

REVERSING THE GAZE:
ROBERT DOISNEAU AND THE FASHIONING OF COCO CHANEL

by
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DEDICATION

To MF Garrod, for your unending patience and support.
To Jen Garcia, for always keeping me laughing.

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ABSTRACT

Robert Doisneau's 1953 photograph, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, is a visual anomaly for both photographer and subject. Doisneau chose to roam the streets of Paris, capturing images that, though sometimes staged, maintained a visceral quality that implied a fleeting moment. Coco Chanel, on the other hand, well versed in portraiture practice, was a willing collaborator with her photographers in order to create an image that suited her desires. *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* was the third of three images captured by Doisneau during his session at Chanel's studio. The photographs are similar in their use of mirrored reflections to craft an enigmatic view of Chanel, but Doisneau's fashioning of Chanel throughout the series differs dramatically. Originally intended for the pages of French *Vogue*, the image never made it to publication. Taken in the mirrored staircase of Chanel's Paris atelier, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, is situated within a private space that functioned as Chanel's personal heterotopia. A desire to watch her shows in the couture salon below without being seen led to the creation of the mirrored staircase. An examination of the photograph through the twinned lenses of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault illuminates the panoptic nature of the space that afforded Chanel an authorial gaze. Doisneau's photograph, in stark contrast to Chanel's commercial images, dissolves the private space that Chanel inhabited on the staircase. Ultimately, Doisneau's photograph undermines the control that Chanel invested in the staircase and appropriated the mirrors and their fragmented reflections in order to reverse the gaze of Chanel and her image.

INTRODUCTION

The 1920s saw a shift in the way that photography was viewed. Artists like László Moholy-Nagy, a Hungarian expatriate working at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, explored and furthered ideas that would influence Surrealism, and proposed a ‘New Vision’ that allowed a new conception of photography. In the New Vision, “artistic creativity...[was] no longer concerned merely with representation but [became] an instrument or tool with which to train and condition the new vision.”¹ Photography was central to this conception, and “was about finding a new form of perception.”² Emphasis was placed on the physical characteristics of a medium that were distinctly representation and photographic, and it increasingly came to function as a visual language. In 1929, three years before Doisneau sold his first photo to the magazine *L’Excelsior*, an exhibition entitled *Film und Foto* was held in Stuttgart, Germany under Moholy-Nagy and his Bauhaus colleagues direction. The show presented photography’s new role in art, advertising and journalism and had a profound effect on the emergence of the French avant-garde, as many of the ideas were soon assimilated into French photographic culture.³

¹ Peter Hamilton, *Robert Doisneau: A Photographer's Life* (Paris: Éditions Hoëbeke, 1995), 38. This volume is the first authorized biography about Robert Doisneau and, through the help of his children, Hamilton provides a comprehensive survey of the photographer’s life.

² Ibid, 38.

³ Photography was still a relatively new development at this time and had, until this point, been utilized to create images that mimicked traditional painting practice. However, “New angles—shooting directly up or down, tilting the frame to generate a dynamic diagonal—created exciting, unsettling perspectives on a real world,” as further creative potential of the medium was explored. Ibid, 40.

Robert Doisneau was a prolific photographer, from his first photographs in 1932 until his death in 1994. His Paris atelier is rumored to house some 400,000 negatives, taken while Doisneau worked as a photojournalist as well as an individual freelancer. A consideration of his oeuvre shows more depth, as the photographs he took conveyed more than simple news illustrations. Doisneau's preferred method of roaming the Parisian streets—like a modern day *flâneur*⁴—did very little to provide a profitable career. Consequently, Doisneau spent nearly fifty years as a commercial photographer in Paris, a small part of which was spent in the world of fashion. Doisneau was personally drawn to the *banlieue*, the suburbs that made up the outskirts of Paris, and the studios and celebrities of the fashion world stood in stark contrast to the backstreets that he usually roamed. In an interview with art critic and historian Jean-Francois Chevrier, Doisneau responded to a question regarding his short-lived period as a fashion photographer. Chevrier recalls, “he [spoke] of it as though it were the worst misunderstanding of his career, where everything was foreign to him.”⁵ Such a declaration makes one image that was captured during these years all the more intriguing. *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* (Figure 1),⁶ one of three examples from a December 1953 session at

⁴ “Flâneur—that aimless stroller who loses himself in the crowd, who has no destination and goes wherever caprice or curiosity directs his or her steps.” See Edmund White, *The Flâneur: A Stroll Through the Paradoxes of Paris* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 16.

⁵ Jean-Francois Chevrier, “From Craft to Art,” in *Robert Doisneau: From Craft to Art*, 15-77 (Paris: HCB Foundation, 2010), 18.

⁶ Despite social tradition in France that reserved *Mademoiselle* for young or unmarried women and *Madame* for married or older women, Chanel was consistently referred to as *Mademoiselle* throughout her career. One of her early biographies, written by Pierre Galante in 1973, was entitled *Mademoiselle Chanel*.

Chanel's Paris atelier, is entirely anomalous for both the photographer and his famous subject.

Coco Chanel was not typical of Doisneau's chosen subjects, nor was he her typical photographer. At the time the photograph was taken, Chanel was just returning from a post-World War II exile in Switzerland and was hoping to stage a comeback, both personally and in professionally. Her rise to fame, prior to the war and after, was marked by high-class affairs and an elegant lifestyle at which she found herself the center, of attention. One of these affairs supposedly involved a Nazi intelligence officer, with whom she was rumored to have spent the war with in the Ritz Hotel in Paris. She later claimed publicly, "really, a woman my age cannot be expected to look at his passport if she has a chance of a lover," a refusal of guilt that further enraged the French.⁷ The Forces Français de l'Intérieur took Chanel for questioning in August of 1944, but she was quickly released and spent the next ten years traveling and living in Switzerland before returning to Paris to launch her comeback in 1954. Photographs taken of her both before and after the War included commercial images by Richard Avedon (Figure 2) and Cecil Beaton (Figure 3), two well-known celebrity and fashion photographers, as well as artists like Man Ray (Figure 4), who featured her as a singular portrait subject. These photographs portray Chanel as a woman simultaneously embodying her brand and haute couture—the objects and designs with which she became synonymous. Wearing classic suits of tweed, simple boater hats, strands of pearls and costume jewelry, and almost

⁷ Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Karl Lagerfeld, Boy Prince of Fashion," in *The Best American Magazine Writing of 2007*, ed. The American Society of Magazine Editors (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 13.

always with a cigarette, Chanel became as easily recognized by her material attributes as by her physical characteristics. Soon these commercial images came to define her image and that of her company.

Doisneau's 1953 photograph stands in stark contrast to these images. In Doisneau's representation, Chanel's image overwhelms the composition, yet she is never directly seen in the photograph. Rather, her presence is mediated by the presence of the mirror in which she is reflected nine times. A departure from her typically commercial images, Doisneau's photograph also served as a departure from his personal photographic style. Taken in Chanel's mirrored staircase, a space she constructed in order to obtain a omniscient view, Doisneau's photograph ultimately reverses the gaze on Chanel's power system, and does so by virtue of the mirrors that enabled its existence.

Doisneau's earliest images were of inanimate objects (Figure 5), his avoidance of people due to a self-proclaimed shy nature.⁸ However, these early explorations with his camera proved valuable to his later work, as he was forced to explore the space around the objects (and eventually individuals) that he photographed. Doisneau later mused, "In the end, those constraints had a good side. By making me photograph people from a distance, the censorship imposed by my shyness surrounded the scenes with the space I tried to find again later on."⁹ This sense of perpetual space that surrounded the subjects of his photographs would become essential to his work, and its evolution is evident throughout his career. Not one to capture traditional studio portraits, Doisneau was always aware of how his subjects were located within the space they inhabited. He

⁸ Chevrier, "From Craft to Art," 19.

⁹ Ibid, 25.

“learned to see the settings of the *banlieue* (neighborhood) in the backgrounds of...[production designer] Alexandre Trauner’s sets for the films of [French film director] Marcel Carné.”¹⁰ Consequently, Doisneau was forced to find a balance between the spontaneity of roaming the streets and situating what he found in a calculated manner within the frame of his photos. Such was the effect of being born into an era that facilitated new approaches to photography and the image in general.

This receptive atmosphere allowed for the development of numerous illustrated magazines in Europe, all of which included dynamic new use of photographs. The *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung (BIZ)*, a popular magazine, was credited with inventing “both the ‘slice of life’ photograph and the picture story with its sequence of interrelated images,” both of which would be influential for Doisneau.¹¹ New advances in photographic processes also allowed for these new types of photograph, giving photographers greater freedom in the subjects they could capture. Consequently, press photographs shifted from pure documentation into illustrative, with the French photographer becoming a *photographe-illustrateur*.¹² *Vu*, a magazine created by French magazine publisher, editor and photographer Lucien Vogel, rose to prominence in the late 1920s as it embraced the ‘New Vision’ style. Early issues of the magazine featured extensive photographic work by artists like André Kertész and Germaine Krull, and were read by young emerging photographers like Doisneau. The influence of Surrealists like André Breton could be seen in many of the images in *Vu* in addition to images of the

¹⁰ Ibid, 25.

¹¹ Ibid, 47.

¹² Ibid.

everyday such as the street fair scenes captured by Krull. These images encapsulated the *fantastique social de la rue* (social activity of the street)¹³, and marked a fascination with street life that, “reflect an emergent idea of modernism—the city visualized as a vast organism pulsating with the lives of its inhabitants.”¹⁴ It was these images that would influence Doisneau, as he delved even deeper into a photographic connection with daily life.

Doisneau’s early career reached a turning point in 1931 when he became the assistant to André Vigneau. Well-established in the art world as a painter, designer, sculptor and maker of fashion mannequins, Vigneau’s studio was frequented by figures from the visual and literary arts that would profoundly influence the nineteen-year-old Doisneau.¹⁵ It was here Doisneau was introduced to the Prévert brothers¹⁶, Man Ray and others, who often gathered in the studio to argue about established values of the *petit-bourgeois* world. “For the first time, I heard people talking about Surrealism, about Le Corbusier’s ‘living machines,’ about Moholy-Nagy,” Doisneau later reflected. “It’s hard to imagine nowadays what an exciting mix of ideas this was.”¹⁷ Vigneau provided technical knowledge as well as stylistic influence, and as Doisneau’s confidence grew he began to photograph children and adults around Paris and in the banlieue.

¹³ Marja Warehime, *Brassai: Images of Culture and the Surrealist Observer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 75.

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Robert Doisneau*, 47-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 48.

¹⁶ Jacques and Pierre Prévert were brothers living in Paris. Jacques became known for his poetry and writing while Pierre focused on filmmaking. Both brothers were engaged in the ‘New Vision’ scene that was fostered at Vigneau’s studio.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 50.

Military service, however, interfered from 1932-1934, and Doisneau found upon his return, that his position with Vigneau was no longer needed. Motivated by the logistics of having to provide for a family, Doisneau accepted a position as a commercial photographer with the French automaker Renault. While the job helped further develop his technical skills, he detested the work and was eventually fired for too often arriving late. This would mark another turning point in his career, but not before the war intervened.

After serving in the military, Doisneau was discharged to Paris, where he attempted to find work. He eventually became involved with forging documents for the Resistance and continued to take photos as he waited out the Occupation in Paris from 1940-1944. With the rebirth of the RAPHO agency¹⁸ under the direction of Raymond Grosset, Doisneau began to work out of a professional agency, one that he would stay with for nearly fifty years. With RAPHO, Doisneau worked with his friend and colleague Blaise Cendrars on what would eventually become *Le Banlieue de Paris*, Doisneau's first book published in 1949. Doisneau was not the first photographer to find himself captivated by the streets of Paris.¹⁹ Èugene Atget²⁰, "spiritual predecessor of Doisneau," was a photographer little known during his own era, though later appreciated by the likes of Breton and Man Ray, who also captured images of ordinary people around

¹⁸ French photographer Charles Rado originally founded the RAPHO Agency in 1933. The RAPHO acronym was a derived from Rado-Photo, a combination between Rado's last name and photography. The agency focused on humanist photography.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of street photography see Clive Scott, *Street Photography: From Atget to Cartier-Bresson* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007).

²⁰ See *A Corner, rue de Seine* (1924), Eugène Atget, in Scott, *Street Photography*, 178.

the city.²¹ Likewise, Hungarian-born photographer André Kertész²² captured images of Parisians and Paris streets, his photographs causing Mac Orlan to declare in the 1930s, “photography is the greatest expressionist art of our time.”²³ Doisneau embraced Orlan’s belief that the ideal role for photographer and writer was that of *flâneur* as he wandered the streets of Paris, waiting for the right images to find their way into his lens²⁴.

The photographs that Doisneau enjoyed taking, as he wandered around Paris, observing the “theatre,” as he called it, took on a distinctive set of characteristics that came to typify his images of *la vie quotidienne* (everyday life). Once he overcame his initial shyness, Doisneau’s photos predominantly featured images of everyday individuals, photographed wherever they were found.²⁵ Images like *Coco* (Figure 6), taken in 1952, illustrate the centrality of ordinary subjects among Doisneau’s early portraits. *Coco* looks directly at the camera and engages the viewer, emphasizing his face. The background is blurred further placing the subject, *Coco*, at the center of attention. While not all the individuals Doisneau captured directly engaged the camera with their gaze, the way Doisneau located his subjects within the space of the frame emphasized their centrality. His 1955 photograph *Jacques Prévert au Gueridon* (Figure 7), taken of his close friend Jacques Prévert, further illustrates this notion: Prévert and his dog inhabit

²¹ Hamilton, *Robert Doisneau*, 35.

²² See *Distortion No. 60* (1933), André Kertész, in Scott, *Street Photography*, 122.

²³ Hamilton, *Robert Doisneau*, 36.

²⁴ “The viewer of street photographs...is the detached, classless *flâneur*, for whom each photograph is a chance encounter, designed to trigger an unselfconscious spontaneity of response, free, shifting, made of insight, amusement, sentiment, but unisistent, and of uncertain duration.” Scott, *Street Photography*, 66.

²⁵ While Doisneau’s photographs put forth a snap shot sense of spontaneity, it came to light later in his career that many of the photographs were staged. This subject will further discussed further in Chapter Four.

the foreground of the photo, while cleanly depicted against a background that blurs as it recedes. These techniques of depicting a crisp, clear subject against a slightly out of focus background, essential to the creation and animation of his subjects, were a result of Doisneau's technical expertise matched with an interest in the life of the portrait.

Much of Doisneau's work beginning in 1932 was completed with a Rolleiflex medium format camera. However, the fixed lens became a limiting factor and, as it provided him more flexibility, he transitioned into more frequent use of a thirty-five-millimeter camera.²⁶ However, he remained loyal to his six-by-six Rolleiflex, going so far as to write an article entitled "La Défense du 6x6," for a 1950 edition of *Point du vue* magazine, in which he claimed:

The precision of a lens, the careful registration of what it transmits, that's how photograph reveals to us the beauty of an everyday subject, of an ordinary material, and it's very valuable. To carefully cut a very fine slice from the ham of life, that's another valid use for photography. With the current state of lenses, film, and paper, that quality and that rapidity of registration are best combined in my little six-by-six trap.²⁷

The creative abilities afforded to him by photography are evident in Doisneau's manipulation of depth of field to emphasize specific figures in his photographs. This experimentation with the structure of images would be further evident in his later work, as he explored visual distortion, manipulation, and photomontage. The softly-unfocused backgrounds served to place greater significance on his subjects, a technique that suggests to the viewer that the captured moment is a fleeting one. This allusion to a

²⁶ Hamilton, *Robert Doisneau*, 256.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 256.

single moment in time is inherent to much of Doisneau's work, yet his 1953 photograph of Chanel on her staircase undermines this notion entirely.

Each panel of Doisneau's photograph, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* (Figure 8), contains a reflection of Chanel's figure, which gradually rotates from profile to frontal view as it progresses across the image from left to right. Each of the nine panels is composed of three horizontal sections. The upper register contains reflections of a staircase's architecture, showing its refracted lines to be jagged yet calligraphically elegant. The middle register is composed of Chanel's figure from her head to the hem of her skirt. The outfit she wears is classic, yet demure, when compared to her typically ornamented style. She wears a white blouse, black sweater and grey skirt, and accessorizes with a black hat, white pocket square, a brooch at her collar and waist, and large pearl earrings. The lower register contains Chanel's legs and the parallel lines of the white-edged beige stairs upon which she stands.

A Western language approach reads the image from left to right, a decision supported by a number of visual characteristics. While the viewer's eye is first drawn to the lightest section of the image, Panels Six through Nine, it then returns to panel one in order to understand the image as a whole. Chanel's figure ascends and rotates by minor degrees in each panel, from the lowest point with side profile in panel one to the highest point with frontal view in panel nine. Chanel emerges from a shadowy, tenebristic background in Panels One through Three into a lighter space in Panels Four through Nine. The horizontal, left to right reading is not mirrored by a vertical ascension, however, as the different registers in each panel do not necessarily correspond.

The nine panels fragment reflections of Chanel's figure. The thin vertical lines marking the edge of each mirror cut through her body, cropping bits of her figure out of each reflection. The lines of the staircase can be seen in two zones (Figure 9), in the lower register behind Chanel's legs and in the upper register above her head. The staircase is also seen in the upper register of Panels Four through Nine, yet is hardly recognizable due to its cropped and distorted reflection. The reflection of Chanel's figure contrasts the intersecting lines of the railing and stairway located above her body. She appears as though viewed through a kaleidoscope with the reflected background negating the perception of the possibility of a real space. The disordered reflections of the staircase in the upper register contrast the orderly parallel of the white-edged stairs behind Chanel's legs in the lower register. Linear white strips on the front edge of the steps have a thick line quality and light value bringing prominence to Panels Three through Six as they contrast the dark background. Their gradual ascension across the nine panels parallels and reinforces the contour of Chanel's rising figure.

The mirror's reflections make it difficult to decipher a central light source for the image. Whether the source is ambient or artificial, Chanel's face is consistently lit across the image, suggesting a light source reflected off the mirror that highlights the front of Chanel's body. The formal aesthetics of black and white photography, coupled with the lighting of Chanel herself and the scene, create a wide tonal range in the image. The lightest values of the photograph reside in the whites of Chanel's clothing, the cuff of her shirt and the white pocket square tucked into her breast pocket. These are accentuated against the dark values of her boater hat, hair and sweater, as well as the

shadows in the first three panels. Along with the ascension of Chanel's figure from left to right, the image transitions from dark to light. The contrast between light and dark contributes to the left to right sense of motion, and adds a sense of theatre to the image. While the upper half of the image progresses from dark to light when read left to right, the lower portion of the image makes the opposite transition, as Chanel's legs become hidden in the shadows as the viewer scans the image to the right. These components give the image a sense of balance, as the top left and bottom right corners mirror each other in their shadowy nature. Chanel looks solemn as she glances off to her right, and the contrast between highlights and shadows gives a dramatic feeling the photograph.

The role of the mirror as subject was not unprecedented when Doisneau captured this image of Chanel. The mirror as a tool emerged in the previous century and played a prominent role in French Modernist painting. Édouard Manet's 1882 painting, *A Bar at the Folies-Bérgère* (Figure 10), deploys a mirror to examine urban leisure culture and the notion of spectacle. The painting is fraught with disparities, most markedly the image in the mirror behind the barmaid, which does not provide a logical reflection of the scene that it claims to reproduce. This complicates the image in the mirror—is it the reflection of the barmaid and a customer? The viewer must recognize that they occupy the space of that customer, implicating them in the scene. This contradiction creates a confusing sense of space, as the viewer attempts to understand their point of observation and involvement in the image.

Doisneau, surely aware of this precedent, incorporates the mirror into *Mademoiselle Anita* (Figure 11), an image he captured at a Parisian café in 1950. The

mirror occupies the upper third of the image, and includes a blurred double reflection of the photographer in the background. Doisneau's reflected image is split where the mirrored walls meet, and serves to question the subject while simultaneously reinforcing the role of photographer. *Mademoiselle Anita* is compositionally centered on the young woman sitting behind the table, yet the photographer's double reflection in the mirrors remains a constant presence, hovering above the scene.

While Doisneau is not visually present in the photograph of Chanel, the question of subject remains due to the dynamic nature of the mirror's reflections. If Chanel's image is mediated through the reflective surface of the mirrors, is the viewer even *seeing* Mademoiselle? More importantly, what does the photograph do to the space in which she is captured, a space that was legendarily known as a place where she chose to hide? One answer lies in the nature of the mirror and the role it played in the creation of Chanel's identity, for 31 *rue Cambon* became synonymous with Chanel herself, and few references are made to the fashion house without acknowledgment of the famous mirrored staircase.

CHAPTER ONE: SPACE

On assignment for French *Vogue*, Doisneau captured the image *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, in 1953. The image is organized around nine mirrored vertical panels, which are located at the top of a staircase that was a central feature of Chanel's Paris atelier. The staircase became a favorite backdrop for photographers and also served as the vantage point from which Chanel watched the presentation of her fashion shows. In 1918 Chanel acquired the four-story building at number 31, rue Cambon and quickly transformed it into a multipurpose atelier. The ground floor contained a boutique, open to the street with expansive windows, while the second floor provided an intimate apartment used for entertaining below her third floor design studio. It was the first floor, however, that contained her couture salon, the space in which she presented her collections and performed fittings for haute couture clients. It is from the salon that Chanel's famous mirrored staircase (Figure 12), "part of a modernist refurbishment [she] would have installed at some point during the early twenties," ascended.²⁸ The Art Deco-inspired staircase included a metal railing with alternating groups of vertical metal bars and two intersecting diagonal bars. The railing ran the length of the staircase and was separated from the mirrored panels of the exterior wall by beige carpeted steps, each with a strip of white on the front edge. The fifth step down from her apartment, her chosen position during the shows, afforded her a *panoptic* view by virtue of the staircase's mirrored panels. "I spent my life on stairs," Chanel claimed, and her lifelong habit of staying hidden during her shows is a favorite reference of

²⁸ Lisa Chaney, *Coco Chanel: An Intimate Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 202.

biographers.²⁹ “Mademoiselle always remained invisible during the presentations, sitting hidden in her favorite place between the mirrors at the top of the staircase,” with all those in attendance below aware of her invisible presence.³⁰ This calculated decision to remain out of view is one of the reasons that Doisneau’s photograph, showing not one, but nine reflections of Chanel in the staircase, is such an anomaly. It is certainly an unusual depiction, even when placed in context of other photographs created of her in the same stairway (Figures 13, 14).

“To dwell means to leave traces,” Walter Benjamin wrote regarding the *intérieur*.³¹ For Benjamin, the interior, or living space, is antithetical to the place of work. Chanel tread a fine line regarding this distinction, however, with her atelier and apartment at 31 rue Cambon. Chanel acquired the four-story building at Number 31 rue Cambon in 1918 and quickly transformed it into a multipurpose atelier. The ground floor contained a boutique, open to the street, while the second floor provided an intimate apartment. The third floor housed her studio, but it was the first floor that contained her couture salon, the space in which she presented her collections and performed fittings for Haute Couture clients. The apartment is the only space in 31 rue Cambon that is not immediately read as commercial, yet despite its intimate nature, it lacked a bedroom and was not a space in which Chanel resided. Rather, she kept a room at the Ritz Hotel in which she spent her nights, leaving the apartment as a space for entertaining friends and

²⁹ Ibid, 202.

³⁰ Axel Madsen, *A Woman of Her Own* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1991), 218-219.

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9.

guests.³² A conflation between living space and place of work, the entire atelier was full of Chanel's traces.

In her discussion of the *intérieur*, historian of architecture Beatriz Colomina observes that in Adolf Loos's interiors of the turn of the 20th century, "the classical distinction between inside and outside, private and public, object and subject, becomes convoluted."³³ Occupants within the houses become "both actors in and spectators of the...scene," the interiors themselves transformed into a theatre.³⁴ Within the architecture of modernity, the subject is constructed while also functioning as a lens through which the surface and subject are compressed. Colomina expounds upon this notion of theatre by using the example of a theatre box:

Traditionally, the theatre box provided for the privileged a private space within the dangerous public realm, by reestablishing the boundaries between inside and outside...The theatre box is a device that both provides protection and draws attention to itself...The 'voyeur' in the theatre box has become the object of another's gaze; she is caught in the act of seeing, entrapped in the very moment of control. In framing a view, the theatre box also frames the viewer.³⁵

Despite intentions of a safe space for viewing, the box becomes a theatre itself as the occupant is inescapably watched as well. The first floor couture salon, where Chanel presented her shows, was lined with mirrors, providing a theatre for Chanel's models and the guests of her shows. However, Chanel chose not to participate on the stage of her salon, instead retreating to a private space of her own.

³² "Chanel Designs Again." *Vogue*, February 15, 1954, 85.

³³ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 244

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

From the first floor couture salon rose Chanel's famous mirrored staircase. Designed by Chanel in 1935, the staircase has become nearly synonymous with the woman who sought out its refuge during the presentation of her collections. The fifth step down from the second floor apartment was her chosen position during these shows.³⁶ While the core of the staircase was open with a handrail, the perimeter was covered by various widths of mirrored panels. "Mademoiselle was famous for watching the *defile*, sitting out of sight on the stairs and observing the crowd's reaction through the kaleidoscopic mirrors," recalls photographer Douglas Kirkland.³⁷ Comparable to a theatre box, her spot on the steps allowed her to observe all the activity in the salon below. Unlike a theatre box, however, by virtue of watching the shows through mirrored reflections she was able to view everything without ever being seen herself.

Michel Foucault explores the construction of space in his 1986 article "Of Other Spaces." He discusses two different kinds of space, utopias and *heterotopias*, on opposite ends of the spectrum, and locates between them the concept of the mirror. "Utopias are sites with no real place," Foucault claims. "They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces."³⁸ To contrast the idea of utopia, Foucault develops the concept of a

³⁶ Five was Chanel's favorite number and would surface again and again as a theme in her life from the name of her perfume (Chanel No. 5) to the day on which she presented her shows (the fifth day of the month). Justine Picardie, *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* (New York: It Books, 2010), 3.

³⁷ Douglas Kirkland, *Coco Chanel: Three Weeks 1962* (New York: Glitterati Inc., 2008), 100.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 14 (1986), 24.

“real” place that embodies “all the other real sites that can be found within [a] culture.”³⁹ These real places, or *heterotopias* as he terms them, act as counter-sites to utopias as they embody a number of real sites within a culture while simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting them.⁴⁰ There is a place between these juxtaposed spaces, however, which is constructed as mirror. The mirror presents itself as mixed experience, embodying elements of both utopias and heterotopias.

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy...it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.⁴¹

A space of contradictions, Chanel’s hidden place on the stairs illustrates Foucault’s concept, its ability to function as such mediated by the mirrors with which she was surrounded. The irony of Chanel’s manipulation of the mirrored space lies in her refusal of the mirrors as self-reflective tool. The ability to look at oneself is an inherent necessity of fashion, as evidenced by images of Chanel’s models looking at themselves in the mirrored staircase (Figures 15, 16). Chanel, however, exploited the mirror’s reflective potential as she insisted upon using it only to watch others (Figure 17).

³⁹ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The mirror was the central element of Chanel's ability to observe the activity in the salon below her. Without the reflections of the mirrored panels, she would have been forced to watch from further down the staircase, in a space that put her on display as much as the models in her show. Through the installation of the mirrors that line the staircase, however, Chanel was able to create a space that allowed for the otherwise disparate actions of seeing and not being seen to occur. As Foucault explains:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible...thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space.⁴²

The mirrored panels in Chanel's staircase function in a similar way, as they reproduce the image of a three-dimensional space in the salon below on their reflective, two-dimensional surfaces. Chanel watched the mirrors as though watching a movie, though the better comparison would be to the theatre as she was able to see the activity of the show and the response of those attending simultaneously.

The conception of her place on the steps as theatre box also fits within Foucault's heterotopic discussion. Foucault states, "In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place...To get in one must have a certain permission."⁴³ Chanel's atelier was a privileged space in general, with only her clients and invited guests allowed. Admission to her collection presentations was by invitation only, and that only gained one entrance to the grand couture salon where the models paraded. The stairway above the salon was a space of even greater privilege, one into which only a very immediate

⁴² Ibid, 25.

⁴³ Ibid, 26.

few were allowed. “Traditionally, she [Chanel] had permitted twenty or so of her most privileged friends and admirers to sit on this, the ‘spine of the house,’ to watch the show unfold,” explains Lisa Chaney in her biography about Chanel.⁴⁴ And while these lucky few would sometimes watch from a space lower on the steps, Mademoiselle remained tucked away in the most privileged location of all.

There is hardly a biography written about Chanel that doesn’t mention her mirrored staircase in one form or another, and within those biographies, there is almost always some mention of her favorite spot at the top of the stairs.⁴⁵ Edmonde Charles-Roux, a friend and biographer of Chanel, recalls the first Post-War show on February 5, 1954:

Many of her old clients had come to see Chanel, who, however, remained in her favorite place, hidden away and invisible at the top of the stairs, seated on the final step where the mirrors permitted her to see everything without being seen.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Chaney, *Coco Chanel*, 362.

⁴⁵ The mentions of Chanel in the mirrored staircase almost always situate her in a spot at the top of the staircase (specifically five steps down) in a space that allowed her, by virtue of the reflections, to see all that was happening below without being seen herself. In my research, I have found only one mention of Chanel in the staircase in a position where she could view and also be viewed. The December 19, 1969 issue of LIFE Magazine includes an article entitled ‘The Real Coco: The daring, sharp-tongued legend behind a new Broadway musical,’ published in anticipation of the upcoming show. Page 44 shows a photo of a standing Chanel at the bottom of the staircase with a group of eight seated individuals. The caption reads, “When her 1938 fashions were displayed in her Paris showroom, Coco watched majestically from her traditional vantage point on the curving mirrored stairway, where she could see everybody, and everybody could see her.” While the image was evidently captured during a show, there is no contextual, visual evidence to prove that there was in fact a show happening at the time. Furthermore, the reflections further up the stairs show nothing to evidence such a show. While I hesitate from stating outright that the photograph is staged, I have found no information in my research to support the photograph or its caption.

⁴⁶ Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and Her World: Friends, Fashion, and Fame* (New York: The Vendome Press, 2005), 355. There are far too many examples of Chanel

As previously mentioned, Chanel's position at the top of the steps located her within a theatre box of sorts, a space that enabled and encouraged viewing, the key to the space, however, was the lack of ability for its occupant to be viewed in return. This position for viewing privileged those in the space, namely Chanel, with a sense of power through vision and reflection over those in the salon below.

Originally conceived as a prison typology in, architect and engineer Jeremy Bentham designed the Panopticon in 1787 (Figure 18). Though most often assumed to be a prison plan, "apart from various minor details, the panoptic configuration could be used for prisons as well as schools, for factories and asylums, for hospitals and workhouses."⁴⁷ Regardless of its manifestation, however, there are two essential elements to the panoptic structure: "its central surveillance system and the invisibility of the eye."⁴⁸ The latter depends on the former, but it is the 'invisibility of the eye' that is the hallmark of the Panopticon. Bentham wrote of this dynamic, "the effect of it consists then, in the *centrality* of the Inspector's situation, combined with the well known and most effectual contrivances for *seeing without being seen*."⁴⁹

The plan for the Panopticon is simple, consisting of a circular building with cells around the circumference and a tower in the center. There is a neutral zone between the central tower and the cells on the circumference, and each cell has a window to the

mentioned as hiding, out of sight, in the mirrored staircase to cite them in their entirety. Because of its significance as a turning point in her career, a large number of the references are in relation to her 'comeback' show on February 5, 1954.

⁴⁷ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," trans. Richard Miller, *October* 41 (1987), 3.

⁴⁸ Miller, "Jeremy Bentham," 4.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon; or, The Inspection House*, (Dublin: T. Payne, 1791), vol. II, letter V, p. 23.

outside and a grilled door to the interior neutral space. These grilled doors allow the central tower to be seen from each cell, but, essential to the system, a series of shutters prevents the rooms of the central tower from being seen by those in the cells.⁵⁰ These shutters allow for ‘seeing without being seen,’ as those in the central tower can look out through the shutters, while their existence is simultaneously hidden.

French theorist Jacques Alain-Miller, a student of Michel Foucault, declares, “The Panopticon is a machine that creates a semblance of God, by concealing itself in the shadows, the eye can intensify all its powers.”⁵¹ This panoptic model is precisely the system employed, consciously or otherwise, by Chanel as she sat hidden, out of sight, at the top of her mirrored staircase. The cunning of the Panopticon, Miller suggests, is that “if the eye is hidden, it looks at me even when it is not actually observing me.”⁵²

Chanel’s presence in the staircase during her show presentations had become something of legend by her comeback show in 1954, to the extent that had she not physically been in the staircase at all, her presence still would have been assumed. Chanel’s presence in the staircase during her show presentations had become something of legend by her comeback show in 1954, and her conspicuous absence in the couture salon bestows an omniscient sense of power through her highly constructed yet reflected gaze.

⁵⁰ Miller, “Jeremy Bentham,” 3.

⁵¹ Ibid, 4-5.

⁵² Ibid, 4.

CHAPTER TWO: PORTRAITURE

Portraiture, as a means of identity creation, has a long history. Traceable to Antiquity, where it came into prominence with the Greeks and Romans, the practice of creating portraits has long been employed as a means of fashioning identities—both individual and collective. The practice has thrived as a societal privileging of the individual over the collective, and though many attempts have been made at classification of portraiture, the renowned art historian Erwin Panofsky most succinctly described its dualistic nature:

A portrait aims by definition at two essentials...On the one hand it seeks to bring out whatever it is in which the sitter differs from the rest of humanity and would even differ from himself were he portrayed at a different moment or in a different situation; and this is what distinguished a portrait from an 'ideal' figure or 'type'. On the other hand it seeks to bring out whatever the sitter has in common with the rest of humanity and what remains in him regardless of place and time; and this is what distinguishes a portrait from a figure forming part of a genre painting or narrative.⁵³

The portrait always functions in a precarious balance between similarity and difference, fleeting and eternal, distance and connection. “All portraits are a series of negotiations,” states Shearer West, a sentiment echoed by photographer Richard Avedon.⁵⁴ In an interview with journalist Charlie Rose, Avedon discussed the question of who controls a photograph. Rose asked, “So the photograph is about you as the photographer, not about me as the subject?” to which Avedon replied, “Yes, I think so, and yet I can’t do it alone.

⁵³ Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Characters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 194.

⁵⁴ Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

It has to be a collaboration.”⁵⁵ There is always a mediation between the aims of the artist and those of the subject, as each individual pursues their own motives for the image. This dynamic, while prevalent in the creation of painted portraits of common individuals, was heightened as the idea of celebrity developed in the nineteenth century.

West traces the developed notion of ‘celebrity,’ defined as the public recognition of an individual’s unique qualities or contributions, back to the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ “Portraiture has been very important to celebrity,” explains West, “as the cultivation of celebrity depends to an extent upon the familiarity and dissemination of likeness.”⁵⁷ Susan Sontag discusses how photographs have become the norm for how things are seen, explaining “Instead of just recording reality, photographs have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality and of realism.”⁵⁸ This world of celebrity was well known to Chanel, and, as evidenced by the photographs taken of her, one that she navigated with considerable success. Images produced by Cecil Beaton and Man Ray emphasize the unique nature of the woman behind the expanding empire, exemplifying a singular image in which Chanel is the center of importance and attention (Figures 3, 4). These commercial images produced with Chanel can be compared to classic State or even Royal portraits in their goals. As explained by Mariana Jenkins in her definitive study of state portraiture, “The primary purpose is not the portrayal of an individual as such, but the evocation through his image of those abstract

⁵⁵ Richard Avedon, interview by Charlie Rose, *A remembrance of photographer Richard Avedon*, (October 15, 2004).

⁵⁶ West, *Portraiture*, 94.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 93.

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 87.

principles for which he stands.”⁵⁹ Chanel’s commercial imagery functions similarly as it simultaneously captures the woman and the ideals upon which she built her company.⁶⁰ Commercial photographs of Chanel were recognizable not necessarily because of the woman, however, but through identification with the familiar objects with which she clothed and adorned herself.⁶¹

Chanel once notoriously retorted, “Dress shabbily and they remember the dress; dress impeccably and they remember the woman.”⁶² A bit of superficial fashion banter, perhaps, yet there is a great deal of truth to the statement for the woman who made it. Portraits, while emphasizing the individual’s physical characteristics, are also often filled with specific objects and items that represent the persona the sitter wishes to convey to the world. The portrait becomes as much about association with the objects—clothes, props, etc.—as it does with the individual subject.⁶³ Drawing on this precedent, Chanel became her own best promoter as she was photographed again and again wearing her own designs. “She was the first designer to create publicly for herself,” a motivation that

⁵⁹ Ibid, 72. For more on state portraiture see *The State Portrait, Its Origin and Evolution*, Marianna Duncan Jenkins (College Art Association of American in Conjunction with the Art Bulletin, 1947).

⁶⁰ “The Other is not only the one whom I see but the one who sees me,” making it possible for me to “recognize that I am” as I am seen. “I can try to be for myself what I am for the Other, by choosing myself as I appear to the Other.” See Justus Streller, “The Other and His Look,” in *Jean-Paul Sartre: To Freedom Condemned* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960).

⁶¹ Specific examples, such as her costume jewelry and simple black and white aesthetic, will be discussed further in the next section.

⁶² Phyllis Hoffman, *Southern Lady: Gracious Spaces: Creating the Perfect Sanctuary in Every Room* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 66.

⁶³ “Portraits are filled with the external signs of a person’s socialized self, what Erving Goffman referred to as the ‘front’ of an individual,” often seen in the form of clothing and props.” West, *Portraiture*, 30.

would serve her well as she came into commercial prominence and was naturally seen in her creations.⁶⁴ The jersey dresses, boater hats, and simple black and white color schemes became synonymous with the woman who created them. As her career progressed, she assembled more items of recognizable nature, as she designed and was seen in elaborate costume jewelry, the classic little black dress and tweed suits. Her creation of Chanel No. 5, her signature perfume, progressed even further beyond visual recognition into the realm of the olfactory. Yet Chanel's constant immersion in her creations wasn't only for public show; each morning prior to her arrival at her atelier, her assistants would fill the famous mirrored staircase with the smell of her iconic perfume.⁶⁵ These objects, that have come to be so associated with Chanel, function in the commercial photographs taken of her not only as accessories, but also as part of her persona. The mirrored staircase that Chanel ascended each morning to reach her studio, and down which her models descended for each of her shows, became as notable an aspect of her 'front' as her signature suits or pearls. Unlike the other objects that came to signify Chanel, however, the mirrored staircase provided itself as a theatre set of sorts on which portraits could be staged.

“No matter where you look, there's always something brewing. You only have to wait,” Robert Doisneau claimed about his photographic practice in a posthumously published retrospective book *Three Seconds of Eternity* (2005). “So I wait, and every time the same high-flown formula trots into my mind: Paris is a theatre in which you pay

⁶⁴ Madsen, *A Woman*, 66.

⁶⁵ “31 rue Cambon: Chanel's Fabulous Paris Flat,” NPR, December 23, 2009.

for your seat with wasted time. And I'm still waiting."⁶⁶ Doisneau has variously been characterized as a documentary photographer and street photographer, his work imbued with an underlying idealism in its desire to depict the everyday. Of the supposed 400,000 thousand photographs he took during his career, the majority of Doisneau's work exhibits a snapshot⁶⁷ sense of spontaneity that supports his claims about their happenstance creations. This owes in large part to his chosen subject matter, as he preferred the everyday individuals of Paris and its surrounding banlieue area. Having grown up in the banlieue outside of Paris, Doisneau always felt most comfortable capturing images of the varied individuals that he found there. "I can only feel happy in streets where you can see at the same time a pensioner with his white dog, a florist, a girl on roller-skates, and a fat man," he said of his preferred environment.⁶⁸ Though he worked in commercial photography in order to make a living, he always returned to those anonymous individuals of the streets to document the contexts and persons that constituted him as a photographer.

The idealistic spontaneity that emanates from so many of Doisneau's photographs was called into question toward the end of his career. A series of international lawsuits

⁶⁶ Robert Doisneau, *Robert Doisneau: Three Seconds of Eternity* (Germany: Schirmer/Mosel, 2005), 15.

⁶⁷ "What I have to propose may appear a dream; but it has at least the merit of being... a realizable one... It is the... representation of scenes in action-- the vivid and life-like reproduction and handing down to the latest posterity of any transaction in real life... I take for granted nothing more than what photography has already realized, or... will realize within some very limited lapse of time... the possibility of taking a photograph, as it were, by a snapshot-- of securing a picture in a tenth of a second of time." The first use of the term 'snapshot' was by Sir John Herschel in "The Photographic News," May 11, 1860.

⁶⁸ Doisneau, *Robert Doisneau*, 16.

brought questions and publicity as they claimed that he “had helped set up the events that are depicted in his photographs.”⁶⁹ Sparking substantial debate, the lawsuits outraged many who had loved his photographs for their authentic, snapshot-like quality. One fact stood, however, amidst the swirling controversy: Doisneau himself never publicly claimed that his photographs were *not* staged.⁷⁰ Doisneau often claimed he had “made a little theatre for [himself],” and it appears that he was sometimes director rather than simply audience member. The most famous example, *Le Baiser de l’Hotel de Ville* (Figure 19), was photographed in 1950 on a Paris street as part of a series about couples kissing in Paris, shot for the American magazine LIFE. Doisneau hired the couple, students at a nearby acting studio, and shot the photograph until he captured just the image he wanted. LIFE published the photograph along with a series of similar images by Doisneau under the pretense that they were all “unposed.” When the photograph resulted in a lawsuit, Doisneau publicly acknowledged that the image had been staged. An early 1980s interview concerning *Mademoiselle Anita* (refer to Figure 11), one of Doisneau’s most famous portraits, sums up the discussion as he explains, “that portrait is the illusion of an instant, because there’s a second photo of her before, wearing her little jacket, and it’s nothing at all.”⁷¹

While the photographs maintain their snapshot spontaneity, each image is dependant upon Doisneau’s process of determining just how to engage all the elements

⁶⁹ Hans-Michael Koetzle, *Photo Icons: The Story Behind the Pictures* (Cologne: Taschen, 2005), 226.

⁷⁰ For the purposes of this discussion, ‘staged photography’ will include any image that involves the planning or setting up of a scene, either by negotiation between photographer and subject, or by photographer alone.

⁷¹ Chevrier, "From Craft to Art," 39.

for maximum effect. If at times this required him to negotiate with his subjects or try different angles and shots, what of it? Some have claimed that the photographs *lose* something when the viewer realizes they were staged in some way. There is a certain idealism in photography until it is exploited when one learns that photographs have been staged. Yet how much does that knowledge truly affect the resulting image? According to Doisneau's thinking, the staging of photographs is what has allowed for the capturing of such striking images. This dilemma is exemplified in *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, for that photograph is only one of three that Doisneau took.

“In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different,” claimed Chanel.⁷²

Extremely aware of the persona presented in her images, Chanel worked with her photographers to craft the exact representation she desired. When Horst P. Horst photographed her for *Vogue* in 1937, she was unsatisfied with his initial attempts and “invited him to photograph her again, this time in her apartment in the rue Cambon, above her shop.”⁷³ The resulting image (Figure 20) is one that presents Chanel in the way she wanted to be seen: as a distinctive, unique force within the fashion world. The carvings of leaves and flowers in the background provide a frame of sorts, as Chanel's arm and face emerge out of the shadowy background. The distinctive jewelry she wears signifies the Chanel brand, for she had popularized costume jewelry as an addition to her simple and elegant looks. Her face and right arm are highlighted by an unknown light source, emphasizing her presence within the image. This emphasis on the woman, as

⁷² Paul LeRoux and Peg Corwin, *Visual Selling: Capture the Eye and the Customer Will Follow* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007), 173.

⁷³ Gabriel Badeau-Päun, *The Society Portrait: From David to Warhol* (New York: The Vendome Press, 2007), 210.

well as the empire, is a hallmark of the commercial images captured of Chanel, and a characteristic that stands in stark contrast to Doisneau's later photograph of her.

A survey of other commercial photographs across Chanel's career provides similar experiences. Though there is a gap from the time she spent exiled in Switzerland, there is no lack of images of Chanel. A variety of photographers, from Boris Lipnitski (Figure 21) to François Kollar (Figure 22) to Cecil Beaton (refer to Figure 3), captured images of her before and after her time spent away from the fashion world. The consistency across the photographs is the way in which their subject fully "owns" each of the images. Though Chanel does not always look out and engage the viewer through eye contact, she always demands the viewer's attention. Avedon's photograph seems the most spontaneous, yet the level of control that she insisted upon having over her image would suggest an agreement between subject and photographer, as Chanel played the part for the camera. Even photographs in which Chanel was not the only subject were dominated by her presence. Avedon photographed Chanel and Suzy Parker (Figure 23), a model and friend, in 1962. Compositionally, the women are equally balanced, if not with Parker occupying a greater amount of the picture frame as she leans slightly back onto Chanel. However, Chanel maintains her dominance, solidly located on the left side of the image, her stable verticality grounding the image in contrast to Parker's unbalanced diagonal. Chanel controls the image even to the extent that Parker is clad in a Chanel suit and jewelry, a further indication of her presence.

In each of these images, Chanel appears alert, aware, a willing collaborator with her photographer. The viewer can tell she is acting, and the photographer is simply

capturing her show. Chanel has both created the theatre and acted within it. This is what makes Doisneau's photograph so anomalous; for in her other commercial photographs, just as the viewer is aware they are watching a production, the Chanel in the image seems equally aware that she is being watched. The contradiction of Doisneau's photograph lies in its voyeuristic nature, and is compounded by the location of the image, captured in the one place in her studio where she consistently retreated so as not to be seen.

CHAPTER THREE: PHOTOGRAPHY

Chanel's body dominates the composition of *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, as it ascends across the panels of the photograph, comprising the middle and lower registers.⁷⁴ The lines of the mirror, however, fragment her into panels and restrict the shape of her figure, an ironic visual for a woman whose success was based on the unique nature of her vision and persona. None of the nine reflections contain a complete image of Chanel because the precise lines of the mirrors slice them individually. The image of her figure rotates with the curvature of the mirror as it rounds a corner of the staircase. The reflection of Chanel's figure differs from the intersecting lines of the railing and stairway located above her body. She appears as though viewed through a kaleidoscope with the reflected background negating the perception of the possibility of Real space.

The potential for depth, often created through the relationship between foreground and background, is confused in the reflections. Distorted images in the top section of panels five through eight deny the potential for recession. The staircase upon which Chanel stands provides the image's foundation, and is only reflected in panels six through eight of the top section. While recognizable, the stairs resemble mechanical cogs more than the steps upon which Chanel spent so much time. The white edges of the stair behind Chanel's legs provide a layered sense of depth, yet the dark value of the stairs beyond the white stripes renders the register flat.

⁷⁴ Refer to Figure 8.

Chanel's ascending figure meets the upper section containing the railing and staircase in the fourth through ninth panels of the photograph, the greatest interaction occurring in the sixth and seventh panels. This encounter, along with the panel's light tonal quality, accentuates panels six through eight as the immediate focal point of the image. The viewer's eye is repeatedly led back to the first panel, sometimes rewinding through the image and reading it backwards, and sometimes returning directly to the first panel in order to re-read the image left to right. Chanel's ascension and emergence from the shadows encourages these readings. The repetition of nine reflections across the photograph suggests notions of reproduction, and the sliver of a tenth panel in the upper-left corner furthers this possibility.

Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris, was photographed while Doisneau was on assignment for French *Vogue* in 1953. Comprised of nine full-mirrored vertical panels and located in the staircase that was the backbone of Chanel's Paris atelier, the image is striking in its composition. It is, however, only one manifestation of three images captured by Doisneau during his session at *rue Cambon*. According to the Atelier Doisneau in Paris, *Mademoiselle Chanel* is the third of three images captured on December 8, 1953.⁷⁵ Francine Deroudille of Atelier Doisneau verifies that only three negatives exist from the session, and they are archived chronologically, listed as numbers

⁷⁵ "La prise de vues de Coco Chanel rue Cambon a été réalisée le 8 décembre 1953. Je suis malheureusement à ce jour incapable de vous indiquer qui en fut le commanditaire et où cette série de photos a été publiée pour la première fois. Il y a une seconde version que voici. En voici deux autres. Je viens de vérifier avec les négatifs, il n'y en a pas d'autres. Bonne soirée, Francine Deroudille." Francine Deroudille, email message to author, February 23, 2012.

626, 627 and 628⁷⁶. While all three images depict the same scene of Chanel reflected in the mirrors of her staircase, they are strikingly different in their composition and atmosphere.

Photograph 626 (Figure 24) is composed of eight mirrored panels that show Chanel's figure rotating from profile to frontal as they are read from left to right. There is a slight ascension of her figure across the panels, but it is not as pronounced as in photograph *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*. Chanel's figure occupies over three quarters of each panel, with only a small section above her head showing reflections of the architecture of the stairway. The lines formed by the hem of her skirt and blouse cuff as they are traced from left to right are horizontal, giving the image a feeling of grounded stability. The reflections of Chanel's skirt blend into each other as they are repeated across the image, fusing the different panels together. The grey of her skirt runs into itself in each of the reflections, making it difficult to decipher where one panel ends and the next begins. Photograph 626 is the only image in the series in which Chanel is looking out at the viewer. The direction of her gaze is altered by the angle of the mirrors across the image, and it is only in the last panel that Chanel makes eye contact with the viewer. However, even as the viewer looks directly into her eyes, they are not engaged and appear vacant.

⁷⁶ The photographs are archivally listed as 626-26, 626-27, 626-28, but for the sake of simplicity I will refer to them as 626, 627 and 628. *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* appears to be a descriptive title attached to photograph 628. My research has not determined the origin of the title, and the Atelier Doisneau has only referred to the image as "626-28 Coco Chanel aux miroirs, 1953." For the purposes of this discussion, I will continue to refer to photograph 626-28 (628) as *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*.

Photograph 627 (Figure 25) is composed of seven mirrored panels that show Chanel's figure rotating from profile to not quite frontal views. At first glance, photograph 627 looks as though it could be a cropped section out of photograph *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*. However, a comparison between the two shows different angles of composition that, along with the existence of separate negatives, confirms the unique identity of each image. When considered in the context of the other two photographs, 627 appears to serve as a midpoint in the progression of the series. Chanel is looking down and to her left, no longer engaging the viewer, and evoking a voyeuristic feeling as the viewer catches her in a moment of reflection. The image has been cropped closer, from the hem of Chanel's skirt to just slightly above her head. The grey of her skirt continues to run together but contains a greater tonal range than in photograph 626, which helps to distinguish the panels from each other. The shadow on her skirt in Panels Four through Six is also more pronounced, emphasizing the tonal range and imbuing the image with a greater feeling of drama. The beginnings of the feeling of ascension so prominent in *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, can be seen in photograph 627, specifically through the line created by the meeting of Chanel's cardigan and skirt. Photograph 627 provides a clear transition into *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* (photograph 628), and it is this manifestation that has emerged as the most successful of the series.

While none of the photographs were published in French *Vogue* as originally intended, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* has seen publication elsewhere. My research has found no examples of publication for photograph 626, and only one

example for photograph 627,⁷⁷ but *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris* has been utilized by a variety of Chanel biographers.⁷⁸ The formal characteristics of the image, similar to photographs 626 and 627 yet exaggerated, contribute to its overall aesthetic appeal. The utilization of the mirror in the photograph elicits a series of characteristics that lend themselves to a discussion within the greater context of Modernist art.

Eadweard Muybridge's 1884-1887 experiments with motion and photography fit precisely with the allusion to movement and time. Muybridge is "acknowledged as the first photographer to establish the use of the camera as an accurate recorder of human movement."⁷⁹ The development of stop motion photography by Muybridge was driven by his desire to better understand the anatomy and movement of the human form. The system allowed him to capture repeated images of a form over a period of time through space. *Woman Descending Steps* (Figure 26, 1884-1886) illustrates this method as it shows two parallel sections, each containing twelve panels, which show the descent of a nude female. Unlike Doisneau's photograph, the top section of Muybridge's image encourages a right to left reading, as the woman begins at the top of the steps in the far right panel and progresses down the steps to the left. The woman is in profile view for the first six panels, but gradually begins to turn until she finishes her descent in frontal view. Images from the *Human and Animal Locomotion* (1884-1886) study were

⁷⁷ See Axel Madsen, *A Woman of Her Own* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1991).

⁷⁸ See Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and Her World: Friends, Fashion, and Fame* (New York: The Vendome Press, 2005), Isabelle Fiemeyer, *Intimate Chanel* (Paris: Flammarion SA, 2011).

⁷⁹ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

ultimately shown in succession as motion pictures, foreshadowing the future production of films.

A more direct comparison comes with the multiple images in Marcel Duchamp's 1912 *Nude Descending a Staircase #2* (Figure 27). The highly fragmented female form, accentuated by dark lines and shadows, descends the staircase in what appears to be a continual stream of motion. The painting "signaled a new awareness of the figure in motion and space."⁸⁰ There are no obvious stopping points, with Duchamp "emphasizing the offensive thrust of the body, which was truly a projectile hurled toward the spectator."⁸¹ The active figure demands that the viewer acknowledge concepts of motion and time as it travels across the space. The painting provides a counterpoint to Doisneau's photograph, as the descending nude contrasts the ascending, clothed Chanel. However, the greater contrast between Doisneau's photograph and the images of Muybridge and Duchamp lies in the fact that Chanel, for all the implied motion of the image, is not actually moving at all. While the figures provide the motion through their own movement in Muybridge and Duchamp's images, Chanel remains stationary while a sense of motion is implied by the reflections of the mirror. She is a passive participant as she is moved across the image without physically moving herself.

"Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in the second degree, narrower by more dramatic than the

⁸⁰ Clarke, *The Photograph*, 197.

⁸¹ Sarane Alexandrian, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Alice Sachs (Italy: Bonfini Press Corporation, 1977), 20.

one perceived by natural vision,” explains Susan Sontag.⁸² Through techniques like *photomontage* and *collage*, Surrealist photographers like Andrew Breton, Max Ernst and George Brassäi called attention to the supposed reality depicted in their images. According to Rosalind Krauss in *L’Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*, the preferred method was not a literal cutting and pasting, but the use of darkroom processes⁸³ that “could preserve the seamless surface of the final print and thus reinforce the sense that this image, being a photograph, documents the reality from which it is a transfer.”⁸⁴ The spaces created between the collaged elements undermined the sense of reality that traditional photographs strove to represent.⁸⁵ The breaks created by the facets of the mirror in Doisneau’s photographs of Chanel function in a similar way. The lines, first and foremost, delineate the different panels in which the viewer sees the reflected Chanel. However, coupled with the ever-present repetition and reproduction of her image, the lines serve to visually signal that the viewer is not, in fact, looking at Chanel,

⁸² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 52.

⁸³ “It seems to me that all other areas of art (except photography) allow for in-process discovery. The painter does not begin with a fully conceived canvas, the sculptor with a fully conceived piece. They allow for a dialogue to evolve, to develop, and as far as I’m concerned, the darkroom is truly capable of being a visual research lab, a place for discovery, observation, and meditation.” See Jerry N. Uelsmann, “Some Humanistic Considerations of Photography,” in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 447.

⁸⁴ Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L’Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Great Britain: Cross River Press, Ltd., 1985), 28. Also see David Bate, *Photography & Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2004).

⁸⁵ Traditional photography presented its images as an objective copy of reality. Surrealist photography sought to undermine this ‘transfer of reality’ by disrupting its seamless nature. “The surreal is, semiotically speaking, a signifying effect, the confusion or a contradiction in conventional signifier-signified relations in representations and where meaning is partially hidden, where the message appears ‘enigmatic’ regardless of how (or in what technological form) it has been produced.” Bate, *Photography & Surrealism*, 22.

but a reflection of her. Indeed, the photograph is composed of nothing but reflections, distancing the viewer from Chanel not once, through the camera, but twice, through the mirrors of her stairway.

Doubling serves a similar function in Surrealist photography, “for it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added its copy.”⁸⁶ The process of doubling undermines the notion that a photograph is a transfer of reality, “destroying the pure singularity of the first.”⁸⁷ Doubling opens the photograph to the possibility of endless reproduction. For Doisneau’s image of Chanel is not only doubled, but repeated nine times, and is especially poignant as it undermines the reality of the photograph while simultaneously questioning Chanel’s singular nature and adding to her elusive nature.

Equally emphasized in Doisneau’s photograph is a technique framing serving to question the nature of a photograph. In Doisneau’s view, “the photographic record serves above all to make plausible, or to authenticate, that strange feat of the imagination which consists of looking in the frame of a viewfinder.”⁸⁸ Krauss explains that, “at the very boundary of the image, the camera frame...essentially crops or cuts the represented element out of reality.”⁸⁹ Indeed, Doisneau’s photographs show his understanding of the power wielded by the individual who frames an image. Doisneau knew that “even as it announces this experience as reality, the camera frame...controls it, configures it.”⁹⁰ The resulting dynamic is a tension between subject and frame. As previously discussed,

⁸⁶ Krauss and Livingston, *L’amour fou*, 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁸⁸ Chevrier, "From Craft to Art," 47.

⁸⁹ Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

Doisneau was well aware of how he situated his subjects within the space of the photographic frame. Instead of centering Chanel and capturing her entire body in motion, her figure is located in the lower two registers of the frame, with her feet and legs cropped out at different points of the composition. This cropping serves not only to further fragment her body within the image, but also draws attention to the frame as her legs and part of her body disappear beyond its boundaries. The frame suggests that the image is merely a snippet of a greater scene, and the ability for reproduction through the photographic medium questions the unique nature of the image captured.

Reproduction (of bodies, of images) makes overt reference to Walter Benjamin's canonical writings regarding art as a manifestation of mechanical reproduction at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Doisneau's photograph of Chanel illustrates Benjamin's emphasis on the possibility of reproduction through repetition. Benjamin states, "In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Mechanical representation of a work of art, however, represents something new."⁹¹ Photography represented this potential for mechanical representation and reproduction. Benjamin further explains, "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."⁹² The repetition⁹³ of Chanel's figure across the photograph exploits the possibility of a singular existence within time and space. The succession of these reflections reads more like a phenakistiscope (Figure 28) or zoetrope (Figure 29), their

⁹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955), 218.

⁹² *Ibid*, 220.

⁹³ Repetition, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "the act or an instance of repeating or being repeated."

repetitive nature evoking a sense of motion and time. In his essential work, *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary explains, “The phenakistiscope substantiates Walter Benjamin’s claim that in the nineteenth century ‘technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training’.”⁹⁴ Indeed, the phenakistiscope allowed for seeing in a completely new way that had never before been experienced, and Doisneau’s photograph took advantage of the precedent.

Photography serves as an essential element in Benjamin’s discussion of mechanical reproduction, for it possess the ultimate potential for reproduction. “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense,” he explains.⁹⁵ The desire to trace an image to an authentic original is no longer practical or possible. In Benjamin’s discussion, this means that, “the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.”⁹⁶ Photography as a general practice brings this dynamic to the forefront, but it is further emphasized when one considers the celebrity culture within which Chanel was functioning. As previously discussed, the commercial photographs produced of Chanel were a necessity for furthering her image and that of her company. The portraits of her were created with the intention of reproduction, and were meant to function in a plural capacity, enabled by the magazines in which they were published.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 112.

⁹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 224.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 224.

Vogue was born in 1892 in the form of a weekly gazette with “the stated aim of representing the interests and lifestyle of this [society] class.”⁹⁷ The precedent for society magazines had been set earlier in the century, with the likes of *Lady’s Magazine* and *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in America, and *Le Mercure Galant* in France. French *Vogue* saw its first publication on June 15, 1920, a natural progression out of American *Vogue*, which was “a magazine that focused on style and fashion [and] that favored designers who were French or lived in Paris.”⁹⁸ These publications allowed for the mass distribution of fashion images, not only in the form of clothing, but also the clothing’s designer. Chanel’s first appearance in *Vogue* came in the form of one of her sports suits, published in the February 1916 issue of the American magazine. The first appearance of the designer herself came in September of 1939, a photograph taken by Horst P. Horst that would be the first, but certainly not the last, image of the famous designer to be published in *Vogue*.⁹⁹

Meant for a wide reading audience, *Vogue* and French *Vogue* exemplify the medium that came to necessitate the reproduction of images. Benjamin explains,

The technique of reproduction detached the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Norberto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva, *In Vogue: An Illustrated History of the World’s Most Famous Fashion Magazine* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006), 2.

⁹⁸ Angeletti and Oliva, *In Vogue*, 26.

⁹⁹ “Chanel,” *Vogue*, accessed March 4, 2012, http://www.vogue.com/voguepedia/Chanel#cite_note-17.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 221.

Publications like *Vogue* relied on the ability to reproduce images so that each member of their readership could experience their own reproduction of an original image.

Doisneau's image serves as a visual representation of this system of reproduction. The three manifestations of the photograph illustrate the camera's ability to capture multiple images in succession, a notion that is visually affirmed by the multiple reflections of Chanel. The photographic medium enables endless reproduction by virtue of its technical capabilities through use of the negative. Finally, the photograph's use in French *Vogue* would have finalized its reproducible nature as it was distributed to an audience eager for its consumption. However, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, never made it to the pages of French *Vogue*.

The space in French *Vogue* for which the image was intended was filled by another photograph, one taken by Suzy Parker, a model and friend of Chanel's who sometimes dabbled in photography (Figure 30).¹⁰¹ Parker's photograph is displayed prominently in the center of a two page spread entitled "La rentrée de Chanel" (The Return of Chanel, Figure 31), published in the March 1954 issue. The photograph is divided in two by its central position that spans the space of both pages and is surrounded by drawings and photographs of Chanel's models. The spread contains only a short

¹⁰¹ Parker's photograph, taken the same day as Doisneau's as evidenced in the same outfit worn in both images, has been attributed to both Parker and Suzy Parker/Robert Doisneau. A 2009 digital article for *Vogue UK* referenced the "famous mirrored staircase on which Chanel was photographed by Robert Doisneau and by Suzy Parker for *French Vogue* in 1954." However, Doisneau's atelier has no evidence of the image within their archives, supporting the *French Vogue* article's attribution of the photograph solely to Suzy Parker. See Jessica Bumpus, "Lagerfeld's Apollo," *Vogue UK*, June 15, 2009, accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.vogue.co.uk/news/2009/06/15/karl-lagerfeld-designs-apollo-costumes>.

paragraph discussing Chanel's return to the fashion world after a fourteen-year absence. Despite the "savage"¹⁰² reviews received by the show, the response accompanying Parker's image was surprisingly neutral, acknowledging a mixed response yet claiming that many found themselves on common ground, admiring the return of Chanel's elegant simplicity.¹⁰³ The decidedly unbiased tone of the response coupled with Parker's photograph created a spread that seemed to embrace Chanel's return to the fashion world.

Parker's image, while taken on the same day and, presumably, in the same space as Doisneau's, is the antithesis of Doisneau's. In Parker's representation, the photograph is taken from above, looking down on a smiling Chanel who stands on the stairs below. Though the image is staged within the panoptic space of her staircase, she owns the image as its subject, her smile signaling her collaboration in the image's production. The reflections of her back in the mirrored panels contrast the singularity of her physical presence in the bottom left of the foreground, a visual declaration of the unique nature of Chanel. The image is well lit, with Chanel's black cardigan and hat providing the darkest tones of the image. The consistency of light produces an image that is devoid of shadowy corners, and the scene lacks the sense of drama illustrated by Doisneau's. Parker's photograph captures Chanel in the established tradition of her commercial portraits. She owns the image as its subject, her smile signaling her collaboration in the image's production. The presence of the mirrored panels in both Doisneau and Parker's

¹⁰² "The reviews were savage enough to have felled a woman less sure of herself. Perhaps the French critics would have sneered at whatever it was that Chanel produced...they saw it as tired repetition, and therefore a failure to engage with fashion." Picardie, *Coco Chanel*, 284.

¹⁰³ "La rentrée de Chanel," *Vogue Paris*, March 15, 1954.

images creates a palpable tension between the photographs. While the panels serve to emphasize Chanel's autonomy and singular presence in the staircase of Parker's image, Doisneau's photograph reverses these dynamics.

CONCLUSION

While discussing the gaze, philosopher Jacques Lacan States, “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”¹⁰⁴ His understanding of this concept is derived from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who theorized, “There is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing my vision.”¹⁰⁵ An awareness that one is constantly being viewed brings a sense of anxiety to the subject of the gaze, as they realize that as they view other objects, they are simultaneously viewed as well. Lacan expanded upon Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical model, arguing, “that sight examines the object, but that the gaze comes from the object.”¹⁰⁶ The anxiety of the subject of the gaze, then, comes from “an asymmetry between the sight of the self and the gaze of the thing that looks back.”¹⁰⁷ The anxiety produced by the awareness that one is constantly being viewed was central to his notion of the dialectics of the eye/I, and provides a fitting explanation for Chanel’s retreat to her hidden spot in the staircase.

The couture salon where Chanel held her fashion shows provides a testing ground for these theories, for viewing was the purpose, and was emphasized by the mirrors that walled the room (Figure 12). It would have been impossible to escape the gaze in such a space, as everyone was constantly looking, and all the activity was reflected in the mirrors. The great anxiety produced by the gaze creates a desire to retreat, to escape

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XI* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 72.

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 123.

¹⁰⁶ Jae Emerling, *Theory for Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 190.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 190.

from the feeling of being watched, over which the subject has no power, and this is precisely what Chanel did. Her retreat to the panoptic space of the stairs allowed her a semblance of control over the subject/object relationship of the gaze. Doisneau's photograph, however, exploits this space and the power that Chanel derived from it.

The mirrored panels allow for the construction of Chanel's system of power, yet their reflective surfaces are precarious at best, for as Foucault explains, "from the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there."¹⁰⁸ While the mirror represents the ultimate source of panoptic power for Chanel, her *heterotopia*, it also signifies a terrifying movement toward loss. To examine one's reflection in the mirror is to lose oneself in an unreal space that separates self and other. In the mirror, the anxiety of the gaze reaches its ultimate manifestation, as the sight of the self is reflected back at the self albeit in a fragmented manner. The self becomes the object as the mirror traps the gaze and the self within its infinite space of reflection.

While the mirror theoretically creates a sense of loss for Chanel, it also literally strips away any control that she would have over the final image captured through its reflection. The mirrors were positioned on the perimeter of the staircase, following the curve of the stairs as they rose. This bending of reflections along the staircase provided a slightly different angle reflected by each one. While it is possible to control the reflection from a single panel, it would be impossible to control the reflection created by multiple panels. Ultimately, the mirror represents the simultaneous loss and creation of control—

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

Chanel's multi-purpose 'eye' at the center of her salon and empire., as Doisneau utilizes it to capture his photograph of Chanel.

By the time Robert Doisneau arrived at 31 rue Cambon in 1953 Paris, Coco Chanel had established herself as a force within the fashion world, thanks in large part to portraiture traditions that predated both her and Doisneau. An established photographer, Doisneau was not Chanel's typical photographer, nor was she typical of his chosen subjects. Rather, Doisneau preferred to wander the streets of Paris, creating a 'theatre' of sorts, and photographing the individuals that happened onto and into the 'set.' While the images he captured had a snapshot quality, he later acknowledged that many had been staged. Staged photography was nothing new to Chanel, however, who had willingly participated in the crafting of her own celebrity, her image and brand, through intensive collaboration with her photographers. The commercial photographs with which she participated conflated her as a singular subject and object, emphasizing those characteristics that came to be synonymous with Chanel as both a woman and a brand.

Chanel constructed a system of power within the exterior and interior spaces of her Paris atelier. The building contained not only spaces of commerce but of creation. The space, the address, became a representation of Chanel with her principal boutique and personal apartment. Most significantly, 31, rue Cambon, also embodied the creative mercurial spirit engendered by Chanel with her design studio and couture salon. Connecting all of these spaces was a semi-circular stair that Chanel had specifically lined with mirrored panels. It was from this highly reflective space that Chanel watched the fashion shows as they unfolded in the salon below. The reflections afforded her a

panoptic view while her presence in the staircase became legendary. Yet her conspicuous absence from the salon(s) only furthered the heterotopic nature of the hidden, privileged space in which she resided. The staircase was a space to which Chanel escaped, and a space from which she held a fragile omniscience by virtue of her gaze that could not be returned.

Robert Doisneau's photograph, *Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris*, was uncharacteristic for both photographer and subject. Chanel was fundamental to the creation of her commercial images, yet Doisneau's photograph, taken against the mirrored panels of the staircase, represents Chanel's relinquishment of agency over her image. The nine reflected panels seen in the photograph violate the inherent security of the staircase's panoptic system, as Doisneau's position defies the presence of Chanel's gaze within the space. The photograph provides a trace or memory of the photographer's existence in the staircase, a space that was reserved for only those of the highest importance.

The image is most poignant, however, as Chanel is photographed as becoming undone by her own mirrored reflections. This action not only reveals a "blind spot" within the realm of Chanel's representation but also brings an unwitting gaze, that of the viewer and photographer alike, into a formerly private zone, by virtue of the mirror that both defined and controls Chanel's vision. Doisneau appropriates the mirror(s) and their fragmented reflections not to undermine Chanel but further reveal that she remained at the center of a labyrinth in which she is seen and not seen at the same time. Ultimately, Doisneau's photograph undermines the control that Chanel invested in the staircase, in

the architecture of her desire, as he reverses the gaze into a shattered representation being put back together again.



Figure 1: Robert Doisneau, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 31 rue Cambon, Paris, 1953, photograph.



Figure 2: Richard Avedon, *Paris*, 1958, photograph.



Figure 3: Cecil Beaton, *Coco Chanel*, 1961, photograph.



Figure 4: Man Ray, *Coco Chanel*, 1935, photograph.

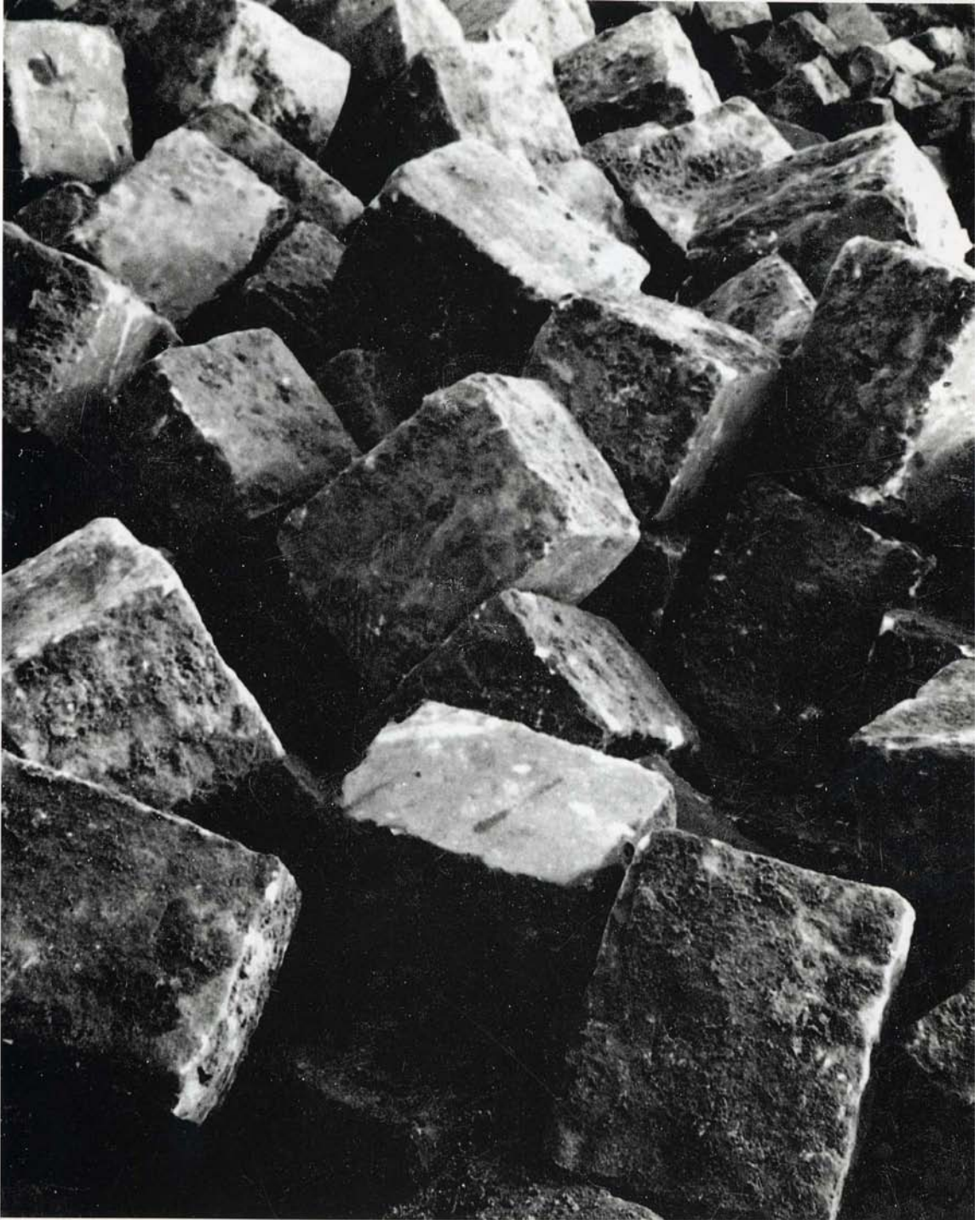


Figure 5: Robert Doisneau, *Tas de Pavés*, 1929, photograph.



Figure 6: Robert Doisneau, *Coco*, 1952, photograph.



Figure 7: Robert Doisneau, *Jacques Prévert au Gueridon*, 1955, photograph.

Frame

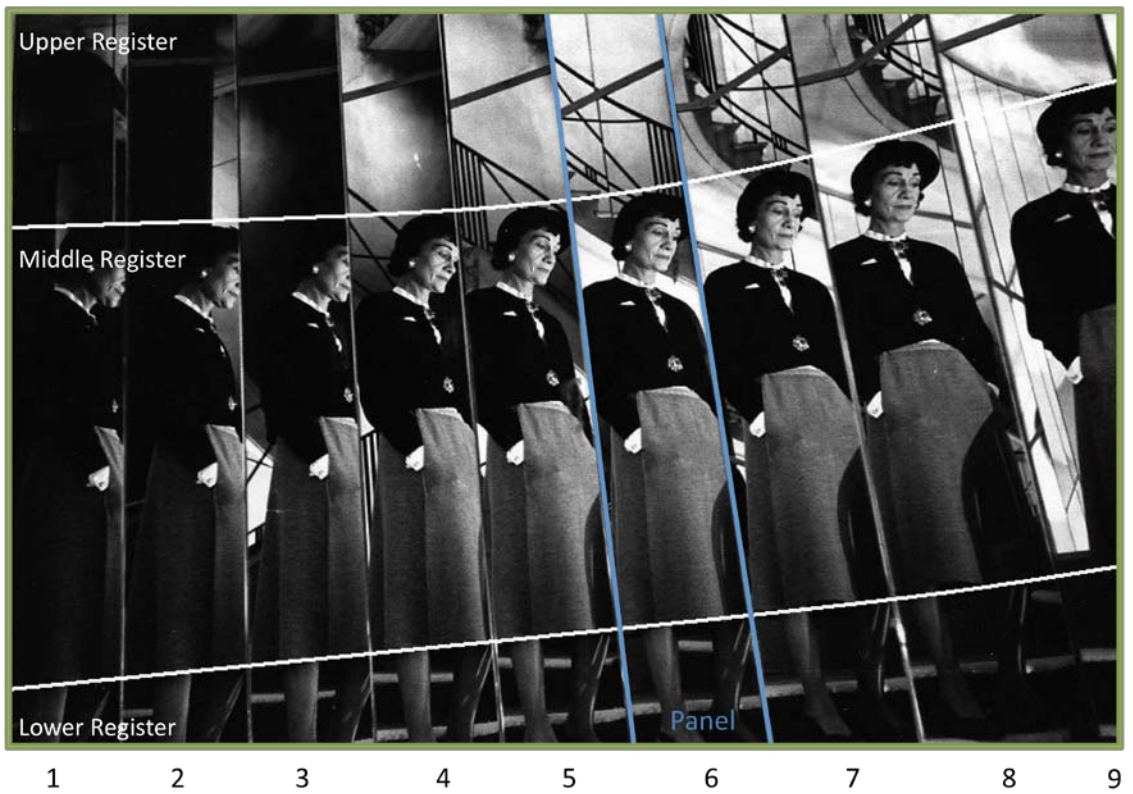


Figure 8: Robert Doisneau, *Diagram of Mademoiselle Chanel, 31 Rue Cambon, Paris, 1953*, photograph.

Frame

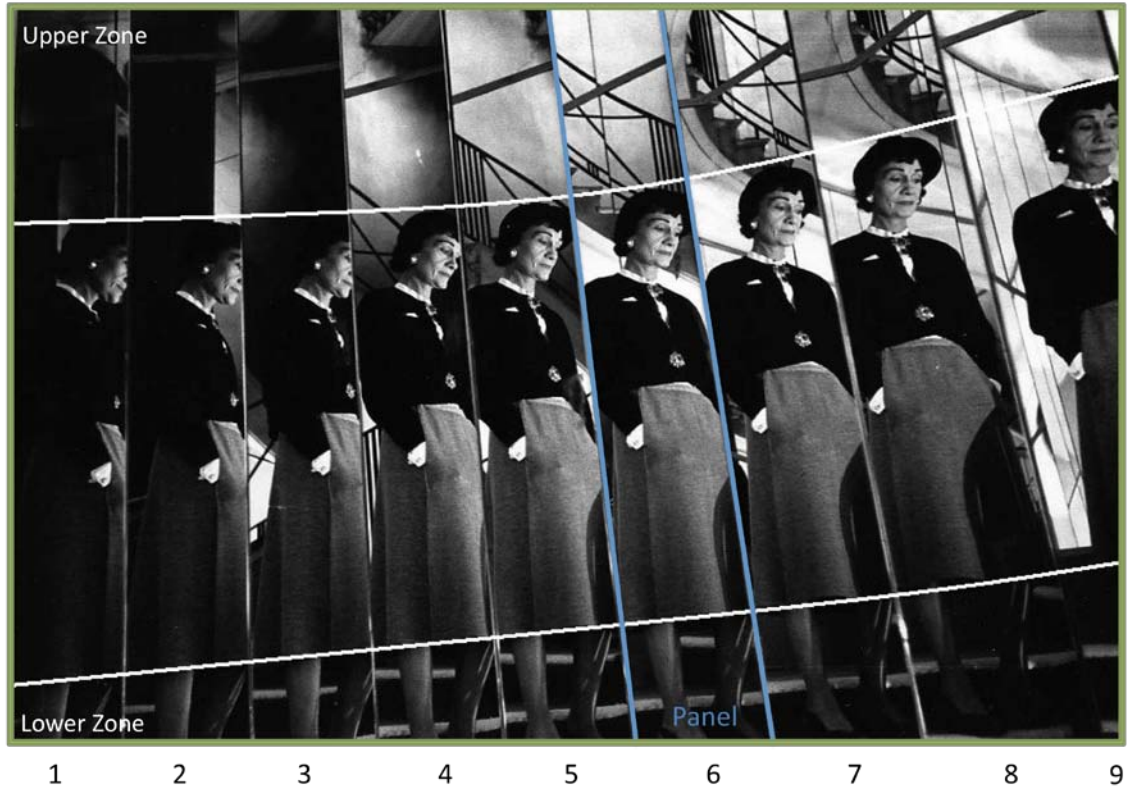


Figure 9: Robert Doisneau, Diagram of *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 31 rue Cambon, Paris, 1953.



Figure 10: Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*, 1882, oil on canvas.



Figure 11: Robert Doisneau, *Mademoiselle Anita*, 1950, photograph.



Figure 12: Francis Hammond, *Chanel's Couture Salon*, undated, photograph.



Figure 13: Cecil Beaton, *Coco Chanel*, 1965, photograph.



Figure 14: Cecil Beaton, *Coco Chanel*, 1965, photograph.



Figure 15: Douglas Kirkland, Untitled, 1962, photograph.



Figure 16: Francois Kollar, Untitled, 1937, photograph.

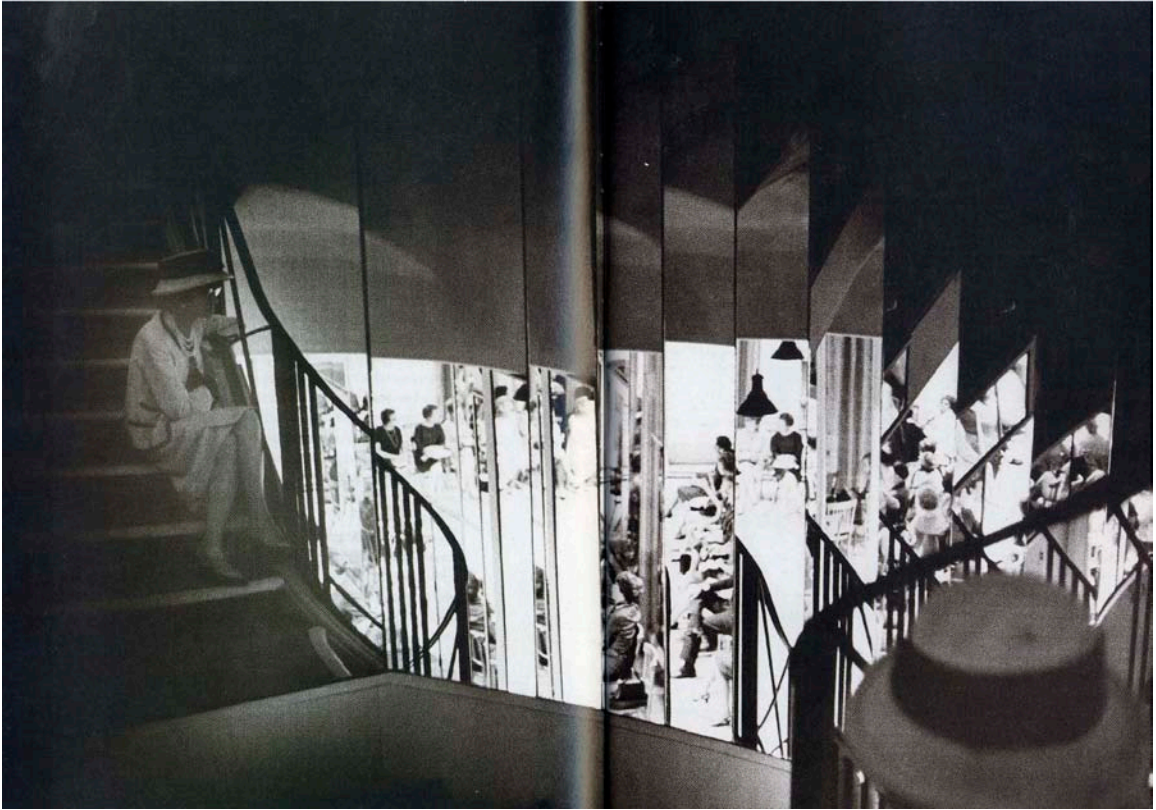


Figure 17: Douglas Kirkland, Untitled, 1962, photograph.

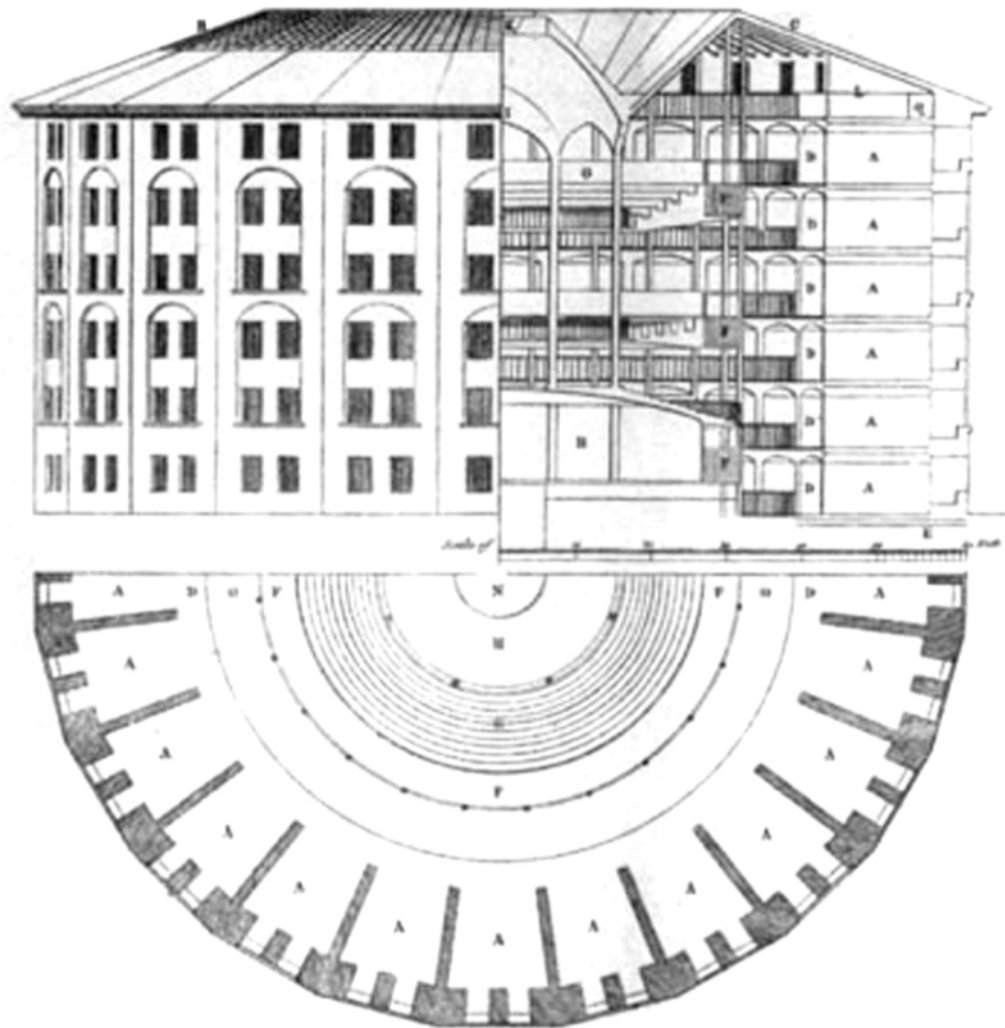


Figure 18: Jeremy Bentham, *Plan and Section for Panopticon*, 1787, drawing.



Figure 19: Robert Doisneau, *La Baiser de l'Hotel de Ville*, 1950, photograph.



Figure 20: Horst P. Horst, *Portrait of Coco Chanel*, 1937, photograph.



Figure 21: Boris Lipnitzki, *Coco Chanel*, 1936, photograph.



Figure 22: Francois Kollar, *Coco Chanel*, 1937, photograph.



Figure 23: Richard Avedon, *Coco Chanel and Suzy Parker*, 1962, photograph.



Figure 24: Robert Doisneau, 6.26_26, *Coco Chanel aux Miroirs*, 1953, photograph.



Figure 25: Robert Doisneau, 6.26_27 *Coco Chanel aux Miroirs*, 1953, photograph.

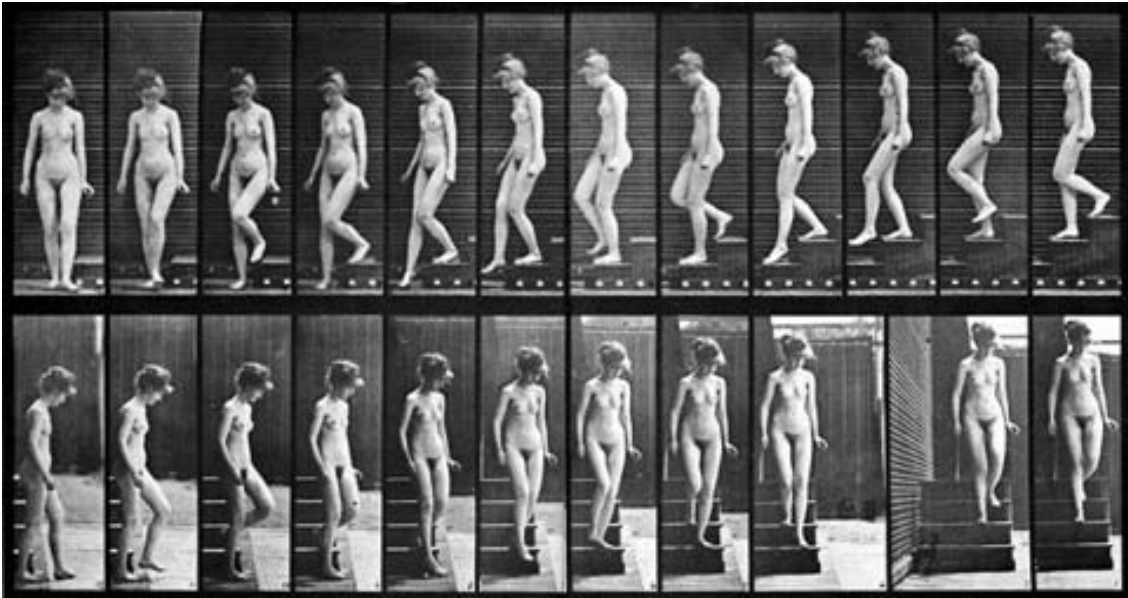


Figure 26: Eadweard Muybridge, *Woman Descending Steps*, 1884-1886, photograph.

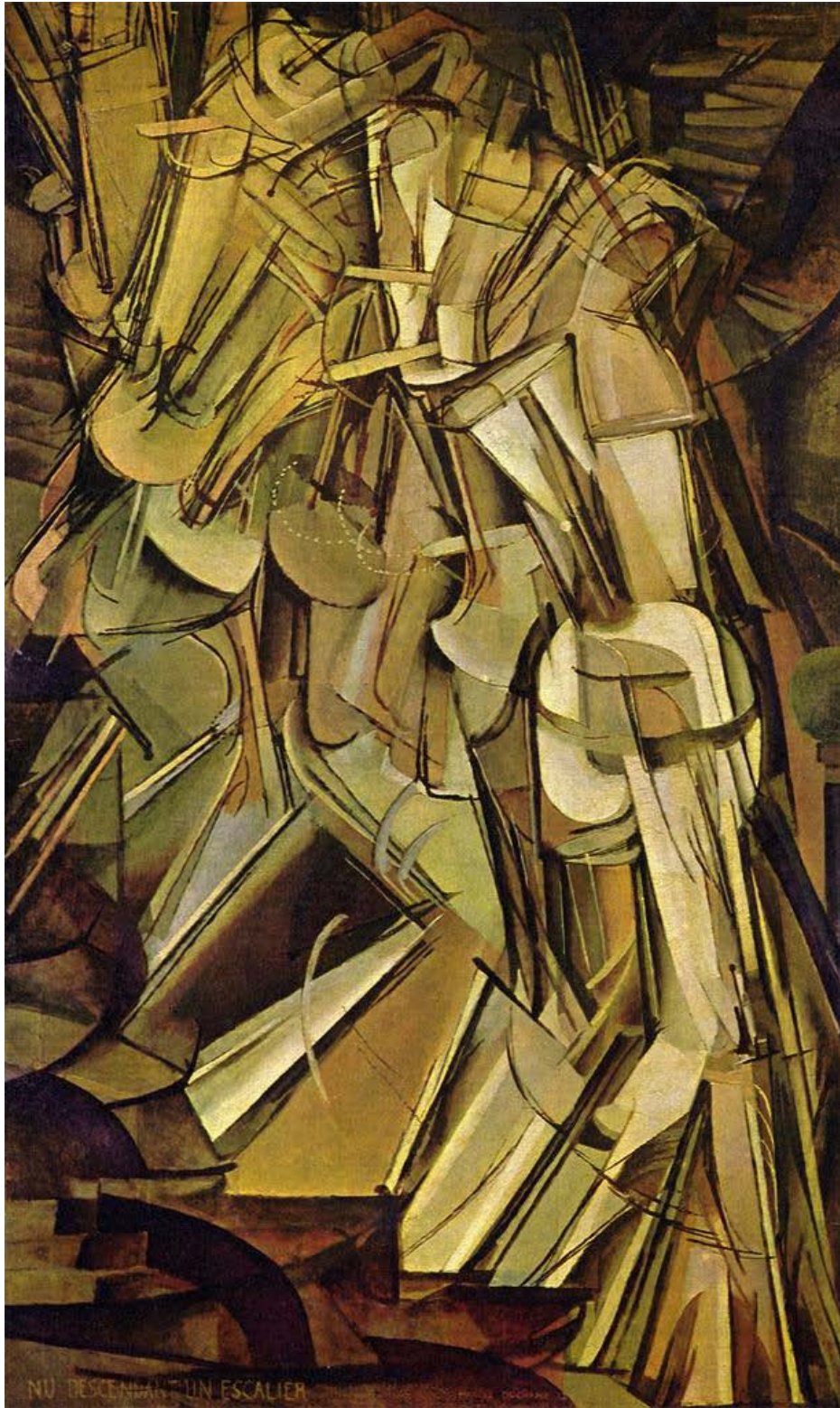
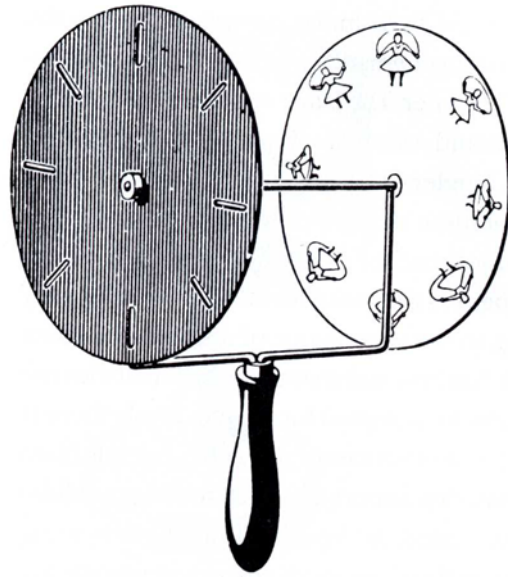
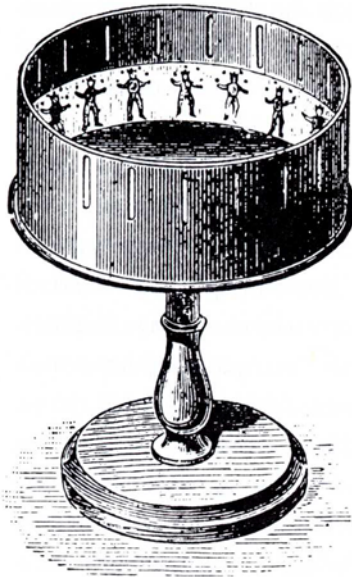


Figure 27: Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase #2*, 1912, oil on canvas.



Phenakistiscope.

Figure 28: Unattributed artist, *Phenakistiscope*, drawing.



Zootrope. Mid-1830s.

Figure 29: Unattributed artist, *Zootrope*, mid-1830s, drawing.



Figure 30: Suzy Parker, *Coco Chanel*, 1953, photograph.



Figure 31: French Vogue, "La rentrée de Chanel," 1954, magazine spread.

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