Chapter 4

In the service of clothes: Elsa Schiaparelli and the war experience

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Introduction

Elsa Schiaparelli is renowned as 'the' imaginative couturier who wowed fashionable Parisian café society with her provocative and individualistic apparel during the inter-war years. Shortened to 'Schiap', her name became synonymous with Surrealism, and her creative and daring designs shocked the fashion world and challenged preconceived ideas of dressing. Schiap pioneered padded and broadened shoulders, re-emphasized the waist, and raised hemlines (and eyebrows). Coco Chanel, her contemporary and rival, referred to her as, 'that artist who makes dresses.' Schiaparelli was greatly influenced by art movements of the period and collaborated with artists so that her designs revelled in colour and fantasy. Yves Saint Laurent described her invention of the now famous colour 'Shocking Pink' as an 'aggressive, brawling and warrior pink' (White 1995: 13). Utilizing the sharp lines of Cubism and dreamlike images of Salvador Dali, Schiap used the body as architecture on which to shape her clothes. Much of her work is severely structured, even at times employing Victorian features such as a bustle which drew on the much-adored clothes of her grandmother's era. Although the severe silhouette was her staple, some of her 1930s evening wear demonstrates expertise in soft draping, and her later collections employed drastically sloping shoulders, contrary to her famed severe frame. Today, Schiap is considered a master of versatility, creating not only variety across her playfully themed collections, but also within a single garment.

To date, very little has been written about how Schiaparelli spent her life after the closing of her Place Vendôme shop in 1954. Even less has been published on her post-war fashion, with the exception of the perfumes and accessories to which she licensed her name. The general consensus is that she was out of step with post-war sensibility, which led to the eventual failure of her career as a couturier. Broadly, this gap in commentary falls into two periods: 1945–1954 (coinciding with the Paris shop's closing, her filing for bankruptcy and the publication of her autobiography, Shocking Life); and 1955–1973 (the time of her death). This discussion will cover the extent to which war and the military influenced both Schiaparelli's designs and how they were marketed. A closer inspection of her work reveals how Schiap's wartime experiences filtered into her garments and accompanying promotional campaigns. Schiaparelli did appropriate some military design elements throughout her fashion career and these can be located in earlier work as well her post-war designs, but these elements were dispersed amongst the many other influences incorporated into her ground-breaking collections.

Elsa Schiaparelli survived both the First and Second World Wars (WWI and WWII), living in Europe and New York. The outbreak of WWI began shortly after her disastrous
marriage to philosophy lecturer Count Wilhelm Wendt de Kerlor in London. Soon after, the couple travelled to Nice, where they remained until the war was over. In 1919 they travelled to the United States, and settled in New York City. However, de Kerlor's philandering ways worsened and he left the family not long after the birth of their daughter, Yvonne (Gogo). The family was left destitute, so Schiaparelli's survival depended on her ability to utilize the friendships made during the voyage to America. These friendships provided introductions to the artistic circles of Greenwich Village, and renowned artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray would later have a significant creative impact on her work. In their portrayal of women, the Surrealists often used mannequins or other objects, a dehumanizing tendency seen, for example, in Man Ray's image of a woman's back as a violin. However, as O'Mahoney states, women artists and designers chose to participate in the Surrealist movement, since:

Surrealism's ultimate emphasis on the examination of the inner being sanctioned a close analysis of their own individualities, allowing their works to reveal many of the complexities and problems inherent within gender-designated roles in society (O'Mahoney, in Martin 1999: 14).

Schiaparelli's work would later reflect the playfulness of Surrealism in her infamous 'shoe hat' as well as designing clothing that re-considered women's attire during the world wars, as discussed below.

While in New York, Schiap's daughter Gogo was diagnosed with a walking disability. Blanche Hayes, a rich divorcée who had befriended Schiap, convinced them to return to Paris to seek medical treatment, and provided a free domicile (Baxter-Wright 2012). Later, Schiap would rent a small flat of her own, and meet the world's most celebrated fashion designer of the time, Paul Poiret, who showered her with beautiful clothes. In this atmosphere, Schiap made her fashion debut with her distinctive black-and-white trompe l'oeil sweater with the knitted bow. An initial order of forty sweaters and skirts from a New York buyer prompted Schiaparelli to rent a garret at Rue de la Paix, wherein she located her workshop. This precipitated the start of her new sportswear business, dressing celebrity actresses and women in high society. As the premises became too restricting, Schiap relocated to the now famous 21 Place Vendôme atelier, where she would flourish and fulfil her destiny as haute couturier. Later, the boutique at No. 21 would become a tourist destination, alongside the other iconic French landmarks (Schiaparelli 2007: 65, 66). Elsa Schiaparelli, the Italian, now fully established in her credentials as a proud Parisian designer, became a French citizen.

'Hard chic'

The sharp, 'hard chic', and rather masculine fitted look of padded shoulders, nipped-in waist and narrow hips that Schiaparelli perfected would suit high-profile customers such as Katherine Hepburn, Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford. The look complemented their
body shape and their lean, angular facial features. As Bolton and Koda note, the moniker ‘Hard Chic’ comprises designs that reference menswear, military and service uniforms, and industrial materials and fastenings applied with deliberate severity (2012: 22). It was a style designed in keeping with the new athleticism associated with the so-called New Woman who would now compete in the masculine public domain, for example, at the revived Olympic games. Schiap emphatically rejected the Victorian ethos of concealing the body, especially any physical ‘flaws’ associated with women’s figures. In contrast, the ‘Schiaparelli look’ defended a new role for the female body – as highly active. Embellishments she added to ‘hard chic’ included padding, quilting, detailed Lesage embroidery, highly decorated boleros and turbans – all elements that could metaphorically protect the female body from assault. This ‘hard chic’ look was extended to incorporate a more military appearance, with the addition of metal buttons and clamp fastenings, epaulettes and accessories such as capes. Schiap’s provocative release of the ‘Wooden Soldier Silhouette’ earned her the title ‘carpenter of clothes’ (Watt 2012). These distinctive angular lines provided strength but retained elegance. This silhouette was adopted later by Hollywood designers such as Adrian, exemplified in the 1939 film The Women (White 1995). Schiaparelli also played with other military elements, appropriating the Maginot Line blue and Foreign Legion reds (Ewing 2001: 118), Cossack coats, and plumed headwear. Despite the fact that Schiap’s design collections ceased throughout WWII, this signature military look continued to be very popular with women throughout this period. Military dress was reflected in the action-ready clothing of famous movie stars, and was also symbolically linked to a strong female population – women who supported the wartime industries at home, in hospitals and ambulance services, and in the countryside in increasing numbers.

Wartime tensions in America and Europe

The pared-down, even masculine Schiaparelli ‘look’ was copied widely across the US by local designers. Schiap was ambivalent about this practice at first, but in her later writings she reflects on it as flattery, feeling complimented that her designs had been so successful. ‘The moment that people stop copying you,’ she held, ‘it means that you are no longer any good and that you have ceased to be news’ (Schiaparelli, in White 1995: 87). French purveyors of haute couture, however, would confront her with this popularity at the close of WWII. In 1945 Schiap was compelled to attend a meeting with representatives from the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture in New York, who used this information against her. They suggested that American fashion had thrived at the expense of French couture, and that she had been instrumental in this event (White 1995). It was ironic that Schiap, who had done everything possible to promote the French clothing industry, and to continuously uphold the good name of France, even from abroad, found herself ostracized from the very group she sought to promote.
Politics again intruded during her stay in New York. Elsa Schiaparelli had been regarded with suspicion throughout WWII by the Germans, encouraged by the fact that the majority of her shareholders were Jewish (Watt 2012: 149). Others believed she was against the French Resistance; then it was rumoured that she was anti-British. Finally, accusations of fascism were hurled after she (unknowingly) wore a hat made by a German milliner working in France, which prompted a visit by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (Schiaparelli 2007: 150; Watt 2012: 149). It is significant that the mere wearing of a hat could have such connotations. The Germans did not place any ration restrictions on buying hats; they were ‘points free’, meaning ‘they could be purchased without any vouchers or clothing cards, and so would become the major fashion item of the war years’ (Guenther 2004: 217). This resulted in the hat’s elevation to the pinnacle of fashion innovation. In 1940, the German women’s magazine, Die Dame, would claim, ‘Alles ist Hut’ – the hat is everything (Guenther 2004: plates 25 & 26).

Beyond Schiap’s control was the fact that the French couturiers chose to furnish uniforms for the German soldiers, acquiring concessions for the high fashion industry for dwindling raw materials. As Guenther explains:

> Every yard of fabric wasted was a yard less of fabric that could be sent to Germany. Every flamboyant hat worn by a French woman, the designer Schiaparelli asserted, was a “symbol of the free and creative spirit of Paris,” a “slap in the face for the Nazis” (2004: 211).

But in fact this extravagance could, instead, be read as Nazi collaboration. Irene Guenther teases out this question: was a French woman wearing a lavish hat a mark of resistance, and in particular would that same hat be read as ‘bad fashion’ if worn by a German woman? Guenther questions this notion of fashion as ‘resistance’. Did the headgear signify a personal response to the restrictions of war, or a broader political statement about the war itself? So Schiap, an Italian-born French woman, wears a German-made hat in America – this challenged the Allied authorities. Hats had been very important for Schiap during WWII, as exemplified in the anecdote that she sewed several thousand dollars into the fur trim of one hat, funds that were entrusted to her by American friends, to deliver to others who had been left destitute in France. Schiap relates that she lost the hat during a rush to board a train, but miraculously it was returned to her, its secret contents intact (Schiaparelli 2007).

On the other hand, the practical operations of Schiap’s business attracted attention. Her rival, Chanel, ceased to do business during WWII, but the salon at Place Vendôme No. 21 continued to operate at a reduced level with fewer staff, and later came under German administration. Even so, nearly sixty percent of French haute couture houses remained open and at their own premises at the insistence of Lucien Lelong, head of the Chambre Syndicale, despite Nazi attempts to relocate them to Berlin or Vienna (Guenther 2004).

It is easy to see how Schiap, Italian by birthright, and distinctively Italian in name, was vulnerable to rumours about her disloyalty to the Allies. But Schiaparelli hated Mussolini and was horrified at the fate of her country of birth. The notion that she may have been
complicit with the military, either overtly or covertly, is difficult to countenance. In 1940, Schiap delivered an ambitious lecture tour of the US (42 towns in eight weeks) to strengthen the French economy, urging Americans to buy French high fashion. Other industries in France were under German control, but fashion still retained some independence. Schiap was welcomed in the US and acquired almost celebrity status, drawing audiences in the thousands. Despite the ship transporting the small collection for display being sunk en route, she managed to get the dresses remade at the last minute, and bravely carried on, to the acclaim of mass audiences.

Following the tour, Schiap returned to France, but, under threat and fearing for her safety, she was smuggled by influential friends out of Europe and back to the US. During her US residence, all of her efforts previously directed to fashion she channelled into the war effort, working chiefly for the Red Cross in New York City, as did her daughter Gogo. They both engaged in fundraising activities for various charity groups, including the Quakers, who were known for their activism for peace. She would not return to France until after WWII, when she would be greatly disappointed at the kind of clothes produced during the Nazi Occupation of France.

**Post-war realities**

During the war, and in the early years afterwards, there had been severe rationing and restrictions, and many fabrics and other dressmaking items were difficult or impossible to obtain (Guenther 2004). On her first return to Paris, after her lecture tour, Schiaparelli came armed with pins, as steel was a scare resource. Throughout Europe, but especially in Britain, strict rules determined the type of garments that could be made: how much fabric and in what styles. Not since the French Revolution, and before that the Middle Ages, had sartorial codes been in place where the relevant decrees were implemented through sumptuary law (Ewing 2001: 139). Schiap, not fazed by these shortages and restrictions, found other ways to continue her creative dressmaking practice. When faced with a problem, Schiap improvised. Dog chains were used for fasteners, and day dresses became evening gowns with the pull of a drawstring and the removal of a detachable collar. This was a solution to both material shortages and to the strict budgets of the buyers. The period between September 1939 and spring 1940 was a strange one in French history. Known as the drôle de guerre (phoney war), it appeared as though the realities of war had not yet hit France (White 1995). In a fight against unemployment and to heighten morale, the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne marshalled their designers to show the world the very best of French couture (White 1995). Their efforts were rewarded after Americans crossed the Atlantic en masse to attend, despite the dangers of travel. Schiaparelli's collection was extremely well-received, and featured many convertible garments – these offered a new 'look' on a single garment in order to make the best use of scarce fabric supplies – wrap-around dresses, elasticized waists, and
other garments with big pockets that could be filled with supplies in times of emergency.

Elsa Schiaparelli, although the most beloved queen of French couture, especially in New York, struggled to keep this moniker post-war. She herself confessed that she was not in touch with the moment. She drew on her established reputation for clever design features that had worked for her in the past, but her reliance on the pre-war elegance of slender lines seemed out of step with the times (Schiaparelli, in Watt 2012: 160; White 1995: 208). As with the Surrealist movement itself, Schiap’s provocative Surrealist creations during the 1930s had outlived their moment (O’Mahony 1999: 15). The ‘outrageous’ did not seem relevant after the war years of military combat accompanied by civilian austerity, and the severe cut of her masculine suits became too reminiscent of military garb, as shown in Figure 1 (Baxter-Wright 2012). Schiap then made radical attempts to change her designs, softening the line of her dresses with sloping shoulders, offering large trench coats, but these designs did not find favour with the buying public (Watt 1995; Baxter-Wright 2012). Elsewhere, Coco Chanel, was able to relaunch her house, seizing the moment to bring back a modified version of her now famous suit. Buying customers wanted a new femininity and Chanel, along with a newcomer, Christian Dior, were destined to rebuild the French reputation for innovative fashion. In 1947, even though fabrics had remained scarce, Dior showcased a silhouette that met this desire: the New Look. Dior’s New Look recalled an earlier version of womanhood, with lengthened skirts, full petticoats and a softer bodice (Watt 2012; White 1995). In response, Schiap claimed, mistakenly, that the New Look would not last (Schiaparelli 2007: 168): in fact it remained in vogue around the world throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.

In February of 1947, in contrast to the extreme femininity of the ‘indulgent’ Dior look, Schiaparelli displayed her wares in an advertisement for a ‘Petite Parisienne’ suit in American Vogue (1947: 122). The model in the illustration appears to have just stepped off the set of Casablanca (see Figure 1). She sports a high-plumed fez, with double-capped-shoulders on a side-buttoning jacket with one large external side pocket, and a knee-length, narrow panelled skirt, and gloves. She also wears what are probably signature Schiaparelli rhinestones. Her strong brows evoke Joan Crawford, and the whole look is very Rosalind Russell. The overall severity is the antithesis of Dior’s New Look, every element being different. The outfit covers and protects the body, in classic ‘hard chic’ style, and the bulky sharp shoulders that taper to a slim hip retain the triangular masculine look perfected by Schiap in the late 1930s. This suit was available at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City, advertised as ‘Designed for the younger figure’. But in post-war America, Schiap’s designs of the war years no longer suited the aspirations of young women. They turned away from the ‘hard chic’ profile after they viewed Dior’s deeply feminine dresses and voluminous skirts in the pages of Vogue three months later. As Watt reports, ‘in its May 1947 issue, Vogue led with Christine Dior; “Dior – Christian Dior – is the new name in Paris”’ (2012: 150).

There was also a new kind of clientele: ‘the newly rich wives of grocers, butchers and provision merchants’ who wanted to see a ‘casual American sensibility’ (Watt 2012: 150).
It is curious that Schiap, after spending the last four years residing and working in the US, did not understand the Zeitgeist. However, her New York years offered a respite from the fashion industry, even to the extent of retreating to a Long Island cottage to restore her sense of self. This self-imposed exile from dressmaking took its toll on her awareness of contemporary fashion sensibility (Schiaparelli 2007: 128–129, 158; White 1995: 199).
There was a set of factors that led to Schiap's downfall as a designer. First, the use of master fashion illustrators, central to the Schiaparelli image, began to fall out of vogue, to be replaced by high-profile photographers (Watt 2012). This was partly due to the rise of the photographic industry during WWII and to the post-war availability of former wartime photographers. Next, the introduction of entrance fees for buyers at fashion shows increased costs, while the ban on the release of press photographs until a month after a collection delayed access to the public. Further, the prohibitive cost of a couture dress as a result of post-war inflation seriously affected Schiap's efforts to regain her foothold as a French fashion house. Her attempts to counter these restrictions caused Schiaparelli to license her name to other manufacturers, but it was not enough to save her atelier. In 1954 she showed her final collection, and in the same year filed for bankruptcy (Watt 2012: 151).

**Schiaparelli markets wartime sensibilities: Memories and realities**

In the first example, in 1949, the magazine *The New Yorker* printed an advertisement for ties, from Bachrach Menswear, Madison Avenue, New York (see Plate iv). The accompanying text reads as follows:

voila Papa! Schiaparelli does ties for men

If your daddy has a recurrent nostalgia for the Ritz Bar, the Place Pigalle and the shops around the Place Vendôme, you will make him so-o-o happy with these. They are just what you'd expect from the rich imagination and gifted hands of Schiaparelli ... witty, Parisian, and wholly original in design and color treatment.

The black-and-white hand-drawn illustration features a rotund, bearded gentleman, reclining in a comfortable chair, surrounded by a woman, presumably his wife, two small children dressed in Victorian clothes, and a ‘French’ poodle. He is suited and smoking a cigar. On the wall behind him is a portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte. The happy domestic setting appears rather old-fashioned, and one might assume that he is either the children’s father or grandfather, a veteran of WWI. Beneath them are four men's ties featuring bright patterns. The sketch and copy clearly signal nostalgia for his time spent as a soldier, on leave in Paris, especially at the Place Vendôme, which lies in the shadow of the Vendôme Column, originally erected by Napoleon to celebrate the victory of Austerlitz (Schiaparelli 2007: 64). The overall tone of this advertisement is reminiscent of a day that Schiap relates in her autobiography, when she encountered WWII American soldiers queued up outside her shop at the Place Vendôme to purchase some little remnant of Paris to take back home to their sweethearts or mothers, a scarf, a fragrance or a hat:

... but what puzzled me was the very long line of G.I.s quietly waiting to enter the shop
... I asked a girl I did not know what was happening, and she answered:
In the service of clothes

“The G.I.s? They are queuing up to buy presents to take home. Most of them buy perfume” (Schiaparelli 2007: 155–56).

In the advertisement, the ‘Papa’ figure depicts a nostalgic mood, driven by remembering good times he spent in Paris as a young man, perhaps including any romantic encounters with French women. The first location mentioned in the advertisement is the famous Ritz, a very upmarket bar in the exclusive hotel: as The Ritz was occupied by the Germans in WWII, it must indicate that the man is nostalgic for Paris during WWI.

It should be noted that the word ‘nostalgia’ was coined in the 17th century when it was used to describe the symptoms of soldiers diagnosed as suffering from homesickness. The term, which then migrated into the vernacular, is used somewhat differently here, however, as the soldiers addressed by the advertisement are assumed to be missing Paris rather than their own homes. Even before Schiap opened her salon there in 1934, Place Vendôme had a reputation as a luxury shopping district, just as Place Pigalle was known as the risqué cabaret area. American soldiers, returning from a different war, had pined for the various delights of the city before, as can be found in the lyrics of this popular 1918 song by Lewis and Donaldson:

How ya gonna keep ’em down on the farm
After they’ve seen Paree’
How ya gonna keep ’em away from Broadway
Jazzin’ around, and paintin’ the town ...
Mother Reuben, I’m not fakin
Tho you may think it strange
But wine and women play the mischief
With a boy who’s loose with change.

Clearly, Schiaparelli chose nostalgia as a selling point for her men’s ties in 1949. The advertisement capitalizes on the recent return of soldiers from France after WWII, assuming this would spark memories in an older generation of men who served in the Great War (WWI). These ‘old soldiers’, even though thousands of their comrades lost their lives, could be reminiscing about their own tours of duty. Schiaparelli remembers this of the time immediately after WWII: ‘Paris was full of G.I.s who were rich in cigarettes, nylons, and black market goodies. They hid in the Bois de Boulogne, necking and strutting down the Champs-Élysées’ (2007: 161). In the advertisement, Bachrach is offering the romance of Paris in the form of a Schiaparelli tie, the finest France can offer a gentleman without having to travel abroad. Note that the ad is saturated with Frenchness. The juxtaposition of ‘daddy’, with the children’s exclamation ‘Papa’ is characteristic of America’s ongoing Francophilia. The address seems somewhat ambiguous, but ‘daddy’ can refer to the man depicted in the advertisement, as well as the father of the woman reading the magazine, also a potential consumer. It is the women, possibly shopping for a Father’s Day gift, who will be well aware of the Schiaparelli name as synonymous with fashion (Plate iv).
In the second example, other types of wartime realities exert their influence on Schiaparelli’s designs. Those influences began with her New York years in the American Red Cross. Nevertheless, these designs connect in their sympathies and through the direct outcome they had on uniforms for women in service, whether paid or voluntary.

When I was with the Place Vendôme I did some work with the Salvation Army, visiting their wonderful canteens and rest houses near the front in the company of General Barret ... The Salvation Army commissioner asked me to design a uniform for the women workers on modern lines, much like the dress I wore during this trip. The uniform which was made and accepted was blue with a red collar and blue apron, but we did not have time to put it into production. I have just learned that they used it later, after all (Schiaparelli 2007: 106–07, 107).

By 1962, Schiaparelli was able to capitalize on her reputation for utilitarian women’s garments with her designs for nurses’ uniforms for Preen (see Plate v). Even though her high fashion business folded in 1954, eight years later the New York Preen catalogues (actually called the Preen Uniform Fashion Guide) bear the name of her salon – 21 Place Vendôme, Paris, France – on the cover. It is evident that the institution of nursing has its organizational origins in military practices, drawing heavily on its discipline. Schiaparelli, having served as a nurse’s aide, understood the necessary practicalities of a working outfit, while still maintaining stylish femininity (Schiaparelli 2007: 136; White 1995: 198). Decades before, she had designed practicality into her innovative tennis culottes, allowing for freedom of movement while retaining modesty, something that became a subject of controversy on the court (Baxter-Wright 2013: 23). But these nurses’ uniforms must have a direct link with Schiap’s personal wartime experience. Here, she observes herself as a figure of irony, as she notes that she is a French couturier who now, after the war wears such odd attire, a moment in her biography that is profoundly affecting:

The sight of Schiap, so-called Queen of Fashion, walking through the streets of New York at 6 a.m. in flat, white canvas shoes, white cotton stockings, and a blue cotton apron, had its funny side ... As a nurse’s aide she had of course to do the humbler jobs, generally given to the charwoman, but that was not really hard because it filled her with passionate interest and gave her a feeling of self respect ... all this gave her a feeling of humanity again ... and it saved her soul (Schiaparelli 2007: 136–37).

Doubtless, while Schiap designed these uniforms, she would have graphically recalled her time in the American Red Cross, when she first encountered dead bodies and tended the suffering first-hand. The strength she gained during that period would sustain her for decades to come, and these Preen uniforms are, in some way, a nod to those years of humanitarian service and her own passionate dedication (see Plate v).
Preen is proud to serve the woman who works in white...nurses, doctors' assistants, beauticians, dieticians, and waitresses who perform the many vital and important tasks, which help keep this nation healthy and happy.

We match your sense of dedication with our own. All the skill at our command goes into creating the uniform styles you want. And thanks to the genius of Mme Elsa Schiaparelli, and other top flight designers...in a Preen uniform, you'll always be fashionable on the job...

The tailoring and detailing of each Preen uniform must meet our rigid standards of quality and meticulous workmanship (Preen 1962: 2).

Note the emphasis on 'serving.' The Preen company targets the women in service industries, whether medical, health, cosmetics or hospitality, and returns the favour with its own dedication to service and perfection. As varied as these professions are, their commonality is acknowledged as providing service to the nation's health and well-being. As a uniform provider, Preen recognizes no hierarchical distinction within these services, and promotes Schiaparelli as the talented French designer who fully appreciates this sense of equality. In her French atelier she appreciated egalitarianism, by insisting that the sewers, or 'girls,' who worked there should enter through the front door.

Finally, note the use of such phrases as 'the skill at our command' and 'rigid standards.' This militaristic language had always been associated with the command structure of the nursing profession but subsequently became ubiquitous in the vocabulary of advertising and modern management, representing standardized and efficient mass manufacturing.

The Preen guides not only feature '...the latest in uniforms, [but also include] dresses, shoes, jewellery, lingerie, and other accessories' (Preen, Fall 1962: cover). Rather than haute couture, Schiap designed affordable garments aimed at the working woman, most of it selling for less than ten dollars. Further, Schiaparelli had always been a pioneer in utilizing new fabrics manufactured from synthetic fibres (Baxter-Wright 2013: 41; Watt 2013: 66). As post-war industries boomed, so did payment plans, and Preen encouraged its customers to use credit, with Preen's Easy Pay Plan, suggesting 'your wardrobe can always be up-to-the-minute with on-the-job and off-the job fashions that you can wear while you pay' (Preen 1962: 2). The 'wear while you pay' would have been a major shift in sensibility for the independent Schiap, who ruled in her autobiography that a woman 'should pay her bills' (Schiaparelli 2007: 211). The Preen company's emphasis on fashion was underscored by their use of a brunette model who strikingly resembled the First Lady, Jackie Kennedy, complete with bouffant hairdo (see Plate v). This conforms to the fashion trends of the time, as 1962 was the height of the Kennedy era in politics, and Jackie was a fashion icon for women worldwide. Even store mannequins bore likenesses to her (Cassini 1995: 66).

Under the model's photograph, the copy boasts, 'You'll be sure to catch plenty of Oh's and Ah's wearing this professional beauty' (Preen 1962: 7). This offers a more alluring image than one normally associates with the nursing profession. Another uniform 'fashioned for
flattery' offers a coat-style uniform with an off-centre opening, and 'fashionable French cuffs' (Preen 1962: 15). Yet another, which looks more like a day dress, is titled the 'Double Duty Classic.' This classic Schiaparelli form features a detachable jacket: 'Here is comfortable adaptability in a uniform that's really two outfits for the price of one' (Preen 1962: 7). As we've seen, Schiap was an innovator of convertible outfits, stressing the need for versatility, particularly in the years approaching war. Her Cash and Carry collection of 1939, in particular, afforded several functions per garment (White 1995: 181).

These two examples - the nostalgic tie advertisement and the Preen uniform catalogues - demonstrate that the post-war Schiaparelli, although no longer engaged with her Paris salon, continued to have creative and active business interests in American clothing companies, and continued to trade on the solid reputation of her Parisian brand, whether licensed or not. They all draw on the practicality, the images, and the emotions associated with the war experience, and, what's more, are steeped in the idea of Frenchness. Schiaparelli herself may or may not have had direct input into the marketing of her designs for these companies, but she did engage in personal appearances worldwide to promote her perfumes and accessories (White 1995: 216). Nevertheless, the association of these military tropes with the Schiaparelli name was well entrenched in the public imagination.

Concluding remarks: The Elsa Schiaparelli revival

In 2012, several new books were published on Elsa Schiaparelli (Baxter-Wright; Parkins; Watt). In 2011, the Victoria & Albert (V&A) publication of her autobiography Shocking Life, written in 1954, was reprinted, after being out of print for decades. In 2012, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held the exhibition, Prada and Schiaparelli: Impossible Conversations, and published their catalogue as a beautiful work of art in itself (Bolton & Koda 2012). The well-known film director Baz Luhrmann was engaged to produce a film starring Judy Davis (as Schiaparelli) and Miuccia Prada, which screened as part of the exhibition. The year 2012 also marked an extraordinary event: the relaunching of the Schiaparelli name and shop at the exact location of the original at No. 21 Place Vendôme (note that this had been attempted in previous years but with limited success). The website accompanying the launch introduces viewers to the brand's history, and current goals, using typically French-styled animations. This renaissance of Schiaparelli intends not just to recapture but to rework the dreamlike Surrealist style for which she was famous. But it is unknown if these so-called 'neo-Schiaps' will attempt the sharp military look that became her signature. The issue remains: to what extent, if any, will current wartime experiences impact upon contemporary fashion? The current climate can be viewed as that of a perpetual state of war - where combat is highly technological, remote from the developed world, albeit ubiquitous in the media. It is possible that body shapes and inclinations do not point contemporary fashion towards the 'protective body armour' that was employed during WWII. The padded shoulders of power dressing had made a
comeback in the 1980s, when women started to climb the corporate ladder, and battled with men in the public sphere, just as the New Woman had done in the 1930s. The year 2011 also marked the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, in which Elsa Schiaparelli's granddaughter (Gogo's daughter), photographer Berynthia (Berry) Perkins (née Berenson), was killed. She was a passenger on the American Airlines jet that hit the North Tower (Baxter-Wright 2012). Perhaps, the return of Schiap to the public's consciousness is timely.

Globally, contemporary fashion is built on difficult terrain, and, as Elsa Schiaparelli said in her most quotable statement, 'In difficult times, fashion is always outrageous.'

References


Notes

1 For the advertisements reproduced in this chapter (Figure 1, Plates iv and v) copyright is undetermined after a diligent search. Should you own the copyright to these advertisements please notify the book publishers.
2 See schiaparelli.com/en.