International Journal of Costume and Fashion
Vol. 13 No. 2, December 2013, pp. 1-13

Avant-Garde Fashion:
A Case Study of Martin Margiela

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(Received August 13, 2013; Revised November 19, 2013; Accepted November 29, 2013)

Abstract *We studied the meaning of the term avant-garde in relation to clothing of the 1980s and 1990s by examining the media's perceptions of Martin Margiela, a Belgian deconstructionist designer who was often labeled as avant-garde by journalists, scholars, and fashion critics in the late 20th century. A five-step content analysis method described by Paoletti (1982) was used to conduct the research. Newspaper and magazine articles in the 1980s and 1990s were analyzed using a set of existing avant-garde characteristics developed by Crane (1987) to determine if those journalists' perceptions matched the characteristics described by Crane. Results indicated that the journalists' critiques and descriptions matched the avant-garde characteristics described by Crane (1987). Including a subjective element to the conceptualization of the term explains how journalists described Margiela's designs despite Japanese designers' use of similar techniques before him. We (re) conceptualize the term's latter 20th century meaning and shifting dialogue to include a subjective element.*

Key words *avant-garde, content analysis, fashion, Martin Margiela*

Journalists, critics, and scholars often employ the word *avant-garde* when interpreting, critiquing, and analyzing art, architecture, film, and fashion. However, the meaning of the term avant-garde is often ambiguous. The characteristics used to determine if an artist or designer or their work is avant-garde are often not consistent among the journalists, critics, and scholars analyzing their work; these characteristics frequently change from year to year and differ among disciplines, which reflects the constantly shifting and social construction of meaning in different contexts. The term avant-garde is continuously bandied about in magazines, newspapers, and fashion-show reviews making it difficult to conceptualize. The purpose of this study was to analyze the meaning of the term avant-garde as it relates to clothing in the last twenty years of the 20th century by analyzing one designer, Margin Margiela, who was frequently labeled as avant-garde. Journalists' use of the term avant-garde to describe Margiela's designs in the 1980s and 1990s, a time period during which many designers had a similar design aesthetic, brings to question the conceptual underpinnings of the term. We suggest a possible need to include a subjective element into its definition.

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Literature Review

Definitions and Uses of Avant-Garde

According to several scholars, the first usage of the term avant-garde in relation to the visual arts is not definite. Calinescu (1977) discussed the use of the avant-garde idea and its metaphorical relationship with the military and art in the first quarter of the 19th century. Poggioli (1971) stated that one of the earlier uses of the term avant-garde was in the mid-19th century. Laverdant (1845) wrote a passage titled *de la mission de l'art et du rôle des artistes* which discussed innovative artists and their relationship to humanity. Laverdant wrote:

> Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer. Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfills its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is…Along with the hymn to happiness, the dolorous and despairing ode…To lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth, which are at the base of our society (as cited in Poggioli, 1971, p. 9).

These claims by Calinescu, Poggioli, and Laverdant highlight that the initial usage and discussion of the phrase was most likely in the 19th century, although its exact date is unknown.

Crane (1987) researched the multiple definitions of avant-garde and identified that the term is employed differently among various groups of artists and art critics. Crane stated that some authors "use the term to refer to almost any art movement while others apply it to certain types of art styles rather than others, generally those that are in opposition either to dominant social values or to established artistic conventions" (p. 11). These ideas are visible in the arguments by Bensman and Gerver (1958) and Burger (1984), which highlight that the differeing opinions of authors can contribute to the lack of clarity. Bensman and Gerver (1958) argued that an avant-garde artist "attempts to paint in a way that no one else has painted before but uses a body of artistic ideas based on preivous art tradtions" (cited in Crane, 1987, p. 13). Burger (1984) identified that "the label of avant-garde should be reserved for artists such as the Dadaists and the Futurists, whose works attacked the institution of art itself on the grounds that modernist art, as a result of its preoccupation with formal aesthetic issues, has ceased to comment on its social environment" (Crane, 1987, p. 13).

Crane (1997) also discussed the difficulty of distinguishing between avant-garde and postmodern apparel designers. She attributed the difficulty of distinguishing between the two to the chaotic and rapidly changing nature of apparel post-1960s when the de-centering of dominant fashion began. Prior to the 1960s, fashion influences predominantly "trickled down" from high fashion designs in Paris (Simmel, 1904). Then, after the 1960s, fashion influences began to "trickle up" (Field, 1970) or "trickle across" (King, 1963) as styles were adopted from the youth on the street or other subcultural groups. Fashion

innovators at that time no longer only looked to high fashion for the latest trends. In Crane's (1997) view, the dominant convention to which apparel designers were compared in order to determine their level of innovation were the French high-fashion designers. However, once the postmodern era began in the 1960s and styles began emerging from different areas, the comparison to the French high-fashion designers seemed obsolete and caused scholars to question what determines a designer as avant-garde as well as what the conventional dress is that new or avant-garde designs should be compared to.

Avant-Garde Apparel Designers and Artists

Whereas the definition and characteristics of the term avant-garde are ambiguous and varied, many scholars have frequently studied artists and designers and described them as avant-garde. Crane (1997) identified Elsa Schiaparelli as the first avant-garde fashion designer in the early 20th century. She incorporated surrealist ideas into her designs by creating "outrageous experiments in which artifacts and body parts were placed in unusual locations, such as a hat in the form of a shoe" (Crane, 1997, p. 128). The next set of famous avant-garde designers after Schiaparelli came from Japan. Kawamura (2004, 2006), Tortora and Eubank (2010), Mears (2008), and Crane (1997) all state that the Japanese designers of the 1980s, including Issey Miyaki, Yohji Yamamoto, and Rei Kawakubo, characterized a new and innovative type of creativity; the authors often used the adjective avant-garde to describe their design aesthetic. Mears (2008) stated that the three designers "had a profound impact and did much to change the direction of avant-garde fashion…they redefined contemporary fashion" (pp. 95-96). Kawamura (2004) explored the perception of the Japanese designers in the West and why their designs were considered avant-garde. She reviewed a range of newspaper and magazine articles to gain insight into these designers' acceptance by the Paris fashion system. Kawamura (2006) used Crane's (1987) framework of avant-garde characteristics to develop and form part of her argument. She reported that their new styles were characterized by monochromatic, asymmetrical, and oversized looks and that they "destroyed all previous definitions of clothing and fashion" (p. 202). Kawamura compared these new and original concepts by the Japanese with "the rules of fashion set by orthodox, legitimate Western designers such as Chanel, Dior, and Saint Laurent" (p. 202).

Crane (1987) studied seven different art movements in New York City between 1940 and 1980 and analyzed the redefinition of the aesthetic content of art. She argued that as each 20th century art movement emerged, it raised new questions and tested new boundaries. Based on her research, she identified the following as underlining characteristics of artists who can be considered avant-garde: (1) "redefines artistic conventions"; (2) "utilizes new artistic tools and techniques (e.g., the elimination of the easel by Jackson Pollock)"; and (3) "redefines the nature of the art objects, including the range of objects that can be considered as artworks" (p. 14). She described that artists may also be considered avant-garde based on their production and distribution of art and whether or not it "redefines the organizational context for the production, display, and distribution of art" (p. 15); yet, the three characteristics previously listed were the most important evaluation in being considered avant-garde. She stated that any artist who

revived styles or an aesthetic from a prior time period most likely would not be considered avant-garde.

Spicer (2009) analyzed the perception of four American avant-garde artists' exhibitions between 1950 and 1964, including Pollock, Rothko, Rauschenberg, and Johns by British art critics and journalists. Spicer (2009) provided a thorough analysis of the perception of those artists by analyzing press cuttings, journal articles, institutional records, and correspondences. However, he did not compile and provide the specific avant-garde characteristics of those artists.

Both apparel designers and artists described as avant-garde pushed the boundaries of accepted conventions within the discipline in the specific time period. Their new ideas were initially perceived as shocking, and the public did not readily accept them. Major differences for the artist versus the designer to be considered avant-garde were to whom and to what they were being compared. For apparel designers, it was the high-fashion designers in the French fashion system, and for the artists it was the recent art movements. While there was a difference in whom and what they were being compared to, both artists and apparel designers disrupted the system of ideas.

Martin Margiela

After the Japanese avant-garde designers began showing in Paris in the 1970s, scholars identified another group of "avant-gardists" from Belgium that emerged on the fashion scene. One Belgian designer, Martin Margiela, had a major impact on fashion viewers by putting deconstructionist designs on the runway. His new designs were often described as shocking and avant-garde.

Deconstruction is a philosophical approach developed by Jacques Derrida and employed by many American literary critics (Norris and Benjamin, 1988). Deconstruction has been used extensively in literary criticism and later had an influence on both architectural and apparel design. Ellinwood (2011) stated that deconstruction began influencing fashion in the 1960s and was first seen in French fashion designer Sonia Rykiel's work, then later in designs by Vivienne Westwood, Yohji Yamamoto, and Martin Margiela. Gill (1998) described deconstructionist fashion design as a type of "new thinking in fashion" and a process where "the garment-maker is simultaneously forming and deforming, constructing and destroying, making and undoing clothes" (p. 28). The deconstruction philosophy translated into fashion in a literal and visual sense. Designers influenced by deconstruction placed seams on the surface of garments and left threads unclipped.

Several authors described Martin Margiela's high fashion designs as avant-garde and inspired by Derrida's critical theory of deconstruction. Tortora and Eubank (2010) stated, "Martin Margiela, a Belgian designer, became one of the best-known of the deconstructionists fashion designers who made clothes with seams located on the outside, linings that were part of the exterior, or fabric edges left unhemmed and raw" (p. 617). In many scholarly and press articles, authors described Margiela's deconstructed fashion as avant-garde; however, characteristics of the term avant-garde were often ambiguous. We aim to investigate if Margiela and his deconstructed aesthetic were appropriately labeled as avant-garde. Though previous authors have analyzed the perception of avant-garde artists and designers, scholars in the fashion

discipline have yet to specify which aspects of fashion characterize a designer or his or her garments as avant-garde in the last two decades of the 20th century. Kawamura (2002) documented that Japanese designers in the 1980s were appropriately considered avant-garde though, their redefinition of sartorial conventions because they introduced different ways of wearing a garment, deconstructed garments, and challenged normative gender-specific clothing. This investigation expanded on Kawamura's work by exploring the next wave of innovative designers in the late 20th century.

Method

For this study, similar to Kawamura (2002), we used Crane's (1987) framework of avant-garde characteristics to investigate and analyze the media's perception of the Belgian fashion designer Martin Margiela, who is often identified as avant-garde. We chose Crane's framework because her work was the result of a rigorous analysis of many 20th century artists and art movements that were considered avant-garde, and it allowed for an objective analysis of the ambiguous concept "avant-garde." We examined all newspaper or journal articles with descriptions of Martin Margiela's work in the 1980s and 1990s using the content analysis method described by Paoletti (1982). The following research questions guided us and were addressed by this study: (1) Did the media's perceptions of Martin Margiela in the 1980s and 1990s match other identified avant-garde characteristics? and (2) Was Martin Margiela appropriately labeled as avant-garde in the context of the postmodern era?

We used the nonreactive, quantitative content analysis research method as described by Paoletti (1982). The first stage of the content analysis method as described by Paoletti (1982) is to determine the objectives of the study. The second stage involves creating the instrument with which to measure the data, and the third stage is concerned with identifying sources to use for analysis in the study. In the fourth and final stage, the, data is systematically recorded using the instrument and then analyzed with suitable statistical procedures.

The instrument used to measure the data for this study contained the three categories of avant-garde identified by Crane (1987) including redefine artistic conventions, utilizes new artistic tools and techniques, and redefines the nature of fashion, including the range of objects that can be considered as fashion. The first category, redefine artistic conventions, is operationalized as the redefinition of the aesthetic of apparel designs such as different or new silhouettes, looks, or styles. Silhouette refers to the shape of the garment, look refers to the combination of garments, and style refers to the garment(s) distinctive features. The second category, utilizes new artistic tools and techniques, is operationalized as non-traditional or new sewing or construction techniques and new construction tools. A traditional construction technique refers to sewing with clean finished seams and edge treatments, and traditional tools refer to sewing needles, sewing thread, and sewing machines. The third category, redefines the nature of fashion, including the range of objects that can be considered as fashion, is operationalized as new or unconventional materials or fabrics and utilizing new spaces or ways to promote designs. Conventional apparel design materials are items such as fabric, thread, and notions. Conventional ways designers pro-

mote their designs include fashion shows with young, thin models on runways surrounded by seats for the audience.

We found the sample of articles through ProQuest Newsstand database by searching the key words “Martin Margiela” in newspaper and magazine articles between the years 1980 and 1999. We found 776 articles written in English by journalists that mentioned Martin Margiela; 564 of these articles contained descriptions of his work, and 212 of them mentioned only Margiela’s name in the article. Out of the 564 articles that described Margiela and his work, 141 identified him as avant-garde, original, or innovative, and the remaining 423 articles described his work without referring to him as avant-garde. We coded the 141 articles that identified him as avant-garde, original, or innovative using a data sheet developed from Crane’s (1987) categories of avant-garde. We used the verbal unit of analysis for the study and looked for underlying implicit meaning in the content of the texts. After all articles were read, we re-read each article to ensure all descriptions of the designs were noted. Finally, we reported and analyzed the data using frequencies.

Results

All articles found in the database that mentioned Margiela dated between 1989 and 1999. Table 1 illustrates the number of articles found per year that mention Margiela’s work and if the author of that article described him as avant-garde or not. In the 141 articles in which Margiela was described as avant-garde, innovative, or original, 75 included the idea that Margiela redefined the aesthetic of apparel designs such as new silhouettes, styles, or looks, 32 articles that Margiela utilized new artistic tools and techniques, and 55 that he redefined the nature of fashion, including the range of objects that can be considered as fashion. The results indicate that the media’s perceptions of the Belgium designer Martin Margiela in the 1980s and 1990s do match Crane’s (1987) categories of avant-garde characteristics. In the following section, we report the results from the content analysis that address the first research question, “Did the media’s perceptions of Martin Margiela in the 1980s and 1990s match other identified avant-garde characteristics?”

Table 1
Number of Articles Found Per Year That Described Margiela’s Work

Year	Total # of Articles Found Per Year	Described as Avant-Garde	Not Described as Avant-Garde
1989	10	1	9
1990	20	10	10
1991	18	4	14
1992	43	10	33
1993	113	39	74
1994	38	7	31
1995	28	3	25
1996	24	3	21

1997	56	16	40
1998	107	23	84
1999	107	25	82
Totals	564	141	423

Redefined Artistic Conventions

The first category of Crane's (1987) characteristics of avant-garde, "redefined artistic conventions," referred to the redefinition of the aesthetic of apparel designs such as new silhouettes, styles, or looks. Traditionally, garments adhere to the proportions and shape of the body and include both front and back pieces. Margiela redefined artistic conventions by introducing distinct silhouettes such as garments with unbalanced proportions (Spindler, 1996) and oversized looks (Snead, 1993). He made "one-armed jackets" (Blanchard, 1997, para. 4) and tuxedo jackets that were "knee length" (Graham, 1999, para. 4) with drooping shoulders and sleeve lengths that extended far past the fingertips, making the jacket impractical for everyday wear. The most notable silhouettes that redefined the aesthetic of garments were designs that were missing traditional pieces, such as skirts without a back or as one journalist described them, "backless slips" (White, 1997, para. 3). In 1998, Margiela created a "sweater front" that was composed of only a front pattern piece with no back, which was designed to be worn over another garment (French, 1998, para. 8). Marilyn Blaszka, owner of a high-end women's apparel store in Chicago who carried Margiela, explained that he is "among the intellectual designers who are re-thinking what a garment is…they don't do the conventional like a skirt with a front and a back" (Buck, 1993, "What a vision" para. 2).

In articles where Margiela was labeled as avant-garde, his aesthetic was often described as deconstructed (Morra, 1991) or anti-fashion (Buck, 1992, May 6). One journalist explained that "you couldn't tell if they were rags or real clothes" (Morra, 1991, para. 7), and another explained that it looked like he had created clothes and "destroyed them in order to make a fresh start" (Horyn, 1992, para. 2). His styles have also been described as "shabby chic" (Snead, 1992, para. 3), "thrown together" (Schiro, 1990, para. 10), and "underground classics" (Buck, 1991, September 11, para. 1). The deconstructed look of his clothes often featured "jagged, unraveled, shredded and bunched hems, linings, sleeves, necklines and cuffs" (Snead, 1992, para. 3). Threads were frequently left hanging and he permanently stitched in creases to create a slept-in look (Morra, 1991). His clothes were often "frayed, distressed, misshapen, [and] wrinkled" (McCue, 1993, para. 7). He presented,jackets and shirts with "sleeves ripped off," (White, 1997, para. 5) and jackets designed with the sleeves inside out (Menkes, 1997, March 14).

Margiela created styles that challenged conventional ideas of where the parts of a garment are located. For example, he created a skirt that had one finished pant leg sewn to the back that hung freely off the hem (Menkes, 1998). He sent "jackets with mismatched parts" (Buck, 1992, March 25, "Off to the Salvation Army," para. 6) down the runway and introduced dresses that incorporated "men's trouser fronts as aprons" (Graham, 1998, para. 11). He also created belt buckle toe rings that the models

wore in his 1992 runway show (Zwerin, 1992). In these types of garments, Margiela played with ideas of where traditional parts of garments are sewn and worn.

Utilizes New Artistic Tools and Techniques

The second category of Crane's (1987) characteristics of avant garde, "utilizes new artistic tools and techniques," refers to non-traditional or new construction techniques and tools. Journalists identified various new artistic tools, techniques, and materials that Margiela used to create his designs. Seams are the major structural component of all garments; typically seam allowances are turned towards the interior of the garment and created using a needle and thread. Margiela's signature non-traditional construction technique was that he often placed seams (Schiro, 1990) and darts on the exterior of the garment and frequently left threads hanging after seams were sewn (Buck, 1991, September 11). Once the seams were perfectly finished on some garments, they were "delicately re-opened" (Mora, 1993, "Martin Margiela's approach" para. 4), juxtaposing his high-quality construction techniques against deconstructed techniques. He also replaced traditional construction techniques such as stitching by utilizing safety pins to attach sleeves to garments (Morra, 1993).

Margiela also chose to replace traditional cutting techniques with slashing, ripping, and tearing (Buck, 1991, September 11). While Margiela had knowledge of and was known for his master cutting techniques, he frequently ripped parts of the garments away to create a tattered or shredded look (Hochswender, 1992) and produced garments that had "sleeves raggedly cut off just below the shoulder-line" (Buck, 1989, para. 8). One journalist wrote, "the buttonholes, the topstitching are perfect⋯but then he plays around, ripping things apart" (Buck, 1991, September 11, para. 9).

In 1999, Margiela was praised as the "innovative Belgian designer" (Coppage, 1999, para. 1) who "set the trend" (Hughs, 1999, para. 1) by creating unique surface designs by dipping garments in agar and treating them with "mold, bacteria and yeast" (Hughs, 1999, para. 2). He worked with a micro-biologst to utilize 15 different strains of bacteria that would create different mold colors. This experiment turned white- and beige-colored garments made from cotton or denim into garments that looked as though they were created from suede or velvet (Copage, 1999).

Redefines the Nature of Fashion, Including the Range of Objects That Can Be Considered as Fashion

Crane's (1987) third category of avant-garde, "redefines the nature of fashion, including the range of objects that can be considered as fashion," refers to new or different materials or fabrics and new spaces or ways to promote designs. Journalists stated several times that Margiela used new or innovative materials in his designs such as grocery bags (Buck, 1989), broken glass for vests (Spindler, 1993, October 11), recycled fabrics from discarded clothes (Spindler, 1993, July 25), tailor's tape (Lawrence, 1990), and anti-theft tags (Graham, 1999). Margiela wrapped garbage bags around clothes (Spindler, 1993, July 25), cut up old denim jeans to create skirts (Morra, 1993), made tops out of clear plastic (Buck, 1991,

September 11), created blouses from delicatessen bags (Buck, 1989), and took jacket and dress linings out of old garments to create independent garments (Morra, 1993). He also designed bras that were made of papier-mâché and surgical masks (Buck, 1991, September 11), used plastic dry-cleaner bags to create dresses (Buck, 1992, March 25), and made a coat out of a duvet cover (Menkes, 1999).

The manner in which garments were distributed and promoted in retail stores and at fashion shows also redefined the nature of fashion. Margiela's iconic presentation of garments often included men wearing laboratory coats. These coats were seen on associates in his retail stores (Menkes, 1997, October 16), and at his 1996 runway show, men in white lab coats escorted guests to their seats (Spindler, 1996). Then again, in 1997 during the presentation of his new line, the white lab coats appeared on men who held out the "fold-flat 'paper-bag' inspired collection" (Menkes, 1997, October 16, para. 15).

Margiela also chose unconventional spaces and models to promote his collections, which caused heightened media attention. Journalists described the fashion show spaces as both bizarre and astonishing (Cunningham, 1990). Spaces included old supermarkets, old theaters, Salvation Army, abandoned markets, and a former electric-motor workshop (Evans, 1998; Hochswender, 1990). Margiela's 1991 runway show was held in an old metro station, where atendees spilled out into intersections above (Buck, 1991, October 23). Instead of using young and slender models at his 1998 show, Margiela hired ordinary women between the ages of 30 and 50 (Delap, 1998).

Discussion and Conclusion

Uses of the characteristics previously stated are examples of what determines a designer as avant-garde in the 1980s and 1990s according to Crane's (1987) characteristics. Margiela's dialogue with the fashion system in the last two decades of the 20th century reveals his play and negotiation with the conventions of acceptable fashions. His garments, distribution, and promotional events earned him the status with other conceptual and edgy designers coming out of Japan. However, how innovative were his designs in comparison to the previous Japanese designers who also showed their designs in Paris and during a style period without a predominant trend leader?

Margiela challenged the chaotic nature of fashion in a time period where extremely loose rules of fashion existed and during an era when "anything goes" (Farrell-Beck and Parsons, 2007, pp. 266-267). The 1960s saw the beginning of these fashion changes where "no one style was going to win general acceptance" (p. 183). This trend continued throughout the last half of the 20th century. Margiela was a prominent high-fashion designer in the 1990s, and this era in particular had an eclectic mix of styles; few people obediently followed the fashion media, trends, or trend forecasts (Farrell-Beck and Parsons, 2007). Fashion influences simultaneously "trickled down" (Simmel, 1904), "trickled up" (Field, 1970), and "trickeld across" (King, 1963) as individuals constructed their appearance from a bricolage of available materials and influences. High fashion therefore was often perceived as less shocking due to the acceptable styles available to each indivdiaul. As Kawamura (2006) noted, the Japanese were considered avant-garde when compared to the dominant Western designers such as Chanel and Dior. Therefore, de-

spite the abundance of acceptable styles in the 1990s, when compared to other high-fashion designers such as Chanel who presented clean-finished styles, Margiela's deconstructed looks were interpreted as avant-garde by journalists.

Kawamura (2004) explained that the Japanese redefined the concpets of fashion by presenting unconventional designs. Kawakubo, Miayaki, and Yamamoto presented styles such as monochromatic, assymetrical, and oversized looks. A close examination of the descriptions of Margiela's designs, construction, and aesthetic are similar to what Kawamura (2004) describes. For example, several of Kawakubo's garments displayed deconstructed characteristics in the early 1980s. A 1984 scarf designed by Kawakubo had unfinished edges. In 1983, Kawakubo designed a T-shirt with uneven hemlines and holes. The previosuly described Kawakuobo designs can be found in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's online collection by searching 2005.173.18 and 1995.209.3 respectively. These and several other examples highlight their similar design aesthetics; however, Marigela produced these designs ten years later. When considering Crane's (1987) notion that revivied styles from prior time periods are not considered avant-garde, we must either reconsider our acceptance of Margiela as an avant-garde designer or reconceptualalize the term avant-garde to include a subjective interpretation of "newness". The length of time inbetween the launch of the Japanese designers' and Marigela's designs was enough for him to be interpreted as new and innovative.

The distance between Margiela's release of deconstructed designs and Rei Kawakubo's earlier release of similar deconstructed designs beginning in the early 1980s highlights the idea that our perception of newness can be shaded over time. The enormous power of the press heavily influences the interpreation and conceptualization of our cultural surroundings. The Japanese designers before Margiela used similar design techniques; therefore, describing Margiela as ahead of his time may be an overstatment from the press or an indication of their desire for a topic that will sell the story. One cannot doubt the edgy and innovative techniques Margiela employed throughout his entire brand. Journalists perceived Margiela's designs as avant-garde despite the fact that similar design aesthetics were evident in the early 1980s. Therefore, adding a subjective element to Crane's (1987) description of "new" may be in order. Indeed, Rogers (2003) describes innovations in relation to *perceived newness*, rather than meeting a criterion of being first on the market. As such, Margiela's designs were perceived by the journalists in the context of high fashion design in the late 20th century as new and innovative. .

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

These findings enhance our current understanding of conceptual and avant-garde fashion in the 20th and 21st centuries. This research provides meaningful implications for apparel designers who hope to challenge traditional conventions of dress. Aspiring avant-garde apparel designers can use these findings in the future in order to analyzye the fashion system and to challenge themselves to push the boundaries of design and create new and innovative design ideas and aesthetics.

The term avant-garde will continually be ambiguous due to the complex nature of what constitutes

the conventional means of a time period and the continually changing socio-cultural influences on the particular context. Adding a subjective element to criteria for conceptualizing the term will add to the ambiguity. This idea highlights the need to continually reexamine avant-garde designers in different time periods and geographic locations. Many other designers past and present have been frequently labeled as avant-garde, including Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, John Galliano, and Alexander McQueen. We suggest conducting an analysis of the other designers labeled avant-garde in both dress history texts and the media and comparing those findings to understand the changing nature of avant-garde fashion.

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