Chapter Five:
Terpsichore as a Mannequin?: Political Economies of the Fashion Performance in Art Dance Productions

Figure 5.1: Ksenia Ovsyanick in English National Ballet’s Firebird (2012);
Photographed by Tristram Kenton; Source: The Observer, Sunday 25 March 2012 [online] Available:
http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/mar/25/beyond-ballets-russes-blake-diptych-review
[Accessed 26 January 2014]

The time for the reunification of the separate arts has arrived…All the arts, each of which has achieved an enormous development individually, must be united in one work…

Leonid Sabaneiev quoted in Dömling 1994, p.9
Cultural capital can in turn…be put to use for the accumulation of economic capital…By exploiting their financial power,…corporations such as the Prudential…transformed selected arts organizations into [their] public relations agents in order to promote [their] corporate image in the most favourable light possible.

Chin-Tao Wu 2002, p.127, 164

Opening the chapter with two visual examples, each accompanied by a short quote, I propose two schools of thought to critically evaluate the relationships between dance and fashion performance in their socioeconomic context. Fashion performance in this chapter lies in the ‘artistic collaborations,’ specifically costume design for art dance productions. The first camp celebrates interdisciplinarity in art events. I employ the English National Ballet’s (ENB) contemporary ballet production of Firebird, premiered at the London Coliseum, London, in March 2013, as a visual illustration. Under the design supervision of David Bamber, a womenswear design studio director for the American luxury brand, Tom Ford, the performance revived this dynamic Ballet Russes production and reinterpreted it in terms of choreography and design. For example, a
hand-painted bodysuit with a wing motif is used for the principal dancer, Ksenia Ovsyanick. As Ovsyanick performs her vigorous solo, a movement that is “spiked and fractured to a glittering mosaic” (Mackrell 2012, p.1), the oversized feathers from the headwear down to the ballerina’s shoulders and spine shimmer and flutter against the dimly lit set, accentuating the movement of the ballerina (see Figure 5.1). Interviewed at the Ballets Russes Design Perspectives event (2010)¹, Rob Phillips, creative director of London College of Fashion, and Stina Quagerbeur, the choreographer for the event, argued for the collaborative affairs between the disciplinary arts.² Collaborative affairs in their sense refer to mixed media collaboration, the spirit that Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes paved the way for other artists to follow in the early twentieth century when they staged seasons that promoted designers and composers alongside star dance performers (Cunniff 2010; Andres 2010). One of the claimed objectives raised at this celebratory retrospective event was to “recognise the incredible legacy of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and…examine the significant impact that Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes continues to have, not only on dance but also on art, design and fashion” (V&A 2010, p.1).³

Contradictory to the set objectives, in the adjacent Raphael Gallery stood a two-metre tall banner promoting the ENB company. Upstairs, alongside the event’s programme before the lecture theatre, piles of leaflets stating the Christmas Magic were provided to advertise ENB’s new ballet productions for the winter 2010-2011 seasons. London College of Fashion also discreetly promoted their design institution by including a list of undergraduate courses, senior staff, associate lecturers and visiting practitioners in the end credits of the short-film presentation. By evidencing the promotional materials from both ENB and London College of Fashion, I therefore propose the second school of thought that argues for commodity relations in corporate art intervention or, in other words, I call deep into the commercial nature of sponsorship.

Penhaligon’s, a British fragrance brand, claims to capture the scent of the ballet in their new eau de perfume Iris Prima under the slogan “The Spirit of the ballet. Bottled”. In the advertisement, the brand’s iconic bottle occupies centre stage and consumes the spotlight. The corporeal body of a ballerina that predominantly inhabits this space is starkly reduced to a ghostly shadow (see Figure 5.2). In the window display, the
Corporeality of classical ballet is absent, as the visual merchandiser tied together pointe shoes and hung them from the ceiling racks (see Figure 5.3). To a certain extent, it conjures up an image of meat racks in a slaughterhouse, where lifeless meat products are hoisted by metal hooks ready to be filleted and sold. The promotional event included Lauretta Summerscales and Nathan Young, two rising stars of *Tribute to Rudolf Nureyev* (2013), performed at the London Coliseum. Summerscales and Young posed as a window display to Iris Prima at Penhaligon’s flagship store on Regent Street. The dance bodies were kept in a curved glass branded with the company’s logo in a knee-height size. The curved façade transforms the display space to a life-sized bottle of the scent. In this sense, the display explicitly corporealised the slogan of “The Spirit of the ballet. Bottled”. 

![Figure 5.3: Iris Prima window display; Source: www.penhaligons.com](image)

By proposing these two schools of thought, I situate ‘fashion performance’ in art dance productions and call upon theories of political economies to investigate socio-politics behind mixed media collaboration as well as corporate art intervention. This chapter investigates the area where luxury fashion designers assume the role of costume designers for art dance performance. The performance exchange between fashion and dance often includes fashion designers imported into the art dance domain and this special celebration was no exception. In order to interrogate the creative process and negotiations of artistic collaboration, the first section of the chapter investigates the terms
'mixed media collaborations' in fashion and dance practice. I then apply this notion, which has been critiqued and reformulated, onto case studies situated within the recent Ballets Russes productions and other artistic collaborations in twenty-first-century British art dance. However, in the second section, I challenge these artistic associations with corporate marketing strategies and their policies of art sponsorship in order to see what has happened to the crossover between fashion and dance in the mainstream theatre and dance worlds. I will employ two case studies, *Shimmer* (2004) and *The Dying Swan* (2009), to consider exploitation within these corporate art interventions.

In so doing, this chapter argues that artistic collaboration has multi-faceted implications. To some extent, collaborations between fashion designers and choreographers can nurture artistic exploration and synthesise dance and fashion in its interdisciplinarities. Nevertheless, under the veneer of artistic collaboration, dance performances can become increasingly controlled and commodified by the corporate politics of art intervention. In this place, fashion designers increasingly consume art dance productions as a promotional platform to advertise their luxury brands and commodities. In a reciprocal fashion, the fashion industry cannot be condemned for its exploitation within the art dance domain. Amidst the process of re-production in late capitalism where many industries strive to be commercially viable, dance companies too, subscribe to this mercantile nature. In exchange for glossy fashion press coverage and advancement in box office sales, some choreographers trade their prestigious status in the cultural field for financial profits, disguised underneath the terms and concepts of artistic affiliation.

5.1. **Artistic collaboration and its transaction for socio-economic exchange**

Has the goddess of dance been moulded into Barbie dolls, a dancing mannequin hired with a purpose of displaying garments for couture houses? In order to determine whether art dance bodies dressed in lucrative costumes designed by luxury fashion designers can sustain their artistic integrity and cultural values, this section investigates how this new genre of choreographic collaboration ties into theories of political economy, particularly in its transaction for socio-economic exchange. I will employ case studies which feature fashion and dance as interdisciplinarities to elucidate this concept,
starting from the milestone collaborations of the Ballets Russes repertoires to the contemporary dance productions of the twenty-first century. Within this section, I argue that the costumes designed by fashion designers to a certain extent can enrich the visual aesthetics of the performance, enhance choreography and further narrate the thematic content of the show.

The Ballets Russes and its repertoires have been widely acclaimed art forms which prescribed to the notion of collaborative dance productions. Referencing the first seasons of the Ballet Russes performances between 1909 to 1914, Jane Pritchard (2010, p.1), a dance scholar and exhibition curator at the Victoria and Albert museum, explains that the productions were visually bursting with exotic designs from such artists as Léon Bakst, whose “bejewelled colours, swirling Art Nouveau elements and sense of the erotic re-envisioned dance productions as total works of art”. Extending Bakst’s design beyond the “rejuvenation and dissemination of the cultural heritage of Russia”, Michelle Potter (1990, p.156), another dance scholar, argues for a close connection between Bakst’s costume design and Isadora Duncan’s performances in St. Petersburg from late 1904 to 1909 and the impact that contemporary dance had upon visions in costume designs. Potter compares Bakst’s full-length drawing of Duncan with his sketches for the Blue Sultana in Schéhérazade (1910) and identifies similarities between the poses of the drawn figures (Potter 1990, pp.160-1). Moreover, by looking at Bakst’s drawing of the two Bacchantes for Narcisse (1911), “Bakst’s models are drawn in unrestrained movement, recalling Isadora’s photographs and hence her poses in performance” (Potter 1990, p.167). According to Potter, these case studies exemplify an artistic convergence between dance and costume design.

Collaboration between artists in the Ballet Russes productions continued in its later seasons. A clear example can be witnessed in Le Train Bleu (1924), a light-hearted ballet set on the French Riviera. Bronislava Nijinska’s choreography, which features sports and leisurely lifestyles, is further liberated by knitted wool swimsuits and jersey sportswear designed by a French fashion designer, Gabrielle Chanel (see Figure 5.4a). By replacing restricted corsets and tutus with stretched fabrics exclusively consumed for male undergarments in the Victorian era, Chanel’s costumes allow dancers to move freely, thus enhancing the spirit of the ballet. Moreover, to further accelerate a sense of
freedom, a French-based artist, Pablo Picasso, paints the drop curtain of the production featuring two voluptuous women leaping over the mountains in oversized Greek-inspired tunics with low cut necklines (see Figure 5.4b).

Figure 5.4a (left): *Le Train Bleu* (1924) featuring Gabrielle Chanel’s costumes; Photo: Sasha; Source: V&A 2010;

Figure 5.4b (right): Oil on canvas drop curtain painted by Pablo Picasso; Source: http://artinvestment.ru/en/news/exhibitions/20091027_dyagilev_gtg.html [Accessed 04 January 2011]

Thus, as seen in *Le Train Bleu* and Bakst’s costume designs, these Ballets Russes productions illuminate how specific disciplinary arts can complement other art forms in the collaboration.

On another level of artistic exchange, outside the theatre, the visual aesthetics of Ballets Russes performances have continued to inspire other art forms, including fashion, since the twentieth century. Yves Saint Laurent, a French fashion designer, designed many of his couture collections (1976 – 1999) with motifs from the Ballets Russes’ visual iconography, such as geometric forms, vivid colours and Oriental themes (see Figure 5.5a) (Pritchard 2010). For example, the Autumn/Winter collection, *Opéra Les Ballets Russes* (1976), featured silk and velvet garments embroidered with metal thread, pearl and glass beads. Moreover, the Autumn/Winter collection of 1979 paid homage to Picasso and Diaghilev through the ornamented designs made of silk, satin and velvet
which were decorated with lace, sequins, and glass beads. The inspirations from the Ballets Russes continued in the Spring/Summer 1991, *Collection Robe à Capuche, Le Manteau d'Organza*, and the Autumn/Winter 1999, *Collection La Blouse Roumaine* (Pritchard 2010). In September 2010, Erdem Moralioglu, a London-based fashion designer, referenced the Ballets Russes in his Spring/Summer 2011 collection launched at the London Fashion Week (Blanks 2010a and Yaeger 2010). Whilst the models strutted around the circular stage to music from *Petrouchka*, Ballets Russes’ silhouettes and design elements, such as appliqué, poppy printed fabrics and harlequin patterns, were featured in Moralioglu’s collection (see Figure 5.5b). There is a canonical trajectory from the Ballets Russes’ repertoire that continues to inspire later generations of fashion designers, as an importation from dance to fashion.

![Figure 5.5a (left): Yves Saint Laurent collection exhibited at the Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929, V&A museum. Figure 5.5b (right): Erdem Moralioglu’s Spring/Summer 2011 collection featuring Ruby Aldridge in printed dress; Source: style.com](image)

In a contemporary dance context, the collaborative spirit of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes remains prominent. In this section, I argue that dance costumes, designed by luxury fashion designers, complement various aspects of their theatrical productions. Elaborate costuming enriches the visual aesthetics of the performance, and extends the choreography beyond the capacity of the moving body, also reinforcing the narrative of the thematic content, all of which synthesise dance and fashion into a collective effort of the mixed media collaboration.
On the first level, costumes can enrich the visual aesthetics of contemporary dance productions. Landmark performances which elucidate this aspect of collaboration reside in the experimental practice of later works from Merce Cunningham. He was one of the key choreographers who gave total freedom to other artists to create various possibilities in his dance productions. These final products were then assembled at the last minute prior to the premiere.

Following from the established procedures of Cunningham’s independent collaborative process, his dances culminate in a rich theatrical experience. For instance, as I argued in Chapter Three, the dance bodies in Scenario (1997) were dressed in exceedingly padded outfits designed by Rei Kawakubo. As a result of the partnership in Scenario, Kawakubo’s costumes reinforce Cunningham’s exploration of the limits and scope of the body in space, challenging the perception of the body silhouette and expanding its abstract forms. Simultaneously, the dance bodies activate and further accelerate the distortions in Kawakubo’s designs as they move through space, extending the forms of the costume with curved spines and spiral torsos (see point 3.3.1).

Figure 5.6: (left) Merce Cunningham’s dancers in Scenario (1997); Source: http://www.fashionprojects.org [Accessed 15 January 2011]; (right) Photo: Pascal Victor; Source: www.classicaltv.com [Accessed 15 January 2011]
Thus, in this collaboration, Kawakubo’s costumes enhance the visual aesthetics and underpin the choreographic concept of Cunningham’s dance practice.

Shifting the timeframe to the twenty-first century British contemporary dance context, but remaining focused on artistic collaborations where costumes can enhance the visual aesthetics of the performance, Shimmer (2004) is a further example. Choreographed by British choreographer Richard Alston in 2004, Shimmer features dancers clad in luxury cobwebbed and jewelled knitwear designed by Julien MacDonald, a British fashion designer who, prior to the launch of his own label, had been working for Chanel and Givenchy fashion houses. Not only does the knitted lace have an elasticity which allows the dancers to move freely, but the cobweb patterns also give another texture to the dancers’ skin, teasing with notions of transparency and opacity (see Figure 5.8). Moreover, these cobweb patterns are adorned with jewels that shimmer under the studio lights. These glints change continuously as the dance bodies travel across the space. Judith Mackrell’s review (2004) reinforces my visual reading of the performance that “these costumes settle around the dancers’ bodies like live skin, adding a shape-shifting airiness to Alston’s choreography.”

Figure 5.7: (left) Rei Kawakubo’s 1997 Spring/Summer catwalk collection, Dress Meets Body, Body Meets Dress and They Are One; Source: http://forums.thefashionspot.com/f60/comme-des-garcons-lumps-bumps-collection-s-s-97-a-42246-2.html [Accessed 28 October 2010]
On another level, focusing on the loose strings and tassels attached to the hemline of MacDonald’s costumes, these design elements seem to “dance” in response to Alston’s choreography. For instance, when the dancers turn, the strings fan out. When the dancers execute off-balance movements, these fringes sway, swing, and ripple in relation to weight, effort and gravity (see Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Tassels in MacDonald’s costumes danced in response to Alston’s choreography; Photo: Hugo Glendinning; Source: http://www.londondance.com/image_library/3S48S18812 [Accessed 27 October 2010]
Thus, both MacDonald’s costumes in *Shimmer* (2004) and Kawakubo’s padded outfits in *Scenario* (1997) support my argument that fashion can enhance the visual aesthetics of the contemporary dance productions.

Not only can costumes designed by luxury fashion designers enhance the visual aesthetics of dance performances, but they can also deliver visual messages, giving audiences a better understanding of characters and their psychological conditions. For example, *Eonnagata*, conceived and performed by Sylvia Guillem, Robert Lepage and Russell Maliphant at Sadler’s Wells Theatre in 2009 and revived in July 2010, is based on a biographic tale of Charles de Beaumont or Chevalier d’Eon, a French spy who “uses cross-dressing in the pursuit of his duties” (Machina and Guillem 2010). In order to visualise the narrative content and heighten the concept of cross-dressing, Alexander McQueen designs masculine tailored jackets that are attached to circular skirts (see Figure 5.10). Because the jackets and skirts merge into one, they blur the distinction between a gender binary of male and female, thus rendering the costumes more androgynous.

![Figure 5.10: Maliphant, Lepage and Guillem in McQueen’s skirted jackets; Photo: Eric Labbe; Source: http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk [Accessed 12 October 2010]](image)

Moreover, both male performers, Maliphant and Lepage, often appear in feminine garments, such as crinoline skirts, headdresses and kimonos (see Figure 5.11), whilst the female dance soloist, Guillem, performs in a masculine military jacket (see Figure 5.12).
This use of stereotypical costumes worn by the opposite sex further highlights the notion of ambiguous gender identities.

Figure 5.11: (left) Maliphant in crinoline skirts; Photo: Eric Labbe; Source: http://www.sadlerwells.com/show/Eonnagata/gallery/harptitle [Accessed 12 October 2010]; (right) Lepage in headdresses; Source: http://www.ballet.co.uk [Accessed 5 January 2011]; (bottom) Maliphant, Lepage and Guillem in white kimonos; Source: http://lacaserne.net/media/Eonnagata [Accessed 27 October 2010]
Towards the end of *Eonnagata*, the Chevalier d’Eon is forced by Louis XVI to wear a dress at all times. To symbolically narrate this change of event, a crinoline skirt is thrown over Guillem’s head whilst she is still clad in a masculine white-tailed coat. The act symbolises a sudden shift of gender identity, from man to woman, as a kind of imprisonment that responds to the story. In this sense, McQueen’s costumes are worn to signify the corruption of gender identity in ways that reinforce the narrative of the performance, and the cross-dressing pursuits of Chevalier d’Eon.

Finally, to support my argument that dance costumes designed by a fashion designer can complement contemporary dance productions and synthesise them into a collective artwork, this section extrapolates those aspects of costumes that can be choreographed to expand the corporeal techniques of the dancing body. If I may direct attention to Bakst’s sketches for the Ballets Russes productions, it is evident that he often draws the models and their costumes, including accessories such as scarves, necklaces and tassels, *in motion*. As seen in Figure 5.13, the draperies of the costumes swing freely as the dance body leaps forward. Not only does the movement suggest particular cutting and choices of fabric, but it also reveals Bakst’s design of white shorts worn underneath the yellow appliquéd dress. Moreover, by twisting the torso, the scarf is unfolded, revealing its printed pattern.
According to the mobility in the sketch, Potter (1990, p.155) argues that Bakst’s costumes are “a functional item in dance…that was capable of extending the range of the body’s movement in space…He used the total costume as a means of adding to the structure of the movement.” Parallel to Potter’s argument, Péladan, a symbolist playwright, novelist and art critic, wrote in his 1911 article Les Arts du Théâtre. Un Maître du Costume et du Décor that:

Mr. Bakst clothes a movement rather than a model…the originality of these designs lies in the intensity with which the draperies are given life, are harmonized with the body’s rhythm, extending it, giving it color [sic], and ennobling it.

Péladan quoted and translated by Potter 1990, p.156

In this sense, Bakst’s designs are not a static sculpture worn over the body but a mobile garment choreographed and considered as an extension of the body.

Bakst’s approach to costume design responds to and expands the corporeal techniques of the dancing body in ways that remain apparent in the twenty-first century British contemporary dance scenes. For instance, in Eonnagata (2009), the volume and weight of the full circular skirts attached to the sleeveless jackets accentuate the bodily movements of the dancers. When they perform a series of spins, the skirts flare out to full volume. When they pivot, tumble and slide over the tables, the costumes are ricocheted to the choreography as the skirts gather, swivel and glide across the surface (see Figure
Moreover, as Guillem performs a series of barrel turns, she holds out the placket of her coat before executing the choreography. As a result, the coat becomes an extension of her arms, acting as if it was a wing to her body whilst she is suspended in the air. Towards the end of the performance, Guillem performs a series of sword fighting sequences. The bell-shaped sleeves from her kimonos swing in circular motions tracing the patterns of her arm. Thus, McQueen’s costumes are incorporated into the choreography for *Eonnagata*, and expand the dancers’ movements and their corporeal techniques.

Figure 5.14: (left) Movements of the skirts in response to the choreography in *Eonnagata* (2009); Source: http://www.cyberpresse.ca/images/bizphotos [Accessed 27 October 2010]; (right) the layered costumes wiped across the tables as the dancing bodies slid across the tables; Source: http://dipity.com [Accessed 5 January 2011]

Through the use of case studies from the Ballets Russes to contemporary dance productions, the chapter has illustrated that the collaboration between fashion designers and choreographers can nurture artistic exploration. In its performance exchange, the choreographic message in *Le Train Bleu* is visually supported by Pablo Picasso’s drop curtain and the freedom given by Gabrielle Chanel’s knitted bathing suits and jersey sportswear. Moreover, Léon Bakst’s designs continue to inspire high-fashion industries as seen in the work of Yves Saint Laurent (1976 – 1999) and Erdem Moralioglu (2010). In the context of contemporary dance, the costumes designed by luxury fashion designers complement the performances in various aspects. In Merce Cunningham’s *Scenario* (1997) and Richard Alston’s *Shimmer* (2004), costumes enrich visual aesthetics of the productions. Rei Kawakubo’s padded outfits expand Cunningham’s exploration of the body in space and its visual perception. Julien MacDonald’s cobwebbed and jewelled
knitwear gives Alston’s dancers another texture to the skin whilst simultaneously reflecting the stage light. Moreover, the loose strings and tassels in MacDonald’s costumes dance in response to Alston’s choreography, all of which enhance the visual aesthetics and arguably, the trajectory through space of the moving bodies.

On another level, costumes reinforce the narrative of the performances. In *Eonnagata* (2009), Alexander McQueen combines a masculine tailored jacket with full circular skirts which highlight the notion of cross-dressing according to the biographic tale of Chevalier d’Eon. Moreover, male dancers often appear in feminine garments. Through costumes, McQueen blurs gender identities associated with clothing in order to achieve the effect. As a result, his costumes deliver messages giving the audience an understanding of the characters and their conditions.

Finally, on the partnership between fashion and dance, costumes become an extension of the body enhancing corporeal techniques. Bakst’s designs of draperies and accessories extend the range of the body’s movement in space. McQueen’s tailcoat becomes wings whilst Sylvia Guillem’s jacket is suspended in the air. In the sword fighting scene, her bell-shaped sleeves swing in circular motions tracing the arm patterns. Costumes have become part of the choreography. The way the garments move is not merely a design for performance but design as performance and, in reverse, it is a performance for the design as well. Thus, focusing on the performance exchange when fashion designers assume the role of costume designers for art dance productions, these collaborations nurture artistic exploration and synthesise dance and fashion into a collective work of art.

### 5.2. Commodity relations in corporate art intervention

Before claiming that art dance bodies retain their Terpsichorean qualities while adorned with high-art values and costumes in the crossover between fashion and dance, the term ‘artistic collaboration’ is arguably problematic. Akram Khan, a British dance artist who often collaborates with other artists across artistic disciplines, raises variable degrees of artistic input that tie together with commercial output under the collective use of mixed media collaboration (Khan 2010). This coincides with the second school of thought highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, which brings awareness to a
commoditisation from the couture houses and their carefully fabricated branding strategies to dance performances. Witnessing significance in the political economy of these fashion brands, I investigate the notion of the collective artwork in relation to corporate marketing strategies and its policies of art sponsorship, because they often overshadow art dance performances.

In his book, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, Chin-Tao Wu investigates enterprise culture and the system of taste and value in contemporary art, particularly in relation to “the general structure of political, economic and social formations” (2002, p.7). He examines the extent to which contemporary art has been affected by the Thatcherian policies of privatisation. Methodologically, he conducts a large series of questionnaire surveys of British companies focusing on corporate art collections and corporate sponsorship. This includes interviews with one hundred and fifty individuals who were involved in corporate art enterprises ranging from senior managers, corporate curators and art consultants to tax inspectors, accountants, city planning specialists, museum professionals and staff from the public arts sector (Wu 2002). From the questionnaires and interviews, Wu develops statistical patterns of corporate arts intervention, particularly in its engagement with cultural practices. According to his findings in British capitalist society, Wu argues that corporations have long been flirting with cultural organisations in various forms. Whether consuming a passive role of “being solicited for donations” or becoming active participants in setting up corporate art awards and showcasing contemporary art in their corporate premises, these corporations hope to shape contemporary culture and use these cultural products and mediums as image-enhancing tools to raise their financial profits (Wu 2002, p.2). This process of transforming cultural capital into economic capital is “using art as a commodity” and in this very precise sense, a corporation makes art its business (Wu 2002, pp.119-20).

From the arguments concerning enterprise culture and its commodity relations, I agree with Wu on the way in which fashion brands advance their social status and financial profits, by cloaking their interests under the role of costume designer. I will employ two case studies, Richard Alston’s *Shimmer* (2004) and English National Ballet’s *The Dying Swan* (2009), to illuminate the point where fashion exploits its financial power
over art dance productions. However, in this argument, I foresee a symbiotic relationship within the crossover as some art dance companies offer their prestigious status in the cultural field *in exchange* for increasing box office sales and glossy fashion publicity, all of which disguise the imperatives of artistic collaboration.

**a) The case of Shimmer (2004)**

To locate commodity relations in the cross-over between fashion and dance, I would like to draw attention to *Shimmer* (2004), the collaboration between British choreographer Richard Alston and fashion designer Julien MacDonald (see point 5.1). Despite arguing for the symbiotic nature in the artistic production, MacDonald’s designs are imbued with commercial connotation. For instance, its jewelled cobwebbed knitwear (see Figure 5.8 and 5.9), which, to a certain extent, enhances the visual aesthetics of the performance, had already been featured in MacDonald’s ready-to-wear Spring/Summer 2004 collection presented at London Fashion Week on September 2003 in the form of tops, dresses and swimsuits (see Figure 5.15). MacDonald did not create the costumes to contribute to Alston’s choreographic concepts, but he did impose his commercial sensibilities upon the collaboration.

![Figure 5.15: Spangled cobwebbed tops, dresses and swimsuits featured in MacDonald’s ready-to-wear Spring/Summer 2004 collection, London Fashion Week, September 2003; Photo: Marcio Madeira; Source: style.com](image)
By designing costumes for *Shimmer*, which contains significant design elements from his fashion practice, MacDonald discreetly transforms Alston’s dance production into one long catwalk show raising the art audiences’ awareness of his fashion brand and merchandise whilst enjoying the kudos of high art publicity.

On another level, by looking at the time line of *Shimmer*, the collaboration was far from coincidental. It becomes apparent that 2004 marked a watershed between dance production and fashion. Not only did MacDonald design costumes for Alston, but he also left Paris couture houses and returned to London to promote his own fashion label. The shift in MacDonald’s career shapes decisions in this artistic affiliation, as designing costumes for *Shimmer* maximises his publicity and further exposes his fashion ideas. It seems expedient that MacDonald consumes Alston’s dance production as an advertising platform for his fashion label to advance his reallocation from Paris to London.

Moreover, by presenting his designs alongside the highly-trained, elite Terpsichorean dance bodies, the artistic values of Alston’s established high art performance identity are transferred onto MacDonald’s fashion merchandise. This act heightens the symbolic values of his fashion practice, thus positioning his garments as works of high art. This is transference of values in advertisement, which takes place when objects and products are placed in the same space. According to the case study, *Shimmer* is the place where the social status and artistic values circulating within Alston’s choreography are transferred onto MacDonald’s fashion brand. Behind the consumption of cultural products in advertising, John Berger (1972, p.258), reinforces that “ads quote particular works of art to imply both wealth and spirituality, imbuing products with a sense of luxury and cultural value.” The fashion brand is imbued with high-art values and intellectual publicity, thereby, as Wu posits, endorsing its opulence as “leading arbiters of taste in contemporary British culture” (Wu 2002, p.164).

**b) The case of *The Dying Swan* (2009)**

The second case study which advances my argument, of making art its business, lies in the collaboration between Karl Lagerfeld, a creative director at *Chanel* couture house, and the English National Ballet’s performance of *The Dying Swan* (2009). In May 2009, Lagerfeld designed a feathered tutu, or what he called “the Barbie of dance,” for
guest senior principal ballerina, Elena Glurdjidze, to wear in her performance at Sadler’s Wells Theatre (Lagerfeld quoted in Cartner-Morley 2009). The upper torso of the tutu is covered with slender ostrich plumes reaching upwards to the neckline. Downy turkey, hen and cock feathers in the muted palette of pink, grey and white are layered around the waistline.\(^6\) In this collaboration, Wayne Eagling, former artistic director of the English National Ballet, highly references Diaghilev and his legacy in drawing upcoming artists across the disciplinary arts to collaborate within dance productions (Eagling 2009). For Lagerfeld, his role as a costume designer follows the footsteps of Gabrielle Chanel, founder of the brand, who made outfits for Diaghilev’s *Le Train Bleu* (1924) and *Apollon Musagete* (1929) (Milligan 2009).\(^7\)

Lagerfeld’s costume for *The Dying Swan*, on one level, enhances the visual aesthetics of the performance and extends Glurdjidze’s corporeal techniques when the layered silk tulles and allured feathers flutter to each effort of the *bourrée* (a quick shuffled of feet *en pointe*) (see Figure 5.16).\(^8\) At this level, the artistic assistance between Lagerfeld’s tutu and the choreography seems to support the collective artwork when costumes are employed to complement theatrical production. However, there is only one design element transferred rather than a re-imagination of the performance as a whole.

![Figure 5.16: Lagerfeld’s feathered costumes fluttered to each *bourrée* performed by Glurdjidze; Photo: Patrick Baldwin; Source: c.photoshelter.com](image-url)
The Dying Swan can be challenged as exploitation from the luxury fashion brand over art dance production that is more significant in this collaboration. On the first level, the fitting of the costume includes an exclusive performance, supervised by Lagerfeld and held at the Chanel couture house. This event is witnessed and recorded by an invitation-only press. In its publicised material, Lagerfeld sits on the black leather sofa gazing in a patriarchal manner upon Glurdjidze’s dancing bodies (see Figure 5.17). The presence of the designer in the shot generates a strong sense of authorship over the performance. Furthermore, this corporate empowerment is reinforced as Glurdjidze dances on the floor inlaid with Chanel’s logo. Control over construction of this image can be read as if her dancing body and Fokine’s choreography were products manufactured at the couture house. The claimed ownership becomes obvious as on the official Chanel website, Lagerfeld labels this performance A Ballet for Karl Lagerfeld (Chanel 2009).

Figure 5.17: Lagerfeld gazes upon Glurdjidze’s dancing bodies at the Chanel couture house; Photo: Xiang Sun; Source: www.guardian.co.uk

On the second level, The Dying Swan performance in London coincides with the launch of Lagerfeld’s pre-autumn 2009 collection in Paris, under the theme “Paris-Moscow” (Mower 2008). His fashion merchandise took Russian inspiration from folklore to costumes and accessories (see Figure 5.18). The timing between these two events is well-coordinated, suggesting a strong connection between the Russian inspired fashion collection and the (Georgian) Russian ballerina. Thus, Lagerfeld’s decision in designing costumes for The Dying Swan is inscribed with promotional connotations aimed at
promoting his commercial practice as they share a Russian theme. My argument is affirmed as the back of the English National Ballet’s *Ballets Russes* programme featured a full blown print of 9.5” x 12” Lagerfeld’s advertising campaign (English National Ballet 2009).

![Figure 5.18: Lagerfeld’s pre-autumn 2009 advertising campaign featuring the “Paris-Moscow” collection; Photo: Karl Lagerfeld](image)

A series of exploitative events continue. On the third level, Lagerfeld turns the premiere of the English National Ballet’s *Ballets Russes* season at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre into a major corporate PR event. He marks his territory as a black carpet is laid at the foyer of the theatre, a colour which continues the design signature of the *Chanel* couture house. The auditorium is filled with both British and international journalists, editors, actors, actresses, models, television presenters, pop singers and designers, all of whom are celebrities from fashion, media, and entertainment industries (see Figure 5.19).
The corporate control carries throughout the event as Lagerfeld lends his couture dresses to four senior principle ballerinas, Elena Glurdjidze, Frenanda Oliveira, Daria Klimentová and Erina Takahashi for the post-performance party (see Figure 5.20). Both on and off the stage, these goddesses of dance mutate into Barbie dolls and are displayed as Lagerfeld’s moving mannequins.

Overall, by designing costumes for a mere three-and-a-half-minute performance, Lagerfeld transforms Sadler’s Wells Theatre and the English National Ballet’s Ballets
Russes production into a major corporate playground raising his brand identity and its status underneath the “moral veneer” of artistic collaboration referencing Diaghilev’s legacy (Wu 2002, p.122).

Can Lagerfeld’s exploitation of ENB’s performance be condemned in this joint venture? I argue that the fashion brand and an art dance company share commercial and class interests. Questioned at the post-performance talk regarding the intentions behind this collaboration, Wayne Eagling, then artistic director of the ENB, reveals that not only does the creative process revive the spirit of Diaghilev, but it also advances box office sales and increases publicity for the company (Eagling 2009). In this symbiotic sense, ENB offers its prestigious status in the cultural field in exchange for promotional and financial profits. In other words of fashion journalists Mark Tungate, at the end, “there would be lots of free publicity for everyone” (Tungate, 2005, p.40).

6.3. Conclusion

By investigating the crossover between fashion and dance when fashion designers assume the role of costume designers for art dance productions, I have argued that the performance exchange under the terms of artistic collaboration is negotiable. The first strand of a discourse arguing for the amalgamation amongst disciplinary arts, to a certain extent, allows dance performance to sustain its artistic integrity by incorporating costumes designed by fashion designers; to nurture art exploration; and to synthesise its visual elements into a collective artwork. Costumes can enrich visual aesthetics of dance performances and expand choreographic concepts. On another level, costumes can provide narrative impetus to a performance. This is also the case when costumes are integrated into the choreography, expanding the corporeal techniques of dancers. At this level, art dance bodies become terpsichorean, as they negotiate their symbolic power over the fashion brands by utilising the costumes designed by luxury fashion designers for artistic advancement.

On the other hand, as fashion is an industry, the crossover between fashion and dance cannot compete with branding strategies and the policies of corporate art intervention. It becomes apparent that some designers exploit their financial power and commercial status over cultural products. The Dying Swan (2009) and Shimmer (2004)
are the cases when Karl Lagerfeld and Julien MacDonald turn art dance performance into their public relation agents in order to sanctify their corporate image as well as advertise fashion merchandise. It also brings them maximum exposure of their brands in the prestigious light of high art publicity. In the so-called collaborative process, MacDonald imports jewelled cobwebbed design elements from his commercial practice onto Richard Alston’s *Shimmer* rather than designing costumes responsible to the choreographic concept. The timing of the collaboration also coincides with and promotes the relocation of MacDonald’s fashion career from Paris to London.

For Lagerfeld, exploitation over art dance performance is lucrative. Before the event, every piece of publicised material is engineered to consecrate Lagerfeld and *Chanel’s* brand values. The costume fitting becomes a private ballet for Lagerfeld. Glurdjidze’s dancing body and Fokine’s choreography become properties of the couture house as *Chanel’s* logo marks the stage and the post-performance reception. Moreover, the timing of the event is well-framed to Lagerfeld’s launch of his pre-autumn 2009 collection in Paris. Overall, his financial power turns English National Ballet’s *Ballets Russes* season into a corporate playground which heightens his social image and brand values. Underneath this façade of artistic collaboration and the legacy of Diaghilev, art dance bodies are moulded into mannequins hired to display fashion merchandise alongside their performances. In this sense, luxury fashion makes art its business and pushes fashion business as art.

Informed by these case studies, it is evident that financial exploitation remains a dominant aspect of capitalist cultural reproduction and promotion. When art dances are “assembled as part of the luxury fashion ethos”, or, as a “business ladder”, these brands are able to advance their positions on “the cultural map” as well as the market place (Wu 2002, p.289). However, in the capitalist economy where every industry strives to survive in the global market, dance companies also need economic resources from the fashion industry to prolong their artistic creations. As a result, the commercial interests underneath artistic collaborations can be mutual. As Eagling admits, by collaborating with Lagerfeld, the ENB raises its publicity and increases audiences for the dance productions thereby making dance a successful business. Thus, at the crossover between fashion and dance attributed to Diaghilev’s legacy, the art dance body seems
interchangeable between a Terpsichore and a moving mannequin in the performance exchange when fashion makes dance its business and choreographers utilise costumes from the fashion business as art.

Notes


2. According to Phillips and Quagerbeur, the crossover between disciplinary arts in the spirits of Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes should be encouraged and continued (Phillips and Quagerbeur in Cunniff 2010).

3. The quote was published in promotional materials for both the English National Ballet and London College of Fashion given at the event.

4. “In both the design and the drawing, the figure is seen from the back, the head turned over the right shoulder, the weight borne on the left leg with the right lifted, and the outline of the dancer’s bottom clearly visible beneath the diaphanous draperies” (Potter 1990, p.167).


7. Interviewed by Cartner-Morley (2009), Lagerfeld became irritated when a journalist connected his practice to the heritage of the couture house when Gabrielle Chanel collaborated with Ballets Russes in the early twentieth century. However, I would like to argue here that the connection between Chanel’s and Lagerfeld’s collaboration is obvious and has been associated in many press reviews, as they both designed the costumes for Ballets Russes repertoires under the umbrella brand of *Chanel* (Vogue 2009a, Milligan 2009, Bumpus 2009).

8. Thomas Edur, ex-senior principal dancer who wore Lagerfeld’s costume in ENB’s *Apollo* (2009), commented that Lagerfeld is the artist who understands the body and designs costumes that are well-responded to the movements (Vogue 2009b).