

Introduction

Exploring the Intersections of Fashion, Film, and Media

ELIZABETH CASTALDO LUNDEN, *Stockholm University*
Guest Editor

The establishment of multi-level programs in several universities around the globe reflects the growing significance of Fashion Studies as a scholarly field. Elizabeth Wilson argues that Fashion Studies has traditionally been a branch of art history and, as such, it

has followed its methods of attention to detail. As with furniture, paintings and ceramics, a major part of its project has been accurate dating of costume, assignment in some cases of ‘authorship’, and an understanding of the actual process of the making of a garment, [a practice that has often locked fashion history] into the conservative ideologies of art history as a whole (Wilson 2007, 48).

However, the relatively recent expansion of Fashion Studies as an academic field has broadened the interest to engage with other areas of study. While some regard Fashion Studies as a new field of research, scholars from various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences have immersed themselves in the study of fashion, costume, and dress for decades despite the absence of a properly established academic program to encompass their interest. The interdisciplinary approach taken by these programs encourages the notion that perspectives and methods from a wide variety of disciplines inform research in Fashion Studies. Such is the case of fashion, film, and media.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the film industry has played a crucial role in the promotion and representation of fashion. Likewise, fashion’s mediated character through newsreels, television, newspapers, magazines, photography, and even paintings has facilitated the historical study of costume and dress. Several film scholars have devoted much attention to the conflation of fashion and film. They have explored the fundamental role of cinema in the production, promotion, and representation of fashion, as well as its role in stimulating consumption (See, for example, Gaines and Herzog 1990; Staiger 1990; Higashi 1994; Desser 2000; McDonald 2010; Fuller 2011; Munich 2011; Bruzzi 2012; Church Gibson 2013; McLean 2016; Paulicelli, et al. 2017; among others). However, far from being an exhausted topic, the intersections between fashion, film, and media studies offer a vast potential for research that is increasingly becoming of interest among scholars. Part of the academic potential rests in the multitude of topics to cover, varied angles and methodological approaches these enable, interlinked with questions of identity, class, race, culture, and industrial practices that fashion, film, and media studies share alike.

This special issue belongs to a series of activities under the umbrella denomination “Studying and Exploring the Intersections of Fashion, Film, and Media Studies,” created in 2014 by film scholar Anne Bachmann and I. Our goal was to promote an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of fashion, film, and media. This venture was launched with two activities at the 2015 edition of the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, in Montreal. The first activity consisted of a panel featuring the on-going projects of four Ph.D. students working with these combined fields.¹ The second activity consisted of a workshop, in which presentations opened to discussions addressing how the use of archival material and film fan magazines, combined with film studies’ methodological approach to history, could benefit fashion research.² This workshop expanded into a Symposium at Stockholm University featuring established scholars who pioneered research in these fields of studies combined. This special issue of *Networking Knowledge* seeks to include early career researchers in such conversation, broadening the network of scholars and the combined field of expertise. Since its inception, a historical approach has been encouraged by the founders of this project. Yet, the semiotic roots used for textual analysis of costume design shall not be overlooked. In this sense, this special issue intends to present a panorama of the heterogeneous nature of studies in these interconnected fields.

In terms of media, fan magazines have been sumptuous sources for scholarly interest for studying the early intersections between the fashion and film industries, as well as for tracing discourses of femininity, fandom, and stardom. For decades, film scholars like Richard Dyer, Jane Gaines, and Anthony Slide, among others, have popularized the use of fan magazines as sources for their groundbreaking studies on stardom, fashion, and fandom (Gaines 1990; Dyer 2004; Slide 2010). Film scholar Tamar Jeffers McDonald, for example, is an advocate of the study of fan magazines as contributors to the historical enterprises of gender, stardom, fashion and film (McDonald 2013; McDonald 2016). These magazines, predominantly catering a female audience, had broader reach than any fashion publication of their time. Awareness about the importance of studying film fan magazines has significantly grown in the past 5 years, in great part due to the launch of *The Media History Digital Library*.³

Julie Nakama’s study focuses on a transitional period for film fan magazines, in which discourses of femininity and adequacy were challenged by an emergent celebrity culture prone to scandal. Nakama follows the media coverage and treatment of Elizabeth Taylor between 1960 and 1965 to “understand the changing attitudes about modes of femininity during the period.” (Nakama 2018, 1). Besides tabloid interest in her agitated love life, discourses about her health became central to giving readers an intimate access to Taylor’s

¹ The panel was titled “Industry Crossovers: Key Women in Fashion, Film, and Media,” with Michelle Tolini Finamore as respondent, SCMS Conference, Montreal.

² The workshop featured presentations by Tamar Jeffers McDonald, Jenny Romero, and Elizabeth Castaldo Lundén. *Because Fashion Matters: Studying the Intersections of Fashion, Film, and Media*, SCMS Conference, Montreal, 29th March 2015.

³ The Media History project made it possible for scholars around the world to access digitized magazines and trade paper, organized in a user-friendly platform that enables direct searches as well as page-by-page browsing in a PDF simulation of the analogue experience. See The Media History Digital Library, available at <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

unknown sides. The body has been a contested territory of ideological survey and, therefore, of interest throughout the humanities at large. Scholars from fashion and film studies have focused on the study of the body in relationship to fashion, film, and media reflecting upon body ideals, gender, movement, identity, race, spectacle, and adornment, among others (Kawamura 2004, Twigg 2013, Entwistle 2015, among others).⁴ Nakama's study also belongs to this group of studies by looking at the media treatment given to Taylor's health issues and other bodily matters.

The production of so-called quality television series has inherited the intertextual potential of early cinema, functioning as a disseminator of fashion images for the mass audience. It has also become an ideal scenario for product placement practices. Departing from this premise, Rachel Velody explores a case study of Olivia Pope, the main character in the series *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-). Using the concepts of dandy-flâneuse and self-fashioning, the author embarks on a semiotic analysis, reflecting upon the representation of identity, race, and class. Through her study, Velody looks into the character's appropriation of the discourses of predominantly white-European fashion brands through conspicuous consumption. In Velody's argument, the character of Olivia empowers herself both through the appropriation of these self-fashioning elements and through her sexualized "porn princess" body that integrates her into a white post-feminist identity. These ideas are reinforced by the cross-media hybridization of fashion advertising and fan forums that rapidly capture the essence of these product placement practices enhancing the fashionable nature of the main character.

The cross-influence of artistic inspiration has been subject of debate at least since the days of the Hollywood Studio System. The impact of Hollywood costume design on fashion (and vice-versa) has been broadly discussed in popular media and scholarship, despite the difficulties to support such arguments empirically. Aesthetic inspiration has not been limited to design *per-se*, but also to how new technologies can inspire other forms of cultural production in a cross-media manner. Leonie Häsler takes a technological angle linking the use of stereoscopy for fashion photography to the release of Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (Warner Brothers, 1954), in which this technology was applied. The study draws from the image collection of the Swiss textile and clothes company HANRO. This cross-media study argues for a formal language of fashion identifiable in the use of this technology. In discussing the nature of the research method, Häsler brings informative insights about the ephemeral nature of archival material, even in the case of a company's home archive. Acknowledging the limitations of arguing for the inspiration/appropriation of aesthetic elements, the study suggests a connection based on the contemporaneity of Hitchcock's film release and the production of this fashionable imagery for this textile company using visual analysis. The paper contributes to a broader network of knowledge that addresses how Hollywood's transnational power has worked as a propagator of ideas, and how cinema at large has inspired fashion photography throughout history.

⁴ The Domitor conference, for example, dedicated its 2016 edition to a full program focusing on corporeality. "Vicera, Skin, and Physical Form: Corporeality and Early Cinema," Domitor Conference, 14-17 June 2016, Stockholm, Sweden. Program available online at <https://domitor.org/conference/2016-stockholm-conference/>

The study of fashion and costume design is often linked to discourses of national identity, particularly when addressed from an industrial standpoint. Much of the available scholarship addressing this conflation of ideas focuses on the United States, France, and Italy (Landy 1986; Paulicelli 2004; Schweitzer 2008; Arnold 2009; Pouillard 2011; Pouillard 2016; Lundén 2018). Chiara Faggella enters in dialogue with Italian scholarship through a case study of the films *Il Signor Max* (Astra Film, 1937) and *I Grandi Magazzini* (Amato-Era Film, 1939). In her paper, Faggella pinpoints at the complexities of negotiating and translating—figuratively and literally—the ambivalent relationship of Italian Cinema under the fascist regime vis-à-vis French and Anglo-American cultural and ideological production. Central to this study is the promotion of austerity discourses during the interwar period, as a sign of a national identity of resistance against the Western fetishized commodities. In a similar vein, yet situated during the Cold War, Kateryna Novikova presents her study of Soviet Cinema between the 1950s and the 1980s. Novikova addresses questions of class, communist propaganda, and the increasing penetration of Western ideals of fashionable lifestyles that influenced a demand for social differentiation and personal identity construction. Novikova accentuates the role of popular culture to shape perception and taste, in this case, in regards to acceptable and non-acceptable fashions and lifestyles. Both studies provide a refreshing voice to complement the bulk of U.S.-centered scholarship, as well as a much-needed historical perspective to the simplified hegemonic discourses about communist regimes as isolated, homogenous, and hyper-coherent propaganda machines lacking any foreign presence of challenging ideas.

Even though the original intention of this special issue was to explore the study of fashion rather than costume, the vast amount of contributions focusing on costume design in response to the call for papers speak for the need to conduct more research in costume as an under-researched area. Due to the visual nature of the topic, publications focusing on costume design tend to fall into the coffee-table format that attracts collectors but rarely contributes to scholarly interest. Whether film or fashion scholars are to take upon this task is not up for discussion. The study of costume offers a broad opportunity for disciplinary collaboration in which tools coming from various disciplines can contribute to building up a substantial corpus of scholarly work. Costume design is the quintessential intersection of fashion, film, and studies.

As a closing remark to this introduction, a special acknowledgment should go to all the peer-reviewers who generously invested their time and effort for this special issue, to Patricia Prieto-Blanco for her promptness and support throughout this process, and to Natalie Snoyman, who participated in the initial stages of this special issue.

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Biography

Elizabeth Castaldo Lundén is a Doctor in Fashion Studies from the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University. She holds a Master in Cinema Studies from the same institution and a Licentiate degree in Public Relations from Universidad Argentina de la Empresa. Her dissertation *Oscar Night in Hollywood: Fashioning the Red-Carpet From the Roosevelt Hotel to International Media* is a historical study of the Academy Awards' red-carpet phenomenon. Her research interests include: fashion, film, and costume design; public relations, advertising, and marketing practices in the fashion and entertainment industries; stardom and celebrity culture; mass media and globalization.

e-mail: elizabeth.lunden@ims.su.se