Midterm Paper:

Essay Two

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BUF 4900 Internship

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November 21, 2019

Introduction

Throughout history, luxury fashion had a special value to it and was reserved for, and representative of, the social class of its owner; nowadays, however, luxury is accessible to all people and its fancy, colorful, and special attributes marketed to all social classes by luxury brands. Particularly the luxury that has been attributed to haute couture faded due to technological advances, mass production, and more advertising in fashion. Fashion company Balenciaga, for example, increased the speed and scale of their garment production thanks to machines today but so debilitated its value as a luxury brand. Only during Rococo as well as the 1980s, luxury fashion was able to maintain the value of haute couture against technological development as well as economic and societal dynamics. This paper will look at this phenomenon but also discuss how external factors caused the role of luxury fashion change between the past and today.

Luxury

Opulence during Rococo

During the 18th century, as the Baroque epoch drew to a close, it culminated in Rococo. Rococo was ludicrously opulent and noble. Most women wore chemise-style dresses that were squared off-the-shoulders and tight around the torso, and had a board, full skirt, bobbin lace trim details under the bust, and pearl trim bands at the sleeves. While female clothing was often made of satin, popular male garments such as the waistcoat were made of silk. To underscore their social standing, women of high status would have additional ribbons, golden laces, or flower hair bands with their dresses (Omesi, 2019) while men could go for trimming made of gold. The grandeur of Rococo fashion was not only evoked by its look but by its production process as well: Every design was a unique, tailor-made piece of haute couture, every single ornament was hand-sewn, and many fabrics were scarce and therefore expensive. In 1769, right at the end of Rococo, the first industrial revolution in the UK resulted in the atomization of some of the procedures involved in creating fabrics and garments thanks to the steam engine, which was invented by the Scottish inventor James Watt and changed human history (N.a, n.d).

Luxury of Lacroix in 1980s

After the industrial revolution, technology improved exponentially. As the baby boomer generation grew into a higher social stratum due to the economic expansions after World War II, they desired to be rewarded for their hard work and enjoy life through more leisure time and higher social status (Stone and Farnan, 2018). Consequently, to upgrade their social status, they spent their money on quality food and of course expensive items including trendy luxury fashion, which was minimalistic at the time; however, to keep up with the rising demand, many luxury

fashion designers scaled up production diluted their standards. One of the designers who did not go with the trend at the time was French creator Christian Lacroix. Lacroix went right against the flow and worked with the maximalism of the Baroque epoch, which preceded Rococo, when he designed haute couture chemise-style dresses (Wexler and Rubinstein, 2018). Lacroix's designs stuck to Baroque/ Rococo conventions such as the usage of satin and the emphasis on the waist; however, he also added some of his own ideas to it, for example, by increasing the volume of the (already broad) full skirts via the help of wrinkles (N.a, n.d). The designs by Lacroix were real luxurious haute couture that might as well have been produced in the Rococo era; however, fashion by Lacroix and from Rococo also have two major differences that will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Differences Between Opulence and Luxury of Lacroix

While Lacroix was doing haute couture inspired by Rococo, he obviously couldn't ignore the social and cultural trends while doing so. Unlike opulent Rococo dresses, Lacroix's dresses have no sleeves and less ornamentation. Removing the sleeves from a dress make it usually look more elegant. Next, Lacroix's designs go without attached ornamentations such as ribbons or hair bands. Instead, Lacroix creates maximalism, extravagance, and luxury by fabrics mixing colorful patterns and flower patterns. He especially enjoyed using bright colors such as pink, red, and yellow, which set him apart from the minimalists around him, who were focusing on black, white, and simple lines during the 1980s (N.a, n.d). So while real luxury in the Rococo depended solely on the value and amount of adornments to an outfit, was real luxury in the 1980s wearing one of Lacroix's uniquely and masterly designed dresses.

Luxury Today

In the past, luxury was a means to demonstrate one's social status and it is still today; however, nowadays, luxurious items are available to a larger customer base due to advertising, online shopping, and forgery. This led to a depreciation of luxury designs. Buying something that is advertised as being extravagant and opulent might have been luxury during Rococo but that doesn't make it luxury fashion today. In fact, more and more designers and high-profile customers are bored and exhausted by the extent of fancy advertisement, pretentious wrapping and packaging, and prominent display of brand logos. They prefer to focus on defining new qualities for luxury fashion such as simplicity, sustainability, and cutting-edge technology.

American designer Tom Ford discussed this development in a conversation with CNN news anchor Monita Rajpal. Ford noted that the luxury today is not real and lost its exclusivity because luxury fashion stores can be found in every city, as opposed to the past when access to it was quite difficult (N.a, 2007). For example, the French fashion brand Dior is certainly admired by customers and still considered to be a premium brand but lost a lot of its grandeur because it went along with globalization and is now located in every city. If you want Dior, you don't have to be in Paris.

Of course, the dilution of luxury fashion under globalization is not exclusively driven by greed for profit. It is also an economical decision made by brands in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market. Today, most customers research the luxury goods that they would like to buy online before ordering them or going to the retail store (Frega, 2014). To make people really admire and dream of luxury fashion again, fashion designers and brands must learn to stick to their beliefs again and realize their special and original ideas.

Dutch designer Iris van Herpen, for example, knows that real luxury fashion customers appreciate that she sticks to her original ideas and beliefs. Since van Herpen doesn't limit herself

in any way, she presently creates garments that redefine the natural female body shape via the help of unconventional materials and particularly 3D printing technology. Her works free up and visualize the *invisible* parts of the female body surrounding every woman. That's why, although van Herpen's only Boutique is in Amsterdam, her retail sales are low, and her designs resemble modern sculptures that are not suitable for everyday use, she is still admired as a luxury designer. She is a pioneer who used 3D printing technology as fabrics and so managed to have her works exhibited in museum such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (N.a, n.d). Of course, other "luxury" brands and designers make it into museum, too, but usually well after their work was initially created.

Conclusion

External factors including social movements, economic conditions, and technological developments changed luxury fashion throughout history. During Rococo, details and ornaments to garments were sufficient to prove one's superior social status and make fashion a luxury good. The up-and-coming baby boomers of the 1980s saw luxury fashion as a reward for their hard work. But slowly, luxurious items became available to the large public due to globalization, which was accompanied by mass production, increasing competition, online stores, and false advertising. Presently, luxury in fashion is diluted and distorted. Too few designers and brands realize their ideas, styles, and beliefs and therefore don't become real luxury fashion creators like Christian Lacroix in the 1980s or Iris van Herpen does today.

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