

Modernity and It's Inherent Conflict with Tradition
Following the American Psychological Association's Guidelines

Karlique Caesar

Department of Business, CUNY New York City College of Technology

BUF 4700 Contemporary Issues in the Fashion Industry

Dr. Denise Sutton

November 6, 2023

Why? “Why?” is the question that has plagued man for as long as man has existed. “Why?” is the reason man found solace in the teachings of the bible, the quran, buddhism, hinduism and many other religions. Religion served to quiet most ideas of doubt and fear in oneself and allowed a sense of comfort in not knowing. That comfort would last only until something more flashy and tantalizing could be dangled in front of humanity. In the late 1800s, the world would begin to settle into the concept of industries being the new normal off the back of the second industrial revolution. During this time, over 32 million people migrated to the United States for work, from all over the world and populations reached all time highs due to leaps in the medicinal industry (Mohajan, 2019). With the access to wealth like never before and newfound defenses against natural population control such as viral infections and disease, humanity no longer felt as strong of an attachment to the ideas of tradition and religion. For the first time in recent history, humanity was left to bear the heavy weight of information. “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him”(Nietzche, 1882). These were the words that so plainly ushered the age of modernity. Tradition had died and in its place developed a notion of self. Man had done the impossible. Man created the locomotive. Man created the automobile. Man created the airplane. Man created the atomic bomb. Nietzche would not be around for that but his words rang true. Man had attained the knowledge of God and that shift in mentality may not have been displayed as plainly by the everyday person as it was in fashion.

It is no coincidence that the onset of the fashion industry as we know it today, is so intrinsically intertwined with the abandonment of tradition. These changes in mentality made room for the innovators like Charles Fredrick Worth, who would hold the moniker of the first fashion designer (Taylor, 2006) for his designs that strayed away from general dress conventions at the time such as separate wardrobes for the time of day an event was held as well as “undress”

offerings for one to wear at home (Krick, 2004). The throughline of innovation first breath by Worth would grow and develop to a point of true rebellion by the 1920s.

The 1920s would see casual wear make its way directly into the cultural lexicon. Women would tout gingham, plaid and vertical stripes while the increase in athlete worship would make way for sportswear in men's fashion (Swatski, 2021). The most culturally significant fashion to claim the 1920s was the flapper fashion (Swatski, 2021). The year 1918, would see the end of the first World War (Showalter and Smith, 2023). This period marked a time for uncertainty for many as tensions were high and hindsight lets us know that World War II was around the corner. This period was not all bad for women however as World War I forced the United States to rely on a woman populated workforce to hold down production as men went off to war. The reliance on women empowered the women's suffrage rights movement and in 1920, women gained the opportunity to vote (McKenna, 2023). Empowered by the spirits of the time the flapper fashion embodied everything it meant to be a 1920s woman. The flapper's slight curve, short cut and boyish silhouette had been accompanied by the behaviors of a dynamic solo act, who would smoke and drink while out and had no issue with liberating themselves sexually. The flapper served as the antithesis to the Gibson Girl stereotype imposed on women in the decades prior (McKenna, 2023). The flapper has galvanized generation upon generation of women to become their own god.

As time has passed so has technology and with technology comes information. Today, people have access to a plethora of information at their disposal when making a choice. The fashions of today much like the fashions of the past come in two forms. The first form is culture. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023), culture can be defined as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group". Through the lens

of culture, fashion can be viewed as a clear way to define or categorize as you can tell a lot about which culture one subscribes to by how they dress. For example, a muslim woman may ensure that they wear their hijab or a sneakerhead may pay close attention to how their laces are tied. On the flip side, the second form of modern dress is that of counter culture. There are a lot of people who wish to subvert the expectations of their dress. They may do something to their clothing to purposely throw one off. For example, Just this year Victoria Beckham (2023) displayed a pair of jeans meant to be worn in a backwards fashion. Backwards Jeans was a style of dress common in the 90s. This resurgence stems from the abundance of knowledge that people have access to on the internet. In this day and age it is not difficult to become inspired by a past fashion and apply it to your style of dress. This freedom in choice has allowed us to in a somewhat roundabout fashion, ignore tradition by digging into the past. Our sensibilities to stand out and differentiate ourselves from the crowd has become the new chic. We live in the day and age of the rebel.

Why? "Why?" is the question as old as time itself. It resides in the heart of human nature. We desire to discover. We want to learn about our world. We want to learn about others. Most importantly, we seek to learn about ourselves. When Nietzsche proclaimed that "God was dead" he had ended his thought with "Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" (Nietzsche, 1882). With the choice of being our own God, comes the burden of self work so that we become worthy. I think this fuels our need to stand out. To once and for all prove that we are worthy of free choice.

References

- Borrelli-Persson, L. (2023, April 6). *Why is fashion looking backward?*. Vogue.
<https://www.vogue.com/article/why-is-fashion-looking-backwards>
- Krick, J. (1AD, January 1). *Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895) and the House of Worth: Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn timeline of art history*. The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrth/hd_wrth.htm
- McKenna, A. (2023, October 1). *Flapper*. Encyclopædia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/flapper>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Culture. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>
- Mohajan, H. (2020). *The Second Industrial Revolution has Brought Modern Social and Economic Developments*. Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 6, No. 1 2020. *p 1-14*
- Neitzche, F. (1882). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
- Showalter, D. E., & Royde-Smith, J. G. (2023, November 1). *World War I*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I>
- Swatski, A. (2023, October 5). *The history of fashion: From the 1900s to today*. Fashinnovation.

<https://fashinnovation.nyc/the-history-of-fashion-from-the-1900s-to-today/#:~:text=In%20the%201900s%2C%20American%20women,on%20the%20time%20of%20day>.

Taylor, S. (n.d.). *The history of fashion design*. Fibre2Fashion.

<https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/458/the-history-of-fashion-design>