

# **A Study on the Role and Working Process of Cinematic Costumes**

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## **I. Preface**

Film directors use costume as tools in explaining the plot of the cinematic story. Cinematic costumes should not be confused with what we know as "fashion." If cinematic costume had not been established as it should be, costumes worn by actors would hardly be suitable for the cinema and would be "nothing but clothes in fashion."

Cinematic costume on film is meant to reveal character and the actor's cinematic role even before the lines are spoken.

For the film producer to attain his visual and descriptive target for cinema, he should look at cinematic costumes to provide core information about the changing scenes without deviating from the story.

It is, therefore, imperative for the costume to be genuinely expressive of the created character.

This paper aims to look into the necessary conditions for the cinematic costume and to theoretically explain the method and system of analysis of the cinematic costume. Based on its theoretical analysis, this paper has looked into how Hollywood costume designers create designs for movies and how they have come to conclude that highbred costumes raise the quality of the movie.

## **II . Cinematic costumes and the role of the costume designer**

Costume in film was not meant to complement the visuals of the movie but instead, enhance the personality of the cinematic character.

It is possible for cinematic costumes to express social status, the internal man, or the psychological conditions of the wearer. The cinematic costume is a conduct of character. A close-up image of the costume can even express information not related to the wearer.

### **(1) Cinematic costumes and the role of the costume designer**

- a) All clothes used for the production of a film, are cinematic costumes. Even before speaking, the actor's costumes already reveal what role he will play. Costume designs, be it showy, florid or modern, are prerequisites in TV and film production. In short, the costume design is an active element in letting the story unfold.
- b) Upon receiving a movie scenario, the designer must initially include sketches of costumes,

investigate fashion trends, actual clothes, and such that are useful to the costume designer, the movie director, and the actors who must all commit to the development of character build-up. The designer should be aware that extreme appearances may not be helpful in building up the desired character. The costume designer should be keen about the fact that the initial role of revealing story to the audience falls in his hands and in the director's.

c) Costume design must be appealing to the audience.

The fine details of the costume are crucial factors in enhancing the quality of the actor's performance, and are often used as a guide in the development of character. More often than not, actors are sensitive about their physical appearance that it is important for them to wear clothes that compliment their physical flaws. This is one goal designers must work for.

d) Although making cinematic costumes can be difficult, they must be carefully and clearly created. And in achieving this, each frame in the film becomes a canvas that captures the lucidity of this scene.

Hues, quality of material, pattern, and form of the costume should be based on a pre-planned blueprint. Since improvisation on stage can capture the audience's wonder, chic and modern designs are apt to seem appealing, even magical. The actor becomes an object of observation in front of a scrutinizing audience.

e) The design triumvirate of film.

This triumvirate includes the movie director, the production designer, and the costume designer. These three help the director create a new world. A movie is an enormous puzzle. It is a prodigious set that has lightings and specially-designed costumes. It aims to create a unique time and a unique purpose. This new world must be gently seated on the shoulders of the narrative.

f) Cinematic costumes tend to greatly influence fashion trends.

g) The costume designers are multi-talented people who are also storytellers, historians, social commentators, psychologists, trend creators, and magicians.

## **(2) Analyzing cinematic costumes**

Costumes are another medium of language in film. It can communicate sophisticated messages, just like any language. A systematic analysis of the costumes should consider the following: the milieu, class, gender, age, quality of material, decoration, color, physical exposure, function and image.

Costume Analysis - <Citizen Kane>

Costume Designer: Edward Stevenson

Director: Orson Welles; 1941)

Andre Bazin, a French critic, noted that <Citizen Kane> is an introduction of methodology when

he pointed out its encyclopedic movie technique. The Orson Wells film is an ideal that reveals how dynamic interaction is realized among various language systems within a unique text.

The costumes made by designer Edward Stevenson thoroughly confirm their sense of milieu on film. Since the film has covered a period of about 70 years, the movie should introduce the times through the changing attire of the characters. Dress from Kane's boyhood were patterned after the 19th century: stiffly starched collars and high silk hats; or the simple apparel of the pioneers from frontier times.

Costumes are both functional and symbolical. Kane was fond of wearing white, in accordance to the spirit of the pioneers. He took off his tie and shirt quite often while working. In his later years, he would wear formal black suits with a tie.

Emile's dress, on the other hand, appeared expensive with impairing her temperate elegance. She was always feminine in her refined attire.

Susan at first wore simple dresses until she came to know Kane. After meeting Kane, she began to wear clothes that aimed to attract: showy dresses in glittering stones.

### (3)The role of the costume in a movie scene

Every scene created under the strict control of the director is called a 'mise-en-scence.' Each 'mise-en-scence' consists of setting, lighting, costume, and action. Just like the others, costume has a specific, and may well even be boundless function, for the film.

These are the roles of the cinematic costume:

#### a) To emphasize the mystique of the costume.

Even the actor's underwear must receive close attention to detail in order to heighten the overall effect of the film.

#### b) It is important to unify the film's development in every way, Careful attention must be paid even to such seemingly minor props as sunglasses, cloaks, pince-nez, shoes, hat, sticks, etc.

#### c) By closely jiving with the setting, costume can strengthen the narrative structure and the types of theme of the movie. Harmony in color is crucial for dramatic effect.

It is noteworthy to point out that the most famous costume in the history of film is Charles Chaplin's vagabond apparel. His costume involves a complicated blend of vanity and bravado with social status and personality.

His mustache, derby and stick insinuates a pigheaded dandy. He uses his stick when he swaggers in a lordly manner. However, his baggy trousers, oversized shoes, and tight coat reveal that he is a poor man.

In his attire alone we can see that Chaplin's vagabond character is a self-deceiving, vain, absurd, and vulnerable man.

## III. Conclusion

Film is both an art and a medium of vast information. In the course of production, the

production designer and the costume designer must help the director create an ingenious world. Cinematic costumes are worn with a purpose - the costume designer must create his designs as soon as he receives the scenario in order to give the actor an eyeball look at the costumes as soon as possible. Costume must match the film's atmosphere, while retaining the power to enhance it all the more.