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While it's not that I completely disagree with the sentiments expressed by Elizabeth Wilson in her essay "Fashion and the Postmodern World", I did find it particularly strange that at no point in the reading was the notion of queerness mentioned. Especially considering the fact that Elizabeth Wilson is obviously aware of the influence of the queer community on the fashion industry as a whole (for example, she talks extensively about the liberation that lesbian women achieve through clothing in her essay "Deviant Dress" in the 35th *Feminist Review*, which was published in 1990). The fact that by the third sentence of her essay she mentions Jean Paul Gaultier, but never once acknowledges one of the primary influences behind the majority of his work: his queerness and his experience with queer culture. Instead, she says that Gaultier "draws inspiration from punk and street clothes"(page 430), which, while partially correct, takes away from a lot of the meaning behind his designs. Gaultier's openness as a queer man is critical to a lot of his pieces, including the dress with the cone-shaped bra that we took a look at in class. I remember the class comparing two pictures of that same dress, one being worn by a woman and the other by a man. A question was posed as to why the different images elicited different reactions, and for me the answer was clear.

The picture with the man in the dress has an innately queer quality to it that the woman in the dress does not. The image with the woman seems to focus only on the dress itself, very few in this day and age would deem the picture particularly controversial. The image with the man, on the other hand, seems to invite controversy. It is clearly more "stagey", a word Wilson associates with postmodern fashion in her essay. It is difficult to tell whether the image of the man in the dress is intended to be serious or not, which ties into the concept of "pastiche", which

Wilson calls “a significant aspect of postmodern culture”(431). But there is something deeper to the image than just the feelings it evokes. The man in the image is named Tanel Bedrossaintz, and he is considered by many to be Gaultier’s muse, having worn a number of the designer’s pieces. Bedrossaintz is also known in the fashion world as “The King of Runway Camp”, on account of the oftentimes gender-bending outfits he wears. The term “camp” is considered synonymous with “androgynous”, and both words have overtly queer undertones. In recent years, the word “camp” has risen in popularity and association with the queer community. It is meant to mean ironic, playful, or even downright bad. This is precisely how Gaultier intends for his work to come across. Even the quote Wilson uses from Gaultier relates to this idea: “People who make mistakes or dress badly are the real stylists”(430). This notion of “dressing badly” that Gaultier talks about aligns perfectly with this idea of “camp”.

With the cone dress in particular, this concept of “camp” comes out in the playfulness that Wilson touches on later in her essay. She writes that “Fashion often plays with, and playfully transgresses gender boundaries, inverting stereotypes and making us aware of the masquerade of femininity”(437). Now, I agree completely with this statement, but the fact that this comes at the tailend of the essay and is the closest Wilson gets to mentioning how queer culture contrasts the heteronormative gender roles imposed on fashion is slightly irking. This idea of the “masquerade of femininity” is perfectly encapsulated by the image of Bedrossaintz in Gaultier’s dress because of the queerness it implies. Many of Gaultier’s other designs do something similar. He introduced skirts on masculine models around the same time as the cone bra, and the pairing of these two designs simultaneously reinforces the idea of gender roles as well as destroys them.

Another facet of this essay that I find slightly ironic considering the lack of commentary on queer influence is that at one point Wilson writes “that the tyranny of the fashion industry

crumbled in the 1970s”(431). This is relevant because this would be precisely the same time that postmodernism was forming and also when the queer community was beginning to fight for recognition of their rights. With the Stonewall riots taking place in June of 1969, the queer community would attempt to insert itself in mainstream media and advocate for equality. This is also when awareness about ballroom and gay club culture would increase. And then, a little over a decade later, the AIDS epidemic would sweep the nation. Gaultier’s cone dress was released as a part of a fall-winter collection in 1984, only three years after the start of the AIDS crisis. The fact that these events all take place so close together is not a coincidence.

The rise of postmodernism and the introduction of queerness into the mainstream narrative are intrinsically linked, making Gaultier a queer fashion icon as much as a postmodern one. When Wilson writes in the final paragraph of her essay: “Fashion... offers a medium across the social spectrum with which to experiment”(438), she is speaking about postmodernism but the idea applies to queerness and identity as well. Therefore, in my opinion, the two must exist together. Postmodern fashion cannot be talked about without the inclusion of queerness in fashion, and vice versa. Wilson says at one point in her essay that Andreas Huyssen makes postmodernism “the site from which the Others... may find a site from which to speak”(437). This section seems like the perfect lead-in to talking about queerness in fashion, given that up against the heteronormative and strict gender binaries present in modernist fashion, the queer community would certainly fit the category of “the Other”. But Wilson doesn’t do that, she doesn’t even mention queer individuals in the examples that follow. She names “women, the non-Western world, [and] the ecology movement”(437), which seem like slightly less relevant examples to the point she’s trying to make.

In queer culture, particularly at the height of the AIDS epidemic, ballroom fashion was a critical and devout practice. Those who participated in ballroom events and drag shows would often create their outfits and costumes from an assortment of mismatched items. The results were extravagant, although usually strikingly odd, feats of fashion. The participants usually had to present clothing that followed a specific theme, but the items used didn't necessarily fit that theme by themselves. This compilation of unique styles and trends is precisely what the essence of postmodern fashion attempts to recreate. What Wilson refers to as postmodernism's "eclecticism and oscillation"(430) is part and parcel with ballroom and gay club fashion. And it was this same idea that inspired the work of Gaultier. So when Wilson tries to define how postmodernism impacts the fashion of the current era, it comes off as sort of lackluster because there is a shortage of queer representation. Not only that, but Gaultier isn't the only queer designer Wilson mentions in her essay, and still there is never any mention of how that queerness should be credited, at least in part, with how fashion operates within a postmodern framework.