

II  
INTERNATIONAL  
CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA CONFERENCE  
CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Getaria, October 2025  
Conference Proceedings

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## Foreword

In 2020, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum promoted, organised, and hosted the First International Research Conference devoted to the figure and legacy of this creator, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth.

The Conference was conceived with the aim of stimulating interest within academic and museum circles and of fostering collaboration in the production of new, rigorous, objective, and verifiable knowledge on Cristóbal Balenciaga: his work, his biographical, historical, and creative context, and his contribution and interpretation from a broad perspective linked to the arts, culture, and contemporary society.

The response to this initiative was outstanding. Despite the complex circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference was successfully held with the presentation of thirteen papers, followed online by more than 2,500 attendees, far exceeding all expectations.

This first meeting represented a key opportunity to strengthen ties with an emerging community interested in deepening knowledge of Cristóbal Balenciaga and his legacy. It was therefore both natural and fair that the effort invested in this initial edition should find continuity in a second conference.

Nevertheless, the five-year interval between the two events has brought about several significant changes. The most evident—and undoubtedly the most valued—has been the possibility of meeting again in person, of sharing experiences, and of opening the Museum to this international community. We are fully aware that travelling to the small coastal town of Getaria is no easy undertaking, and we therefore deeply appreciate the effort made by the more than 200 participants who journeyed from around the world—quite literally—to join us and exchange knowledge.

The support of our renewed Scientific Committee, together with the intensive preparatory work involved in disseminating the call for papers and in evaluating and selecting the research proposals, was clearly reflected in both their active presence throughout the Conference and in the keynote lectures—opening (Lesley Miller) and closing (Karen de Perthuis)—as well as in the moderation of the paper sessions (Alexandra Palmer, Simona Segre-Reinach, Emily Brayshaw, Valerie Steele, and Carlos Naya). This generous and selfless commitment is fundamental to an initiative of this nature and therefore they deserve our most sincere gratitude.

By broadening the fields of research beyond fashion history—our natural area of expertise—to include proposals related to education, journalism, audiovisual production, philosophy, or architecture, the Conference greatly enriched interpretative approaches and introduced new perspectives that reinforce the contemporary relevance of Balenciaga's work and figure. Over the past five years, the Museum itself has likewise expanded its curatorial approach, presenting exhibitions that connect Balenciaga with contemporary creation and strengthening research lines related to the intangible heritage of Haute Couture, aspects that were also reflected in several of the Conference papers. For all these reasons, we wish to extend our warmest congratulations to the thirty authors of the papers presented, whose profiles range from specialists and doctoral candidates to communicators and curators.

The significant increase in the number of selected proposals compared with the first edition, combined with an inevitably limited time frame, posed a genuine challenge for the scientific and technical organisation of the programme. The final schedule brought together twenty-one papers over two intensive days, made possible thanks to the dedication, commitment, and passion of our team and collaborators, whose contribution deserves special recognition.

Finally, while we have highlighted certain changes, other aspects have fortunately remained constant. These proceedings of the Second Conference include all the full papers developed from the presentations delivered, with the exception—once again, as in the first edition—of those selected for publication in a special issue of *Fashion Theory* and duly referenced in these proceedings. Special recognition is due to Valerie Steele, Editor of *Fashion Theory*, to the issue editor Ana Balda, and to all reviewers and contributing authors.

Miren Vives Almandoz  
Director of Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

## Balenciaga's Heritage in Italian Fashion. The Federico Forquet and Roberto Capucci Cases Between Aesthetics and Marketing

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

As Diana Vreeland famously noted, "(Balenciaga) was the prophet of nearly every major change in silhouette" (cit. Irvine: 119). Christian Dior defined him as "The master of us all". Even Coco Chanel admitted, "Balenciaga is the only true couturier; others are just draftsmen". This article highlights the significant influence he wielded on Italian fashion from both aesthetic and marketing perspectives, with a focus on the figures of Roberto Capucci and Federico Forquet.

When considering the profound influence that Balenciaga had on the work of Capucci and Forquet, it should be noted that this influence was primarily stylistic rather than methodological. While Cristóbal Balenciaga was a true couturier, Capucci and Forquet were primarily fashion designers.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, apart from a few isolated cases such as Salvatore Ferragamo, there was still no fully established Italian fashion system. Although the fascist regime had made many efforts to make Italian fashion independent from French fashion, such as the creation of the Ente per la Mostra Permanente Nazionale della Moda (National Permanent Fashion Exhibition) in 1932, the major Italian fashion houses continued to "draw inspiration", explicitly, from fashion from across the Alps. So, even after 1945, the big names in Italian fashion - from Ventura to Montorsi, from Zecca to the Botti sisters - continued to send their representatives to Paris Fashion Week to buy designs by Jacques Fath, Pierre Balmain, Christian Dior, and Balenciaga.

### 2. Giorgini and the First Italian High Fashion Show

It was in this context that the pioneering figure of Giovanni Battista Giorgini emerged. He did far more than promote local talent: he acted as market maker, platform orchestrator, and place-branding strategist. Beginning with collective presentations in Florence in 1951 and professionalizing them in the Sala Bianca from July 1952, he built a multi-sided platform uniting products, venues, media, and ordering logistics. The format reduced cross-border frictions — search, coordination, and quality uncertainty — by matching qualified Italian supply with American department-store demand in a time-limited, camera-ready exchange, helping shift power from Paris to a multi-centred Europe and positioning Italy on craftsmanship, modernity, and value (Pinchera and Rinallo, 2022; Devine, 2022; Belfanti, 2015; White, 2000). Three design choices mattered: timing against Paris; an assortment spanning couture,

<sup>1</sup> Although the article represents the result of joint research and reflection by the co-authors, the final draft can be attributed as follows: To Sofia Gnoli, paragraphs: Balenciaga: The Italian School; Roberto Capucci: le petit Balenciaga; The Federico Forquet Case. To Annamaria Esposito, paragraphs: Balenciaga's "anti-marketing" strategy; Balenciaga's Legacy across Capucci and Forquet marketing. To both co-authors: Abstract; Introduction; Giorgini and the First Italian High Fashion Show.

boutique, sportswear, and accessories that mapped to U.S. price ladders; and the Sala Bianca's servicescape that encoded "Italian style." He engineered signalling and cross-side network effects, and standardized shows, on-site ordering, and follow-up, collapsing AIDA and rewiring the market interface with reliability.

Despite his excellent prospects, Giorgini faced many difficulties. Many Italian fashion houses, especially those of the old guard, accustomed for decades to buying French designs, feared that participating in a collective fashion show under the banner of Italian style would mean closing their doors to Paris forever. For this reason, they declined Giorgini's invitation when, in 1951, he organised the First Italian High Fashion Show, a collective Italian fashion show at his home, Villa Torrigiani in Via de' Serragli. The idea was to present the collections at the end of Paris Fashion Week, to convince American buyers to extend their European trip from Paris to Florence. There were many factors in favour of the project, ranging from craftsmanship and high creativity to sophisticated fabric production and unbeatable prices that only Italy was able to offer (White 2000, p.44)<sup>2</sup>. The Florentine gentleman's invitation was accepted mainly by young couturier who had recently opened their doors, including Simonetta Visconti and Fabiani, Sorelle Fontana and Emilio Schuberth, Carosa and Marucelli.

This first event was a resounding success: the critics were enthusiastic, and the Italian creations, which were 50% cheaper than their French counterparts, immediately sold out. Buyers commented "Paris didn't impress us that much" or "it was worth the trip" (Vergani, 1992: 50).

Buoyed by this success, Giorgini organised a second, larger fashion show in July of the same year, taking the halls of the Grand Hotel in Borgo Ognissanti. Then, in 1952, he triumphantly arrived in the majestic Sala Bianca of Palazzo Pitti, which until the 1970s would be the best springboard for any newcomer. Although the national and international press hailed the great victory of Italian fashion, on closer inspection, many creations born under the aegis of Italian style continued to be influenced by France.

After centuries of French subjugation, Italian fashion was emerging, but on closer inspection, the influence of Parisian ateliers continued to reign supreme in many of the creations of the pioneers of Italian style.

### 3. Balenciaga: The Italian School

The titans of fashion to whom many Italian couturiers looked for inspiration were Christian Dior and Cristóbal Balenciaga, who, according to Cecil Beaton, were the two leading figures in post-war fashion. While comparing the former to Antoine Watteau (rich in nuances, elegant and delicate - an essential exponent of Rococo painting), Beaton defined Balenciaga as the Picasso of fashion. Like Picasso, behind all his experiments in the name of modernity, Balenciaga concealed an immense respect for traditional forms and the purity of line.

<sup>2</sup> In the United States, as reported by *Women's Wear Daily* in 1952, an Italian fashion dress could cost from \$130 to \$250 (day dress), from \$120 to \$500 (evening dress), and from \$90 to \$130 (boutique); cf. White, 2000, p. 44.

While the creations of fashion designers such as Sorelle Fontana and Emilio Schuberth reflect the work of Dior and Balmain, those of Simonetta, Fabiani, Marucelli and Carosa often show the influence of Cristóbal Balenciaga (Quinto, 2025).

In the case of many noblewomen of Italian fashion, such as Carosa<sup>3</sup> (Princess Giovanna Caracciolo Ginnetti di Avellino) and Simonetta (Duchess of Colonna di Cesarò), the French influence, and that of Balenciaga, is particularly evident. This was perhaps also due to the training of the two dressmakers, given that French fashion was probably more traditionally accepted among their mothers than in other social classes.

The reference to Balenciaga is not only a constant feature of Simonetta<sup>4</sup> but also of her husband, Alberto Fabiani, a well-known Roman tailor, famous above all for the masterful cut of his suits.

Although Balenciaga's work has recently been reflected in certain creations by many other representatives of Italian fashion, from Mila Schön to Gianfranco Ferrè, his true Italian heirs are Roberto Capucci and Federico Forquet. Although both were more fashion designers than couturiers in the manner of Balenciaga, who was a master of couture techniques, these two were close to Balenciaga not only in style but also in their conception of fashion, which for them was a kind of silent ritual linked to haute couture.

For this reason, it could be argued that Balenciaga's influence on Capucci and Forquet was not only aesthetic but marketing structural. His model of controlled aura offered a repertoire of strategies that the Italians reinterpreted to fit their systems and selves. Together, they illuminate how couture in the 1960s was not just a matter of dresses but of designing ways of being seen — and of not being seen.

#### 4. Roberto Capucci: le petit Balenciaga

The famously haughty French press christened him "Le petit Balenciaga" (Blum, 2011:45). Dilyl Blum, who dedicated an exhibition to him at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2011 (*Roberto Capucci. Art Into Fashion*, from 16 March to 5 June 2011), said of him, "Capucci represents everything that every designer aspires to be - an artist true to himself - and so he links himself to the tradition of great couturiers such as Cristóbal Balenciaga and Charles James." (Gnoli, S., 2011:18.)

Like the Spanish maestro, the Roman couturier-artist Roberto Capucci (1930) belongs to the artistic category of great couturier-architects, and he can undoubtedly be considered one of their leading representatives. As Cecil Beaton wrote about Balenciaga, Capucci

*is not part of any clique, he plays no one's game but his own; he vigorously refuses to market himself and his talent, pays little attention to seasonal changes in fashion, and pursues a solitary creation of values that have earned him the respect,*

<sup>3</sup> The Carosa atelier was founded in Via Sistina in Rome in 1947 by Princess Giovanna Caracciolo Ginnetti di Avellino (1910-1983), who soon became the sole owner. The fashion house was also supported by Countess Barbara Rota Angelini Desalles and Mrs. Sakellarios, a Greek lady whose apartment in Via Sistina served as its first headquarters.

<sup>4</sup> Simonetta Colonna di Cesarò (1922-2011) founded an atelier in Via Gregoriana in Rome in 1946. In 1951, she successfully participated in the collective Italian fashion shows organised by Giorgini in Florence. In the meantime, she met the couturier Alberto Fabiani, who would become her husband. Their activities remained separate until 1963, when they moved to Paris together and opened the Simonetta e Fabiani fashion house.

*admiration and protection of those who are able to appreciate his uncommon genius.* (Gnoli, 2007: 47-48.)

Unlike Alberto Fabiani and the noblewomen of Italian fashion mentioned above, who in most cases reproduced Balenciaga's models with few variations, Roberto Capucci reinterprets the Spanish maestro's taste through the lens of his own personality. Although his style is very individual, on closer inspection, the influence of the Spanish couturier is evident. It is no coincidence that, as Enrico Minio Capucci, the couturier's nephew and now general manager of the Roberto Capucci Foundation, recounts: "From when I was a small child, when I went with my mother to the atelier to see my uncle, I would always hear people talking about Balenciaga." (Capucci, 2025, 2 July.)

Roberto Capucci's passion for Balenciaga is deeply reflected in his love of pure lines and sculptural volumes, but also in his choice of "full-bodied" fabrics such as taffeta, faille and gazar.

To give an example, Balenciaga's influence is particularly evident in the 6 Gonne dress (1957). This was a taffeta gown inspired by the concentric circles produced by a stone thrown into water; it quickly became such a classic that it was chosen for a Cadillac advertisement and was later immortalized in a famous cartoon in The Dallas Morning News. Another great example of originality is the Linea a scatola (Box Line). [Figure 1]

Launched in 1958, it was based on sculptural and abstract volumes and earned the Italian couturier the Fashion Oscar established by Filene's department store in Boston. That collection, which reflected Balenciaga's yearning for clean lines, was a huge success. Denise Minelli, one of the great socialites of the period, married Vincent wearing a wedding dress from that collection. "A little bereavement box. Only she could wear it at her wedding, don't you think?" Capucci told Oriana Fallaci. (Fallaci, O, 1961:203.) It was a sort of antithesis to Dior's new look, which exalted a slender, retro hourglass silhouette, while Capucci's box dress, reminiscent of Balenciaga's silky sculptures, was almost "a textile habitat, an elaborate, hollow form to inhabit" in its geometry (Vergani 2001:13). The following year saw the arrival of "Lampione" skirts and overlapping collars, also associated with the aesthetic tradition of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work. "Two or three overlapping collars?" asked Gianna Manzini in 1959, and answered her own question: "No, nine. Incredible but true; nine collars one on top of the other, made of very light fabrics, preferably satin organza." (Manzini, 2003:110). [Figure 2]

Later, while often going beyond the world of fashion, he kept his love for Balenciaga's typical sculptural lines intact. This is particularly evident in a 1982 red taffeta dress with an asymmetrical length embellished with ruffles, created for Duchess Lydia Sforza Cesarini for the 18th birthday ball of Donna Leontina Pallavicini. That design is very similar in appearance to a fuchsia gros de Naples dress with a moiré effect made in 1963 by Balenciaga for Sonsoles Díaz de Rivera y de Icaza, now preserved at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> This dress was exhibited in Milan (Palazzo Morando, 21 February–2 March 2025) during the exhibition *Balenciaga / Shoes from Spain Tribute*.



Figure 1  
Roberto Capucci  
Sketch *Box Line* fall-winter 1958-59  
Courtesy Fondazione Roberto Capucci

Figure 2  
Roberto Capucci  
Sketch *Lampione Line*, 1959  
Courtesy Fondazione Roberto Capucci

## 5. The Federico Forquet Case

The Italian couturier most closely linked to Balenciaga is undoubtedly Federico Forquet (1931); he was born in Naples, from an ancient family of French origin. He had admired Balenciaga since childhood, when he would leaf through his mother's fashion magazines. "My big break," he confessed, "came in 1954 when Marie-Louise Bousquet<sup>6</sup>, one of the most famous socialites in Paris, called Enrico d'Assia (editor's note: a close friend of Federico's since childhood) and asked him to entertain Cristóbal Balenciaga, who in a few days, was due to arrive in Ischia for a spa break with his friend Ramon Esparza, who made the hats for his collections. But Enrico had an unavoidable commitment. His first exhibition of paintings was about to open at the Obelisco, the Roman gallery owned by Gaspero del Corso and his wife, Irene Brin. Forquet recalls:

*Knowing my admiration for Balenciaga, he immediately let me know and asked me to go in his place. I contacted Balenciaga from Naples. Assuming that I was already in Ischia, he made an appointment to have dinner with me that same evening, so I rushed to catch the first ferry and hurried to the island.*

Forquet and Balenciaga also spent time together the following day and for the rest of the Master's stay. Forquet once again recalls:

*Balenciaga was such a "legend" to me that, in the few days we spent together, I didn't have the courage to show him my designs. Then Enrico returned; we all went out together, and he asked Balenciaga, 'So, what do you think of our young friend's designs?' The great couturier looked at him, puzzled. At that point, not having had time to warn Enrico that I hadn't mentioned my passion, I admitted it with great shame. Balenciaga asked me to show him the designs, but I had left them in Naples. (Forquet, 2013)*

Several months later, despite his family's disapproval, he took the train to Paris. There, Balenciaga had arranged for him to stay with his friend Bianca Gilchrist. He continues:

*I introduced myself to him with a bundle of 500 designs. Balenciaga leafed through them quickly, like a cashier counting banknotes; he judged 480 of them useless, the rest good, and invited me to prepare a collection based on those he had liked. (Comitto, 1962)*

In the meantime, although he had to leave Paris for a few days, he invited Federico to stay at his house.

*He lived on the fifth floor of an anonymous building, I think on Avenue Morceau, near the Spanish Embassy and opposite the Église. His apartment was very conventional. The predominant colours in the house were dark green and eggshell as a base colour. He also had a country house near Paris: La Reinerie. This too was normal, sober. Balenciaga did not like to show off; he was not grandiose. He never believed himself to be a star.*

<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s, Marie-Louise Bousquet was the French correspondent for Harper's Bazaar. Cecil Beaton, describing her in *The Glass of Fashion* (1955), claimed that Madame Bousquet resembled the magical ingredient that the Chinese have used for centuries to flavour soups and sauces. Without her, the fashion world would be deprived of an essential part of its mind and heart, Milano, Garzanti 1955, p.313.

*He had dedicated his life to fashion, but he did not feel like a superhuman god (Forquet, 2024).*

On his return, after seeing the designs he had made during his absence, he said to him, "I have thought a lot about you and what you have to do in life. And I think that you could be a very good designer." (cit. Bowles, 2020:25.) He allowed him to stay in his studio while he prepared the collection. It was December 1954, and the Spanish couturier was working on the spring / summer 1955 collection that he would present in February. Shortly afterwards, Gerard Chueca, Balenciaga's secretary, contacted Forquet, and from that moment on, he received a small pay cheque at the end of each week. "It was an elegant way," Forquet recalls today, "to give me the possibility of staying in Paris." (cit. Bowles, 2020: 25.) Forquet, who had no support from his parents - they wanted him to manage the family estate - rented a modest room in a small boarding house. Balenciaga wanted him to make sketches based on what he observed during the collection rehearsals to better understand his abilities. Shortly after that, the Master declared himself very satisfied with what he had learned. Forquet remained in Paris until the presentation of the collection on 2 February 1955, without even returning home for Christmas. "My family," he recalls, "was stunned by that decision." (Forquet, 2024.) He returned to Naples after the show and left for Paris again after about a month, when Balenciaga invited him to assist him in preparing the next season's collection. On that occasion, Forquet also met the Master's fabric suppliers, including Gustav Zumsteg of Abraham from Switzerland. [Figures 3 and 4]

It was the period when young talents such as André Courrèges and Emanuel Ungaro were working at the Balenciaga fashion house.

*In the early 1980s, at a reception at the French embassy, I met Ungaro, who confessed that he and Courrèges were very jealous of me. He told me, 'We didn't know each other, but I hated you because when we were working for Balenciaga, we weren't allowed into Monsieur Balenciaga's studio.' I was the only one allowed into the Master's studio. They cut and sewed, but they weren't where he created. I watched him create. Some ran around with fabric, others passed him pins or scissors. I stood there in silence, watching. Then I went home and drew. Sometimes I would create designs thinking about what he would have liked. (Forquet, 2024).*

Meanwhile, during the gap between collections, Balenciaga urged Forquet to sell his sketches to various house of fashion. It was then that, to support himself, he designed briefly for Princess Giovanna Caracciolo Ginnetti of Avellino, owner of Carosa, and Alberto Fabiani. He worked with the latter, famous for his impeccably cut suits, for a couple of years. When Balenciaga started his new collection, Forquet returned to Paris to assist him. However, "Nobody else was designing the clothes at Balenciaga other than the Master himself, although in Forquet's sketches from the period one can discern the genesis of a number of significant silhouettes of the period." (cit. Bowles, 2020: 26.)

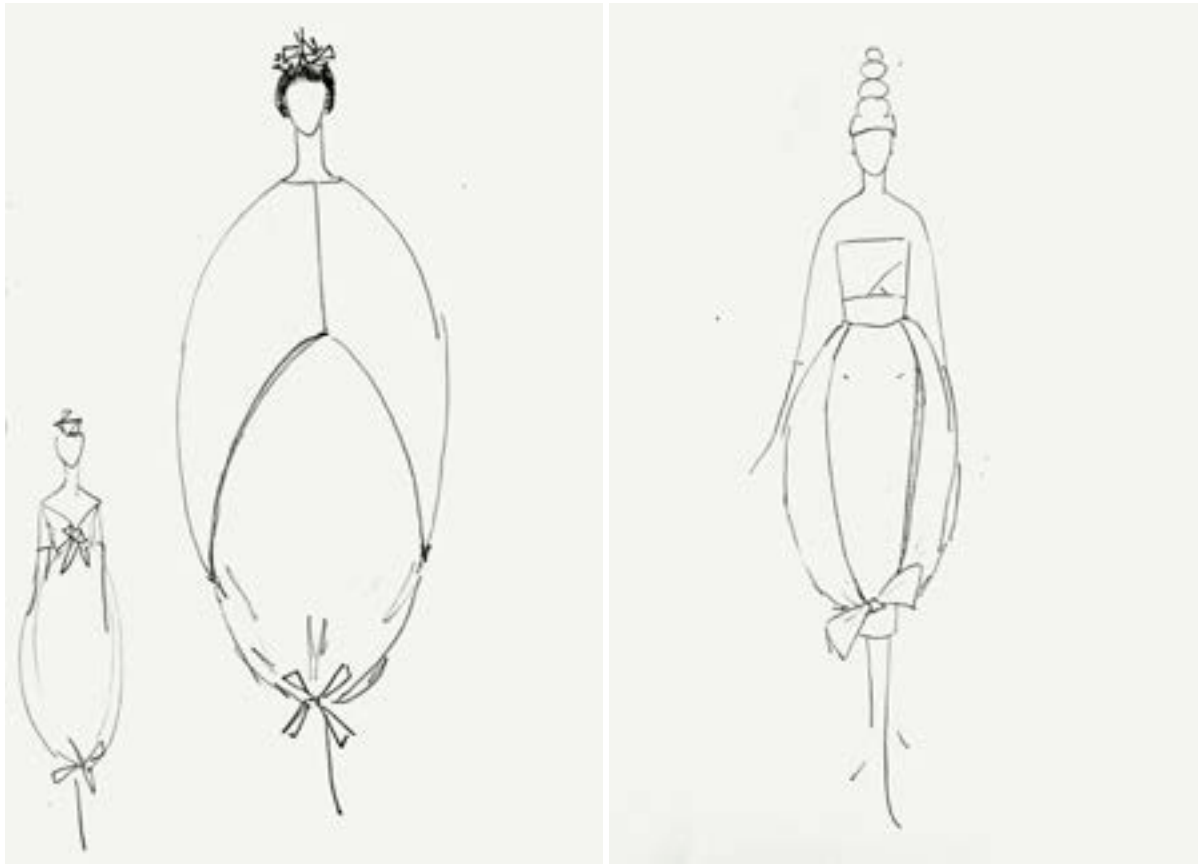


Figure 3  
Federico Forquet  
Sketch ca. 1955-1958 Courtesy  
Federico Forquet

Figure 4  
Federico Forquet  
Sketch ca. 1955-1958 Courtesy  
Federico Forquet

*In 1958, Balenciaga told me that I now had enough experience and that I could start flying with my own wings. He protected me a lot, he had a paternal affection for me and was concerned about my future. He insisted that I should find a job as a designer. He told me, 'You have to start making collections for someone who can't hold a pencil. You draw the designs and explain to your employer and the cutters what you want.' I was afraid. He said to me, 'Wait... Let's see if we can do something.' He also spoke to Mademoiselle Renée, the strict director of the atelier. After about ten days, Mademoiselle Renée mentioned Galitzine (Forquet, 2024).*

Forquet began working for her during the preparation of the spring / summer 1959 collection. The atmosphere at Galitzine was very different from that of Balenciaga in Paris. "The Spanish master," recalled Forquet, "always thought about his customers, but Galitzine's approach was completely subjective: 'The woman was her.'" (cit. Bowles 2020: 29.) The Galitzine / Forquet partnership gave rise to an eternal paradigm of elegance: the 'Palazzo Pyjamas'. At that point, Forquet felt the time had come to set up his own business, so in partnership with Bebe Pozzi<sup>7</sup>, former director of Fabiani, he opened a fashion house at number 9 Via Condotti in Rome in 1961. The timing could not have been better, as Capucci, Simonetta, and Fabiani - three big names in Roman fashion - had just left the Italian capital to move to Paris. "Italian fashion has therefore found its 'golden boy' on the day it lost him," commented Renato Barneschi in Gente, referring to Roberto Capucci's move to Paris (Barneschi, 1961). The day after his first collection, presented on the Florentine catwalk of the Sala Bianca (XXIII Fashion Show) on 14 January 1962, Pia Soli Roncoroni, correspondent for Il Tempo, wrote an article retracing the friendship between the young couturier and the great Spanish master with the evocative title "Top marks from Balenciaga". On 10 March 1962, Mimmina Quirico wrote an article in Telesera entitled: "Balenciaga's Italian pupil is the fashionable designer for well-to-do ladies". That collection consisted of 73 designs of great cleanness, all based on asymmetry, a distinctive feature of his creations. Balenciaga was no stranger to this type of exercise, as evidenced by the Peacock line (1957) and the Sari line (1963). In fact, as seen in his collections, designed for fun in his youth, in addition to the 'Fungo' and 'Cartoccio' line, there was also the 'Urto' line, completely unbalanced on one side. The press and buyers were ecstatic. In the pages of the Corriere d'informazione, Irene Brin commented: "For Forquet today, there was nothing short of a miracle, a succession of impeccable elements, increasing enthusiasm, until in the end the eyes of some of the female spectators were literally overflowing with tears." (Brin, 1962.) Balenciaga passed on to his protégé his conception of fashion, which he believed should be evolution rather than revolution. Unlike Dior, who completely changed his lines with each collection, the Spanish couturier limited himself to adding a little "firework" from time to time while always remaining true to his signature style. Forquet would always treasure this lesson. So much so that every time he created a new collection, he would spread all the designs from the previous season on the floor to find a common thread. The toga line, which would become a constant feature of his style, is emblematic in this sense. It is difficult to find a collection

<sup>7</sup> Bebe is the nickname of Immacolata Pozzi.

in which he did not present this design in the form of a dress or a tunic to be worn over soft trousers. Another interesting example is the Crescendo 1 and 2 collections, which he launched in 1959 in two successive seasons. The second was a development of the first. Serena Sinclair commented on the collection in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23 July 1969:

*He presents five versions of the same dress or coat on the platform at one time, each with subtle graduated differences. This way, a woman can see what length, how dark a shade of beige or coral she should choose. It's an amazingly beautiful version of a catalogue* (Sinclair, 1969).

According to Balenciaga, one had to remain faithful to one's roots. Balenciaga always remained close to Spain and encouraged Forquet to 'feel' his homeland, Naples. A few years later, this teaching would give rise to a collection of volcano collars dedicated to Vesuvius (fall / winter 1963-1964). "His suits stay in the Balenciaga category," commented Eugenia Sheppard in the *New York Herald Tribune* on 16 June 1963, "but he adds some stylish touches. (...). Both dresses and coats have high turtle-necked collars, some of them so high that they look like a cast for a broken neck."

The similarities between Forquet and Balenciaga are particularly evident in the yellow gazar petal dress from 1967 that belonged to Laura Tanzini and is now part of the collection of Enrico Quinto and Paolo Tinarelli, which has many points in common with *La Tulipe* (fall / winter 1965) designed by Balenciaga for Eisa<sup>8</sup>. This is yet another example of the Spanish master's supremacy.

## 6. Balenciaga's "anti-marketing" strategy

Cristóbal Balenciaga was a celebrated couturier renowned for his purity and modernity, yet he was almost invisible as a public figure. Where contemporaries became household names through media and personal visibility, Balenciaga operated in near silence (Walker, 2006). This was not a deliberate approach, but rather a reflection of his naturally reserved personality, which anticipated many contemporary luxury marketing strategies.

The marketing strategy employed by Balenciaga was predicated on the couture contradiction: the more a particular silhouette was observed, the more rapidly it was replicated, thereby diminishing its perceived value (English and Munroe, 2022). The Maison solved this problem by turning scarcity into a marketing tool. This involved the implementation of an invitation-only salon system, the rationing of press access, and the strict regulation of product diffusion. Furthermore, the Maison managed the sequence and lead time in a manner designed to deter imitation (Thorpe, 2017; Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2018). Cristóbal Balenciaga is widely regarded as having perfected the model (Kapferer, 2017; Miller, 2007), reinforcing what have been termed 'luxury anti-laws': resisting the adoption of scale, appearing sparingly, and privileging the connoisseur over the crowd (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> A light pink version of the dress was purchased by Ava Gardner, who later donated it to the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The first pillar of Balenciaga's marketing strategy was silence that created an aura of exclusivity: unlike many of his contemporaries, he was notably discreet and humble (Walker, 2006), and he avoided media engagement—granting only a few interviews in his fifty-year career (Victoria and Albert Museum; Balda, 2022b)—thereby sidestepping the self-promotion typical of Parisian houses. This was not due to a lack of marketing, but rather an effective implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication, which engendered depth and costly signalling via access / time. Reticence (Palmer, 2021) created interpretive scarcity that was then filled by admirers (e.g. Dior, Chanel) as earned media. The house's press image unified esteem rather than inviting debate (Balda, 2022a; Keller, 2001, 2013; Kapferer, 2012).

The second key pillar was his manipulation of time (Balda, 2022a). In the postwar era, piracy posed a severe threat to couture. Buyers, journalists, and sketch artists transmitted Paris silhouettes to department stores and ready-to-wear manufacturers, who produced copies within weeks (Pouillard, 2016; Tregenza, 2021). For houses like Dior, widespread copying eroded exclusivity even as it amplified influence (Raustiala and Sprigman, 2006). In order to protect the exclusivity of his designs, Balenciaga, in 1956, introduced a system of re-sequencing the calendar so that private clients and trusted buyers were able to view collections first, with journalists being granted access weeks later.

A third element of Balenciaga's marketing strategy was selective diffusion. Despite his aversion to publicity (Victoria and Albert Museum), he recognised the importance of mass touchpoints. It is evident that fragrances such as *Le Dix* (1947), launched in 1947, coinciding with the unveiling of the *New Look* by Dior (Miller, 2017), *La Fuite des Heures* (1949), *Quadrille* (1955) — were conceived as a means of providing an entry point for consumers who did not have the financial means to procure couture, yet still sought to experience the associated aura of the brand. Accessories such as scarves (Bowles, 2011) and handbags played a similar role (Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, Balenciaga accessories 1940–1968).

The distinguishing characteristic that set Balenciaga apart from his contemporaries was his ability to exercise restraint. He resisted the temptation to license his name extensively or to launch prêt-à-porter lines, even as other Parisian fashion houses did so in the 1950s and 1960s (Romano, 2022; Thurman, 2006).

In line with this rationale, the company rejected the idea of providing paper patterns and was reluctant to embrace prêt-à-porter and extensive licensing (Thurman, 2006).

The fourth pillar was his belief in the value of communication with his customers. His client list included some of the most prominent women of the 20th century, such as Grace Kelly; the Duchess of Windsor; Mona von Bismarck; Elizabeth Park Firestone, heiress to the Firestone tyre fortune; Ava Gardner; María Sonsoles de Icaza y de León (Marquesa de Llanzol); Marella Caracciolo di Castagneto.

These women's wardrobes and public profiles amplified the fashion house's aura, effectively serving as unpaid influencers and bringing Balenciaga into the society pages. *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Women's Wear Daily* were among the publications that covered the fashion house (Arndt, 1967; Brown and Reingen, 1987; Cova and Cova, 2002; Holt, 2004; Ismail, 2015).

Rather than embodying the absence of marketing, Balenciaga represents a distinct marketing paradigm in which press coverage is not the primary means of creating value.

## 7. Balenciaga's Legacy across Capucci and Forquet marketing

Further examination of how Balenciaga's marketing strategy influenced Capucci and Forquet in the 1960s reveals that it cannot be reduced to imitation alone. The aura created by Balenciaga could not simply be transferred to Italy, where the high fashion economy in cities such as Florence and Rome depended on visibility and media coverage abroad (White, 2020; Pinchera and Rinallo, 2022). Giorgini's Sala Bianca shows were designed to attract American buyers and magazines, so visibility was essential. In such a system, Balenciaga's strategies could not simply be copied. They had to be adapted.

The lesson for Italian designers Capucci and Forquet was clear: visibility could be achieved without chasing publicity. Silence, if disciplined and authentic, could serve as a form of brand differentiation.

They absorbed Balenciaga's teachings and interpreted his philosophy differently, developing two distinct strategies that nevertheless shared his core principles: controlling visibility and distribution, and elevating the couture experience through its temporality, space, and service. Capucci incorporated Balenciaga's teachings into an artistic, Italian-first strategy, while Forquet adopted a more selective approach. Capucci would later adopt this ethos of retirement, while the more sociable Forquet retained an aristocratic reserve that echoed his master's discretion.

## 8. From Balenciaga's silence to Capucci's artistic creations: a marketing continuum

Roberto Capucci's trajectory during the 1960s demonstrates a clear absorption of Balenciaga's legacy, albeit refracted through the conditions of postwar Italian couture. Like Balenciaga, Capucci cultivated an aura of reticence. Although his Paris debut in 1962 (*Linea pura*) was celebrated by the French and American press, he consistently resisted the trappings of personal celebrity (Blum, 2011). His reputation was consolidated less through continuous media engagement than through episodic acclaim, particularly in the United States, where department stores such as Macy's and Ohrbach's promoted line-for-line adaptations of his designs. In this sense, Capucci mirrored Balenciaga's logic of selective diffusion: allowing peripheral products (hosiery, perfumes) to circulate symbolically while preserving the integrity of couture.

Capucci's disavowal of seasonal market pressures reframed him not as a couturier of fashion but as a sculptor in fabric, aligning his work with art rather than commerce. Where Balenciaga mobilized royal patrons and actresses as unwitting ambassadors, Capucci relied on cultural intermediaries. His collaboration with Pier Paolo Pasolini on the film *Teorema* (1968) exemplifies a strategy of client-led communication transposed into cinema, extending his aura into new cultural fields without recourse to advertising.

Viewed through a marketing lens, both Balenciaga and Capucci resisted mass visibility and prioritized exclusivity, thereby transforming silence and absence into signals of prestige.

#### 9. The Balenciaga shadow on Forquet marketing approach

Conversely, Forquet, who worked for Cristóbal Balenciaga in Paris between 1955 and 1956 (Gnoli, 2020: 47) engineered a small yet coherent client interface, incorporating selective distribution, relationship marketing and brand-identity coherence. He adapted the model into media couture characterized by selectivity. This, combined with a regular presence in prestigious publications and celebrity endorsement, has been instrumental in establishing his reputation.

Forquet built desirability through curated access: invitation-only trunk shows tightly edited capsules, and high-prestige editorial placements (*Vogue* / *Bazaar* / *WWD*). Imagery focuses on elite and material intelligence; society muses act as living media. The tone is sociable yet aristocratically reserved visibility without overexposure. International aristocrats and tastemakers wore his garments at high-society events, generating visibility through their appearances. This was similar to Balenciaga's approach but with an Italian twist: Forquet's clients also came from the glamorous worlds of cinema thanks to Matteo Spinola, press agent and his partner for 40 years, and international diplomacy in 1960s Rome.

All of this network functioned as proto-influencer marketing: Forquet's proximity to socialites and aristocrats didn't just dress the elite; it signalled elite belonging.

Unlike typical mid-century licenses (perfume and accessories) for a very short period, Forquet designed salon-exclusive fashion lines for Elizabeth Arden's luxury salons in Rome and Milan (Gnoli, 2020).

Together, selective distribution, experiential retail, meaning transfer via high society, and iconic product codes prefigured later luxury theory while remaining unmistakably his own.

These two different approaches effectively channel Balenciaga's logic of scarcity and sequence into distinct market systems (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013)

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