From Fashion Show to Exhibition: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*

Maude Pesant-Johnson

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2017

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Maude Pesant-Johnson

Entitled: From Fashion Show to Exhibition: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Art History)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

_____ Examiner

Dr. Elaine Cheasley Paterson

_____ Examiner

Dr. Kristina Huneault

_____ Supervisor

Dr. John Potvin

Approved by   _____

Dr. Kristina Huneault, Graduate Program Director

_____

Rebecca Taylor Duclos, Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

Date   _____

ABSTRACT

From Fashion Show to Exhibition: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*

Maude Pesant-Johnson

The exhibition format, as both space and medium, has developed as a site for pragmatic, interdisciplinary experiments of the performative. The North-American fashion exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2011 and 2015) proved to be a significant case study of this cultural phenomenon materializing through curatorial and exhibition-making practices. At the intersection of a legacy of theatrical aesthetic and new museological and technological possibilities taking shape in the 2010s, the multi-layered blockbuster emerges from the tensions raised by its investment in the materiality of performance, its deep entrenchment in consumer culture, and its *memento mori* scheme. As a substantial entry point to the study of a museology of the performative, *Savage Beauty* is analysed throughout this thesis for its relation to the experience, as both subject matter, displayed "object" and product of consumption. I discuss the translation of one medium into another taking shape through the retrospective: the way in which the institution transposes the fashion show into the format of an exhibition. At once a response to the history of fashion curating, this thesis intends to examine the issues conveyed by the politics of embodiment in the fashion exhibition system via a focus on the specificities of *Savage Beauty*, observed through the lenses of the experiential, performativity, and theatricality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s a range of spectacular fashion shows, first in London and then in Paris, gave rise to the speculation that fashion had become 'the new performance'.

Caroline Evans[1]

In the context of an increased porosity between art and cultural practices, the question "Is fashion art?" has been absorbed into the performative turn or what Chris Salter designates as "one of the major paradigms of the twenty-first century."[2] Evolving from the revival of "liveness" taking place at the end of the 1990s, this phenomenon has contributed to a prominence of interdisciplinarity that profoundly marks present day practices. Fundamentally tied to the performative are the notions of experience and the impetus to archive. Curating and exhibition-making exercises, as forms of discursive, mediated presentation of art works, became strategic sites for pragmatic experiments of the performative. At a time when disciplinary boundaries are increasingly dismantled, the exhibition format appears like a scene where everything can happen—as both space and medium—and yet it actively participates in institutionalizing emerging and avant-garde practices, as well as historicizing ephemeral projects. Fashion, as a performative practice meaningfully entering the consecrated spaces of art display, proves to be a substantial entry point to the study of a museology of the performative. As a key North-American example of fashion exhibition, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* confirmed the cultural worth of fashion with its record-breaking attendance. Held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) of New York in 2011 and organized by the Costume Institute, *Savage Beauty* was the first retrospective exhibition of the late British fashion designer Lee Alexander McQueen (1969-2010). McQueen was an extremely popular designer, dubbed *enfant terrible* and fashion genius early in his career for his provocative, rebellious, and revolutionary creative impulse. His design practice was autobiographical, complexly echoing his take on life. McQueen's affect-rooted collections transcended the

---

[1] Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003: 70.

[2] Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010: xxi.

restrictive idea of fashion as a utilitarian product and invested fashion as an art product—as a critical and reflexive object—and ultimately as an experience. The spectacular value of his work made it very seductive on the visual level and his profile allowed for an extensive creation of narratives, rendering McQueen especially attractive to the exhibition realm. In March 2015, four years after the first staging of the exhibition, *Savage Beauty* found its way to Britain at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). At the intersection of a legacy of theatrical aesthetic originating from Diana Vreeland's curatorial work of the 1970s, which I discuss later in this introduction, and new museological and technological possibilities taking shape in the 2010s, the multi-layered blockbuster emerges from the tensions raised by its investment in the materiality of performance, its deep entrenchment in consumer culture, and its *memento mori* scheme. What makes this fashion exhibition distinctive and analysis-worthy is its relation to the experience, as both subject matter, displayed "object" and product of consumption. It corresponds to McQueen's attention to the experiential, the creation of "experiences" being the crux of his practice.

Fashion fundamentally functions as an interactive dialogue between objects and bodies that is endlessly conditional on newness. The extensive presence of contemporary fashion in the everyday through visual and material culture problematizes its articulation in the exhibition. It raises unusual dynamics regarding the long-established historicizing system of the institutional space, that is its ability to construct history and thus make its exhibited object(s) part of a historical narrative. Fashion museology, as Marie Riegels Melchior suggests, puts forward "new museological ideologies" fostering a "fascination with the new."[3] She explains: "fashion is also selected as an effective strategy by museums in order to achieve the decades-old 'new museology' paradigm, which still provides the model for museum politics and the goal of greater social inclusion among visitors."[4] On another level, Fiona Anderson reports that "museums and galleries engage with, and contribute to, the fast-moving circulation of information involved in the contemporary fashion system."[5] She underlines the very

---

[3] Marie Riegels Melchior, "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology" in Birgitta Svenson and Marie Riegels Melchior (eds.), *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014: 6.
[4] Ibid., 5-6.
[5] Fiona Anderson, "Museums as Fashion Media" in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000: 372.

function of the postmodern institution, that of a communication channel. In the context of a fashion exhibition, this significant shift in the museum's purpose arises in the translation of one media into another. Inhabited by fashion, the exhibition space dedicated to art undertakes an adaptation of its curatorial codes. At the same time, fashion simultaneously appropriates the representational modes of exhibition-making. Consequently, both modes of activity engage in a reciprocal relationship and cause a mutual displacement of their individual politics. This exchange between art's and fashion's structural spaces has the effect of blurring the borders of the two categories, which are united through their communicative logics. As a result, the use of "art" in this thesis refers to a broad field encompassing practices that reflect, question and communicate ideas through creative production, embedded within forms of consumption.

The reason why *Savage Beauty* is an essential case study to art history is manifold. The blockbuster can contribute to the analysis-based discipline's increasing permeability, by proving to be a relevant example from which to study the exhibition of performative practices. *Savage Beauty* highlights the curatorial anxieties around exhibiting the performative function of objects. It enacts a practice that gives rise to a ghostly embodiment of an object that still refers to a past performance, but persistently fails to (re)create it anew. Hence, what is at stake is the translation of one medium into another taking shape through the retrospective: the way in which the institution transposes the fashion show into the format of an exhibition. The curatorial approach of *Savage Beauty* looks to the past and is defined by a marked intention to create history (or a story) around McQueen's body of work and himself as an artist. The potential performativity of the display is invalidated by the curatorial inability to activate McQueen's work in the new context and realities of the exhibition. What, then, are the conditions leading to the loss of the inherent performativity of fashion in the exhibition space? How could the dialogue between fashion and art remain interactive in this institutional context? At once a response to the history of fashion curating, this thesis intends to examine the issues conveyed by the politics of embodiment in the fashion exhibition system via a focus on the specificities of *Savage Beauty*, observed through the prism of media translation—a concept that characterizes acts of conversion of one communication means into another. It posits that the solution would lie in the logics of the "new" instead of the "re": doing it *again for the first time* rather than doing it *again*. In order to answer my research questions, I rely on a multi-disciplinary methodology by using material culture as an object-based approach to analyze the

garments in the exhibition settings, hermeneutics to interpret the theoretical sources and visual culture to study the exhibition and the fashion shows through photographs, videos, films and digital displays.

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty was the first exhibition to present retrospectively the work of the British fashion designer. The fact that the exhibition took place a year after his death was the result of the modification of the original concept, intended to be "a trilogy of exhibitions called *Against Nature*"[6] featuring the work of several designers including McQueen. Held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 4 May to 7 August 2011, *Savage Beauty* is one of the most popular exhibitions of the New York museum, with more than 660,000 visitors. Curated by Andrew Bolton under the supervision of now former chief curator Harold Koda, the retrospective involved the production designers and music producer of McQueen's runway presentations: Sam Gainsbury assumed the creative direction, Joseph Bennett managed the production design, and John Gosling coordinated the soundtrack. The blockbuster was conceived around the pivotal theme of romanticism, and was divided into several themes staged in different galleries: "Romantic Mind"; "Romantic Gothic and Cabinet of Curiosities"; "Romantic Nationalism"; "Romantic Exoticism"; "Romantic Primitivism"; and "Romantic Naturalism". The exhibition covered the nineteen-year career of McQueen and encompassed nearly one hundred ensembles and seventy accessories. Produced accordingly to accompany the presentation, the catalogue[7] gathers special photographs of the garments. Rather than a reference tool that would extend the critical scope of *Savage Beauty* and its curatorial premise, the MET catalogue functions as a visual archive of McQueen's pieces and their formal details; it does not include any exhibition views. Funded by Alexander McQueen[TM], American Express, and Condé Nast, the exhibition seemed to straightforwardly speak to its sponsors. The manifest implications of the fashion industry in *Savage Beauty* shed light on the value of fashion exhibitions. American *Vogue*'s May 2011 issue was devoted to McQueen, with a fashion spread titled "A Look at 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty'" that included an interview with Alexander McQueen's creative director Sarah Burton. Power

---

[6] Andrew Bolton interviewed by *AnOther*. Isabella Burley, "*Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the MET," *AnOther Magazine*, May 3, 2011. Accessed 16 April 2015. http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/1062/alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty-at-the-met

[7] Andrew Bolton (ed.), *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

relations fixed the context of *Savage Beauty*, at the core of it resided commercial objectives. These economic foundations allowed—and implicitly asked for—some sort of sensationalism: the exhibition had to succeed and visually impress, in other words to speak the very language of the fashion industry. The Victoria and Albert Museum iteration, curated by Claire Wilcox, underwent a slight variation through a number of additions. The larger spaces of the London institution allowed for a reconfiguration of some of the original galleries and integrated supplementary pieces including garments, shoes, headpieces, and jewellery.[8] As part of the programming to complement the presentation, a conference, *Sabotage and Tradition,* was held on 5 and 6 June 2015, and a new catalogue[9] was published. Contextualizing McQueen's work through a diversity of angles, it developed specific aspects of his practice so as to strengthen our understanding of the cultural significance of the designer's oeuvre. With 493,043 tickets sold between 14 March and 2 August 2015, the record-breaking monographic show became the V&A's most visited exhibition.

While these differences between the two iterations hint a slight shift in context and curatorial goals, the overall display and rationale of the show remain the same. In the original version as conceived by Bolton for the MET, the concern was to trigger an emotional experience for the viewer: "when I [Bolton] began working on the exhibition, the only thing I was certain of was that I wanted visitors to experience the same powerful, visceral emotions that I experienced during my first McQueen runway presentation."[10] This issue correspondingly materialized in the V&A iteration. As such, the curatorial frame reproduced the idiosyncratic aesthetic of McQueen's shows' visceral politics. The exhibition format took the shape of a row of rooms focused on thematic cliché (previously mentioned), markedly theatrical in their play with lighting, music, tapestry, mirrors, architectural constructions, and technology. The designer's voice generated narratives in the form of wall texts and a soundtrack heard in the galleries. Garments and accessories were displayed on mannequins elevated on pedestals. It was forbidden to take photographs or even to draw within the spaces of *Savage Beauty*. The retrospective was distinctively constructed around large parts of

---

[8] Victoria and Albert Museum, "News Release: Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty," *Victoria and Albert Museum*. Accessed 5 February 2016. http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/252514/Savage-Beauty-Press-Release-Febuary.pdf

[9] Claire Wilcox (ed.), *Alexander McQueen*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015.

[10] Bolton, "In Search of the Sublime," 18.

McQueen's collections, as it brought together many pieces of the same collection in a given space of the exhibition under a specific theme. For the purpose of this thesis, I will only address one section of one thematic space in the interest of having a precise, in-depth grasp of the exhibition content. I limit my focus on a specific part of the "Romantic Naturalism" gallery that showcases seven looks of McQueen's Spring/Summer 2010 collection entitled *Plato's Atlantis*. This fragmentary, circumscribed investigation is driven by the significance of *Plato's Atlantis* collection within McQueen's work. Symbolically loaded by the fact that it is the last completed collection and final runway presentation of the designer, *Plato's Atlantis* is also the first show to be live streamed on the Internet. It meaningfully and uniquely expresses the structural rapport between fashion and technology at the core of McQueen's practice, regarding the unprecedented scale of the interchange between the two systems. Although *Savage Beauty* unfolded in two different venues, it did not change the nature or general thematic of the exhibition: the examined sample remains identical in both iterations. The reiteration at the V&A is thus understood here as a repetition of the initial project, which is deeply anchored in a North-American curatorial tradition and representative of its operational aesthetics.

The first part of this thesis, "Visceral Politics," investigates the performance of materiality through the case study of *Plato's Atlantis*'s runway show. By means of a thorough focus on the Spring/Summer 2010 presentation, I examine McQueen's performance of fashion and, more broadly, consider the role of the fashion show in highlighting the relationship between spectacle and performative practices. This section borrows models of scenography and theatre from the work of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud as well as the concept of "shock" from philosopher Walter Benjamin so as to unfold the conceptual structure of the designer's practice. This part aims to provide relevant and meaningful material to analyze the *Plato's Atlantis* section of the exhibition. Partly based on my experiential knowledge of *Savage Beauty*, Part II, "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty," delves into the exhibition and examines its "thingness" and curatorial approach through a circumscribed focus on the space of *Plato's Atlantis* in the "Romantic Naturalism" gallery. By considering the two catalogues produced by the MET (Andrew Bolton) and the V&A (Claire Wilcox) within the frame of the exhibition, as well as press reviews and critical articles, I intend to implement a thorough and multi-layered contact with *Savage Beauty*. Studied in terms of a media translation, from fashion show to exhibition, *Savage Beauty* is unpacked through Dorothea von Hantelmann's

theory of the "experiential." This analysis of *Savage Beauty* through both an object-based approach and a theoretical underpinning leads to a deeper grasp of the exhibition's context, content, form and issues. Part III, "Ritual as Praxis," proposes to use Shannon Jackson's concept of "staged management" as an entry point to investigate the mediality of performance. While it gathers together the two previous sections—the fashion show and the exhibition—it draws on the system of ritual to review the agency of fashion through an assessment of the media translation's effectiveness. By means of the notions of performativity[11] and theatricality,[12] which are core concepts throughout this thesis, it also investigates the constitutive power of the exhibition space. As a result, this section looks at the ephemerality of the act versus the lasting value of the performative object. With a focus on the mechanisms of the act, it examines fashion exhibitions' inherent instability. The museum, I argue, has to become performative instead of exhibiting performativity if fashion is to be part of its agenda: for the embodiment of the interactive dialogue is conditional on the efficiency of curation.

---

[11] There is a lot of confusion around the term "performativity," often misused as a synonym of performance. One accurate definition I found was developed in relation to the curatorial: "The performative is understood as the constitution of meaning through acts or practices. However, not all acts are necessarily performative; imitation may lack a constitutive effect on reality. […] The performative research method observes the conditions of meaning-production through detailed analysis of the social, spatial, structural, and physical conditions of the act, whether it is intentional or unintentional." (See Balázs Beöthy, "Performativity," in Eszter Szakács (ed.), *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2012. Accessed 27 December 2016. http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/performativity/) I thus use "performativity" to refer to a reality-producing capacity understood as the moment when the current state is altered—coming from philosophy of language, based on John Langshaw Austin's "constitutive utterance." (See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962 and John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.) As explained further in the text, I use the term performativity in accordance with Dorothea von Hantelmann's line of thought regarding the origins, definition and application of the concept. (See Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010.) In this sense, I do not use it as equivalent to performance, although the two concepts are at some point markedly close in their porous definition. To be clear, I understand performance in a wide-ranging manner, which corresponds to Chris Salter's identification of "[p]erformance as practice, method, and worldview." (See Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010: xxi.)

[12] I use the term "theatricality" in reference to the staging or mise-en-scène of the real, and as a concept that characterizes the theatrical language and its various elements and conventions by and through which the (re)presentation occurs. In line with Josette Féral's work on theatricality, I understand theatricality (the theatrical process) as a conceptual construction that results from signs interpreted by the spectator. Significantly, Féral defines theatricality as a "transcendental structure" and suggests that "[m]ore than a property with analyzable characteristics, theatricality seems to be a process that has to do with a 'gaze' that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge." (See Josette Féral, "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," *SubStance*, vol. 31 (number 2 & 3), issue 98/99, 2002: 94-108.)

Contextual premises

At the end of the 1990s, new figures of the British contemporary art landscape came to light under the label of Young British Artists (YBAs). Employing provocation as the operating modes of a practice that merged conceptualism and pop art,[13] this "newly imagined avant-garde"[14] grew in popularity at a time when London was repositioning itself as one of the world's major centres for contemporary art exchange.[15] As part of this 1990s British avant-garde scene, McQueen's work corresponds to the YBAs' practices particularly with regard to his male contemporaries Jake and Dinos Chapman, Damien Hirst, and Marc Quinn, since it tackles the same issues, such as death, sexuality, and the economy, through analogous motifs. Born in 1969 in Lewisham, South London, McQueen was a tailor's apprentice on Savile Row and worked for a theatre costumier before pursuing a Master's in Fashion Design at Central Saint Martins (1990-1992). While simultaneously working on his collections under the McQueen label, he was appointed chief designer at the French haute couture house of Givenchy in 1996, which he left in 2001. His work has been widely celebrated throughout his prolific yet short career,[16] as he committed suicide on 11 February 2010. The reins of his brand were left to Sarah Burton. The designer had a radical and provocative approach that recalled shock tactics of the aforementioned visual artists, and he reflected on themes such as death and expressed ideas through forms that could be labelled "trash" to some extent. In 1997, Martin Maloney wrote: "The achievement of recent British art has been its radicality of content, not radicality of form."[17] According to him, the YBAs' work "represents the art of ideas with a high visual impact. It enforces a belief in art's ability to show ideas as physical things, and in this manifests a set of attitudes towards looking at and experiencing the world."[18] This statement sheds light on a sensibility that recalls the spirit of high fashion as it stresses the

---

[13] Martin Maloney, "Everyone a Winner! Selected British Art from the Saatchi Collection 1987-97," in Brooks Adams et al., *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1997: 26.

[14] Michael Corris, "British? Young? Invisible? w/ Attitude?," *Artforum International*, May 1992: 106.

[15] Aidan While, "Locating art worlds: London and the making of Young British art," *Area*, vol. 3, issue 35, 2003: 251.

[16] Lee Alexander McQueen has been the recipient of the British Designer of the Year multiple times (1996, 1997, 2001, 2003) and of the Council of Fashion Designers of America Award for Best International Designer (2003), and awarded a Most Excellent Commander of the British Empire (2003).

[17] Maloney, "Everyone a Winner!," 26.

[18] Ibid.

significance of the material within a conceptual practice, but most notably articulates what comes about in the practice of McQueen that makes him part of the YBAs' drive. The designer indeed used fashion—clothing, models, props, and the interactions between these physical entities—as a strategic way of *showing* concepts via unsettling experiences with a great attention to the visual. Carried by the YBAs but reaching a broader scope, this London-based impulse to break barriers led to the reconfiguration of the art market as much as fashion. It is within this context that McQueen presented his graduate collection *Jack the Ripper Stalks his Victims* (1992) and his inaugural professional collection *Taxi Driver* (Fall/Winter 1993-94). He was part of a generation of designers who graduated from Central Saint Martins—along with figures like Tristan Webber, Andrew Groves and John Galliano—and who staged controversial and spectacular shows.[19] According to Caroline Evans, "the commercial reality behind these innovative London shows, however, was that the designers had few other options, and nothing to lose, because of the lack of infrastructure in the British fashion industry."[20] She adds: "young London designers looking for a backer in the 1990s recognised the commercial value of shock and spectacle to attract press, backers and buyers."[21] Entwined in a larger cultural network, the functional logics of the fashion scene's practices coherently resonate with the YBAs' *modus operandi*.

Established through group exhibitions[22] (*Freeze*, 1988; *Young British Artists*, 1992-1996; *Sensation*, 1997), the YBAs' success has a lot to do with Charles Saatchi, a wealthy key figure of the UK's advertising industry and preeminent art collector. He undertook a multifaceted involvement through his patronage of many young radical artists,[23] which strengthened and fostered a network that has come to represent Britain on the international

---

[19] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 71.

[20] Ibid., 70.

[21] Ibid., 71.

[22] The exhibition *Freeze* (1988) was organized by Damien Hirst during his second year at Goldsmiths' College (known today as Goldsmiths, University of London) and featured 16 artists, many of whom studied with Hirst at the time. Whereas history sets this exhibition as the first occurrence of the so-called "Young British art," it seemed to be the launching point of art collector and advertising specialist Charles Saatchi's famous support of this new generation of artists. Presented from 1992 to 1996, Saatchi's series of six exhibitions entitled "Young British Artists" (I to VI) participated in the consolidation of the label, with one of its first applications by Michael Corris in the May 1992 issue of *Artforum*. Saatchi's exhibition *Sensation* (1997) at the Royal Academy of Art signed the exalted reputation of the YBAs, strengthening the group as a societal "sensation" and art historical category.

[23] Such as Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Gary Hume, Chris Offili, Tracey Emins, Jake and Dinos Chapman, to name but a few.

scene. Honed by his advertising practice, Saatchi was both patron and curator of exhibitions, by which he set the YBAs as a canon and became quite famous. Saatchi's 1997 exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* at the Royal Academy of Art (RA), co-curated with then RA's exhibition secretary Norman Rosenthal, marks a shift in curating practices towards an inherent economic feature that faced much criticism. As such, the iteration of *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum was highly criticized for its close connection with commerce. In his survey of the issue, David Barstow is implacable: "The director of the Brooklyn Museum of Art gave the collector Charles Saatchi a central role in determining the artistic content of 'Sensation,' so much so that senior museum officials repeatedly expressed concerns that Mr. Saatchi had usurped control of the exhibition."[24] The powerful influence of museums' corporate patrons undeniably sheds light on one's desire to inflate the value of her/his collection, and calls into question "artistic independence and integrity"[25] of institutions. The implications of such a presence of the market in the realm of the gallery raised several issues and debates on the possible conflicts of interest and curatorial compromises,[26] which still remain present today.

In the context of fashion exhibitions, this phenomenon dates back to 1948 when fashion publicity doyenne Eleanor Lambert organized the first benefit party for the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Thenceforth, the industry has funded the Costume Institute largely by what has come to be known as the MET's annual Costume Institute Benefit, informally called the MET Gala.[27] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the entanglement of the fashion and advertising industries and the cultural institution became more complex as an effect of the appointment of Diana Vreeland as special consultant of the MET's Costume Institute in 1972. Within this framework took place a decisive shift in fashion curatorship, what

---

[24] David Barstow, "Art, Money and Control: Elements of an Exhibition," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1999. Accessed 5 December 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/06/nyregion/artistic-differences-special-report-art-money-control-elements-exhibition.html?pagewanted=all
[25] Ibid.
[26] In his chapter entitled "The Unethical Art Museum," Alan Wallach addresses the ethics of exhibition financing and stresses the issues related to this concern. He highlights several late 1990s North-American exhibitions that caused scandals, such as the iteration of *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum and the Armani retrospective at the Guggenheim. Alan Wallach, "The Unethical Art Museum," in Elaine A. King and Gail Levin (eds.), *Ethics and the Visual Arts*. New York: Allworth Press, 2006: 25.
[27] Hamish Bowles, *Vogue & The Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute: Parties, Exhibitions, People*. New York: Abrams, 2014: 7.

Riegels Melchior calls fashion museology and describes as a "front-stage display of fashion [that] was shaped and inspired by the experience of commercial fashion shows, the styling of fashion editorials, focusing less on the actual piece of clothing and more on the creation of a visual impression, a narrative to engage and evoke the feelings of the visitor."[28] Within the North-American curatorial tradition of theatrical and spectacular exhibitions, less concerned with historical accuracy than with visual impact, the role of Vreeland is seminal. After having worked as a fashion editor for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* for thirty-four years, she entered the museum and organized fourteen exhibitions from 1973 to 1987.[29] Her approach to history was a "subjective, interpreted, and interpolated"[30] one, and she set extravagant *mise-en-scènes* that ultimately became sensory experiences markedly lacking any intellectual engagement. Vreeland's 1983 retrospective exhibition of Yves Saint Laurent led the way for "single-name designer blockbuster shows"[31] that materialize, Deborah Silverman argues, "a narcissistic project of identity."[32] Silverman highlights the strong affiliation between fashion and corporate hierarchies fostered by the Saint Laurent exhibition, writing "Vreeland remade history in the image of the opulence, luxury, and social privilege of the Reaganite elites in the 1980s."[33] To describe this problematic image making at the core of Vreeland's shows, Silverman speaks of "ahistorical projections of Vreelandian fantasies."[34] In light of her legacy, Vreeland's work at the MET gave rise to the theatrically imbued curatorial approach of the Costume Institute and the broader North-American tradition of fashion curating, and normalized the direct involvement of the fashion industry within the realm of the curatorial. In the midst of the 1990s, Anna Wintour and mass media publishing conglomerate Condé Nast made their way into the MET. Wintour, *Vogue* editor-in-chief and Condé Nast artistic director, has served as co-chairperson of the MET Gala since 1995 and an Honorary Trustee of the Museum since

---

[28] Riegels Melchior, "Introduction."

[29] Amy Fine Collins, "The Cult of Diana," *Vanity Fair*, November 1993. Accessed 6 April 2015. http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/1993/11/diana-vreeland-199311

[30] Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Diana Vreeland: Immoderate Style*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993: 7.

[31] N.J. Stevenson, "The Fashion Retrospective," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 12, issue 2, 2008: 221.

[32] Deborah Silverman, "Fabrication and Francophilia: The Fêtes de France at the Met and Bloomingdale's, 1981-1984," *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*. New York: Pantheon, 1986: 62.

[33] Ibid., 82.

[34] Ibid., 77.

1999. In 2014, her name was given to the freshly renovated gallery space of the Costume Institute, The Anna Wintour Costume Center, which was designed as a "'a more tabula rasa place,' […] a 'white cube' that will allow the museum to create 'more conceptual' exhibitions."[35] Following Wintour's 1999 Honorary Trustee nomination, Condé Nast became a regular sponsor of the Costume Institute as it has provided "additional support" to every exhibition ever since.[36]

The accusation of absolute commercialism resulting from the association of curators with the fashion industry, Fiona Anderson suggests, is not the exclusive way to understand the complexities of this multi-layered relationship. She claims: "scholarly work must embrace an acknowledgment of the commercial character of the fashion industry."[37] Likewise, Elke Gaugele speaks of a "new cultural-industrial completion,"[38] as she asserts that "the fashion-shaped arts and art-shaped fashions of the 1990s and 2000s are the effects of networks within a visual industry that builds its image production and visibility on the corporative structures,"[39] which "promotes not only the entering of fashion logics or celebrity structures into the art world, but also the adoption of art practices and gestures of artistic ideals of freedom in the field of fashion."[40] Distinctively arising at the turn of the century, this idiosyncratic commercialism is made visible by many artists such as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, controversial figures that have been accused of "sacrificing" a critical position.[41] With regard to this concept of critical stance, Dorothea von Hantelmann advocates for another kind of critique, a performative one that "[operates] at the limit of what one could call the paradigm of criticality"[42] in the interest of a *real* change. In that sense, these artists integrate commercialism from within through their appropriation of the logics and codes of the market. It increases the

---

[35] Christina Binkley, "The MET's Costume Institute Opens New Anna Wintour Costume Center," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2014. Accessed 6 April 2015.
http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303456104579489732411563854
[36] Bowles, *Vogue & The Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute*, 271.
[37] Anderson, "Museums as Fashion Media," 375.
[38] Elke Gaugele, "Aesthetic Politics in Fashion: An Introduction" in Elke Gaugele (ed.), *Aesthetic Politics in Fashion*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014: 14.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Here I talk about Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, as artists acknowledged of participating in the contemporary art system. Lee Alexander McQueen, as a figure associated to the fashion system, faces a different type of critique and thus seems to be exempted of any critical requirement.
[42] Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2010: 178.

agency of their work in such a way that its ultimate outcome is to transform conventions pertaining to the market and the broader art system in which fashion is included.

Performativity in the gallery

According to the *Curatorial Dictionary*, the concept of the *curatorial* must be distinguished from *curating*, which refers to exhibition-making and issues of display. The curatorial, or curatorial praxis, is rather a conceptual framework, "a way of working within the cultural field,"[43] in other words, a methodology. It is a form of "socio-cultural practice for generating, contextualizing and making art and ideas public."[44] To clarify the distinction between curating and the curatorial, Beatrice von Bismarck interviewed Irit Rogoff on that particular subject. Rogoff's response was:

> [Curating] has everything to do with what goes into the making of exhibitions, or alternatively what we call "platforms of display," as I don't think it is so narrow as to include only exhibitions. In this practice there are a series of transfers of works that move from one world to another and in that movement become a presentation […]. Therefore, developing the concept of the curatorial, as many of us have been trying to do over the past few years, has been about getting away from representation to a very large extent, and trying to see within this activity a set of possibilities for much larger agendas in the art world. […] So if in curating, the emphasis is on the end product—even if that end product is often very complicated and ends up performing differently than one might have assumed—in the curatorial, the emphasis is on the trajectory of ongoing, active work, not an isolated end product but a blip along the line of an ongoing project. […] This has to do with two things. One is the attempt to understand the curatorial as an epistemic structure. It is a series of existing knowledges that come together momentarily to produce what we are calling the event of knowledge […]. The second thing is the gap that begins to appear between the exhibition's stated aims and its effect in the world.[45]

Bismarck added: "curating has to do with […] all the activities taking place in order to allow an exhibition to come into the world. These activities feed into the curatorial; they are part of it. […] I understand [curating] less as representation driven than motivated by the need to

---

[43] Eszter Szakács (ed.), "Curatorial," *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2012. Accessed 26 August 2016. http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/
[44] Ibid.
[45] Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial," in Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012: 22-23.

become public. By comparison, the curatorial is the dynamic field where the constellational condition comes into being."[46] Also referred to as the curatorial turn, the development of this discursive practice took place alongside the emergence of globalization in the 1980s and 1990s, with key biennials and large-scale group exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la terre* and *documenta*.[47] The curatorial is now acknowledged as a significant paradigm of the post-millennia world. Preoccupied with contemporary curating, Terry Smith asks: "Can we say that the purpose of curating today is something like this: To exhibit (in the broad sense of show, offer, enable the experience of) contemporary presence and the currency that is contemporaneity as these are manifest in art present, past, and multitemporal, even atemporal?"[48] As he delves deeper into the issue, Smith quotes Kate Fowle: "The institution is now not just the museum but a whole industry that has grown up around exhibition making."[49] This excerpt is particularly interesting for its association of curating with economics, adding a layer to the curatorial in considering as an institutional industry. As contextualized in the previous section, the discursive practice appears to be organized by power relations and embedded in an economic structure. In the words of Smith, a "moment of stardom around 2000"[50] marked contemporary curating; as a core element in the curatorial turn, the fashionable figure of the curator emerged at the end of the 1990s and has expanded to become less a profession than a role one could take on for the moment of a project. By means of this agent, the structural discourse of the curatorial gained the strength to shape the (new) canon(s) and, at the same time, the curatorial became itself the new meta-canon. Following this logic, the curatorial would be a set of economic activities shaping a spatial and temporal analysis of its object, which Smith identifies as "the infrastructural." As such, it moves towards branding: in a very effective and extensive way, the curatorial brands its object in creating a discursive context for its public unfolding.

The exhibition of contemporary fashion operates at the junction between the curatorial and the performative through a multi-layered media translation. In the context of late western

---

[46] Ibid., 24.
[47] Jens Hoffmann, "Archaeologies of the Present," *Canadian Art*, March 1, 2008. Accessed 15 April 2016. http://canadianart.ca/features/archaeologies/
[48] Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. New York: Independent Curators International, 2012: 29.
[49] Ibid., 250.
[50] Ibid., 253.

capitalism, these paradigms challenge normative modes of experience and the politics of the exhibition space in providing (new) alternative methods of organizing things in time and space(s) and in prompting interdisciplinary structures. As such, fashion exhibitions played a significant role in the development of post-millennial models of porosity (for example the increasing presence of terms such as inter/trans/cross/multidisciplinary) that are today's scholarly and museological "fashion." In this regard, Riegels Melchior writes: "a new generation of scholars […] now focus on the ways that museums have become ideal platforms for fashion display, on fashion's potential for other areas of museum practice outside the exhibition, and fashion's role in developing and transforming the museum as a twenty-first century cultural institution."[51] In the course of her examination of the reality-producing dimension of the curatorial, Hantelmann identifies performativity as the power of any form to produce and shape reality. As one among many sites of reality production, the exhibition reframes its subject matter in a way that can activate the performativity and societal impact of its displayed object.[52] She relates the concept of ritual[53] to the exhibition, describing it as "a fairly new ritual […] that is specific to Western democratic market societies and that ritually establishes and enacts an important set of values and parameters that were and still are fundamental to Western societies: the instantiation of a linear notion of time; the increased valorization of the individual; the exceptional importance attributed to the production of material objects; and their subsequent circulation through commerce."[54] Since it is one, if not the main, convention that underlies the art system, the exhibition has the ability to alter its parameters from within. Regarding its performative potential, Hantelmann asserts that "[t]he exhibition format, as the avant-gardes taught us, cannot be taken out of art, just as it cannot be taken out of art's politicity. It is essential to a work's praxis, and therefore part of art's public and political existence. Any impact art has can therefore occur not by breaking with this context, but by making it the place where art takes place in praxis."[55] My thesis departs from

---

[51] Riegels Melchior, "Introduction."

[52] Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, 9.

[53] The term "ritual" is used throughout this thesis as a concept that defines a "ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order." (See "Ritual," *Oxford Dictionaries*. Accessed 18 February, 2017. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ritual)

[54] Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, 10.

[55] Ibid., 14.

Hantelmann's interrelated conceptions of the exhibition format and performativity, as they bind my thoughts. In a post-studio era where other sites of production arose, the exhibition space became a place where the production and presentation of the work occurred concurrently. Within those renewed praxis-engaging conditions of the exhibiting platform, fashion now encounters potentialities that can efficiently address its dual nature, caught somewhere in between act and object.

Deeply tied to western modernist ideals of neutrality, the gallery's presentation conditions were—and still are, to some extent—subjugated to the white cube model, or what Nikolett Erőss describes as "representative of a normative exhibition convention, serving an ideological function of controlling and reproducing hierarchies of values."[56] There is, however, another model that strengthened in the course of the twenty-first century with the relentless technological development and increasing presence of "new" media in the exhibition space: the black box. Rather "[evoking] the atmosphere of the cinema in the white cube, which likewise presented art works isolated, detached from outer reality,"[57] the black box generates a different experience of the spectacular and offers alternative—yet still normative and hierarchical— entry points to a critical encounter. As Rebecca Park argues, the essential function of the museum lies in its establishment of a space for critically engaged reflections that generate dialogue within the institution's walls yet also outside of these ones in order to participate in broader cultural knowledge.[58] Institutional interpretation thus directly affects the agency of fashion because the exhibition has the power to shift the meaning of an object or a practice through its display.

Scholars have been little involved in a critical examination of fashion exhibitions, although many recognized the issues raised by the presence of contemporary fashion within the walls of the art museum. Held in 1997 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, Martin Margiela's exhibition *(9/4/1615)* was a retrospective of the designer's work up until that point, and took the shape of a collaborative site-specific project between Margiela and a microbiologist. The show meaningfully entangled the performative and the theatrical as a result

---

[56] Nikolett Erőss, "White Cube," in Eszter Szakács (ed.), *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2012. Accessed 15 September 2016. http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/white-cube/
[57] Ibid.
[58] Rebecca Park, "Savage Beauty, Tame Museum: Alexander McQueen at the MET," *Artcritical*, September 2, 2011. Accessed 16 April 2015. http://www.artcritical.com/2011/09/02/alexander-mcqueen/

of the mold-, yeast-, and bacteria-sprayed clothes display, a strategy that made visible the very concept of process—specifically that of decay. Leading fashion to produce meaning within a space that does not usually communicate through the same language, this media translation, according to Caroline Evans, "transcended the expository […] pedestrian way that fashion can be displayed in the museum."[59] On another level, N.J. Stevenson and Fiona Anderson have published articles[60] that tackle the history of and debates on fashion retrospectives, and pinpoint commercialism as a core aspect that problematizes fashion curating. While they surely participated in the development of a historiography of the fashion exhibition, contributions of scholars such as Evans, Stevenson and Anderson lack a deeper analytical and theoretical engagement and distance from their object of study. Yet, a number of recent interdisciplinary scholarly works are fuelling the emergence of an intellectual, critical framework in the analysis of fashion, such as John Potvin's scholarship on the fashion exhibition format.[61] His examination of Giorgio Armani's practice deepens the discourse and offers a critical take on the performative spaces of fashion. At the same time that it acknowledges the input of fashion studies in the development of a theoretically-based analysis of fashion practices, this thesis is in line with recent scholarship asking for a more critical approach.

My theoretical framework brings into play theatre and performance theories, tackling concepts of theatricality and performativity, as well as new materialism theories focusing on the performative object, to support the idea that fashion has its place within the exhibition space. This premise is however contingent upon a committed acknowledgement and an activation of the performative condition of fashion. The question, then, is: How can fashion materialize in the gallery without becoming a frozen documentary trace of a past reality?

One of the structural theories that shape my thesis is Shannon Jackson's concept of staged management, which she defines in relation to institutional critique as "a 'dramaturgy of

---

[59] Caroline Evans, "The Golden Dustman: A Critical Evaluation of the Work of Martin Margiela and a Review of Martin Margiela: Exhibition (9/4/1615)," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 2, issue 1, 1998: 73.

[60] See N.J. Stevenson, "The Fashion Retrospective," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 12, issue 2, 2008: 219-236, and Fiona Anderson, "Museum as Fashion Media," in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000: 371-389.

[61] See Dirk Gindt and John Potvin, "Creativity, Corporeality and Collaboration: Staging Fashion with Giorgio Armani and Robert Wilson," *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol. 33, issue 1, 2013: 3-28, and John Potvin, "Fashion and the Art Museum: When Giorgio Armani Went to the Guggenheim," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 1, issue 1, 2012: 47-63.

unveiling' […] that use[s] a varied array of theatrical gestures to expose institutional structures."[62] She draws on Bertolt Brecht's distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) to address the inherent theatricality of critical practices that foreground the apparatus and disrupt conventions through a focus on the *act*, or, in her words, that stage management. Understanding the art institution as a "service industry"[63] that produces events, Jackson investigates "the performative labor required to stage those actions."[64] According to her, mechanisms of the act support the very function of the institution as a space of social exchanges that is "less an object than a process, less static than durational, less a sculpture than a drama."[65] Jackson's staged management provides significant entry points to examine *Savage Beauty* through the conceptual lenses of power and belief, given the exhibition's amplified use of theatrical registers, its entanglement with the commercial, and its performance-related content and form. Staging fashion in the museum explicitly involves power relations with regard to its direct reference to the body, whose presence within the exhibition brings into play issues of the institutionalized body. As an institutional ritual, the exhibition educates and disciplines, it regulates behaviors through performative processes and impact the body's agency. Judith Butler, in an early work on the performativity of gender from phenomenological and feminist perspectives, addresses the body as not only san historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized […] [, which] gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world."[66] Fashion is one of the constitutive aspects of this "historically mediated expression," but its display in the museum furthers the codification of the mediation.

     As previously mentioned, another fundamental element in my thesis is Hantelmann's work on performativity and the exhibition format. Performative in itself, fashion as a transformational medium and a living phenomenon problematizes reality by operating at the limits of theatre. The societal relevance of art, Hantelmann assumes, is now conditional on a

---

[62] Shannon Jackson, "Staged Management: Theatricality and Institutional Critique," *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011: 105.
[63] Ibid., 114.
[64] Ibid., 108.
[65] Ibid., 125.
[66] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, issue 4, 1988: 521.

subversive play with conventions from within these governing structures. The exhibition format, in this sense, happens to be a space in which political significance, although always latent in every art work, can be shaped and therefore induces change. As a place where "very basic constitutive parameters of modern societies are kept and cultivated,"[67] namely the socio-economic dynamics at the core of the western institutional ritual involved in the production of meaning and subjectivity, the exhibition's fundamental structures must be questioned by artistic and curatorial practices. Whereas the political existence of fashion is conditional on its public manifestation, its embodiment within the art museum offers contingencies that operate directly upon the constitutive parameters of the modern idea of art and the normative (trans)formation of the self. In this sense, the societal impact of fashion comes into being through the prism of publicness. Yet fashion's preoccupation with the exhibition format expands this impact to another level, as it fosters a new kind of interaction between corporeal entities that is rooted in the tensions created by the intimate relationship of fashion to praxis—an active mode of doing—and in the one-on-one exhibition proximate contact.

Alongside these central theories, Mathieu Copeland and Julie Pellegrin's investigation of choreography as a mode of exhibition-making[68] is informative for the performative potentialities of the mental and physical spaces of the exhibition. Adrian Heathfield's examination of the historicization of performance, with a focus on transformation as "one of performance's most consistent and recurring conditions,"[69] enriches the understanding of the media translation at stake in the context of a fashion exhibition. Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy's work on the performing object[70] as well as Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye's survey of the performing presence[71] offer meaningful tools to unpack the nonhuman entity in relation to fashion and theatre and its effect on the human body within *Savage Beauty*. As Schweitzer and Zerdy declare: "objects and things powerfully script, choreograph, direct, push,

[67] Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, 13.
[68] Mathieu Copeland and Julie Pellegrin (eds,), *Choreographing Exhibition*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013.
[69] Adrian Heathfield, "Then Again" in Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (eds.), *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2012: 32.
[70] Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (eds.), *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*. New York: Palgrave, 2014.
[71] Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye, *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

pull, and otherwise animate their human collaborators."[72] Put forward by Schweitzer and Zerdy, Robin Bernstein's "scriptive thing" denotes a theatrical object that shapes human agency, a useful concept to study the garment's "action." Whereas these theories fall within the new materialism's interest in the structural and active role of the material object, Giannachi and Kaye's investigation of the notion of presence in regard to the live, the mediated, and the simulated rather deal with perception and representation and their various layers so as to unfold "the production and reception of presence."[73]

---

[72] Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (eds.), "Introduction: Object Lessons" in *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*, New York: Palgrave, 2014: 6.
[73] Giannachi and Kaye, *Performing Presence*, 2.

PART I

Visceral politics

> *I don't want to do a cocktail party, I'd rather people left my shows and vomited.*
>
> Lee Alexander McQueen[74]

As a marketing exercise and a presentation site, the fashion show has traditionally served to display garments for a specific public, including special guests, press and buyers. This designer presentation constitutes one of the conventional platforms, along with the commercial campaign and the magazine editorial, to exhibit fashion. Conveyed by the catwalk, the spectacle is structured through its relation to and organization of the space. In many ways, McQueen transcended the paradigm of fashion by means of the catwalk show, using the spectacle as a strategy to subvert conventions from within. The radicality, a term which will be discussed further, of his shows does not reside in the form itself, but rather in the content. The designer disrupted the idea of fashion through his conceptual work by "[breaking] out of its own realm."[75] Acknowledged by scholars as a figure at the forefront of avant-garde fashion,[76] McQueen's "fashion shows [rely] on the live moment to provoke and challenge the industry."[77] His theatrical manipulation of time and space as well as his interest in technology transform the body into a political entity: a device unsettling the status quo, critically shaping new realities and altering experiences. By means of a shift of focus away from the personality—either the designer or the model—towards the garments within the fashion show, clothing turns into this

---

[74] Andrew Bolton, "In Search of the Sublime" in Claire Wilcox (ed.), *Alexander McQueen*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015: 18.

[75] Nathalie Khan, "Catwalk Politics" in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000: 115.

[76] Nathalie Khan speaks of radical practices in addressing the medium of the fashion show (see "Catwalk Politics" in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000 and "Fashion as Mythology: Considering the Legacy of Alexander McQueen" in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2014). Jennifer Griffith focuses on McQueen's interest in technology as recapturing the historical avant-garde concern, which can be found especially in the Futurist aspirations (in the context of a paper entitled "Savage Beauty: A Futurist Legacy of Self-Design" presented in the conference session *Fashion and the Contemporary Avant-Garde*, 103rd College Art Association annual conference, New York, February 11-14, 2015).

[77] Nathalie Khan, "Fashion as Mythology: Considering the Legacy of Alexander McQueen" in Stella Bruzzi (ed.), *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2014.

political body; Nathalie Khan even speaks of "the spectacle of the clothes themselves."[78] Performativity, in this sense, is contingent upon clothing, which is infused by a newly increased agency. For McQueen, the catwalk became a stage on which to embody a concept, as he was recognized to decide his show's overarching concept before engaging with the specific looks. Within the frame of the designer's practice, "the symbolic production of fashion has taken an almost mystical role," Khan writes, "outside temporal or physical dimensions."[79] Constituted as live research, McQueen's shows were thus spaces for the investigation of the agency of fashion, the conventions of the industry, and the politics of ritual. Yet the designer had a strong and substantial team involved in the production of the shows, for the most part working with him until his death: Sam Gainsbury (show producer), Joseph Bennett (art director), Daniel Landin (lighting director), John Gosling (music producer), Les Child and Michael Clark (choreographers), Simon Kenny (scenic artist), Shaun Leane (jewellery designer), and last but not least, Sarah Burton (personal assistant and head of design for womenswear). This list, though certainly not comprehensive, illustrates the extent to which every little detail was important in the creation of the fashion show. Part I takes as its case study the runway show for the collection *Plato's Atlantis* (Spring/Summer 2010), since it is the spectacle exhibited in the *Savage Beauty*'s gallery that is analysed in the following parts of this thesis. In order to closely survey the significance of McQueen's practice, this section investigates its connexion to theatre, specifically to Antonin Artaud's theory of the theatre of cruelty and Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation, and posits the theatrical as the system of McQueen's subversive performance of fashion. In this sense, it keenly analyzes the primary material of *Savage Beauty* so as to provide a deep understanding of the issues at the core of the exhibition.

Staged within the frame of Paris Fashion Week on 6 October 2009 at the Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, McQueen's Spring/Summer 2010 collection, *Plato's Atlantis*, is the last runway show realized by the designer. Inspired by classical philosopher Plato's account of the lost city of Atlantis, the presentation "merged Darwin's nineteenth-century

---

[78] Khan, "Catwalk Politics," 125.
[79] Khan, "Fashion as Mythology."

theories of evolution with twenty-first-century concerns over global warming."[80] As the show's informative text reveals:

> When Charles Darwin wrote the origin of species, no one could have known that the ice cap would melt, that the waters would rise and that life on Earth would have to evolve in order to live beneath the sea once more or perish. We came from water and now, with the help of stem cell technology and cloning, we must go back to it to survive.[81]

Systematically part of the designer's practice as a structural element and an agent of meaning, technology was key in this cross-media spectacle. According to curator of the London iteration of *Savage Beauty* Claire Wilcox, "*Plato's Atlantis* was widely considered to be McQueen's greatest achievement."[82] She explains: "The mixture of nature, technology and craft was a uniquely McQueen perspective, as was the showmanship, and the boldness of live-streaming the presentation on SHOWstudio for an audience of millions. The finale was set to the soundtrack of Lady Gaga's new single 'Bad Romance'. It was also a commercial success, justifying its production cost of close to one million pounds for a 17-minute show."[83] Articulated by a large scene, "a white-tiled backdrop that resembled a clinical laboratory,"[84] the show reunited models and spectators around the performative spectacle of technology [Figure 1]. It is from within the conventions of the catwalk as an elevated platform, the models parading garments, and the physical presence of viewers witnessing the show, that McQueen's work develops its critical component and demonstrates its progressive quality. In the first minutes of the show, a massive screen on the back wall displayed a projection alternating between a thematic film[85] and the closed circuit live-stream of the environment. Fixed on rails, two camera-mounted robotised structures ran along the white platform in a continual back and

---

[80] Kate Bethune, "Encyclopedia of Collections" in Claire Wilcox (ed.), *Alexander McQueen*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015: 321.

[81] Alexander McQueen, "Women's Spring/Summer 2010 'Plato's Atlantis,' *Alexander McQueen*. Accessed 15 January 2016. http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/experience/en/pages/alexandermcqueen/archive/?years=2010#id_article=260

[82] Claire Wilcox, "Plato's Atlantis: Anatomy of a Collection" in Claire Wilcox (ed.), *Alexander McQueen*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015: 91.

[83] Ibid., 91-93.

[84] Bethune, "Encyclopedia of Collections," 321.

[85] The film was produced by Alexander McQueen, Nick Knight and Ruth Hogben. It can be entirely watch on SHOWstudio.com (http://showstudio.com/project/platos_atlantis/fashion_film).

forth. While filming each other, the two machines projected themselves and the spectators onto the screen, which had the effect of exposing the institutional apparatus, that is, the formal conventions that comprise the fashion show; or, to borrow Jackson's expression used to define her concept of staged management, of a "dramaturgy of unveiling."[86] As straightforward references to science fiction films,[87] technology shaped *Plato's Atlantis*'s visual affect. Digital printed textiles [Figure 2], "with each design engineered specifically for individual garments,"[88] and 3D-printed shoes [Figure 3] revaluate fashion's propensity to the "human-made." In total, forty-five outfits were showed, all "engineered and hand-embroidered, like couture,"[89] according to Burton. In addition to the thirty-six prints "circle-engineered to the body,"[90] sequins, expensive fabrics, and innovative shapes defined the collection's uniqueness and illustrated McQueen's investment in craft. As a result, fifteen bespoke pieces were made as one-off creations unsuitable for commercial production.[91]

The term provocative can describe an array of strong emotions and reactions caused by something or someone. In some cases, McQueen's work, especially his shows from the 1990s, was perceived as offensive, and rather disturbing. In the context of *Plato's Atlantis* it characterizes something that shocks. Addressing Benjamin's concept of "experience of shock," Hantelmann examines the potentialities of rupture "not as a deficit but as a constitutive element in a new conception of memory and experience."[92] Reminiscent of the metaphysical concept of the sublime, with regard to the theories of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, the shock as experienced by the audience of *Plato's Atlantis* speaks of the "beyond humanness" and danger. Burke's theory of the sublime implies the idea of horror, as the sublime is engendered by the combination of fright and distance—the "delightful horror."[93] Facing a remote threat, one feels relieved since the distance prompts the withdrawal of the displeasure caused by the threat. For

---

[86] Jackson, "Staged Management," 105.
[87] Kate Bethune identifies Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), John McTiernan's *Predator* (1987), and James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989) as "cinematic references […] [that] found expression not only in aspects such as the show invitation and colour palette but also show designs." See Bethune, "Encyclopedia of Collections," 321.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Sarah Burton, "An Interview With Sarah Burton, Creative Director, Alexander McQueen, By Tim Blanks," in Andrew Bolton (ed.), *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011: 230.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Wilcox, "Plato's Atlantis," 93.
[92] Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, 40.
[93] Edmund Burke, *1729-1797: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999:129.

Burke, violence is inherent to the sublime. Within this frame, the sublime is thus a feeling of contradiction that transcends the notion of the beautiful, since it (re)presents the metaphysical, in contrast to the beautiful as (re)presenting the physical. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime departs from this principle, whereby the sublime would transcend the beautiful, as well as from the idea of distance put forward by Burke. Kant approaches the sublime as a feeling that reveals our human condition in (re)presenting the gap between perception and the intelligible, understood as the unimaginable or the infinite. In this sense, the sublime is fundamentally ontological. Jean-François Lyotard suggests that deprivation is the trigger of terror as theorized by Burke.[94] In the context of *Plato's Atlantis*, the highly distorted silhouette of the model and the two robotic machines refer to something that is beyond the human life. The spectator thus visualizes a deprivation of life, which cause a fear of death if one considers it in the logic of the sublime, and experiences a violence of the gaze by technology. Moving images of *Plato's Atlantis*, both those inhabiting the screen and those generated by the performance through the viewer's gaze, mediated highly threatening situations. By evoking the observations of *Plato's Atlantis'* online broadcaster Nick Knight and show producer Sam Gainsbury, Wilcox grants the robotised cameras a predatory behaviour: "the cameras were programmed to swoop within inches of the models, 'like velociraptors,' but they had not taken into account the height of the extreme, backcombed and plaited fin-like shapes created by hair artist Guido; […] 'Once you switched them on, they were unstoppable.'"[95] These "prowling motion control cameras"[96] recalled a Foucauldian notion of social surveillance[97] in scrutinizing the audience and a hunting attitude in tracking the models. In addition, scary and uncanny living beings such as moths, snakes, and jellyfishes emerged within the film and designs, as well as hybrid and alien-like forms [Figure 4]. To some extent, the presence of water evoked an inexorable drowning for the human nature, whether via the models' amphibious qualities that arose during the show, making them no more human, or the transformation of the film's protagonist in an aquatic creature at the end of the show. The politics of McQueen's spectacles are visceral, with their effect on the viewers' affect and

---

[94] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991: 99.
[95] Wilcox, "Plato's Atlantis," 86.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Such as theorized in his work *Surveiller et punir*. See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

models' behaviour. Perturbing and manipulating, his work prompts an intuitive reaction, which acts as a response to their contact with the various elements of the show. McQueen stated that he wanted people to react, and the medium of the runway was pivotal in this task.[98]

McQueen's practice recalls playwright and theorist Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty."[99] With the aim of a cathartic and unsettling experience for the public, Artaud's theatricality seeks to "[wake] up heart and nerves"[100] through "a serious theatre which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy."[101] Echoing Burke's sublime, Artaud advocates an extensive manifestation of terror that would make the viewer feels alive through confrontation.[102] Concerned with the specificities of the theatrical illusion, he clarifies: "And the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, not for a servile imitation of reality."[103] McQueen's intent to provoke a visceral experience seems to have several points of contact with Artaud's project, which sought to trigger inner reactions and subconscious, raw emotions by producing reality within the performance; a reality that comes from inside. Artaud expected a confrontation of the viewer's senses through an immersive and discomforting theatre, "where life stands to lose everything and the mind to gain everything."[104] To some extent, McQueen approached fashion in a similar way than Artaud did with theatre: they both used their discipline as a site for political and social engagement through the creation of gut-wrenching, confrontational experiences. Whereas Artaud worked towards a therapeutic outcome in the context of the 1930s, McQueen aimed at a critical, eye-opener experience.

---

[98] A conversation between Sam Gainsbury and Susannah Frankel in the context of the conference *Sabotage and Tradition*, held at the V&A as part of the programming of the exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. Sam Gainsbury and Susannah Frankel, "Session One: Staging Spectacle," *Sabotage and Tradition* Conference, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, June 5, 2015.
[99] His concept of a "théâtre de la cruauté" was the subject of two manifestos published in his 1938 book *Le théâtre et son double*.
[100] Antonin Artaud, "Theatre and Cruelty," in Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet (eds.), *Theatre and Performance Design: A Reader in Scenography*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010: 367.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 368.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 369.

The spectacle of materiality

The objects of *Plato's Atlantis* (garments, models, and props) are presented as images rather than physical bodies, as a consequence of the multifaceted technological exercise. The materiality of the performance becomes a visual memory through mediation: a spectacle of materiality. In his 1967 work on the spectacular society, *La Société du Spectacle*, Guy Debord addresses the cult of illusion as a social practice: "Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation."[105] As the methodology of the societies of production, spectacle is understood as a *weltanschauung* (worldview) which language (or signs) operates through the gaze. Assessing the opposition between reality and image and their reciprocal inversion, Debord locates the emergence of reality in the spectacle and consequently understands the spectacle as real.[106] In this sense, contemplation estranges the viewer as what is *imagined* comes to define the subject.[107] Following Debord's line of thought, images organize social relationships between human beings. Within this appearance-based system, representation of the real becomes the model of reality. The idea of society becoming spectacle is telling in the context of McQueen's work, since it plays with the parameters of societal spectacle in shaking and even momentarily dislocating the stable boundaries of this regime of knowledge. *Plato's Atlantis* subverted its very language in operating through images: the fashion show's spectacular terms were intensified in such a way that they were both exhibited and criticized. McQueen met the expectations of spectacle, yet he especially revealed the constructed real in this social model of reality. The productivity of the representational, which finds its expression in spectacle and performance, is activated by the gaze. Sharing a common ground although in constant tension, spectacle and performance function under the same modality: the image. According to Peggy Phelan, as she stresses the very impossibility of a "Real-real" in favor of several discursive reals, the "believable image is the product of a negotiation with an unverifiable real."[108] The strategic use of technological mediation combined to the artificial alteration of corporeality in *Plato's Atlantis* demonstrate this discursivity and disclose the act of persuasion. Creating a new reality or reality anew, the

---

[105] Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992 (1967), 3rd edition: 10.
[106] Ibid., 12.
[107] Ibid., 20.
[108] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993: 1.

performance generates within the viewer an emotional potential based on a discontinuous production of images—yet simultaneously responding to these images by gestures. Considering performance as an alternative, Phelan argues: "Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the Other as the same is not assured."[109] Indeed, the show established a complex image that (re)presented reality without mirroring it, that distanced without alienating completely. At times both spectacle and performance, *Plato's Atlantis*'s materiality shifts to an architecture of images, as it resides in the shaping of space through visual structures.

Conventionally, fashion shows hinge on expressions of presence, unfolding from the immediacy of an experience in a delimited time and space. As something that is witnessed live, the runway's paradigm of presence relies on the relationship between models, spectators, and space. Highly effective, the marketing strategy of the momentary plays with politics of the time-based encounter so as to create an impression of authenticity and exclusivity. In the context of *Plato's Atlantis*, garments and machines modeled and activated multifaceted spaces of reality. With their ability to control and manipulate their wearer, these pieces of clothing and robotic cameras gained the agency and presence usually emanating from human activity; as they independently performed, they came to replace human bodies. Felt presence turned out to be that of these non-human entities. As such, the traditional modes of presence shifted to what Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye describe as: "'presence' as both practice and experience: as phenomena realized in performative encounters with images, objects, technologies, bodies, sites, acts and events."[110] As one of the first fashion designers to live-stream its show on the Internet, McQueen created an unprecedented buzz with *Plato's Atlantis*, which was live-streamed on Nick Knight's online platform SHOWstudio. As a result of Lady Gaga's Twitter announcement about her new single *Bad Romance* premiere on the runway, it mobilized a record-breaking audience and actually crashed the stream. According to Emma Hope Allwood, "[i]n what was arguably the first case of high fashion truly meeting the power of the digital masses, […] a gap had been crossed between the industry and the world at large—with Suzy

---

[109] Ibid.
[110] Giannachi and Kaye, *Performing Presence*, 2.

Menkes describing the show as 'the most dramatic revolution in 21st-century fashion'."[111] Although the live-stream ultimately failed, what is of interest here is how McQueen used digital technology as a social practice in disrupting the runway's strategically restricted procedure—one that usually operates through invitation. Whereas photographic documentation is part of the fashion show phenomenon, the very idea of live-streaming the event was still relatively new in 2009. Distinctively, this practice is not a form of documenting in itself, since it does not record but rather broadcasts. In this sense, the worldwide live projection radically dissolved the distance traditionally structuring the aura of the event in fostering an inclusive attitude to the audience; it participated in a turn towards a democratization of high fashion. To this extent, the aural spatiality of the real underwent an extension, as the "being there" in time and space shifted from material to perceptual in theory.

Plato's Atlantis began with a screening of the viewers on the huge display around which was organized the spatial composition. They became dramatically aware of their own presence precisely through its mediation. Although always relying on the live, it is a mediated presence that framed the show. The spectacle of materiality expands the conceptual experience of the interactive lapse that is the fashion show. Articulated by a series of mediations, praxis became a reality enacted through technological imagery. Giannachi and Kaye, in the course of their examination of theatrical performance, consider the work of playwright Samuel Beckett in which "actors and spectators alike wait for something to happen and in the process of waiting their attention is continually drawn back to themselves as another interval occurs."[112] The reversal of the audience's attention towards itself in the context of an anticipation phase is particularly evocative of McQueen's practice. As viewers wait for models to walk the runway, they are forced to look at themselves. Although one could argue that it supports a narcissistic experience, I rather discern a self-reflexive effect. McQueen literally provoked a moment of self-scrutiny through a transitory discomfort; it turns the gaze on itself and exposes self-consciousness that fashion creates. To some extent, this experienced presence critically reproduces a major criticism that is often made of the fashion world, and especially runway

---

[111] Emma Hope Allwood, "The McQueen show that changed the future of fashion," *Dazed*, August 2016. Accessed 20 October 2016. http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/32285/1/the-mcqueen-show-that-changed-the-future-of-fashion-platos-atlantis-nick-knight
[112] Giannachi and Kaye, *Performing Presence*, 7-8.

presentations: people attend these exclusive, elite events to look at others and to be seen. In this sense, it confronted the "implicit" power relations organizing the audience by making them visible: it spectacularized the status of the front row and, in playing with the question of which spectacle they want to see (or be part of), it revealed a fashion theatre in which they are (forced) actors. This *modus operandi* reenacted the preamble of *Voss*, McQueen's Spring/Summer 2001 catwalk show, where viewers had to watch their self-reflection as they were seated in front of a large mirrored glass device for a long period of time since there had been a two-hour delay before the show started. Although not done through technology, this even more confrontational strategy also turned the focus on the audience and exacerbated its visibility while shifting the power relations at play [Figure 5].

Technologies of mediation alter the phenomena of presence in (re)engaging a consciousness of the "mediated": they render visible the structure(s) of the real. In the case of *Plato's Atlantis*, the mediated presence does not only refer to spectatorship and the live diffusion of the show on the Internet, it applies to a whole spectrum of technological constructions: from the closed circuit live-stream of the models walking on the runway and the *mise-en-scènes* taking place in the projected film onto the background to the corporeal identities simulated through material, prints, shapes, and physical extensions. The models underwent a transformative experience on the stage, as their body merged with the garment and scenography, and together formed new entities. Giannachi and Kaye speak of the "phenomena of presence performed in movements between trace and event, image and action, proximity and distance, simulation and 'the real', between the mediated and the 'live'."[113] Through several strategies, layers of presence are deconstructed and then consciously reconstructed in the course of the show. With regard to phenomenological presence, subjective experiences (i.e. perception) lead "to the realization of a consciousness of the self."[114] Here, phenomenology is understood according to the logic of Giannachi and Kaye, "as a philosophical method [implying] the study of structures and acts of consciousness through analyses of experiential phenomena."[115] Presence thus resides, the authors write, "in the theatrical relation."[116] Whereas

---

[113] Ibid., 20.
[114] Ibid., 10.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 20.

the idea of consciousness is central to phenomenology, it is an awareness that systematically marks the experienced presence engendered through McQueen's work, an awareness of the mechanisms of representation and embodiment.

As theatrical stagings, McQueen's catwalk shows unfold through an active scenography. In this context, Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet bring forward the idea of "designing in performance,"[117] as something that would be in-the-making, a process, a performative design, in opposition to "designing for performance,"[118] as something done before and whose final state hosts the performance. While the meaning of theatre traditionally resides in the words rather than in the visual, "often cast in a supporting role,"[119] the meaning of fashion shows is conveyed specifically by visual structures. In this sense, *Plato's Atlantis* operates a performativity generated by technology that engages the legacy of playwright and stage director Bertolt Brecht. His collaboration with scenographer Caspar Neher, most notably, empowered scenography "with potential for comment, criticism, humour and disruption,"[120] as "physically [exemplifying] the anatomy of action."[121] The theatre of Brecht and Neher operated as "constant reminders of illusion."[122] Central to Brecht's dramatic theory was the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), a concept that aesthetically and politically disrupted theatre's traditional conventions of realism in using techniques to keep the viewers aware of the performance's artificiality. *Plato's Atlantis*'s experienced presence draws precisely on Brecht's distancing effect in provoking a detachment from the (re)presentation as it makes the audience conscious of itself. The scenographic act sheds light on structures that are already visible to the eyes of the spectators, yet unconsciously seen because they are naturalized as conventional forms. Audience, models, runway, and props as structural elements remain *unseen* prior to this scenographic focus. Reality therefore emerges through images rather than through reality itself as contains in the tangible realm—the "real" things.

---

[117] Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet (eds.), *Theatre and Performance Design: A Reader in Scenography*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010: 139.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 140.
[120] Christopher Baugh, "Brecht and Stage Design: The Bühnenbildner and the Bühnenbauer," in Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet (eds.), *Theatre and Performance Design: A Reader in Scenography*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010: 194.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 196.

In regard to McQueen's work, Artaud's and Brecht's theories enable a layer of meaning to surface through their shared focus on confrontation. Both intend for reality to manifest within this space of fiction that is theatre. These two models explicitly call for a need to get out of our comfort zone. Within the frame of *Plato's Atlantis*, it took the shape of a perilous path on the runway for the models punctuated by the difficulty of walking with the especially high Armadillo heels and by the threatening activities of the robotised cameras. Physically, they risked to fall either by losing their balance or being struck by the machines. It was also played through a *mise-en-scène* of the spectators that critically addressed the power of visibility and representation, to name but a few. In short, the challenge unfolded in an exacerbation of the logic of fashion through the *act* of technology, encompassing both the technological means on stage as well as the technology-based pieces. The structural bodies of *Plato's Atlantis* disappear and (re)emerge accordingly as images, directly addressing the representational form of runway shows. It is precisely through theatrical mediation that McQueen subverted the conventions of fashion, performing them at first and disrupting them simultaneously by way of a dialectical play with illusion and reality. The show provoked the viewer, promoted a collectively-lived reality by spectators and models, both actors in this event, and problematized representation as well as the displayed garment (or props) in making performance the central element of the show, all of this through a self-reflexive mode.

PART II

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty

> *The exhibition, once conceived as a space dedicated to cultivating our most sophisticated relationships to objects, now proposes an aesthetic experience that is no longer work-related but self-related.*
>
> Dorothea von Hantelmann[123]

As part of the "Romantic Naturalism" section, the final gallery of the retrospective exhibition was dedicated to McQueen's last catwalk show, *Plato's Atlantis*. Seven looks of the Spring/Summer 2010 collection were displayed in a distinct room replicating the runway setting with a white-ceramic surface and a sizeable screen before which were placed the garments [Figure 6]. Organized in a row, the three first looks beginning from the left were dresses evoking an aquatic world through jellyfish-like digital prints, shades of blue and turquoise, and hand-embroidered enamel paillettes resembling fish scales. The three last dresses recounted the initiation of the mutation, still referring to land organisms with their snake's skin and moth's pattern digital prints and various tones of brown and green. Positioned in the middle of the display, the seventh outfit was *Plato's Atlantis*'s final piece. The iridescent look was composed of the "Jellyfish ensemble", a pailletted dress and sequined leggings and correspondingly glittering Armadillo boots. Whereas the outfits' presentation did not follow the collection's order and narrative, both the soundtrack played in the gallery and the film projected behind the garments were identical to those of the fashion show. Within this laboratory-like space imbued with *Plato's Atlantis*'s visuals and sounds, viewers could experience, at least partially, the zeitgeist of McQueen's runway. Part II examines the fashion exhibition through a focus on the *Plato's Atlantis* gallery in order to elaborate a theoretical encounter with *Savage Beauty* and to engage with its curatorial scheme. It surveys the project's thingness, understood with regard to thing theory's relation to function,[124] in view of Dorothea

---

[123] Dorothea von Hantelmann, "The Experiential Turn," in Elizabeth Carpenter (ed.), *On Performativity*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014.

[124] Whereas this thesis does not aim to engage in a thing theory based case study of the object, Bill Brown's theory of thingness is useful to clarify both concepts of thing and object. He suggests that "[w]e look through

von Hantelmann's theory of the "experiential" and suggests the experience as the object of the exhibition's system—or, in other words, the becoming thing of the experiential.

Savage Beauty brought the runway into the museum, as it relocated the designer's discursive oeuvre within the institutional framework. The exhibition was not conceived as a dialogue as the wall texts almost exclusively comprised quotes by McQueen himself. Although it is definitely relevant for a monographic exhibition to be accompanied by the artist's voice, I would argue that it ought to be challenged by the curatorial voice in order to bring a dialectical logic and critical perspective to its content. Concepts were put forward through citations yet the institution did not unpack them. It even created contradictory threads at some point. For example, the exhibition inserted this quote of McQueen in the "Romantic Exoticism" gallery [Figure 7], which contained several of his culturally-appropriated designs: "Fashion can be really racist, looking at the clothes of other cultures as costumes. That's mundane and it's old hat. Let's break down some barriers."[125] *Savage Beauty* did not respond to nor engage with its inconsistency, as the designer maintained the stereotypes he condemned. It created an illogical discourse since it was next to the highly problematic term "exoticism"[126] and stereotyped clothing without any critical support. Perhaps this was a curatorial attempt to consider the racist tendency of Western fashion; yet it failed and reinforced the condition of non-criticality from which fashion usually benefits. Amongst others, accusations of misogyny formed part of the criticism of the designer's visual treatment of women throughout his career.[127] In the catalogue of the V&A exhibition, Wilcox skims the problem through a safe wording: "McQueen clearly used his mesmerizing collections as a vehicle for the metathesis of his

---

objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us […]. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation." (See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, issue 1, Autumn 2001: 4)

[125] Alexander Lee McQueen, quote displayed in the "Romantic Exoticism" gallery of the exhibition.
[126] A term deeply entrenched in Western-centric politics of racism which use necessitates an explicit acknowledgement of and critical engagement with this fact.
[127] Caroline Evans addressed this question of misogyny in her book *Fashion at the Edge*, of which the chapter six entitled "Cruelty" is dedicated to McQueen in the form of an analysis of the aggressiveness of his practice. See Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003: 139-162.

feelings about women, whether consciously or not."[128] Within the frame of the conference *Sabotage and Tradition*, which I attended, a question came from the audience raising the concern of misogyny and asking for a clarification of the Museum's stance. The response of the V&A was very weak and shallow with the organizers saying that McQueen was not misogynist, he loved women and wanted to empower them through his designs, without elaborating on how they understand it was carried out by the designer. These are just two examples of how *Savage Beauty* failed to address conflicting issues present in McQueen's work, to the point of denying them.

In the context of the first iteration of *Savage Beauty* at the MET, Park wrote: "When an organization as well-regarded as the Metropolitan fails to address the most basic controversies facing an artist, it ignores its mission and sets a dangerous precedent."[129] This situation was not different at the V&A. The conference, as a complementary scholarly site of knowledge production, could have been an ideal occasion to address cultural appropriation and the vision of women in McQueen's fashion. This lack of critical commitment and distance from the curatorial towards what it curates adds a layer in the production of a story (legend) around the figure of McQueen and his practice. It tightens the focus of the exhibition to the past, unfolding as a strategic mode of myth construction, and prevents it from engaging with the present or even the future. Organized as representation-work (of a past event) rather than event-work (a *new* event or an event *anew*), the displayed practice remained trapped in its former context. At last, this mythologizing contributes to the invalidation of the practice's performativity, since its performative condition is not activated in the present context.

The exhibition has had an outstanding success given public and press response, and one just has to look at the numbers of both the MET's and the V&A's iterations to grasp the extent of the phenomenon. Yet two critiques of the exhibition sum up the crisis that fashion exhibitions such as *Savage Beauty* face: the first suggesting that "one could even argue that those behind *Savage Beauty*, instead of allowing for a neutral space that would provide much-needed intellectual distance, reinforce the fashion designer's violent fantasies through the too-

---

[128] Wilcox, *Alexander McQueen*, 327.
[129] Park, "Savage Beauty."

35

theatrical displays that dramatize the conflict inherent in his pieces,"[130] and the second that "the Alexander McQueen *Savage Beauty* (2011) exhibition and its catalogue, was a purely aesthetically-driven exercise in showmanship and presentation and was entirely devoid of any critical investigation, intellectual rigour or contextualization, a fact painfully absent from any review of the show."[131] Both critiques were in response to the MET presentation and clearly identify the structural problems at the core of *Savage Beauty*. If a valid, contextualizing effort marked the V&A iteration however, the exhibition remained deeply rooted in dictatorial narratives. In the end, the retrospective performed a mythologization; it created a discourse to convince museum-goers of the institution's beliefs without any possibility given to them to respond or be critical about what they experienced.

Dialectics of thingness

As an act of media translation, *Savage Beauty* converted fashion shows into exhibition matter, just as many other fashion exhibitions have attempted to do. Whereas this type of presentation usually curates objects of clothing, *Savage Beauty* curated experiences; more precisely, the past experiences of McQueen's runways. In her essay, "The Experiential Turn," Hantelmann connects the notion of the performative with the production of experiences in building on "a general revaluation of experiences as a central focus of cultural, social, and economic activity"[132] in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. With regard to visual art, she writes: "the object, traditionally the protagonist of meaning production, becomes a device for engaging in an experimental relation with oneself and others."[133] Yet she outlines a key distinction on which is based the "experiential turn": if every artwork produces an experience, some of them *shape* experiences. Referring to Rosalind Krauss's work on Minimal Art, especially in her essay "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," Hantelmann distinguishes a shift towards a bodily-oriented production of meaning that would mark the

[130] Ibid.
[131] John Potvin, "Fashion and the Art Museum: When Giorgio Armani Went to the Guggenheim," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 1, issue 1, January 2012: 57.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

practice of a generation of artists in the 1990s.[134] Quoting Krauss, she suggests that the logic of minimalist aesthetics gave rise to "'the synchronic museum'," as the museum "'would forgo history in the name of a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically spatial'."[135] To this extent, Hantelmann argues, the institution became "an objectified and abstract entity"[136] and the exhibition space, "the object of an experience."[137]

      With this in mind, the experiential puts into sharp relief the politics of embodiment tied to the contemporary exhibition format, which are contextual to the revival of "liveness." Curatorial practices engage with embodiment, the *representation* of an idea or concept in the form of a body, both in terms of what is curated and its public. The temporal presence and activation of a body or bodies as a contemporary condition of this discursive site generates "new" modes of thinking, creating and being, and thus meaning and value. At the same time that this curatorial embodiment speaks of physicality, it also involves dematerialization; what Adrian Heathfield identifies as the "lure of presence"[138] with regard to "a proliferation of live art and experimental theater practices deploying technologies of mediation and simulation, […] aesthetic techniques of self-interrogation, evident duplicity and haptic spectacle."[139] This kind of embodiment transforms the perception and experience of time as well as the experience *per se*, making the exhibition a *lived* experience, something that is produced through experience. To exhibit the performative—as a different format than traces, documentation, archives— essentially requires shaping experiences as the primary material of exhibitions. Paradoxically, *Savage Beauty* pursued this experiential ambition while still visually and physically understanding the "exhibited" as an archival object, rather than a situational-driven reality. The thingness of the show thus unfolded through various embodiments, caught in between spectatorship, the materiality of the pieces, and memories of the physical entities treading the

---

[134] She asserts: "Although for artists like Andre, Irwin, and Graham the visual remains an important factor in art, their works dismiss a reflexive spectator-object relationship, in which meaning is determined only by the optical exchange across the visual field, in favor of a felt and lived experience of corporeality, a haptic or tactile phenomenology of the body as it encounters the physical world." Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Adrian Heathfield, "Then Again," 31.
[139] Ibid.

runway. The fact that dress bears a strong, intrinsic connexion to the corporeal inexorably sets the viewer's body in tension with the displayed garments. In a back-and-forth between materiality and immateriality, dialectics of thingness generated the very substance of *Savage Beauty*. However, this ontological thingness was anchored in the past, as the exhibition endlessly tried to (re)activate former events. The force of the garments resides in their activation on the catwalk, yet it is impossible to invest past experiences by disregarding the present ones. One cannot *live* a past experience; one can only *feel* a past experience through the living of a present experience. Ultimately, *Plato's Atlantis* in the museum and *Plato's Atlantis* as a fashion show are irreconcilable in terms of how viewers experience them.

The curatorial is agentic in either solidifying or deconstructing the system of belief that is the exhibition regarding its power to manage the immaterial exchanges taking place through rituals, in terms of the various ruled, symbolic gestures sustaining faith. In 1971, Duncan F. Cameron distinguished two poles in the continuum of museums: the forum and the temple. The museum-temple, Cameron argued, would be "sociologically […] much closer in function to the church than it is to the school"[140] since "the museum provides opportunity for reaffirmation of the faith."[141] Conversely, the museum-forum would offer spaces of dialogue and reflection through a social engagement with the audience. In line with Cameron's theory, Claire Bishop accuses the contemporary museum of being "a populist temple of leisure and entertainment."[142] She advocates a "more politicized engagement with our historical moment,"[143] or in other words, "a 'dialectical contemporaneity'."[144] Speaking of contemporaneity as a "disjunctive relationship to temporality,"[145] Bishop investigates the purposes and effects of "[looking] backwards." She writes: "critics have questioned whether these artistic efforts are ultimately more nostalgic and retrospective than prospective: Dieter Roelstraete has lambasted contemporary art's turn towards history-telling and historicizing for its 'inability to grasp or

---

[140] Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator: The Museum Journal*, vol. 14, issue 1, March 1971: 17.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books, 2014 (2nd revised edition): 5.
[143] Ibid., 6.
[144] Ibid., 9.
[145] Ibid., 19.

even look at the present, much less to *excavate the future*'."[146] The observations of Cameron and Bishop significantly resonate throughout *Savage Beauty*, which produced a temple-like space in regards to the Museum's approach. Rituals, in this context, were performed by the visitors through a posture of meditation and wonder led by scenographic codes such as lighting, exhibition path, sounds and music, etc. as well as by picture and drawing bans. The operational logic of the exhibition led to the strategic creation of a Benjaminian-like aura[147] enveloping McQueen's pieces. Approached as autonomous entities, garments were deemed artworks, surviving the event through their shifted status. As a result of this nostalgic setting, viewers encountered the realm of a past moment. The garment came back to life as a new construction, yet it did not experience a new life or a new reality. What was formerly just part of a whole work—the fashion show—became an entity in itself through its display. The curatorial economy was grounded in McQueen's passing and the assumption that his work was dead accordingly. To this extent, the exhibition's premises relate to death, with the designer's presence as a ghostly *mise-en-scène*. With this in mind, *Savage Beauty* is a prime instance of a formula that seeks enlightenment through mechanisms of devotion. In a similar way as the Roman Catholic Church, the exhibition provided a lavish and visually rich setup so as to trigger a phenomenal, multisensory experience that would convince the viewer of the divine, prodigious talent of the fashion designer. Just as the Church would canonize a person after his or her death, the exhibition "canonized" McQueen. To this extent, *Savage Beauty* closed the works on themselves rather than unpacking McQueen's conceptual, provocative practice. As the narratives of the designer characterized the ethos of the presentation, it reinforced the romantic myth of the genius artist that unfolded from the humanist tradition.

In *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, Griselda Pollock unpacks the academic canon in relation to its religious overtones and significantly underlines the displacement of a sacred authority into the secular.[148] Her critique stresses the

---

[146] Ibid., 20.
[147] Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura is defined in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." He argues that the technical reproduction of the work of art, in destroying its uniqueness and permanence, jeopardizes its authenticity and as a result, its authority. Benjamin identifies this lost element as the *aura*, which he defines in relation to nature as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be." See Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
[148] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. New York: Routledge, 1999: 3.

masculine ideals implied in the canon, understood as a mythic structure performing patriarchal mythologies.[149] She defines this structure as "a discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to the legitimation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with Culture."[150] According to Pollock, the canon is rooted in the hegemony of "*selective* tradition," what she identifies as "'an intentionally shaping version of a past and a pre-shaped present'."[151] More importantly, she asserts: "What is thus obscured is the active process of exclusion or neglect operated by the present-day makers of tradition."[152] The multilayered problems of such a canonization of McQueen could be apprehended under this idea of tradition. On the one hand, it deactivated the critical and political quality of his work, embedded in what Evans pinpoints as "an uncompromising and aggressive sexuality"[153] which made McQueen's woman "a frightening subject […], dressing if not actually to repel or disgust, at least to keep men at a distance, rather than to attract them"[154] —what could be considered and further analysed from the standpoint of McQueen's homosexuality. Structurally rooted in patriarchal politics, the artistic canon paradoxically excludes women and includes them as its Other, in an act of masculine narcissism: "the discourse of phallocentric art history relied upon the category of a negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity."[155] In this sense, McQueen's inclusion in this tradition of masculine domination that is the canon automatically shifts any visions of women as autonomous into narratives of binarity. On the other hand, the very participation of the institution in the canonical tradition leads to the loss of credibility of the exhibition, given the lack of transparency and auto-reflexivity at the core of the process. It supports a longstanding hegemonic approach to the format of the exhibition that demonstrates, in this twenty-first century, a marked irresponsibility regarding the power of the museum.

Bolton responded to charges of partisanship:

---

[149] Ibid., 5-9.
[150] Ibid., 9.
[151] Ibid., 10.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 145.
[154] Ibid., 148-149.
[155] Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 5.

It is a myth that curators treat the subjects of their exhibitions with cold-hearted objectivity. Curators cannot help but let their personal feelings and judgements creep into their exhibitions. Indeed, the exhibition was deeply and profoundly subjective, but I believe it was its subjectivity that contributed to its success. A more objective approach would certainly have generated very different reactions from the audience. In many ways, the exhibition was an unabashed and unapologetic love poem to McQueen.[156]

The curator defends the subjectivity of curatorial practices, which is indeed an integral condition of exhibition-making understood as an analysis generated by a *subject*. What is problematic in this statement, however, is an apparent misinterpretation of the subjective (or the objective, perhaps) as sanctioning the denial of curatorial and institutional responsibilities. Not unlike scholars, curators and institutions have responsibilities with regard to their contribution, as the curatorial is a form of discourse. Any exhibition is political, in the sense that something is shaped through a politicized space (i.e. a space that bears witness of choices made by institutions), whether claimed or not. The lack of critical reflection on the curatorial position leads to the misunderstanding of the designer's legacy as it fails to deepen its validation of McQueen's work beyond the aesthetic level. One could *see* the designer's technical skills, thematic methodology, and autobiographical approach to fashion yet without having access to the questions that profoundly drove his performance of fashion; one could not *see* the deeper political motifs spanning his practice, its ontological structure. The exhibition was a spectacle, driven by highly symbolic and persuasive images. It exacerbated our contemporary sensibilities characterized by the societal politics of late capitalism. To this extent, *Savage Beauty* should be considered a re-presentation: a representation as both mediation of the real and reproduction of an earlier presentation. Through the set of the exhibition, the garments functioned as an image, rather than an object, since it was situated within spaces of the past event. Thingness, in this sense, is caught in limbo; it is attached to the garment, bearing it in itself and yet it does not surface. McQueen's *Plato's Atlantis* runway show, as a performance and a representation, operated through images although the objects were physically present. The show did not lose its thingness so far, as it can materialize in

---

[156] Bolton, "In Search of the Sublime," 19.

images. However, this concept is inherently tied to a present temporality: it is constituted within the aural effect of the live, experiential time. Therefore, thingness cannot accurately emerge through the (re)activation of a past image. In *Savage Beauty*'s *Plato's Atlantis* gallery, garments remained imprisoned in a historical time and could not perform in the present moment of their exhibition: they lost their performativity, temporarily. Thingness is all at once triggered and denied, constantly challenged in a discontinuous dialogue between its presence and absence. Whereas one would suppose that thingness rather unfolds through the exhibition, a format that allows a proximity to materiality that the fashion show does not, it appears that it is not a given. The garment, yet physically present, was visible as an image, replicating the fashion show mental construct. In the end, what was invisible is the ontological genuineness of McQueen's work, accordingly rejected with its political and critical weight, on which it depended.

PART III

Ritual as praxis

Performance is both the thing unveiled and the means by which unveiling occurs.

Shannon Jackson[157]

As a media translation, *Savage Beauty* shifted McQueen's performance of fashion into an object of exhibition. The runway show and the exhibition format are two distinct media that both function as intermedial configurations, that is, productions within which several media converge and interact. In terms of an interconnectedness of various sensory modalities of communication, intermediality systematizes the fashion exhibition—as a media translation and a meta-intermedial structure—in structuring the experience. The mediality of performance thus characterising the crux of *Savage Beauty* engages different levels of corporeality, materiality, temporality, and visibility, which are negotiated and performed through the ritual as the *modus operandi* of the retrospective. Understood in terms of a set of regulated symbolic practices (and processes), the ritual implies a cult-value of art. It acts upon an intersubjectivity and, within the frame of an exhibition, produces a social space. Beyond this general concept, *Savage Beauty* relied on an *affective* ritual in generating contexts of experience in which meaning emerged through the viewer's affective response. Specifically, this part analyzes the constitutive power of intermedial spaces in relation to the politics of ritual both operating within and activating them. Drawing on Shannon Jackson's concept of "staged management," I investigate the fashion object and human agency in order to evaluate the societal and political efficiency of the fashion exhibition.

Liveness and thingness beyond binarism

Mathieu Copeland addresses the exhibition as a temporal gathering, writing: "the plural-reality of an exhibition is akin to a 'choreographed polyphony'—the orchestration of a score reveals,

---

[157] Jackson, "Staged Management," 117.

over time, the physicality of any given space and the memory one creates of what it *is*."[158] Speaking of "an exhibition that inhabits the realm of re-materialised forms,"[159] Copeland sheds light on the "re" at the core of exhibitions dealing with performativity. He further notes that "to choreograph an exhibition is to envisage both an exhibition *in* a moment of time and the exhibition *of* a moment of time. Self-contained and generative."[160] With this in mind, *Savage Beauty* exhibited moments *of* time, although not generative. Fashion exhibitions bear an inherent instability with regard to their dualistic seizure of the ephemerality of the act and the lasting value of the performative object. Mechanisms of the theatrical act underlying McQueen's practice were expanded by the curatorial program of *Savage Beauty*. Consequently, they became strategies to reinforce institutional power. The exhibition rejected the integral ephemerality of its object in denying the temporality of the event, since it structured finished acts as the trigger of its viewers' experiences. By disregarding any temporal conditions, *Savage Beauty* straightforwardly historicized McQueen's work and naturalized the past as endlessly reactivated in the present. Furthermore, the retrospective historicized an experience as it reproduced the aesthetics of the runway; it aimed for a repetition of this experience.

Savage Beauty infused highly symbolical value to the designer's pieces, a value that lied in the curatorial understanding of the garments as entry points to a dramatic, outstanding and yet unsettling experience pertaining to the fashion shows. Catherine Wood's question, "[i]s it that without a material object as a point of symbolic negotiation, ritualised words, gestures and actions are in themselves in the body of their enactor, heightenedly—and critically objectified?"[161] deepens the reflection on the *act* of ritual. In this sense, the garments and accessories of *Savage Beauty* are oddly caught between act and experience, which are in effect the "real" (displayed) objects of the exhibition. Addressing the object-based model of contemporary museology, "an increasingly globalised conceptual and formal language of

---

[158] Mathieu Copeland, "Choreographing Exhibitions: An exhibition happening everywhere, at all times, with and for everyone," in Mathieu Copeland and Julie Pellegrin (eds,), *Choreographing Exhibition*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013: 19.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 20.
[161] Catherine Wood, "People and Things in the Museum," in Mathieu Copeland and Julie Pellegrin (eds,), *Choreographing Exhibition*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013: 115.

object-immanence,"[162] Wood explains that the work "becomes untouchable […] [and] un-useable: as a relic preserved for display."[163] In this sense, the displayed pieces became fragments or remains of the sanctity of McQueen's body of work, simultaneously autonomous in their operation of a system of belief and highly reliant on the figure of McQueen himself with regard to their sacred character. Wood furthers: "The development of a language of 'performance' […] makes sense as a 'primitive' reinstatement of human agency. But often, […] this capacity for liveness is set in opposition to the qualities of those works that are collected and displayed."[164] This tension between liveness and thingness, between human agency and object agency—and thus their interrelation and mutual influence—recalls *Savage Beauty*'s irresolute engagement with the performative. Drawing on Bruno Latour's theories on the role of objects regarding human behaviour, Wood highlights the co-existence and reliability of objects and actions within the museum's landscape: "'In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action,' things might authorise, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on' rather than, as is commonly understood in sociology, to simply 'express' or 'symbolise' power relations or hierarchies, etc."[165] Likewise, Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy rely on Latour as they reflect on the object's agentic quality, writing: "we understand physical materials not as inert human possessions but instead as actants, with particular frequencies, energies, and potentials to affect human and nonhuman worlds."[166] Latour's concept of "actant" is defined here as "'a source of action'."[167] Schweitzer and Zerdy continue by bringing into play Robin Bernstein's notion of the "scriptive thing" understood as "a material object that 'like a playscript, broadly structures a performance while allowing for agency and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable'."[168] Stressing the political potential of a "thingcentric methodology," Bernstein's work "uncover[s] hidden repertoires of oppression and resistance"[169] through an analysis of the object. Theorized as an "'archive of repertoires',"[170]

---

[162] Ibid., 117.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 118.
[166] Schweitzer and Zerdy, "Introduction: Object Lessons," 2.
[167] Ibid., 7.
[168] Ibid., 11.
[169] Ibid.

the scriptive thing bears in itself past, present, and future possibilities and modes of (re)action, fostering a performative history.

A choreographed ritual

With this in mind, the ideas of actant and "scriptive" open different perspectives from which to assess the object of *Savage Beauty*. In the context of the *Plato's Atlantis* runway, clothing transformed the parading body [Figure 8]. Alien to the human form, the silhouette generated by the different pieces controlled the models' agency, limiting their movements. Paradoxically, it empowered them at the same time in giving the models a mystic, almost supernatural presence. To some extent, it triggered action: primarily because the very mode of fashion shows is moving bodies—with regard to their initial purpose of displaying a collection to potential buyers; and because garments provided the models a new identity, they influenced both their physical and mental (re)actions on the catwalk. In this sense, McQueen's pieces undertook an active role within the frame of the shows for which they are designed: they were actants. In the exhibition's *Plato's Atlantis* gallery, this active role of the garments and accessories was displayed rather than performed. The curatorial approach acknowledged their potential in reference to a past activity, instead of a current activation. Bernstein's "archive of repertoires" seems more appropriate to tackle their contingencies. The notion of repertoire, as a list or supply of capabilities and skills that have been and that could be again, is particularly telling when applied to the exhibited object of *Savage Beauty*. Through this lens, the pieces seem to bear in themselves the different potentialities related to their performativity, inherently conveying every performances they could (re)perform. They function as a repository of past, present, and future activations in embodying the range of latent eventualities. In this sense, *Savage Beauty*'s objects contain their entire possibilities, as a spectrum, but they are unable to get them (re)activated. The scriptive is thus part of the object's qualities, arising from its performative condition as an actant. Whereas they actively impacted human agency on the runway, McQueen's garments and accessories rather passively choreographed the bodies of *Savage Beauty*—both physical (e.g. viewers) and imaginary ones.

---

[170] Ibid.

As a media, the exhibition format communicates information and meaning through people, setting, technology, and displayed (art) works. This communication is thus partly executed through other media. With the retrospective, the media translation from event to exhibition proceeded through different devices such as video projections, sound recordings, wall texts, and garments' displays to some extent, but also through choreography. As a result of the scenography, the pieces created a path one had to follow. They thus triggered movement, since viewers must move along the installation in order to closely see the garments' details. Facing the viewer's body, the display did not allow proper side or back views of the objects. As a curatorial choice, McQueen's material works were presented in the art object tradition of display, that is, the viewer's reading orientation is chosen by the curator and it does not allow for proximity or physical encounter. It made it either impossible or very tricky if one wanted to look at it from another angle, since the pieces were generally displayed against a wall. If this is the case of a majority of fashion exhibitions, there are a few examples of alternative engagements with the display that succeeded in rendering the performativity of fashion through an (visual) art-oriented presentation. I refer to exhibitions such as *Issey Miyake '92 Twist* (Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum, 1992),[171] Martin Margiela's *(9/4/1615)* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1997) [Figure 9], *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*[172] (MoMu, 2004) [Figure 10] by independent fashion curator Judith Clark, and *Yohji Yamamoto* (V&A, 2011) [Figure 11] within which the display was itself questioned and challenged. These presentations reflected on the practice of exhibiting fashion. As such, they explored and developed different strategies of display that converted the garment *into* a visual object mostly through the form of installations.[173] In this light, the pedestrian logic of *Savage Beauty* can be

---

[171] For images of this exhibition, see documentary film *Issey Miyake Moves*, directed by Setsuko Miura and produced by Toshiya Harada and Setsuko Miura, c. 1992.

[172] The exhibition was re-titled *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* for its subsequent presentation at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2005.

[173] In these exhibitions, the garments were reconstructed as visual art objects. In the case of Miyake and Margiela, the fact that the designers were still alive and concretely implicated in these curatorial projects surely impacts and influences the possibilities of such a curatorial practice. Both Miyake and Margiela restructured the purpose of the pieces, evacuating their initial function of being worn. For example, Miyake tied the garments to create a very long thread, whereas Margiela reproduced 18 looks in white fabrics, one from each of his 18 collections, and invited a microbiologist to spray them with bacteria and yeast—thus literally creating "living" garments. In the case of *Savage Beauty*, the exhibition expressively took place *in memoriam* of McQueen. Thus, the designer was not there to deconstruct or modify his pieces so as to stage them in a temporal conjunction of past and present times, rather than in the sole temporality of the past—as the ultimate state of *Savage Beauty*. In the case of Clark's

recounted as a traditional, standardised condition of fashion exhibitions: a ritualised enactment of the historical dress exhibiting methods. Yet it is the very opposite of fashion shows, wherein the audience is still and the garments are in motion. This historical-based spatial display was combined with an uncritical use of the terms of the fashion industry. Jackson speaks of "a hierarchical and obfuscating brand of for-profit theatricality."[174] She suggests that if "the theatrical tools of *verfremdungseffekt* [alienation affect] seek to disrupt the theatricalized society of the spectacle, […] for Brecht the dramaturgical unveiling of the conditions of the art event simultaneously unveils the dramaturgy of social process."[175] Unsurprisingly, the idea of a "for-profit theatricality" starkly resonates with *Savage Beauty*. Its theatrical organization of the displays shaped a coded trail to be operated by the viewers, and acted as a set of rules programming the procedures of this operation. As such, the theatricality of the "procession" serves the stimulation of strong emotions: throughout his or her journey, the viewer lives a moving, supposedly enlightening experience.

With this in mind, the exhibition creates a space for the cult of McQueen that validates as well as reinforces the prescribed worship at the outset of the Costume Institute's rationale. The exhibitions' rules could thus be seen as rites, and the exhibition in itself, a precisely choreographed ritual. The museum as a sanctuary, in the sense of a building dedicated to the ceremonies of a cult, is a premise that relates undeniably to the MET to the V&A. Its power specifically functions by means of Jackson's notion of "dramaturgy of social process." The ritual it programed became effective in the conversion of the viewers as believers (in an active way): history is fabricated through the belief of its audience. Therefore, the *mise-en-scène* of a collective performance is indispensable to the theatricality of the event, and consequently to its symbolic efficacy. To this extent, I suggest the idea of ritual as praxis; ritual as what is performed through the exhibition format—the performative ritual, in constant validation of

---

exhibition, which was not a retrospective, she organized it as a fashion installation that had the effect of creating a dialectical dialogue between past and present. Clark considered the garment "as an element of a narrative." See Marco Pecorari, "Contemporary Fashion History in Museums," in Birgitta Svenson and Marie Riegels Melchior (eds.), *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. For the Yohji Yamamoto's retrospective exhibition, curator Ligaya Salazar and scenographer Masao Nihei created an installation through which one could walk all the way around the clothes. Visitors experienced a close encounter with the pieces and were even allowed to touch them. This matter of touch transferred the experience of the viewer and the performance of the garment in the present.
[174] Jackson, "Staged Management," 113.
[175] Ibid., 114-116.

itself, alteration of the exhibited work's status and value, and shaping of the audience's identity(ies) as well. With regard to acts of gender, Judith Bulter states: "the formulation of the body as a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted."[176] Through societal instances of power, such as the museum, one's identity is implicitly regulated by behavioural politics. Regarding the museum, specifically, what is exhibited are not only (art) works, but also people. According to Hantelmann, "the museum is the institution dedicated to the self-formation of the individual."[177] She assesses the "ritual character of the museum experience"[178] and argues that "in the art museum the model of progress is realized performatively,"[179] adding that "the spatial and discursive structure of the museum is realized in the act of walking, through which the visitor both mentally and physically recapitulates the historic development of art. Progress is experienced through one's own physical (and mental) progress."[180] Jackson's concept of "staged management" becomes increasingly interesting in this context. Whereas she defines "stage manage" in relation to the theatricality of institutional critique, it seems that it can also apply to the exact opposite of the spectrum: the institutional operating modes. With *Savage Beauty*, staged management refers to viewers that, to some extent, can be considered as "performative labor required to stage those actions."[181] In this sense, what is at stake here are the staged actions, visible and invisible, of the performative labor: the audience is proceeding in a theatrical setting, on a scene that exceeds the sole platforms welcoming McQueen's pieces. The performance of *Savage Beauty* is not that of the garments, since they are stuck in the reactivation of the fashion show, but rather that of the visitors. Therefore, the actions are both the visitors' bodily activities taking place through the physical spaces of the exhibition (visible) and the visitors' validation of the Costume Institute's diktat (invisible). If this conventional performance is the case of a majority of exhibitions, the fashion subject complexifies it by its initial relationship with both the moving body and its audience. Bolton stated that the retrospective "was instrumental in conferring this iconicity—not because of the institution and

---

[176] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 525.
[177] Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, 98.
[178] Ibid., 99.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Jackson, "Staged Management," 108.

what it represents but because of what visitors represented. People make icons, and over 660,000 people made McQueen an icon."[182] This declaration, which lessens the institution's power and accompanying responsibilities, expresses very clearly how it perceives the role of its public. It became obvious that the museum staged management through the spectatorial system.

Within the frame of *Savage Beauty*, staged ritual and performative labor come to outline the mechanisms of the exhibition. These productive tools, in fact both performative and theatrical, served the construction of history—the historicization of a body of works and the subsequent mythology created around the figure of McQueen. In the context of the complementary conference *Sabotage and Tradition*, a conversation between V&A curator Susanna Brown and photographer Anne Deniau took place on 5 June 2015 at the V&A. Deniau, who worked thirteen years with McQueen documenting his shows backstage, said at some point in the exchange that "the legend is more powerful than the man."[183] Whereas the exhibition fuelled the audience's increasing faith, staged a whole universe, and ultimately created and told a story (of McQueen's fashion shows) through the practice of ritual or ritualised physical and intellectual gestures, what was *real* in the end? What was not predetermined by conventions and naturalized modes of "acting" (a collective ritual)? Phelan stresses: "the confusion between the real and the representational occurs because 'the real is positioned both before and after its representation; and representation becomes a moment of the reproduction and consolidation of the real'. The real is read through representation, and representation is read through the real."[184] In this view, it appears that *Savage Beauty* articulated multiple realities, without producing one however. The retrospective consolidated a cult-based reality that it historically, conventionally, and developmentally represented, rather than presenting an evolving reality. The exhibition's praxis thus remained very much separated from the reality of the displayed pieces—their latent performativity. Yet if there is one thing that is real, it is the symbolic capital consequently produced, labelling "legendary" the fashion designer and his performance of fashion.

---

[182] Bolton, "In Search of the Sublime," 21.
[183] Photographer Anne Deniau in conversation with curator of photographs Susanna Brown, "Session Four: Staging, and Seeing," *Sabotage and Tradition* Conference, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, June 5, 2015.
[184] Phelan, *Unmarked*, 2.

CONCLUSION

Archive and survive

> *Birth is not a beginning, death is not an end.*
> Bill Viola[185]

Known to have staged incredibly theatrical shows, McQueen considered the runway as first and foremost a means of communication. Through his theatrical staging of fashion, the designer questioned its boundaries and repelled its limits as well by incorporating an implicit reflection on fashion itself and its operating modes. As a curveball of media translation, *Savage Beauty* functioned simultaneously like a repository of different media and a broader communication means in itself. The exhibition displayed the fashions shows through their related videos and "performing objects," which could all be acknowledged as media for their communicative function, and is at the same time a media in its very format and purpose. Within the frame of *Savage Beauty*, the manifest theatricality strongly marked the logic of the exhibition in the manner of McQueen's shows. These theatrical deployments however managed two opposite discourses in their treatment of performativity. Circumstances of encounter structured through both spaces defined the performative character of each production. Since *Savage Beauty* relocated fashion within the realm of the museum without investing its complex specificities of live-based media, the exhibition staged a reality that has already been performed. It neutralized the critical potential of McQueen's work in hiding the institutional structures of the authoritarian curatorial site and failed in its constitutive component of communicating a new reality. It theatrically displayed the pieces in unilateral conversation with their original scenography and, strongly bound to their performance purpose, they kept reenacting past presences rather than exploring their inherent performativity and current existence. The viewer, waiting for a new performance to unfold from the garment, witnessed the sole moment of a past embodiment. This ghost story left the new space opened by the exhibition format utterly hollow. Historicized through the temporal construction of a

---

[185] Bill Viola, press release of the exhibition *Inverted Birth*, James Cohan Gallery, New York, December 10, 2015 – January 30, 2016. Accessed 10 April 2016. http://www.jamescohan.com/exhibitions/2015-12-10_bill-viola

forever past, fashion artifacts shifted from performative works to an archive of performance. By discounting any critical perspective in favour of a visual tribute, *Savage Beauty* suppresses the distance required for a performative theatricality. Through several registers of invisibility, the exhibition showed and hid. As a force at the core of the institutional power dynamics, invisibility was the *modus operandi* used to secure parameters of the aura created around the displayed object. Fashion, with its multifaceted nature, requires its performative tensions to be well transmitted within the curatorial discourse, especially in the case of McQueen's performance-based practice. *Savage Beauty*, as an exhibition of performative objects, conventionally freezed praxis as if it was genuinely possible to capture it, and reinforced the idea that the exhibited object is "dead."

To our contemporary sensibilities, death seems to be the end of life as humankind experiences it. Nativity and mortality, the two poles of the human spectrum, structure the temporality of existence. There appears, however, that death is far from being the finale; it rather is a state from which unfolds something that is much more powerful than human life. This is, concisely, what *Savage Beauty* has demonstrated throughout its two iterations. As the exhibition mythologized the figure of Lee Alexander McQueen, it produced meaning through the merging of the man and his work to the extent of making them inseparable. It articulated and marketed an encounter with a fabricated entity. Jackson and Butler, in their collective keynote address of the MoMA's performance symposium entitled *How Are We Performing Today?*,[186] reported the increasing institutional interest in performance, stating that it most notably comes from the ability of live art to control the spectator's body—thereby contributing to institutional power. While they acknowledged that the creation of affect and the design of experience is not new, dating back to the pre-industrial era, they situated the production of experiences in a post-fordist service economy that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. In this context, Jackson and Butler stress that immaterial affective relations became a primary product and performance, a social compulsion. Through this experience economy, or experiential turn as framed by Hantelmann, experiences and encounters are being marketed. In the wake of these surveys of the value of experience, Sven Lütticken addresses the superior

---

[186] Shannon Jackson and Judith Butler, Keynote address of the Performance Symposium *How Are We Performing Today?*. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, November 16, 2012.

value and status of immaterial products in speaking of a "spectacle of absence."[187] He asserts that "[t]he difference between artist and oeuvre has collapsed: the artists themselves are their main commodity on the performative market."[188] With that in mind, what *Savage Beauty* displayed was the *experience* of the fashion show: through the exhibition, viewers had access to ended experiences that the death of McQueen heightened by sealing their impossibility to occur again. The retrospective wanted to convince the audience that they were experiencing these historical experiences. This case study not only exemplifies the functioning of the experience economy and the institutionalization of fashion, it underlines the societal quest for experiences.

As it granted the image of McQueen an ontological status, the blockbuster generated an icon accordingly. In *An Anthropology of Images*, Hans Belting brings into play Louis Marin's concept of "ontological transfer," which a body underwent by shifting into an image.[189] Belting explains: "The image was given power to act in the name and place of the body."[190] He goes on:

> [This power] effectively endowed the image with a new kind of authority. The image was no longer merely compensation for a loss but had, in the very act of representing a body, acquired "Being" in the name of that body. Its presence, precisely because it was delegated to the image, surpassed that of an ordinary body—quite apart from the fact this new image-body, as part of a cult of the dead, had now acquired a sacred character. Through images and their use, the social realm acquired this new dimension, the realm of the living became less precarious.[191]

The image, in this sense, is more powerful than what it represents, which gains a new status *in absentia*. Death, as the anchor point of the retrospective, shaped the exhibition space as a mausoleum; it displaced the signs of commemoration into the museum. According to Belting, a tomb is a place of action: a place where the time of death is reenacted.[192] It creates the space

---

[187] Sven Lütticken, "Progressive Striptease," in Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (eds.), *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2012: 190-193.
[188] Ibid., 195.
[189] Hans Belting, "Images and Death: Embodiment in Early Cultures," in *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011: 86.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 87.
[192] Ibid., 96.

for a "'symbolic exchange' that unites the living with the dead as members of the same social unit."[193] Whereas physiological death functions within the regime of immediacy, the exhibition space—what could ultimately be understood as an epideictic space—shifts this temporality into perpetuity exactly as the tomb operates: *Savage Beauty* incarnated a moment, a circumscribed portion of time that was not meant to last. The retrospective became the spatial marker of a symbolic exchange between the time of the viewers (present) and the time of death (past), which generated the historical time. Thereby, the exhibition inserted McQueen in the traditional Western-white-male-based history.

Savage Beauty's politics of embodiment involves both the material and the immaterial, presence and absence, without understanding these terms in opposition to one another. The material works of the exhibition were embedded in immateriality, within which they found their meaning. The retrospective gained its value from the absence of McQueen and this value was validated through the presence of viewers—the force of the unseen. The problem with that staged embodiment, or the staging of an absent body, is the illusion of experience. The reanimation of individual projections, instead of "new" experience(s), from the different people implicated in the curatorial management of *Savage Beauty* generated splintered material. Viewers experienced this fragmented information rather than McQueen's practice itself. Despite the fact that mixing and rearranging are customary techniques of any curated project, these procedures must be acknowledged and self-consciously disclosed within the exhibition when it comes to the (re)presentation of performative works; otherwise it fails to anchor performativity in the actual context and consequently loses its effectiveness. McQueen rejected the white catwalk, seemingly imbued with ideological aesthetics of the white cube, and rather drew on theatre and cinema as spatial mediums shaping his performance of fashion, two media that function on the basis of acting and sequences. To a certain extent, he denied the so-called neutrality of space. It is rather paradoxical that *Savage Beauty* claimed neutrality through its reproduction of McQueen's aesthetic politics, while disregarding the multiplicity of realities engendered by interpretation. It implemented structures based on the fashion industry's advertising codes that allowed a single reading, and ultimately, a single image in which viewers were immersed—or should I say, indoctrinated?

---

[193] Ibid., 97.

54

Contemporary fashion curation faces idiosyncratic issues related to the practicality of its object. The very act of *wearing* as a naturalized condition of fashion problematizes its embodiment within the exhibition space, as fashion undergoes a transfer of status through its artification and historicization. In the course of her reflection on the art object display, Catherine Wood advocates "the object 'in use'"[194] as a conceptual, performative presentation mode, which is seen as an alternative to the "traditional display in a pristine state that is removed from the process of its making."[195] She significantly suggests that the exhibition format, in its conventional configuration, disconnects its object(s) from the realm of everyday life and presents it as "dead things."[196] She writes: "The nature of the museum collection and its influence on art history is such that we study things that survive as tangible evidence—i.e. objects—rather than actions."[197] As a possible tactic to disrupt the traditional display, Wood brings forward the latent retroaction of these "dead" objects "that are constituted as the potential site for, or after-effects of, performance action"[198] and which "[drag] the suggestion of their genesis—a personal history contaminated by explicit subjectivity—with them."[199] Thus, their "use-ability" as she puts it could be the keystone of a way to engage differently the material object within the museum, a solution to reinvest a form of performativity in the object. The museological embodiment of fashion could find in this approach a productive mode to secure the interactive dialogue that characterizes fashion. On the one hand, *Savage Beauty* indeed provided a "personal history contaminated by explicit subjectivity" to its object, both in terms of McQueen's biographical implications and the object's original activation and public constitution—that reside in the fashion show—as a condition of its genesis. Moreover, one could suggest that the media translation at play brought a focus on the action rather than on the object, although utterly withdrew as a consequence of the display. Whereas it did not work in the end, whereas the performativity did not emerge, the exhibition still is an interesting case study in the context of a reflection on the strategies to unsettle the conventions of the

---

[194] Catherine Wood, "The Things That Dreams Are Made Of," in Eric Mangion and Marie de Brugerolle (eds.), *Not to Play With Dead Things*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009: 85.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 88.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.

exhibition format. In this sense, fashion can effect art history and museology to reconsider or reflect on their relation to the object, bring in an alternative perspective from which to engage with it, and offer a form of resistance to conventions. The idea, then, would be to do it *again for the first time* rather than to do it *again* as if the past was not over yet. According to Hito Steyerl, the future can only happen if history does not invade the present; one cannot repeat the same, one needs to bring it to the next level.[200]

---

[200] Hito Steyerl, "A Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War," Communication within the frame of the *e-flux*'s *Avant-Museology* symposium, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, November 20, 2016.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allwood, Emma Hope. "The McQueen show that changed the future of fashion," *Dazed*, August 2016. http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/32285/1/the-mcqueen-show-that-changed-the-future-of-fashion-platos-atlantis-nick-knight

Barstow, David. "Art, Money and Control: Elements of an Exhibition," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1999. http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/06/nyregion/artistic-differences-special-report-art-money-control-elements-exhibition.html?pagewanted=all

Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Binkley, Christina. "The MET's Costume Institute Opens New Anna Wintour Costume Center," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2014. http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303456104579489732411563854

Bishop, Claire. *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books, 2014 (2nd revised edition).

Bolton, Andrew (ed.). *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Bowles, Hamish. *Vogue & The Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute: Parties, Exhibitions, People*. New York: Abrams, 2014.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, issue 1, Autumn 2001: 1-22.

Bruzzi, Stella (ed.). *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000.

---. *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2014.

Burke, Edmund. *1729-1797: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999.

Burley, Isabella. "*Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the MET," *AnOther Magazine*, May 3, 2011. http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/1062/alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty-at-the-met

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, issue 4, 1988: 519-531.

Cameron, Duncan F. "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator: The Museum Journal*, vol. 14, issue 1, March 1971: 11-24.

Clark, Judith and Amy De La Haye. *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Copeland, Mathieu and Julie Pellegrin (eds,). *Chorégraphier l'exposition*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013.

Collins, Jane and Andrew Nisbet (eds.). *Theatre and Performance Design: A Reader in Scenography*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

Corris, Michael. "British? Young? Invisible? w/ Attitude?," *Artforum International*, May 1992: 106.

Debord, Guy. *La Société du Spectacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992 (1967), 3rd edition: 10.

Evans, Caroline. *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

> ---. "The Golden Dustman: A Critical Evaluation of the Work of Martin Margiela and a Review of Martin Margiela: Exhibition (9/4/1615)," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 2, issue 1, 1998: 73-94.

Fine Collins, Amy. 1998: 73-94.,: Exhibi*Vanity Fair*, November 1993. http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/1993/11/diana-vreeland-199311

Gaugele, Elke (ed.), *Aesthetic Politics in Fashion*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014.

Giannachi, Gabriella and Nick Kaye. *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

Hoffmann, Jens. "Archaeologies of the Present," *Canadian Art*, March 1, 2008. http://canadianart.ca/features/archaeologies/

Jackson, Shannon. "Staged Management: Theatricality and Institutional Critique," *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.

Jackson, Shannon and Judith Butler. Keynote address of the Performance Symposium *How Are We Performing Today?*. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, November 16, 2012.

Jones, Amelia and Adrian Heathfield (eds.). *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2012.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Maloney, Martin. "Everyone a Winner! Selected British Art from the Saatchi Collection 1987-97," in Brooks Adams et al. *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1997: 26-39.

Martin, Richard and Harold Koda. *Diana Vreeland: Immoderate Style*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993.

McQueen, Alexander. "Women's Spring/Summer 2010 'Plato's Atlantis,' *Alexander McQueen*. http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/experience/en/pages/alexandermcqueen/archive/?years=2010#id_article=260

Park, Rebecca. exandermcqueen.com/experiem: Alexander McQueen at the MET,ch*Artcritical*, September 2, 2011. http://www.artcritical.com/2011/09/02/alexander-mcqueen/

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Pollock, Griselda. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Artxander-mcque*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Potvin, John. "Fashion and the Art Museum: When Giorgio Armani Went to the Guggenheim," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 1, issue 1, January 2012: 47-63.

Sabotage and Tradition Conference, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, June 5, 2015.

Salter, Chris. *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010.

Schweitzer, Marlis and Joanne Zerdy (eds.). *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*. New York: Palgrave, 2014.

Silverman, Deborah. "Fabrication and Francophilia: The Fêtes de France at the Met and Bloomingdale's, 1981-1984," *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*. New York: Pantheon, 1986: 50-104.

Smith, Terry. *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. New York: Independent Curators International, 2012.

Stevenson, N.J. "The Fashion Retrospective," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 12, issue 2, 2008: 219-235.

Steyerl, Hito. H Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War," Communication within the frame of the *e-flux*'s *Avant-Museology* symposium, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, November 20, 2016.

Svenson, Birgitta and Marie Riegels Melchior (eds.). *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Szakács, Eszter (ed.). *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2012. http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/

Victoria and Albert Museum, "News Release: Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty," *Victoria and Albert Museum*. http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/252514/Savage-Beauty-Press-Release-Febuary.pdf

Viola, Bill. Press release of the exhibition *Inverted Birth*, James Cohan Gallery, New York, December 10, 2015 – January 30, 2016. http://www.jamescohan.com/exhibitions/2015-12-10_bill-viola

Von Hantelmann, Dorothea. *How to Do Things with Art*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2010.

---. "The Experiential Turn," in Elizabeth Carpenter (ed.), *On Performativity*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014.

Wallach, Alan. "The Unethical Art Museum," in Elaine A. King and Gail Levin (eds.), *Ethics and the Visual Arts*. New York: Allworth Press, 2006: 23-36.

While, Aidan. "Locating art worlds: London and the making of Young British art," *Area*, vol. 3, issue 35, 2003: 251-263.

Wilcox, Claire (ed.). *Alexander McQueen*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015.

Wood, Catherine. "The Things That Dreams Are Made Of," in Eric Mangion and Marie de Brugerolle (eds.), *Not to Play With Dead Things*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009: 84-90.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Runway view of *Plato's Atlantis* (Spring/Summer 2010), Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, 6 October 2009, by Alexander McQueen. Photo: Joseph Bennett. Source: "Alexander McQueen, Plato's Atlantis," *Joseph Bennett*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://josephbennett.co.uk/fashion-shows/alexander-mcqueen-platos-atlantis

Figure 2. Alexander McQueen's dress (Spring/Summer 2010). Photo: Marcio Madeira. Source: "Spring 2010 ready-to-wear, Alexander McQueen," *Vogue*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2010-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen/slideshow/collection#40

Figure 3. Alexander McQueen's "Alien" shoe (Spring/Summer 2010), 3D printed and painted resin. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum. Source: "'Alien' shoe," *The Museum of Savage Beauty*, accessed 25 November, 2016.

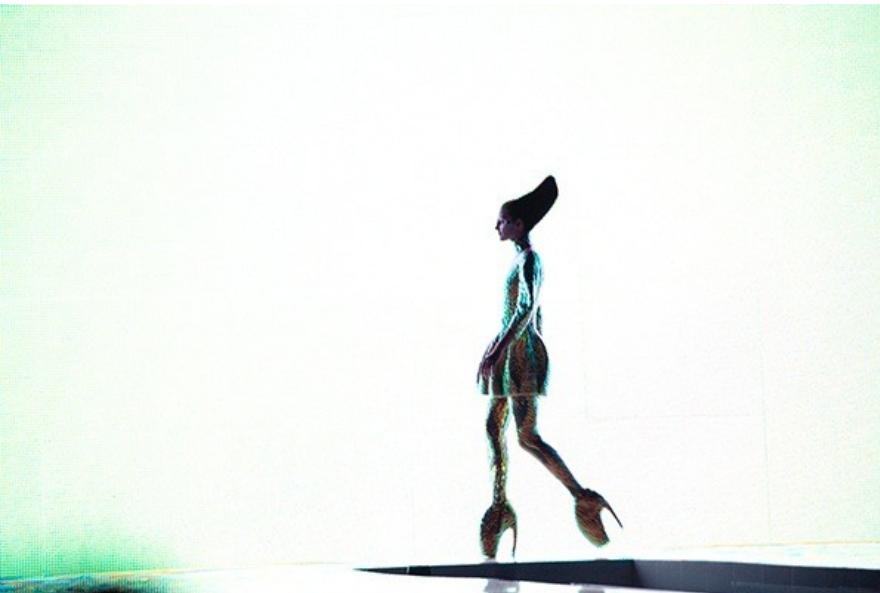http://www.vam.ac.uk/museumofsavagebeauty/mcq/alien-shoe/

Figure 4. Runway view of Plato's Atlantis (Spring/Summer 2010), Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, 6 October 2009, by Alexander McQueen. Photo: Lauren Greenfield. Source: "Jellyfish ensemble and Armadillo shoes," *UAL News*, accessed 25 November, 2016.

http://newsevents.arts.ac.uk/45873/savage-beauty-alexander-mcqueen/fashion-week/

Figure 5. Runway view of *Voss* (Spring/Summer 2001), unknown warehouse, London, 26 September 2000, by Alexander McQueen. Photo: unknown. Source: "The Stages of Alexander McQueen: S/S 2001 Voss," BON, accessed 25 November, 2016.
https://bon.se/blogs/vnivrs/the-stages-of-alexander-mcqueen-ss-2001-voss/

Figure 6. Exhibition view of *Savage Beauty* (*Plato's Atlantis* gallery), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 14 March to 2 August 2015, curated by Claire Wilcox. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum. Source: "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty – About the Exhibition," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed 25 November, 2016.
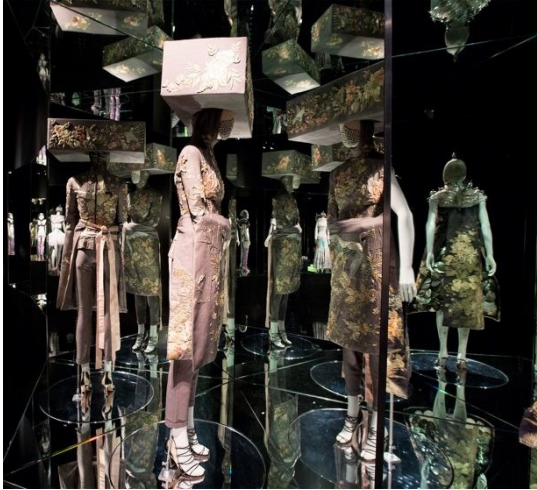http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/exhibition-alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty/about-the-exhibition/

Figure 7. Exhibition view of *Savage Beauty* (*Romantic Exoticism* gallery), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 14 March to 2 August 2015, curated by Claire Wilcox. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum. Source: "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty – About the Exhibition," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/exhibition-alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty/about-the-exhibition/
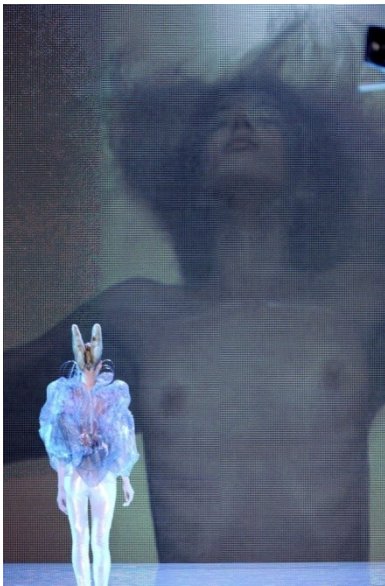

Figure 8. Runway view of Plato's Atlantis (Spring/Summer 2010), Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, 6 October 2009, by Alexander McQueen. Photo: unknown. Source: "Long Live McQueen," *The Widows of Culloden*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://the-widows-of-culloden.tumblr.com/post/129171857216/alexander-mcqueen-ss-2010-platos-atlantis-the

Figure 9. Exhibition view of *(9/4/1615)*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 11 June to 17 August 1997, curated by Thimo te Duits. Photo: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Source: "Martin Margiela (9/4/1615)," *Europeana Fashion*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://www.europeanafashion.eu/record/a/808437a549360852fee8c915006da5dc59f5d4568ac1 d402cfad94b2299cba05

Figure 10. Exhibition view of *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*, ModeMuseum of Antwerp (MoMu), 18 September 2004 to 30 January 2005, curated by Judith Clark. Photo: Tim Stoops. Source: "Exhibitions Archive, Malign Muses," *Fashion in Antwerp*, accessed 25 November, 2016. http://www.fashioninantwerp.be/momu

Figure 11. Exhibition view of *Yohji Yamamoto*, Victoria and Albert Museum, 12 March to 10 July 2011, curated by Ligaya Salazar. Photo: Mette Bassett. Source: "Yohji Yamamoto at the V&A + dressing the bump accordingly," *Mette Bassett*, accessed 15 February, 2017. https://mettebassett.com/2011/04/05/yohji-yamamoto-at-the-va-dressing-the-bump-accordingly/