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BUF1101 Introduction to the Fashion Industry

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Fashion is one of the most powerful industries in the world: it represents 6% of global consumption and is constantly growing. It is not only about clothing, but also accessories, makeup, perfume and even body modifications. This is one of the industries that has a considerable power in the modern world. The most of its influences are passion, suspicion, hostility, but never indifference. People are ready to change their own style fascinated by the fashion show. Typically, we are covertly recruited to a fashion and follow it reflexively.

The phenomenon of fashion can be explained by a brief description of some intellectual and behavioral modes in the risky and ephemeral controversy between the avant-garde and the tradition. My attitude is focused on the collectiveness and transition to novelty. They are the driving forces for a new generation. Nevertheless, there is no fashion without negative aspects as well: excess, one-sidedness, exclusion. Indeed, fashion can be also defined by a certain excess. It favors a single aspect of a complex situation and cultivates it to excess. This aspect is given an exclusive importance, even if it makes everything else irrelevant and destroys everything that was made in the history before. Fashion behavior also provokes a great number of "garbage cans" in history: everything is to be rejected except for the one thing that we affirm.

Virgil Abloh is a popular contemporary American designer with the urbanistic inclination whose collection portfolio exceeds the number of 18. His professional life is not only limited by fashion, but also integrates other creative areas such as art, electronic music, architecture and design in a broad sense. Virgil Abloh found his own label "Off-White" in 2013. The major part of it is sportswear, T-shirts, tracksuits, hoodies, accessories specially designed to satisfy the contemporary needs. He got his education at Boylan Catholic High school and had the apprenticeship at the Italian fashion house Fendi. However, Virgil Abloh works independently now, has many experimental projects with other designers and is flexible in his professional ideas. His main collaborations were with Louis Vuitton, Levi's, Nike, Ikea, Heron Preston, Moncler, Asap Rocky, Kanye West, Jimmy Choo, Kith, Takashi Murakami, Byredo, Champion, Sunglass Hut, Timberland, Boys Noize, Le Bon Marché and Composer's Holiday. So, Virgil Abloh can be considered as the postmodern designer of the new era of fashion.

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The main feature of Virgil Abloh's brand is the tendency to experimentation and aesthetic innovation in the period of postmodern fashion. Firstly, the initial influence that consolidated his independent views was the collaboration with Kanye West upon the completion design studying at Fendi in 2009. It was the first step to his professional development as an independent designer and the creation of his own clothing line "Off-White". When it was launched firstly in 2013, it introduced American streetwear, stemming from 90s hip-hop, into the clean and ultra-expensive world of the fashion world. In four years, his reputation in the fashion world has grown exponentially. So, these things were the most influential for the formation of Virgil Abloh's personality in professional frames and the recognition of him as a talented designer since 2013.

The American designer's contribution to the world of fashion cannot be overrated. He is known not only for removing borders, but also for the incredible changeability and the ability to keep pace with the times. He has definitely changed the history of fashion for a new 21st generation and blurred the concept of tradition. The product he creates is not limited by social and geographical characteristics, but is totally global in its nature. However, it cannot be said that Virgil Abloh produces fashion goods for a community in general, but rather for people who are joint and several in his life philosophy and futuristic views. Virgil Abloh's design projects are presented in the form of a lively dialogue with a new generation (2035: US Edition). Besides, an architectural background helped him to develop his design expertise and bring some urbanistic flavor to some of his works (Mower, 2017). For particular, his outfits are masterfully elaborated in shape and form, with the realization that clothing material is the living tissue for experimentation and modification. This confirms the changeability in his style and openness to the new projects. So, the Off-White developer shattered the social barriers of fashion, its stereotypes, its divisions, and freed it from its vain chains.

Another feature of Virgil Abloh's designer style is revolutionary character, as it tends to refine and influence fashion tastes. Firstly, his design projects can be described as "directional". According to freelance writer Sharon Feiereisen (2012), this notion implies having a manipulative power over the general tendencies. In so doing, he profitably distributes his new ideas and reinvents the old ones. For example, his major work on reinvention was related to the elaboration of the 90s denims, which was held in collaboration with Levi's (Salessy

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and Marain, 2018). His other progressive project was on Nike sports footwear for *The Ten*. It featured the special attention to youth-led active lifestyle (2035: US Edition). According to journalist Matthew Bedard, the designer's approach to fashion was "street couture" (p. 1). Moreover, he preferred bright colors, unusual materials and versatile shapes in designing to make his works provocative. One of his famous projects was the Spring/Summer 2018 collection presented on the famous fashion show in Florida. There were many revolutionary images with the interplay between color and form on the show. According to Vogue journalist Sarah Mower (2017), it was inspired by some political issues of the time. So, the fashion style of Virgil Abloh is never the same, as it is progressing with the world itself. On the show, there were presented many revolutionary patterns with the interplay between color and form. According to Vogue journalist Sarah Mower (2017), his creative approach was inspired by the political and social issues of the time. So, the fashion style of Virgil Abloh is never the same, as it is progressing with the modern world.



*Figure 1.* Men's Collection Spring/Summer 2018, Florence, Temperature. From "Look 2" by A. Virgil, 2017, <https://high.org/exhibition/virgil-abloh-figures-of-speech/>. Copyright 2020 by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

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The most appealing fact about Virgil Abloh is the changeability of his features and a wide range of professional areas in which he is involved. Firstly, he designed a versatile number of eye-catching accessories for extreme sport activities and urbanized life. For example, waterproof double bags in cooperation with Heron Preston and bright raincoats and rubber boots, multicolor hoodies, unisex tracksuits for Moncler. Secondly, his artistic views developed independently and aimed at erasing social, age, sex, racial prejudices in line with promotion of the diverse fashion modes. In particular, most of his clothes are unisex, loose-fitting and futuristic. Thirdly, he finds a lot of inspiration in music and art. Aside from his main activities, Virgil Abloh is a professional DJ, a lecturer, an engineer, an artist and a businessman. Besides, his ideas are highly appreciated by celebrities, as they are used as a part of musical performances and a musical culture on the stage (rave outfits, etc). According to his own words, he finds inspiration in expressing ideas in different spheres (McGrath, 2018, p. 4). Thus, the fact that the designer's works are incredibly transitional from one domain to another attracts so much interest to his personality.

To some extent, Virgil Abloh's manner reminds something of Karl Lagerfeld's one. Firstly, in spite of, the latter started his career at the greatly earlier period, both designers are considered the representatives of postmodern avant-garde fashion. Secondly, they were both who gave an informal mode to the old fashion schools. Moreover, Virgil Abloh and Karl Lagerfeld masterfully reinvented the old samplings of clothes into fresh ones with the high degree of design expertise and creativity. In so doing, Virgil Abloh was substantially influenced by the 90s years, but emphasized the need for innovation rather than the tradition in his fashion campaign. Another feature that contributes to similarity of the designers is that their collections mix several styles: their clothing lines are parade and elegant, but also are inspired by street style and art: graffiti and skateboarding, in particular. Therefore, Virgil Abloh is a progressive modern designer whose product is featured by a particular freshness and flexibility in the mixing trending ideas and renovation of old school.

The studying of both historic and contemporary fashion designers can reveal a lot about the role of fashion in the world. The different tendencies generate new ideas and contribute to our aesthetic development. The eventual product cannot be without commercial value, but its main quality is in the cultural meaning. Fashion is an

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economic activity because it produces objects, but it is also an artistic activity because it produces symbols. So it does not just transform fabric into clothes, it creates objects that have meaning for those who wear them. The designers change our life, transform our habits and create a material capacity to realize our potential. Besides, they adapt their product to the peculiarities of times and pay much attention to the community's needs in its national and global aspects. Revolutionary, transformation and innovativeness are the main features of contemporary designers in contrast to the historic ones who tended to a greater integrity in the structural aspects of fashion. The best role of fashion is when it changes the world and speaks to the generation. We often follow fashion unconsciously or because we belong to a specific social group. It is a kind of thought, a form of aestheticism that helps us to distinguish ourselves from others and, therefore, to express our originality, our protest and social or political rejections. Fashion brings people together and reassures them. Its contradictory nature is truthful as is life itself.

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