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## The Visuality of Scenes

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# HOMOGENIZING THE CITY/RE-CLASSIFYING THE STREET: TOMMY TON'S STREET STYLE FASHION MONTH PHOTOGRAPHS

REBECCA HALLIDAY

## Résumé

*Résumé Depuis le milieu des années 2000, les blogues de mode de rue ont documenté la mode individualisée dans les grandes métropoles. Leur popularité ne cessant d'augmenter, les photographes de rue et blogueurs se sont tournés vers l'évolution du style vestimentaire, et ce, en dehors des défilés des capitales mondiales de la mode. Le Mois de la mode est un événement bisannuel consacré au prêt-à-porter féminin avec des présentations à New York, Londres, Milan et Paris. S'appuyant sur les travaux de Bourdieu, les spécialistes de la mode soutiennent que chaque Semaine de la mode est une matérialisation du domaine de la mode (Entwistle and Rocamora). Ce rassemblement exclusif peut également être décrit en tant que scène. Cet article soutient que la diffusion des représentations médiatiques des spectateurs des défilés de mode, sous la bannière mode de rue, s'approprie un terme contesté et réinsère les idéaux sociaux et matériels élitistes de la mode. J'examine la carrière du photographe canadien Tommy Ton et je réalise une analyse de contenu avec les photographies prises durant les saisons Printemps/Été 2014 et Automne/Hiver 2014 et publiées sur Style.com de Condé Nast Media. J'examine le terme mode de rue selon sa définition de mode « observée dans la rue » (Woodward) et selon les références historiques aux sous-cultures. Je contextualise ensuite la photographie de mode de rue en ligne selon les représentations des citoyens dans les lieux urbains, mais aussi en fonction des contestations entre le « vrai » et l'« authentique » dans la mode éditoriale. En combinant la notion de modalité sociale de Gillian Rose avec l'analyse du discours de la mode dans les médias d'Agnès Rocamora, je décris la façon dont l'esthétique de Ton réunit l'architecture sans lieu spécifique avec des symboles de corps parfaits et de luxe afin de communiquer la distinction sociale. Les photographies de Ton ne mettent pas en évidence les caractéristiques des villes, mais représentent plutôt la rue elle-même en tant que symbole identitaire : une toile de fond éditoriale qui permet d'accentuer les modes.*

## Abstract

*Since the mid-2000s, street style blogs have documented individualized fashion in international cities. With their rise to prominence, photo-bloggers turned their lenses towards mobilities outside fashion show venues in the dominant industry capitals. Fashion Month is the bi-annual circuit of women's ready-to-wear presentations in New York, London, Milan, and Paris. Each Fashion Week is an enactment of what fashion scholars, pace Pierre Bourdieu, term the field of fashion (Entwistle and Rocamora). This exclusive assemblage can also be described as a scene. This article contends that the circulation of media representations of fashion show attendees, under the banner street style, appropriates a contested term and reinscribes fashion's elitist social and material ideals. I examine the career of Canadian photographer Tommy Ton and perform content analysis on photographs captured from the Spring/Summer 2014 and Fall/Winter 2014 seasons posted to Condé Nast Media's Style.com. I trace the term street style to its definition as fashion "observed on the street" (Woodward) and to historical references to subcultures. I then situate online street style photography within a history of depictions of citizens in urban locations and contestations between the "real" and the "authentic" in editorial fashion. Combining Gillian Rose's notion of social modality with Agnès Rocamora's fashion media discourse analysis, I describe how Ton's aesthetic combines non-place-specific architecture with ideal bodies and luxury signifiers to communicate social distinction. Ton's photographs do not foreground features of cities but rather depict the literalized street itself as a status signifier—an editorial backdrop against which to emphasize fashions.*



The Italian fashion editor Anna Dello Russo perches on a red motorbike. She sports a sweater dress and a quilted leather purse in a near-identical shade, emblazoned with what appears to be McDonald's "golden arches" logo but is actually a doubled signifier for the Italian brand Moschino (Figure 1). Dello Russo's look debuted during Fall/Winter 2014 Milan Fashion Week, where Moschino's collection received criticism for its mix of high and mass culture icons. However, the sole clue that this photograph has been taken in Milan is the motorbike, a common mode of transportation in Italian cities; the name Deloitte, the international financial firm, is visible on mirrored windows that reflect brick facades. This photograph is one of 386 images that Canadian-born Tommy Ton captured of attendees at the Fall/Winter 2014 presentations and posted to Condé Nast Media's *Style.com* under the banner *street style*. The "Big Four" Fashion Week circuit refers to the biannual showcase of women's ready-to-wear collections in New York, London, Milan, and Paris—the complete series is termed Fashion Month. From 2009 to 2015, Ton captured thousands of photographs of the outdoor scenes of Fashion Month, in addition to Paris Couture Week and smaller-scale fashion weeks in other international cities.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1

In a phenomenon known as the *street style parade*, in-house and freelance photographers compete to document attendees' and models' ensembles as they enter and leave Fashion Month venues. Street style blogs, the medium from which this spectacle arose, claim to capture the fashions of "real" people on the streets of international cities. Following the medium's rise to popularity in the mid-2000s, fashion publications offered photographers lucrative contracts to contribute street style images from Fashion Month to enhance collection reportage. This article examines Tommy Ton's photographs for *Style.com* to interrogate the media representations of fashion show attendees and the class politics communicated in the metropolitan streets on which Fashion Month materializes. I contend that these photographs, and their inclusion in press content, appropriate the contested term *street style* as a site on which to inscribe fashion's elitist social, material, and embodied ideals. I further scrutinize depictions of Fashion Month cities to situate the clothes within fashion's internationalization under neoliberalism. Fashion's consecration of the Fashion Month insider photograph as palimpsest has disconnected the medium of *street style* photography from its (tenuous) ideals of candidness. The photographs' circulation via professional websites and media outlets has rendered the sartorial choices of fashion's arbiters arguably more influential than collection photographs and has blurred distinctions between the fashions worn in the indoor and outdoor environments. Jennifer Craik describes a form of "global high fashion worn by

fashion journalists, stylists, and celebrities who travel worldwide to attend fashion weeks and special fashion events" (354). It is this subset that cultural parlance terms *street style*. Ton's aesthetic utilizes streetscapes to promote this internationalized mode of dress that communicates wearers' status not just in fashion circles but as members of a larger cultured class. Cities function as status enhancers within a discursive system that privileges beautiful clothes and bodies. Elements that do reveal location, such as historical landmarks, function within existent cultural discourses to promote cities as idealized *fashion capitals* (or *fashion cities*) and tourist destinations (see Gilbert).<sup>2</sup>

This article is part of broader research situated in fashion, media, and cultural studies: this research examines the mediation of the fashion show as a microcosm of online media's effects on consumer culture and assesses the social discursive production of fashion shows and their attendees via diverse textual and visual platforms. It is crucial to contextualize Ton's photographs as embedded within the academic and social histories of the discursive terms and practices that they appropriate. Furthermore, one must account for the production of cultural and aesthetic ideals specific to the cities in which these representations are located, including intersections with other aspirational branding and consumer practices, such as those of tourism.

I first outline the methods used to analyze Ton's photographs and defines a theoretical conceptualization of Fashion Month as scene. I then document Ton's rise to prominence within fashion's industrial structures. Further, I describe how the mobilities of Fashion Month within dominant cities enact fashion's condition of internationalization. Next, I offer a scholastic genealogy of *street style* to illustrate the class and racial tensions in which Ton's discursive representations circulate. Further, I summarize research in street style photography as both photographic genre and material practice, contextualized within historical representations of modern cities and fashionable subjects. Ton's photographs demonstrate—and are situated within—a persistent dialectic between "real" or "authentic" depictions and fashion's editorial or commercial dictates: this dialectic reflects international cities' contestations in the cultural positioning of urban environments and class-based and/or racialized constructs of the "street."



## Methods

I performed manual content analysis on a non-random sample of all of the photographs that Ton posted to *Style.com* during the Spring/Summer 2014 (n=339) and Fall/Winter 2014 (n=386) ready-to-wear women's collections, for a total of 725 photographs (n=725). The breakdown of cities is as follows: Fall/Winter 2014—Paris (44.3%), New York City (27.7%), Milan (17.9%), London (10.4%); Spring/Summer 2014—Paris (47.8%), New York City (24.2%), Milan (16.5%), London (12.1%). To obtain an accurate count of cities depicted, I cross-referenced the photographs with the archives on Ton's personal website, which names the locations.<sup>3</sup> Paris photographs comprise almost half of the sample, suggesting that Ton either attended more fashion shows or preferred to take more photographs there; this statistic also attests to Paris's dominance as a fashion capital (Rocamora).

Gillian Rose's Foucauldian approach to visual discourse analysis intersects Ton's photographs with related media discourses and aesthetic and embodied trends predicated on an elevated class echelon. Rose's notion of *social modality* considers the "economic processes" and "social practices" that inform the production of visual materials (24-31). Central to reception is the element of *compositionality*, the presentation and relation of items (22). Agnès Rocamora's formulation of *fashion discourse*, or *fashion media discourse*, combines Bourdieu's symbolic value production and Foucault's relation of discourses to institutional structures in order to read representations of Paris and other fashion capitals and of the persons that inhabit these cities.

## The Fashion Month Scene

This article applies a Bourdieusian lens to the material and social structures of Fashion Month and to the consumer distinctions communicated in fashion show attendees' sartorial choices. Joanne Entwistle and Agnès Rocamora, *pace* Bourdieu, describe Fashion Week as a literal manifestation of the *field of fashion* in which *cultural intermediaries* compete for cultural, social, and economic capital (736). This formulation parallels Will Straw's characterization of *scenes*:

*[A]s collectivities marked by some form of proximity; as spaces of assembly engaged in pulling together the varieties of cultural phenomena; as workplaces engaged . . . in the transformation of materials; as ethical worlds shaped by the working out or maintenance of behavioural protocols; as spaces of traversal and preservation through which cultural energies and practices pass at particular speeds, and as spaces of mediation . . . (477)*

Fashion Weeks coalesce the industry's social relations and material practices: audience risers create a Foucauldian "regime of looking"—a reverse Panopticon—in which members that possess the most influence are seated in the front row, visible to others (Entwistle and Rocamora 744). Insiders' display of personal *fashion capital* constitutes a performance of *habitus*, sets of *tastes* and *dispositions* that Bourdieu identified as the product of class position (Entwistle and Rocamora 740). What can productively be called the *fashion scene*, or the *Fashion Month scene*, is rendered visible on an international scale and in an immediate timeframe via online photograph circulation. Bourdieu's hierarchical theorization of consumer culture has its critics: Gilles Lipovetsky declared that the introduction of multiple markets facilitates individual choice, while Mike Featherstone posited that

consumption in postmodern culture should be evaluated based on tastes. Subculture research, outlined below, further indicates alternative directions of fashion adoption. However the press's increased focus on fashion show attendees indicates fashion's reassertion of class-based hierarchies in the Internet era. Cultural intermediaries must *appear* to other field members, through their dress and embodiment, to possess appropriate economic capital, design knowledge, and professional connections (Entwistle and Rocamora 746). Consumers who access Fashion Month photographs perceive attendees as representative of an elite class, and their ability to travel to international fashion capitals as evidence of financial flexibility and industrial clout.

### The Rise of Online Street Style Photography

Online street style photography became a recognized practice through the work of photographers such as Ton, Garance Doré (*Garance Doré*), Phil Oh (*Street Peeper*), Yvan Rodic (*Facehunter*), and Scott Schuman (*The Sartorialist*, who photographed for *Style.com* from 2006 to 2009). These photographers documented international street fashion, purporting to capture cities' sartorial experimentation. Photographer and ethnographer Brent Luvaas contends that street style blogs' "cultural value" resides in their illustration of "specific cities at specific moments in time ... well beyond the traditional boundaries of the global fashion industry" (4). Print and online street fashion photographers have earned their reputations touring cities with a casual, all-seeing approach that scholars liken to the *flâneur* of the Parisian arcades. Fashion and visual culture scholars have written on Schuman and Rodic's portraiture as demonstrative of the form. Popular claims of street style blogs' democratic nature are predicated on online media's geographical reach and interactive capacities (including

comment forums); depictions of clothes from different price echelons; and the fact that bloggers earned professional notice through amateur practices. However, scholars problematize such utopian ideals, noting the promotion of a homogenous aesthetic that adheres to fashion's limited embodied standards. Further, fashion's stakeholders exerted an influence in the medium from its earliest incarnations via brand collaborations, advertisements, and invitations to practitioners to attend fashion shows.<sup>4</sup>

Ton's position as one of the earliest online street style photographers facilitated his rapid rise to influence in the field of fashion and the formation of an international forum for his work. Ton created his blog *Jak & Jil* in 2005 while working as a buyer at the luxury department store Holt Renfrew in Toronto (Amed). Canadian retailer Lynda Latner, impressed with Ton's online work, paid for Ton to travel to Paris Fashion Week: there, Ton honed a "candid" and frenetic photographic style that differed from his peers' portraiture (though he does shoot portraits) (qtd. in Amed). Still in his 20s, Ton was not as established in fashion as predecessors such as Schuman, who had worked in menswear (de Perthuis 4; Rosser 158). Nonetheless, his position at Holt Renfrew reinforces the fact that several street style visionaries already worked in fashion prior to starting their recreational online pursuits. In 2009, Ton was one of four bloggers invited to sit front-row at Dolce & Gabbana's Spring/Summer 2010 presentation, a moment that scholars pinpoint as fashion's consecration of the medium. That same year, Condé Nast hired Ton as its "resident" photographer of Fashion Month street style (replacing Schuman). During Ton's tenure, the *street style parade* became a documented phenomenon. Nicole Phelps lists Ton's recruitment as a catalytic event before street style exploded in the form of bloggers' increased Fashion Month presence and the pervasive influence of brands and media sites on the practice.

The seasons covered in the sample represent street style photographers' dominance in the streets of Fashion Month, later to be outnumbered by press and commercial photographers (Luvaas 284).

Ton's photographs for *Style.com* demand analysis, as those few scholars that have addressed his work situate him within street style photography but do not examine his oeuvre in detail. In 2011, *The Business of Fashion* deemed Ton "the world's most influential *street style fashion photographer* today" (Amed, my emphasis). Luvaas cites Ton as a creator of street style stars (270). Other photographers observe whom he shoots, and his chosen intermediaries gain public recognition—Dello Russo, who appears 22 times in this sample (at least with her face discernible), is the foremost example (Titton, "Styling the Street" 132-33).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Ton's aesthetic has become representative of street style photographs and is often used as a visual referent for the term itself. *Style.com* is not the sole outlet to publish Fashion Month photographs under a *street style* banner: however, it is (or was) an essential resource that contains news stories, product recommendations, and a comprehensive database of collection reviews and photographs.<sup>6</sup> Announcing his departure, Ton praised the site as "the most influential and relevant fashion publication" (qtd. in Wolf). For such a reputable site to feature *street style*—documented during Fashion Month—represents fashion's appropriation of online street style photography. The move did not just conflate street style with the outfits worn at Fashion Month but *naturalized* its direct, delimited association with intermediaries' ensembles. In the site's context, the

street style photograph becomes *solely* a representation of Fashion Month and reads in relation to collection photographs and advertisements.<sup>7</sup> *Style.com* does not invite reader comments but instead compiles a clickable album, a more commercial mode of presentation (see de Perthuis). Ton's images thus communicate aesthetics from within Fashion Month as a scene to an online spectatorship. Karen de Perthuis notes that documentation of "how fashion works in [a specific] street style blog offers a model that can be translated or applied ... to other types of blogs across the field" (4). Analysis of Ton's Fashion Month street style photographs illuminates the medium's enfoldment into established discourses.

### Fashion on the "Street"

The presence of Fashion Weeks inform cities' cultural positions, while their representations are situated within historical referents (Craik; Gilbert). Fashion capitals have become international due to increased corporatization of fashion houses and sponsorship of Fashion Week events—a phenomenon that Frédéric Godart terms *imperialization* (14, 129-42). Fashion Weeks impress a set of classist signifiers onto urban environments, through the arrival of editors, retailers, celebrities, and photographers and their enactments—what de Certeau terms *spatial practices* (96). Presentations occur in tourist-centered cosmopolitan areas rather than in residential (or disenfranchised) communities. Alan Blum examines scenes as products of cities' "urban theatricality" and notes that

"fashion scenes" are positioned as exclusive (365-67). Rocamora and Alistair O'Neill contrast "the public space of ordinary people" with "the exclusive space of the fashion show and its extraordinary audience of celebrities and other fashion insiders" (189). Fashion Month has assumed such spatial proportions, distinct ensembles, and theatrical interactions that columnists and scholars compare it to a circus or a red carpet affair (Menkes; Shea; Titton, "Styling the Street"). On-site observation that I conducted of New York Fashion Week in February 2016 confirmed a sartorial distinction between elite attendees and outsiders, the "real" inhabitants whose quotidian, work-related mobilities underwrite the streets (de Certeau 93). People familiar with Fashion Month photograph conventions can determine which individuals will attract photographers based on their outfits and attractiveness (see Luvaas 266). Nonetheless, comments from locals and tourists indicated that even outsiders could conclude that attendees' dress transcended the mainstream. Craik stresses that event producers fabricate a "cosmopolitan atmosphere" via "international" associations (366): this construction follows tourism advertisements that turn cities into simulacral destinations (362). Notions of the international street as simultaneously accessible and elitist exist alongside alternative imaginings of the *global street* as a site of political resistance (Sassen). Fashion Month's depictions of the urban street complement and clash with its often European associations to editorial effect: manipulating subversive formulations just as, *pace* de Certeau, the fashion scene performatively appropriates cities' physical spaces (98).



### Street Style in Discourse

Scholars trace the term *street style* to its references to popular trends and subcultural movements, situating its traditional associations in urban communities. Sophie Woodward defines street style as fashion worn and “observed *on the street*” and outlines how the term is constituted via a circuit of discourses: “as part of popular parlance, within media representations of fashion in the street style sections of magazines, in outfits that are assembled, in exhibitions and academics’ accounts” (84, my emphasis). Monica Titton delineates between notions of *style*, as individual experimentation, and *fashion* as subject to commercial imperatives (“Fashion in the City” 136). David Gilbert observes that communities influence cities’ cultural fabrics in a manner that fashion narratives overlook: “the creativity arising from the intermixing and chaos ... the performance of fashion on the streets” (29). Research in subcultures illuminates problematics between examination of street style as representative of demarcated communities and acknowledgment of its diverse influences (Woodward 85). Caroline Evans observes that attempts to categorize subcultures overlook the nuances of cultural statements as derived from multiple sites, references, and practices. Subcultures have offered well-documented inspiration to fashion: hip-hop and punk aesthetics have recurred in the collections of Chanel and Jean Paul Gaultier and in mainstream retail lines (Barnard 45-46). Ted Polhemus formulates a “bubble-up” model of influence that contradicts classical social theories. Dick Hebdige asserts that the dominant culture *incorporates* statements’ subversive intent for commercial and political interests (94). For publications to name Fashion Month photographs *street*

*style* represents not just an incorporation of the medium but also fashion’s textual incorporation of the term. In limiting street style as a referent to Fashion Month ensembles, the press erases dress as a situated practice and describes items from high fashion, positioned at a socioeconomic remove from urban communities. Journalists complain that for media discourses to use the term to refer to intermediaries’ outfits diminishes the individual locatable expression that true street style should constitute, and lament a lost space “free from” fashion’s “transactional compromises” (Berlinger; see also LaFerla, Shea). Indeed, editors’ outfits are often donated or loaned from fashion houses and public relations companies, and high-profile attendees have become notorious for changing outfits between presentations.

### Street Style in Photographs

The historical presence of cities and streets, as place and idea, illuminates how fashion photography operates on a spectrum between the authentic and the produced, invoking a contentious politics of urban representation. Fashion needs “the street” to position itself as upper-class, while the “street” needs fashion to read as authentic (Rocamora and O’Neill 189). In an echo of Woodward, Luvaas defines street style photography “as simply fashion photography taken ‘*on the street*,’” in contrast with studio shoots and fashion shows (23, my emphasis). Predecessors include street photography; anthropological portraits; fashion photographs of models in outdoor locations or studio-replicated streets; street style photographs in which subjects are not aware of the camera; and portraits of non-professional subjects (see Luvaas).<sup>9</sup> Titton comments that cities have occupied a “central” position “as both scene and real space for the photographic staging of fashion” (“Fashion in the City” 128). Luvaas and Titton

(“Styling the Street”) trace street style photographs to the modern period and its fascination with man-made environments, notably Haussmann’s Paris. Luvaas articulates the predominance of “the street” as “a *subject* of street style photography, perhaps even *the* subject, a fluid, amorphous entity that accumulates meanings as it snowballs into fashion world ubiquity” (25, original emphasis). Fashion photographers such as Irving Penn and Edward Steichen romanticized the street as a construct of urban impoverishment: a location “where upmarket fashionistas could go slumming in search of ‘real life’” (Luvaas 43; see also Rocamora & O’Neill 187). Fashion’s embrace of subcultures and countercultures celebrated the street as a site of raw expression (Luvaas 44; Rocamora & O’Neill 188-89). The work of print media street fashion photographers such as Bill Cunningham and Amy Arbus in New York demonstrates a confluence of these aesthetics (Luvaas 45-47; Titton, “Styling the Street” 128-29).<sup>10</sup> *i-D Magazine*’s iconic 1980s “straight-up” portrait showcased the UK’s “real” brick wall: *i-D*’s 2003 studio fashion choices via its comparative *lack* of production. Subjects were captured against a white wall on an actual street, represented as a “site for the creative performance of ‘real’ people” (Rocamora & O’Neill 185; see also Luvaas 49). Creator Steve Johnston shot most of the portraits in front of the same wall—the location was both specific and representational (Luvaas 51). Rocamora and O’Neill contend that print media’s co-optation of street fashion erased the street in lieu of a metaphorical (and perhaps racist) white space or brick wall: *The Face*’s 2003 studio-produced homage to street fashion renders the street “a blank canvas” or a

reductionist “urban wasteland” (195). The Los Angeles magazine *NYLON* and the Japanese magazines *FRUiTS* and *TUNE* return to a more untouched street fashion portraiture (Luvaas 55-56).

While online street style photography returns to literal streets, it commits a similar act of erasure—the wall reappears, but its connotations are editorialized. Luvaas posits that the street has been turned into a “conceptual screen” (25), blurring social and locational contexts. Susan Ingram observes that *The Sartorialist* renders cities visually indiscernible:

*[T]he city forms an anonymous backdrop against which fashionistas can look urban. The [subjects] ... are in an interesting way placeless. In many of the images, the city disappears completely, and it is rarely clear from the photos themselves where they have been taken, which is why each has to be labeled. Viewed without their labels, it becomes apparent how lacking in specificity these places are, and how similar the looks. (188)*

Elizabeth Wilson notes that marketers use the term “urban” to invoke the lifeblood of streets or allude to wastelands (35): these inverted associations become connected to cosmopolitanism. Sarah Banet-Weiser asserts that “street” and “urban” are racialized in American cultural discourses, connoting dangerous ghettos or nostalgic historical sites (105). For Luvaas, the street remains contested: “the last vestige of authenticity in a commodified culture and ... a stage on which that very commodified culture performs

some of its most ostentatious displays” (68). Ton’s photographs collapse the distinction between the authentic and the constructed, imposing the fashion scene upon the “street” and repositioning the street itself as status marker.

Ton’s photographs must be read beside his contemporaries’ ambivalent realizations of the “street.” Luvaas likens Ton’s aesthetic to that of H. B. Nam (*streetfsn.com*), Youngjun Koo (*koo.im*), Michael Dumler (*onabbottkinney.com*), Nabile Quenum (*jaiperdumavest.com*), Driely S. (*Driely S.*), and Adam Katz Sinding (*Le 21ème*) (63-64). These photographers’ movement-based shots include “the details of the garment” as but one component and instead reconstitute the modernist, European street “of the poetic moment ... of romantic possibility, of happy accident ... [the rest] dissolves into a field of lens blur” (Luvaas 65). Ton remains, however, a pioneer in the use of the horizontal frame and cropped focus (see Phelps). While lens blur and streetscapes are prominent compositional elements, Ton’s conceptualization of the street is much more complex: here, it becomes aestheticized and often effaced. Moreover, his focus on fashion is far from (and cannot be) incidental. Ton’s is the international street of *fashion tourism*, of tourist mobilities predicated on consumerism, and the arrival of the international fashion set (Craik 354). Ton’s composition is more readable than that of his peers, prioritizing opulent commodities and their aspirational wearers over mood. However, the photographs are not democratic: rather, the aesthetic treads a line between the experimental and the commercial.

**Analysis: Tommy Ton's Cities as Streetscapes**

Ton's photographs share numerous elements: foremost are the attendees walking or running to or from venues, while in the background are rows of town cars, taxis, and motorbikes and/or textured architecture. Ton also offers cropped torso shots or close-ups of handbags, shoes, and other accessories (Figure 2). Ton positions the street as an editorial backdrop against which to emphasize fashion; cities are often recognizable only to those who are already familiar with them. Weather helps to indicate location: shifts inform light and shadow, while select photographs represent extreme conditions. New York endured wet snowfall

during Fall/Winter 2014 Fashion Week, and several photographs depict insiders protecting themselves from the elements. Taxis and buses, in addition to license plates, often become the only markers of place. Sixteen photographs taken at New York Fashion Week (eight from each album) show editors in front of iconic yellow taxis; similarly, red double-decker buses feature in several London photographs. Nonetheless, the vehicles' presence becomes naturalized as a scene of international mobilities and an advertisement for these cities as tourist destinations: not cities as lived but cities as discursively produced. The vehicles become a flattened and often blurred element. More than half of the photographs (56.1%) make visible the literal street and its referents (54.7% for Spring/Summer 2014

and 57.3% for Fall/Winter 2014). 349 photographs (48.1%) illustrate cars; 104 (29.8%) of these feature cars in a prominent position. 211 photographs (29.1%) contain traffic, parking, or directional signage, or barriers and traffic cones. 219 photographs (30.2%) depict subjects on or in the street, while 69 (31.5%) of these show an indicated crosswalk (Figure 3). 174 photographs (24.0%) capture individuals close in front of an architectural structure, while half (50.1%) illustrate architectural structures in the distance. 33 photographs (5.0%) were coded as "perspective shots" that Ton took from the middle of a street, creating a striking aesthetic that recalls a modern-era fascination with urban architecture (Figure 4).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Ton's photographs frequently convey a sense of placelessness, similar to those of *The Sartorialist*. Esther Rosser observes that photographs' location in the dominant fashion capitals lends clout to the insiders who appear (161; see also Titton, "Styling the Street" 132). However, status is communicated through the *fact* of the subjects' location and not the cities' specific architectural features. I coded 343 photographs (47.2%) as "streetscape," in which elements of the urban setting comprised significant additional space in the frame or were otherwise instrumental to the composition (Figure 5). This percentage is consistent across seasons (51.3% for Spring/Summer 2014 and 43.8% for Fall/Winter 2014).

Historical architecture with friezes and columns reads as European but not location-specific: it increases the cachet of the locations as museum cities. It suffices that the architecture appears to be antiquated and European. 76 photographs (10.5%) capture subjects in front of walls or doors, whose colours and textures reflect or contrast with their outfits (11.5% for Spring/Summer 2014 and 10.0% for Fall/Winter 2014). 20 of these photographs (26.3%) feature a brick wall. One particular beige brick wall in New York (Fall/Winter 2014) matches an insider's parka (Figure 6). In a subsequent photograph, it offers a plain canvas to foreground Russian fashion editor Miroslava Duma's flower-printed coat (Figure 7). 404 photographs

(55.7%) use lens blur to render streets indiscernible or erase them (53.1% for Spring/Summer 2014 and 58.0% for Fall/Winter 2014). 129 photographs (17.8%) contain sculptures, walls, architectural structures, landmarks, or (torn) street posters or advertisements that bear similar or opposite colour palettes and/or textures to subjects' outfits.

In 18 photographs (9 from each album), from New York and Milan, Ton juxtaposes ensembles with graffiti. Banet-Weiser examines street art's "ambivalent" role, both contentious and productive, in cities' cultural positioning: "street art's association with graffiti and tagging ... are not only deeply racialized



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

in the US imagination but also fetishized for their links to racial otherness” (101). Graffiti emerged out of the 1970s and 1980s US hip-hop scene in response to the encroachment of commercial culture onto public spaces and the disenfranchisement of Black and Latino neighbourhoods under New York’s “urban ‘renewal’” policies (Banet-Weiser 102). As “figures” that rhetoricize urban spaces, such “calligraphies howl without raising their voices” and resist photographic pinning down (de Certeau 102). Cities’ use of street art to self-brand as *creative*—making it palatable for a white audience (Banet-Weiser 105)—parallels photographers’ use of graffiti to mark streets and persons as fashionable. In a Fall/Winter 2014 Milan photograph, Ton frames Dello Russo in profile in a fringed black jacket and pencil skirt in front of black, curled scrawl (Figure 8). In another, a woman stands in a white trench coat (printed with red lips) and embellished red heels in front of a yellow wall with red graffiti (Figure 9). The tagged walls invoke “urban” hip-hop aesthetics to create a class contrast that prioritizes the expensive fashions.

### Tourist Locations

Ton has begun to depict specific locations more often, as certain fashion shows are held at recognizable tourist destinations; however, he continues to use attractions to construct a fashionable aesthetic. Rocamora recalls that the Eiffel Tower is Paris’s most persistent visual signifier, functioning, like a couture label, as a “geographical signature” (172). Artists

depict the Tower as a feminine form, as the shape of its base recalls the lines of a dress or skirt (167). Three photographs juxtapose the Eiffel Tower with female fashion personnel. In the first, Dello Russo stands in black stiletto boots and a black mini-dress. Lean and muscular, she appears half as tall as the structure, while the chainmail pattern on her dress echoes its crossed steel beams (Figure 10). In the second, editor Giovanna Engelbert stands cross-legged, wearing a sweater dress that flares out past the knee and black stiletto heels (Figure 11). In the third, stylist Sarah Chavez stands in profile, bent over to light a cigarette; her ankle-length skirt blows in the wind (Figure 12). Ton comments that “there’s a certain chicness to the way that people smoke” (qtd. in Hainey). The Eiffel Tower creates a sense of placelessness, as the view from the top “naturalizes” Paris within the modern period as simulacrum (Rocamora 166), in a similar manner to de Certeau’s view from New York’s World Trade Center (92-3). Craik declares that the “traveling ... spectacle” of Fashion Month “rivals the more familiar attractions of the tourism industry” (368). In one Paris photograph, editor Michelle Elie performs an air kick that frames a group of tourists and their guide (recognizable for his flag) (Figure 13). Ton’s photographs therefore reduce landmarks to icons for international tourism and invoke their associations as a thematic, luxurious backdrop.

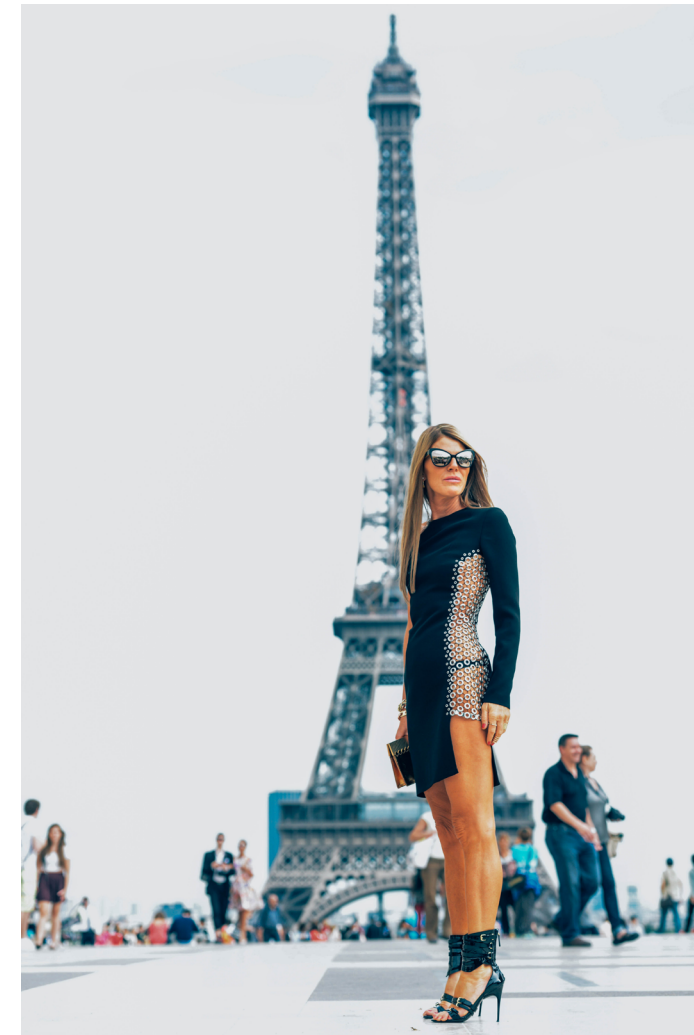


Fig. 10





Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



### Fashionable Mobilities as Exclusive

The photographs' composition presents fashion as an exclusive realm in which access is denied via subjects' visualities and positionalities. Just 84 photographs (11.6%) depict subjects that look *at* the camera: all others look ahead or to the street, are shot from behind, or have their heads omitted from the frame. 199 photographs (27.5%) illustrate subjects wearing sunglasses. 258 photographs (35.6%) feature subjects holding a cell phone, while 94 (36.4% of these) illustrate subjects talking or texting, detached from the chaos or coordinating their schedules. Ton claims that insiders' nonchalance attracts his lens: "the fact that they don't want to be photographed or they're running away from you makes you want to photograph them more" (qtd. in Hainey).<sup>11</sup> Attendees maintain an awareness of Ton's surveillance, as he has the power to render them visible outside of the field of fashion. While the totality of photographs depicts the "fashion set" as a collective, Ton's selective focus on specific members indicates that the competition for distinction happens at an individual level. 83.6% of the photographs (606) feature one individual (even if others appear in the background) while none features more than five. The rest of the scene becomes enfolded into the spectacle: 261 photographs (36.0%) feature members in behind, near or at a distance (38.1% in Spring/Summer 2014 and 34.2% in Fall/Winter 2014), while a handful (45, or 6% of total) capture other photographers shooting the same subjects, boosting their visible social influence.

The sense of exclusion is enhanced via icons and invocations of urban mobilities: recalling de Certeau, the scene is constituted via the *modalities* of walking (99). Directional signage appears with arrows pointing to other parts of cities (Figure 14). Traffic markers indicate "walk" or "don't park," preventing persons from becoming situated. Street names function as "metaphors ... detached from actual places ... a foggy geography of 'meanings' held in suspension, directing the physical deambulations below" (de Certeau 104). Here, street names indicate everywhere and elsewhere. 401 photographs (55.3%) depict subjects walking, often with their skirts, coats, or hair billowing behind them or in the opposite direction. 430 photographs (59.3%) are shot at a 45-degree angle. 219 (30.2%) position subjects at the side of the frame to showcase the streetscape or the crowd as additional elements. 101 (13.9%) depict subjects in profile. 84 (11.6%) tilt subjects' bodies. The bodies' ephemeral presence in the frame invokes Peggy Phelan's famous observation that the disappearance of the female form as *unmarked* is powerful, just as performance's disappearance informs its cultural status. 149 photographs (20.5%) communicate an overall sense of movement due to the curvature of a sidewalk or traffic circle; to the position of vehicles in extreme close-up, or parallel or opposite to the subject's facing direction (Figure 15); or to subjects depicted riding bicycles or motorbikes. That Ton photographs hundreds of these movements emblemizes de Certeau's observation of mobilities as individual and fragmented: "The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a



Fig. 14

Fig. 15



place ... broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks)” (103). For the duration of Fashion Month, personnel (several of whom work in international markets) become placeless, as do their ensembles. Attendees often do not inhabit these cities outside of the hectic presentation schedules (Craik 367; Skov 773). Ton’s photographs, however, position these insiders as arbiters of “real” fashion: street names are immaterial—rather, fashion is constructed as an aspirational realm within its international cities.

### Embodied Fashion Capital

The fashions and bodies that appear in Ton’s frame reference high fashion’s ideals of embodied social distinction. Bourdieu observed that the upper classes base consumer choices on considerations of cleanliness, smoothness, and fabrics to convey financial ease (*Distinction* 247-48). Fashion insiders here similarly communicate a moneyed aesthetic through luxurious fabrics. Outerwear appears in 504 (69.5%) photographs—166 (49.0%) from Spring/Summer 2014 and 338 (87.6%) from Fall/Winter 2014. A total of 598 pieces are depicted, due to multiple people in the frame or to layering practices.<sup>12</sup> 239 coats (40.0%) appear to be constructed from wool or felt; 126 (21.1%) appear to be leather or suede (often the classic black leather jacket); and 80 (13.4%) read as fur, faux fur, or (in two cases) feathers. Dana Thomas states that such materials have functioned as signifiers of privilege since prehistoric times (6), and that leather handbags continue to be fashion’s most coveted item

(188-194). Identifiable brand logos do not consistently appear, though Louis Vuitton’s “Damier check canvas” pattern and Chanel’s quilted leather are still visible on handbags (see Thomas 19). 492 photographs (67.9%) contain handbags or purses. 564 handbags appear in total, while 60 photographs contain more than one item: handbags are the *focus* of 148 (30.1%) of these photographs. 405 bags (71.8%) appear to be made of leather, crocodile, suede, or other animal skins, while 163 (40.2%) are black leather. Journalist Connie Wang muses that, because insiders’ ensembles’ worth resides in fabric and construction, provenance is discernible only to members: “The people who know about these things know that the plain grey sweater is from The Row and costs \$1,000” (qtd. in Shea). Authentic field membership is thus indicated through authentic materials, which denote authentic luxury brands to those that possess authentic fashion capital.

Ton’s photographs further promote pervasive industrial standards of attractiveness that are both classist and racialized. Titton comments that street style blogs “reintroduced the body image, racial stereotypes, and sartorial style of mainstream fashion into a new media format and an old photographic genre” (“Styling the Street” 135). 98.0% (711) of the bodies in Ton’s photographs were coded as “lean,” “lean-athletic,” or “lean-petite,” while another 13 (1.8%) were coded as “petite.” Half (50.0%) of all outerwear pieces were coded as “oversized”: the exaggerated proportions serve the simultaneous function of rendering the clothes distinctive and the wearers’ bodies slimmer.<sup>13</sup> 34 coat-wearing individuals (20.6%) in Spring/Summer

2014 and 50 individuals (14.8%) in Fall/Winter 2014 drape coats over their shoulders, emphasizing a lithe frame underneath. Titton claims that the repeated appearances of editors such as Giovanna Engelbert and Hanneli Mustaparta, who both had prior modeling careers, illustrate street style blogs’ aesthetic reductionism (“Styling the Street” 135). Engelbert appears fourteen times in the sample, and Mustaparta four times; other editors such as Emmanuelle Alt (five appearances) and Caroline de Maigret (eight appearances) also worked as models. Ton also features current models: blonde Belgian model Hanne Gaby Odiele appears in thirteen photographs (third behind Dello Russo and Engelbert). East Asian models Ming Xi, Liu Wen, Soo Joo Park, and Xiao Wen Ju appear 29 times combined. Other faces-of-the-moment include Joan Smalls, Saskia de Brauw, Caroline Brasch Nielsen, Binx Walton, Edie Campbell, Chloe Norgaard, Alanna Zimmer, and Grace Mahary, all photographed three or more times. The racial breakdown reflects fashion’s disproportionate whiteness: Caucasian—502 (69.3%); East Asian—95 (13.1%); Unclear—91 (12.6%); Black—34 (5.0%).<sup>14</sup>







## Elements of “Real” Streets

Elements of the “real” streets persist that resist incorporation, such as construction sites or refuse; however, Ton contains these within an aesthetic frame. In Fall/Winter 2014, Ton captures Torontonians bloggers and socialites Samantha and Caillianne Beckerman—profiled for their eclectic, expensive tastes (Sanati)—at New York Fashion Week, posing alongside street workers (Figure 16). The photograph illuminates the labour that maintains cities, but also smacks of class tokenism. One of the twins dons a worker’s vest and a neon toque, making her resemble a traffic cone, while holes in her sweater and jeans suggest burns or contact with the pavement. Jeans appear in 175 photographs (24.1%), often ripped or with oversized patches. Calculated distressing increases their retail value and creates an appearance of conspicuous waste. In contrast, the workers’ uniforms are intact and clean. Three street workers are black, while the Beckerman twins represent the white subjects that dominate Ton’s photographs. Luvaas observes street style photographs’ capacities to render “occasional critique” of the class-based nature of Fashion Month’s social enactments (64). However, the posed, even touristic appearance of this photograph eliminates such potential. The combination of high fashion and street workers’ uniforms abstracts street fashion from situated streets and occludes the cultural specificities of fashion capitals, in addition to the high-low sartorial combinations that once characterized notions of street style.

## Conclusion

Analysis of Tommy Ton’s *Style.com* Spring/Summer 2014 and Fall/Winter 2014 photograph albums demonstrates that high fashion has incorporated the contested term *street style* to refer to the ensembles worn by members of the elite industrial scene within fashion cities. Scholars and columnists propose that fashion editors have become the primary arbiters of trends, perhaps more so than the collections. Titton documents a reciprocal relationship between intermediaries who have advanced their careers via appearances in street style photographs and behind-the-scenes tastemakers and decision-making processes that dictate what is fashionable (“Styling the Street” 135). Editors are trusted to “incorporate the newest fashion trends into their wardrobes” because their positions place them ahead of a representational curve (135). However, close examination and season-to-season comparison of Ton’s photographs reveals that ensembles are uniform: a flattened mode of dress via which members of the fashion set communicate industrial and social distinction, rather than a mode of innovative, individual expression. Furthermore, editors who wear items *direct* from the runways disseminate trends determined by fashion houses (Berlinger), but do not demonstrate that these trends can be made *wearable*. Titton declares that “the establishment of street style blogs was only possible through the intense cooperation with fashion industry insiders and resulted in the reinforcement of prevailing power structures and visual narratives” (“Styling the Street” 135). Ton’s *Style.com* albums can be seen as

evidence of this collusion. However, the photographs’ aesthetic standards are not those of *mainstream* fashion but rather those enclosed within the *field of fashion*, a (materialized) realm predicated on class-based forms of capital. *Style.com*, while accessible to consumers thanks to the ostensibly democratic medium of the Internet, is nonetheless dedicated to high fashion aesthetics. The comprehension required to read the photographs is predicated on habitus: if one recognizes a specific location, architectural element, or designer, one feels a sense of inclusion within an elite and mobile fashion scene. At the same time, it becomes sufficient to represent these cities as fashion capitals rather than as specific geographical locations. Since not all consumers possess the means to travel or to purchase the products or the clout to attend fashion shows, street style photographs become a tool for the production of desire. The proliferation of these images as representative of the “real” is intended to fuel the luxury *and* mainstream marketplaces via consumers’ imitation. Further critical analysis of Fashion Month representations should account for consumers’ social interactions with fashion content, and their material effects, in the Internet era.

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## Image Notes

Figure 1: Anna Dello Russo at Milan Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 2: Milan Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Vogue.com/runway*.

Figure 3: Edie Campbell at Paris Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 4: Hanne Gaby Odiele at Milan Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 5: New York Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 6: New York Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 7: Miroslava Duma at New York Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 8: Anna Dello Russo at Milan Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 9: Milan Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *vogue.com/runway*.

Figure 10: Anna Dello Russo at Paris Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.



Figure 11: Giovanna Engelbert at Paris Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 12: Sarah Chavez at Paris Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 13: Michelle Elie at Paris Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

Figure 14: Milan Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Vogue.com/runway*.

Figure 15: London Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Vogue.com/runway*.

Figure 16: Samantha and Caillianne Beckerman at New York Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2014. Photo credit: Tommy Ton. Source: *Tommyton.com*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In July 2015, Ton resigned from *Style.com*. *Style.com* became an e-commerce site while fashion show information migrated to the new *Vogue.com/runway*.

<sup>2</sup> A draft of this article was presented at the “Cities and their Fashions: Capital Connections” seminar at the American Comparative Literature Association conference in New York in March 2014.

<sup>3</sup> In September 2015, Ton launched an eponymous website with separate archives; several photographs overlap with those on *Vogue.com/runway*. The FW 2014 *Vogue.com/runway* archive omits 22 photographs from the initial *Style.com* album. I retained these photographs in the sample.

<sup>4</sup> Schuman, based in New York, started to shoot New York Fashion Week in 2005 (Rosser 160).

<sup>5</sup> The artist-muse relationship that Dello Russo developed with Ton was the subject of a 2011 photograph exhibition in Toronto.

<sup>6</sup> Luvaas provides a list of *street style* photographers (with Ton as top earner) that contribute to print and online media publications (235).

<sup>7</sup> Street style blogs increasingly feature advertisements and/or collection photographs (see Luvaas).

<sup>8</sup> For street style in specific cities, see Intellect's *Street Style* series.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to New York-based photographer Dan Bendjy for outlining these categories.

<sup>10</sup> The process of photographing fashion show attendees has also been compared to the approach of paparazzi.

<sup>11</sup> Men appear in just 16 photographs (2.20%), and no man is photographed solo. This could be because Ton photographs men's street style for GQ; nonetheless, *Style.com* covers men's and women's fashion.

<sup>12</sup> The Fall/Winter presentations occur in February and March, and Spring/Summer in September and October. Almost half of Spring/Summer 2014 photographs feature outerwear despite milder weather.

<sup>13</sup> Ton's website also lists “oversized” as a trend.

<sup>14</sup> Latin American, East Indian, and Middle Eastern subjects did not appear enough to be considered statistically significant.

