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From CHARACTER
To CLOTH:
Analysing Costume Design on Screen

Master of Arts by Research

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Art History and Film Studies
University of Sydney
2014

Julie Lynch
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Julie Lynch
FROM CHARACTER TO CLOTH

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FROM CHARACTER TO CLOTH

INTRODUCTION

Stand ten naked men and women in a row and the first detail an observer will note is their sex, the next a guess at their age and their skin colour will give some clue to their ancestry. This is the starting point for the costume designer. The performer is the naked canvas, and the costume is the paint and the brush. The performer’s embodiment of the costume brings the costume and character to life. Add a pair of glasses to a dress mannequin and the result is just that. Add the same glasses to George Reeves and Clark Kent is born. Hide Clark Kent in a phone booth and take his glasses away and Superman has arrived.

As soon as the costume designer selects the pair of glasses they begin a visual dialogue with the audience. A visual communication that is as powerful as the verbal.

Consider how costume is explored in Caryl Churchill’s 1979 stage play Cloud Nine,

“...set in a British colony in Africa in Victorian times. Cloud Nine is an elaborate dissection of the sexual underworld of Victorian society. Largely through the use of cross-dressing, Churchill challenges and ridicules the accepted notions of Victorian morality and behavior by inverting the assumption that what people look like and wear are straightforward indicators of who they are and what they are feeling.”

This demonstrates the responsibility of the designer, where all their choices acutely inform the audience’s understanding of character and narrative.

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Costume Designers work within a creative team. Their work supports the narrative and they are responsible for creating visually authentic characters. In order to do this they become generous collaborators, and sensitive observers. They keenly support character and function. They measure their stylistic choices and then combine all their skills and ideas, contributing into the mise-en-scène.

Despite the rise of new technologies aiding imagery on screen, the fundamentals of screen story telling remains the same. The design needs to support narrative and character. The audience needs to relate to the characters. I believe that no amount of decoration, digital design or animation will compensate for a film that lacks heart or depth of ideas.

The following chapters will investigate design methodologies and philosophies of leading costume designers and their creative collaborators for screen.

Chapter one scrutinises perspectives and the power of observation. The production designer, director, cinematographer and editor consider viewpoints when utilising observation methods. Depending on whether a screen shot is taken in close-up and then opened out wide or visa-versa will inform the audience in two contrasting ways. Each perspective will manipulate the viewer’s comprehension and psychological response. The composer and sound designer both underscore observation. The audience may have a limited or sophisticated knowledge of music but subliminally the most elementary spectator will relate to sound’s ability to communicate all facets of human emotion without needing a scholarly knowledge of the history or mechanics of composition. The costume designer utilises their powers of observation by exploring all areas that relate and support character through clothes, hair, makeup and accessories, and the director drives all observation methodologies and then unites each artist’s contribution into one complete vision.
Chapter two examines the importance and variant methods of collaboration. Costume designers need to embrace collaboration, they work within a team and their work can only exist when working within a creative partnership. Costume designers connect their art with the performer, director, production designer, editor, composer and cinematographer. Their work becomes a better whole when the sums of all contributors are combined to bring the best ideas and images alive.

Chapter three studies the multiple layers in which the costume designer supports the character and function through costume design. The costume designer supports character by working closely with each performing artist, developing and correlating ideas through the exploration of text, concept, and function, as well as the performance arc. They consider the individual physical and intellectual needs of a performer and support the direction and interpretation of a singular character while creating an overall costume language for all characters within the entire dramatic and visual landscape.

Chapter four investigates design styles and themes and considers how some films are created using a combination of styles and themes. The labels naturalism, fantasy, science fiction and period are frequently used when discussing costume design. Is it possible or necessary to describe costume design as any one particular style? This chapter examines costume design styles within a film and identifies stylistic influences, ambiguities and the designer’s methods that have aided the creation of the final design.

Chapter five considers the costume within the mise-en-scène. Costume design makes up an important visual element within the moving frame, influencing the film’s pictorial and dramatic focus, it messages subliminally and underscores character and storytelling. Costume designers act like painters, balancing colour, form, line, texture and value. They work with a
live performer creating a three dimensional costume that will be seen within a two dimensional frame. The costume designer contributes to each moving picture layer as each frame moves to the next, developing story and magnifying emotional depth.

Costume Designers are visual dramatists, writing with image, and supporting story telling with their visual imagination. Over the past 30 years I have worked as a costume designer for live performance, working in theatre, opera and dance. During my career I have been influenced by my stage peers and by costume designers who design for screen. There have been many film costume designs that have inspired and informed my work. This thesis analyses the films and the costume designers who have influenced my practice and my career. The aim of the five following chapters is to study and learn from some of the most masterful costume examples in screen history.
1. OBSERVATION

1a. Look and See - Observation and Viewpoint

“Draw what you see, not what you know.”

Director - Peter Greenaway

Film director Peter Greenaway once said “Draw what you see, not what you know.” He was quoting his Arts Professor at Walthamstow College from the 1960s. The professor’s instruction became Greenaway’s inspiration for developing the screenplay and directorial approach for The Draughtsman’s Contract (1982), (TDC). So influential was the dictum “Draw what you see, not what you know”, that Greenaway quotes it seventeen years later when describing his creative process.

While Greenaway had his unique inspiration for creating The Draughtsman Contract, it was the inventive plot, cinematic originality and the inimitable production design that inspired me to become a designer.

Greenaway describes how he developed the plot and screen shots for TDC by considering personal observation and individual viewpoint. As he created the film, he explored the theory that, depending on the individuality of the viewer, the location of the viewpoint and the minute of the day, individuals see images and actions uniquely.

In life, individuals view objects and situations differently. For example, if an artist looks up at a sky filled with clouds, the artist will see the sky in a different way to a scientist studying the

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3 Ibid.
same clouds. They may be standing in the same spot on the same day at the same time, but the artist is more likely to contemplate the colour, tone and line in the image. The scientist influenced by his technical background may consider how the clouds are being formed. If they were each standing in a different position, they would gain a different physical perspective. The same person viewing the same clouds from below a tree and then through a window will have seen two images of the one set of clouds.

A group of costume designers have more common interests and experiences than the example of the artist and the scientist, however costume designers will observe differently when viewing people, clothing and situations. Designers come from differing levels of education and professional experience. During their career, their peers have influenced them, and from childhood their physical, artistic and cultural environment has helped shape their imagination. Therefore when an individual costume designer examines a piece of clothing or character, their life experiences will affect their observation methods and sway their point of view.

Costume designers need to develop complex observation skills when studying character and clothes. They exercise their individual viewpoint when analysing and interpreting dramatic texts. They collaborate with other artists such as the director or performer and then incorporate those artist’s additional observations and viewpoints into the costume design. It is the sophisticated melding of a number of individual observations and viewpoints that essentially form the creative tools that the costume designer will use to design the costume.

Costume designers use their observation skills and viewpoint to respond differently to the design brief. For example: give the same piece of black cloth to a group of designers and ask them each to swiftly fashion a nun’s costume on a mannequin. Each individual designer will respond differently, some will have a great knowledge of the history of clerical dress and will
utilise that as naturalistic inspiration to create their costume. Others may interpret the brief differently to the first group and choose to add more of their own personality into to their design, and some may decide to create a more abstract religious connotation by responding to the capacity of their rudimentary design materials. Each individual’s knowledge, professional expertise, interpretation of the design brief and the physical materials and environment will influence the costume designers’ methods in creating the nun’s costume.

Costume designers become observation masters. They spend their lives consciously and subconsciously studying life, clothes and art. For example in a single day’s journey to the designer’s workplace, the experienced designer may record costume evidence for a future project. They may sketch how a hat looked on a man’s head. They may secretly photograph the striking appearance of a lady with her brightly coloured hair next to her pale complexion. The designer may ponder the history of the garment as an office girl rushes by on her way to work. Every costume design scenario comes from some kind of truthful investigation. The costume designer seeks out authenticity before embarking on the design. If they understand the verisimilitude of the image, they may manipulate it with confidence and clarity whether it is a naturalistic story - set now, or an imaginative world - set in the future.

In Deborah Nadoolman-Landis’s book Screencraft, veteran costume designer Ann Roth describes her observation process,

“When I was preparing to design costumes for ‘Working Girl’, I went to the World Trade Center and watched people getting on and off the Staten Island Ferry. Staten Island, where the heroine was raised, actually had its own style and flavour. It was the late 1980s, and the hairstyles were very exciting to me; all the women had big hair. They carried their office shoes in their bags, and they were sexy. It was the best way I could think of to get a genuine sense of how to dress the principal actress. Being
observant is an important quality in a costume designer. The designer should look and search out and be in awe. They should notice the hair, the girdle, the no girdle, the carriage of the body, the stains, the starch, the balance.”

In this example Roth describes her drive and diligence to find the authentic image of the Staten Island working girl. She does not just rely on memory she observes and examines every detail from the inside out.

Given that “Draw what you see, not what you know” is a succinct way of describing observation and viewpoint, then surely Greenaway’s dictum is an indispensable starting point for costume designers designing for stage and screen.

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The following example examines the method of Greenaway’s keen observation:

In *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982), Greenaway artfully frames up each scene. His angles, viewpoints, character and prop placements are carefully considered creating a series of screen masterworks. Sue Blane and Greenaway create a colour palette of whites for all costumes with the single exception of the draughtsman dressed in black, reinforcing his status as the outsider and heightening focus. They reverse the combination at the end where the family and guests wear all black and the Draughtsman finds himself failing to connect again, this time dressed in white. The colour palette is made more resonate by being placed in front of a background of lush green countryside.
Greenaway talks about his framing device,

“...the draughtsman uses an optical device constructed as a frame. Recent publications by David Hockney have suggested that artists after and during the Renaissance resorted to all sorts of optical equipment in order to improve the artificiality of their medium. The notion of the frame as a filmic device, and also as a drawing device, is related very significantly to the notion of a frame-up. Though we imagine the draughtsman rules the roost and governs the action, he's in fact slowly, scene by scene, being framed. So the notion of the subject matter of the film - to frame somebody, that is, to put them up as a victim of a conspiracy of some description - is also relative to the way the film itself is very self-consciously framed.”

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Here Greenaway describes that by the nature of his framing and therefore how the audience observes and understands each image, helps to strengthen the visual literacy, clarifying and amplifying character, plot and action.
1b. Visual Literacy - Appropriateness and Balance

“I want the clothes to not get in the way of the writer’s words.”²

Costume Designer - Aggie Guerard Rodgers

What is appropriate when balancing costume with words? Often as I have left the cinema I have overheard a member of the audience comment “It looked great! But I didn’t think much of the story...” Occasionally the story isn’t well written or well conceived, but from time to time, a good or even outstanding screenplay is overwhelmed by the excessive or inappropriate design and production values, and if the story has been overwhelmed by the design then the performer and character surely will have been as well. The key to good design is to find appropriateness and balance. In a film musical, such as The Ziegfeld Follies (1945), the audience expects a cinematic spectacle, where the design is one of the biggest players in the production. In a Mike Leigh film such as Secrets and Lies (1996), the costumes form the subliminal fabric of the character, allowing the focus to be on the words, and the performance. The lack of attention seeking design in this instance permits the audience to be immersed entirely in the emotional narrative.

Another example of design taking a step back and supporting the text are Edith Head’s costume designs for many of the Alfred Hitchcock films she collaborated with him on. Head wrote,

“Alfred Hitchcock has a complete phobia of what he calls ‘eye-catchers’, like a scene with a woman in bright purple or a man in an orange suit. Unless there is a true

reason for a colour, we keep the colours muted, because Hitchcock believes they can detract from an important action in the scene.”

An example where the costume and production design has overwhelmed the script or at least highlighted the script’s weaknesses is Baz Luhrmann’s Moulin Rouge! (2001). The quality of the Oscar winning production design implies that all the creative elements will be equal. It suggests that the artistic core of the work - the plot and the dialogue will also be world-class. To compare another Luhrmann work - Romeo + Juliet (1996), where Luhrmann worked with dialogue and plot written by William Shakespeare. In that instance, the quality of directorial concept and balance of design was universally praised. The design, as well as being brilliant, vigorously supported the characters and storytelling and allowed the words and story to come alive. The balance of great writing and appropriate costume was equal to all of the artistic and dramatic areas within the film.

On Moulin Rouge! The design was so powerful, wonderful and attention seeking that it outshone all other elements, and in particular highlighted the lack of depth and detail in the dialogue and simplistic plot. Like a prize fighter the design’s glamour and imagination knocked the weak plot out of the ring. Film lovers will forgive meager production values on a low budget film especially if the dialogue, plot and concept are strong, but they will balk at over-decoration of average words and lack lustre concepts. They will protest when design overwhelms or confuses the essence of the narrative or character.

Given that the words are vitally important and contribute powerfully towards the directorial vision, it is essential that the costume designer absorbs the text and understands how the

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director and other members of the conceptual team are relating to the words. As a designer, I try to read the text at least five times before beginning a design.

Costume designer James Acheson who designed *The Last Emperor* describes his process for understanding the potential of the words when working with director Bernardo Bertolucci, he says,

“He insisted on a very close working relationship with his chief collaborators. His cinematographer, production designer, editor and costume designer were vital players in the planning of his films. I have never had before or since, the opportunity to sit down with the director for four days and go through page by page to find out - even at that early stage how the costumes could and should contribute to the storytelling and serve the vision of the film he was about to make.”

Bertolucci’s process of collaboration and communication to find the most valuable understanding of text, and communicating with his creative team about the words and recognising the potential for artistic possibility through text analysis, seems to me to be the ideal method.

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The following films examine the importance of supporting the text with costume:

In the first example of *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), costume designer Colleen Atwood is faced with the challenge of designing costumes for one of literature's most famous characters - Alice. Since 1865, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been a family favourite. It has been represented in numerous illustrated books, countless films including the very famous Walt Disney animation and has been used as inspiration for thousands of artist’s interpretations from watercolours to bronzes. The story is so popular that most children and adults could describe Alice's journey of falling down the rabbit hole, drinking the ‘drink me’ potion and eating the ‘eat me’ biscuit, in correct order without needing to refer to the book and with that familiarity comes expectation and anticipation about how the costume designer will support the words. “What will Alice be wearing?” In the most recent film version of *Alice in Wonderland*, Colleen Atwood worked with long time collaborator, director Tim Burton.
Atwood described how text inspired the costume design, she says,

“It came from the following words; in the opening of Tim Burton’s ‘Alice in Wonderland’, the heroine argues with her mother about—what else? — Clothes. Scolded for not wearing a corset, Alice says, ‘Who’s to say what is proper? What if it was agreed that proper was wearing a codfish on your head? Would you wear it? To me, a corset is like a codfish.’ Atwood goes on to say that ‘this line set up Alice’s character as slightly more modern, more of a human being.’ Her costumes follow suit.”

Alice begins the film in a 19th century blue party dress, which cleverly references the Disney animated puff-sleeve creation she’s worn since 1951 but is more sophisticated and characterful. “It’s an iconic thing, not a bad thing,” says Atwood. “But when Alice goes down the rabbit hole and lands in a transformative new world, her clothes do too.”

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6 Ibid.
"We made a decision that as Alice shrunk and grew, her dress would not," says Atwood. This leaves Alice puzzling over what to wear throughout the film.”

“First, she improvises a halter and quadruple-wrapped ribbon belt to hoist up her underskirt.”

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8 Ibid
“Then, when she shrinks again, the Mad Hatter fashions a teeny dress for her to change into inside a teapot.”

“Next, when she suddenly grows out of this garment and ends up gigantic and naked at the royal court, the Red Queen orders, “Clothe this enormous girl!” At this point, Alice is given an asymmetrical black, white, red gown. In each iteration Alice’s
dress gains a detail—black trim, contrasting colors, and a stripe.”

The audience’s expectation has been satisfied by Atwood’s costume creations inspired directly by the words. She manages to discover a modern day, confident Alice and translates this into the clothes. She also develops a narrative contract with the director, dialogue and plot by deciding that the garments Alice wears should have a truthful transformation as her size and situation dramatically changes. By creating costume elements that transform more realistically as she shrinks and grows, it ups the stakes of threat and challenge as Alice makes her unusual journey through Wonderland.

The second example is Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet (1996) where Luhrmann worked with the text by William Shakespeare (Screenplay by Craig Pearce/Luhrmann). The quality of directorial concept and balance of design was universally praised, the design supported the characters and words, and the story came alive, breathing new life into a classic that was appreciated by a new audience. The balance of great writing and appropriate costuming was equal to all artistic and dramatic contributions within the film. R+J’s plot of feuding families sets in motion the fates of Romeo and Juliet. Therefore it is essential that the audience can identify the warring parties immediately and Luhrmann does this as he introduces each character in Shakespeare’s Prologue within a news bulletin, outlining events and key characters as well as establishing the News Broadcaster as the Shakespearean Chorus and therefore reinforcing the image of a new modern day Verona.

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It has been tradition that stage and screen productions of *Romeo and Juliet* present the divide of the feuding Capulets and Montague families visually. Most commonly their family individuality is illustrated through colour, where the fiery protagonists, the Capulets, wear an overall colour palette of red, and the more passive but equally divisive Montagues are
represented by the motif of water, wear blue. An example of such colour coding is represented in Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, where after Mercutio has been slain by Tybalt, the extensive Montague and Capulet families confront each other in a Verona Square swathed in blue and red silks and velvets.

In Luhrmann’s 1996 production, costume designer Kym Barrett supports the traditional visual methods, but creates a contemporary visual dialogue. In figure 10 depicting the Montague’s, the traditional and identifiable Montague blue is evident, but it has been contemporised in the choice of Hawaiian style shirts. The Hawaiian shirts are designed with religious symbols and family crests re-enforcing religion and family honour. In contrast the Capulets in figure 11 wear tight gangster style clothes in reds and blacks, embellished with religious symbolism and family iconography. The soft shirts of the Montagues are less threatening and more youthful than the tight costume styles of the Capulets. The costume designs not only separates the warring families clearly, but they subliminally side the audience with Romeo as he is presented as more vulnerable and innocent. While Romeo is part of a gang, he is presented more passively to the volatile Tybalt. Shakespeare wants the audience to support Romeo, and to embrace the lovers Montague and Capulet by creating such precarious stakes of conflict. The death of the hero lovers makes the futile loss and waste created by a family feud even more potent.

Barrett has supported the words and character through her layered and thoughtful costume designs. Her choices look simple, but the statement for each character excel as a potent partnership to Shakespeare’s genius and Luhrmann’s bravura.
1c. Curious Research - Research Methods and Analysis

“My research had been pedestrian, unimaginative. I simply was not curious enough.”

Costume Designer - Ann Roth

Costume designers research subject areas that are far removed from their everyday life. For example, when designing *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), they will research serial killers, if they are designing uniforms for *War Horse* (2011), then investigating uniforms and ranks for WWI English and German soldiers will need to be museum accurate, and if they are creating trans-sexual costumes for *The Crying Game* (1992), then interviewing transvestites and cross-dressers may uncover secret dressing business unable to be gleaned from photographs. In most instances designer’s research will be far more wide-ranging than a trip to the local library.

Designers find themselves in challenging locations having curious conversations in the quest to source the most valuable research material. As a costume designer I have called on a tattoo parlour, researched in the NSW Forensic Office, written to the Church of England in the UK and travelled through the Pitjantjatjara Lands studying Australia’s Indigenous for an upcoming play. It is fascinating and important work and similar to studying the text, research is equally important. Having a strong understanding of the words and having a deep body of research underway is a necessary way to fuel the designer’s imagination and is essential before skipping into the exciting task of designing.

In *Screencraft*, costume designer Anne Roth describes her view on research:

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“When I was in school in Pittsburgh, I was determined to learn to design scenery and costumes. One of my first jobs was to design ‘Ring Around the Moon’, and after I had designed it, drawn it, completed the working drawings and painted the elevations, the director asked me about my research. He was an older, very experienced, and highly cultured man. My research had been pedestrian, unimaginative. I simply was not curious enough. He knew it, and I learnt the most significant lesson of designing essentials, research and more research. Now I probably spend way too much time gathering source material, but it is part of my process.”

Designers fuel their imagination by referencing diverse sources. Their research process will be most successful if they have a sound understanding of the text, themes and subject areas. Their solid research foundation will make manipulating imagery and developing original ideas more successful and more potent. If the design ideas are just whim and without substance they will be exposed.

The lengthy process of research continues throughout each project and as the designer commits to the utilisation of their research material, they must employ their observation skills to best integrate their findings into their costume design. For example, there is little visual advantage in finding a reference that is so obscure that the audience won’t recognise it. There is no advantage for confusing the audience by the discovery of an incomprehensible or confused image. It may be useful background information, but the designer will need to assess whether it will connect and communicate to the audience. Costume designers are visual communicators, they communicate instantly with image. They need to take measure of the information that they have found and use it to support the character’s visual appearance. For example, if the designer has found a wonderful reference for a Catholic Bishop from the 18th century, but it bares similar characteristics to a Bishop from the Church

of England, then more research as well as critical selection will need to take place, the
designer will need to consider how the design will be observed by the audience. In most
religious portrayals it is essential that the audience recognise instantly the denomination. If
the audience is left confused then the designer’s extensive research efforts will have been in
vain.

Designers also reference for manufacture, finding the painting or photograph that inspires a
design idea for a character is just the beginning. The designer may be referencing a black and
white photograph of a hand-knitted cardigan from the 1920s. Knitting techniques have
changed since then, wool is manufactured differently and so too have weights of wool and
pattern making. The designer will need to continue their research process to fully
comprehend how the garment will be reproduced, partially copied or reinterpreted. In
Martin Scorsese’s Hugo (2011), costume designer Sandy Powell talks about the lengthy
research process that went into the manufacture of the clothes well after the initial design
ideas had been created, she says,

“We had to have the knits made for the kids, especially since there are duplicates.
Hugo’s sweater was based on an original one I found, so I had to find wool to match.
If the colours weren’t right, I dyed them to the exact shades I wanted. Isabelle’s
colours weren’t so unusual; I wanted a very French look for her so she is in a lot of
navy and burgundy which are colours easily found now. I did, however want to use a
wool that was more vintage in feel, which meant it was a lot less comfortable than a
lot of wools used today, as it was scratchy! All of Mr. Frick’s knitwear was done by
hand, again using wools with colours as close to period as I could get. Lisette’s beret
and scarf were all made from original 1920s patterns.”

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Powell demonstrates her ability to utilise her detailed research methods and communicate to the audience period accuracy and detailing that will support character.

The following two films examine the importance of curious, imaginative and accurate research methods for costume design:

The first example, *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) illustrates how the costume designer needs to think outside the box when faced with limited primary research sources. The designer’s visual interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth needs to convince a worldwide religious audience. The image of Jesus has been represented throughout history in countless countries in all forms of artistic expression. Costume designer Maurizio Millenotti had access to endless interpretative sources, such as paintings, sculptures and illuminations, but did not have access to definitive sources such as photographs, actual clothing or film footage. Despite this information not being available, the audience will have preset ideas of how the characters should look. For example if you were to ask a passerby on the streets of Rome,
“What colour eyes and hair did Jesus have?” they will probably answer with great conviction, and ask a number of people the same question and each answer will surely vary.

Millenotti had the challenge of designing Jesus, Mary, Mary Magdalene, the twelve disciples and countless other religious icons. As well as this challenge he was serving producer Mel Gibson who is a devout Catholic. Millenotti would need to back up his ideas with solid research to convince both his audience and employer. He describes his research and design process,

“Mel Gibson had a very clear vision of the look of the movie and he guided me while at the same time giving me complete creative freedom. It was a very different world to recreate because there was no visual reference for the Palestinian common people and of life in ancient Palestine. I started reading books and studying how fabrics were made at that time and tried to understand the colours and how they prepared the dyes.”

In this case Millenotti built a truthful design style by using the small primary research materials available. Armour has survived this period as well as a small amount of textiles, therefore the nature in which the thread was created, woven and then utilised gave the designer a starting point to create a design language. Similar to Asian and Islamic where clothing is based on the weaving loom’s rectangular and square shapes, it is understood that clothing from this period, culture and location follows the same method.

The simplicity of design and recycling of materials from the age of Christianity inspired Millenotti to create original and exiting designs spawn from seeds of truthful investigation.

The second example, *The Iron Lady* (2011), is a film based on the life story of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and played by American actress Meryl Streep. This is an opposite challenge to *The Passion of the Christ*. By the contemporary nature of the subject there is a wealth of primary reference material accessible to the designer and similar manufacturing materials available to aid exacting reproduction. The design challenge may first appear easy, but the subject material is so recent that most of the audience either by watching news footage or reading the newspaper, will remember Thatcher and have strong opinions as to whether her hair, her clothing and even her teeth are correct.

Another challenge is how the costume designer Consolata Boyle will utilise her research when working with Streep. Boyle needs to convince us that Streep is Thatcher throughout her lifetime from a youngish woman as she enters parliament to her final days at home suffering dementia. When filming took place, Streep herself was 61 and needed to look considerably younger in the beginning and then shrink and age as she portrays Thatcher’s decline. Boyle will have had access to endless photographs, real examples of Thatcher’s clothing to copy and news footage to pore over. Thatcher’s clothes and hair have become synonymous with Thatcher’s style further embedding her image into the audience’s psyche.

Boyle will have discussed the Thatcher research with the makeup, prosthetics and hair-design team. Each will be measuring their contribution to every Thatcher ensemble. If Boyle relies solely on correct historic research for Thatcher she will be doing Streep a disservice. Informed by history she will need to apply her design theory, making Streep look younger and older where appropriate as well as being historically accurate. Her design powers of observation and her factual costume knowledge of Thatcher gained by fastidious research must go hand in hand to create to the final individual costume design.
In figure 13, Streep plays Thatcher early in her career, the design is historically correct, we recognise the late 1970s pillbox hat, pale blue two-piece suit with conservative blouse and lapel brooch. Thatcher may never have worn such soft colours, but if Boyle sticks to darker tones from the outset then Thatcher’s appearance has no room for development. Simple but significant choices have helped Streep look younger, the light coloured suit and blouse with white in amongst the pattern of the blouse is soft, the navy blue trim in the collar links to the hat and helps to frame the face. The hairstyle is more youthfully blonde than later images and the curly wave in Streep’s hair is softer and more feminine than the later very set and controlled style in figure 14.
In figure 14, Thatcher is at the height of her powers and her image is controlled and sophisticated.

It is interesting to observe that in figures 13 and 14, Streep is wearing exactly the same costume elements apart from the hat. It is the manipulation of styles, colour, accessories, hair and makeup that reinvent the ensemble and supports the character's visual journey.

Thorough research has been essential teamed with critical design observation and collaboration.
1d. Material Language - The Communicative Power of Textures and Surfaces

“But, there’s always an element of trapped death in her costumes, such as the skeletal cage around her shoulders in her wedding costume.”  

Costume Designer - Colleen Atwood

Humans respond emotionally and subliminally to textures and surfaces. It is natural for people to want to touch beautiful and interesting objects, hence the need for museum and galleries signposting asking patrons not to touch. On occasion gallery visitor’s accidently brush their hands over marble, textiles, timber and painted surfaces, sending off alarm bells, as they are subliminally attracted to the tactile spell of magnificent objects.

Costume designers work with materials that have equivalent magnetism as well as materials with recognisable identities due to their prevalent use in a particular period. Other materials are identifiably linked to occupation, class and occasion due to their extensive use in uniforms and formal attire. Such characteristics allow the costume designer a head start when designing for period or occupational costume. Other materials have an emotional impact to the viewer, such as the softness of a fur collar or the threat of a thorny crown.

Costume designers observe the messages materials make and employ the physical features to support character and create three-dimensional tactility for a two dimensional medium. For example if the design is a simple sleeveless shift-dress made from thin cotton worn without shoes or jewellery, the audience may see a person with little financial means. If the costume designer makes the same sleeveless shift-dress in a gold sequin fabric and gives the wearer high shoes, the design will change from housedress to nightclub gear. The fabric

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chosen and the addition of high shoes elevate the original shape to a new status. The material language transforms the design.

When Colleen Atwood recently designed costumes for *Snow White and the Huntsmen* (2012), she described how her material choices impacted on character,

❝In this movie, there are more symbolic elements in Ravenna's costume which go on a journey from lightness, which you see there in the beginning [where] she's sort of this golden personage. But, there's always an element of trapped death in her costumes, such as the skeletal cage around her shoulders in her wedding costume. The trim of her blue costume is made with beetle wings from Thailand, which are beetles that they eat. Another of her costumes kind of speaks for itself. It's got a reptilian quality. So her costumes progress from a lighter mood through a dark mood. The feather cape I knew in the beginning had to turn into birds so that was one of the first things we started with. The gold dress underneath was a dress that goes through a black slick and comes out black, and when it does, it almost looks like old skin.❞

Atwood's description highlights how designers utilise the subtlety and power of material choices and how each choice will affect costume design and character.

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The following two films examine material language when applied to costume design:

![Figure 15 – The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring – 2001](image)

Sean Astin as Sam Gamgee, Elijah Wood as Frodo Baggins
Dominic Monaghan as Merry Brandybuck, Billy Boyd as Pippin Took
Costume Designers – Ngila Dickson (costumes) and Richard Taylor (armour)

In the first examples of Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) (*TLOTR*) and *The Hobbit* (2012), the audience is encouraged to believe that Middle-earth costume and prop materials have originated from the earth. The costume’s construction and designs imply that Tolkien’s characters are sans-sewing machines and lack a haberdasher and their only means of clothing construction is depicted by hand-stitching, silver hand forged fastenings and brooches and elements tied up and linked together with strips of twine and leather. Any contemporary machine stitching actually used to build the immense collection of Middle-earth clothing is carefully hidden from view, transporting the audience deeper into the imagination of Tolkien’s writing and Jackson’s inspired interpretation.

Costume Designer’s Ngila Dickson talks about the truthful backstory she created when designing a complete costume world for Middle-earth,
“I can’t make half-arsed outfits… For me, it has to be what it would be. I have to make costumes as real as possible - however small the scene - because a costume is the actor’s "pass" to a character. Whether it is a royal get-up that is incredibly accurate and weighty, or some ghastly, scratchy woolen outfit for the local yokel, the actor wearing it will be in no doubt as to who they are.”

Dickson’s fastidiousness is well weighted in the fabrics she chooses. Here she describes her lengthy process in developing the fabric language for Gandalf,

“The material was specially woven for us in Indonesia and, whilst it may look like a lot of old grey raggedy stuff, I can tell you that a huge amount of work went into making it like that. The process began with good washing: Several good washings actually. Next we over-dyed it until we got to what was the agreed Gandalf costume colour and then we washed it again - to dull the colour down. After that we put it through another dye-bath and washed it yet again. Then we really got started!’ Sand was used to roughen the surface and oxides were worked into the folds of the cloth to give those variations of colour that only come with fading. The costume was then put on an 'Ian McKellan substitute’ so that the natural wear points could be marked - elbows, knees, hems and down the front, 'where hands and life happen!’ - areas which then received serious attention: creating stains, making holes, snagging threads… It took up to three days to create a convincingly 'broken-down' costume and the same laborious process would then have to be able to be applied to however many versions of the costume were required for filming - in the case of Gandalf, some fifteen - all of which had to match as well as show varying stages of wear-and-tear.”

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18 Ibid. (p.88)
Dickson goes on to talk about her passion for textiles and materials and the personalities they represent,

“The detailing - whether exquisite or ugly - is extraordinary: the buttons on Aragorn’s tunic embossed with the Tree of Gondor or Saruman’s belt braided in white wool, interwoven with gold thread.”  

“Maybe for a designer, the true essence of beauty lies in texture...It’s incredible what texture can do. Various techniques and precision skills were employed to create such multi-textured effects: some materials were screen printed with designs, others were embellished with cornelli, a craft in which patterns are delineated with string and then over-stitched to give the rich look of raised embroidery.”

Another example of fabric impacting on character is: Miranda Otto’s costume for the character of Eowyn from TLOT: Two Towers:

“It was in the choice of colours and materials that Eowyn’s personality was differentiated from that of Arwen. We decided, that since Eowyn was human you needed to feel as if you could reach out and touch her, unlike Arwen and Galadriel who are Elves and, therefore more illusive, more like a trick of light. The use of natural fabrics (wools, hessians, velvets and brocades) suggests warmth, earthiness and royalty as well as a sense of imprisonment - a woman bound and trapped by duty.”

Here, Dickson’s fabric choices support Otto’s interpretation of character, raising the actor’s confidence in communicating character subtleties to her audience.

20 Ibid. (p.92)
21 Ibid. (p.96)
In *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), (TH-AUJ) designers Bob Buck, Ann Maskrey and Richard Taylor have the task of designing individual Warrior Dwarves. Similar to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), the Hobbit dwarves have different personalities and varied role dynamics within the group. The costume design and material choices are essential in creating a unique dwarf identity. In particular the costume of Thorin Oakenshield immediately succeeds in communicating his significant role of Dwarf Warrior Leader. In the collection of thirteen warrior dwarves, Buck, Maskery and Taylor’s simple but bold choice of a large rugged wolf type fur collar, instantly references ancient-times, brutality and king or leader. His silhouette parallels Henry the Eighth and the fur is more generous than any fur texture utilised in any other dwarf costume, enabling his leadership to be clearly recognised.
The singular, simple and measured material choice of a fur collar for Thorin communicates class, hierarchy, period, location and character, immediately directing the audience to follow the leader.

In *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), costume and prop materials appear to have metamorphosed from an apocalyptic car yard. Fierce looking male and females with shaved heads and towering Mohawks of horsehair, wear heavily shoulder padded armour made up of riveted rubber car mats, hubcaps and adorned with reflectors, rearview mirrors and motorcycle fenders.

Costume designer Norma Moriceau creates a material language that is more narcissistic panel beater than polite tailor strengthening the visual identity of the Thunderdome world to the audience. Tina Turner’s costume is part Glomesh handbag and part chainmail, conjuring equally an image of diva glamour and warrior soldier. The combinations of eclectic
materials that are recognisable and tactile create a layer of atmosphere that are achieved by the subliminal message that exists within each material and object. The audience observes consciously and subconsciously the character and world identity created by succinct material choices made by the designer.

In this chapter I have examined the power of Observation, identifying the essential strategies related to keen observation and referencing. Each component bringing together a successful and effective costume design. I refer back to my first reference to Greenaway’s “Draw what you see, not what you know”22, such a simple statement encourages designers to question what they observe and their methods in relation to a multitude of complex layers.

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2. COLLABORATION

“Never Say ‘I’... Always say ‘we!’”¹

Diana Vreeland, speaking about collaboration.

Fashion Editor of Harper’s Bazaar, Editor in Chief of Vogue and Special Consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Costume designers put away their egos and work as ‘we’ within a creative team. Their focus is on supporting the performer’s image within the moving picture. They are different to fashion designers who create clothes that people will buy and by doing so develop a brand that promotes their work and their name. Their brand and image ends up at the forefront of the work, while the costume designer steps back and humbly serves the performer and the film. Even the most celebrated costume designer is unknown to the general public, where the successful fashion designer’s name becomes part of the shopper’s aspirations and vocabulary.

The costume is a collaborative and fluid tool that supports the performer as they speak, sing and gesture in front of the camera. As the performer moves the costume reacts physically, supporting and emphasizing the performance. The costume’s colours, fabrics and textures respond to light and movement and when designed thoughtfully should aid the communication of all the interpretative facets of the performer’s character.

Costume designers paint within a moving picture, contributing with numerous artists towards the final image. Fine-artists such as painters and sculptors initiate and self direct their work, sometimes they work with other artists, but more often they work alone. For this reason costume designers and any artist contributing towards a stage or screen project, must throw away their ego and collaborate. Designers need to embrace openness and be willing to share and explore each other’s ideas and communicate with each other as they work. It is a

challenging process, hence when an artist finds the rare beast of a creative soul mate they often employ that exceptional partnership over an over.

In this next chapter, I will examine the collaborative partnership between Costume Designer and Film Director. The dictionary defines the word Collaboration as working together and working with the enemy and provides synonyms that include: partnership, alliance, cooperation, and group effort. Interestingly, it excludes harmony, love and respect. Designer Piero Tosi has described director Federico Fellini as,

“Fellini was as nasty as a hyena and a liar, a bitch, and as seductive as a snake. It was torturing to work with him because he would never lose control, day or night. When he was working on a film, he would not put it down for a second.”

Yet they worked together many times.

As a costume designer I have worked with some stage directors who have been real tyrants and while I have found the relationship uneasy, I have admired the artistic outcomes that have been lead by such personalities. Stage directors that I have found easier to work with have in my view not always achieved the strongest outcomes onstage and therefore I have been left believing that in order for a director to succeed they must have a tyrannical vision. It was Australian actor Andrew Tighe’s description of the skills a director should bring to the table that best explains the relationship for me. He says,

“That a great director needs to be a Benevolent Leader (a generous and open ruler) and that everyone working within the creative, performing and technical team needs to feel respected, able to contribute and be granted the ability to be honest within the

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creative relationship. Ultimately the director should have a vision that is strong, well conceived and intelligent, but within that vision there is room for further substance, polish and depth throughout the process by all of the participants.”

While I believe the most common relationship for the director within the creative team is the Benevolent Leader, there are many ways of doing things in the arts and therefore no absolute perfect way. When considering the Director/Designer/Creative team structure, I think there are three common arrangements; the most popular: The Benevolent Leader and less common, but practiced The Love In, where every member of the creative team has equal input and equal status, and the Lost Leader, where the director has highly tuned skills, such as working with the actor or developing performances on set, but relies on their creative team for much of the visual concept or other significant input.

As a designer, I feel more comfortable knowing that the director will be capable of leading a clear vision for the production. That the director will be able to describe the seed of their vision and utilise a language and a mode of working that invites and respects the contributions of everyone involved. Firstly by including the creative team and the performers and as the creative process progresses the inclusion of every contributor from the costume supervisor to the runner.

As costume designer I have taken on the role of Benevolent Leader or Dictator depending on whom you ask when building* the costumes for a work. The designer needs to tenaciously protect their vision through the most challenging situations as they navigate through budgets, skills shortages, tight schedules and production demands.

* Building Costumes: The use of the term ‘building costumes’ instead of using the term ‘making costumes’ originates from creating a costume from the inside out or from the foundation up. Costumes are multi-layered objects, whether they are a slinky 1930s evening gown or an elaborate and heavy Elizabethan court costume. The designer and makers work from the performers body out, considering their action and character, building from underwear, paddings or underpinnings that manipulate or enhance the silhouette, adding petticoats, layers, canvases and linings creating the final costume that the audience eventually sees onstage. The costume is a physical and evocative construction for character, unique to the vision and action and more considered than a dress on a dressmaker’s mannequin.

A. Tighe (personal communication, July 1, 2013).
However if the designer does not practice generosity and openness while working with the costume team, they will rob themselves and the project of valuable creative and technical contributions that only a team atmosphere can achieve. Nobody can do it alone, directing and designing relies on teamwork and within a team there is a captain and generally the captain has been appointed by the team and/or management, through the admiration of their unique skills, their respect for all members of the team and their potential to be a good and respectful leader.

With the Love In method, where all members are made to feel they have equal input and equal status, makes for a potentially more fun experience. Where the director begins the creative dialogue with “What will we do? What do we think?” It is possible that this method works best when there has been a history of collaboration within the team and there is already an environment of trust and respect. Sharing every idea that one has with every member of the creative team, can be time consuming and less efficient than going through the director as a kind of creative adjudicator. In any creative team there will be stronger personalities with stronger voices. For example, the costume designer might be older and louder than the production designer, finding a balance of voice within the total equality method may be harder in different scenarios and has the potential for bruised egos. Once egos have been damaged, the equality method will evaporate and the ship will begin to sail without anyone at the helm, and like all shipwrecks the strongest will survive.

The Lost Leader exists when the director verbally acknowledges or unconsciously acknowledges through lack of contribution, missing components in their creative and technical tool kit. Instead of trying to improve on their weaknesses they hand over the leadership of particular areas and by doing so, shirk their creative responsibility. The creative artist that is less engaged and less involved in the creative dialogue may end up dominating or be made to feel less important. Lack of communication and examination may create a tunnel
vision in one area and rob the entirety of becoming a cohesive whole. If the director has many missing attributes then the overall vision is at risk of being taken over by the entire creative team.

The director has often been described as the hub of a wheel, spinning fast or slow from the centre. Travelling in one direction and supported by the tire of all artists, it is this scenario, which is closest to the Benevolent Leader that I believe works best. Essentially, I maintain that a director and a designer need to respect their fellow artists, and have the capacity to consider all ideas, communicate positively and revel in the outcome of a creative group’s discovery.

Below are some statements from leading film costume designers about collaboration:

Jenny Beavan – “The number one quality that a costume designer must have is a collaborative spirit.”

Mark Bridges - “The most indispensable quality a costume designer needs is patience. Designers have to be patient at every point, at first with the producers and the budget, then with the actors and their schedules or idiosyncrasies. And...with the time it takes to build* a costume.”

Shay Cuncliffe – “John Sayles is a fabulous director to work with because he trusts his designer and provides a huge amount of information about his characters. He writes a page backstory about every single character in his movies, even the bit parts. Each back story includes intimate information that is nowhere in his script, including their childhood, their dreams for themselves, their fears, and where they heading in life; it's all there.”

Judianna Makovsky – “At the interview I was very open to many different ways to design the film and I was told I was the only designer who didn't scare Chris by having set-in-stone ideas. Still I was shocked when they called my agent the next day and said, 'We want her.'”

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
The next sub-chapters examine the collaborative process of four internationally successful director/designer partnerships. They include: Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin, (AUS), Luchino Visconti and Piero Tosi (ITALY), Tim Burton and Colleen Atwood (USA) Martin Scorsese (USA) and Sandy Powell (UK).
2a. Risk Takers - Luhrmann and Martin

*Strictly Ballroom, Romeo and Juliet, Moulin Rouge! Australia,*

*The Great Gatsby.*

Director - Baz Luhrmann and Designer - Catherine Martin

“Baz and I started a conversation and it has been going on for twenty five years.”

Designer and Producer – Catherine Martin

Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin grew up in contrasting cultural environs. Martin received a privileged, intellectual and artistic upbringing and Luhrmann grew up in an artistic backwater. Martin has described her childhood as physically beautiful and imaginative, her bedroom decorated with wallpaper fashioned after Toulouse Lautrec’s Moulin Rouge posters. She experienced a superior intellectual environment with her University French Professor father and her French tutor mother. She has said that,

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“Speaking two languages, allowed her to see the world through two windows, and to realise that neither French nor Australian culture had all the answers. ‘It strengthens you to see that there are many options in the world, not just one.’”

Luhrmann grew up in Heron’s Creek, a small inland country town, his mother was a ballroom dance teacher and his father ran a petrol station and a movie theatre. It was the rare opportunity of carte blanche to his own movie theatre that enlivened Luhrmann’s passion for the arts. Luhrmann says,

“I grew up in the middle of nowhere and we got lots of old television and my dad ran a cinema for a while, so I loved musicals as a kid.”

While Martin had access to sophisticated city gifts, Luhrmann developed his imagination from the smaller offerings of his hometown in country New South Wales.

Their lives became more culturally balanced when Luhrmann and Martin both attended The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Sydney. Luhrmann graduated in 1985 from the acting course and Martin followed in 1988 in design. It is possible that Luhrmann and Martin may never have met, with Luhrmann graduating as Martin enrolled at NIDA. However in 1987, Luhrmann was looking for a designer for an experimental opera that he was developing for the Australian Opera titled Lake Lost (1988) and Martin was recommended in her NIDA graduating year to work with Luhrmann. The rest is history, as Martin has said in several interviews, “Baz and I started a conversation and it has been going on for twenty five years.”

Numerous design, theatre, opera and commercial projects, five internationally renowned

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11 Ibid. 9
feature films, copious awards and nominations, the rise and rise of their production company Bazmark and a marriage with two children. Is there any better example of creative collaboration than this?

In their film debut *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), Luhrmann and Martin were unknowns, they had enjoyed stage success in Australia with works such *Lake Lost*, and subsequent opera productions of *La Bohème* (1990) and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1993) and their signature style could be seen developing nationally. However *Strictly Ballroom* put them into the international spotlight, and winning the *Award Of The Youth for Foreign Film* at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival created the splash that got everyone talking.

Since then all their collaborations have received significant international press and industry attention with; *Strictly Ballroom* being described as, “...so colourful and high-octane that it almost seemed to be an animated film come to life.”12 *Romeo and Juliet* has been praised for, “the swirling camera and dazzling production design which breathed new life into the oft-told story.”13 And *Moulin Rouge!* “A landmark musical movie -- controversial, mercurial, even cheeky. It’s the kind of film that wildly divides audiences and critics -- people tend to either love or hate it.”14 For *Australia*, “It’s not the masterpiece that we were hoping for, but I think you could say that it’s a very good film in many ways. While it will be very popular with many people I think there’s a slight air of disappointment after it all. Despite its flaws — and it certainly has flaws — I think Australia is an impressive and important film.”15 And the divided reviews for *The Great Gatsby* have included “...was "a lot of fun" and "less a conventional movie adaptation than a splashy, trashy opera, a wayward, lavishly theatrical celebration of the emotional and material

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13 Ibid.
extravagance that Fitzgerald surveyed with fascinated ambivalence”; Scott advised “the best way to enjoy the film is to put aside whatever literary agenda you are tempted to bring with you.” Most reviews are divided in their praise, and it would be expected that Luhrmann and Martin would be ambivalent to both praise and the criticism, knowing that in order to awake the nicely arranged bird, you need to ruffle some feathers.

Tom Rothman, chairman of Fox Films Entertainment describes why they have supported Luhrmann,

“Baz’s film pitches are a experience in themselves as they tend to be an escalating series of impossibilities. It is really less about the project and more about the film maker and the basic decision to want to make a movie with an artist like Baz, it becomes a decision about backing the artist - to back Baz's vision.”

In the end Luhrmann’s unconventional song and dance convinced 20th Century Fox to role the dice for Moulin Rouge!

“Moulin Rouge! was a risky venture for director Baz Luhrmann. Australia had virtually no history of musicals – Gillian Armstrong’s ‘Starstruck’ (1982) is a rare exception – and the movie musical itself had not enjoyed much worldwide popularity since the late 1960s. Particularly out of favour were musicals in which song lyrics advance the plot, as they do in Moulin Rouge!” Luhrmann has said, “Because people say to me, "My God, you’re so brave," and all that. And I’m just thinking, ‘What are you talking about?’"
I’m sort of like, ‘Well, gee, somebody’s got to make the musical work now. I guess I’ll have to do that job, you know.’” 19

During Martin’s Oscar acceptance speech for Production Design for Moulin Rouge! She thanked Luhrmann,

“…. and to Baz. You come up with ideas that even I sometimes think are crazy, but you’ve taught me to live the dream that anything is possible through ideas, hard work and discipline. Thank you for letting me come on this journey with you. You are my other half. This is for you. Thank you…” 20

Both Martin and Rothman describe a form of risk taking and aiming for the impossible led by Luhrmann. Luhrmann and Martin speak often about Artificial Reality. Where new and artistic worlds are created by an exploration into the truth first and then expanded upon. To give an example,

“...in order for Luhrmann, Pearce (co-writer) and Martin to capture the heady excitement of the Moulin Rouge, Luhrmann and his collaborators blended modern, pop, rock, techno, opera and Broadway show tunes spanning the entire twentieth century. Their only rule was that every song had to help tell the story.” 21

Another example of Artificial Reality is where costume designers Angus Strathie and Martin describe how the costume design rules evolved,

“...all costume details, elements of apparel and materials had to have existed in the 19th
century, but one could use them out of context. For example, Satie the avant-garde composer wears sunglasses to underline his alternative rock star status, even though in this period they were only be used for specific activities and were not worn as a fashion item.”

In the opening titles of Moulin Rouge! Appear the captions NO LAWS, NO LIMITS, ONLY ONE RULE, NEVER FALL IN LOVE, if the last line is changed to TRUTH, BEAUTY, FREEDOM AND LOVE, (the words that frame the title for Moulin Rouge!) some clue into the creative collaborative minds of Catherine Martin and Baz Luhrmann may be revealed. In Luhrmann’s forward on the making of Moulin Rouge! He reinforces this theory by saying,

“… that CM (Catherine Martin) and I, plus the core collaborators on this film, in some crucial sense live in a kind of Moulin Rouge. We share the Boho’s naïve belief in Truth, Freedom, Beauty and Love. And like our courtesan and poet lovers Satine and Christian, like impresario Zidler and Toulouse’s improvisatory band of Bohos, we are constantly dealing with the harsh reality of time and economics.”

With five internationally acknowledged films in their canon, Luhrmann and Martin have set an unprecedented international path and creative standard for Australian film making. They have forged a global career by risk taking and by doing so they have created a body of work that is unique to their creative partnership.

With such success and experience they demonstrate mutual respect for each other as artists. Their exceptional and unpredictable work shows their ability to labor with unyielding candor. Music Producer, Josh Abrahams describes their special creative openness,

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23 Ibid. (p.89)
“Apart from his own ideas, Baz’s main strength is getting people to contribute, and Catherine is his first, biggest contributor. He invites criticism at every step of the way, he likes to have everything he says and does really challenged. If he can get past that challenge, he knows it’s a worthwhile idea. And Catherine certainly wasn’t holding back (Moulin Rouge!). Because he’s Baz Luhrmann, if something wasn’t necessarily a good idea, you’re not going to say ‘Hey Baz, that’s a dumb idea,’ whereas she would. She’d be really straight up about it, and I think that serves him very well.”

In Global Creatures’ promotional banner for the new big budget blockbuster stage adaption of Strictly Ballroom, appears the mantra “A Life lived in Fear is a Life half lived.” Whether audiences enjoy all aspects of the Luhrmann/Martin duo’s films, they would at least acknowledge the bold risk-taking foundation of their work.

Luhrmann, “We set out to make a cinematic form; which is the antithesis of the current cinema vernacular. Where the audience participate, where they are awakened. Where they are alive in the cinema. Where they are actually uniting with the rest of the people in the cinema and participating.”

Catherine Martin has only ever collaborated with director Baz Luhrmann in the medium of film. Luhrmann has worked with Angus Strathie and Kim Barrett under Martin’s leadership. There creative partnership has been remarkably exclusive, they are both equally brave, supporting each other candidly in their quest for groundbreaking work. Their collaborative core is made of unconventional guts, unyielding artistic muscle and a utopian vision.

2b. Dreams and Detail - Scorsese and Powell

_Gangs of New York, The Aviator, Shutter Island, Hugo, Sinatra_

Director - Martin Scorsese and Costume Designer - Sandy Powell

“Scorsese is one of those people where if I was ever asked to work for him, I would drop everything - which I kind of have.”

Costume Designer - Sandy Powell

Sandy Powell grew up in South London and attended London’s Central School of Art. In her first year at Central she, “saw a production of ‘Flowers’ by choreographer and dancer Lindsey

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Kemp. It was at that point she realised she wanted to do something involving visuals and performance.”27 She spent the summer of 1974 working with Kemp, she loved it so much she took a year off study, designing and making costumes for a piece about Nijinsky at Milan’s La Scala Opera House. More and more opportunities followed and she never went back to college.

In her career she has gravitated towards directors who care about the visuals including: Derek Jarman, Mike Figgis, Neil Jordan and Todd Haynes. She says, “Marty’s just like them, really: an art-house film-maker, but with much bigger budgets.”28 Powell has been included in the quartet of greatest costume design achievers in the Victoria Albert Museum’s Hollywood Costume exhibition. She has received seven Oscar nominations and won three Academy Awards and was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her services to the costume design and film industry in 2011.

Martin Scorsese grew up in New York and attended New York University, where he received a Master of Arts. He has made some fifty films and has received numerous honours and awards including: the Academy Award for best director, three Golden Globe Awards, an Emmy for best director series and the American Institutes Life Time Achievement Award. The Chairman of the National Endowment Foundation for the Humanities in the US, James Leach describes Scorsese’s work as,

“His films are grounded in a sense of time and place and though they are strikingly diverse in subject and style, they are known for incorporated camera and editing techniques, for different genres and for distinctive treatments of signature themes of

28 Ibid.
isolation and ethnic identity, violence and loss, guilt and redemption, faith and spirituality." 29

He is a passionate filmmaker that humbly acknowledges his groundbreaking directorial predecessors; he is screen educator as well as director, who generously shares his knowledge and passion for film with his peers and future filmmakers. He is a Founding Director and Chairman of The World Cinema Foundation: a foundation that preserves cinema heritage and educates future filmmakers. He has said,

“I still consider myself a student. The more pictures I made in my career, the more I realise there are things that I really don’t know. I am always looking for something or someone that I can learn from. I tell the younger film makers and the younger film students ... ‘do it like painters used to do, study the old masters enrich your palette and there is always so much more to learn.’” 30

Scorsese credits the 1950 English film The Magic Box as the film that first ignited his passion for cinema. As a child he suffered asthma and for recreation his parents took him to the movies. At eight years old he saw The Magic Box with his father and has said, “I never really got over the impact that it had, and I believe this is what ignited in me the wonder of cinema and the obsession of watching movies, making them and inventing them.” 31

Scorsese and Powell’s film work together has shared common themes and have been from the past: On Gangs of New York (2002) and Shutter Island (2010), the films have been developed around fictional characters inspired by historical events. The Aviator (2004) and Sinatra

(2013) are about the lives of the famous historical figures: Howard Hughes and Frank Sinatra, and *Hugo* (2011) has been based on Brian Selznick’s children’s book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, inspired by Georges Méliès film career and his celebrated animation, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902).

Scorsese collaborates with ghosts as well as the living. His profound knowledge and passion for the work of film’s pioneers, the development of different film genres and his understanding of shooting and editing styles throughout history have unquestionably informed his unique body of work.

The Five Points District production design in *Gangs of New York* was a vast studio set with a myriad of infinite vanishing points, similar to the epic studio set for Munchkin Land in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), exploring large sound stage possibilities, but spattered with bucket loads of blood in blastings of snow. *The Aviator’s* design is based on Hollywood’s heyday, with glamorous movie stars and American tycoons strutting the sets in elaborate coiffures, backless evening gowns, jaunty jodhpurs and riding boots. *Shutter Island* embraces Film Noir for its visualisation and atmosphere and *Sinatra* depicts the Hollywood Legend with a Mafia underscore. Finally *Hugo* combines all of Scorsese’s zeal for film’s technical discoveries from the early imaginative inventions of Méliès to the inexhaustible potential of 3-D digital technology.

Powell has entered Scorsese’s creative collective comparatively late in his career, and has travelled across the Atlantic to do so. Powell has a reputation for designing Period with a Twist, a period costume design approach that avoids slavish museum reproductions and antiquarianism, achieving a sensibility that feels contemporary, characterful and sexy. Industry leaders have praised her ability to reinvent the potential for period costume. Miramax producer Harvey Weinstein has said that,
“Sandy’s great gift is her ability to make historical costumes look contemporary. She manages to be both true to the period and modern.” The Crying Game’s producer, Stephen Woolley, is an admirer; “She was always thinking outside the box. She would not accept things should be done the standard ‘industry’ way - and that fitted in our left-of-field, alternative view.”32 Colin Vaines, an executive producer on Gangs of New York says, ‘She’s just brilliant. What’s great is that she has a flamboyance about her design, and that suited the film as Martin had a big operatic vision of it - something baroque but also authentic. She does a massive amount of research and a look came out of that.”33

Powell explains her approach in amplifying period costume,

“Unless a film requires it, I am not interested in an exact replica of the period. I look at the period, how it should be, how it could be and then I do my own version,”34 and “I think probably what I do is get a little bit more adventurous with the colour. If you are trying to make a film with complete historical accuracy it is too boring, you are not making museum pieces, it is not a documentary, it’s a film, it’s entertaining.”35

Powell has described Scorsese’s relish for research and detail with enthusiastic gratitude,

“Scorsese’s entire conversation is littered with references to old movies, you can’t talk about a collar or a buttonhole without some reference to a collar or buttonhole in some film you’ve never heard of and when you say you have never heard of it, he either

33 Ibid.
screens it, or you get sent a DVD through the post, and there it is. Scorsese has somebody who works fulltime that does all his research, so at the very beginning of a project as soon as you have got the script and read the script, even before meeting him you get a little package of research which is fantastic!”

Powell sees Scorsese as a visual director, who respects the role of the costume designer and the importance of the costumes,

“The first film I did with Martin Scorsese was 2002’s Gangs of New York. Marty’s a director who really cares about the look of a film. He likes to talk about clothes and look at them close-up. Every time an actor comes on set wearing a new costume, the first thing Marty does is touch the cloth. I like that.”

Scorsese’s attraction to the tactile properties of the costume demonstrates how he values the costume’s impact on the actor’s performance and costume designer’s contribution to the film. He understands that all details small or large have the capacity to speak volumes, whether it is the type of fabric selected, the height of a hat, or the choice of a bound buttonhole over a regular buttonhole, he understands that all components will make a valuable visual contribution. He respects the power of costume and by demonstrating his appreciation on set he encourages the performer in their costume and gives the costume designer confidence and support to keep working.

As a collaborator with the director and costume department Powell has said,

“...that only twenty percent of her job is art - the rest being psychology: ‘You should be of the temperament to deal with all types of people and understand very quickly how

to get the best out of your department, get your own way with actors and fulfill your role of helping to create your director's vision."

Scorsese has found a designer who can embrace his passion for detail and amplify the poetry and substance of his vision, but sustains authenticity when appropriate. Powell's description of her relationship with 'Marty' characterises a Benevolent Leader a leader that many would queue up to work with.

Scorsese's anecdote to the children working on Hugo best sums up his professional creative relationship for me, he says,

“Sometimes I try and explain to children around me, I say we're just playing, it is what you do, we think up a game and we try and put it on film or digital or whatever, but we are all playing together.”

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**Note:**
2c. Substance and Style - Visconti and Tosi


Director – Luchino Visconti and Costume Designer – Piero Tosi

“I was lucky. Visconti happened to attend the Festival of Music, a major event in Florence in those years, great musicians and artists would be there. And it was a great event in the history of Italian cinema. Visconti was directing Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida. I was very young, and when I showed him my portfolio, he looked at my work and asked how old I was. I was 21 and he said, ‘Oh, you are young, you have time!’ …And that was my start.”

Piero Tosi – Costume Designer

Piero Tosi was born in Florence, Italy, “...he dreamed about cinema since he was a child and while learning his father’s trade, iron processing, he used to draw stylized images and costumes for the works of Shakespeare whom he secretly read, knowing that nothing else would ever be his future, his life.”41 Visconti was born into the elite classes, his formal title The Count Luchino Visconti and was heir of the Duke of Milan, a title dating from the 14th century. Tosi was 21 years old, when Visconti discovered him.

Tosi has worked with other directorial masters such as Federico Fellini, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, but it is “Tosi’s long collaboration with Visconti that remains the backbone of his career.”42

Italy in the 1950s and 60s was a hothouse for groundbreaking cinema. Visconti was considered the leader of the great directorial triumvirate that included Fellini and Antonioni. Visconti firstly worked with Tosi on Bellisimma (1952). Afterwards he collaborated with only two other costume designers on features from the period of 1952 to 1976. (Marcel Escoffier, Bice Brichetto,43) Such frequency of collaboration acknowledges that both artists recognised that their talents enhanced each other’s.

Tosi’s versatile flair and hands on approach for all aspects of costume design were considerable with his ability to create elaborate and characterful hairstyles (Visconti’s The Damned, 1969) and imaginative makeup designs (Fellini’s Satyricon, 1970), as well as his expertise in costuming.

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Tosi is possibly best known for his mastery in historical costume, but he also achieved success in more contemporary works such as Fellini’s *Toby Dammit* (1963) and Visconti’s *Rocco and his Brothers* (1960). The most praised efforts with Visconti has been for his adept touch with period, character and style for films such as *The Leopard* (1963), *Death in Venice* (1971), *Ludwig* (1972) and *L’Innocente* (1973). In more recent times he has been commended by Oscar winning costume designer James Acheson, he says,

> “Part of Tosi’s success, is derived from the fact that the designer has a ‘hugely profound knowledge’ of the 19th and 20th century. Until you know the steps, you can’t interpret the dance, you can sense that real respect for the period. It is about accuracy, but it is also about being able to move in the rules and manners and regulations of the epoch with such ease you know that it feels absolutely right.”

Tosi and Visconti’s collaborative artistry renders the elaborate, intense, radiant, profound, agonizing, brutal, beautiful and the balanced. Their work often depicting realistic characters in scrutinised detail, combined with an aesthetic that expands the minutiae into the monumental. In *Death in Venice* the pale colour scheme of linens and sand amongst the day and evening heat, heighten the central character’s claustrophobic journey through his pedophilic delusional haze. *The Leopard* projects like a great master, as if painted by Boldoni and spoken by Carducci. Illuminating a Sicilian aristocracy in crisis with the most extravagant representation of threatened opulence, while poignantly rendering the future; the newly engaged mixed classes of aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The betrothed’s youthful optimism and sexual magnetism is energetically contrasted with *The Leopard’s* tired image of a man and his impotent acceptance of the inevitable surrender of his royal lineage. In *L’Innocente* they

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explore the danger of sexual double standards in a framework of constricted finery, so tight and perfect that it emphasizes the character's flaws in amongst the haunting beauty.

In all of Visconti’s films, he understood that to achieve an artistic reality, he needed to find art behind doorways, under stairwells and inside the elite and destitute’s minds and homes. Tosi has described Visconti’s instructions for sourcing costumes for Bellissima (1952),

“I had to walk in the street looking for the people who most resembled the characters and get their clothes off them. And without washing them or changing them, I had to put them on the actors. This was for me the most extraordinary lesson I ever had. No school could have taught me that... You feel the body heat in those clothes.”

Visconti worked as a Benevolent Leader,

“...he worked with people who well understood how to create a living atmosphere from such false sources as sets, lights, and acting. That is, Visconti embellished his own genius with a genius for choosing talents such as Suso Cecchi d’Amico, his screenwriter on many films, Armando Nannuzzi and Pasqualino De Santis, two of his great cinematographers, and Tosi, his ubiquitous costume designer, whose job was as complex, demanding and subtle as any below or above the line.”

Tosi has been described as a,

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46 Ibid.
“A maestro, a gentleman, with polite manners and an innate elegance. A man who has dedicated his life to cinema, who has told worlds, stories, periods through costumes and made them masterpieces”  

And Tosi has described Visconti’s leadership,

“I have to say that I was lucky to work with very talented and determined directors and their actors would not play their role wrong. They could not rebel against Visconti. As soon as he appeared on the set, there would be silence. He was a great and charming man. Everyone would obey this leader and nobody would discuss it and after a day of work, we would say, ‘The count was pleased.’”

Tosi describes Visconti as a leader, a general with military power and unfaltering resolution. Visconti is determined to find both substance and style in his work, and forbids arbitrary distractions and interference. Like a great leader he knows he will need good captains and lieutenants, Tosi his Brigadier, loyal to the end, and wearing the most striking livery.
2d. Visual Irony - Burton and Atwood

Edward Scissorhands, Cabin Boy, Ed Wood, Mars Attacks, Sleepy Hollow, Planet of the Apes, Big Fish, Sweeney Todd- The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Alice in Wonderland and Dark Shadows.
Director – Tim Burton and Costume Designer – Colleen Atwood

“I met him when I interviewed for Edward Scissorhands, we’ve collaborated on and off...it’s been a great ride and a collaboration, I’m very lucky to be able to work with Tim.”

Colleen Atwood – Costume Designer

Atwood grew up in Washington State, and originally wanting to be a painter; she trained in art and fashion, but at an early age she became a single mother. Her ambitions to become a painter were set aside in order to make a living. Since then, she embarked on what she calls an ‘untrained and self taught career’, she has received ten Oscar nominations, three Academy Awards and was recently listed in the most respected quartet for costume design in the international touring exhibition; Hollywood Costume Design curated by London’s Victoria Albert Museum. A considerable achievement for a designer who worked her way up by the

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old-fashioned method, firstly working as an assistant and buyer and energetically embracing each potential promotion.

Burton was born in Burbank California. He studied animation at the California Institute of Arts (CalArts) and after graduating became an apprentice working for Disney. In interviews, Burton has described his disconnected and disillusioned youth; where he recounts a boy that would much rather play in a graveyard than play on a baseball field. Much of his work relates back to his own life’s alienation with the majority of his films’ characters either representing the misunderstood outcast, the youth questioning the societal status-quo or the imaginary escape, these characters all feature in the following: Edward Scissorhands (*Edward Scissor 1990), Ed Wood, (*Ed Wood, 1994), Edward Bloom (*Big Fish, 2003), Sweeney Todd (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, 2007), Alice (*Alice in Wonderland, 2010) and Barnabas Collins (*Dark Shadows, 2012).

When looking at the costume canon of Atwood, her work portrays wit and character married with incredible style and imagination. She has worked with Burton many times but has also produced exceptional work with other directors such as Jonathan Demme (*The Silence of the Lambs, 1991), Rob Marshall (*Memoirs of a Geisha, 2005 and *Chicago, 2002) and Brad Silberling (*Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events, 2004). However, it could be said that the recognition for her most humorous and inventive work and what brought her into the Hollywood spotlight can be attributed to her first feature collaboration with Burton on *Edward Scissorhands in 1990.

Burton has worked as director, producer, artist, photographer and writer. His work as a graphic artist has been advantageous and unique when compared to the more usual creative collaboration between director and designer. Usually a director would not to be able to evocatively sketch an idea they have, they usually communicate through words and existing
inspirational images and research. There is physical evidence of Burton’s artistry depicting his early ideas for many of his film characters before the commencement of the costume build. Works such as the eccentric scratching in black ink of the sharp and skinny creature Edward Scissorhands (that Burton showed Johnny Depp to entice him to work on the film), his lively caricature of the bulbous headed Red Queen (his wife Helena Bonham Carter) for Alice in Wonderland and his sexy scribe for Martian Girl (Model Lisa Marie) in Mars Attacks. Each artwork dated a year or so earlier than the film’s release.

Atwood explains how some of Burton’s drawings have been used,

“There’s something that he captures that is kind of the soul of the character on paper, and there’s often costume elements, but we’re not married to that at all. I mean, for sure on Edward Scissorhands, because there was so much involved with that, but with the Mad Hatter, with Sweeney, with those costumes, he really doesn’t give me a drawing and say, ‘This is what I want.’ I think it’s because he knows the other people working with him are artists, so he gets very excited and enthusiastic when we show him what we have. He has a wonderful eye himself, and so he’ll add a little magical touch to something.”

Burton has the ability to blend the fantastic, the horrific and the comedic; his style is so distinctive that it has been defined as ‘Burtonesque’. His CalArts student notebook records the following: “If I look at certain Van Gogh paintings, they’re not real, but they capture an energy that makes it real.” Burton has a similar energy, with his message emerging from a truthful core fused with a heightened interpretation that pokes a stick in the eye of modern civilization. He has been described as a visionary, “…Whose visions look like cartoons and go


down like dessert...Burton is spitting in the eye of culture anyway, while simultaneously celebrating it. That’s the fabulous, odd thing about his work: he's angrily spitting something sweet.” New York’s Museum of Modern Art (M.O.M.A) has coined him an ‘Auteur For All Ages.’ A directing author who’s original vision speaks to everyone and can be considered as unique as other ground breaking directors such as Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Peter Greenaway, where by just describing a work by their last name conjures up a recognisable and individual style of filmmaking.

To consider M.O.M.A.’s accolade of Auteur for Burton, ask an audience to close their eyes and reflect on an image that says to them Tim Burton, I would immediately see the character Edward Scissorhands and perhaps the next image would by Johnny Depp. The character Burton, Depp and Atwood arrived at for Scissorhands has become the signature for so much of their future work. Edward Scissorhands is as famous as Mickey Mouse, as evocative as Shakespeare and as edgy as Mick Jagger. With all their work, they combine iconography and pathos heightened with a rock star energy.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (2007) is seen as a dark comedic musical and is often represented in a gaudy Victorian colour palette. Previous creative teams have thought that to create funny means making something colourful. Burton and Atwood ignored the colours of onstage interpretations. They searched back through history and unearthed the baseness and desperation of Victorian times, they chose darker sombre colours, deep sepias layered over dark concentrated colours, the result was more threatening and the humour more surprising.

The challenge for Alice in Wonderland (2010) was it’s venerable literary and pictorial fame. There have been so many visual interpretations through history. Designing Alice is nearly as controversial as designing Jesus. Burton and Atwood also worked with new 3-D digital
technology and in order to create the digital costumes, they designed and built them in the usual way first, creating real fabrics, sewing on real buttons and distressing knees and elbows in a real lived in way. The fabrics and costumes were scanned and then manipulated in the animation process, thus creating a more believable series of characters, but with the fantasy advantage of being able to animate digitally as well. For Depp, Atwood looked at existing illustrations and explored the world of hat makers in London of the period, she discovered the tell tale truths about the occupation where, “They called hatters ‘mad hatters’ because they used these toxic glues and dyes all the time, and they were actually quite mad.” In all of these works Atwood demonstrates integrity, humour and an originality created by researching and exploring the character’s truthful origins.

Atwood speaks about her respect for Burton as an artist and a collaborator,

“Tim is one of the great graphic designers, he has a phenomenal eye for what is important in a negative space, and he is not a cluttery kind of guy. So I think he came from animation, there are elements of his animation even in his realistic work, so knowing that about him is helpful. I am not the only person who knows that about him, I think people figure it out, it is not like it is some magic thing between he and I, we just hit it off, we often laugh at the same things, which I think is really important.”

Atwood describes a Benevolent Leader,

“...he really likes other people to show him what they have, to show him ideas and stuff; he may not like all of them. But he doesn’t say it has to be like some directors with less confidence will say ’I don’t like the way the button looks over there’ Like, if Tim gives


me a note on a costume it is always like, specific and clear and a really good note, he
has a great visual eye that I trust as much as anybody I have met in my life." 55

Atwood describes their working method,

“Tim is the kind of guy who isn’t wordy in the sense of having to go over stuff over and
over again, and I am a pretty quick study. And I think that by doing that and short
cutting things and visually... you know a guy with his visual skill is a visual
communicator, so you sort of rather than going in and blabbing about something for a
long time, you are kind of showing pictures of things, kind of this is cool and then you
get kind through it quickly with him, because a director’s job is extremely demanding.
A lot of people are coming at him asking him questions. Sometimes it is easy to answer
and some times there is stuff you can’t answer at the time, and I think I have a sense of
when Tim is ready to answer a question I ask it, and I think that has been the base of
our collaboration and what makes it work and that I understand his kind of particular
visual secrets, what he likes and doesn’t like, and I can sort of kind of keep him
interested and fresh each time I go out and work with him.” 56

With Burton, Atwood has designed for Johnny Depp six times, and had designed for Depp with
other directors. Depp’s chameleon characters have reflected the vulnerable, the
misunderstood, the dreamer, the murderer, the anarchist and the walking dead. Burton, Depp
and Atwood have found something new each time and in all cases the image that they have
created has become the hero image for the movie poster and the visual spearhead for multi-
million dollar marketing campaigns and endless merchandising spin off opportunities.
Atwood has said of Depp “He takes on the character in the clothes. They don’t ever look like

http://guru.bafta.org/podcast-colleen-atwood-make-up-conversation
56 Ibid.
costumes on him; they look real, and that really helps my job.”57

Atwood speaks about their triple collaboration,

“I have collaborated with Tim and Johnny a number of times on different things, but you know always challenging yourself to do something you haven’t done before, which is you know one of those big misconceptions that people think you know that you just automatically do what you do with these people with out it really being a challenge. Just because you as a designer already know the actor doesn’t mean that it is easy or that you’ll do what you have always done with them, it is always a fresh thought a fresh idea, the whole idea of it is to be creative, trying to keep challenging that and serving what ever it is that you are working on at the time.”58

If collaboration can be classified as a more professional type of arrangement to marriage, where an artist discovers they love something or many things about another artist, and want to spend a lot of time working together. Then perhaps Atwood and Burton have fallen in love with each other’s vivid humour and extraordinary visual courage. Atwood has described a kind of shorthand where she and Burton move quickly through ideas almost reading each other’s minds, she says, “Take for instance Burton’s concept art for the Red Queen (or, the Queen of Hearts), a character that posed a certain challenge because, as Atwood puts it, “Cards have been done to death.” Without seeing Burton’s sketch, Atwood almost matched it. “The same thing happened with the Hatter!”59 Atwood is describing being on the same page, that she has stylistic shorthand and a common artistic sensibility to Burton. Some artists may admire another artist’s work, but it doesn’t automatically lead onto harmonious and creative invention. Similar to romantic relationships, a person may admire someone for their beauty,

58 Ibid.
their wit or their charisma, but they may not be sexually attracted to them or their conversation may fall flat and turn to small talk. If their relationship lacks cohesion, then pursuing a romance may lead to a series of disappointing dates, therefore when there is a spark, most know it is a rare connection to be courted.

In this chapter, I have examined Director and Designer collaborative relationships. I have studied four successful collaborative teams, and although they each have their own individual approach, their methods are of the Benevolent Leader, with each designer describing a director with a vision, and who respects and values their contribution. The Tosi/Visconti, Powell/Scorsese and Atwood/Burton collaborations have unique creative components that each ignites each other’s magical creative spark.

I believe the Martin and Luhrmann relationship operates with the most equal collaborative status. Martin is a producer/associate on all the Bazmark films and is director of the Bazmark Company. They develop all their creative projects from the ground up together, through securing funding, script development and therefore have equal emotional, creative and financial investment. Martin doesn’t wait around for the phone to ring, she calls the shots as much as Baz. Luhrmann’s name flies the marquee, but that is to both of their advantage in promoting their brand. Luhrmann is a performer as well as a director and he is a consummate showman, the perfect front man for Bazmark risk taking identity. Martin is the intelligent, imaginative creative driving force at the forefront of all the decision-making. She doesn’t perform she gets it done. Luhrmann’s success is inextricably linked to Martin, like Lennon and McCartney’s inimitable contribution to the Beatles. Without Martin, there would be no Luhrmann or Bazmark, they both rose to the top from unknowns together, the ultimate collaboration and partnership.
3. CHARACTER AND FUNCTION

3a. Does it Fit? - The Performer's influence on the Costume

Costume designers interpret the text, and support the character’s arc within the storyline. The individuality of the actor playing the role will significantly impact on design choices. They will consider the performers physicality and discuss with the performer their interpretation of the role. The costume designer will measure the costume design with the weight and strength of the anticipated performance of all characters and balance additional costume designs within the scene or work. As the direction and design style is developed, the designer will support the character’s dramatic arc within the text through costume design. Director Baz Luhrmann expresses it simply by saying that “Costume design is fundamentally the expression of character through clothes.”

Nadoolman Landis describes creating costumes as “… being not so much a change of clothes as a change of skin. This inhabiting of a character is the actor’s profession as they morph into hundreds of people in their professional careers.”

This description of clothes becoming a performer’s skin captures the essence of the costume designer’s role when supporting character function. This can be further illuminated upon in the first example of the creation of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin describes his journey of discovery, interpretation and visualisation of The Tramp and how a performer must become part of the costume and the costume become part of the character.

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“I had no idea of character. But the moment I was dressed, the clothes and the make-up made me feel the person he was. I began to know him, and by the time I walked onto the stage, he was born.”

Performer - Charles Chaplin

After a disappointing costume experience for Charles Chaplin in a previous Keystone Film Company film. Chaplin was determined to find a costume for his next character,

“I had no idea what make-up to put on... However, on the way to the wardrobe, I thought I would dress in baggy pants, big shoes, a cane and a derby hat. I wanted everything a contradiction, the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small and the shoes large. I was undecided whether to look old or young, but remembering director Mack Sennett had expected me to be a much older man. I added a small moustache, which I

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reasoned, would add age without hiding my expression. I had no idea of the character. But the moment I was dressed, the clothes and the make-up made me feel the person he was. I began to know him, and by the time I walked onto the stage he was fully born. When I confronted Sennett I assumed the character and strutted about, swinging my cane and parading before him. Gags and comedy ideas went racing through my mind.”

Film historian David Robson describes the legend of the creation of The Tramp costume,

“From all accounts, that costume was to be little modified in his 22-year career and was created almost spontaneously without premeditation. The persuasive legend is that it was concocted one rainy afternoon in the communal male dressing room at Keystone, where Chaplin borrowed Fatty Arbuckle’s voluminous trousers, tiny Charles

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Avery's jacket, Ford Sterling's size 14 shoes, worn on the wrong feet to keep him from falling off, a too small derby belonging to Arbuckle's father-in-law, and a moustache intended for Mack Swain's use, which Chaplin trimmed to a toothbrush size.”

Chaplin had trimmed Mack Swain’s moustache into toothbrush size because his acute comedic instincts informed him not to hide his facial expressions. It is this insightful performance knowledge that a costume designer must glean from the artist. They must appreciate the discovery of the performance from within and help serve the creation of a character.

Figure 3 – Charles Chaplin, 1915
The Chaplin Photographic Archive at The Musée De L’Elysée
http://www.elysee.ch/en/collections/chaplin-at-the-musee-de-leysee/

Chaplin explains his Tramp character,

“You know this fellow is many-sided, a tramp, a gentleman, a poet, a dreamer, a lonely fellow, always hopeful of romance and adventure. He would have you believe he is a scientist, a musician, a duke, and a polo-player. However he is not above picking up cigarette butts or robbing a baby of its candy. And of course if the occasion warrants it,

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This description of merging many characters into one illustrates the critical function of the costume and costume designer's supportive role. Costume designers find ways of mingling time periods, merging personas and accumulating classes and hierarchies into a single costume. In the case of Chaplin, he was both performer and designer affording seamless communication and interpretation.

As another example of how the costume designer must help to combine the talents of designer and performer, costume designer Angus Strathie has said when discussing costumes for Moulin Rouge! “The designers have embraced the actors’ discoveries, which is why there’s a completeness to it all.”

Chaplin was creating a character and a brand that would influence works not yet imagined. His costume partially connected to the truth, created a visage that hoodwinked his audience. At first they didn't know how to take him and he used this illusion to his comic advantage. Other comics have followed his style such as Australian satirical comedian Norman Gunston (Garry McDonald) whose appearance and persona bridged the gap between genuine and pretense. Gunston’s audience initially granted him guarded belief only to be flabbergasted when his character reached humiliating extremes both physically and verbally.

In Kid Auto Races at Venice (1914), Chaplin does little more than interrupt the children’s go-cart races and hog the camera. It is his physical appearance, his movement and his utilisation of his costume as he walks, squirms, kicks, dances and falls for the camera that shocked and delighted the race goers in 1915 and has continued to do so for movie enthusiasts in the 21st century. A parallel to Chaplin's costume may be made with the development of a dance costume where,
“...in dance, there is no playwright. Dance often deals in abstractions and uses the body and movement as metaphor. Words are replaced by music and movement. The dancer's body, gesture, attitude, and relationship to other dancers serve as a visual dialogue.”

Because there was little dialogue in Chaplin's early works, just subtitled introductions and signposts for each scene, Chaplin needed to find the abstract properties that a dance costume might have, and similar to the process of developing a dance costume where the costume is developed through a number of experimental toiles or test costumes in order to solve the physical and dramatic needs of the performance. Chaplin experimented with the clothes and found solutions by himself.

It is interesting that The Tramp costume is most amusing when seen in it's theatrical form as if onstage from his clown-like feet to his tiny bowler hat. So often in close-up on film, the legs or lower torso are cut off and while we gain the benefit of Chaplin's chameleon facial expressions, the strength of the costume silhouette is diminished. It is a joy to watch him from head to toe from every angle, with his swaying back and pert bottom from the side, his proud back-view and his mischievous front-view. Every element of the costume supports his internal and external narrative.

The example of the development of Chaplin's costume is not to put costume designers out of work, but to magnify the importance of both artists collaborating to support character and function. The designer must have the overview as they are creating the big character picture. Just as the performer knows they will have physical requirements, the designer brings an acute understanding of how to manipulate a collar to become tragic or comedic.

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Perhaps if Chaplin had not been such a wonderful comic he would have made a great costume designer.

The second example of how such a costume may influence the interpretation and visualisation of a character is:

![Image of Alice in Wonderland](image)

**Figure 4 - Alice in Wonderland - 2010 - Johnny Depp as the Mad Hatter**
**Costume Designer - Colleen Atwood**
**DVD Still**

**Alice in Wonderland**

"I knew Johnny Depp was going to be the Hatter for a long time, so it would be hard to say that I changed anything for it. It is a part that Johnny was born to play."  

Costume Designer - Colleen Atwood

To demonstrate how an actor influences a costume or how a costume can support a performance and character direction, let’s consider Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland*. In an imaginary scenario Johnny Depp, who plays the Mad Hatter, needs to pull out unexpectedly and Burton’s next casting choice for a new Hatter is English actor/writer Stephen Fry. Fortunately

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*Atwood, C. Interview Colleen Atwood – Oscar Costumes Exhibition at FDIM. [Video file] SCV-Arts & Entertainment. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q8NEtFYYM*
Fry is available but the first hurdle is that the finished costume will definitely not fit. But not fit is a metaphorical hurdle as well as physical; it is not likely to fit or work on any level. The original design for Depp, with all it’s textures, colours, shapes and design choices were created by costume designer Colleen Atwood with a specific actor in mind, she herself says, “I knew Johnny Depp was going to be the Hatter for a long time, so it would be hard to say that I changed anything for it. It is a part that Johnny was born to play.”

What Depp brings to the role in regards to physical energy, his performance style and visual persona will influence the interpretation of the character in a vastly different way to the interpretation of Fry. This thinking is verified by Devil Wears Prada designer Patricia Field who says “Costumes embody the psychological, social and emotional condition of the character at a particular moment in the script. It is impossible to design for the actor unless the designer knows who the character is.”

Fry and Depp have diverse energies and yet they could play the part equally well. Their anticipated performances will be very different, these actors come from different cultures, and they have different professional experiences and are well known for different performing styles.

Atwood has created a unique piece of wearable art specifically to enhance and support the definitive performance by Depp. She would need to re-assess all of her design choices and consider Fry’s anticipated influence on the Hatter and begin to redesign, not just make bigger pantaloons. With much discussion with Burton and Fry, Atwood would develop new design work, supporting the Pooh Bear charm of Stephen Fry.

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It is this line by production designer Catherine Martin where she flips the adage, “clothes maketh the man but actors maketh the costume.”\textsuperscript{12} capturing the performers contribution to a costume in just a few words.

In opera and musicals, many versions of the same production are mounted annually and tour the world. Often multiple performers may play the one principal role. Generally designers design a costume for the inaugural production and it is common practice that the presenting company makes a perfect copy of the original costume design for the next cast. As a costume designer I don’t agree with this practice as I know from experience that different performers not only present with different body-types, but they also bring new interpretations and performance styles to their character.

In a recent production of La bohème for Opera Australia (OA), I had designed a specific series of costumes for the leading female character Mimi for the opening production. Our Mimi would be played by a striking African-American soprano, a long way away from Puccini’s 1896 invention, the consumptive and tiny-framed Italian soprano Cesira Ferrani. Our Mimi with her beautiful dark skin would be framed onstage by her other principal characters Rodolfo, Marcello, Coline, Schaunard and Musetta. Each one of these opera singers had white skin. White on stage acts as an inbuilt follow spot; therefore it was my task as costume designer to ensure that the colours and materials chosen for our dark skinned Mimi’s costume helped to balance her total image onstage. If the colours chosen were too light, the contrast of her skin would make her look even darker and if the colours chosen were too dark, the complete image would be so dim that she would disappear. We found a balance with mid tones and small amounts of lighter tones on collars and cuffs that helped balance her appearance within the principal mix onstage.

Two years later, a new soprano had been cast in the role of Mimi to perform in the same production. Opera Australia swiftly moved to make a perfect copy of the original design without consulting me. By chance I stumbled across the new Mimi’s photograph to discover no physical similarity to our original diva. Much to the annoyance of OA, I called a stop to the production of the copy costume. Costume designers design for individual performers interpreting a character. In particular the new Mimi’s body type did not suit the cut of the original dress and coat, nor did she suit the original fabrics used. As my new Mimi has light skin I could consider a different colour scheme. The new soprano has a larger frame than previous, but still needed to look to be dying of consumption. I chose darker colours and simpler design lines to make her look smaller, and selected finer fabrics for both the coat and dress to avoid making her look heavier. And as we worked in the fitting room with the new Mimi, I learned more about her technically, emotionally and physically and made adjustments accordingly.

Had I not considered all aspects of the new soprano, there would have been a far heavier and badly balanced image on-stage.
3b. The Costume Journey - The character’s arc supported by the costume

Costume designers need to support the arc of a performance. The arc may represent a number of layers within the actor's journey. Within a screenplay, a character may go through an arc of decline; they may age, become poor, develop an illness, have a dramatic accident or turn into a drug addict. Or they may experience a more positive arc where they become healthier, fall in love, win the lottery or receive a promotion. Such aspects within the plot and character's journey will be reflected in changes to their clothes, make up and accessories.

Figure 5 - The Pianist – 2002 - Adrian Brody as Wladyslaw Szpilman
In the radio recording studios of a successful pianist
Costume Designer - Anna B. Sheppard
DVD Still

"Costumes, like the characters they embody, must evolve within the context of the story and the arc of the character within it.”13

Costume Designer/ Writer/Educator - Deborah Nadoolman Landis

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In Roman Polanski’s *The Pianist*, Wladyslaw Szpilman is a Polish Jew, an accomplished pianist who struggles to survive the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto of World War II. His journey is based on a true story. Costume designer Anna B. Sheppard designs clothes that represent the period and supports Szpilman’s physical and mental decline throughout the film’s true story as he goes from a successful and well respected member of his Jewish community in Warsaw, to an outcast and prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps.

We first see Szpilman in his world of piano concert halls. It is the beginning of his journey and therefore essential that the audience identifies his success and wealth before the story proceeds further. In figure 5, Sheppard chooses a stylish, golden taupe, three-piece, double-breasted suit. While this is period correct, it also demonstrates wealth, sophistication and a man with a white-collar occupation. A three piece, double breasted suit is the most expensive suit a man can own, it uses the most amount of fabric and it is the most difficult to tailor and if tailored with a stripe or pattern to be matched it will make the suit more expensive again. A double-breasted cut generally is worn by men who will be doing little physical labour, the cross over nature of the suit lacks a practicality for bending as it needs to be undone each time the wearer sits down, therefore we tend to see it worn on men who have a less physical occupation and a more intellectual leadership role. The soft light, sophisticated colour that Sheppard chooses gives us more information; a light colour is easily muddied, consequently it is generally worn in an environment where it will remain clean. The unusual and less common colour of golden taupe alludes to Szpilman’s artistic lifestyle and aesthetic, as he is a man more likely to select a more interesting option than the more common clothing catalogue offerings such as a navy blue pinstripe. A light colour in this scenic environment expresses a lighted hearted and positive mood as well as indicating a warmer European climate.
In figure 6, the Nazis have bombed Szpilman’s radio studio and soon Szpilman’s family will move to the Nazi established Jewish ghetto. We see Szpilman leading his family out of their once cozy, comfortable middleclass home. Szpilman wears a double breasted, coffee coloured, heavy wool, well tailored overcoat, a checkered, dark brown, woven wool scarf, he carries his dark felt hat and his hair is still well cut and styled to the period. There is a somberness and anxiety in the image, so much so that the viewer will detect the solemnness and apprehension portrayed by the visual picture before the onset of dialogue.

Sheppard’s design choices have maintained Szpilman’s initial wealth, she preserves his well cut clothes and expensive fabrics, but his wardrobe is more practical now and the darker colour choices for Szpilman and family contribute significantly to the ensuing subdued atmosphere. And even though the colour choices have darkened they have remained warm, such decisions with hue contribute to our subliminal understanding of character, and the warm colour wave retains our positive perceptions of each person. Had the family been wearing grey tones, the
group would have read as colder and the audience would have less empathy for them and fortuitously the greenish grey hue of the historic Nazi officer uniforms is a valuable contrast when it comes to storytelling.

In figure 7, Szpilman has taken a job playing the piano at a restaurant in the Jewish ghetto, his family is surviving, but conditions continue to disintegrate. Sheppard changes the suit, keeping the double-breasted style, as this look has become synonymous with his character, the audience should understand the suit to be one he owned prior to entering the ghetto. By using a dark navy colour, with a fine pattern it appears more practical, more ordinary and underscores the unease and depressed atmosphere in the scene. Szpilman’s hair is slightly less perfect and he wears a two-day growth beard. Subtly Sheppard has shifted the white collar to a pale grey, the alteration will probably only register to the unconscious but it is effective and worthwhile as it subdues the image further. His tie is darker than previous, creating a more striking and dominating image. On his right arm he wears the Jewish star or badge, (the Jews were ordered
to wear the star either as an armband or sewn onto their clothing the ‘badge of shame’ representing anti-Semitism as a way of marking out Jews in public\(^\text{14}\), the blue braided star on the white armband is associated with Polish Jews and is generally depicted in WWII photographs being worn on the right arm. In some photographs the armbands are rough on the edges and haphazardly made, Szpilman’s armband is simple and well made at this point in the film.

In figure 8, Szpilman and family are waiting to be shipped to their deaths at the Treblinka concentration camp. The family sits under the blazing sun waiting with hundreds of other Jews. The father buys with his last 20 zlotys a piece of candy that he shares with the family. The eating of a tiny piece of candy represents the last meal they will have together, a strong contrast to earlier happy family dinners and is a poignant reminder of how serious and low their situation has become.

Sheppard dresses Szpilman in less typical clothing, the jacket and shirt look more like found clothes, alluding to the possibility that his more expensive clothes may have been confiscated. His jacket is single breasted and made of coarser material, and has wear and tear on the collar, cuffs and body of the jacket. His shirt is striped, similar to mattress ticking, a fabric often associated with work-wear. Szpilman chooses to keep his jacket on, ignoring the blazing sun, perhaps to avoid having it stolen by the desperate crowd or confiscated by the Nazis. By Szpilman continuing to wear his jacket he maintains a visual dignity in a demoralising and terminal situation. His hair and beard are similar to before and the pain in his face has been accentuated by subtle shades of make up around his eyes.

In figure 9, After Szpilman escaped the Holocaust train to Treblinka concentration camp. He walks in despair through the ransacked streets of the Jewish ghetto, desperate about his family, who have not been so fortunate. Sheppard and her make-up team provide an abundant amount of sweat and tears as Brody stumbles tragically through the blazing sun.

Figure 9 - The Pianist – 2002 -Adrian Brody as Wladyslaw Szpilman
Szpilman walks in despair through the ransacked streets of the Jewish ghetto, after he has escaped being shipped to the Treblinka concentration camp. His knows his family has not been so fortunate.
Costume Designer - Anna B. Sheppard
DVD Still
In figure 10, Szpilman is discovered in isolation, he is starving and it is important that Brody looks thinner than previous scenes. Sheppard and the make-up and hair team supports time passing as well as his diminishing frame by providing longer hair, covering his face with a full beard, making his facial features appear smaller in contrast. His overcoat and trousers are oversized again, aiding a more malnourished image.
In figure 11, one of the final scenes, (also known as the coat scene) the war is over and Szpilman is found walking dazed by a French peacekeeping troupe navigating the deserted war-torn city. Due to the extreme cold Szpilman has put on a Nazi officer's greatcoat, (the coat, previously owned by the officer that had spared him, knowing the end was imminent and who had taken his own life.) In this example Brody is dwarfed by the coat making him look further wasted away. And despite his head having the strong physical image of a Polish Jew with unkempt hair and beard, the peacekeeping soldiers believe he is a Nazi and attempt to shoot him down on the street. It is a strong example of how uniforms group people in teams and almost disguise the wearer of individuality.

Sheppard's example of supporting a characters dramatic and emotional arc through costume design, demonstrates how subtle choices and details are necessary and impactful.
3c. Dressing Up - Working with the performer creating the costume

“On every film, the clothes are half the battle in creating the character. I have a great deal of opinion about how my people are presented. We show a great deal by what we put on our bodies.” 15

Performer - Meryl Streep

Costume designers are thrown into all sorts of situations as they design costumes. They may have a long lead-time to experiment with ideas and to engage in lengthy character discussions with the performer and the creative team, or they may only have a few weeks, days or hours to create a costume. No matter the circumstances it is important that the designer works and communicates with the performer to create the costume.

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Costume Designer Anthony Powell recalls designing Cruella De Vil for *101 Dalmatians* (1996),

“When I asked Glenn Close for her thoughts, she said ‘You just design it, and at the end I shall look at myself in the mirror and then I shall decide how to play the part.’”16

While this is a flattering declaration of trust, it is not a statement that encourages collaboration, communication or teamwork when developing a costume. It is risky because Glenn Close may not be happy with what she eventually sees in the mirror, even though she may have worked with and admired Powell’s contribution in the past. If she avoids communicating about character and performance early on, she is aborting an opportunity for two significant artists to create something unique born from the combination of individual ideas. To give an analogy; Powell is a red paint pot and Close is blue, combining two red paint pots will make a new shade of red. A Powell red will be dramatic but we know it will turn out to be red. While swishing around red and blue, depending on how much Powell and Close is thrown into the mixing pot will make endless, startling and unpredictable combinations of purples and violets. It is the ambition of surprising one’s own self and therefore the audience that can happen more readily in a collaborating scenario.

An approach with more creative potential to reap the rewards of performer and designer collaboration is when Meryl Streep and costume designer Ann Roth develop the costume together in the fitting room. Roth says:

“Meryl Streep is known for her complete commitment to her new characters; long-time collaborator Ann Roth describes how, in the fitting room, ‘We wait for the third person to arrive.’ Streep always looks at herself in the mirror sideways, she says, ‘to see if something’s happening’. ‘Because Meryl is 100 per cent committed, probably 200 per cent, to this transformation.’”17

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17 Ibid. (p. 57)
The waiting of the third person to arrive is a good way of describing the magic of collaboration in the fitting room and the design development process. Some of the ‘third people’ that Roth and Streep have developed together have included: Kay (Hope Springs, 2012), Sister Aloysius Beauvier (Doubt, 2008), Donna (Mamma Mia, 2008), Ethel Rosenberg and the Jewish Rabbi (Angels in America, 2003) and Karen Silkwood (Silkwood, 1983).

The following examples from both designer and performer express individual approaches on how the designer may work with a performer to develop a character:

Costume designer Colleen Atwood describes some of her experiences working with actors and developing their costumes,

“Some of the most amazing actors that I have worked with, put on their costume and don’t even look in the mirror right away, they walk around in it and they feel the costume and there is something almost visceral about them sort of feeling what that is, it is not a vanity driven job of necessarily costume design it is more like that they feel right with what they have and the things that they have, yes they connect with clothes, sometimes it is with a shape of a coat or you know or with many different actors that I have work with, they don’t have a specific and it is the same with women, some of the most kind of glamorous, very unexpected women, don’t really look at themselves in the mirror, they don’t want to be hung up about that right away, they want to do other things.”

Here Atwood describes a performer examining and bonding with their costume. Just as we all get up in the morning and put on clothes, we don’t necessarily look in the mirror straight away,}

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or at all. It is something about knowing about the physical and emotional day ahead that influences the practical and sensitive choices we make as we select items of clothing from our wardrobe. The performer does a similar thing in the fitting room as they test the impact of each clothing article. Performers give great consideration to their emotional arc before attending a fitting and it may be something as simple as the way a jacket fabric moves or doesn’t that makes the costume perfect or flawed.

“Costume drama is a very difficult phrase for me. I want to be taken into the inner lives and the world and the political forces, the inner and outer worlds of the narrative with an immediacy that makes me not even think about the costumes.”

Performer – Geoffrey Rush

As Rush describes wanting to be taken into the inner lives of a character and not think about the costumes, he his setting a goal for himself as well as the costume designer. He knows that in some works he will wear a lot of costume such as Quills, Shakespeare in Love and The Pirates of the Caribbean. Rush manages to wear these elaborate costumes well, because the depth and execution of his character is so well constructed and has included the costume within its foundation.

“The Elves were troublesome: They are tall, androgynous, centuries old, yet ageless! How do you convey all that on film? Then, thank God, in waltzed Cate Blanchett followed by Hugo Weaving and, suddenly we knew that we had found a couple of perfect Elves. Between the two of them, they defined ‘Elf’ for us at last and we were able to create a design language that was rich and sumptuous and which we knew would work.”

Costume Designer – Ngila Dickson, The Lord of the Rings Trilogy

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Dickson is describing the magical moment that takes place in the fitting room. When after creating a costume on the mannequin without the performer, the costume not only survives the test of the actor but also explodes into a new stratosphere of character communication.

“The actors looked nothing like the ‘real’ people so it was a question of finding the spirit of each character rather than attempting a slavish depiction.”

Beaven needed to discover what Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush would bring to the famous ‘real’ people in _The King’s Speech_. She describes her work in the planning and the fitting room; For Firth: ‘Colin was concerned with looking as thin as possible. We tried to tailor things to make them as lithe as we could and give them as lean a line as possible. He’s a gorgeous man, fascinating and he’s very involved in everything.’

Costume Designer – Jenny Beaven, _The King’s Speech_ (2010)

Beaven describes how she takes the performers energy and physicality into consideration when planning the costume,

For Rush, “Logue was a very smartly dressed man in all the photos I’ve seen of him. Originally I’d actually seen him in separates: a sports coat or cavalry twill, as he was coming from Australia. I knew he had an interest in sport because there are family photographs of him playing tennis and he’s obviously quite outdoorsy. When Geoffrey came in we tried some trousers and sports coats but somehow it didn’t work as well as the suits... when Geoffrey put on the brown suit for the audition it just felt like Lionel Logue. That’s how it happens.”

Costume Designer – Jenny Beaven, _The King’s Speech_ (2010)

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“It just felt like Lionel Logue” to both Rush and Beavan, a combination of over sixty years experience starring into the mirror and measuring up all the intricate layers that a costume can bring in an instance. Rush could test how it felt, moved and looked to support his character and Beavan could see she was on her way to providing the look for one of the most important pieces of the chess set.

“I’d put on the top hat and the costume and the heels, ha ha, the heels helped and I would lose my inhibitions. I would just think Ah Baz, we have 600 extras today, you are going to make me sing in front of all these people and they are going to judge me and decide whether I can or can’t or, but as soon as I stepped into the character, I’d be able to do it.”

Performer – Nicole Kidman, Moulin Rouge! (2001)

Kidman describes becoming another being when she adds the final element, the top hat to her costume. It is difficult to imagine a performer such a Kidman to be concerned about what a bunch of extras might think of her skill-set, but in this case of the famous Diamonds are a Girls Best Friend scene in Moulin Rouge! The effect she describes that her costume brought to her performance helped to create one of the most watched musical scenes in cinema history.

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3d. Setting the Tone - Colour and Character

"Colour costs nothing. All of us have memories in black and white and in colour. Some quiet, some vivid. These hues must be used carefully, sometimes strongly, sometimes meekly. A colour of passion and strength that one dons in the morning might only be seen as a colour at the end of the day, as a person’s daily routine takes a turn against the daily agenda of emotion." 25

Costume Designer – Julie Weiss

In The Devil Wears Prada (2006), senior fashion editor Miranda Priestly sums up aspiring journalist Andrea Sachs frumpy blue jumper and explains that it isn’t just blue or turquoise or lapis, but cerulean. Priestly illustrates to Sachs how appreciating the delicacy of colour is vitally

important to any designer. The importance and considerations of colour has been one of the keystones of design since ancient times and in our modern age we are well served to better comprehend the intricacies of hue and tone by such colour specialists as Pantone Inc, who measure every subtlety of colour by the microgram for our benefit.

“Colour impacts every area of human life--physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, political, educational, scientific, economic, and artistic. The symbolic aspect of colour is also an effective means of communication on various levels. But this process is mostly automatic, even subliminal, and humans remain unaware of the power of colour to enhance both personal well-being and cross-cultural communication.”26

Costume designers utilise the power that colour has over costume and character. If a designer chooses the wrong hue or shade for a costume then all the efforts of cut, fabric, styling and accessories will collapse. Imagine iconic clothing such as the red dress for Satine in Moulin Rouge! being any other tint, or Keira Knightley’s green dress in Atonement in yellow. Both women would have experienced a very different fate.

“Historically, what is often described as colour psychology is actually colour symbolism - the conscious associations that we are conditioned to make. Cultural responses to colour derive from a variety of causes: for example, green is the sacred colour throughout Islam, being the colour of the Prophet’s robe; in Ireland it is considered lucky, perhaps because when the world around us contains plenty of green this indicates the presence of water and therefore little danger of famine.”27

In a study by Virginia Marie Marable, *Cross-Cultural Symbolism of Color*, Marable examines eleven colours: white, black, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, orange, pink, and grey for it basic symbolic associations and possible universal meanings. Her detailed study of red, references historic and cultural symbolism of colour universally and much of her findings can be applied to Satine’s dress in *Moulin Rouge!* As part of her study, Marable divides red into two categories: “‘Blood and Fire’ (Verity, 1980). Radcliffe-Brown (1922) suggested that this dual symbolism might be universal, having a psychophysical basis of a 'dynamogenic' kind.”  

“Blood: The most primitive use of this colour symbolism, occurred as early as 25,000 years ago when ancients worldwide applied red ocher to goddess figures as a representation of the sacred menstrual blood, which signified fertility, procreation and life itself (Spretnak, 1986: Stone, 1976).’ Whereas the dark menstrual blood has often carried negative connotations, a bright red shade of blood has been considered positive, creative, symbolising: the flesh, the heart, health, activity, love, joy, and the life force itself. Red is thus all three dimensional - physical and emotional, and spiritual.”

“Fire: Red has long associated with love. As noted above, red was the sacred colour for numerous ancient gods and goddesses of love. Red flowers have symbolised love to many people.”

The character of Satine represented ‘Blood and Fire’ in numerous ways; she was goddess, life and death, heart, flesh, energy, love and sex. As Martin and Strathie created the iconic Satine red Smoldering Temptress costume, they blended centuries of culture, symbolism and art subliminally into one.

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29 Ibid
30 Ibid
First a novel and then a screenplay – “the emerald green dress from Atonement could be the most famous item of clothing on film in the last decade and was recently voted ‘Best Costume of All Time’ by Sky Movies and readers of In Style.”  

Referring back to the original novel by Ian McEwan, the colour green plays a significant role throughout the book. To give an example; McEwan describes the quality of light and the evening dress worn by Cecilia in the famous Robbie/Cecilia seduction scene. “The silk dress that she wore seemed to worship every curve and dip of her little body,” and “…was the figure hugging dark green bias-cut backless evening gown…as she pulled it on she approved of the form caress of the bias-cut through the silk of the petticoat, and she felt sleekly impregnable, slippery

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and secure; it was a mermaid who rose to meet her in her own full length mirror.”

He describes Briony’s nauseated and confused reaction when discovering her older sister in the sexual act as: “at first, when she pushed open the door, she saw nothing at all. The only light was from a single green-glass desk lamp and illuminated little more than the tooled leather surface on which he stood.” And earlier, “She had green eyes and sharp bones in her face and hollow cheeks...”

McKewan’s choice of green for the light, for Cecilia’s eyes and the dress is not arbitrary, it may have been subliminal, but such a respected and practiced writer would be deeply in tune with how colour impacts on story and character. In Marable’s thesis on colour she finds “Brownish-greens indicate mildew, decay, stagnation and putrification, added Luckiesh (1938) and green light on human skin is sickly, nauseating and cadaverous. Mammals are not green, so the colour is associated instead with reptiles, monsters, aliens and with poison (Varley, 1980).” McEwan by selecting green for the dress and the light supports the nauseated feeling that Briony experiences and supports Cecilia’s mirrored image of a Mermaid to be no longer mammal but poisonous and reptilian.

Atonement’s film director Joe Wright had the great sense to follow McEwan’s lead and specially requested that costume designer Jacqueline Durran work with a rich emerald green colour, Durran describes the dress and the importance of the tone and hue of green,

“It was a combination of tones: Lin black, green organza and green chiffon. An unusual choice for film, green is thought to render viewers uncomfortable. This unnerving

34 Ibid. (p.123)
35 Ibid. (p.10)
effect is why Alfred Hitchcock clad Tippi Hedren in an omnipresent green suit for The Birds in 1963.”

When I consider the Atonement dress, I cannot imagine it in any better-suited colour or tone, it conveys to me the jealousy of Briony, the onset of the sickly mood of the dinner party, the other worldly journey into sexual temptation and then later Cecilia’s cursed existence. Colour cannot necessarily be pigeonholed into any one feeling or emotion. It is the very ambiguity and mystery of how colour impacts on character and storytelling that makes it such an exciting and powerful tool for the costume designer.

In this chapter, I have examined Character and Function. Highlighting the importance of the costume designer working with the performer from beginning to end. The designer and performer go on a voyage to unchartered lands. The performer may have played the role before, they may have died and gone to heaven before, and while doing so worn green, but in another time working with a different designer on a new location, heaven will look changed and when they put on their new green costume, they should feel an entirely new exciting shade of emerald.

4. DESIGN STYLES & THEMES

Throughout screen history, designers have created original, visual worlds for screen. These worlds evolve out of the necessity to support the screenplay with imagery, and by doing so, provide a richer meaning to the totality. Sometimes films are categorised under style headings such as: period dramas, fantasy adventures, science fictions and contemporary thrillers. Designers, directors and cinematographers invent the imagery by building vast sets on screen stages, re-inventing existing locations, concocting angles and framing and creating costumes that connect and extend those worlds. As designers work into the future, nonphysical environments and costumes are being fashioned and created through digital technology.

While design and technology moves fast-forward,

“…the rules of drama haven’t changed in 2,500 years. Man against man, man against self, man against nature, and protagonist vs. antagonist, hero- heroine and villain. These situations can be arranged, according to one book, into twenty master plots, a few more or less according to others, but all drama is defined by conflict, usually with moral connotations. That makes every story a parable and every character a symbol for human condition of principle.”

The above paragraph highlights the need for the creative artists to present a visual connection to our lives within the Design Style, where there are stakes and the audience relates to the characters and themes of the film. What would the story of Dorothy be, if there were only fantastical OZ and no Kansas family to go back to? And who would care if Death in Venice were a mere haute couture parade with flawless fashion concealing the imperfections of its central characters. Costume designers highlight the essence of the situations and characters within all
themes and periods and then relate the subjects back to our own lives.

“The real story, then, resides not in the dialog or the setting but in the theme, which is what all the visual and audible information expresses and reveals. One could say that the invisible ‘spirit of the film’ is clothed in the art directed appearance, which is communicated to the audience via the image-sound projection. The effectiveness of a movie’s communication, then, relies on the strength and accuracy of the physical illustration, not of the superficial, quasi historical aspects, but of the character-symbols that embody the theme.” ¹

All design elements should support the characters and actions within the text. No matter how unreal the world, the ideas are most successful when they are born from the core of the story’s foundation. Beetlejuice costume designer Aggie Guerard Rogers has said, “my goal is for the people in the story to be real, even if they’re in Beetlejuice. They may be nuts, but they are also real.” ²

Some of the most successfully designed worlds have achieved their imaginative heights by looking into the past, present and the future, combining cultures and therefore creating ambiguity and otherworldliness. As Clockwork Orange’s director Stanley Kubrick once said to designer Milena Canonero, “I don’t want science fiction. It is more ambiguous. It’s now. It’s tomorrow.” ³

The costume design style grows out the visual world on screen and communicates placement, history and hierarchy for each character.

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The following chapter analyses the definitions and components of costume design styles, including genres such as: Naturalism, Period, Science Fiction and Fantasy Costume Design. This chapter will examine how screen design worlds are created and how truthful details are combined to support each genre.

It is difficult to conclusively label a design style for costume or production design. The problems with attempting to do so may be highlighted when considering popular international costume design award categories. Design awards attempt to classify design styles, and set out to categorise design achievement through labels such as Best Fantasy Costume, Best Period Costume, Best Contemporary Costume and Best Sci-Fi Costume Design. These classifications are generalised, they are fixed in their meaning and therefore can only define a body of work that completely matches the heading. On the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) some films are described by utilising a potpourri of styles and themes, such as Drama, Fantasy, Science Fiction, this attempt is getting closer to describing the elements and thinking behind the works, where most designs have been created using a completely individual recipe, perhaps never to be repeated.

It is my opinion that the most original and exciting costume design work has been achieved when the design styles are merged, blurring boundaries and by doing so creating an original ambiguous and unpredictable design. In the following chapter, I examine successful works that are boldly designed worlds and have also managed to support the characters, themes and narratives by thoughtful, truthful choices and where the designer’s ego has stood back and avoided bombarding the work by excessive or obtrusive design.
4a. Epochs, Minutiae and Style – Period Costume

"Does authenticity matter? Films are entertainments above all and not antiquarianism; in any case, it might be argued, if we cannot get back to a true knowledge of the past, should we try?" ⁴

Aileen Ribeiro – Academic and Costume Historian

“If you allow that a film is usually first an emotional document and only second a historical document, then arguments about the relative historical inaccuracy of any film become less important, even less so if the costume in question serves the spiritual or thematic sense of the character better than the accurate one would have. In our business, the characters, even historical ones, have to appear correct, even if they are, in reality, inaccurate.” ⁵

Richard La Motte – Costume Designer

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Death in Venice

"The essence of costume design to me is the willingness and humility to accept each project as a new venture."  

Costume Designer – Piero Tosi

_Death in Venice_ is a film adaptation of Thomas Mann’s esteemed novella, directed by Italian director Luchino Visconti. English actor Dirk Bogarde plays the central figure of composer Gustave von Aschenbach, who travels to the Lido, a Venetian seaside resort in search of respite after a period of artistic and personal trauma. Aschenbach becomes distantly obsessed with an adolescent boy Tadzio and instead of finding peace, becomes more and more agitated.

The fourteen-year-old boy is on vacation with his mother, three sisters and their governess. Tadzio is exceptionally beautiful and Aschenbach becomes dangerously infatuated. During the Venice summer a deadly cholera plague infests locals and bourgeois holiday makers, threatening the entire Venice tourism economy. There is an attempt to conceal the threat by the Venetians and Achenbach’s pederast obsession runs a similar parallel, where he desperately tries to hide his own mental corruption. His declining mental state may be considered just as obvious and dangerous as the poisonous chalky germicide that has been hastily washed up onto the crumbling Venetian walls in attempt to secretly purify the city.

Throughout film making history, period costumes have been reproduced with varying degrees of success and historical authenticity. To compare an Egyptian themed film made in the 1960s with later attempts and then scrutinised in the 21st century, will reveal many recognisable contemporary influences. One of the most common indicators of the contemporary time in which the film was made and designed will be the hair and makeup. The most diligent

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attempt to re-create the authentic past will be influenced by the times in which it is being made including: the materials, lighting and filming technology. It is impossible for it to be otherwise as new materials exist and old materials will have vanished. The observations of looking back to a period from the contemporary period will colour and style the interpretation in the contemporary way and cannot be avoided. The observer is from another time, whether it was last year or one hundred years ago, the gap and progress of time will influence the viewer and the interpreter.

In *Death in Venice*, costume designer Piero Tosi satisfies both the period integrity of Venice in 1913 and the evocative emotional themes within the storyline. Tosi supports the themes as well as the period through his well-observed attention to detail and artistry. His instinctive approach and artistic technique, has received universal praise.

It is to the degree that the period accuracy and visual themes succeed within the costume design that I wish to examine in *Death in Venice*. *Death in Venice* was made in 1971. The signposts to the contemporary time of the film’s creation can be linked to the styles of hair, makeup, cinematography, lighting, editing, and film stock. The period accuracy and characterful costumes by Tosi are so beautifully designed and cannily observed that when examining them in 2013, they stand up brilliantly to the ultimate test – the test of observation from another time.

In my opinion Tosi has led the way in the field of designing with period authenticity and thematic meaning and avoiding antiquarianism. It is confirmed by so many preceding costume designers praising him as one of the most respected costume designers in screen history. Costume Academic and Designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis praises him, “To describe Tosi as the master of authentic period costuming, is really diminishing him because he finds the truth in
whatever period it is.” 7 And three times Academy Award winner Colleen Attwood says, “Piero Tosi is one of the greatest gods of costume design ever, I think he is just amazing” 8 “All the costume designers around the world think he is one of the most important designers,” Dante Ferretti says, "I think he's giving a lot of inspiration to other costume designers.” 9 “There are lots of designers I admire, but he is a head and shoulders above. I know my colleagues won't be offended because he is on another level. I have just been watching some of the Visconti films he did and you can't fault Tosi's work. It's total perfection.” 10 Anthony Powell, Academy Award winning costume designer.

Visconti and Tosi demonstrate a profound understanding of the bourgeois and aristocratic holidaying classes in Death and Venice. Visconti’s first hand experience of the well to do may have been an advantage for them both, as Tosi has said “that the director showed him photographs of his mother, donna Carla as a young woman,” 11 to be used as inspiration for the clothing for Tadzio’s mother. The costumed images also render poignantly the lower and suffering characters of the Italian underclass. Visconti’s skill in observation has been described as, “His gaze is that of a man who has seen everything worth noticing and having understood it.” 12 Tosi has said that the director was obsessed by faces, often casting first for appearance before acting ability and often including real people within the films cast in order to create the perfect visual mix. With the director taking such care on searching for the truth to support his powerful work, then it is bound to inspire and inform those working around him: Bogarde has reported, 

9 Ibid. 7
“...that before each take Visconti scrutinised the costume and hair of every actor, right down to the extras. His preoccupation with such matters extended back to his collaboration with Jean Renoir on ‘A Day in the Country’ 1936, when he was in charge of wig and costumes. Like Renoir he knew that, in terms of class distinctions, and class war, for that matter, minutiae matter - a tone of a voice, a tilt of a knife, too many jewels, or not enough. People who wear silk underthings walk differently. As do people who haven’t had enough to eat.”

While Tosi masters the essential dressing etiquettes of each character and the period, he also pushes his sophisticated practice one step further by managing each clothing accessory and material in an immersive allegorical way. Tosi conquers decorum, style and rituals down to the very last collar stud. His understanding of how to turn a brim, how to juggle a silk handkerchief into a breast pocket, how to drape the most appropriate fob chain across a waistcoat and how to choose the perfect hatband for a panama is exquisite. It is as if he invented the art of dressing up himself. However he also knows when to break with etiquette or to manipulate the boundaries in order to aid the narrative.

Figure 2 – Death in Venice – 1971 – Dirk Bogarde as Gustave von Aschenbach
Costume Designer – Piero Tosi
DVD still

“Never once do we see him enter the water, for he is dressed for the beach only in the strictest fin de siècle sense of the word: he wears a black banded panama hat, black waistcoat with gold watch-chain and dark tie, white linen suit, and white bucks. Not a man will ever wear his trousers rolled. Or go barefoot.” 14

In figure 2, the power of the white starched cuffs and collars, take the eyes to Bogarde’s most powerful performance tools, his face and his hands. By shortening the linen jacket’s sleeve length, the lengthy cuff-linked wrists conduct a symphony of character as Bogarde subtly manipulates his hands. The face framed by the stiff collar draws focus onto what Bogarde describe as the face poses that were so important to what essentially was almost a silent film.

Tadzio is first seen in a sailor’s suit, the suit represents period, youth and privilege. It mocks the role of the actual sailor. The wearer is immune to National Service, and quite possibly never been at sea. This crisply starched suit is beautifully tailored in the finest fabrics with perfectly proportioned embellishments and jauntily accessorised with a mock whistle cord that is draped into the miniature breast pocket. The suit is seen in three variations, ivory and navy and navy and ivory and mixed with the interchangeable collars. While the garment is

starched it has been pressed with utmost care, avoiding creases on the sleeves, but pressing creases into the legs, causing the legs to look slimmer and indicating access to a trouser press. Avoiding sleeve creases suggests the support of a sleeve board at a laundry service instead of a domestic tool of just an ironing board. Therefore the seemingly simple choice of the sailor’s suit holds much more characterful detail when closely examined. The audience will unconsciously register such detail and learn further about Tadzio privileged existence.

“The whole family there on the verandah, all dressed in pale shades of linen and bathed in white light, look more ethereal than ever, the mother veiled in white mousseline de
soie against the white plaster of the hotel’s columns, the white tracery if their rattan chairs. With this whiteness and otherworldliness, all this purity, they could be angels at tea.”

The heavenly appearance of the family support Tadzio’s story, they provide him with a mise-en-scène that suggests safety and enclosure. The five angelically dressed females surround him and in many of the scenes their faces are often masked or partially masked by their hats. The three sisters are barely focused upon, although they appear often, and it is by the identical puritanical nature of their clothes and concealing straw cloches that present them as unadorned pawns, protecting and emphasising Tadzio’s confident, nubile knight.

His mother is set up similarly to the daughters but with more detail and status. She represents wealth, elegance nurture and love, but the love is presented at arms length, the nature of her veiled lofty hats keeps her at an emotional distance. The viewer is not privy to any more of her feelings other than hers for Tadzio. If she had been more emotionally present, she may have noticed the introverted predator in the shadows. The costume supports her ethereal remoteness and irresponsible obliviousness. Her daughters receive little attention. They play the part of their mother’s hierarchical decoration, assuming roles similar to smart luggage accessories for the perfect aristocratic holiday.

Figure 6 – *Death in Venice* – 1972 – Silvana Mangano as Tadzio’s Mother, Björn Andrésen as Tadzio and Dirk Bogarde as Gustave von Aschenbach
Costume Designer – Piero Tosi
DVD still

Figure 7 – *Death in Venice* – 1971 – Dirk Bogarde as Gustave von Aschenbach
Costume Designer – Piero Tosi
DVD still

Figure 8 – *Death in Venice* – 1971 – The Foppish Man whose dyed hair, false teeth, and makeup gave him, at least from a distance a semblance of youth.
Costume Designer – Piero Tosi
Aschenbach is encouraged to apply makeup and hair dye to improve his appearance. It is described as what he deserves, “Sir you have the right to your own natural hair colour. Would you permit me to restore it to you what is rightly yours”. The Venetian barber applies white grease paint to his face, hair dye directly into his tired looking hair, eye shadow, rouge and lipstick. Aschenbach’s morbid transformation mirrors the earlier image of the theatrically painted aging man on the boat who Aschenbach was sickened by when he first arrived in Venice. Tosi changes his tie and hatband to red, punctuating the link to the repugnant fop and underlining his desperate plea for youth.

Figure 9 – Death in Venice – 1971 – Dirk Bogarde as Gustave von Aschenbach
Costume Designer – Piero Tosi
DVD still

“Aschenbach is so lost in a labyrinth of his own fabrication that what does or does not happen around him is of little matter. His powdered face filmed with sweat, his body sagging, eyes tearing, one hand clutching his side, he slinks deeper and deeper into the shadows as night falls. As the governess and her charges leaves Aschenbach behind, Tadzio lingers a moment and smiles at him, half-crouching in darkness, the brim of his pale straw hat losing its shape in the stifling heat, his pink rose boutonniere wilting. Gasping for his breath, he sags to the filth-strewn pavement next to an ancient stone wellhead.” 17

In the last minutes of Aschenbach's life, dark hair dye drips down his brow. It has been demonstrated earlier to be just hastily applied hair dye, but now it assumes a more sinister appearance of blood dripping down a forehead after a terrible fall, or trickling tears of grief. Aschenbach has fallen from grace, he has fallen into unreciprocated love, and he has fallen into a deep deathly sickness. The period nature of the temporary hair dye supports the definitive moment of the film. It is historically correct and unambiguously potent.

*Death in Venice* is often set as a best practice teaching example to aspiring costume designers and students. It is Tosi and Visconti's emotional attention to detail, as they use the art of dressing as a powerful expressive visual form of storytelling that sets them apart.
4b. Past Present and Future - Science Fiction

Brazil

“The influences were everything from Schiaparelli through to the latest developments in personal protection. Strange catalogues of protective gear, police badging and uniforms, again a lot of American influences sort of flap-jackets lots of protective bits and pieces and I guess we were always looking to America, the nightmare always pointed us towards America.”18

Costume Designer – James Acheson

“With the year 1984 looming and its relevance to the bleak, totalitarian novel of George Orwell, Gilliam decided to make his own version of 1984 with a bit of the over-the-top, surreal style of Federico Fellini that would become his masterpiece, 1985’s Brazil. Set in the 20th Century in a different world, Brazil is a grand, otherworldly film that combined Orwell’s bleak, Metropolis-like vision of 1984 with many of Gilliam’s

The film is about an oppressed, meek man named Sam Lowry who dreams about the perfect girl in amongst feathery clouds when he’s feeling oppressed by the bleak, totalitarian world around him. A mistake occurs when a bug flies into a typewriter in the warrant office and an innocent man Archibald Buttle is detained and killed by the Establishment. Lowry is a low status and anonymous clerk from the Ministry of Information who investigates and attempts to correct the error by visiting Buttle’s widow. There he discovers the girl of his dreams, living above the deceased's apartment. Lowry is a cowardly man who unexpectedly becomes an accidental hero, or at least in his dreams he does.

The film is set sometime in the 20th Century, and as the story continues more visual signs depict the future and the past. Brazil is neither East nor West, but the combination of numerous cultures and imagery that make for expansive and compelling story telling.

Most of the character’s names are fundamentally English such as Buttle and Tuttle. The mannerisms of the dreary dominated world Ministry of Information, while oppressed, remain optimistically and politely British. The challengers to the status–quo are often played by characters with more aggressive accents including, Robert de Niro, American (Harry Tuttle), Bob Hoskins, Cockney (Spoor) and Kim Greist, American (Jill Layton). The most physically threatening characters are the guards, who are identifiably intimidating in their German WWII inspired uniforms. And when Lowry’s dream sequence is at its most mysterious and alarming, a super-sized Samurai accompanied with surreal Noh masked trolls play into his fantasy.

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“Lowry is a dreamer, who doesn’t want to be noticed and wants to live in his dream without facing any kind of realities or responsibility.”\(^\text{20}\) He is the central character who lives in a bureaucratic world of poverty, corrupt hierarchy and where machines are controlling man, and often malfunction. Costume designer James Acheson explains,

“Sam Lowry, he starts off with a single breasted quite narrow three piece striped darkish grey suit, and when he changes over and becomes part of the establishment and gets a promotion or what ever he went into this awful shiny Tootal double breasted broad shouldered lighter grey suit, which in retrospect should have been more extreme than it was. I know this sounds strange with my track record, but I am a great believer in not trying to swamp an actor with an idea...”\(^\text{21}\)
The two grey suits communicate emotional shifts in time, place and status. The first is cut in a late 1930s style; single breasted, with natural shoulders and matching waistcoat. The difference in the shade of grey is noteworthy. The mid grey tone is a very practical colour and can be strongly associated with schoolboy uniforms. Such a practical grey is utilised to absorb the dirt and grime when boys crouch, kneel and crawl along the schoolyard, comparable to Lowry’s apologetic approach to his daily civic duties. The second in a shinier paler grey, which is a two-piece double-breasted suit, described by Acheson as being made by Tootal or styled to look like the Tootal brand, indicates his promotion, and the cheap imitating brand of a designer style suit is an attempt to look more valuable, making him more fake and therefore more part of the Establishment. While he was a little boring in the beginning of the film, at least he was honest. The new suit is a visual metaphor for him entering the dark side, where players do anything to protect their own backs. The new suit, just two pieces with broad, more powerful shoulders communicates the 1980s as well as the 1940s. Updating and combining periods render the establishment more in the future as well as in the past. As Acheson mentions, he wishes he had taken the idea to further extremes, maybe so, however a
suit with even more shoulders or shinier may have potentially drowned Lowry, with whom we must sympathise through to the end.

Acheson speaks about his design for Ida,

“She was wonderfully supportive about what I thought was a kind of fairly crazy thing to do, the idea being that everyone else in the restaurant would have rather strange things on their head that relate to the restaurant, in fact you don’t see any of that, but years later I remember everybody always asked about the shoe on her head. I thought she brought it off beautifully; she just wore it with such style. It is really bizarre you know it is one of those things that probably got me the next job.”

It is interesting that the shoe hat is such a successful accessory for the future, it is often pondered, what will be wearing in the future? What will we be eating in the future? And in Brazil the questions are answered. As I write now in the 21st century and actually quite a bit

into the future after Brazil, I can concur with their forecasting. In figure 15, Shirley, Mrs Terrain’s daughter and Sam’s unwanted sweetheart, peruses a light up menu, not dissimilar to the IPad. Mrs Lowry’s and Mrs Terrain’s main topic of conversation is face lift treatments, not unlike the Botox parties of today, where even the most unlikely participate. The carte du jour all looks the same, but comes in different flavours and can be compared to a very crude version of micro-cuisine of today. In the 21st century couture designers such as: Mucci Prada, Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan have designed human-hair skirts, hinged dresses and hats made from garbage tin lids. The comparisons, make wearing a shoe on your head to be quite unsurprising and would easily fit in today. Acheson says himself that he referenced the famous Schiaparelli shoe hat of 1938, which was inspired by her collaborator, surrealist Salvador Dali who wore an actual shoe on his head. The surreal styling of the shoe supports the surreal action within the scene’s dramatic centre, where terrorist’s bomb the restaurant and the undisturbed go on eating and drinking while others bloodied and limbless lurch around in the background screaming for help. The shoe hat by its surreal composition makes for the perfect signature to Ida’s ambitious, futuristic and unflappable façade in amongst a bizarre world.
Figure 16 – *Hat Illustration 1937–38* – Elsa Schiaparelli
The inspiration for the Leopard Skin Shoe Hat for Mrs Ida Lowery.
Costume Designer – James Acheson
(Schiaparelli’s collaboration with Salvador Dali reached the height of Surrealist absurdity in this high-heeled shoe from winter 1937–38.)
In figure 17, the street people stare down at Sam. He has been searching furiously for Tuttle who has been trapped by the windswept requisition forms and has mysteriously evaporated. The mise-en-scene contrast of the foreground crowd wearing circa late 1930s winter clothes before a background of neoclassical revival 1980s architecture and neon suggests that things are not all what they appear to be.
Acheson describes the development of the Guards costumes,

“We would get the tallest guys we could find, I think everyone had to be at least 6’ 4” tall, and then these huge thick, great coats, which had a slightly Prussian feel to them, but they were built over the top of American football padding, to make them really big. You don’t get it on film on set they look enormous. But again it was an idea that didn’t work, they were supposed to look like these huge big grey rectangles with chromium heads.”23

If you want to suggest someone is evil, then dress them in German military costume or in black, either will do it for sure. I can’t speak for the Germans but they must be getting tired of such a costume cliché. On a more positive note and ignoring the travesties of the two world wars, another reason why German uniform design is repeatedly used to represent foe and induce fear, is that it is such outstanding design. The uniforms consist of complex multiple

design elements, and communicate supremacy and a chain of command in a superlative way.
The designs for both WWI and II are extraordinarily theatrical with abundant designs for
-denoting ranks and without doubt are unsurpassed by any other modern military design to
date.

Acheson reinvents the Prussian style by combining materials that speak to the future. By
casting military belts, buttons, gloves and hats in chrome, the guard’s look becomes timeless,
and retaining the heavy sizable more naturalistic great coats, creates an unkind reminder of
the uniform’s previous application.

Acheson explains how they created the Samurai Warrior costume,

“...the 15ft high Samurai Warrior was an equal nightmare. It cost a huge amount of
money even by today’s standards, it got out of control and I have to take full
responsibility for it, because it was this huge Japanese suit of armour made with
computer parts. It got out of control because we tried to make it out of computer bits, but only by carefully analysing the still photograph would you get that.”

The giant Samurai warrior is another superior example of military design, this time from the Ancient world where Samurai armour “first appeared in historical records of the tenth century” represents the forces of darkness in Sam’s dream. Despite the ancient warrior’s protection being constructed of natural materials such as woven straw, leather and metal, there are many surviving examples that can be studied today. The Samurai “rose to power initially through their martial prowess—in particular, they were expert in archery, swordsmanship, and horseback riding. The demands of the battlefield inspired these men to value the virtues of bravery and loyalty and to be keenly aware of the fragility of life.” Sam exhibits bravery in his dreams. He is loyal and respects the fragility of life. He possesses an inner Samurai and by taking on the intimidating martial combat with the Samurai as the winged warrior, he reveals a powerful multi-faceted inner strength. Acheson reinvents the Samurai protective beetle like body by replacing the small metal plates with computer parts, suggesting the giant Samurai comes from an ancient world of the future. By Sam conducting battle with a future threat he deals with his demons from the past, present and future.

26 Ibid.
Acheson describes his inspiration for The Winged Warrior costume,

“Sam’s winged warrior outfit, it was based on all sorts of things; Pavel, space suits, Icarus, an anatomical suit as well, anatomy came into and I think they were the main influences. We designed a 14 foot wing span on the back of Jonathan Pryce with transparent feathers on a metal frame so it was like an angel but also a man in a flying machine and he operated it by pulling it’s handles. Because our wings were made on carbon fibre rods, we had this… when we actually built them we discovered that we got this really very nice sort of whip to them, so our Icarus figure glided and when he moved his arms he had this rather beautiful fluid movement that the carbon rods gave us. My favourite shot in Brazil is when Jonathan Pryce lands.” 27

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The Icarus figure is a potent reference, “According to legend, Icarus ignored his father Daedalus’s warnings and flew too close to the chariot carrying the sun across the heavens, melting the wax in his wings and falling to his death.” Clearly Icarus was a risk taker, the opposite of Sam’s mild mannered diurnal existence. However his nocturnal persona is far sexier and braver. He is part Icarus, part warrior and saviour with a dash of rock-star. And thanks to Acheson’s design he includes all these visual characteristics as well as still being able to recognise Sam.

Acheson describes creating Tuttle’s costume,

“It was a remarkable experience to work with Robert de Niro; he would come on a regular basis to develop the costume. I think we worked out that we had spent 26 hours in fittings with that one outfit - a cross between a burglar and a ninja warrior. I remember it was so dark. The detailing on the costuming was unbelievably elaborate. You see none of it in the dark. We had such exhaustive fittings for that outfit.”

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A cross between a Ninja Warrior and a Burglar is a perfect combination of honour and criminality for the anarchic Tuttle. “A ninja was a covert agent or mercenary in feudal Japan who specialised in unorthodox warfare. The functions of a ninja included espionage, sabotage, infiltration, and assassination, and open combat in certain situations.” Tuttle’s costume is capable of performing all things ninja yet we think of him as Western, with his American accent, Groucho moustache and gadget rich boiler suit. The darkness of the costume and detailed apparatus speaks ninja and skillful bandit equally. Acheson has created another costume conveying effective schizophrenia. It is interesting to note the comparisons where, “their covert methods of waging war contrasted the ninja with samurai, who observed strict rules about honour and combat.”

“During the fixing, Central Services suddenly arrives with its fix-it guys Spoor (Bob Hoskins) and Dowser (Derrick O’Connor) to check up but because they didn’t have the forms to fix things, they’re forced to come back.”

The fix-it guy’s costumes consist of mostly mid 20th century work wear. Spoor and Dowser look like American suburban repairmen and are similar to the everyday man carrying their toolboxes in Norman Rockwell paintings. However their characters are not as friendly as a Rockwell portrait, and Acheson supports their aggressive behavior by extending the peaks on their baseball caps to extreme length. The new silhouette supports the characters ranting behavior like destructive birds let loose in a park stealing sandwiches. The cap addition combines 1940s tradesman and 80s pop group Devo in their Whiplash music video.

“For instance, Sam’s mother, Mrs. Ida Lowry, became a more commanding figure over him, a driving force in his professional life. (One could more clearly see how Sam’s passive, escapist personality would have developed growing up in a household run by such a woman.)” 33

In this scene Doctor Jaffe performs a Salvador Dali face-lift of the future on Ida. Where by in a dream like scenario, the doctor is able to manipulate the patient’s skin like Play-Doh without anesthesia, and with out alarming the patient and securing the skin in the desired position by

the most rudimentary of tools – the bulldog clip. Jim Broadbent as Dr. Jaffe is dressed in a silk operating gown that combines, hairdresser, dentist and cheongsam, the result is an exotic figure: the confidante as the hairdresser, the intimidating surgeon as the dentist and the mysterious adventurer into the dangerously exotic world of plastic surgery of the cheongsam.

![Image of Sam and Jill from Brazil]

“In his waking life, Sam eventually comes face-to-face with the woman of his dreams in the form of Jill, who is ultimately revealed to be a terrorist (or rather, an agent provocateur in the employ of the Ministry of Information).”

Jill Layton is the most contemporary figure, she is the only female principal represented in Brazil in a masculine occupation as the tough-as-nails truck driver suspected of terrorist activities – she also ‘wears the pants’. Her occupation speaks to the future where women travel to the moon and fly planes as well as referring to the warring past where women assumed male roles out of necessity in Land Armies and Munitions Factories. They wore male attire and rolled up their sleeves and were idolized in graphics such as Rosie the Riveter. The WWII bomber jacket was a symbol of the sexy role of men, flying in the new war of the skies.

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Therefore it says a lot about Jill, she is a groundbreaker and a leader, she wears male clothes did not appear for women in the workplace until the 1970s. Her haircut is 1980s and her leather bomber jacket sits in this period with its broad shoulders, fake sandblasting and an inverted pleat into the shoulder. When she is not driving the truck she is floating around in Sam's dream like Botticelli’s *Venus*, veiled in white chiffon and needing to be rescued. She makes an equal opposing transformation to Sam in his night and day unrealities and the costume designer extends the metaphors with his past and present merger of design.

“*Michael Palin for his eccentric, strange performance as Jack Lint, with his nice guy, ignorant role as a man who doesn’t think torture is a bad thing.*”

Some people consider going to the dentist is a torturous experience. Just the thought of a man in a dental coat gives some people the shivers, but imagine the dentist putting on a Japanese Otafuku Noh Mask before they begin, the patient would certainly know they were in for some hefty drilling.

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In the scene where Sam is tied to an industrial dental chair inside a nuclear tower, the faraway image of Jack Lint in a white dental jacket is blurry but also dramatically clear, Sam is in trouble and when the shot reverses and Lint can be seen masked in the foreground, the audience understands Sam is in very big trouble. The dental jacket is a universal badge of anxiety and dread, and the addition of the Noh mask adds a mythical and ritualistic flavour to the anticipated terror. Shrouded trolls in the earlier Samurai/Sam scenes wore the same masks, and help to preempt a mysterious and murky underworld.

James Acheson has created costumes that are both clear and ambiguous. They allow the label of Science - Fiction to be so much more. In 2013, I find them as shrewd and inventive as they were in 1985.
**4c. Make-Believe - Fantasy Costume**

*The Wizard of Oz*

Costume Designer – Adrian

Set in Kansas, Dorothy Gale, the daughter of struggling farmers, fantasises about a more exciting and beautiful place to live. In the legendary song *Somewhere over a Rainbow*, Dorothy yearns for a world where bluebirds fly and colourful rainbows appear at whim. The song conveys the contrast to Dorothy’s monotonous and lonely lifestyle of dusty and remote landscapes and contrasts with a fantasyland where she would much rather live. Dorothy is a disenchanted and romantic teenage girl, she is frustrated like most teens with her family, neighbours and environment.
The catalyst to the shift in storyline begins when Dorothy runs away from home in order to save her dog from the clutches of a nasty neighbour Miss Gulch. While Dorothy and Toto are running away, an enormous cyclone scoops them up and carries them to a magical land called Oz. There she meets a good and evil witch, she travels along a yellow brick road and finds three unlikely new friends, a Scarecrow who needs a brain, a Tin Man who wants a heart, and a Cowardly Lion who desperately needs courage. With them she travels to Emerald City, hoping to find her way home. Dorothy is continuously challenged by the Wicked Witch of the West’s attempts to steel the magic ruby slippers and to prevent her from meeting the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy survives all contests and learns life’s lesson to be careful what you wish for, to appreciate the family and friends you have and be proud of where you come from.

In *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), costume designer Gilbert Adrian creates costumes for a world that is part of Kansas (shot in black and white and then washed in sepia tone) and three parts, Munchkin Land, Emerald City and Yellow Brick Road adventure (shot in Technicolor™). The costume and production design supports both Dorothy’s naturalistic physical world as well as the fantasy world of her dream state imagination.

In extracts of the letter to the scenarists six months before principal filming began Associate Producer Arthur Freed wrote,

> “The main objective about everything else is to remember that we are telling a real story in our screen play of the ‘Wizard of Oz’. Our story has not the construction of fantasy although it includes fantasy...

> Too much stress cannot be placed on the soundness of the sentimental and emotional foundation of this story because it is only against such a canvas the novelty and comedy and music of our venture can ever mean anything. When we get to Oz, there
must be a solid and dramatic drive of Dorothy's adventures and purposes that will keep the audience rooting for her.”

Freed's letter describes the challenges for the design team; therefore it is difficult to categorise precisely Adrian's costume design style. He first designs grounded naturalistic costumes for a struggling mid-American farm town community, to be filmed in black and white, with denim overalls, rancher straw hats, cotton housedresses and aprons. He supports the underlying message and connection with Dorothy's hometown when many of the world worn Kansas characters are reimagined, retaining their personality traits, but reinvented to transform into the new characters in Dorothy’s glorious Technicolor™ dream world.

Adrian sets up design tools to create the new fantasy characters born from their unadorned original including: The Wicked Witch of the West (Miss Gulch - nasty neighbour in Kansas), The Wizard / Professor Marvel (travelling, fraudulent but well meaning Kansas fortune-teller as well as his four other cameo roles) The Scarecrow, The Tin Man and The Lion (Dorothy's Kansas farmhand friends, Hunk, Zeke and Hickory). It was important to the Associate Producer Arthur Freed that despite the inclusion of the Fantasy World that the characters that journey with Dorothy could be partially recognised from home. To support the fantasy further Adrian then designs fantastical fairies, munchkins, good and evil witches, flying monkeys and Emerald City dwellers. The key characters that can be identified visually, and emotionally keep the imagery from becoming so fantastical that the audience risks losing their passion for Dorothy's struggle.

Black and white, washed with sepia – Kansas – Dorothy’s costume

The original costume of Dorothy takes on a fantasy style by the transition of sepia toned film stock to Technicolor™, as Dorothy wakes up after the tornado and opens the door of her twister damaged Kansas farmhouse – the old world, and then enters a new and coloured world of blue birds and rainbows in Munchkin Land. The farmhouse door opens into Munchkin Land, and her dress and backgrounds are seen for the first time in Technicolor™. There had been limited numbers of films shot in colour by 1939, and given the opening credits were also sepia, the unexpected transition of black and white into colour to the audience may have had similar dramatic surprise to the arrival of the talkies in 1927, a new frontier for film making and many more opportunities for design.
Has the film industry achieved anything as surprising or groundbreaking since? Even animation mixed with real performers or the invention of 3D films seems more like baby steps to the running leap and jump of Technicolor™. By presenting the film industries’ groundbreaking transition from black and white into colour within the one narrative is pure genius.

Munchkin Land – Munchkin Costumes - The Lollypop Guild

What should a Lollypop Kid look like? The three representatives (also known as the three little tough guys) from the Lollypop Guild present Dorothy with a giant lollypop and a delightful song and dance. Dorothy is given the royal treatment in Munchkin Land, the little people commemorate and congratulate her for killing the Wicked Witch of the East when her tornado driven house crash-landed in OZ. The fantasy nature of the reward and the tiny miniature people, set up a dream type state, “you’re not in Kansas anymore Dorothy”. Dorothy’s
comparative scale and her situation of being guardian-less, renders her more grown-up than the previous Kansas scenes. The central platform staging and the tiny people provide Dorothy with hierarchy and therefore make her more responsible for her impending choices. However the reward of the Lollypop remains a child’s fantasy reward and items like these remind us of the still vulnerable child within.

In the Frank Baum’s book ‘The Wonderful Wizard of Oz’ the Munchkins are described as being slightly small in stature and all blue. Munchkin is derived from the German word for ‘mannikin’ or ‘little figure’. Baum came from German ancestry. The Munchkin’s costumes have style connections to miniature versions of German national costume, while the Wicked Witch of the East’s flying monkey army has a Russian military and Cossack costume influence.

The Lollipop Kids (LPK) from the Lollypop Guild, have a teenage gang look to their clothes, this is re-enforced when the blue shirt, clay pipe smoking LPK enters the set by climbing up a New-York style manhole hidden in the stage floor. An unexpected contrast to the rural nature of the rest of the Munchkin landscape, this immediately sets up the language of street-kid; they exist everywhere. Their exaggerated torn shirts and shorts, ankle boots, their raspy voices, tough faces and hard hitting kicking steps, portray a gang that are more likely to rob a lolly shop, rather than give lollipops away. Dorothy may never have seen anything like a street-kid before and she mostly revels in the excitement of the new characters and her new environment.

Dorothy is undeterred by her predicament, her house has fallen from the sky, she has inadvertently killed somebody; she has no idea where she is or how she will get home. Little people who are friendly but very foreign to her surround her. She conveys a mixture of fascination; anticipation and a concern that she will eventually need to find her way back home.
The fantastic nature of her situation and her unquestioning approach in finding a solution is pure dream state fantasy and how she plans to solve her situation is helped by the lack of need for complete logic. Most people can remember waking startled from a dream, wondering how to get home or off a cliff or escape the jaws of a crocodile. The fantasy nature of the journey within the real story of a young girl's personal epiphany is supported by the production and costume design as it sets up a visual framework that supports the sophisticated message within the narrative. By visually grounding the characters and locations at the beginning, the leap of the cliff into the Fantasy World is more remarkable and more astonishing. Dorothy is an ordinary person caught up in extraordinary circumstances, a popular scenario for American Populism in the 1930s that many everyday Americans could relate to. Had Dorothy lived in an Uptown apartment in New York to begin with, she would have had far less distance to travel to find her way to Emerald City.
The Wicked Witch of the West

Dorothy saw Miss Gulch outside the window in the tornado and at that moment, she transforms into a witch flying on a broom. Miss Gulch becomes The Wicked Witch of the West by the addition of lengthy black shrouds and a pointy imperfect black hat. Black is often considered chic, Coco Chanel immortalised the little black dress and its transformative potential from work wear to cocktails to evening wear with the addition of well-chosen accessories and for that reason black can have the danger of also looking smart. Therefore when black is used to create evil characters, it often used in a shrouded or layered form, such as in the 1937 Disney animation of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves where the Evil Queen transforms in to the Old Women with the poisonous apple. Her garments are black, torn and layered looking and her animated face is extreme. Margaret Mitchell who played the Wicked Witch of the West has a remarkable face. She is the human victor to the Disney’s animated interpretation of a witch. Her nose, unique bone structure, and thin features all contribute to
the costume as a whole. Even a similar but less extreme face such as American actress Lily Tomlin would not be able to make an equal contribution to the costumes complete image. Mitchell’s remarkable face completes the costume and achieves further treachery through the application of bright green makeup. The colour is vivid and the makeup layer is thin, allowing the audience to appreciate Mitchell’s menacing expressions through the thin veneer. Mitchell is helped by the costume and the makeup, but even buttercup yellow would have a hefty task to disguise her perfect sorceress physical features.

![Image of Ruby Slippers](image)

**Figure 30 – The Wizard of Oz – 1939, The Ruby Slippers**  
Costume Designer – Gilbert Adrian  
DVD still

**The Ruby Slippers**

Originally described in Baum’s book as the Silver Slippers, Dorothy’s shoes soon became the Ruby Slippers, “as the colour red worked much better technically within the films medium and it was Scenarist Noel Langley that made the change.”37 While silver slippers rolls off the tongue

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beautifully, ruby slippers are destined for more adventure. There were six pairs in total, (5 pairs still accounted for, in various museum and private collections) with one of the original pairs on display at The Smithsonian Institute. Each meticulously made with individual sequinining and glass beadwork. The designs of the shoes are complete fantasy, and certainly a fantasy for a teenage girl more accustomed to sexless, leather Mary-Janes. The ruby shoes demonstrate Dorothy to be more powerful and confident, they are more than just a pretty pair of shoes; the slippers have protective powers. The kind of powers most parents of teenagers would hope to provide for their child as they travel through the difficult years. In Figure 64, the shoes are red, the socks are school uniform blue (a more practical colour for a country girl), and the glow emitted from the slippers is gold or yellow, the three primary colours are make a dynamic foreground image in each setting. The green hands in this image work as a powerful secondary colour, the gold is the brightest part of the image and takes the viewers eyes to the action. The extra-ordinary appearance of the ruby slippers visually supports the extra-ordinary powers of the slippers and further explains the Wicked Witch of the West's fatal attraction to them. The luminous haze that surrounds the slippers in each of the close-ups draws the audience’s attention to the object, like a magnet securing emotional focus from beginning to end of the film.

In OZ, Dorothy's shoes protect on her journey, they cannot be removed while she is alive, they are a potential source of strife in the hands of the Wicked Witch of the West (WWW) and were once own by her sister the Wicked Witch of the East. By Dorothy now owning the ruby slippers demonstrates a strong shift in power. The audience understands that if the WWW were to get her hands on the slippers, it would be a complete power shift and imminent disaster for the people of Oz. While there is fantasy in the shoes, the reality of their power is most formidable, and the design supports both, in that while they are glamorous and jewel encrusted in an sophisticated powerful way, their shape is more practical, still harking back to
a little girl, still functional enough to take Dorothy on her journey and not too grown-up looking before she does that in her own time.

Dorothy spends most of the film trying to get home, the very place that frustrated her in the beginning of the story. She has discovered that home is a place where most people return to at the end of the day, a demanding day, an awful day or even a tragic day. It is a place where most feel someone will be there to support them, hence the strength of the lyrics, “There’s is no place like home.” In the words of Ray Bolger, the Scarecrow,

“Home is not a house or a shelter or material things, it’s the people who live there the ones you love and the ones who love you, your mother, your father, your sister, your brothers, your cousins your uncles, your aunts... all of these people, that’s what this is all about... to me - The Wizard of Oz, besides being a great classic, it is a great lesson in humanity and that is why I think it will live for ever and ever.” 38

In The Wizard of Oz, costume designer Adrian designs fantastic costumes, so fantastic that their influence lives on in the twenty first century. For example, Baz Luhrmann used the Dorothy - Somewhere Over the Rainbow scene in a short sequence as part of the outdoor movie theatre scene in Australia (2008), Luhrmann knows that a 21st century audience will recognise the pictures immediately and in the case of Australia, the image of Dorothy in pigtails in the windswept landscape of Kansas, bares a striking parallel to the dusty, sweaty audience of Aussie country folk who watch the film under the stars with their eyes wide open as Dorothy’s story and fantasy imagery unfolds before them.

It is Adrian’s contribution of designing appropriately to support the grounded characters in Kansas and then imaginatively for OZ that creates such depth in the art form of fantasy.

Adrian has been praised by costume designer Colleen Atwood, “...I think The Wizard of Oz is kind of one of the best movies ever for design too. So many things re-invented and genius design.”

4d. Genuine - Costume Naturalism

*Mildred Pierce*

“...a garment’s imperfections can speak volumes about the character: a torn seam, a crease, a stain, the way a sleeve is rolled, or the sheen on a dress hem from a sizzling iron picked up just in the nick of time.”

Costume Designer - Ann Roth

Costume Designers observe and forensically document naturalistic details in costume and utilise them to support the truthful portrayal of a character. Whether it is a quirky garment detail or an eccentric hairstyle, costume designers relish investigating the less than perfect world we live in. The flawed and unpredictable details that happen naturally in every period, influence the design of the performer’s complete costume, creating an image that enhances storytelling and has the potential to relate to the audience’s own life. The following example is

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of Mildred Pierce (2012) designed by Ann Roth, the master of naturalism, who was recently included in the top four contributors to film costume design in the Victoria Albert Museum’s international touring costume design exhibition Hollywood Costume Design, where she shares her position with other legendary costume designers: Edith Head, Colleen Atwood and Sandy Powell.

In Mildred Pierce (2011) and earlier in Places from the Heart (1984), costume designer Ann Roth designs for two strong women who have fallen on hard times in the Great Depression, both fighting for survival and a better life. Roth's mantra, “I don’t dress movie stars; I dress actors who are playing characters. I think about how much money they have to spend, where they go, does she have a draw for slips?”41 This ‘method’ style of developing a character or a scene’s back story to aid designing the appropriate coat or handbag has kept Roth in good stead for over 100 feature films and four Academy Awards.

In Mildred Pierce, a mini series made by HBO set in the Depression Era in Los Angeles. Costume designer Ann Roth constructed back-stories for each of the principal characters in order to develop their clothing plot. She asked actress Kate Winslet how often Mildred washed her hair and before Winslet could answer, Roth chimed in with, “once a week, on Sundays at 4pm!” Winslet adored this idea and included this thought in developing her character’s identity.

Roth says “In the first episode you see Mildred wearing the same print dress over and over again and you never see that in a movie with a beautiful star like Kate Winslet.”42 This approach underscores a reality that is often missed by the glamourising of characters played by Hollywood stars, where a new dress is supplied for each scene, She also goes on to say

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“Todd Haynes the director was very specific in saying that Pierce would have had three housedresses; there was such a thing as a housedress. A housedress had an apron and then there was a dress for church, maybe two dresses and maybe one of those was a party dress.”

Interestingly when compared to the earlier version of Mildred Pierce (1945) starring Joan Crawford, the approach for Winslet contrasts the Film Noir fashion parade designed for Crawford, where Pierce’s rise to the top is depicted in numerous outfits from glamorous interpretations of the homely to movie star business lady royalty, all with signature Crawford shoulder pads expanding to extreme widths as her financial power rises and her emotional confidence and mother-daughter relationship fractures. Comparing the two examples illustrates how the contemporary period influences the films image in the periods that they were made.

In figure 31, Winslet wears the dress that Roth describes as the mud-brown, body skimming, long sleeved floral-print dress. Roth says,

“It’s the kind of ‘good’ dress women had a few of in their closet. Many women had three housedresses, a navy blue or black dress for church, funerals or weddings, and probably one or two other good dresses — but that doesn’t mean they were brand-new. People did mending and people darned socks in those days.”

“To add a well-worn feel to the thin frock, Roth and her team patched and added iron spots where it gets shiny. Probably no one can see it but us. But, yes I think it helped Kate.”

The mud-brown floral-print dress, tells us a number of things about the character. Having a large amount of pattern on a dress makes it a practical fabric. The busy pattern hides mends, marks and stains. The pattern has a pretty vibrancy to it, which support’s Pierce’s personality, and the white dots within the pattern helps to lift Winslet out of the scenes background as the

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45 Ibid.
white dots within the pattern act as a subtle built in follow-spot. The high neckline is conservative and prudish. She wears little jewelry; a simple maroon felt hat, almost matching shoes and gloves, topped off with an unremarkable handbag. The tool of wearing the same costume over many days helps to create an image of an ordinary and respectable woman with limited resources. Pierce is a picture of practicality and caution and the only way forward for her dress sense and fortunes are up.

In figure 32 Winslet wears a green satin dress. Roth says, “the green satin dress that Pierce wears to New Year’s Eve was a dress she bought off a rack” (Roth develops another back-story.) “I have a feeling that she did not cross the hills to buy that dress, (Los Angeles) she didn’t have that kind of money.” Roth describes Pierce’s personal style as “cautious”, defined by meek dresses and separates, “probably from Bullocks Wilshire in the earlier years. If a lady lived in the Valley in 1931 and hadn’t been anywhere, she didn’t see high fashion.”

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The dress is simple enough that it looks elegant, but it would not measure up to the more expensive, beaded and layered 1930s bias cut dresses of the Beverly Hills couture houses. The green colour is an ordinary shade, sickly and muddy next to Winslet’s pale skin. Had Roth chosen gold, silver or white in exactly the same style, she would have created a far more expensive and sophisticated image. Roth’s colour choice is critical in keeping the evening look down market and genuine.

In a scene where director Todd Haynes tracks across a number of characterfully dressed women and men sitting, waiting patiently on long wooden benches, Roth interrupts the filming and tells Winslet she can’t sit that way with her legs crossed, because her girdle would be too tight. Roth says “When you are in that girdle, it just holds you in a certain position and implies a certain behavior, manners.” Winslet was quick to obey. Roth is always on the lookout for the truth of the image and a consideration such as how underwear will influence the shape and texture of a costume, how the actor will move and feel in the costume and

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therefore influence the character's portrayal within the mise-en-scène is a critical consideration for the costume designer.

In Nadoolman Landis’s *Screencraft*, Anne Roth goes on to say,

“When I was in school in Pittsburgh, (Carnegie Mellon University) I was determined to learn to design scenery and costumes. One of my first jobs was to design ‘Ring Around the Moon’, and after I had designed it, drawn it, completed the working drawings and painted the elevations, the director asked me about my research. He was an older, very experienced, and highly cultured man. My research had been pedestrian, unimaginative. I simply was not curious enough. He knew it, and I learned the most significant lesson of designing essentials. Research and more research, now I probably spend way too much time gathering source material, but it is part of my process.”

Ann Roth’s mantra of more and more ‘curious research’ is critical to her success and is an essential strategy for designing in any style. Roth has mastered costume naturalism. Her ‘method’ style of design, where she conjures backstories for clothing details, so expressive and studied that the clothes smell of soap flakes, illuminates the creative potential for all designers working in visual naturalism as well as the dramatic benefits that can also assist the performer.

The genre naturalism may be defined more easily than others. Perhaps it has less additional influences and a more direct pathway to follow. The exact physical history of a dress has a forensic track to examine or to invent. It does require imagination and experience to invent a naturalistic track to a costume, the dialogue and storyline will aid the fabrication, but the

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costume designer's lifetime of studying people, original clothes, photographs and paintings will be the component that creates the full visual naturalistic biography.

In this chapter I have examined design styles and themes. It appears that they need to exist together and support each other and their co-existence makes the other richer. Ambiguity plays a major part in a design's success. Combining many visual themes and messages with precision can result in greater design clarity. It is not that anything can be mixed together to create a new style but that a deep understanding of the layers within the story and the characters when well studied and observed can be reinforced successfully with meticulously chosen and combined visual elements.
5. MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND THE COSTUME

5a. Mise-En-Scène - Painting into the Scene with Costume Design

A costume design may sometimes be described as painterly, costume designers act like painters, balancing colour, form, line, texture and value, providing the essential visual balance of characters within the screen's moving image. They work with a live performer creating a three dimensional costume that will eventually be seen within a two dimensional frame. Similar to a painting hanging in an art gallery where the artist creates the painting to have one possible angle for viewing, the film costume designer works with the creative team to realise the singular view within each moving frame. In contrast, the costume designer who invents for theatre creates a costume more similar to a sculpture standing in a gallery where every viewer takes in a different perspective and no spectator necessarily sees the exact view the sculptor intended. The costume design within the screen frame is known as the costume within the mise-en-scène (“to put in the scene”), where:

“...the contents of the frame and how they are organised and are made up of lighting, costume, décor, properties and the performers. The organization of the contents of the frame encompasses the relationship of the actors to one of other and décor, but also their relationship to the camera, and thus the audiences view. So in talking about mise-en-scène one is also talking about framing, camera movement, the particular lens employed and other photographic decisions. Mise-en-scène therefore encompasses both what the audience can see, and the way in which the audience is invited to see it.”

The mise-en-scène, combined with the cinematography and editing of a film, influence the emotional tone, the verisimilitude, and the understanding of a film to the viewer.

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The following examples examine how costume design contributes to the mise-en-scène:

The Gangs of New York

“Costume Design is not about making someone look beautiful. Through costume you tell a story, support or emphasize the personality of a character. Sometimes a costume by
itself looks strange, but when it’s put on set together with all the other costumes, it fits perfectly.”

Costume Designer - Sandy Powell

Gangs of New York (2002) is set in the Five Points area of New York in the 1860s and is based around the story of Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) who returns home seeking revenge against Bill the Butcher (Daniel Day-Lewis), his father’s killer.

Costume designer Sandy Powell uses colour, form, line, texture and value to paint a picture of characters within the film’s moving picture frame. Her sophisticated design choices help to inform us about character, hierarchy, education, class, nationality and character relationships.

The central image in figure 1 consists of a gangland army led by Bill the Butcher. The audience understands that Bill the Butcher is the leader by his costume’s colour, form, line, texture and value, he is also aided by the director, who places him centrally and forward in the mise-en-scène. Powell has established visually the commander before he speaks any dialogue. The Butcher’s distinct form creates the leader; he is the only character wearing a coat, he wears the tallest top hat and has the most significant handlebar moustache. His silhouette helps to draw the viewer’s eye to the element requiring the most attention. He is aided by colour, as he wears the largest blue sash on his hat and a different coloured waist sash. The design lines of the sash reference the uniforms of military insignia of ranked officials and officers further contributing towards an image of leadership.

Powell designs the gangland army similarly to a sports team or army. Powell needs to communicate a unified group as well as communicate an army with an underground agenda.

The team is visually achieved by dressing each army member in an improvised uniform that is linked by colour, line, shape and texture. The raggy and inconsistently sized blue sash worn by the group represents a team and suggests the team lacks wealth and time to prepare their uniform. The imperfections of each costume element create a more threatening image than a regular army uniform, where a perfectly made uniform may be at risk of communicating chocolate box soldiers, the truthful backstory of how the uniform has been improvised adds to emotive dynamic within the mise-en-scène.

Powell communicates storytelling and character utilising colour and texture. She chooses sepia to deep coffee colours and constructs in heavy coarse materials. The dark hued, broken down, roughly surfaced and elaborately repaired costumes helps to lift each character out of the lightly coloured, snow filled landscape. The line and form of the clothes illustrate the period of 1863 and will be recognised by the audience as coming from an earlier time. The viewer’s knowledge of period costume will determine whether they are able to completely place the costume in the exact time period. It is important that Powell demonstrates the period by utilising all her period costume knowledge, it may not fully register 1863 to the majority of the audience, but it will have a subliminal effect.

Powell’s contribution to the mise-en-scène is significant. The screen picture is filled with characters that are clearly defined by their dress and the viewer’s focus, understand of story and character is manipulated by the aid of costumes. Powell’s costume design choices create image signposts that support the story visually and emotionally. Both the costume foreground and background production design contribute to an expressive and dimensional moving picture on screen.
The second example examines the potential for a painterly costume design in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*:

![Figure 3 - Girl with a Pearl Earring – 2003 - Scarlett Johansson as Griet, Colin Firth as Johannes Vermeer
Costume Designer – Dien van Straalen
DVD Still](image-url1)

![Figure 4a (detail) and 4 - Girl with a Pearl Earring – by Johannes Vermeer – circa 1665, oil on canvas, Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague
http://www.mauritshuis.nl/index.aspx?chapterid=2340&contentid=17233&SchilderijTop10SsOtName=Inventarisatienummer&SchilderijTop10SsOv=670](image-url2)
Figure 5 - *Girl with a Pearl Earring* – 2003 - Essie Davis as Catharina Bolnes Vermeer  
Costume Designer – Dien van Straalen  

Figure 6a (detail) and 6 – *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* – by Johannes Vermeer – circa 1663, oil on canvas  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  
https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objecten?q=vermeer&p=1&ps=12#/SK-C-251,1
**Girl with a Pearl Earring**

Costume Designer – Dien Van Straalen

What better potential for a costume designer to contribute into the mise-en-scène and to work like a painter within the screen frame, than the costume representation of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer’s life in *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003). Beautifully framed by shadowy Delft corridors and sensitive illuminations of light shining through Jacobean windows, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (GWAPE) allows us into Vermeer’s painterly world, as if his entire body of work consisting of 36 known paintings were seamlessly woven together to form the film’s affecting backdrop.

Most will remember the startling promotional image of actress Scarlett Johansson, with her hair drawn up in a sapphire blue turban. The poster image was such a successful representation of the Vermeer original that it took our imagination straight to the art gallery walls of The Hague, where the original painting hangs. The Johansson image promised a costume design that was as painterly as the Vermeer brush, and further promises were made as the opening scene’s cinematography and production design took the audience via the illusion of camera obscura into a world of meticulously reproduced Vermeer domestic interiors, with recessions, light play, and changes of focus.

Dien van Straalen costume design did not meet my Vermeer expectations. To compare the GWAPE’s central character Griet in the Vermeer (fig 4 detail) and the van Straalen costume design interpretation (fig 3); the costume designer did not utilise the painterly layers in the wrapped turban. Instead van Straalen chose a plain, new looking, sapphire blue Jap silk for the wrap component of the turban and similarly a singular golden shade of voile type fabric for the main body of the headdress. The lack of depth in the materials surfaces and colours failed to represent the character and story within the period. Griet a servant girl would be wearing
clothing that had experienced a working life and although the turban is an element that is put on by Vermeer as an artist’s addition, the stark newness of the materials lacked any sense of provenance. Most elements of clothing have had some kind of history, it is rare apart from a special item of clothing such as a wedding dress that we see or notice a completely new item of clothing in day-to-day life and Vermeer adeptly captured real characters of everyday Dutch domestic life within his intimate interiors. Every item in a Vermeer painting has a history and a future; they don’t look to be about to be returned to the costume box.

On examination of the GWAPE image a number of questions arise; where had the lapis blue fabric come from? Was it a strip of silk used in studio set-ups by Vermeer? Was the golden voile fabric a painting tool, kept in abundance, usually used to mop up paint? Vermeer the artist captures that potential back-story; and when examining the detail of figure 4, the viewer can muse over splashes of bleach, linseed oils, turpentine and crushed pigment powders on both of the turban layers; suggesting the potential scenario of the artist’s assemblage of textiles and objects set aside for the managed composition of a Vermeer masterpiece. In the van Straalen example, the fabrication is not as unique or particularly inspired by Vermeer, the fabrics chosen are more likely to have been purchased at Lincraft in the 21st century than a 17th century textile merchant, let alone stored away in a Delft art studio.

Again in figure 5 of Vermeer’s wife, the costume design lacks physical and personal history and lacks an effective contribution to the film’s painterly production and lighting design. Catharina Bolnes Vermeer’s costume is most likely to have been inspired by figure 6, Vermeer’s Women in Blue Reading a Letter; the chosen material lacks depth and in particular drape - drape of a garment that has been hand-woven, hand laundered and worn numerous times. The sky blue colour in Bolnes Vermeer’s costume is a solitary blue, without age and without depth; the tight, thin and even weave appears to be mechanically loomed - an impossible intervention for the 17th century - where such fabric would have been woven by a
hand-operated shuttle loom, creating a less evenly textured and coloured textile, and a more
characterful fabric. Such detail is rendered in Vermeer’s portrait, the women’s various shades
of blue jacket falls softly over her body and finishes with an uneven hemline, indicating a
more open weave that has begun to lose its original hemline and a more truthful example
than the stiff contemporary silk dupion imitation in the film.

In this example I have identified where the costume designer has not satisfied the potential to
work as a painter within the screen frame, the film’s overall mise-en-scène relies on the
costume designer to visually support the pivotal foreground and background figures in the
composition. They need to be working with the same brush and palette as the lighting and
production designer. The performers in GWAPE are moving objects and are often the main
focus within the composition, the screen image moves and shifts as the camera shifts focus
and light plays into the picture, but that can be less obvious than moving objects such as boats,
bikes and animals. Because the central characters are human, they make the ultimate
emotional impact as moving objects within picture and therefore the solutions to their clothes
and appearance is of ultimate importance to the mise-en-scène.
5. MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND THE COSTUME

5b. Attention Seeking - Emphasis and Focus

The methods in which costume elements are choreographed, filmed, lit and edited as well as the costume’s physical attributes such as weight, colour, movement, texture manipulate the audience’s focus and therefore influence their understanding of a character and story. Baz Luhrmann when describing the clothes impact in The Great Gatsby (2013) goes as far as to say, “That the costumes in close-up, become the set.”

His observation highlights the scale of effect costumes are able to make to the mise-en-scène.

The addition of an accessory such as a tiny lapel flower contributes to the focus play, where the ornament may for a second fill the entire picture before the image moves into the next frame. The significance of the flower may assist establishing the character or help set a mood for the scene. During a close-up of a leading actor, the clothing trim on an extra’s jacket may find its way into the background making a much bigger impact in the image than the costume designer intended. Simple decisions such as what side to part the leading man’s hair to introduce his character, or if the actress will carry her handbag on her right arm, depending on the shot, will determine whether the bag is featured significantly or become a shadow amongst the performer’s silhouette. If the detail is missed, the loss may affect the audience’s overall understanding of the character. Designers make both instinctive and informed decisions rapidly and repeatedly throughout their contribution on a film.

Costume designers need to know how each costume element will be filmed and ultimately how their work will contribute to the mise-en-scène. They keep in close communication with

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the director, production designer and cinematographer to achieve precise costume focus to aid character and storytelling. Costume designer Lindy Cummings describes how she first began to understand how the camera sees the composition of costume, light and set while working on a Mike Leigh Film,

“...it was the first time that I understood how closely the camera looks at everything. I began to think of films as individual frames, including all the little nuances that you can put into characters in films that are lost on stage.”

Costume designer Sharon Davis says,

“To design for film you have to see things through the camera; you can’t trust your eye. Designers should take classes to learn the different kinds of film stock and lighting techniques that affect how the costumes will look on screen.”

Both designers are stressing the essential need to understand and anticipate the camera and film’s material’s impact on costume and the costume detail’s impact on image when designing costume for screen.

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5 Ibid.
The following example examine the focus tool of costume and character within the screen frame:

**The Artist**

“Without the colour to communicate the language of telling the story, I was trying to tell the story through textures, whether it be lamé, sequins and beads for Hollywood, or very flat rough textured wools to communicate down-on-your-heels, or the elegance of satin lapels for evening wear, or the shimmer of a beautiful nightgown. It became a story of textures telling the story.”

Costume Designer - Mark Bridges

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Almost silent and shown entirely in black and white (but actually shot in colour, “Black and white was too sharp, too clean,” explains Guillaume Schiffman, director of photography. 7) The Artist (2011) is a romantic vision of old Hollywood. George Valentin is a silent movie star (Jean Dujardin) who meets a young dancer Peppy Miller (Bérénice Bejo) and the arrival of talking pictures sends their careers in opposite directions.

The movie’s near silence pursues the idea that narrative can be understood without dialogue and sound. Costume designer Mark Bridges effectively codifies characters by costume and supports the silent narrative with his exacting design choices of accessories, costume details and fabric choices. The rise of aspiring actress Peppy Miller can be charted by her clothes from the early days of autograph hunting in a drop waist rayon dress to her box office success in fur coats, beaded gowns and fur stoles. As talking pictures sends Valentin’s career downwards, we see him pawn his suit and through subtle tailoring Valentin is seen as less of a man as Bridges crafts his suit to sit more loosely making Dujardin look smaller as well as appearing less refined by using coarser fabrics and limper tailoring methods (fig 8).

For the camera set-up in figure 7, Bridges controls and styles accessories to affect the mise-en-scene. He places the fur stole to the side on Miller’s shoulder revealing white satin creating a sharp contrast towards the centre of the picture frame, this focus pull is strengthened by the white flower on her cloche hat that sits directly perpendicular. Both elements take the viewer’s eye straight to Miller’s face and the centre of the image. Had the shot been taken on the opposite side of the car, the flower would be seen on the side near the car and would have made a much smaller impact.

In the case of *The Artist*, the use of authentic and reproductions of 1920s gowns and accessories combined with considered fabric choices have all contributed to the focus impact on the screen. In a *Los Angeles Times* interview, Bridges explained how he tackled the challenge of the film’s black and white palette,

> “With costumes, you’re always trying to tell the story subliminally…
> So in the medium of black-and-white, we used a lot of textures and high contrast when the characters were at their pinnacle and more monochromatic looks when they were down on their heels. It was all about whether there was enough separation in tone because once it goes to black and white it becomes mush. You lose definition. I couldn’t have a dark sweater on an actor if there was going to be a black wall behind him. The colours wouldn’t make a difference in a black-and-white film. We did some camera tests to figure out what a colour looked like in black and white. And seeing as he couldn’t utilise colour as a motif for characters, he and his team instead used different textures to tell the story. Flatness corresponded to an atmosphere of ‘real life’ or being down on your luck.”

Here Bridges fabric choices become a significant tool for design and focus. Bridges directs the viewer’s attention as well as conveying plot, supporting performance and character relationships.

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In figure 8, Bridges uses subtle tailoring by crafting his suit to sit more loosely on him and using coarser fabrics and limper tailoring methods as Valentin career diminishes and he is seen as less of a man. There is less tonal contrast in this image and the white shirt helps to draw our eyes to Valentin’s face.
Figure 9 demonstrates many of the design focus tools that Bridges describes; Bernice wears a glimmering beaded lightly toned dress; the dress reveals more skin than any of the other characters and she is the most luminous figure in the scene. She is centrally positioned and surrounded by women in mid tone to black matt fabrics, they wear less makeup and fall into the background, despite two of the foreground women being on the same plane.
The next example shows how the seemingly simple and arbitrary choice of a sweatshirt instead of singlet is well considered and successfully focuses on the main character within the screen frame:

![American Beauty - Lester Burnham jogging with the Jims](image)

In *American Beauty* (2000), Lester Burnham jogs with the Jims, ‘the Jims’ are Lester’s gay bourgeois neighbours. Costume Designer Julie Weiss helps to create focus by giving Lester (Kevin Spacey) a different running costume to his gay co-runners; the two Jims run in near to identical dark singlets and shorts and creating bookends to the central heterosexual figure of Burnham, emphasising him as the main focus. The choice of sweat shirt and sweat pants, contrasted to the sportier and more youthful framing of the singlet and shorts duo, contributes to the mise–en-scène; Burnham looks older due to his body being more covered up, he looks more suburban due to the design of the sweat shirt ensemble, he looks less fit and more of a jogging greenhorn as the costume is a little oversized making him appear less confident in showing off his body, the colour of grey is neutral and light enough in tone that we can see the large amounts of sweat in his costume illustrating a contrast to his fitter and
more pristine jogging comrades. The audience understands where to focus by the composition of characters and their clothes.

The selection of training clothing is a precise strategy of design, placement, focus and communication by Weiss.

The next example shows how balancing the physicality of the performer and costume helps to support focus on the main character within the screen frame:

Amélie (2000), played by Audrey Tautou, is an innocent and naïve girl in Paris, who while searching for love, decides to help those around her and finds love along the way. It is Amélie’s story, and for the majority she is the central image on screen. Fortunately for the creative team Tautou has magnetic dark eyes, red lips and pale skin, all magnificently framed with a crop of dark thick chestnut hair. Costume Designers Fontaine and Labail support focus by making costume choices that don’t overpower the physical strengths Tautou possesses.
Many of Tautou’s costumes consist of one colour and v- necklines or simple straps without collars avoiding fussy detail around her neck that might pull focus away from her. By trimming her fringe in the style of Audrey Hepburn’s *Roman Holiday* coiffure, the audiences focus is drawn directly to her shining dark eyes ready to observe her daily adventures, not what she will be wearing next, despite her numerous outfits in the film.

The next example shows how the performer's accessories aids focus on the main character and supports the narrative within the screen frame:

![Image](image_url)

Figure 12 – *A Separation*– 2011 - Leila Hatami as Simin
Production Designer – Keyvan Moghaddam, costume design un-credited
DVD Still

When a film begins, the audience's attention focuses on two main questions; where are we? And who are they? In an opening scene in *A Separation* (2011), there is a casually veiled lady, driving alone and steering past more traditionally dressed people, including fully veiled woman in burqa and hijab (*Arab and Persian religious uniform is symbolised by the simplicity of the black burqa. The pious pare down their clothing to the least colourful and individualizing garments in order to humble themselves before their God.*). The veils are a clue to the location

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and the fashionable and more contemporary nature of her Fortuny pleated veil conveys to the viewer that she is not the average female in the society she is travelling through.

Her confident independence is portrayed by the act of her driving alone. She travels through a country where women are veiled for their religious beliefs and their roles may be seen as traditional or even repressed to an outsider. Her simpler more contemporary veil conveys that she is more modern than most. However the sunglasses, the focus to this shot, is the biggest clue as to who she is, where she is and where she is be going, and it is by no accident that the side view of the glasses which captures the branding is one of the first close-ups with: ‘the arms are inscribed ‘Ray-Ban’. Already this well-known brand name has communicated a great deal about Simin’s character. We now know Simin is middle-class, modern and adventurous, or certainly she wants to appear that way.’ Simin wants to leave her homeland of Iran and make a better life for her family, especially for their only daughter, while her husband wants to stay, as he feels obliged to look after his aging father. The Ray-Bans signal the onset of her journey as she considers how her future could be abroad and she eventually seeks a divorce. I can remember watching the sunglasses moment in the film and thinking, this is going to get interesting, I am interested in this woman, she is not stereotypical to her culture, there is more to her, I want to know her story.

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The next example shows how the focus on the performer’s accessories achieve focus on the main character and support the narrative within the screen frame:

Robert Altman's *Prêt-à-Porter* (1994) functions in a number of ways: as a critique of the Paris ready-to-wear collections, as an examination of clothing and identity, an exposé of clothing and the naked body and an investigation into clothing without the body. The overall costume design is attributed to Catherine Letterier with the addition of specifically designed costumes, couture and ready to wear clothing by Thierry Mugler, Sonia Rykiel, Tatjana Patitz, Ève Savali, Nicola Trussardi, Jean Paul-Gautier, Christian Lacroix, Issey Miyake, Gianfranco Ferré and Vivian Westwood. *Prêt-à-Porter* juxtaposes the character and narrative driven costume designer’s contribution of Letterier with the real couture designers work within fictional and real fashion shows as well as appearances of the designers portraying themselves.

The film’s final scene in figure 13 depicts the character of Isabelle de la Fontaine (Sophia Loren) who gains immediate attention by Letterier’s witty and eye-catching accessories to her mourning dress. In amongst the black clad funeral procession of de la Fontaine’s late husband Olivier, Loren is adorned in vivid red; the red catches the audience’s attention and amplifies the narrative. Isabelle has demonstrated throughout the film, that she never liked her rich and successful husband, she calls him a shit to his face in the opening scene and upon his death,
rejoices in his demise. In the scenes that ensue Olivier’s death, Isabelle appears in an escalation of more glamorous ensembles, as if her husband’s death has yielded her new life, fresh romance and an exciting new wardrobe. For the funeral the addition of a Merry Widow sized couture hat in luminous red, matching scarf and handbag ostentatiously signals celebration, availability, triumph and freedom. Nothing is said in this scene, the image and her accessories say it all.

In this sub-chapter, I have concentrated on the practice of manipulating focus with costume within the mise-en-scène, for the reason that no matter how detailed, how beautiful, how appropriately designed for the character the costume maybe, if the designer is not considering how the totality of the image will be captured and utilised within the screen frame, then no amount of money, creating, assembling or fittings will fully realise the costume’s potential to communicate character and storytelling on screen.
5. MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND THE COSTUME

5c. Counterpoint – Costume Underscoring and the Subliminal Message

A change of colour, the choice of materials or a shift or contrast in tone within the costume design can accentuate the meaning of words and the relationships between characters. Costume choices are made utilising balance. At times it is more useful to communicate an idea more subtly or subliminally than illuminating an idea so brightly that the audience needs to shut their eyes to it. The strength of a subtle or subliminal message can be more effective and long lasting than a neon billboard. The audience enjoys the challenge of analysis as well as the eventual discovery.

The following examples illustrate the subliminal message within the film’s narrative underscored by costume design:

Figure 14 – The Artist – 2011 – Jean Dujardin as George Valentin
On the stairs Valentin passes Miller, she has just signed with Kinograph, she is ascending the stairs and this is used as a continuing symbol throughout the film as we witness Valentin’s demise.
**The Artist**

“With costumes, you're always trying to tell the story subliminally...”

Costume Designer - Mark Bridges

In *The Artist* (2011), after Valentin has stormed out of Al Zimmer’s office, we see him in a wide shot descending a staircase in amongst the hustle and bustle of a busy movie studio. On the stairs Valentin passes Miller, she has just signed with Kinograph, she is ascending the stairs, an image that becomes a repeating visual metaphor. In contrast, as we witness Valentin’s career demise we see him continually descending stairs. Here Bridges supports this metaphor by choosing a simple white dress for Miller and Valentine wears mid greys that are matt and...
are of little tonal distinction. His look is unremarkable and he is shot to blend in with the background and the extras. Miller in contrast glows like a beacon on the staircase and we continue to see her shot on levels and angles that are higher than Valentine from then on.

Bridges does two things here, he reinforces the rising star symbol with his choice of tone in the fabric of the garment, with this he communicates that Miller is on the way up, and the simple style of her dress indicates she hasn't made it just yet.

Figure 16 – The Piano – 1993 - Holly Hunter as Ada McGrath, Anna Paquin as Flora McGrath
Costume Designer – Janet Patterson
DVD Still

The Piano

“The close relationship between mother and daughter is established immediately through colour and dress; the colours identical or harmonious, matching bonnets - like peas in a pod on arrival - Flora a diminutive version of her mother. This merging implies
that Flora is an extension of her mother and an interpreter of Ada’s inner self to the world.”

Costume Designer – Janet Patterson

The Victorian period is well known for its introverted repressed sexual behavior and correct and proper facades. The mid-Victorian crinoline ultimately symbolises the period’s sexual reticence, as an apparatus worn by most women that challenges sexual foreplay and virtually assures sexual defeat. The very notion of incarcerating a woman in the centre of a cage and suggesting that a man makes sexual advances towards is optimistic and does not appear to be a garment that might attract any kind of foreplay let alone intercourse.

The laced tightness of the bound and corseted female waist made even smaller by the contrast of the billowing birdcage added to the uptight nature of the period. However the challenges of concealment and distance heightened the male and females sexual desires as the soft caged

crinoline and layered petticoats swung from side to side revealing tiny feminine Victorian feet and ankles and the Victorian evening dress with its draped Bertha collar, promoted the females shoulders and décolletage to pop up like a bunch of flowers to be impregnated by a passing bee, creating powerful objects of sexual yearning.

The costume design for *The Piano* (1993) supports the sexual relationships between the three protagonists, Ada a mute Scottish woman (Holly Hunter), Stewart a rich local landowner and Ada’s husband (Sam Neil) and Baines, Ada’s lover (Harvey Keitel). The clothing style that Patterson designs for Ada is more concealed and repressed than average Victorian daywear, it resembles mourning wear and therefore emits a quiet sadness throughout the film. The lack of joy in the clothes and the restricted and concealing nature of their design underscore Ada’s grief for her predicament and extends the sexual challenge for her husband Stewart, heightening his sexual craving and frustration. *The Piano* is much more than a Victorian period costume drama. In particular the lead character Ada is not a stereotypical submissive Victorian female, she is vulnerable to her environment, her arranged marriage, and her restrained costume. However she challenges this restraint by following her primal urges and pursues a far more dangerous and exciting male sexual partner than her husband Stewart in Baines. “Stewart is represented with uncomfortably tight clothing, a contrast to Baines. Baines symbolises the presence of the dangerous, erotic other, the force that in the context of traditional repression narratives conventionally remains implied by the concealed.”13Much is made of the impracticality of her clothing and the metaphorical barricading of Ada by the crinoline throughout the film, with one of the last images of nearly drowning in the ocean but also being dragged down and strangled in her clothing (fig 18).

In Stella Bruzzi’s *Undressing Cinema* she examines fetishism, allure and desire being heightened by clothing, and costume having the ability to imply and inflame such sensations by men and women through concealment. She says,

> “The potential sexuality and sensuality of clothes is overtly explored in The Piano, as both costume and the body appear linked in this film to a complex feminist displacement of the conventionalised objectification of the women’s form via scopophilia and fetishism.” ¹⁴

Therefore Ada’s traditional Victorian clothing which would not usually be considered sexy; due to the narrative and the cinematographic language within the mise-en-scène support and underscore Ada’s fervent sexual allure and desire. With this underscoring by costume Ada attains a power that implies sexual, feminine and domestic liberation. Costume designer Janet Patterson explains,

“It was important to set up contrasts between the rivals for Ada’s love so we used the language of clothes to set up a number of distinctions. We agreed that Baines should be a very international person in nineteenth-century terms; a whaler and traveller who would have picked up his clothes along the way. Baines has given up his culture; he’s not a Pakeha (white New Zealander) nor Maori; instead he’s somehow suspended between the two, though inclined more towards the latter, evident from the tattoos on his face. He has gone bush and has a strong relationship with the Maori people. Stewart, on the other hand, is rigid and awkward, which we accentuated by making his clothes too small to make him more uncomfortably uptight. Particularly in the scene when he first goes to meet Ada, his clothes are not a good fit.”

Director Jane Campion describes her inspiration for the costumes for Baines and the Maori characters,

“She became intrigued over the years with the photographic section of the Turnbull Library in New Zealand, which documents, from the earliest days of photography, the ways in which New Zealand became colonised. ‘I was particularly taken by how the Maori people adapted to European clothes, in combination with their own dress, which became such a graphic metaphor for their understanding of Europeanism – and vice versa in a way. There they were sitting in these photographs with great dignity, with such a fierce look at the camera. This sense of themselves was so powerful that it transcended anything that might seem ridiculous with the misappropriation of clothes.’

Campion’s initial observation for character development followed by Patterson’s choice of specific European clothing elements, gives Baines a subliminal sophistication, he is more than

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15 Bilbrough, M. (1994). “Crafting the Piano.” Object 12, (Summer), 36-38
a Maori, he has retained his ancestral European traits, while embracing the Maori way of life, by doing this he represents a type of super power where he assumes the physical, spiritual and intellectual characteristics of both cultures. His costume demonstrates that he has influenced the Maori culture surrounding him.

Holly Hunter describes her transformation into Ada, through costume,

“One of the ways I chose to prepare early on was by putting on the corset and having it laced up nice and tight, putting on the hooped skirt and the complexity of the costume I wanted to see where that would take me in that I thought that was a very useful external tool to just to give into the costumes, the challenge of walking and finding how a 19th century woman in general would move and Ada in particular might move with those constrictions.”17

Hunter is describing the importance of her preparation, where she understands the potential dynamic that the costume will add to her performance and that her physical choices and emotional embodiment of the costume will communicate to the viewer more about Ada.

In Jane Campion’s book on The Piano, Hunter describes further how her costume assisted her character development for Ada,

“The costumes helped my tremendously: the incongruity of having a women in a really laced up corset, huge hooped skirts, petticoats, pantaloons, bodice and chemise trying to gracefully maneuver her way through the bush was a really physical manifestation of Ada. There was an obvious physical fragility – and yet strength and stamina, as well as grace, were required to wear those clothes. That was an interesting dichotomy

which that period offered me.”

Patterson as well as the Victorian period has provided Hunter with external tools to aid the development of her internal and external character development. The contrasts of restrictiveness of her dress in the Australian bush landscape, in the heat, cold, mud and rain, help to underscore the sexual and emotional freedom she finds in the stripping away of the costume’s layers in her love making scenes with Baines.

In Laleen Jayamanne's study on Gothic costume in The Piano, she describes the costume’s impact as,

“The performative dimension of costumes in this film clearly moves beyond historical exactitude and verisimilitude, and enables the emergence of a Gothic will.”

Jayamanne is describing an emergence of metaphorical layers achieved by the way the historical costume has been used by the director, cinematographer, designer and actor. They each have added a Gothic dimension that transcends naturalism, and allows an eeriness and power to wash into the storytelling and imagery.

Janet Patterson’s considered and sophisticated costume solutions visually underscore Hunter's, Keitel's and Neil’s multi-dimensional characters and performances. She creates realities and histories for each character within the mise-en-scène underscoring the sophisticated narrative of complex relationships. Patterson’s deft hand arranges and composes each solution with subtlety and clarity creating a resonant underscore.

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In this chapter, I have examined the costume's contribution to the mise-en-scène. I have analysed the simplest solutions such as the contemporary sports sweater choice in *American Beauty* to the complex, historic and imaginative costume solutions created for *The Piano*. Each resolution is as important as the other, the costume designer supports the performer's visual identity and impact within the screen's continuously moving picture frame.
CONCLUSION

In the previous five chapters I have examined five essential elements in costume design for the screen. The five studied are significant components to the art of costume design.

Observation analyses the importance of accurate perception with unrelenting consciousness. Where director Peter Greenaway’s dictum, “Draw what you see, not what you know” encompasses the costume designer’s fundamental mission for observing the truth in words, images, and character and ultimately including their findings in their interpretative visual contribution.

Collaboration examines four leading director/designer partnerships and finds that while they all have individual film making styles and diverse bodies of work, they have the common characteristic of operating within the Benevolent Leader model. They all toiled, experimented and expanded the film’s potential, challenging each other’s creative ability and collaborating with respect and candor. By operating with such rigor they each developed a conceptual core to build out from, applying their total creative contribution to their vision and by doing so conceived original masterpieces.

Character and Function studies the performer’s influence on the costume, the characters arc supported by the costume, the methods of creating the costume with the performer and colour’s influence on character. Each area highlighted the need for appropriate and balanced choices within the designer’s contribution that considered the physical, emotional and dynamic needs of the individual performer. The costume designer measures and supports the character’s emotional and physical journey within the screenplay. They use verbal and visual communication skills when developing a costume design from conception to completion with
the performer and the creative team, and they embrace the powerful tools of colour, line texture, movement, silhouette and its influence on character.

Design Styles tests the coding of design styles, and finds that ambiguity plays a major part in a design’s success. Where a Fantasy style is combined with a degree of Period or Science Fiction, it creates a more interesting and meaningful experience for the viewer. The study analyses the considerations and skills required when measuring out the combined style ingredients, where too much fantasy or too much science fiction without any grounding component can make for a spectacular but meaningless explosion on screen.

Mise-En-Scène and the Costume scrutinises the costume’s role within the arrangement of elements within the screen frame. It examines the costume’s role within the composition of the moving image, and how costume can manipulate emphasis and focus and has the power to underscore storytelling. The chapter notes the importance of detail and finds tiny subtle strokes that speak volumes such as the Ray-Bans in A Separation and compares it to the more complex layered brushwork in the characterful and period costume considerations made for The Piano.

It has been misleadingly prescribed that the work of the costume designer should go unnoticed. Of course costumes need to be noticed, the word noticed means to be seen, to be observed and to become aware. Costume designs should be noticed, it is the degree of appropriateness and balance that the costume designer must critically measure when devising their design contribution, not design unnoticeable costumes. The statement also mistakenly suggests that the visual impact of the performer does not need to register or be understood, it may not be obvious but in all cases the costume will register to the viewer subliminally. There is no absolute way to design a costume and there is no precise rule that any type of costume performs a bigger part or a smaller part in a film. It is all the ingredients measured together that become the perfect combination.
The design of singlet and jeans might be described as a design that will go unnoticed, however the audience will subliminally register that the performer is wearing a T-shirt and jeans. They will observe the shirt to be greyish white, grubby and torn, tight fitting, and the jeans 1950s in cut, dark, and without a belt. This simple and potentially unnoticeable costume of T-shirt and jeans is the iconic costume worn by Marlon Brando as Stanley in Elia Kazan’s film version of Tennessee William’s *A Street Car Named Desire* (1951). The rugged and sexual image of Brando was so noticed and considered so sexy, that it is credited for beginning the T-shirt wearing trend where it was promoted from underwear status to macho outerwear. Proving that what might be considered a simple costume without adornment will be noticed, especially given the actor that will be wearing it. It was appropriate for *Street Car* and appropriate for the time.

When reflecting on all five chapters, common factors arise for the designer: the need to support the text’s message and intention, the ability to use appropriate and balanced choices and communicate subliminally, a method of communicating and work harmoniously and creatively within a team, and the costume designers commitment to support the performer whole heartedly and to be continually observing, researching, analysing, learning and therefore growing as an artist.

To refer back to the ten naked men and women from the beginning of this study; clothes can cover our nakedness and modesty, protect us from the elements, hide our insecurities, allow us to appear more confident, decorate our appearance and convey our identity. Clothing is a critical tool for storytelling, through an elaborate clothing language costume designers use clothes to enhance the audiences experience on screen, in the words of Joe Orton from *What the Butler Saw*, “Let's put on our clothes and face the world.” For the purposes of the costume designer, the director and the performer change the dictum to, “Let’s put on our clothes together, let’s consider every option and enhance a new artistic world.”
In conversation when speaking about my career as a designer, people will say, “Wow, that must be so much fun!” It is fun and it is my job and with all jobs there are challenges. I will ask my students after a design master-class, “Did you learn what you were expecting to learn?” They often answer, “I have learned so much more than I expected, I didn’t realise there was so much to consider.”
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CHAPTER 5 - MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND THE COSTUME

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