



VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION

A Queer History of Fashion

From the Closet to the Catwalk

ANNA BLUME

History of Art Professor, Fashion Institute of Technology

ANNA BLUME

History of Art Professor, Fashion Institute of Technology

Video length: 4:18 | This video is online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqkXbpJp9DU

When I think about being queer as a child—I was born in 1958—well first off the word ‘queer’ didn’t exist, and the words that did exist were so terrifying I certainly didn’t identify with any of them, but I probably knew from the age of about six or seven that at least I think I was neither a girl or a boy, or maybe both a girl or a boy. But whatever I was I couldn’t talk about it, and there were no words for it. And so the place I looked was in cinema, and I used to stay up late at night to watch those black and white movies that I didn’t really understand but I loved looking at, and the first one I felt like I was in or may be related to was Jean Cocteau’s *Beauty and the Beast*. I think that spoke to me as a child because here you had this beautiful beast, but he was kind of locked in a body he didn’t understand and he didn’t know how he got there, and he didn’t really know if a girl would ever kiss him, and I felt that was pretty perfect for me. I felt like I was locked in a body that I didn’t understand, and I really didn’t know if a girl would ever kiss me. That was probably the first film that opened me up to a possibility that I wasn’t the only one of whatever it is that I was.

The next film was probably an earlier film, which was Dreyer’s *Joan of Arc*, and the character that played Joan—well, I couldn’t tell if she was a girl or a boy—and the camera was so tight on her face that I felt that it invited an identification and a kind of love I was hoping to find in my own life. She was also just transgendered in her clothing, and later in life when I became a historian, I read the trials and I was amazed at how often her prosecutors were asking her ‘Why was she dressing in men’s clothing? Who gave her the authority to do this?’ And of all her transgressions it seems like this possibly was the one they were most fixated on, and so of course very early on she became my role model.

Other places I looked for a community was kind of out in the universe; a place that seemed to invite community to me was the zodiac. There were hybrid creatures in the zodiac and I’m born in December so my sign is Sagittarius, and I thought well maybe that’s what I am. Maybe I’m half human, half horse, and that’s why I was born under this sign, and everyone can see that in the night sky and everybody talks openly about that, so maybe that’s what I am and that’s what I could be. And it really wasn’t until I moved to New York in the 1990s that I found my queer fellows, that is, fellow humans, and realized that this feeling of being part-male, part-female, part-animal was something that I shared with many people and it wasn’t just a sexual orientation. It was a kind of intellectual orientation that has stayed with me my whole life.

Moments within the fashion world that have kind of excited me beyond belief would have to be—a high point—would be Alexander McQueen’s 2006-2007 fall/winter show in which the models came out with feathers all over their bodies, or the one, that fabulous one, with the cream silk dress and the resin ear horns with silk lace up on it, and I thought how that is really queer. ▼