

# Cinematic Fashionability and Images Politics

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The marriage of cinema and fashion? When, where and how their interaction and origin is begun? There should be no glamor and red carpet when The Lumière brothers short films like *Workers leaving the Lumière factory*, *The Gardener*, *Baby's Breakfast* on the birth of cinema in 1895. However, we notice that artificially costumes are tailor-made for *A Trip to the Moon* in Georges Méliès and D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*. Suddenly, it adds the aesthetical and modernist elements into the blood of cinema beside the raw-realism of how the daily life of the common people is represented on the silver screen. Some kinds of bourgeois ideology and middle class value is enhanced. It is so unbelievable that some ordinary actress like Mary Pickford transforming into a movie star after beautifully dressing up. Not only the audience feel the power of movie magic but also the fashion magic. This paper explores the different perspective of movie and fashion in terms of fashion and film costumes, movie stars icon, fashion trends influenced by movies, and how fashion designers changes the look of cinema as well, etc.

*Keywords:* ideology, movie images, stardom, fashionability

## Introduction

Cinema is somehow like a showcase of fashion. General audiences are fans of movie stars not just because of their personal charisma, but because of the fashion they wear. From the catwalks of Paris to the red carpets and silver screens of Hollywood and European cinema, especially French cinema, fashion and film have frequently costarred in their very own rags-to-riches story of style.

This research explored and studied the history of and interaction between the costumes and movie icons that have transformed the look of movies between decades from 1910-1989. Fashion trends, such as haute couture in *Falbalas*, the 501 T-shirt and chinos in *Rebel Without A Cause*, and Tiffany's elegant "little black dress" in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* were examined in-depth. Frequently, filmmakers invited famous designers and stylists to create the costumes for their characters; therefore, fashion had a substantial affect on the look and tone of films, which consequently heightened the glamour and fame associated with fashion brand names. For example, Jean-Paul Gaultier designed costumes for *Subway*, *The Fifth Element*, and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*; Coco Chanel designed costumes for *Last Year at Marienbad*; Karl Lagerfeld designed costumes for *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*; Giorgio Armani designed costumes for *American Gigolo* and *The Untouchable*; Ralph Lauren designed costumes for *Annie Hall*; Yves Saint Laurent designed costumes for *Mississippi Mermaid*, and Hubert de Givenchy designed costumes for *Funny Face*. Audiences likely also

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remember the classical movie icons, such as Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, and Peter Fonda and Dennis Hooper in *Easy Rider*.

In addition, there are also movies whose stories focus on the fashion industry or famous fashion designers. For example, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006) is the story of how Anna Wintour becomes editor-in-chief of *Vogue*; the origin of haute couture is explored in *Falbalas* (Becker, 1943), *Prêt-A-Porter* (Altman, 1994) uncovers the irony of the inner fashion world, and the romantic story and creativity of Coco Chanel is portrayed in the *Coco Avant Chanel* (Fontaine, 2009) and *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky* (Kounen, 2009) biopics.

Finally, this paper also determined the instinctual similarities between fashion and cinema as both art and a commercial project. Key factors, including icons of ideology, movie stardom, and supermodel fantasies are analyzed and discussed.

### **Fashion vs. Film Costumes**

There are family tie between cinema and fashion. Most crucially, both are linked to brand names (i.e., superstars, supermodels, famous fashion designers, and film directors) and trends. Cinema and fashion have a substantial effect on the trends and look of each other, through their reciprocal exchanges of taste, sexual politics, zeitgeist, commercial operation, public identity, and worship. Notably, movie stars are portrayed as the models of silver screens, and most fashion designers have noted that their muses of design are originated from the image of certain stars or movies.

However, a clear separation between fashion and film costumes is also apparent. Specifically, film costumes are based on a story's location and time, as well as the characterization of the people, whereas fashion design can seem to have unlimited possibilities. Therefore, fashion trends have little influence on the initial costume design intentions of film, beyond providing the framework for the aesthetics and style of particular eras and places, even when a famous fashion designer is hired as the costume designer.

As Landis (2004, pp. 3-6) argued,

Film costumes serve two equal purposes: to support the narrative by creating memorable characters, and to provide balance within the frame by using color, texture, and silhouette. Costume and production design are the yin and yang of film design and are equally legitimate. Costume designers are skilled professionals trained to work in the two-dimensional format of the film frame, [with] costumes designed to [fit] one actor, one set, and one frame in [a] specific way. All [of the] clothing used in a fictional film is considered costume, enriched by a magnified theatrical scale, through which a heightened reality is utilized to reveal the nature of each character.

Costumes are one of the tools a film director has to tell a story, [and] embody the psychological, social, and emotional condition of the character at a particular moment in the script. Contemporary costumes are considered successful if audiences don't [sic] notice the costumes at all, but if they are nonetheless deeply connected to the characters.

Costumes are never clothes. Unlike fashion, which is designed for our three-dimensional world, costumes are designed to appear in two dimensions on film, which flattens and distorts the image. What's [sic] pretty in person may not be pretty on screen, needing the enhancement of color, texture, or silhouette to [be] "read" on camera. Costumes are part of the visual jigsaw puzzle that is the frame—and designers consider the entire picture when they design a costume. Floral wallpaper, burgundy herringbone upholstery—even the turquoise of the BMW the actor is driving—is entered into the design equation. Expensive clothes feel fabulous. Costumes don't [sic] have to feel good; they just have to look like they feel good on screen. Costumes don't have to be expensive; they just have to look expensive in the movie. Fashion designers often credit classic and current movies as influencing their style. But they are inspired by the costume design—the irresistible elixir of fascinating characters and a story well told.

A word about fashion. Fashion is a visual art of enormous creativity. Fashion is about commerce, change, comfort, individuality, and standing out in a crowd—or conformity and the status quo. It's [sic] easy for the public to confuse actors with the characters they play. The red carpet phenomenon exemplifies this fusion of fact and fantasy, role and reality. In a celebrity-obsessed media, celebrity and stardom eclipse the serious endeavor of creating authentic fictional characters. Not every costume is meant to make a glamorous entrance. As designer Abigail Murray notes, "Characters are not about fashion. Characters are about real life." Fashion and costumes are not synonymous; they are antithetical. They have directly opposing and contradictory purposes.

In addition, according to the article "Thinking Made Easy" (Thesis, 2009),

The term fashion applies to a prevailing mode of expression. Inherent in the term is the idea that the mode will change more quickly than the culture as a whole. The terms "fashionable" and "unfashionable" are employed to describe whether someone or something fits in with the currently popular mode of expression. Fashion can suggest or signal status in a social group. Groups with high cultural status like to keep "in fashion" to display their position. Because keeping "in fashion" often requires a considerable amount of money, fashion can be used to show off wealth. Adherence to fashion trends can thus form an index of social affluence and [be] an indicator of social mobility.

Thus, fashion and film costumes are theoretically slightly different concepts that provide diverse functions and signify particular meanings. According to Gibson (1998), the term "costume" is used to refer to the clothes worn in films, whether period or contemporary dress, and has been slighted in a similar manner as fashion. However, film costumes have a narrative function, whereas fashion is more often a fetish commodity; according to second-wave feminism, it is also an arena in which women present and display themselves to satisfy male desires. Traditional mise-en-scene concerns have often focused on a film's use of setting, props, lighting, color, positioning of figures, and costumes; moreover, mise-en-scene analysis studies of the narrative film to determine how visual features may reinforce, complement, or subvert the meanings suggested by plot, dialogue, and character. In this respect, costumes carry meaning or create emotional effect, particularly in relation to character. However, although traditional mise-en-scene analysis encourages attention on costumes, it is not interested in dress or costume per se; rather, costumes are viewed as the vehicle through which meaning about the narrative or character can be recognized. Overall, costumes represent just one of several signifying elements within a film (Gibson, 1998).

A focus on costumes as part of mise-en-scene analysis may be linked to a focus on genres where costuming is regarded as a defining element. In the 1960s, genre theorists turned to iconography to distinguish various genres in visual terms. Iconography, which refers to the recurring pattern of images associated with a particular genre, is usually divided into settings, objects, and dress (McArthur, 1972). For example, gangster films employ specific settings (the city, saloons), objects (cars, machine guns), and styles of dress (the dark topcoat, the sharp suit, the white shirt and obtrusive tie, the fedora and gloves), which have become characteristic symbols of the genre and are used to cue the audience's responses. Therefore, the relevant clothes or "costume props" (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980) are a vital part of genre recognition (Gibson, 1998).

### **Iconography of Movie Stars (1910s-1980s)**

Film costumes have been crucial for creating unforgettable characters that then became movie stars throughout the 20th century; this phenomenon was particularly notable during the "Golden Period of Hollywood" in the 1930s and the French New Wave of the 1960s. A summary of the most substantial movie icons and their visual attributes are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Iconic Movie Stars (1910s-1980s)*

Decade	Actor/Actress portraying fashion trends in films	Notable iconography
1918	Theda Bara in <i>Salome</i>	Black eyes and red lips. Fitted business suit ( <i>Gone with the Wind</i> ).
Mid-1930s	Clark Gable in <i>Gone with the Wind</i>	When Clark Gable changed clothes in <i>It Happened One Night</i> (1934), he was not wearing an undershirt; immediately following release of the film, undershirt sales dropped dramatically. Later, in <i>Idiot's Delight</i> (1939) he appeared in an undershirt to help improve sales.
1930s	Fred Astaire in <i>Top Hat</i>	Tuxedo.
1930s	Marlene Dietrich /Greta Garbo/Joan Crawford	Unisex, geisha, dancer. Female body as a lethal weapon.
1930s	Jean Harlow/Claudette Colbert/Carole Lombard/Loretta Young	Gentlewoman and the Lady.
1940s-1950s	Gary Cooper/Humphrey Bogart in <i>Casablanca</i>	Unruly and dissolute (Gary Cooper). Trenchcoat (Humphrey Bogart).
1950s	James Dean in <i>Rebel Without A Cause</i> and Marlon Brando in <i>The Wild One</i>	501 T-shirt, leather jacket, chinos, jeans (James Dean). This style was the originator of street fashion and the prolocutor of rebellion; it also symbolized self-realization and a longing for freedom. Levi Strauss jeans, Perfecto Bronx jackets originating from WW2 military uniforms (Marlon Brando).
1950s	Veronica Lake/Katharine Hepburn/Grace Kelly/Marlyn Monroe	High-waisted pants, mixed masculine-feminine style (Katharine Hepburn). Females appeared more masculine. Grey business suit (Gregory Peck). "Little black dress", glasses, hat, pearls, trench coat (Audrey Hepburn).
1960s	Gregory Peck/Aubrey Hepburn in <i>Breakfast at Tiffany's</i>	Lighter lips and darker eye makeup. Hubert de Givenchy, the most celebrated costume designer in Hollywood history, created the costumes under the supervision of Edith Head.
1960s	Faye Dunaway in <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>	Bob-style hair, beret, midi, bra-free (Faye Dunaway). This style was chic, as well as a distinctive symbol of women's liberation, sex appeal, female independence, and boldness. Long hair, dyed handkerchiefs, inwrought collars and wristbands, shiny accouterments, edging fanon.
1960s	Yippy Culture in <i>Easy Rider</i>	Suffering from the ongoing trauma of the Vietnam War, most American youth escaped from and protested against the social system by pursuing alternative cultures and life styles; yuppies also advocated for nature.
1970s	Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in <i>Annie Hall</i>	White shirt, cloth pants, white shoes (Woody Allen), to create a preggy-style sagacious New Yorker. Vest, hat, baggy pants, men's shoes, ties (Diane Keaton). This image of masculine-and-talented women was already a classic. Ralph Lauren was the costume designer.
1970s	John Travolta in <i>Saturday Night Fever</i> (1977) and <i>Grease</i> (1978)	Black leather jacket, as well as "bad-girl style" ( <i>Grease</i> ). Origin of the upsurge in glam rock and disco styles in the 1980s.
1980s	Jennifer Beal in <i>Flashdance</i>	Leg warmers, leggings, leotards, cut-off sweatshirts with studding. Michael Kaplan was the costume designer of <i>Flashdance</i> .
1980s	Punk Culture in <i>Jubilee</i>	Originated from the fashion shop Sex by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, and further promoted by The Sex Pistols. Mod culture.
1980s	Mod Culture in <i>Absolute Beginners</i>	Paul Jobling and David Crowley called the mod subculture "fashion-obsessed and hedonistic cult of the hyper-cool" young adults who lived in metropolitan London or the new towns of the south.

Note: Cheng Cheng (n.d.), edited by Sun Yuanshun (1998).

### Fashion Trends Influenced by Film Costumes and Star Icons

There are numerous cases of film costumes and images inspiring fashion trends. These movie-inspired or celebrity-inspired styles have a considerable impact on fashion sales, and offer trendy models for fans to follow and imitate. According to the article “Cinema’s Fashionability” (n.d.),

There is many individual examples of garments having had a direct impact on off-screen fashions and sales. One designer, Adrian Adolph Greenburg (1903–1959) designed robes for Joan Crawford in *Letty Lynton* (1932), the same year that Crawford was first named “The Most Imitated Woman of the Year.” A similar example was Edith Head’s (1897-1981) white party dress, which she designed for Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun* (1951). Head herself had declared that she had seen more than thirty copies of the dress at a single party. More contemporary examples also emerged from the notable films *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Annie Hall* (1977). Specifically, Faye Dunaway’s thirties-style wardrobe in *Bonnie and Clyde* has been credited with relaunching the beret and cardigan, and Diane Keaton’s androgynous ensemble in *Annie Hall* (created by American fashion designer Ralph Lauren) was swiftly copied in both the exclusive pages of *Vogue* and on the High street; women wearing masculine trousers, shirts, and waistcoats in the late 1970s and early 1980s were the epitome of chic. Through the influence of film on fashion, one can see the true democratization of movies, as well as film’s relationship with spectatorship; although fans cannot literally become their favorite stars, they can mimic and emulate them through fashion.

Contemporary cinema generates the same pattern of mimicry when it comes to both clothes and accessories, although male actors are now more often the fashion icons: a heightened awareness of male fashion that had been evident since the early 1990s. For example, retro aviator shades made a comeback after Tom Cruise wore them in *Top Gun* (1987); black suits and the monochrome outfits of French designer Agnes (along with Uma Thurman’s Chanel “rouge noir” nail varnish) became synonymous with masculinity and cool following the success of Quentin Tarantino’s second movie, *Pulp Fiction* (1994); most recently, Keanu Reeve’s long swishing coat, mobile phone, and glasses were a fashion hit after the release of *The Matrix* (1999).

Moreover, according to the documentary *Fashion in Film* (Black, Backer, & Kanew, 2008), there are numerous examples of fashion imitating design from movies:

- Jean Paul Gaultier’s spring 2008 ready-to-wear collection was influenced by *The Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski, 2007; costume designer Penny Rose).
  - ✧ Michael Kors’ fall 2008/2009 collection was influenced by *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963; particularly blonde actress/model Tippi Hedren and costume designer Edith Head).
  - ✧ Alexander McQueen’s newest collection in *Vogue* was influenced by *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982; costume designer Michael Kaplan).
- *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Anderson, 2001), and specifically the red tracksuits worn by Ben Stiller.
- *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (Anderson, 2004; costume designer Milena Canonero), particularly Bill Murray’s blue striped Adidas sneakers and knit cap.
  - Thomas Burberry, Max Mara, Viktor Horsting, and Rolf Snoeren were all influenced by Humphrey Bogart’s trenchcoat in *Casablanca* (Curtis, 1942; costume designer Orry-Kelly).
  - Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, and Tom Ford (Gucci) were each inspired by Elizabeth Taylor’s costumes in *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, 1963; costume designers David Berman, Renie Conley, Vittorio Nino Novarese, and Irene Sharaff).
  - Domenico Dolce, Stefano Gabbana, and Roberto Cavalli were each influenced by the costumes worn by Catherine Zeta-Jones and Renee Zellweger in *Chicago* (Marshall, 2002; costume designer Colleen Atwood), as well as Lisa Minelli’s costumes in *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972; costume designer Charlotte Flemming).
  - Elizabeth Taylor’s appearance in *Giant* (Stevens, costume designer Marjorie Best and Moss Mabry, 1956) influenced fashion designs by Domenico Dolce, Stefano Gabbana, and Jean Paul Gautier.

- Marilyn Monroe's costumes in *The Seven Year Itch* (Wilder, 1955; costume designers Charles LeMaire and William Travilla) influenced Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana.
- Katherine Hepburn's costumes in *Pat and Mike* (Cukor, 1952; costume designer Orry-Kelly) inspired the polo shirts of Saverio Palatella, Ralph Lauren, and Lacoste.
- Finally, Audrey Hepburn's "neighbor girl" look in *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953; costume designer Edith Head) influenced Mario Prada, Oscar de la Renta.

These movie-inspired fashions can be viewed as "Hollywood Fashion" for people who worship movie stars, and desire to wear the same styles: a psychological and subconscious transformation into celebrity. Therefore, ceremonies such as the ceremony of the Academy Awards are not just a glorious event to celebrate acting and filmmaking talent; they are also among the world's largest fashion shows. Similarly, the preshow red carpet arrivals can be viewed as a contemporary form of catwalk modeling, particularly for commercially successful movies with well-known celebrities, who play an instrumental role in future fashion trends.

### Films Influenced by Fashion Designers

Famous fashion designers are also often hired as costume designers for film productions, and their personal styles markedly influence the movies' final appearance. For example, Coco Chanel in *The Rules of the Game* (Renoir, 1939). A perfect match between Hubert de Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn occurred in *Roman Holiday*, *Sabrina*, *Paris when it sizzles* and *Funny Face*, creating a sense of arrogance and nobility. Another flawless match was the combination of designer Yves Saint Laurent and actress Catherine Deneuve, who collaborated on *Mississippi Mermaid*, *Belle de Jour*, *Subway*, *Le Paraplie de Cherbourg*, and *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*; Deneuve was praised as "perfect" when appearing in Saint Laurent's stylish designs. Jean Paul Gaultier is similarly famous for designing Milla Jovovich's white space suit in *The Fifth Element* (Besson, 1997), as well as the revolutionary costume design ideas for *The City of Lost Children* (Jeunet & Caro, 1995) and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Greenaway, 1989). Other designers well-known for their influential work on films include Giorgio Armani for *American Gigolo* (Schrader, 1980) and *The Untouchables* (de Palma, 1987), Karl Lagerfeld for *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (Bunuel, 1972), and Emi Wada for *Hero* (Zhang, 2002).

### Implications

Beyond referring to the clothing that characters and people wear, both film costumes and fashion also share similar notions of commodification and money, transformation, and transition between supermodel and celebrity stardom.

#### Commodity of Fashion and the Mainstream Movies

Fashion and filmmaking have similar business models that frequently involve a substantial amount of money. Many actresses and actors have had their name or images copyrighted as part of their own fashion lines, such as Jaclyn Smith (Jaclyn Smith Collection), Sarah Jessica Parker (BITTEN clothing line), Sienna Miller (Mblem clothing line), and Jennifer Lopez (sweet face and J-Lo lines); Amanda Bynes' appearance as Penny Pingleton in the *Hairspray* teen clothing line (Black et al., 2008) was similarly trademarked. According to the article "Thinking Made Easy", this commodification of actors and actresses also creates a "bandwagon effect":

Another negative effect of the relationship among the fashion industry, the film industry, and celebrity endorsers is that it creates a bandwagon effect on the consumer, which leads people to behave in certain ways

or believe certain things simply because others (usually celebrities) do. For example, people will buy unnecessary or even unwanted products just because they have received a celebrity endorsement; this behavior encourages people to blindly believe what they are seeing on television or in movies, even gimmicky and promotional stunts aimed at capturing a target market.

Another effect of this practice is that it promotes unintelligent consumerism in society, whereby consumers are motivated to purchase products without considering its pros and cons.

Overall, fashion trends and mainstream commercial films provide a fantastical, obsessive, and alternate reality through which people can harmlessly escape their imaginative value.

### **Transformation in Fashion and Film**

The clothing people choose to wear is a prominent indicator of identity; similarly, changing specific articles of clothing or overall style symbolizes a transformation of identity. A classic example is Cinderella's evolution from maid to princess, primarily represented by her change in clothing. Both fashion and cinema have a transforming function, where new clothing signifies an enhanced personality and life. For example, in *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978), Olivia Newton-John's character transforms into a "bad girl" by changing into tight leather pants and curling her hair. In *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006), Anne Hathaway's nerdy assistant character eventually becomes a glamorous fashionista who wears high-end labels and expensive jewelry. In *Legally Blonde* (Luketic, 2001), Reese Witherspoon plays fashion-forward law student, Elle Woods. Perhaps most notable is the transformation in *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990), in which Julia Roberts' character changes so drastically from a hooker into a beautiful classy woman that even Richard Gere does not recognize her. Finally, Jane's (Katherine Heigl's) closet full of bridesmaid gowns in *27 Dresses* (Fletcher, 2008) represents a transformative space similar to the telephone booth in the *Superman* movie series (Black, Backer, & Kanew, 2008).

### **Supermodels and Film Celebrities**

Finally, there is a trend for supermodels to transition into actresses. Supermodels including Christy Turlington, Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, and Cindy Crawford have all been part of the main cast in a range of movies, suggesting that Hollywood embraces "supermodel cinema." Examples of such films include *Her Alibi* (Beresford, 1989), *Batman* (Burton, 1989), *Sirens* (Duigan, 1994), *Fair Game* (Sipes, 1995), and *Bordello of Blood* (Adler, 1996). In Hong Kong, the trend of using young models has recently prevailed in the entertainment industry; therefore, large numbers of young models have also become movie stars. For example, Xiong Dai Lin starred in *Ip Man* (Yip, 2008), Janice Man starred in *See You in YouTube* (Pang et al., 2008), Xiong Dai Lin and Angela Baby starred in *All's Well, Ends Well* (Ming & Yau, 2010), Chrissie Chow starred in *Womb Ghosts* (Law, 2010), Taiwanese supermodel Lin starred in *Split Second Murders* (Yau, 2008), and Chi Ling starred in *The Treasure Hunter* (Chu, 2009) and *Red Cliff, Parts 1 and 2* (Woo, 2008; 2009).

## **Conclusion**

From Bible, Adam and Eve don't need to wear clothes originally. They are not embarrassed to be naked. After they eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they find it so shameful to be naked. Therefore, they wear cloths (fig leaves together in Genesis, 3: 7) to cover their body. Human body is a symbol of original sin in Bible. And the Lord God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife, and he clothed them (In Bible, Genesis, 3:21). The word "Clothes" is first appeared in our understanding. Therefore, cloth/fashion is a way of

covering human sin/body on religious level, it is not just something to make ourselves keep warm and protective. It is about crime and punishment, salvation and redemption, life and death, and good and evil. For cinema, when actor/actress wears some kind of costumes/fashion, it is the method acting of hiding human tragic flaw, then actor/actress is able to act the shadow of role theologically. And during the journey of story, the dark side of character would be revealed or healed or overcome or worsen through the story are progressing. That is why most characters and roles in movies ending unmask or naked themselves to reveal the true identity and value. Finally, their lives are reborn again into a new life journey.

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