Chapter One:
Introduction

Figure 1.1: Visual examples of the crossover between dance and high fashion

Figure 1.1a: (top left) Deliveryance (2003) featuring Alexander McQueen’s Spring/Summer 2014 collection, The Salle Wagram, Paris Fashion Week; 9 October 2003; Choreographer: Michael Clark; Source: http://www.elle.com/runway/ready-to-wear/spring-2004-rtw/alexander-mcqueen/collection;

Figure 1.1b: (top right) Strike a Pose, Grazia, 28 September 2009, p.95; Photo: Gustavo Papaleo;

Figure 1.1c: (bottom) Shimmer (2004) featuring Jonathan Goddard and Ino Rigga; Photo: Chris Nash; Source: www.exploredance.com
1.1. Locating the research focus

In her 1987 book *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, dance historian Sally Banes investigates a transgressive turn in postmodern dance perspectives that explores cultural shifts ranging from avant-garde dance performance to transnational popular dance. Banes uses the muse of dance from the Western tradition as a rhetorical device within the text. She assumes Terpsichore wears pointe shoes given the predominance of classical ballet within Western art dance history. As a radical act, Banes puts her Terpsichore in sneakers, making dance an everyday activity, one that non-ballet bodies can do. I adopt Banes’ tactic of changing the footwear to make a statement about dance and high fashion. While Banes’ muse wears sneakers, mine wears stilettos by luxury accessory brand designer *Jimmy Choo*. What does it mean for dancers, dance history and dancing bodies to not just metaphorically wear high fashion stilettos, but to engage with high fashion in general? What interconnections exist between dance and high fashion?

There has been a marked ascent in the artistic relationship between contemporary dance and high fashion in twenty-first century Britain. The terms “contemporary dance” in the context of this thesis refers to modern and post-modern dance. The term also includes contemporary ballet when modern and post-modern dance choreographers were commissioned by, or became artists-in-residence of ballet companies to create new productions that fuse classical ballet vocabularies with modern and post-modern dance movements. High fashion refers to haute couture and designers’ ready-to-wear collections presented as part of the biannual London Fashion Week. London has become a popular site for collaboration between designers and choreographers, not only as host to numerous productions but across a wide variety of platforms. Fashion advertising events, photography, films, and dance productions are the significant areas where one can see the confluence between fashion and dance. For example, *Deliverance* (2003), the show choreographed by Scottish dance artist and choreographer, Michael Clark, featured the Spring/Summer 2004 collection designed by Alexander McQueen, a British fashion designer as part of Paris Fashion Week (see Figure 1.1a). It presented clothed bodies as a post-modern dance performance sewn with provocative intertextuality and unruly falling bodies on the catwalk.
In fashion photography, *Strike a Pose* is an eight-pages fashion editorial published in *Grazia* magazine, UK, in September 2009. The collection featured in the article was presented as choreography and modelled by Michela Meazza, a principal dancer from New Adventures, British choreographer Matthew Bourne’s dance company. In the photo shoot, Meazza references American modern dancer/choreographer Martha Graham’s repertoire by striking her left leg in *attitude à la seconde* (bent leg to the side) and thereby stretching *Donna Karan*’s draped jersey gown in a manner similar to Graham’s costume and choreography in *Lamentation* (1930) (see Figure 1.1b).

In contemporary dance performances, Clark dressed dancers performing in *Would, Should, Can, Did* (2003) in *Prada*, a luxurious Italian brand, and *Hussein Chalayan*, a brand founded by a British fashion designer famous for his conceptual design.¹ In February 2004, the British choreographer, Richard Alston, featured dancers in *Shimmer* performed at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre, London. These performers were clad in cobwebbed and jewelled knitwear designed by Julien MacDonald, a British fashion designer who, prior to the launch of his own label, had been working for Chanel and Givenchy fashion houses (see Figure 1.1c).² These varied examples serve as evidence of the significance crossovers between dance and high fashion, and serve as my introduction to this research.

In the above cited examples, contemporary dance provides both a cultural platform and acts as an archive for high fashion performance. For example, 2004 was a watershed between dance production and fashion. Not only did MacDonald design costumes for Alston’s *Shimmer* (2004), he also left Paris couture houses and returned to London to promote his own fashion label.³ Karl Lagerfeld, a creative director at *Chanel* couture house, designed a white-feathered tutu for a principal ballerina, Elena Glurdjidze, to wear in the *Dying Swan*, performed at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre in May 2009.⁴ The performance was part of English National Ballet’s *Ballet Russes* programme.⁵ The fitting included an exclusive performance held at the *Chanel* house, supervised by Lagerfeld, witnessed and recorded by the invitation-only fashion press (see Figure 1.2).⁶ At the same time as MacDonald and the *Dying Swan* (2004) performance in London was the launch of Lagerfeld’s pre-autumn 2009 collection in Paris, under the theme “Paris-
Moscow,” which took Russian inspirations from folklore costumes and accessories (Mower 2008) (see Figure 1.3).

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 1.2**: The costume fitting of the English National Ballet’s *Dying Swan* at the *Chanel* couture house; *Photo*: Xiang Sun; *Source*: *The Guardian*, 30 May 2009

![Image](image2.png)

**Figure 1.3**: Advertising campaign for *Chanel* pre-autumn 2009; *Photo*: Karl Lagerfeld shot at the Russian Embassy, Paris

Given the increasing convergence between dance performance and high-fashion costume in the last decade, I question whether these collaborations are designed to assist artistic exploration, or, rather, to reinforce the discourses linking art and commerce through the aesthetics of choreography.

Choreography plays a significant role in the way I engage with the images. I am particularly interested in how the choreographed pose and the idea of the movements that
occurs before and after the shot affect how the garment is displayed. For instance, in fashion photography, the image of a model, Taryn Davidson, is captured whilst she performs a jumping sequence (see Figure 1.4). By looking at the executed movement, her left leg is extended in a parallel position whilst she rotates her right thigh to the side and elevates her knee. By doing so, her body displays the shoes designed by Yohji Yamamoto in two different angles. The front view obtained from her extended leg features the metal toe-cap whilst the side view, as emphasized through her turn-out, reveals the heel studs. Simultaneously, the lifted knee raises the awareness of the shoes as it shifts the location of the footwear from the bottom of the page into the mid-frame. Moreover, by distancing both of her legs, Davidson demonstrates that even though these Nicole Farhi ankle-length trousers are tapered to the body, the fabric has its elasticity as it allows her to extend her legs more than one hundred and thirty degrees. Finally, by raising her right arms, it expands the neckline of the jacket, which accentuates the off-shoulder design. Such a reading through the lens of choreography thus indicates a close connection between choreography and fashion merchandising.

Figure 1.4: Taryn Davidson in Feel the Power, Harper’s Bazaar, April 2010, p. 159; Photo: Mark Pillai; Stylist: Hector Castro
Other than the choreography of the pose, there exists the choreography of the catwalk. Fashion events display many variations within the model walk. Some models exaggerate a crossover between each stride (see Figure 1.5). Moreover, whilst some models amplify their hip movement swaying from left to right (see Figure 1.6), others elevate their knees higher when they walk (see Figure 1.7). These corporeal techniques lead me to consider what key factors determine these styles of walk or runway modelling technique as a whole. How do bodies learn these techniques? How is embodied knowledge in the fashion industry exchanged? Practiced? Developed? How does the garment determine the type of corporeal technique necessary for the ultimate fashion performance on the catwalk? These are among the questions that this thesis sets up to consider.

By engaging with visual materials linked to the aesthetics of contemporary dance performances, fashion photography and fashion advertising events, this thesis considers how fashion photography, events and dance spectacles such as those in *Shimmer* (2004), *Dying Swan* (2004) and *Strike a Pose* (2009), blur the boundaries between commerce and
art. It will suggest these dance and fashion collaborations represent a rich site for challenging the dominant agents and rationale of the cultural and economic fields in fashion. *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.

The terrain of artistic explorations and commercialism, such as the policies of art sponsorship, is one of the concepts I investigate. This is the case where key players in both dance and fashion industries, such as marketers, choreographers, dancers, fashion editors, photographers, stylists, and models, re-appropriate and translate existing notions of class, social hierarchy, through the use of the body and its value systems in exchange for promotional and economic gain. Moreover, I set up ways of identifying and reading the corporeal techniques and choreography of the fashioned body (e.g. the models’ walk and their poses) in relation to fashion commodities. The thesis ties together choreography, dance and fashion through an examination of dance and fashion collaborations, fashion photography and catwalk performances. It is not an attempt at displaying a seamless pattern of collaboration. Instead, my attempt here is to separate out the various components of each field in order to see how they come together for the purposes of commerce, consumption and presentation. I set up a kinetic language through which one might read (or create) fashion photography and performances (e.g., posing, runway shows, and fashion films). Focusing on contemporary dance choreographies (i.e. modern and post-modern dance) in performance of high fashion (couture and ready-to-wear brands), *Terpsichore in Jimmy Choo* sets up a relationship between high fashion bodies, material/fabric and theatre dance choreographies.
1.2. Research Questions and Thesis Structure

Focusing on consumption and the performative body in contemporary dance and high fashion performance in relation to fashion merchandise, branding and the politics of exchange, I question how contemporary dance, a “product” rich in cultural capital, feeds into, affects, is transformed, and appropriated by the economy of fashion advertising within advanced industrial capitalism. My thesis investigates three areas of the confluence between fashion and dance: a) fashion photography and films; b) fashion advertising events; and c) contemporary dance performances that collaborate with high fashion.

Chapter Two, *Corporeal Cloths* functions as a methodological chapter providing visual frameworks and choreographic readings on shape, form, and motion in fashion performance. It draws connection between fashion materials and corporeality. My analytical approach functions as a choreography in itself as I position seemingly disparate disciplines and juxtapose them in a series of images in order to create a type of coherent structure that instantiates my claim of the interrelationship between fashion, choreography and photography. I set up a taxonomy of the different components that I argue make up the choreographed fashion shoot. The visual analysis I do sets up the model for the ways I engage with the images in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three, *Tracing Terpsichore*, investigates the interrelationships between fashion, fabrics and choreography of modern dance. I examine the work of American modern dance pioneers, Loïe Fuller, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, in their experimentations with fashion, fabric and dance. Through a series of dance photographs and high fashion editorials, I illustrate the visual taxonomies linking early modernist dance to twenty-first century high fashion. I argue that modern dance brings the concept of dynamic flow, tensile elasticity and experimentation of bodily silhouettes into dance and fashion practices. These practices work to display visual and kinetic properties within fashion commodities that also are geared to maximising potential exposure.

Chapter Four, *God Saves the (Mc)Queen*, focuses on radical transgression and appropriation of punk aesthetics and attitude particularly in the case of *Deliverance* (2003). This chapter examines how McQueen and Clark appropriate punk aesthetics and how the fashion performance then feeds into the changing political economy of fashion.
advertising events. I address the political economy of the fashion industry, particularly how aesthetics, bodies, brands, choreographers and fashion designers circulate ideologies of punk in the performance. I demonstrate how the aesthetics of punk interlink with postmodern dance choreographies and how the appropriation of punk, a seemingly counter-cultural aesthetic, leads to the further commercialisation of dance in the fashion industry. In other words, I argue that punk becomes a destabilizing way for the idea of the avant-garde or the rebellious choreographer to gain notoriety and fame in the mainstream. This chapter thus examines this process through an analysis of the performances by employing gender analysis, some Marxist theories and Bourdieu’s notion of negation between the establishment and the challengers, dominant agents in the artistic field to establish new ways of conceptualizing and conceiving the fashion show.

Finally, Chapter Five, *Terpsichore as a Mannequin?*, investigates the area where fashion designers assume the role of costume designers for art dance performances. This chapter discusses the politics of art sponsorship in order to identify some outcomes of the relationship between fashion and dance. I investigate whether fashion designers solely collaborate with dance performance for artistic exploration, or, whether dance productions have transgressed into a promotional platform for these fashion brands to advance their symbolic capital and economic gain. The chapter sets up a trajectory from Ballets Russes productions to other artistic collaborations in twenty-first-century British art dance productions. I contrast these artistic associations with corporate marketing strategies and their policies of art sponsorship in order to see what has happened to the crossover between fashion and dance in the mainstream theatre and dance worlds. I employ two case studies, *Shimmer* (2004) and *The Dying Swan* (2009), to consider how these collaborations operate.

1.3. **Focused theories and data collection methods**

This is a qualitative research project utilising an interdisciplinary approach across the field of dance studies and analysis, fashion studies, and cultural studies. I employ a Marxist framework of analysis in political economy to explain the value systems circulating within fashion commodities. Karl Marx (1867; ed. 1976, p.163-7) particularly in his work *Capital: Volume 1* sets out a concept of use- and exchange-value for
commodities which resulted in the idea of “commodity fetishism” whereby a commodity that is consumed by members of capitalist societies confers symbolic power to its user. Production and consumption are a means to define the circulation of values in material life (ibid.). From Marx’s concepts, Jean Baudrillard (1972) demystifies this power by focusing on the consumption side of a commodity. He expands use- and exchange-value in Marx’s terms into commodity sign- and symbolic-value. At this point, Baudrillard’s framework allows me to draw and extract meanings from signs and references encoded in fashion advertising and its performance.

This political economy framework is grounded in sociological studies and consumption theories. Colin Campbell (1987) focuses on modern consumerism, particularly identifying discourses such as instinctivism and manipulationism. In the instinctivism tradition (Maslow 1943) locates consumption in response to the biological and hierarchical needs of human beings whilst other scholars who favour manipulationism consider that consumers are compelled to want products due to the medium of advertising (Galbraith 1967; Campbell 1987). Campbell stresses the individual’s consumption of goods in relation to the concept of “bandwagon” and “snob” effects. The bandwagon effect is a cultural phenomenon where “an individual’s demand for goods or service is increased by the fact that others are seen to be consuming them” (Campbell 1987, p.50). In contrast, the snob effects explain a decrease in consumption of an individual when others are consuming them. In this sense, commodities are interlaced with cultural meanings and entail issues of taste and style which influence social groupings and indicate class fractions forecasted from the consumption.

To further advance consumption theories, Pierre Bourdieu (1984, pp.6-7) focuses on those negotiations amongst class distinction and social structures which illuminate and direct the production of taste and distinction. He examines consumption in relation to class and concludes that it is motivated by “class fractions” in order to formulate social groupings who acquire a recognised status. Bourdieu (1993a) further examines the field of cultural production and constructs the concepts of dominant agents, negotiations between establishments and challengers and their power relations. In relation to my research, the notions which Bourdieu has defined are relevant to the domain of luxury fashion culture. For instance, the front row seats at the couture and ready-to-wear fashion
shows are exclusively reserved for influential fashion figures such as fashion editors, journalists, stylists, fashion investors and celebrities. Moreover, publicists or press office at the couture house seasonally send sample garments or gifts to key fashion editors after they premiere their collection. The purpose is to retain a good relationship between the brand and outside agents with the hope of securing sponsorship, maximum publicity and positive criticism. Bourdieu’s framework is integral to the analysis of Chapter Four and Chapter Five as the selected case studies challenge mainstream high fashion yet provide choreography to the fashion event. It also opens a discourse between unification of disciplinary arts and politics of art sponsorship. Thus, a framework positioning the fashion field in relation to class, dominant agents and their power relations is required. This is where Foucault’s work on technologies of power (1977) informs how I engage with this industry.

In response to, and informed by, these key twentieth-century scholars, I also employ a framework of analysis tailored to examine the socio-cultural and political context of the twenty-first century such as advancement in technology, the impact of globalisation, the local re-appropriation and the velocity of information transmission. All these factors of contemporary society affect fashion production, consumption and promotion. In order to shed light on this issue, Beverley Skeggs (2004) re-assembles the existing models and illustrates how different classes become imbued with values by transmuting culture into a form of property. This property resource simultaneously provides use-value to the class member and adds exchange-value in the organisation of symbolic and economic exchange. The concept of exchange in relation to class and the transference between value systems is useful to an investigation of the consumption occurring between contemporary dance and fashion advertising.

These analyses from political economy and sociology are informed by analytical models from other disciplines relevant to the arts. In terms of visual analysis, I employ advertising theory (Williamson 1978, Goldman 1992, Wernick 1991, O’Donohoe 1997, Hegarty 2011) to decode signified meanings within the sign systems in the performance materials. I also incorporate detailed movement analysis including Laban effort-shape theories from the visual materials in order to explain how the body is perceived and how it operates in terms of musculature, bodily alignment, effort and balance in relation to the
promotional context. By referring to Roland Barthes’ body in performance, Marcel Mauss’s concept of body techniques and Michel Foucault’s disciplined body, Susan Foster (1997, pp.241-53) focuses on the body in dance practice to construct the notion of “the body of dance techniques.” This is where corporeal bodies are transformed into a “body-of-ideas” through the cultivated discipline of performance practices and in response to choreographic or aesthetic demands (ibid.). Foster also includes the concepts of the hired body in which the body advances in several dance techniques and fitness schemes in order to engineer a multitalented body ready for employment opportunities. This takes art dance bodies into commoditised bodies in order to service the relationships between dance and commercialism. I also employ Entwistle’s (2006, 2015) concept of the aesthetic labour of the fashion body to inform the way I engage with the performances of the fashion models (i.e., their poses, walks, and theatrical role-play) as they demonstrate the garments. I also look at Evans (2001, 2013) work on fashion modernity and performative corporeality in fashion performance particularly on forms, postures and technique of the body in fashion shows. Deleuze’s work on the ‘movement-image’ of cinema (1985) and Michaud’s reading on Aby Warburg and the image in motion (2004) also inform how I engage with this industry.

As my research traverses the field of art and consumerism, Foster’s thesis (1997, pp.241, 253) on the “hired body” and “the body of technique” allows me to investigate the construction of the fashion body and its technique. Critical dance studies and its particular focus on the body as a discursive site acts as the foundation for how I experience, read and analyse the bodies throughout this thesis. I examine a collection of performing materials, which incorporate theatre art dance as a visual vehicle to display luxury garments, in order to establish the interrelationship between moving bodies and mobility in fashion products. The representational strategies by these bodies within the fashion context make up the original contribution of this thesis.

Data is collected by sampling strategies focused on the three areas of the research: contemporary dance productions from contemporary ballet to modern and post-modern dance, fashion photography and films, and fashion events. In contemporary dance productions, I employ the visual materials of photographs and video recordings of the performance from dance and fashion archives. This includes press reviews and interviews
from the choreographers and the artistic directors regarding the intention and outcomes of
the confluence between fashion and dance. In fashion photography and films, I focus my
research on three categories of fashion magazine sold in the UK classified by the target
reader. The first group is a long-established brand of *Vogue, Elle, Harper’s Bazaar* and
*Marie Claire*. The second group includes *AnOther, Dazed and Confused, i-D, Numéro, 10* and *W*. The last category is *Grazia*. I incorporate interviews from a fashion stylist
Kate England, and photographers such as Nick Knight and Chris Nash, who have, on a
regular basis, employed contemporary dancers in their portfolios and work closely with
the fashion domain. This also includes excerpts of fashion films from the websites
SHOWstudio and NOWNESS.

In terms of ‘the fashion event’, I observe runway master classes for female
models and the television programme *Britain’s* and *America’s Next Top Model*. The
master classes include those given by Jay Alexander, a former model; Mac Folkes, a
freelance runway trainer and choreographer; and the ‘in-house’ training sessions run by
modelling agencies including *Elite, Next, Wilhelmina UTG,* and *Premier* to prepare
inexperienced models for the business. Alexander works closely with television
programmes and haute couture shows whilst Folkes is involved primarily with luxury
ready-to-wear. Others concentrate on developing young talents for the industry ranging
from couture to mass production brands. Data is collected through photos and video clips
of non brand-oriented runway shows from London Fashion Week from the beginning of
the twenty-first century in order to set up a set of performance practices for this particular
commodified body. In the case of exchanges between fashion and the trained dancer
body, I conducted interviews with contemporary dancers, Michela Meazza, Kate Coyne,
and Riccardo Buscarini, who perform extensively in fashion events. I also provide visual
materials of photographs and video excerpts from runway show archives.

Overall, *Terpsichore in Jimmy Choo* establishes a narrative about the
interrelationship between contemporary dance, and the world of high fashion. It analyses
fashion as a form of performance, by comparing fashion to dance, and argues that fashion
too has a choreography. By using movement theories from dance studies to analyse
fashion imagery, it suggests how high fashion requires a particular set of embodied
knowledge from the models, choreographers, photographers and stylists. Finally, through
my visual and movement analysis, I provide a kinetic language to read fashion performance potentially contributing to the fields of critical dance studies and fashion studies.

Notes

1 *Would, Should, Can, Did* was produced as part of the Barbican’s multimedia series, *Only Connect*, and performed at the Barbican Hall in London on April 25th 2003 (www.michaelclarkcompany.com, accessed 9 June 2010).


7 As described in the beginning of this chapter, the fashion show was presented as a post-modern dance performance collaborated between British fashion designer Alexander McQueen and Scottish dance artist and choreographer Michael Clark as part of Paris Fashion Week.