Chapter Three:
Tracing Terpsichore: Visual Taxonomies of Fashion, Fabrics and Choreography of Modern Dance

Figure 3.1: A genealogy between fashion, fabrics and choreography of modern dance: dynamic flow (top row), tensile elasticity (middle row), and experimental shapes in space (bottom row)

Chapter Two suggests how shapes, forms, and motion have been critically embedded in high fashion practice. Not only are these concepts involved in the process of designing and constructing garments, but their kinetic properties are also explicitly choreographed in fashion performance, particularly in editorials, advertising campaigns and promotional events. This is the basis of my argument that I have established and will continue to draw upon throughout the thesis.
Focusing on the performance exchange and genealogy between dance and fashion, this chapter examines how shapes, forms, gestures and motion in fashion performance reference modern dance choreographies. It draws a visual history that links early Terpsichorean dance, as it has emerged since the development of modern dance, to twenty-first-century fashion editorials. It investigates the crossover between dance and fashion particularly prevalent in the work of Loïe Fuller, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. In so doing, I suggest that Fuller, Graham and Cunningham set their experimentations with fabrics and fashion garments, and their practice is referenced in current editorial pages and clothing campaigns.

Methodologically, I will compose three visual taxonomies demonstrating the trajectory of moving bodies and fabric. The first set of photographs will investigate the concept of dynamic flow in the work of Loïe Fuller and illustrate the interrelationships between lightweight, free-flow fabrics in relation to choreography. This use of free-flow is prominent in the current fashion editorials of Dynamic Blooms (2011) in AnOther magazine Spring/Summer 2011 issue and Fred And Ginger (2011) in Vogue Japan. The second group of photos will examine the concept of tensile elasticity in Martha Graham’s performance Lamentations (1930), particularly her choreographic partnership between stretch fabrics and the restrained tension in her corporeal techniques. The photographic analysis will include the fashion editorials Strike A Pose (2009) from Grazia magazine and Feel The Power (2010) in Harper’s Bazaar UK. In this part, I contend that the models’ poses coupled with the tensile fabrics cite Graham’s famous work.

Finally, I will expand upon the notion of experimental body shapes in space by looking at Merce Cunningham’s dance practices, particularly his collaboration with fashion designer Rei Kawakubo in Scenario (1997). Moreover, some of the photographs from the editorials Strike A Pose (2009) and Beautiful Stranger (Vogue UK 2012) play with the Cunningham-esque body shapes and corporeal alignments that I highlight. I will also draw connections between these performances to conclude this third and last visual taxonomy of fashion, fabrics, and choreography of modern dance. My analysis of these photos will focus on textile and costume construction; image composition; and role of technology and media within the work in relation to choreographic movements and moving bodies.

In this chapter, I bring modern dance concept of dynamic flow, tensile elasticity and experimentation of bodily silhouettes to read the fashion trade. These
fashion performances become part of a visual history of fashion’s relationship with
dance and vice-versa. In other words, there has always been a similarity between
fashion, fabric, bodies and dance. This chapter is by no means arguing for a historical
narrative of the crossover between fashion and performance but, rather, has its
purpose in establishing key choreographic concepts that emerged from the
experimentation with fabrics and high fashion garments since the development of
modern dance.

3.1. Loïe Fuller and dynamic flow

McDonagh distinguishes between different corporeal techniques in classical ballet
and modern dance of the late nineteenth century. McDonagh illustrates how dance
pioneers created their new art forms through an alternative set of performing
aesthetics and new types of characters. This ranged from gods and goddesses from
Middle Eastern tales to imitation of birds, insects and other natural phenomena. In his
argument, McDonagh lists a group of pioneering dance artists and highlights their
significant choreographies. Amongst those vital names are Loïe Fuller, Martha
Graham, and Merce Cunningham. What is significant in the development of this
period is that “each of the great modern dance choreographers has shaped the human
body in a distinctly personal way to frame those creative ideas that he or she wanted
to express” (McDonagh 1976, p.2). The “distinctly personal ways” in McDonagh’s
terms refer to revolutionary dance techniques that are invented through closer contacts
with the floor, diverse relationships between body weight and gravity, spinal curves
and rotations in its alignment, restrained tensions amongst muscle groups from the
core of the torso to the periphery of the body, and the use of props and lighting
effects.

McDonagh’s quotation also articulates the creative process in modern dance
that sought to explore interrelationships between the kinetic body and choreographic
shapes. These experiments also share close proximity to how fashion designers
formulate ideas and develop *toiles* (a test garment) for their upcoming collections.
They regularly determine which yarns and fabrics to use and foresee how to construct
garments to express the design concepts as well as communicate to their consuming
audience. In the context of fashion films and photography, choreography remains vital
in the creative process. Fashion photographers like Nick Knight and Steven Meisel
often capture images of the models at the peak of their energetic performance in order to display fashion in motion. Moreover, some photographers employ wind machines and post-production techniques such as blurring to advance mobility in fashion merchandise and to amplify dynamism of the images chosen for the advertising campaigns. In this very precise sense, both dance and fashion are engaged with certain degrees of choreography to make points about the body, fabric and clothing.

3.1.1. Loïe Fuller

In identifying close connections between fashion and modern dance, I would like to draw attention to the interrelationships between these two disciplines in the work of Loïe Fuller and argue for her experiments at the starting point of her choreographic development. The discussion focus on Fuller’s artistic practice refined through inventive manipulation of hundreds of yards of lightweight cloth, bathed in coloured lights. I highlight Fuller’s corporeal technique which united free-flow property in its materials with her torque and spiralled body. This integration between moving fabrics and swirling choreography created “airy sculptural designs” imitated physical phenomena, most notably flowers, insects, and atmospheric illuminations (McDonagh 1976, p.20). As a result, the dynamic flow and interpretive metamorphosis of the spectacles define Fuller’s choreographic legacy which later becomes one of the key visual references in the fashion trade. This trajectory from the amalgamation between modern dance and dynamic flow to twenty-first century high fashion editorials is the basis of my photographic readings which will be explored. By dynamic flow I refer to a concept developed in Chapter Two, which is the change of movement in fabrics, high fashion costumes, and the bodies that carry Laban’s effort of free-flow and lightweight factors. The term ‘dynamic flow’ also indicates a quick-time component as the cloth sharply responds to any vigorous movements that dance/fashion bodies perform. It also suggests a space factor in fashion garment that can grow and expand its shape, tracing choreographic patterns and directions of modern dance.

Looking closely at Fuller’s repertoire, one of her choreographic signatures is evident in the Serpentine Dance, in which the motion of the draperies expands across the traverse plane prior to swirling rhythmically according to her vigorous spins, spiralled torso and rotations from the shoulders. Premiered at the Casino Theatre, New York in 1891, McDonagh (1976, p.21) described the performance as follow:
The dancer appears on a darkened stage in a long silken dress that is cinched at the waist and falls to the floor. A wavy line circles the garment at the hem, and a similar wavy line undulates across the circle-cut neckline. Suddenly the folds of the dress begin to ripple and seethe and light beams out from the dancer. She holds the hem at shoulder height and with rapid ‘rowing’ motions creates cascades of folds in it. It becomes a swirling, billowing mass of motion.

She moves from side to side, always bathed in lights, and then, turning her back, she dips her head toward her audience and the skirt now becomes like a flower circling her torso, when a moment before it had been like some enchanted butterfly. The dance ended with the filmy folds collapsing around her in light-stained glory.

Working with suspension and momentum, Fuller keeps these fabrics aloft and moves in spiral loops rising and falling around and over her body in rhythmic impulses.

Ann Cooper Albright, a performer, choreographer and professor of dance, also extends Fuller’s notion of experimentation between dance and fashion material in her 2007 book *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*. The use of verbs and nouns suggesting visual imagery and movements can be highlighted as follows: “Watching Fuller’s serpentine dance, we can see the suspension of her fabric toward the sky, its movements cresting like a wave. We can follow its looping spiral back toward the ground, intrigued by the process of seeing her silks rise and fall, again and again, each time a little differently. As she grew more skilled, Fuller could manage the syncopation of one side rising as the other was falling, creating an ongoing canon of tumbling images [my italics]” (Albright 2007, p.47). Albright adds a corporeal texture to Fuller’s performance, rhetorically establishing the connection between fabric and corporeality. Furthermore, Albright highlights the skill and technique Fuller acquired as she practised her craft. This relates to the claims I made in the previous chapter where models must learn specific corporeal techniques to manage, move and sell the luxury fashion they wear on the catwalk. Perhaps Fuller could be considered one of the first models who produced a visually rich marriage between her body and fabric.

It is significant that most of Fuller’s performance derived from experimentation between corporeality and lightweight fabric with free flow as its property. In her autobiography *Fifteen Years of a Dancer’s Life*, Fuller wrote that her costume comprised a lengthy skirt made of sheer fabric from India that was too long.
so that she had to raise the waistline above her bust in order to perform without stepping over its hem. During the performance, “I endeavoured to make myself as light as possible, in order to give the impression of a fluttering figure obedient to the doctor’s orders” (Fuller quoted in Albright 2007, p.17). She also records the point where she raised the gown up with both of her hands and held them aloft whilst continuing to flit around the stage in a light and airy manner. Suddenly, the audience uttered words like “butterfly” and “orchid” in response to Fuller’s choreography. This incident connects the manipulation of lightweight fabric executed in free-flow dynamism with the figurative motion of her spiralling torso, and simultaneously metamorphosed dance and fashion to make significant visual imageries. The success of this experiment inspired Fuller to explore the unification of voluminous lightweight fabric and dynamic flow in order to create shapes and images reminiscent of flora and fauna.

By looking at Fuller’s discovery of Serpentine dance, Albright proposes that:

Fuller initiates a twist in her torso that swirls through the upper body to lift the fabric. She can then ride that motion, recognising through trial and error when she needs to move again. If she moves too soon, the suspension is cut short, and the expansive billowing of fabric is truncated. Similarly, if she waits too long, the fabric gains too much momentum in its descent, which makes it that much harder to get it back up into the air.

Albright 2007, p.77

Albright reveals the complex relationship between the abstract vision of moving fabric and the physical labour of the body presented in Fuller’s dance. To expand upon Albright’s argument, the advancement of the experiments was also visually evident in Eugène Druet’s photographs which capture the overall impression of Fuller’s performance. Set in an outdoor location, her body is cloaked in yards of plain white silk whilst she holds a wooden dowel attached to the fabric to maximise her reach. In sequential momentum, she circles her right arm along the sagittal plane and chases the pattern traced by her left arm. This pattern is characterised by a swirling figure which begins to flick out along the transverse plane and reach out towards the camera (see Figure 3.2a). Her corporeal image thus becomes abstract as the material engulfs parts of the body. Simultaneously, fabrics become an after effect, tracing her motions that are swirling and spiralling through space (see Figure 3.2b).
The visual spectacle in Fuller’s performance also evokes shapes commonly found in nature such as flowers and insects. In *Le Lys*, Fuller employed curved wands which were attached to hundreds of yards of silk in her costume to reach maximum expansion in a manner similar to those performed in Druet’s photographs. Through continuous play of momentum, Fuller creates an on-going canon of swirling fabric, one that would spiral upwards into the space whilst another descends towards the floor. In the midst of her spiralling spectacle, the silk consumes parts of her body and she gradually metamorphoses from a woman into a lily (see Figure 3.3).
Fuller was able to fashion a visual spectacle that played between a sensuous display of colour and moving fabric (Current and Current 1997). Yards of silk became Fuller’s dancing partner, spiralling in rhythmic and canonical patterns according to the dynamic flow of her corporeal technique (Sperling 2015). This way, Fuller explored interrelationships between a large scale of fabrics and the torque of her body spiralling through the fabric. Her dance provided kinetic and visual imageries that were moving between choreography and fashion. I argue that these early experiments provide the foundation for further experiments between fashion, fabric and the moving body.

By looking at Fuller’s creative vision in experimenting across the disciplines of dance and fashion, her legacy shares large similarities with the performances of the current fashion trade. To shed light onto the subject, I establish this visual taxonomy in Dynamic Blooms, a fifteen-page fashion editorial published in the Spring/Summer 2011 special issue of AnOther magazine, UK, and photographed by Nick Knight. This will be followed by Fred and Ginger, a photographic collection featured in Japanese Vogue in March 2011, featuring fashion model Raquel Zimmerman alongside post-modern dance choreographer Stephen Galloway.

3.1.2. Nick Knight’s Dynamic Blooms (2011)

In Dynamic Blooms, one of the featured garments was a blood-red silk dress designed by Alber Elbaz, creative director at the house of Lanvin. Premiered at Paris Fashion Week in October 2010 and modelled by Karlie Kloss from NEXT modelling
agency, the garment was placed in the middle of the Spring/Summer 2011 collection, which was dominated by fluid drapery and acid colours. Looking closely at the dress’s construction, Elbaz constricted Kloss’s torso with a one-shoulder bodice, creating a hugging silhouette whilst revealing a neckline that runs across the body from the right trapezius to the left underarm. Fastened around the waistline was a tan belt that heightened the nipped-in silhouette. Proportionally, this line cut her erect slim body into two contrasting halves as the train of the dress exploded into voluminous flares with hundreds of pleats around the waistline (see Figure 3.4). In its countless folds, Elbaz slit open the train in the middle and revealed her long lean legs that were advancing forward with each stride.

In Kloss’s performance, she called upon what I have described in Chapter Two as the modelling technique required for the purpose of displaying fashion in motion. To advertise Elbaz’s lightweight and free-flow silk dress, Kloss rushed down the runway so fast that the fabric was caught in the air and fell backwards. Simultaneously, she pinched both sides of the dress and tossed them away from her body with every stride to demonstrate its full volume.

In this fashion performance, Tim Blanks, a contributing editor at Style.com, wrote that “Kloss looked like a great big Georgia O'Keeffe flower as she sashayed down the runway in an opulent orange [red] skirt” (Blanks 2010). Blanks refers to a
luscious blossom in a vivid streamline that is oozing out from its stamen and continues spiralling and dispersing in dynamic flow (see Figure 3.5). Gentle curves are layered as petals which can be imagined through the series of pleats and folds.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 3.5: Red Cannas III, oil painting by Georgia O’Keeffe; Source: www.okeeffemuseum.org**

This way of seeing recalls the work of Loïe Fuller and her technique for the manipulation of voluminous fabrics, through swirls and spirals under the vivid coloured light, in order to create impressions of a flower.

In addition, Elbaz’s garment was constructed in a manner similar to that in Fuller’s costumes (see Figure 3.6). Fuller draped voluminous fabrics in a triangular shape utilising the crown of her head as an apex of the folds before letting the rest of the materials softly fall in flares with a slit in the centre front seams that allowed her to expand its volume according to her corporeal technique (see Figure 3.4). Blanks also highlights the relationship between visual culture and fashion. I would also like to suggest that while the dress does resemble a flower with petals opening up, it is Fuller’s legacy that emerges here, not O’Keefe’s. This is due to the necessary component of the moving body to make Lanvin’s fabric materialise into the flower imagery conveyed by Blanks. Therefore, close visual connections between Fuller’s repertoire, Elbaz’s collection, and Kloss’s performance can be made through its fashion presentation.
Figure 3.6: Technical drawings of Fuller’s costume, as a static design and a costume in motion, illustrating draped fabrics and curved wands that trace the dynamic flow action. Source: Albright (2007)

Drawing attention to *Dynamic Blooms*, Nick Knight interpreted Elbaz’s couture creation with his own artistic vision; nevertheless, the entire shoot draws heavily on the visual impression that Fuller had previously established. Knight’s photographs demonstrate close associations between moving fabrics and choreography, with experimentation in post-production of photographic collage, in order to create abstract blooms in the process of metamorphosis (see Figure 3.7). To achieve these visual outcomes, Knight employed a Polish fashion model, Monika Jagaciak, known as “Jac”, who has modelled in a number of high fashion campaigns such as *Hermes, Valentino, Alberta Ferretti,* and *Marc Jacobs.* Her extensive portfolios continue in runway shows as she has walked for many fashion brands including *Donna Karan, Calvin Klein, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana,* and *Versace.* Her experience and training provided the necessary corporeal skill to manoeuvre the fabric. In *Dynamic Blooms,* Knight partnered Jagaciak with Benjamin Warbis, a principal dancer from Michael Clark Company who has also performed in many fashion magazines, such as *Arena Homme+* and *Attitude.*
The shoot features a collection of images captured at the peak of the performing duet (i.e. kicks, jumps, and turns) whilst Knight directed the improvisation between Jagaciak and Warbis. There is no firm evidence that Jagaciak received any dance training. However, her bodily alignments and the moving poses recall certain balletic and contemporary dance vocabularies, such as attitude, passé, and stag jumps. Moreover, Warbis’s dance and partnering skills advanced Jagaciak’s corporeal technique as he elevated, supported and displayed her fashion body in a typical balletic pas de deux. In order to achieve the metaphoric image of a flower, Jagaciak displayed the voluminous gown by striking her right leg forward whilst throwing away the fabrics and leaning her torso in the opposite direction (see Figure 3.8). The expansion of the limbs between the forward battement leg and the retreated hands as well as her arched spine open up a great distance in the folds of the dress. Simultaneously, Jagaciak shot herself up in the air whilst executing this pose. The elevation was maximised as Warbis supported her lumbar spine and raised her body in a greater height. As a result, the lift created distance and time for the fabrics to
catch the air and slowly shape shift, allowing the ‘blossom’ to materialise before the lens.

During the shoot, Jagaciak performed a series of turns, placed both of her legs in distancing angles from open *passé* to splits, and used her arms to throw these fluid draperies in all directions. She experimented on the poses that would provide maximum expansion in the skirt of the *Lanvin* dress whilst being lifted by Warbis. Moreover, in order to amplify the dynamism of the moving fabrics and choreography to its fullest potential, Knight incorporated a wind machine that constantly blew these voluminous free-flow gowns with vigorous force during the dance duet. As a result, *Lanvin*’s high flow, lightweight, draped silk dress was caught in mid-air and its fluid drapery unravelled immeasurably.¹

It is also significant that the dynamic flow in the editorial pages was advanced through Knight’s experimentation with collage. To elaborate this claim, the visual outcome was comprised of layers of photographs that were cut out and rearranged in either consecutive or contrasting angles in post-production process. On the sixth editorial page (see Figure 3.7), the image was constructed from four layers of photograph (see Figure 3.9).² On its surface, Knight cropped Jagaciak’s and Warbis’s upper body together with Warbis’s right leg and the background out of the shot. What is visible is an abstraction of the body evidenced through Warbis’s bare masculine left
leg, Jagaciak’s right foot, upper arm, and part of her hair. What is accentuated here was an expansive volume of the skirt that flew out in a transverse plane.

Figure 3.9: Dissection of Dynamic Blooms

Knight then layered this image over the second photograph which captured the movement when Jagaciak struck her left leg in attitude backwards as Warbis rotated her body towards the lens. In this frame, Knight entirely removed every visible body part and left it with a blank space contrasting to the remaining pleats and folds within the shot that injected further train of acid colours and volume to the first photograph.

After taping the first and second photographs together, Knight then rotated them ninety degrees clockwise and placed them over the third layer which was cut into large irregular pentagon. In this picture, Knight cut the bodies in half on sagittal plane before slitting diagonally towards the left corner of the frame leaving Jagaciak’s and Warbis’ upper body out of the shot. What remains visible are the photographic backdrop, stage, Warbis’s right heels, Jagaciak’s lower leg, and blood-red pleats and folds that continued to enhance dynamic flow featured in the first photograph. In a
sense, Knight utilised this layer as an established shot anchored the raised platform and the background, without any rotation, as a point of reference to the overall image.

Underneath the third photograph slid the final layer where Knight continued to crop the body in a manner similar to those performed in the first and second photograph. Outline of Warbis’s naked leg together with his bare hand that cupped Jagaciak’s waistline were evident alongside drapes of swirling fabrics. Even though Knight rotated this layer forty-five degrees clockwise, he deliberately placed Warbis’s masculine leg parallel to the slit edge of the third photograph. The angle of the leg may mislead viewers into believing that it was erected from the podium as it was placed adjacent to the established shot but, in fact, Knight has carefully laid these layers one after another in clockwise rotation. As a result, the technique heightened the fluid draperies of the dress and contributed towards the photographic theme of a blooming flower. It may appear that Knight has laid the fifth layer underneath the blossoming red flares revealing an abstraction of Jagaciak’s face. However, the scale of her epaulement appeared petite in comparison to the close up shot of the stretched legs and vigorous flow of the dress. To a certain extent, it can be read that her feminine face was transformed into a stigma of the flower whilst Warbis’s stretched leg became a stamen and a stalk all of which wrapped inside layers of blood-red petals from Lanvin’s luxurious gown. In this sense, Dynamic Blooms pays homage to Fuller’s choreographic flow which produces metaphoric visual connotations and marks close connections between moving fabrics and choreography of modern dance.


Continuing with the trajectory of dynamic flow from Fuller’s and Knight’s experimentation is *Fred and Ginger*, a series of fashion editorials published in Japanese *Vogue*, March 2011 issue. The images were captured by Dutch photographers, Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, whose extensive portfolios include featured editorial pages of *Vogue, Harper’s Bazzar* and *V magazine* as well as biannually advertising campaigns for Balenciaga, Dior, Givenchy, Gucci, Lanvin Homme, and Louis Vuitton. In *Fred and Ginger*, post-modern dance artist Stephen Galloway who also appeared alongside international fashion model Raquel Zimmermann choreographed the entire shoot. The movements consist of a playful dance duet in which Galloway called upon those performed by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, famous partnership between two American film and Broadway stars.
of the 1930s. In the second image of the photographic set, Zimmermann was clad in *Lanvin’s* blood-red asymmetrical silk dress, the exact garment worn by Karlie Kloss in Alber Elbaz’s fashion show and Monica Jagaciak in Nick Knight’s *Dynamic Blooms* (see Figure 3.10). Adjacent to her was Stephen Galloway in black and white luxurious evening attire. In Figure 3.10a, Zimmermann flicks her left hand towards the ceiling light whilst extending her arm to her side. Simultaneously her right hand brushes the skirt at the slit of the dress towards the photographic backdrop. In doing so, Zimmermann reveals her long, lean, naked leg which is adorned with a crimson undergarment and orange ankle-strapped stilettos. The opening action performed by Zimmerman’s arms is akin to those performed by Kloss on the runway show but executes forcefully so as to highlight the fluidity of the drapery and mobilise its volume that ripples through the skirt of the dress. The outward expansion of the skirt matches the curls in her hair that are rolled out revealing her smouldering eyes that gaze upon her dance partner. The seduction of Zimmermann’s skirt dance causes Galloway to turn his head and eye upon her bare legs.

![Figure 3.10a (left) & 3.10b (right): Selected pages from *Fred and Ginger*, Vogue Nippon, March 2011, pp.184-185 featuring *Lanvin’s* red silk dress modelled by Rachel Zimmerman and Stephen Galloway in a double-breasted dinner suit.](image)

The dance duet continues in Figure 3.10b. As Zimmermann plants her right foot on the floor, she grabs the skirt, which was previously pulled backwards, and draws it over Galloway’s body. Surprised by the action, Galloway seals his legs from an open-fourth position in ballet to a parallel stunned pose. Whilst her legs are presented to the
camera, the fabrics obscure both upper bodies, leaving continued actions from the previous image to the reader’s imagination.

The visual spectacle (i.e. choreographic shapes and the attires) in *Fred and Ginger* recalls corporeal techniques and manipulation of costumes recorded in Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers’s musicals. Amongst iconic performances are *Top Hat* (1935), *Carefree* (1938), and *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), all of which were projected as films as well as presented as still photographs for promotional purposes. By looking at the apparel in *Fred and Ginger* and Ginger Rogers’s costumes, the chosen garments are paraded with vivid colour, free-flow voluminous show-stopping gowns with numerous layers of pleats, folds, fluid draperies and swirling tassels in their decoration. These clothes would quickly respond to sudden turns, kicks, swings, gallops, and leaps. In “Manhattan Downbeat”, the closing number of *The Barkleys of Broadway* musical, Rogers was clad in candyfloss pink strapped dress with full circular skirt fluffed by countless layers of tulles undergarment of the same colour. Flow in the costume was enhanced as organdie scarf in flamingo pink was wrapped around her neck but hung loose over the shoulders. Whilst performing a series of promenades, turns, and crisp petite allegro, Rogers pulled up the skirt and vigorously swung it to highlight her advanced footwork (see Figure 3.11a). Costumes became an extension of her body as the fabrics ‘dance’ alongside her moving body.

![Figure 3.11a (left): Ginger Rogers in ‘Manhattan Downbeat’, *The Barkleys of Broadway*](image1)

![Figure 3.11b (right): Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in ‘The Yam’, *Carefree*](image2)
In “The Yam”, one of the dance duets in Carefree, Rogers appeared in a floating chiffon gown with a tight bodice that was twisted over the bust line. Volumes of silk were ruffled over her shoulders and cap sleeves complementing the silhouette of the pleated silk skirt that was gathered around the waistline and layered in an uneven hem length (see Figure 3.11b). Whilst performing the dance routine, Rogers repeatedly grabbed the edge of her free-flowing voluminous dress and swung it freely around her body. In each syncopated rhythmic pattern, the dress and the sleeves bounced and sashayed in staccato dancing as if it was a third partner to the dance duet.

Drawing comparisons between Rogers’s performances and those displayed in the editorial pages, on one level may suggest that Fred and Ginger appropriates the corporeal use of fabrics from the musicals that are lightweight and free-flowing. On another level, I argue here that Fred and Ginger belongs to a genealogy of Loïe Fuller’s work rooted in a symbiosis between moving fabrics and choreography. Yards of white silk might have been used in Fuller’s repertoires that were then bathed in saturated coloured lights which illuminated the costumes in acid colours.

In terms of corporeal technique, Zimmermann’s performance recalled Fuller’s Serpentine Dance, a choreographic signature that was aided by voluminous free-flow of costumes in lightweight fabrics. Dynamic swings of the limbs that throw cloths in all directions can be an example. Moreover, seductive interplays between what is revealed and concealed in Fred and Ginger can be compared to the early development of Fuller’s skirt dance. Some elements of burlesque connotation are unavoidably associated with the presentation as her naked legs and cleavage were prominent to spectators. Albright (2007, p.47) describes a play of gender in Fuller’s performances that “There was a very seductive rhythm to their appearance and dissolution, evoking the erotic play between presence and absence. These moments of suspension and release were also embedded in a larger narrative structure of gradual build, energetic climax, and subsequent resolution”. Through abstraction of the body obscured by sheer fabrics, the act of tease emerges. This is evident in the Folies Bergère poster by Jules Chéret where the illustration shows her naked tum through transparent cloth, something which in fact was not visible in photographs of the performance.
The poster contrasted her complexion with the dark background as if she was floating around the stage. Whilst Fuller manipulated exquisite drapery of the cloth in rhythmic pattern, her bare left leg was elegantly erected in *demi-pointe* and her right foot was pushed backwards. Amidst the spin, Chéret captured Fuller in high arch. This is a moment when her bosoms swung towards the ceiling lights. Finally, underneath the sheer costume, Chéret drew a line displaying Fuller’s body from her abdomen to her upper thigh and from her lower back to her buttock. These are the bodily contours that had never been revealed in Fuller’s performance as they were obscured by the fabrics no matter how sheer the material was.

Overall manipulation of the poster can be implied that, to certain extent, Fuller’s performances have been objectified whilst some spectators depicted the act as arousal peepshow. In relation to Zimmermann’s movements in *Fred and Ginger*, her manipulation of fabrics calls upon this seductive play as she deliberately revealed bare legs and female genitalia which was covered by mere crimson undergarment. The swinging action of Zimmermann’s arms calls to mind those illustrated in Chéret’s poster as it controls the intention of what is revealed and what is concealed. In this very precise sense, *Fred and Ginger* highlights Fuller’s and Knight’s dynamic flow and extensive use of saturated coloured gowns which arouse seductive play. This marks genealogies of the close connections between moving fabrics and choreography of modern dance.
In closing this section, it is evident that the concept of dynamic flow in Loïe Fuller’s development of modern dance enables me to read the performance in current fashion trade and marks its trajectory from the *Serpentine Dance* to *Dynamic Blooms*, and *Fred and Ginger*. The manipulation of free-flow lightweight fabrics presented in saturated acid colours changing shapes, seductive plays, or metaphoric connotations draw close connections to experimentation in modern dance that move between choreography and fashion.

### 3.2. Martha Graham and tensile elasticity

Certain fashion materials such as knit and *Lycra* have elasticity in their performance. This is a tensile property which can grow and expand from the surface of the body as the wearers push and pull these materials beyond the centre of their torso.

By looking at the performance of the tensile body in fashion materials, this concept has close proximity to Martha Graham’s dance technique and the interrelationships between her dancing body and the use of costumes which carry elasticity in its materiality. For instance, in creating her dance work *Ekstasis* in 1933, Graham reveals that “I discovered, for myself, the relationship between the hip and the shoulder. I wore a tube of jersey which made me more aware of the stretching of the body and the articulation of anatomy” (Graham 1991, p.123). In this sense the use of jersey, a soft fine knitted fabric, enables Graham to explore possibilities in her dance body and create a dialogue between dance and fashion which has become a visual reference in modern dance choreography as well as in fashion performance. This experimental crossover in Graham’s work that fuses the discipline of dance and fashion is evident throughout her career. From the purple jersey tube to long expansive circular skirts in contrast with tight bodices or straps that hug across the torso, the tensile nature of Graham technique can be translated into fabric and employed as visual references in fashion trade until the present days. This subject will be explored and discussed in detail in this section.

#### 3.2.1. Lamentation (1930)

In her 1997 article “Dancing Bodies”, Susan Foster describes Martha Graham’s choreographic vocabulary as one that focuses on “the tensile successions from central to peripheral body” (Foster in Desmond, 1997, p.246). This is a dance
technique where movement originates in the pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles which then, through certain restrained tension, shift to the periphery of the body (Foster 1997). As a result, it causes the body “to spiral around a spinal core, extending out and then pulling back into dynamic positions” (ibid.). The principle metaphor of tensile elasticity in Graham’s movements can be labelled as “contract”, a dynamic pull that is conducted by a concave torso, and “release”, an eruption of energy that disperse the body in various pathways to the external space. Not only does Graham’s tensile elasticity occur in the dance body, but this concept is also translated into the way she manipulates the costumes, which reflects the principle of contraction and release in her technique.

The restrained tensions between dance and fashion bodies are apparent in her short solo performance, *Lamentation* (1930). By restrained tensions, or, tensile elasticity, I suggest a bound-flow effort factor of the knitwear that restricts expansion of movement, as the nature of interlocking loops and highly spun yarn, mostly interwoven with Lycra fibre, makes the fabric retain its shape when external force is released. Sitting on a bare wooden bench dimly lit by the front and ceiling lights, Graham’s body in purple jersey tube emerges from the dark backdrop of the room. Her legs are wide open, stretching the fabric to its maximum whilst her elbows, forearms, and the crown of her head contort the circular ring on the top of the jersey tube into a triangular pull. In this posture, she shakes her head vigorously. Graham begins to increase the tensile nature of the fabric by drawing her head to the furthest route against the direction of her hands which grab the excess of fabric between her groins and plunges them down between her open thighs.

On one occasion, Graham elevates her pelvis off the bench whilst fastening her arms across the body. The right hand pierces through the top circular ring of the tube and clasps onto her left thigh whilst the left hand forcefully pulls the stretched fabric from the inside to caress her pale face as she gently inclines her head towards her right shoulder (see Figure 3.13). In this position, the tube jersey costume is stretched to its limits in all directions. The horizontal pull is evident as Graham distances her legs in a wide stance. The vertical tension can be drawn, from the ankles to the crown of her head, as she fully erects her spines. This also includes the way her left elbow vertically plunges towards her lower abdominal which is executed against the direction of her extruded neckline. Finally, the diagonal stretches in two opposite directions across her body emerge from the shapes and directions of her forearms.
The constant tension between her stretched body and the knitted fabric continues throughout the performance of *Lamentation* as Graham alternately shifts her pose from side to side, a pose that creates tensile elasticity throughout the body from the spreading of the legs to the angular shapes between her shoulders, elbows, and forearms against the erected spinal posture and extended neckline. Particularly, in Figure 3.14, one of the poses is a plea where both of her hands grasp the edge of the jersey tube and diagonally reach towards the ceiling as she elevates and extends her right foot towards the audience. This creates a maximum tension in all kinetic planes as her right knee strikes the garment forwards whilst her arched spine and the tip of her head pull the material in the opposite route. The pose also generates diagonal restrained tension between her skull and her wrists which remain at the furthest distance from her left knee. This reach continues to circle in a horizontal plane before she collapses her torso onto her right thigh which marks the end of the choreographic phrase. According to Graham, the manipulation of the purple jersey tube in relation to tensile elasticity in her dance body indicates “the tragedy that obsesses the body, the ability to stretch inside your own skin” (Graham 1991, p.117). This is the interrelationship between modern dance and fashion materials that reflects Graham’s psychological grief and her physical self which communicates through the restrained tension between her dance body and the elasticized costume.
3.2.2. Gustavo Papleo’s *Strike A Pose* (2009)

Although choreographed and premiered in 1930, *Lamentation* and the concept of tensile nature in Martha Graham’s choreography has become a visual landmark for artists across the creative industries. Significantly, Strike a Pose was an eight-pages fashion editorial published in the *Grazia* magazine, UK, in September 2009. The collection that was featured in the article was presented as fashion choreography which I suggest was borrowed and adapted from a series of iconic images from Graham’s performance. These collections of photographs were predominately taken by Barbara Morgan, an American dance photographer whose work often captured performance of pioneer modern dance artists. Amongst others are Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, Jose Limon and Doris Humphrey. In *Strike a Pose*, the selected garments were modelled by Michela Meazza, a principal dancer from New Adventures, who has also carried extensive portfolios in fashion performance, ranging from *Deliverance* (2004), a catwalk presentation for Alexander McQueen’s collection at the Paris Fashion Week, choreographed by British dance artist Michael Clark, to *Dress Rehearsal*, an eight-pages fashion editorials published in *Marie Claire* 2009 featuring luxury sportswear.

In *Strike a Pose*, one of the featured apparels was a draped jersey gown worth £2,140 designed by American fashion designer Donna Karan for her Autumn/Winter
2009-2010 Ready-to-wear collection (see Figure 3.15). This garment is imbued with tensile elasticity in both materiality and costume construction which can be performed in a manner similar to Graham’s purple jersey tube in *Lamentation*. For instance, Donna Karan’s fine knitted fabric tightly embraces a bodily contour of the model Toni Garrn from the waist down to her knees. The grey jerseys also firmly drapes over her upper limbs from the elbows down to the wrists creating a restrained tension in each stride (see Figure 3.16a). However, from the neckline down to her navel, the bodice releases into a generous fit. This area becomes a jersey tube in its pattern that can be draped as the wearer desires. On this occasion, Karan gathers the fabrics over Garrn’s shoulder, creating a diagonal pull between the model’s left shoulder and her right forearm. The ease of the tensile elasticity continues in the lower part of the train as the garment flare out in a fishtailed silhouette. The pattern can be further explained by looking from the posterior view (see Figure 3.16b) as all of the knitted fabrics are tightly drawn towards Garrn’s lumbar spine, fastened over her shoulders and clung onto her hip but cut in a deep slit exposing her back. These firmed gathers are then twisted before releasing into a full drape towards the hemline.

![Figure 3.15: Strike a Pose, Grazia, 28 September 2009, p.95; Photo: Gustavo Papleo; Model: Michella Maezza](image-url)
For the editorial page, Maezza appropriates Graham’s use of elasticated costume and applies the concept of contraction and release from modern dance onto Karan’s gown. In her pose against the white backdrop in a black box studio, a typical setting for many dance photography, Maezza clasps her hands and firmly presses her wrists down towards the floor whilst drawing her biceps together. In doing so, it tightens her pectoral muscle as she squeezes her triceps against the ribcage at the same time. In contrast to the upper body, Maezza releases her knee and strikes her left leg in *attitude a la second* (bent leg to the side). The distance between her *battement* and her standing leg is in the furthest length that the fabric will allow, and Maezza assures the effect by stepping onto the hem with her right foot for the maximum stretch. As a result, a triangular pull at the train of the gown is prominent. Maezza’s right foot, left knee and metatarsals as its corner formulate this pulled shape. The *battement* also presses the gown firmly against the right side of her body to reveal the feminine curve similar to those displayed on the catwalk by Toni Garrn despite the distancing of the legs in the dance body. Moreover, the *battement* also demonstrates the vast volume of the fabric that can be expanded from its drapery located at the back of the train.

For the upper part of the garment, which, as described in the previous paragraph, has a loose bodice which can be freely draped, Anna Foster, the stylist for
this shoot, decided to embrace the tensile elasticity of the dance and fashion body by creating double folds in a cross axis over Maezza’s busts. The first one runs from her right abdomen and drapes diagonally over her left shoulder in a manner similar to how Karan styles her gown for her catwalk presentation. The second layer is then formed as Foster gathers fabrics at the left side of Maezza’s ribcage and drapes them over her right collarbone. Despite having extra materials in the bodice, Karan’s gown does not carry sufficient amount of fabric for this cross folds. As a result, it creates two layers of distorted rectangular pull which fastens the area of trapezius, deltoid, upper arms and ribcage of the dance body.

Not only does the principle concept of contraction and release from modern dance translate onto the fashion garment in *Strike a Pose*, but Foster also reflects this idea onto Maezza’s hairstyle. It is gelled, combed and pulled tightly backwards from the hairline down to the nape of her neck before releasing into flare which allows her to fling it in response to the *battement*. Thus, according to *Strike A Pose*, it is clear that the concept of tensile elasticity in Graham’s dance technique allows me to read Donna Karan’s fashion trade and draws connections between modern dance and clothing industry.

3.2.3. Mark Pillai’s *Feel the Power* (2010)

Continuing with the concept of tensile elasticity, *Feel the Power* was a ten-page fashion editorial published in the *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine, UK, in April 2010, which translated the restrained nature of Graham dance technique into high fashion and corporeal poses. The photographic prints featured Taryn Davidson, a Canadian-born international model, who has appeared on numerous catwalk shows, including *Calvin Klein, Jil Sander, Alexander McQueen, Hermès*, and *Lanvin*. The collection was set against the white paper backdrop and introduced a series of black and white attire. Half of the editorial pages were transmuted into grey scale whilst the rest were predominated by the skin shade. The overall apparels focus on the plays of silhouette that suggest a notion of empowerment through the visibility of female contours and strong angular shoulders.

*Feel the Power* articulated female authority with the image of Davidson. Her tall and slim body was adorned with a stretched silk dress designed by British designer Vivienne Westwood. Underneath the dress was a sheer silk-knit brassière from *Pringle of Scotland* obscuring Davidson’s bosom from explicit nudity. The
ensembles were completed as Hector Castor, fashion stylist of the shoot, cuffed Davidson’s wrists with leather wristbands from Givenchy. In terms of choreography, Mark Pillai, the photographer responsible for the event, constantly captured Davidson’s image in various stylised dance poses. In Figure 3.17, she turns her hip away from the camera and lowers her bodyweight towards the floor. Although she pushes the left knee forward, both of her inside legs and ankles are pressed together. As Davidson thrusts her buttock towards the left side of the frame, she pulls the opened neckline of the buttoned dress with her hands in a shape of a fist towards the ceiling lights. Frowning in concentration, she stretches out her elbows yet pulls the shoulder blades together.

Figure 3.17: Taryn Davidson in Vivienne Westwood stretch silk dress, Harper’s Bazaar, April 2010, p.154; Photo: Mark Pillai; Stylist: Hector Castro

There is no firm evidence to confirm whether or not Davidson has received any dance training. However, the tensile elasticity from the interrelationships between stretching fabrics and moving bodies, explored in Graham’s dance technique, are translated and embedded in this fashion performance.

In terms of garment constructions (see Figure 3.18), Westwood’s black silk sheath restricts the body through front-buttoned seams that run zigzag along the median of the model. However, the dress relieves its tension as the slit was cut from mid thighs down to the hem of the dress that brushes below the kneecaps of the model, contrasting play between contraction and release also continues in its bodice.
Even though the neckline opens into a deep V, it hangs over the scapulae and creates a triangular pull across the bust where wide shoulder straps, the first fastened button, and side seams are three corners of the tensile shape. At the shoulder seams, Westwood also attached small triangular volumes of silk that are gathered in its apex and released in flare before the deltoids.

![Image of Daniela Borges in Vivienne Westwood stretched silk dress, Paris Fashion Week, October 2009; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: Style.com [Accessed 30 August 2012]](image)

In its accessories, the restricted composition endures as Castro clamped tight silk-knit brassière over Davidson’s bust whilst firmly securing Givenchy leather cuffs around her wrists. The notion of contract and release is also reflected in Davidson’s hairstyle, as Angelo Seminara, the hair stylist for the shoot, combed the hair tight to her skull and tied it in a ponytail at the crown of her head before allowing the blond highlighted curls to redeem their volume and fountain in frizz over the forehead. On this justification, the concept of tensile elasticity is translated into entire fashion apparels and the overall looks.

Finally, the configuration of restrained tension explicitly lies in Davidson’s corporeality. Despite obtaining no vocational dance training like Maezza in *Strike A*
Pose, Davidson appropriates tensile elasticity prescribed in the fashion garment with her corporeal modelling technique. As Westwood’s sheath and the brassière tightly embraced the body, she resists this entrapment by pulling its shoulder seams above the crania, stretching its elasticity to the limit. Within this executed choreography, the contraction similar to Graham’s dance technique is also evident in her body parts. Tight fisting gesture of the hands where her fingers were pressed against the palms, tensions between the eyebrows as she frowned, pressures between opposing shoulder blades, inner thighs, knees and ankles that are drawn towards each other can be of evidence. However, Davidson provides contrasting release in her lumbar spine and ribcage that push forwards against the restricted tension of the pull. Moreover, her bended left knee also advances the tensile relief of the dress as it pushes the slit of the front seam to open even further.

Through these selected images, it is evident that the concept of tensile elasticity in Martha Graham’s development of modern dance enables me to read another strand of the performance in the current fashion trade. This second series of photographic essay marks genealogical charts from Lamentation to Strike A Pose, Feel the Power and other fashion performances that express experimentation in manipulating stretched fabrics, through pushes and pulls, contractions and releases, in order to display restrained tension between the body and fabrics.

3.3. Merce Cunningham and experimental body shapes in space
Drawing from point 2.1 in Chapter Two, it is apparent that fashion designers have been experimenting with the female silhouette. Certain shapes and forms were created, endorsed, and consumed according to the designers’ vision composed in response to the already existent market and current trends. As fashion is, to a large extent, ephemeral, the outlines of celebrated female figure have constantly changed from period to period. This idealised body can be achieved through diet and exercise; however, structures in clothing and undergarments play an important role in sculpting the female body into its desired image. A corset would emphasise the waistline whilst a crinoline would accentuate the curve of the hip and exaggerate the hourglass silhouette admired in the Victorian era. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Coco Chanel liberated the female body from the restriction of the previous period, and experimented with the masculine look, tailored for a proactive lifestyle which propelled women towards modernism (de la Haye 2011). Her ideal female
configuration was achieved through the use of jersey fabrics from menswear undergarment combined with tailoring techniques. In 1947, Christian Dior launched the “new look” for the post-war fashion. His signature shape comprised a full-circular skirt hemmed below the mid calf with a large bust and pinched waist. The push-up brassiere and abdominal controlled underpants were invented to mould the body into this fashion ideal (Palmer 2009). In demonstrating changes of the bodily silhouette in fashion industry, the practice reflects constant experimentation of the body shapes through clothes that has been embedded throughout the studies of fashion design.

Experiments on body shapes and corporeal alignment in space were also cultivated in the work of Merce Cunningham. Born in Centralia, Washington, in 1919, Cunningham was among the first to challenge the conventions of “spatio-temporal relations” in dance (Foster 1997, p.248). To elaborate this point, Cunningham’s choreographic approach examines formal exploration of bodies in space and time. According to dance scholar Susan Foster (1997, p.248) in her ‘Dancing Bodies’ essay, the technique focuses on segmentation of the bodies such as the spine, arms, knees, and legs with equal significance and value engaging simultaneously in task-like activities. The fractured bodies may move independently through complex spatial and temporal patterns which rarely operated in a unified manner. The body may present spinal curves whether located in the upper back, middle or lumbar spine and continue to tilt, arch, or twist in various directions whilst performing these curves (ibid.). At the same time, knee bends, leg lifts, brushes of the foot, and/or relevés may occur at the lower limbs whilst the pelvis continues to travel through space.

Within these body segments, either through improvisation or computer programmes, Cunningham explored possible ranges of movement and articulated them in complex spatiotemporal relations.4 The dance may not narrate stories or be driven by psychological impulses such as those of Martha Graham’s, but it simply dramatizes the actions of the body in space and time. The visual representation of the dance relies solely on “the distinctive physical capacities of each individual body’s joint flexibility, bone lengths, muscular mass, speed, or dexterity” (Foster 2001, p.175). As a result, Cunningham’s costumes are often kept simple (i.e. leotard) in order to celebrate an activity of movement in these experimental body shapes (Cage quoted in Foster 2001, p.173).
It is also significant that Cunningham had collaborated with an array of visual artists and designers across the disciplines of arts. The experimental collaboration results in a complex partnership amongst shapes, forms, and bodily motion. For instance, the formal configuration is displayed in Cunningham’s *Rainforest* (1968), where dancers in footless tights and fitted long-sleeved jersey tops performed their dance sequences through collections of inflated foils in the shape of a pillowcase. Andy Warhol, an American artist, designed these inflatable props and clustered them around the stage (see Figure 3.19). Through Cunningham’s choreographic method of ‘chance’, the geometric shape of the inflated silver pillowcase thereby attached itself to a streamline silhouette of the dancers as they moved through space. The performance allows for a conversation between these seemingly disparate shapes (i.e. foiled pillowcase and the dance bodies) as they occupy the same space. In other words, *Rainforest* demonstrates a partnership between geometric shapes of the props and the form of dancing bodies.

![Figure 3.19: Merce Cunningham’s *Rainforest*, Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Biped, Barbican Theatre, October 2011, photographed by Tony Dougherty](image)

Not only did fine arts support the notion of shapes and forms in Cunningham’s repertoire, but fashion was among the key compositions that also helped to advance experimentation of shapes and forms in Cunningham’s bodily practice, which furthers my thesis about the interrelationship between fashion, dance and choreography. I propose *Scenario* (1997) as a case study to extrapolate interrelationships between
choreography and high fashion as Rei Kawakubo, designer-in-chief for the global Japanese brand *Comme des Garçons*, appropriated design concepts from her Spring/Summer 1997 “Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body” collection onto the costumes worn in the dance performance. As a result, *Scenario* will be the starting point of my final visual taxonomy where the artistic practice of modern dance and high fashion meets. I will then revisit and investigate *Strike A Pose* (2009) and *Beautiful Stranger* (2012) which marks the visual history on the notion of experimental body shapes in space derived from the concept of modern dance but eminently circulated in these fashion editorials.

### 3.3.1. *Scenario* (1997)

Premiered at Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, on October 14, 1997, *Scenario* was a collaboration between Merce Cunningham and fashion designer Rei Kawakubo. Accompanied with electronic musical score *Wave Code A-Z* composed by Takehisa Kosugi, dancers appeared on stark white stage surrounded by side panels and white marley floor covering and began to execute Cunningham’s task-like choreography in their individual space. One female dancer rose in relevé on her left leg whilst kissing her right foot to her left inside thigh in a balletic passé pose. Simultaneously, she stretched her right arm whilst bending her left elbow in twisted *port de bras* which was rotated upwards and away from the body (see Figure 3.20). This bodily alignment projects kinetic angularity of the human shapes into the white space.

![Figure 3.20: Scenario (1997); Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders](image)
Not only did dancers concentrate on their solo sequences, but they also came into contact with one another and performed a series of dance duet or group works. For instance, one female dancer leaned sideways towards another male dancer and rested her head over his high-arched chest. Her legs were separated in a wide stance calling upon the fourth position in ballet terms. Her arms formed a round shape of *port de bras*, but her shoulder blades were magnetised towards each other. As a result, it exaggerated the shapes of her upper body by pulling her arms towards her buttocks and pushing her ribcage out of the alignment (see Figure 3.21). In receiving the weight of her resting position, the male dancer counterbalanced the pose with a small lunge whilst extended his arms in a parallel distance towards the negative space before him.

![Figure 3.21: An example of a dance duet in Scenario (1997); Source: NRCD](image)

Towards the end of the performance, additional dancers rushed to the stage and joined the cast. Whether performing solo sequences or group works, Cunningham presented the dance bodies in their experimental shapes and forms through straight lines of the elevated legs, sharp angles of the bended knees and elbows, arcs from the curved spines and twisted torsos, and rigidity of the extended limbs in relation to rounded shapes of *port de bras* in various perspectives.

In reading Cunningham’s choreographic shapes, British dance critic Judith Mackrell in her 1998 essay *Mesmerising* posited that “It took a while for them [dance audience] to accept that choreography could be enjoyed simply as absorbing and
beautiful human activity and to learn the zen-like art of savouring the images and associations [my emphasis] sparked by Cunningham’s movements, without trying to harness them to a theme” (Mackrell 1998, p.1). Despite no overt story line or plot, Cunningham circulated ideas through visual, oral and kinetic representations in his choreography. “By declaring that his choreography means nothing, he allows it to mean everything and for those willing to see there are landscapes, natural life forms and patterns portrayed in his work as well as a range of human encounters, from the comical to the poignant”, Mackrell argued (ibid). In associating shapes and forms with bodily interaction, dance is never abstract in Cunningham’s terms, as it always connects to daily behaviour and living organisms. By no means do I argue that Cunningham’s choreographic practice endorsed static poses or was composed from moving images. Rather, my reading highlights Cunningham’s dance concept in exploring the body shapes in space through the human instruments of arms, legs and torsos; but composite in such way to push the boundaries of kinetic language and verify endless possibilities of the movements within complex spatiotemporal relations.

In raising the importance of experimental shapes and forms in Cunningham’s practice, it is most significant that Kawakubo’s design advances this notion to its fullest extremity due to the protuberances that distort various parts of the body. Although artistic partnerships were often collaborated in the performance, Kawakubo was the first invitation Cunningham made to the world of fashion. Kawakubo initially declined, but after premiering her design concepts that reconfigured the female bodies in her Spring/Summer 1997 collection “Dress Meets Body, Body Meets Dress”, she re-considered the proposal and accepted the offer, as she, too, shared artistic visions in destabilising audience perceptions of bodily aesthetics (Carpenter 2012). In her design, Kawakubo corrupted the ‘appealing’ female contours in high fashion with padded features that would distort their anatomical silhouettes to the extreme. In the advertising campaign (see Figure 3.22a), Kawakubo cut blue and white gingham fabric into a long sleeves dress. Although the garment was fastened with ties around the waist to display a nipped-in silhouette, the trapezius, abdomen, and upper pectoral muscle of the model were satiated as Kawakubo constructed padding structures inside the garment. In its visual outcome, it was as if the model was pregnant with a heavily hunched spine and swollen shoulders, the size that would exceed the level of her earlobe. To heighten this distortion of the female contour, the hired model performed
a choreographic shape whereby she pressed her palm against the padded abdomen. This is a common gesture found in pregnant women. In order to sharpen the narrative of her design concept further, Kawakubo chose to light the garment where the padded structures lay.

In her catwalk presentation, a series of experimental protuberances continued throughout the collection. Displayed on stark white raised strips with fluorescent-lit setting, padded apparels emerged one after another. Whether in acid colours of blood-red, tangerine, and lime green, printed red and white check, blue gingham, or simple grey scale monotone, Kawakubo reformulated perceptions of female contours in high fashion with the padded designs that were intentionally misplaced along the bodies. It may come in a small-balooned strip that would twist and curve around the hip (see Figure 3.22b) or stuffed in a form of oversized lumps that would run across the model’s torso (see Figure 3.22c). Through these various protuberant swellings that grotesquely mushroomed around the body, Kawakubo succeeds her intention in destabilising the concept of femininity and aesthetics in the fashion industry as she destroys the hourglass curve of the fashion bodies which has long been celebrated since the birth of haute couture.5

In translating the protuberant body from “Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body” to the dance costumes for Scenario, Kawakubo implants the fundamental concept of protuberances from the high fashion context onto the dance bodies. She divides the costumes into three sets according to the fabrics, from a series of plain
black attire to lipstick red and blue/white or green/white stripes and gingham. Despite the differences in colours and patterns, each set of costumes shares commonality in its silhouette. All of the bodices provide no sleeves and cut close to dancers’ torsos unless adorned with Kawakubo’s padding designs. The lower half of the costumes also closely fit to dancers’ skin but hemmed in various lengths from miniskirts to fitted shorts, three-quarter length footless tights, and ankle-length dresses. Significantly, Kawakubo peppered the protuberances in varied positions of the body from busts to buttocks, deltoids to abdomen, and spine to extended coccyx and expanded hip bone that plumed out and hung low towards the back of the knees (see Figure 3.23).

![Figure 3.23: Protuberant designs in Kawakubo’s costumes; Source: NRCD](image)

Regarding the choice of fabrics, Kawakubo deliberately selects plain colours (i.e. black and red) and grid patterns (i.e. stripes and gingham) for Scenario’s costumes. These materials are best in representing the protuberance designs as, on one level, bumps and lumps from the padded structures cast dark shadows over the solid coloured fabrics creating the monotonous contrast between light and shade along the protuberant contours. This is the first visual technique Kawakubo embedded in her costume (i.e. through the use of colour block and contoured shadows) to emphasise her padded designs. On another level, the swelling protuberance creates optical distortion towards stripes and grid patterns in gingham fabrics. Straight lines and squared patterns become hyperbolic curves and stretched fish-eyed grids. These changes in Kawakubo’s rigid prints easily allow the audience to see the padding designs.
By looking at Kawakubo’s costume designs that critically distort human contours, it can also be seen that these protuberances extremely disfigure the dance bodies both visually and kinaesthetically as they move through space. On one level, the exaggerated paddings reconfigure the bodily contours to the extremes. In Figure 3.24, a male dancer stands erect in a neutral position. His limbs angle in rigid geometric shapes as he fully extends his left arm and reaches towards the audience whilst the right arm squarely folds up at the elbow and turns its palm downstage. His bare legs stem up from the floor in a straight parallel line. Though the dancer stands erect in neutral position and executes rigid geometric shapes, Kawakubo deforms his bodily silhouette via the protuberances as she swells the dancer’s torso and heavily emphasizes his buttocks with padding designs. The dancer’s neutral position, viewed in profile, becomes high arched with a forcefully pushed pelvis. This visual spectacle results from the inflated bodily contour where abdomen and pectoral muscles are bloated up before him and rounded up to reach his ear-lobes. The costume continues to balloon up his trapezius as well as his cervical vertebra before concaving back to the neutral at the lumbar spine. Not before long, Kawakubo’s padded design once again inflates his gluteal muscles to the extremes pushing the gluteus maximus towards the ceiling lights.

Figure 3.24: A male dancer clad in Kawakubo’s costume standing erect in profile; Source: NRCD
As dancers move through space whilst performing Cunningham’s task-like choreography, Kawakubo’s protuberant designs highly reinforce the shaping concept and push Cunningham visual and kinetic experimentation to the extreme. In Figure 3.25, the male dancer (left) strikes an angular pose in Kawakubo’s black attire. His spine is erect but hinged towards his right leg as it glissés forty-five degrees off the floor before him. He extends his right arms towards the ceiling in the angle that matches the left thigh as he bends his left knee and lowers his bodyweight closer to the floor. Despite performing rigid and geometric shapes, the black mushroomed bodice and the swim-ringed waistline alter his bodily alignment from straight lines into curves as the eye would draw the outline of his dance body together with the padded costumes. Visually, it is as if the dancer performs upper-back curves as the costume signifies a heavily hunched torso. The costume also erases the dancer’s tucked-in pelvis as the padded waistline adds volumes to his hip.

![Figure 3.25: Angular choreographic shapes that appear as curvature due to protuberant designs; Source: NRCD](image)

On another occasion, three dancers perform the same choreographic shapes but clad in a variety of black protuberant designs which enhance or obstruct the pose. All of them lunge in a wide stance with erect torso but arch their cervical spines which project their chest towards the ceiling. They keep their arms in bras bas but draw their clavicle together which brings both of their arms behind their pelvis (see Figure 3.26). Despite executing the same movement, Kawakubo’s costumes direct these choreographic shapes into three variations. Visually, it appears that the female
dancer in the middle of the trio hinges her torso forward with the lesser degrees of high arch at the lumbar spine in comparison to the male dancer on the right. In fact, it is the mushroomed paddings that provide this optical illusion as described in Figure 3.24 and 3.25. Moreover, the volume of the padded clavicle in her costume aligns with the protuberant waistline, suggesting that her spine is neutrally erect but hinged forward as she gazes to high distance. In contrast, the male dancer’s costume has no padding design on the bodice but substantially bulges around the pelvis. As a result, the protuberance creates additional angles between the lumbar spine and the pelvis, giving an impression that his spine is highly arched in greater degrees than hers.

Kinetically, it is also evident that Kawakubo’s design forbids the female dancer on the far left to perform this high-arch pose. This is due to the great volume of the padded waistline that pushes against her buttocks. As a result, she has to lean her torso forward in order to maintain the angle of the designate shape. To further elaborate the account on choreographic obstruction due to Kawakubo’s padding design, Trevor Carlson, an executive director of Cunningham Dance Foundation, who also performed in Scenario, admits to this kinetic obstacle. He reveals that Kawakubo places the protuberance in front of his bodice when he is assigned to rock his torso on the floor (Carlson et al. 2010). As a result, he is unable to perform the choreography, as he loses the momentum in swinging his abdomen neither forward nor backward. To overcome this costume restriction, Carlson altered the mobile action into a static pose compensating for a loss in abilities to execute the set choreography due to the kidney bean-shaped down padded (ibid.). Carlson argues that Cunningham did not perceive this restriction as failure to the collaboration. Rather, this is the result from Cunningham’s independent collaborative intention which provides fragmentation to his choreography, thereby adding a new dimension to art dance exploration and raising other possibilities.
Despite the obstruction to Cunningham’s choreography or distortion to Cunningham’s choreographic shapes, conceptually, the visual and kinetic impact dictated by the costumes has been thoroughly thought through since the beginning of design and collaborative process. In experimenting the concept of choreographic shapes with the padded costumes, Kawakubo questions what would happen to choreography if shapes and volumes of the costumes restricted movements in this collaboration. Would it result in defiance, or, rather, a problem to be resolved into an adaptable pattern fusing the choreographic concept of modern dance with high fashion design? She revealed that,

Merce didn’t ask me any detailed questions about the costumes, and I didn’t ask him anything about the choreography. However, I agreed to produce a costume that would greatly limit movement, and I challenged the choreographer to create in his turn something for this costume…I believe the purpose of collaboration is to push each other as far as possible. It is fascinating to think that, thanks to the choreography and movement of the dancers, the costumes themselves are moving. New shapes are created, and the original shapes destroyed…I believe that the qualities of costumes are accentuated and exaggerated by the dancers’ gestures. This creates a true synergy between form and space.

Rai Kawakubo quoted in Barbican 1998

Cunningham responded:

The way in which Rei Kawakubo conceived the décor, her complete vision, matches my own preoccupation with space. Whatever happens, happens, that is my motto –with costumes as with music. The shapes [of
the costumes] force the dancers to turn differently. They also change the
dancers’ rhythm. It is a very vital experience.

Cunningham quoted in Barbican 1998

These quotes clarify Kawakubo and Cunningham’s intention in experimenting upon
shapes and forms as well as choreography in kinetic bodies. This is collaboration
between two artistic disciplines when high fashion dictates choreography of modern
dance and, simultaneously, dance bodies become active agents that activate design
concepts and push “new” fashion silhouettes beyond the catwalk presentation.

3.3.2. Strike A Pose (2009): revisited

As Rei Kawakubo posited her opinion upon dancers’ gestures that accentuated
and exaggerated the qualities of the costume in Scenario, some of the editorial pages
in Strike A Pose (2009) also subscribe to this concept. These are the cases when
Michella Maezza, the hired model, interpreted the sculptural forms experimented in
the selected high fashion and displayed them through the corporeal technique of her
dancing body. As discussed earlier, Maezza re-appropriated iconic photographs taken
from Martha Graham’s performances for these editorial pages. She obtained her
vocational training at the London Studio Centre, where wide ranges of contemporary
dance techniques are taught, including Graham and Cunningham styles. As a result,
her trained body is experienced and equipped with several dance styles which can be
hybridised simultaneously. To illuminate this account, the fourth page of Strike A
Pose displayed a medium shot of Maezza in a printed coat designed by Italian fashion
partnerships Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana for Dolce & Gabbana
Autumn/Winter 2009 ready-to-wear collection, which calls upon experimental body
shapes in space that are moving between fashion and dancing body (see Figure 3.27).
This is a modern dance concept previously experimented in Cunningham’s Scenario.
To put Dolce and Gabbana’s coat into a wider high fashion context, this garment, worth £2,394 at the time of launching, was numbered as the forty-seventh look on the catwalk presentation and made its debut at Milan Fashion Week in March 2009 (Mower 2009b). The whole collection was made from luminous and lustrous materials such as silk satin, rich brocade, dyed goat hair and mink in black and white with an injection of shocking pink in the middle of the fashion parade to excite the viewers. What is significant in the design is how Dolce and Gabbana toyed with the “butterfly” silhouette (Gabbana in Blanks 2009). Corsets were in place to minimise the waistline whilst puffed sleeves, in some cases raised up to the earlobes, were engineered to complete the wings for the butterfly effect. Enhanced shoulders, in contrast to tapered sleeves at the forearms, were dominant features of the entire season. Out of the sixty-four looks, merely four were adorned with no ballooning shoulders as they were strapped or sleeveless dress. If there are sleeves, they are puffed. Fashion critic Sarah Mower (2009) compared Dolce and Gabbana’s design silhouettes to those of Elsa Schiaparelli’s, an influential Italian fashion designer at the pre-war era, who often collaborated with Surrealist artists such as Jean Cocteau and Salvador Dalí. According to Mower, Schiaparelli was an “original proponent” of the exaggerated and oversized forms, as she frequently included these details in her surreal glamour. Amongst those is the skeleton dress whose bodice Schiaparelli padded with stuffed spines and ribs as posterior adornment. In raising the importance
of embellished sculptural forms in high fashion, I highlight the experimental body shapes that are present in the print coat featured in *Strike A Pose*.

By looking at the garment construction, the double-breasted coat has a square cut and falls over the knee. At the shoulders, fabrics in grey scale abstract leopard print were gathered around the armholes to create a puffed up butterfly effect. The coat does not have sleeves but Dolce and Gabbana provided a slit at the waistline for wearers to insert the arms (see Figure 3.28). This slits develops into ruched seams that drape upwards from the biceps to the neckline.

![Figure 3.28: Ksenia Kahnovich in Dolce & Gabbana printed coat, Milan Fashion Week, March 2009; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: Style.com [Accessed 05 September 2012]](image)

In terms of the choreographic shape, Maezza pressed her wrists against each other and planted them between her thighs that were parted in a wide stance. Simultaneously she concaved her middle spine and tilted her ribcage as she rotated her head towards the lifted right shoulder. In so doing, Maezza reconfigures the shape of the coat and accentuates the butterfly silhouette in her fashion performance. For instance, the position of her arms that were drawn towards each other encloses the distance between the two slits. As a result, it magnetises the fabrics before the abdomen but reveals a pinched-waist contour. Moreover, it creates a heart shape
between the shoulders and the waistline, which further accentuates the ballooning shapes as the bodice becomes slimmer at the bottom of the heart. Maezza also creates an illusion of the most petite midriff as her bare wrists draw viewers’ eyes towards the conceptual apex of this shape minimising the waistline to a mere width of a wrist. To further emphasise this shape, her stance maximises the volume of the coat below its slits as her parted legs pull the fabrics towards both ends of the frame. From a squared silhouette of the coat presented by Ksenia Kahnovich at the runway show, Maezza distorts its shape into an hour-glass figure through her isolated dance body to achieve the overall concept of Dolce and Gabbana’s original intention (see Figure 3.29).

In her body alignment, the tilted ribcage also raises the ballooned shoulder to a higher level calling upon viewers’ attention. To advertise this design feature to the maximum, the angle of her head turns towards the puffed-up shoulder. Within this pose, Maezza directs audiences to follow her épaulement as she gazes upon its volumes. Through her eyesight and corporeality of the body, Maezza appropriates structural forms in high fashion with the choreographic shapes suggesting a practice similar to Merce Cunningham’s exploration of shape in space.
3.3.3. Mario Sorrenti’s Beautiful Stranger (2012)

The final strand of the visual taxonomies focuses on experimental body shapes in space that are moving between dance and fashion closes with Beautiful Stranger (2012). Published in British Vogue, March 2012, Beautiful Stranger is comprised of twelve high-fashion images captured by Mario Sorrenti, an Italian fashion photographer and director whose extensive portfolios include Emporio Armani, Hugo Boss, and Kenzo advertising campaigns as well as featured covers for Vogue, GQ and W magazines. The collection was shot in a deserted warehouse with asymmetrical wooden panels painted in white and pale olive. Props of white bentwood chairs, a chrome clothes rail, a gunmetal frame of ironing board and strips of neon lightings were utilised as dance partners to the shoot. The featured garments were selected from brands such as Gareth Pugh, Paul Smith, Stella McCartney, and Vivienne Westwood but kept in monochrome whether in solid sheets, fine prints, or jewel embellishments. Jane How, a fashion editor for British Vogue, referred Beautiful Stranger to a resonation of the avant-garde movements in the early nineteen-nineties when fashion designers were “in thrall to experimentation” (How in British Vogue 2012, p.326). In recent development of fashion design, reflected through the garments featured in these editorial pages, How describes the overall impression when “concepts fly high, lines are asymmetric and designs beautify both mind and body” (ibid). What How extrapolated in the photographic explanation are studies of shapes and forms in distorted formulae that push boundaries of fashion design and questions viewers’ perception on the beauty of female silhouettes.

On page 335, the tenth image of Beautiful Stranger, Sorrenti conceptualised the body of French-born international model, Aymeline Valade, in dynamic lunges (see Figure 3.30). Sorrenti seized the moment when Valade advanced towards the left frame. The executed effort was so vigorous so that both of the platform heels were lifted off the bare concrete floor. In such a wide stance, Valade reached out with her left hand towards the empty space before her. Most of Valade’s upper body was obscured by the striped inflatable dress designed by British fashion designer, Gareth Pugh, who often experiments on shapes and forms in response to the futuristic strand of avant-gardism. In contrast to the rectangular shape of the blown-up dress, Valade’s lower body was adorned with striped legging with black panels on the inside legs. The
platform buckled leather boots from international fetish wear brand *Demonia* elevated her height.

**Figure 3.30**: Aymeline Valade in *Gareth Pugh* inflatable dress and leggings, *British Vogue*, March 2012; Photo: Mario Sorrenti

Gareth Pugh’s inflatable dress was worn by Magdalena Frackowiak at 2011 Paris Fashion Week and reflected his futuristic vision through two contrasting graphics. The accompaniments were orchestrated between black and white, positive and negative, and rigidity and fluidity. Focusing closely in geometric plays, he formed stiff rectangular panels at the front and back of the bodice of the dress that runs from the underarms to the chin level (see Figure 3.31). It was as if the model’s body was interlocked with opened tongues that obscured her collarbones. The resulting visual impact shows how the black frames dissect her face and upper limbs away from her slim torso.
In contrast to the square bodice, Pugh cuts the skirt of the dress in a large hollow pillow shape, but softly inflates its negative volume so that it mushrooms over her thighs. To accentuate this experiments of forms, Pugh contrasts the sheer volume of the skirt by dressing Frackowiak in striped skinny leggings. In so doing, the body becomes abstract and dismembers into several cut-out shapes: a circular face, a square torso, a half circle of ballooning hip and four lines of limbs (see Figure 3.32).
To further enhance the floating concept of the inflatable dress, Pugh creates a visual illusion where the tips of the tongued bodice are structured from two black planes whilst the inside panels are kept in horizontal stripes of contrasting black and white. These lines start from the bust and continue downwards to the ankles. As the black panels blend into the animated background projected in grey scale, the squared frames traverse into negative space, separating the shoulders and face from the body even further. The composite graphics also apply to hair and make-up as eyebrows of the model are painted in white strips. These are diagonal lines that toy with the model’s facial structure of high cheekbones and square jaws exposed via the hair that is combed tight over the skull and firmly parted across the forehead.

Experimenting between rigidity and fluidity, it is also significant that Frackowiak’s torso and her cigarette legs are caged by Pugh’s taut horizontal stripes, in a form of bodice and leggings. The figure hugging of the cut has reserved the stripes to run parallel to the floor matching the solid grids of white high-ankle heels.
Through restrictions within these body parts, it connotes rigidity in its apparel. On the other hand, fluidity of the garment results in its ballooning skirt. Even though the inflatable volume is made from the same striped fabrics that continue from the bust towards the hemline running in the same angle, soft infusion of air has distorted the horizontal lines into various broken graphs that arch over Frackowiak’s thighs. In this sense, Pugh highlights the fragmented shapes of the garment through linearity in the fabric that can be broken according to soft flares of the inflation.

By analysing graphics and shapes composed in Pugh’s inflatable dress, I would like to draw attention back to Beautiful Stranger and demonstrate how Mario Sorrenti, the responsible photographer, translates and advances the geometric forms and rigid lines in Pugh’s garment through fashion styling, photographic techniques, choreography, and the locale’s mise-en-scène. As Jane How captioned the image as “Blow fashion out of proportions? Never!”, it is evident that the pillowed skirt is inflated to its full capacity in this photo shoot (How quoted in British Vogue, 2012, p.335). The puffed-up shape is solidified and stretched the stripes out in its horizontal plane. In so doing, Sorrenti no longer contrasts rigidity with fluidity emerging in Pugh’s design, but addresses solely its geometric forms as the soft flare mushroomed skirts become erected taut pillows. Moreover, Demonia strapped platform boots has replaced the white-grid ankle heels. Although the horizontal lines from the buckled straps invoke what white leather ribs in Pugh’s footwear signify, the platforms of the boots add another asymmetrical shape to the overall apparel located under the sole and extend the length of the model’s lower limbs further than what Pugh presented in his fashion show.

The maximised length of the legs is crucial to the editorial, as it catalyses distortion of the perspectives obtained from the photographic techniques Sorrenti employed. On the first degree, Sorrenti chose to capture Valade’s dynamic body and Pugh’s blown-up pillow dress in worm’s-eye-view. This is the position whereby the camera is placed nearer to the floor and looks up diagonally towards the ceiling. By viewing the subject in this angle, it extends the body and disrupts its proportion. What situates closer to the lens will be enlarged whilst what locates farther will be minimised in its viewpoints. The distorted perspective from this low angle certainly directs Valade in her stance. The choreographic shape of a wide lunge establishes an extensive base contrasting to the tapered torso that is diminished behind the inflatable dress. What is left of the upper body is a mere left hand in its reduced dimension that
reaches out towards the left frame. Her erected body becomes an abstracted triangular frame whilst the inflated dress hybridises into a torso with the tip of its left corner as her coned head. On this account, Sorrenti employs a low camera angle to destabilise the bodily silhouette of the model and modify its proportion in relation to the high fashion garment.

Sorrenti continues to experiment on shapes and forms of the subject by using a wide-angle lens, but capturing in a close-up shot. This is the photographic technique employed to highlight the experimental body shapes in space. The experimentation may derive from a different discipline (i.e. fashion photography) to those explored in Cunningham’s choreography. Nevertheless, they share similar artistic vision in creating variations to the human bodies. In photography, a wide-angle lens refers to a lens whose focal length falls from 35mm or lower in comparison to those of the standard lenses which carry its focal length between 35mm to 85mm. Wide-angle lenses are commonly used for capturing landscapes or architecture when photographers wish to include every aspect of the photographic subjects such as the sky, mountains, and trees from the furthest distance to delicate flowers in its foreground without losing any details. A wide-angle lens may have its advantage in obtaining an inclusive reach, however, if photographers incorporate it in a close-up shot, it will result in modifications of the subject’s relative size, exaggerations of distance, and increasing depth of field. The foreground will be magnified whilst the background will be reduced drastically in size. Moreover, the depth between each plane will appear to be deeper in contrasting proximity. Nevertheless, all of the distant details will never loose their foci (Nash 2010; Sheppard 2011).

By using a wide-angle lens in Beautiful Stranger, Sorrenti advances the distortion of perspectives amongst the body, the garment, and the background previously reformed by the low angle view. The lens further extrudes Valade’s cigarette legs, which have already been elongated by the platform boots, and maximises the size of the inflatable dress as the body and the garment locates at the closest proximity to the camera. The lens also minimises the background in its size, yet, through increasing depth of field, records every detail of spots, lines, shapes, and forms from the grainy cement floor, to the neon strips, angular wooden panels, ceiling grids, and long cylindrical pipes and pillars locate within the photographic mise-en-scène.
In showing every depth of the photographic aspects, Sorrenti illuminates the geometric play of graphics in Pugh’s garment which has been translated into choreography and the use of props. Shapes and lines in distorted perspectives can be of example. The bended knees mark a broken line to the lower body, yet the extension of Valade’s left leg runs parallel to the top of the left wooden frame, the left seams of the inflated dress and the left neon strips (see Figure 3.33). Perpendicular to the legs are the neon lights which were attached to the extruded wooden panels planted in a zigzag outlines. The round pillar appears to run parallel to the erected panel whilst the ceiling pipes point towards Valade’s right lifted sole. Moreover, Sorrenti placed the lighting where Valade’s left foot cast a line of shadow that draws its direction in reference to the right wooden panel, the floor and the angle of the wrist.

![Figure 3.33: My visual analysis of Beautiful Stranger focusing on shapes and forms.](image)

By examining Pugh’s garment construction in comparison to Valade’s executed choreography, Sorrenti’s photographic techniques, and the locale’s mise-en-scène in this detailed visual analysis, it is evident that experimental shapes and forms are the key concepts in Beautiful Stranger, as it has been explored through various media ranging from fashion photography to corporeality of the body, set, lighting and high fashion design. This aspect of fashion performance shares similar novel views to
the choreographic practice of Merce Cunningham, particularly in *Scenarion*, where Rei Kawakubo distorted dancers’ bodily contours in relation to the restriction troubled by the costumes that may alter rhythmic patterns of the dance in their collaboration. Moreover, the association between *Beautiful Stranger* and Cunningham’s dance practice, especially in its formal representation of the body, can be further affirmed as Sorrenti’s photograph hybridises the streamline bodily silhouette (i.e. Valade’s lower body contour in skin-tight apparels) with Pugh’s inflated rectangular pillow skirt. This partnership between the moving body and the inflated garment recalls the visual presentation of Cunningham’s *Rainforest* (1968), which I have previously highlighted. Visual connections between *Beautiful Stranger* and Cunningham’s repertoire mark a genealogical chart that draws intimate relationships between modern dance and fashion performance. By intimate relationships, I refer to experimentation of shapes and forms in dance choreographies that have merged with props and costumes. In this sense, experimentation of body shapes in space is one of the key concepts of choreography that allows me to read visual representation of the fashion trade.

In closing this third and final visual taxonomy of fashion, fabrics, and choreography of modern dance, *Scenarion* sets a visual history and offers experimentation on shapes and forms in spaces that are moving from choreography to luxury fashion. The genealogy illustrates how Maëzza executes a dance pose that accentuates Dolce and Gabbana’s padded shoulders whilst Sorrenti employs choreography, props, photographic *mise-en-scène*, technology, and camera angles to display geometric shapes and forms of Pugh’s inflatable dress.

### 3.4. Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, three strands of artistic trajectories from the development of modern dance to the performance of current fashion trade have emerged tracing Terpsichorean performances from early modernist dance to twenty-first-century high fashion. The genealogical charts began with Loïe Fuller and the concept of dynamic flow. The selected images located in this section linked the Fuller’s *Serpentine Dance* to Nick Knight’s *Dynamic Blooms* and Stephan Galloway’s *Fred and Ginger*. The genealogy of dynamic flow has demonstrated visual representations of lightweight fabrics draped and pleated in voluminous gowns
that move in response to energetic and vigorous choreography in order to display expansive patterns of the high fashion garments.

In the second section, I addressed the concept of tensile elasticity in Martha Graham’s dance technique particularly on her manipulation of purple jersey tube costume in Lamentation. This restrained tension between the dancing body and the costume can be seen in Strike A Pose and Feel the Power when Michella Maezza and Taryn Davidson execute the choreography that would stretch their high fashion apparels to the limit.

Finally, the concept of choreography at the development of modern dance concluded with Merce Cunningham and his practice that explored perceptions of body shapes in space. The experimentation began in Scenario, where Cunningham collaborated with fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, who reconfigured the human body with padded designs in her costumes. The stuffed gingham garments restricted the movements, distorted bodily contours and altered rhythmic patterns of the dance according to the misplacements of curves and exaggeration of the moulded forms. These experimental shapes in Cunningham’s practice set up the final visual taxonomy that include Strike A Pose and Beautiful Stranger in which artistic agents translated the concept of modern dance through choreographic shapes, photographic techniques, and locale’s mise-en-scène in relation to the graphics (i.e. lines, shapes and forms) explored in high fashion practice. The three strands offered in this chapter are by no means an exhaustive compendium of these types of collaborations. Instead, I offer these series of visual taxonomies as evidence of a relationship between fashion, bodies and choreography which has a historical component in the twentieth century. The next chapter looks at appropriation of punk aesthetics and political attitude in a crossover between dance and fashion in order to continue my visual mapping and investigation in fashion events.

Notes

1 See http://showstudio.com/project/dynamic_blooms/process_films for a behind the scene video excerpt, [8 May 2015]
2 My analysis comes from visual dissemination of the presented photograph published in the editorial pages. As I do not have an access to the original photographs, I traced the outline of the cut out with the help of its contrasting shades and disconnecting folds in order to divide these layers.
3 I am unable to confirm whether this photograph came as part of the second layer whether Knight brought it in from a different image entirely.
4 Judith Mackrell (1998) envied Cunningham’s creativity in exploring computer technologies which allowed him to “envisage an entire new range of movement”. According to Cunningham, “technically,
through the computer, my use of arms has changed completely in the last five or six years. I have been able to see all these new possibilities” (Cunningham quoted in Mackrell 1998)

5 Kawakubo extrapolated the impetus for her design concepts that “Fashion was very boring, and I was very angry. I wanted to do something extremely strong. It was a reaction. The feeling was to design the body” (Kawakubo quoted in Carpenter 2012).

6 “Would something totally unexpected be produced? The results are unpredictable. We can only await chance and fortuity” (Rei Kawakubo quoted in Barbican 1998).