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THE WOMEN'S MAKING



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Women's Entrepreneurship in Fashion Design during the 20th Century

The Case Study of Teresina Negri and GRISINA

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Keywords

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Abstract

The general theme of this paper is the role of women in the development of business systems and in the creation and anticipation of design scenarios through invention products and registered models, in the women's clothing sector, during the 20th century. The case we are presenting here to the scientific community is the result of an ongoing original and unpublished research study concerning a female entrepreneur and creative mind, Teresina Negri (1879-1974).

During the course of her life, characterised by different forms of creativity, she was able, according to the different periods and the socio-economic context, to give the most appropriate response to the evolution of customs and behaviors, becoming emblematic and a pioneer of a way of positioning the female figure towards a proactive society.

In conclusion, the discovery and the research activity about Teresina Negri are gathering a multiplicity of documentary sources all over the world, that incorporate innovative aspects and offer an original contribution to the theme of the role of women, in the recent past, in design creations and business history and are emblematic of a creative fervour that has been able to combine inventiveness and entrepreneurial ability as well as social and economic affirmation.

1. The Beginnings in Dance and Theatre

Teresina Negri (known as Grisina, the stage name of Teresa Maria Margherita Negri; Turin, 28.05.1879 – Principality of Monaco, 18.01.1974) is an Italian (naturalised French) dancer, entrepreneur, and designer (Fig. 1).

Teresa and her sister Margherita (1880-1936), daughters of a carpenter and a factory worker, study to become seamstresses; however, they attend ballet classes, which they keep secret from their parents. Teresa is particularly gifted in this art, and upon being discovered, in 1895, only 16 years old, she runs away from home to Rome where she begins her career as a dancer.

From the theatres of Rome, she moves to those of Naples, and then on to France. In 1902, she is employed by the Nice Opera House and, from 1905 to 1908, she works at the Monte Carlo Theatre as a *coryphée*.

Between 1908 and 1911, Negri enters Parisian high society with a small troupe of dancers led and directed by her, and with whom she performs during dinners and private parties. A letter¹ sent by set designer R. Piot² to the theatre director J. Rouché³ confirms this. In 1911 she performs at the Hébertot Theatre under the direction of L. Staats⁴: already aged thirty-two, this is her first leading role.

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1. René Piot, letter to Jacques Rouché, [1911]. Fonds Rouché, Th. des Arts, R8(4), Pièce 15(24), BN-Opera.
 2. René Piot (Paris, 1863 - ibid. 1934), painter and pupil of the Académie Julian and G. Moreau, was the author of great frescoes and sketches for the Gobelins tapestries.
 3. Jacques Rouché (Lunel, 16.11.1862 - Paris, 9.11.1957) was a French patron, entrepreneur, theatre director and film producer. He contributed to the transformation of the French theatre by directing the Théâtre des Arts from 1910 to 1913 and, as director of the Paris Opera (1915-45), he gave greater impetus and splendour to choreographic activity.
 4. Léonard Armand Staats (Paris, 26.11.1877 - ibid. 15.02.1952) was a renowned French dancer and choreographer, maître de ballet of the Paris Opera from 1908 to 1926, and from 1926 to 1928 the leading choreographer at the Roxy Movie Palace in New York.



Figure 1. On the left: Teresina Negri, 1912. Source: private collection. On the right: *coryphées* the Monte Carlo Theatre, 1906. Source: Archives Monte Carlo SBM.

Her dances, which combine the classical tradition of the Italian school with Isadora Duncan's experimental forms of expression, are a huge success, and bring her sudden fame. She is then hired by the Opéra-Comique Theatre, where she dances between 1912 and 1913, and under the aegis of the choreographer Mariquita⁵, she wins the coveted role of *danseuse étoile*. At that time, she takes part in conferences on dance with Mata Hari and G. Wague⁶, while in 1913, her choice to desert the highly prestigious Opéra-Comique Theatre to play the leading role in the Théâtre Marigny's successful *Le Triomphe de Bacchus* causes quite a stir.

5. Marie-Thérèse Gamalery known as Madame Mariquita (c. 1838 - Paris, 5.10.1922) was an internationally-renowned dancer, choreographer and dance instructor. She was choreographic director of the *Palais de la Danse* during the 1900 Expo, and *maîtresse de ballet* at the Opéra-Comique in Paris from 1898 to 1920. Among her best known students are Liane de Pougy and Bella Otero.

6. Georges Wague, at that time Georges Marie Valentin Waag (Paris, 14.1.1874 - Menton, 17.04.1965) was a French mime actor, pedagogue and silent film actor.

At the same time, she establishes an extensive network of public relations and becomes a regular guest at the *soirées* organised by the *Escholiers*, an association of lovers of literary and artistic life, who came together in order to produce shows and discover new talent, with particular attention to the phenomena of worldliness.

In 1914, together with the *étoile* Dithy Darling, she presents for the first time in Paris the Furlana or *Danse du Pape*, an ancient form of dance which was given a new lease of life when Pope Pius X expressed his preference for it, compared to other dances that were popular at that time. The fact that Negri immediately puts herself at the service of this fashion, conducting precise historical-philological research and with the help of one of the most important choreographers of the time, the aforementioned Staats, further highlights her artistic and intellectual skills and versatility, as well as her meticulous attention to trends and the product offered.

In 1914, the Negri-Darling couple is called upon to perform at the New Middlesex Theatre in London, and in Manchester in the company of the *impresario* F. Karno⁷.

When she returns to Paris in 1915, Teresina Negri takes on the role of France in *Europe*, an allegorical pantomime about the First World War, shown at the Alhambra Theatre. Because of the themes it deals with, it causes a scandal and is censored. This is her final public appearance.

7. Fred Karno, the pseudonym of Frederick John Westcott (Exeter, 26.03.1866 - Lilliput, 17.09.1941) was one of the most important theatre producers of his time, and a well-known supporter of great talents, including Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel.

2. Professional Transformation from Dance to Fashion Design

When her dazzling career as a dancer ends abruptly, Negri reunites with her family, who are still living in Italy. In 1920 she returns to Paris where, together with her sister (Margherita Negri Aiassa, shirtmaker in Turin), she starts a fashion workshop under the pseudonym of Madame Grisina. The business, focused on creating and producing lingerie and luxury swimwear, is extremely successful in the context of Parisian fashion, often preempting styles and ways of use. Negri is acutely aware of the areas of reference of the customs and behaviours characterising the emancipation of women of her time. Because of this, much of the experience she has acquired during her dancing career and the skills and expertise she attained from her family heritage are poured, as potential data relating to an entrepreneurial project, into her decision to launch her own brand of women's underwear.

Her entrepreneurial activity is characterised by craftsmanship, attention to detail, innovative use of materials, ease of use and attention to ergonomic requirements and practicality, combined with elegance and measured, basic shapes. The original and revolutionary designs come from an in-depth knowledge of practical needs partly resulting from Negri's experience in dance and spark demand in several countries (France, USA, Algeria, Vietnam, Switzerland, Cuba).

In her creative entrepreneurial activity, which continues without interruption until 1961, Negri dedicates herself – as we will see later – to an intense patent production, protecting the fruit of her ingenuity. In addition to taking care of the product throughout the entire cycle of conception, design and consumption, Negri personally supervises its distribution to her own boutiques and

through a very wide and precise advertising effort, using appropriate and innovative communication tools: radio advertisements, ads in newspapers and magazines and art photography.

3. Creation of a Brand Identity

Although Negri never created a real monogram with which to personalise her garments (as, for example, Jean Patou was the first to do, by affixing to her creations the monogram made up of the initials JP and as Coco Chanel also later did), the brand GRISINA was born with disarming simplicity from the acronym composed of one syllable from the surname Negri, and two from the name Teresina. This is a very strong stamp of identity, behind which the inventor both hides and reveals herself at the same time. Grisina is not just a product, but a person: Madame Grisina, the creator. And it is no coincidence that, at the time of putting together her identity documents, in order to acquire French citizenship, the entrepreneur makes the choice to officially register as Teresa Maria, known as Grisina, Negri. GRISINA is also an international brand, officially registered in Bern on January 10, 1935 and related to the “manufacture of brassieres, girdles, belts, swimsuits and women’s clothing in general, which are worn under clothes”⁸.

4. Identification of a Target Audience and Characterisation of a Niche in the Reference Product Sector

The target audience identified is a type of emancipated woman, who is in step with the times, cultured and uninhibited; who

8. From *Costituzione Società Anonima Italiana “Grisina”*, notarially designed by Notaio Dott. Cav. Erminio Martelli, in Milan, 27.05.1936, rep. n° 761, arch. 549.

follows the evolution of current trends and uses clothing as a visual code of belonging.

During the First World War, with men occupied at the front, women of all social classes begin to feel the need for simpler and more practical clothes that allow freedom of movement and let them lead much more dynamic lives than before. With this in mind, we cannot fail to mention the role of Paul Poiret who, even before the Great War, had freed women from the constraint of corsets.

Aided by the influences provoked by cinema and the freedom of styles deriving from musical rhythms such as the fox-trot, jazz and the charleston, the process of women's liberation from the 19th century constraints of bodices, girdles and skirts made with whale bones is now underway.

The ways of dressing and the history of underwear follow, in parallel, that of women's liberation and, as described by C. Saint-Laurent (1986, pp. 85-101), are based on three categories of interpretative investigation of the phenomenon: the sleeping women (the sophisticated relationship between the woman and her clothes); the bathers (rites and myths linked to the joyful exercise of rediscovered bathing: think, for all of them, of the Côte d'Azur Riviera and the literary and imaginative repercussions of D.H. Lawrence, or those of the artistic depictions of bathers by A. Renoir onwards); the dancers (who went from knee-length trousers to short skirts and tutus, and then moved on to feather-light fabrics which, wrapping the dancer's body, wrapped it in flickers).

Therefore, in each of these categories of investigation, Teresina Negri was able to contribute her inventions.

5. Design and Development of New Products and Patenting of Inventions at an International Level

Being aware of the value of her work and the innovations of her designs for women's underwear, since 1920 Negri is fully committed to an intense patent activity in the battle against imitations. She organises a legal protection structure that makes use of notaries and lawyers, and files registrations with patent offices in France, Italy, UK, Canada, the USA, and Cuba, in order to defend the artistic and technological property of the registered models, from which there is a great attention and care of the executive detail and descriptive precision of the components and their assembly.

Studies have made it possible to recover the complete documentation of most of these international patents, with the exception of those filed in Italy from 1934 to 1938, due to the temporary closure of the State Archives buildings in Rome, where they are kept.

The descriptions accompanying patent applications are striking due to the topicality and rigorous precision of the technical language used and contain not only detailed illustrations of the construction methods but also statements regarding the advantages and usefulness of the new solutions.

It is interesting to consider how the creative intuitions that lead Negri to process these patents are signs of an extraordinary ability to understand practical issues and aesthetic needs, often predicting future scenarios, assisted by great inventiveness and a profound foresight, whose trajectories of innovation have lasted until the present day.

These merits are evidenced by the fact that one of her bra models is exhibited in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Brassiere with a Low-Cut Back, Grisina, c. 1926 - c. 1932. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.15665>.

The caption accompanying the item reads:

In the late 1920s and the 1930s, many evening dresses had low-cut-backs, revealing a so-called back décolletage. The design of this brassiere accommodates this style: the straps can be wound around the body, leaving the back bare. The model is called 'Le Grisina Invisible' (The Invisible Grisina), because the flesh-coloured tulle was practically invisible when the bra was worn.

Let us take a closer look at some of these models of invention.

5.1. Soutien-gorge

The first patent application for this bra model is filed by the entrepreneur in Paris on February 14, 1920 and its object is:

un soutien-gorge remarquable notamment par ce fait qu'il permet de maintenir correctement les seins, grâce à la constitution appropriée dudit soutien-gorge qui oblige les seins à se mouler

respectivement dans chacune des deux poches qu'il forme et cela sans le secours d'aucune baleinage ni d'aucune bande de renforcement, mais simplement par l'assemblage par couture rabattue et piquée, de trois pièces de tissu convenablement coupées composant chacune des moitiés du soutien-gorge symétriques par rapport au milieu de la poitrine⁹. (Fig. 3)



Figure 3. On the left: Teresina Negri, drawings from patent, Paris, 1920. On the right: Grisina advertisement, *Comoedia Illustré*, 1920. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

9. "Its object is a brassiere worthy of note, above due to the fact that it allows the breasts to be supported correctly, thanks to the appropriate construction of the bra, which forces the breasts to mould themselves to the two bra cups, and this without the aid of any ribbing or reinforcement band, but simply because of the assembly with folded and sewn seams, of three pieces of fabric appropriately cut to form each of the halves of the bra symmetrical in relation to the centre of the breast", from *Résumé*, in *Brevet d'Invention*, section XVI (*Habillement*), part 1 (*Mercerie, ganterie, lingerie, fleurs et plumes, corsets, épingles*), no. 510.063, 14.02.1920, p. 2.

The radical and unprecedented design of the bra, as J. Farrell-Beck and C. Gau observe, “had contouring seams similar to those of 1960s bras”¹⁰, makes the brand an immediate success.

5.2. Masque pour le Repos du Visage

Negri's inventiveness, together with her ability to capture and satisfy the most diverse female desires and needs that fashion is maintaining, such as body care and remedies against imperfections, is also manifested in a model that is included in the product sector Chirurgie, médecine, hygiène, salubrité, sécurité. Gymnastique, hydrothérapie, natation. It is a mask for resting the face, patented on October 9, 1924 (Fig. 4), that

grâce à sa forme particulière, moule d'une façon parfaite le visage en s'appliquant sur toutes ses parties, permettant ainsi de faire disparaître les bajoues, double mentons, bouffissures et rides et permettant également l'application d'onguents, crèmes, etc. Ce masque est destiné à remplacer les articles en caoutchouc dits hygiéniques, lesquels sont plus ou moins efficaces et vont à l'encontre du but recherché en ramollissant les muscles du visage, en ternissant la peau par l'excès de transpiration qu'ils provoquent tout en fatiguant inutilement.¹¹

10. Farrell-Beck, J. & Gau, C. (2002). *Uplift: The Bra in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 54.

11. “Thanks to its particular shape, it perfectly shapes the face as it is applied to all its parts, thus eliminating sagging cheekbones, double chin, swelling and wrinkles, and also allowing the application of ointments, creams, etc.”. This mask is intended to replace the so-called hygienic articles made from latex, which are more or less effective and go against the desired objective, softening the muscles of the face, dulling the skin due to the excess sweat they cause, and tiring it unnecessarily”, from *Brevet d'Invention*, section XIX (*Chirurgie, médecine, hygiène, salubrité, sécurité*), part 3 (*Gymnastique, hydrothérapie, natation*) n° 587.083, 09.10.1924, p. 1.

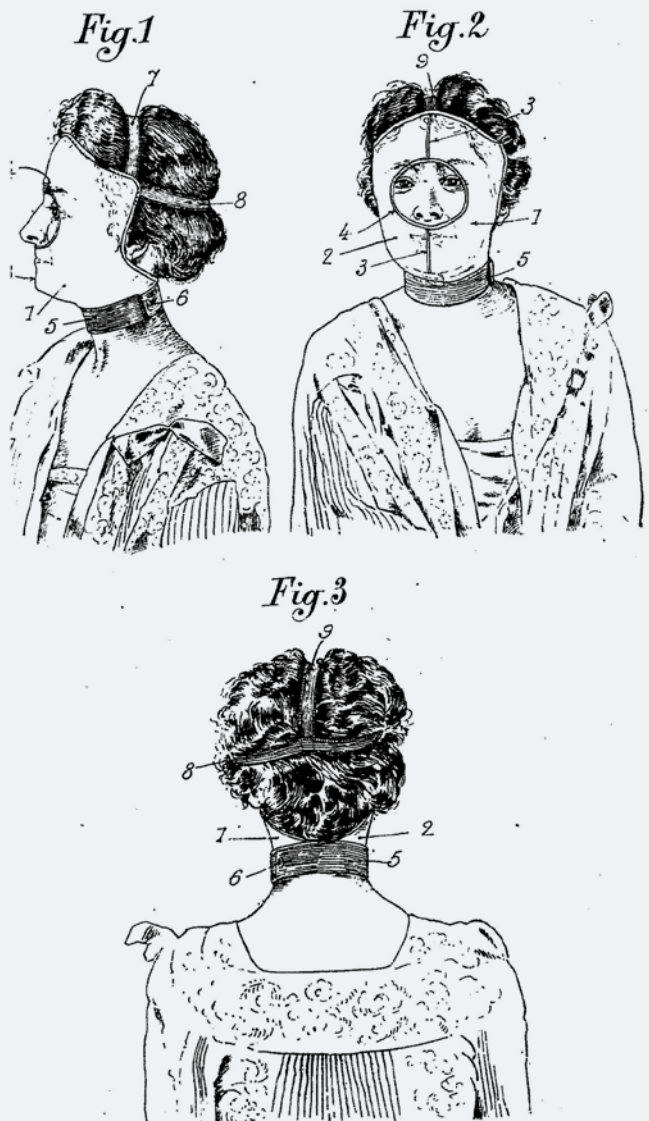


Figure 4. Teresina Negri, drawings from patent, Paris, 1924.

5.3. Nouveau Maillot de Bain pour Dames

On March 24, 1932, a ladies' swimsuit is patented, available in two variants. The first is a costume consisting of an upper part, the edges of which draw two curved and convex lines upwards, arranged symmetrically, and at the top of which are attached elastic laces, and two trapezoidal side and back pieces, fixed laterally along the edges of the front upper part and featuring, at the ends, devices to fasten them to each other. This solution therefore allows a double fastening of the costume. Furthermore, in this version, the garment can also be found “ajouré, grâce à des effets de dentelles, broderie, tulle ou analogues, sur tout ou partie de sa surface, de manière à permettre le passage de rayons du soleil tout en dissimulant les formes et en protégeant l'épiderme”¹² (Fig. 5). The second solution is made from a single piece of fabric, cut in its upper part symmetrically with respect to the longitudinal axis, and along a line such that the front part, at the top, forms the two cups which are to contain and shape the breasts. A common feature of the two versions is undoubtedly to give rise to “deux poches qui, au lieu d'aplatir les seins, les contournent, en les moulant et en les maintenant, sans faire pression sur eux”.¹³ Once again, Grisina's product not only meets practical needs, improving the body's silhouette and protecting it from overexposure to sunlight, but also those of an aesthetic nature, in the attention to detail of the design and materials chosen.

12. “Perforated, thanks to the effects of lace, embroidery, tulle or similar, on all or part of its surface, so as to allow the sun's rays to pass through, while concealing the shape and protecting the epidermis”, by *Résumé*, in *Brevet d'Invention*, no. 734.167, 24.03.1932, p. 1.

13. “Two pockets that, instead of flattening the breasts, surround them, shaping and supporting them, without putting pressure on them”, by *Résumé*, in *Brevet d'Invention*, no. 734.168, 24.03.1932, p. 3.



Figure 5. On the left: Teresina Negri, drawings from patent, Paris, 1932. On the right: article about the Grisina swimwear, *L'Intransigeant*, 1932. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

This is in line with the most fashionable trends of the time, such as the fascination with tanning, which, after having been associated for centuries with the less well-off social classes and therefore far from common taste, just at the beginning of the 1930s, had acquired popularity due to Chanel.



Figure 6. In the upper part: Teresina Negri, drawings from patent, Paris, 1934. In the bottom part: Grisina advertisement, *Vogue Paris*, 1935. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

5.4. Sous-Vêtement pour Dames

On March 24, 1934, Negri files a patent for an elasticated undergarment consisting of a bra, girdle and culotte (Fig. 6). The culotte gives rise to the use of garters and is able to replace the corset, while the bra can be sewn or independent, and if necessary buttoned to the girdle. The undergarment is therefore intended to improve and slim down the female form, and, since it is designed to be made of elastic fabric, to shape and support the breasts in their natural position. But that's not all: one of the most interesting innovations undoubtedly lies in the fact that, unlike other similar garments which were widespread at that time, this, which forms a single garment, given the structural continuity, eliminates the need to layer several individual items, whose edges would generally overlap, thus giving rise to unsightly folds and marks underneath the clothes.

6. Coverage of the Various Markets on an International Level

During the 1920's, Grisina's merchandise begins to garner interest from the national and international markets, and we have seen this in the main shopping centres in Algeria, Switzerland, Vietnam, Cuba and the USA: Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's and Stern Brothers in New York, Saks Fifth Avenue in Miami Beach, Sax-Kay in Detroit, The May Co. in Los Angeles.

In particular, the demand for lingerie from American retailers increases to such an extent that it is likely to exceed the limits of the tailor's shop production capabilities, which still retains the characteristics of artisan production, and this gives rise to numerous cases of counterfeiting. In May 1929, on magazine *Women's Wear*, Negri announces that, as of October of the same year, "she no longer has a representative in the United

States. Brassieres of this type not coming direct from Madame GRISINA in PARIS are copies and do not give the correct line to the feminine figure”. Nevertheless, Grisina’s garments are present in the U.S. market at least until the mid-1930s.

7. Visual and Advertising Communication

Teresina Negri begins sustained visual communication campaigns to promote the brand’s mission and contents, also with reference to the use of tools and methods typical of professional or art photography and, with these tools, she implements a wide penetration in the sector’s advertising, also at an international level. In addition to a widespread presence in the main trade magazines and prominent newspapers, there are extensive editorials to promote and document the quality of her creations in fashion and entertainment magazines of the time, such as *Le Théâtre*, *Fémina*, *Les Modes de la Femme de France*, etc. We saw how the first result of Negri’s ingenuity is a bra, which is revolutionary both in its design and its practical input. A few months after its launch on the market, it is praised in the magazine *Comoedia Illustré*, as follows:

C’est moins que rien! Un morceau de tulle: mais coupé et cousu de telle sorte qu’il s’enroule et s’adapte à la gorge comme une double coupe arachnéenne. Sa transparence laisse voir la délicatesse de la peau, et malgré sa finesse, ce léger maintien conserve et retient la gorge sans la déplacer. Quel avantage pour la danse ou le sport!¹⁴.

14. “It’s less than nothing! A piece of tulle: but cut and sewn in such a way as to envelop and fit the breast like a spider’s web double cut. Being transparent, you see the delicacy of the skin, and despite its fineness, this light support supports and holds the breast without moving it. What an advantage for dance and sport!”, from *Mon Carnet*, in *Comoedia Illustré*, VII, n° 6, 15.04.1920, p. 296.

As can be inferred from this first journalistic review, the product is aimed, though without any preclusion for everyday and social use, at dance and sports activities, undoubtedly due to the creator's previous artistic experience.

And so the bra is also advertised in programs and flyers of the major Parisian theatres, such as the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt.

From the '30s, Negri begins sustained visual communication campaign through advertisements made using artistic and original photographs, taken by photographers such as G.L. Manuel Frères, H. Clarke (Fig. 7) and G. Saad (Fig. 8).



Figure 7. On the left: Henry Clarke, Grisina bra, 1949. On the right: Studio Saad, Grisina corset, "L'Officiel de la Mode", n° 357/358. Source: private collection.



Figure 8. On the left: Georges Saad, Grisina swimwear, 1953. On the right: Teddy Piaz, Grisina swimwear, 1955. Source: private collection.

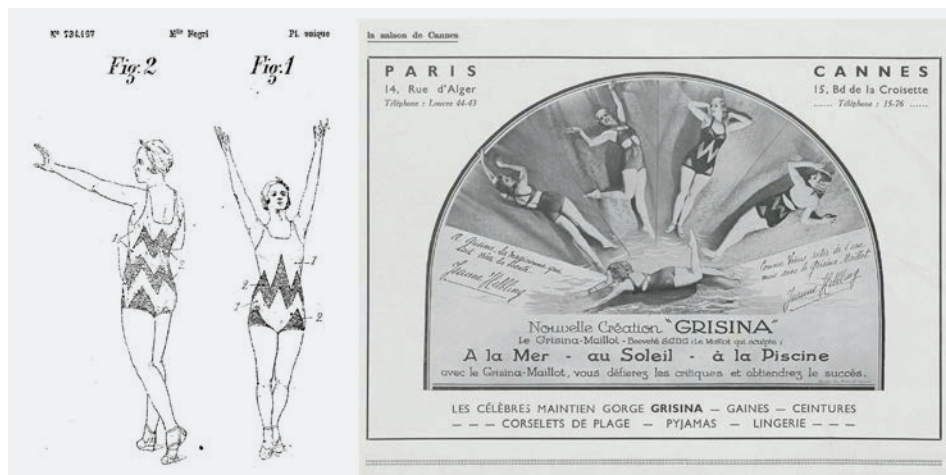


Figure 9. On the left: Teresina Negri, drawings from patent, Paris, 1932. On the right: Grisina advertisement, *La saison de Cannes*, 1932. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

The extensive advertising campaign that, in 1932, accompanies the opening of the GRISINA boutique on the Croisette, in Cannes, the city of cinema, is emblematic; it is characterised by specially designed advertising, with a fascinating and evocative design typical of cinematic dynamism, and stars the Hollywood actress Jeanne Helbling (Fig. 9).

A great deal of interest is sparked by the innovative products in the sector's publicity, and which also interests some of the main newspapers, both journalistic and fashion, on an international level: *Le Gaulois*, *Excelsior*, *New York Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode*, *L'Art et la Mode*, *Vogue Paris*, *Vogue USA*, etc. (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. On the left: *Women's wear daily*, 1949. On the right: *L'Art et la Mode*, 1947. Source: private collection.

8. Business Creation, Financial and Real Estate Administration

Although Negri's activity initially takes place at home in her apartment, in 1923, in response to the growth in demand for garments on a national and international scale, the entrepreneur expands her production and distribution spaces, renting a boutique with a workshop on the upper floor, in the very centrally-located Rue d'Alger, near Place Vendôme, the Parisian fashion district par excellence. A second sales space is opened in 1932 in Cannes. Although the Cannes experience lasts only two years – probably as a result of the worsening health of Teresina's sister who is admitted to the Sanatorium in nearby Vence in 1933 – it bolsters Grisina's fame and prestige. In 1935, in a symbol of the continuous commercial expansion of the business, a corporate nucleus of Grisina is established, along with the consequent opening of a new Italian store in Piazza Santa Maria Beltrade, near Piazza Duomo, in Milan, the productive hub of the Italian market and a major international metropolis.

In 1941, when Negri acquires French citizenship, and with the advent of the Second World War, all her assets and property in Italy – including the Company – are confiscated. However, this doesn't slow down the economic growth of Grisina, which the entrepreneur has meanwhile (in 1939) converted into a new corporate structure in Paris, whose partners includes bank officials, publicists and prominent members of the Parisian fashion scene. The articles of association of the Grisina Company are carefully drafted, and give full powers to Negri, who assumes the role of sole director and then president and general manager.

Another strong sign of Negri's socio-economic emancipation is the prenuptial agreement of 1938, signed together with her husband Henri Espirac.

It is drawn up in such a way as to guarantee her total independence in asset management, in a regime of separation of assets, and full freedom of choice in the conjugal context. It has also been possible to trace, through extensive documentation, the turnover of the boutique between 1937 and 1938, with figures of 1,034,125.60 Fr (discounted figure € 609,063.72) and 1,257,355.18 Fr (discounted figure € 665,969.11), numbers showing obvious growth, and surprising considering the single homemade style production unit.

The business, which is always run by Teresina Negri, despite her aged, ceases to trade in 1961, when faces with the frenetic and pressing pace of industrial production to which Grisina, which has developed into a niche product sector, offering a largely tailor-made manufacturing service, is unable to align itself. Negri, as if wishing to take the brand identity with her forever, doesn't give in, but rather prefers to permanently close the Company.

However, a few years later, several local and national entrepreneurs in France attempts – albeit in vain – to ride on the successful wake left by Negri, by filing new patents and trademarks in the name of Grisina.

Lastly, research carried out at the French Land Registry showed that the entrepreneur has invested a large part of Grisina's income in luxury real estate, from which she has managed to obtain a considerable financial return: a castle in Saint-Tropez, several apartments in Paris and in Saint-Raph-

ael, and the *Villa Unda Maris* in the Principality of Monaco, which is to be her last residence.

In 1939, Teresina marries the French baritone and bibliophile Henri Espirac (1890-1950) in Monte Carlo, and thus obtains French citizenship, ensuring that her assets are intact in anticipation of the Second World War.

After spending her last years between Paris, Saint-Tropez and Geneva, the businesswoman moves permanently to her villa in Monaco, where she dies at the age of 94.

She is buried in France, in the cemetery of Cap-d'Ail.

9. Conclusions

At the end of this story, of almost legendary character, based on just a few available documents and despite the obstacles to the reconstruction of a complex biography, we can draw some fundamental considerations on the real reasons that pushed the daughter of a carpenter and a factory worker to embark on such a dazzling, industrious and successful career in the various fields in which she operated. In the first place, we feel a reason lies in the redemption from a condition of misery, reached through huge sacrifices, including the move away from home and from her parents in late 19th century Turin in order to expatriate to France and UK, at that time more modern countries boasting societies more open than Italy to the unprejudiced acceptance of women's contribution beyond the artistic field, in politics, economics and social activism, letting them occupy without inhibitions roles and prerogatives in an anti-traditional sense not subordinate to male hegemony. Let us not forget that, historically, feminism had its roots precisely in France, during the late Enlightenment, developing

further in the last two decades of the 19th century and extending therefore to Great Britain and the US. We can accordingly presume that underlying the radically innovative and pioneering approach of Teresina Negri, especially in her role as designer, was a precise strategy of exploiting the favourable historical and social conditions for re-evaluating women's position in those very countries where it was easier to get objective validations and acknowledgments, not least among them those of economic and financial advantage, and penetrate fields usually reserved for the traditional patriarchal society. Secondly, another reason might be sought in the personalities Teresina was coming into contact with by virtue of her career as a dancer. In the current state of researches, which are still going on, we do not know much about the encounters that might have influenced the reasons for her success, but, undoubtedly, having frequented the cosmopolitan elite environments of culture, theatre, show business and fashion might have developed in her an aptitude for detecting the signs of novel tendencies that she translated into her designs. Teresina certainly paid the price for professional success by finding sentimental fulfilment at an advanced age, marrying the person who was then going to be her husband until his death and choosing in marriage, too, an artist and an intellectual.

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