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Research Report

Christian Dior: Ball Gown

Du Gay et al. states, “Meanings helps us to interpret the world, to classify it in meaningful ways, to make sense of things and events, including those which we have never seen or experienced in real life but which occur in films and novels, dreams and fantasies, as well as objects in the real world” (Du Gay et al., 2013). The Circuit of Culture is a structure that creates and can be used to inspect how meaning is created. The cultural space of the fashion designer, Christian Dior, designs of ball gowns has been chosen as a case study and will be analyzed in the Circuit of Culture Model by Du Gay et al. This study will provide a cultural space by glancing at Christian Dior’s ball gown’s representation, regulation, production, design, and consumption.

The designer, Christian Dior, was born in Normandy, France, in the year of 1905. Christian was the second child of Maurice and Madeline Dior. He had two brothers and two sisters, Raymond and Bernard, Catherine and Jacqueline. When he was at the age of five, his family moved to Paris, France. As Christian grew up at twenty years old, he attended École des Science Politiques and studied political science as his mother and father wanted him to come to be a diplomat. Dior had a desire for art not long after his science knowledge in college. After completing his education in 1928, Dior went to the streets of France and sold his sketches to make extra money. Christian Dior’s father worked as a fertilizer manufacturer and made fortunes. Dior opened a small art gallery from his father’s financial support with his father’s

financial circumstances. Dior's art gallery consisted of works from artists such as Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, and more. When the stock market crashed in 1929, the Dior family would become entirely insolvent. Accompanying the stock market crashing, Christian would lose his mother and his brother. These tragic events concluded for Dior to shut down his art gallery.

Soon after Dior closed his art gallery, he began his journey into fashion design when he worked with fashion designer Robert Piguet until he was enlisted in 1940 in the military. While he was in the military, French fashion studios such as Jeanne Lanvin and Nina Ricci dressed wives of Nazi officers and other French allies to keep the fashion industry alive during the war, both economically and artistically. During Dior's service, his younger sister Catherine became a part of the French Resistance and would be imprisoned at the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she survived and was liberated in 1945. When Dior's service was completed, Dior named his first fragrance Miss Dior after his sister. Later on, in December of 1946, Dior opened the Christian Dior Fashion House in Paris. Marcel Boussac, a cotton magnate, helped Dior with his fashion house. Formally, in 1947 the house of Dior considers when the business first started since that was when Dior first displayed his series of collections.

Dior's first collection had a total of 90 divergent looks, which his collections were named "Corolle" and "Huit." In the late 1940s to early 1950s, Dior's "New Look" of fashion came out in the East. According to Rosemary Harden, "In the early 1940s, the fashion industry was encouraged by the Board of Trade and the Department of Overseas Trade to organize fashion shows and tours to both North and South America so as to stimulate export and earn much needed cash for a war-impooverished Britain" (Harden, 2010) During this period, the 1940s fashion industries affected the way trade was happening. Dior's "New Look" included a calf-length, full skirt, a cinched waist, and a fuller bust were all part of the style, which had not been

since the turn of the century. In her article, Elizabeth Wilson describes glamour as Dior's New Look. Wilson states, "From one point of view, glamour could be said to have reached a fashion high point with Christian Dior's New Look and Balenciaga's sculptural garments in the 1950s" (Wilson, 2007). Dior's new look had an attractive look whenever a woman would be seen in Dior's designs. This look received some backlash when it was first published, as it was disapproved of postwar fabric constraints where the average dress used twenty yards of fabric. Dior's designs stood in contrast to the bleak postwar climate. Paris was re-establishing as the cheerful fashion capital of Europe as a result of Dior's fashion efforts. It used to be the fashion capital of the world.

Dior's "New Look" in the House of Dior became popular when famous stars such as Rita Hayworth, Margot Fonteyn, and the Royal Family in England. In 1946, renowned ballerina Margot Fonteyn went to France to join a younger dancer named Roland Petit. Margot Fonteyn left France and went to London for a getaway from her chaotic ballerina life. Roland Petit introduced Fonteyn to the House of Dior. In Rosemary Harden's article, she quotes Margot Fonteyn's experience on her meeting with Christian Dior. Margot Fonteyn states,

"Roland was going to take me to an opera performance at the Theatre des Champs Elysees. No doubt he was justifiably nervous about what I might wear, He said, 'There's a marvelous new couturier who has just shown his first collection. It's a sensational success. He's called Christian Dior.' He took me to Dior where they lent me a striking dress to wear that evening. Everyone complimented me on the gown, and I have never felt so elegant in my life" (Harden, 2010)

Margot Fonteyn wore Dior's "New Look" collection was a black wool suit named 'Daisy' which was featured at the end of the season in 1947. Margot Fonteyn became the 'poster girl' for Dior's fashion line. Harden writes on the House of Dior's opinion of Fonteyn. The House of Dior mentions, "Her narrow waist and long legs make Margot an ideal subject for this dark blue day dress by Christian Dior, the New Look creator." (Harden, 2018) Fonteyn worked with Dior for ten years after her first grand experience with Dior's designs. Rosemary Harden writes on Fonteyn's career with Dior. Harden states, "Margot mentions that he lent her an evening dress, but it seems likely, too, that she actually bought sample garments at the end of the season. Following her first purchase, she then acquired a coat called 'Goemon' from Dior's second collection, and a straw hat decorated with Petersham ribbon" (Harden, 2010). Fonteyn made Dior her number one go-to fashion designer until the late 1950s, when Dior passed.

The circuit of culture model will be applied to Christian Dior's ball gown designed during Dior's fall and winter season collection from 1953 to 1954. This ball gown is displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York. The circuit of culture model is applied to this ball gown with its representation, production, consumption, design, and regulation.

The first element of the circuit of culture model discussed will be representation. This gold and silver ball gown consists of materials such as silk, sequins, pearls, and stones. The neckline of this gown is strapless with an A-line figure. The top of the dress displays the artificial pearls in a genuine way that makes them stand out. The House of Dior creates these ball gowns for celebrities and women worldwide to feel beautiful and elegant like Margot Fonteyn felt when she wore Dior's evening gown.

The second element of the circuit of culture model analyzed will be production. The production of Dior's ball gowns consists of the House of Dior's seamstresses, publicists, makeup artists, and models to construct these unique, fabulous ball gowns. Creating one of the high fashion gowns first starts with the dressmaker's sketch and designs of the ball gown. Once the graphic is drawn and planned out, the House of Dior's seamstresses and others will pattern-make the material for the dress and other elements. After making sure the fabric is sewed and fitting all the right places, models come in to test out the design to its perfect fit.

The third element of the circuit of culture model discussed will be consumption. When I look at fashion or award shows, I am amazed by the gowns worn by different celebrities and from other designers. Whenever I research the style, uniqueness, materials, and design of a ball gown, I am amazed at how this kind of dress can bring beauty to life. Women who wear Dior's designs can feel stunning when they contribute to his style. They are wearing Christian Dior, but they are wearing the creation and magic of fashion design from the official House of Dior.

The fourth element of the circuit of culture model analyzed will be design. This element plays an essential part in creating ball gowns by Dior. Du Gay et al. speaks about the way to promote consumption, by the way, the meaning of specific products and services can influence consumers' lifestyles (Du Gay et al., 2013). The purpose of wearing a Dior ball gown is to look beautiful like the person wearing the design. In Elizabeth's Wilson article on glamour, Wilson speaks of the glamour feels on someone whenever they wear stylish attire. Wilson states. "The combination of person and clothing to a pitch at which that person created glamour by means of daring departures from the conventionally well dressed, combined with an aura of defiance" (Wilson, 2007). Wilson portrays the feeling of glamour when wearing outfits that can create a sense of enchantment.

The fifth element of the circuit of culture model discussed is regulation. During the start of the fashion world in the early 1900s, the trading happened overseas, and the Board of Trade was in full effect. Now fashion designers purchase fabrics, accessories, and other materials from manufacturers, wholesalers, or agents. The House of Dior has manufactures depending on the product such as scarves in Italy and jeans produced in Japan. The House of Dior created the ball gowns designed by Dior in Paris, where the official House of Dior is located.

In conclusion, analyzing Christian Dior's design of the ball gown has been helpful for the circuit of culture model. As you can see, when the first fashion collection of Dior's New Look was introduced, there was a new wave of style. In today's world, the ball gowns the House of Dior and other designers sketch out can be different ball gowns containing different elements. The circuit of culture model can help understand ball gowns when the fashion industry first made its start overseas and is increasing each day by the various designs that can be turned into a magical dress.

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