

Unusual choreography in fashion shows

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Abstract: If the rules of the model's gait on the fashion show's podium are traditionally defined, the most avant-garde of the fashion world dare to emancipate of them; the simple rectilinear gait transformed to modes of artistic expression. We allow dancing, running and even swimming while creating unusual choreographies. An unusual choreography can be born through an anti-fashion creation or not. In short, the fashion show becomes more attractive and more visible, the creation is represented differently and many clear messages are transmitted. Our article is based on a corpus of various fashion shows that have been talked much about.

Keywords: fashion show, choreography, model's gait, unusual

Introduction

Since its first appearances, the fashion show has manifested as a living spectacle constituted essentially of the comings and goings of models dressed in a fashion collection. Modeling agencies take care of the selection of the most beautiful girls for the modeling profession to teach them how to walk on the stage in accordance with the standard rules all over the world.

With the evolution of the means of communication and the modes of representation, it seems that the clothing creations are not sufficiently valued by simple comings and goings on a rectilinear scene. Having the ambition to open other ways in the representation of fashion, several creators dare to emancipate themselves from the habitual rules related to the fashion shows.

The methodology of this article is based on the analysis of a corpus of various fashion show's choreographies mainly that of Alexander McQueen, Viktor & Rolf, Hussein Chalayan and Jana Nedzvetskaya.

This paper consists of four parts. The first part is interested in the traditional walk of the models and its evolution. In the two next parts, we treat the corpus that deals with the unusual choreography. Precisely, the second part is interested in anti-fashion creation that contributes to making an unusual choreography. The third part deals with more advanced ways in the walk of the mannequins. Through the fourth part, we discuss the results of the emancipation of the classical model's gait.

1. Progress of Model's gait

The Gait is a person's manner of walking. In Fashion, "a model's gait is what designers look for at casting calls" [1].

Exhibit the fashion creations with very strict model's gait; straight back and forth. That's how the fashion shows started [2]. In the second half of the twentieth century, this field has seen a radical deviation in its traditional characteristics especially with regard to the walk on the catwalk, through some bold interventions. In fact, the steps of the models become more flexible and more elaborate by introducing music.

The spectacularization of the fashion shows was born in the 1980s with the development of dance and music, integrated two decades before. The musical backgrounds are quite loud, often imposing, sometimes even noisy. In particular, inspired by the dance and the theater, this spectacularization begins with more flexible.

Each model should have a beautiful and graceful gait, because no matter how attractive the face is, and no matter how sexy the figure is, a sloppy gait can ruin the whole first impression.

Of course, the ability to walk femininely is useful for any girl and woman, but for a model it is a very necessary and important "accessory" that can reveal her individuality and give a ticket to the world of haute couture [3].

Furthermore, for a beautiful walk, the fashion model should apply many rules and requirements traditionally imposed, are also valuable nowadays.

- Rule 1. Smooth posture;
- Rule 2. Head Position;
- Rule 3. Relaxed hands;
- Rule 4. The Right Step;
- Rule 5. Heels.

In other, fashion model should have unique gait and certainly self-confidence... These rules and requirements are explicated by public-welfare [4].

With the beginning of the XXIst century, the model's gait becomes even more emancipated. They are hybridized by many gestures and body movements. The classical rectilinear walk, considered as essential for a fashion show, is formally transgressed in favor of performances and happenings.

It is within the framework that we distinguish two kinds of innovation in the model's gait during the fashion shows: those which depend of the evolution of the creations named "anti-fashion" and those which are quasi-independents of the other existing elements insofar as they are fundamentally based on a well elaborated choreography composed of unusual exhibition manners.

How does a fashion creation manage to emancipate itself from the strict classical walk to give birth to a mode of artistic expression within a fashion show? For what ambitions does a designer opt for new forms of presentation via anti-fashion creations or by inlaying new forms of exhibiting, far from the classical model's gait?

2. Anti-fashion and unusual choreography

Certainly, innovative and daring anti-fashion¹ clothing designs give the shows in which they are unveiled a spectacular aspect that is particularly different from that of classic fashion shows. Avant-garde and conceptual fashion designers, such as the Dutch duo Viktor and Rolf, the British Lee Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan, often do not allow this kind of creations to be unveiled like any other creations. They seek to move away from the usual forms of classic fashion shows in order to consolidate a daring character to the representation. Their representations transform, frankly, into an original real live show.

More than a fashion designer, Chalayan² is an artist who is interested in various subjects, particularly those related to society and identity. After words (2000) is one of his most famous shows as much for the creations as for the audacious way of presenting them.

Five people, men and female models, representing a family, are the actors of this fashion show which takes the aspect of a happening. This happening is based on clothing and furniture transformations: furniture and home objects give their meaning to clothes. In fact, these transformations hide many meanings and emotions, more specifically, for the designer of Turkish origin. Chalayan refers to the immigration of Turks³, including his family: refugees who fled the horror of war with the constant concern to move, taking their belongings with them and hiding them carefully.

The show was inspired by refugees of war, people forced to flee their homes, carrying their worldly possessions on their backs. Given the designer's Turkish Cypriot heritage and the conflict that occurred in that area during the 60s and 70s, this inspiration has a particularly personal resonance – and it was dealt with sensitively. "Everything was deftly handled from the Turkish theme, used for a background choir, to coats with built-in mitten pockets and the quirky ending..." wrote Suzy Menkes in her show report for *The New York Times*. "It was a stellar performance" [5].

Here is that a designer crystallizes the societal tensions of the contemporary world in his fashion speech [6]. It is therefore a speech in the form of a fashion show. But it's a show that is not like others because it emancipates itself from any classical appearance of coming and going of models.

Still in the happening mode, Viktor & Rolf⁴ prepare for their 2015 fashion show who named Wearable Art show a very eccentric collection with a flagrant influence on the course of the show. It's an anti-fashion collection of dresses purely inspired by art.

"Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren [...] took to the catwalk to assist with completing the outfits in the collection live" [7]. After having done their classic tour of the catwalk, the two designers undress models to transform their clothes into real artistic paintings hanged on the back of the stage.

Daring to break away from the classic way of representing a fashion collection by deviating a simple fashion show into a gallery of art, comes from a deep ambition to affirm that art is fashion and fashion is art. In

¹ Anti-fashion is a term that encompasses various styles of clothing that are clearly contrary to the fashion and trends of the day. It has been adopted in response to people who are "too fashionable". Anti-fashion creation is not often wearable. However, specific people, like stars, can dare to wear such clothes for special occasions

² Hussein Chalayan is a British fashion designer of Turkish origin, born in 1970. He is so recognized, from the beginning, by his conceptual and experimental work. He created his fashion house in 1995. His creations, which are a mixture of fashion, design, architecture and new technologies, earned him the title of "British Designer of the Year" in 1999 and 2000.

³ This fashion draws its inspiration from the memories of the ethnic cleansing that the Turks of Cyprus suffered in 1974. In 1974, the island of Cyprus was divided into two parts between Turks and Greeks. Before this division, a historical event marked the Turkish Cypriot families, represented in their forced migration.

⁴ Viktor & Rolf is a Dutch fashion house founded in 1993 by Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, both born in 1969

fact, the real recognition of fashion as art, like painting and music...etc., is not obvious for many people. Indeed, this surprising answer to the question of the relationship between fashion and art is so sought after by other 'revolutionary' fashion designers.

For his part, Lee Alexander McQueen⁵ does not skimp on creativity, or on his audacity for the benefit of this alliance between fashion and art, obviously, through the emancipation of the classics. In this context, the last dress of his show No. 13 (1998) is one of the creations that remains engraved in the history of fashion shows.

McQueen summons Shalom Harlow, a former Canadian ballerina, who, instead of walking back and forth to reveal her white mini-dress, takes a place on a rotating platform to be thrown from the paint by robotic machines⁶. With carefully orchestrated choreography, led by fantastic pirouettes from the model, the dress is transformed into a stunning artistic product, made with one of the new technologies of the late 20th century: the robot!

McQueen's fashion show becomes a multidisciplinary performance in which fashion is associated with theater, dance, and plastic art and certainly with technology. The relationships between modernity and art and between mass production and the unique artisanal piece are very highlighting by the way.

3. No limits in unusual choreography

The fashion micro some knows other fashion shows that turn into an artistic expression without the need for sartorial sophistication. In this regard, for the closing of the 2009 Chanel summer fashion show, the artistic director Karl Lagerfeld (1933-2019) asked his models to improvise by walking as if it were a feminist demonstration while holding up signs with famous slogans⁷. It is a rather spontaneous walk that takes the form of a happening. This happening creates the highlight of the entire parade. He passes, at the same time, clear messages related mainly to women's rights but also to prove that fashion is inspired by the street.

More spectacular than a walk that looks like a demonstration, the dance is certainly one of the most recurrent body forms that boldly replace the methodical and habitual walk of the models. The dance was a source of inspiration that led to soften the strict walk of the past. He imposes nowadays itself on the fashion catwalks by integrating as a part of the walk or even replacing it completely. In this context, during the H&M x Kenzo fashion show (2017), the designers dared to make the models dance during their passages.

"It's just a celebration of the collection," designer Humberto Leon explained after the runway show for the new Kenzo x H&M collaboration had dissolved into a full-on dance party. Not that it hadn't already been a dance party; with a Southern drumline, a New York-based orchestra, and models and dancers from across the country, as well as a beatboxer and a surprise set from Ice Cube at the after party, the show was vibrant, energetic, and far from the austerity of fashion week [8].

In the same context, the English designer Stella McCartney transformed, for her 2017 summer fashion show, her catwalk into a dance stage where the finale was danced by the models who engaged in a kind of choreographed battle in the heart of the Opéra Garnier [9].

In turn, Lee Alexander McQueen prepared for his 2004 summer show, described as one of the great spectacles at the beginning of the twenty-first century [10]. A rich choreography mixing dance and theater: the models march sensually at the beginning, dance in duets afterwards, laugh and then run as a group to end up falling over with fatigue! Jan Margan, fashion historian, states that this happening is only a "metaphor for the incessant renewal of fashion[11]; a metaphor that concerns fashion trends that, each time, start to spread very slowly and then become a mass phenomenon in an almost universal way before being dissipated by new trends. On the other hand, Jean-Pascal Simard ⁸notes that this choreography deals with a very harsh social critique where we see the protagonists [12].

A decade later, the fashion world is surprised by a fashion show that apparently draws its inspiration from McQueen's show: a performance for the Owndays⁹ eyewear brand from its 2015 winter collection. In fact, as a preamble, models make, one after the other, their comings and goings of the catwalk running. They are, thus, followed by Naomi Watanabe, a curvy Japanese actress and singer, who also appears running with all her strength to come back softly singing.

⁵ Lee Alexander McQueen is a British fashion designer (1969-2010); he is nicknamed the bad boy of fashion because of his boldness, his style and his provocative creations.

⁶ Two painting machines are borrowed from the Fiat car manufacturing plant.

⁷ Among these slogans: "Ladies first", "be different", "Free the freedom", "without women more men", "vote for us"

⁸ Professor at LaSalle College. Artistic director of the Markantoiné brand.

⁹ *Owndays* is a Japanese eyewear brand founded in 1989.

Jana Nedzvetskaya¹⁰, one of Russia's most outrageous fashion designers, has a history of creating original, graceful and surprising images through her various fashion designs and performances. To unveil her 2015 summer collection, she exploited an indoor pool that represents the stage during the fashion show. After a small classical straight walk, the models obviously throw themselves into the water as if they were going to commit suicide. A whole aquatic choreography with graceful gestures that sublimate their floating dresses [13], transmitted live on a giant screen, offers a sensational lightness of the silhouettes and forms that are as expressive as they are amazing and that certainly cannot be exhibited through a classical gait of the models.

Triggering a new form for her silk collection is not the only ambition of Jana Nedzvetskaya through the replacement of a classical gait by an aquatic choreography. In fact, this performance is presented as a proposal for her version of the positivity that arises from the poetics and sensuality of the performance in the face of the violence evoked by the graphics¹¹ illustrated on the aquatic backdrop¹². In short, the desire to break with wars and evil is symbolized by the positive and fertile acts of suicide performed by the models, giving birth to beauty and harmony.

4. Unusual choreography; result of study

By transforming or exposing themselves as a work of art, these anti-fashion creations offer, within a fashion show, new purely reflexive walk, directly linked to the ways of representing. Thus, they create a fertile ground for other designers to invent and to rebel against the traditional norms not only of fashion creation but also of fashion representation.

En effect, the audacity of fashion designers is only a will resulting from a purely conceptual and artistic spirit wanting, once again, to confirm that fashion is an art in its own right although the real recognition is not yet obvious.

Moreover, beyond the collection represented and the brand itself, other deeper ambitions are realized. Obviously, nothing is allowed at random, everything means and has a meaning; all these bold emancipations are not fortuitous. Those emancipations have the essential objective to launch clear messages and subjects in relation with humanity. The messages confirm, on the other hand, that fashion is not only limited to esthetic and beauty.

In other respects, other designers and/or choreographers even more courageous give an even more unusual dimension to the show than an innovative artistic performance realized on a fashion podium. Through an anti-fashion creation or not, they make the models run, dance or swim while creating unusual choreographies. Those new ways of representing highlight the creations in a different way; they offer them other ways to reveal themselves, not allowed by the simple customary model's gait.

As a result, the models who are, ordinarily, the moving hangers of the collection, let go of this "soulless" function to become influential actors on the course of the show.

There are many questions about the ability of the models to realize these artistic performances like the marine performance of Jana Nedzvetskaya. Indeed, those women chosen for this show are not real fashion models; they are swimming athletes who participated in various synchronized swimming¹³ competitions.

To tell the truth, Nedzvetskaya is not the only one among the designers we mentioned above, to think about people outside the field of modeling: for the show "After words", Hussein Chalyan hired normal people constituting a family; Alexander McQueen thought for the show "No. 13", a ballerina and professional dancers for the summer 2014 show. Indeed, these designers are forced to not use, for these cases, professional supermodels that are, generally, accustomed and trained only for the classic walk.

Finally, the creator can only shock and attract attention while creating more relief for his fashion show, for his creations and, certainly, for his brand. In short, the sale of his creations rise in this way and his aura is radiate; this is the major objective of many fashion designers.

Conclusion

Getting the word out and circulating images of their shows around the world is one of the deepest obsessions of today's designers. Through our article, we exposed how and why some daring fashion designers

¹⁰ Jana Nedzvetskaya is a Russian fashion designer, born in 1957. She is the founder and creative director of two fashion brands LO and JN.

¹¹ These graphic details are basically represented on waterproof banners that cover the entire nautical environment.

¹² In fact, this show is called "Harmagedon", a term frequently used to designate catastrophic battles of universal scope as well as "the final war between God and human governments"; a term symbolic of the great struggle between good and evil

¹³ Synchronized swimming is a water sport that combines swimming, gymnastics, and dance.

deal with the surprising creation anti-fashion and the unusual choreography. The most visionary and avant-garde designers find that this is only possible by daring to emancipate themselves from the classic, traditionally codified norms linked to the fields of fashion representation, notably, the canons of gait on the catwalk.

From now on, there are no limits and rules to follow: the gait of models no longer means straight back and forth; we dare to transform the fashion shows into real artistic moments through performances or artistic happenings; we dare to unveil anti-fashion creations that can be transformed by the models, directly on stage; theater, dance, synchronized swimming, mime..., we dare to hybridize the different artistic disciplines in fashion so that we can't distinguish one from another!

In fact, actors, playing the role of models, who sometimes free themselves from the constraint of being necessarily from the field of modeling; Therefore, they dare to replace them with professionals from other fields of scenic arts in order to perfect a daring performance instead of a rectilinear walk; it happens that people of small or large size walk on the scenes for a choreographic necessity. In the same vein, how far will audacity and emancipation go in modeling, precisely, in the choice of models?

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