

The daring in contemporary fashion

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Abstract: Our article aims to shed light on the daring in contemporary clothing design, which has long been codified and managed by conventions and rules where the right proportion, balance, harmony and canons of beauty reign. This concept is part of the transgression and the unusual, and it is fundamental in the contemporary conceptions of several fashion designers. This study will address the notion of audacity in terms of etymology and artistic manifestations, and will analyze some examples of extravagant works by various global designers such as John Galliano, Viktor & Rolf, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan and Rick Owens.

Keywords: Audacity, insolite, contemporary fashion, fashion show.

Introduction

At a time when clothing remains dependent on the phenomenon of fashion, a phenomenon that is becoming more and more massive and accessible to everyone, the question of originality in the creation of clothing is posed increasingly. This figure of boldness is reflected in the contemporary designs of several fashion designers.

Therefore, some questions arise:

- What does the notion of artistic audacity and particularly clothing audacity contain?
- In what purpose some fashion designers have started, in their works, this mode of thought and unusual design?
- Why this desire to express themselves with daring acts and tools, according to unusual conceptual modes?

It goes without saying that each designer has his or her own way of designing and his or her own sources of inspiration; some work on a formal level with non-standard cuts, gigantic volumes and unusual materials. Others are inspired by exotic cultures and revolutionary artistic trends. And still others opt for conceptual strategies that convey messages in a provocative way that remain to be deciphered. All these approaches to clothing design result in most of the time in bold appearances.

In this article, we will discuss the notion of daring in terms of etymology and artistic manifestations through the analysis of a corpus of examples representing the eccentric achievements in the fashion shows of different global designers such as John Galliano, Viktor & Rolf, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan and Rick Owens.

1- Artistic audacity

The field of classical art has long been codified and managed by conventions and rules, where the right proportion, balance and harmony dominate. Then, it knew the intrusion of the audacity, the provocation, the extravagance, the unusual, the incongruous, the dissonance and the humor. In his book, *L'audace en art* (Berthet, 2005 : 11), Dominique Berthet treated the question of the artistic audacity by defining it as a disposition, a state of mind, a movement which carries to extraordinary actions, in defiance of the obstacles and the dangers. He believes that this notion refers to a particular type of attitude of bravery, courage, boldness and intrepidity. In the same way, he thinks that the audacity indicates a process, a detail which defies the habits and the dominant tastes, and which thus carries the mark of an originality, of an innovation. We retain here, that the audacity is a form of unusual. It is well about a state of mind deviated, voluntary, intentional and which does not fear the order of the challenge, the taking of the risk and the danger.

In the artistic field, the notion of audacity aims at both the artist and the work: we speak about an artist who acts with audacity, called the author of audacities, as we can speak about a work which gives to see the audacity. The art of audacity is considered here as a space of creativity and innovation through which it is allowed to dare and to deviate from the norm. It is an art that transgresses the aesthetic and anaesthetic principles and that disturbs the established codes and the dominant ideology. The artistic audacity is simply original, out of the ordinary; it represents the start against the repetition and the ankylosis and opens new perspectives of creation.

Moreover, Berthet distinguishes two kinds of manifestations of artistic audacity, one inside the work that has its own provocative danger, and the other that represents the relationship existing between the work and its public and that can lead to a kind of criticism or frank hostility and antipathy, even condemnation.

The audacity can also be considered from a pejorative point of view to indicate a failure of balance, of respect, of manners. Nevertheless, the artistic audacity does not always undergo reactions of hostility. We thus note some kinds of audacity which introduce the novelty without necessarily provoking the criticism and the rejection of the public. There are in particular dazzling, resounding audacities and other less disturbing ones. There are audacities that aim at an echo and others that are more discreet. The first ones sometimes provoke strong reactions that want to be scandalous. The others are rather tolerated.

On the other hand, what is audacious comes from a notion relative to its time; it belongs to the time and the place, even to the society and the mentality in which it manifests itself. What is audacious today will be of great banality tomorrow. The audacity is a challenge of the given moment and an effrontery towards a precise context, because simply we do not treat the things in the same way during the passage of the years, and the audacities end up being tolerated even adopted.

For this reason, artistic audacity must be a renewed attempt in the exploration of new practices and the expression of other insolences and liberties. From the beginning of the twentieth century, audacity became the ferment of the new artistic conduct for certain artistic currents belonging to Modern Art. The Baroque, with its formal overload, was the first spark that provoked the phenomenon of the unusual. Among others, Symbolism, opting for the use of symbols, created other magical worlds. Expressionism, on the other hand, transmitted messages of horror. Futurism sought to invent another fictional world based on speed and industrial development. While Dadaism, using the technique of collage, opted for a seemingly banal and childish conception, and Surrealism, inspired by science and psychoanalysis, conceived of worlds where reality intertwined with the imaginary. And, usually, in a world in permanent upheaval and in rapid emergence of confused events, the unusual of yesterday, becomes familiar and even dominant and triumphant today. As a result, these artistic currents are gradually losing their eccentricity, but they remain major sources of inspiration for current art.

The unusual and audacious culture animates an exalted movement, declined in diversified creations which draw in the register of the absurd, the provocation, the fantastic, even the scandalous, and this by impregnating all the domains of the art and the design, notably the universe of the clothing.

2- Why do we opt for an unusual clothing design ?

Generally, the clothing informs us about the state of the person who wears it. We can therefore, and in most cases, guess his gender, his social role, his age, his profession, his mood, his beliefs, his religion, etc. In addition, every cut, shape, color, pattern in the garment informs us about the identity of the person. These are the conventional norms and habits in society.

From the nineteenth century, clothing plays an indispensable role socially, economically and even politically. Clothes, hairstyle, ornaments, make-up, etc., are elements that embellish our bodies and participate in the construction of the personality of individuals and in the diversified composition of societies. These clothing components prove to be responsible in the game of appearance, in the dynamics of change, but also in the disruption of the usual social norms. Thus, some appearances represent attempts to organize society, to manipulate it and to lead it towards the search for another world by claiming new attitudes and aspiring to an excessive freedom.

The appearance of clothing is therefore something stable; it is in fact a perception shared by the majority of the members of society. It designates the social belonging or the marginality of the person. In both cases, no one is indifferent to the appearance of clothing.

The boldness of the clothing style often attracts sympathy and admiration, but sometimes also fierce and insulting judgments. These harsh judgments are probably due to the fact that we feel annoyed by such appearance because we live, unfortunately, in communities lacking tolerance and open-mindedness, in societies that accuse the difference. For this reason, many modernists think that mentalities must change more towards the acceptance of the difference in the sense that this one is an enriching factor in the society and because to be audacious is not a pathological attitude but an expression of creativity and originality. However, many people do not dare to differentiate themselves with a distinguished and strange style, for fear of being seen as bad or even attacked by violent and ironic looks. And this obviously requires self-confidence, a strong personality and enough boldness to dare to be original without complex and to bear the malicious comments.

On the other hand, boldness is explicitly manifested in the clothing designs of some contemporary designers. Dealing with the figures of the audacity in the fashion shows, Nathalie Heinich evokes, in her book, *De l'artification* (Heinich, Shapiro, 2012 : 245), the question of this notion in the conceptions of certain designers of clothing. She thinks that these last ones opt for unusual creations because they are today in a competitive world where the originality wins and where the norms of beauty and utility are transgressed for economic strategies which draw their originality in the creative processes of the avant-garde in plastic arts.

Therefore, can we attribute to these current clothing creations the status of avant-garde artistic work? Can any deviance of forms or materials be an object of art? The answer to this question can only be established when it is consistent with the context of the objects' creation and the intention of their designers. Thus, although these designers of clothing fashion have recourse to avant-garde and audacious realizations, they do not qualify as visual artists. Because, quite simply, these days, young designers aim to implement avant-garde strategies that allow them to acquire a form of capital that can consolidate their status as fashion designers. It is through these strategies that their creations amply capture the attention of the media and shock the public.

3- Daring in fashion shows

Generally, a fashion show is a live show that allows to present clothing creations or accessories worn by models in front of an audience. In her book *Défilés de Mode. Conception, Organisation et Développement*, Estel Vilaseca sees the fashion show as a way for the designer to transmit his ideas, to make his brand known, and to obtain media coverage and public predisposition towards his brand (Vilaseca, 2010 : 9). Therefore, a fashion show is a presentation in which several elements and components contribute and intertwine to achieve its success.

It should be noted that the genre of the fashion show daring and even theatrical and original begins to see the day, both in Paris and London, that from the nineties and that some call "the new performance" (Vilaseca, 2010 : 87). From then on, the classic and simple fashion shows, presented in front of a limited audience, did not thrill the hearts or catch the eyes of the press, which was always looking for originality, the new, or even the scandalous.

Obviously, this much desired audacity affects both the clothes and the staging. It is a complete show: the designs are like a moving work of art, and the originality and sophistication in form and technique are often so far-reaching and outrageous that it is not possible to wear these creations in open spaces. In this kind of fashion show, many of the creations are produced only for show, while the collection that appears in showrooms and boutiques is less spectacular and more wearable. In this way, the unusual outfit that appears in less than two minutes on the catwalk, fulfills its role perfectly: to be photographed by photographers, on the catwalk and in sophisticated fashion productions, until it becomes an identity image for the designer.

Indeed, the boldness of clothing manifests itself on stage through various forms, techniques, materials and concepts. It is a theatrical universe rich in colors, sources of inspiration and artistic references. Thus, the theatricality is revealed during the fashion shows of the English designer John Galliano, under the brand of Dior, as much in his clothing works as in the staging. In his exhibitions, the collections follow each other at a dizzying pace, undergo incredible upheavals and seem to come from a nightmare, but also from a fairy world, exotic, surprising, spectacular and unusual. The models parade with voluminous clothes, heavy dresses, sophisticated cuts, ethnic costumes, accumulated jewels, extravagant shoes, all the while being very weighted, very bluish, very coiffed and very colorful.

His spring-summer 2003 collection for Christian Dior is a textbook example of gargantuan theatricality and confusing unusualness. With Japanese and Chinese inspiration, Galliano opts in his clothing designs for the excessive accumulation of different types of multicolored fabrics. Chinese costume patterns, Japanese kimonos, intense colors, silk, brocade, taffeta, chiffon, ruffles, feathers, flowers... all transformed and reinterpreted in Galliano's singular and surprising way.

The fashion designer Galliano thus becomes the symbol of the unusual that we also find in his show spring-summer 2008. Indeed, this opulent outrageousness, loaded with shimmering colors has become the imprint of Galliano who stimulates his inspirations by references to history, different cultures and civilizations, the field of art, etc. In addition, this collection takes its references from the American painter John Singer Sargent, and in particular from one of his works (1884), called *Madame X*, which in turn caused a scandal in its time through the representation of a woman in deep cleavage. Galliano combines his creations with backward tilted volumes and ornaments reminiscent of the aesthetics of the period in which the painting is set. In fact, each model in this collection is distinguished and seems to follow its own line. While one appears tapered and mermaid cut, the other blooms into a corolla as if inflated with helium. The designer plays on the bending of the waist, sometimes very tight, sometimes widely puffed. The boldness is also identified in the parabolic hats and extravagant shoes.

And we end with the last collection of John Galliano in his career. Always faithful to elegance and femininity, he offers us this show, fall-winter 2010-2011, this time drawn from nature and its most beautiful flowers. A magical and luxurious setting, decorated with gigantic artificial flowers, bursting with fresh and vivid colors, through which models parade and follow one another in the image of flowers. The gradations of silk, the transparency of organza, as well as the voluminous hand-painted skirts, recall the contrasting hues of certain flowers such as parrot tulips or orchids. The distinction is revealed as well in the materials exploited as the cellophane sheet serving alternately as a belt or as a hairstyle whose hair is lacquered in a gourd bun above the

head, wrapped by this cellophane veil, like a bouquet of flowers. Thus, with his amazing and eclectic style, the British designer reflects in some way his already eccentric personality, which disrupts the field of fashion from the 1990s to 2010.

In the same daring perspective, we distinguish a duo of Dutch designers, Viktor Horsting & Rolf Snoeren, who fascinate their public through creations endowed with an unbridled, unusual and original innovation. Indeed, they are known as much for their art as for their fashion. Their clothing creations are already referred to as sculptures. This duo loves to distort the proportions of clothing and prefers to use unusual accessories.

Their fall-winter 2005-2006 collection is unprecedented, with models walking down the runway with their hair spread out on pillows. The models look sleep deprived and wear light shirts with all the eyelet trimmings and ruffles intact, comforting comforter coats with huge collars, long waterproof jackets, etc.

In another surprising fashion show of this famous duo, fall-winter 2007-2008, the models present themselves harnessed with sound-light devices fixed on their shoulders. The clothes are suspended and attached to these constructions. Viktor & Rolf have never ceased to showcase the vitality of their inexhaustible creativity by defying the laws, daring the most innovative concepts in order to surprise the public with their particularly daring creations.

Moreover, with the idea of facing the polar temperatures of winter, this duo presents another collection, fall-winter 2010-2011, as sought after and as unusual as its predecessors. Usually, when going outside in winter, women dress and layer a whole set of clothes; sweater, coat, plaid, vest, jacket or cape. On the podium, they lead a performance where they take off a coat from such a mannequin to make another girl wear it; in fact, they break down, modify and recompose a whole wardrobe of different clothing elements. In addition, we note a whole set of clothes in broken colors and blackened tones, unusual fabrics such as Nylon, Mink, Tweed, ornaments in the form of mechanical nails and metal fasteners, and also extravagant shapes. Like magicians, Viktor and Rolf turn a fur lining inside out, turn a reversible coat inside out and turn oversized capes into parkas. In addition, the set is completely new; the stage is covered by a black and white print, displaying wrenches, nuts, bolts, hammers, wheels and chimneys. Here we understand that the duo occupied the role of a mechanic who repairs and rebuilds.

We note on the other hand, that the year 2015 was for the house Viktor & Rolf the end with the collections of ready-to-wear line. As a result, the two designers now want to focus on high fashion, performance and show fashion. In addition, the two designers offbeat this time to begin another degree of creativity and originality and represent a brand new collection, during a fashion show, fall-winter 2015-2016. Called "Wearable Art", this collection is unveiled through a performance in which Viktor & Rolf were the actors; in fact, the duo dresses the models with canvases lined with golden frames, already hung on the wall and which they instantly transform into dresses, skirts, capes and coats. The duo's particular vision transforms the rigidity of a wooden frame into the airy weave of an asymmetrical dress and the stiffness of the canvas into a sensual body envelope. "Fashion is above all an art of change" (Peres, Agostini, 2016), Viktor & Rolf announce. Each piece unveiled is like a work of art.

We also mention the spring-summer 2016 collection in which Viktor & Rolf again embraces the notion of "Wearable Art" with a surreal fusion of sculpture and clothing; it is a harmonious, yet complex, mix of clothing and sculptural elements. The human bodies appear camouflaged or even overtaken, and the faces of the models are sometimes hidden by the sculptural material. Boundaries are crossed and values are again reversed; the sculpture is humanized, the mannequin is sculpted and we seem to have a performance of the sculptures in motion that crosses the stage. Once again, through these long white and immaculate figures, Viktor & Rolf have signed their mastery of the unusual, but also, of the cut and volumes; gigantic ruffles, huge masks, shapes and childish graphics in relief displaying an eye, a lip, a nose, half a face, breasts, hair of the hands. Thus, Viktor & Rolf proves that fashion is formidably established in interdisciplinarity. Art and design are considered here as expressions liberated from all disciplinary conformism in favor of the creative impulse.

Moreover, dozens of stylists around the world are pursuing this daring quest in their clothing designs, especially in the gigantic shapes and volumes, as well as the intense colors. We cite various collections of the Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo, founder of the brand *Comme des Garçons*, who opts for an approach that refers to another world and represents unusual shapes and cuts with an omnipresence of the color red in most of her shows.

In fact, during her spring-summer 2015 show, Kawakubo designs a whole new collection. Revealing itself in a single color, bright red, each model presents a different line from the other. The clothes, as well as the hair styles, turn out to be absurd in that they are inspired by natural elements or trivial objects brought to gigantic proportions: car seat, Japanese seaweed, stalagmites, chimney pipe...

Kawakubo continues with the same line in her fall-winter 2016-2017 collection. For the designer, the catwalk is reserved for the show and artistic creations, while the stores are set up for what serves to clothe. Thus,

the clothes are revealed in the image of sculptural pieces formed by volumes, sometimes assembled, sometimes superimposed in excess; large ruffles mounted on bustiers and dresses and volumes in the form of a bouquet of flowers. Consequently, these clothing creations seem very heavy. Indeed, they are lined with upholstery, down jackets and yardage of pink and red vinyl, and also loaded with multi-colored graphics. The hairstyle is not lacking in extravagance; it is clearly a combination of punk and baroque style.

Once again, we encountered the bold shapes in his Fall-Winter 2017-2018 collection that opts for comet-like looks and celestial bodies propelled down the runway. These hallucinatory and even humorous sculptures, whose ergonomics and wearability we don't question, are revealed with complex compositions and extravagant shapes. The models curl up in these massive, aerial and deformed shells. Whether lace, wool or waterproof fabric, the various fabrics undergo all kinds of effects: quilted, draped, molded, chewed.

In addition, besides the forms and materials, the concept of the unusual in the parades is sought and treated as well, in the clothing design as in the scenario of the representation. We refer here to a conceptual fashion and a conceptual fashion show. "Through this type of fashion show, the designer presents, communicates and questions, inviting the audience to reflect on certain themes or aspects " (Vilaseca, 2010 : 88).

In this context, we mention the example of Hussein Chalayan. Through his original fashion shows, this creator incites the spectators to decipher his messages and to think about their contents. He thus invokes the question of religion, the female body and the place that women can occupy in his preserved society. His Burka collection (1997-1998), one of his first creations, is also a performance that shocks and provokes scandal and criticism with its daring subject dealing with the wearing of the Burka; models parade with burkas of different lengths, revealing each time the legs, thighs ... until reaching, with the last model, a completely naked body.

In the same direction, we cite the unusual fashion show of American fashion designer Rick Owens, spring-summer 2016. More than surprising, it is a shocking fashion show, according to several critics. Indeed, the models parade wearing all ... other models! The result is just as incongruous! And Owens always wants to shock or even disturb his audience.

Conclusion

The clothing, this second skin which first protects the human body from the external effects, can play for the individual the role of his spokesman. We can say that the clothing appearance serves, in a way, for the identification of the person. It can reflect the distinction and the originality in the group. On the other hand, we find the fashion of dress. The latter is inspired by customs, but is located in the sphere of innovation, invention, modernity, originality and the sublime. It values neither the ordinary nor the traditional. It sometimes represents extravagance by seeking to transgress the usual.

Regarding the current unusual designs in fashion shows, designers choose different strategies. Formally and technically, the audacity in these projects is built through unusual means and original approaches. Some deviate from the basic rules of sewing and pattern making, namely the symmetry of the cuts, the bending clamps and the measurement of the sizes. Others exaggerate in shapes, volumes, materials and colors. Or some choose to establish a direct relationship with conceptual art to convey powerful messages through singular clothing designs and surprising performances.

John Galliano, Viktor & Rolf, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan and Rick Owens are typical examples. Of course, their initial goal is to launch new fashion trends but also to attract the curious, to amaze them, even to shock them.

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