

MARAC Spring 2014

Pop Tarts Session: Images Are Not Enough

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Text

We'll be looking at four sets of fashion photographs from four different collections in the Kellen Design Archives.¹ The theme connecting these fashion photographs together is their depiction of working women.

Before we get started looking at fashion images – and I know that's what everyone wants to see – I'd like to briefly introduce two essays that inform my research.

Joan Schwartz's essay, "We May Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us," calls for archivists to understand photographs as instruments of power, whether by governments or by corporations.² Fashion photographs are no different, and, in fact, I believe they are perfect examples for illustrating Schwartz's essay.

¹ The Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus defines "fashion photographs" as a type of photograph differentiated from other photographs by the circumstances of their commission. Fashion photographs are "photographs made to sell clothing and accessories or show them to advantage." What stands out in this definition is the *intent* behind the creation of the record, not the content of the record; fashion photographs are not photographs *of* clothing and accessories. *The Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion* (2005) defines the fashion photograph as, "a photograph made specifically to show (or, in some cases, to allude to) clothing or accessories, usually with intent of documenting or selling the fashion" (62). Entry author Nancy Hall Duncan continues by defining fashion photography as being preoccupied with the documentation of a "fashionable lifestyle" associated with the apparel or accessories depicted however indirectly, echoing Martin Harrison's description of fashion photography as style documentation. As in AAT, the intention behind the record's creation is never in doubt.

² Joan M. Schwartz, "We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (1995), 40-74. "Today,

By examining functional context – and not merely content – we may observe agenda concealed within individual photographs, whether perpetuating a socioeconomic order (Schwartz uses the phrase, to “express an embedded social vision” (Schwartz, 45), or disrupting the status quo.³

Like any archival record, photographs are created for a specific purpose. As contextualizers, we should consider which activities result in photographs’ creation, dissemination, and retention.⁴ The clues will often not be within the image but in the photograph’s provenance. That’s what I want us to think about as we look at fashion photographs.

The second theorist is pioneering Australian scholar Margaret Maynard.⁵ Although she’s written extensively about gender, class, and dress, the essay in I want to mention here is, “The Fashion Photograph: An Ecology.”⁶

magazine editors, book designers, advertising executives, and a host of others intervene between photographer and viewer; it is their invisible hand that determines the images we see and the context in which we confront them” (Schwartz, 48).

³ “They are created for the attainment of effects, although we often fail to see them as prompted by an act of will to produce consequences” (Schwartz, 43).

⁴ According to Schwartz, photographs only become archival records if archivists relate them back to the action or sphere of activity for which they were originally created, or in which they participated.

⁵ I use the term pioneering because Maynard helped establish fashion studies as a legitimate field of academic study. The following quote illustrates her challenges: “There is no doubt that early on dress and fashion studies were considered to be an ideal match for the interests of women. Male historians in Australia saw the topic as lightweight and unable to offer any opportunity to tackle larger historical issues. This is not correct, but it was a perception that to study dress meant the study of sewing machines and needlework. This was something an extremely eminent historian once said to my face.” (*The Fashion Archives*, Issue 1, August 2013, accessed online).

⁶ The essay appeared in a superb edited collection edited by Eugenie Shinkle titled *Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008).

Instead of focusing on the fashion photograph or obsessing over the fashion photographer⁷, Maynard advocates broadly surveying the culture that produced the image: it's economy, its political atmosphere, its image-making and image-reproducing technologies, consumer behaviors, all of the individuals connected to the production of images ("stakeholders"), and, finally, how images are used post-publication ("circulation afterlife"). Clearly, Maynard is writing from the same place as Schwartz, except for a different academic audience.⁸

Now, we can't cover all that in 15 minutes, but we'll keep these things in mind.

I'll be showing fashion photographs in chronological order, covering an approximately forty year period.

One commonality across the four sets is that these images all originate in the papers of fashion designers, or in the case of Saks Fifth Avenue, the records of a corporate entity engaged in fashion retail operations. None of these images came from the papers of a fashion photographer. Not only that, but the photographer is not identified in any of the images.

These materials are from the Joset Walker Scrapbooks.

[1st Walker Slide] New York at Lunch

Our first image is a full-page editorial feature from the *New York Times Magazine*. The text is written by Virginia Pope. It appeared on page 30 of the June 21, 1942 issue, in the first year of the U.S.'s engagement in World War Two:

⁷ Maynard categorizes this fixation a "construct" that either comes from ignorance about modes of image production or a conscious diversion of attention.

⁸ Maynard suggests that comparing fashion images with each other can provide clues about the genre of fashion photography as a whole and its dissimilarities at the granular level. To put it simply, (1) fashion photographs can only be understood in relationship to other fashion photographs, and (2) we can't understand the fashion photograph unless we strive to understand the context in which it was produced. Sounds pretty archival to me!

“[New York women’s] costumes are smart, but casual, for whether they devote themselves to a social or professional life, they are apt to leave their homes in the morning wearing the costumes they will keep on all day. Now that many are active in war work, this is more the case than in the past.”

Some observations:

- Virginia Pope reported on fashion for the *Times* from 1933 until her retirement in 1955. She’s often credited with launching the careers of American designers at a time when the American fashion industry was seen as more about manufacturing than designing. She also served as president of the Fashion Group, a professional women’s organization with a mission to promote women in the fashion industry.
- Joset Walker, from whose scrapbooks this image originated, enjoyed her heyday from the 1930s into the 1950s (coinciding with Pope’s career at NYT).⁹ She thrived as a designer throughout Depression-era and wartime austerity by excelling at inventiveness, and what we would call today, sustainability.¹⁰ She was unusually conscious of demands on women’s time and fashion journalists in the 1940s frequently commended Walker for her

⁹ Born in France, Joset Walker came to the United States as a teenager to escape from what she claimed in interviews to be an unhappy family life. She graduated the Costume Design program of Parsons School of Design and soon went west to Hollywood where she briefly designed costumes for RKO Studios. At that time, she was using the name Joset de Lima (she married a Mr. Walker later on). Milbank mainly includes Walker under the 1940s in her chapters arranged by decade, and notes that during World War Two, Walker created drawstring waists and designer clothes that were easy for women to launder and iron (138). At an average cost of \$15 per item, her apparel was “extremely affordable” (166). Caroline Rennolds Milbank. *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style*. Abrams, NY, 1989.

¹⁰ One extreme example is a swimwear outfit she designed under the David Goodstein label with a terry cloth skirt that detaches and can be used as a blanket, while the stole doubles as a towel.

low-maintenance apparel.¹¹ Finally, she often appeared in advertisements in her role as a working woman.

[2nd Walker Slide] Photoplay

- Here we have a page of one of her scrapbooks into which she's pasted a 1932 *Photoplay* advertisement depicting herself at her desk. Note that she's not wearing anything remotely fashionable; she's dressed in a smock.

[back to New York at Lunch]

- This is the only fashion photograph I found in the Kellen Design Archives that depicts working women together, enjoying each others' company. I found fashion photographs of male executives together, and mixed male-female groupings, but no working women dyads.
- The fact that they're at lunch is significant. Although women workers were greatly needed during wartime, they are a bit frivolous, aren't they? Lunch outings makes working seem kind of glamorous and also non-threatening. It's interesting that an economic cross-section of the population is depicted here. Again, the last time we'll see this.

The next set of materials is from the Edith d'Errecalde Papers.

[1st d'Errecalde Slide] – Public Health Nurse Clipping

¹¹ In a March 1944 article by Virginia Pope, Walker is quoted, "Many women are going to wash and iron their own clothes. Let's make it easy for them." Examples of Walker's designs applauded by journalists include linen suits cut in such a way that they don't easily wrinkle and easy-to-care-for fabrics, particularly cotton. She borrowed from Jamaica, Thailand, China, and Guatemala, where she went during World War Two, which makes me wonder what her purpose in going to Central America was. Specifically, I am wondering if it was a government-sponsored trip, possibly with the purpose of designing uniforms for women? Who paid for her to go there and why? "She found that the dress worn by the Indians was exactly the kind suitable for American work clothes."

Here we have an article with accompanying photographs and illustrations. It's not dated, but contextual information indicates this is probably from the mid to late 1940s.

The motivations of this "news" item's stakeholders are quite clear:

- We're explicitly told that the reason we're looking at these fashion photographs is that we'll be enticed to become a public health nurse because of the amazing uniforms. The stated purpose is to "attract applicants for 8000 public health nurse positions."
- The credit is listed as AP Newsfeatures. Who is responsible for placing this news item remains to be concretely identified, but it's a government office.
- We're informed the model isn't a real nurse, but Hollywood starlet Marian Carr. The caption reads, "Beautiful Nurse." The bulk of the captioning describes the extensive wardrobe available to public health nurses.

[2nd d'Errecalde Slide] Photograph of Nurse

Although only two were used in the AP feature, the Kellen Design Archives file contains five different black-and-white prints depicting Carr wearing different parts of the wardrobe.

[3rd d'Errecalde Slide] Photograph of Nurse

Note that our nurse is not depicted getting her hands dirty with the business of nursing. The public health nurse's responsibilities are never referenced.

[4th d'Errecalde Slide] Sketch of Nurse

An original drawing of our nurse outfit. Note especially the initials on the bottom-right corner.

Designer Edith d'Errecalde ended up working during World War Two when she found herself widowed without an income. She was employed for approximately a decade as an uncredited assistant designer for Mainbocher, which would work

out to approximately 1940 to 1950.¹² None of the clippings in her papers identify d’Errecalde as the designer of the nurse’s outfits, and Mainbocher is typically identified as the designer in histories of nursing.¹³

A little historical context: Between 1942 and 1944, the U.S. government intensely courted women as workers in the war effort, and then just as intensely dropped them. Media appeals orchestrated by government and industry (the lines delineating the two are often blurred), presented labor as “glamorous, exciting, and a patriotic duty” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 231).¹⁴

The next set of fashion photographs presents a different picture. Let’s meet our 1950s Career Girls.

These photographs are from the Saks Fifth Avenue Publicity Collection.

[1st Saks Slide] Cheerful, outgoing Career Girl

¹² It is perhaps worthwhile to note that d’Errecalde was born in France, and came to the U.S. one year before Mainbocher, who was born in Chicago, relocated his operations from Paris to New York (1940). D’Errecalde was a French citizen who studied art in her native country and in Switzerland before coming to the U.S. with her husband in 1939. He returned to France without her and was subsequently killed during the War. In 1953, we know d’Errecalde was hired as the head designer of Max Milstein, Inc. Eventually, she became a fashion journalist.

¹³ The caption only assigns credit to a “New York designer.” “The public health nursing uniform changed in the late 1940’s from the blue chambray uniform to a cotton seersucker uniform. A surplus of nursing uniforms designed for military use by the American born haute designer Mainbocher became available at the close of World War II. This uniform design had been Mainbocher’s contribution to the war effort.” Mississippi State Department of Health. *Public Health Nursing, 1920-1949*. Accessed April 19, 2014 from (<http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/index.cfm/19,10786,378,html>).

¹⁴ Jowett & O’Donnell cite Hartmann’s (1982) harrowing statistics on lay-offs: In a three month period in 1945, one in every four female workers employed in war-related work was terminated, and those who kept their jobs were transferred into lower paying positions (Jowett & O’Donnell, 239). Garth S. Jowett & Victoria O’Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1992.

In 1956, Saks Fifth Avenue opened a new floor in its flagship store. The College and Career Shop catered to young women attending college and their older sisters, known as “career girls.” Press releases in the Saks Fifth Avenue publicity collection announce that the stores would be exclusively staffed by such young women, giving the shop a clubby atmosphere.¹⁵

[2nd Saks Fifth Avenue Slide] Career Girl

These black and white prints would be sent out to newspaper fashion editors along with a press release and captions. Often, the photograph and text from the press release or caption would simply be reproduced verbatim as an article.¹⁶

[3rd Saks Fifth Avenue Slide] Career Girl

While the College Girl photographs in this file frequently depict models in dyads or triads, or with a male model, the Career Girl is always depicted alone. The College Girl photographs appear to be shot on a real campus or in natural settings, while the Career Girl is not depicted actually working or in an office.

We know who produced these photographs as they were donated to the Kellen Design Archives by retired publicity director of Saks Fifth Avenue, Helen O’Hagan, herself a career girl.¹⁷

Saks Fifth Avenue was not an anomaly in having a woman at the helm of publicity operations. The 1950s fashion industry in New York was populated with numerous female executives, directors, editors, consultants and designers.¹⁸

¹⁵ Indeed, handwritten corrections to the captions accompanying this and the following fashion photographs indicate that whoever typed the captions did so believing the shop to be the “College and Career Club.” American College Girls, 1958, Saks Fifth Avenue fashion publicity collection, KA.0018, Binder 21, The New School Archives and Special Collections, The New School, New York, NY.

¹⁶ Evidence of this editorial practice is prevalent throughout the collection.

¹⁷ O’Hagan succeeded the previous publicity director, Grace de Mun, under whose direction this campaign was launched.

However, “girls” was often used to describe employed women, possibly to trivialize the nature of women’s employment or to emphasize its temporariness.¹⁹ It was something these “girls” would grow out of.²⁰ Of course, many women chose to remain employed by necessity – if necessity can be called a choice – or desire or some combination of the two.

We’re going to skip ahead a bit to 1980, when our career girl has become a female professional.

This last set of materials is from the John Weitz papers.

[1st Weitz Slide] Haspel model talking on phone

¹⁸ A sense of the control powerful women exerted over the fashion retail and fashion publishing industries during this decade can be gained from examining the newsletter of the Fashion Group. In the newsletter, whose audience was a closed, internal society of professionals, the career girl is celebrated, possibly because of her independence and purchasing power. These records are held by the New York Public Library.

¹⁹ Condescension with class overtones can be discerned in working professional woman Edith d’Errecalde’s observation of fashion consumption in the 1940s, and the absence of individuality: “When I first came to this country many years ago, I was amazed at every little secretary who went out every weekend and spent all her money on the same things that the other little secretaries were wearing...Clothes have to function today – whether it’s your sports life, your daily life, your office life, or even when you go out.” As Margaret Maynard notes in a *Fashion Projects* interview (Interview with Nadia Buick, September 2013), “There are also degrees of fashionability dependent on class and economic circumstances as well as aspirations to look stylish.”

²⁰ As early as 1934, Joset Walker was featured in a *Collier’s* article about female fashion designers, titled, “They Have Your Number.” Journalist Selma Robinson observes, “They know what the American *woman* wants, these *girls* who are pursuing the latest American profession – dress designing.” Scrapbook 1, Joset Walker fashion design scrapbooks, KA.0045, The New School Archives and Special Collections, The New School, New York, NY.

The next fashion photographs are 35 mm slides from a fashion shoot in the John Weitz Design corporate office.²¹ The slide mounts are stamped February 1980. I haven't identified the model, but she reappears in John Weitz's runway shows from the same era.

[2nd Weitz Slide] Haspel model gesturing with compass

Students who see these images – I often employ them in archival instruction – tell me she holds an executive position in the office because of her posture and her gestures. They're pretty sure she's not an administrative assistant.

[3rd Weitz Slide] Haspel model holding magazine

While processing this collection, I found a lot of photographic materials related to this particular shoot – slides, prints, negatives. The volume of these photographs leads me to believe this was a fairly important campaign.

However, none of the numerous shots depicting the model in the office, engaged in work-related activities were used in the resultant advertisement.

[4th Weitz Slide] Full-page ad from W

The ad ran in the fashion trade newspaper *W* – now *Women's Wear Daily* – and took up two pages. The photographs were taken on a Midtown sidewalk, where it's harder to read our model's status than in the office environment. Perhaps that's the intention behind their selection, to purposefully obscure her role.

So, who is John Weitz?

[5th Weitz Slide] Left page ad from W

²¹ One can see the photographer and his lamps reflected in the glass high-rise windows. It must be challenging to shoot inside a Modernist office building. These images force us to consider how far camera technology has progressed. In the early years of fashion photography, the vast majority of fashion photographs were taken in the studio because it was difficult to photograph in such an uncontrolled environment as a city street – although that's not to say it was never done.

According to Eleanor Lambert, John Weitz is "considered the most successful American in international menswear." He also wrote *Man in Charge* (1974), "a dress and manners guide for the modern executive" (p. 261).²²

These photographs are part of a series of files labeled, "Haspel Brothers" although the name of this manufacturer is absent in the *W* advertisement.²³ Haspel Brothers has been around since the early twentieth century, and has an extensive corporate history section on its website.²⁴ Nowhere on the website's corporate history is it ever mentioned that Haspel Brothers manufactured anything but men's clothing. The following items in the file indicate otherwise.

[6th Weitz Slide] Haspel Brothers price list

This brochure prominently notes the existence of the Haspel Brothers' Women's Division.

[7th Weitz Slide] Memo from Weitz to Haspel

I will conclude by contrasting the Haspel ad with John Weitz's menswear ads from 1979.

[8th and 9th Weitz Slides] Signature Collection

²² Although Weitz designed men's, women's, and children's clothing beginning in the 1950s, he concentrated primarily on menswear beginning in the early 1960s. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, his focus was on men's sportswear and office attire. It wasn't until the late 1970s that Weitz began designing for women again, possibly seeing a lucrative opportunity in the demand for women's attire based on menswear for which he was known. Eleanor Lambert quote from *World of Fashion* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976).

²³ The files primarily consist of fashion sketches and swatches created by John Weitz Designs and sent to Haspel Brothers for manufacture. In the resultant advertising, Haspel is not mentioned, although the official name of this particular line was, "John Weitz by Haspel." The file contents are of a short duration, 1979 to 1981. John Weitz papers, KA.0047, Box 10, Folders 2-8, The New School Archives and Special Collections, The New School, New York, NY.

²⁴ Haspel Brothers History timeline (accessed April 15, 2014):
<http://www.haspel.com/history.htm>

These two ads are for Weitz' signature men's collection, manufactured by the same parent company that owns Haspel Brothers. For me, the striking aspect of these ads is that the men who are the focus of the fashion photographs aren't alone.

When we contrast all these fashion photographs, we see the Haspel model, specifically the images chosen for the final *W* advertisement, as completely isolated.

[Back to *W* advertisement Slide]

Why doesn't our professional woman in the Haspel advertisement have a male co-worker with whom to catch a cab, or another female co-worker to confer with?

[Back to New York at Lunch Slide]

Where is her lunchtime companion?

A full answer to this question would take another 15 minutes. I believe a concise answer can be found in an exploration of women's employment and competition between women for jobs at the close of the 1970s.²⁵

²⁵ Wendy Chapkis dedicates an entire chapter to women's professional attire in *Beauty Secrets* (Boston: South End Press, 1986). In "Dress as Success," Chapkis posits that as working became less of a choice than a necessity for many middle class women – it was never a choice for lower income women – "women are finding a need to indicate *personal* financial authority through their dress" (80). Increased competition, coupled with the growth of self-help books that undermine gender solidarity – John T. Molloy's chart-topping *Women's Dress for Success Book* is cited as an example – leads women to view other working women as threats: "Other women are competition not colleagues" (86). Fashion historian Catherine Rennolds Millbank, far from identifying as a feminist, cites this same predicament: "Whereas women forging wholly new careers in the early 1970s may have felt free to dress like mavericks, particularly by wearing pants rather than skirts, women in the late 1970s following them into the workplace, who faced much more competition, fell under the spell of doing everything by the book. The specific book was John T. Molloy's *Dress for Success*, which, along with countless articles, counseled women intent on climbing the ladder to adopt a suitable uniform...Women who had achieved success could afford to be adventuresome in their wardrobes, and more creative fashion would be a

harbinger of the 1980s (*New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style*. Abrams: NY, 1989, 247).