Subversive Beauty: Reassessing the Surreal in 1930s American Vogue

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Historians writing on Surrealism's relationship with the American fashion press have largely focused on the translation of surrealist imagery within late 1930's fashion advertisements. Following the emergence of Surrealism in America in 1936, several major fashion magazines drew from Surrealism as a means of transforming dreams into capital. According to Richard Martin, publications like American Vogue and Harper's Bazaar served as the primary points of dissemination for the surrealist style during this period: "It was precisely Surrealism's ability to juxtapose the real and unreal that made it a primary form of advertising and media expression. Merchandise, in its crassest form, could be seen; the dream of the consumer product, whether fashion or otherwise, could also be envisioned." The proliferation of surrealist imagery in 1930s fashion advertising has led critics and scholars to link the commercialization of Surrealism to the American fashion magazine.

While the appropriation of Surrealism in fashion advertisements threatened its status as a form of high art in the United States, surrealist scholars have yet to consider the creative direction of *Vogue* during the interwar period.⁴ Starting in 1929, the magazine's publisher, Condé Nast, initiated a series of changes that led *Vogue* to become a site for surrealist intervention. That year, he hired Mehemed Fehmy Agha as *Vogue's* new art director, a Russian émigré who undertook the first major redesign of the magazine and brought photography to the forefront. He also set up photographic studios in London and Paris that allowed him to recruit avantgarde artists and photographers who displayed surrealistic qualities within their work: Georges Hoyningen-Huené, Cecil Beaton, and Horst P. Horst. These three photographers along with Agha extended the aesthetic boundaries of the fashion spread. For this reason, surrealist fashion photography is one of the most innovative and experimental developments to occur within the magazine in the 1930s.

Vogue's staff photographers brought the unusual elements and techniques

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of surrealist photography to American audiences prior to Surrealism's arrival in the United States; however, scholars writing on Surrealism's influence in American fashion magazines reject the notion that surrealist fashion photography contributed to the creation of new forms and ideas. Richard Martin, Susan Sontag, Dickran Tashjian, and Sandra Zalman, among others, have written about Surrealism's influence on American popular culture, and have argued that fashion magazines merely commercialized Surrealism in the 1930s.⁵ For Martin and Zalman, surrealistinfluenced fashion advertising became an effective means of promoting desire for the commercial product.⁶ Other scholars view Surrealism's rapprochement with the fashion world as undercutting the Surrealists' photographic legacy. Sontag claimed that photograms, solarizations, and multiple exposures were marginalized once they were appropriated by fashion photographers; Tashjian argued that mass media interpretations of Surrealism were often shallow and misleading because the politics of Surrealism had to be removed in order to appeal to a wider audience. I argue that surrealist fashion photography was not just a visual manifestation of the dream image, but rather an iteration of Surrealism put forward by the surrealist artist and photographer Man Ray.8

Ray's aptitude for commercial photography influenced Surrealism's engagement with the world of fashion. Prior to becoming a member of the surrealist movement, Ray explored photography as a medium and as a commercial product through his involvement in Dada. ⁹ His collaborations with Marcel Duchamp led him to view the photographic medium as a means of de-contextualizing and subverting commodity culture. From his assimilation of a range of ideas and technical possibilities, Ray became a key figure in Surrealism and brought fashion photography to the forefront of the surrealist journals. Interwar fashion magazines also endorsed Ray's photographic experimentations in that they offered a new way to depict fashion on the printed page. *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Harper's Bazaar* frequently reproduced his experimental fashion photography. ¹⁰ Ray also received additional fashion assignments from other couture houses like Worth, Chanel, and Schiaparelli. Drawing from his background in surrealist photography, Ray's fashion oeuvre often expressed a "surrealist style" and thus serves as a rich source for the intersection of Surrealism and fashion on the printed page.

Apart from Ray's photographic experimentations, readings of Surrealism in American *Vogue* tend to focus on the use of surrealist imagery within fashion advertising. In contrast I explore the incorporation of photographic surrealist techniques within several fashion editorials. Unlike advertisements that appeared in the front and back of each issue, *Vogue*'s editorial section gave creative license to its staff photographers and art directors. Editorials in 1930s American, British, and French *Vogue* reported on the latest fashions coming out of Paris, and were considered to be the epitome of taste and elegance inside the magazine. ¹¹ Experimenting with photographic surrealist techniques, *Vogue's* staff photographers

drastically changed the presentation of haute couture in the 1930s. They did not produce advertisements but instead created images that at times called *Vogue's* pursuit of elegance and refinement into question.

In this essay I examine original issues of American Vogue along with editorial correspondence to understand how Vogue's staff photographers brought the unusual elements and techniques of surrealist photography to the magazine's editorial section. I begin by discussing the transatlantic manifestations of surrealist fashion photography and how American Vogue became suspectable to the aesthetic devices of Surrealism prior to the Museum of Modern Art's 1936 exhibition, "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism." I then reassess three fashion editorials in American Vogue illustrated by Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton, and Horst. During the interwar period, Nast set up photographic studios in London and Paris and hired several key photographers who were familiar with and/or involved in the surrealist movement. Lastly, I identify how their specific uses of photographic surrealist techniques align with the marvelous, a key concept of Surrealism that found expression within Ray's surrealist fashion photography. By experimenting with lighting, unusual angles, and darkroom processes, I argue that surrealist-influenced fashion editorials in 1930s American Vogue were more than just a commercial endeavor. Vogue's staff photographers brought a surrealist sensibility to the magazine's pages that briefly challenged the commercial ethos of Vogue's editorial section.

Transatlantic Manifestations of Surrealist Fashion Photography

Surrealist scholars have yet to critically engage with fashion editorials illustrated by Vogue's staff photographers. Those who have investigated the incorporation of surrealist aesthetic devices in 1930s fashion photography focus primarily on Ray's fashion oeuvre. 12 As one of the first members of the avantgarde to crossover into fashion photography in the 1920s, Ray's photographic experimentations were featured throughout the pages of several avant-garde journals and fashion magazines. His initial collaborations with Alexey Brodovitch at Harper's Bazaar afforded him the opportunity to creatively arrange fashion onto photographic paper. 13 In fact, the first photograph he published in *Bazaar* demonstrated his integration of photographic surrealist techniques in fashion photography. Published in September of 1934, Fashions by Radio illustrated the latest fashions sent by wire photo from Paris openings to New York (Fig. 1).¹⁴ Rather than focusing on the garment's design or construction, Ray used his cameraless photogram technique, known as rayography, to produce an impression of the gown. By means of his experimentation with different light sources and exposures, the model and garment appear as if in the process of being transmitted to New York over radio waves.

Although Ray's photographic experimentations brought about a new way of representing fashion on the printed page, American audiences were unaware of Surrealism's influence on popular culture until the latter half of the 1930s. In 1936,

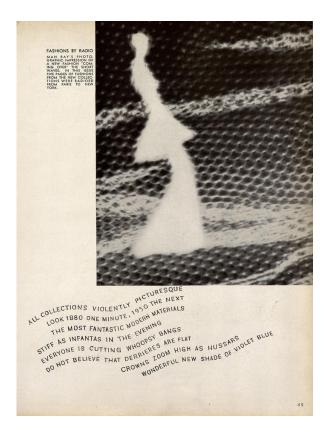


Fig. 1. Man Ray, Fashions by Radio from Harper's Bazaar (September 1934: 45) © Man Ray 2015 Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris 2020

the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr Jr., organized the first major exhibition of surrealist art in the United States. ¹⁵ Rather than discussing the movement's political agenda as it was put forward by the French writer and poet, André Breton, Barr portrayed Surrealism as a "heterogenous mixture of art and culture" and exhibited works by Dalí alongside cartoons of Disney characters. ¹⁶ His representation of Surrealism as a visual manifestation greatly affected the American public's perception of Surrealism. In fact numerous advertising campaigns drew from Surrealism's association with dreams the following year. ¹⁷

In comparison to Barr's representation of Surrealism as an escape from reality, surrealist practitioners sought to address social and psychic repression operating under capitalism. In Europe, Surrealism was dominated by Breton; he published the "First Manifesto of Surrealism" in 1924 and thus effectively founded the movement. Throughout the interwar period Breton influenced the direction of Surrealism, contributing to numerous avant-garde publications in France. Drawing from Sigmund Freud's analysis of dreams and the unconscious, he defined Surrealism as an "absolute liberation of the mind." For him, the unconscious was the voice of a truer, better reality that was more receptive to one's desires.

Breton believed artists could render a state of "pure psychic automatism" and elude conscious control through a variety of automatic writing techniques.²⁰ In 1929, he combined his view of Freud and psychoanalysis with the theoretical basis of Marxism in order to challenge rationalism and repression within bourgeois society.²¹ Surrealism had then become a way of looking inward in order to change the principal problems of life through the unconscious and dreams.

Breton's political agenda led the Surrealists to engage with the world of fashion. Surrealism was not passive nor did American fashion magazines unknowingly or unwillingly appropriate it. Instead, the Surrealists consciously explored fashion for its visual, semantic, and cultural contradictions throughout the '20s. In 1925, the Surrealists published a fashion photograph on the cover of La Révolution surréaliste (Fig. 2). The photograph in question depicts a fashion mannequin at the foot of a grand staircase, wearing a silk chiffon slip dress designed by Paul Poiret. Originally conceived for French Vogue, the image was taken by Ray at the 1925 "Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes" in Paris. ²² Main Bocher, the editor of French Vogue, commissioned him to photograph the latest fashions shown on display at the Pavillon d'Élégance. This particular photograph captivated Bocher and led him to promise Ray the title page of the August issue. The manner in which he photographed Poiret's design, however, also intrigued the Surrealists who took an interest in the fashion mannequin. Breton convinced Ray to publish the fashion photograph on the cover of their journal one month prior to its publication in French Vogue. Bocher had to pull the August cover but agreed to reproduce several other photographs by Ray inside the issue.

In French Vogue, the images documented the latest styles by Poiret, Lucien Lelong, and Louise Boulanger, among others, while the Surrealists chose to exploit the photograph's connection to the material world. In placing the image between the words: "et guerre au travail" (and war on work), the mannequin was transformed "from an icon of ephemeral beauty into an exemplar bohemian satire" that spoke to the dangerous lures of the commodity. Removed from its original context, the photograph became a means of disseminating Surrealism's social and political aspirations. Based on its growing position in commodity culture, fashion had become one of the most salient mediums for surrealist creation. This was not however understood by the American public nor reflected in Barr's exhibition.

Breton's repositioning of Surrealism following his second manifesto effectively ended the French Surrealists preoccupation with the world of fashion; however, several of *Vogue's* staff photographers continued to explore surrealist-influenced fashion photography within the magazine's American, French, and British editions. This was largely due to Nast's endorsement of avant-garde practices, one that allowed modernist conceptual and artistic devices to infiltrate the magazine's pages during the interwar period. Unsatisfied with the quality of illustrations in *Vogue*, Nast devised a plan that would allow avant-garde artists and photographers



Fig. 2. Man Ray, *Pavilion of Elegance*, 1925, commissioned by Main Bocher for the August issue of French *Vogue* in 1925, yet published on the cover of *La Révolution surréaliste* one month prior; © Man Ray 2015 Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/ ADAGP, Paris 2020

to bring their innovative vision to the magazine. In 1916, he launched a British edition.²⁴ Until then no American publication or newspaper had established a foreign presence beyond a small export of its press run.²⁵ Vogue was the first American magazine to have a foreign edition produced and edited locally. Nast later launched a French edition in 1920 that allowed him to recruit a number of photographers living in Paris, namely, Man Ray, Georges Hoyningen Huené, and Horst P. Horst.²⁶ Vogue's expansion exposed American readers to the work of avant-garde artists and photographers whose understanding of Surrealism had developed in relation to Breton's philosophies and not with Dalí's vision of the fantastic and dreamlike.

In 1929, Nast hired Agha to redesign American Vogue. ²⁷ Drawing from design innovations introduced in European publications like *Die Wiener Mode* (Vienna Fashion), *Die Form* (The Form), and *Neue Dekoration* (New Decoration), Agha drastically changed the magazine's design and layout. ²⁸ He placed photography at the center and creatively arranged photographs on the fashion page, "removing their frames, enlarging them and filling whole pages and double spreads." ²⁹ He also used multiple sizes and angles, tilting, overlapping, or scaling photographs to create dynamic collage-like layouts. ³⁰ In bringing photography to the forefront of American Vogue, Agha's innovations in graphic design and layout ultimately heightened the effects of surrealist fashion photographs.

From the outset fashion photography held a prominent position within Surrealism. As Richard Martin points out, "Fashion and its instruments were at the heart of the Surrealist metaphor, touching on the imagery of women and the correlation between the world of real objects and the life of objects in the mind."³¹ The Surrealists' publication of Ray's fashion photograph on the cover of La Revolution surréaliste demonstrates an initial engagement with the world of fashion, while Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton, and Horst continued to experiment with the principles and techniques of surrealist photography inside American Vogue. Through their use of framing and darkroom manipulation, they effectively extended the aesthetic boundaries of the fashion spread. Vogue's ties to the European avant-garde led the magazine to become something more than just a vehicle that sold haute couture. It also put forward new forms of artistic exploration and more specifically, the marvelous. In what follows I analyze key works by Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton, and Horst. I show how their specific uses of photographic surrealist techniques brought Surrealism's revolutionary character to American Vogue before Surrealism became known by the American public as a means of prompting desire for the latest fashions. I also interpret how the magazine's editors co-opted the surrealist effects of surrealist fashion photography in the late 1930s.

Surrealist Fashion Photography within 1930s American Vogue

Hoyningen-Huené was the first *Vogue* staff photographer to use new and radical photographic techniques in the 1930s. The importance of his style lies in



Fig. 3. Georges Hoyningen-Huené, Bas Relief from Vogue (U.S. edition, November 15, 1931: 44-45) © Condé Nast Publications

his new compositions and surrealist effects. These can be seen in his illustration of an editorial that ran in the November issue of American Vogue in 1931, and which brings together the classical and the contemporary body (Fig. 3). Entitled Bas Relief, this photograph shows the same model wearing a pale pink crêpe pajamas by Madeline Vionnet positioned before a black, empty background. Drawing from Vionnet's reference to Greek sculpture, Hoyningen-Huené used different light sources to call attention to the model's figure that then emerges from beneath the fabric as a kind of second skin, while the white satin textile gives the appearance of her flesh as marble. His decision to photograph the model as though she were floating in empty space disrupts the illusion of physical reality. She instead appears as a mysterious entity that emerges from the classical past. Hoyningen-Huené's reference to classicism is reiterated within the title and the text below it, both of which describe Vionnet's pyjamas [sic] as an embodiment of Grecian grace and simplicity.

Hoyningen-Huené's meticulous, formal composition exemplifies his aesthetic style. In not photographing the model in an elaborate studio set-up or decorative interior, he would often use simple lighting effects and strong graphic elements to evoke a particular mood or setting. As Hoyningen-Huené explained:

I would plan backgrounds and introduce various props, then in the middle of a sitting I would discover that they hindered me and I would instantly discard them, no matter how much I planned the overall effect, and once I freed myself of all unessential contraptions, I would return to the simplicity and calm of an unencumbered scene and concentrate on the mood.³³

His use of empty space and lighting imparts a sense of ambiguity and mystery. In the photograph, Hoyningen-Huené transcended the four walls of *Vogue's* Paris studio and created a visual manifestation of the model emerging, as a classical figure, onto photographic paper.

As one of the realist mediums, photography should have been rejected by the Surrealists who sought to render reality from the point of view of the unconscious. Rosalind Krauss, however, demonstrated how the Surrealist's exploration of different photographic techniques allowed them to create new images that did not cohere to reality. Instead, their manipulations of the photographic image—whether through photographic framing, collage, or darkroom processes—disrupted the simultaneous presence of reality while preserving the unity of a single print. According to Krauss, the Surrealists' manipulations of the camera lens or photographic image related to free association and dreams, and estranged the representation of the world to reveal the hidden universe of unconscious desires and dreams that lie underneath. Rather than evolving from a state of consciousness, they challenged or refuted photography's traditional temporal instantaneity: the photographic image becomes not an instantaneous recording of physical reality, but the result of unconscious creation. Through their use of photographic framing and manipulation, *Vogue's* staff photographers also refuted the illusion of reality that photography typically offers.

In *Bas Relief*, Hoyningen-Huené's use of the camera lens, lighting, and darkroom processes led him to transform the model into an ethereal and gracious form on the fashion page.³⁶ His use of lighting exploited the model's features and silhouette, while his use of empty space alluded to a dream-like scene that displaced the model from reality. Through his use of complex lighting and a surrealist depiction of the element of space, Hoyningen-Huené produced a kind of metamorphosis that blurs the boundaries between her body and the relics of the classical past; she is contained, limited, and depersonalized in a mysterious and dream-like setting. Oscillating between a state of the inhuman and the living, he created a new creature that doubles the human body and evokes the marvelous.

The particular placement of this image within American Vogue's Vanity issue further disoriented the viewer and her reading of Bas Relief as a fashion editorial. Hoyningen-Huené's photograph was placed alongside several other images and articles that offered beauty advice to the magazine's readership. "Vogue's Eye View" stated:



Fig. 4. Cecil Beaton, *Shadow Her* from *Vogue* (U.S. edition, December 1, 1935: 70-71) © Condé Nast Publications

We are too intelligent, we twentieth-centuarians [sic], to think that beauty is a gift of the Gods—something you either have or haven't. We belong to a generation that believes anything is achievable—anything can be self-made—that an ugly duckling is ugly only through her own fault.³⁷

This issue was meant to provide American women with new ideas and methods for improving their self-image. Hoyningen-Huené's transformation of the model into a depersonalized relic, however, departed from the magazine's intention of putting forward a new kind of beauty viewers could imitate. His imaginative use of light and perspective offered new ways of rendering fashion and the female body, thereby challenging canons of beauty and gender that were central to *Vogue's* core mission. The same might be said for the chief photographer of British *Vogue*, Cecil Beaton.

Towards the latter half of the '30s *Vogue's* editorial staff questioned the use of photographic surrealist techniques in editorial fashion photography, a response that was primarily a reaction to Beaton's work.³⁸ Following several visits to *Vogue's* Paris studio in the early '30s, Beaton began to incorporate surrealist motifs in his photography, most notably incongruous juxtapositions and strong shadows.³⁹ On December 1, 1935, he published a photograph entitled *Shadow Her* in American *Vogue* that depicts two models in an empty studio, wearing the latest fringed gowns by

Lucien Leong (Fig. 4).⁴⁰ These women are accompanied by six debonair phantoms dressed in tuxedos. Beaton used backlighting to project their silhouettes onto a white muslin screen, which can be seen behind the models. These men appear as ghost-like shadows emerging from the unconscious, projected onto the models' bodies.

While Beaton is known for his romantic backgrounds, *Shadow Her* demonstrates his penchant for surrealist effects. He would often recreate a surreal mise-en-scène in *Vogue's* London studio by building up an intricate layering of shadows or featuring irrational juxtapositions.⁴¹ Beaton described:

We worked in the studio with large transparent screens of stretched white muslin, which enabled us to indulge in a great variety of shadow effects; and by placing strange objects, and even strange people, on the far side of the screen, we produced a background of fantastic silhouetted shapes.⁴²

Beaton's projection of the male models onto a white muslin screen creates a hallucinatory scene that makes the women strange; they appear as Grecian goddesses arising from the abyss, and isolated in a sea of male suitors. With their repeated shadows and *doppelgänger* silhouettes, these constructed entities open up the image to a surrealist interpretation.

Beaton's juxtaposition of ghost-like figures with live models produced a moment of "fission." Krauss uses this term to describe when the addition of a copy exposes the fallacy of the original: "For it is doubling that produces the formal rhythm of spacing—the two-step banishes the unitary condition of the moment, that creates *within* the moment an experience of fission." Beaton's transformation of male models into silhouettes disrupts the illusion of photographic reality and leads the reader to consider the conundrum with which they are presented, or, the "fissure" within reality before them. In *Shadow Her*, Beaton creates a new image that blurs the distinction between surrealist creation and fashion photography. These female figures are shown oscillating between different states, the living and the dream, and not within a decorative interior.

Beaton's photograph was featured within *Vogue's* report on the Paris openings, in an issue that included a number of articles on winter sports and holiday gift ideas. Placed as it is between several illustrations and how-to-articles, the photograph confronts *Vogue's* readers with an ambiguous scene that does not conform with other images or articles in the issue. With Beaton's photograph, the reader no longer receives the image as a good consumer. Rather they are puzzled with uncertainty and must stop to analyze it. Instead of selling haute couture or gift ideas, this image explodes the reader's expectations. As is the case in other surrealist photography, Beaton revealed new realities that, by picturing women in extremes of

terror, challenge collective perceptions of feminine beauty.

Shadow Her created a dilemma for the editorial staff of American Vogue. Fashion photographs were to offer women a look they could recreate; they were to capture the line of a new look or the essence of a collection. 44 Yet Beaton's experiments with lighting, shadows, and framing effectively hindered the viewer's reading of the garments. In his correspondence to Nast on January of 1937, Agha wrote,

Last year, for instance, [Beaton] tried to introduce surrealistic methods in his work. He started with something which was extremely interesting, but unfortunately, also very dangerous for *Vogue*. His first surrealistic photographs were based on the idea of placing elegant women in extremely unelegant [sic] surroundings.⁴⁵

Agha's concern about Beaton's use of surrealist photographic techniques demonstrates the impact of surrealist fashion photographs on the magazine's American edition. Surrealist-influenced fashion photography diverted from the magazine's intent to provide its readership with "a clear and precise representation of the products they promoted." This diversion was compounded by the fact that the magazine would often publish the same content within its British, French and American editions.

By 1928, French *Vogue* began to endorse visually disorienting imagery that addressed a French audience already exposed to Surrealism through various publications and exhibitions organized by surrealist practitioners. ⁴⁷ The transatlantic exchange between *Vogue's* French and American editions thus allowed the disorientating effects of surrealist fashion photography to appear before the magazine's American readership. However the reception of surrealist fashion photography changed after American department stores and advertising campaigns appropriated surrealist motifs during the late 1930s. Surrealist fashion photography moved from the sidelines of American *Vogue's* editorial section to the forefront of the magazine.

In January of 1937 Agha declared Surrealism's affinity for commercial advertising at the Advertising and Marketing Forum in New York City: "Surrealism deals primarily in the basic appeals so dear to the advertiser's heart. It capitalizes on fear, disgust, wonder, and uses the eye-catching, bewildering devices which we all know are the basis for many a sound advertising campaigns." Vogue's editorial staff soon interpreted the surrealist effects of fashion editorials so as to follow Agha's newfound understanding of Surrealism as an effective tool for advertising. This new interpretation can be seen in a spread Horst illustrated for the magazine's report on the Paris openings of the following year (Fig. 5).

Published in August of 1938, *Mammoth Tricorn* and *Miniature Tricorn* captures the latest styles of tricorn hats designed by Suzy and Elsa Schiaparelli. To the left, a





Fig. 5. Horst P. Horst, Mammoth Tricorn and Miniature Tricorn from Vogue (U.S. edition, August 15, 1938: 54-55) © Condé Nast Publications

model wears Suzy's large tricorn hat "folded obliquely, trimmed with Brandenburg braid, worn sideways with musketeer bravado." To the right another model is shown wearing Schiaparelli's miniature tricorn hat with "a brim processed into a blunted triangle and a crown covered with black satin bow-knots." Rather than showing the hats or jewelry as part of an ensemble, Horst conceals the models' bodies behind geometrical architecture. His use of dramatic lighting further disrupts the reader's view of the models' facial features and limbs. Only their eyes, head, and hands remain visible amidst the various props and accessories.

Horst honed his skills in the photographic studio of French *Vogue* under the guidance of Hoyningen-Huené.⁵² His signature characteristics include his striking use of black, dramatic lighting, and geometrical forms.⁵³ While previous photographers avoided using shadows in fear that the final image would be dull and unclear, Horst often used spotlights, floodlights, and reflectors to create deep shadows and highlights in order to accentuate specific features.⁵⁴ As he described:

My first pictures were loaded with background. I was continually

dismantling palaces, hauling in small forests and entire hothouses meant to enhance but really crushing the little woman in their midst. Finally I realized the incongruous effect and began a series of strong black compositions that made a big inky splash on the magazine page blotting everything else out.⁵⁵

Horst used this technique in both *Mammoth Tricorn* and *Miniature Tricorn* to remove distracting elements and draw attention to the detailing of the hats and jewelry. In doing so, the images begin to dismember reality by disembodying the model as well as the architecture.

Horst's use of lighting and architectural forms mimics the angled look, a technique the Surrealists used to isolate objects from their traditional contexts and everyday associations. ⁵⁶ In focusing on either an unfamiliar angle or on a fragment of the whole, they removed the female body from its corporeal reference. ⁵⁷ In disrupting the viewer's reading of the female body, the angled look showed women as sites of desire and not as of objects of desire. Horst's exploration of studio lighting and photographic framing brought a surreal interpretation of the female body to *Vogue*'s pages. Dismembered and separated from the rest of their bodies, the models appear distorted and unbalanced and thus removed from physical reality. Instead of standing in for the female consumer, they became props similar to the fashion mannequin.

While Horst's photographic manipulations were extreme in their dismemberment and fragmentation of the female body, Vogue's editor-in-chief Edna Woolman Chase interpreted Horst's surrealist fashion photography for the magazine's readership. 58 Both images were published in Vogue's August issue dedicated to the promotion of the latest Parisian fashions. Many of the pictures inside the magazine showed women what to wear and how to create ensembles. At first glance, Horst's spread appears to stand out and disrupt the viewer's habitual expectations situated as it is between several illustrations and straightforward fashion photographs. Upon further examination, however, it becomes clear that Chase addressed the exchange between Surrealism and fashion in this particular issue. In "Vogue's Eye View," she wrote: "Significant things are beginning to emerge from behind the wall of the future. First to come into sight are the new hats."59 Her description was published alongside another image by Horst that featured the same model wearing Schiaparelli's ostrich-tipped hat. 60 In drawing attention to Horst's use of dramatic lighting and of the angled look, Chase undermined the very effect of such experimentations. The reader's eyes are instead drawn to Schiaparelli's design, emerging from behind the column. Hence, surrealist-influenced fashion editorials had been co-opted by the magazine's editorial staff by the end of the 1930s and ceased to disrupt the flow of the magazine.

Subversive Beauty

Surrealism influenced all areas of American Vogue, not just advertising. The fashion photographers I've discussed were the primary photographers who took up photographic surrealist techniques in the magazine's American edition. They did not photograph models against fantastical backgrounds or in relation to surrealist artworks, as was the case in fashion advertising of the late 1930s. Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton and Horst alternatively created new pictures that transgressed the boundaries of fashion photography. Their manipulations of lighting, perspective, and the camera lens disrupted the identity of the wearer, along with the magazine's general intent of delivering pertinent information about the latest styles. Models were given new assignments in surrealist fashion photographs; they were seen emerging from the unconscious and onto photographic paper.

Vogue's creative direction also brought a surrealist sensibility to the magazines' design. Nast encouraged photographers to draw from experimental photographic techniques while Agha's innovations in graphic design and layout heightened the effects of their work. Previous scholarship has viewed surrealist fashion photography in isolation, largely ignoring its integration in the mass media fashion magazine. An analysis of the placement of the photographs inside each issue reveals how disruptive they were to Vogue's overall narrative: like surrealist photographs they initially caused disbelief and uncertainty on the part of the viewer.

Surrealist fashion photography not only altered the presentation of fashion in photography but also that of the professional model. Prior to the '30s fashion photography was conservative and standardized, despite the wide range of artistic experimentation that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Under Nast's direction the magazine became a series of incongruous visual juxtapositions of dreamlike ambiguity and mystery. The sophistication of fashion production at the time also required a certain degree of knowledge that led fashion photographers to employ professional models with beautiful faces and perfect bodies. As anonymous figures, these women were not selected based on their ability to promote fashion through their social status. They rather became mere silhouettes against backdrops or hangers onto which garments were displayed, casting aside traditional points of emphasis in fashion editorials of the previous decades. Similar to the transformation of everyday objects pictured in the pages of the surrealist journals, these models were metamorphosed into mysterious figures of haute couture.

While each of the three fashion editorials I've discussed transgressed the boundaries of fashion depiction, they were received differently by *Vogue*'s editors and readership once Surrealism fully arrived in America. By the late '30s the disorienting effects of surrealist fashion photographs gave way to surreal-like settings that featured models in fantastical studio set-ups or against the backdrop of Dali's paintings. In fact, Dali became the most widely exhibited surrealist artist in the United States. ⁶⁴ Just three months after Barr's exhibition opened, American *Vogue*

published a number of works by Dalí alongside several evening gowns for sale at Bonwit Teller and Bergdorf Goodman.⁶⁵ Dalí's Surrealism was a revolution against monotony which better reflected Nast's intention to "portray not just beautiful women in clothing but every detail of how that clothing was constructed and worn" in that his figurative artworks generally left behind the visual ambiguity of the surrealist fashion photographs.⁶⁶

The reception of 1930s surrealist fashion photography has been confined to the fantastical, mysterious, and dreamlike. More specifically, in the early '30s Vogue's staff photographers Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton and Horst introduced the unusual elements and techniques of surrealist photography to the magazine's editorial pages. They did not merely exploit Surrealism as a marketing ploy. They created new pictures that for a time disrupted the conventions of mass culture, and from inside of the American fashion magazine itself.

- 1 For scholarship on Surrealism's proliferation in 1930's American fashion magazines, see Nancy Hall-Duncan, *The History of Fashion Photography* (New York: International Museum of Photography, 1979); Richard Martin, "Surrealism and the World of Fashion" in *Fashion and Surrealism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 217-225; Dickran Tashjian, "Surrealism in Service of Fashion," in *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 66-90; Hannah Crawford, "Surrealism and the Fashion Magazine," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Biography* 14, no. 2 (2004): 212-246; Sandra Zalman, "The Vernacular as Vanguard: Alfred Barr, Salvador Dalí, and the US Reception of Surrealism in the 1930s," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 1, no. 1 (2007): 44-67; Sandra Zalman, "Surrealism Between Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 11-46.
- 2 The first exhibition dedicated solely to Surrealism in the United States was held at the Wadsworth Antheneum in 1931 and later on displayed at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932. Yet, Sandra Zalman proposes that the first major exhibition of Surrealism to be held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936 informed the American public's understanding of Surrealism as a visual manifestation by transcending the boundaries between art and mass culture. Zalman, "Surrealism Between Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 11.
- 3 Richard Martin, Fashion and Surrealism (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 11.
- 4 Helena Lewis proclaimed that Surrealism was depoliticized in the United States and stripped of its ideological content. This was largely due to the fact that American audiences were not able to engage with the theoretical and political underpinnings of surrealist creation through their publications; it wasn't until the 1940's that surrealist texts were widely translated from French to English. Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragona House, 1988).
- 5 For scholarship on the commercialization of Surrealism within America, see Keith L. Eggener, "An Amusing Lack of Logic': Surrealism and Popular Entertainment," *American Art* 7, no. 4 (1993): 30-45; Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995); Angela Miller, "With Eyes Wide Open': The American Reception of Surrealism" in *Caught by Politics: Hitler Exiles and American Visual Culture*, eds. Sabine Eckmann and Lutz Koepnick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 61-94; Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture*.
- 6 Martin, Fashion and Surrealism, 218; Zalman, "The Vernacular as Vanguard," 51.
- 7 Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 52; Tashjian, A Boatland of Madmen, 75.
- 8 Andy Grundberg has written about the different avenues of surrealist scholarship: those who view Surrealism as a singular, historical moment between the wars, as one "thread" among many others in the history of modern art, or as a pulse of revolt that continues to reoccur throughout the history of modernism. In his essay, Grundberg specifically viewed the self-conscious cropping, collaging, and refiguring of reality in contemporary photography as a marker or reoccurrence of surrealist photography. In this paper, I view surrealist fashion photography as an independent reoccurrence brought forth by Vogue's staff photographers whose photographic experimentations were not openly acknowledged by other surrealist practitioners, yet still produced instances of the marvelous within the editorial pages of American Vogue through their photographic experimentations. Andy Grundberg "On the Dissecting Table: The Unnatural Coupling of Surrealism and Photography" in Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography, ed. Carol Squiers (New York: New Press, 1999), 123-133.
- 9 Launched as a reaction to the First World War, Dada was an avant-garde movement that experimented with various materials and techniques in order to comment on modern society's shortcomings. The Dadaists were particularly drawn to photography and developed photomontage, pasting cuttings from newspapers and commercial magazines together to form a chaotic, explosive image; a provocative dismembering of reality. Ray first recognized commercial photography as a vehicle for artistic exploration through his collaborations with Duchamp on the single-issue art journal, *New York* Dada, that assimilated the size and format of the commercial magazine. Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*

- (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986), 13.
- 10 Man Ray and John Esten, *Man Ray: Bazaar Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988). In 1922, Frank Crowninshield, *Vanity Fair's* editor- in-chief, published four of Ray's rayographs in the magazine's November issue that captivated the Surrealists including André Breton who described Ray's photograms as "pre-Surrealist by virtue of his subconsciously derived, refractured visual imagery" in his inaugural manifesto. Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1988), 124.
- 11 Martin Harrison, *Appearances: Fashion Photography Since 1945*, ed. Mark Holborn (London: Jonathon Cape Ltd., 1991), 15.
- 12 For scholarship on Man Ray's fashion oeuvre, see Man Ray and John Esten, *Man Ray: Bazaar Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988); Willis Hartshorn, Merry Foresta, and John Esten, *Man Ray in Fashion* (New York: International Center of Photography, 1990); Margaret Sundell, "From Fine Art to Fashion: Man Ray's Ambivalent Avant-Garde" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009).
- 13 Harper's Bazaar underwent a publishing transformation in the early thirties. In 1934, Carmel Snow, Bazaar's editor-in-chief, hired Alexander Brodovitch to redesign the magazine and persuaded Ray to join the magazine the following year. Ray, Man Ray: Bazaar Years, 12-13.
- 14 Man Ray, "Fashions by Radio," Harper's Bazaar (September 1934): 45.
- 15 Even though "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" was not the first exhibition of surrealist art in the United States, Zalman argued that this exhibition spoke to a wide audience and captivated the American public. Zalman, "Surrealism Between the Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 11.

 16 Ibid., 19.
- 17 Zalman has written about numerous advertising campaigns that either drew from surrealist strategies or directly appropriated surrealist artworks following MoMA's 1936 exhibition, including but not limited to the department stores Bonwit Teller and Macy's. Zalman, "The Vernacular as Vanguard," 49-51.
- 18 Briony Fer, "Surrealism, Myth and Psychoanalysis," in *Realism, Rationalism, and Surrealism: Art Between the Wars*, eds. Briony Fer, David Batchelor and Paul Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 172-173.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 26.
- 21 Fer, "Surrealism, Myth, and Psychoanalysis," 180.
- 22 Hartshorn, Man Ray in Fashion, 16-17.
- 23 Ulrich Lehmann, "Stripping Her Bare: The Mannequin in Surrealism" in Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion, ed. Peter Wollen (London: Hayward Gallery, 1998), 92.
- 24 Norberto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva, In Vogue: The Illustrated History of the World's Most Famous Fashion Magazine (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 26.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Vogue's staff photographers were well acquainted with Ray's fashion oeuvre. In fact, Hoyningen-Huené and Ray were close friends. They collaborated on a fashion portfolio of the most beautiful women in Paris: "Man Ray was to take the photographs and I was supposed to supply the sitters as well as the props and background." Shortly after, Hoyningen-Huené was given an exclusive contract for his illustrations and became the chief photographer of Vogue's Paris studio in 1925. George Hoyningen-Huené and International Center of Photography, Eye for Elegance: George Hoyningen-Huené (New York: International Center of Photography, 1980), 10-11.
- 27 For scholarship on Agha's influence on the layout and design of *Vogue* magazine, see Roger R. Remington and Barbara J. Hodik, *Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Stephen J. Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 247–8; Antje Krause-Wahl, "American Fashion and European Art—Alexander Liberman and the Politics of Taste in *Vogue* of the 1950s," *Journal of Design History* 28, no. 1 (2015): 67-82.

- 28 Krause-Wahl, 69.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Martin, Fashion and Surrealism, 11.
- 32 Geroges Hoyningen-Huené, "Bas Relief," Vogue U.S. edition, November 15, 1931: 44-45.
- 33 William A. Ewing, *The Photographic Art of Hoyningen-Huené* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 13.
- 34 Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in Service of Surrealism" in L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism, eds. Rosalind Krauss, Jane Livingston and Dawn Ades (Washington, D.C.; New York: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 7.
- 35 Ibid., 35.
- 36 In 1930, Jean Cocteau asked Hoyningen-Huené to work on his first cinematic production, *Le Sang d'un Poète* (The Blood of a Poet). He declined Cocteau's offer. Ewing, *The Photographic Art of Hoyningen-Huené*, 34.
- 37 "Vogue's Eye View," Vogue U.S. edition, November 1, 1931: 39.
- 38 Barron-Duncan discussed *Vogue's* editorial response to surrealist imagery in 1930s fashion photographs. She specifically noted Agha's displeasure with Cecil Beaton's work in his correspondence with Condé Nast and Edna Woolman Chase. Rachel S. Barron-Duncan, "Marginal Dislocations: Fashioning Surrealism within the Pages of Interwar French *Vogue*" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2015), 86-87.
- 39 Hall-Duncan, The History of Fashion Photography, 108, 112.
- 40 Cecil Beaton, "Shadow Her," Vogue U.S. edition, December 1, 1935: 70-71.
- 41 Ibid., 112.
- 42 Cecil Beaton, Photobiography (London: Odhams, 1951), 97.
- 43 Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," October 19 no. 1 (Winter, 1981): 24.
- 44 Harrison, Appearances: Fashion Photography Since 1945, 15.
- 45 Barron-Duncan, "Marginal Dislocations," 86-87.
- 46 Sophie Kurkdjian, "The Emergence of French Vogue: French Identity and Visual Culture in the Fashion Press, 1920-1940," *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 70.
- 47 Rachel Barron Duncan has examined the ways in which Surrealism was portrayed within French popular culture, including fashion magazines during the interwar period. Rachel S. Barron-Duncan, "Transatlantic Translations: Surrealist Modes of Advertising in France and the United States of America," *Visual Resources* 34, no. 3-4 (2018): 232-264. In addition, Sophie Kurkdjian has analyzed the competing visions of *Vogue's* editorial staff. She argued that the magazine's French edition pursued a more artistic approach to fashion illustration during the interwar period, while *Vogue's* American edition undertook a more commercial, industrial approach to the advertisement of fashion. Kurkdjian, "The Emergence of French *Vogue*: French Identity and Visual Culture in the Fashion Press, 1920-1940," *International Journal of Fashion Studies 6*, no. 1 (2019): 63-82.
- 48 M. F. Agha, quoted in "Links Surrealism and Ads," The New York Times, January 23, 1937: 32.
- 49 Horst P. Horst, "Mammoth Tricorn and Miniature Tricorn," Vogue U.S. edition, August 1, 1938: 54-55.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Susanna Brown, Horst: Photographer of Style (New York: Rizzoli, 2014), 11.
- 53 Prior to serving as the chief photographer of French *Vogue*, Horst studied architecture under Le Corbusier. His architectural knowledge informed his fashion work. Angeletti, *In Vogue*, 77.
- 54 Brown, Horst: Photographer of Style, 12.
- 55 George Davis, Horst, Photographs of a Decade (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1944), 10.
- 56 Fer, "Surrealism, Myth and Psychoanalysis," 227.

- 57 Ibid., 229.
- 58 Hannah Crawford has suggested that *Vogue's* interpretation of surrealist fashion photography impacted the surrealist effects of such images on the fashion page. Crawford, "Surrealism in the Fashion Magazine," 242.
- 59 "Vogue's Eye View—The Autumn Forecast," Vogue U.S. edition, August 1, 1938: 29.
- 60 Horst published four additional photographs using the same props in *Vogue's* August issue, including his illustration of "Vogue's Eye View—The Autumn Forecast."
- 61 Hall-Duncan, The History of Fashion Photography, 13.
- 62 Angeletti, In Vogue, 116-188.
- 63 It is important to note that by shifting attention away from real women to the commodity, Hoyningen-Huené, Beaton, and Horst's experimentations ultimately led to the demise of surrealist fashion photography moving forward into the late 1930s.
- 64 Miller, "With Eyes Wide Open," 63-64.
- 65 "Vogue's 3 Man Show," Vogue U.S. edition, March 15, 1937: 82-85.
- 66 Angeletti, In Vogue, 88.