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“French fashion journalists and the development of ready-to-wear in the magazines *Elle* and Jardin des modes, 1945-1965”

This communication will deal with the role played by French fashion journalists in disseminating ready-to-wear in the fashion press in the fifties.

From the XIXth century on, journalists play an important role in the fashion field, in disseminating the new fashion throughout the society. This role, an “informer role”, evolves radically in the middle of the XXth century, after World War II. The breakup observed after the war is the result of the war itself: fashion radically changes during the conflict, and is completely different in 1950. At this time, if the Parisian Haute couture still dominates the fashion world, the ready-to-wear starts to impose its legitimacy. The latter impacts durably the fashion industry, but also the profession of fashion journalists who takes indeed another dimension. After 4 years of restrictions during which clothes were not a priority, and coquetry was the result of improvisation, fashion journalist need to “reinvent” fashion, and to support its “democratization”. Because fashion becomes more accessible, less expensive, journalists need indeed to adapt their speech. Acting until then as “fashion informers”, these journalists also become at this time “fashion advisers” for women. More involved with the readers, they teach indeed a new and rejuvenated fashion to the latter who learn how to seduce again after the war. At this time we can observe a new way of addressing to readers, a real “fashion education” supported by the journalists - all female journalists (which was not the case until there, and which demonstrates that these journalists played a female role to female readers)-, who build thus a new relationship of trust with their readers. Giving the latter the means to buy affordable fashion, rather than promoting brands or couturiers, that is the role these journalists want to play. A real pedagogy is thus set up in the magazine, both at the level of the text (where journalist speak to readers with intimacy, and aim at “personalizing” fashion) and at the level of images (the photograph becomes more and more prevalent, and this medium is used to promote the modernization of ready-to-wear). In highlighting this new role of the journalists, who become new cultural and social intermediaries for the readers promoting indeed a new way of life, and a new way to consider fashion, this communication will also show how these verbal and visual representations of ready-to-wear reflect more generally the evolution and modernization of fashion in the fifties, and the evolution of women identities in the postwar period, a direct legacy of the WWII.

Short biography:

Sophie Kurkdjian is a Research Fellow at the Institut d’histoire du temps présent (IHTP-CNRS) where she is in charge of a research seminar on fashion history. In December 2014, she has co-organized an international conference on the history of fashion during the WWI, “Mode, vêtement et société en Europe during the WWI”. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Paris I (France). Her research interests focus on the social, economic and cultural history of fashion press and fashion journalism during the XIXth and XXth centuries. Her thesis, “Lucien Vogel et Michel de Brunhoff, parcours de deux éditeurs de presse illustrée au XXe siècle”, dealing with the history of two French publishers who played a key role in the development of fashion press at the beginning of the XXth century (*Gazette du bon ton, Jardin des modes, Vogue…*), has been published in December 2014.