Abstract

Terpsichore in Jimmy Choo sets up a relationship between high fashion bodies, material/fabric and theatre dance choreographies. It argues that these relationships have been crucial in twentieth and twenty-first century art dance and fashion practices. It examines the complex web of consumption, negotiation and re-appropriation between dance and fashion. It investigates the relationship between performance, shape, form, fabric, haute couture, modern dance and the bodies that set all of these into motion. The thesis includes a series of visual materials carefully tailored to deliver the overall argument of the thesis: a genealogy of high fashion bodies, material/fabric and theatre dance choreographies has always existed.

To answer how contemporary dance, a “product” rich in cultural capital, feeds, affects, is transformed and appropriated by the socio-political economy of high fashion, I provide collections of visual materials in thematic groupings which include excerpts from fashion films, advertising campaigns and live catwalk or fashion performances. I use visual analysis, art history, and detailed movement analyses while paying particular attention to textile and costume construction, image composition, and the role of the camera. Whilst movement analysis informs my work in several chapters, other chapters draw upon other aspects of comparative dance analysis.

I establish a kinetic language to read fashion performance through modern and post-modern dance choreography. This language can then be used to develop new trends in dance and fashion practice. I argue that fashion choreographies are influenced by shapes, forms, and the mobility of fashion materials. I utilise the concepts of dynamic flow, tensile elasticity and experimental shapes in space in order draw links between the modern dance choreographies of Loïe Fuller, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham and current fashion editorials. In later chapters, I engage with how punk aesthetics and attitude in British fashion was appropriated to subvert normative bodily representation in mainstream high fashion. I examine multiple collaborations between fashion designers and established dance companies in order to unpack the negotiations that occur when dealing with corporate art sponsorship.

Terpsichore, the muse of dance, inspires these pages. I envision her dancing alongside the models, the photographers; I see her whispering inspirations to the choreographers and fashion designers. I would like to think she choreographs new ways of thinking about dance, fabric and the fashion industry. Her movement is either tensile or fluid, depending on what she wears. Dance scholar Sally Banes (1987) put her in sneakers. I put her in Jimmy Choos.
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