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The Metropolis in Masquerade:
Melbourne 'through the Looking-Glass' Lens of Fashion Photography

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Abstract

Each of the world's major fashion capitals has a unique and enduring identity that has in part been established through its photographic representation. Fashion magazines and advertisements have re-presented Paris, London, New York and Milan as cities at the fore-front of style and taste, not least by accessorizing fashion with iconic monuments and streetscapes. This paper questions the rhetorical devices used by photographers to establish fashion capitals as style sites. It will argue that this lexicon is so successful in representing cities as objects of fashion that locations not immediately associated with high-fashion status have been similarly posed so as to participate in the symbolic economy attributed to the renowned global fashion capitals.

In analyzing fashion photographs of Melbourne from the 1950s and 60s this paper will establish that two conflicting images of the fashion city were prevalent in the metropolis' self-imaging at this time. Specifically, this paper contends that Paris and New York shaped the aesthetic and cultural aspirations of the city as well as inspiring the fashion photographers Bruno Benini, Henry Talbot and Helmut Newton. This paper will explore how alternate photographic fashion narratives—Paris as elegant and romantic, and New York as dynamic and modern—helped to cement Melbourne as Australia's fashion capital during this period.

Introduction: Mode and the Metropolis

Cities have long relied on fashion for cultural and economic domination and distinction, yet fashion has also adopted the city's mythologies of modernity, romance, and excitement to glamorize its objects.[1] The concept of a fashion city suggests an international metropolis at the forefront of style, a location where the production and consumption of fashion thrives along with its cultural mediation. In the collective imagination the enduring stylistic influence of Paris has sanctified the French capital as the world's fashion capital and is one of the longest standing examples of the city as a global fashion brand.[2] The geography of fashion culture has similarly positioned London, New York, Milan and Tokyo as key fashion cities and centers for style.

Recent scholarship by fashion historian Christopher Breward and urban geographer David Gilbert investigates how certain cities have come to be identified as key sites of global significance in fashion culture.[3] In drawing on John Friedmann's 'world city hypothesis', Gilbert argues that the key fashion cities have been both materially and symbolically constructed through a complex dynamic of economic factors, production systems and cultural representations. For example, by the late-nineteenth century, New York became established as a fashion city due to its pecuniary dominance in the United States marketplace, 'a public culture of socially choreographed displays of fashion', and a 'highly flexible manufacturing sector'.[4] New York continues to be a prominent commercial and cultural fashion city that is frequently mythologized, as evidenced by the recent *Sex and the City* media franchise.

In establishing the historical development of fashion cities, Gilbert highlights the role of 'a distinctively modern fashion media system'[5] in creating a symbolic economy for fashion. The significant role that photography has played in the representation of fashion cities is specifically noted:

> The imagined cities of fashion press rhetoric become visualised as the
> city is presented as a fashion object by photography. Fashion photo-
> graphy has a close relationship with the representations of cities on

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[1] This paper is part of my continuing inquiry regarding the relationship between fashion and the city most recently explored with regards to photographic iconicity in 'Modes of the Metropolis: The City as Photography's Fashion Icon', *Third Global Conference Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues*, 2011, http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/berryfapaper.pdf but also in relation to street-style fashion photography in 'Flaneurs of Fashion 2.0', Scan Journal of Arts Media Culture, Nov. 2010, http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=152

[2] David Gilbert, "Urban Outfitting: the City and the Spaces of Fashion Culture" in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis,* eds. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 9.

[3] Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (eds), *Fashion's World Cities* (Oxford Berg, 2006).

[4] Gilbert, op. cit., 2000, p.18.

[5] David Gilbert, "From Paris to Shanghai: the Changing Geographies of Fashion's World Cities" in *Fashion's World Cities,* eds. Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p.19.

postcards and tourist guides. In both cases there is value in those symbols that are unambiguous identifiers of a particular city.[6]

Elsewhere I have drawn on Gilbert's argument to contend that fashion photography develops characters around prominent fashion cities, contributing to their status as style sites.[7] In 'Modes of the Metropolis: The City as Photography's Fashion Icon', I establish that in the 1940s and 50s photographers, including Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Willy Mayfield, Georges Dambier and Norman Parkinson moved out of the studio and into the street to accessorize fashion with the familiar monuments and vistas of renowned fashion cities. Specifically, I argue that while fashion itself is constantly changing, the fashion city image is far less mutable where each of the world's major fashion capitals has a unique and enduring identity that has in part been established through photography. In the collective imagination, Paris is romantic and elegantly chic, New York is dynamic and modern, London both dignified and eclectic. These images have become iconic representations of the fashion city and are consistently adopted and appropriated in contemporary magazine editorials and advertising campaigns.

Given the cultural cache attached to the fashion city—which has real economic benefits—it is no surprise that peripheral and non-fashion cities have, at various points in time, laid claim to fashion city status. While Paris, London, New York, Milan and Tokyo have remained dominant locations within global fashion discourse, according to Breward, the orchestra of shifting fashion cities has also included 'Moscow, Vienna, Berlin . . . Barcelona, Antwerp, Delhi, Melbourne… Shanghai, Hong Kong, Mumbai and others'.[8] As Gilbert suggests, the effort to promote particular cities as style sites 'is now a common and often explicit aim of urban policy'.[9]

As a peripheral fashion city, Melbourne has recently attempted to position itself within the global marketplace through promoting local designers, retail strategies and events such as L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival (LMFF).[10] While these approaches are focused on production and consumption, Melbourne has also been careful to harness the symbolic capital of place. For example, the 2012 LMFF cultural program "Fashion Capitals of the World

[6] Gilbert, op.cit., 2000, p.21.

[7] Jess Berry, 'Modes of the Metropolis: The City as Photography's Fashion Icon', *Third Global Conference Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues*, 2011, http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/berryfapaper.pdf

[8] Christopher Breward, 'Fashion Cities', *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: Volume 10 – Global Perspectives,* accessed February 16, 2011, http://bergfashionlibrary.com.

[9] Gilbert, op.cit., 2000, p.20.

[10] While Sydney has often attempted to lay claim to global fashion city status, Melbourne's heritage as the nation's center for clothing manufacture and textile production underpins the city's status as the Australian fashion capital.

Runway and Exhibition" will attempt to promote Melbourne as a global fashion city by leveraging the power of Paris, London, New York and Milan.[11]

This paper recasts my previous argument regarding the iconic identity that photographers established for Paris and New York in the 1940s and 50s to consider in detail how these rhetorical devices were successfully co-opted by photographers to pose Melbourne as Australia's fashion capital during the 1950s and 60s. As such, this paper considers how fashion cities are sanctified in the collective imagination through their visual representation. Further, it will illustrate that exploiting the cultural capital of the major fashion capitals is not a new strategy for non-fashion cities. Through analyzing images by Bruno Benini, Henry Talbot and Helmut Newton I will establish how a peripheral fashion city is able to adopt the symbolic economy of the world's most recognizable fashion capitals to establish itself as a style-site.

Melbourne: The Metropolis in Masquerade

Melbourne's self-imagining as a modern city was contested throughout the twentieth century when architects and urban developers raised questions as to whether a machine aesthetic of glass towers or a sophisticated European vista would dominate Melbourne's skyline. As Ben Schrader argues of the development of the metropolis:

> Two cities were to loom larger than others in subsequent discus-sions on its future: Paris and New York. (Each city was seen as an ideal cultural landscape, where the built environment shaped city life.) At stake . . . was whether the beaux-arts urbanism of Paris or the skyscraper urbanism of New York would shape Melbourne's future.[12]

Schrader's analysis notes that the debate surrounding Melbourne's modernization was not only concerned with the aesthetic distinctions between Parisian and Manhattan architecture, but also the cultural lifestyle associated with these spaces:

> The soaring skyscrapers of New York aroused images of immenseness, conspicuous wealth, brazen corporate power and fast living…New York offered a modern and thrilling prospect of Melbourne's future… [whereas] a 'touch of Paris would make Melbourne the most attractive city in this hemisphere. The streets and pavements…wide enough to allow the open air café'.[13]

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[11] Fashion Capitals of the World Runway and Exhibition Media Release, accessed 11 January, 2012 http://www.designacademy.edu.au/events/media_releases/MEDIA_RELEASE_LMFF_Fashion_Cap itals.pdf

[12] Ben Schrader, "Paris or New York? Contesting Melbourne's Skyline, 1880-1958", *Journal of Urban History* 36 (6) (2010), p.817.

[13] ibid, p.817.

I contend that the aesthetic and cultural distinctions that Schrader identifies as differentiating the architectural environments of Paris and New York are also reflected in the way these cities have been consistently characterized in international fashion photography since the 1940s. Further, while debate concerning Melbourne's modernization centered largely on issues of urban planning, I argue that these divergent views are also reflected in conflicting representations of Melbourne as a fashion city during the 1950s and 60s.

Paris' position as a fashion capital is undoubtedly tied to the systems of production and consumption that have thrived there. However, I argue that the image of Paris fashioned by photographers, including Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Willy Maywald, Walde Huth and Norman Parkinson, has significantly contributed to the city's iconic fashion status. Since the 1940s the recurring narrative of an elegantly clad woman on a quest for self-discovery and romantic liaison has dominated the city's representation in fashion-magazine editorials and advertising, and photographers have modeled the city's architecture and recognizable streetscapes as central protagonists in this fashion fantasy. As Hilary Radner describes, 'the displacement of the fashion model from the studio to the outdoor *mise-en-scène* signified the construction of an "active" as opposed to "passive" feminine'.[14]

In particular, the Eiffel Tower has come to signify Parisian chic and act as a geographical signature of authorship. Fashion scholar Agnes Rocamora's treatise on how Paris is conceived through the fashion media highlights the inextricable link between the Eiffel Tower and Paris' representation as a fashion capital. She argues,

> That the tower was erected at around the same time as Paris haute couture emerged also makes the monument significant in the construction of Paris fashion as part of the nation's heritage, an idea that French fashion discourse often invokes. The tower's iconic presence in fashion images suggests the Paris fashion- Yves Saint Laurent, Dior, Givenchy, for instance—is a seminal modern gesture, as central to the nation's *patrimoine* (heritage) as Eiffel's monument.[15]

The mythology of Paris' photographic representation casts the city as romantic, elegant, sophisticated and timeless. While the tower is dominant in the portrayal of Paris fashion in magazines and advertising images, picturesque backdrops of landmarks including the Seine, Arc de Triomphe and street-side cafes have all accessorized fashion and promoted Paris' mythic qualities in a similar way to tourist images, so creating an aesthetic and symbolic value for the city.

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[14] Hilary Radner, "On the Move: Fashion Photography and the Single Girl in the 1960s", *Fashion Cultures Theories, Explorations and Analysis,* (eds.) S. Bruzzi & P Church Gibson (London: Routledge), p. 130.
[15] Agnes Rocamora, *Fashioning the City; Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 178.

As a fashion city, New York has an equally distinctive image. While Paris is elegantly chic and romantic, New York is portrayed as dynamic and exciting, a place for the fashionable femme to stand out against a towering backdrop of modernist architecture. Photographers as diverse as Norman Parkinson, Erwin Blumenfeld and David Bailey have employed the strong vertical lines of skyscrapers and streetscapes to portray New York as a city of adrenaline and adventure. Through their repetition over time, the characterizations of Paris and New York as exclusive fashion cities have been embedded in the collective imagination, signified by iconic markers of the urban landscape. It seems remarkable, then, that a city without these distinctive landmarks can successfully appropriate the established fashion city narratives of Paris and New York in order to lay claim to fashion city status. Yet, I would argue that this is exactly how 1950s fashion photography of Melbourne operates.

Fashion historian Margaret Maynard adopts the term 'ecology' to describe how the meaning of fashion photographs is 'produced by viewer expectations from their resemblance to "*other images*"'.[16] This assessment appears particularly relevant to Benini's styling of Melbourne during the 1950s and ' 60s, which draws on streetscape elements, architecture, and the model's poses to mimic the mythological Paris and New York previously depicted by Maywald, Dahl-Wolfe and Parkinson. Benini, along with a number of other European émigré photographers, including Henry Talbot and Helmut Newton, bought international experience and aesthetics to Australian fashion photography and are celebrated as pioneers in this context. While the practice of street photography had been established in international fashion media since the 1940s, the influential working habits of Newton, Talbot and Benini pushed Australian fashion photography beyond studio-based practices concerned with the details of garments, and instead created an 'atmosphere' for fashion staged on Melbourne's 'streets, nightclubs and parks'.[17]

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[16] Margaret Maynard, "The Fashion Photograph: an Ecology" in *Fashion as Photograph*, ed. Eugenie Shinkle (London: I.B Tauris, 2010) p.56.

[17] Anne-Marie Van de Ven, "Creative Partners: Bruno & Hazel Benini" in *Benini Creating the Look: Benini and Fashion Photography,* eds. Anne Marie Van de Ven and Hazel Benini (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2010) p.9.

1. Bruno Benini, Helen Homewood, client Hall Ludlow, Melbourne University, 1957. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

2. Willy Maywald, Patricia Smith, Jacques Fath Robe, 1950.

3. Bruno Benini, Helen Homewood, Parliament House, Victoria Doorway, 1961.
Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

4. Bruno Benini, Helen Homewood, client Australian Wool Board, Parliament House, 1959. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

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5. Bruno Benini, Helen Homewood, Phillipa Gowns dress, Eastern Market, Melbourne, 1956. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

I contend that Benini's images show an understanding of established narratives and icons associated with the Paris and New York of previous international fashion photography to portray Melbourne as a glamorous style-site. For example, Benini's image of a model wearing a Hall Ludlow gown framed by a colonnade of arches at Melbourne University (1957) (Figure 1) is reminiscent of Willy Maywald's photograph of Patricia Smith in Jacque Fath walking among a backdrop of vaulted pillars in Paris (1950) (Figure 2). In both instances, the narrative suggests a solitary woman in sentimental contemplation, framed by old-world European architecture to convey a romantic ambience. Similarly, photographs of Helen Homewood in front of Parliament House, Victoria Doorway wrapped in fur (1961) (Figure 3), on the steps of Parliament House in a tailored woolen coat (1959) (Figure 4), and wearing a Phillipa Gowns silk dress in the doorway of Melbourne's Eastern Market (1956) (Figure 5), exploit the continental facades of the city, attempting to capture the aura of Paris. Benini's illusion is achieved through soft focus and diffused lighting that enhances the luxurious fabrics of couture when coupled with the model's aristocratic posing. Thus, Benini styles both the model and the city in such a way that it is no longer an Antipodean hamlet, but a European metropolis.

This masquerade is perhaps most recognizable in Benini's photograph of an elegantly attired woman, walking her poodles in Melbourne's Fitzroy gardens (1961) (Figure 6). The image immediately recalls a similar scene depicted by

Louise Dahl-Wolfe in front of the Eiffel Tower (1940)[18] or even Maywald's famed representation of Dior's 'Le Bar' suit and coolie hat modeled amid an arbor on the banks of the Seine (1955).[19] Although iconic monuments and vistas are missing in Benini's version, it matters little—the visual cues of tree-lined boulevard and the Parisian canine mascot cast Melbourne in a characteristic role that had been established for Paris on the pages of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

6. Bruno Benini, Margo McKendry, fashion by Sharene creations, Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne, 1961. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

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[18] Image Available: Loise Dahl-Wolfe, Model in Dior Suit Walking Poodles in Paris, Centre for Creative Photography, Arizona, http://ccp.uair.arizona.edu/item/16109
[19] Image Available: Willy Maywald, Bar Suit, 1955, http://www.dior.com/magazine/en_gb/The-Models-of-Christian-Dior#

Historian Graeme Davidson identifies a short documentary, *The Place for Village* (1948) as representative of the pictorial conventions that have been employed to depict Melbourne as a modern city. Specifically, he notes the commentary: 'There is a cosmopolitan and continental touch about much of Melbourne' with the city's central fashion district likened to a 'Parisian boulevard'.[20] Collins Street, to which Davidson is referring, was the location of Benini's photographic studio and, I would argue, greatly influenced his representations of the city. Collins Street's 'Paris End', as it continues to be evocatively described, was aligned with glamour and fashion in the 1950s. Its European aspect, café culture and boutique retail environment gave the street a cultivated ambience of Parisian chic in the Australian imagination.

Curator Susan van Wyk's exhibition catalogue *The Paris End: Photography, Fashion and Glamour* paints an evocative picture of Collins Street at this time,

> The roadway was wide enough to suggest a boulevard. The footpaths, paved in generous grey flagstones, were dappled with the shade of plane trees…there were shops: boutiques selling imported fashions, beauty parlours, bookshops… And outside the famous Oriental hotel were rows of tables, chairs and jaunty umbrellas, lending to the street an air that was regarded by Melburnians to be particularly Parisian.[21]

The couture culture of 'The Paris End' was reliant on the relationship between fashion houses and photographers. According to Danielle Whitfield, 'a number of influential salons, including Le Louvre, La Petit and Hall Ludlow' were situated in this fashion precinct and 'reigned over fashionable society by emulating and importing the atmosphere and practices associated with *la mode francaise*'[22] where 'the appreciation of high fashion in Australia was linked to a belief in the importance of Paris as *the* center of style'.[23]

Benini was not the only photographer of the period commissioned to imitate Parisian chic in the name of these exclusive boutiques. Helmut Newton and Henry Talbot's image, *Model in Lane with Painting* (1960) is further evidence that the European aesthetic (in this case cobbled pavements and bricked terrace buildings) was a deliberate rhetorical device adopted by photographers to convey that the city of Melbourne was as stylish and sophisticated as Paris. While I would suggest that 'The Paris End' of Collins street provided Benini, Newton and Talbot with the inspiration to cast Melbourne as Australia's fashion

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[20] Graeme Davidson, "Images of Modern Melbourne, 1945-1970", *Journal of Australian Studies* 22 (57) (1998) p. 148.

[21] Susan Van Wyk, "The Paris End: Photography, Fashion and Glamour" in *The Paris End: Photography, Fashion and Glamour,* ed. Susan van Wyk (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006) p.11.

[22] Danielle Whitfield, 'La Mode Francaise Australian Style" in *The Paris End: Photography, Fashion and Glamour,* ed. Susan van Wyk (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006) p.105.

[23] Ibid, p.105.

capital by photographically transforming it into a kind of Champs-Élysées-through-the-looking-glass, it would appear that the business end of Collins Street would be the catalyst for Melbourne's representation as another fashion city, namely, New York.

Like Schrader, Davidson notes New York to be the other aesthetic inspiration for Melbourne's architecture, identifying the influence of Robyn Boyd as the vanguard of the modern movement in the 1950s. Davidson argues that 'Boyd had imagined Melbourne transformed into a Corbusian *ville contemporaine*',[24] a city inspired by the modernist machine aesthetic. In particular he applauded 'the sheer unadorned concrete and glass surfaces' [25] of Melbourne's functionalist architecture, such as the towering ICI House that the photographer Wolfgang Sievers was to document as symbol of Melbourne's modernity (Figure 7). Sievers is considered highly influential in Australian photographic history for his approach to industrial and architectural subjects that complied with the geometric compositions of American modernists, such as Charles Sheeler.[26] It is highly conceivable that Benini, Newton and Talbot also learned the lessons of the New Photography and adapted it for the purposes of fashion. While these Australian fashion examples of the genre do not necessarily comply with the high-contrast formalism that was characteristic of the New Photography, the choice of city as subject was a shared concern with photography of the new age. The Australian fashion photographer Henry Cazneaux describes the vitality of the modernist city as a subject,

> What contrast was there—the drop to the ground floor in the modern lift and being hustled by a modern crowd into the modern bustle of our modern city streets, where…concrete and steel, colour and human beings seem all messed up and doing jazz!... What we cannot get in romantic old-world subjects in the modern youthful city…must be turned to account in exploiting its modern possibilities.

As with his photographs that frame Melbourne as Paris, Benini was able to convincingly cast the city as New York by adopting the visual rhetoric of previous fashion photography. Like Blumenfeld and Parkinson, Benini recognized that the formidable vertical lines of modern skyscrapers, with their cool facades of steel and glass provided a dynamic and dramatic contrast to the model's action and the fashions that adorned her. Benini's image of Bambi Shmith in Hall Ludlow tweed suit (1957) (Figure 8) compares the slimline of the model's refined posture with a modernist architectural setting to suggest the *au courant* nature of the garments on display. The image echoes the mood of Parkinson's aristocratic models walking along Fifth Avenue, dwarfed by the buildings behind them. While this image suggests something of the influence of

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[24] Davidson, op. cit., p. 153.

[25] Ibid. p.154.

[26] Gael Newton, *Shades of Light: Photography and Australia 1839-1988*, (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1988), p.121.

modernist architecture and its associations of excitement and youth on Benini's aesthetic, this would be developed further in Benini's latter work.

Benini's advertisement for the fashion label Sportsgirl featuring Jan Stewart (1966) (Figure. 9) is perhaps a more striking example of Melbourne masqueradeing as New York. The model hangs aloft a crane hook before a backdrop of high-rises, so making reference to Lewis Hine's photographs documenting the construction of the Empire State Building in the 1930s. Hine's *Icarus Atop the Empire State Building* (1931)[27] and *Man on Hoisting Ball* (1931)[28] depict the New York skyline as a machine-age wonder of steel and glass built by courageous men. The framing of architecture and industrial materials to highlight the verticality of the city and the dynamism of the worker's body is co-opted by Benini to present Melbourne as a city of adrenalin and action, and the Sportsgirl model as a vivacious modern woman.

7. Wolfgang Sievers, ICI House, East Melbourne, 1958. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

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[27] Image Available: Lewis Hine Icarus Atop Empire State Building, http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc2/m197701650069_ful.html
[28] Image Available: Lewis Hine Man on a Hoisting Ball, http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc2/m197701600032_ful.html

8. Bruno Benini, Bambi Shmith, Hall Ludlow tweed suit, Melbourne University, 1957. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

Melbourne's masquerade as Manhattan is further compounded by Newton's photographs of the period. This is particularly evident in his image featuring Janice Wakely with her arm outstretched, holding her handbag as if hailing a taxi (1959).[29] Again, high-rise buildings and cars become modernist symbols that allude to established New York narratives of adventure and suggest a precursor to David Bailey's memorable 1960s gritty streetscapes featuring Jean Shrimpton. Like the models of New York fashion images, it is worth noting that Benini's image of Jan Stewart and Newton's photograph of Janice Wakely highlight the model's action. In doing so they replicate the modern woman of New York depicted in 1940s fashion photography who, Alistair O'Neill argues,

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[29] Image available: Fashion Photograph by Helmut Newton, 1959
http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=157914&search=helmut+newton+henry+talbot&images=&c=&s=

participated in city life and enjoyed the freedom that moving through the urban environment entailed.[30]

From the examples identified here, it is evident that Melbourne was convincingly portrayed as both Paris and New York. Further, this representation was concurrent with how these cities had been characterized in international fashion photography of the 1940s and 50s as well as in the public debate surrounding the urban development of Melbourne in the image of these two capitals. While it would seem that Benini, Newton and Talbot were particularly inspired by their surroundings—with Collins Street's 'Paris End' and business precinct offering suitable backdrops for these divergent aesthetics, other factors may well have contributed to Melbourne's masquerade.

9. Bruno Benini, Jan Stewart, Leroy dress, client Sportsgirl, 1966. Photography by Bruno Benini. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney ©Estate of Bruno Benini.

During the 1950s, the Australian fashion industry's culture of imitation cultivated a climate in which photographers felt compelled to copy their international counterparts. That these images were set in the key fashion capitals and were thus backdrops for fashion photography is a simple enough answer as to why Melbourne might be represented in this way. As Maynard

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[30] Alistair O'Neil "A Young Woman, NYC, Photography & Culture, 1 (1) (2008), p. 7-26.

argues, magazines such as *Vogue Australia* 'humiliated photographers by showing them clips from quality publications like British *Vogue* and *Harper's* asking simply for versions'. [31] Maynard offers this as an explanation for Australian fashion photography's lack of distinctive 'look' during the 1950s and 60s, though this might also be the consequence of an industry that sought endorsement for its dress from elsewhere.

Arguably, the fashions that Benini, Newton and Talbot depicted lent themselves to being accessorized by the city in this way. In the post-war period, Christian Dior's New Look would prove to be particularly popular in Australia. Melbourne boutiques and department stores purchased toiles for copying and original designers, such as Hall Ludlow, sought inspiration from French couturiers such as Jacques Fath and Balenciaga.[32] Given that Parisian haute couture provided the stylistic influence for many of the garments depicted by Benini and others, it is unsurprising that these photographers were inspired by their Paris-based counterparts, such as Maywald and Huth. As Louise Mitchell argues of Athol Smith's studio based images of the New Look (commissioned by Melbourne's Myers department store), 'the contrived glamour, sophistication and opulence of Paris couture is immediately apparent'.[33] I would suggest that Benini, Talbot and Newton further intensified this effect by conjuring simulated Parisian street-scenes in their images.

According to van Wyk, Melbourne 'traded on its cultivated air of Parisian chic';[34] yet, New York fashion also played a leading role in Melbourne's fashion industry, with Flinders Lane manufacturers concocting evocative names, such as Charlotte of Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue Gowns to promote their garments.[35] Benini's Sportsgirl advertisement featuring Jan Stewart in a short Leroy dress and Newton's photograph of Janice Wakely wearing a relaxed skirt and sweater take the vibrant New York streetscape as their influence instead of Paris; this seems a purposeful styling to suit the garment's identity as 'youthful' rather than 'elite'. As Mitchell suggests, these American fashions were practical and comfortable and thus better suited to the Australian culture and lifestyle.[36] Thus, it is clear that both fashion capitals of Paris and New York played a significant role in the Australian imagination as locations at the forefront of style. That the Australian fashion industry of the 1950s often emulated the fashions designed and manufactured in these cities and also traded on the symbolic economy of their city streetscapes through fashion photography of the era appears a logical development.

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[31] Margaret Maynard, "What is 'Australian' Fashion Photography? A Dilemma", *Fashion Theory* 13 (4) (2009), p.452.

[32] Louise Mitchell, "The Fabulous Fifties Glamour and Style" in *Australian Fashion Unstitched,* eds. Bonnie English and Liliana Pomazan (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.26.

[33] ibid, p.21.

[34] van Wyk, op.cit., 2006, p.11.

[35] Mitchell, op.cit., 2010, p.24.

[36] ibid, p.22.

Conclusion

The perception that Australian style lacks innovation and distinction has plagued the industry, and in many ways Melbourne's photographic imitation of Paris and New York in the 1950s and 60s could be seen to reinforce this idea. However, I concur with Maynard's view that there is little to be gained from trying to understand Australian fashion photography as having a distinctive style or content in the same mode as Paris, New York or London.[37] It is important to remember that fashion photography is simultaneously placed in artistic and commercial realms. Benini, Talbot and Newton were clearly responding to the demands of the market. This is evidenced by the desire of Melbourne boutiques and fashion labels to portray their garments within the aesthetic context of the major fashion cities as well as the requests of local fashion magazines for photographers to supply versions of their international counterparts. Yet, it is also worth observing that these photographers employed artistic techniques and 'pushed creative boundaries' in ways that had seldom been conceived in the Australian fashion context at this time.[38]

This paper has argued that creating an identity for the peripheral fashion city need not be reliant on unique monuments or recognizable streetscapes. Rather, Benini, Talbot and Newton were able to cast Melbourne in well-established and characteristic roles by alluding to previous iconic images of global cities that had been captured by Maywald, Dahl-Wolfe and Parkinson in the 1940s and ' 50s. Through the model's pose, the careful framing of backdrop and the use of ambient lighting, these photographers were able to style the city as if another, and so Melbourne became a metropolis in masquerade. Further, this paper has suggested that in casting Melbourne as either Paris or New York, fashion photographers were echoing debates regarding the aesthetic and cultural development of Melbourne through its architecture. Both represented the major global capitals as having divergent identities, Paris being romantic and elegant, New York being modern and dynamic.

While Melbourne-as-Paris or Melbourne-as-New York representations are likely to have had as much to do with their suitability as backgrounds in relation to the clothing that was depicted, in casting Melbourne as a city in the same league as the global fashion cities cemented its status as Australia's fashion capital. Arguably, this had real economic consequences for the Melbourne retail sector in the 1950s, for, according to van Wyk, the 'Paris End' of Collins Street dominated sales of high-end clothing.[39] It is interesting to note that similar marketing devices continue to be used, where a Melbourne-based shopping mall recently adopted the slogan 'New York, Paris, London, Rome, Chadstone' in its trade on the cultural capital of the fashion capitals. [40]

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[37] Maynard op. cit., 2009, p.457.

[38] Van de Ven, op.cit., p.13.

[39] van Wyk, op.cit., 2006, p.11.

[40] Gibert, op. cit., 2006, p.4.

According to Schrader, 'for Melbourne's twentieth-century city builders Paris and New York represented cities of modernity, ideal cultural landscapes that might be imitated to a greater or lesser degree in their own town'.[41] It would seem that for Melbourne's fashion photographers of the same period this sentiment was equally true, for them Melbourne could be a style equal to the major fashion capitals, in particular the center for style. As the journalist John Heatherington wrote in 1951,

> To Parisians in particular; and to all the rest of mankind in general, I have no doubt the beauty of the Champs-Élysées dwarfs, if it does not surpass in detail, the beauty of Collins Street's 'top end'; but to men and women who claim Melbourne as their city, this is beauty unexcelled.[42]

While the rhetoric of Melbourne as Paris or New York was aspirational, the photographers who attempted to cast the city in these roles helped Australians see their fashion design in a world context and so were significant to the development of the country's fashion industry.

About the author

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[41] Schrader, op. cit., 2010, p.827.
[42] Heatherington cited in van Wyk, op.cit., 2006, p.13.