

# Studies On the Relation between Human Performance and Fashion Show from the Perspective of Commercial Fashion Show

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**Abstract**—Through studying the relation between human performance and commercial fashion show as well as their disparities in terms of the development, presentation and function, we can figure out that commercial fashion show belongs to and is covered by human performance. From the perspective of development, both prospered in post-industrial era. In terms of presenting form, performance studies cover various forms of performance and presentation while commercial fashion show is based on model show and illustrated by music, performance design and stage arts. As to function, performance studies contribute to people's understanding of the nature and value of the performers through those artificial forms; while commercial fashion show functions in costume consumption and sale by attracting the audience to purchase.

**Keywords**—*performance studies; commercial fashion show; discipline; comparison*

## I. THE RELATION BETWEEN HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND FASHION SHOW

Talking about relation between performance studies and performance itself, Professor Richard Schechner believe performance happens at certain places and in certain contexts in which all including making-up, fashion, writing and parole are inscribed with non-traditional performative arts. Social reality is reconstructed again and again. In reality, something deep and hidden are regarded as true compared to those on the surface. However, in post-modernism, the relation between deep and surface is fluid and dynamic. When Prof. Richard Schechner elaborated performance studies (PS) in his lecture at Shanghai Theatre Academy, he explained that that all self-referential activities are performance since all beings in the world exist in activities; and, performance studies are to examine these performances. Performance studies are related to pioneering arts, presentism arts, traditional arts as well as various forms of popular arts. Performance studies are to explore endless human activities in different forms as well as arts and performances in different circles of the society.

Guan Jie, in her monograph *Organization and Design of Fashion show*, defines fashion show as a way to reconstruct the clothes and to present the texture by human figure and

profile, at the same time to show the designer's intention by combining clothes, human body, music, light and background. Fashion show is also arts which origins from the daily life yet retains higher than the daily life like other forms of arts.

In terms of definition, performance studies include commercial fashion show. Performances in PS are daily-life while those in commercial fashion show aim to sell products at different levels to consumers; commercial fashion show, from professionals (designer, producer and trader) to consumers with sense of fashion, contributes to direct and official expression, thus becoming the most exciting promoting approach and refusing dramatic effect most.

## II. SIMILARITIES AND DISPARITIES BETWEEN HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND COMMERCIAL FASHION SHOW

### A. On Development

“Performance studies emerged since the end of the second world war, from America to the Europe. It is a great era from 1945 to the recent decades that huge changes have taken place in politics, social culture and economy.” “Performance studies hold that the whole world shall be interpreted from how people perform.” In academic words, PS focuses on relativism theory, which means more complex research. PS trains people to make use of and to question performative acts. In this way, the five kinds of performances which often overlap esthetic performance, social performance, ceremonial performance and playing performance to obtain more attractive form and more completed content.

The founding of PS and the wide reception of commercial fashion show are in the same period, that is, the post-industrial era. Drama theorist Richard Schechner founded performance studies as a discipline in order to examine human performances in plays, ads and rituals in the post-industrial era when it was difficult to distinguish between arts and life. He also intended to explore performance in human's history and in the contemporary

<sup>1</sup> *Guide to Producing A Fashion Show*, Qingsong Dong, Ling Zhang[trans], Beijing: China's Knitting Press, 2003:1.

society. The start of commercial fashion show was a bit earlier than the founding of PS; it appeared in the 19th century yet was not widely accepted until 1960s when the west stepped into post-industrial era. At that time, commercial fashion show became a crucial part of popular culture among consumers and also being studied by PS researchers. From the beginning of PS and commercial fashion show, it can be seen that the special cultural context which was imbedded in the post-industrial era contributed to the development of the both.

Commercial fashion show can be dated back to the 19th century. At the Paris Expo in 1990, a famous designer Lady Jean Paquin replaced the original boring exhibition of clothes by presenting the clothes on wax human models. The innovative exhibitions with fashionable clothes received warm welcome among audiences. Since then, clothes manufactures realized the importance of an active and fashionable way to exhibit clothes. Also, the relation between human performance and costume design was getting closer; commercial fashion show became a routine.

The first performer was the wife of Charles Frederick Worth, the founder of advanced fashion clothes. In 1845, she displayed cappa in Charles's shop so that the sale of cappa was increased. It was the first clothes show for commercial aim in history. Then, the value of human performance in clothes industry was recognized. The couple employed more models to exhibit their clothes and since then models became professional work.

In the 1910s, Lady Jean Paquin utilized grand human performances to attract audience which was prior to opera performance or house racing and got good business effect. Thus, fashion show became a separate performance and added more dynamics by music in certain background setting. From then on, the basic framework of commercial fashion show was founded.

In the 1920s, designer Jean Patou promoted the quality of models by selective employment, which made elegance and good manner become a cultural symbol of fashion show at that time. At the end of 1940s, Christian Dior's New Outlook clothes gained a good reputation in the world. In order to increase business income, Dior gave much emphasis on fashion show and models' stage presentation. Everything on the T-stage including the rhyme, rotating and turning around were equipped with performance studies; fashion show at that time was as popular as the musical plays at Broadway.

Since the late 20th century, with the promotion by designers like Mary Guant, fashion show is inserted with distracted effect and scenic interpretation. Comments on clothes in previous shows are replaced by dancing, music and light. Fashion show plays an increasingly important role in promoting designers, manufactures and sellers. Therefore, commercial fashion show becomes an advertising action with business, image, arts and dramatic effect.

### *B. On Presenting Form*

Richard argues that any action being designed, performed, emphasized or exhibited can be regarded as human

performance. Performance studies embrace all kinds of performances and presenting forms. PS refuses a fixed definition but focuses on different sorts of performances which believes that various forms at different levels contribute to the best state. PS boasts a broad research scope and welcomes different approaches interconnecting with disciplines including archeology, sociology, psychology and so on. PS is influenced by pioneering arts, representing arts, traditional arts and mass cultural arts. Also, PS is manifested with esthetic performance, social performance, mass performance, ceremony and games.

However, commercial fashion show is "an arts of style, and a high-level non-verbal communication. Though it can be conveyed in multiple ways including clothes, music, facial expressions, actions, stage design and light, it is basically demonstrated by human body language including paces, posture, and facial expressions by models which presents the general style of the clothes." Commercial fashion show promotes products and spurs people to buy the products, which restricts models' freedom in performance. Commercial fashion show doesn't duplicate the original form of life but adapts from it; fashion show presents the beauty of clothes and of human figure in a dramatic way, reaching a balance between commercial demand and esthetic value.

In terms of exhibiting, performance studies demonstrate various forms which interrelate with each other, reach beyond text, dynamic and virtual. While commercial fashion show is based on T-show with models and equipped with music, perform design and stage design.

### *C. On Function*

Performance studies is an advanced discipline in the 21st century, because the current world is waiting for people to join a grand performance while performance studies can help people to deal with the context and benefit communication between individuals, between an individual and the whole humanity, also between people and the world. Performance studies transmit, integrate and process information; help people to distinguish between positive and negative information, to transfer information into knowledge. Moreover, in lots of important activities, it is crucial to perform properly for success. Therefore, performance studies help people to learn the nature and value of performers through artificial performances, making this discipline more and more essential in today's world.

In fashion shows, models present the latest pattern, texture and trend of clothes, attracting the audience to join the show or even to imagine themselves dressed in the clothes. This interesting and valuable distracted effect influences the market and the consumption. It can be somewhat called culture-presented yet economy-oriented which inserts dynamic power and emotion into clothes, making it the most attractive form in today's advertising market. Fashion show is a soft commercial product, affecting consumers' mind. It has intangible value, direct and profound economic significance due to its advertising power.

Research into performance studies and its manifestations are quite broad and profound with special interpretation of information and performance. Commercial fashion show, however, has relatively single focus which eyes on the promotion of products and fashion trends to obtain more purchases.

### III. CONCLUSION

Designers and owners like Charles Frederick Worth, Jean Patou, Christian Dior, through inserting stage design, drama design, distracted effect and scenic interpretation from PS approaches and methods into fashion show, make commercial fashion show a kind of human performance with commercial, art and dramatic value.

Applying performance studies in commercial fashion show makes the latter more profound, dynamic and effective. On the other hand, practice in fashion show extends the performance studies as a discipline. The mutual benefit contributes to both in theory and practice and is conducive to the development of the two disciplines.

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