenchwoman's goal was to present herself according to the French ideals of dress and style, translated in the *couturiers*' designs. During World War II, the *couturiers* played an essential part in upholding the physical representation of the Frenchwoman's national identity.<sup>86</sup>

In this chapter I will discuss the lives, businesses, and fashions of the most influential *couturiers* during World War II. Doing so will provide insight into the state of the industry and the mentality of those closest to it as war and occupation became a reality. Furthermore, analysis of various designers paints a picture of the well-to-do Frenchwoman of the period. Sophie Rochas, Marcel Rochas' daughter and author of his biography, indicated "couturiers were more than just suppliers; they were acquaintances to be cultivated, some even worshipped. They were

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<sup>86</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 2016), 1-7.

part of Parisian life.”<sup>87</sup> Their intimate knowledge of women and society gave them a complete view of what it meant to be French.

German fashion historian, Irene Guenther, stated, “Some historians of French fashion will argue that it was Lucien Lelong and the combined inventiveness, bravery, and resistance of the French fashion world that stopped the Nazi ‘Goliath’ in its tracks. Many historians of the Third Reich would counter with the assertion that when Nazi government was truly intent upon accomplishing a certain goal, there was little that evaded its terror or its grasp,”<sup>88</sup> however, neither of these presumptions are entirely accurate. While the strength and willpower of the *couturiers* was an important factor in moving the *couture* industry forward, Sophie Rochas says, “it was the women themselves, like carriers of pollen, who fertilized insatiable Paris fashion; it was the millions of women exchanging constant glances over a cut, a nuance, the set of a sleeve, asking for alterations and hoping for a change who created fashion; thus did the artists of *couture* understand what was in their minds.”<sup>89</sup> It is the keen eye for deciphering what women want in their clothing that make *couturiers* unique. Moreover, while some had all of the skills necessary to execute the intricate pieces they created in their heads, each *couture* house relied heavily on the craftsman and artisans that were so abundant in France. The support system for *couture*, the auxiliary craftsmen of embroidery, trimmings, buttons, and more, were exceptionally skilled in France because of government support. The French government offered trade schools for craftspeople that turned out skilled workers ready for *haute couture*. The government also offered subsidies for the use of French textiles, which made textile manufacturers willing and able to make short runs of fabrics specific to the couturier’s wants and needs, owing to the

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<sup>87</sup> Rochas, *Marcel Rochas*, 28.

<sup>88</sup> Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 210.

<sup>89</sup> Élisabeth de Gramont, *Souvenirs du monde de 1890 à 1940*, (Paris: Grasset, 1970), 380, quoted in *Les Années folles 1919-1929*, (Paris: Paris Musées, 2007), in Rochas, *Marcel Rochas*, 32.

exclusivity of *couture*.<sup>90</sup> Cristóbal Balenciaga himself reminisced in his later life, “Paris used to have a special ambiance for fashion because it contained hundreds of dedicated craftsmen making buttons and flowers and feathers and all the trimmings of luxe which could be found nowhere else.”<sup>91</sup> While the *couturiers* were the name, face, and genius behind the house, they would not have been able to accomplish the wonders of dress they did without the structure of craftspeople and supplementary industries at their disposal.

Apprentices were another vital part of the *couture* system. When establishing a *couture* house, it was most common for *couturiers* not to expect their house and their brand to outlive them. Fashion historian, Leslie Ellis Miller notes, “Often, a life of fifty years was built into a contract. Death was the natural end of the house.”<sup>92</sup> Each house’s apprentices were expected to move on and open their own *couture* house to make a name for themselves. The third phase of *couturiers*, those who earned celebrity status through their work and societal image, however, have created legacies that have outlived them for decades thus far and many more to come.<sup>93</sup>

### **Jeanne Lanvin**

Jeanne Lanvin opened her *couture* house in Paris in 1885, twenty-seven years after Charles Worth refitted the dressmaking industry. As a middle class woman, she could not afford to fill her closet with the luxury of *couture*. Noting an absence in her daughter’s wardrobe, she began her career by dressing her daughter in clothes that were against the norm and what was deemed appropriate for little girls. Soon, other mothers began asking her to dress their daughters.

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<sup>90</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 24-25.

<sup>92</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 158.

<sup>93</sup> The phases of *couture*, as I discuss them in this paper, are (1) the foundational figures such as Charles Worth and other early *couturiers*, (2) the post-World War I *couturiers* that changed fashion dramatically, and (3) the final phase, within the scope of this paper, consisting of *couturiers* who became celebrities and elite figures in the social arena.

She continued to dress these girls as they grew older, eventually expanding her expertise to dressing young ladies and women, designing for herself and the others' mothers as well.<sup>94</sup>

Both in World War I and World War II, Lanvin remained open. Of the occupation during World War II, she said, "Life goes on, no matter how hard things may get. And it is a woman's duty to remain as elegant as possible. Think of all those whose living depends upon feminine elegance...and everything that goes along with it! Naturally balance is required. With discretion and distinction as its watchwords, couture was able to set the tone."<sup>95</sup> Keen on providing women with the clothing and confidence they had before the war, Lanvin aimed to keep producing garments as she always had. Additionally, "those whose living depends on feminine elegance"<sup>96</sup> amounted to thousands of craftspeople. She was conscious of the industry's weight in the French economy and the importance of persisting through troubled times.

Lanvin noted that "wartime restrictions forced fashion to accentuate even farther the simplicity of Parisian elegance. Exaggeration of any kind would therefore have been premature, and ridiculous."<sup>97</sup> The essence of Parisian *couture* and style was never lost in Lanvin's designs, nor was the vitality of the French. Lanvin stated in an interview about World War II,

However, since one must at all costs create beauty, and the quest for inventiveness, audacity, and vitality should never be held back or limited in any way, I created elegant dresses that were in harmony with the interior decoration of those Frenchwomen who were still able to entertain guests. Despite all the sad aspects of the Occupation, we never stopped enriching our collections with evening dresses...those dresses gave us courage!<sup>98</sup>

While this interview was conducted in 1967, and it is common to re-narrate the past to be more favorable, the actions of other *couturiers* and clients, as well as memoirs from Frenchwomen

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<sup>94</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 48-59.

<sup>95</sup> Suzanne Fournier, "Jeanne Lanvin vous parle d'élégance," *Modes et travaux*, July 15, 1941: 11, in Pamela Golbin, *Couture Confessions: Fashion Legends in Their Own Words*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2016), 48.

<sup>96</sup> Fournier, "Jeanne Lanvin," 11, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 48.

<sup>97</sup> Claude Cézan, *La mode, phénomène humain*, (Paris: Privat, 1967), 108, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 48.

<sup>98</sup> Cézan, *La mode, phénomène humain*, 108, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 48-49.

suggest that, while not actual resistance, the extravagance of *couture* was a way for many women to be contemptuous toward the occupiers.

Lanvin's ability to operate during both World Wars successfully speaks to her strength, courage, and place in French culture. She provided women with an air of normality in the lifestyle represented in the garments she created and with armor to combat the oppressing forces and continue with the life, culture, and social activities reminiscent of everyday life for Frenchwomen.

### **Lucien Lelong**

Lucien Lelong was arguably the most important couturier involved in the preservation of *couture* during the Nazi Occupation. Not only did he serve as chairman of *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* and negotiate with German officials, but he spoke about the importance of *couture* to the character and morale of France.

Lelong grew up in a family of *couturiers*. His parents owned a small *couture* shop where he worked from a young age. In 1914, he was set to debut his first solo collection but, World War I cancelled the show. During and after the Great War, Lelong continued to work under his parents' brand to expand the company. Inspired by the Great Depression, Lelong worked to create quality clothes at a lower cost than *couture*. In 1934, Lelong created a luxury ready-to-wear line in hopes of reaching a new audience that could not afford *couture* but wanted to maintain the elegance and aura of a distinguished Frenchwoman. With this innovation, Lelong is credited as the inventor of luxury ready-to-wear. While ready-made garments were common, especially in the United States, Lelong was the first designer to create collections of garments

intended to be mass-produced while maintaining a high quality in fabric and finishes. In 1937, Lucien Lelong was appointed Chairman of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*.<sup>99</sup>

At the outset of the Second World War, Lelong was called for military service but was soon exempted. Upon returning to Paris, he aimed to safeguard *couture*'s prominence and longevity, keep employees working, and ensure *couture* maintained a high profile abroad<sup>100</sup> as "luxury and quality are national industries."<sup>101</sup> Lelong continued, stating that *couture* brought "millions of foreign currency into the State coffers, which we need now more than ever... What Germany earns with chemical products, fertilizers, and machinery, we earn with diaphanous muslin, perfumes, flowers and ribbons."<sup>102</sup> The industry's economic significance to the survival of France was undeniable.

Not only was Lelong concerned about the financial impact the loss of the *couture* industry would have on the French economy, he was worried about the spirit of its people and the nation's reputation internationally. He believed that Frenchwomen needed to uphold their elegance as it would show that the country was not afraid of the future and ready to face whatever may lay ahead face on. Additionally, he believed the *couturiers*' "role is to give France an appearance of serenity; the problems must not hamper creators. It is their duty to hold aloof from them."<sup>103</sup> This interview, conducted in 1939, alludes to the small form of resistance Lanvin remembered in her much later interview. The power of dress during the Nazi Occupation was important in preserving morale among the French.

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<sup>99</sup>Jaqueline Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*, (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*.

<sup>101</sup> Lucien François, *Votre Beauté*, December 1939, in Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 13.

<sup>102</sup> François, *Votre Beauté*, 1939, in Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> *Votre Beauté*, September 1939, in Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 6.

A strong leader in the industry, Lelong reluctantly worked with the Germans to ensure the vitality of the industry. He believed it “essential ‘to bear witness to its vitality, to demonstrate that French creations remain worthy of their past and that they intend to safeguard their future’.”<sup>104</sup> In order to do this, he argued with the Germans that if the French *couture* industry were moved to Berlin or Vienna as they wished, Parisian *couturiers* and seamstresses would not be able to create as *couture* is a reflection of the spirit of the place in which it is created. The essence of *couture* would be lost if the industry was moved. While Jacqueline Demornex states in her biography of Lelong, *Lucien Lelong*, that “it is directly due to him [Lucien Lelong] that French haute couture remained in Paris during the Second World War,”<sup>105</sup> the industry was so engrained in the French economy, culture, and national identity that any attempt to uproot it would have resulted in its death. The vast network of textile manufacturers and craftspeople inundated throughout France is what made *couture* unique and made the level of quality attained feasible. Because of the multitude of moving parts that made up the industry, which were spread across France, and the reflection of cultural ideals within the designs, *couture* was ingrained in the French national narrative that the German occupiers could not move.

### **Coco Chanel**

Undoubtedly one of the most influential designers of all time, Coco Chanel’s most extensive scope of influence was from 1904 through the late 1930s, and again in 1954 when she made her comeback after being closed during World War II. She revolutionized the way women dressed and perceived themselves by freeing the body from restricting undergarments and tight fitting dresses and offering practical clothing that allowed the body to move freely and

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<sup>104</sup> Collective propaganda plan, spring 1941, (C.O.V. Group 1: Archives nationales), in Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 87.

<sup>105</sup> Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*, 7.

uninhibited. She believed “if function came first, beauty would follow.”<sup>106</sup> She became the unofficial first lady of France as she was the most well-known Frenchwoman across the world because of her vivacious personality and celebrity status as a couturier.<sup>107</sup>

At the beginning of World War II, Chanel saw a bleak future, “convinced the world of fashion had ended with the war.”<sup>108</sup> She took the opportunity to exact revenge on her employees who had rallied in a strike against her a few years earlier in 1936. She believed she treated them fairly and paid them well and felt betrayed when they went on strike. She used the war as the perfect excuse to fire an immense amount of her workforce and close her *couture* house. She escaped to the French countryside in the mass exodus of Parisians but soon returned to her home at the Ritz in Paris as it seemed life in Paris, for someone of her stature, had not changed much. She lived among German officers, who had commandeered part of the Ritz as offices and living quarters, for the remainder of the Occupation.<sup>109</sup>

In closing her *couture* house, Chanel believed life as she knew it was coming to an end. The eminent war on the horizon painted a gloomy future for Parisian life in which it was imperative to dress appropriately for prescribed events and parts of the day. With the apparent upheaval of society she believed fashion was no longer relevant.

The governing bodies and major investors of the industry were vehement at the closure of her *couture* house; “They were furious when she closed her mirrored salon on the rue Cambon and accused her of outright ‘treason’...It was a question of the prestige of Paris. Even the other couturier houses, her competitors, protested. What would Paris wartime galas in support of the

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<sup>106</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 134.

<sup>107</sup> Ann Gaines, *Women in the Arts: Coco Chanel*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004).

<sup>108</sup> Hal Vaughn, *Sleeping with the Enemy: Coco Chanel's Secret War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 101.

<sup>109</sup> Gaines, *Women in the Arts*.

soldiers be worth without Chanel?”<sup>110</sup> Her glamour, simplicity, and practicality resonated with the Frenchwoman and many customers, industry professionals, and fellow *couturiers* believed her to be a traitor to the image and essence of Paris. However, she kept her perfume business open which allowed Chanel’s name and image remained in the press as she continued making appearances in her usual social groups of high profile figures, and with her new lover, Nazi officer, Hans Gunther von Dincklage.

When Chanel moved back to Paris, not only did she live among German officers at the Ritz, something that was controversial enough as it was, but she was outspokenly anti-Semitic and pro-German. She hoped her allegiance and even her love affair with a German officer would help her win back the portion of her perfume company from her Jewish partners possessed. Although this failed, she was still loyal to her lover and willingly attempted a secret mission on behalf of the Nazis. Chanel was good friends with Winston Churchill and travelled to London on behalf of the Nazis in an attempt to meet with Churchill and negotiate peace between Germany and England. The mission failed, however, since the meeting never came to fruition.<sup>111</sup>

Despite closing her *couture* house and being openly pro-German, Chanel believed “Fashion has always been quintessentially French.”<sup>112</sup> She loved her home country and what *couture* stood for internationally. Of fashion, she said

These days, while countries the world over are gung-ho on exporting their traditions, agriculture and own particular genius, it’s more important than ever for us to defend the spirit of Paris, rather than a few innovations. Let us remain instigators of the ephemeral rather than vainly attempting to stabilize that which is inherently unstable, and to codify fashion. The genius of the French, in matters of fashion, has always been its wellspring. Draw as much water as you want, but you can’t walk off with the fountain.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Vaughn, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, 104.

<sup>111</sup> Vaughn, *Sleeping with the Enemy*.

<sup>112</sup> Denise Weber, “LES PAGES Mademoiselle Chanel nous parle,” *Marianne*, November 11, 1937, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 82.

<sup>113</sup> Marcel Zahar, “Faut-il poursuivre ou exploiter la copie,” *Vu*, April 5, 1933: 510, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 78.

Though her political leanings contradicted those of most of her fellow countrymen, her dedication to the importance of *couture* never wavered. As was the case for most *couturiers*, Chanel's version of French nationalism centered around the intense commitment to the ideal of *couture*, beyond the quantitative financial benefits. Referring back to German ideals of *Zivilisation*, an ideal that was superficial and rational which was perceived as 'feminine', and *Kultur*, a more 'masculine' idea of national character associated with a deeper understanding of the world, one can see that *couture* was not a threat to the aims of Nazi *Kultur* as it was exemplified as an aspect of surface level *Zivilisation*, evident in Chanel's interactions and interpretations of the period.

### **Molyneux**

Edward Molyneux, an Englishman, opened his *couture* house in Paris in 1919, after fighting in the British Royal Army during World War I. Before the war years, he was an illustrator for various fashion magazines in London. As a designer his clothing was known for clean, simple lines that were devoid of extraneous decoration.

At the outbreak of World War II, he left Paris for his home country but worked diligently to uphold the standards of *couture* while supporting the allied effort. Though he himself was no longer in Paris, nor a Frenchman, he was determined to keep his Paris *couture* house open and continue providing his staff with employment and an income. At his London house, the proceeds of his garments went to the British Defense budget. Not only was he philanthropic in his business during this period, but he also used his influence to support the industry in both London and Paris. In London, he was the chairman of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers. He also opened a trade school for *couture* workers modeled off the Parisian system,

offering many unemployed persons the opportunity to gain the skills needed to obtain a job. Molyneux started a camp for war victims in France and operated international canteens in Paris and London to aid in the war effort as much as possible.<sup>114</sup> In addition to these efforts, Molyneux was commissioned by the government to create a civilian garment, the first of its kind. In England, utility clothes became the go-to garments for wartime fashion. They were practical and met the strict regulations placed on the clothing industry.<sup>115</sup>

Molyneux's desire to aid the war effort as well as the *couture* industry showcased his loyalty to his country and to his industry. While he was not a Frenchman, his loyalty to France, especially Paris, stemmed from an acknowledgment of the importance of *couture* for the culture. *Couture* was integral to his identity and livelihood. This shared bond with the French allowed him to integrate himself into the French way of life and understand the spirit of the nation, making him part of the community. His return to Paris in 1945 confirms that Paris truly encapsulates the spirit and essence of *couture*.

### **Marcel Rochas**

Marcel Rochas was born in Paris in February 1902 to a wealthy family. Growing up, he was gifted in the arts and received a good education. Because his parents belonged to the upper-middle class of Parisian culture, Rochas was exposed to socialites and women who participated in the *couture* industry. His initial career path was to become a lawyer, however, to pay for law school, Rochas got a job with a fabric manufacturer to pay for law school, exposing him to his true passion, clothing.

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<sup>114</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 144-149.

<sup>115</sup> Batterberry, *Mirror Mirror*, 333.

In May 1922, he was conscripted for eighteen months of mandatory service which interrupted his law studies. Shortly following his discharge, he married. His first design was the wedding dress his wife wore who encouraged him to follow his dreams and open a *couture* house. In 1925, at the age of twenty-three, he did just that. Rochas' career lasted thirty years. During this time, he experienced immense success and was able to open a second house in 1933, add a perfume business, accessories, and a cinema department.

Rochas was known for his structure, cut, and proportion, as well as his graphic designs and aggressive pricing model. Rochas' designs cost significantly less than some of his fellow *couturiers*'. His innovations in style include the colored semi-sports jacket, the black afternoon suit, the two-piece wool suit with large buttons over a slim black skirt for the country, and sports clothes including a skating dress, clothes for hiking, golfing, and spending time in the mountains.

In 1939, he closed his *couture* house because he was drafted for service during World War II. He was soon relieved of duty and resumed business. His first collection in 1940 was a shock to his French clients as well as the French and American reporters that attended the show. *The New York Times* reported on December 2, 1940: "[The] 'Bruennhilde-figured' manikins, long skirts, puritanical silhouettes, [which were so disconcerting that the] spectators kept looking out windows to assure themselves it was really Avenue Matignon, not Unter den Linden."<sup>116</sup> The apparent German influence in Rochas' collection did not settle well with those who opposed the Germans. Some speculated that he created a collection with new clientele in mind because he was aware of the German's intent to move the *couture* industry. Others believed the collection represented collaborationist ideologies on Rochas' part. In 1943, however, Rochas admitted such

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<sup>116</sup> Kathleen Connell, "Paris Styles Cater Little to Berlin, But Its Influence Creeps Into Them," *The New York Times*, December 2, 1940, quoted in Rochas, *Marcel Rochas*, 140.

a collection was a mistake. Was this hindsight or fear of being labeled a collaborationist? His 1941 collections and beyond reflected a shift back toward his typical identity as a designer.

Rochas' attempt to appeal to German women's sensibilities was not received well, partly because the political context of the situation was tense, and partly because German fashion was not considered stylish or *chic*. After this speedbump in his career, Marcel Rochas continued to innovate, solidifying a new, slim, high-waisted shape in 1943, and creating the wasp waist or *guêpière*, in 1946, the foundational garment that allowed Christian Dior extended success with the "New Look."<sup>117</sup> Rochas closed his *couture* house in 1953 and unexpectedly died shortly thereafter, in 1955. His continued innovations at the end of the war, played a vital role in the progress of *couture* beyond the occupation.

### **Elsa Schiaparelli**

Elsa Schiaparelli, an Italian native, was a well-established woman who rivaled Coco Chanel in terms of celebrity status as a couturier. After a messy divorce from her husband, Schiaparelli and her daughter moved to Paris. She began her fashion career making sportswear on a small scale in 1925 which she sold out of her 'shop' located in her attic. In 1927, she opened an actual storefront.<sup>118</sup> After her black and white sweater with a knitted bowtie took the world by storm in 1928, she shifted her business to focus on *couture*.<sup>119</sup>

Her designs were characterized by "innovative provocative interpretations of femininity."<sup>120</sup> She collaborated with artists, specifically the great Surrealist artist Salvador Dali, to create prints and whimsical designs for her garments. Milbank states, "Just as Dadaists

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<sup>117</sup> Rochas, *Marcel Rochas*, 228.

<sup>118</sup> Sweeny-Risco, "Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics," 310.

<sup>119</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 196-203.

<sup>120</sup> Sweeny-Risco, "Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics," 312.

mocked the notion of good art, Schiaparelli mocked the notion of good taste, knowing that as women became increasingly confident, rules about propriety and taste could be more effective if broken. Undeniably creative, she proved that innovation in fashion need not be limited to the reformation of silhouette or explorations of dressmaking techniques.”<sup>121</sup>

At the onset of World War II, Schiaparelli initially decided to keep her business running. She noted, “As we expected a quick and savage bombardment, most of the employees had to be evacuated; but when no bombardment came...Schiap called her dispersed staff together to ask them if they would like to take the risk of coming back to work, though at lower wages because of the lack of business. They readily and graciously accepted part-time work.”<sup>122</sup> When Schiaparelli returned to business, she did not lose her sense of whimsy and rebelliousness but added war-time practicality in her designs. She was aware of the important role of *couture* in “The opposition of feminine grace to cruelty and hate reached farther than plays or books.”<sup>123</sup> Like Lanvin, she believed that well-dressed women represented strength in spirit that the Germans could not tear down. In September 1940, however, Schiaparelli left for New York. She wrote to *Vogue* explaining the circumstances.

On my way to America, I left Lucien Lelong at the French frontier. “Please go for all of us,” he said. “Try to do all that you can so that our name is not forgotten. We should like to remain as it was. You must represent us over there. Assure everybody our work will start at the first opportunity.”

We waved au revoir, and I crossed, on foot, the bridge leading into Spain. So my duty is plain. War is behind me, and I am given a definite assignment from the head of “*La Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*.”

Right from the beginning of the war, of course, great difficulties confronted the *couture* in France. All branches of the industry were affected, and everything was upset. We could count on nothing. The accessories were immediately hit, with leather and metals for buttons and bags taken for the Army. Silks, some of them, were taken for airplane cloth...Certain dyes, especially some yellows, were proscribed. Rapidly we learned to do without all these things...

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<sup>121</sup> Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 202.

<sup>122</sup> Else Schiaparelli often referred to herself in the third person by a shortened nickname, Schiap, which is demonstrated in this excerpt.; Elsa Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1955), 50.

<sup>123</sup> Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life*, 113-114.

This state of affairs made the spring Mid-Season Collections difficult, but buyers and private customers who saw our Collections agreed that Paris had not shown such beautiful models in years...The showing was a remarkable demonstration of the spirit of France at this moment...

Events were piling up. But until the Germans battered at Belgium, the work in the *couture* had not gone so badly...With the Belgian move, however, everything was cancelled...

...Those of us with Biarritz connection went into friendly partnership, deciding to work there, to show and ship together our goods to New York...

We sent machines, supplies ahead but we waited in Paris, hoping that all these preparations would in the end be unnecessary. But the war came closer to Paris. At a given word, we had to leave.

...We rented a house for our workers for a year, put beds into long stretches of rooms in hospital formations, and opened a canteen for them...

...We left [Paris] to wait for events...

...Molyneux, we thought, must get to England while there was still time. Against his will, he left that night, catching the last boat...Monsieur Lelong urged me to leave if I intended to fulfil my lecture contract in America...

...To five of my people, including my secretary and my accountant, I left instructions to go back to Paris as soon as possible, to keep the place open, and to sell what they could...Monsieur Lelong promised to look after them for me...

However, I know and I wish to assure you that all those in our work, although sad and completely stunned, have certainly not lost their courage. Every effort will be made to help the cause of our great French industry. This effort will be made in spite of everything.

...I explained [my brooch] was a phoenix, a bird which, after being burned and reduced to ashes, revives and grows again in full beauty—and this, I feel, is the Symbol of France!<sup>124</sup>

Schiaparelli left Paris for New York in a time of strife, unwillingly but fulfilling her duty as a couturier, sharing the knowledge and prestige of the practice. While in New York, she explored the opportunities and possibilities present there for *couture* to expand. As the first couturier to open a ready-to-wear boutique on her *couture* house premises, Schiaparelli was familiar with the variety of markets available for *couturiers* to expand into.<sup>125</sup> Due to the integration of American women's lifestyle and mass-productions, the American market was more suited to the ready-to-wear industry than *couture*. The idea of luxury ready-to-wear, introduced by Lelong in the mid-1930s is an industry suitable to the American woman and her lifestyle. In 1945, after her tour of America, Schiaparelli returned to Paris and began producing designs out of her French *couture*

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<sup>124</sup> "Needles and Guns," *Vogue*, September, 1, 1940: 57, 104-105.

<sup>125</sup> Batterberry, *Mirror Mirror*, 321.

house, reinforcing Paris' continued dominance of *couture* and reaffirming the deeply entrenched tradition of fashion leadership.

### Madame Grès

Madame Grès, born Alix Barton, struggled to get off the ground to make a name for herself in the *couture* industry. She opened her first *couture* house with a business partner in 1934 under the name "Alix". The *couture* house saw success as her elegant designs pleased French women. Two weeks after the start of World War II, Grès gave birth to her daughter whom she fled Paris with early in 1940.<sup>126</sup>

After the Nazi occupying forces established themselves in Paris, Grès' business partner denounced her as a Jew, hoping to obtain the full rights to the business. This drew Madame Grès back to Paris. She cleared her name by presenting appropriate birth records and paperwork and sold her share of the *couture* house, releasing her of business responsibilities. She wanted to leave Paris again to be with her estranged husband in Tahiti, however, Lucien Lelong strongly opposed the idea. He encouraged her to open another *couture* house in which she was the sole owner and designer. He believed in her talent and wanted the *couture* industry to continue to grow, even under Nazi control. In 1942, Alix Barton opened a second *couture* house, this time under the name Grès.<sup>127</sup>

Because many did not realize that the creators of "Alix" and the House of Grès were the same woman, Madame Grès had to rebuild her reputation as a couturier. Several features of Madame Grès' journey are reminiscent of the spirit of *couture* and the belief the French shared in the industry. Firstly, the ability to open a *couture* house amidst a military occupation and fabric

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<sup>126</sup> Patricia Mears, *Madame Grès: Sphinx of Fashion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Mears, *Madame Grès*.

restrictions, speaks to the strength of sales (for there to be a need for a “new” designer) and the willingness of both the French and the Germans’ willingness to accept and appreciate expansion of *couture*. Additionally, because most did not realize that Madame Grès had illustrated her skills under another name previously, she was seen as new and innovative, showing that Paris was still growing and changing in their identity even under oppressive Nazi control.

Madame Grès established herself quickly and readily defended *couture* saying, “we are staunchly defending this industry because we don’t want it to disappear! It needs to stay alive and perpetuate itself. We are the only ones who consistently use the most beautiful material, thus providing a livelihood to so many marvelous craftsmen!...Haute *couture* is and will forever remain a melting pot of ideas and experimentation!”<sup>128</sup> She also understood the importance of the labor required to create *couture* and the effect losing such labor would have on the industry. Not only did she reestablish herself as a great couturier quickly, but she was a threat to German control. She became very outspoken against German customers who entered her showroom and purposefully created collections ignoring the fabric restrictions imposed on the industry and used the French tricolor proudly in her collections. Throughout the occupation, she did the opposite of whatever the German guidelines dictated. While this led to a temporary closer in January 1944, she was allowed to reopen in the early summer of the same year, just in time for a final collection before the Liberation of Paris. The lack of response on the part of the Nazis shows the tolerance they had for *couture*. The cultural significance of *couture* aligned with the German ideals of *Zivilisation* and wanted the industry to continue to flourish to cultivate French culture in hopes of capitalizing on it and integrating it into the new idea of a hegemonic German identity.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> F. Vergnaud, “Recontre avec Madame Grès,” *Marie France*, October 1976: 49, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 148.

<sup>129</sup> Mears, *Madame Grès: Sphinx of Fashion*.

### **Jaques Fath**

Jacques Fath was born to an upper-middle class French family in September 1912. His paternal grandparents were fashion illustrators, so his childhood was filled with clothing and costumes. His mother believed fashion was not a suitable career for a man, however, he became a couturier. In 1937, the House of Fath opened with an informal atmosphere, uncharacteristic of other *couture* houses.

While his first collection was not received well, his subsequent collections put his name on the map. In 1939, he was called for service, as were many other male *couturiers* of the period. Like those other *couturiers*, he was discharged shortly after his call to service. Upon returning to the *couture* business, he gained full ownership of his house and pushed boundaries as the Nazi occupiers closed in. He was “impatient, enthusiastic, addicted to style and pleasure, Fath was determined to reinvent seduction. Using yards of rebellious tartan that mocked German occupiers, he designed myriad tunic dresses and peasant skirts for women riding bicycles; the timing was perfect for this new and sporty style,” says Savignon.<sup>130</sup> While Fath offered sporty clothing during the war and pushed the Nazi’s level of toleration, as other *couturiers* did, his true fame came after the war. He, along with Christian Dior and Pierre Balmain, was vital in the resurrection of the international *couture* industry.

### **Cristóbal Balenciaga**

Cristóbal Balenciaga, a Spaniard, was born to a dressmaker and a fisherman in 1895. He was the youngest child and felt like an only child for most of his adolescence as his two surviving siblings were significantly older than he. At age eleven, Balenciaga’s father died,

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<sup>130</sup> Savignon, *Jacques Fath*, 10.

leaving he and his mother in the household. Because of this, he traveled with his mother when she met with clients and was exposed to dressmaking and the Spanish aristocracy.

After several apprenticeships, including one in Paris, Balenciaga opened his first store in San Sebastian, Spain in 1918. In 1924, he opened two more locations in Madrid and Barcelona. In 1927, he opened a second location in San Sebastian, however, these items were lower priced than garments sold at his other locations because of the dictator's regulations regarding luxury goods. His rapid success in Spain already marked him as a great dressmaker. His move to Paris in 1936, however, labeled him as the master couturier.<sup>131</sup>

Balenciaga operated his *couture* houses by a few guiding principles. Firstly, *couturiers* were a part of a historical process that needed to be appropriately interpreted. The garments reflect the needs of women and society at the time they are created and should do so without frivolity. Secondly, he recognized his client's busy lives and maintained that his garments should be simple to wear and practical for a variety of figures. Thirdly, he believed women should patronize a single dressmaker. The relationship of client and couturier is intimate and personal. Finally, he believed the foremost decision in making clothing for women was color choice. The color of the garment represented a mood and attitude and played heavily in the aesthetic appearance of the woman wearing it.<sup>132</sup>

Balenciaga's designs were known for abstract minimalism.<sup>133</sup> In his collections, he evolved styles gradually rather than dramatically as other *couturiers* might have. The most important aspects of his collections were proportion, fit, finish, and presentation. These guidelines were the same for the *couture* garments created in all of his locations, however, those

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<sup>131</sup> Mary Blume, *The Master of Us All: Balenciaga, His Workrooms, His World*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>132</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 58-65.

<sup>133</sup> Golbin, ed., *Balenciaga Paris*, 11.

made in Paris cost twice as much those made in Spain. Even among the French *couturiers*, he by far, offered the highest priced garments.<sup>134</sup> Part of the discrepancy in price between the Parisian garments and the Spanish garments was cost of materials. The Parisian *couture* house had access to better quality materials and craftsmanship because of the well-integrated system of fashion in the French economy. Further, the prestige of Paris was worth paying for.

During World War II, Balenciaga remained steadfast in his beliefs of what *couture* should be. He did not compromise design or quality in his wartime garments. Also, because he was a Spanish citizen, he was free to move between Occupied and Free France as well as between France and Spain. This mobility was advantageous in his career as he was able to keep all of his locations operational and circumvent some of the fabric restrictions by bringing products to France from his Spanish *couture* houses.<sup>135</sup>

Balenciaga closed his *couture* house in 1968 but preserved the brand through perfume and accessories. Balenciaga refused to adapt his work to fit in the luxury ready-to-wear market. However, after his death in 1972, an outside company bought the brand and introduced a ready-to-wear line. Balenciaga believed wholeheartedly in the unique and fundamental nature of *couture* in French culture. Its reputation and responsibility to the French nation were of the utmost importance to Balenciaga.<sup>136</sup>

### **Pierre Balmain and Christian Dior**

Both Pierre Balmain and Christian Dior became exceptional *couturiers* who started their career in the industry during the inter-war period. Balmain began his career at the House of Molyneux but was called for military service in 1936, shortly after he started. He remained on

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<sup>134</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 121.; Golbin, ed., *Balenciaga Paris*, 11.

<sup>135</sup> Blume, *The Master of Us All*, 50.

<sup>136</sup> Miller, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, 158-163.

Molyneux's payroll throughout his service but upon his return in 1939, he left Molyneux and joined Lucien Lelong's *couture* house, a venture that was again cut short with the outbreak of war. Balmain left Paris for the French countryside to be with his family.<sup>137</sup>

Christian Dior had a similar faltering pattern to his early career in *couture*. In 1937, he completed an apprenticeship and moved to work in Robert Piguet's *couture* house. There he completed three collections but was unsatisfied with the autonomy he had over his designs. In 1939 he joined Elsa Schiaparelli but was mobilized to Mohun-sur-Terre, halting his *couture* career. In 1940, he was reassigned to the southern zone and was able to join his sister and father at the family retreat in Callian.<sup>138</sup>

Both men believed *couture* would not be part of their foreseeable future, however, "When interzonal communications became easier, we learnt that life in Paris was gradually resuming something approaching normality. The *couture* houses had re-opened their workshops. As much to provide employment for thousands of workers as out of patriotic pride."<sup>139</sup> Both men returned to Paris in 1941 to work under Lucien Lelong. Dior and Balmain served as apprentices and expert artisans, part of the indispensable labor pool that kept the *couture* industry flowing. They became an unlikely design duo. Balmain believed that "luxury is never ostentatious; it consists chiefly in refusing mediocrity"<sup>140</sup> while Dior "saw his work as part of a larger cultural milieu and sought to locate the practice of haute *couture* within the high cultural sphere of the fine arts."<sup>141</sup> Both men believed in the necessity and significance of luxury and culture that

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<sup>137</sup> Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 159-172.; Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers*, 252-257.

<sup>138</sup> Christian Dior, *Dior by Dior: The Autobiography of Christian Dior*, (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1957; London: V&A Publishing, 2018).

<sup>139</sup> Dior, *Dior by Dior*, 199.

<sup>140</sup> *Haute Couture Pierre Balmain—Erik Mortensen—Créations Contemporaines—Dessins de René Gruau*, exhibition brochure, (Nantes: Galerie de Beaux-Arts, 1987), in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 170.

<sup>141</sup> Lourdes Font, "Dior Before Dior," in *West 86<sup>th</sup>: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 2011), 29.

*couture* provided and worked tirelessly under Lelong's guiding presence to uphold the French tradition they both loved. In 1945, Balmain left Lelong to open his own *couture* house. Dior followed suit in 1946. The pair contributed immensely to defend the spirit of *couture* and the true nature of the French way of life both during and after the German occupation.

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French *couturiers* shielded the delicate seams of the *couture* industry woven throughout France. Many *couturiers* recognized the skill and rarity of the craftsmen they worked with and their vital role to the French economy and as the backbone of the *couture* industry. Without this experienced group of people integrated so deeply into the French culture and economy, *couture* would have collapsed under the pressures of Nazi Occupation.

In addition to the labor required to fulfil the needs of such a complex industry, the designers themselves played a role in *couture*'s survival. While some tended toward collaboration, or rather more accurately for some, a feeling of indifference, the perception of *couture* as an integral part of culture, viewed as *Zivilisation* by the Germans, a surface-level, 'feminine' ideal, created a sense of place for *couture* in the overall Nazi national identity.

While it can be contended that the realization of dress as a form of resistance was a post-war rewrite, actions of specific *couturiers* such as Madame Grès, Jacques Fath, and Cristóbal Balenciaga, purposefully circumventing restrictions and pushing against regulations can be viewed as small but noticeable struggles against the oppressors.

### CHAPTER 3 – CHALLENGING *COUTURE*

In each new country it occupied, “the Reich endeavored to present itself as a cultural leader.”<sup>142</sup> After conquering Belgium, the Germans moved toward France. The initial occupation of France was met with little resistance. The German forces were amicable and calm but disciplined—a collaboration with French police forces made for a smooth transition.<sup>143</sup> In many cases, the Nazi occupiers’ goal was to overrun and stamp out the existing government and culture and replace it with a strictly German way of life. France, however, the Nazis treated differently. Hitler believed that

The culture-creating capabilities of the Aryans in fact rested primarily on their ‘idealistic basic orientation’, a race-related tendency ‘to subordinate one’s own ego to the life of the whole, and, if the situation demands, to sacrifice it.’ This ‘capacity for self-sacrifice of the individual as against the whole’ was itself the necessary precondition for the formation of more highly organized, territorial states, and state formation was itself a precondition for the development of ‘human culture’.<sup>144</sup>

The Nazis viewed France as a highly civilized nation, relating to the German, *Zivilisation*. The continued analysis of the relationship between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* is vital in understanding why France, particularly Paris was treated differently than other occupied nations, beyond issues of race. As the center for high art and culture, Paris represented the façade which the Germans wished to encapsulate. Beyond this, German *Kultur* was to be cultivated in the motherland where true Aryans of Germanic blood could understand the world on a deeper, more meaningful level.

As Western Europeans, the French met the majority of the standards set for Aryans’ purity in race and were regarded as almost equals, simply missing the Germanic lineage that made those native to Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and

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<sup>142</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 356.

<sup>143</sup> Alan Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation, 1940-1944*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 3-12.

<sup>144</sup> Zentner, “Hitler’s Worldview,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, 427.

Sweden, ultimately superior. Because of this attitude toward the French, rather than obliterate French culture, the Nazis planned incorporate it into a superior German identity.<sup>145</sup> About Paris specifically, Hitler said, “I am grateful to fate to have seen this town whose aura has always preoccupied me. At the beginning of hostilities, I gave orders to the troops to find a way around Paris and to avoid fighting in its periphery. For it is our responsibility at several levels to preserve undamaged this wonder of Western civilization. We have succeeded.”<sup>146</sup> Because of the esteem Hitler held for the historical place, the plan to gain French cooperation varied from other nations. Mary Blume comments that the fact

that France seemed to have been given more freedom, than other occupied countries was simply a great convenience for the Germans. Their troops, assigned to relatively light occupation duty thanks to soon-enlarged French police force, were available for battle in the east and the Germans benefitted from an obedient French government, huge payments for occupation indemnities, and raw materials and labor that were cheap against a new, highly unfavorable, exchange rate.<sup>147</sup>

The collaborationist government’s unique position in Vichy gave the French seemingly more freedom in the occupied regions because some of the authority of control was allocated to the French police force. Additionally, since the goal of occupation was not submission but rather assimilation, the terror experienced by other nations was not initially felt in France.

Though he recognized the cultural superiority and importance of Paris, Hitler wanted to place it under a German sphere of influence. Some of the Third Reich’s commanding officers, specifically those of Joseph Goebbels’ ministry, believed that “The result of our victorious struggle should be to smash French predominance in cultural propaganda, in Europe, and in the world. After having taken possession of Paris, the

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<sup>145</sup> Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 263.

<sup>146</sup> David Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation, 1940-1944*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981), 13.

<sup>147</sup> Blume, *Master of Us All*, 53.

center of French cultural propaganda, it is possible now to give this propaganda the blow to finish it off, whereas assistance is given to it, or tolerance shown, would be a crime against the nation.”<sup>148</sup> Instead of the rapid destruction of French culture proposed by the ministry, the Nazis implemented a policy of “cautious demoralization.”<sup>149</sup> This consisted of reminding the French that they were, in part, responsible for the war and creating new power relations to dominate the spirit of the French.<sup>150</sup> “The Germans scrupulously took advantage of their victorious privileges, by economically expelling conquered France and imposing on it increased administrative rigor, without, however, succeeding...in neutralizing resistant haute couture,” noted Trojanowski<sup>151</sup>

*Haute couture* was an international industry, centered in Parisian culture. With the arrival of the Germans, *couture* remained constant and resistant. Dominique Veillon describes the period and motivations of the Third Reich the best, stating:

More than a change in ways of dressing, fashion here appears to be an important economic and cultural factor. It was an economic factor because the Germans were greatly in need of raw materials and imposed strict rationing, which affected creative *couture*. It was a cultural factor because at the outbreak of war the prestige of *haute couture* was at its height. Paris was the capital of elegance, and the reputation of certain *couturiers* went far beyond national frontiers. Every collection was an opportunity for the creators to dictate a style that spread throughout the world...France was the depository of a cultural heritage that it was determined to defend. The envious conqueror aimed to break this hegemony...the Germans wanted to take over the great Paris fashion houses and transfer the biggest names to Berlin.<sup>152</sup>

Intent on taking over French culture, the Germans implemented limitations and policies to uproot and destroy the French identity.

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<sup>148</sup> Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich*, 88

<sup>149</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 358.

<sup>150</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 358-359.

<sup>151</sup> Krzysztof Trojanowski, “French Fashion under the German Occupation in the Journal of Andrzej Bobkowski 1940-1944,” in *Criação & Crítica*, trans. Piper Head, (1991), 126.

<sup>152</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, viii.

At the outset of the Occupation, German guidelines for the French economy included increasing German war potential (through accumulated factories and manpower), identification and promotion of French organizations most beneficial to military production (completed by the Parisian administrators), reduction of civilian consumption, and termination of Jewish businesses.<sup>153</sup>

Unafraid to use manipulation tactics, the Nazis used various incentives and prohibitions to make strategic and advantageous moves toward their military and political goals in France. Many French people found it impossible to avoid working for the Germans in one form or another as they struggled with the reduced availability of consumer goods and shortages of food, cloth, and other necessities.<sup>154</sup> German production of consumer goods were increasingly shifted to French factories so more factories in the homeland could be used for the war effort.<sup>155</sup> This subliminal nod to French culture unintentionally reaffirmed the established notion of France's tradition of superiority in the international arena. The integrated manufacturing systems of the French *couture* industry allowed this shift to be possible and beneficial for the Germans.

Not only was the French economy under attack by the occupiers, but the culture and spirit of France was subject to the same fate. Both the physical atmosphere and social climate of Paris changed. The German direction signs in bold black and white font were erected on street corners, Nazi banners and swastika flags were hung and uniformed soldiers roamed the empty streets, save for the German military vehicles. The Nazis took over the most elite hotels, such as the

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<sup>153</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 23.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Hayes, "The Economy," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Richard Gellately, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 189-212.; Pohl, "War and Empire," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Gellately, ed., 243-274.

<sup>155</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 3, *The Mediterranean, South-east Europe, and North Africa 1939-1941*, ed. Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegmann, and Detlef Vogel, trans. Dean S. McMurry, Ewald Osers, Louise Willmot, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 138-145.

Ritz, and government buildings to establish living quarters, offices, and meeting spaces for German officers and staff.<sup>156</sup>

The inundation of German military men, their families, and other party staff members resulted in a new public etiquette and a shift in the social hierarchy. The German occupying personnel made up the new elite.<sup>157</sup> Because of their position in western Europe and the German need to integrate French culture into the Nazi master narrative, the prewar elite of Paris were coaxed and persuaded into assimilation with the Germans. A prime example of this is Coco Chanel and the other French society people who remained at the Ritz living side by side with German officers, often befriending one another. Even those who were not part of the elite social class experienced a new public etiquette. German officers and soldiers received the highest priority in all situations, even on the crowded train in seats usually reserved for the elderly and pregnant.<sup>158</sup> Soldiers' presence and the constant visual reminder of the Occupiers did not bolster or encourage the public morale. Dr. Johnathan Schmidt associates the decline in public morale to five conditions including: (1) the realization of defeat sinking in, (2) a visibly worsening economy, (3) the effectiveness of English propaganda, (4) the return of the refugees from the South of France, and (5) activities of the Communist saboteurs.<sup>159</sup> While morale across Europe declined, "culture became more 'masculine' as it was determined by war, conservative gender roles, and violence, while societies became more feminine,"<sup>160</sup> however, in Paris, French society eventually adjusted to the presence of the enemy and cultural practices continued with an air of normalcy.<sup>161</sup> The French were able to quickly move past the initial shock of the Occupation

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<sup>156</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 13-19.

<sup>157</sup> Pohl, "War and Empire," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Gellately, ed., 257-258.

<sup>158</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 13-19.

<sup>159</sup> Schmid to Streccius, October 2, 1940, BA-MA Freiburg, RW 35/284, in Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 18.

<sup>160</sup> Pohl, "War and Empire," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Gellately, ed., 265.

<sup>161</sup> Trojanowski, "Journal of Andrzej Bobkowski," 126.

quickly because cultural activities such as attending theaters, operas, and galas continued. The Germans helped the high culture of France flourish by offering musical talent and other artists and performers. These entertainers were of German origin and met the Party's artistic and cultural expectations. Mitchell states, "All of this cultural opulence was clearly intended to coax the discriminating Parisian public into a warmer appreciation of the Occupation and presumably therefore a more collaborative mood by presenting the best that Germany had to offer."<sup>162</sup> These actions were important in maintaining control over the French. As historian Krzysztof Trojanowski noted in his analysis of Andrzej Bobkowski's journal on French fashion under the occupation, "traditions of French culture—including fashion and haute couture, the luxury industry—can be considered a model of European identity."<sup>163</sup> The German soldiers, experiencing the opulence of France for the first time, engaged heavily in the luxury markets, consuming goods that had not been available in Germany for quite some time. The unadvantageous (for the French) exchange rates allowed the German soldiers to obtain luxury goods at significantly reduced rates.

Jacqueline Demornex states, "The Germans had tried systematically to crush couture, by drowning it in foreign competition, depriving it of raw materials, preventing it from advertising and denying it access to foreign markets. One last option remained: to mutilate it by conscripting part of its labor force."<sup>164</sup> This became evident as Germany implemented a labor-prisoner exchange in which Germany would release one Prisoner of War (POW) for every three workers France provided to the German factories. Shortly after they implemented this program, the Nazis ended this exchange and French workers who were unemployed no longer had a choice in their

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<sup>162</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 27-28.

<sup>163</sup> Trojanowski, "Journal of Andrzej Bobkowski," 127.

<sup>164</sup> Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*, 90.

participation in the work program. Unemployed men between the ages of eighteen and fifty and single unemployed women between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five were placed into a draft. The work draft disrupted the French economy immensely and France became a seemingly endless supply of labor for the Germans.<sup>165</sup> Those who remained employed in France, especially those considered cultural workers (those working in radio, television, art, and journalism to name a few) were supervised through professional organizations in an attempt to keep French influence from surpassing the German desire for cultural hegemony.<sup>166</sup> , as chairman of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, Lucien Lelong negotiated extensively with the Germans regarding the labor force associated with *couture*. Ultimately, less than five percent of the labor force employed by *couture* industries were conscripted for labor in German factories.<sup>167</sup> Again, the distinctive personnel in the *couture* industry were an essential force counteracting the German objectives.

While the Nazi Party's goal was to break France's intellectual monopoly, move the fashion capital to Berlin<sup>168</sup> and "appropriate an art whose know-how was traditionally linked to French culture,"<sup>169</sup> the image of the perfect German woman, needed to replace the French ideal, was missing. Irene Guenther points out that

Instead of an agreed-upon plan for female fashion in the Third Reich, which would encompass a unified view of what 'German fashion' meant to a singular, consistently-touted public image of the female, incongruities abounded. The result was that there was not one prevailing female image, but several. These images not only competed with one another, but they also sometimes glaringly conflicted with either the Party's rhetoric or its policies. High-ranking officials...were aware of the inconsistencies, but did nothing to rectify the growing gap between ideology and reality. Rather, members of the new Nazi elite and their wives only exacerbated the deepening schism.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Julia S. Torrie, "The Home Front," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich*, Richard Gellately, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 275-310.; Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 55-63.

<sup>166</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 355-356.

<sup>167</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 91.

<sup>168</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 27-36.

<sup>169</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 85.

<sup>170</sup> Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 92.

German officers and wives shopped at stores that exemplified French luxury, contributing to France's continued success.<sup>171</sup> In January 1941, the German magazine, *Die Mode* published an article praising the Third Reich. The article stated,

The German victory over France has an incisive meaning for fashion, which was mostly influenced by France until the outbreak of the war notwithstanding some delightful German-created contributions. The creative-spiritual work that is inherent in the design of the European clothing style and, hitherto, has been generated by the Parisian haute couture, will now be brought to fuel achievement by German fashion designers...the national self-confidence, which expresses itself in the architectural style of the Reich, as well as in the new sculptures, in the modern creation of landscape a city planning, through its road building, in the outward manifestations of political formations, and in the presentation of political festivities, must lead to a similarly inspired designing-spirit in German clothing...when one asks, how will fashion look that is created out of the new political, cultural, and social situation, one has to study the new type of German youth, who is the carrier of this great future thinking. Their ideals: simplicity, comradeship, faith, and readiness, along with the external matters of life, will determine the laws of design...not least, that specific feeling for life, which comes from sports, nature, and group experiences, will be an essential requisite in the modern clothing style.<sup>172</sup>

While espousing the apparent accomplishments of the Reich, coupled with the foundation of the *Deutsches Mode Institute*, a fashion institute in Berlin, backed by the government, the German fashion industry seemed ready to blossom. The reality of the situation, for the Germans, however, was much more complex. Because the National Socialist Party had semi-supported three opposing ideals of German women – the farmer's wife who wore traditional folk dress and the young National Socialist who wore a uniform both of which rejected international trends, condemning cosmetics and promoting the natural look and physical fitness, or the third image, which was a woman with no prescribed look but was based on anti-cosmetics and anti-foreign ideals, aiming for pure Aryan-Nordic beauty – it was impossible to create a united front.<sup>173</sup> In addition to the lack of consistent messaging and Nazi elite perpetuating the French luxury

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<sup>171</sup> Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich*, 88-93.

<sup>172</sup> Anonymous, *Die Mode*, January 1941, in Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 208.

<sup>173</sup> Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 98-109.

industry, the images of Nazi officers, including Hitler and Goebbels, and their wives and girlfriends, Geunther notes, they

made patently clear that they, too, were velvet and to set themselves against international currents in the realm of fashioning. While relentlessly proselytizing in favor of a return to 'the old true Germany' which, they argued, had been polluted by degenerate modernism and vulgar mass culture, they personally rejected the 'blood and soil' female image proposed by the hardliners. Instead, they found the allure of modern fashions to the women who wore them far more to their liking... The 'poster' they envisioned for the world to read was one that would proclaim, 'Schick women in the Third Reich!' instead, by the end of Hitler's twelve-year reign, there was nothing left of fascism's deceptively fashionable countenance.<sup>174</sup>

Despite a seeming lack of effort on the part of Nazi officials and the women in their lives to eliminate the influence of French fashion, policies created by the party directly affected the *couture* industry.

In order to assume control of the industry and benefit the war effort, the Nazis enforced limitations on textiles and thread. French industries were allowed to keep a total of thirty percent of woolsens, sixteen percent of cottons, and thirteen percent of linens.<sup>175</sup> In addition to these industry limitations, clothing cards and rations cards were distributed to the public in February 1941 which "compris[ed] a certain number of points to every customer holding a food ration card. The [new] card would allow the acquisition of clothing and textile articles according to a scale based on the nature of the article and a determined number of points."<sup>176</sup> In addition to these new clothing cards, there were special *couture* cards which allowed a holder to deduct fifty percent of the points on the clothing card, deduct the letters "A" and "B" which allowed the exchange of two old garments for a new one, and pay a tax to purchase a *couture* garment. Each person who desired this card had to receive special permission from the Germans. To monitor these restrictions, the Germans created the *Comite General d'Organisation de l'Industrie*

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<sup>174</sup> Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 277.

<sup>175</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 66.

<sup>176</sup> Dossier, "Carte de vêtements," Archives nationales, in Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 55.

*Textile*<sup>177</sup> comprised of seven groups including (1) *couture*, decorations, fashion, made-to-measure clothing, lace, tulle, and embroidery, headed by Lucien Lelong; (2) men's clothing; (3) women's clothing; (4) manufacture of men's shirts, underwear and ties, and lingerie; (5) furs and skins; (6) related industries such as hats, cravats, and scarves; and, (7) the cloth trade. The committee wanted French manufacturers to use more synthetic fibers to preserve natural fibers, such as leather and wool, for the war effort, however, the amount of wool allotted to each individual French person was higher than that allotted to German citizens, an indirect acceptance of the place of dress in France.<sup>178</sup>

Limiting natural fibers was a way in which the Germans attempted to diminish the prestige of *couture*; however, the Germans helped the French establish their synthetic fibers industry, particularly rayon. While the production of rayon helped the war effort, by creating more raw material for uniforms and textiles, designers were able to transition to using higher concentrations of synthetic fibers in their collections and convince their customers that the quality and luxury of the material met the specifications *couture* demanded. In 1941, the Exhibition at the Grand-Palais showcased the uses of rayon, fibranne, and ersatz as new and innovative materials.<sup>179</sup> The French women cared about their appearance and were determined not to lose their elegance and pride. As Krzysztof Trojanowski states further in his analysis of Andrzej Bobkowski's journal, "any elegant woman worthy of the name did not forget to take care of her beauty regularly, which even becomes a patriotic duty for every Parisian, the embodiment of a legendary chic world renowned and very envied."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> "Comite General d'Organisation de l'Industrie Textile" translates to "General Organizing Committee of the Textile Industry."

<sup>178</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 39-68, 70, 85-106.

<sup>179</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 75.

<sup>180</sup> Trojanowski, "Journal of Andrzej Bobkowski," 130.

The battle for *couture* was continuous throughout the Occupation. The industry was vital to the French economy and the cultural value was both beneficial and detrimental to the Germans. It was beneficial in terms of its economic value and as a tool to heighten the validity of German culture and reach the goal of a hegemonic German nation. *Couture*, however, hurt German attempts at complete cultural realization because the industry was so tied to French identity that it could not be separated. It embodied the France's spirit and allowing it to continue as it did, though against their best efforts, kept morale and hope secure in the minds and hearts of the French people.

Frustrated that *couture* continued to flourish even after strict regulations were placed on fabric consumption and collection sizes, the Germans tried "to supplant the French in the art of fashion [which] drove them to extend their hold over the women's press"<sup>181</sup> giving them tighter control over fashion publications. Film was another tool in the German arsenal. Propaganda films and newsreels appeared in theaters throughout the occupied zones. However, French and Hollywood films, as well as theater, remained a significant business in which *couturiers* designed costumes for the stars. Marcel Rochas expanded his *couture* business to include a cinema department in 1941. Though the German stranglehold on fashion grew ever tighter, film and theater costumes were a stage on which *couturiers* could still present their latest creations.<sup>182</sup> *Couture* became increasingly limited in what was allowed to leave Paris. It was viewed as a cultural activity, ideas of which Germans attempted to stop the spread of unless presented as German in origin. *Couturiers* struggled to sell their designs to clients, especially to those who escaped and remained in the unoccupied zone due to the strict regulations at the demarcation line and abroad. Because of this, smaller dressmakers in the unoccupied zone filled a multitude of

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<sup>181</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 95.

<sup>182</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 27-36.

orders for new clients as people reached out to them for copies of the designs created in Paris.<sup>183</sup> As an article published in *Comoedia*, an arts and culture newspaper, reported, “each material, each design, each color, represents a victory for French ingenuity, a success for Parisian taste.”<sup>184</sup> Though limited, each new design promised a bright future for the French and hope was not lost.

It became apparent that “neither the indirect nor the direct method proved effective with the occupied populations. It was only natural that, following their military and economic subjection, they should wish at least to retain their cultural independence.”<sup>185</sup> Also, “the ineffectiveness of German propaganda and the rejection of the occupation policy were due not only to their underlying ideology. The bulk of the inhabitants of the occupied territories were unable to see any advantage in the ‘new order’ because the change in political circumstances was very soon associated for them with a material deterioration and sometimes also a decline in social status.”<sup>186</sup> Especially in France, many began to realize that the Germans did not have much to offer culturally or politically that was considered positive.

Whereas people in Berlin continued to think that German fashion would eclipse French fashion, in Paris the authorities appointed by the occupier began to understand that the Berlin experiment had failed and that Parisian fashion was surviving all the problems it encountered. From this they concluded that the really clever thing to do would be to allow it to continue in order to turn the export potential of the Parisian *couturiers* to the benefit of the German economy when the time was ripe.<sup>187</sup>

*Haute couture* stood up to and challenged the National Socialist cultural hegemony through its role in national pride. Without such feeling surrounding the *couture* industry, by the French, Germans, and international buyers and clients, the industry would have crumbled in the fist of Nazi oppression. Additionally, the lack of a coherent and complete alternative to present to the

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<sup>183</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 21-38.

<sup>184</sup> Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich*, 104.

<sup>185</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 357.

<sup>186</sup> Research Institute for Military History, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 5, Part. 1, 376.

<sup>187</sup> Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 96.

occupied nation concerning the ideal German woman, to assimilate and adjust to, allowed the activities of the *couturiers* to continue unencumbered by German identity.

## CHAPTER 4 – SURVIVING OCCUPATION

In every community, there is something that ties people together. Benedict Anderson says, “in everything ‘natural’ there is always something unchosen...in this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin colour, gender, parentage, and birth era... ‘national ties’.”<sup>188</sup> From its established tradition as a fashion leader, the French have formed an identity around dress and *couture*. In contrast, the Germans experienced extreme societal changes as a result of the reparations demanded in the Treaty of Versailles. National ties began to relate to lineage and Germanness. In an attempt to create a complete and comprehensive German image, representations of the ideal German woman were proposed, however, attempts at true German style were feeble.

In 1942, the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM),<sup>189</sup> hosted a fashion show to demonstrate appropriate fashion for German women. The show opened with girls of the BDM performing a gymnastics routine in which “they exude an aura of youthfulness and joy, health and natural radiance.”<sup>190</sup> Following the display of physical excellence prominent in German propaganda, the show of clothing takes place. Kristel Paun’s entry in the BDM yearbook states, “When it was over, a BDM unit leader stated that the BDM, and in particular the BDM program Faith and Beauty, sees an obligation no to simply ignore various trends in fashion but rather to actively participate in designing fashions that are appropriate for our times and to thus allow the outer appearance to clearly reflect the inner workings of human beings.”<sup>191</sup> While the Germans

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<sup>188</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 143.

<sup>189</sup> “*Bund Deutscher Mädel*” translates to “Association of German Girls.”

<sup>190</sup> Kristel Paun, “Wartime Fashion Show,” in *Wir Schaffen*, (Munich: Verlag Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1942), 156, in Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, ed., *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 265.

<sup>191</sup> Paun, “Wartime Fashion Show,” in Rabinbach and Gilman, ed., *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 265.

believed they were encapsulating the appropriate image for women in the period, the illustration presented did not align with French ideals, thus increasing the desire for French *couture* even under occupation. Between 1941 and 1942 Balenciaga's sales increased by 400%, showing extraordinary growth.<sup>192</sup>

The war and occupation allowed a new type of customer to emerge. Women who made money selling items on the black market, better known as *Beurre Oeufs Fromages* or BOFs, comprised a new class of women now able to afford *couture*.<sup>193</sup> According to the restrictions set by the Nazis, in order to purchase *couture*, one had to first buy a *couture* card which cost either 200 francs and two kilos of fabric.<sup>194</sup> The *couturiers* continued producing garments for their traditional clients but added business from this new group of women. Postwar, many foreigners were concerned that the French had catered to the German need for clothing, however, only two hundred of the 20,000 *couture* cards sold during the Occupation belonged to the wives of German officers.<sup>195</sup> The majority of couturier's business remained with clients who had established relationships before the war and the new class of French woman, the BOFs.

Throughout the Occupation, French women gravitated toward exaggerated, feminine clothing. Dressing in such a way was a "national feature that the Germans could not eradicate,"<sup>196</sup> stated Maselli, and served as a form of rebellion against the Nazis.<sup>197</sup> This mentality surrounding clothing and rebellion is reflected in the tricolor collections created by Madame Grès and the illicit fashion shows planned and promoted by Lucien Lelong. Also, one

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<sup>192</sup> Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved and Died Under Nazi Occupation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 136.

<sup>193</sup> Sebba, *Les Parisiennes*, 116.

<sup>194</sup> Two kilos of fabric equates to about four and a half pounds. Each pound of fabric is equivalent to about one and a third yards, so two kilos of fabric is about six yards of fabric.; Blume, *Master of Us All*, 57.

<sup>195</sup> Sebba, *Les Parisiennes*, 137.

<sup>196</sup> Maselli, "Lucien Lelong and the *Théâtre de la Mode*," 135.

<sup>197</sup> Maselli, "Lucien Lelong and the *Théâtre de la Mode*," 135.

of the aims of occupation was reduced civilian consumption. Continued production of *couture* directly countered this aspiration. Because the German's end goal was to incorporate French fashion in the larger German identity, they continued to "nourish the cultural life of Paris,"<sup>198</sup> which included *couture*, even as Allied forces entered France. The war was inevitably lost for the National Socialist Party. Christian Dior recounted, "Lelong was actually in the midst of preparing his winter collection when we were liberated: several weeks later, to the amazement of the Allies, he was able to present them with a spectacle of living Parisian fashion."<sup>199</sup>

Immediately, liberation revealed what Robinson describes as "one of the best-kept secrets of the war, that of French fashion design."<sup>200</sup> *Vogue* was eager to report on the French fashion that appeared after the Nazis were removed from Paris. The first article indicating French style had not died stated, "With Gallic wit and spirit, French women wear clothes that circumvent wartime shortages and Nazi dictates..."<sup>201</sup> The triumphant article continues,

Fortunately, immediately after the armistice, the Underground movement sprang up to continue the battle clandestinely throughout France. The couturiers—these representatives of the spirit of Paris—were counseled to keep their establishments running, keep their personnel at work in order to provide them with a livelihood—all for the good of the country.

...It was necessary to save all these 'little hands,' these ingenious unknowns who contribute to the glory of the great houses...

The most important couturiers, therefore, reopened their shops...

Thus Spirit triumphs over Force...

But nothing will keep the spirit of Paris (where the people and the *couture* are more than ever united) from manifesting itself. Nothing will keep certain dressmaking houses from helping us in the 'Underground' war—where even trick belts are useful. The battle of Spirit versus Force continues.... As for me—I am betting on Spirit.<sup>202</sup>

While the French remained stylish and true to their traditions, the Americans and British dressed plainly and dowdily, in uniform-like clothes. The French believed their dress to be a

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<sup>198</sup> Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 140.

<sup>199</sup> Dior, *Dior by Dior*, 200.

<sup>200</sup> Julian Robinson, *Fashion in the Forties*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 21.

<sup>201</sup> "Paris Wears Defiance," *Vogue*, June 1944, 107.

<sup>202</sup> "Paris Wears Defiance," *Vogue*, June 1944; 107-108, 166, 173.

celebration of French identity and a form of dissent to German control. The foreign press, however, immediately rebuked French dress as too excessive.<sup>203</sup> While clothing in Great Britain was truly limited to utility clothing, which was often considered plain and uninspiring and were under strict fabric regulations, American manufacturers, often ignored or pushed the boundaries of the clothing regulations put in place in the United States. Jennifer M. Moyer and Elaine L. Pedersen conducted interviews with American women who lived during World War II, hoping to ascertain women's consumer experiences in relation to federal regulations on clothing. They determined that the majority of the women did not remember specific regulations but a shift in style (to shorter skirts and narrower silhouettes) and increased difficulty in finding certain materials (silk, wool, nylon, leather, etc.) though no serious deprivations were felt, unlike in Britain and other European nations.<sup>204</sup> No matter the opinion in terms of excess, many *couturiers* wanted to continue their practices and resume international trade.

Christian Dior, who departed from Lelong's *couture* house to establish as house of his own after the war, said, "We were just emerging from a poverty-stricken, parsimonious era, obsessed with ration books and clothes-coupons: it was only natural that my creations should take the form of a reaction against this dearth of imagination."<sup>205</sup> He wanted to turn away from the war mentality which stemmed from a desire to defy the occupying forces and austerity of Vichy and return to the true function of *couture*: clothing women and enhancing their beauty.<sup>206</sup>

Pierre Balmain, Dior's design partner from their time at Lelong, opened his *couture* house in October 1945. Reflecting on its opening, Balmain said, "To start a new house at that

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<sup>203</sup> Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*, 92-95.

<sup>204</sup> Jennifer M. Moyer and Elaine L. Pedersen, "Pretty and Patriotic," *Dress: The Journal of the Costume Society of America*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2013), 37-54.

<sup>205</sup> Dior, *Dior by Dior*, 23.

<sup>206</sup> Dior, *Dior by Dior*, 3-11.

time seemed to be pure folly, especially since the international set had yet to return to Paris.”<sup>207</sup>

His first collection included trouser ensembles, homespun jackets, kimonos zippered at the shoulder, evening *tailleurs*, narrow, taffeta evening dresses, and full skirted ball gowns.

Balmain’s relationship with architecture was reflected in his clothing and his desire for fashion to be beautiful and elegant following the stiffness of the war came across.

Jacques Fath, who became notable during the war, accelerated his career immediately following the war, significantly contributing to the preservation of French *couture*, along with Dior and Balmain. In 1946, Fath trademarked the *bustier corbeillé*, a new undergarment, following suit with Marcel Rochas’ wasp waist corset.<sup>208</sup> These inventions indicated a shift in style, appropriate with the changing mood of the period. These new conceptions of fashion were presented internationally in the *Théâtre de la Mode*, in hopes of reviving the *couture* industry to its former glory.

The *Théâtre de la Mode*, a project created and spearheaded by Lucien Lelong, was a travelling collection of miniature dolls (twenty-seven inches in height)<sup>209</sup> to represent “France’s need to reemerge, sweep away the debris of war, restore the unity and national identity that Nazi Germany had tried to repress, and relaunch a key sector of the economy.”<sup>210</sup> The goal was not only to fundraise money for Parisians affected by the war, but it served as a travelling advertisement of the vitality of *couture*, to promote Parisian creativity abroad, and to revitalize the economy and communications in such an important industry to French culture.<sup>211</sup> The exhibition included three hundred miniatures created by the most well-known *couturiers* in

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<sup>207</sup> “Press Kit for Pierre Balmain Spring Collection,” Centre de Documentation Mode at the *Musées des Arts Décoratifs*, 1976, in Golbin, *Couture Confessions*, 164.

<sup>208</sup> Savignon, *Jacques Fath*, 75.

<sup>209</sup> Riding, *And the Show Went On*, 347.

<sup>210</sup> Maselli, “Lucien Lelong and the *Théâtre de la Mode*,” 129

<sup>211</sup> Maselli, “Lucien Lelong and the *Théâtre de la Mode*.”

France including Christian Dior, Pierre Balmain, Lucien Lelong, Elsa Schiaparelli, Jeanne Lanvin, and more.<sup>212</sup> With his contribution to the *Théâtre de la Mode* and in his postwar collections, “Dior created a postwar fashion that celebrated abundance, revived French luxury industries and the fortunes of the Parisian haute couture, and ensured that it would reclaim its place at the summit of women’s fashion.”<sup>213</sup> Many *couturiers* wanted to revitalize French culture and prove that *couture* and the spirit of the French people was not broken.

Beyond the designs presented at the *Théâtre de la Mode*, French *couturiers* began producing new collections and showing them in their salons as they had before the war. *Vogue* resumed its reports of the last French fashions, praising the experimentation and risks *couturiers* were taking in their postwar designs. The October 15, 1945 review of the autumn collections says, “Against all odds the Paris couture has created conversation and excitement. Give them fabrics and labour and they will be sensational again.”<sup>214</sup> The French government and the leading authority on couture, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, did everything in their power to do just that and reassert that French *couture* was the expert division of the fashion industry. Ultimately, with the aid of the *Théâtre de la Mode* and stunning and invigorating designs from new *couturiers*, specifically Christian Dior’s “New Look”<sup>215</sup>, “Paris fashion rose from the ashes of war, because it still represented the height of luxury, chic, and feminine beauty,” stated Steele.<sup>216</sup> Ultimately, Robinson concluded, “In London, it was agreed that every sensible critic now acknowledged Paris as the fountainhead of original design. ‘Paris is the spiritual home of

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<sup>212</sup> Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*, 96-103.

<sup>213</sup> Font, “Dior Before Dior,” 26.

<sup>214</sup> “Paris Collections, Autumn 1945,” *Vogue*, October 15, 1945, 102.

<sup>215</sup> This term was given to Dior’s “Bar” suit by Carmel Snow editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*. Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*, 145.

<sup>216</sup> Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 274.

the creative fashion designer’.”<sup>217</sup> This sentiment reaffirmed Paris had regained its international seat at the forefront of fashion innovation and creative design.

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<sup>217</sup> Robinson, *Fashion in the Forties*, 82.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

Paris, the home of *haute couture* and long-standing cultural authority, experienced hardship, devastation, and displacement during the Nazi Occupation of 1940-1944. While its overall place as a cultural authority was left in question after World War II, Paris reestablished itself as the central hub of fashion, *couture* being the superior facet of the industry. In this text, I set out to position the *couture* industry, not only as an integral part of the French economy, but as central to French cultural identity.

Dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, French dressmakers have been a leaders in style and fashion, utilizing the French courts as runways to showcase the latest designs. The prestige of French design became a defining factor of France, weaving into French identity. This aspect of French culture manifested in many ways giving France, particularly Paris, an aura of elegance and refinement, adding to feminine associations affixed to Paris by German ideas of *kultur* and *zivilisation*.

The arduous relationship between Germany and France between 1940 and 1944 was entrenched in a cultural power struggle in which Germany was intent on surpassing France as the cultural capital of the world. A significant representation of culture is dress. Dress is the daily practice of placing body supplements and modifications on oneself to create a style reflective of a facet of identity. Often, distinctive dress can identify people as members of a certain group. For France, the *chic* elegance of *couture* was integral to French identity, whether one could afford it or not. *Couture* set the rule for fashion and served as point of reference for other dressmakers and manufacturers. German dressmakers were not excluded from the sphere of influence of French *haute couture*.

In establishing cultural hegemony over Europe, the Nazis made an attempt to enact a form of German dress that would become the national costume. The three conflicting ideals of the perfect German woman, the folk farmer's wife, the model National Socialist in uniform, and the non-descript pure Aryan image, hindered full German control over the French. Had they succeeded in constituting official German dress for women, however, Coco Chanel's sentiment that fashion had ended would've been accurate. The frivolity of *couture* was a feminine condition that the ideal German nation would not have a need for. The Nazis offered no alternative to *couture* while also allowing the *couture* industry to continue creating new garments and styles. The desire, and need, to dress well, as Frenchwoman, remained throughout the war. Presenting oneself as feminine, elegant, and refined was a sign of national pride and push back against Nazi regulations.

Lucien Lelong, noting that the Germans considered the *couture* industry a cultural activity, argued intensely that to move *couture* to Berlin would wash it of its charm and beauty. Culture, as a product of the environment, could not be moved. In addition to firmly planting *couture* in Paris, Lelong was able to negotiate the exclusion of essential craftsmen from the labor draft, keeping the intricate network of French artisans employed in the industry, allowing further production and consumption of *couture* garments.

Beyond legal and political maneuvering, foundational ideas of race and purity were factors of German ideology that aligned closely enough with French culture to create tensions and uncertainties in how to proceed with French occupation. As Western Europeans, the French were considered more pure and closer to Aryan and Germanic roots than their Eastern European counterparts. Because the Nazi ideas of nationalism were centered on ideas of race, the hierarchy created among occupied countries led to differing treatment. The tactic of cautious

demoralization, rather than an abrupt and violent infusion of Germanness, allowed French cultural leaders the room to influence societal practices during the occupation. A result of this manipulation was the exaggerated feminism represented in fashion, serving as a beacon of hope for the spirit of France.

Ultimately, after the war ended, the influence of the *couturiers* over cultural representations of French identity were, again, on the international platform. The *Théâtre de la Mode* solidified Parisian fashion as the leader once again. The new era of fashion was established by Dior's "New Look" and the world could move beyond the stagnation and hardships of war.

Without the integration of *couture* ideals into French culture and identity, German sentiments of *kultur* and *zivilisation*, and the interconnectedness of the craftsmen and economic entities tied to the *couture* industry in France, the industry and influence of France would not have survived the Nazi Occupation. These unique factors, seemingly in line with National Socialist principles of feminine and masculine representations of culture, created an environment in which the ideals of German hegemony were undermined and usurped in unexpected ways.

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