

# A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week

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# ILLUSTRATION

A visual response

— AS —

to New Zealand Fashion Week

# INQUIRY

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Nadeesha Godamunne

October 2010

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Nadeesha Godamunne

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**This thesis develops a body of creative work that presents its findings as an illustrated commentary on New Zealand Fashion Week. The research asks the question, “what is the potential of illustration in communicating the content and context of a fashion event?”**

**Accordingly, the thesis outcome, *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*, is formatted as a bound text that utilises an illustrator’s approach to Horatian satire.**

**The illustrator’s voice is employed as a subjective but informed tool for analysis. In developing a visual dialect, it renegotiates certain conventions in fashion illustration as they relate to pose, form, subject and proportion.**



# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

The importance of the physical is a *prime trope* in contemporary fashion periodicals that inform us that certain types of beauty are more valued than others. This project is concerned with challenging certain visual codes used to talk about fashion, and through this offer commentary on New Zealand Fashion Week.<sup>1</sup> The publication ‘tile’ contests current notions of idealised beauty, utilising certain illustrative methods to propose an alternative form of visual ‘voice’. This discourse operates as a social commentary but also as a means of describing the nature of clothing and its relationship with the wearer. In so doing, I suggest a language that might narrow the gulf between the perceived ideal and the actual. I argue that an illustrator has the potential to create captivating imagery that offers viewers an alternative to certain commercially generated ways of seeing.

In supporting this thesis, the following exegesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses research design utilised in realising the project. Employing Action Research as a methodological framework, I discuss the relationships and synergies activated between contextual reviews, ‘reflection in and on practice’, experimentation and critical feedback.

The second chapter considers specific approaches related to the development of the publication. These include an investigation into photojournalism as a form of social documentary, and the devices employed in the satirical illustrations of artists such as James Gillray, Philip Dawe, William Hogarth and Francisco José de Goya. The chapter also draws comparisons between the works of Hogarth and Goya, in relation to *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*.

The final chapter offers a visual commentary on the publication that forms the core outcome of the project.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Fashion Week’ is a fashion industry event that allows fashion designers, brands or ‘houses’ to display their latest collections in runway shows. It brings together influential fashion editors, buyers, and stylists to view emerging fashion trends.



# METHODOLOGY



## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Paradigm*

#### ***1.0***

In explicating this project, I have employed Action Research. This section of the exegesis details its application in the development of my work.

#### ***1.1***

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that to be located in a paradigm is to “view the world in a particular way” (p.24). Research paradigms define for the researcher what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108). The research for this project is constructed under a paradigm of creative practice. Scrivener (2000) describes creative practice as being inventive and imaginative, and realised through artefacts (p.16). He suggests that these “artefacts contribute to human experience and with this being the case, the creative production, as an object of experience, is more important than any knowledge embodied in the artefact” (p.6). In a creative practice thesis, such as *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*, acquired knowledge and the generation of hypotheses lead to a sustained, self-reflexive engagement with my own work (through illustration).

This thesis may therefore be seen paradigmatically as a qualitative, subjective inquiry into the creative potentials of illustration. Its concerns are with creating a unique voice that challenges certain conventions in the depiction of fashion in print media.

Action Research

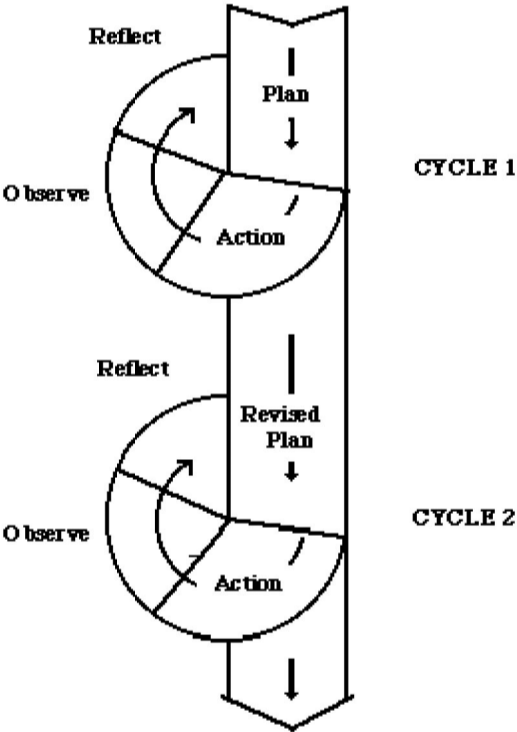
1.2

In developing self-reflexivity I employ a methodology that may broadly be described as Action Research. Often those who apply this approach are practitioners who wish to improve understanding of their practice. O’Brien (2001, para 3) suggests, “action research is learning by doing”. In this process, normally, a problem is identified, theory concerning the issue is investigated, actions are carried out to resolve it, and reflection occurs<sup>2</sup> [see figure 1.1]. If the results are unsuccessful the process is modified and repeated (Mc Niff, 1988, p.1).

Avison, Lau, Myers and Nielsen (1999) propose that Action Research’s experimental nature allows each iteration of the action, and observed result to add to theoretical knowledge. Gray and Malins (2004) believe that within this cyclic process mistakes are revealed and acknowledged. They propose that Action Research is more personal and interpretational than methodological, because it requires direct involvement with the researcher, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Theory and practice inform each other, they argue, in a process of continuous transformation.

Bolt (2006 n.d.) quoting Heidegger suggests, “we come to know the world theoretically, only after we have understood it through handling tools and

Figure 1.1  
Kemmis’ model of the cyclical nature of a typical action research process (O’ Brien, 2001). Although my research follows the tenets of this process, it draws into itself a range of other methods [see figure 1.2].



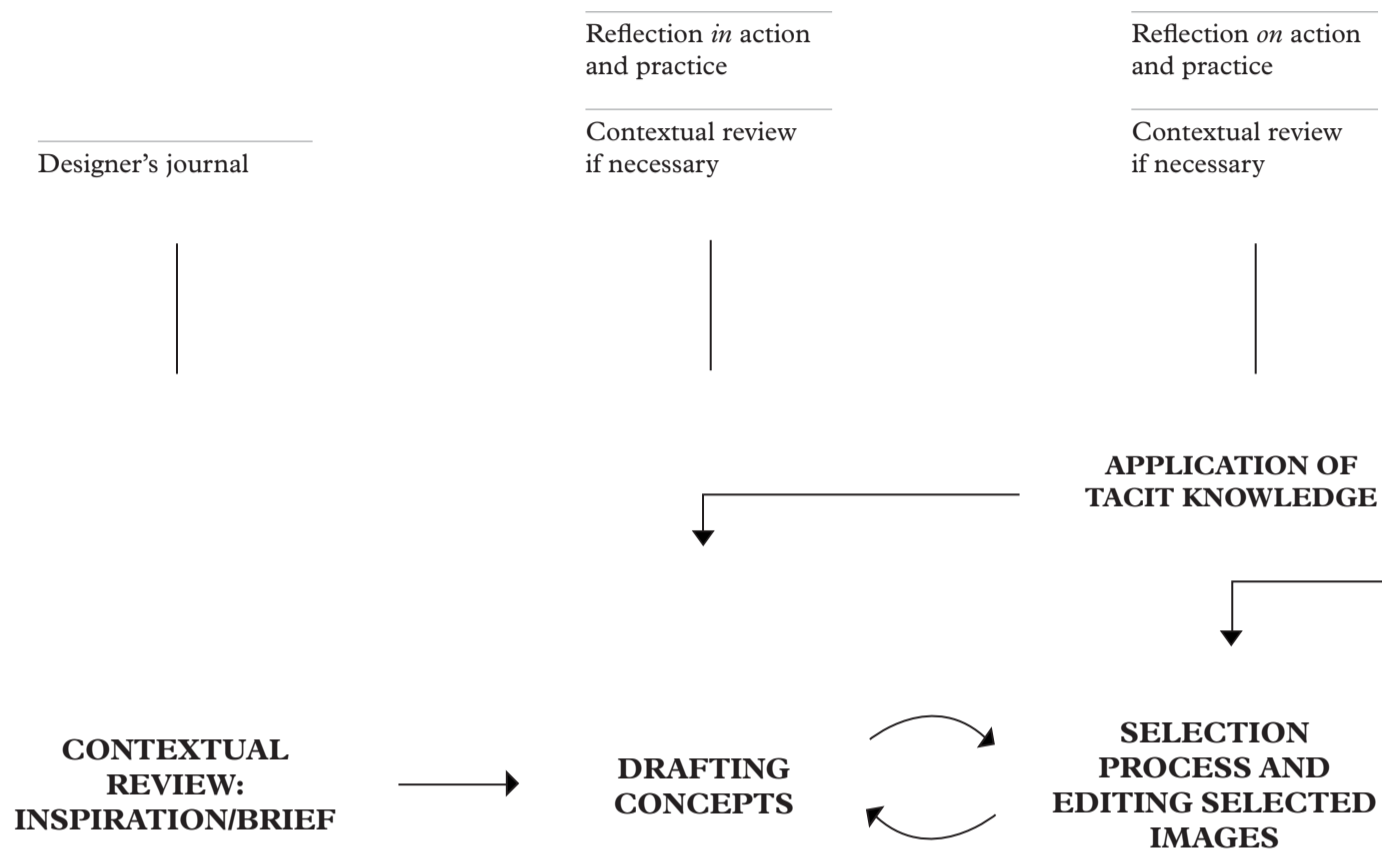
materials” (para 11). In other words, an illustrator might lay out her brushes and prepare her paper, but until she begins to externalise work with them in ‘making’ an illustration, she cannot understand their ‘being’. Bolt also believes that what is critical in this creative practice is articulating what has emerged and been realised through the process of handling materials and ideas. Action Research may therefore be conceived as being based on real experiences; it is research that involves adopting a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes.

<sup>2</sup> Scrivener (2000) suggests that reflection should be central to the discipline of creative production (para 54). Practice, he argues, is not just about doing, but about being aware of the doing, using self-critical awareness to be open to a process of change and improvement. Schön (1983) suggests that this involves recording epiphanies and moments of crisis or triumph; at such points the practitioner, he argues, momentarily steps out of action, reflecting on the meaning of the experience. Scrivener (2000) says that in contrast to reflection in action and practice, reflection on action is driven by the desire to learn from experience: it is a discipline rather than a necessity for further action (para 30). Reflection in action however (which occurs naturally whilst an action is in progress) is essential, as it helps the researcher/practitioner to avoid past mistakes from reoccurring.



*Research Process*

*1.3*



While I employ Action Research, its relationship to contextual reviews of knowledge, processes of refinement and critique, and the application of tacit knowing in this project may be helpfully described diagrammatically.

The 'Contextual Review' Phase involves maintaining a 'Designer's Journal', used for collating images of illustrations, art movements, exhibitions, etc, that inspire me. It is discussed in more detail under 'Explanatory Notes'.

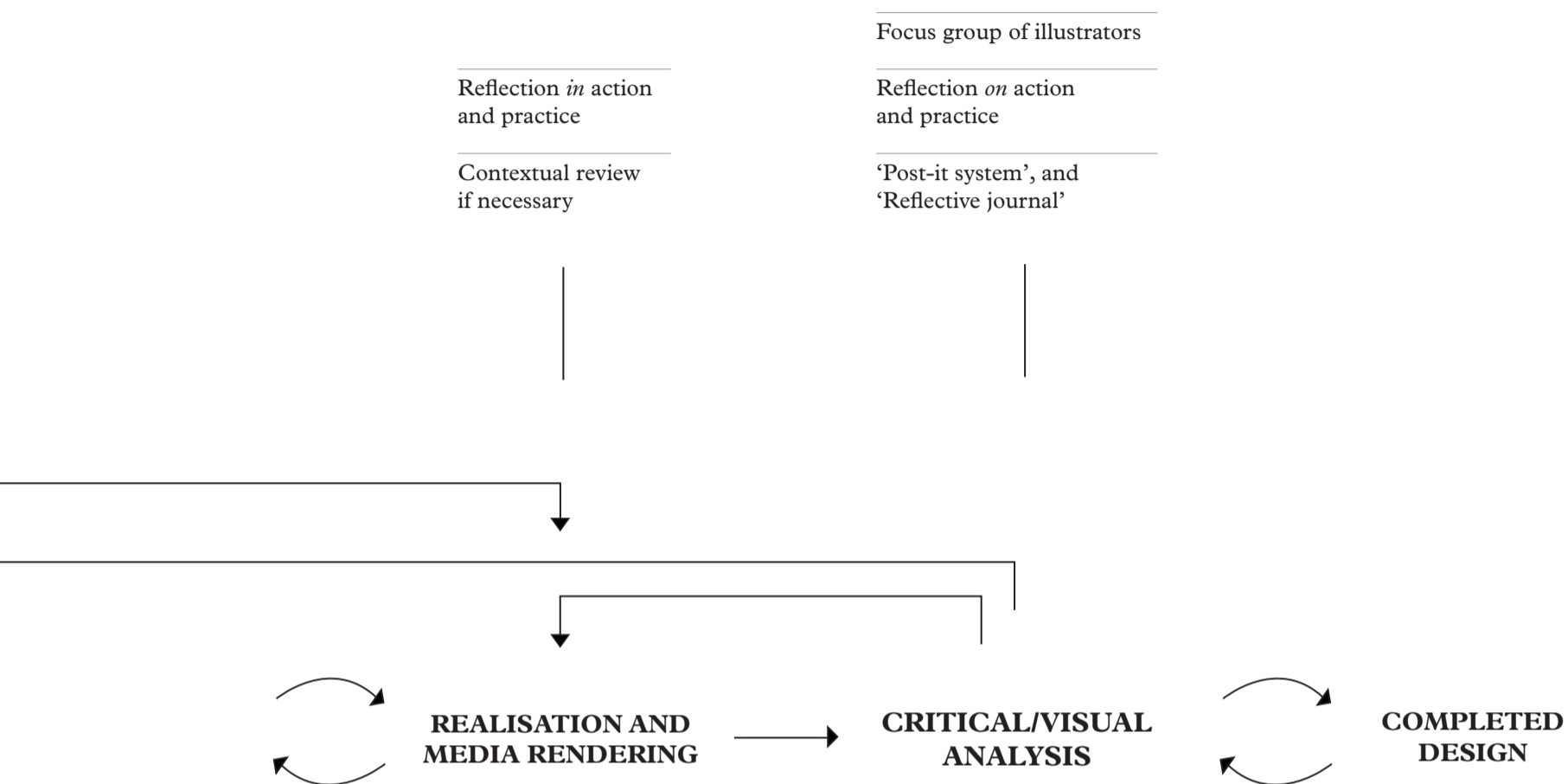
'Exploratory experiment', involves spontaneous action that is unaccompanied by any predictions or expectations (Scrivener, 2000). Raw energy is captured, where line-work and media application is not laboured or calculated. The process is quick and allows for a smooth flow of action that produces a vast number of illustrations [see figure 1.3]. Huxley writes, "It is important to externalise thoughts before rejecting them ... Ideas from the mind direct what the hand makes but what becomes visible feeds the imagination of the mind" (Huxley, as cited in Prentice, 2000, p.6).

Scrivener (2000) argues that this process is most effective when the practitioner has a thorough intuitive and technical understanding of the required skills in the domain, so they can cope with the spontaneous nature of the exercise. My repertoire of explicit and tacit knowledge is applied. For a fuller discussion of this process see 'Explanatory Notes'.

Once the exploratory process is complete I begin to reflect and scrutinise. In this process I trace off and re-edit. [see figures 1.4 & 1.5].

Externalising, sketching, organising, and editing layer by layer, effectively becomes a form of visual self-dialogue that allows for further reconsideration. The sketchpad becomes a medium for reflection. It acts as a thinking/reasoning aid, and thereby becomes a manifestation of the thinking process.

Figure 1.2  
A diagram of the Action Research process  
employed in *Illustration as Inquiry*; A visual  
response to New Zealand Fashion Week.



The image is finalised and the rendering occurs [see figure 1.6]. “Past experiences provide examples, images, understandings and actions” (Scrivener, 2000, para 28), allowing me to push the potential of materials I am using.

This phase critically analyses and contextualises emerging outcomes. The painter Shahn suggests that an artist functions as “two people not one”, being both the producer as well as critic (Shahn, as cited in Prentice, 2000, p.528). This requires ‘meta thinking’ (thinking about thinking), whilst maintaining an open mind, and being free from all bias (Gray and Malins, 2004). For this I employ a ‘Post-it System’ and a ‘Reflective Journal’. In these I list struggles, accomplishments, and comment on the meaning of the process. Refer to ‘Explanatory Notes’ for a detailed explanation.

In addition, as an external review of work I use 'focus groups' for critique. If from these groups I am able to ascertain if a design is not communicating effectively, I return to 'Selection process and editing' or 'Realisation and media rendering', to reconsider approaches to the image. The nature of the 'Focus Group' is explained in detail under 'Explanatory Notes'.

The final image is created [see figure 1.7]



Figure 1.3  
'Exploratory experiment'/concepts  
developed to produce figure 1.6,  
(final outcome).

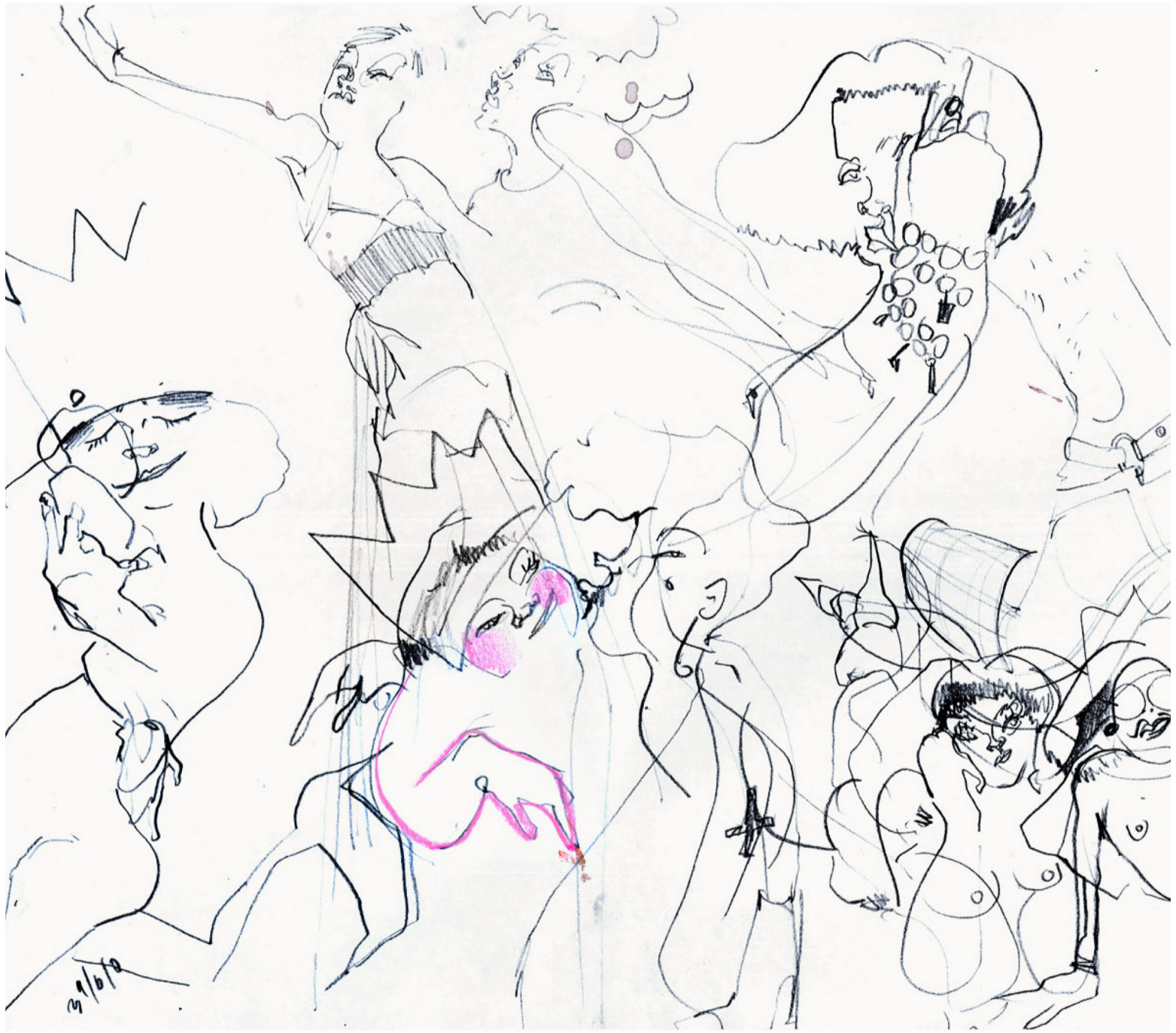




Figure 1.4  
Concepts are edited and modified by using layout paper. Certain elements are traced off and developed further (to produce figure 1.6, the final outcome).



Figure 1.5  
Further refinement and development (to produce figure 1.6, the final outcome). The use of media has altered, and line work simplified.



Figure 1.6  
The image is finalised and rendered.



Figure 1.7  
The final image.



EXPLANATORY NOTES

Contextual Review

Illustration Manuals

1.4

These notes provide an elucidation on certain elements of the diagram [see figure 1.2]. In doing so they help to further explain specific applications of the contextual review, tacit knowing, the designer’s journal and the focus group.

1.5

In this project a review of contextual knowledge initiates the process of Action Research. O’Brien (2001) says that what separates Action Research from general professional practices, or daily problem-solving is the emphasis on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is informed by theoretical considerations. Thus the process of an illustrative inquiry into the potentials of documentary involves an intensive inquiry that may be broadly discussed as a contextual review of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> This review is a critical and analytical inquiry that helps to define the scope of the investigation as well as the state of the relevant knowledge to date. It acts as a bridge between identifying the question and researching the problem.<sup>4</sup> Repositories of knowledge accessed throughout this study have been diverse. Although certain academic texts such as Schön (1983), Scrivener (2000) and O’Brien (2001) have been useful in positioning concerns alongside current academic discourse, practical considerations have also been shaped by other sources. Among these, the following are worthy of note.

1.6

These texts were useful because they offered overviews of a variety of approaches to fashion illustration, and in some cases were accompanied by a contextualising commentary. Texts such as the Dawber’s *Big Book of Fashion Illustration* (2007), and Borrelli’s *Fashion Illustration by Fashion Designers* (2008) presented the works of established and emerging international fashion illustrators. The imagery provided a context of developments in historical and contemporary aesthetic and stylistic approaches. The manuals also initiated further investigation, as contacts, web sites, and illustration agencies of the featured illustrators were provided. From these texts I was able to embark on a deeper exploration into the works of Julie Verhoeven, Jean Philippe Del Homme, and Gladys Perint Palmer.

3 This term is used to differentiate the review from a literature review because this traditionally engages with only written texts. A review of contextual knowledge may engage with a wider range of knowledge deposits including, in this research, professional practitioners, artefacts and images.

4 Gray & Malins (2004) suggest that by gaining knowledge about the social and cultural developments of a project, the nature of the research question and the researcher’s position within it can be identified. This background knowledge serves to enrich the researcher’s intellectual repertoire and creative resources. However, it does not have to directly inform her work; rather it may act as visual language that aids better understanding of the material presented in galleries, books, exhibitions, etc.

*Julie Verhoeven*

**1.7**

Verhoeven’s work experiments with proportion, composition and line [see figure 1.8]. Her models often have eccentric facial characteristics and are posed in awkward positions. These elements, alongside her use of inharmonious colour combinations, work synergistically to create both ambiguity and impact. Her work is of use to this current research project because her renegotiations of convention enable a higher level of engagement with the expressive relationship between the ‘wearer’ and the ‘worn’.

*Jean Philippe Del Homme*

**1.8**

Del Homme’s work is significant due to his idiosyncratic use of humour [see figure 1.9]. His child-like, painterly aesthetic complements a satirical approach to illustration which contextualises characters in a variety of loosely drawn environments. Del Homme’s light-handed attention to setting also helps to convey a sense of missing narrative; a factor I employ in varying degrees in my work.

*Gladys Perint Palmer*

**1.9**

Perint Palmer’s illustration covers both fashion and non-fashion arenas but is useful as a composite body due to her use of unorthodox fashion models [see figure 1.10]. Many of her illustrations carry subtle undertones of race, sexuality, age and body image, which are useful to reflect upon in relation to the culture of fashion week and its often superficial homage to ‘otherness’.

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[http://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2007/09/julie\\_verhoeven.html](http://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2007/09/julie_verhoeven.html)

*Figure 1.8*  
*Illustration by Julie Verhoeven for a Top*  
*Shop Christmas card in 2005.*

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URL available at  
<http://amt.parsons.edu/files/2010/01/JPDelhomme.2.pdf>

*Figure 1.9*  
*Gouache painting for 'The Cultivated Life'*

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URL available at  
<http://www.gladysperintpalmer.com/index2.html>

Figure 1.10  
An image from Perint Palmer's book,  
'Fashion People'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Fashion People* by Gladys Perint Palmer is a book constructed around the phenomenon of fashion week. The publication differs to *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* in that the illustrations are organised in a non-linear manner, are based on observations rather than interpretations, and are not informed by critical or social commentary.

## *Historical References*

### **1.10**

Printed texts and online resources were also used to access illustrations by artists like William Hogarth (1697–1794) [see figure 1.11], James Gillray (1757–1815) [see figure 1.12], Egon Schiele (1890–1918) [see figure 1.13], and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) [see figure 1.14]. Although close readings of their work allowed for a deeper consideration of technique and composition, it was also useful in understanding the historical context of satire as a method of documenting fashion and social context.

The concept of character is particularly distinctive in Gillray, Hogarth and Toulouse-Lautrec's work. Attention to clothing, expression and setting often create a dialogue between a character and their environment. We see the character as animated and often discordant. These are social beings exposed through caricature and emphasis. While these artists pay particular attention to fabric and cut of clothing, garments are treated as an extension or articulation of the personality of the wearer. We also see that in the state of 'fashionability' there is an essential denial of 'glamour'. In their work artifice and affectation are in direct discourse with clothing as a signifier of class and personality.

Schiele's figurative paintings on the other hand are useful because of his unique approach to line and space.

That said, his figures also express character through line and distortion. These figures are not the personification of the homogenising mannequin. Their bodies are imperfect, and in that imperfection lies their beauty and their expressive relationship with the garments they wear and the space they consume.

Finally, the drawings, paintings and lithographs of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, especially those he created as social portraits of the dancer Jane Avril, are useful to this project because of the manner in which he uses expressive line and strong colour to capture the dynamism of character. In these works we see beauty personalised, and made more arresting because the artist strips away the affectations of 'prettiness'. These works have both rhythm and immediacy. They are theatrical and gently satirical. Character is suggested as much in the absence of detail as it is in the portrait's expressive intimacy.

From historical works such as these, elements of character and line are examined, altered, and amalgamated as a means of developing a personal iconography that reflects contemporary fashion, but does so by touching base with historical approaches that engage the wearer and the garment in a form of social commentary.

Image deleted.  
URL available at  
<http://www.williamweston.co.uk/pages/previous/single/784/267/1.html>

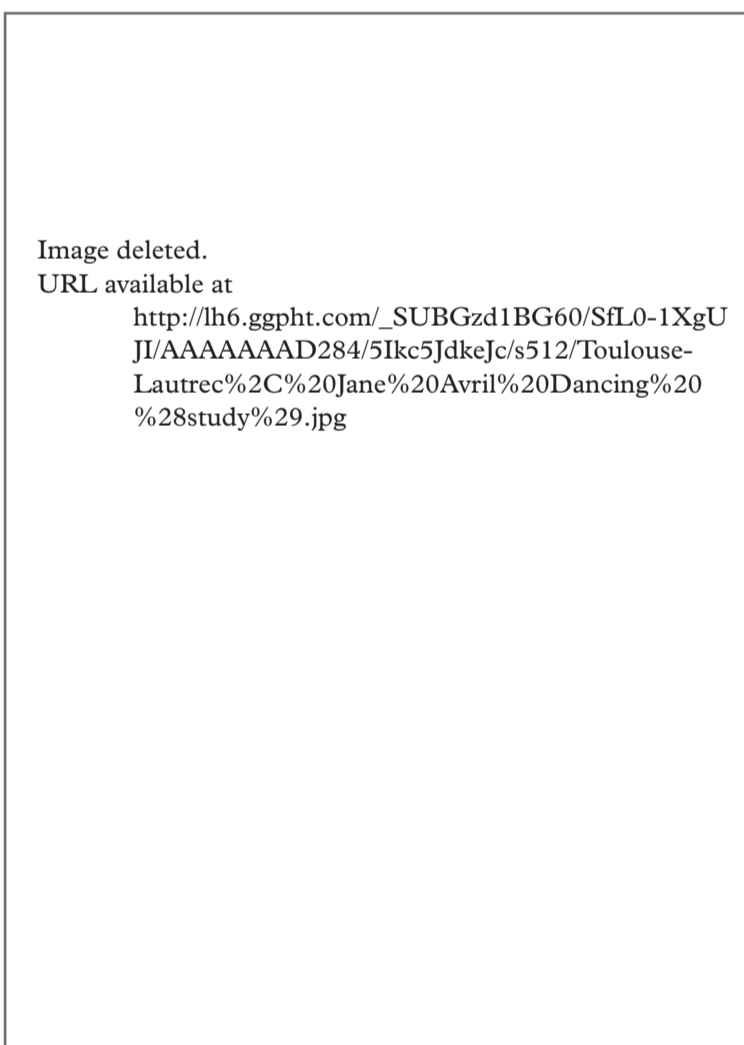
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[http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/artifacts/caricatures/assets/punch\\_cures-big.jpg](http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/artifacts/caricatures/assets/punch_cures-big.jpg)

*Figure 1.11*  
*An etching by William Hogarth, entitled*  
*A Midnight Modern Conversation.*

*Figure 1.12*  
*A hand coloured etching by James Gillray,*  
*entitled Punch cures the Gout, the Colic.*  
*and the 'Tisick.*

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URL available at  
[http://www.suspectguru.com/images/museum/Egon\\_Schiele\\_079.jpg](http://www.suspectguru.com/images/museum/Egon_Schiele_079.jpg)

*Figure 1.13*  
*A self portrait by Egon Schiele.*



*Figure 1.14*  
*A drawing (Oil pastel on paper) by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, entitled Jane Avril Dancing.*

### *Exhibitions and Online Research*

#### **1.11**

In addition to published illustration, I consciously sought out the work of emerging student artists. Accordingly I attended exhibitions such as “*Here Are You*” [see figure 1.15], which featured the works of third year graphic design students at A.U.T University. This type of exhibition was useful as it raised an awareness of new approaches and personal styles, profiling emerging thinking, ‘voice’ and a level of ‘disobedience’, as students were not constrained by the limitations of a client’s brief.

In addition to exhibitions of student work, I researched blogs and web sites such as *Ape On The Moon*, *Juxtapose*, *3x3 Magazine*, *Signature Illustration Blog* and *4 Wall*.

Youtube was an important resource as it enabled me to study the venues of certain fashion shows, and the personalities that attended them. This archive facility contained contemporary records that provided references of garments, audiences, and contexts, allowing closer scrutiny to occur and higher levels of authenticity in my work.

In addition, the web site [www.nzfashionweek.com](http://www.nzfashionweek.com), which provided write-ups of designers’ profiles and the links to their personal web-sites, allowed access to an accurate reportage of clothing when illustrating for the publication. In this regard,

online research may be seen as providing a certain level of ‘currency’. Posted footage of shows became available before they appeared in print and these images normally contained ‘leakages’ of context that were useful in creating environments and indicators of posture and fatigue.



Figure 1.15  
Illustrations by third year graphic students.

## *Tacit Knowing*

### **1.12**

In the process of Action Research the illustrator engages both external knowledge and knowledge she possesses but is not aware of. Polyani (1966) describes this knowledge as tacit knowing. Tacit knowing is not easily shared nor articulated in writing; in fact it often consists of habits and culture that we do not recognise in ourselves (Nonaka, 1995). Schön (1983) suggests tacit knowledge is, “actions, recognitions, and judgments which we know how to carry out spontaneously; we do not have to think about them prior to or during the performance” (p.2). An example of tacit knowing may be seen in the use of a language that a native speaker develops from childhood. The speaker may be unaware of the formal grammar structures that underpin this language, but she uses these effectively in new situations. Similarly, for an illustrator who has drawn since childhood and also made garments for many years, tacit knowing is integral to her way of ‘linguaging’ form. Years of observational drawing of people, garments, fabrics, and scenes have resulted in the internalising of information. This fundamental store of knowledge provides her with the ability to draw on visual references and memories, as opposed to relying on photographic works as source material.

Accessed in problem solving, this tacit knowledge may be defined as uncodifiable and, when made explicit in work, codifiable. Thus, the knowledge is accumulated and applied but is not explicitly known until it is made manifest in a solution.

In fashion illustration Gully (2010) calls this form of knowing “form literacy”. She describes this as the ability to generate and interpret form and complex shapes, thus enabling an illustrator to predict how garments sit against the body when illustrating. For me, a repertoire of knowledge has been developed through pattern making and garment construction over a significant number of years.



Figure 1.16  
Examples of observational drawings used in developing thinking in this thesis.

## *Designers Journal*

### **1.13**

#### **Archive Journal**

Running concurrently with this research project were three forms of designer's journal. The archive journal operates as a repository of ideas and influences. Newbury (2001) suggests, “the reason for keeping a research diary is to facilitate the research process through recording observations, thoughts and questions as they happen, for later use by the researcher, and to stimulate reflective thinking about the research” (para 8).

In this regard, an archive journal is utilised to organise and synthesise a variety of material relevant to one's research (this material may include images, text, diagrams, quotes, etc). In *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*, the journal was used to collate imagery that acted as visual stimuli [see figure 1.17]. In so doing, various illustrations may be considered as relationships between certain ideas and manifestation.

#### **Reflective Journal**

The second type of journal does more than provide a systematic approach to collecting and archiving reference material. A Reflective Journal is updated weekly, and aids to externalise thoughts and reflection concerning the work in progress. In this way, areas of struggle in need of further refinement are recorded. Newbury (2001) says that this form of journal captures something of the “real inner drama” of research (para 8). Effectively, the journal acts as a vehicle for developing strategies to overcome obstacles. It also lists completed tasks, so as to ensure that the project is in synchronisation with fundamental considerations like time and budgets. The reflective journal is primarily a written text of ‘notes to the self’ [see figure 1.18].

#### **Unbound Journal**

The third type of journal is a wall of personal illustrations. Onto this surface, post-it notes connect thinking and feedback with emerging work [see figure 1.19]. In this research project, literally hundreds of illustrations were grouped and re-grouped in a process of connection, re-connection and critique. Being ‘unbound’, the limitations of linearity normally prescribed through bound text were circumvented. As I completed an image I ‘posted’ it on the wall with a detachable critique on a yellow sticker. This enabled me to view both the specific and the overview. As work progressed I changed the notes to myself. The wall also operated effectively when I was seeking peer feedback because a full body of work (and networks and relationships within it) could be viewed at one time.





Figure 1.19  
Unbound journal as a studio wall demonstrating the use of a yellow post-it system.





## FOCUS GROUP

### *As a System of Peer Review*

#### 1.14

In the process of Action Research, independent systems of critique and data gathering are instituted through the use of focus groups.

Kitzinger (1995, para 3) describes a focus group as being a “form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate information”. She states “people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each others’ experiences and points of view” (ibid). This method is therefore particularly useful for exploring people’s knowledge and experiences.

In *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* a focus group was used to analyse and critique my illustrations from an external standpoint. The group consisted of three professional illustrators and academics<sup>6</sup> who provided reflection on the communicative nature of my drawings at particular points during the year. Ongoing critique raised questions that might otherwise have gone unanswered in an isolated environment.

The process of peer review adopts an ‘open viewing’ method that enables the focus group and researcher to view images collectively, identifying possible patterns of significance within the content of the images (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

This was particularly helpful when I was seeking continuities in the emerging narrative and aesthetic arc of the work.

An extension of this was the presentation of research issues and findings at conferences. This year I presented a discussion of my methodological framework for critique in August at the A.U.T Postgraduate Conference. Feedback forced me to consider a more thorough articulation of the research design so relationships between process and method could be made more explicit.

### *As a System of Data Gathering and Narrative Technique*

#### 1.16

Because the final publication is constructed around New Zealand Fashion Week, in order to gain insight into the occurrences and atmosphere of the event I employed an additional focus group that regularly attends the event. They included Amanda Haxton - a fashion journalist and editor for *Inunison Magazine*, Hannah Mc Ardle - blogger for *Aych*, Matt Nash - fashion designer for *Matt Nash*, and Lauren Nuttall - model for *Red 11 Models Talent Management*. These participants provided me with personal experiences that helped me to capture the essence of Fashion Week as a narrated social phenomenon. While listening to the stories being told I reflected by drawing continuously. This provided the opportunity to raise any questions about setting, characters and clothing. Visual note taking requires more information in regards to image composition, therefore it is the most effective method.

This focus group was also useful in providing me with ongoing feedback relating to the social critique embedded in my narrative. Because these participants in the research have a ‘living’ exposure to the professional and social experience of fashion week, they are able to address the narrative arcs constructed through my imagery and other people’s recollected insight and commentary.

Finally, peer review also occurred in the professional realm where elements of my research were published in international journals. Significant publications this year included *The Australian Creative*, Vol 10 August/September 2010 - Animation and Illustration Issue; Martin Dawber’s *The Big Book of Fashion Illustration*, and Sandra Burke’s *Fashion Design Series*. Because readers, designers, potential clients and critics ‘Google’ my details, the publication of this work enables a system of discourse and feedback. In addition the selection of my work for these publications indicates a level of international peer esteem and interest in the approaches I am taking.

<sup>6</sup> Dr Welby Ings, Chris Mousdale and Linda Jones.



## CONCLUSION

### *I.I7*

The system of inquiry employed in this research project may be broadly described as Action Research. As a system of progressive problem solving that engages a reflective process, it employs both the self and teams of others to assist the thesis refine both its core concerns and the quality of its outcomes.

Supporting the actualisation of this system I employed a contextual review of knowledge that embraces both theory and practice. In addition I engaged with tacit knowing and reflection in and on action and practice. This involved maintaining both archival and reflective journals, and utilising a post-it system.

External critique is integrated with the dynamics of production through the use of focus groups. These offer professional and academic critique, and access to narratives of social and professional engagement with the phenomenon of New Zealand Fashion Week.



# CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS

Image deleted.  
URL available at  
[http://thewomensroom.typepad.com/the\\_womens\\_room/2008/11/we-love-bill-cunningham-in-the-new-york-times.html](http://thewomensroom.typepad.com/the_womens_room/2008/11/we-love-bill-cunningham-in-the-new-york-times.html)

*Figure 2.1*  
*Photography by Bill Cunningham for the New York Times. Women on bikes (n.d.), New York.*

CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS

What is Fashion Visual Journalism

Timeliness

2.0

This section of the exegesis discusses certain ideas that were influential in positioning and developing the practical work in the thesis. It begins with a brief consideration of the nature of visual fashion journalism with specific reference to the features of timeliness, subjectivity and narrative. It then considers methods of creating a visual fashion commentary by comparing narrative devices used in William Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress* and Francisco José de Goya’s *Los Caprichos*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Horation satire as the illustrative voice adopted in the project. In considering Horation satire as a form of commentary, the exegesis discusses the contribution to the created text of burlesque, theatricalisation, context, distortion, parody and the grotesque.

2.1

Because the term fashion visual journalism may potentially encompass a wide variety of ideas, it is useful at the outset to consider how it is used in this thesis. Drawing on Hopkinson & Lenmans’ (2010) definition of photojournalism as “photography intended, in conjunction with text, to convey information about a topical event or events” (para 1), I use the term fashion visual journalism to describe still images (as either photographs or illustrations) that are collated, edited and presented to visually communicate news stories for publication. In general these images and text have a number of features that one might normally associate with photojournalism.

2.2

By this I mean the images are current and relevant to the period in which they are created. The idea of currency or timeliness is illustrated by fashion photojournalists like Bill Cunningham whose reputation has been built largely on his ability to visually document the nature of fashion beyond the artifice of the catwalk. His photographs for the *New York Times*, featuring emerging fashion trends on the streets of Manhattan, may be framed as a form of a cultural anthropology because they document variation among humans in the context of a local cultural reality [see figure 2.1]. Using the traditional anthropological method of participant observation in a field site his journalism is noted for its candid and context focused nature.<sup>7</sup>

7 It is useful to note that his largely anthropological methodology meant that his editor Authur Gelb called his visual journalism “a turning point for the time, because it was the first time the paper had run pictures of well-known people without getting their permission” (as cited in Horyn, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted however, that the relationship between the industry and the fashion visual journalist working outside of the socially and financially choreographed world of fashion weeks, is not entirely antithetical. Indicative of this is the fact that although Schuman's images are marked by their unaffected nature, his work has attracted considerable commercial attention. To date, his editorial clients have included GQ, GQ Style UK, Interview, Fantastic Man, Vogue Paris, Italian Elle, Vogue Pelle, British Elle, and Style Piccoli.

Fashion visual journalism is also practised by image-makers like Scott Schuman, a photo blogger who uses the nom-de-plume, *The Sartorialist*. His candid and ongoing documentation of fashion on the street is normally accompanied by small written observations. Because he uses neither props nor studios, his visual journalism has gathered into itself a reading of authenticity that has resulted in him being listed as the Number One Fashion and Photography influencer in American Photo in 2008 (Root, 2009).

Arguably more significant however, is the manner in which Schuman documents the relationship between the worn, the wearer and the architectural context of the contemporary, built environment [see figure 2.2]. Colour, texture and architecture work cohesively to produce visual documents that are descriptions of emerging fashion trends, but more subtly of time, character, and the isolation of urban living. His people are often slightly awkward. If they are aware of the viewer, their means of address is not sensual or provocative. They are mildly distracted, nuanced with boredom and a sense of being caught somewhere in a process of transition.

In an information age no longer constrained by the limitations of conventional publishing, fashion visual journalism that

operates outside of the edited (and financially engineered) 'needs' of the fashion 'industry'<sup>8</sup> has developed a distinct and attentive following.

Today, fashion visual journalism features in blogs, and related fashion portals such as <http://coutureinthecity.com>, <http://glamour.com>, and <http://ifashion-network.com>. These have become major sites for accessing information with high levels of currency and commentary.

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URL available at  
<http://ingenyfashion.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/genyfashion-sartorialist.png>

*Figure 2.2*  
*Photography by Scott Schuman, capturing*  
*subjects in architectural settings.*

Objectivity/Subjectivity

2.3

If the sense of timeliness is a feature of fashion visual journalism, so too is the friction that exists between constructs of objectivity and subjectivity.

Zamroni (2010, para. 2) argues that historically, we have been encouraged to view documentary photographs as “direct, unmediated transcriptions of the real world, rather than seeing them as coded symbolic artifacts whose form and content transmit identifiable points of view.”

Because there is an iconic similarity of the photograph to its subject, this can disguise the distinction between image and reality. It may also deflect consideration from the ‘picture-making’ process in the construction of a photographic message.

I would argue that the documentary photograph is not an objective, transparent window on the world. It does not capture the reality of fashion in front of the lens of a machine, but instead the subjectivity of the fashion photographer’s vision. Many variables involved in the process of generating this image are undeniable. Subject, angle, framing and the choice related to the moment in time captured by the image-maker are all subjective decisions.

Journalistic images are not objective but they may be subjectively insightful and attentive. As with my illustrations in *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to*

*New Zealand Fashion Week*, fashion photojournalism constitutes a subjective incursion into a fashion phenomena. Whether created as drawings or photographs, such documentary images more often than not deal with tendencies and trends that are subjective by nature.

Accordingly, fashion journalism has a history that holds a sometimes tenuous relationship with facts. In this regard, I would suggest that the term ‘journalism’ might not carry the traditional deontological aspects of professional journalism.

Narrative

2.4

Fashion visual journalism also tends to engage (in varying degrees) with forms of narrative. Generally images are presented to the public in a sequence. Zamroni (2010, para. 44), when discussing photojournalism, argues that the image-maker normally compiles a set of images that will allow an editor to assemble a sequential visual representation of a news event, telling the story “as it occurred”...

He says,

*This sense of dramatic ‘storytelling’ is evident in certain forms of fashion visual journalism. Because the narrative is nuanced with observations that transcend the limitations of the written word,<sup>9</sup> we encounter a subjectively constructed ‘retelling’ of an event.*

Generally, the visual fashion documentary may be seen, not as a collection of discrete images, but instead as a form of narration that leans towards the episodic or sequential. Its storytelling generally forsakes the dramatic structures of much conventional narrative. Freytag’s ‘Exposition’, ‘Rising Action’, ‘Climax’, ‘Falling Action’ and ‘Denouement’<sup>10</sup> do not generally determine its narrative form.

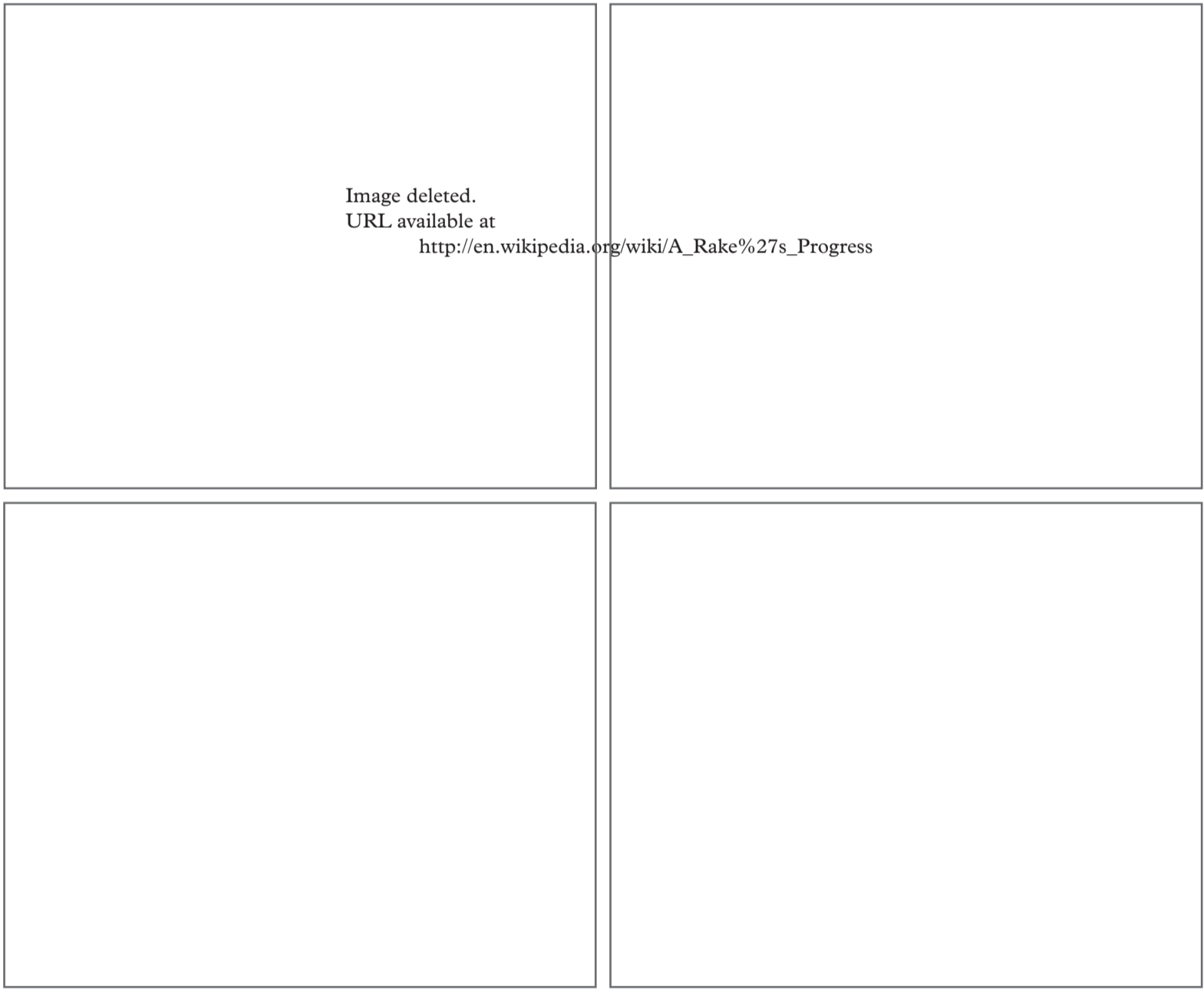
9 That said, written notation in fashion visual journalism has a significant history, both as a manifestation of contemporary photojournalism (Zamroni, 2010) and in illustration (William Hogarth, James Gillray, Philip Dawe, Matthew & Mary Darley, and the British single-sheet satires [that parodied fashionable behaviour of the late 17th century]. In many of these satirical prints written commentary either appeared at the base of the image (as an explanatory or satirical explanation) or was wrapped into the composition of the image as speech. In contemporary photojournalism the use of written explanation continues today in the form of the cut-line).

10 According to Freytag (1863), dramatic narrative may be divided into five parts, which constitute a dramatic arc. A narrative rises to a single climax, crises, or reversal and, from there, falls through unravelling to a resolution.

Instead its drama lies in the exposition of context. By this I mean each image contains its own dramatic event as an analysis of location and character. Each event is influenced by what preceded it and in turn it will influence what follows. However it is the context of each image and the conversations between elements within it that serve the dramatic purpose of the work.

This approach to narrative is manifest in two historical documenters of fashion whose work is useful in the development of *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*. In both cases the artists engaged actively with a critique of both fashion and its social context(s).

What is useful to this research project is how they did it.



1 2  
3 4

Figure 2.3  
William Hogarth (1697-1764).  
*A Rake's Progress* (1733).

## NARRATIVE DEVICES, FASHION CRITIQUE AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

### *William Hogarth*

#### 2.5

William Hogarth was an English painter, pictorial satirist, social critic and editorial cartoonist who was noted for his contribution to western sequential art. Dobson (2005) discusses that his series of pictures, called ‘modern moral subjects’, were visual narratives that offered a form of fictional journalism based on real locations and heightened attention to fashionable profiles of the day. Of use to this thesis is his second visual narrative *A Rake’s Progress* [see figure 2.3].<sup>11</sup>

Hogarth completed the eight illustrations in this work between 1732 and 1733.<sup>12</sup> Although the series paid detailed attention to fashion as it profiled in different classes of London Society of the time, it was also a moral tale. His visual narrative tells the story of Tom Rakewell, a young man who inherits a fortune after his affluent merchant father passes away. The newfound wealth eventually leads him to a path of self-destruction, caused by lavish spending on attire, prostitution and gambling. The final images show Rakewell incarcerated, insane and violent, ending his days in a mental asylum.

*A Rake’s Progress* also offered an insightful commentary on place, behaviour and dress. In terms of location,<sup>13</sup> the work is significant in the manner in which it draws into discourse costume and social context. We follow a single protagonist

through a series of known public spaces and in each of these he becomes part of a social and moral commentary. Narratively, the images follow a chronological, linear progression, and in doing so they draw parallels between fashionability and moral demise.

The series begins with the attentive dressing and fitting of the rake. It progresses onto the expensive costuming of musicians and fashionable ‘fair weather friends’ at a morning levée in London,<sup>14</sup> and terminates with two fashionable ladies of the time visiting the lunatic asylum as a social occasion, where they expect to be entertained by the antics of the inmates, including the now ‘fallen’ protagonist.

Each of the images may be seen as self-contained (and indeed they were sold as such). Each contains a separate event that follows the sequential ‘progress’ of the protagonist. Each image is in a separate location in the same city. In each image we see small, contextual narratives playing out. These narratives contain hostilities; breaks of faith, class and moral discords. Across all of these, fashion and fashionability are used as metaphors for moral decline. The work essentially offers a social commentary and moral (visual) treatise.

*Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* contains

narrative approaches that are similar and different to this work.

In terms of similarities, my illustrated commentary follows a sequential approach. In this, the viewer is taken on a journey from the beginning to the end of a specified period of time. This enables events that occur over an extended period to be viewed in a much more compressed manner. As with Hogarth’s work, each image has the ability to stand alone, and reveal its narrative in a specific context. In addition each work offers a form of critique.

<sup>11</sup> This was Hogarth’s second ‘modern moral subject’. It was preceded by the critically acclaimed and highly successful *A Harlot’s Progress* (1730).

<sup>12</sup> These were later engraved and published as monochromatic prints in 1735.

<sup>13</sup> The Rose Tavern (a famous brothel in Covent Garden), the gambling den at Soho’s White Club, Fleet debtor’s prison, and Bethlehem Hospital for the insane (Bedlam).

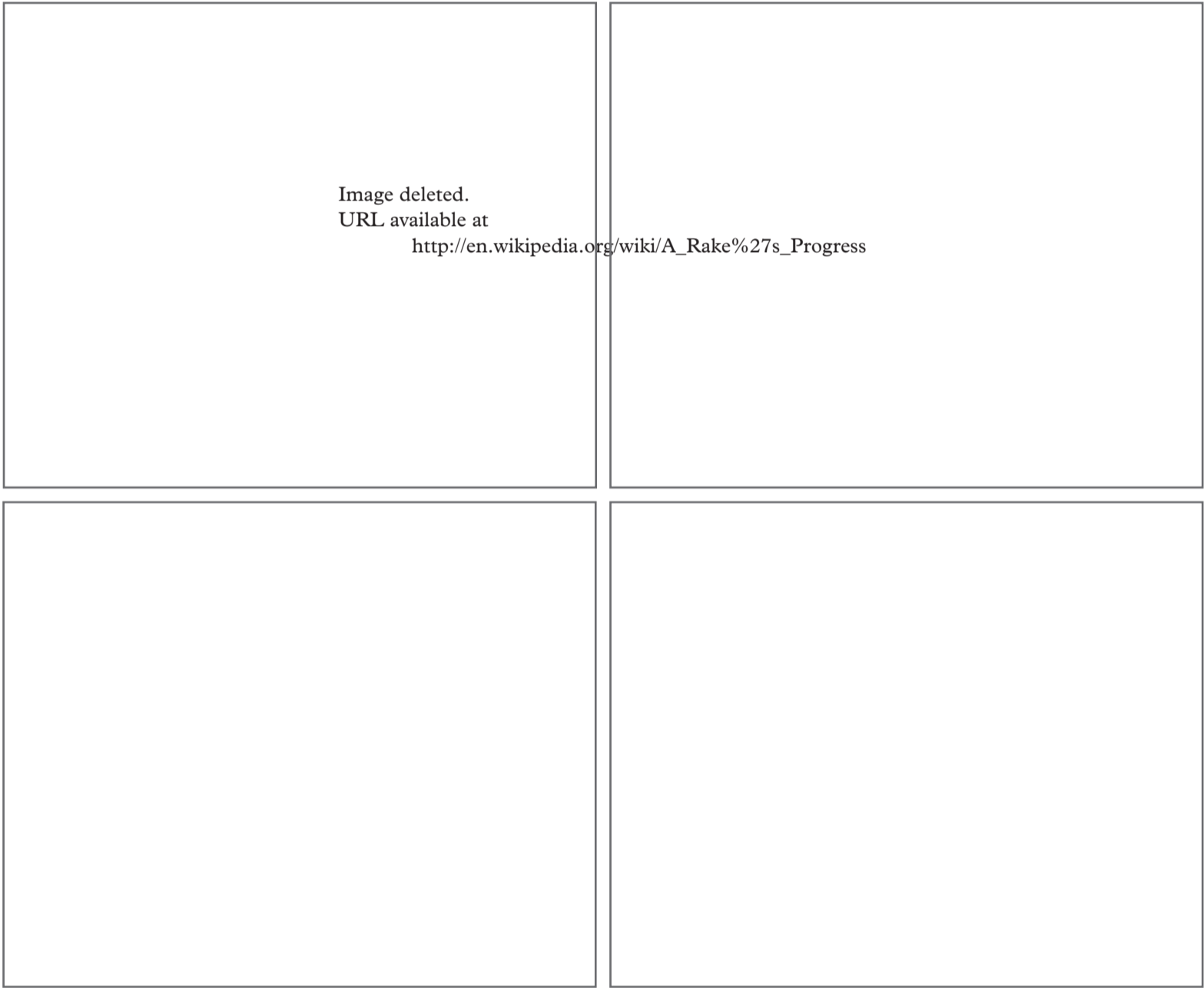
<sup>14</sup> Hogarth is noted for the aligning of certain fashion profiles with unsavoury characters. In this illustration the quarterstaff instructor looks disapprovingly at both the fencing and dancing masters, both of whom are dressed in the ‘French’ style, which was a fashion affectation of the period that Hogarth apparently despised.

The publication also runs parallel to *A Rake's Progress*, in that it uses recognisable locations. Sites within the vicinity of fashion week (the bar, entrance, etc.) are referred to, alongside the offsite locations of the shows. Designer Karen Walker, for example, showcases at *Stephen Marr* hairdressers. Because the location is small and cramped, its space and certain signifiers within it inform the viewer of the specifics of the site.

Finally, like *A Rake's Progress*, behaviour and apparel are addressed as a means of communicating character.

However, my commentary differs from the narrative in that *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* does not posit a moral message, nor does it employ a single protagonist who appears in each scene. Rather it features various recognisable characters that re-appear in different frames, contexts and garments. One example of this is the use of a distinctive model who is present at each catwalk show. This provides me with the opportunity to visually demonstrate how the relationship between the wearer and a garment can be altered to affect demeanor.

Finally, unlike Hogarth, I employ both factual and fictional characters. These are used as a method of speaking both generically and specifically about aspects of fashion week as a social phenomenon.



5 6  
7 8

Figure 2.3  
William Hogarth (1697-1764).  
*A Rake's Progress* (1733).

*Francisco José de Goya*

2.6

The artist Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828) was a Spanish romantic painter who as Kossowska (n.d.) explains, utilised sequences of images to broaden the potential for presenting ideas and beliefs, beyond what could be expressed in a singular composition. These series of works were called ‘capricci’, and were variations of images based on a single concept. Indicative of this are the etchings he titled *Los Caprichos* (1797–1799). These comprised a set of eighty aquatint prints published as an album in 1799.

The word ‘Capricho’ may be translated as a whim, fantasy, or an expression of imagination. However, Johnson (2005) suggests that since the release of Goya’s work “the meaning has deepened, binding an ironical cover of humour over one of the most profound indictments of human vice ever set on paper.”

*Los Caprichos* presented a critique and condemnation of the follies and foolishness of the Spanish society in which Goya lived. The work was biting critical of superstition, the vacuousness, vanity and inabilities of members of the ruling class, the frivolity of young women, and the decline of rationality.<sup>15</sup> Goya described the work as depicting “the innumerable foibles and follies to be found in any civilized society, and the

common prejudices and deceitful practices which custom, ignorance, or self-interest have made usual”.<sup>16</sup>

The loose narrative structure of the work may be likened to a compendium of contemplations on an idea. In this series Goya narrates with considerable attention to dress and character. A consideration of the following images is helpful in understanding how he achieves this.

Goya’s use of the vanity of the elderly is seen in several etchings from the series. In this work (see figure 2.4), the subject is ‘blind’ to the state of her physical appearance and the less than impressed male sycophants that surround her. The title signifies that no amount of visual evidence can prevent the pursuit for self-delusion. It has been suggested that the ‘real’ subject is either the Dowager Duchess of Osuna, or Queen María Luisa.

‘*What A Tailor Can Do*’ explores transformation, and how something can be altered into a presumptuous coxcomb through the skills of a designer. The work carries a critique of those who practice a level of adoration of a fashion ideal when it is in fact vacuous and empty. In this biting satire, the tailored object, while adored by women, is revealed as nothing more than a gnarled tree draped artfully in fabric.

In ‘*Nobody Knows Himself*’ [see figure 2.6], Goya explores the fraudulence of the world and the masquerade that occurs in society, where face and dress are misrepresentations. People appear to each other as personifications of artifice. Fashionability is critiqued as a masque, alluring yet somehow dangerous and predatory. In this world of fine fabrics and affected poses, there is a loss of identity and a suggested loss of moral safety.

15 Goya was a royal painter to the kings of Spain during the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries, but he died eventually in exile. His major print series had been ‘donated’ to the crown to protect him from the Inquisition.

16 As cited in Simon, L. (2003). *The Sleep of Reason*.

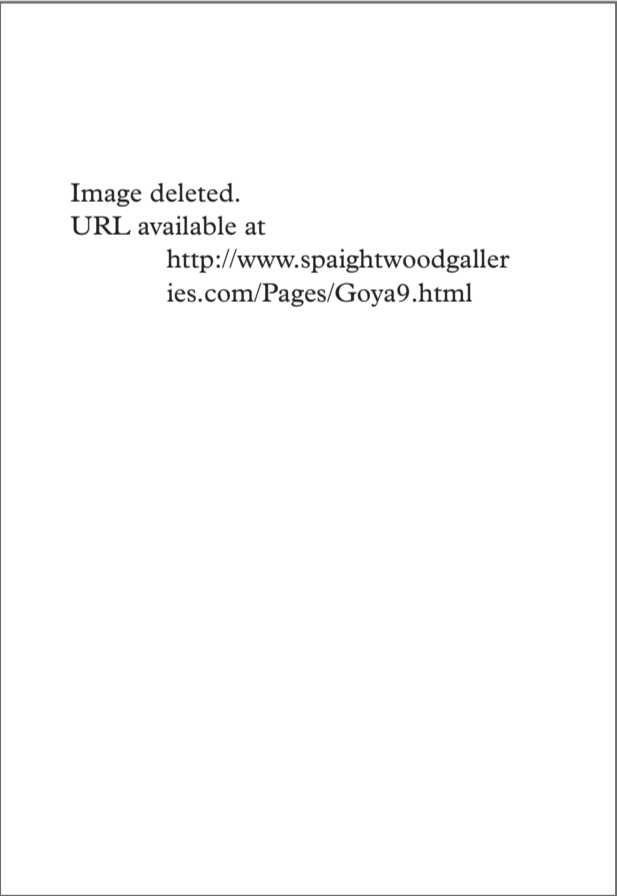


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URL available at  
<http://www.spaightwoodgalleries.com/Pages/Goya9.html>

Figure 2.4  
“Until Death” (Caprichos 55, D. 92, H. 90).  
Etching and aquatint, c. 1798.

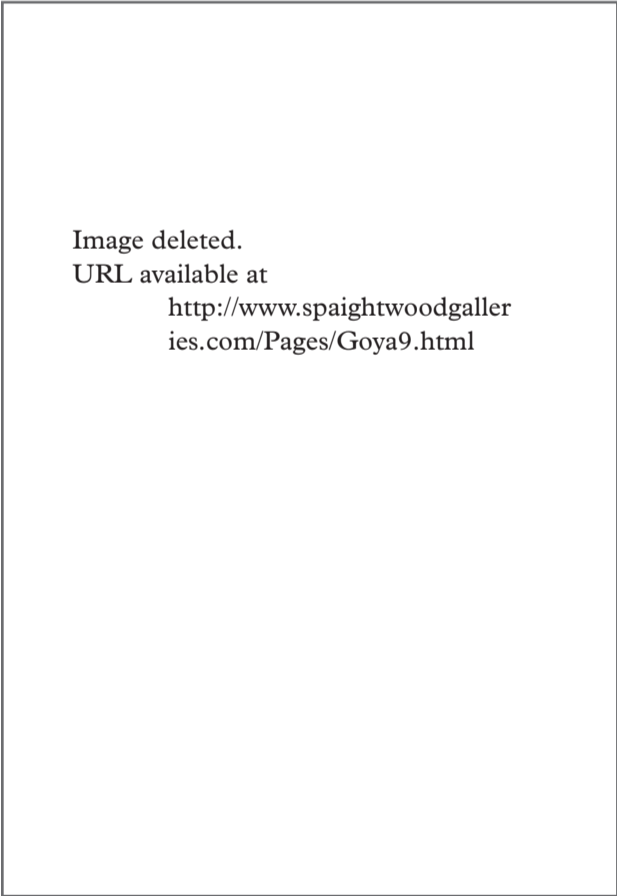


Figure 2.5  
*'What A Tailor Can Do' (Caprichos 52, D. 89, H. 87). Etching and aquatint, c.1798.*

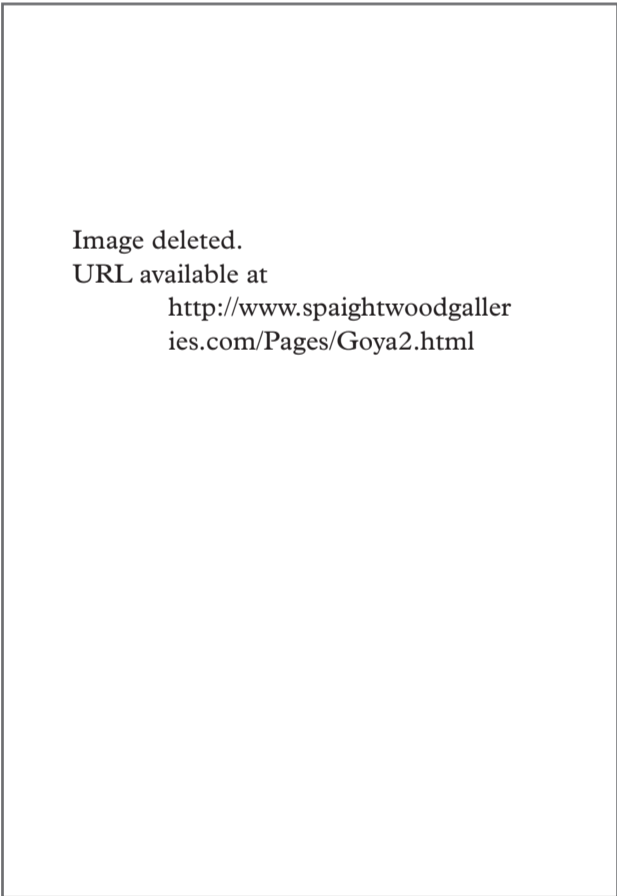


Figure 2.6  
*'Nobody Knows Himself' (Caprichos 6, D. 43, H. 41). Etching and aquatint, c. 1798.*

Goya's images are realistic yet engage simultaneously with the concept of caricature. His documents express critical observations of social realities. His work may be seen as more biting satirical than Hogarth's, and may be differentiated further by the fact that, while Hogarth tended to use references to known fashionable foibles of the day, Goya often employed allegorical symbolism, including animalistic representations of human shortcomings.

Like a number of the English 17th century fashion satirists, Goya's imagery was also partly explicated by short titles and brief explanations.

In comparison with *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week*, certain approaches may be noted as similar.

Both visual commentaries deal with images that are interpretations of personal experience. In both, exaggeration and omission are explored. Through these devices the sense of drama and isolation is heightened.

In addition both my work and Goya's adopt a stylistic approach where foreground elements are often rendered more dramatic by reducing the level of detail in contextual material [see figure 2.5]. This method of commentary differs significantly from the often didactic and 'regular' nature of the traditional photographic

image. In illustrations that employ this device the eye is directed to gesture and detail not only by what is rendered but also by what is not.

Furthermore, like Goya's caprichos, certain known characters are identifiable in the publication, as are specific fashion statements of the period. In this way both approaches deal with social profiles and the characters that form part of the culture of practice.

Like Goya's critique on the weaknesses of Spanish society, *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* also satirises the foibles of New Zealand fashion week specifically, and fashion week as a social phenomenon.

However, the publication differs from Goya's caprichos, in that no allegorical imagery is used. In addition certain illustrative devices are clearly different. I use an expansive colour palette where Goya's caprichos are monochromatic aquatints.<sup>17</sup>

Goya also accompanies his images with short captions and commentary. This convention is also a feature of much photojournalism (cut lines). However, my work uses only the illustrated plates. This means that any commentary is conducted solely off the image. Although this differs from conventions in much 17th century satirical illustration, the decision to drop written commentary as titles or reflective

comments affords my work a more confident visual voice. It also leaves the plates open to a slightly wider level of interpretation and emphasis.

Compositionally, my illustration employs a greater level of vernacular pose.<sup>18</sup> My style also employs distinctively different approaches to line because they are rendered as drawings on paper and printed, not via metal plates but as digital prints created through a process of photographic scanning.

Finally, unlike Goya's caprichos, my illustrations utilise a gentler form of satire. While Goya's works adopt a Juvenalian approach to satire, my work is more Horatian in nature.

17 An aquatint is an intaglio printmaking technique that is a variant of etching. In this process, the artist makes marks on a copper or zinc plate using scribing tools and acid. The resulting incisions are capable of holding ink. The inked plate is run through a printing press together with a sheet of paper. The pressure results in a transfer of the ink on to the paper.

18 By this I mean poses that are less formalised. In my illustrations characters often slouch and drape across the page and (sometimes) across each other. In contrast to Goya's caprichos, there is an informality in my work. In my images characters are also often aware of the viewer, but underwhelmed by the attention. This approach has been developed in reference to a knowing engagement with being seen that has become part of the visual language of fashion photojournalists like Scott Schuman.

## Satire in Fashion Illustration

### 2.7

*Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* may be understood as a form of illustrated satire. However, the use of satire in the project may be framed as more Horatian than Juvenalian in form. Griffin (1994) discusses that Horatian satire (after the Roman satirist Horace) tends to playfully criticise through the employment of ‘light-hearted’ humour. In this form of satire the ‘voice’ is normally indulgent, tolerant, amused, and witty. The satirist holds up to gentle ridicule the absurdities and follies of the subject, aiming to produce a wry agreement from the audience. Conversely, Juvenal satire is less humorous, more contemptuous, barbed, and direct in its assault on an issue.

Today, although fashion illustration tends to exist in print media in a subordinate relationship to photographic documentary, I argue that satirical illustration may offer much to how we might ‘speak’ about fashion and its contexts.

Satirical illustration may be seen as having a didactic purpose because it offers criticism but uses humour and wit as its agent of delivery. Generally, satire does not intend to harm or insult, but seeks rather to arrest attention and through this, initiate critical thinking.

Leemk (2007) suggests satire breaks down our mental resistance to question-

ing existing views and Harris (1990) argues that this is a significant reason why satire is utilised for political commentary.

Historically, visual satire in fashion has employed a number of devices. Included among these are the use of irony, hyperbole, metaphor, innuendo, oxymoron, parody, double-entendre and allegory. However, generally more prominent than these is the employment of exaggeration as a means of discourse and emphasis. Often this is achieved illustratively through the use of caricature.

The word caricature comes from the Latin ‘caricatura’. This term first appeared in the writings of Italian critics in , and was derived from words indicating a loaded statement, or an exaggeration.<sup>19</sup> A caricature today generally refers to a form of portrait that exaggerates or distorts the essence of a person, object or environment as a means of attaining a visual likeness. While most satirical fashion illustration deals to some degree with caricature, there are conventions and nuances of caricature that are worthy of consideration in this exegesis because they have impacted on certain stylistic approaches that I have taken in developing the illustrative approach to my work.

## Burlesque and the Theatrical

### 2.8

In the often acerbic fashion commentaries of the English satirical illustrator James Gillray we see a form of caricature that becomes almost burlesque in its approach. Drury (2008) suggests that burlesque is a form of comedy characterised by ridiculous exaggeration and distortion. The essential quality that makes for burlesque, she suggests, is the discrepancy between subject matter and style. This means that a style that might ordinarily be dignified may be used for nonsensical material. Conversely, a nonsensical style may be used to ridicule a normally dignified subject.

In works like *Following the Fashion* [see figure 2.7] and *Le belle Assemblée* [see figure 2.8] we see the delicate touch of a coloured engraving, with its subtle and sometimes fastidious attention to detail, used to render beautifully dressed atrocities. By extension both works carry seemingly serious and respectful titles that the imagery calls into question.

Gillray’s illustrations are also theatricalised; the fashionable ladies are presented as if on a stage, brought to the fore either by the removal of background detail, or the flattening of space into a low-relief tableau.

<sup>19</sup> Crowley, C., Gill, J. Grossmann, E., Little, R., Smith, M. & Sell, B. (1971). *Introduction, in Caricature and its Role in Graphic Satire*, Juergen Schulz, compiler (Providence, Rhode Island: Young & Klein) p.5 (As cited in Rauch, 2009).

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URL available at  
[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_TqBOU0-Unis/Rx0B1COxYnI/AAAAAAAAABuU/nvQGSyReZI4/s1600-h/1796-short-bodied-gillray-fashion-caricature.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_TqBOU0-Unis/Rx0B1COxYnI/AAAAAAAAABuU/nvQGSyReZI4/s1600-h/1796-short-bodied-gillray-fashion-caricature.jpg)

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URL available at  
[http://www.artchive.com/web\\_gallery/J/James-Gillray/James-Gillray-reproductions-1.html](http://www.artchive.com/web_gallery/J/James-Gillray/James-Gillray-reproductions-1.html)

Figure 2.7  
James Gillray (1794). *Following the Fashion*  
Etching, Published by H. Humphrey Hand

Figure 2.8  
James Gillray (1787). *Le Belle Assemblée*  
Etching, Published by H. Humphrey Hand

## Context and Signification

### 2.9

Conversely Darly's treatment of the woman having her wig coiffured does not use burlesque in its treatment of title. *The Ridiculous Taste, or the Ladies' Absurdity*, makes explicit from the outset the position of the satirist [see figure 2.9]. Yet despite the condemnation implicit in the caption, this work is still Horation in its approach. The woman is not rendered grotesque; it is her situation that carries the absurdity. This work is gently ridiculous but this must be understood in a context that differs to the one in which we might read the illustration today.

Satirical texts need to be understood as products of their time. A work like *The Ridiculous Taste, or the Ladies' Absurdity* relies on the audience having an understanding of key signifiers and the context of the image.

In the image we see a hairdresser mounting a ladder to gain access to the topmost section of an enormous coiffure. Another man holds a sextant to measure the distance. On the surface this seems to suggest the ridiculousness of physical disproportion, as indeed it does. However, the image may be more than this.

As Powell and Roach (2004) point out,

*"With regard to hair in the fashionable performance of everyday life during much of the eighteenth century, size mattered. . . . 'social hair,' as the part of the body that can be most readily and flexibly shaped, vividly signifies performance in publicly defined roles."*

The woman in this satirical image is a social condition rather than an individual. She is the expectation of social position taken to a level of absurdity. Perhaps that is why as a social condition, rather than an individual, she is not caricatured.

As Hallett (1999, pp.152-153) suggests in *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth*, satire is a nuanced methodology. Successful satires, he argues, are conversations with, and symbiotic to, the cultural products of the time. Much of the polemical wit of graphic satire is derived from a contextual understanding between what is understood and expected, and how the satirist has engaged with and twisted that expectation to create pointed commentary.

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URL available at  
[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_CvDCiEFbNy8/S2uoXoDuJEI/AAAAAAAAANPw/x07wi9D8V0s/s1600-h/1771+%26+1776+Sayer+%26+Bennett.+The+Ridiculous+Taste+or+the+Ladies+Absurdity.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_CvDCiEFbNy8/S2uoXoDuJEI/AAAAAAAAANPw/x07wi9D8V0s/s1600-h/1771+%26+1776+Sayer+%26+Bennett.+The+Ridiculous+Taste+or+the+Ladies+Absurdity.jpg)

Figure 2.9  
Matthew or Mary Darly (1771). *The Ridiculous Taste, or the Ladies' Absurdity*. Darly's Comic Prints of Characters.

## *Distortion, Parody and the Grotesque*

### 2.10

In Philip Dawe's print *A New Fashioned Head Dress of Young Misses of Three Score and Ten*, we see three devices of visual satire used in composite [see figure 2.10].

The first is distortion. Harris, (1990, para 31) says, "Distortion changes the perspective of a condition or event by isolation (separation from its ordinary surroundings), or by stressing some aspects and de-emphasising others". This is a significant advantage of illustration, as drawing allows the satirist an individual filter. By distorting perspective, the room becomes a travesty of conventional order. The delicate and petite become swamped with the weight of ornamentation and affectation, and we are alerted to the instability of the situation.

Dawe's print also contains elements of parody. Drury (2008, para 5) describes parody as a variety of burlesque used in "a composition that imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular work, or the distinctive style of its maker, and applies the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject." She says, "Often a parody is more powerful in its influence on affairs of current importance, politics for instance, than its original composition" (ibid.).

*A New Fashioned Head Dress of Young Misses of Three Score and Ten* [see figure 2.10], is clearly a parody because it sits

in the context of a plethora of fashionable mezzotints produced by London printmakers between 1760 and 1800. A popular theme of these widely distributed images was the young woman at her toilet [see figure 2.11]. In general, these prints were delicate, sentimental, and extremely attentive to detail, (especially in their recording of fabric, wallpaper and clothing styles of the period).

As a parody, Dawe's print takes the issue of a belle who, having reached three score years and ten (seventy years), uses the excesses of fashion to distract herself (and hopefully the world) from the coarse reality of her ageing. Attended by acolytes whose obsequious countenances suggest a kind of corrupted pleasure, the 'Young Misses' is a character with her equivalents in fashionable western society today. While there may not be a wigmaker and flourishes of lace and trimmed fabric, there is botox, make up, hair dye and cosmetic surgery. The spirit of advertising sells her dreams of physical youth and beauty from the extolled virtues of cosmetics and day spas. Despite the changes in materials and processes, the woman at the mirror is a character and a parody who can be transported across time.

One of the other significant devices Dawe's uses to heighten the sense of satire in this commentary on fashion is the

employment of the grotesque. When this term is used in visual satire it tends to be related to the literary meaning of the word. In literary fiction, characters are considered grotesque if they simultaneously evoke a sense of sympathy and repulsion. Physical deformities and social traits that are considered cringe-worthy are characteristics that are often used to define the grotesque. In literature, Victor Hugo's 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' is a notable example.

Dawe's use of the grotesque elicits laughter and disgust; the grotesque by nature is aggressive and discomfiting. Because of this it can produce powerful satire. As satire seeks a multiple reaction from its audience, for example laughter, and anger or disgust, the grotesque may be used as an intensifying agent. This is because it deals with the binaries like sympathy and revulsion.



Figure 2.10  
Dawe, P. (1777). *A New Fashioned Head Dress of Young Misses of Three Score and Ten.*

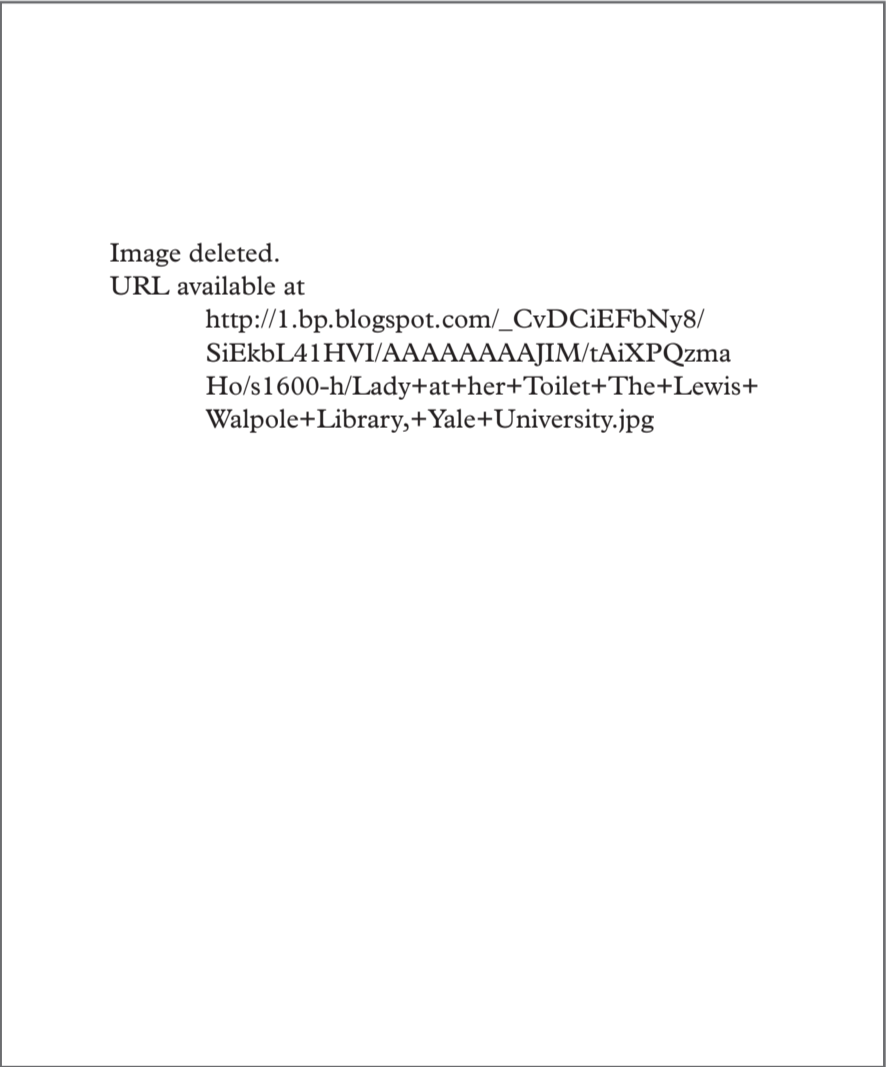


Figure 2.11  
Anonymous (n.d.) *Lady at her Toilet.*  
The Lewis Walpole Library; Yale University.



## CONCLUSION

### *Conclusion*

#### **2.11**

In discussing satire and the agents that are used in its visual realisation, I have sought to contextualise certain approaches taken to illustrating my work. In addition I have shown how specific approaches adopted in the narrative style of *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* have precedents in fashion commentary that date back well before the advent of photojournalism. While photojournalism as a method of fashion commentary has certain features that are evident in my work (timeliness, subjectivity and narration), I have tried to show that fashion commentary was well developed before the advent of the camera. It is this older, although often less documented, method of providing commentary of fashion events, that has been the inspiration behind this project. This is because these artworks have provided a range of considerations that while being illustrative and satirical, have also developed outside of the pictorial concerns and limitations of the camera.



# REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY



## REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

### 3.0

*Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* refers to significant events that have occurred across the last ten years of fashion week's manifestation as a social and fashion phenomenon. My book draws on the works of influential New Zealand designers who have developed distinctive work for these shows.

Featured brands include *World*, *Zambesi*, *Trelise Cooper*, *Annah Stretton* and *Karen Walker*. These designers were chosen for their unique aesthetic values and approach to design. Accordingly, the publication is able to comment upon the intricacies and varied elements of cut, style, and fabrication that are both contemporary and generated from a New Zealand context.<sup>20</sup>

*Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* employs Horatian satire to critique certain aspects of fashion week. While many issues related to fashion week as a social and design phenomena feature in the book, a brief discussion about a few issues is useful.

<sup>20</sup> The Autumn/Winter 2011 collections were included in the publication as a means of affording the publication a sense of timeliness and currency.



## ISSUES ADDRESSED

### *Exclusivity*

#### 3.1

The first image in the bound text depicts a sense of exclusivity and conveys this by referencing specific social archetypes. This is seen in the illustrative approach taken to the gatekeeper who prevents the ‘uninitiated’ from entering the world of fashion. Here the bodyguard is Pieter Stewart, the director of New Zealand Fashion Week. She is used as a symbol for one who controls those who enter this ‘realm’ of the privileged. This may be likened to Goya’s use of known personalities like the Dowager Duchess of Osuna, to stand for both themselves and an archetype of social behavior.

The realm of the fashion elite is revisited and satirically undermined in the final image of the book where we revisit the location of the entrance, but find it dilapidated and stripped of fragile illusion. The condition of this location now reveals how the original construction was a facade.

This refers to the fact that the shows that follow after fashion week (created for the general public) are only an echo of the glamour created for the elite. These public shows are essentially a moneymaking business.

### *Character*

#### 3.2

Utilising a satirical approach enabled characters that are traditionally unseen in the fashion magazine context to be considered. In this way both obvious and non-obvious forms of beauty are explored. Utilising this wider social vocabulary enables me to discuss the importance of diversity, and challenge levels of artifice and exclusion that easily become part of normalised discourse surrounding contemporary fashion events. Accordingly, the publication is not simply a report on products and an event, but also a consideration of human nature, interaction, behaviour, and foible.

I deal with character in several distinctive ways. One method is to replicate the same garment on a range of wearers. By doing this I suggest that a garment does not hold fashion’s traditional promise of transformative power, but is in fact subsumed by the personality of the individual. My characters are not the generalised models and mannequin-like fashionistas of traditional commentary, but very real people with their flaws and idiosyncrasies exposed and integrated into unique representations of difference.

I also caricature notable fashion figures, suggesting they are real people and not divorced from the banality of the public. In doing this I am attempting to push beyond the work of photojour-

nalist commentators like Bill Cunningham and Scott Schuman who, although purporting to shoot ‘real’ people, still ensure their subjects conform to a certain sense of sanctioned ‘style’.

Thus, the images in *Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* are undeniably unglamorous, with models, celebrities and designers caught in unflattering ways. Fashion garments in this world are placed in real situations other than the catwalk. This shows that clothing has character beyond what is suggested when it simply adorns the body of a model.

Finally, I deal, through caricature, with the issue of style identification. By this I refer to people presenting themselves as having allegiance to a specific brand, by wearing it as an entire ensemble. Through this I satirise the consumer who purchases a manufactured ‘identity’. They become the brand and present this as a substitute for the self.

### Models

#### 3.3

In the work I am concerned with issues of weight and age of models and the dislocation that exists between the ‘constructed’ aesthetic and the bodies of people who consume the garments. Thus I focus in parts of the commentary on the public who are associated with the world of fashion week. As an extension of this concern I depict the distinctive differences between models used for brands like *Carpenters Daughter*, (a NZ plus size label), and those used to promote the designs of fashion houses like *Zambesi* and *Karen Walker*. Back stage, models are also placed in various states of undress. We see them as manifestations of vanity and their bodies are often juxtaposed with those of their fitters.

The sense of vanity bordering on narcissism is satirised as it is in works by James Gillray (*Le Belle Assemblée*) and Philip Dawe (*A New Fashioned Head Dress of Young Misses of Three Score and Ten*). These images show a woman at her toilet.

In my work, the model Nikki Watson is seen back stage surrounded by a large team of unimpressed makeup artists who have at hand botox and litres of foundation. Her reflection in the mirror is that of an extremely old woman. This suggests that makeup and photoshop are used to create illusions of beauty and that people consume images of models that are really constructed forms of artifice.

I also satirise the transformative process (no makeup to makeup) where models are constructed as painted clones, or homogenised mannequins, moulded and tweaked by a designer’s vision [see figure 3.1].

In terms of the age of models, I sometimes portray them with homework and children’s picture books. In one particular illustration we see them leaving a school bus and entering the realm of fashion week. These are direct references to the use of very young models who, despite the make up and veneers of elegant sophistication are, in many cases, still only children.

In addition, I satirise the illusion of the fashion model as a discrete phenomena, who has few intersections with ordinary human functioning. Accordingly we sometimes find models in images that are unflattering. These illustrations strip back the glamour associated with perfection. We see models consuming food in frantic ways or with their poise disrupted as they trip over badly designed heels.

These are ordinary human beings.

### Clothing

#### 3.4

In the publication clothes become a point of reference for character and personality. Clothing engages with the notion of stereotype, social grouping (as a signification of class), fashion branding and affectation.

For example, *World* caters to those with an acquired taste. Its designs are often avant-garde creations that contest traditional norms of New Zealand fashion. The brand carries with it a sense of the courageously ‘colourful’. It utilises clashing colour combinations, prints and fabrics, and eccentric silhouettes. In commenting on the brand’s engagement with wit and absurdity, I compare their attire to that of a clown, applying a visual metaphor that shows a clown-like shadow that a model casts on the wall before appearing on the catwalk.

Characters in the front row are also illustrated with oversized statement ties and bows and extremely small bags [see figure 3.2]. In developing this discourse between the modelled and the purchased, I lift the ethos of the brand off the catwalk and allow it to permeate my depiction of the audience.

This gentle form of Horatian satire distinctly captures the essence of *World* in a lighthearted and humorous manner, but on a more subtle level it also critiques the irrationality of what is considered ‘fashionable’ and the notion of brand allegiance taken to the level of absurd imitation.

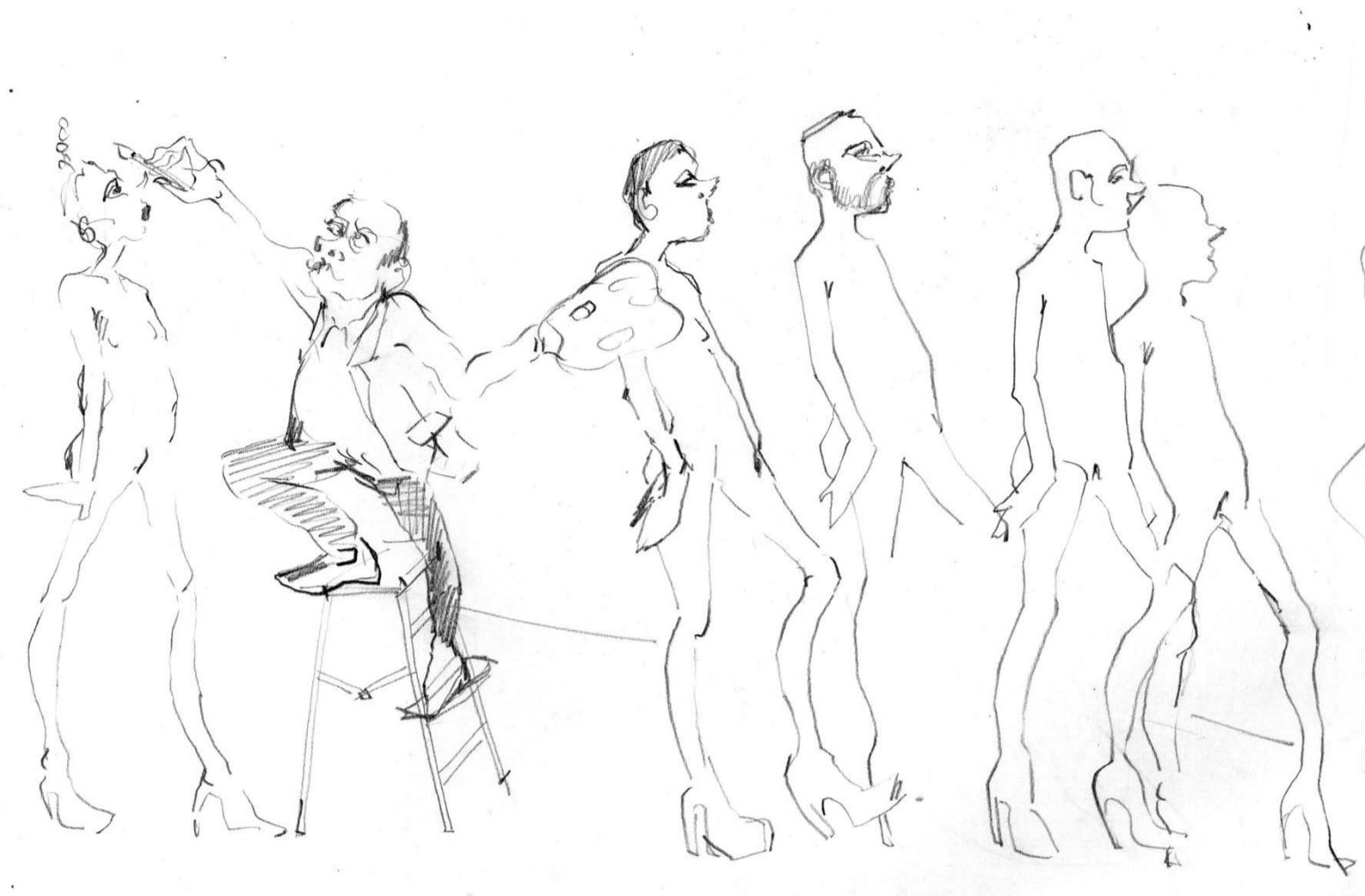


Figure 3.1  
Models 'moulded' by a make-up artist.

Figure 3.2,  
Draft of World Audience.

## *Celebrity*

### 3.5

The work spends some time satirising the problematic concept of celebrity. Accordingly, the publication visually considers issues of social status and hierarchy, demonstrating the precedence given to insignificant celebrities over important buyers. I deal with this in a number of ways.

First, I play on the concept of characters being at fashion week simply to be noticed for their latest purchases and branded attire. In the illustrations we see labels still attached and ‘hired’ stickers apparent on *Coco Chanel* bags. Socialites are seen demanding attention from photographers, particularly at the bar scene, which is illustrated as a location where people mingle in an attempt to be photographed and feature on a blog, in a magazine or a newspaper.

I also deal with status and its relationship to physical positioning in the shows. Front row seats constitute the physical confirmation of social status.

The ‘star studded’ front row becomes a theatrical display that competes with the exhibition of designers’ clothes. In my book, I use Trelise Cooper as an example. Cooper’s shows tend to have the highest numbers of celebrity appearances. However in some cases these figures simply constitute status set dressing. All Black ‘stars’ like Daniel Carter probably do not purchase her clothing.

Her shows are also known for their theatrical displays, featuring dancers, monkeys and flamethrowers. As a result the audience is illustrated marvelling at the performers and not the clothes [see figure 3.3]. The shows receive large amounts of press because they are gimmicky and entertaining.

Allegiance to the brand brings an association with the theatrical. Status is associated with both exclusivity and a sense of bohemian chic.



Figure 3.3  
Draft of the Trelise Cooper Show.

### *Soft Critique*

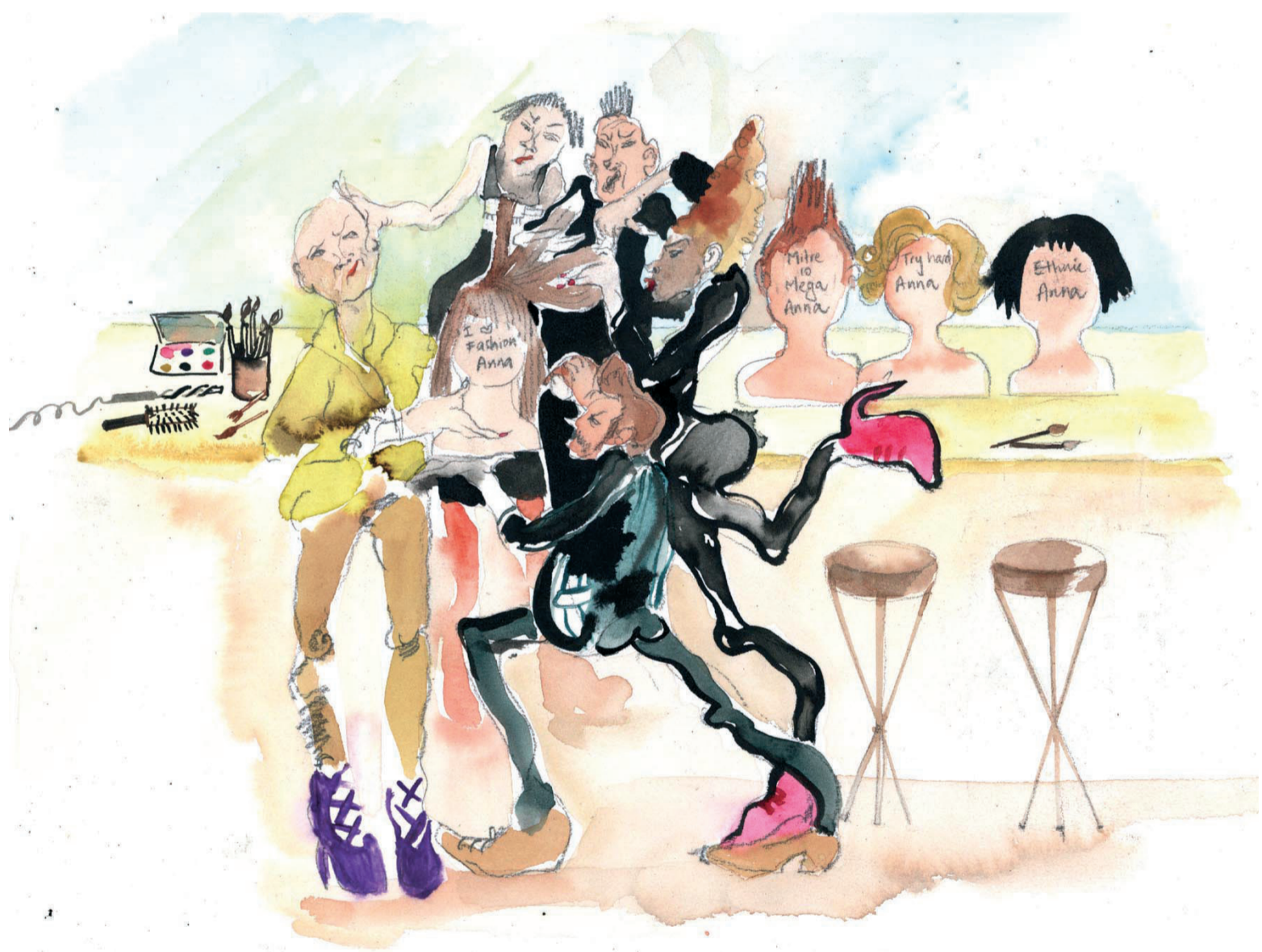
#### *3.6*

The satire also considers the concept of soft critique and its interface with earned status. In this regard the work satirises the ‘corrupt blogger’ who provides glowing reviews after each show as a means of enhancing his social capital and network base. In general, these reviews often lack insightful critique and this is often attributed to fear that the commentator may not be invited to subsequent shows.

The New Zealand fashion industry is still young; therefore there is a sense that everyone must support one another. However, in doing so, insightful and internationally contextualised critique is sometimes lacking and the industry cannot move forward. This is why in some images I depict bloggers as drunk and corrupt. Their ability to review is sodden and capable of being only a series of softened, non-specific, and sweepingly hyperbolic statements [see figure 3.4].



Figure 3.4  
A draft featuring intoxicated bloggers.



## ILLUSTRATIVE APPROACH TO THE WORK

### *Media*

#### 3.7

*Illustration as Inquiry: A visual response to New Zealand Fashion Week* employs a wide range of media that places emphasis on the expressive. Materials such as gouache, watercolour, ink, pencil and acrylic are used so that their gestural qualities express ideas like frenzy, excess, texture and unpredictability. Thus spatters, drips and bleeds between and within media are italicised as part of a dynamic that loosens the pictorial quality of my illustrations. Because of this pursuit of the spontaneous and serendipitous, Photoshop is only used for mild colour correction. The power of the work lies in its openness illustratively to chance and unpredictable mark making.

Watercolour allows me to experiment with both bright colour and degrees of transparency. Generally, saturated images are brought to the fore and light washes are used to suggest backgrounds. This creates a sense of hierarchy, depth and focus within the illustrations. This approach to image construction asserts both dynamism and caricature.

Within this approach I also sometimes accent work with idiosyncratic attention to specific details like buttons, or style lines.<sup>21</sup>

### *Paper*

#### 3.8

In general I use non-bleached watercolour paper. This is because the illustrations themselves are vibrant, and pitching these against bleached white stock tends to make them appear harsh. Unbleached paper generally softens images and provides subtlety and warmth to the work.

In the final publication I have printed the illustrations on ‘super fine’ stock as it suggests a certain level of luxury and exclusiveness without making the pages difficult to bind or turn. The texture of the stock is velvet, which provides a substrate that is sensuous to the touch.

<sup>21</sup> This is evident in the garments illustrated for *Zambesi*, which photographically are difficult to capture, as details cannot clearly be seen on black garments. Illustration, however, allows the opportunity to control the intensity and tone of the washes used, so details can be made more explicit.

*Line*

3.9

<sup>22</sup>Thick, dark and rigid lines for example were used for *Zambesi's* show to convey a level of harshness and foreboding, while the *Trelise Cooper's* images are much more fluid with thin lines, conveying a sense of delicacy. These effects reflect the aesthetic of the brands.

The publication employs curvilinear lines, which are both dynamic and organic. This creates a sense of natural warmth and fluidity [see figure 3.5]. This approach is similar to the line work of Henri de Toulouse Lautrec and his lithographs for the ‘Moulin Rouge’. Curvilinear lines are particularly effective when depicting the female form as they follow the curves of the figure. Conversely rectilinear lines, which are straight and geometric in style, I occasionally employ to create a sense of severity, energy or contrast. Egon Shiele for example employs both forms of line. In my practice I found that slimmer androgynous characters that are linear in build tend to suit the rectilinear approach, as opposed to larger more robust women who are often more expressively realised in curvilinear lines.

My work also engages with implied and actual line. Actual lines refer to lines that are drawn with the intention of being seen. Implied lines, however, are those that are created when the viewer connects elements within a composition to form a line.

Indirect line can be used to create movement within an artwork because that which is not presented becomes part of the dynamism of suggestion. An extension of indirect line is the exploration of contour lines (outlines).

Contour lines vary throughout the publication. They express different moods and bring to the fore what needs emphasis. These contours exploit the potential of thickness and thinness, fluidity and rigidity and lightness and darkness.<sup>22</sup>

Traditionally contour lines define and border entire figures. The images in the publication, however, omit certain areas of line, allowing the work to allude to and suggest. Again this leaves something to the reader’s imagination. Sometimes an image’s power is in what is not ‘said’.



Figure 3.5  
An image demonstrating the use of  
curvilinear lines.

*Colour**3.10*

The use of media such as gouache and acrylic enable bold hues to be created, whilst the intensity of colour used reflects emphasis within the publication. Pages that need negative space and breath remain minimal in colour, yet intense in line. Conversely, illustrations that feature the catwalk show are saturated and vibrant so as to convey a sense of climax.

Within images colour is also used as an agent to enhance. Distant objects appear lighter and less saturated with less distinct attention to detail.

The colour palettes selected for each show reflect something of the ethos of each designer's work. Brands carry with them signifiers of colour; for example Zambesi is known for their use of black and World is associated with peculiar colour combinations like fuchsia and mint green.

In this way hues communicate the aesthetic and feel of the shows.

The value or tone (lightness and darkness) of the colours is used to emphasise setting and lighting. During shows, for example, the contrast of tonal value is heightened in order to depict spot lighting and harsh shadows. Outdoor scenes during natural daylight utilise washes that are much more muted and light. These do not create intense contrast as the light source is dispersed more evenly.

*Layout and Order**3.11*

The publication utilises an A3 format. Its large size amplifies the sense of theatre associated with fashion week.

In terms of layout, double page spreads are utilised when illustrating shows as it alludes to a sense of the catwalk. However they also become helpful when broader, more generic scenes are illustrated (such as backstage scenes). In these images a variety of human interactions are satirised. This wider engagement with scene/scenario embraces many micro narratives that may be read in different orders by different viewers.

When illustrations deal with a single concept, a double page spread is not necessary. In some cases single images with different angles of the same room are placed together so the reader can gain a sense of the ambiance of the event from a variety of perspectives.

In terms of the overall momentum and rhythm of the narrative, certain pages are used to segregate and divide the publication into chapters or 'days of the week', thereby breaking up the intensity of the fully rendered illustrations.

Finally, subtle cohesion between the illustrations is achieved through devices like the replication of architectural elements or people. In this way images do not appear dislocated or presented as random observations.



### *Depth of Field*

#### *3.13*

The illustrations generally utilise ‘triangulation’ as means of creating depth. This technique brings prominent characters to the fore, and moves less significant characters to the back [see figure 3.6]. A subject may be rendered more dramatically when they fill the frame. Their large size in relation to the insignificant subjects that surround them is a device evident in much satirical fashion illustration from the 17th century. Here we often see the subject of satire contextualised but not eclipsed. The focus of the satire is clearly nominated but it is ‘read’ and understood by the environment it occupies.

Triangulation orchestrates scale, perspective, viewpoint and distance. In using this device, one is able to create interesting angles and distortions of space. Distortions of space may suggest something of the cacophony of inclusion (as a commentator), in contrast to a voyeur who may witness an event from the comparatively stable safety of distance.

With reference to photography I sometimes crop images so certain characters are ‘captured’ out of frame. The approach emphasises that only a small section from a much broader picture or narrative is selected. This alludes to candid photography’s association with capturing a moment in time in a manner that might forsake traditional values of composition and inclusion.

With reference to the camera I also use elements of focus to enhance depth within a composition. For example a subject may be rendered exquisitely, and their surroundings fade out into linear form. In addition, the outer edges of an image may feature less defined brushwork. In this way my illustrations sometimes blur subjects, feather their details, dissolve them into light and seek out the candid and unexpected moment.



Figure 3.6  
An image that utilises 'triangulation'.



## CONCLUSION

### 3.13

The aim of this thesis was to discover the potential of illustration to communicate a fashion event like New Zealand Fashion Week. In doing this, the thesis employed a form of Horatian satire as a means of actualising a unique form of commentary. Because I was aware that commentary on fashion is not a new phenomenon I was interested in both the visual dialects of photojournalism, and certain resonances and devices used by satirical illustrators of the 17th century. In analysing these I was intrigued to see if such approaches might effectively be translated across time and technique to provide an original form of compassionate, yet critical, illustrative commentary.

I am aware that, currently, visual fashion commentary is largely captured by photography and the voice of the illustrator is rarely heard. By drawing on both historical and contemporary forms of fashion commentary I have sought through practice to develop a body of work that illustratively acknowledges contemporary approaches to fashion illustration while simultaneously reaching beyond these to develop a distinctive and idiosyncratic ‘signature’. In the past year it has been heartening that my work has appeared in *The Viva (New Zealand Herald)*, *Australian Creative*, *Martin Dawber’s The Big Book of Fashion Illustration*, and Sandra Burke’s *Fashion Design Series*. I have sought to develop a unique ‘signature’ but, in saying this, I have not sought to use this ‘signature’ to create captivating imagery. Rather I have used it to develop a highly expressive form of social critique, (an aspect currently lacking in much fashion illustration).

My methodological approach enabled a fusion of both theory and practice, whilst employing complex and sometimes idiosyncratic approaches to organising and reflecting on emerging outcomes.

External factors like focus groups also aided critique, and advanced insight and personal knowledge.

In concluding it is useful to note that Aristotle discussed the virtue called *phrōnesis*. *Phrōnesis* is the ability to consider an action in order to make change. In other words, it is the bringing about of something through action and as a result we enhance the quality of our life. Aristotle says that *phrōnesis* is not just a skill; it involves not only the ability to reflect upon what one is doing. Garrison (1997, p.73) says that this “involves developing the habits, abilities, thoughts, ideals, technical mastery and virtues of the practice. Becoming an expansively more competent practitioner requires disciplined practice and eventually

self-creation that is calling into existence a new and better self.”

A new and better self....

This has been a difficult thesis. It is not always conventional in its approach and it is marked, as is my illustrative work, with a level of idiosyncrasy. This is not an affectation. I have tried to balance scholarship, creativity and a certain truth to the self. This has not always been easy but the result has been both the production of a unique body of illustrative commentary, a contextualising exegesis, and unexpectedly, the development of a better self.

That is a worthy outcome of a thesis. I am not the same person who began this project.

Nadeesha Godamunne October 8th 2010

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**ILLUS-  
TRATION  
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INQUIRY**

A visual response to  
New Zealand Fashion Week