

ARTICLE

Fashion, Industry and Diplomacy: Reframing Couture–Textile Relations in France, 1950s–1960s

Vincent Dubé-Senécal 

This article investigates the change in relations between Parisian haute couture and the French textile industry in the 1950s and 1960s. This study is grounded in the multiple changes that occurred between the two decades with the end of a state-sponsored and textile-backed aid to couture plan in 1960, the dematerialization of fashion in the 1960s and the advent of brands and licenses, and the waning of couture’s influence throughout the period. It cross-references archives from multi-stakeholder meetings between the state, couture, and textile representatives with the couturiers’ trade association archives and diplomatic archives to show how the changing fashion landscape impacted their interactions. This study shows that while the couture and textile industries drifted apart, the government’s interest in couture grew. This reframes the narrative on couture’s alleged influence as the spearhead of the textile industry while illustrating its wider prestige influence and its relevance to the state.

Introduction

The transition from the 1950s to the 1960s marked a major turning point in Western fashion, representing the end of what Gilles Lipovetsky designated as the “hundred years’ fashion.”¹ That is, for a century starting in the 1850s, a fashion system centered on the role of Parisian haute couture as a trendsetting business wherein high fashion influenced mass fashion through a “trickle-down movement,” defined by Georg Simmel.² By the end of World War II, in the last

Author’s note: Some elements of this article were informed by my published PhD dissertation, *La mode française: Vecteur d’influence aux États-Unis (1946–1960)* (Québec, 2020; Paris, 2021). Furthermore, some elements of this article are reworked elements from my unpublished PhD dissertation, “La mode française: Vecteur d’influence aux États-Unis de l’après-guerre à l’orée des années 1960” (Université de Montréal, 2019). This article answers a novel research question and is thus a separate piece of research. Quotations from French archives and books have been translated by the author.

1. Lipovetsky, *L’empire de l’éphémère*, 80.

2. For the “trickle-down movement” expression, see: Blaszczyk and Pouillard, “Fashion as Enterprise,” 3; Simmel, “Fashion,” 130–155.

Published online December 03, 2021

© The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Business History Conference. All rights reserved. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

decade of the hundred years' fashion and following France's Occupation, haute couture had experienced an intense revival, which historians have defined as a true "golden age."³ This coincided with a state-sponsored and textile-backed aid-to-couture plan from 1952 to 1960, based on the assumption that haute couture would serve as a showcase for French fabrics and thereby develop foreign outlets for the textile industry.⁴ The implementation of this plan by the public authorities at the request of couturiers was a response to the changing fashion context, which was paralleled by that of the couture and textile industry at an international level in the 1950s and 1960s.

These changes are grounded in the democratization of fashion that followed the modernization of the means of production of ready-to-wear garments and the popularization of the dissemination of designers' lines at department stores.⁵ These developments were part of an international context that itself was going through significant transformation regarding couture and the textile industry. For haute couture, the number of houses had declined from fifty-nine to twenty-five between 1953 and 1973, and their production of clothing models from ninety thousand to thirty thousand. By 1973, to cover the shortfall resulting from the decreased demand for haute couture models, couturiers now integrated licensing agreements into their business model.⁶ The textile industry's globalization started accelerating in the 1960s, which resulted in a geographic redistribution of production starting in Asia with the advent of Hong Kong as a production center, followed by Taiwan, and South Korea.⁷ As discussed by Dominique Jacomet, global trade in textiles and clothing was respectively \$5 billion and \$1 billion in 1955 (current dollar) and had increased to \$7 billion and \$2 billion in 1963, but by 1973, the total had quadrupled to reach \$23 billion for textiles and \$13 billion for clothing.⁸ This confluence of both international contexts of the couture and textile industry forms the backdrop of the changing fashion system of the 1960s.

This article addresses the following research question: How did the French couture–textile relations evolve within the new fashion system that took shape in the 1960s? In doing so, it makes the case that the diplomatic interest in haute couture as an instrument of France's commercial diplomacy was the driving force behind its continued importance for the state, rather than its alleged importance for the textile industry. I show this by analyzing archival material that pertains to meetings held between the couturiers, the public authorities, and the various textile branches from 1952 to 1964 concerning the management of the aid-to-couture plan. The minutes of these meetings are complemented by archives from the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* (the haute couture trade association, hereafter CSCP), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance.

3. Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*.

4. Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 74–77; Pouillard, "Keeping Designs and Brands Authentic," 815–835; Pouillard, "Recasting Paris Fashion," 35–62; Dubé-Sénécal, *La mode française*, 131–264; Di Giangiolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 30–35, 53–65.

5. The phenomenon of the democratization of fashion emerged in in the United States the nineteenth-century: Blaszczyk and Pouillard, "Fashion as Enterprise," 10. The phenomenon expanded to the world at large following World War II: Leventon, "Shopping for Style," 24; Marly, *The History of Haute Couture*, 207; Lipovetsky, *L'empire de l'éphémère*, 128, 135; Örmén, *Histoire(s) du prêt-à-porter*, 20, 30; Guillaume and Veillon, *La Mode*, 80, 84–85.

6. "Couture-cr ation 18 %, pr et- a-porter couture femme 18 %, pr et- a-porter couture homme 5 %, pr et- a-porter diffusion femme 20 %, pr et- a-porter homme 3 %, accessoires 36 %." Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 87.

7. Jacomet, *Mode, Textile et Mondialisation*, 12–13.

8. *Ibid.*, 95.

Additionally, this article will also look at key parallels between the Italian and French fashion sectors at the time. This is important because, as Ivan Paris explained, “within the Italian fashion sector during the 1950s, no component was able to maintain a stable horizontally and vertically integrated system,” unlike the French fashion sector.⁹ This means that, during the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan, the ties between the textile and fashion industries were still forming in Italy, making it more difficult to represent a unified front capable of proposing events in favor of national rather than regional or sectoral interests. As we will see, this distinction is an important part of French diplomacy’s interest in haute couture.

As such, by cross-referencing the perspectives of the French couturiers, public authorities, and representatives of textile branches, this article seeks to reframe the traditional narrative regarding the importance of haute couture for the French textile industry after the war. Indeed, business historians and researchers working on haute couture have noted the close ties that existed between textile manufacturers and Parisian couturiers. In particular, the seminal work of Didier Grumbach on the history of the French fashion business emphasizes that “since Worth [in the 1850s], haute couture is the spearhead of the textile industry. . . . A production industry, haute couture leads the textile industry to export markets.”¹⁰ Grumbach—who from 1961 was at the head of C. Mendès, a clothing company specializing in high-end ready-to-wear—analyzes couture–textile relations from the dressmakers’ perspective. For the 1950s and 1960s, business historians have also conducted studies that reflect the view expressed by Grumbach. Taking a more general view at the *soierie* manufacturers of the 1950s in his 1960 thesis on Lyon, Michel Laferrère notes that the main reason *soierie* remained a key partner of high fashion, even if cotton and wool manufacturers had better price, was because of the prestige of its creations and brands.¹¹ This finds an echo in the work of historians who study French fabrics manufacturers. In her history of Staron, a French *soierie* manufacturer, Martine Villelongue notes that although these two decades mark the last years of haute couture’s supremacy, they constituted “*un moment magnifique*” for *soierie*.¹² For his part, Pierre Vernus, working on Bianchini-Férier, another important French *soierie* manufacturer, recognizes that the most prestigious fabrics manufacturers, such as Ducharne, Pétillaud, and Staron, remained close to the haute couture houses during this period.¹³

By approaching the French couture–textile relations of the 1950s and 1960s mainly through the lens of government-tabled meetings, this article is linked to the broader business and economic history literature on “the glorious thirty,” a term coined by Jean Fourastié to represent the three decades of growth in France between the end of World War II and 1975.¹⁴ As we will see, even if the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan was financed by funds stemming from a tax that originated as a wartime measure of the Vichy regime, its nature was modified in 1948 with the creation of a control committee whose members represented the French public authorities. This was done specifically to help modernize textile production,

9. Paris, “Fashion as a System,” 531.

10. Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 96.

11. Laferrère, *Lyon ville industrielle*, 103.

12. Villelongue, “Un rubanier dans la soierie,” 191.

13. Vernus, *Art, luxe & industrie*, 266–267.

14. Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses*.

linking it to the French postwar modernization context at the root of the glorious thirty.¹⁵ Regarding both government–industry relations and the relative importance of the textile industry, two main characteristics define this period. First, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, even though France moved from the parliamentary Fourth Republic to the Gaullist presidential Fifth Republic, government–industry relations remained the same. As Richard Kuisel explains regarding the Fourth Republic, this relation was grounded on a mixed economic management style that “blended state direction, corporatist bodies, and market forces.”¹⁶ For his part, Daniel Verdier notes that this management style continued unabated in the 1960s and early 1970s, stating that the decade from 1963 to 1973 “marked the triumph of industrial policy and pressure politics.”¹⁷ Second, while the growth that France experienced during the glorious thirty is recognized as the “fastest in French economic history,” as French historian Jean-Charles Asselain puts it, this was not the case for the textile industry.¹⁸ Serge Berstein and Pierre Milza explain that this is a result of emerging new high-tech activities in the 1960s—nuclear, aerospace, electronic—that disturbed the balance in the French industrial context to the detriment of lower-tech industries such as textiles and steel.¹⁹

In parallel to these works on the glorious thirty, historians have also studied the impact of this period of modernization on the evolution of haute couture’s business model throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Regarding the influence of couture, fashion historian Valerie Steele distinguishes the two roles that couturiers played: as “an advertisement to promote a brand [and as] a laboratory to explore new design ideas.”²⁰ This distinction reflects both aspects of the evolution of couture’s business model after World War II, which saw a decline in its couture activities and an increase in the exploitation of brand names through license agreements. This can be illustrated by the conclusions of Tomoko Okawa’s research stating that from the 1960s, “it is the licensed products that assured haute couture’s revenues.”²¹ In short, business historians and fashion historians alike identify two major changes at the root of this upheaval in the 1960s: the advent of ready-to-wear and the new all-important need for brands.²²

The state of French couture and textiles in the 1950s and 1960s portrays a picture of change in the status of both sectors. On the one hand, the period of growth and modernization of the glorious thirty left the textile industry lagging. On the other hand, the same context inspired major changes to haute couture’s business model, turning it from a craftsman-based trade to a design-centered brand-advertising business focused on the nascent luxury industry. Interestingly, couture–textile relations are typically presented as remaining positive throughout this period of major change, which contradicts the evolution of the French textile industry after World War II.

This article will address this contradiction in three stages. First, the period of the aid-to-couture plan will be analyzed to understand the evolution of couture–textile relations in the

15. Loi no 48-23 du 6 janvier 1948 relative à certaines dispositions d’ordre fiscal. J.O. du 7 janvier 1948, January 7, 1948, B-8357/1, Centre des Archives Économiques et Financières, Savigny-le-Temple, France (hereafter CAEF); Rapport sur le compte spécial d’encouragement à la production textile, n.d., B-8425/1, CAEF, 2.

16. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*, 248.

17. Verdier, *Democracy and International Trade*, 252.

18. Asselain, *Histoire économique de la France*, 133.

19. Berstein and Milza, *Histoire de l’Europe*, 264.

20. Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 2.

21. Okawa, “La maison Christian Dior,” 239.

22. Veillon and Fridenson, “Introduction,” 7; Vernus, *Art, luxe & industrie*, 292–293.

late stage of the hundred years' fashion, when haute couture still commanded great influence in the world of fashion. Second, the focus will turn to the decoupling of couture and textiles. Third, the French public authorities' persistent interest in haute couture will be analyzed in light of the decoupling of couture and textiles.

From Aid-to-Couture to Sixties' Fashion

During the summer of 1951, two major events occurred simultaneously that brought couture and textiles together following years of cool relations after World War II stemming from the fact that the suppliers of *tissus spéciaux à la couture* (special fabrics)—novel high-fashion fabrics for haute couture and high-end fashion—did not offer haute couture any exclusivity of use. These *tissus spéciaux* could be used in the couture collections but were also made available to ready-to-wear manufacturers.²³ In July 1951, Italian high fashion houses (*alta moda italiana*) presented their collections as a unified group for the second time in Florence, following their first presentation in February, which had foreshadowed their global ambitions.²⁴ For the CSCP, this show was the straw that broke the camel's back. Indeed, Carmel Snow, the influential editor in chief of the American *Harper's Bazaar*, sponsored the Italian event, which received boisterous press coverage both in the United States and in France through *Paris-Press*. The French couturiers perceived this chain of events with dismay, because they were concerned that it represented the fashion world's will to move away from France toward Italy.²⁵ Adding to that Parisian anxiety in the face of the rise of the Italian high fashion, a global textile crisis was brewing in May 1951. This crisis was a consequence of two changing trends in the global postwar textile industries. First, the modernization of industry worldwide led to an increase in production. Second, this growth in supply was not followed by a corresponding growth in demand, quite the contrary. Indeed, following the postwar exacerbation of demand in textiles—making up for the years of wartime restrictions—demand had now started to stabilize and thus decreased.²⁶ For the French textile industry, this meant that by 1952, textile exports had dropped by 46 percent compared with 1951, from 195.4 billion 1952 constant francs to 106.2 billion.²⁷

Additionally, the Italian shows that took place in 1951 also marked a key difference between the French and Italian fashion sectors in the 1950s and 1960s. That is, while a single trade association—the CSCP—represented the French couturiers based in Paris, the *alta moda italiana* was composed of multiple fashion centers: the Ente Italiano Moda of Turin, the Centro Italiano Moda of Milan, and the Comitato della Moda of Rome.²⁸ While the shows in Florence,

23. Rapports couture-textile: Exclusivité, June 19, 1952, Conseil de Direction de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne (hereafter CD/CSCP).

24. White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion*, 43–45; Di Giangrolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 34.

25. Présentation à Florence, September 14, 1951, CD/CSCP, 3–4; Di Giangrolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 34–35.

26. Aperçu sur la crise mondiale du textile, May 31, 1952, 19771638/69, Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France (hereafter AN); "Crisis of the French Textile Industry," August 11, 1952, RG59/CDF1950-1954/B4991, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA).

27. These numbers come from *Tableau général du commerce extérieur—Année 1952*, 21; and are analyzed in Dubé-Sénécal, *La mode française*, 146–147.

28. Pinchera and Rinallo, "The Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country," 157–159.

organized by Giovanni Battista Giorgini represented a “turning point in the emancipation of Italy from French inspirations” as Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinaldo put it, they also marked the beginning of what the authors termed “Italy’s fashion civil wars.”²⁹ That is, the creation of minor bodies in other Italian cities after 1951, “bringing the total number of Italian organizations promoting fashion to 13,” and the subsequent yearly clashes between the major Italian centers.³⁰ These fashion civil wars lasted until the spring of 1965, when the fashion calendar that the Camera Nazionale della Moda—modeled after the CSCP—had been working on since September 1962 “became operational, sanctioning a division of promotional labor built on each city’s vocation.”³¹ This means that, contrary to the case of France, where the centralized action of the couturiers allowed for nation-branding initiatives, it was less the case in Italy, where fashion regionalism remained the norm until the mid-1960s. This is what made the case of France an “ideal, but not necessarily typical situation” according to Pinchera and Rinaldo.³² As we will see, this feature of French fashion was a key part of its diplomatic appeal.

As such, the fashion show in Florence and textile crisis of the summer of 1951 contributed to a reinforcement of couture–textile relations at a time when public authorities were assessing the relevance of the aid-to-couture plan presented by the CSCP. The reason why couturiers needed financial support after World War II and throughout the 1950s was threefold. First, the postwar inflationary context in France made it necessary to have a lot of capital to start a new business and ensure its day-to-day operations.³³ In the immediate postwar years, this was compounded by the fact that the traditional affluent private clientele of haute couture had shrunk because of the war.³⁴ Second, while the advent of commercial buyers representing mostly American department stores brought an increase in the couture sales of designs and patterns, this was no panacea. As Jacques Heim decried in 1957, a year before being elected president of the CSCP, the risk averseness of these clients meant that 80 to 90 percent of their purchases targeted only the same two or three houses, with Balenciaga and Dior singled out by Heim.³⁵ Third, until the turn of the 1970s, Christian Dior was in a unique position, in that his business had been founded in 1946 with capital from the Groupe Boussac, the world’s largest cotton textile group at the time, the other houses having no such affluent backers.³⁶

The change in context of the early 1950s had enabled a couture–textile rapprochement that represented the culmination of the French Plan Council’s strategy for high novelty defined in 1948. At the time, it stated that the textile industry should become France’s first export industry, with French special fabrics (*haute nouveauté*)—and haute couture as its main vector—having the task to lead textiles to foreign markets by mobilizing its international

29. *Ibid.*, 159, 165.

30. *Ibid.*, 165.

31. *Ibid.*, 168.

32. *Ibid.*, 170.

33. Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 69–70.

34. Untitled letter from Thomas Kernan to Mrs. Chase, August 12, 1948, Vogue/Business/Editorial/B10/F5, Condé Nast Archives, Edna Woolman Chase Papers, New York City, USA.

35. Jacques Heim—Point de vue d’un couturier sur la situation actuelle de la haute couture et les conditions de son amélioration, annex of an untitled letter, July 9, 1957, 19771635/24, AN, 5, 21, 23.

36. For the distinction between Dior and other couturiers, see: Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 109–126; Dubé-Senécal, *La mode française*, 78–82.

reputation.³⁷ In this respect, while the First Modernization Plan covered in part the textile industry, it did so mostly indirectly. This can be explained by Daniel Verdier’s distinction between the two tiers of the postwar French industrial policy separating champions from a second tier “reserved for declining sectors and which was administered by the sector’s trade association.”³⁸ In this context, the couture subsidies were administered directly by the trade associations, with the state representatives—a government commissioner for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and a state controller for the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance—serving as mediators between the private trade associations and the public control committee.

Thanks to the couture–textile rapprochement, the CSCP’s proposed aid-to-couture plan of August 1, 1951, was adopted on November 27.³⁹ It was officially implemented through the Aid Compact (Convention d’Aide) of July 24, 1952. In its first year, the subsidy was set at 400 million francs, 100 million of which was to be provided by the textile industry.⁴⁰ The remaining 300 million came from the Encouragement Fund for Textile Production (Fonds d’encouragement à la production textile, hereafter Textile Fund), a structure created to manage funds from the Encouragement Tax for Textile Production (Taxe d’encouragement à la production textile, hereafter Textile Tax) created by the act called the “Loi du 15 septembre 1943” to subsidize businesses responsible for supplying or producing textile products in order to avoid price hikes.⁴¹ A new law implemented on January 6, 1948, instituted a control committee composed of fourteen representatives for all the ministries involved in the Textile Fund and two representatives of agricultural trade associations.⁴² This control committee would be expanded to forty members on December 31, 1953, to better represent the scope of interests in the Textile Fund.⁴³ By this point, the original goals of the subsidies had shifted to support research and offset the difference between domestic and global prices.⁴⁴ As such, the wartime-enacted Textile Tax had shifted after the war to comply with the public authorities’ objectives of modernization.

The main goal of the aid-to-couture plan was to help couturiers finance their purchases of French fabrics and to limit to 10 percent the number of garments that could be executed in

37. Rapport définitif d’ensemble de la Commission de modernisation du textile, Commissariat général du Plan de modernisation et d’équipement, 1948, 19771635/26, AN, 23, 103.

38. Verdier, *Democracy and International Trade*, 251.

39. Plan d’aide à la création, October 9, 1951, CD/CSCP, 9; Demande de subvention de la couture-crétion présentée par la Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne, August 1, 1951, B-8409/1, CAEF; Compte rendu de la séance du comité de contrôle du Fonds d’encouragement à la production textile, November 27, 1951, 19771635/2, AN.

40. The textile industry would finally only manage to provide 95 million francs instead of the promised 100 million. Convention d’Aide à la création-couture parisienne, July 24, 1952, B-8409/1, CAEF.

41. Taxe d’encouragement à la production textile, note from the Directorate General of Indirect Contributions, September 27, 1943, B-8357/1, CAEF, 1; Jean-Pierre Lévy Memo for the Cabinet Director, October 22, 1951, 19771635/1, AN.

42. Loi no 48-23 du 6 janvier 1948 relative à certaines dispositions d’ordre fiscal, J.O. du 7 janvier 1948, January 7, 1948, B-8425/1, CAEF.

43. The control committee would now include 26 representatives for the public authorities, 8 for employers’ organizations, 4 for workers’ organizations, and 2 independent academics. Textes relatifs au taux de la taxe d’encouragement à la production textile, n.d., B-8357/1, CAEF; Extrait du Journal officiel du 6 janvier 1954, n.d., B-8359/2, CAEF, 1–2.

44. Jean-Pierre Lévy memo for the Cabinet director, October 22, 1951, 19771635/1, AN, 2–3.

foreign fabrics.⁴⁵ This plan was dedicated to haute couture creations only and could not be used by couturiers to cover the costs of their “boutique” collections. Indeed, by the start of the 1950s, in France—as in Italy—couturiers had started creating what were termed “boutique” lines: ready-made clothing set between high-end couture garments and mass-produced ready-to-wear apparel.⁴⁶ In the 1950s, the main difference between the French and Italian cases stemmed from the mobilization of such boutique garments by the Italians in the fashion shows in Florence, while the Parisian fashion shows exclusively presented haute couture garments, boutique lines being dissociated from haute couture lines.⁴⁷ This is one of two major differences between the French and Italian experiences. First, as discussed by Gianluigi Di Giangirolamo, the French experience was based on the centralization of interventions around the CSCP, whereas the Italian experience saw local interests prevail to the detriment of a single body.⁴⁸ Second, because “the most successful of the Italian collections were in the boutique category” from the start—not in made-to-measure handmade couture as in France under the aid-to-couture plan—the orientation of the Italian strategy also differed from that of France.⁴⁹

By 1953, the French aid-to-couture plan had already started shifting when the textile industry, still reeling from the global textile crisis of 1952, halted participation in the subsidy scheme, arguing that the Textile Tax was enough of a contribution. This had an immediate impact on the subsidy amount, which diminished to 200 million francs derived exclusively from the Textile Fund.⁵⁰ Following the constitutional change of October 1958, officially inaugurating the Fifth French Republic amid the chaos of the Algerian War, the new structure of the public authorities required an overhaul of the Textile Fund’s control committee; in turn, an inquiry was launched into the usefulness of maintaining the fund.⁵¹ The government’s inquiry resulted in two reports: the July 20, 1959, Working Group report on the Textile Fund and the Delacour report on the aid-to-couture plan. Both reports criticized the plan’s goal of subsidizing French fabric purchases for haute couture collections by stating that if the textile industry thought haute couture served its interests, it should also shoulder the subsidies. On the other hand, both reports noted that the state should continue to finance promotional

45. Règlement annexé à la Convention d’Aide à la création-couture parisienne, July 24, 1952, B-8409/1, CAEF.

46. For discussion on French boutique lines, see: Palmer, *Dior*, 62; Bosc, “Produire la mode,” 191; For discussion on Italian boutique lines, see: Paris, “Fashion as a System,” 534; White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion*, 44.

47. Paris, “Fashion as a System,” 534; For the separation between couture and boutique lines, see: Règlement intérieur de la Commission de contrôle et de classement “couture-cr ation,” January 12, 1955, F/12/10505, AN, 2; Classification couture-cr ation, February 24, 1956, Comit  de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne (hereafter C/CSCP), 6; Lettre adress e   toutes les Maisons class es couture-cr ation en 1956, 26 mars 1956, April 16, 1956, CD/CSCP, 1–2.

48. Di Giangirolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 111.

49. For the quotation, see White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion*, 44.

50. Convention d’Aide   la cr ation-couture parisienne, October 21, 1953, B-8409/1, CAEF.

51. Memo for Monsieur le Ministre to Monsieur Carli from the Textile Sub-Directorate, May 5, 1959, 19771635/1, AN; Rapport sur le Fonds d’encouragement   la production textile  tabli par le groupe de travail institu  par le d cret 59-886 du 20 juillet 1959 et un arr t  du m me jour, n.d., B-66342/1, CAEF, 4.

activities by haute couture—called *propagande*—as long as the Textile Fund remained active, given the prestige of these events.⁵²

The term used in French at the time, *propagande*, can be translated as “propaganda” but lacks the (negative) ideological connotation of that English word. This difference is important, because it can be traced to *Propaganda*, the work of Edward Bernays first published in 1928, before being reissued in 1955 and again in 2005 with an introduction by Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media studies at New York University. As discussed by Miller, Bernays’s attempt at normalizing the word “propaganda” in English failed, his position remaining “eccentric, in the public eye, when this book came out in 1928.”⁵³ This is because, as Miller explains, “*Propaganda* is aimed mainly at Bernays’s potential corporate clientele.”⁵⁴ This is important to note, as the heads of couture houses, not professionals in public relations, expressed the couturiers’ definition of *propagande* at the time. Moreover, while this text has had an undeniable influence on the field of public relations, it was not translated into French until 2007. Writing in response to the 2007 French release of *Propaganda*, psychoanalyst Sandrine Aumercier noted the sharp difference that existed between its “legendary fame” in the United States and it being “almost unknown” in France.⁵⁵

For this reason, in the context of haute couture, the couturiers themselves formally defined two major variants: *propagande de prestige* and *propagande commerciale*. The former concerned promotional activities intended to advertise the distinctiveness of French fashion to the public. The latter concerned publicity and participation in trade fairs or department store exhibitions.⁵⁶ In this regard, it would be fairer to define haute couture’s *propagande* as a form of persuasion. Indeed, as David W. Guth notes, the distinction between *propaganda* and persuasion can be found in the definition proposed by Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell in *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2006). For them, persuasion “is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee,” whereas *propaganda* seeks “to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”⁵⁷ Because both couturiers and French authorities sought to support haute couture and the French textile industry by filling a need in the American mass market, the two-way nature of persuasion better reflects the *propagande* “mandate” of haute couture.

Thus, the foundations of this new *propagande* mission of haute couture were established on October 24, 1960, when the government dedicated 500,000 new francs exclusively to promotion in foreign markets in addition to the final installment of the aid-to-couture plan.⁵⁸ This *Budget spécial* (Special Budget), as it was called, illustrated the willingness of the French public authorities to act in accordance with the new fashion context that had dawned at the end of the 1950s, in which pictures or drawings of garments (*images de mode*) and brands were valued more than fabrics and dresses. This centrality of fashion ideas that appeared in the mid-

52. Rapport sur le Fonds d’encouragement à la production textile, B-66342/1, CAEF, 47; and Delacour report on Aid to Couture, n.d., 9–10, 19771635/3, AN.

53. Miller, “Introduction,” in Bernays, *Propaganda*, 29.

54. *Ibid.*, 18.

55. Aumercier, “Edward L. Bernays et la propagande,” 452.

56. Rapport sur la propagande, November 25, 1953, 19771635/13, AN, 1.

57. Guth, “Black, White, and Shades of Gray,” 311.

58. Meeting report of the Executive Bureau of Propaganda, October 24, 1960, 19771635/23, AN, 3.

1950s found a parallel expression in the advent of private styling bureaus, which served the role of trend-forecasting mediators between the consumer market and fashion producers.⁵⁹ While testifying to the increasing importance of fashion ideas and images, the advent of these bureaus was more immediately relevant to the emerging ready-to-wear manufacturers than to Parisian couturiers.⁶⁰ This can be explained by the fact that until the beginning of the 1960s, the average consumer followed “the ukases of the couturiers as best they could,” as explained by Sophie Chapdelaine de Montvallon in her work on French stylists Maïmé Arnodin and Denis Fayolle.⁶¹ As such, for the subsidized couturiers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the private styling bureaus did not play a prominent role, although they would later come to be important for the couture ready-to-wear (*prêt-à-porter des couturiers*).⁶²

By 1961, the Budget spécial explicitly expressed the views presented in the Working Group and Delacour reports through the actions detailed in the propagande plan of March 1961. These were to target the United States, the United Kingdom, and West Germany to circulate images of haute couture not in fashion magazines but in the general press, prioritizing images of couture rather than garment production with French fabrics.⁶³ In the 1960s, this new reality was mainly defined by the dematerialization of fashion through the advent of brands and licenses as all-important tools for the continued existence of haute couture as a creative industry. This shift traces its roots to the mid-1950s with the advent of color photographs in fashion magazines and the role played by newly expanding department stores.

In France, the fourteen pages of color photographs opening the May 1956 issue of *Le Jardin des modes* marked a key turning point in the presentation of fashion images at a time when *Vogue's* French edition still presented drawings.⁶⁴ As for department stores, as explained by Florence Brachet Champsaur in her work on Galeries Lafayette: “Through initiatives such as the 1954 Festival of French Design, Galeries Lafayette aimed to stock mass-market goods and to democratize design for the consumer.”⁶⁵ As such, the dematerialization of fashion was already well underway when television became a new vector in the dissemination of fashion images in the 1960s with the first televised haute couture fashion show taking place in 1962.⁶⁶ This is not to say that television would not play a role in this process of dematerialization, but that the role it played starting in the 1960s was accelerating a process that had already taken root by then.⁶⁷

As Steele notes of the 1950s, “Couture was in the process of changing from a system based on the atelier to one dominated by the global corporate conglomerate.”⁶⁸ During this decade, “French couturier collections were nearly the sole source of inspiration for expensive ready-

59. Maillet, “Histoires de la médiation entre textile et mode en France,” 451.

60. *Ibid.*, 19–20.

61. Chapdelaine de Montvallon, *Le beau pour tous*, 61.

62. Battiau, *Les industries textiles de la région Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 349.

63. Propaganda Plan for Foreign Markets for the Period from January 1 to December 31, 1961, March 3, 1961, 19771635/18, AN.

64. Chapdelaine de Montvallon, *Le beau pour tous*, 30.

65. Brachet Champsaur, “Buying abroad, selling in Paris,” 139.

66. Best, *The History of Fashion Journalism*, 160.

67. For a more in-depth discussion on the evolution of television equipment rates in Europe and North America, see the work of Isabelle Gaillard: Gaillard, *La télévision*.

68. Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 17.

to-wear, mass-produced clothes, ladies sewing at home, and everything in between.”⁶⁹ By 1967, sales figures of even the most renowned houses had started their irreversible decline.⁷⁰ Thus, the dematerialization of fashion constituted the stage on which the decoupling of couture and textiles took place at the turn of the 1960s.

Decoupling of Haute Couture and the French Textile Industry

To correctly frame the decoupling of the French textile industry and haute couture, it is first necessary to clarify the distinction between the special fabrics suppliers and the other textile branches, as the couture–textile tensions were also felt in the textile industry itself. The special fabrics suppliers were represented by their own trade association, the *Chambre Syndicale des Tissus Spéciaux à la Couture* (CSTSC). The companies that made up its membership came from a variety of textile branches, including cotton, wool, and soierie. Since the modernization of spinning techniques starting in the interwar period, companies that specialized in soierie fabrics could now also present full collections of novel high-fashion wool fabrics, and vice versa.⁷¹ By the end of the 1950s, this was compounded by the advent of new synthetic fibers, which presented new opportunities for all the major textile branches. Michel Battiau explains that, by 1959, the *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (INSEE) had already started to note that the cotton branch was no longer the branch that only worked this fiber, but one that had the suitable tools to work cotton even if it mobilized synthetic fibers, this situation being the same for all other branches.⁷² As discussed by Ivan Paris, these technological innovations had a similar influence in Italy, expanding productivity and, by extension, making it necessary to integrate both textile and apparel production.⁷³

Additionally, because a special fabrics supplier was rarely able to produce every type of fabric needed by the couturiers, ad hoc collaborations between a CSTSC member and smaller fabric companies frequently took place.⁷⁴ This can be exemplified in the case of soierie, which was the most important haute couture supplier. In his work on the Lyon soierie, Laferrère explains that soierie included two main “activities”: haute nouveauté (special fabrics suppliers) and *nouveauté fantaisie*. In short, nouveauté fantaisie’s role was twofold: reproducing haute nouveauté ideas while simplifying them to reduce costs, but also creating original models of fabrics. In both cases, nouveauté fantaisie was useful to the special fabrics suppliers. In the first case, the reproduced models served to meet demands that special fabrics suppliers were unable to meet. In the second case, for a nouveauté fantaisie house to be able to enter the haute nouveauté circuit of soierie, it needed to collaborate with a house that was already a part of it. In turn, this is what Laferrère defines as the originality of Lyon soierie: *le négoce* (trading). That is, the role of soierie special fabrics suppliers was to collect the purchase orders on a

69. Bourhis, “The Elegant Fifties,” 20, 22.

70. Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 252.

71. Rouff, “Une industrie motrice,” 124–125.

72. Battiau, *Les industries textiles de la région Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 20.

73. Paris, “Fashion as a System,” 528.

74. Annual report of the silk industry (calendar year 1954), July 8, 1955, RG59/CDF1955-1959/B4585, NARA.

collection of fabric samples presented to customers (e.g., haute couture houses) in order to redistribute them to the manufacturers depending on demand.⁷⁵ This illustration of the intermediary role played by special fabrics suppliers highlights the distance that separated the textile industry as a whole from haute couture, marking a distinction between French haute couture and the boutique ready-to-wear at the root of *alta moda italiana* collaborating with the textile industry at large.

Nevertheless, another variable specific to the changing context of the French textile industry starting in the mid-1950s played in favor of the couturiers' arguments that they represented the best vehicle to promote French textile exports. To put this perspective in context, it is important to understand the distinction between silk and soierie as well as the specificity of this textile branch compared with the other major branches of cotton and wool. This is important because, as discussed by Michel Battiau, the advent of synthetic fibers used in the textile industry erupted between 1955 and 1965 in France, being multiplied eightfold.⁷⁶ However, by 1955, soierie already only used 4 percent raw silk, making businesses in this branch far from just covering the natural silk production, contrary to what its name entailed (*soie* being French for "silk").⁷⁷

This impressive growth in the development and use of new synthetic fibers such as nylon and polyester resulted in a progressive blurring of the traditional lines between the textile branches, which Battiau defines as an "intertextilisation" of the industry.⁷⁸ That is, more and more, manufacturers of soierie, cotton, and wool could produce similar fabrics by mobilizing comparable amounts of synthetic fibers in their production, while using less of their designated natural fibers. However, as Laferrère argues, this contributed to further specialize soierie toward high-end and high-novelty fabrics compared with cotton and wool manufacturers who mainly mobilized these new fibers to improve their cost prices.⁷⁹

By 1960, soierie manufacturers used 3,985 tons of natural fibers (905 tons of silk, 2,348 tons of cotton, and 732 tons of wool), 26,639 tons of synthetic fibers, and 1,229 tons of diverse fibers and materials.⁸⁰ This eclectic nature of the soierie branch combined with its close bond with haute couture substantiates the case made by the couturiers that haute couture could act as the spearhead of the entire textile industry. Indeed, the fabrics it used were composed of a variety of textiles representing the diversity of the French textile industry's production.

However, the structural closeness of the special fabrics suppliers—that primarily included soierie manufacturers—and couturiers did not come with exclusive shared interests. On November 8, 1956, the president of the CSTSC, Robert Ducass, laid bare the disconnect between couture and special fabrics suppliers by discussing the total special fabrics purchase figures of subsidized haute couture houses, amounting to roughly 600 million francs by the CSTSC's account—precisely 548.94 million francs by the Union des industries textiles'

75. Laferrère, *Lyon ville industrielle*, 103–109.

76. Battiau, *Les industries textiles de la région Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 266.

77. *Ibid.*, 263.

78. *Ibid.*, 293–294.

79. Laferrère, *Lyon ville industrielle*, 239.

80. *Annuaire statistique de la France 1961 (Résultats de 1959 et 1960)*, 239.

account—which he considered insufficient.⁸¹ This amount represented the fabrics used in creating the original garments presented in the couture collections as well as the *répétitions* (replicates) made by the couture houses for their clients. While this number compared advantageously to couture’s total revenues for 1956 of around 5 billion francs—of which 2 billion stemmed from their exports—the crux of the problem rested squarely on the selling of paper patterns to foreign manufacturers, especially American ones.⁸² Indeed, with a ready-to-wear market inspired by couture designs that represented around 1,400 billion francs, it is easy to understand why the CSTSC members demanded couturiers systematically refer buyers of paper patterns to the original special fabrics manufacturers.⁸³ In this instance, the couturiers not doing so—because special fabrics suppliers refused to give additional benefits to the couturiers to limit their risks through stock limitations—did nothing to improve the commerce of French textiles.⁸⁴

Between 1960 and 1963, despite the couturiers’ insistence on the alleged importance of couture for the country’s textile industry, representatives of the various textile branches each voiced a different perspective that brought the Parisian couturiers face-to-face with their contradictions. By the end of the aid-to-couture plan in December 1960, the representatives of the textile branches had already made clear that, except for soierie manufacturers, the others were reluctant to commit to any aid whatsoever.⁸⁵ On February 2, 1961, faced with this impasse, Louis Lavenant, the government commissioner in the Aid Commission, presented a thinly veiled ultimatum to the CSCP: if, by the end of April, the textile industry was unable to guarantee any funding for a new aid-to-couture plan, the unspent final subsidy allotment would be dedicated to propagande.⁸⁶ What had appeared to be a temporary couture–textile deadlock following the end of the aid-to-couture plan was to become a fixture of couture–textile relations in the 1960s.

For this reason, on June 9, 1961, the funds remaining from the original aid-to-couture plan were reallocated to the propagande services and activities.⁸⁷ By 1963, French officials grew weary of this stalemate. On June 14, Lavenant explained that he could not fathom why the textile industry, which could afford to help haute couture financially, did not implement a new aid-to-couture plan of their own creation to ensure the long-term survival of couture’s mission of propagande in the service of French textiles. Encouraged by this admonition, Jacques Heim, honorary president of the CSCP, nonetheless recognized that couturiers were facing a new problem. The couturiers now had to convince the textile industry that haute

81. Meeting report of the November 8, 1956, couture-textile meeting, November 26, 1956, 19771635/24, AN, 1; Rapport de gestion de l’aide textile pour 1953, Union des Industries Textiles, February 1955, 19771635/16, AN.

82. For the total revenues, see Rapport D. G. “Livre Blanc,” November 6, 1956, CD/CSCP, 4; For the export numbers, see Aide à la création-couture parisienne—Renseignements communiqués par la Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne, October 1957, B-8409/1, CAEF, 5.

83. Vasse, *Freddy*, 141

84. Letter from J. Rouët to Monsieur Lavenant, February 18, 1954, 19771635/23, AN.

85. Meeting report of the Aid to Couture Commission, December 13, 1960, 19771635/22, AN.

86. Interview report with Monsieur Gorin, February 2, 1961, 19771635/22, AN.

87. Meeting report, March 24, 1958, C/CSCP; “The Eye...: M. Le President,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, May 28, 1962, 1; projected minutes of the Aid to Couture Commission, June 9, 1961, 19771635/22, AN.

couture's prestige made investment in this sector more sustainable regarding the influence of its propaganda compared with investment in the ready-to-wear industry.⁸⁸

This marks another major difference between the French and Italian cases, because the postwar development of the Italian fashion industry was rooted from the start in ready-to-wear boutique fashions, whereas in France, it was the handmade creations of haute couture houses that were subsidized specifically to support textile exports. Indeed, the parallel “clothing propaganda” (*propagande “habillement”*) financed by the Textile Fund targeted almost exclusively French consumers of ready-to-wear garments. It was not a subsidy for the expansion of new export opportunities on foreign markets as was the case for the aid-to-couture plan.⁸⁹ In Italy, as examined by Di Giangiolamo, the constitution of a Permanent Advisory Committee in 1963 to discuss financial contributions for promotional events in favor of Italian fashion abroad included representatives of all textile branches, as well as clothing manufacturers beyond only couture and special fabrics representatives.⁹⁰

In France, however, even Heim's proposition was no longer enough to ensure a rapprochement with the textile industry. On September 25, 1963, as a follow-up to the June 14 meeting at which the textile branches had not been represented, a new meeting took place to allow representatives of each textile branch to voice their opinions. First, François Vigier, executive officer of the trade association of soierie manufacturers (Fédération de la Soierie), reiterated that they were interested in an immediate short-term aid plan that could allow some time to develop a new textile-sponsored plan. Second, Jean David, the director of the trade association of cotton manufacturers (Syndicat Général de l'Industrie Cotonnière Française), noted that they were concerned mainly with household linen as well as menswear and womenswear, making haute couture a somewhat foreign promotional tool in their view. Third, Louis Robichez, the executive officer of the trade association of wool manufacturers (Comité Central de la Laine), explained that they could support a certain form of couture propaganda, but that it would not be exclusive to French couture because of the trade association's ties to the International Wool Secretariat.⁹¹ Following this barrage of bad news, Heim expressed the CSCP's frustration, asking the only question that mattered for the couturiers: “Does couture interest the textile industry, yes or no?”⁹²

This firm stance adopted by the CSCP and backed by the French public authorities prompted a rapid reaction from the textile industry. On January 14, 1964, couturiers were informed that the trade associations for soierie, cotton, wool, “special fabrics,” and lacework had gathered 60,000 new francs that would constitute a onetime subsidy from the textile industry to haute couture. The nonrenewable nature of this aid led the CSCP to conclude that

88. Meeting report of the Executive Bureau of Propaganda, June 14, 1963, 19771635/23, AN.

89. For 1952, 1.5 million francs out of 19.3 million were nonetheless dedicated to “export propaganda” for womenswear, whereas haute couture had reserved 44 million francs for propaganda purposes. Programme de propagande générale en faveur de l'habillement féminin (vêtement de dessus)—Quatrième état de dépenses à engager, April 23, 1953, 19771635/8, AN, 1–2; Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 1^{er} octobre 1952 de la Commission propagande—Bordereau des dépenses approuvées, October 2, 1952, 19771635/8, AN.

90. Di Giangiolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 82.

91. Meeting report, September 25, 1963, 19771635/23, AN, 4.

92. *Ibid.*, 5.

this meant the end of the propagande role of haute couture.⁹³ The declining interest of French textile manufacturers in haute couture was compounded by the changing fashion context of the 1960s, with the decline of haute couture in parallel to the advent of both new designer ready-to-wear and new fashion centers such as London, Rome, Florence, and New York.⁹⁴

In fact, on September 25, 1963, the trade association representatives for the major textile branches had laid bare a disconnect that was rooted in the relative stagnation of the French textile industry's exports in parallel to the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan. Indeed, between 1952 and 1960, the share of textile exports in France's total exports (outside the franc zone) went from 13 percent to 12.3 percent, going from second to third place in terms of its weight in French trade, behind metallurgy and transport equipment.⁹⁵ As such, even though textile exports grew from 106.2 billion francs in 1952 to 216.2 billion in 1960 (constant francs of 1952) in absolute value, other sectors of the French economy outpaced this growth.⁹⁶ This meant that, contrary to the claims made by the couturiers and special fabrics manufacturers of haute couture being an efficient instrument to promote textile exports, this benefit did not materialize for the majority of textile branches.

Thus, the decoupling of the French textile industry and haute couture was confirmed in 1964 alongside a growing interest among French public authorities in the influence of haute couture on foreign markets. Indeed, the government's increasing interest in couture was partly responsible for the textile industry's loss of interest; haute couture was no longer dedicated to the improvement of textile exports, as it had been at the start of the aid-to-couture plan, but had become an instrument of prestige propagande at a national level. In turn, this is connected more generally to France's postwar commercial diplomacy as defined by the work of Laurence Badel. In her research, Badel explains that the postwar structures of France's commercial diplomacy that took form in the 1950s through the growing importance of the Directorate of External Economic Relations (Direction des Relations Économiques Extérieures, hereafter DREE) are at the roots of the *diplomatie commerciale de prestige* (prestigious commercial diplomacy) that took shape during the presidency of Charles de Gaulle (1958–1969).⁹⁷ The peculiarity of this prestigious commercial diplomacy was that it added an additional layer to the traditional diplomatic actions of promoting the trade of French consumer goods and services as well as supporting new export outlets by looking to also disseminate “universalizable values” to reaffirm France's grandeur.⁹⁸ Badel explains that Renault constitutes a good example of such diplomacy in France in the 1950s and 1960s, “embodying the dynamism of a modern and independent France, which intended to break with the image of a conservatory country for luxury craftsmanship and subject to the United States.”⁹⁹ However, as we will see,

93. Meeting report, January 13, 1964, 19771635/23, AN, 2–3.

94. Steele, “Fashion Futures,” 8.

95. *Tableau général du commerce extérieur—Année 1952*, 21; *Statistiques du commerce extérieur de la France—Année 1960*, xv.

96. Idem. The change in 1952 constant francs has been done using the INSEE online conversion tool: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2417794>.

97. Badel, *Diplomatie et grands contrats*, 137, 320; Badel, “France's Renewed Commitment to Commercial Diplomacy in the 1960s,” 63, 77.

98. Badel, *Diplomatie et grands contrats*, 319–320.

99. Badel, “Milieux économiques et relations internationales,” 21. This is discussed in more details in Badel, *Diplomatie et grands contrats*, 320–322.

the new opportunities generated by the dematerialization of fashion made haute couture an especially interesting prospect for French diplomats in the 1960s. Indeed, by progressively disconnecting ideas from clothing, this phenomenon made it possible to associate the prestige of couture's brands and fashion images with French consumer goods at large.

Haute Couture and the French Public Authorities

Starting in 1957, the new propagande concept mobilizing haute couture ideas (names, designs, brands) kicked off a series of state-sponsored couture events abroad that reflected the new-found diplomatic interest in fashion's influence on foreign markets. One key event held in 1957 exemplifies the government's interest in haute couture, with effects that rippled into the 1960s. From October 14 to 19, Parisian couture houses participated in a series of galas to present haute couture models as part of the French Fortnight (*Quinzaine française*) organized by the Neiman Marcus department stores from October 14 to 28, 1957. As discussed by Anne E. Peterson in her article on the hundredth anniversary of Neiman Marcus in 2007, this was the first such "Fortnight" staged by Neiman Marcus "to celebrate France and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the store."¹⁰⁰ French models were flown to Dallas to present the couture garments for the occasion (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. "Paris Models at Neiman Marcus."

Source: *Time*, October 28, 1957, p. 89. From DeGolyer Library, SMU, Stanley Marcus Papers, a1996.1869.

100. Peterson, "Neiman Marcus at 100," 51.

The event was unique in that it was organized by a department store but included the support of French diplomats (either the consul or the commercial counselor) and aimed to promote French products at large and not just haute couture or textiles.¹⁰¹ Indeed, many events were organized in the Zodiac Restaurant at Neiman Marcus in Dallas to promote French food and wine, while there were also exhibitions of “French automobiles” and “exciting exhibits of French merchandise throughout Neiman Marcus” (see Figure 2).¹⁰²

French diplomats perceived this French Fortnight very positively. As reported by the ambassador Hervé Alphand on October 21, 1957: “In terms of French propaganda, . . . the result has already been achieved.”¹⁰³ An example of this “French propaganda” could be seen in the French atmosphere instilled by the installation of temporary facades as part of the French Fortnight at Neiman Marcus, illustrating the national character of this propagande event (see Figure 3).

Nevertheless, for the couturiers, it was a success in name only. This was because the couturiers were weary of participating in events directly tied to department stores, as it risked diluting the prestige of Parisian couture while mainly benefiting the commercial interest of the store, especially as part of events promoting such a vast expanse of French goods beyond haute couture and “special fabrics.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, by 1957 the propagande activities of couture did not meet the expectations of either the textile industry or couturiers, but the CSCP agreed to follow through, because the subsidy that reduced creation costs depended on it.

However, on the public authorities’ part, this new approach to propagande through haute couture’s image and ideas was interesting. A note from François Gavoty, the commercial counselor of the French embassy in the United States, illustrates this interest expressed by French officials. On December 6, 1960, he made clear that haute couture was to be one of the highlights of the French Fortnights to ensure wide media coverage of such events.¹⁰⁵ In short, after the state-sponsored aid-to-couture plan ended in 1960, the government—and especially the DREE—was keen on integrating the propagande role of haute couture into wider French commercial diplomacy. Indeed, as explained by Badel, “In 1945, the network of economic expansion posts abroad was permanently integrated to the DREE.”¹⁰⁶ Because the French commercial counselor in the United States was also heading the French department of economic expansion in the United States, Gavoty was a key part of the institution of trade attachés

101. A special “Prestige & National Propaganda Committee” was responsible for liaising between French exporters and American retailers. Déplacement spécial à Dallas (Texas) et New York, à l’occasion de la Quinzaine française de Dallas (14–28 octobre 1957), August 29, 1957, 91QO/505, Archives Diplomatiques de La Courneuve (hereafter AD).

102. Quotations are from: “Z Is for the Zest of Shopping in France at Neiman Marcus October 14–28,” A1993.1869, Stanley Marcus Papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University. For example, for the letter “R”: “R Is for Renault, and Rodier Fabric on the Rue de Rivoli!,” A1993.1869, Stanley Marcus Papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University.

103. Quinzaine française de Dallas, October 21, 1957, 91QO/505, AD, 3.

104. Compte rendu du voyage à Dallas, November 12, 1957, CD/CSCP, 1.

105. Note sur l’organisation de Quinzaines françaises par de grands magasins américains, December 6, 1960, 4095, Archives de l’Ambassade de France aux États-Unis (hereafter AAF).

106. Badel, “France’s Renewed Commitment to Commercial Diplomacy in the 1960s,” 71.

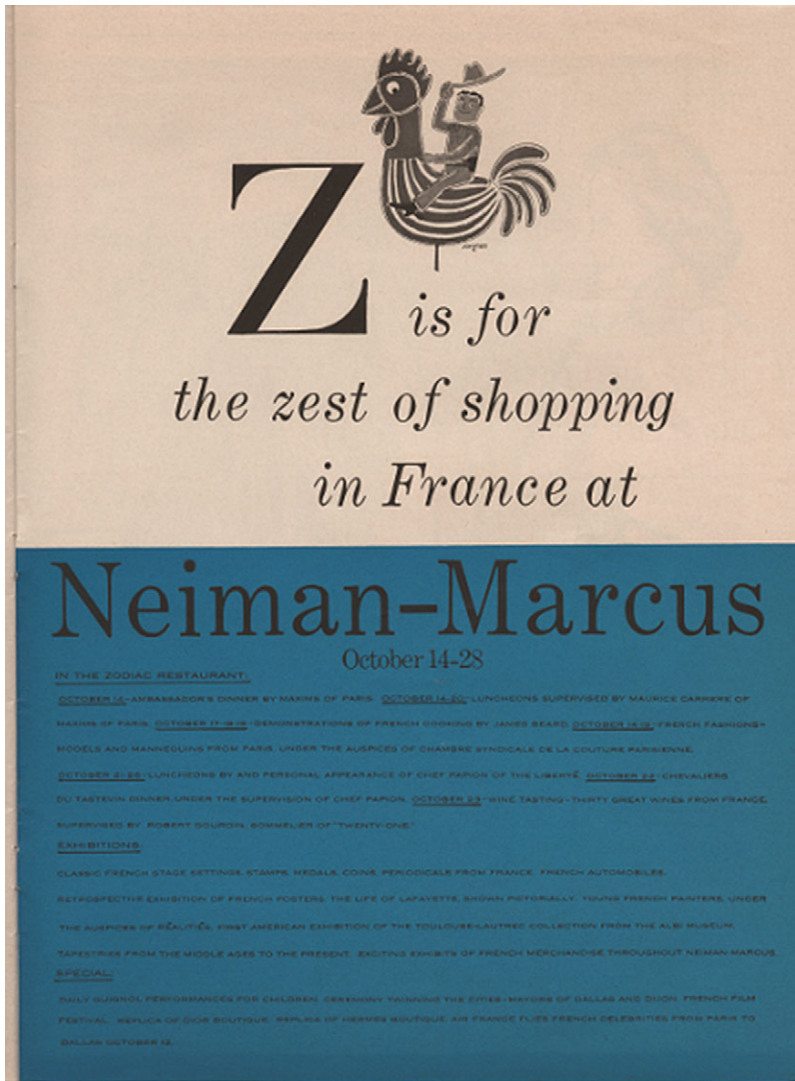


Figure 2. The last page of a booklet in which each page represented a specific letter from A to Z dedicated to various French goods.

Source: "Neiman Marcus Brings France to Texas: Everything from A to Z 1957." From DeGolyer Library, SMU, Stanley Marcus Papers, a1996.1869.

that Badel defines as having been "the spearhead of bilateral commercial diplomacy."¹⁰⁷ In this regard, the integration of haute couture in commercial events was not trivial, but rather testified to the importance attributed to fashion by French diplomacy. However, the

107. For the quotation, see Badel, *Diplomatie et grands contrats*, 147. For the status of the commercial counselor, see *Rapport sur l'activité des services de l'expansion économique aux États-Unis au cours de l'année 1950*, May 1, 1951, 4089, AAF, 2.



Figure 3. Temporary facades served to establish a French atmosphere.

Source: “French Fortnight,” DeGolyer Library, SMU, Stanley Marcus Papers, a1996.1869.

formalization of this diplomatic interest in fashion images happened when the aid-to-couture plan had already been terminated and at a time when French officials still thought the textile industry would replace the aid-to-couture plan with a subsidy scheme of their own. This is an important nuance, as it testifies to the indirect role played by haute couture as part of the French commercial diplomacy of the early 1960s; the DREE never having proposed to instigate a propagande-focused subsidy scheme of its own to compensate for the lack of interest expressed by the representatives of the textile industry.

Between 1960 and 1964, the couturiers’ propagande activities reflected the prestige interest of France’s commercial diplomacy more than the commercial interest of the textile industry. It is important to note that while this shift was occurring in France, the Italian fashion industry was starting to develop its partnership with the textile industry, as had been decided by the newly constituted Permanent Advisory Committee in 1963. As discussed by Di Giangiolamo, this translated in the setting up of the Centre for the Development of Textile, Clothing, and Haute Couture Exports (CITAM) on June 17, 1964, intent on improving collaboration between textile and clothing manufacturers (both *alta moda* and ready-to-wear) and boosting exports.¹⁰⁸ This development was consistent with the arguments put forward by the representatives of the French textile branches in September 1963, testifying to the growing importance of ready-to-wear for their outlets. However, by this time in France, the shift in the public

108. Di Giangiolamo, *Institutions for Fashion*, 83.

authorities' expectations regarding haute couture's influence nurtured its relevance in terms of prestige-based diplomatic influence.

Thus, the first series of events that couture planned within the Budget spécial depended on the condition that these events would appear not as prospecting in the U.S. market but as supporting charitable organizations.¹⁰⁹ From March 1 to 15, 1962, haute couture participated in a series of events in New York (aboard the cruise ship *France* under the patronage of the wife of the French ambassador), Boston (for the benefit of the Junior League), and Chicago (for cancer research).¹¹⁰ On April 19, Jean-Claude Pettit, the French commercial counselor, notified the CSCP that these actions were in line with what the French diplomacy expected in the United States. In a letter to Jean Manusardi, the CSCP executive officer for propagande, Pettit explained that following the event aboard the *France*, all the French diplomatic representatives—who had earlier met in New York—had reaffirmed their interest in the continuation of couture propagande operations, not only because of their alleged benefit for the French textile industry but also for the positive impact on France's reputation.¹¹¹

This argument that public authorities presented to the CSCP was the opposite of that of the textile industry. This dissonance between the public authorities' discourse and the textile industry's increasing apathy toward haute couture stemmed from the fact that couture propagande activities served the interest of the state more so than that of the textile industry. In September and October 1963, the propagande actions of haute couture sponsored by the Budget spécial returned to their roots of 1957–1960 through participation in French Fortnights held in Chicago and Peoria and a French Week in San Francisco.¹¹²

Each time, following Gavoty's note on French Fortnights, haute couture's propagande objective was to serve as the main highlight of the event and ensure that the presentation kept a national French appeal and avoided becoming solely a publicity stunt for the stores and couture.¹¹³ As for the public authorities, they conveyed their prestige-based diplomatic objective by asking the CSCP to reserve additional images created of their events to distribute to a wider range of newspapers.¹¹⁴ However, following this series of promotional events, the couturiers were to learn on January 14, 1964, that the textile industry would not offer a new textile-sponsored aid-to-couture plan. From this moment, the public authorities' goal was to stretch the remaining budget as much as possible to ensure the survival of the propagande service by sacrificing direct actions abroad.¹¹⁵ As a result, approximately a third of the CSCP's propagande service operating costs were ensured until August 1967, but the heyday of couture events abroad had passed.¹¹⁶

109. Jean Manusardi, report on his New York trip, September 26, 1961, 19771635/22, AN, 4.

110. Chambre Syndicale Letter to the Government Commissioner, February 9, 1962, 19771635/19, AN.

111. Letter of the French Commercial Counselor in the United States to Jean Manusardi of the Chambre Syndicale, April 19, 1962, 19771635/19, AN.

112. "The Eye... French Accent," *Women's Wear Daily*, April 11, 1963, 2; "Eye: Road Tour," *Women's Wear Daily*, October 1, 1963, 1; "Paris Promotion Set at Carson's," *Women's Wear Daily*, September 16, 1963, 2.

113. Chambre Syndicale report on couture events in the United States and Canada, December 12, 1963, 19771635/19, AN.

114. Jean Manusardi, letter to the Aid to Couture State Controller, January 8, 1964, 19771635/19, AN.

115. Letter from the Deputy President of the Chambre Syndicale to the State Controller, November 10, 1964, 19771635/19, AN.

116. Memo from the State Controller for the Textile Sub-Directorate, September 12, 1966, 19771635/20, AN.

Conclusion

This article highlights the fact that the positive postwar relationship between French haute couture and the country's textile industry that business historians describe in terms of the golden age of couture was the exception rather than the rule. The couture–textile rapprochement of 1952 was tied directly to the immediate conjuncture of the global textile crisis and the advent of the *alta moda italiana*. The continuation of the aid-to-couture plan until 1960 had more to do with renewed government interest in the propagande potential of haute couture than with the commercial interests of the textile industry, which started finding new outlets in the burgeoning ready-to-wear industry.

In Italy, this changing context manifested in parallel to the relative concentration of the various parties involved in the fashion industry, having remained decentralized throughout the 1950s. While similar to what the French fashion industry experienced, integration of Italy's fashion industry came about in the 1960s—most notably through the CITAM—constituted a difference. Indeed, while the collaboration between textiles and fashion in Italy in the mid-1960s sought to boost textile and apparel exports, the expectations of the French public authorities had evolved throughout the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan.

In France, this changing context also led to occasional clashes between haute couture and their special fabrics suppliers, who refused to give couturiers the exclusive benefits they thought they were owed because of their alleged importance in the promotion of French fabrics abroad. In turn, the expansion of couture propagande activities toward French products and away from the textile industry led to an increasing disinterest in couture among textile representatives. In parallel, the French public authorities requested more and more of this kind of propagande by the CSCP, seeing foreign media interest in French fashion as a way to promote French business interests beyond the textile industry within the broader framework of France's postwar commercial diplomacy. This was clearly stated by the French authorities at the conclusion of the aid-to-couture plan in 1960 and presented as a clear way forward through the subsequent Budget spécial allocated to keep the propagande mission afloat until the textile industry presented a plan of its own. However, between 1960 and 1964, when the textile industry made it clear that no such support would be forthcoming, such actions from haute couture remained in line with the public authorities' expectations of national-level rather than sectoral-level propagande.

By cross-referencing sources from diplomatic, ministerial, business, and multi-stakeholder meetings archives, this article argues that the dematerialization of fashion is the key phenomenon at the heart of both the decoupling of couture and textiles and the newfound government interest in haute couture propagande in the 1960s. This argument contributes to reframing the narrative of postwar French couture–textile relations from a positive one toward a gradual decoupling process accompanied by a couture–diplomacy rapprochement as part of the French commercial diplomacy of the 1960s. Also, because the public authorities played an evolving role between haute couture and the textile industry in the 1950s and 1960s—that of a conductor during the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan followed by that of a mediator after 1960—the multi-stakeholder meetings archives are useful for comparing the perspectives of each actor to distinguish between interest and discourse.

There are two important new implications for research on couture and the fashion business. First, by integrating the new fashion context of the 1960s with studies on the 1952–1960 aid-to-couture plan, it was possible to point out that the financing of propagande was not a mishap in the framework of what was at its core an industrial subsidy scheme to support the French textiles trade. In fact, the present article revealed that it was rather the textile part of the aid-to-couture plan that was contextual; the propagande aspect of the aid enduring throughout the 1960s, long after the aid-to-couture plan had ended. Second, the undeniable interest that French diplomatic agents abroad showed in the influence of haute couture and images of its fashions testifies to the importance of considering diplomatic interests in the study of the fashion business, even more so starting in the 1960s, as from then on, dematerialization of fashion becomes the norm.¹¹⁷ This is compounded by the fact that haute couture propagande events were mobilized as an indirect but original instrument of France’s postwar commercial diplomacy, highlighting the specific expression of fashion’s diplomatic influence at the confluence of prestige and commerce.¹¹⁸ As such, this serves to open a new perspective on the outputs of haute couture by integrating the point of view of consuls and commercial counselors, who observe the influence of fashion in terms of both national business opportunities and media influence.

VINCENT DUBÉ-SENÉCAL is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oslo. His research project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 886026. It has also benefited from partial support from the ERC Consolidator Project CREATIVE IPR under grant agreement no. 818523. He obtained a PhD in history from the University of Montréal in March 2019. He is the author of *La mode française: Vecteur d’influence aux États-Unis (1946–1960)* (Québec, 2020; Paris, 2021). Contact information: Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo, Oslo 0851, Norway. E-mail: vincent.dube-senecal@iakh.uio.no.

Bibliography

Books

- Annuaire statistique de la France 1961 (Résultats de 1959 et 1960)*, vol. 67. Paris: INSEE, 1961.
- Asselain, Jean-Charles. *Histoire économique de la France du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours. 2. De 1919 à la fin des années 1970*. Paris: Seuil, 1984.
- Badel, Laurence. *Diplomatie et grands contrats. L’État français et les marchés extérieurs au XX^e siècle*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010.
- Battiau, Michel. *Les industries textiles de la région Nord-Pas-de-Calais: étude d’une concentration géographique d’entreprises et de sa remise en cause*. Vol. 1. Lille: Atelier reproduction des thèses Université Lille III, 1976.

117. Pouillard, “Christian Dior-New York,” 128; Janin, “Mode et médias,” 109.

118. Badel, *Diplomatie et grands contrats*, 320.

- Bernays, Edward. *Propaganda*. New York: Ig Publishing, 2005. First published 1928 by H. Liveright (New York).
- Berstein, Serge, and Pierre Milza. *Histoire de l'Europe du XIX^e siècle au début du XXI^e siècle*. Paris: Hatier, 2006.
- Best, Kate Nelson. *The History of Fashion Journalism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Chapdelaine de Montvallou, Sophie. *Le beau pour tous. Maïmé Arnodin et Denise Fayolle, l'aventure de deux femmes de style: mode, graphisme, design*. Paris: L'Iconoclaste, 2009.
- Di Giangiolamo, Gianluigi. *Institutions for Fashion: Public and Private Intervention in Italy and France (1945–1965)*. Translation made with the contribution of Centro di Studi Avanzati sul Turismo–CAST Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Campus di Rimini and of Institut de Recherche et d'Études Supérieures du Tourisme–IREST Paris 1 Université Panthéon-Sorbonne. Milan-Turin: Pearson Italia, 2021.
- Dubé-Sénécal, Vincent. *La mode française. Vecteur d'influence aux États-Unis (1946–1960)*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2020.
- Fourastié, Jean. *Les trente glorieuses, ou La révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*. Paris: Fayard, 1979.
- Gaillard, Isabelle. *La télévision. Histoire d'un objet de consommation, 1945–1985*. Paris: INA Éditions, 2012.
- Grumbach, Didier. *Histoires de la mode*. Paris: Regard, 2008.
- Guillaume, Valérie, and Dominique Veillon. *La Mode. Un demi-siècle conquérant*. Paris: Gallimard, 2007.
- Jacomet, Dominique. *Mode, Textile et Mondialisation*. Paris: Economica, 2007.
- Kuisel, Richard F. *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Laferrère, Michel. *Lyon ville industrielle. Essai d'une géographie urbaine des techniques et des entreprises*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles. *L'empire de l'éphémère. La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*. Paris: Belin, 1995.
- Marly, Diana de. *The History of Haute Couture 1850–1950*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1980.
- Örmen, Catherine. *Histoire(s) du prêt-à-porter avec la Fédération française du prêt à porter féminin 1929–2009*. Paris: Fédération française du prêt-à-porter féminin, 2009.
- Palmer, Alexandra. *Dior: A New Look, A New Enterprise (1947–57)*. London: V&A Publishing, 2009.
- Steele, Valerie. *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Vasse, Marie-Josée. *Freddy. Dans les coulisses de la haute couture parisienne: souvenir d'un mannequin-vedette recueillis par Jean Carlier*. Paris: Flammarion, 1956.
- Vernus, Pierre. *Art, luxe & industrie. Bianchini Férier, un siècle de soieries lyonnaises*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2006.
- Verdier, Daniel. *Democracy and International Trade: Britain, France, and the United States, 1860–1990*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- White, Nicola. *Reconstructing Italian Fashion: America and the Development of the Italian Fashion Industry*. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- Wilcox, Claire, ed. *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957*. London: V&A Publishing, 2007.

Articles, Chapters in Books, and Dissertations

- Aumercier, Sandrine. "Edward L. Bernays et la propagande." *Revue du MAUSS* 30, no. 2 (2007): 452–469.
- Badel, Laurence. "France's Renewed Commitment to Commercial Diplomacy in the 1960s." *Contemporary European History* 21, no. 1 (2012): 61–78.
- . "Milieux économiques et relations internationales: Bilan et perspectives de la recherche au début du XXI^e siècle." *Relations Internationales* 157, no. 1 (2014): 3–23.
- Blaszczyk, Regina Lee, and Véronique Pouillard. "Fashion as Enterprise." In *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry*, edited by Regina Lee Blaszczkyk and Véronique Pouillard, 1–32. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Bosc, Alexandra. "Produire la mode: de la haute couture au prêt-à-porter, une évolution nécessaire?" In *Les années 50. La mode en France 1947–1957*, edited by Alexandra Bosc, 186–195. Paris: Paris Musées, 2015.
- Bourhis, Katell le. "The Elegant Fifties: When Fashion Was Still a Dictate." In *New Look to Now: French Haute Couture 1947–1987*, Stephen de Pietri, Melissa Leventon, Katell le Bourhis, Marie Andrée Jouve, and Caroline Rennolds Milbank, 13–22. New York: Rizzoli International, 1989.
- Brachet Champsaur, Florence. "Buying Abroad, Selling in Paris: The 1953 Italian Fair at Galeries Lafayette." In *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry*, edited by Regina Lee Blaszczkyk and Véronique Pouillard, 119–145. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Janin, Nicole. "Mode et médias: les années 1960." In *La mode des sixties. L'entrée dans la modernité*, edited by Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat, 104–109. Paris: Autrement, 2007.
- Guth, David W. "Black, White, and Shades of Gray: The Sixty-Year Debate over Propaganda versus Public Diplomacy." *Journal of Promotion Management* 14, nos. 3–4 (2009): 309–325.
- Leventon, Melissa. "Shopping for Style: Couture in America." In *New Look to Now: French Haute Couture 1947–1987*, Stephen de Pietri, Melissa Leventon, Katell le Bourhis, Marie Andrée Jouve, and Caroline Rennolds Milbank, 23–28. New York: Rizzoli International, 1989.
- Maillet, Thierry. "Histoires de la médiation entre textile et mode en France: des échantillonneurs aux bureaux de style (1825–1975)." PhD diss., École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2013.
- Okawa, Tomoko. "La maison Christian Dior, modèle de référence pour les années 1960." In *La mode des sixties. L'entrée dans la modernité*, edited by Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat, 229–240. Paris: Autrement, 2007.
- Paris, Ivan. "Fashion as a System: Changes in Demand as the Basis for the Establishment of the Italian Fashion System (1960–1970)." *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 3 (2010): 524–559.
- Peterson, Anne E. "Neiman Marcus at 100: The Fortnights and Fashion in Dallas." *Legacies: A History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 42–53.
- Pinchera, Valeria, and Diego Rinallo. "The Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country: Nation Branding and Collective Meaning Creation at Florence's Fashion Shows (1951–1965)." *Business History* 62, no. 1 (2020): 151–178.
- Pouillard, Véronique. "Keeping Designs and Brands Authentic: The Resurgence of the Post-war French Fashion Business under the Challenge of US Mass Production." *European Review of History* 20, no. 5 (2013): 815–835.
- . "Christian Dior-New York: French Fashion in the Luxury US Market." In *Global Luxury: Organizational Change and Emerging Markets since the 1970s*, edited by Pierre-Yves Donzé and Rika Fujioka, 111–131. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- . "Recasting Paris Fashion: Haute Couture and Design Management in the Postwar Era." In *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry*, edited by Regina Lee Blaszczkyk and Véronique Pouillard, 35–62. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.

- Rouff, Marcel. “Une industrie motrice: la haute couture parisienne et son évolution.” *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 1, no. 2 (1946): 116–133.
- Simmel, Georg. “Fashion.” *International Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1904): 130–155.
- Steele, Valerie. “Fashion Futures.” In *The End of Fashion: Clothing and Dress in the Age of Globalization*, edited by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, 5–18. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019.
- Veillon, Dominique, and Patrick Fridenson. “Introduction.” In *La mode des sixties. L’entrée dans la modernité*, edited by Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat, 4–13. Paris: Autrement, 2007.
- Villelongue, Martine. “Un rubanier dans la soierie, la maison Staron face aux maisons lyonnaises.” In *Esprit Staron. Rubans, soieries et haute couture 1867–1986*, Joëlle Dalmasso Montel, Nadine Besse, Sylvain Besson, and Martine Villelongue, 184–193. Paris and Saint-Étienne: Somogy éditions d’art et Musée d’Art et d’Industrie, 2007.

Newspapers and Magazines

Women’s Wear Daily

Archives

- Archives de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, Paris. (C/CSCP; CD/CSCP)
- Archives de l’Ambassade de France aux États-Unis, Washington, DC. (AAF)
- Archives diplomatiques du ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve, France. (AD)
- Archives Économiques et Financières, Savigny-le-Temple, France. (CAEF)
- Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France. (AN)
- Condé Nast Archives, New York.
- DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.
- Direction générale des douanes et droits indirects. *Statistiques du commerce extérieur de la France—Année 1960*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1961.
- Direction générale des douanes et droits indirects. *Tableau général du commerce extérieur—Année 1952*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1953.
- National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. (NARA)

Cite this article: Dubé-Senécal, Vincent. “Fashion, Industry and Diplomacy: Reframing Couture–Textile Relations in France, 1950s–1960s.” *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 2 (2023): 455–479.