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Fashion History: Modern Era (FASH319)

Analysis of a Collection

John Galliano: Christian Dior Fall 2000 Couture

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John Galliano's Dior runway show took a bold and controversial turn, exploring the theme of "Freud versus fetish" to unearth the hidden tensions between desire, repression, and identity. By channeling the unconscious mind, Galliano transformed fashion into a psychological tableau that unsettled as much as it seduced. Drawing from historical references like early Christianity and Victorian iconography, he merged past and present to create garments that felt both sacred and transgressive. The collection spoke in symbols rather than words, leaving an indelible impression that challenged societal norms and redefined beauty boundaries.

The show, presented in the early 2000s, focused on the psychological connection between clothing and fetishism, delving deep into the emotional layers of fashion. Galliano described his intent: "I am trying to symbolize what fetishism evokes in the psychology of clothing." This vision is reflected in his use of fabrics and design elements that initially appear calming, such as priestly ecclesiastical robes in soft creams and ivory, or a fluorescent silk wedding gown. The motifs in Look 1 and Look 24 are somewhat similar, and create a cohesive look to the collection..These subtle design choices

encourage viewers to look beyond the surface, inviting them to explore the deeper significance of the garments and the emotions they evoke.

Freud's theory of fetishism posits that the origin of a fetish stems from early experiences with the mother. According to Freud, when a boy realizes his mother lacks a penis, it creates fear and distress, particularly about her genitalia. To cope with this anxiety, the boy may develop a fetish—finding an object or symbol to replace the traumatic experience. This helps the boy regain a sense of control and power over the maternal figure, despite her lack of a penis. In essence, the creation of a fetish serves as a psychological coping mechanism for unresolved trauma.

In the context of Galliano's show, fetishism is not only a form of sexual expression but also a displacement of anxiety from early life experiences onto objects, body parts, or features. The emotions associated with fetishism may stem from a desire for control, power, or even guilt. Such displacement often occurs when an individual struggles with interpersonal relationships, leading to stunted or “frozen” connections. Galliano's designs reflect this psychological complexity, as his garments manifest these feelings of tension, conflict, and desire in visual form, offering insight into deeper emotional states.

Galliano's Dior show exemplified many of these psychological themes through symbolic elements in his designs. The eerie music accompanying the priest, Look 1¹, at the show's opening sets a tone of guilt and psychological tension, mirroring the emotions at the heart of fetishism. The bride, handcuffed to the groom with pearls, symbolizes the

¹ Figure 1

complex power dynamics between men and women, echoing Freud's theory of the boy's fear of female genitalia. As the show progressed, the colors of the garments shifted from innocent tones to darker hues, and the clothing became more revealing, signaling a transformation both in the garments and in the music, adding layers of meaning to each look.

As the runway show unfolded, the models' porcelain-like faces and sheer garments revealed less of their bodies with each passing look. Corsets became more prominent, restricting the models' movements, and in Look 35², an outfit that began beneath the breasts emphasized the chest. Elements of bondage, such as handcuff-like wrist buttons, were introduced, while other looks, like Look 23³, incorporated influences from historical fashion, such as a Ming Dynasty-inspired garment reimagining a string puppet doll. These unsettling details reinforced the psychological themes Galliano sought to explore, adding to the complexity of his show.

Galliano's historical references blended 17th, 18th, and 19th-century styles with modern fabric innovations. Many models wore Victorian boots, and kitten heels, or went barefoot, while subtle nods to figures like Marie Antoinette, Look 24⁴, appeared in the designs, such as a slash across her neck symbolizing her beheading. The runway show itself felt like a performance, where the models acknowledged the presence of the audience, diving into the unconscious mind where unsettling characters emerge.

Galliano's choice to deviate from traditional fashion norms, with men in dresses or

² Figure 9

³ Figure 6

⁴ Figure 7

minimal clothing and women in tailored suits, emphasized this departure from the expected.

In Look 25⁵, Galliano presented a model inspired by the Day of the Dead, with a dress made from a skirt, bone-like skin markings, and a mask in hand. This striking visual referenced the Mexican holiday, adding to the eerie atmosphere of the show. Galliano maintained cohesion throughout the collection by thoughtfully arranging colors and contrasts, while small details such as gems, tailored suits, and feathers enhanced the overall aesthetic, further elevating the collection's impact. These subtle touches added depth to the collection, making it all the more captivating for the audience.

The diversity of looks in the collection showcased Galliano's skill in blending historical influences with modern twists. Look 10⁶, for instance, featured a woman in a taffeta-tailored suit paired with a 17th-century cartwheel hat, incorporating a 1930s silhouette with exposed cleavage and flanged shoulders. In Look 18⁷, a model wore a hat made from what appeared to be alligator skin, paired with a garment resembling animal meat, creating a dramatic and unexpected visual. These stylistic shifts, moving from historical references to innovative material choices, kept the audience engaged and eager to see what would come next.

Galliano's runway shows are not only a fashion statement but also an exploration of deeper psychological and cultural themes. Viewers may interpret his work in a variety of ways, especially when the psychological concepts of Freud's theory are not

⁵ Figure 8

⁶ Figure 4

⁷ Figure 5

immediately apparent. By taking on a controversial subject and presenting it through the lens of a major brand like Dior, Galliano takes a calculated risk. However, he continues to bring real-life art into the fashion world, where garments alone tell a story without the need for words.

Galliano's ability to inject meaning into his creations makes them feel more valuable to those who purchase them. While tailored suits and classic pieces appeal to a wide range of audiences, his runway shows often attract younger crowds looking for innovation and deeper layers of meaning. By catering to diverse age groups, Galliano ensures that Dior's brand continues to evolve and expand. This approach allows Galliano to connect with a broader audience, blending timeless fashion with cutting-edge creativity.

Freud's dream interpretation of fetishism allows viewers to interpret Galliano's show through their creative lenses. The music, props, and visual choices reflect how different memories can trigger unique feelings in viewers, aligning with Freud's theory of how experiences shape perception. Each viewer may walk away with a different interpretation, which is what makes Galliano's runway shows so compelling. Galliano's deep knowledge of cultural and historical fashion influences ensures that every piece he creates is unique, allowing the audience to engage with the collection on multiple levels.

Galliano's use of drapery and surrealistic silhouettes creates a romantic or dreamlike quality to his work, reminiscent of Salvador Dali's artwork. Through his skillful manipulation of fabric and silhouette, Galliano challenges viewers to go beyond

the superficial appearance of a garment and instead consider the deeper themes he is exploring. For this particular show, Galliano encouraged audiences to reflect on human sexuality and whether it is defined by an object or a person, inviting them to question their emotional responses to the designs.

Despite his work's challenging and often unsettling nature, Galliano maintains a cohesive aesthetic throughout the runway. Using hats, tulle, feathers, ruffles, and gems ties the collection together, creating a visual harmony that keeps the viewer's eye engaged. In Look 8⁸, a man wears a classic 1950s fedora with a ruffled suit, and the following Look 9⁹ presents a woman in a fur-lined jacket, further developing the color palette. These small, deliberate details help maintain a visual flow while still allowing for the unexpected, such as the transformation of tailored suits in Looks 19 and 20, which are reinvented with props and makeup.

In a departure from traditional runway shows, Galliano's models often interact with one another, adding a dynamic element to the presentation. Look 37¹⁰ and 38, for instance, go hand in hand, with one model in a wedding dress holding a ribbon connected to another model in a fishnet ensemble. This interaction may symbolize the guilt and psychological tension explored in Freud's theory of fetishism, with Look 38¹¹ representing the weight of guilt that always lingers in the background. Through these

⁸ Figure 2

⁹ Figure 3

¹⁰ Figure 10

¹¹ Figure 11

powerful visual cues, Galliano's show continues to captivate and provoke, leaving the audience to reflect on the complex emotions embedded in his designs.

References:



Figure 1. Look 1: Priest



Figure 2. Look 8.



Figure 3. Look 9.



Figure 4. Look 10.



Figure 5. Look 18.



Figure 6. Look 23.



Figure 7. Look 24: Marie Antionette



Figure 8. Look 25.



Figure 9. Look 35.



Figure 10. Look 37.



Figure 11. Look 38.

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