

Danielle Daniel-Ramsey
Danielle.ramsey94@gmail.com
ARTH 1204-E432
Prof. Romano
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Museum Exhibition Object Analysis Paper

Not many fashion items have out lasted generations of culture quite like the Chanel suit. The classic yet iconic two-piece set was originally introduced to the world by French designer Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel in the 1920’s and later taken over by Karl Lagerfeld until his recent death in 2019. The Chanel suit will not only live on to be a symbol of timeless fashion but an ideal representation of the women who makes her own rules.

During my visit to the Power Mode exhibit, the garment I chose to analysis was the 1994 Chanel three-piece ensemble. The suit with a white T-shirt stamped with a double-C logo to update the look comes in the color white and pale pink. The size of the mannequin appears to be a size 2 with a body hugging corset. The jacket and skirt is matched with a corset to make the relaxed garment more elevated and sophisticated. The materials of the garment are pink cotton, white cotton and wool. The garment has a stitched pattern all over the jacket and skirt. This ensemble is a reinvented take on classic tweed suit.

To make a Chanel jacket, the appropriate sized pieces are cut, stitched and sown on to the torso of the mannequin. After the sample has been made, the Atelier then uses the tweed textile and pins and uses a sewing machine to create the final look. “...Chanel suits are still created to the same exacting standards. While remaining faithful to the Chanel tradition, Karl Lagerfeld is constantly modernizing and updating the jacket to move with the times and to inject it with the right dose of brazen fun” (youtube.com). The kind of person who would have been in the market to buy this ensemble is a young person who is concerned with what kind of status they have. This ensemble would have been worn out for a fun day with the girls. Actress, super models and musicians all would have worn this Chanel suit. This 1994 Chanel suit was made for the woman on the go, she expensive and she knows it. She’s a fun girl who follows her own rules and shopping is her favorite sport. The women that wear this suit live in the city. Working girls wear suits so this updated take on the relaxed sportswear garment created by Coco Chanel herself was

perfect for the fashionable woman on the go who wanted to make others aware of her status in society.

As one of the most popular decades for current generations to emulate, the 1990's is by far the most iconic era when it comes to fashion and pop culture. The year 1994 was year that innocence returned in fashion with the baby doll dress silhouette being staples trend around many designer labels. In the 90's women's garments were made to hug the body close in the torso area or show skin. The culture of the 1990's was everyone preparing for the new millennium.

Many of movies and television shows were demonstrating what life could be in the turn of the new century. "American Culture in the 1990s focuses on the dramatic cultural transformation of the last decade of the millennium. Lodged between the fall of Communism and the outbreak of the War on Terror, the 1990s was witness to America's expanding influence across the world but also a period of anxiety and social conflict" (Harrison, Colin). Some defining moments of the 90's was the O.J. Simpson trial, this verdict created a racial divide. There were also things happening in politics that was quite interesting." In South Africa Nelson Mandela became the first black president and Americans said farewell to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis" (youtube.com). Bill Clinton was then elected into office shortly after. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy was later created as a compromise for the now LGBTQ community to keep quiet and decide not to share their sexual orientation. Lastly, the Rodney King riots became a huge police brutality problem, the incident was taped and received a lot of news attention. "During this decade, the United States moved into a new era of domestic progress and evolving technology, but foreign conflicts and terrorism foreshadowed trouble on the horizon" (youtube.com). Despite the negative things happening in the media, pop culture and fashion still managed to become memorable as the last decade of the millennium.

The Chanel tweed suit, reinvented by Karl Lagerfeld defined what was in style for the then fashionista to wear. On the runway for Spring/Summer 1994 Chanel, a model wore the timeless suit with hair that looks sort of unkempt and doing what it wants. What this garment suggest about the 90s culture is that fashion was moving forward to the future so the garment reflects that. The young people of the new millennium would be status driven so Chanel decided to put the double-C logo on the garments that convey a sense of wealth and power if seen wearing it. That was the energy pop culture was receiving from consumers. They wanted to be

popular, movies like *Clueless* made that fantasy so much more real demonstrating similar silhouettes in their costume design to the iconic Chanel tweed ensemble. Women of the 1990's were working women so their clothes represented that. Garments created by Karl Lagerfeld stayed true to the vision on Coco Chanel. Comfortable fabrics with a relaxed yet fitted silhouette.

In 1982, Mr. Lagerfeld's debut to Chanel was taken on like a challenge. The then chairman of Chanel asked him to design for the house. "Everybody said, don't touch it, it's dead it will never come back. But then I thought it was a challenge" (businessoffashion.com). He then went on to redefine the Chanel way of doing things buy making it his own while paying homage to Chanel herself. The Spring 1994 tweed suit is a perfect example of that. That added T-shirt to give a sophisticated garment a sporty look. He also made cult items like the bouclé tweed, pearls and the interlocking C's for new generations around the world. "In addition to his design talents, Lagerfeld was also a photographer and a filmmaker..." (businessoffashion.com). He brought the Chanel heritage to life through imagery and film. Chanel's advertising was also shot and creatively directed by Lagerfeld himself. He was an artist, a man with a creative vision and Chanel was his canvas.

At the Power Mode exhibit the Chanel tweed suit is chosen as a symbol of power due to its timeless silhouette, trademark fabric and logo. The garment was displayed on a mannequin. The ensemble consists of a pink jacket, a knee length pink skirt, a matching corset and T-shirt with the double-C logo. The garment was placed between two other jacket and suit ensembles and the Chanel "dookie" chain that was an ode to hip hop and RUN DMC in the 1990s. Have this pale pink garment included in the exhibition means the curator is very much aware of the impact that this suit had. The essential idea of the tweed suit was to challenge the idea of gender. Women were over wearing restrictive clothing and wanted something elegant while still allowing them to move freely.

The suit holds power in the fact that women were setting the stage the being the leaders in the work force. Based off the pale pink ensemble Paris fashion in the 1990s was inspired by supermodels being the hot new celebrities on the scene. Paris fashion slim and sexy. The colors are bold but with a twist. Everything seems to be tailored just a bit more than American fashion. The exhibit was very effective in my opinion. I think it perfectly represented different cultural periods and what had the most impact during that time that we still see being implemented in the fashions of our time. "It begins with military uniforms, status dressing, the suit, resistance and

“sexy” fashions” (McClendon, Emma). This exhibit showed many facets of power and gender was also a focal point. Both women and men garments were shown together dating back from the early centuries to present day. Power Mode conveyed the message I believe that they wanted viewers to understand. Power isn’t in the clothing but the force of fashion pushing symbolism and making it social.



Figure 1. Chanel Tweed Ensemble (Pale Pink)

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