

## **The fabrics as the protagonists in the Balenciaga silhouette**

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### **Abstract**

All creations we call “dresses” have been made with textiles or materials suitable to fit the natural shape of the human body. Tailors, dressmakers, designers and creators of fashion have been aware of the importance of the materials they worked with to implement their ideas. The technical and physical characteristics of the materials have been and are essential when thinking of the structure of a dress. The human body has not anatomically changed so the structure of dresses are subject to cuts set in advance to those that a design must follow. In this sense, fashion designers have known the importance of materials to create the most striking shapes and volumes of the history of fashion and especially today where smart fabrics are more present.

Our aim in this paper is to explain how Cristóbal Balenciaga contributed to the fabrics development with his work. Cristóbal Balenciaga (Guetaria 1895 – Javea 1972) was a great designer and connoisseur of all the processes needed to make a garment. The studies made of Balenciaga report that the master had a predilection for certain tissues which gave answers to all his creations. The protagonists’ tissues were the following: velvet, faille, duchess satin, and embroidery for evening dresses, the recurrent use of lace and unique fine wool clothes for the day. Each of these tissues were carefully selected since the characteristics of the materials were crucial to the execution of his creations , to the point of working in direct contact with textile manufacturers, as Gustave Zumsteg from the brand Abraham’s, obtaining the adequate tissue for getting heavy volumes.

**Keywords:** Balenciaga, Fashion, Structures, Fabrics, Technology,

Research paper.

All the creations we call “dresses” have been made with fabrics or materials that adapt to the natural forms of the human body. Tailors, male dressmakers, designers and craftsmen of fashion have always been conscious of the importance of the materials with which they worked to execute their ideas. The technical and physical characteristics of the materials have been and still are fundamental when it comes to outlining the structure of a dress. The human body has not automatically changed so the structures of the dresses are subject to the fixed cuts made and which the design must adhere to. In this sense, The creators of fashion have always been aware of the importance of the materials to create the showy shapes and volumes in the history of fashion and especially today in which intelligent fabrics are more present.

One personage who has always attracted attention for his great knowledge of fabrics, the materials of which they are made and of their complex structures, has been Cristóbal Balenciaga, the subject of this study. Those who knew him were aware of the fact that his knowledge was as specialised at that of the manufacturer. Juliette Duclos the French representative for English fabrics, sums it up very eloquently: “I had an appointment with Mr. Balenciaga. He was very punctual, he was never more than ten minutes late. He examined the samples in front of me. In silence, in his profound silence....

-Composition, Madame Duclos? ( he always knew our names) I had just received the collection of samples late and I answered at random:

-This sample? Wool, cashmere....

- Wool, cashmere and camel hair, he replied. He was right.

### **The designer. Short biographical notes**

Cristóbal Balenciaga, is one of the most important couturier of the XX century whose work has been determining in the evolution of the fashion of that century. He was born in 1895, at the height of the Belle Époque, in a little fishing village on the North coast of Spain called Guetaria very close to the Cosmopolitan San Sebastian, which in those days had become the fashionable summer resort of the Spanish Monarchy, and the European Nobles and Aristocracy. From a very early age he was sure what his career was going to be so he studied all the materials concerning the art of dressing in depth. Gifted with an exquisite sensitivity and proper personal qualities to develop his craft, explain how at the age of eleven he carried out his first sewing jobs for his patron the Marchioness de Casa Torres. In 1907 he moved to San Sebastian and started his apprenticeship as a tailor of the best fashion houses. A short time later Balenciaga was working as a tailor in Almacenes au Louvre, the headquarters in San Sebastián of the prestigious Paris establishment. He was put in charge of the department of ladies wear. As a

result he had to make frequent trips to Paris, which allowed him to get to know the fashion trends and to meet the most relevant couturiers in the city of fashion (Arzalluz, 2010).

Seven years later and after having worked in Bordeaux in a fashion house owned by some friends, Balenciaga started to outline his own company and in 1917 he opened his first shop and called it C. Balenciaga in calle Vergara in San Sebastián. His first venture were made with shareholders, but in 1924 he set up on his own in Avenida de la Libertad, number 2 in San Sebastián.

San Sebastián like Biarritz had become the fashionable summer resort and in this sense it was the ideal place to show the latest creations of the artifices of fashion. Chanel opened a shop in Biarritz in 1915 and other houses of renown like Worth, Paquin, Callot etc preferred to show their season's collection in the luxurious premises in San Sebastián (Arzalluz, 2010: 118). The outbreak of the First World War and Spain's neutrality during the conflict did not slow down spending nor did it minimise the interest in fashion. On the other hand, if we take into account that San Sebastián became the favourite exile destination of the important people in Europe, it enhanced it. The decade of the 20's were significant for Balenciaga. He began his professional journey on his own, and very soon his creations were adopted by the most discerning members of Society. Queen María Cristina became the most important client of the couturier. Quite often Balenciaga would go with his tailor Tomás Ruíz to the Palace of Miramar for the Queen's fittings (Jouve and Demornex, 1988: 20-21). It was also in the 20's when Balenciaga met Madame Vionnet in the Palace Hotel in Madrid. From that moment on, a very close friendship was born between them. Madame Vionnet was the most important professional reference for Balenciaga. He admired the technical expertise. And for a long time he purchased models of the dressmaker to undo them and study the morphology of her creations. It was Vionnet herself, who on seeing several of Balenciaga's creations, urged him to be himself.

The exile of Alfonso XIII and the Court in 1931, after the proclamation of the Second Republic, put an end to the golden age of haute couture in San Sebastián, and no doubt affected the atelier of the couturier. Spanish political life slowed down his business, but that was not an obstacle, as he opened new premises in San Sebastián and branches in Madrid and Barcelona. In 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out and Cristóbal Balenciaga went into exile. Political circumstances were the reason he left his mother country. He was mature and took with him his cultural and professional baggage which was necessary to be successful in Paris. As Balenciaga commented: "Paris possessed a special ambience for fashion as it had hundreds of dedicated artisans immersed in creating buttons, flowers, feathers and all the luxury passementerie (gimp, lace, bead and ribbon embroidery) which could not be found anywhere else (Glynn, 1971: 6). In 1937

he founded the Balenciaga company with Nicolás Bizcarrondo and Wladzio Jaworowski d'Attainville, the great love interest of the master (Thurman, 2009: 190), in the important Parisian avenue, 10 George V. The same year he showed his first haute couture collection, which was a great success. The fashion magazine *L'Officiel* called it “remarquée, pleine de gout et de personnalité” (Jouve and Demornex, 1988: 33).

The Paris house became the neurological centre of the couturier, although he kept his premises in Spain. He travelled there frequently to keep an eye on them. The French stage was, without a doubt, that of the greater creativity of Balenciaga. It is in this period that innovation is present in all his creations. As a man of his time, he was not unaware of the cultural and social references which were happening around him. Nevertheless, his creations presented such radical change that they were not in harmony with his time. During these years Balenciaga reached the pinnacle of fashion. His appointment book was full of the most discerning clients in the world. He was admired by his colleagues and by the greater part of the Press. Judith Thurman (2009: 189) writes: “Balenciaga designed some 300 original creations a year, which , with the help of a team of tailors, seamstresses, fitters, cutters, hats and specialists in ornaments (some 500 at his most prolific) satisfied thousands of private orders”.

Balenciaga formed part of that group of exclusive couturiers within which with their craft dominated all the secrets of the difficult art of haute couture in the 50's, an era which merited being known as the Golden Age of Haute Couture. In the decade of the 60's, Balenciaga unlike his colleagues did not become part of the prêt-à-porter adventure. He did, however, design the uniforms of the Air France air hostesses. His prestige, the economic strength of his couture houses did not prevent him from closing his doors in 1968 after 50 years of dedication to his art. As he said to his disciple and friend Givenchy: “I have given enough, I have dressed everyone” (Thurman, 2009: 198) Balenciaga passed on the baton to his disciple Courrèges, who would develop the last designs of the Master, straight lines and light volumes. Balenciaga died in Javea in March 1972, the year in which he created his last work. The bridal gown of Carmen Martínez Bordiú, the granddaughter of Franco and future Duchess of Cádiz.

### **A sculptor for the shape**

Anyone who is interested in the character of the Spanish couturier recognises the phrase. “A sculptor for the shape”. Balenciaga was a couturier in all the meanings of the word. The idea he had of his craft can be summarised in the words he once spoke to his friend Gustav Zumsteg, a Swiss Manufacturer, and the man in charge of the most important industries of the sector: “A good couturier should be at the same time an architect, a sculptor, a painter, a musician and a philosopher” (Miller, 2007: 30). The documentation that has been conserved on the Maestro, the

declarations of those who knew him and with whom he worked closely coincide in pointing out that Balenciaga knew and knew how to carry out each one of the steps that the planning and creation of a collection required. At the same time, they all coincide on the special importance that the couturier gave to the materials with which he worked. The perfect execution of his ideas depended on them up to the point that one can say “The fabric is the Boss” (*Balenciaga París*, 2006: 19).

Balenciaga had passion for the fabric; they were his main ally, the skin of his creations. He knew that on a good choice of materials and their structural qualities depended the achievement of the volume of his innovative silhouettes. He analysed (the fabrics), he looked at them looking for their sense, the shape and flexibility. Just like an architect, he planned its construction drawing with a pencil, big arrows on the pattern indicating the downward sweep. When he discovered a flaw in the fabric he was using, Balenciaga became exasperated (*Balenciaga París*, 2006: 19). Twice a year, close to the presentation of the collections, the principal suppliers handed in their products to Ms Renée, the house director. Balenciaga personally saw all the fabrics that came to the atelier but only met the most important manufacturers or representatives. He had a good relationship with many of these manufacturers, such as Ascher, but among all of them we should mention the close relationship he had with Gustave Zumsteg, from the Abraham silk industry in Zurich (Arizzoli-Clementel, 2011: 51-60). From his arrival in Paris, Balenciaga ordered great amounts of silk from this important company, but his collaboration was closer when it was managed by Zumsteg himself. The company manufactured fabrics exclusively for the Maestro and some of them were the result of joint research between the manufacturer and the couturier, such as the gazar, created in 1958, or the zagar, also known as super gazar created in 1964.

Balenciaga had a predilection for fabrics with sculptural qualities. So his expertise in all that were on the market and his interest for the new fabrics obtained from natural or artificial fibres, which were so successful in the 20's. Among the fabrics used by the Maestro, we have to highlight the cocktail and evening dresses: velvet, faille (ribbed silk), satin duchess, taffeta, gazar, etc and for daywear, he had a special predilection for fine wools and tweed, which he cut in many different ways. From the end of the 50's, the couturier used synthetic fabrics, like the lurex, produced by Abraham and he was a pioneer in the use of a type of silk with a black metal plastic finish. All this personal baggage justified the praise that his contemporary colleagues piled on the Maestro from Guetaria. Pedro Rodríguez (Valencia 1895-Barcelona, 1995) said of the Maestro “He had the secret of the volume”( *Hommage à Balenciaga*, 1985: 30). The volume he achieved because of his concept of proportion (Cerrillo, 2001: 61-79) joined to the good choice of the fabric and a masterly cut. It is said that his passion for volume was inspired by

Zurbarán's paintings. Through his paintings Balenciaga could appreciate some features that would be characteristic in his creations: the mastery of the fabrics of the Spanish Baroque, the austerity of the monastic life reflected in the simple structure of the monk's habits and especially in the Portraits of Zurbarán's female saints, with their fantastic attire of theatrical volume which in that moment caused the "*guardainfante*" farthingale (hoop skirt) (Descalzo, 2013).

In June 1938, the Magazine *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode de Paris*, wrote "Balenciaga travaille ses collections avec la précision du technicien unie à la fantasia de l'artiste." (*Balenciaga Paris*, 2006 : 35). Technique and creativity, two qualities that would accompany the Maestro until the end of his professional career. Even if it is true that the quality of the artist was not so evident in his Spanish period as in his Parisian one, Balenciaga, not only participated in the configuration of aesthetic of his time but he also did it in what was to come. His search for new forms freed his creative personality when joined with the high degree of technical precision, created models of new silhouettes which were progressively evolving to lighter volume in the designs which foresaw the aesthetic which would triumph in the 60's, In this sense we can understand what Diana Vreeland said to Eugenia Sheppard in 1973: "I was always told that fashion came from the street but I always saw it first in Balenciaga".

From his first collection in Paris in August 1937 to the end of his career the Maestro from Guetaria was always successful. *The New York Herald Tribune* published: "Balenciaga, a young Spanish couturier espagnol who has just presented his first Parisian collection, in his new very modern premises, to the presse and his potential purchasers, with simple lines, without superfluous ornaments and in a very young style" (*Balenciaga Paris*, 2006: 32). Balenciaga's collections in his Parisian atelier highlighted, from the beginning, his sobriety and simplicity of lines, using as inspiration Spanish culture and fashion because of the daring combination of colours and because of the reinterpretation of historical models. Well, simplicity in the decade of the 50's was associated with day wear, whereas for evening wear he gave free rein to his creative genius, conceiving extraordinary models, made from sumptuous fabrics which were reminders of daring volumes of success in the past. (*Cristóbal Balenciaga. Collectionneur de modes*, 2012). The model "Infanta", made from ivory satin with black velvet applications, inspired by Velázquez, caused a sensation. In this model, just like in the dresses that the Infantas of the House of Austria wear in the Velázquez paintings, he resorted to contraptions to elongate the hips, an effect which was accentuated by the rigidity of the satin and the relief of the velvets. The Velázquez influence was evident. *France Amérique*, wrote "Balenciaga's models look like Infantas that have stepped down from Velázquez paintings. To say Velázquez is to say

“hoops” or thin waists and accentuated hips”(Balenciaga *París*, 2006 : 59) very much in harmony with the ruling aesthetics of the time.

In the 40's Balenciaga remained faithful to his personal style. The difficult war years did not stop the Maestro from launching proposals among which loose skirts were successful, and in a certain way were the precursors of the line which Dior presented in 1947 and which defined an era. This collection was called “Corolle” because of the ample skirts which opened like with corollas with tight bodies and waistlines. It is in this year 1947 that Balenciaga began his personal technical experimental stage which would end when he retired in 1968. This line of daring exposition, in which a perfect symbiosis between the material and the technique was necessary, was inaugurated with the presentation of the barrel line, which curiously hid the silhouette. “Corolle” and “Barrel” two opposing silhouettes, that of Dior, reinterpreted the past and that of Balenciaga anticipated the future at the same time as it stepped back from the aesthetic ideals established for women in the decade of the 50's. This new concept did not go down well with many of his clients, who preferred to buy the models with triumphant corolla silhouette.

The Barrel line was followed by the semi shaped line in 1951, the tunic in 1955, the sack dress or shirt in 1957 or the Baby Dolls dress, silhouettes so breaking that the fashion magazine *Draper's Record* pointed out in August 1950, that Balenciaga's garments were directed to those women who wanted to be ahead of the fashion. Let's look at each one of these models and how Balenciaga's silhouette was determined by the qualities of the cloth and by its precise cut.

### **The cloth is the Boss. Revolutionary silhouettes**

In 1942, the couturier created the “barrel” (Fig. 1) line but it was not presented until the summer of 1947. He chose it to show his idea of a coat which Jacquelin would model. These types of loose garments had a formidable looseness which started from the shoulders; the Maestro chose fabulous wool cloth: heavy handmade tweed, braided comfortable wool, which were as warm as leather coats. Wool was the ideal cloth with which to make the barrel line because of its thickness and natural elasticity and which did not lose the shape given to it in the cut. The silhouette which this new creation of Balenciaga generated was totally new. The history of Western Fashion had never offered anything of a similar nature, in spite of the complicated attire that was coming along one after the other, but in all of them they were referring to the silhouette, whether in its natural place or displaced from it. The impact was total when we take into account how far away the barrel line is to the aesthetic which was triumphant in the New Look.

In his collections, Balenciaga was alternating corseted figures which emphasized the feminine shape with corsets and gimmicks with 19<sup>th</sup> century reminiscences, with dresses of fluid figures which hardly drew that natural shape of the body. Fabrics with body were the principal protagonists of the Balenciaga house in the 1950's decade. Tweed with two colours were those preferred for dressed during the day, just as linen was used for summer clothes; silk velvet of different types were perfect for evening dresses and for coats, because of their sumptuous and ornamental character as one could technically vary the colour and type of fibre. Their qualities allowed him to evoke models of the past in which the richness of the fabric underlined the social difference. Alongside these, the silk dresses in the taffeta technique and the balloon shaped skirts were the protagonists of 1951. These empty and floating shapes of great lightness were notable as they were achieved with taffeta as thin as cigarette paper. It seems that they were they hollow balloon shaped skirts of the women from Ibiza which inspired the couturier. There is nothing more enlightening than the black dress from the collection in the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Gueteria. This is made in taffeta of black silk, perfect for the purpose of the Maestro for its adaptability to the volumes and its changing properties depending on the light. The dress draws the silhouette of the new look because its body was armed with stays and exquisitely lined in Gros from Naples. The balloon skirt, symmetric, lies on a scaffold of nylon tulle, perfect for its resistance and rigidity joined to a petticoat with metal hoops, decorated at the base with two flounces of metallic Chantillí lace (Fig. 2).

Following the concept of the barrel line, the couturier presented a new line in 1951 which the magazine *Vogue* described in the following way: "seen from the front, it's a tight coat, seen from the back it's an ample coat. These garments, at the same time tight and ample, are the great novelty of Balenciaga" (*Balenciaga Paris*: 2006: 83). The semi-fitted suit was baptised by Carmel Snow, the director of Harper's Bazaar as the "semi-fitted look" (Fig. 3). All the fashion magazines gave special attention to this new line charged with surprise because of its ambivalence. This new silhouette of the XX century had its predecessor in the XVIII. Balenciaga had a great knowledge of the fashions of other eras, not only through a select bibliography in his library but also through his collection of historic pieces as we saw above. His interest in reinterpreting models from the past was a constant in all his work. His desire for experimentation led him to examine historical models because of their singularity, whether it was the volume or their fabrics or the design which stood out in their era. The dress known internationally as "the French dress", which appeared in the French Rococo were characterised for being tight in the front and ample in the back, that is to say the same concept which Balenciaga applied to his semi-fitted garments. It was the dress that was in fashion in all Europe for almost 40 years. It formed part of the group of ample dresses inspired in the housecoat,

comfortable (inside the comfort of the period) and functional to be able to carry out the new social norms which had been started in the XVIII century. Balenciaga gave a new meaning to this eighteenth century dress, applied to the daily dress code, in which usefulness was primary. The first semi-fitted dress was made in black wool for the winter collection in 1951 and broadcast through a Richard Dormer photograph of the semi-fitted garments it is worth highlighting the “Rouge coquelicot” for spring which was shown in Vogue in March 1952, and because of its bright colour, was the one that got the most attention., “a poppy red, one could not keep the eyes off, here is a totally new colour in the Paris collections and totally unexpected this spring. This is the colour chosen by Balenciaga”(Balenciaga París, 2006: 86). Linen was the perfect fabric for the summer, as much for its freshness as also for its little flexibility, which allowed the semi-fitted suit to keep its cut. Using this same concept Balenciaga also designed dresses and one the most spectacular night coats was made from red shantung, open in front with large buttons. The structure is perfect for evening clothes and the effect majestic, especially in the large garments with long tails. The great quantity of fabric used in its creation was in contrast between the front and the back (Fig. 4). His inspiration in the eighteenth century fashion also gave two models, not used today, with spectacular volumes and also with spectacular fabrics such as the *Déshabilles*. Created in thick fabric and with body like ribbed silk, or Naples gros because of its rigid and sculptural qualities, they were elegant and solemn garments even if only used at home.

Following with the innovations of the Couturier, in 1955 he once again surprised us with the tunic line. Carmel Snow, who followed all the details of the Balenciaga collections, as we can contrast, said of this new contribution: “Fashion once again renews history” (Jouve and Domernox, 1988). All the magazines and newspapers which followed fashion day by day coincided in that all the novelties came from the House of Balenciaga. The couturier had launched the tunic, a dress in two pieces of straight and clean lines which wrapped the body with squeezing it. The magazine *Elle*, classified it as the “Balenciaga Revolution” (*Balenciaga París*, 2006:100), it highlighted its absolute simplicity, not only from the point of view of the pattern but also for its form. Its neck, its waist, without ornaments and without a visible fastener, the tunic almost breached the knees and underneath it had a tight skirt. The tunic was made with light fabric and could be used at any time during the day: as a day dress, a cocktail dress or an evening dress, depending in the fabrics used and their fall. For daytime Balenciaga used fabric or light wool or knits, for the afternoon, silk organza sometimes printed with buttons which reminded us of his coats, and lace, one of the Maestro’s favourite materials because of its lightness, its transparencies and decorative qualities (Fig. 5).

The tunic generated a tubular silhouette, a little rigid but elegantly austere. Little by little the adhesion was complete; it was a comfortable fashion of ample lines which looked good on almost every woman. The tunic hid the waist and reminded us of tubular shapes from other times. Nevertheless the genius of this garment was the complete absence of the figures and its similarity with the basic patterns of the “T” shape which was used in the classical world and which like Balenciaga’s tunic, its cut was simple, uniformly wide, without a seam in the waist or in the sleeves. In this sense the couturier had arrived at the basic pattern, he had gone back to the starting point of sartorial elegance; he had closed the cycle of fashion history in the West. Balenciaga’s tunic was the turning point in the history of fashion which inspired new generations of Couturiers. As Myra Walker wrote, Balenciaga gave his apprentice Courrèges a pattern for his space style in 1965, which inspired the London mods and the miniskirt (*Balenciaga and his Legacy*, 2007).

The tunic line was followed in 1957 by the sack line or camisole. In August of that year *Women’s Wear* said: “Gigantic is the word the clientele use to describe Balenciaga’s collection [...] The clientele is fascinated by the new shirt dress which reaches the knees. It resembles a nightdress. It is worsted in the back, it is not fitted and falls loose along the back and light near the body” (*Balenciaga Paris*, 2006: 107). The same press months later said: We are dealing with a shirt line, a straight back, a formula happily conceived to follow the transition between the fitted lines and the ample ones. This dress suits all women and all silhouettes. Everything is foreseen for small sizes to large ones. The tunic had a tubular silhouette, the sack dress, a more abstract one, more separate from the body. Melle. Renée, director of the House of Balenciaga, made a significant statement on these new silhouettes when she specified that Mr Balenciaga worked on the fabric on the model, so that in these new dresses there is no essential construction.

In the sack dress in the Cristobal Balenciaga Museum in Guetaria we can see all the characteristics which are described in detail in the press on this dress. The couturier chose black wool crepe, perfect for its weight, structure, and especially for the free fall of the fabric. With this idea he designed dresses and also coats and raincoats. Some of these, like the dress, start from a gimp and others repeat the oval shape, like the black woollen coat, photographed by Seeberger (fig). The sack dress got more attention than any other Balenciaga dress. The asexual character gave it a justified main role in a moment when feminine attributes were not being hidden. Converting the exuberant feminine silhouette in the fifties into a simple geometrical shape could not go unnoticed. Curiously in the same year he introduced the sack line, his skirt began to get shorter. The magazines echoed the maestro’s most elegant proposal and wrote in an article “Parisian Promotions”. The skirts do not go below the knees; all the mannequins in the

House of Balenciaga wear very fine black nylon stockings, which give a surprising effect to the leg. It is a beautiful effect with the non-fitted and shorter dresses introduced by Balenciaga” Conceptually, this proposal of Balenciaga was closer than that of his contemporaries, to that which in the sixties his disciple Courrèges would do. The Balenciaga clientele wore the shorter dresses; some thought they looked better in the new style (34).

Following this line, in 1958 Balenciaga presented the Baby Doll dress, inspired in children’s dresses. It was one of his last creations based on experimentation with the waist line. To make the Baby Doll dress, Balenciaga chose the silk in his taffeta and satin techniques. Fabric which given its structural and sculptural characteristics allowed daring silhouettes of hollow volumes. To potentiate this trapezoidal silhouette which characterised this model with tucks in the chest, Balenciaga made some of his Baby Dolls with double fabric, taffeta or satin and strengthened the skirt with underskirt to give a greater fall to the fabric and make the trapezoidal silhouette more provocative. The same year the press announced the recovery of the tall figure of the couturier’s models. Some clients, who attended the collection in August, commented that Balenciaga had modified the sack or shirt line. Alongside this new silhouette, the reversible woollen coats were also successful.

It was in this year also when the gazar was created, a silk fabric with a lot of body created by the Abraham Firm for Balenciaga. It was the result of a joint collaboration, as we commented on above. The structural character of the fabric allowed them to create spectacular shapes in the sixties. During those years, Balenciaga continued working on the models he had created in the preceding decades, but purifying the shapes even more. He was conscious of the fact that the innovation was coming from the new fabrics, not only synthetic but also natural. As a result of this he was one of the first to make transparent raincoats in plastic from the House of Racine and combine it with mohair and synthetics for Zika Ascher. A total novelty was the coat made of “papacha”, a fabric made of hand woven mohair and wool. It is a clear example of how the fabric was the determining factor in the work of Balenciaga. As Lesley Miller commented “while mohair at the end of the fifties was thin and easy to cut to make not only dresses but also coats. The volume of the “papacha” required a simple conic cut” (35).

The newer silhouettes of the sixties were achieved with the dresses made from the gazar fabric. Created in 1958, it responded to the exigencies of the Maestro. That fabric is rigid and thick and capable of reproducing the most daring volumes. One of the most spectacular models was made in 1967 and was baptized “Cuatro Picos”(Four Peaks). It was made of black gazar and drawn in a silhouette of an inverted cone. Tight at the bottom and attached with strass straps (fig). Balenciaga created sculptural forms of geometric silhouettes, some with the gazar fabric,

created in 1964. In these garments there are hardly any seams, the cut is precise. An example of this is the bride's dresses of those years (fig). A year before he closed his Parisian atelier and coinciding with the thirtieth anniversary of his house, Balenciaga presented a historic collection highlighted by the miniskirt. Once more Balenciaga showed he was a man of his time, with good taste. The elegance of his very modern garments showed through fabric the perfect symbiosis with the idea the Master had.

## GLOSSARY

**Atelier:** Workshop or place where the couturier works.

**Bias cut:** Oblique cut across the cloth in relation to the warp of the threads, which gives the garment a vertical, soft drop that allows it to be manipulated to form natural pleats.

**Bolero:** Women's short jacket.

**Chenille:** Fabric with a fuzzy texture woven of a soft-tufted silk or cotton fiber and used for weaving or embroidering.

**Cheviot:** Heavy fleece wool from Scottish lambs.

**Cloqué:** Fabric having a small, irregular pattern or figured motif woven into it to give a puckered, blistered or quilted effect the term comes from the french *cloque*, which means to blister.

**Crepe:** Wool, silk or cotton fabric with a crinkly surface from the use of hard-twisted warp threads.

**Crinoline:** Steel or spring bone frame used between 1850 and 1870 to plump up skirts.

**Damask:** A fairly thick and glossy fabric of many textile fiber combinations. The pattern can appear to be both dull and matt depending on which way the yarn has been woven. Named after the capital of Syria, where it was first produced.

**Déshabillé:** A light robe, traditionally worn in the morning. During the 18th century, the term *déshabillé* was also applied to more comfortable and functional day dresses. Balenciaga made magnificent *déshabillés* with high quality fabrics for his most distinguished clients, who wore them when receiving guests at private dinners and receptions organised in the privacy of their homes.

**Donegal:** Hand-woven tweed fabric, originally from the Irish county of the same name. In the 20th century, the name was applied to a variety of machine-woven tweeds with coloured, knotted threads interwoven into the fabric.

**Faille:** Silk or taffeta fabric with marked transverse ribbing made with a thick weave.

**Gauze:** A thin, sheer-woven fabric in which each filling yarn is encircled by two warp yarns twisted around each other in such a way that the material almost never loses its shape. Used for dresses and adornments since the 19th century.

**Gazar:** A full silk fabric created by Abraham of Switzerland for Balenciaga in 1958. Its successor, *supergazar* or *zagar* followed in 1964 and was a variant of the original fabric with much more sculptural qualities. Both fabrics were the result of a close collaboration between Balenciaga and his friend, Gustav Zumsteg. They were also deciding factors in the creation of some of Balenciaga's most spectacular and conceptual models.

**Grosgrain or Gros:** From the Latin *grassus*, which means fat. Generic word used to name the fabrics that have reliefs with a horizontal ribbed effect. The term is normally accompanied by the city where it was produced, such as tours or Naples, because each city would make a certain *gros* with its own technical characteristics.

**Guipure:** A heavy, large-patterned decorative lace.

**Haute Couture:** French term that refers to the design and production of quality fashion garments. Couturiers create their models using a variety of materials to which they then add their name .

**Lace:** Ornamental openwork fabric made by hand or by machine. The two most common types of lace are bobbin lace and knitted or needle lace. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the most representative centres for lace were Venice, Chantilly, Valenciennes, Alençon, Mechelen and Catalonia.

**Lamé:** A type of fabric, often silk, woven or knit with thin ribbons of metallic yarns.

**Lurex:** Trademark registered by the Dow Badische Company for its metallic fibre spinning, introduced on the market in the 1940s. Lurex is used to make dresses, knitted jackets and sweaters, because it is woven or knitted with cotton, nylon, rayon, silk or woollen fibres.

**Majismo:** Social phenomenon developed in Spain in the second half of the 18th century as a reaction to foreign influences — particularly the french — which had been imposed since the

beginning of the century. In terms of clothing, the *majismo* advocated traditional Spanish fashion instead of the trends from the french court, which had been introduced into Spain through the House of Bourbon.

**Minimalism:** Term first used in the field of fashion in the mid-1980s to describe the trend for reduced, simple clothing in neutral tones, inspired by the sculptural and well-proportioned work of the japanese designers established in Europe.

**Miniskirt:** Very short skirt, above the knee, introduced during the 1960s.

**Moiré:** Fabric finish that creates an effect that resembles rippling water on the surface, mainly used on smooth silk fabrics. The effect is created by crushing the surface of a slightly ribbed weave with heat and pressure.

**Nylon:** First fibre obtained from a synthetic polymer.

**Organdy:** Very light, fine and transparent cotton cloth, stiffened by an acid treatment.

**Organza:** Light silk or cotton fabric, transparent and semi-rigid, finer than muslin, particularly used for making women's clothing.

**Ottoman:** Fabric – normally silk – with parallel ribs along the weave, used mainly for women's dresses.

**Pekin:** Cloth characterised by its parallel strips on the warp, produced with alternating colours or weaves.

**Piqué:** Cotton fabric, spun rayon or silk woven lengthwise with raised cords.

**Rayon:** Artificial fibre mainly made of regenerated cellulose, marketed as artificial silk until 1924, when the term 'rayon' was adopted. it is currently called 'viscose' in Europe. Rayon was produced as a thread-like fibre until the 1930s, when it was discovered that the broken fibres of residual rayon could be woven.

**Robe à la française:** The most characteristic women's dress of the 18th century, the quintessential garment of French Rococo used throughout Europe. a long dress with a train, open at the front, which showed another skirt of the same fabric. The upper part opened in a 'v' shape from the waist, and was filled with a richly adorned triangular piece called a 'stomacher'. The most characteristic feature of this robe was the double pleat at the back. In the 1780s, its use began to decline and became essentially reserved for ceremonies.

**Satin:** A fabric in a warp-effect or filling-effect satin weave, such as acetate, rayon, nylon, or

silk. It often has a glossy face and a soft, slippery texture.

**Shantung:** Taffeta originally from the Chinese province of the same name. It is a heavy silk fabric with a knobby surface that is formed by filaments from different cocoons and threaded without twisting.

**Taffeta:** Name given to silk fabrics in which the warp and weave threads cross over each other, alternating odd and even threads on each crossover.

**Tailored suit:** Outfit made of two pieces: jacket and skirt, or jacket and trousers, inspired by men's 19th century suits.

**Tarlatan:** Thin cotton fabric, similar to muslin but with a greater consistency and finer than linen.

**Transparency:** Fine fabric that reveals the fabric underneath.

**Tulle:** A thin, fine, machine-made net of acetate, nylon, rayon, or silk used as adornment on hats and wedding dresses.

**Tunic:** Originally a straight, long dress worn by women in Ancient Rome.

**Twill:** A weave in which the weft yarns are worked around two or more warp yarns to produce an effect of parallel diagonal lines or ribs. Fabric made with this weave.

**Velvet:** A fabric of silk, nylon, acetate, rayon, etc., sometimes having a cotton backing, with a thick, soft pile formed of loops of the warp thread either cut at the outer end or left uncut and having a soft, rich texture.

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