City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Findlay, R. (2017). "Things to be Seen": Spectacle and the performance of brand in contemporary fashion shows. About Performance, 14/15, pp. 105-119.

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/30455/

Link to published version:

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@city.ac.uk

“Things to be seen”: Spectacle and the Performance of Brand in Contemporary Fashion Shows

Rosie Findlay

> “On the face of it, most fashion shows […] are deliberately inverted theater [*sic*]; a commercially targeted performance art where the tickets are free but almost everything on stage is for sale.”
>
> —Nadine Frey

Introduction

In some ways, fashion and the performance genre of spectacle are analogues. Both fashion and spectacle are intended to be superficial, their meanings located and enacted on their enticing surfaces. Both are designed to captivate the eye and appeal to the senses; and both are ambiguous, allowing for a multiplicity of meanings and associations in the minds of those that apprehend them. The fashion show is the apotheosis of these two entities, where fashion’s product comes to life, and spectacle’s ethos of “bigger is better” is employed to directly appeal to the consumer. All that is primarily demanded of the audience of a fashion show is that they look.

Many fashion theorists have employed derivatives of the word *spectacle* to describe fashion shows, often arguing that their theatrical qualities mask their inherently commercial function (see Wells 1997; Frey 1998; Evans 2001, 2003; Khan 2000; Gregg Duggan 2001; and Hoffman 2009). Such a perspective is reflected in Caroline Evans’s proposition, quoting historian Thomas Richards, that the fashion show is “the theatre through which capitalism acts” (Evans 2003, 71).

Yet despite the frequent use of a theatrical metaphor in such literature, the performative elements that distinguish these shows as spectacles imbued with theatrical qualities have been left largely un-interrogated. In this article, I seek to address this theoretical gap, being here concerned with what performance theory might offer our understanding of how fashion shows function, and how the relationship between their creative and commercial concerns are enacted. In so doing, this work will implicitly draw upon three of the four analytic pillars of performance studies as implemented at the University of Sydney— that is, anthropological, semiotic and embodied methods of analysis— to examine the qualities and effects of fashion shows (see Maxwell 2006, 37-38).

This work has been developed through the implementation of a performance-studies-inflected use of fieldwork, an approach to research that borrows from anthropology and privileges the knowledges acquired when one is present at the performance being studied. As such, I assumed the role of participant observer in 2007 and 2014, attending two Australian Fashion Weeks (AFW). In 2007, I was an Honours student at the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney and worked at the event—then held at the Overseas Passenger Terminal on Sydney Harbour—as a full-time volunteer. In 2014, Australian Fashion

Week was held at Carriageworks, a performing arts venue in Redfern (an inner city suburb of Sydney), and I attended in my capacity as a fashion columnist, in this instance for an academic opinion and analysis website, *The Conversation*.

Central to my argument here is an engagement with the work of John J. MacAloon (1984), who is renowned for his investigation of spectacle as a performance genre. In utilising, extending, and critiquing MacAloon's work, I argue that the performative qualities of the fashion show works in tangible and sensory ways to create a visual world around the product of the showing label, intended to directly appeal to potential customers.[1] I also interrogate the function of this genre of performance by questioning who actually is the audience for fashion shows. In examining the nature of the mediated participation of spectators at such events, I will propose that these performances are largely intended for an audience who is not actually present. This mediated participation is facilitated by coverage of fashion shows, both in the professional fashion media, as well as on user-generated social media platforms, which extend the life of the spectacle. Here I turn to the work of Guy Debord ([1968] 1983) and Phillip Auslander (1999), in order to explore how the spectacle of fashion shows is extended through their mediatisation.

All of these ideas circulate around a consideration of fashion as an industry predicated on the production and consumption of the fashion product, and the creation of symbolic meanings of prestige and desire around that product, all organised within a set hierarchy of taste and access. Fashion shows function as a crucial site at which these symbolic meanings are circulated around the fashion product, offering an environment within which the elements of performance metaphorically clad the clothing worn by the models. As such, this work will ultimately demonstrate that fashion shows, as well as the garments they display, are, as MacAloon describes the genre of spectacle, "things to be seen" (1984, 243).

On the Ground at AFW

Australian Fashion Week was first held in Sydney in May 1996 as an industry event to showcase Australian fashion on an international stage.[2] Many of the dynamics of international fashion weeks were, and still are, at work in this local event, despite the minimal coverage it attracts from the international press being outside the "big four" fashion weeks of New York, London, Milan, and Paris (Bubble in Amed, 2011). In fact, Sydney is situated on what David Gilbert describes as the periphery in his formulation of a fashion world city, a space constituted through the "relationships between places, both between imagined or actual centres of influence and

---

[1] The name of Australian Fashion Week changed between 2007 and 2014, as the principal sponsors changed from Rosemount Australia (a wine manufacturer) to Mercedes-Benz. For clarity and consistency, I will refer to the event as Australian Fashion Week rather than either of its official (former and current) branded names, Rosemount Australia Fashion Week (RAFW) and Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia (MBFWA).

[2] For a discussion of the process undertaken to establish Australian Fashion Week, see Lock (1998); for further discussion on early Australian fashion shows see Maynard (2001).

‘peripheral’ places in the geography of fashion” (2013, 13). AFW is smaller in scale and lacks the international influence of the “big four” fashion weeks, and yet it is hardly peripheral within its own location—Australia. Indeed, in the years since its genesis, AFW has become the foremost showcase event for the Australian fashion industry.

Like all fashion weeks, AFW features a selection of fashion designers each presenting their newest collection. Each show is scheduled consecutively over a period of four or five days. AFW, as an annual event, is always held in Sydney, with most of its shows presented in an official venue, alongside a number of off-site shows held in various private locales around the city.

As is consistent with most international fashion weeks, attendance at AFW is by invitation only. Potential delegates—who must have a professional connection to the Australian fashion industry—register their interest in attending and, if approved by the event’s organisers, are placed on a list circulated to the showing labels. These labels, in concert with their PR representation, issue invitations to their choice of delegates. Usually, this selection is comprised of members of the Australian print and digital media, including those working for fashion magazines, entertainment websites, and national newspapers; buyers from department stores, private boutiques, and online stores; notable members of the Australian entertainment industry; and other people affiliated with the label or the Australian fashion industry: freelance stylists, fashion photographers, and so on. A label may also invite personal guests: friends and family of the designer and loyal customers. These invitations will either designate a seat to the guest (Assigned Seating) or require them to stand (General Admission). The closer a guest’s proximity to the runway, the greater the prestige conferred on them by the showing label.

The difference between the experience of watching a show from the front row and watching in General Admission is vast. A seat in the front row affords an unimpeded view of the runway, as well as a gift bag from the label, and the kudos of one’s implied importance in the room. A General Admission ticketholder may be invited to fill any available seats when the house lights go down, but if the seats were all full, those guests stand behind the back row of seated guests or crowd into the space between the seating and the photographer’s pit. From this vantage point, the runway is often only visible in glimpses and snatches. When occupying this position at some of the shows I attended, I often strained to see the models pass by, completely hemmed in by other guests.

Nevertheless, to be present at all is a mark that you are of some importance to the showing label: even though AFW is representative of Australian fashion, it is closed to the general public. The event does, however, attract widespread national media coverage, both in the weeks preceding and over the course of its duration. This coverage affords those interested some means of engaging with the collections shown over the course of the event.

There were a number of changes to AFW during the seven-year gap between my two experiences as an attendee, not only evident in the change of venue and the signing of a new principal sponsor, but, most significantly, in the ubiquitous presence of social media by 2014. The use of this type of media was barely visible at AFW 2007. At that time, fashion blogs were still the domain of tech-savvy early adopters for whom attending fashion week was a rare occurrence.[3] In 2014, there were fashion bloggers everywhere, the most famous of whom were often seated in the prominent front-row positions that, in 2007, had been the exclusive domain of international celebrities and the editorial staff of respected news and fashion publications. Furthermore, entering the event in 2014 required delegates to pass through a crowd of streetstyle photographers, who would either shoot, paparazzi-style, as delegates passed, or request them to stop completely and pose on their way to the show.[4] This was not the case in 2007, where the photography of guests was largely limited to photographers from newspaper social pages taking shots of celebrities posing on the front row.

The behaviour of guests on-site also changed as a result of this technological influence. Guests filmed sections of a show on their tablet or smartphone, many holding their device in front of their face for the show's duration, or taking up even more of the available space in the standing area by holding up their smartphone to record the entire show. The foyer of Carriageworks also bore signs of a push from the organisers for social media coverage from guests: the wall above the bar between The Box and The Theatre—two of the theatres in which shows were held—displayed the social media "handles" of each of the showing labels, as well as the official Instagram and Twitter handles for the overall event (see Figure 1). Less subtle still were the sponsored stand-alone displays directly appealing to guests to take a photo against their backdrop, or wear their product, and tag their photo with the suggested hashtag (see Figure 2). In 2014 the organisers evidently wanted the event to be as visible as possible to those who were not present, to extend to them the spectacle of AFW. Social media use was encouraged to attract the attention of this absent audience and facilitate their proxy attendance.

Irreducibly Visual: MacAloon's Theory of Spectacle

In his essay "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," MacAloon nominates spectacle as the genre of cultural performance least understood by anthropologists (1984, 243). His efforts to categorise the distinctive features of this form resulted in his creation of four criteria by which spectacle can

[3] I outline the history of fashion blogging in my forthcoming book *Personal Style Blogs: Appearances that Fascinate*, an examination of personal style blogging to be published by Intellect in 2017.

[4] Streetstyle photographers shoot photographs of what people are wearing on the streets, usually "documentary style," in situ. In 2014, the genre was dominated by imagery shot outside fashion shows, as popularised by photographers such as Tommy Ton (*Jak&Jil* blog), Phil Oh (*Streetpeeper* blog), Rei Shito (*STYLE from TOKYO* blog), and Vanessa Jackman (eponymously titled blog). These photographers commonly publish their images on their own blogs, or in slideshows on fashion websites such as *New York* magazine's The Cut (nymag.com/thecut) or Voguerunway.com.

be identified. These criteria were initially provided as a specific response to the Olympic Games, the cultural performance upon which MacAloon focused his work.

Of central importance for MacAloon is that spectacles "give primacy to visual, sensory and symbolic codes": they are performances that exhibit, that are intended to appeal, to the eye (*ibid.*). MacAloon writes that only sights of public display that engage the eye "by their mass proportions, colour, or other dramatic qualities" can be considered spectacles, designed as they are to attract attention and manufacture awe (*ibid.*). As a corollary, MacAloon stipulates that not all performance sights can be classified as spectacles: "only those of a certain size and grandeur" (*ibid.*) are designed to attract attention on a large scale.

Attention is crucial, as spectacles "institutionalize [*sic*] the bicameral roles of actors and audience"; the live presence of both being necessary to the performance (*ibid.*). A spectacle's audience primarily observes, being at liberty "simply to watch and to admire" (268). These shows provoke "diffuse wonder and awe" rather than a specific mood, which MacAloon argues is the case with other performance genres, such as ritual (246).

MacAloon's final criterion for spectacle is that it is a "dynamic form, demanding movement, action, change, and exchange on the part of the human actors" involved, and the spectators "must be excited in turn" (244). Such a criterion seems inherent to fashion shows as a genre, suggestive of their dynamism, exaggeration, and intention to dazzle the audience. It is also fitting for a genre that serves a creative and commercial industry devoted to the extravagance of continual change and reinvention.

In fact, all of these criteria are evident in the elaborate performances of fashion shows. They give prominence to the visual. Producers and performers seek to impress, encouraging an enthusiastic and receptive response from their audience. These shows feature a clear distinction between performers and audience, requiring one to move the clothes and the other to observe the clothes being moved. Yet a crucial point of difference here between something like an Olympic Games Opening Ceremony and a fashion show is that, according to MacAloon, the spectator must be present at the live event to participate in it: "if one or the other is missing, there is no spectacle" (1984, 245). As such, he argues that media "even of the highest technical standard, reduces the spectacle to constricted little rectangles of colour and form, systematically impoverishing [its] gifts to the human eye" (245). This impoverishment is due to all that a recording cannot represent, such as the "sheer scale and intensity of it all," which is "mock[ed by the] puny efforts of the[…] camera to capture it in two-dimensional images" (245). For MacAloon, what the media offers for the absent or subsequent audience is commentary, but these are "interpretive glosses that cannot capture the visual ecstasies and terrors of the original" (245).

Yet the official fashion media coverage—and the social media coverage by guests—has a vital function in realising the aims of a fashion show, namely to impress and

unveil the new to potential customers. In this way, media coverage extends the life of the live spectacle by transforming it into a spectacle of another kind—that is, the kind of spectacle defined by Guy Debord as “a mass of superficial relations between people, mediated by commodities and images” (Vejby and Wittkower 2010, 98). Rather than endeavour to completely capture the “ecstasies and terrors of the original,” such mediated representations of the fashion show offer coverage that is suggestive of their content, and its attendant glamour and exclusivity, whilst also, as MacAloon argues in relation to live spectacle, seeking to generate a response of excitement and desire.

Such coverage can never comprehend the entire live spectacle. For example, a photograph of a show’s finale of scowling models posed in a phalanx at the end of the runway, suffused in smoke, does not recall the sounds, lights, and sequence of outfits revealed during the preceding show. Yet what the photograph does is communicate something of the spirit of the collection and the performed moment to an absent audience, simultaneously signalling their outsiderness and enticing their gaze with the fashion product. For this absent audience, media representation of the live event creates another kind of spectacle, but one with identical aims as those that underpin the live show.

The Production of Aesthetic Value

MacAloon describes the Olympics as “performances that are exhibited, intended to appeal to the eye” (1984, 243), and there may be no more apt description of a fashion show. Such shows frame and contextualise the collection on display, and are literally designed to appeal to the audience, comprised as it mostly is of people who will either buy for a store, or compose a report on it. As such, what is produced by a fashion show is “aesthetic value” around the garments being shown (Entwistle 2009, 9). To this effect, the performative elements of such shows are, as with most live performances, designed in concert with one another in order to communicate a particular set of values and meanings. Every element of a fashion show, from the lighting design to its soundtrack, to the styling and movement of the models, is designed to reinforce the aesthetic concept that imbues the clothing with symbolic meanings and immerses the spectator in a visual and sensory world. What is particular about fashion shows is that the meanings communicated are all in service of the collection being shown.

Consider the AFW 2014 show of Australian designer Alice McCall, entitled “In My Dreams I Was Flying.” According to the show’s program, this was a collection inspired by “the surreal and the infinite possibility of the lucid dreaming” (Alice McCall show program, 2014). The collection—comprised primarily of sweet pastel jumpsuits, cotton mini dresses with lace inserts, and printed neoprene separates—could be said to depict a “dreamy femininity” (Findlay 2014), but was not particularly surreal in and of itself. As I observed in my resulting column, the most obvious nod to Surrealism was a print of lips in one of the collection’s stories, but even they were “more ’60s lipstick advertisement than Salvador Dalí” (Findlay 2014).

It fell primarily to the show, not the clothes, to imbue the collection with this theme. The show was held in the repurposed industrial space of Carriageworks, a former workshop for repairing trains, with an extremely high ceiling and wide windows running down its length, and with the original iron train tracks still embedded in the concrete floor. The morning light flooded the space, illuminating the prominent set piece that was suspended from a lighting rig, hung so low that it apparently floated in the centre of the runway. Like a heavy cloud in the midst of the space, it was made up of white porcelain cast objects hanging at different heights from thin wires. These objects were suggestive of the work of Surrealists such as Dalí, cast in the shape of disembodied hands, a giant clamshell, miniature planets, a zeppelin, and so on (Figure 3). Rows of white wooden chairs faced the runway, a demarcated space of concrete flooring ending only at the photographer's pit; and behind that, the tech desk. What was central here, as Carlson observes about theatrical spaces, was "the implied dialectic of the space of the observer and the space of the observed" (1989, 128).

Playing throughout was the tragic sweep of Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor for strings and organ, overlaid with the cry of ravens and the distant chopping of helicopter blades: distinctive sounds that had no clear correlation to one another. The start of the show was signalled by a brief silence, before the first model appeared to a soundtrack of dreamy electronica. Then out they flowed, one by one, models moving through the pastel, cotton lace, and digitally printed looks of the collection. As the last model exited, a soft fluttering drew my gaze above the runway, where two confetti machines concealed in the lighting rig had burst into action. They blew white confetti, like snow, over the expressionless models now parading as a finale to the tune of "Rainbow Connection," a wistful song about "the lovers, the dreamers, and me" (Williams and Ascher 1979). The ephemerality of the confetti, and its white weightlessness in contrast to the stilled heft of the porcelain set, furthered the hazy, soft aesthetic of the girlish clothes being shown. These all worked in concert with the morning light making a nimbus of the models' mussed hair, the vague, trippy soundtrack, their pastel clothes. Here, a pretty collection, and one that was in keeping with McCall's usual style, was rendered *more*— more significant, more appealing— through the performative qualities enveloping it.

McCall's show was by no means an exception at AFW 2014. I entered another showroom to find a single violinist playing in a silver sequinned dress, spot-lit so to cast dancing points of light around the darkened room. Another show began with a troupe of Indigenous Australian dancers performing to a prerecorded guided meditation under dim white lights, the air around us thick with a bespoke essential oil created to evoke the "spirit" of the showing label (according to the labelled sample in the gift bag). These shows directly appealed to the senses, utilising sound, scent, smoke, sets, and visually striking images designed to linger in the memory. These elements were fundamental in the creation of a sensory world around the collections, which respectively comprised of a range of formal evening gowns and casual streetwear printed with the works of select contemporary Indigenous Australian artists. To borrow from Caroline Evans, such moments, then, were an evocation of the principle of the commercial being veiled in a dream world, "the

starriest of star commodities" (2003, 67), and as such, they added colour and drama to the shows, making the collections seem more than a display of goods for sale.

Bigger is Better

The bigger a fashion show is—that is, the more famous the guests, the more controversial the choreography, the more unusual the set design—the more memorable it will be for the audience, the more attractive for press coverage, and, in the contemporary era, the more "social-media-friendly" it will be. For the shows that succeed, it is the performative concept and performance of the show that is often the focus of press coverage, rather than the collection it revealed. For example, contemporary press coverage for Australian streetwear label Ksubi still regularly mentions that 169 live rats were released onto the runway during the label's debut show in 2001 (see Sexton 2013; *Vogue Australia* website profile). Such coverage highlights not only the concept of the show but also furthers the branding of the showing label, fulfilling what Nathalie Khan argues is the sole purpose of fashion shows: for the label "*to be noticed*" (2000, 116; original emphasis).[5]

These spectacular elements make a show "bigger" in the sense of surrounding it in hype, but there are other ways in which the producers of fashion shows manipulate grandeur in order to attract attention. As mentioned earlier, notable guests are always seated in the front row, which not only affords them an unobstructed view of the runway, but it also makes them visible to the rest of the audience, seated as they are in closest proximity to the runway, itself almost always positioned in the centre of the room. As Entwistle and Rocamora observe:

> [The] staging of the catwalk show is a staging of the gaze; the gaze of the participants sitting in the audience, who are at once its object and subject [...]. In such an auditorium, one becomes keenly aware of being watched in turn, while observing the audience constitutes part of the spectacle of the show. (2006, 744)

As such, to view a fashion show is not just to observe the performers and the performance, but also to participate in the spectacle of seeing and being seen as a guest. This occurs not only in the room, but also through the "catwalk" of the streetstyle photographs that are blogged during the week. Thus, the presence of notable guests—famous editors of leading fashion magazines, celebrities, high profile fashion bloggers, and so on—adds to the prestige, glamour, and spectacle of a show, and the legitimacy of fashion weeks for the fashion industry.[6] In this instance, the presence of famous guests does not increase the actual size of the event, but can

---

[5] For a video of this show, see Ksubi designer profile on the *Vogue Australia* website (2012). Notable international examples of this kind in recent years include Chanel's "supermarket" for Fall 2014-15 in the Grand Palais in Paris and the steppers starring in Rick Owens's Spring 2014 show. For more on these shows and the coverage they attracted, see Beusman (2014), Blanks (2014), Burley (2014), and Vogue.com (2013).

[6] For more on the performance of prestige at fashion weeks, see Entwistle and Rocamora (2006).

be crucial to the amount and value of the event's circulation in the media, as images of famous guests generate attention and coverage for the showing label.

Grandeur also circulates around a show as hyperbole. The collection's name and the show program frame the clothes and the display of those clothes with words that add to the drama, articulating the world of the characters that inspired it, the label's vision, and its philosophy. Take for example the notes for Marnie Skillings's 2007 show "The Future Has A Past": a "looking glass is a mysterious thing. [W]hat if it showed you a glimpse of the future? Would it also reflect back the past? The future can't exist in a vacuum. The tomorrow, like the now, is built on what has gone before" (Marnie Skillings show program, 2007). The phrasing, although vague, is evocative. It is reminiscent of the progression of models in a runway show, each performer styled as the mirror image of the girl who walked before her, and the one who will immediately take her place on the runway. Such documents encourage the live audience to receive the collection in a particular way, whilst also creating an aura around the show, so that again, what is on display is more than a collection of clothes. Imbued with a philosophy or a story a collection becomes the representation of a desired way of being.

These potentialities are reified and reinforced by the fashion show as performance: its singular meaning repeated, extended, and enlarged so that it cannot be missed. The show, the brand, and the collection conflate the ephemeral, the material, and the commercial, drawing them together in the moment of performance. This is mirrored by the fact that fashion shows often share the name of the collection, as if the two are synonymous. In this sense, it is immaterial if the collection is overshadowed by the material and technical elements of the show, as to invoke one is to invoke the other, and both lead back to the name of the showing label.

Who is the Intended Audience of a Fashion Show?

Before seeing a fashion show live, I had never given much thought to the shape of the runway, nor the model's relation to it as a performer. I had assumed that models walked down and back because their stage is a long, narrow walkway, thereby delimiting the possibilities of their movement and the space they could occupy. It was not until I watched the relation of models to the photographers in the pit that I realised the function underpinning this convention. The runway leads to the photographers' pit, providing them with an unimpeded frontal view of the outfits. It is the photographers towards whom the models walk, and for them that they pose at the end of the runway, not the live audience.

The live audience see the garments in motion, and observe the models as they pass, but the best view of the collection is where the photographers are and, by association, in the images they take during the show. These images are not primarily for the audience who was present, but for those who were not, and who will not see the clothes in motion but will experience them via a different mode of visual consumption. Indeed, it is this absent audience who are the intended recipient of the

live, posed moment; the photographer's lens is a proxy for their presence in the room.

What we see, then, are two audiences, one live and one observing at a distance through livestream videos and still photographs. The producers of events such as AFW presuppose the presence of both audiences. In fact, Nadine Frey attributes the development of the fashion show in its contemporary form to the interrelation between these present and absent audiences. She argues that the advent of ready-to-wear shows in the mid-twentieth century interposed an intermediary between collection and consumer, with designers showing to press and buyers rather than directly to the house's clientele, as had been the case with haute couture shows. As such, from the 1970s, designers began to stage more conceptual and theatrically impressive shows, "shouting their message so loud that it could be heard over the heads of the inevitably interpreting" buyers and press (Frey 1998, 34).

These two sectors of audience are not, however, equivalent: as previously intimated, a crucial aspect of being present at a fashion show is the prestige inherent in receiving an invitation. As Khan argues, the exclusivity of a show contributes to its aura and becomes part of its "marketability" as a branding exercise (2000, 116). To be invited to attend is a sign of one's importance to the label, and of access to the closed field of fashion. There is no comparable prestige to accessing a show online, which connotes fandom, or that one is a follower of fashion rather than an insider. However, it is important for the spectacle to attract the attention of both insiders and outsiders in order to realise its commercial aims and the imperatives of the field.

In fact, rather than constricting or impoverishing the spectacle, as MacAloon asserts, media coverage of fashion shows extends their reach and offers information not otherwise available to guests at the live event. For example, it is common for photographers to shoot and publish images of the backstage business of preparation for the show, a scene closed to the majority of a show's guests. Only certain players in the field enjoy privileged access to the designers, models, stylists, and so on, enabling them to record interviews that many ticket-holding guests are not privy to. In order to gain this knowledge about an event, spectators who were in attendance are also obliged to access the information online or through the print media, an instance where the two modes of spectatorship overlap. At work here is a kind of highly mediated spectatorship, of a different nature to the experience of those at the live performance, but generating an attention very much desired by the producers of these shows. In light of these observations, media representations of fashion shows should be considered an integral aspect of a multifaceted spectacle beyond the scope of a single interpretation or experience, an intervention that brings many sectors of the desired audience closer.

In dispersing the event and extending it to a broader audience, media coverage effectively gives the AFW shows a second life—they live beyond their liveness through their mediatised transmission. Phillip Auslander (1999), who popularised the idea of mediatisation and its place in performance making and viewing, provides

a useful lens through which the tension between the real and broadcast event might be further brought into focus. Auslander probes the "realness" of mediatised performance, writing that "the common assumption is that the live event is 'real' and the mediatized [*sic*] events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real" (1999, 3). He questions whether there are actually clearcut ontological distinctions between live forms of performance and those that are mediatised, indicating a blurring of genres and experience which translates into a confusion surrounding the privatised experience for a spatially distanced spectator. That is, "the viewer of the television screen feels himself to be on the scene" (7) even though s/he is not. Such a sentiment seems to be reflected in Belgian designer Dries Van Noten's assertion that his label does not advertise, as he prefers to "communicate and immerse people in [his] brand" through his fashion shows, despite the fact that most of his customers will never attend one of his events in person (Van Noten quoted in Cavanagh 2014).

As Auslander argues, the mediatised event and the live event should be treated as "parallel forms that participate in the same cultural economy" (1999, 5), rather than the live being conceived of as the legitimate and the mediatised as an "interpretive gloss," insubstantial and lacking by comparison. Van Noten's sentiment illustrates this position, with the live event of his label's shows speaking beyond their temporal and exclusive context through mediatisation, to "immerse" those who were not present, albeit in a different way. Therefore, fashion shows and the media that transmit their image—livestream broadcasts, photographic slideshows, magazine spreads, blogs, and so on—are complementary. The live and the mediatised are intertwined as live shows are organised to facilitate clear and detailed transmission and their mediatised coverage furthers the reach of the event, contributing to its hype, stimulating consumer desire, and communicating the messages of the performance.

Finale

A physically striking model dressed in the new emerges like a phantom through a wall of smoke, or smashes a pane of candied sugar as she storms down the runway. She is followed by a series of other models that are the same but not the same: attired similarly and styled identically, they recall Rabine's characterisation of fashion photography as "the endless repetition of similar images [… inviting] a look that drifts rapidly through them in a semihallucinatory state" (1994, 63).

The audience sits in silence, then claps the models as they walk in the finale, on their final circuit of the runway. The applause vociferously intensifies when the designer emerges to take a bow, then the house lights come up. Phones in hand, the audience furiously posts images taken during the show to their Instagram, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat, and Facebook pages, hashtagging, tagging labels, before exiting the venue to get to the next show, passing, perhaps, through a rush of streetstyle photographers keen to capture their outfits in motion. These photographs, too, are quickly posted online, to be viewed by thousands of people curious about what was

shown on the runway, what the set and styling were like, and what the audience wore.

The images these brief spectacles cast will be just memories the following year, as the new once again takes to the runway. These new collections, too, will be surrounded by material and technical elements that evoke around them a visually striking, sensory world; the performance embodying the showing label's aesthetic for anyone who will watch.

In analysing the performance qualities of fashion shows against MacAloon's criteria, this article has offered inroads into understanding the relationship between performance and fashion in this particular genre. In fulfilling and extending MacAloon's four criteria for spectacle, I have offered an analysis of fashion shows that shows them to be spectacular, but spectacles with a particular purpose. They are visually striking, drawing on sensory and symbolic codes to immerse the fashion product in an evocative world, whilst seeking to transmit this world, through their manipulation of size and grandeur, to both a present and an absent audience. Both sectors of the audience must be excited in a performance for it to fully succeed—to be memorable; to fulfil its aims as a marketing exercise; to sell the dream—for the presentation of a collection and the success of the showing label.

References

Amed, Imran. 2011. "The Fashion Trail: Australia, Against All Odds." *The Business of Fashion*, 20 May, last accessed 15 August 2014, http://www.businessoffashion.com/2011/05/the-fashion-trail-australia-against-all-odds.html/.

Auslander, Philip. 1999. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Beusman, Callie. 2013. "Rick Owens Replaced Runway Models With a Step Dance Team," *Jezebel*, 26 September, last accessed 7 September 2014, http://jezebel.com/rick-owens-replaced-runway-models-with-a-step-dance-tea-1404498034/.

Blanks, Tim. 2014. "Chanel Fall 2014 Ready-to-Wear Review," Style.com, 4 March, last accessed 7 September 2014, http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2014-ready-to-wear/chanel/.

Burley, Isabella. 2014. "Chanel AW14," *Dazed*, February, last accessed 7 September 2014, http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/19110/1/chanel-aw14/.

Carlson, Marvin. 1989. *Places of Performance*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Cavanagh, Alice. 2014. "The Mix Master." *Vogue Australia*, March: 232-235.

Clark, Judith. 2001. "A Note: Getting the Invitation." *Fashion Theory* 5(3): 343-354.

Coffey, Debbie, ed. 1998. *Catwalk: The Designer Collections*. Sydney: ACP Books.

Debord, Guy. (1968) 1983. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black and Red.

De Perthuis, Karen. 2003. *Dying to be Born Again: Mortality, Immortality and the Fashion Model.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney.

Entwistle, Joanne and Agnès Rocamora. 2006. "The Field of Fashion Materialized." *Sociology* 40: 735-751.

Evans, Caroline. 2001. "The Enchanted Spectacle." *Fashion Theory* 5(3): 271-310.

——— 2003. *Fashion At The Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Findlay, Rosie. 2014. "Alice McCall at MBFW 2014." *The Conversation,* 12 April 2014, last accessed 6 September 2014, https://theconversation.com/alice-mccall-at-mbfwa-2014-25484/.

Frey, Nadine. 1998. "Mass Media and Runway Presentations." In *The Style Engine*, edited by Giannino Malossi, 30-39. New York: The Monacelli Press.

Gilbert, David. 2013. "A New World Order? Fashion and Its Capitals in the Twenty-First Century." In *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, edited by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, 9-30. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gregg Duggan, Ginger. 2001. "The Greatest Show on Earth: A Look at Contemporary Fashion Shows and Their Relationship to Performance Art." *Fashion Theory* 5(3): 243-268.

Hoffman, Megan. 2009. "Is a Fashion Show the Place for Social Commentary? Investigating the Spectacle Dressed Up in Ideas in Hussein Chalayan's After Words." *Australasian Drama Studies* 54 (April): 35-49.

Khan, Nathalie. 2000. "Catwalk Politics." In *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations, and Analysis*, edited by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, 114-127. London and New York: Routledge.

Lock, Simon. 1998. "Foreword." In *Catwalk The Designer Collections*, edited by Debbie Coffey, xx-xx. Sydney: ACP Creative Books.

MacAloon, John J. 1984. "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies." In *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, edited by John J. MacAloon, 241-280. Philadelphia: ISHI.

Maxwell, Ian. 2006. "Parallel Evolution: Performance Studies at the University of Sydney." *TDR: The Drama Review* 50(1): 33-45.

Maynard, Margaret. 2001. *Out of Line: Australian Women and Style*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

Rabine, Leslie W. 1994. “A Woman’s Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism and Feminism.” In *On Fashion*, edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, 59-75. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Sexton, Jennifer. 2013. “Dan Single, founder of cult brand Ksubi, stripped of street cred.” *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 May, last accessed 7 September 2014, http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/dan-single-founder-of-cult-brand-ksubi-stripped-of-street-cred/story-fni0cx12-1226650587238/.

Vejby, Rune and D.E. Wittkower. 2010. “Spectacle 2.0?” In *Facebook and Philosophy: What’s On Your Mind?*, edited by D. E. Wittkower. 97-108. Chicago: Open Court.

Vogue Australia. 2014. Ksubi designer profile. Last accessed 7 September 2014, http://www.vogue.com.au/people/designers/ksubi,329/.

Vogue.com. 2013. “Rick Owens Spring 2014.” September 26, last accessed 7 September 2014, http://video.vogue.com/watch/rick-owens-spring-2014/.

Wells, Gwendolyn M. 1997. “Of Critics and the Catwalk: Interdiscursive Dialogue in the Postcouture Era.” *L’Esprit Créateur* 37(1): 72-83.

Williams, Paul and Kenneth Ascher. 1979. “Rainbow Connection,” *The Muppet Movie: Original Soundtrack Recording*. United States: Atlantic Records.