Chapter Four:
God Saves the (Mc) Queen: Appropriation of Punk Aesthetics in a Crossover between Dance and Fashion

Continuing to shed light on the subject of a performance exchange between fashion and dance, this chapter shifts its focus from early experimental developments between shapes, forms, fabrics, moving bodies and choreographies in the first half of the twentieth century to the influence of punk aesthetics on high-fashion performances. The chapter has as its purpose the establishment of the second strand of interrelationships that occurred when post-modern dance artists began to employ aesthetics from artistic and political movements to create radical outcomes in visual design and performance. The connotation of this punk aesthetic was that post-modern dance choreography appropriated political and aesthetical viewpoints to display fashion garments.

To advance this argument, this chapter focuses on the politics of performance, in particular the legacy of the punk movement and its ideologies through a case study of Deliverance (2003). This performance was a crossover between a fashion-advertising event and post-modern dance performance. Choreographed by a British dance artist,
Michael Clark, the show featured the Spring/Summer 2004 collection designed by Alexander McQueen, a British fashion designer, worn by the cast that was comprised of professional dancers and high fashion models. By employing this case study, this chapter examines how McQueen and Clark appropriated punk aesthetics and how the politics of performance then fed into the changing political economy of fashion advertising events. The findings from this chapter contribute towards a key focus of this thesis which investigates consumption and performance exchanges between high fashion and modern and post-modern dance.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents the fashion products, lifecycles and characteristics of the fashion industry, specifically the contestation between the establishment and its challengers. The second section focuses on the punk movement, its strategies and political practices, which were employed to challenge the notion of the mainstream, and which, as a result, assumed a new significance in the cultural field. It also includes McQueen and Clark’s aesthetic history and how they both sought to establish themselves in their respective industries whilst appropriating punk ideologies so as to enter the mainstream fashion and dance industries. The third section then investigates how McQueen and Clark translated punk ideologies, styles, and aesthetics in their practices and how they adhered shock tactic and oppositional strategies to the case study, Deliverance. Finally, I compare the results of the performance analysis with McQueen’s other fashion promotion contexts in order to establish a correlation between acclaimed punk politics in the case study and a political economy of high fashion situating Deliverance and the performance of these Terpsichorean in the socioeconomic context of fashion events.

In each section, I address the political economy of the fashion industry, particularly how aesthetics, bodies, brands, choreographers and fashion designers circulate ideologies of punk (e.g. oppositional strategies) in the performance of Deliverance. I am particularly interested in how the aesthetics of punk interlink with the postmodern dance choreographies and how the appropriation of punk, a seemingly counter-culture aesthetic, leads to the further commercialisation of dance in the fashion industry. In other words, punk becomes a destabilizing way for the idea of the avant-garde or the rebellious choreographer to gain notoriety and fame in the mainstream. This
chapter thus examines that process through an analysis of the performances by employing visual and gender analysis, some Marxist theories and Bourdieu’s notion of negation between the establishment and the challengers.

Methodologically, I continue to employ the neo-Marxist framework of analysis outlined in Chapter One (Marx 1976 and Baudrillard 1972) in conjunction with punk theories (Laing 1985; Massumi 1992 and Lockwood 2009), detailed movement analysis, gender analysis and visual readings of the performance. I draw upon shapes, forms and motions in fabrics and McQueen’s garments in relation to Clark’s choreographies. I employ Sydney Pollack’s 1969 film They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?, which the fashion performance was based upon and which opens up other intertextual references of dance marathons. I also employ the song God Bless the Child, sung by Billie Holiday, to develop an understanding of key connotations circulating within Deliverance. In the gender relationship between the male dancers and the models, I connect Clark’s presentation of the clothed bodies with Kenneth MacMillan’s ballet, as the work is a highly relevant dance contribution to the visual analysis. The intertext of MacMillan is as strong as that of the film and makes some sense of Clark’s own history and stance concerned with the manipulation and the victimisation of female bodies. These analyses are not conducted independently but grounded in the hierarchical structure of the fashion field, particularly in the dominant agents and their power relations theorised by Pierre Bourdieu (1993a, 1993b) (see Chapter One). Data are collected through photographs, video clips, interviews, press reviews and newspaper articles (Blank 2003; British Style Genious 2009a, 2009b; D’Souza 2001; McDowell 2008; Rose 1997).

Through the use of a punk destructive persona, grotesque bodily movements and provocative intertexts, this chapter argues that Deliverance challenges the representation of clothed bodies in mainstream high fashion and offers a critique of the commercialism of capitalist society. Nevertheless, this performance ultimately remains a commodified one, subjugated by fashion merchandising and marketing strategies, thus overshadowing McQueen’s and Clark’s artistic practices.

4.1. Fashion industry and seasonal politics
Fashion is ephemeral. This is partly driven by seasonal changes in the European climate. Simultaneously, fashion advertisements are published and broadcast to arouse an extensive and continual desire for consuming new products, which further reinforces and accelerates the velocity of fashion production whilst reducing the lifecycle of existing merchandise. The short lifespan of fashion coincides with the fashion calendar, particularly in ready-to-wear collections, where new ideas are introduced biannually as in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Mike Easey, a fashion marketer, expounds on the fashion product lifecycle beginning with the introductory stage of the products (i.e. the launch of the collection), which grows into its maturity, before it finally declines in popularity and sales value (2002, p.129-131). He notes, however, that there are variations in a fashion product’s lifespan from fad to classic. A fashion fad is a short-lived product. It sharply reaches its maturity and rapidly declines in its popularity. In contrast, a fashion classic is a style that, once introduced, establishes itself and maintains its popularity over time within the market (Easey 2002). Because of the obsolescence of fashion trends and the manufacture of trends to begin with, the fashion industry produces a desire for the new through a desire for being ‘on trend.’ This is the case when luxury brands regularly launch their new products and promote them on various promotional platforms; from magazine pages to gigantic billboards, from runway shows to global live streaming channels on the Internet, from celebrity endorsement to blogs and ‘like’ pages on social media network.

Even the notion of a fashion classic is a commodity. The value of the fashion classic emerges from how long the name has been historically recognised, the designer’s legacy and its ability to remain current and attract new, and in the case of luxury brands, elite clientele. *Louis Vuitton* leather goods are examples of the notion of a fashion classic. Its merchandise does not follow seasonal changes and has never gone into sales. Rather, its price is regularly increased (www.louisvuitton.com, accessed from 2009 to 2010). According to this immunity to the fashion cycle, *Louis Vuitton*’s products can be perceived as ‘timeless’ and therefore never expire. However, despite the classic character of *Louis Vuitton* leather accessories, the brand launches new products every season provoking new demands from its consumers. This introduction of new designs
consequently outdates its existing merchandise. Thus, it eventually affirms that, despite some ‘classic’ characters in the fashion production, fashion is a short-lived product.

As fashion is a short-lived commodity, luxury brands heavily rely on the fabrication of surplus values and a desire for the new (i.e. being ‘on trend’) to maximise social and financial profits. I turn to Marxist terms of value to demonstrate how luxury brands create these social and financial values and how they manufacture the idea of luxury through their advertising campaigns and other promotional tools such as celebrity endorsements. I argue that the luxury fashion industry has high surplus values because the use-value of the item, be it a purse, a bag, or a pair of shoes, is considerably small compared to the desire, status and luxury lifestyle that owning said item brings. To elaborate upon this account, it is worth pointing out that the fashion industry as a whole is a factory, a factory that, on the first account, produces commodities. This is the case when global conglomerates or individuals, such as LVMH or the Gucci group, possess portfolios of prestigious brands and provide capital support for the cost of producing fashion goods. At the same time, this factory also manufactures surplus values to turn utilitarian functions of the products into financial and social profits. In Marxist and Bourdieu’s terms, this is a process of transforming use- and exchange-values into sign- and symbolic values consumed to indicate wealth and luxury lifestyles.

Surplus values are constructed through publicity, advertising and marketing, all of which contribute to a manufacture of desire. This is the case when designers globally employ fashion models in biannual runway events to display garments and accessories. British fashion brands, including Paul Smith and Burberry, broadcast their upcoming collections via live streaming channels making their next trend available and accessible to the public.³ Editorial and advertising campaigns simultaneously feature the trend through alluring, tall and slender bodies clad in fashion commodities of the next season. Magazines, such as Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, W, and AnOther, publish these new trends and campaigns whilst fashion editors and journalists, including Anna Wintour of The American Vogue and Hilary Alexander of The Daily Telegraph, illustrate their views on the new season’s clothing through articles, critiques, or, on some occasions, through facial expression alone.
Moreover, brands offer and lend their new trends to highly respectable celebrities to wear in significant social platforms, such as music and film awards, television shows, and concerts. Celebrity endorsement has been one of the key strategies of fashion marketing since the beginning of haute couture because iconic film stars, artists, models or singers carry a high visibility which can stimulate fashion consumption (Jackson and Shaw 2006; Okonkwo 2007). This process in a celebrity-dominated culture sees members of the public scrutinise all forms of media to focus on and imitate the fashion and lifestyles of their beloved celebrities (Gibson in Jackson and Shaw, 2006, p.26). “It is as if, by wearing what they wear, we share their lives and privileges” (Jackson and Shaw, 2006, p.206). Thus, to a large extent, celebrity endorsements within the context of fashion advertising help to generate maximum profits due to their public exposure. As a result, it opens up a channel for social media correspondents and supporting fans, including the PR team of the brand themselves, to distribute photographs of celebrities on their blogs and websites providing consecrated social values between the brands and the stars to the global network of fashion audiences.

Market positioning and pricing strategies also provide surplus value in luxury fashion. Easy (2002, p.136) points out that consumers “perceive a relationship between price levels and quality”. They associate high price products with premium quality due to the higher costs in manufacturing, skilled labour and luxurious raw materials. In this sense, price decisions determine the products’ values, define target segments within the market and tie them to the image foregrounded in the commodity.

In the context of this thesis, labours of fashion performance and dance choreographies provide distinct surplus values to fashion commodities and manufacture desire for new consumption. It is evident in Chapter Two that models construct corporeal techniques and perform a series of shapes and walks to exhibit new silhouettes as well as mobility in high fashion products. In other words, they execute choreographies to display fashion in motion. The argument then expands in Chapter Three, where I investigate visual taxonomies linking early modernist dance to the twenty-first century fashion. Through the work of modern dance pioneers, Loïe Fuller, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, in their experimentation between fashion and dance, I illustrate the genealogy and direct influence of modern and post-modern dance on twenty-first century
high fashion. This is most obvious when the fashion industry appropriates movements and corporeal compositions, particularly the concept of dynamic flow, tensile elasticity and experimentation of bodily silhouettes, from modern and post-modern dance archives into fashion trade. These fashion-dance practices work to display visual and kinetic properties within fashion commodities that are also geared to maximising potential exposure. As a result, labours of dance and fashion choreographies produce desire for the new. This raises social and symbolic values in high fashion products, as the commodities are regularly worn by alluring high fashion models, published in the celebrated fashion press, and seen on prestigious social platforms. Labours of fashion performance and dance choreographies are political economies of fashion industry that manufacture the idea of luxury and make fashion ephemeral, or, in this sense, converting labours and social values into surplus values with price tags of high fashion products (Entwistle 2006, 2015 and Evans 2013).

Not only is the fashion product lifecycle ephemeral, but the industry as a whole also operates in this manner. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1993a, p.59, 83), the artistic field is structured around a negation operating between the “establishment” and the “challengers”. The establishments are “those who dominate the field of production and the market through the economic and symbolic capital they have been able to accumulate in earlier struggles by virtue of a particularly successful combination of the contradictory capacities specifically demanded by the law of the field” whilst the challengers are those who have interests in advancing their status within the existing hierarchical structure and therefore contest the independence of those established agents (Bourdieu 1993a, p.83).

To apply Bourdieu’s concept of the establishment and the challengers to the fashion field, the established brands ensure their symbolic power and consecrated status through conservation strategies. 5 This process of producing continuation and communication links the reproduction of a brand’s apparatus with their target consumers. The newcomers challenge this already existing power through “subversion strategies” seeking heterodoxy by devaluing the established figures and assuming greater significance in the field (Bourdieu 1993a, p.83). In this sense, by establishing themselves as upcoming players, the newcomers have to conform to the law of the field yet interrupt its hierarchical structure in order to succeed.
One mode of disruption in the artistic industry, as Boudieu argues, concerns time:

To bring a new producer, a new product and a new system of tastes on to the market at a given moment is to push the whole set of producers, products and systems of taste into the past.

Bourdieu 1993a, p.108

Here, Bourdieu’s quote addresses my concerns that as fashion is a short-lived product pertaining to seasonal changes and the emergence of numerous fads, any challengers in fashion must seek to promote their new visions and collections with a hope of de-valuing and invalidating previously dominant agents. Thus, to summarise the previous points on the fashion industry and its politics, in much the same way that punk employed visual inscription and embodied interventions to challenge the status quo, any ‘challengers’ in fashion will ‘pierce’ their position onto the existing structure. Once entering the system, they further ‘tattoo’ their significance onto the market whilst ‘spitting’ previously established figures into the category of outdated agents in the fashion field. This represents an ongoing tension and negotiation of power between the establishment and challengers within the fashion industry. It is a constant negotiation of power and popularity through the manufacture of the surplus value of the luxury brand or the ‘celebrity’ status of the designer. When Alexander McQueen emerged as the *enfant terrible* of the high fashion industry, he was competing against long standing luxury brands from French and Italian houses such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Gucci. As a result, McQueen looked to the punk history and aesthetics of his native Great Britain to make a bold entrance into the high fashion industry. Having discussed fashion industry and seasonal politics, the next section of this chapter focuses on how McQueen sought to establish himself in the fashion industry whilst adopting punk ideologies, attitude, and other commercial affiliation to enter mainstream fashion industry.

4.2. Punk aesthetics and the appropriation of punk

Punk was both a musical and cultural phenomenon of the late 1970s, especially in the UK (Sabin 1999, pp.2-3). It caused pandemonium and furore amongst politicians, critics and record company executives (Laing 1985). In the twenty-first century, the emblem of punk (i.e. fashion, attitude, rhetoric) was adopted by a new generation of
performers and artists who have made punk a continuing phenomenon. Hebdige (1979) and Laing (1985) employ semiology to extract meanings from punk sign systems from stage name to accents, lyrics, style of music, apparels, gestures and behaviours. Hebdige and Laing conduct their readings of punk in relation to the historical and socio-cultural context of the 1970s. Moreover, Tsitsos (1999) focuses on post-punk movements and examines rules of rebellion whilst Sabin (1999) investigates the impact of punk on the arts, including film, comics, literature and fashion. Sabin sees punk as an “amorphous concept” where the subculture of youth rebellion connotes identifiable attitudes, “a consciousness of class-based politics…a belief in spontaneity and [a practice of] doing it yourself” (1999, pp.2-3). Moreover, he re-situates punk in its historical context and re-questions its political paradigms in relation to the memory, experience and historiography of those involved as punk artists.

According to these studies, one distinctive property which can be drawn from punk sign systems is the aesthetics of shock effect. Punk artists consciously presented this concept because it “involves confronting an audience with unexpected or unfamiliar material…which invades and disturbs the discourse to which that audience is attuned” (Laing 1985, p.78). To shock, or “outrage the public,” was a foremost requirement of punk (Benjamin quoted in Laing 1985, p.76) and this condition took the form of radical juxtaposition, exaggeration, or subversion of normality. To further elaborate punk ideologies, shock effects and strategies for resistance, Dean Lockwood (2009), a music scholar, connects Brian Massumi’s pragmatic guidelines for causing “friction in the molar machine” with post-punk bands (Massumi 1992, pp.103-6). The guidelines offer various ways of developing “new weapons and strategies for resistance and cultural-political engagement” (Lockwood 2002, p.22). In his conference paper, Lockwood illustrates “stop the world” as one of the pragmatics of punk resistance. This strategy has been significantly translated and embedded within the show, Deliverance. To ‘stop the world’, the fabric of common sense needed to be mutilated, and the circuit board that connects “regularised stimuli” and “habitual responses” needed to be destroyed (Massumi 1992, p.103). In this sense, punk experiments sought to vitiate the consecrated regulations set up by the mainstream or establishments by causing an aesthetic revolution that employed shock values and oppositional strategies.
To summarise the key ideas of the punk movement, artists made use of this genre to inscribe political ideologies, shock effects, and strategies for resistance in their performance practice and in doing so, they challenged conventions of the mainstream music industry. Punk became attitudes and aesthetics as artists subverted the established rationale within the field and re-directed the flow of the circuit with the hope of challenging existing rules set by established figures within the industry. These are the attitudes and aesthetics that punk artists employed in order to advance their status within the musical and cultural field, and, in this sense, to ‘stop the world’.

The union between punk’s oppositional strategies and fashion is intrinsic to my argument because shock effects and Lockwood’s pragmatic guidelines for political resistance are witnessed in fashion performance including Deliverance (2003). It challenged the mode of presentation in the high fashion events and critiqued the images of the industry as a whole. Prior to analysing the case study, I will introduce the designer, Alexander McQueen, and choreographer, Michael Clark, and their aesthetic history in appropriating punk ideologies and attitudes to challenge their industries’ mainstream.

Born Lee Alexander McQueen (1969-2010) in East London, McQueen was the son of a taxi driver and a social history teacher. At the age of sixteen, McQueen left school and undertook an apprenticeship at the traditional Savile Row tailors, Anderson & Sheppard, and Gieves & Hawkes (www.alexandermcqueen.com, accessed 16 June 2010). After advancing his expertise in the technical construction of clothing, McQueen moved to the theatrical costumiers, Angels & Bermans. This was where he learnt how to master six methods of pattern cutting and tailoring from the melodramatic period of the sixteenth century (Davies 2009). At the age of twenty, he was employed by the designer Koji Tatsuno and Yohji Yamamoto before he moved to Milan in 1993 and became Romeo Gigli’s design assistant (McQueen in Rose 1997). He returned to London in 1994, where he completed an MA in fashion design at Central St Martins College of Art and Design. His creative talent was spotted by an influential fashion stylist, Isabella Blow, who bought his degree collection, became his mentor, patron, and PR agent, which launched McQueen’s fashion career (www.style.com, accessed 09 June 2010).

In 1996, McQueen became a designer-in-chief at the French Haute Couture House, Givenchy. In 1992, McQueen launched his own label and expanded from
womenswear to menswear, accessories, fragrance and eyewear. Fifty-one per cent of his company is owned by the Gucci Group. His collections are now distributed in over thirty-nine countries through one hundred and ninety-four wholesale accounts including specialty shops and luxurious department stores (www.alexandermcqueen.com, accessed 16 June 2010). Tragically, due to anxiety and depressive disorder, triggered by the death of his mother in early February 2010 and his patron, Isabella Blow, in May 2007, McQueen committed suicide at his home in Green Street, London, on 11 February 2010 (Armstrong 2010; Cartner-Morley 2010).

Focusing on McQueen’s artistic practice in relation to punk oppositional strategies, it becomes clear that he had circulated his shock effect since his early career (Evans 2003). McQueen’s Spring/Summer collection Nihilism featured radically low-rise jeans which barely covered the wearer’s pubic bone (i-D magazine 2010, p.108). One year later, McQueen contested the glamour of the fashion industry by launching his Highland Rape collection, which featured tattered dresses, blood-stained, dishevelled and battered-looking models. To further affirm this rebellious signature, in the second half of the Spring/Summer 1998 collection, McQueen figuratively ‘urinated’ over the high-fashion stage by gushing a stream of water lit by yellow lights from the ceiling of the hall down the catwalk (see Figure 4.1). Through the use of shock value and punk ideologies of rebellion and counter-culture, McQueen began to challenge the mainstream luxury fashion and competed for symbolic power as a newcomer to the industry.
Regarding the choreographer of *Deliverance*, Michael Clark was born in Aberdeen, Scotland on 2 July 1962. Clark studied Scottish dance and ballet as a child prior to his vocational training in classical ballet with Richard Glasstone at the Royal Ballet School in London from 1975 to 1979 (Duerden in Bremser, 1999). During the summer break, Clark attended the Merce Cunningham School in New York, where Cunningham dance technique later became influential in his choreography. After his graduation, he joined the Rambert Dance Company and was a contemporary dancer until 1981. Clark’s career as a choreographer began with Karole Armitage Company, and in 1983 he became a choreographer-in-residence at the Riverside Studios, London. Within that year, he formed his own company and collaborated with other artists in various disciplines whilst continuing to choreograph both for his own company and for other commissioned works until the present day.

In terms of Clark’s aesthetic history, he has attracted controversial attention since the early 1980s through his “anarchic blend of technically proficient dance performance” which references and manipulates classical ballet technique (Duerden in Bremser 1999, p.63). In his work, Clark often makes ballet movements appear distorted in conjunction with unexpected juxtapositions. For instance *cabrioles* are placed adjacent to *pirouettes*, which is unusual for classical ballet phrases. Moreover, in contrast to classical ballet
posture, Clark regularly employs the pelvic shift in his choreography. Musically, his movement vocabulary is consciously performed to popular music, particularly the experimental post-punk movement, such as The Fall, a British post-punk band formed in Greater Manchester in 1976, and Bruce Gilbert, an experimental art-punk English musician. Theatrically, his work frequently uses non-dancers, such as personal friends and family, in conjunction with references to contemporary issues such as drug abuse.

Significantly in Clark’s performances, he regularly replaces the traditional ballet costumes of tutus and sequined leotards with incongruous outfits, props and thematic materials. In 1984, he performed New Puritans in platform boots and a pair of rubber trousers designed by Leigh Bowery (1961-1994), a London-based performance artist, club promoter and fashion designer, which displayed Clark’s buttocks to the audience (see Figure 4.2).

![Figure 4.2: Michael Clark, Ellen van Schuylenburch, Julie Hood and Matthew Hawkins in New Puritans (1984); Source: Dance & Dancers, September 1984, p.32.](image)

Similarly influenced by other punk apparel, Clark presented Our Caca Phoney H (1985) in a deep neckline leotard that revealed his nipples whilst his hair was partly shaved into a Mohican and dyed a vivid colour (see Figure 4.3).
Thus, by investigating McQueen’s and Clark’s early practice, it is evident that they deliberately contravened the lucrative fields of luxury fashion and classical ballet with a punk infusion of styles and values that resulted in them being labelled as “enfants terrible” in the press (Adams 2010; Jones 2009; Apter 2004; Barber 2009). Punk infusions, in this sense, came through representation of the bodies and shock values circulated within their artistic practice: from the radically low-rise jeans in Nihilism (1994) to the cropped buttock trousers of the New Puritans (1984); from battered-looking models in torn, blood-stained dresses of Highland Rape (1995) to punk hairstyle and extremely low neckline leotards in Our Caca Phony H (1985); from, figuratively speaking, urinating over fashion models on a prestigious stage of London Fashion Week with a regular blend of pelvic shifts, nudity, and classical ballet vocabulary performed to punk music, appropriation of punk ideologies and attitudes provide them entrance to the industries’ mainstream. As their practices share core values of punk in both aesthetics and ethos, it is unsurprising that these similarities have led to a partnership between two rebellious British forces, creating Deliverance in 2003.
4.3. The case of *Deliverance* (2003)

The show was cast with a mixture of professional dancers and fashion models who were intensively rehearsed over two weeks in London under the artistic direction of Clark. With a long history of circulating shock values within his choreographic work, Clark shared ideologies and etiquette with McQueen’s brand, and this engagement led to collaborative furor. By appropriating Lockwood and Massumi’s strategy for political resistance, “stop the world”, Clark, as a high art agent, had to infuse *Deliverance* with significant signs. These signifiers involve thematic content and social commentary from various visual readings, including choreographic structure and movement vocabularies, mode of presentation, and the use of bodies. Explicitly, I will draw upon the hybrid between classical ballet and fashion modelling to illustrate how Clark disrupts his high-art training with punk practices placing learned dance vocabulary in the context of fashion advertising.

As the first visual reading, *Deliverance* is based on the work of Sydney Pollack’s 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* What *Deliverance* borrows from the film is thematic content and scenic structure. On another level, *Deliverance* appropriates the radical criticism of the film towards consumerism and materialistic characters within capitalism. McQueen and Clark reassemble some of the meanings from the film, however, in order to maintain McQueen as a key player in the fashion industry. This argument is based upon intertextual references of *Shoot Horses* where I employ a methodological framework in the linguistic discipline, particularly intertextuality, to develop an understanding of key connotations circulating within *Deliverance*. In its disciplinary framing, intertextuality is a methodology developed from literary theory, semiotics and post-structuralism that can also construct meaning in dance. As Adshead-Lansdale proposes:

> if any element of a performance –for example an image, a movement, a sound –can be treated as a ‘text’, then each element can be ‘read’, singly or in units, through codes on which it draws.

Adshead-Lansdale 1999, p.9

In this sense, intertextuality is a process of shaping the meaning of a performance through closely related use of texts from other media. In fashion, consumers are given signifiers
and by exchanging them make new connotations. A system of meaning can be employed by using signs from other systems (e.g. images, feelings or ideas) that are transferred to certain products or brands (Williamson 1978). Visual readings of Deliverance in relation to Shoot Horses will be conducted in tandem with detailed movement analysis, gender analysis and the political economy of the fashion industry. The methodological framework illustrates how post-modern dance choreography adopts attitude and aesthetics from punk movement to display the clothes, provide gender representation and attach surplus values to garments, the McQueen brand and the fashion industry as a whole.

Shoot Horses is a film about a marathon dance contest in the depths of the depression era. The story is set in the run-down La Monica Ballroom, situated on Santa Monica pier near Los Angeles. The film focuses on a group of disparate characters hoping to win the cash prize and be noticed by Hollywood talent scouts. The contestants include a cowboy, a sailor, an actress, and dancers. At the beginning, contestants are partnered up and occupy the hall. They are identified by the number attached to the back of the male dancers’ costumes (see Figure 4.4) and have to dance continuously. Those who stop will be eliminated from the contest. Simultaneously, Rocky, an opportunistic emcee, observes the vulnerabilities of the contestants and exploits them for the audience’s amusement and publicity of the show.

Figure 4.4: Contestants at the beginning of the dance marathon in Pollack’s Shoot Horses. Source: Manrutt Wongkaew (2014), captured as a screen shot from the DVD.
Both *Shoot Horses* and *Deliverance* can be divided into three main scenes: the dance competition, the elimination race and the ‘fall’. The opening scene of *Deliverance* restages the beginning of *Shoot Horses*, the dance marathon. Piercing through the darkness, a sharp sound of trumpets accompanied by brass band instruments sets the tone of upbeat 1940s swing jazz music. Starry lights reflected from the mirror ball hanging from the ceiling light the Salle Wagram hall, in which McQueen’s show was staged. The sound of Gig Young in the role of Rocky emerges to enhance the competitive context:

Yowsah! Yowsah! Yowsah! Welcome to the dance of destiny, ladies and gentlemen. Around, and around, and around we go… and we are only beginning, folks. Only beginning! On, and on, and on, and when will it stop? When will it end? When?

Young in Pollack 1969

Before long, the hall is filled with female dancers and models partnered up with male dancers. They perform basic social dances, such as the *promenade* (a stylised walk) and swing, around the hall to the upbeat jazz music (see Figure 4.5). Some dancers and models use classical ballet steps such as *grand battements* (high kick) and *chaînés*, (a series of turns whilst traveling in one direction) alongside the social dance.

![Figure 4.5: A dance competition in Deliverance; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: www.style.com (Accessed 30 January 2014)](image-url)
Occupying centre stage, Lorena Randi, dressed in McQueen’s black satin jacket with sheer beaded stockings, performs a pas de deux with Tom Sapford, dressed in white. Supported by Sapford, Randi extends her leg from attitude en avant\textsuperscript{10} to attitude à la seconde (open to the side) (see Figure 4.6). In this position, the couple promenade.

![Figure 4.6: Tom Sapsford and Lorena Randi in a pas de deux; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: style.com [Accessed 30 January 2014]](image)

After the full rotation, Randi sharply plunges into a penché\textsuperscript{11} allowing her leg to pierce through the air. Here, Clark’s choreography begins to commercially display and mobilise McQueen’s commodities to its fullest potential. The pas de deux contains a series of shapes and forms derived from balletic vocabulary. These shapes and forms are choreographed movements that endorse McQueen’s fashion silhouette. For instance, arm extensions separate the sleeves from the bodice, displaying their flared lines that are cropped above the wrists. Leg extensions, at the same time, fully expose the stockings from the jacket, unravelling lace and trimming details at mid-thigh. As Randi strikes her leg in a penché, this choreographic shape elevates the sequined stockings and beige stilettos above the ground, raising awareness of the products that are mostly situated below the eye-line to sight (see Figure 4.7). Moreover, Clark’s choreography allows the satin jacket to catch light and reflect its alluring texture to the buyers and fashion audience.
Dancing around Sapsford and Randi, Kate Coyne, dressed in McQueen’s spangled bodices and a voluminous feather gown, is supported by her partner as she exuberantly weaves through the space with a series of battements, lifts, sweeps, swirls, and advanced ballroom dancing steps (see Figure 4.8). Each choreographic movement accelerates motion in the feather gown as it meanderingly sways across the hall, pulses in various rhythmic accents, and seamlessly fountains out of the sequined bodices that shimmer to the ceiling lights.
Clark makes it evident from this opening choreography that the models are trained dancers, and that the clothing is on display through their corporeal accomplishments being on show. On the outer circle, the models are dressed in McQueen’s figure-hugging satin dresses, fishtailed silver lamé and elaborated gowns. Most of them merely promenade and perform a basic swing dance around the hall. They are led by their male partners clad in black and white as a blank canvas which acts to accentuate McQueen’s garments (see Figure 4.9). Despite simple dance steps and walks, the seemingly basic choreography also activates mobility in fashion products. Sways of the hip allow Elson to shimmer the silver lamé texture of the gown to the disco lights. As she sashays along the hall, each stride further expands the fishtailed silhouette of the dress displaying its full volume. Simultaneously, led by her partner in promenades, the tension between her arms and shoulder blades creates pendulous pulls allowing the bias-cutting flare sleeves to jive with the dancing bodies.
As the scene progresses, the music dissolves into a disco song *Dance, Dance, Dance (Yowsah, Yowsah, Yowsah)* released in 1977 from *Chic*, an American disco and rhythm and blues band formed in 1976. This aural code is merged with a sound from Gig Young from *Shoot Horses* echoing the phrase: “Yowsah! Yowsah! Yowsah!” The music then cuts into the rhythmic beat of a tango abetted by the alluring and teasing sound of trumpets set against brass band instruments. As the aural elements pick up their tempo, Clark’s choreography increases its dynamic as if adrenalin had been injected into the competitive air (see Figure 4.10). The spotlights beam towards the centre stage, where each couple takes a turn “striking a pose” and performs its best moves. In a series of chaîné turns, Lisa Davies spins herself towards her partner before striking her right leg and landing it over her partner’s shoulder as if she wanted to score full marks from the judging panel. This is the first time attention is specifically drawn toward individuals and the garments.
Clark’s choreography constantly provides opportunities for the dance and fashion bodies to display McQueen’s fashion in motion. For instance, as a model shimmies across the hall, her pink ostrich-feathered shawl dazzles, capturing the attention from the audience (see Figure 4.11).
At another point, Erin Wasson elevates her right knee in a *passé* position (see Figure 4.12). This posture lengthens the distance between the lifted knee and the standing leg, which expands the ruffled details of her fishtailed skirt and displays the knitted pattern of the lace.

![Figure 4.12: Erin Wasson poses in *passé*; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: www.style.com [Accessed 30 January 2014]](image)

Whether a pink *charmeuse* and ostrich feathered gown, mint satin tap-suits, *tulled* tutus or masculine tailored jacket, Clark’s choreography sets McQueen’s merchandise in motion whilst the dancers and models are brought into the limelight in this dance competition scene. Poised and controlled, the clothed bodies fill the Salle Wagram hall with elegance. Led by their male partners, Clark commands the female bodies to retain their verticality, level their chin and fix their gazes upon the audience. They compose and drape their bodies around the male dancers with great dignity utilising their partners as fashion furniture or human podiums for them to display the garments. As Baudrillard argues, the body is the most aesthetically and favourable consumer object because the “value of exchange” is given “erotic implementation” and in this fashion event, through choreographic shapes, forms, and movements, the body is celebrated as a commercial sign (Baudrillard cited in Brandstetter et al 2000, p.16).

In the next part of the film, weeks into the marathon, *Shoot Horses* presents a series of derbies which lead to the elimination of contestants. In this section, they are clad
in sportswear and compete in an elimination race (see Figure 4.13). Lines are drawn onto the dance floor defining a running track. When the time is up, the three couples who finish last will be eliminated.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4.13: The stage and the contestants in Shoot Horses’ elimination race. Source: Manrut Wongkaew (2014), captured as a screen shot from the DVD**

In an echo of the structure of the derbies in the film, *Deliverance*, in its second scene, stages the elimination race. The ceiling lights turn the Salle Wagram hall into a running track. The models and female dancers are dressed in fluorescent chiffons and sport pieces treading on high heels, accompanied by their male partners who are clad in grayscale vests and shorts. The couples hotly dash around the hall.

McQueen’s stilettos, however, are not designed for this purpose. Within the choreography, the models’ arms begin to swing and pull their bodies outside their kinaesthetic spheres. By doing so, their spines are no longer erect. Their torsos begin to sway, curve, arch and tilt (see Figure 4.14). Whilst some models lose their balance and plunge toward the floor, others slip backwards and abruptly crash without prior warning. These falls interrupt their partners’ flow in the race, which results in a comical struggle.
It is evident that Clark’s choreography began to disrupt the verticality of the fashioned bodies. However, the acceleration of speed, combined with vigorous movements of dashing, tumbling, pushing and pulling, further advance mobility in McQueen’s products displaying layers of the free flow floral chiffon gowns or revealing printed leggings underneath the voluminous skirts.

In Shoot Horses, after several frantic series of derbies and the dance marathon, contestants become distressed, distraught and dishevelled (see Figure 4.15). However, desperate to win the cash prize, they continue to dance.

Figure 4.14: The elimination race; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: style.com [Accessed 30 January 2014]

Figure 4.15: Contestants in Shoot Horses continue to dance after a series of derbies, Source: Manrutt Wongkaew (2014), captured as a screen shot from the DVD
In *Deliverance*, against all the conventions of glamour and beauty at the beginning of the show, the third scene, the ‘fall’, opens downstage with Karen Elson dressed in a crumpled floral printed chiffon gown. The hall is dark and her figure is merely lit by a single follow spotlight. Her body is no longer upright (see Figure 4.16). Her upper limbs are heavy, her chin drops and her energy drains. Her legs are almost paralysed and barely sustain the weight of her heavily hunched torso. After a few attempts to progress further down the runway, she collapses. With hopes of finishing the routine, she pushes her body to resume the vertical stance. However, she is not successful. As Elson continues to fall, her partner appears. He scoops her up, sweeps her legs and drags her down the hall. Finally, he rolls her body over his shoulder and carries her off stage. The selected musical code for this scene is the song *God Bless the Child* sung by Billie Holiday. The abject nature of the lyrics together with Holiday, a struggling figure in capitalist currencies, reinforce Clark and McQueen’s choreographic statement, which is influenced by punk practice and seeks to annihilate the verticality of high fashioned bodies. This argument will be explained in more detail later on in this section.

Figure 4.16: Karen Elson on the verge of collapsing onto the ground;
Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: style.com [Accessed 30 January 2014]
In the McQueen/Clark production, the scene develops, despite a change in lighting and aural code from a dark and dreary tune to contemporary looped, dense, and heavy electronic beats. The theme of spinal descent and exhaustion continues. Dishevelled and disoriented, Lily Cole sways in a zigzag floor pattern across the hall. Erin Wasson hangs her arms over her partner’s shoulders whilst plunging her whole body weight over his. As the couple approaches downstage, he extends her arms and sweeps her body forward. However, as her lower limbs are no longer mobile, her pelvis drastically drops towards the floor breaking the verticality of the bodyline in half (see Figure 4.17). For the last attempt, he carries her in a crucifix position and drags her off stage.

In the final scenes of the film Shoot Horses, Rocky reveals that numerous expenses will be deducted from the prize money, leaving the winner with close to nothing. Shocked by the revelation, the protagonist, Gloria, requests her partner to shoot her. He obliges and when questioned by the police for his motivation, he responds with the film’s title: “They shoot horses, don’t they?”.
In *Deliverance*, the show also reaches its climax with a lone exhausted dancer when Kate Coyne, in a silver sequined gown, collapses centre stage (see Figure 4.19).

By looking at the intertextual framing of *Shoot Horses*, in which Clark’s choreographic structure is so highly referenced, Pollack’s dance-marathon critiques American and other capitalist societies whose members are competing in a life-long contest. To elaborate this concept, Carol Martin examines the American dance
marathons, “hourly dance contests in the 1920s,” which later developed into “infamous Depression-era entertainment” (Martin in Malnig 2009, p.93). Martin explains that the shows were mostly set in run-down dance halls featuring local amateur dancers seeking immediate rewards (e.g. prize money, food, and gifts) from the organiser as well as the spectators. Over time, contestants were engaged in increasingly complex tasks which pushed them to greater extremes. Ironically, this complexity raised the publicity of the show. In this manner, Martin argues that dance marathons were a modern vision of the ancient Roman Colosseum, whose pursuits “grew increasingly violent in order to please an increasingly jaded public” (Martin in Malnig 2009, p.100).

Not only was violence woven into the contests, pre-fabricated and manipulated dramas, too, were interlaced with the events. Marathon publicists often featured one contestant over another with the hope of catalysing conflicts. Moreover, Martin records that when a manager set up a wedding on the dance floor, including a private tent, the couple could stay after they were married. In this sense, Martin concludes that “dance marathons were fixed, staged and arranged to facilitate excessive dramatization”, yet they presented the private individuals as a public commodity (Martin in Malnig 2009, p.99-101).

As a social critique, Shoot Horses raises the theme of exploitation and the dehumanised manipulation taking place between the producer, promoter and audience through American dance marathons, indicating a malfunction in industrial capitalism which failed to provide economic security for those who supplied the labour input. The players who could not tolerate the ongoing pressure would suffer, fail and be eliminated from the game. Warshow reinforces that:

> the marathon is a microcosm...of a fraudulent society, and in particular American capitalistic society, which pretends to make comfort, security and sufficient leisure possible for all its citizens, but does not; which claims to unite its members in a common bond and to subvert their natural aggression toward each other, but which in fact fosters –indeed prides itself in –competition and the carrying out of aggression.

Warshow 1970, p.47

Whether denoting exploitation or dehumanised manipulation amongst the key players in capitalist societies, the dance marathons underlined their mode of victimisation whilst
critiquing consumerism and the materialistic characters of finance capitalism, since “the winners typified the American dream, whereas the losers lived the American real life” (Martin in Malnig 2009, p.99).

In this sense, *Shoot Horses* significantly features characters as commodities and portrays a series of manipulative events in the early twentieth-century dance marathons, just as Martin describes. It explicitly reveals the interplay between human needs as in conflict with social values. As a direct reference and structure, *Deliverance* adopts *Shoot Horses’* signified meanings and values, in particular its social commentaries, and these are transferred onto McQueen’s commodities and brand. Within the space of the Salle Wagram, however, multiple signifiers are juxtaposed.¹²

Not only does the dance marathon McQueen and Clark employed in *Deliverance* serve as a social commentary towards mainstream high fashion and its consumption which was appropriated from punk’s oppositional strategy, but another significant intertextual reference is evident in Clark’s use of Billie Holiday’s song *God Bless the Child.*¹³ This aural element is used to accompany the dance sequence in the third scene, the “fall”, and carries several signified meanings. One interpretation is that it is predicated upon the “unsettling and disruptive effect” that money has over the relationship between a parent and a child (Early 1986, p.415).¹⁴ In the lyrics of the song, Holiday also makes reference to the Biblical verse of the New Testament, Luke, chapter 19, verse 26, which critiques society for its materialism, wealth, and commercial objectives.¹⁵

Secondly, the song portrays Holiday’s sour experiences and view of life. Chilton (1975, p.238) posits that Holiday’s life-equation with the abuse of her vocal talents relates to a series of traumatic events in her childhood and adolescence and later racial prejudice, narcotic addiction and unfortunate love affairs. Friedwald further postulates that Holiday was:

> betrayed by the American system of racial and sexual politics, yet alive in the world of crass, illegitimacy, prostitution, inhuman exploitation and abuse…These are the ‘mounting list of Holiday horrors’ which exemplify her as a victim of the American Dream.  

Friedwald 1991, p.137
In this sense, Holiday represents a figure struggling within American capitalist society where commercial objectives, racial and sexual politics, and inhuman exploitation are often the predominant currency. Thus, by employing *God Bless the Child* as a soundtrack to the dance sequence, its signified meanings underpin Clark’s and McQueen’s social commentary. This is visually reflected in the choreography, where the model, Karen Elson, clad in McQueen’s lucratively flamboyant garment struggles, falls, and is carried across the runway. Cumulatively, *Shoot Horses*, the dance marathons, and *God Bless the Child*, demonstrate the tactics of punk and its oppositional strategies which “aimed imaginatively to disrupt the everyday life of capitalism in order to expose its oppressive nature”, or, in the sense, ‘stop the world’ (Laing 1985, p.126).

To support my visual reading of *Deliverance*, McQueen’s numerous interviews confirm his critical stance. In response to the question “What is it that you bring to the fashion world?” asked by Charlie Rose, McQueen replied that fashion can be perceived as a shallow business involving endless parties and pretentious social networking. Therefore, in his artistic practice, “I do like to expose what is going on in the outside world into the fashion world…I just have to keep my feet on the ground” (McQueen in Rose 1997). Six years later, interviewed after the premiere of *Deliverance*, McQueen’s message remained consistent (McQueen in Blank 2003). In relation to punk ideologies appropriated by the fashion context, McQueen emphasised that “I am always being a rebel…which is to destroy the fashion industry from within. I come from the alley…not some boudoir left bank of Paris” (McQueen interviewed by The Business Channel (2008). In response to being claimed as an anarchist designer, he commented that:

> I do not like to put on a smoked screen over everything to make the world the prettiest place because it is not. And I try to reflect that in my work. Sometimes it gets great praised, some time it gets slated. If that makes me an anarchist, that is cool.

*McQueen interviewed in BBC’s *British Style Genius*, 2008*

Thus, McQueen’s statements connect with an intertextual and semiotic reading of *Deliverance’s*, by affirming the objectives of his fashion and its representation against a
series of values derived from a materialism, manipulation and shallowness within the fashion industries, including its role in global capitalism.

*Deliverance*, particularly “the fall,” can also be interpreted as a surreal contestation between grace and the grotesque. Its collapse of spinal verticality and the drainage of the dancer’s physical energy in Clark’s choreography are set against McQueen’s highly lavish garments which are typically found within global luxury fashion (see Figure 4.16, 4.17 and 4.19). In relation to “the fall”, Brandstetter (2000) examines the concepts of the body in modern society, particularly off-balance bodily movements or those that fall out of the prescribed form. She raises the notion of standing and falling within the discipline of phenomenology in relation to kinaesthesia. She refers to phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in conjunction with Waldenfels in order to suggest that man’s upright gait carries its stability. This movement, she suggests, can signify forms of being and, therefore, a disturbance of verticality in the spinal posture, such as stumbling and falling, can be seen as failures in motion and human forms of being. As Waldenfels emphasises:

In falling, we touch the boundaries of our being. In falling over or falling down, we enter a movement that slips out of our control.

Waldenfels in Brandstetter and Völckers 2000, p.126

Brandstetter’s thinking about bodily comportment most explicitly connects with *Deliverance* in the gender relationship between the male dancers and the models. This is the case when Clark, visually and stylistically, adopts Kenneth MacMillan’s approach to the *pas de deux* in terms of manipulation between the male and the female bodies. MacMillan became the director and principal choreographer of the Royal Ballet after the resignation of Frederick Ashton in 1970 and is famous for a pungent sense of character, focusing on the darkest aspects of the human psyche. MacMillan choreographed dance duets between lovers, which often took place in private spaces that were sexually and emotionally charged. Significantly, he created ballets that deal with dark subjects matters, such as *Manon* (1974) and *Isadora* (1981). These works illustrate ill-fated female characters in the world of men, sexual exploitation and monetary power. Similarly, *Mayerling* (1978) portrays a tragedy in the double suicide of Rudolf, Crown Prince of
Austria, and Baroness Mary Vetsera, and *The Judas Tree* (1992) contains a gang-rape scene. Rather than presenting the decorative side of the ballet, MacMillan affirmed “I am very interested in people and I wanted to portray the dilemma of people living, working and being with each other” (MacMillan interviewed by Bailey 1990). His choreography reached “new heights of dramatic intensity in classical ballet”, and his critical position gave him a reputation as the *enfant terrible* of British ballet in that period (Thorpe 1992a, p. 27; 1992b, p.67).

Female characters regularly appear as victims of the ballet and the emotions that the characters experience are narrated from the choreographic craftsmanship of MacMillan’s *pas de deux*. Female bodies are often forcefully manipulated by male dancers who distort the bodily alignment of classical ballet. The pelvis is often pushed beyond the limitation of the standing leg. For instance, in *The Judas Tree* (1992), Edward Watson wraps his left arms around Leanne Benjamin’s torso and scoops her body into a reverse vertical stance towards his right shoulder. He then places his right hand on her inner thigh and pushes it in the opposite direction. By doing so, it distorts her linear bodily alignment between the spine, pelvis and lower limbs (see Figure 4.20).

Figure 4.20: *The Judas Tree* (1992) features Edward Watson and Leanne Benjamin performed at the Royal Opera House on March 2010; Photo: Johan Persson; Source: www.independent-dance-reviews.com [Accessed 30 January 2014]
The manipulation of the ballerina reaches its height in *Mayerling* (1978). In the bedroom scene, Prince Rudolf elevates Stephanie, who holds a first arabesque position in her legs and pelvis. He then spins her body around before dropping and twisting her body towards the floor. On the verge of collapsing, he scoops her body over his shoulder and swings her around once more. Rudolf repeats the swing-drop sequence before throwing her body onto the floor. As Stephanie reaches towards him, he rejects her pleas by grabbing her waist, spinning her body over his shoulder and dropping it over his knees. Before she fully rests her body weight over his lap, he grabs her arms and twists her body over her head. This grip forces her upper body to become erect and rotate. In agony, she elongates her left leg in the air. In this sense, the distortion of her bodily alignments through the manipulation portrays both the physical and emotional agony of the female character.

Moreover, in MacMillan’s *pas de deux*, these constant directional changes also include the level between the bodies and the floor. In *Romeo and Juliet* (1965), Christopher Gabel supports Lynn Seymour, who poses in an arabesque position with a high arch in her upper back. In a split second, she dives into a penché. Gabel then throws her body above his head and before catching it in a ‘fish’ position (bended legs and torso that drape around the male partner) it lands two-inches above the ground. In relation to gravity, female dancers often throw and abandon their body weights onto the male dancers with such force that they can be swung around the stage whilst obtaining a minimal point of contact. Moreover, female bodies often hang in vulnerable positions which cannot be sustained without the aid of the male dancers (see Figure 4.21).
Similarly, in the final act of *Isadora* (1981), after receiving the news of the death of her children, Madame Duncan screams in agony and her body is heavy and disoriented. She soullessly recedes before collapsing over her partner. He tries to push her lifeless body back to the vertical stance but fails the task (see Figure 4.22). In this *pas de deux*, the female body loses its verticality and is unable to sustain her body weight in order to represent her despair. Throughout this scene, the female dancer requires her partner’s support in order to complete the dance sequence.

![Figure 4.22: Isadora (1981) performed by the Royal Ballet on March 2009; Photo: John Ross; Source: www.ballet.co.uk](https://example.com)

Viewing *Deliverance* again, its dance duets operate in a similar manner to those in MacMillan’s ballets. In terms of the manipulation of the female bodies, Elson’s partner catches her by the waist whilst scooping his hand underneath her left leg and dragging her body across the stage (see Figure 4.23). The theme of manhandling continues as the scene develops (see Figure 4.24)
With regard to the vulnerable position of the female bodies, Randi tumbles across the hall before her body solidifies into a crucifix position whilst her partners elevate her body more than six feet above the ground and carry it off stage (see Figure 4.25).
In relation to the drainage of energy, Soukupova soullessly treads downstage. Her lifeless upper limbs magnetise her already hunched torso to hang over the bent legs, bringing her closer to the ground (see Figure 4.26a). For Boscono, her right knee gives in, and her left leg becomes paralysed. Just before she collapses, her partner catches her underneath the armpits and drags her across the hall (see Figure 4.26b).
What might be drawn from the relationship amongst the gendered bodies in *Deliverance* is akin to those in MacMillan’s *pas de deux*: a concern with the victimisation of female bodies, or, in Brandstetter’s terms, failures in motion and human forms of being.\(^{17}\) Thus, by presenting grotesque, exhausted and flaccid female high-fashioned figures tumbled and dragged across the stage in vulnerable positions, yet adorned with luxury garments, Clark reinforces the notions of failure in human forms in relation to McQueen’s statements about bodies which perform in the fashion industry. This is a business in which youth and beauty are often glorified and, according to tabloids, to be associated with negative labelling such as hauteur, superficiality, ageism and narcissistic body-fascism is said to provoke eating disorders. The condemnation of the modelling industry escalates as stories of Kate Moss’s affair with cocaine and Naomi Campbell’s tantrums catch the media’s interest, which has further ‘handcuffed’ this business. It is also significant that high fashion turnarounds make female bodies as indispensible to the desire to be ‘on trend.’ They are central figures, hired to perform, circulate and disseminate fashion knowledge (Entwistle 2006, 2009, 2015). However, they are disposable as a labouring body because there are always more models and dancers to choose, from younger to taller, from better bone structure to more seductive signature walks, or a better career portfolio.

The vulnerable fashion bodies performed in *Deliverance* can also be linked to the consumer body of advanced capitalist societies, as Baudrillard argues (Baudrillard in Brandstetter *et al.* 2000). They are commercial signs allowing fashion audiences to associate themselves with the chosen models, clothing and the brands, or, in other words, seeing themselves as a new owner of the advertised items. Thus, by subverting the distinct upright comportment, victimising the clothed female bodies and drawing upon recent British ballet and choreography infused with punk attitude, Clark visually and aesthetically destabilises the network of fashion consumption and weakens core values of the physical bodies. As such, the choreographic manipulation of the clothed female bodies in *Deliverance* reinforces the meanings that are communicated by the intertextual references (such as *Shoot Horses*, American dance marathons, *God Bless the Child* and the life of Billie Holiday) and movement vocabulary (such as the collapse of the erect spinal posture) employed in this fashion event.
To summarise the shifting ideologies from punk to high fashion, both McQueen and Clark have subsumed punk’s oppositional strategies and shock tactics in their artistic practice since the beginning of their career. In Deliverance, they draw upon their own interests in these strategies (i.e. ‘stop the world’) through the use of their punk destructive personae and grotesque bodily movements (such as tumbling, falling, the collapse of spinal posture and drainage of the energy) and provocative intertexts (such as Shoot Horses and God Bless the Child) in order to challenge the representation of the clothed bodies in mainstream high fashion. In doing so, they present a critique of commercialism in capitalist society.

### 4.4. Politics of the merry-go-round?: Punk and commercial gains

In direct contradiction to McQueen’s and Clark’s social commentary and anti-establishment strategies within Deliverance, McQueen’s financial income heavily relies upon the canonical and hierarchical structure of the capitalist society which celebrates new demands in fashion consumption. From these commercial perspectives, McQueen’s marketing team also employs branding and promotional strategies, including celebrity endorsements, market positioning and pricing strategy, to guarantee his financial profits, all of which operate during and outside the performance of Deliverance. These strategies provide surplus values to McQueen’s commodities, which is a fundamental concept in fashion promotion raised in point 6.1. ‘Fashion industry and seasonal politics’ that ties additional values onto fashion products beyond their utilitarian functions.

**a) Celebrity endorsements**

In response to the expectations of celebrity endorsement, McQueen designed a white dress for Kate Winslet, a British actress, worn at her wedding with James Threapleton on November 22, 1998. Moreover, Lady Gaga, an international pop artist, executed the dance routine in her music video Bad Romance whilst dressed in garments designed by McQueen as part of his Spring/Summer 2010 collection (see Figure 4.27).\(^{18}\)
Not only utilising celebrities as mannequins, the front row seats of *Deliverance* were reserved for influential figures within the fashion industry.¹⁹ As shown in Figure 4.28, these fashion personalities included Kate Moss, a British fashion model; Isabella Blow, a British stylist; Philip Traecy, a British millinery artist; Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of the *American Vogue*; Franca Sozzani, editor-in-chief of the *Italian Vogue*; Michael Roberts from the *New Yorker*; and Jonathan Newhouse, a chairman of the *Conde Nast International*, which controls over one hundred and twenty-six magazines worldwide ranging from *Vogue, Tatler, GQ, Vanity Fair* and *W* to *Architectural Digest* and *Easy Living*. The invited guests included Domenico De Sole, President and chief executive officer of the *Gucci Group* and Francois Pinault, a founder of *PPR*, a luxury goods conglomerate which owns the *Gucci Group*.²⁰
By inviting these figures, not only did McQueen retain a good relationship, but he also launched a bid to secure sponsorship and publicity. These agents are not challengers or newcomers within the fashion field but, rather, establishment figures within the mainstream luxury fashion industry.
b) Market positioning and pricing strategies

Inevitably, superior value is assigned to the McQueen brand rather than other mass production. Consumers celebrate the brand as if McQueen’s garments confer special powers beyond a material utility to those who possess them (Cortese 2004). The special powers that the McQueen merchandise denotes can be demystified through market positioning and pricing strategies. The basic cost in McQueen’s garments is derived from their innovative design, advanced-skilled labour and high quality material. However, there are other signs and strategies employed as surplus-values in his brand and commodities which result in an increased selling price.

Pricing strategy is one of the goal objectives used by McQueen’s marketing team to build a prestigious reputation for the label. For this reason, McQueen’s t-shirts can cost up to £295, a price which does not sound as humbly punk as McQueen claims to be in his interviews and critiques of commercialism in Deliverance. Rather, the terms “lord of misrule”, coined by McDowell (2008), or “the hooligan of English fashion” (British Style Genius 2009) have become a symbolic value enhancing McQueen’s brand image and advancing his commercial profit. As Okonkwo (2007) argues, luxury brands do not happen by accident. They have been uniquely crafted through consistent and diligent strategies in the branding and marketing plan.

Moreover, by employing Michael Clark as a ‘cultural ambassador’ from the contemporary dance context, Clark’s art and its symbolic-values are added to the commodities of the costumes. This is a process of “value leakage” (Cortese 2004, p.128), or exchange in advertising where “values are not fixed and adherent but…exist in exchanges” (Williamson 1978, p.42). Distinctively, Clark’s choreography commercially mobilises the garments to its fullest potential throughout the performance of Deliverance, even in the “fall”, when Lepere paddles her legs whilst being carried by her partner. The movement of her legs separates the voluminous satin trousers whilst its momentum displays the weight of the crêpe fabric (see Figure 5.29).
Figure 5.1: Lepere paddles her legs; Source: www.elle.com

From choreographic shapes in *pas de deux* and ballroom dancing steps to disruptive dashes and earthbound stumbles, these examples illustrate how Clark’s choreography reinforces the design of McQueen’s garments and heightens the promotional values of the event.

By viewing the case study through the lens of punk theories, semiology, detailed movement analysis, gender analysis, political economy of luxury fashion and promotional contexts, such as those of celebrity endorsements, marketing positioning, pricing strategies, and the use of contemporary art dance, *Deliverance* can be read as a new form of fashion event. Its political attitude and aesthetics, inherited from the punk movement, detaches the performance of choreography in order to critique the mainstream fashion industry. Ironically, however, fashion is a business operating under the economic structure of capitalism of which McQueen is a key player. This dualism in McQueen’s artistic practice is parallel to the artists of punk. Sabin (1999, p.5) comments on the ambivalent character of punk whose subversive strategies promoted anti-commercialism and commercialism at the same time. Punk rock bands may try to detach themselves from mainstream popular music industry but, in many cases, punk artists were employed by major record companies to sell music.
In a parallel fashion, Vivienne Westwood, an incendiary British fashion designer, contests consumerism by encouraging the public not to regularly purchase new garments but carefully select their favourite items and wear them repeatedly (Westwood interviewed by Marie Claire TV 2010). However, as Brockes (2007) from The Guardian puts it, Westwood may be more “concerned with combating the ‘drug of consumerism’ than making the perfect pair of trousers… Just do not ask about those £60 T-shirts”.

Thus, in staging Deliverance, McQueen may have critiqued the economics and superficiality of the fashion industry; nevertheless, he too is a player of capitalist society where human needs and social values are frequently in conflict. Profit in his business is crucial in order to secure his status and survive in the canonical and hierarchical world of the luxury fashion industry. This contradiction between punk politics and commercial realities resonated with the film of Shoot Horses. Horace McCoy, the author of the original novel, mirrors his perspectives on this subject via Gloria, the protagonist, in her speech:

This whole business is a merry-go-round. When we get out of here, we are right back where we started.

McCoy 1935, p.76

Connecting McCoy’s thinking about the merry-go-round business with high fashion, “Westwood seems to walk the walk. She made headlines earlier this year by telling people not to shop. Making special clothes that, like some of these, aren’t disposable is one way to spin it. But if you thought about it too long, you’d eventually get to the question: If she's right, what are we doing here?” (Mistry 2010).

4.5. Conclusion

In closing this chapter, McQueen and Clark appropriate punk attitudes and aesthetics in Deliverance through subversive strategies as a tactic to enter the fashion field. They fabricated shock values and a pragmatic guideline for political resistance and interlaced them within the fashion event, employing punk’s subversive ideologies, grotesque bodily movements and provocative inter-texts to ‘stop the world’. By communicating through these signs, Deliverance challenges a representation of clothed bodies in mainstream high fashion and critiques commercialism in capitalist society. The
collaboration between dance, or contemporary ballet, and fashion that McQueen and Clark undertook with *Deliverance* began to construct an alternative approach to modelling the body and social values. It also allowed them to disturb the conventional signs of glamour from the lucrative fashion context within which McQueen operated.

However, *Deliverance* still fulfils the choreography of the fashion event and provides surplus values to McQueen’s brand. The Terpsichorean performance was commodified and inevitably subjugated by fashion merchandising and marketing strategies which subscribe to the politics of a merry-go-round. McQueen may distinguish his brand by setting his objectives against the establishment and hierarchical structure within the fashion industry. Nevertheless, he cannot abandon the commercial aspects of advanced capitalism which supply the financial capital to his business, which, ultimately, prolongs his artistic practice.

Both McQueen and Clarke demonstrated a good understanding of the fashion industry. They were able to subvert certain normative aesthetics of fashion design while still maintaining, and perhaps even exceeding their own reputations. In other words, in their thinly veiled critique of the fashion industry, they nevertheless become significant members of the industry they are attempting to critique. By using punk ideologies, they are able to engage in a critique that emerges as cool, subcultural yet relevant, which grants them greater status and possibly even respect in a fickle industry.

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**Notes**

1 Due to limited archival resources, the referenced material studied is the recorded video archive from the live performance at the Salle Wagram, which has been edited and featured in the Alexander McQueen’s official website, www.alexandermcqueen.com. I am aware that Clark’s choreography was created for a live event whereby the perspectives between audience and the cameras are different. Moreover, screen dance components such as selections of shots and editing process play a vital role within the selected material. As a result, I have considered the differences between screen dance and stage choreography in my analysis.

2 This claim derives from several McQueen’s interviews (Blanks 2003; the Business Channel 2008; McDowell 2008 and Rose 1997). This account will be further explained as the chapter develops.


4 The House of Worth and Poiret in Paris sponsored popular and influential societal women and actresses to promote their luxury garments (Jackson and Shaw, 2006).

5 The conservation strategies in Bourdieu’s concepts run parallel to Brian Massumi’s notion of “the rational foundation for order” (Massumi 1992, p.4). This is a process whereby the established brands employ “limitative distribution,” such as logos or specific law, to celebrate their “hierarchical ranking,” which operates as a means to measure a supreme standard and the degree of excellences (ibid.).
“Friction in the molar machine” is the strategy which constitutes resistance as a way of becoming. Massumi (1992, p.4) critiques Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and explores “the space of nomad thought” as opposed to State space. The nomad thought is a process of becoming which is operated autonomously but nevertheless is in conjunction with the confined order assigned by the State. See Massumi (1992) Monstorsity, pp.94-106.

In *The Shivering Man* (1987), Julie Hood is dressed in a red leotard and a short frill, thrusting her pelvis back and force whilst pulling her underwear. In *Mmm...* (1992) Clark strikes his legs in *battement* whilst pushing his pelvis forward (Glasstone 1994).


From this point onward, I will refer to Pollack’s film as *Shoot Horses*.

This is a position where a dancer poses on one leg with the other extended with the knee slightly bent to the front.

This is a movement where one leg is extended backwards and other is standing on the floor. From this position, a dancer leans forward as the extended leg is raised.

See Williamson (1978), Beasley and Danesi (2002) for more details regarding the process of decoding signs in advertisements and the exchange of meanings.

The song was written by Holiday and Herzog Junior in 1939 and recorded in 1941 under the Okeh label.

According to Holiday’s autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1984), an argument with her mother over money led to the song. This was because she lent money she had earned as a singer to her mother, ‘Mom Holiday’s café’. When she requested the money back, her mother refused, which led to an argument. This was where she said the line “God bless the child that’s got his own” and walked out. This became the starting point for Holiday to turn it into a song (Holiday 1984).

‘He [A man of noble birth] replied, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away’ (The International Bible Societies 1980, p. 1054)

There is no written or verbal evidence to confirm a direct link between Clark’s movement vocabulary in *Deliverance* and MacMillan’s choreographic style. However, MacMillan was the director of the Royal Ballet between 1970 and 1977 and remained a principal choreographer until the end of the 1980s (Parry in RAD 2002, pp. 6, 8). The reign of MacMillan’s directorship covered the period where Clark studied at the Royal Ballet School (1975-1979). This may suggest a leakage of choreographic styles and artistic directions that Clark may have witnessed during his vocational training at the Royal Ballet School.

This analysis maintains its focus on socioeconomic of the fashion performance but expands onto the aesthetic labour of fashion modelling and the gendered bodies.

The single was released in October 26, 2009 under Interscope Records (www.ladygaga.com 2010).

Celebrities form close interrelationships with fashion shows, particularly in their attendance to the events. Designers need celebrities to enhance their brand images, values and publicity whilst, symbiotically, these celebrities are aware that by attending the fashion events, they may be featured on the cover of lifestyle magazines or broadcasted in popular television programmes. In this sense, it secures publicity for both parties (Everett and Swanson 2006, p.18).

*The Gucci Group* is one of the leading global conglomerates in retail and luxury goods which carries extensive brand portfolios such as *Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Boucheron, Gucci, Sergio Rossi, Stella McCartney* and *Yves Saint Laurent*.

In 1997, McQueen removed the title of his Spring/Summer 1998 collection from *Golden Shower* and changed it to *Untitled* to avoid any offence that may occur to his sponsor, American Express. According to McQueen, “you strive to get that equilibrium and you try to crack that perfect ideal of creativity and commercialism” (McQueen in D’Souza 2001).