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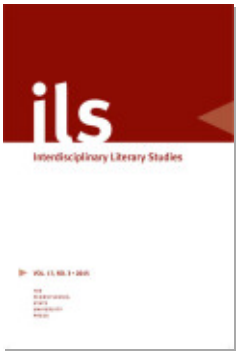

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Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics

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ABSTRACT
Jacques Rancière, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, *argues that in making the commodity form into artwork, Surrealism, and modernism in general, transformed every object into a potential piece of art. By fusing popular culture to high art, Surrealism destroyed the boundary that held back the aesthetic from the everyday and flooded the artistic with the commercial. However, Rancière's analysis forgoes the Surrealists' collaborations with the French couture fashion houses. This paper argues that Elsa Schiaparelli worked together with the Surrealist movement, and Salvador Dali in particular, to formulate a couture style that critiqued traditional modes of femininity while still working within dominant social structures. Their collaborations produced a form of bricolage that, by use of counterpoint, juxtaposed sophisticated couture fashion with images of female sexuality and violence. This relationship assuages Rancière's criticism of Surrealism. By imprinting Surrealist bricolage onto the female body, Schiaparelli and the Surrealists created an aesthetic model that directly related to the New Woman movement of the 1930s without relegating it to mere commodity.*

KEYWORDS: *material culture, fashion, critical theory, surrealism, feminism*

In the foreword to her autobiography *Shocking Life*, Elsa Schiaparelli claims that, "the only escape is in oneself . . . it is stronger than jealousy, hardship,

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or oppression."[1] Schiaparelli takes on the role of third person narrator in her deployment of persevering selfhood. She fractures herself into two personas and, in the process, constructs a dual-pronged interpretation of her own subjectivity. This doubled rendition enables Schiaparelli to fabricate her identity in the form of a mask. She explains: "I know Schiap by hearsay. I have only seen her in the mirror."[2] The mirror holds Schiaparelli away from herself and diverts attention from her more revealing thoughts. The split personality that Schiaparelli uses to represent herself highlights her strategy for resisting oppression, which has a discernable synecdoche to the aesthetic and political models she pursued in her sartorial designs. Part of the New Woman movement in 1930s France, Schiaparelli faced considerable backlash for her independent lifestyle: she lacked the necessary socioeconomic means to fully integrate into Parisian life. Her position as a single mother and a female business owner placed her in a precarious social situation. Schiaparelli turned to her clothing in reaction to these uncertain social and economic conditions in order to resist potential adverse response from conservatives who would view her self-supporting way of life wanton.

Published in 1954, *Shocking Life* combats the negative commentary surrounding the bankruptcy and closure of Schiaparelli's business.[3] Her position as a member of the rising numbers of women entering the workforce generates her dual subjectivity in the text. One of the most prominent and influential couturiers of the interwar period, Schiaparelli offers a remarkable example of the successes of the New Woman movement. Palmer White's biography of Schiaparelli, *Elsa Schiaparelli: Empress of Paris Fashion*, provides background on the designer. In 1913 Schiaparelli, estranged from her Italian family, moved to London and married Count William de Went de Kerlor.[4] The couple immigrated to New York where, in 1920, they separated after Schiaparelli gave birth to their daughter, Maria Luisa.[5] The Count left Schiaparelli penniless and she took on small jobs in Greenwich Village to support her daughter. There she met artists such as Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp and followed them to Paris in the mid-1920s.[6] To make ends meet in France, Schiaparelli turned to fashion design. She opened her first shop in the midst of financial difficulty in Paris, 1925.[7] Although her initial store closed in less than a year, she moved her business to its famous location at 21 Place Vendome in 1927.[8] Once there, Schiaparelli's business soared, and by the early 1930s she designed attire for celebrities and films.[9]

The tension between the celebrity persona Schiaparelli developed as her business gained footing and the economic realities of her familial situation yielded the dual subjectivity from which she writes in *Shocking Life*. Schiaparelli wrote in the context of the failure of her career: to write her life story required her to detail the impoverished position from which she initiated her business. As Llya Parkins argues, "[Schiaparelli] pictures herself as always somewhat estranged from the very rhythms upon which her success and celebrity are so dependent."[10] Schiaparelli turns to what Parkins defines as "glamour" to counter potential humiliation from the bankruptcy and her single lifestyle. Glamour allows Schiaparelli to travel between the couture designer's supposed celebrity and the class and gendered actualities of her life.[11] *Shocking Life* deploys glamour as a "quasi-magical perception of inaccessible depth below the spectacular surface."[12] Schiaparelli's fractured subjectivity in the autobiography performs glamour underneath the spectacle of celebrity in a synecdochical way to that of her clothes. Schiaparelli modeled many of her clothes on modernist art, Surrealism and Dadaism most precisely, and produced fashion lines patterned on the contemporary avant-garde. She collaborated with various modernist artists, notably Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau. Cocteau famously wrote of Schiaparelli arguing, "[h]er establishment in the Place Vendome is a devil's laboratory. Women who go there fall into a trap, and come out masked."[13] Cocteau's description of 21 Vendome Place draws attention to Schiaparelli's sartorial politics: her clothes perform the same glamorous spectacle that her narration executes in *Shocking Life*. Dali and Schiaparelli together designed one of the most famous of these "traps," the 1938 Circus Collection in which this paper takes interest.

This article defends Schiaparelli's choice to infuse her stylized representations of the New Woman with Surrealist experimentation. In particular, the Circus Collection's deployment of Surrealism formulated a sartorial style that united the Surrealist collage with the New Woman look that Schiaparelli contributed to the development of after World War I. According to Ghislaine Wood, Surrealism shifted from poetry and automatic writing to an interest in material objects in the 1930s: "The move away from text and image to the adoption of the object as subject in the early 1930s established templates that facilitated a Surrealist 'style,' which utilized such methodological tools as the unusual juxtaposition, displacement and fetishization."[14] Surrealist artists in the 1930s shifted to stylistic methodologies that fore-fronted the commodity in order to materially recognize

unconscious desires and represent commodity fetishism. Wood describes the materialist turn in Surrealism in the context of clothing: "Fashion brought the body into a direct relationship with commodities, and in the imagery of fashion and fashion photography it was manipulated and fetishized."[15] Although one could argue that fashion always already carries with it its relationship to the commodity form, in the context of Surrealism, fashion fused the Surrealists' fascination with the commodity form to their interest in the body, marking a potential unification of the two.[16] Surrealists used sartorial designs and fashion photography to create art that critiqued commodity fetishism's relationship to the body.

Although most critics agree that Schiaparelli's designs produced innovative and provocative interpretations of femininity, their articulations of her contributions to Surrealism often remain in the background in preference for her endeavors in the world of fashion.[17] Even when critics spotlight Surrealism, they pass over the political ramifications of Schiaparelli's participation within the movement. For example, Sabina Stent argues that the Surrealists showed interest in working with Schiaparelli because clothing "made Surrealist art into physical, visual fashion," and allowed for the "creation of functional pieces out of unusual or ordinarily irrelevant objects."[18] For Stent, the Surrealists exhibited curiosity in haute couture because it could actualize their designs within a physical and visual field of reference and launch their ideas into the cultural and capitalist mainstream. Stent's discussion of Schiaparelli offers a provocative starting point for a more thorough examination of Schiaparelli's role within Surrealism, but her analysis of the movement still remains secondary to the clothing itself. Caroline Evans's work furnishes a second example of this line of reasoning. Evans contends that Schiaparelli's work aided in the Western cultural shift toward the decay of subjective coherency. Evans does place emphasis on the particularity of Schiaparelli's designs but she does not account for her contributions to the specific aesthetic goals of Surrealism.[19] Instead, she argues that "Schiaparelli's avant-garde practice must also be situated, both socially and economically, in the field of fashion."[20] Evans correctly attributes Schiaparelli's avant-garde practice with its revolutionary representation of the New Woman. However, she does not turn her analysis back toward Surrealism to explain her arguments in the context of the movement's eventual collapse into commercialization. Evans' focus on fashion ignores how Schiaparelli's designs acted as a corrector to the failures of Surrealism.

Even critics studying Surrealism and Schiaparelli's forays into the movement focus on her participation in terms of its disintegration into the pure commercialization of postmodernism. Wood argues that fashion "proved a primary agent in the commodification of Surrealism" insomuch as it "brought the body into a direct relationship with commodities" through fashion photography and its dissemination in magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*.[21] Fashion periodicals popularized Surrealism because their photos fused its aesthetics onto bodily trends. Man Ray's incursions into fashion journalism provide an example of Wood's arguments.[22] John Xiros Cooper goes further than Wood to argue that Surrealism always already carried its commodification within it. Its marketing structures foreshadowed the "turbo-capitalism" of the status quo.[23] Jacques Rancière provides the most vehement critique of Surrealism. He claims that the movement's fascination with the commodity form transformed everything into a potential piece of art. This bonding of commodity and high art blurred the boundaries between the aesthetic and the social, collapsing the difference between the two. High art became commodified under Surrealism's watch because it named everyday objects exemplary for its artistic preferences.

SCHIAPARELLI'S AESTHETICS AND THE NEW WOMAN

Schiaparelli's couture house developed its depiction of the New Woman during Surrealism's methodological shift to object aestheticism. The figure of the New Woman evolved from fin-de-siècle France and represented the emerging lifestyle choices that women could adopt.[24] In the 1930s, French society shifted to accord women more space for social and economic mobility.[25] Changing opinions on women produced new representations of the feminine. Caroline Evans describes the New Woman as characterizing the "representations and practices of femininity that challenged established certainties about women's social place."[26] Schiaparelli played a leading role in this project. Although most remember her for her collaborations with Dali, her broader design choices emphasized practicality. Schiaparelli built her reputation on sensible, useful items for women. Her clothes reframed the woman's body toward a more active role in the world. Parkins explains that "[t]hough she also designed evening dress, in the early years her emphasis was on practical clothing for women—she designed women's

trouser skirts, for instance, as well as bathing suits and travel clothes."[27] However, practicality did not efface aesthetics, and Schiaparelli towed the line between sensibility and beauty. Wood argues that "[t]o be dressed by Schiaparelli was automatically to acquire confidence and chic, whether one was beautiful or not."[28] It did not matter if a woman's body fit within contemporary beauty trends, Schiaparelli's clothing made one feel beautiful and self-assured.

Schiaparelli's New Woman styles endeavored to counter the conservative backlash that surrounded women's emerging entrance into the public sphere. Women faced harsh socioeconomic conditions in France during the 1930s. Economically, they struggled to find employment in a workforce geared toward protecting male privilege. Men coming back after World War I and the subsequent global depression took its toll on the French economy and squeezed out the increased numbers of female workers who filled in for soldiers at the front. Eugene Weber clarifies: "With the labor market overcrowded, the struggle in it was hard but especially hard for women. Welcomed during and after the war, tolerated as times got harder, by 1934 and 1935 women found themselves brutally sidelined or expelled with a minimum of formalities or excuses."[29] Weber sums up male reactions to the New Woman's entrance into traditionally male-dominated workplaces such as law, higher education, and even administrative functions during the 1930s: "second-class workers, second class-citizens . . . women had no vote, hence no access to political power."[30] Not given the ballot until 1944, women received second-class access to legal and economic benefits including employment, birth control and medical attention, and access to governmental procedure. Schiaparelli designed the Circus Collection in the midst of this conservative economic and political environment. Its Surrealist theme interjected a discussion of gender into the public sphere and provided commentary on the struggles of the New Woman to gain access. Its representation of gendered violence reveals the brutality and turbulence imposed upon women seeking equality.

The use of Surrealism in the Circus Collection presents a sartorial take on contemporary French gender debates and employs a model of critique that relies on the fractured depiction of subjectivity that Schiaparelli later represents in *Shocking Life*. The Collection demonstrates the ways in which France's traditional feminine norms represented the New Woman as abject, distinctly vulnerable to conservative violence. As the Great Depression foreclosed financial possibilities, men began to rely on essentialized interpretations of femininity to place women squarely in

the home. Weber describes contemporary French representations of women by quoting a 1935 postal union bulletin: "Emancipation doesn't bring happiness, it merely destroys family feeling."[31] Women were expected to marry, produce children, and provide support for a man economically head of the household. However, post-World War I France saw a rise in women who refused the domestic lifestyle. These women sought their own socioeconomic arrangements and aesthetically structured their bodies to depict their societal ambitions. Fashion offered women the opportunity to challenge conventional sensibilities about the relationship between appearance and identity: it furnished them with the means through which to demonstrate the gap between dominant representations of the feminine and their own desires to occupy the public sphere. According to Carolyn Dean, these women "destabilized the conventional association between appearance and identity by using makeup, the salon, and fashion to blur the distinction between the 'respectable' woman and the prostitute."[32] Fashion muddled traditionally succinct classes of women and opened the rising numbers of independent women to conservative backlash predicated on the impossibility of telling the difference between respectability and promiscuity.

The New Woman's refutation of traditional depictions of femininity through fashion made it difficult to distinguish class or cultural differences among women. The obfuscation of class and gender identity produced cultural anxiety about the influx of femininity into the public sphere. Conservative commentators opined that they could not "differentiate at first sight an honest woman or a pure young girl from a whore" and hailed the New Woman's often-indecipherable identity as a corrupt style of masculinity.[33] The New Woman's sartorial decisions "blurred the boundaries between masculinity and femininity."[34] Women complicated established notions of the possibility of a stable, fixed identity through their refusal to adhere to traditional representations of the feminine. The tension generated what Evans names a crisis of male power:

> The New Woman's choice of her own sexual partners was taken by conservative critics to be a mark not of deviance but—worse—of masculinity, that awful capacity for gender fluidity that characterized the modern woman who usurped male prerogatives. Thus the "crisis" of male power was related to the fluidity of gender and, specifically, the mobility of femininity in its cultural construction--in make-up, masquerading fashions, and financial and sexual independence.[35]

The New Woman blurred distinctions between male and female and redefined gender in terms of social construction in the process. This crisis reinforced masculine entitlement: men could no longer claim dominance over the public sphere if their gendered privilege only existed in the context of a cultural construct. Soldiers returning home from World War I expected women to shift back into domestic positions. However, the New Woman pushed for equality and independence. In doing so, these women made femininity mobile enough to infringe on traditional masculine dominance.

Schiaparelli, along with a host of other couture designers, stood at the forefront of this aesthetic revolution.[36] Her couture house first became famous for its sportswear and most of her lines emphasized functional clothing for active women.[37] In particular, Schiaparelli's Circus Collection draws attention to the ways in which clothing constructs gender through the collection's dedication to the Surrealist aesthetic. It utilizes a model of Surrealist bricolage: the production of art from a diverse range of objects found readily at hand.[38] Wood's description of Surrealism offers a context for the mode of critique that the Circus collection applied. The Surrealists' turn from text to object in the 1930s entailed a movement toward the juxtaposition and manipulation of unlike items. Ulrich Lehmann explicates that Surrealism's "formal aspects of collage or assemblage combined contradicting, heterogeneous and often pre-existing forms within one work, displaying a conflict between visual styles or modes of manufacture, rather than being created or designed in a stylistically coherent language from one material."[39] This framework of collage, or bricolage, combined heterogeneous and incongruous forms into a singular work of art rife with contradictions. The Surrealists' use of conflicting forms and materials compelled viewers to examine how objects became part of everyday norms. Once separated from their commonplace surroundings, items could assume new and unprecedented meaning.

The Circus Collection's specific use of Surrealist bricolage relied upon a model of counterpoint to juxtapose haute couture and the absurd. Counterpoint, the complex interaction between contrasting interpretations and understandings of aesthetic objects, spotlights the collection's opposition to normative representations of femininity.[40] Victoria R. Pass's description of the Circus Collection spotlights its use of counterpoint. Pass recounts the designs, quoting a review from 1938 to do so:

> Ignoring conventional good taste and restraint [Schiaparelli] made hats shaped like hens, lamb chops and inkwells. "Circus tent" veils

> were made in fabric to match the gowns in the collection and could be worn with a small hat shaped like a snail or a small fez. . . . It also included garments inspired by the spirit of the circus with "Surrealist touches, like snail toques, mouth pockets, eye embroideries with gold eyelashes and dresses worn backwards."[41]

The cut and tone of the pieces denote conventional images of femininity: the veils coordinate with the gowns and could be worn with matching hats. However, the details, beadwork, embroideries, and so forth "ignored good taste" and counter each look's traditional aspects: hens, lamb chops, and inkwells become fashionable hats, and circus tents transform into trendy veils.[42]

The counterpoint between the conventionality of the clothing's cut and its use of Surrealist bricolage highlights the representational nature of gender and opened space for feminine expression. Evans, discussing Schiaparelli's designs more broadly, argues that they created an "interface between subjectivity and social meaning."[43] As in Schiaparelli's fractured subject in *Shocking Life*, the body transformed into a screen that could intervene between intimate subject and readable meaning in the public sphere. The divide between body and subjectivity operated as a mask that the New Woman could don to project innovative behavior and simultaneously resist traditionalist backlash. Cocteau's description of 21 Vendome Place offers an illustration of Schiaparelli's masking technique. He calls her shop a "devil's laboratory" and contextualizes the clothing her patrons wore as a "mask" because the designs cloaked the wearer in an aura of respectability despite their outlandish construction. The outrageousness deflected attention from the women to the clothes without reducing the wearer to a mannequin. Evans and Thornton demonstrate how Schiaparelli's split interpretation of subjectivity allowed for the manipulation of normative representations of gender: "By creating herself as a spectacle, ironically, as Schiaparelli did, a woman puts a distance between herself and her observers, a space within which to maneuver and to determine the meanings of the show."[44] Schiaparelli's clothes allowed women to "take control of the mask," dominant representations of femininity, and exploit them to resist negative interpretations of their actions.[45] As spectacle, the clothes manipulate the New Woman's vulnerability to place emphasis on the body's social and constructive dimensions instead.

An analysis of two examples from the Circus Collection exhibits how its designs created room for the New Woman to demonstrate her

precarious position within contemporary politics while resisting traditional interpretations of the feminine. The Skeleton and the Tear Dresses stand out within the Circus Collection because of their uncanny references to death and physical violence within the midst of the rest of the designs' seeming absurd revelry. With the mass causalities of World War I still fresh in people's minds, the French watched anxiously as Germany militarized in 1938. Pass connects these two dresses to France's increasing parlous geopolitical situation: "these dresses were the phantoms of war amid the raucous joy of the rest of the Circus Collection."[46] The gowns' use of morbidity connects France's concerns with war with the violence the New Woman experienced in her strives toward gender equality. To do so, each utilizes a version of counterpoint to style a bricolage of gender performativity, feminine violence, and couture-fashion.

The Skeleton Dress, made of skintight silk crepe and cotton wadding, depicts the female skeletal structure while covering the body from head to foot. Jan Reeder, curator of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, describes the gown:

> Although otherwise in elegant harmony with the prevailing lines of late 1930s evening wear, the skeleton dress is so constricted that it became a second skin and the imitation anatomy sat defiantly proud of the fine matte silk surface. Schiaparelli exaggerated the usually delicate trapunto quilting technique to make enormous "bones"— the design was stitched in outline through two layers of fabric, then cotton wadding inserted through the back to bring the design into relief on the front.[47]

The dress depicts a contrapuntal play between the "prevailing lines of late 1930's evening wear" and the skintight "imitation anatomy" grafted "defiantly proud" on the "silk surface."[48] It accentuates the rib cage and pelvis, erotically charged parts of the female body normally hidden from view. In doing so, the gown hints to what lies underneath the gown's two layers of fabric. Stent argues that the gown's provocative design alludes to the New Woman's sexual independence: "intimate bodily encounters can be evoked not only by nakedness and the exposure of flesh but by the possibility of things to come that are currently concealed."[49] The dress' illusive anatomy enabled women to evoke their own sexual signification without exposing their intimate parts, representing promiscuity and traditional femininity simultaneously and directly upon the body.

However, Stent's articulation of the sexual playfulness of the Skeleton Dress ignores its darker signification. The dress covers the body in a black silk crepe and its quilted boning protrudes artificially. Although the gown throws the naked female physique into relief, it does so in a morbid fashion. The dress makes the female body appear deadened, unable to move or breath, and turns the wearer into a skeleton, a corpse. Its skeleton frame highlights the potential violence associated with the New Woman's refutation of contemporary gender norms. Women did not transition into public life easily—their appearance exposed them to physical and mental trauma.[50] The juxtaposition between the gown's somber color and bone structure and its fashionable cut forces viewers to examine the violent potentiality inherent to the New Women's entrance into the public sphere. Its trendy cut signals to the New Woman's social acceptability, yet its skeletal design implants contemporary backlash directly onto the female form. The contradistinction between the two marks a caesura where women could simultaneously distance themselves from their appearance and annunciate their position in the public sphere.

The second example, the Tear Dress expounds upon the Circus Collection's production of a fragmented female subject capable of resisting conservative interpretations of femininity. Dali modeled it off of his painting *Three Young Surrealist Women Holding in Their Arms the Skins of an Orchestra*.[51] The gown depicts a confrontation between feminine poise and gendered violence. Dali based the gown's trompe l'oeil pattern on the "savage rips and tears" depicted in his artwork.[52] According to Stent, the Tear Dress

> presents the female body as a fragile object made of delicate material. The dress offers a juxtaposition of violence and poise that, although not directly eroticized as the *Skeleton Dress*, remains a powerful presentation of the violated female body. Instead of choosing to cover her scarred flesh and hide away from public view, the female wishes her attack to be made known and to highlight her abuse, which may come from an act of domestic violence or rape.[53]

The gown underlines gendered violence by contrapuntally shuttling between the elegance of contemporary fashion and Dali's trompe l'oeil images of tattered flesh. Unlike the Skeleton Dress, the Tear Dress de-emphasizes the New Woman's independent sexuality to portray the violence to which this self-determining subject exposed itself. In Evans'

and Thornton's analysis, "[t]he imagery of violence, the suggestion of attack, is counterpoised by the elegance of the dress, its existence as sophisticated fashion, the fact that is not rags, not torn."[54] The counterpoint provides an opportunity for an examination of the New Woman's use of fashion in terms of the violence she experienced in doing so. Although she may appear elegant in her dress, that elegance emerges out of subjective positions teeming with violence.

The dress's portrayal of the challenges with which New Woman coped constructed the body as a performance that disputed contemporary representations of the feminine. In particular, its corresponding veil presents a critique of the woman in the home as rife with violence. Although French culture began to view marriage in terms of "tenderness" and "mutual affection," women still held little political power to fight against domestic abuse.[55] In the 1930s, the French began to emphasize companionship within marriage but divorce procedures and monetary policies did not shift to keep up with this changing definition. Weber's discussion of the magazine *Marie Claire*'s advice to women on marriage provides evidence of the prevalence of household strife: "don't be helpless, learn to defend yourself against aggression or insolence."[56] The Tear Dress represents the situations many wives found themselves in because of their lack of legal redress. Dali's pattern rips apart Schiaparelli's veil, traditionally a symbol of a bride's innocence, countering how it shrouds the face from public consumption. Its masking of the feminine physique cannot cover the violence that type of gendered performance entailed. Furthermore, the veil splits the wearer from her public persona by showing how normative gender politics produced violent interpretations of femininity. Holding her representation away from herself, the wearer could comment on the repressive and brutal nature of contemporary gender politics. The Tear Dress, a representation of both feminine poise and abuse, directly confronted contemporary representations of femininity by refusing to label the New Woman as either prostitute or masculine. The gown's veil signals the ways in which dominant representational schemas incorporated women into their place within established gender politics. Dali's motif critically examines the violence in said norms and reveals the silencing and repressive nature of contemporary portrayals of femininity.

The Tear and Skeleton Dresses' use of contrapuntal bricolage reveals how Schiaparelli's larger aesthetic project rejected the possibility of a stable feminine subject in favor of a free-play of signification. Evans and Thornton argue: "Behind [Schiaparelli's] handling of women's fashion is a meditation

on the wider category of dress itself as a cultural language that inscribes the body. Her approach to dress centers around an understanding of how it acts simultaneously to repress the body and to bring it into the realm of language—the symbolic."[57] Schiaparelli's designs reject essentialized understandings of gender in favor of the body's representational potential. Both the Tear and Skeleton Dresses treat women's bodies as a social construct. The gowns repress the anatomical body in favor of language, the symbolic. The Skeleton Dress deploys the female anatomy to show the relationship between feminine sexuality and the violence the New Woman experienced. The Tear Dress veils the gendered body but utilizes Dali's trompe l'oeil motifs to rupture the traditionalism inherent to said shrouding. Each dress produces the type of ambiguity that generated the cultural anxieties surrounding contemporary debates about the New Woman's place in the public sphere.[58] Schiaparelli pulled the feminine body into the symbolic by treating it in the context of its representation: her clothing inscribed socially significant meaning onto the female form.

The Circus Collection's deployment of the Surrealist bricolage created a new depiction of femininity that infused the contemporary public with a fascination with the surreal. Wood, discussing Schiaparelli and Dali's collaborations, contends that "the body was refashioned by Surrealism and Surrealism was in turn subsumed into the cultural mainstream."[59] However, Wood's description of the commercialization of Surrealism through fashion fails to adequately represent how both enterprises jointly affected the New Woman. The Tear and Skeleton Dress strain current discussions of the failures of the Surrealist movement. Schiaparelli and Dali's designs shuttled between politics and aesthetics, allotting room for gendered resistance. The Circus Collection encouraged viewers to decipher femininity as a performance of multifaceted and often contradictory sociopolitical components. Its counterpoint between feminine poise and gendered violence interprets the female body constructively instead of in terms of essentialized biological form. In doing so, it worked to counter contemporary masculine privilege and garner women access to the public sphere. The Collection placed women in a position of resistance where they could interact with masculinity without collapsing into it. By shuttling between spectacular performance and feminine resistance, the Circus Collection's Surrealist bricolage generated a model of aesthetics that undergirded the New Woman's entrance into the public sphere. It acted as a corrective to Surrealism's commodification by drafting the Surrealist aesthetic into political engagement in its conscription onto the body.

SARTORIAL POLITICS AND THE SURREALIST AESTHETIC

Surrealism offers one example of the interweaving of art and commercialism where the aesthetic component did not collapse into capitalist exchange. Wood's description of Surrealism's commodification through fashion offers one example of contemporary debates on the subject. Rancière's articulation of the failures of the movement conveys one of its most adamant critiques. He explains that, in rearranging prosaic everyday items into art, Surrealism transformed every object into an always already aesthetic potentiality.[60] The fusion of the commodity form and high art deteriorated the border between the aesthetic and the everyday, opening the world of the avant-garde to commercialization. Rancière argues that Surrealism's failure to achieve its political goals lays in its inability to navigate the tension between aesthetics and the commodity. The movement collapsed because it converted the commodity form into art in an age when commodification became the norm. Surrealism sought to transform commodities into works of art as postwar, industrialized capitalism commodified politics.[61] In doing so, the movement blurred the distinction between art and capitalism.

In his criticism of Surrealism's use of commodities, Rancière argues that the movement navigated between two "regimes" that constructed and ultimately restricted its potential: the political and the aesthetic.[62] The political regime refers to contemporary representational norms, including that of capitalist, communal, and legal construal. The aesthetic acts in dialectical opposition to the political and pertains to art's autonomous, distanced position. The museum offers an example of this regime. The museum separates art from its cultural context because of its geo-cultural position outside normative politics. Rancière depicts Surrealism's failure to maneuver between the aesthetic regime of art and the political regime of capitalist exchange as artistic entropy: "a point where the border [between art and non art] becomes completely blurred, where nothing, however prosaic, escapes the domain of art."[63] Both political and aesthetic regimes produce artistic entropy, what he defines as "art becoming mere life or art becoming mere art."[64] When art sways too far in either direction, toward life or art, it fails to successfully interrogate contemporary political norms. The Surrealists' aesthetic aloofness forestalled their art from collapsing into a "form of life," but their political views crumbled the distinction.[65] They sought to insert themselves into politics through their manipulation of the commodity form

without sacrificing artistic detachment from commercialization. Crossing "back and forth over the line separating the specific world of art and the prosaic world of commodities," Surrealism slipped into the world of pure commodification.[66]

Schiaparelli's Surrealist designs complicate Rancière's depictions of Surrealism. Although the movement did in fact turn any commodity form into always already art, its transference onto the female body via the Circus Collection confronted post-World War I politics while still remaining high art. The Surrealists' shift from poetics to object materialism did place the movement at the forefront of the emergence of industrialized capitalism but Schiaparelli's use of the aesthetic challenges contemporary readings of its fall into capitalist propaganda. Rancière explains that aesthetics may successfully challenge representational norms by "shuttling" between the aesthetic and political regimes.[67] The aesthetic forges a redistribution of representational power by refuting the "hierarchical divisions of the perceptible" and a hopeful isolation, "the guardian of the promise of emancipation."[68] Art offers a valuable tool for those that do not fit within dominant representational schemas, because it can shelter ideas from normative censure by retreating into high art, becoming a "guardian" of future liberation.[69] On the other hand, art's attention to politics emphasizes its capacity to reallocate representational norms toward freer models of communal configuration. Art may only intervene in politics by successfully negotiating between these two poles. The shuttling between social critique and aesthetic isolation generates a break from naturalized representations of the world. It exposes injustice, making visible what previously had been unseen, while simultaneously aspiring to future political change. The Circus Collection shuttles between the aesthetic and politics in its representation of the New Woman.

The Circus Collection utilized a style of bricolage that countered depictions of the New Woman as promiscuous or morally repugnant, and in doing so, occupied the space of the political regime of art. Its playful, contrapuntal comparisons between trendy fashion and more radical, sexualized depictions of gendered violence helped to insert the feminine body into the public sphere as separate from the masculine yet utterly in contention with it. Both the Skeleton and Tear Dresses provide the New Woman an opportunity to maneuver within the symbolic. Each refused to renounce feminine desire as either wanton or reducible to dominant masculine norms. Yet Schiaparelli's reputation as a couturier held the collection

in the aesthetic regime of art and furnished space for the New Woman's resistance to conservative interpretations of femininity. Its contrapuntal moves between couture trend and independence displayed the violence innate to contemporary gender norms without portraying the New Woman as socially aberrant. The shuttling between couture tradition and gender critique produced the potential for the New Woman to insert herself into the public sphere and reveal the violence inherent in her attempts to do so. Schiaparelli redistributed dominant representations of femininity in favor of a playful performativity by contrasting violence and traditional femininity.

Rancière's depiction of the political power of art offers a useful lens through which to read the social ramifications of Schiaparelli's Surrealist fashions. Her designs granted women autonomy to enter into the public sphere without relinquishing their own desires. In *Shocking Life*, Schiaparelli textually depicts the model of selfhood her surrealist designs championed. Each time she switches from "I" to "she," Schiaparelli distances herself from the realities of the events she describes. For example, she transitions from first person to third when she narrates her first attempt to drive a car. Left alone in the United States after her husband abandons her, Schiaparelli knows that she must learn to drive in order to provide for her daughter. Instead of successfully navigating the wheel, Schiap rushes through a "huge, well-locked cowshed" to "end in a ditch. She amply realized that driving was something she could not do."[70] Right before this disastrous scene, Schiaparelli describes the last time she sees her husband in first person. To avoid talking to him, she leaps into a stranger's car "leaving my husband on the kerb."[71] The difference between her glamorous, spectacular getaway from her husband and the misfortunate car crash generates a caesura between the two. First person Schiaparelli can claim her escape into the car because it makes her feel empowered. Her driving lesson, on the other hand, develops a depiction of feminine incapacity and humiliation. The contrast between this moment of first person glamour and its subsequent third person failure complicates any stable depiction of Schiaparelli.

Schiaparelli's use of glamour below the spectacle of the fashion celebrity in *Shocking Life* proffers a version of the counterpoint she earlier developed in her clothing lines. The differences between the "I" and the "she" produces a contrapuntal relationship that generates a type of subjectivity capable of withstanding the hardship and oppression that she details in the foreword. The play between Schiaparelli the celebrity and Schiap the New Woman

places her in a position of resistance to the negative commentary she was likely to receive from both her bankruptcy and the single mother lifestyle she depicts in the text. Like the Tear and Skeleton Dresses, Schiaparelli's fractured narration in *Shocking Life* ferries between feminine poise and the realities of the class and gender struggles of the New Woman. In holding moments of her experience away from herself, Schiaparelli creates a dual-pronged interpretation of subjectivity that serves as a diversion for her more intimate thoughts. This textual depiction of her sartorial feminism reveals the ways in which her Surrealist fashions functioned to generate the artistic shuttling Rancière argues as necessary for emancipatory politics. Schiaparelli's bricolage, contrapuntal Surrealism, enables her to formulate a model of subjectivity predicated upon the creation of new meaning, meaning that allowed her to look back on her life's work in admiration despite the loss of 27 Place Vendome.

NOTES

1. Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life*, viii.
2. Ibid., vii.
3. For more information on the bankruptcy of Schiaparelli's business, see White.
4. White, *Elsa Schiaparelli*, 35.
5. Ibid., 38.
6. Ibid., 41.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 86.
9. For more information on Schiaparelli's business, see Steele.
10. Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*, 84.
11. Ibid., 85.
12. Ibid., 85.
13. Cocteau quoted in Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 255.
14. Wood, "Surreal Things," 9.
15. Ibid., 11.
16. For more information on fashion's relationship to capitalism and commodification, see Edwards. '
17. Ghislaine Wood's discussion of Schiaparelli in "Surreal Things: Making 'the Fantastic Real'" offers a good example of dominant treatments of Schiaparelli. Although Wood discusses surrealism's connections with fashion extensively, Schiaparelli always plays only a collaborating role. Caroline Evans' "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins: Elsa Schiaparelli and the De- Centered Subject" gives a fashion-specific approach to Schiaparelli's surreal designs. Like Wood, Evans does not discuss Schiaparelli as a Surrealist, but as a collaborator with the

movement. Victoria Pass offers a third example of this line of argumentation. Pass connects Schiaparelli's surrealist designs with more contemporary clothing trends, in particular Alexander McQueen's. To do so, however, Pass forgoes a larger discussion of Surrealism in favor of a discussion of fashion history.

18. Stent, "Fetishizing the Feminine," 79.
19. For more information on the aesthetic and political goals of Surrealism, see Lehmann.
20. Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins," 4.
21. Wood, "Surreal Things," 11.
22. For more information on Man Ray's career in fashion photography, see Blum.
23. Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*, 181.
24. For more on the emergence of the New Woman in France, see Roberts.
25. For a historical examination of the New Woman, see Weber.
26. Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins," 8.
27. Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*, 79.
28. Blum, "Fashion and Surrealism," 145.
29. Weber, *The Hollow Years*, 83.
30. Ibid., 84.
31. Ibid., 84.
32. Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins,"14.
33. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures*, 70.
34. Ibid., 70.
35. Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins," 20.
36. Other designers included Gabrielle Coco Chanel, Madeleine Vionnet, Jeanne Lanvin, and Jean Patou.
37. For more information on Schiaparelli's sportswear, see Parkins.
38. Jacque Derrida, in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," offers a history of the word "bricolage." He discusses Levi Strauss's examination of myth and defines the term in the context of language: "If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*" (*Writing and Difference*, 285). In the context of aesthetics, bricolage borrows concepts and materials from arenas heterogeneous to the ideas said art wishes to draw forward.
39. Lehman, "The Uncommon Object," 20.
40. This article defines counterpoint in terms of Edward Said's famous use of the term. On page 51 of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that "[a]s we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts." Said's understanding of counterpoint centers on the way dominant discourses produce complex, contrapuntal relationships between metropolis and periphery. Aesthetic objects, read through Said's interpretation of counterpoint, do not speak to one issue or viewpoint, but represent intricate power dynamics in antagonist relationship to each other.

41. Pass, "Schiaparelli's Dark Circus," 36.
42. Ibid., 36.
43. Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, and Mannequins," 10.
44. Evans and Thornton, "Fashion, Representation, Femininity," 55.
45. Ibid., 55.
46. Pass, "Schiaparelli's Dark Circus," 36.
47. Reeder, "The Skeleton Dress."
48. Ibid.
49. Stent, "Fetishizing the Feminine," 80.
50. For more information on the violence experienced by women in France in the 1930s, see historian Eugene Weber's *The Hollow Years.*
51. Stent, "Fetishizing the Feminine," 80.
52. The painting itself portrays three women holding the limp shells of orchestral instruments. The figure in the middle wears a tattered gown that appears to have been shredded. Dali and Schiaparelli based the Tear Dress on this figure.
53. Stent, "Fetishizing the Feminine," 80.
54. Evans and Thornton, "Fashion, Representation, Femininity," 50.
55. Weber, *The Hollow Years, 80.*
56. Ibid., 80.
57. Evans and Thornton, "Fashion, Representation, Femininity," 53.
58. This paper treats the symbolic in terms of its history of use grounded in psychoanalytic theory and forefronts its discursive elements. Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, applies the feminist-oriented analysis this essay takes as its center in her reading of the symbolic: "woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation that disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women" (85). She argues that the symbolic takes on a totalizing masculine dimension, silencing women in the process. Women do not have access to language because language operates through masculine power structures.
59. Blum, "Fashion and Surrealism," 62.
60. For more information on Rancière's arguments about "readymade" objects, or what this essay has named bricolage, see Arnall, Gandolfi, Zaramella, and Rancière.
61. For more information on post-World War I economics and modernism, see Cooper.
62. Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 46.
63. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 126.
64. Ibid., 133.
65. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 36.
66. Ibid., 49.
67. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 132.
68. Ibid., 139.
69. Ibid., 132.
70. Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life*, 35.
71. Ibid., 34.

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