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BUF 4900

Midterm Essay

### **Minimalism in the 90s**

Throughout the nineteen nineties there has been a series of different styles and aesthetics that were being seen on the runway and in everyday life on the streets. The exhibit of “Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion of the Nineties” at the Museum of Fashion Institute of Technology has displayed some looks from the 1990s that demonstrate different themes of minimalism and luxury to deconstruction in fashion. Minimalism, retro revivals, deconstruction, and luxury were some of the themes that were being seen during the 1990s both on and off the runway. Collections following these different themes were seen on the runways of designers like Anna Sui, Moschino, Vivienne Westwood, Calvin Klein, Gucci, and Versace among many others. Some of these designers focused on creating more grunge and retro looks during the 1990s while others focused on taking a break from these avant-garde designs and created minimalist but elegant and luxurious looks. These minimalist looks tend to follow a neutral color palette which includes colors like black, white, grey, brown, and beige as well giving a sense of calmness, clarity, elegance, and innocence (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint slides, p. 30-42). One of the designers who took on this route was Tom Ford for Gucci, specifically the Fall/Winter 1996 collection. The garment on exhibition, as seen on figure 1, was a long white sleeve evening gown with a V-neck deep cut and a gold metal detailing on the waist mimicking a belt. The gown is made of a white matte jersey textile and gives off a minimalist yet elegant and sensual look due to the deep V-neck cut, color and fabric (Museum at FIT, 97.30.1 2022). The inspiration for the creation of this gown came from Tom Ford’s own experiences during his night

life at Studio 54 in New York City during the 1970s which he referred it to “celebrate hedonism on the runway” (Nast, 1996).

When it comes to the use and significance of color on the runway, it is very important to find the correct ones to use. Color adds to the feeling, performance, and it is one of the biggest motivations when it comes to buying a garment besides price or fit (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint Slides, p. 21). This Gucci gown is all white with a pop of gold hardware, it does not contain a range of tones or values. The value of a color is when shades of black or white are being added to create light within a garment (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint Slides, p. 35). Although this garment is all white, it tends to catch the light and look brighter than it is. Since Tom Ford wanted to showcase the luxury of nightlife as well as step away from the extravagant streetstyle that was being seen on the runways of other designers, he decided to create minimal gowns and garments that follow a neutral monochromatic color palette rather than vibrant colors. Balance, line, rhythm, form, dominance, proportion, and repetition are some of the things that go into making an effective visual display. The visual display of the garment follows an asymmetrical balance as well as a curved line. Balance in a display comes in two form, symmetrical and asymmetrical with symmetrical being a mirrored image while asymmetrical refers to equal weight but not the same (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint Slides, p. 55). The reason this display can be classified as asymmetrical is because it does not mirror each other since the Gucci dress is placed on one side facing a different direction while on the other side there are two mannequins with one at a lower step than the rest. There are also shoes in the middle to divide the Gucci gown from the two other garments on the same display. The line for this display is curved because they are all placed at different positions facing different directions and at different heights. The dominant side of the display would be to the

right where there are two mannequins dressed in vibrant pastel shades of purple, but the dominance of the Gucci dress would be the gold hardware on the waistline which can be seen in figure 2, since it is what sticks out on the all-white gown. The contrast, which refers to a sharp difference (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint Slides, p. 56) would be the gown itself next to the two other garments since the gown is sleek, long sleeved, white, and overall minimal compared to the other two which contain a soft but vibrant color and are a lot more flared from the waist down. The contrast between these garments makes you question why they are in the same display when they are so different, but still attracts the eye of the viewer. When it comes to proportion it seems to follow a steady one since the mannequins are the same size although the height of one is lower by a couple inches due to a one stairstep difference. Although there are a total of three items, including the shoes, the rhythm of the display which refers to the movement from one element to the other usually from the most dominant to the sub-dominant (Adomaitis, Lecture notes, PowerPoint Slides, p. 58) would be the Gucci white evening gown. It would be the white gown because it is the only white gown out of the two purple garments and the black shoes. They all follow the same form due to sizing except the shoes since they are smaller and in an acrylic box on the ground diving the Gucci dress from the other two. The Gucci gown does not have any sort of patterns therefore there is not much repetition within the garment itself, but on the display, repetition can be seen in the two purple garments although they are different hues of purple.

Sticking with Tom Ford's theme of minimalism, the gown does not have a set of different textures and it only sticks to one. The dress is made from a white matte jersey which is usually very stretchy, soft, and breathable. Jersey is typically used to create athleisure, t-shirts, undergarments and even loungewear due to its versatility and multifunctionality (MasterClass,

2021). Since jersey is a stretchy fabric, the dress on the mannequin is clinging onto its body which gives it a sleeked and elegant look to it. The deep V-neck cut, long sleeves, and flared skirt on the gown gives it a sensual feeling making the garment look elegant and luxurious but also sexy. This gives out an idea that when this dress is being worn, it will take on the form of one's body to enhance different body features and may be worn by anyone with different body types due to the natural stretch the textile contains. The gold hardware on the waist is also something that will help enhance the waist, so it gives off an illusion of an hourglass shape as well as give it a sense of sophistication and fun.

The zeitgeist of the 90s was very versatile most of the trends were overall very fun, innovative, and influential. The themes of the 90s ranged from retro, minimalism, luxury, and deconstruction but also introduced a new form of streetstyle influenced by film and music. Some of the music that influenced the fashion of the 90s was hip-hop, rap, and pop. The artists who were influential in both music and fashion include Gwen Stefani, Celine Dion, Jenifer Lopez, The Spice Girls, and Tupac among many others (Rolling Stone, 2019). Although their styles were different, they still fit into different subcategories of fashion and managed to influence the fashion of the 90s through red carpet events, music videos, streetstyle, and photoshoots. A dress that fits into the same category of minimalism and luxury would be a dress worn by singer Celine Dion at the 1996 Billboard Music Awards, which can be seen on figure 3. The dress she wore here was a long sleek gold halter neck dress with an asymmetrical shoulder line and just like the white Gucci 1996 dress, it clings onto her body, focuses on one textile but also has a detailing to tie in the luxury but sexy feeling. During the 1990s, technology was slowly advancing, and which helped other industries advance as well. With fashion, there is a cycle which allows for past trends to come back in a different way through innovation and it is

something that can be seen happening now. Lately, the theme of minimalism has been seen back on the runways and in the streets around the world. Minimalist designs can be seen being done by brands like Acne Studios, fashion companies like Zara and Arizia and on the runway of Bottega Veneta's Fall/Winter 2022 collection. Some of the 90s trends we can see today include sheer clothing, slip dresses, printed leggings, leather, oval sunglasses, and baggy clothing to name a few (Block, 2022). Overall, the zeitgeist of the 1990s is one that captures a variety of subcultures and aesthetics, including that one of minimalism and luxury, that one can now see being relived and brought back in new ways to form part of the forming zeitgeist the 2020s.



Figure 1: Garments on Exhibit



Figure 2: Gold Hardware on Gown, Museum at FIT, <https://fashionmuseum.fitnyc.edu/objects/5917/97301?ctx=7699416a-5b3e-40ad-8d26-204fd49fd057&idx=38>



Figure 3: Celine Dion at the Billboard Music Awards 1996, Popsugar, <https://www.popsugar.co.uk/celebrity/photo-gallery/37483550/image/37483521/Celine-Dion-1996>

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