



The Undressing Women:
The Function of Film Costume in Hollywood Film *The Women* from the
1930s and the 21 Century

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Abstract

As the representation of people's identity, dress reveals people's characteristics, social status and most importantly, how people want to be "looked like". The same theory can be applied to film costume, which is not only a purely visual spectacle but also an important element to sustain the entire film. Film costume on one hand helps to form the concepts and images of different characters and through the process of changing different costumes film narrative develops simultaneously. On the other hand since the change of dress can reveal social changes, thus film costume can represent the social changes for it is adopted from the daily dress, in this way the audiences can gain further understanding about the film.

In my thesis I will discuss two different films (*The Women*, George Cukor, 1939 and *The Women*, Diane English, 2008) from the perspective of film costume, throughout the discussion I will examine how film costume in these two films helps to create the images of different characters, how film costume corresponds with the film narratives thus the audience can gain further understanding of the whole film through the help of film costume. At the same time, since these two films made in different periods, I intend to discuss how film costume reveals different images of women in these two periods through the method in which it helps to support different characters, and discuss the relationships between these different images and film narratives. Therefore, through my discussion I will examine and analyze one function of film costume as a method to form film characters, promote film narrative and create deep meanings of the film.

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Introduction

Film costume, as one of the most important elements for a film, has recently been considered as a legitimate and fruitful subject. Scholars like Pamela Church Gibson suggested that costume/fashion is merely an expression of capitalist commodity fetishism¹, at the same time, some feminists, for example Sarah Street sets Laura Mulvey's opinion that costume/fashion is one of the primary ways in which women are trapped into gratifying the male gaze². One can not deny these pioneer (Pamela Church Gibson, Laura Mulvey, as mentioned above) opinions; however, the negativeness of these opinions should be also point out. Film costume, as Sarah Street suggests, not only a spectacle which arouses purely visual delectation, but also can be linked to wider debates such as film form, the meaning and function of mise-en- scene, the role of the costume designer, the complex ways in which film costumes are "read" as intertexts, the impact of such representations on audiences in their everyday behaviors and appearances.³

Some sociologists and psychologists have defied "fashion" as "a system of dress characterized by an internal logic of regular and systematic change⁴", this opinion indicates "fashion" as a "problem" for the western world, as an effect of monopoly capitalism with competition as the key dynamic for change. From this perceptive one can get conclusion that dress can be related to status and to social class. Thus, film costume can be seen as a "system" governed by complex influences that relate to notions of realism performance, gender, status and power.

As one of the most popular forms of mass media, film not only shows pop stars and amuses the masses, but also arguably functions as a mirror that reflects social, political, gender and racial issues. In pace with the development of the feminism,

¹ Street, Sarah. P2

² Street, Sarah. P3

³ Street, Sarah. P7.

⁴ Entwistle, Joanne. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2000.

more and more feminists started to pay attention to film and criticize the relationship between film and female characters which are the indispensable role for almost all films. Their criticism arrange from macroscopical aspects for example how women been represented on the screen in our patriarchy-orientated society within which popular films are produced substantially, the social and political background of why femininity have been depicted as the secondary protagonist but masculinity as the first protagonist, to microcosmical aspects like analysis of how *mise-en-scène* or costume represent women and support the narrative.⁵

Inspired by studies of film costume and the studies of dress/fashion theories, this thesis will focus on two Hollywood films. As the indication of the global pop culture and as the typical representation of capitalistic cultural industry, Hollywood has a significant influence on western society.⁶ Furthermore, one can say that Hollywood film itself has become the embodiment of western society. Thus through the study of Hollywood film, one can has further comprehension about western culture and society.

1.1 The Case Study

I chose two films as my case studies. The first one is *The Women* which made in 1939; the second one is the remade edition of *The Women* (1939) which released in 2008. The reason for my final choice is first of all, *The Women* (1939) use an extreme way to represent women — the entire cast of more than 130 speaking roles was female, at the same time, it creates the invisible men which promoted the narrative of the film. Second of all, since the original edition and the remade edition shot in different times and has almost 70 years time horizon, the differences between two films are distinct thus it is more readily to make comparison. Especially the original edition was directed by George Cukor who was a famous gay director at his period (the other famous films which he directed such as *Little*

⁵ ⁸ Benshoff Harry & Griffin Sean. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* Wiley-Blackwell Press. 2003.

Women (1933) and *My Fair Lady* (1964)), and the costume in the film was designed by Adrian Adolph Greenberg, who is a famous gay designer, both of them made the 1939 edition.

Focus and Limitations

The motivation for this thesis came from an interest in the process of how dress developed and changed in the film, and its functions. In order to develop this interest in a project of a suitable size, I limited the study to two versions of a particular film which contains both fashion/dress features and gender features. In order to make an explicit comparison, I wanted to choose one film which is well-known and which has been remade in the 21 Century, the time horizon between the original edition and the new edition should be more than 30 decades. As the result I chose the film *The Women* (1939), I limited the study to such factors that are relevant to the 1930's viewpoint about dress and women and the changed viewpoint which represent in *The Women* (2008). The main focuses lies on the people's perspectives about dress and women from different times and according to my analysis I will try to analyses how dress and women related to each other in the film and discuss how film costume promoted the whole narrative of the film.

Research Objectives

I have three main research objectives for my study. First, I will discuss about the background of how body, dress and women been connected. Second, I will discuss how film costume been used in order to represent different characters. Third, I will further discuss that how film characters were created and how film narratives been promoted by film costume. While generating these ideas I must consider the different backgrounds for two films, not only the theatrical background about dress and fashion but also the perspective of women during these two different periods.

Research Questions

There are two main questions for this thesis:

1. How film costume constructs different characters?
2. How film costume promotes the narratives?
3. How different images about women been represented in these two films?

These three questions can be answered with the help of the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between body, dress and identities?
2. Why dress and fashion always connected with women?
3. Through what way different dresses and adornments are used to emphasis different characters?
4. How characters became further rich when dress and concepts of women work together?
5. Compare different characters, what are the differences and what have changed?
6. What is the function of beauty salon in old film?
7. How film narratives correspond with dresses? Since two films' dresses represent different characters' personalities, how dress, characters' personalities and film narratives related with each other?

Methods and Theories

In order to generate the whole idea of my thesis, I will use comparative method in which I put fashion theories connected to film studies. I chose the theory of dress as the main theory for my current study, especially Joanne Entwistle's work. In her book *The Fashioned Body, Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, she integrate both phenomenological and semiotic theories of dress and body, gives a clear summary of the theories surrounding the role and function of fashion in modern society. I will also

use Fred Davis's theory, which is also analyses fashion from perspective of social semiotics.⁷

I will further look at the semiotic theory of dress and fashion when discuss the two films. For sociology semiotics, dress and fashion is a language of signs, symbols and iconography that non-verbally communicate meanings about individuals and groups. Dress and fashion in all their forms from a tattooed and pierced navel, to the newest hairstyle, are the best form of iconography one has to express individual identity. Dress, enables people to make ourselves understood with rapid comprehension by the onlooker.⁸ Thus, film costume no just creates visual pleasures but also riches the film characters, expresses the non-verbal meanings of the film.

Earlier Research

Early film research focused mainly on for example how women's body was portrayed in the film, how women's identity been constructed in a film, in the meantime they made tremendous analysis about women's film which women emerged in film industry as directors or producers.⁹ Some recent research started to pay close attention to the film costume. Julianne Pidduck for example, in her essay *Travels with Sally Potter's Orlando: Gender, Narrative, Movement*¹⁰, she discuss how Orlando's clothes became the key element functioned as an indicator for each different movements. Also in her book *Costume and Cinema, Dress Codes in Popular Film*, Sarah Street made explicit example about how dress helped to develop the narrative and represent character's identity. Film costume arouses more scholars to follow the interests with. *The Women*, is well suited for my study not only because it has only female characters but also because it is a glorious and spectacular show of film costumes.

⁷ Davis, Fred. *Fahion, Culture and Identity*. The University of Chicago Press.1992

⁸http://www.fashionera.com/sociology_semiotics.htm#Veblen%27s%20%27The%20Theory%20Of%20The%20Leisure%20Class%27

⁹ Benschhoff, Harry & Griffin, Sean. P219.

¹⁰ Codell, Julie. P163.

The Structures

Basically my thesis includes three parts. In the first part I will analyse body, dress and identity, how body and dress related with each other, how people's identity represented from dress, and I will further my discussion and analysis from the enlightenment of structuralism and phenomenology.

In the second part I will further analyze dress and gender, how and why dress are related with women, how sex been involved in dress. How people's perspective changed about dress and women.

In the third part I will specially discuss two films from the perspective of dress and women in two different periods according my first two chapters, and how the dress, and women been revealed explicitly by the different film costumes, I will discuss the differences about two films in order to analyze how film costume help to create different characters and promote the development of the film simultaneously.

Chapter 1: Body, Dress and Identity

Almost in all human culture, people “dress” their bodies in some way; one can never separate human bodies from dress.¹¹ Thus human bodies are dressed bodies; our society is full of dressed bodies. In no society that allow body exhibits itself without any dresses or adornments. In almost all social situations we are required to dress ourselves appropriately, been nude is always associate with awaked, ashamed or unbearable. Under what kind of situation we must wear what kind of clothes is not just a matter of personal test and personal interest but more an issue of cultural and social orders. Our culture and society have significant effects on our appearances; they draw up basic rules and restrict our choices of our clothes. Dress, is the extend of our physical body, the fact is that “dress or adornment is one of the ways by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity”¹² Thus, every people and their every acts of getting dressed is a process of getting our body prepared for society, make our body appropriate and acceptable by the cultural and social orders.

Our body and appearances must fellow the culture conventions, which attempt to transform our body in order to let them recognizable and meaningful to our culture, if a body doesn't compromise, our culture conventions and society will consider they are offended and contempt. For example women body builders, their behaviors are considered as a transgression of the proper boundaries of sexual difference because they challenge the conventional concept of what women or what is femininity should be.¹³ Therefore our clothes and how we dress are often associated with moral terms, such as “good”, “bad” or “correct”. People can feel ashamed for certain mistakes of dress, such as a man finding he forgot to zip his pans or a woman noticing her teeth colored by lipstick. Thus we can say that our dress are so important to us, they are not only the fabrics which are the extension of our physical body but also our soul.

¹¹ Entwistle, Joanne. P6.

¹² Entwistle, Joanne. P7.

¹³ Entwistle, Joanne. P8.

Dress, more than our shell, it links with the body and the self and these three links to our identity, everyday dress can be seen as an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self.¹⁴ Everyday dress must be considered as an embodied practice, as Joanne Entwistle puts it

Dress as situated bodily practice as a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress and culture. Such a framework recognizes that bodies are socially constituted, always situated in culture and the outcome of individual practices directed towards the body: in other words, 'dress' is the result of 'dressing' or 'getting dressed'.¹⁵

As mentioned above, dress is constrained by our cultural and social orders, in order to examine the structuring influences on the dressed body we need to take account of these orders. When people getting dressed for certain situation, these orders need to be attend consciously or unconsciously, thus the presentation of the body for this particular social setting will seen as suitable or appropriated. "Getting dressed" implies the idea that dress as an activity, therefore dress is a consequence of the practices which constituted by culture and society but actually carry out by individuals.¹⁶ That is to say when individuals get dressed they must attend to their bodies and it is an experience that is as intimate as it is social. We get dressed and this action happened within the limitations and orders that set by our culture and society, we get dressed as what our culture and society expected.

1.1 Enlightenment from Structuralism that body as cultural object.

Social constructivists (such as Quentin Bell, Bryan. S. Turner, Erving Goffman) think the body as a thing of culture and not merely a biological entity. Body as a cultural object is not something new, back to the medieval courts the idea that one's success

¹⁴ Entwistle, Joanne. P10.

¹⁵ Entwistle, Joanne. P11.

¹⁶ Entwistle, Joanne. P11.

or failure can depend on how good manners, civility and wit been demonstrated by body was promoted, in this situation body became the bearer of social status.¹⁷ In order to show success, one must to learn the techniques of the body, as Entwistle sets Marcel Mauss's suggestion, these techniques are "the ways in which from society to society man [sic] know how to use their bodies"¹⁸ The significant meaning of these techniques is to socialize individuals into culture, the body is the means by which individuals get to know a certain culture and incorporate him/herself into this culture. Mary Douglas suggests the body is a natural object which shaped by social forces, she further suggests that there are two bodies: the physical body and the social body, she summarizes the relationship these two bodies in *Natural Symbols*

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.¹⁹

Thus, the expression of the body is highly restricted by culture and at the same time, it expresses the social pressure brought to bear on it. Certain social situation imposes itself upon our body and set bounds therefore our body can only act in particular ways. For instance people's laughing and crying, social situation determines in what situation our body can laugh or cry and to what kind of degree our body laugh or cry, the less serious the situations is, the more free our body can laugh or cry loud. The particular group/situation that our body found in is articulated symbolically by the functions and boundaries of our body.

Then what about our dress, since our body bears so many bounds, orders, disciplines and expectations, what kind of function of dress played on us?

¹⁷ Entwistle, Joanne.P13.

¹⁸ Entwistle, Joanne.P14

¹⁹ Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. Taylor & Francis e-Library. 2002. P69.

As mentioned before, dress and adornment can be seen as the extend of our body and soul, thus dress in everyday life is the outcome of social pressures and the image the dressed body makes can be considered as the symbolic of the situation in which it is found.²⁰ The more serious the situation is, the more elaborate rules will involve in. For example dresses for funerals are more decency (black suits and black ties) and dresses for picnic are more leisure (straw hats and jeans). In this sense the dress conveys information about what situation we are involved in and then we can act appropriate accordingly.

At the same time, gender boundaries can be reinforced by our dresses.²¹ Especially formal situations, such as job interviews, business meetings and formal evening events, all these situations demand clear gender boundaries in dress. Evening events for example, men need to wear black tie and dinner jacket and women need to wear a gown.

According to Foucault, the body is the object that modern knowledge/power seizes upon and invests with power since “nothing is more material, physical, corporeal than the exercise of power”²². This can help us to understand the body training and body management for body is bound up more with individual and personal identity in modern world. Since the early twentieth century self-care regimes of the body increased dramatically, the body has become the focus for increasing “work” and there is a general tendency to see the body as part of one’s self that is open to revision, change, transformation.²³ The body has become a certain project that can be worked at, take care of the body in not merely the issue of health, but about gain pleasure, it seems our happiness and personal fulfillment is depended on the degree to which our bodies conform to contemporary standards of health and beauty.

²⁰ Entwistle, Joanne. P15.

²¹ Entwistle, Joanne. P140.

²² Foucault, Michel. *Body and Power*, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon Books. 1980.

²³ Entwistle, Joanne. P19.

Foucault's notion of power can also be applied to the study of dress, such as in what ways the body acquires meaning, how the body is acted upon by social and discursive forces and how these forces are implicated in the operation of power.²⁴ One example is to use Foucault's idea about power and discourse to examine how gender boundaries can be marked out by dress. For example, gender is reproduced by dress codes: women are associated with long dresses and men are associated with dinner jackets and trousers, these associations are considered as "natural" so femininity is connoted in the gown and masculinity is connoted in the black jacket and black tie. Another example is as Entwistle illustrates how women employees are gazed by their managers in order to make sure they dress themselves smartly,²⁵ thus the modern and professional image of the corporation can be projected.

1.2. Enlightenment of Phenomenology for Dress as Embodiment.

Entwistle analyses Merleau-Ponty's theory about the body, which is the centre of his analysis of perception. He emphasizes on perception and experience, subjects are reinstated as temporal and spatial beings, we grasp external space, relationships between objects and our relationship to them through our position in, and movement through, the world.²⁶ According to Merleau-Ponty, positioning our bodies physically and historically in space is the way how we understand our relation in the world. He disagrees that our body is merely an instrument or object in the world, instead he says our bodies are what give us our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions.²⁷ That is to say, we experience the world through our bodies, at the same time, through our bodies that we come to be seen in this world.

²⁴ Entwistle Joanne. P21

²⁵ Entwistle Joanne. P23.

²⁶ Entwistle Joanne. P28

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge.2002.

Merleau-Ponty's theory offers us very useful insights when analyzes dress as a situated bodily practice. The space for Merleau-Ponty is a structuring movement and through which self is presented, space is something that individual have to grasp and interpret. Thus part of our micro-social order of most social spaces are formed by dress and when we are getting dressed we must orientate ourselves to the implicit norms of these spaces²⁸ (who are we going to meet? Where we are going to meet so what kind of order we need to fellow? What self-images we want to express?) And because of certain situation we orientate ourself for getting dressed and acting in certain ways upon the body, and because our bodies are the "visible form of our intentions",²⁹ we act upon the body as the envelope of the self.

Thus, "the experience of dress is a subjective act of attending to one's body and making the body an object of consciousness and is also an act of attention with the body. Understand dress then means understanding this constant dialectic between body and self."³⁰ When people getting dressed, different levels of consciousness are involved, this consciousness means how we think about our body and appearances, how we want to represent ourself. For instance, in particular social spaces for example meetings we are more aware of our bodies and appearances because we know our bodies are objects to be looked at, however when we are at home, we do not aware that our bodies are objects to be looked at.

1.3 Dress and Habitus.

From sociological viewpoint, dress is more than simply clad the body for warmth, modesty or comfort. Dress can articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, that is to say, dress construct a personal habitus. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the habitus is "a system of durable, transposable dispositions"³¹

²⁸ Entwistle, Joanne. P34.

²⁹ Entwistle, Joanne. P35.

³⁰ Entwistle, Joanne. P30.

³¹ Bourdieu, Pierre 'Structures, Habitus and Practices', in P.Press, *The Polity Reader in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 1994. P95.

that is produced by the particular conditions of a class grouping. Mike Featherstone sets that habitus includes “the unconscious dispositions, the classification schemes, taken-for-granted preferences which are evident in the individual’s sense of the appropriateness and validity of his [sic] taste for cultural goods and practices” as well as being “inscribed on to the body”³² through the self-presentation techniques and modes of our bodies.

All class groups have their own habitus;³³ they gained their own dispositions through education. Therefore the habitus is a concept links individual to social structures and from doing so we gain our class position. For example different class groups have different taste (the word ‘taste’ indicates a highly embodied experience.) Joanne Entwistle use caviar to illustrate tastes for particular foods are said to be “acquired” and are indicative of class position.³⁴ In this way, the habitus can be seen as the objective outcome of certain social and cultural conditions, it a structure which been structured by these conditions. For our bodies, habitus as a concept provides a link between the individual and the social: our social position in the world structures the way how we come to live in our bodies. However, these structures can not be known in advance because they acquire the embodied actions of individuals through which they are reproduced.

Here, we can use the concept “habitus” to examine our dress. Since dress is a situated bodily practice, in everyday life dress cannot be known in advance only by examine the fashion industry or fashion test, because our choices about dress are always depend on our “habitus”. Fashion industry can only provides the basic options for our choices, but we select and adapt these options within the context of our lived experience, our class, race, age, occupation and so on. Thus, “Dress in everyday life is a practical negotiation between the fashion system as a structured system, the social conditions of everyday life such as class, gender and the like as

³² Featherstone, Mike, ‘Lifestyle and consumer culture’, *Theory, Culture and Society*. 1987. P64.

³³ Entwistle, Joanne. P37.

³⁴ Entwistle, Joanne. P36.

well as the “rules” or norms governing particular social situations”³⁵ In other words, we use the way we wear our bodies in order to present ourselves to our social environment, and our fashion behavior can map out our codes of conduct.

Different habitus affect people’s choices of dress, equally, habitus can be distinguish through the way how we dress ourselves. That is to say, our dress do tell the others, tell the society who we are, where we belong. There is certainly something to the idea that we say things with what we choose to wear. Nevertheless, According to Fred Davis, what dresses try to tell us is rather ambiguity,³⁶ the reasons he offers are firstly our dresses are heavily context-dependent, that is, the “meaning” of certain combination of clothes or certain style vary tremendously because the vary of the identity of the wearer, the social situation, the space or even the emotions of the viewer or the wearer.

Secondly, because of different social strata and taste groupings, how dress constituent symbols can be interpreted and appreciated in tremendous ways. Dresses, adornments, style and appearance can be considered as signifier, but what is signified is strikingly different for different publics, audiences and social groupings. As Fred Davis argues, “the universe of meanings of meanings attaching to clothes, cosmetics, hairstyles , and jewelry—right down to the very shape and bearing of the body itself—is highly differentiated in terms of taste, social identity and persons’ access to the symbolic wares of a society.”³⁷

Thirdly, in Western society, “undercoding” is given much more attention than precision and explicitness, which means aesthetic expression is implicated powerfully, but the code modifications do not occur spontaneously and dependent on “aesthetic expression”.³⁸

³⁵ Entwistle, Joanne.P37.

³⁶ Davis, Fred. P22.

³⁷ Davis,Fred. P9.

³⁸ Davis, Fred. P25.

Though compare to ordinary speech and writing, the meaning of our dresses is vague and elusive. In order to figure out how dress and fashion (in this thesis “fashion” means a specific system of dress, according to Entwistle’s theory) try to express we need to take dress and fashion within the realm of culture. What we wear must be subsumed under the general notion of a code. Fred Davis explains

Within that broad arc termed ‘contemporary Western culture’, a great deal of sign conventionalization obtains in clothing as it does in the arts and crafts generally. Hence, different combinations of apparel with their attendant qualities are capable of registering sufficiently consistent meanings for wearers and their viewers.³⁹

Therefore, fashion must be referring to some alteration in the code of visual conventions; through these conventions we can read meanings of any of dressed contemporary wearers.

³⁹ Davis, Fred. P12

Chapter2: Dress and Women

2.1. Dress and Gender.

Through today's fashion is more androgynous, Elizabeth Wilson sets in her book *Adorned in Dreams*: "Fashion is obsessed with gender, defines and redefines the gender boundary"⁴⁰ Indeed, even today's uni-sex dresses are actually display that fashion likes to play around the gender boundaries in order to represent our sexual differences, and this play is embedded in everyday life for men and women dresses them self differently to mark gender difference,⁴¹ for example in many situations and occasions there are special clothes demanded of men and women. Dresses let us pay attention to the sex of the wearer, that is to say we can distinguish men and women form the first glance by their dresses. Normally, this society asks men to be dressed like a man and women to be like a woman, thus we use different clothes, fabrics, shapes or colors to fellow this social convention, that is why we usually say three-piece suits is for men and long dress if for women; pink is girls' color and blue is for boys.

However, dress does not just simply show our natural biological sex, it is not simply draw attention to our physical body, emphasize sexual sings of difference, take this difference as just "natural", but it also adds cultural meanings,⁴² dress can construct our body, that is to say, beyond "men" and "women", there are "masculinity" and "femininity", which we normally understood as "gender" issue, (Joanne Entwistle quotes Ann Oakley's definition of "gender" which is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classifications into "masculine" and "feminine".⁴³).

⁴⁰ Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Mondernity*. Rutgers University Rress. 2003. P117

⁴¹ Entwistle, Joanne. P140.

⁴² Entwistle, Joanne. P141.

⁴³ Wilson, Elizabeth. P117

For example men's suit does not just highlight male body feature but also emphasize masculinity of the body. In this sense, our dress projects the sexual difference even without actual body. When mention "trousers" normally we have a man in our brain, when mention "skirt" normally the first image we got is a woman. Thus, dress becomes the signifier of difference, to connote "masculinity" and "femininity". Joanne Entwistle sets an example in her book to examine that sometime dresses, in some situations, are more strongly link to "masculinity" and "femininity" rather than actual biological body

The commonly used expression "she wears the trousers" is used to describe a dominant woman in a relationship who has acquired characteristics normally associated with men. Here "trousers" signify "male" and "masculine".⁴⁴

Thus we can say from getting dressed, our body are far removed from the realm of biological body and firmly linked with the realm of culture. "Masculinity" and "femininity" are embedded on our body by our dresses, therefore dress is one of the most immediate and effective indicates of the way in which bodies are gendered, made feminine or masculine. Dress not only used to distinguish biological sex difference but also have close relationship with gendered codes—masculinity and femininity.

If "sex" refers to the biological differences between male and female, for instance the obvious difference in genitalia, and this biological difference determines who we are (male or female), sex does not determine the traits of "masculinity" and "femininity" which are product by our culture. The distinction of "masculinity" and "femininity" is important because from this distinction we can examine how our bodies acquire meanings which is the result of culture but rather the nature. For example all cultures draw the same line between two sexes, but not all cultures agree on the same characteristics of men and women. There is no universal

⁴⁴ Entwistle, Joanne. P141.

evidences to show that sex and gender are natural linked with other, gender is more oriented by culture, the studies of hermaphrodites show that the acquisition of “masculinity” and “femininity” has nothing to do with “natural sex”, but is the result of cultural expectation.⁴⁵

However, dress as an aspect of our culture, can be seen as a significant feature in the production of masculinity and femininity

It turns nature into culture, layering cultural meanings on the body. There is no natural link between the item of clothing and “femininity” and “masculinity”; instead there is an arbitrary set of associations which are culturally specific.⁴⁶

Thus the way how dress connects femininity and masculinity is different from culture to culture. For example Entwistle made an example that trousers are commonly wear by men and until the twentieth century the woman who wears trousers is considered as indecent, but in Middle East countries trousers are worn by women for centuries.⁴⁷ Skirt are worn by men in ancient Egypt and not been considered as “femininity”. Through the distinctions of gender by dress are arbitrary, when we reading the bodies, we already took these distinctions as the fundamental as our commonsense. In this respect, dress turns culture into nature, it naturalizes the culture order. A part of our system of social signaling is formed by dress and at the same time dress functions as the indicator to tell the others our belongings, but the most important function for dress is to demarcate gender, and this gender/sex codes remain the same even the symbols change with fashion, that is to say, feminine appearance indicates female sex and masculine appearance male sex.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Entwistle, Joanne. P143

⁴⁶ Entwistle, Joanne. P143.

⁴⁷ Entwistle Joanne. P144.

⁴⁸ Woodhouse, Annie. *Fantastic women: Sex, Gender and Transvestism*. Rutgers University Press. 1989.

2.2. Women and Fashion

Through different dress and styles, sexual difference has been marked out progressively, at the same time, the linkage between fashion, finery and the “natural” vanity and weakness of the feminine soul has also been marked out through history.⁴⁹ For centuries women has been linked with fickle fashion, vain display and indulgent narcissism.⁵⁰ Why fashion is more associated with women need to be considered from two aspects: literal and metaphorical.

For a long time, women are associated with making clothes women’s prowess with textiles was one ways to strengthen their reputation as ladies and suitable wives at the time when they had almost no economic independence. For centuries preparing raw material, sweing and altering and purchasing garments in the home are women’s jobs. Thus at least in medieval times “woman became entwined with concepts of weaving, textile work and fashion as ‘feminine’ pursuits” and “the management of the wardrobe took on a special significance viewed as a feminine prerogative, specifically concerned with the display of power through a wealth of textiles and the cultivation of physical beauty”⁵¹ Along with the raise of bourgeois, the functions of dress have been changed, dress is used as a tool to represent their family’s history, to signal their social position and to differentiate their class form the lower working class. Thus, according to Breward, women “became well versed in rhetoric of clothing, its growing importance as a communicator of status taste and gender roles”⁵²

Some scholars (J.C. Flügel, James Laver) also suggests that women’s nature made women associate with dress and fashion, according to Entwistle quotes both Flügel and Laver’s suggestion that compare to men, women are more narcissistic and have

⁴⁹ Entwistle, Joanne. P145.

⁵⁰ Entwistle, Joanne.. P145.

⁵¹ Breward, Christopher. *The Culture of Fashion. A New History of Fashionable Dress*. Manchester University Press. 1995. P33.

⁵² Breward, Christopher. P34.

a sharper sense of sexual competition,⁵³ these features make women more inclined to compete with each other for sexual attention, therefore women struggle with each other by wearing the latest or most costly frocks. Dress for women is the most important weapon to capture attention.

From the metaphorical aspects, as Entwistle quotes the expression of Jennifer Jones: “women had for centuries been associated with inconstancy and change”, characteristics which also describe fashion.⁵⁴ According to Christian morality, women are always associated with sine, and this attitude formed western attitudes towards women. Entwistle illustrates that from the First Testament to the apostolic letters of St Paul, woman has been associated with temptations of the flesh and decoration, she quotes Efrat Tseëlon’s expression that Christian Europe “bears witness to the fact that even though finery in general was considered a vice, it became conflated with the very conception of the essence of woman”⁵⁵ Tseëlon also notes that since the Fall is blamed on women, then “the links between sin, the body, woman and clothes are easily forged”.⁵⁶

Furthermore, the fashion and dress of women has been regulated along with the issues of gender and sexuality historically, they are also linked with social issues. For example at certain time furs was forbidden among prostitutes for only respectable women can wear furs, and in the seventeenth century there was a fear that the spread of luxury may focused on women’s supposed insatiable desire and the threat it posed to the family, however by the eighteenth century, women’s excessive interest in fashion was thought legitimate if its aim was to please a husband or attract a suitor.⁵⁷

⁵³ Entwistle, Joanne. P158.

⁵⁴ Entwistle, Joanne. P148.

⁵⁵ Entwistle, Joanne. P148.

⁵⁶ Entwistle, Joanne. P148

⁵⁷ Jones, Jennifer. ‘*Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Regime Paris*’, in V. de Grazia & E. Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. University of California Press. 1996

In his books, Veblen analyzes in the late nineteenth century a newly affluent class emerged in the United States and attempts to recreate an aristocratic way of life in the mercantile “New World” Republic, and in order to capture their purpose this new class started expressed its wealth through conspicuous consumption, conspicuous waste and conspicuous leisure; in other words, it demonstrated its “pecuniary” strength by purchasing goods and discarding them when they were deemed out of fashion and living a leisured life. Dress became an example of the expression of pecuniary culture since our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance.⁵⁸ Thus, according to Veblen, because women’s role was to demonstrate her master’s ability to pay, women’s dress of this milieu shows more dynamics than men’s, and this is also why fashion is changeable, for women are trying to escape the futility and ugliness of old fashion.

Here, we can use Veblen’s analysis not just suggests how women are associated with dress from social perspective, it also reveals dress represent our identity and social status. Though Veblen’s analysis mainly refers to the nineteenth century, but it is still useful when analyze *The Women* (1939)/ (2008). Next chapter I will based my analysis about two films upon the analysis and theory I discussed above.

⁵⁸ Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. Nabu Press 2010.

Chapter3: Undressing Women

Through when those scholars (Entwistle, Davis) analyze dress and fashion, they seldom discuss film in their works. However, the study of film costume can not be seen has no relation with the former studies of dress and fashion. Since our dress are frequently linked with gender, class and social status, film costume, as we shall say, also frequently relates to notions such as performance, gender/sex, status and power. For example in classical Hollywood film, female costume was emphasized greatly for female costume was related to sexual attractiveness, as Laura Mulvey said, female costume was try to catching the “male gaze”. Not only for its ability to constructs gender codes and expectations, film costume can also helps to support and promote the film narrative, enhances character’s personality and emotions.

3.1 The Women (1939)

The Women (1939) is an American comedy-drama film directed by George Cukor, the film is based on Claire Boothe Luce’s play. The film is about wealthy Mary Haines is unaware her husband is having an affair with shop girl Crystal Allen. Sylvia Fowler and Edith Potter discover this from a manicurist and arrange for Mary to hear the gossip. On the train taking her to a Reno divorce Mary meets the Countess and Miriam. While they are at Lucy's dude ranch, Fowler arrives for her own divorce and the Countess meets fifth husband-to-be Buck. Back in New York, Mary's ex is now unhappily married to Crystal who is already in an affair with Buck. When Sylvia lets this story slip at a country club dinner, Crystal brags of her plans for a still wealthier marriage, only to find the Countess is the source of all Buck's money. Crystal must return to the perfume counter and Mary runs back to her husband.⁵⁹

Before analyze the dress in *The Women*, we need to consider the background of 1930s’ classical Hollywood film, how those films represented the women images

⁵⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032143/plotsummary>. Written by [Ed Stephan](mailto:EdStephan@cc.wvu.edu) <stephan@cc.wvu.edu>

during 1930s. At the beginning of 1930s, because of the Depression-era, less and less audiences went to the cinema,⁶⁰ in order to woo American audiences, more strong forward and sexualized heroines started to emerge on the screen, but it doesn't mean Hollywood film started to place importance on female characters. However, we have to say that Hollywood films always attempted to portrayed women under the men, Benshoff and Griffin analyze in their book *America on Film* (2004).

Hollywood films had always tended to be about men, and to punish sexually active “bad” women while rewarding “good” women with romance and marriage. Most Hollywood genre films of the 1930s...still centered on men and tended to simplify female characters...The musical and the romantic comedy initially seem to offer more equity to men and women...Yet, even within that format, the gender codes of the day regarding clothing, makeup, courtship, and marriage all work to reinforce traditional gender roles.⁶¹

Indeed, even *The Women* (1939) which is full of women and might be called “woman’s films”, it does little to mention women’s rights or freedoms. In this film, women fight for men, further reinforces the idea that women have to compete with each other but not cooperate and female happiness can only gain by finding a right man.

Understand the background of *The Women* (1939) is important for analyze the dress in this film. Because in this film female characters’ dress reveals their own characters, dress functions as “iconic clothes”, which explained by Stella Bruzzi’s book *Undressing Cinema* as “spectacular interventions that interfere with the scenes in which they appear and impose themselves onto the character they adorn”⁶². The way how dress in this Classical Hollywood film helps to support the narrative is by reinforce each female characters’ personalities.

⁶⁰ Benshoff, Harry & Griffin, Sean. P219.

⁶¹ Benshoff, Harry & Griffin, Sean. P218, P219

⁶² Bruzzi, Stella. *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. Routledge Press. 1997 P xv.

The film starts with the scene of beauty salon where we can see many women, no matter their age, are training their bodies or trying to beautify their features. This scene does not just want to show the audience how's the modern life of the women or just a foreshadowing of how Sylvia finds out Mr. Haines has an affair, it also reinforces the gender concept that women need to show their appropriate appearances in order to get right men, all the efforts that women did is for the purpose that to woo their husband or owner. As mentioned in the first chapter, it seems our happiness and personal fulfillment is depended on the degree to which our bodies conform to contemporary standards of health and beauty.

According to Foucault, human's body is far more beyond the biological realm. The training of the body is a way to show discipline and power. Influenced by Foucault, Entwistle quotes Mike Featherstone's argues that since the early twentieth century there has been a dramatic increase in self-care regimes of the body, the body has become the focus for increasing "work" and there is a general tendency to see the body as part of one's self that is open to revision, change, transformation.⁶³ Thus, as mention before, our body has become a project that we can work on, and through the working we gain our happiness and personal fulfillment, it is no only bout health, but also beauty. Therefore the beauty salon as the first scene implies that even at the modern time women are still governed by traditional concept that their appearance is more important since appearance is crucial for showing their family and their social statues.

In this scene one can notice that dress functions as the sign of different social classes. All working girls in beauty salon are wearing uniforms (the same condition with the shopping mall later). And what should be furthermore noticed is that even all of them come form working class, only white female characters are wearing uniforms, the only three black female characters in this film are having maid clothes (first one is in beauty salon, the second one is in the shopping male and the third one is the servant on the train to Reno). Dress here indicates clear line between upper class and working class/social statues, (even white and black/different races).

⁶³ Entwistle Joanne. *The Fashioned Body*. 2000. P19.

Another example for dress to represent the class difference is the scene of fashion show. When Crystal goes to the fashion show, she starts to purchase lots of fashion clothes, because she is a counter girl before who comes from the lower class, when she goes to the fashion show which is mainly for upper class, she takes it as an unalterable principle that the more expensive clothes she obtains and wears, the closer she is to the upper class. Crystal takes “shopping fashionable dress” as a habitus of upper class. This can explain why she takes different fashionable and expensive clothes even without trying them first. When she is trying a new dress, Mary goes into her fitting room and argues with her, Crystal fights back and says: “What have you got to kick about? You’ve got everything that matters. You got the name, the position, the money.” This line also reinforces that buying expensive and fashionable dress is a way to show people’s social classes. The only reason for Crystal to stay with Mr. Haines is to use his money to purchase luxury stuff in order to advance her own class. Purchasing luxury, buying fashionable dress has the same function as eating caviar; both of them indicate different social classes for they are different habitus that belong to certain social classes.

For Crystal, dress is a tool to show her sexuality. In the scene when Sylvia and Peggy go to the shopping mall where she works, one can notice that compared to the other counter girls, Crystal’s dress is sexier though they are wearing the same working clothes. First of all Crystal has more jewelries than the others, second of all, she shows her neck and a little bit of her chest. Dress and body are her weapons to woo Mr. Haines. Because in this film, Mary never wears sexily even when it is just a night gown. When in the fitting room Mary judges Crystal for she is having a sexy shining night gown, she implies to Crystal that Mr. Haines doesn’t like “such obvious effects”, Crystal answers her subtly: “Thanks for the tip. But when anything I wear doesn’t please him, I take it off.”

In this scene, Crystal’s sexy night gown is shining, and at that time she defeats Mary, but at the end of the film, Mary wins Mr. Haines back, Crystal loses everything, the last scene is Mary wearing a shining gown for the party, though not

sexy compare to Crystal's but still fancier than Mary's older dress. The comparison of these two scenes here just implies, as mentioned before, Hollywood films always tend to punish sexually bad women and rewarding good women with romance and marriage.⁶⁴ And since Dress for women is the most important weapon to capture attention, the shining gown for Mary implies that she will get Mr. Haines attention after her comparison with Crystal, the two similar shining gowns emerged on the screen at two different times in this film just correspond with the different status of this comparison. Thus, film costume corresponds with the narrative of the film, helps to create further meanings.

Sylvia is the first main character showed on the screen, after she heard the rumour from a gossipy manicurist that Mr. Haines has an affair, she called Mrs. John Day (Peggy). In this scene audiences can see that Sylvia are wearing fine dress which shows she comes from a rich family, she is an upper-class woman. The dress we choose to wear can be the expressive of our identity, it also implies how we want to be "looked like", in the whole film Sylvia is having the most finest or, in another words, most showy dress, which at the same time indicates that Sylvia is a gossipy and showy, unstable woman. For example when she goes to Mrs. Stephen Haines (Mary)'s house for lunch, she is wearing a high collar clothes which has three big eyes on it, when Nancy sees her jersey she insinuate asks her: "Great guns, what are you made up for? 'The seeing eye'?"(Figure 1) The lines here imply that Sylvia is a woman who likes to spy the other's privates and spread rumours, and the three eyes clothes emphasize her personality. Eyes are the symbol of "observing", "watching", indeed in this film Sylvia is always watches the other people's gossips.

Dress also shows Sylvia's unstable personality. Her fancy hats, which always have flowers or lace to decorate them, are much more complicated than the other character's hats, especially Mary's hats. When she and Peggy go to Sydney (the shopping mall where Crystal Allen works), one can notice there is a fine lace bet

⁶⁴ Benshoff Harry & Griffin, Sean. P218

around her hat and she ties them in a big bow-tie around her jaw. Compare to Sylvia's hat, Peggy's hat is rather plain, through we don't know the color, we can still tell Peggy's hat is simpler, just the ordinary shape which is prevalent in 1930s (small and close to the head, be wore tipped demurely forward over the eyes).



Figure 1: Sylvia's eye-dress. *The Women* (1939).

Another scene that to show Sylvia's gossipy personality is when the four main characters join a fashion show, again one can notice Sylvia's hat is "outstanding" and captured more noticing. In this scene her hat is higher than the other's because of the erect bow-tie and again, a piece of lace around her head, face and jaw. And her dress is also the more fancy compare to the other character's dress: a big flower-shaped gather decorates around her hip; she is the only one who has this decorated dress at that scene. This scene is also the one when Mary and Crystal first meet each other. Before Mary decides to meet Crystal, she hesitates for a while, it is Sylvia

who persuades Mary to go and see Crystal. Again this scene shows audience Sylvia does this not because she really considered Mary's feeling, she just want to make more gossips. Her garish dress correspond with her frivolous personality, explicitly depicts a vivid flibbertigibbet.

Notwithstanding, the main character Mary's dress is less fancy and less garish. Mary thought she has a happy family, Mr. Haines loves her and her life seems perfect, she never think one day she need to face marriage crisis. Her personality is more like innocent and pure, because she doesn't have too much "troubles". According to this, her dress is simpler and has fewer decorations. Mary also wants to be a modern and independent women, she thinks men and women are equal, so her dress are less feminine (for instances nearly all her dresses have pockets on them, sometime on her chest, which reminds the audience men's suit or uniforms, see figure 2), short jackets, gloves, the shape of her hats are like bowlers, especially she is the only one who wears trousers in this film. All her dress implies Mary has "masculine" feature, she pays less attentions on her female appearance (she doesn't go to the beauty salon to train her body or do facial masks in the whole film), and she is "strong". This can explain why Mr. Haines has an affair with Crystal who knows how important her feminine feature is and uses it as weapon to capture men's heart (Crystal shows herself at the fashion show and buys lots of clothes to strength her beauty). Mary's strength, her too modern and independent personality scares Mr. Haines, because at that time women should be a good wife and seen as propriety of her husband, and femininity was strongly emphasized, but Mary's appearance is rather manly, which means she is hard to control. Especially she wares trousers, which has becomes the signifier of masculine, and wearing trousers is inappropriate for women at that time, even France, the most fashionable country in this world, women who wear trousers can not be acceptable until 1950s. Without our body, dress can still projects the sexual difference, thus, even we know Mary is a woman, we still linked her to "manly" by our glance of her dresses.

Therefore, according to her dress, Mary is “modern”, “independent” and “strong”, she wants to be equal with Mr. Haines, she travels around and almost has her own successful “career” — she is a photographer who had published her photos on magazine — she receives her punishment, marriage crisis.



Figure 2: Mary’s dress with pockets. *The Women* (1939).

The whole film implies that women should be stay at home and be a good wife and housekeeper, otherwise will have bad ending. The dress of Mary is not only enhancing her personalities, but also reveal us how gender boundary embedded in dress. Mary’s less feminine dress fears her own husband that she is too strong to control, she is not appropriate with the patriarchy society, she chooses divorce but she is not happy. The wedding ring becomes a key indicator of Mary’s story. Even after she signs all the papers and take train to Reno, one can notice she is wearing a ring on her ring finger all the time, and two years after her divorce, Mary still

wearing a smaller ring on the same finger. There is a scene when she is reading a book, audiences can see exactly there is a small ring on her ring finger, and when she knows from her daughter that Mr. Haines is not happy with his new marriage, she became excited and hopeful and go to a party to fight with Crystal, at the end she won Mr. Haines back.

Mary's ring not only a symbol for her own marriage, but also reveals Mary's mental world that she is still a woman, she needs marriage and a husband, she never gives hope of Mr. Haines. This ring shows the ironic party of Mary. On one hand she wants to be equal that is the reason she choose divorce and on the other hand she is still waiting for Mr. Haines's back, she can never be wholly independent in this male-dominated society.

Mary's the other two friends, Peggy and Nancy, can be seen as two extremes. Peggy has lots of children and she always dresses appropriately, neither as garish as Sylvia's nor as simple as Mary's, and she is the only one who has not problems with her marriage in the whole film. Peggy raises children, she dress appropriately, she is never the one who started to spread rumors and she has no jobs or incomes. Her dress is "normal" but just because she is "normal", she is an ideal woman for her husband, and she is the model for the audience to show how women should behave. On the other hand, Nancy hasn't married, she wears masculine dress all the time, when Mary meets her, they shack hands instead of kissing and hugging. Compare to Peggy, Nancy is totally a negative example.

3.2. The Women (2008)

The remade version of *The Women* added more contemporary element in it, including the characters' dress. The main story doesn't change too much but the background changed somehow. For example in the new version instead of imply Crystal want to entre to the upper class, her purpose became to get money. Sylvia

has really good relationship with Mary and she is a successful career woman. In the old film Mary shared good relationship with her daughter, little Mary, but in the new version Mary is a really careless mother. The function of dress in this film also changed, in the old film dresses are more functioned as to reinforce the personalities of different characters, in the new film, dress also serves to promote the development of the film narrative.

Another feature for new version is the beginning of the film, instead the old one which showed different characters' images and animals, the new film start with different high heels which wearing by different women (though it didn't show the entire bodies of these women). The high heels emphasize women's sexuality, implies this film is especially about women's story since high heels, which is the symbol of female sex and spoke for erotic pleasure.

Sylvia in the new version becomes a successful career woman. She is the chief editor of a fashion magazine, thus, as a professional woman she must be careful with her appearance. Before analyses Sylvia's dress we must consider the common attitude about "career women" and "sexuality".

Entwistle mentions in her book that because women started to enter the workplace which dominated by men for a long time, they must be very careful with their dress, as secretaries and later as professionals, women been required to adopt such as uniforms or tailored suits to designate them as workers and separate public from private figures.⁶⁵ At the same time, Entwistle quotes Foucault's arguments about sexuality, she mentions Foucault argues that "sexuality was 'put into discourse' through endless prohibitions with the effect of producing sexuality as an important aspect of one's identity".⁶⁶ According to Foucault, sexuality is the product of our

⁶⁵ Entwistle, Joanne. P38

⁶⁶ Entwistle, Joanne. P184.

cultural attitudes but not the “nature” qualities for human.⁶⁷ Sexuality is close linked to the gender, the characteristics of gender are often rooted in commonly held notions of the sexuality of men and women.⁶⁸ Entwistle examines this attitude to gender and sexuality, she suggests that “...men’s supposed ‘assertive’ or even ‘aggressive’ natures and women’s supposed ‘gentle’ and ‘passive’”.⁶⁹ Therefore, as “professional” women, on one hand they must avoid to wear dress which emphasize their sexuality too much, even the colors such as salmon pink which can undermine women’s “authority” is forbidden,⁷⁰ this determines business suit is adopted by most of the career women; on the other hand, career women must to avoid looking too “masculine”, John T. Molloy explains the reason for this avoiding in his book *Women : Dress for success*. In his book, Molloy argues that since the most of workplaces are male-dominated, trousers are generally avoided by career women since it is too “masculine” and it can make men feel threatened. Even in the female-dominated companies, “you are taking a chance if you have to deal with men”.⁷¹ Thus, female professional workers need to maintain femininity in men’s world and at the same time they need to avoid the potential eroticism of the female body and show their professional abilities, that is the reason why through the business suit, the skirt is still “not just acceptable, but preferable” since “sexuality may be off-limits, the skirt” still “potentially connotes ‘femininity’”.⁷²

Thus, as a successful editor Sylvia wears a business suit for the most of the time in the film, business suit is well appropriate to represent her professional abilities and the skirt wearing skirt help to keep her “femininity”. At the same time, cell-phone and sunglasses can be the other two adornments which present Sylvia’s characteristics. In the film, Sylvia holding a cell-phone for the most of the scenes, which implies that she is busy with her work and she need to content with different people because of

⁶⁷ Entwistle, Joanne. P185.

⁶⁸ Entwistle, Joanne. P185.

⁶⁹ Entwistle, Joanne. P185.

⁷⁰ Entwistle, Joanne. P189.

⁷¹ Molloy, John. *Women: Dress for Success*. New York: Peter H. Wyden. 1980. P73.

⁷² Entwistle, Joanne. P190.

her job. Sunglasses is adopted by the fashion trend.⁷³ and draws on the “cool” images of the wearer, therefore in the film wearing sunglasses is actually an act in cooperation with Sylvia’s job since she is working for a fashion magazine, sunglasses not only mentions Sylvia’s background in the film but also implies as a successful editor for a fashion magazine, Sylvia knows well about fashion and knows well how to keep her successful image all the time. Thus, as analyzed above, dress and adornments on one hand help to build a vivid image of Sylvia and on the other hand set foreshadowing of the film’s development (Sylvia takes her job as the most important thing and betrays Mary later for her job).

When Sylvia and Edie go to Saks to see what Crystal looks like, Edie’s daughter, April says to Edie that she hates this store, Sylvia come to her and tells April: “I want you to listen to me, I’m going to say something very important and I want you to remember it for the rest of your life. Nobody hates Saks” And when they find Crystal, Sylvia pretends to ask Crystal to recommend a new perfume for her, she describes her own personality as “smart, fearless, clever, loyal...” Those lines combine with her dress in order to emphasize Sylvia’s personality to the audience that she is a strong woman.

In this scene one can also say shopping is an important active for women. As Jennifer Craik suggests in her book

As well as offering pleasures of anticipation and consumption, shopping also constitutes a habit and a discipline. Since shopping plays a major role in the lives of way women, it contributes to the formation of self and gender identity...Shopping also contributes to the process of self –formation by offering ideal images of femininity as goals to be worked towards.⁷⁴

⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunglasses#Further_functions_of_sunglasses

⁷⁴ Craik, Jennifer. *The Face of Fashion*. Routledge Press. 2000. P72.



Figure 3: Mary and Sylvia are shopping, which shows Mary's careless about her dress and Sylvia's career woman look (with sunglasses). *The Women* (2008)

Indeed, according to shopping in advanced store Saks, Sylvia enhances her image as a wealthy woman and she is proficient at fashion, the difference between Sylvia and ordinary working woman is she can afford luxury things since she is successful, and she belongs to wealthy class. And because of shopping, audiences get the image that Crystal now can afford luxury dress just as Sylvia or Mary, she successfully attained her goal.

Since Sylvia's image has been accepted as a career woman according to her dress, audiences can understand why she betrayed her best friend — Mary for telling Mary's marriage crisis to an author. Because audiences get the concept that Sylvia takes her job as the most important thing, her betrayal is not a surprise. And her betrayal promotes the development of the narrative — her break up with Mary, she becomes good friend with Mary's daughter, Molly, and Mary comes to her and blames her for she "took" Mary's job as a mother, and because of their last fighting Sylvia and Mary become reconciled. The last fighting scene, Sylvia changes her business

suit to leisure clothes, the lack of sunglasses and cell-phone can be noticed. At Mary's fashion show, one can also notice that Sylvia changes her hair style, from inflexible straight hair to romantic curl hair. Likewise, this change implies that Sylvia changes her own personality, from a workaholic who once forgot the importance of friendship and life to a more careful woman; the changes of her dress and her hair style tell the audience that Sylvia is going to have a new life.

Similar with new Sylvia, new Mary's change is more explicit. At the beginning of the film, the audiences get the image of Mary who is careless about her appearance according to her untidy long curl hair and her streak T-shirt which she wears for the most time in the film. And because she need to work at garden, she wears rubber boots all the time, even the house keeper can not stand it anymore and said to Mary her appearance is not an appropriate model for her daughter.

If we say in old film Mary is less feminine but still dresses her up appropriate, then the new Mary is more likely to dress slovenly, she seems to have varied and graceful social life but only neglects her own husband and her own daughter. That is the reason for Mr. Haines to have an affair with Crystal, who is a sexier woman. Especially when the newspaper publishes two photos of Crystal and Mary, we can see Crystal is more like a wealthy woman than Mary, who only wears old steak T-shirt and long skirt. (Figure 4).

At the end of the film, Mary changes her hair style, starts to dress like a career woman. The new change indicates that Mary starts to try to have a different life; starts to try to save her relationship with her daughter (Figure 5). Mary has her own fashion show at the end and won big success, according to her daughter, Molly, this impressed her father, Mary's husband Mr. Haines. The change of dress and the fashion show serve to promote the narrative: firstly the change of Mary means she starts to pay attentions to her appearance again, which can satisfied her husband and appropriate for her as a wife and mother who comes from a wealthy family.



Figure 4: The comparison between Crystal and Mary. *The Women* (2008).

Secondly, unlike the old film where fashion show is used as a method to show class difference, in new film, Mary's fashion show means that she starts to have her own career, which is also means she found the goal for her life, she did something she always want to do, her success makes Mr. Haines takes her as an talented woman and he admires her again. We may also say Mary's success threatens Mr. Haines because Mary is talented and she gave up her goal because she thought she could eclipse him. Now she won success, he feels its time to go back to her otherwise he can never control her since Mary may succeed him. Thus, Mary's change of appearance not only shows the change of her personality but also promotes film's narrative and make the film achieve a climax.

As in the old film, Crystal uses dress as a tool to show her sexuality and to woo Mr. Haines. The image about Crystal as a "sexual woman" gained by the audiences is form the scene when Sylvia and Edie met her at Saks, one can notice the tight blue one-piece dress which she is wearing emphasizes her sexy body (Figure 6), and the other counter girls in the same scene are only wearing normal uniforms. Another scene is when Crystal and Mary meet each other at an underwear store which seals expensive and luxury underwear, Crystal is the only one who can try a sexy corset.



Figure 5: Mary changed her style and won big success of her show, she also won her saved her relationship with her daughter. *The Women*(2008)

Crystal's great sexuality is annotated by corset appropriately since as Entwistle suggests that corset is an object which is connected with sexuality and eroticism in both past and present culture,⁷⁵ Furthermore, corset represents her "slut" personality and combines with her lines (when the shop assistant told to Crystal the only mirror with better light is in the hall so probably Crystal doesn't want to go to the hall since she is wearing a corset, Crystal answered her: "I am not shy."), implies Crystal as a shameless woman.

⁷⁵ Entwistle, Joanne. P195.



Figure 6, Crystal wearing tight blue one-piece dress to show her sexy body. *The Women* (2008)

Thus, as analyzed above, in the new film the dress for different characters not only reveals their special characteristics, but also corresponds with film narratives, combines with film lines, helps to further the audiences' understanding of the entire film.

Conclusion: Undressing Film

As discussed above, film costume not just provides visual pleasures for the film audiences, it has great functions for helping to consummate the whole film. For the classical Hollywood film *The Women* (1939), the main characters' characteristics are strengthened by their dress, furthermore, film costume in this film corresponds with the development of the story to reveal the concept about women in that time—how a decent woman should behave and dress herself, and film costume also implies the different social classes. For the remade version, film costume on one hand represents different characters' personalities as it functioned in the old version, on the other hand the film narrative is promoted by the change of characters' dress and appearances.

Sarah Street cites the other instance in her book when analyzing film costume. For example when she comes to how film costume promotes the film narrative she discusses a pyramid jacket which throughout the whole movie functions as a key element in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985) and how the main character achieved the transformation through the change of this pyramid jacket.⁷⁶ Another example how film costume corresponded with the film narrative is in the film *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992), the change of Orlando's clothes paralleled with the change of Orlando him/herself, thus this change of clothes supports the whole film narrative since here the clothes function as the witness of Orlando's change⁷⁷.

4.1 More Functions of Film Costume

Film costume has more functions than what is mentioned above. For instance in her book, Sarah Street quotes Stella Bruzzi's theory that the dress in film can function

⁷⁶ Street, Sarah. *Costume and Cinema*. Wallflower Press. 2001

⁷⁷ Pidduck, Julianne. Travels with Sally Potter's *Orlando*: Gender, Narrative, Movement. *Screen*. Volume: 38. Issue: 2. Publication Year: 1997. Page Number: 172. From *Genre, gender, race and world cinema*. Codell, Julie.(Ed). Wiley-Blackwell Press. 2009. P163.

as “iconic clothes”, which means “spectacular interventions that interfere with the scenes in which they appear and impose themselves onto the character they adorn”⁷⁸

Some times film costume can exceed the demands of the narrative or historical reality, conveying sophisticated address that can be considered as a “language” of its own, thus an alternative meaning can be read from what is suggested by the “preferred” reading. Sarah Street also quotes Cook’s analysis of Madonna of the *Seven Moons* (1944) to show how the central character’s split personality is represented through the dress as a complex signifier of associated emotional and sexual themes.⁷⁹

Character’s dress can correspond with the actor’s images, for example Kenneth More’s images in 1950s is as a hero, when he played Charles Lightoller in *A Night to Remember* (1958), his uniforms helped to reinforce his image as a “hero”.

4.2 What Should be Further Considered

Nowadays, more and more scholars have started to pay attention to film costume, questions also have emerged: can dress have more functions than what is illustrated above? What is the relationship between film costume and the fashion trend in the real world, if they can influence with other or not? Since film costume becomes more and more important, then in what way can a costume designer be involved in film industry? In what degree can film costume be the symbol of a nation or a culture?

It is a good thing if we consider all the questions about film costume, it will improve not just the quality of the film scene, not just make pure visual spectacle, but also it can help to advance the film narrative, actors’ performance and even to

⁷⁸ Street Sarah.P5

⁷⁹ Street Sarah.P6

help to create the deep meaning of a film. The study needs multi-disciplinary consideration and it is worth for us to reach further and further.

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