

The Influence of Movement on the Perception of Costume in Film

Studying the actor in correlation to exceptional costume movement

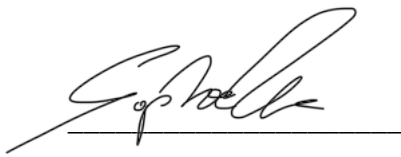
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Hoper', is written over a horizontal line.

Sophie Hoper

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of movement in costume design and its impact on the audience's perception in film, as well as the actor in relation to the moving costume. Costumes are not static elements, they exist in direct correlation with the moving body. This study examines how costume movement enhances the narrative and emotional depth of a film while considering construction techniques and fabric choices as well as the actor's influence on costume movement.

By analysing key moments in film, where costume movement plays a fundamental role, this thesis investigates how the costume designer intentionally craft garments to interact with motion. Case studies include *Cinderella* (2015), *Crimson Peak* (2015), *The Cell* (2000) and *Snow White and The Huntsman* (2012). These films illustrate how costume movement can define a character's identity, evoke supernatural effects, and ease a character's on-screen transformation.

Through this research, I highlight movement as a crucial component of costume design as movement functions as both a visual and narrative tool within the craft of costume design.

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Introduction

“Every crease in his clothes takes on the same expressive significance as a wrinkle in his face” (Balázs, 1931, p. 29) This quote from Béla Balázs, a Hungarian film critic suggests that the smallest costume detail can be just as meaningful as an actor’s facial expression. Costume Design is a craft that is often an overlooked yet fundamental element in the art of filmmaking. While audiences tend to think of the director or the cinematographer, being responsible for the look of a film, costume also plays a crucial part in storytelling. By shaping a character’s visual identity costume design subtly influences how audiences perceive and connect with the characters in a film. It is not merely about dressing the actors, it is about constructing meaning enhancing narrative depth, and contributing to an immersive cinematic world.

One of the most fascinating yet underexplored aspects of costume design is its relationship with movement. Unlike static fashion displays or historical garments in museums, costumes in film come to life through the actor wearing them. The way fabric flows, stiffens or reacts to movement, can significantly affect how a character is perceived. In many cases movement is not just incidental, but purposefully designed to contribute to the narrative.

My interest in this topic was sparked by my experience working as a costume assistant for theatre and specifically the ballet. In ballet movement is a primary consideration from the very start of the design process. A dancer’s silhouette, the flow of fabric and the way a garment enhances or restricts motion are all meticulously planned. This made me wonder, how movement influences costume design and how do costume designers intentionally craft garments to achieve specific movement effects on screen?

As there is little literature on the specific topic of costume movement in film to this day, I’m approaching the role of costume in performance and film in a broader way, by studying literature like *The Hollywood Costume* by Deborah Nadoolman Landis

and *Performance Costume* by Sofia Pantouvaki and Peter McNeil. Both books give insight into the diverse role of the costume designer and the costume design as a semiotic art. I'm examining the role of costume design and the costume designer, also in differentiation from fashion design. To study the costume in relation to the body, Aoife Monks "The actor in costume" is of interest as well as Aby Warburg's theory of "the moved attributes". The German art historian analysed movement in paintings and what emotional effect these moved attributes have on the beholder of the painting. Lastly I'm looking at the interaction of construction techniques and movement at the example of the ballet production *Mayerling* from the Stuttgart Ballet Company.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I'm exploring how specific moments in film involving exaggerative costume movement shapes the audience's perception of costume in film. By analysing key cinematic moments where costume movement plays a critical role, I will examine how different fabrics, construction techniques, and silhouettes influence not only the actor's physicality, but also the storytelling itself. I will focus on the following three ways in which costume movement serves a narrative function:

1. Space-Occupying Movement: How costume interacts with the space around it, creating a dramatic visual effect at the example of *Cinderella* (Branagh, 2015) and *Crimson Peak* (Del Toro, 2015)
2. Supernaturally Moved Costume: Costume that appears to move beyond the natural laws of physics, suggesting the presence of an external supernatural force that is not seen on screen. I'm discussing this phenomena by analysing *The Cell* (Singh, 2000)
3. Transformational Movement: Costumes that facilitates on-screen metamorphosis and visually represents a character's transformation. This might often be a transition into an animalic form, where texture and movement allow a smooth transformation. A great example of multiple

transformations is the work of costume designer Collen Atwood in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (Sanders, 2012)

Through this study I hope to highlight movement as a crucial component of costume design and an integral part of cinematic storytelling.

Chapter One: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In my first chapter I'm going to approach the idea of the moving costume as a method of storytelling, by defining the purpose of costume design and the complex job of the costume designer. I will also look at the costumed body in relation to movement and the influence of materials and construction techniques in response to movement. This will help me to build a terminology to discuss my second chapter.

1.1 COSTUME DESIGN AS A SEMIOTIC ART

Costume Design is the art of designing and constructing clothing for characters in Film or Performance Art, incorporating historical and cultural research on the basis of a text or script.

Landis, the author of *Hollywood Costume* writes: "Costume Design is not just about the clothes: in film it has both a narrative and a visual mandate" (Landis, 2012, p. 48). She indicates the deeper purpose of costume design to enhance the storytelling and character development. Costume Designer Chris Lavery refers to Costume Design as a semiotic art, he explains: "Costume shapes our viewing experience by subtle communication, drip-feeding information so vital to the narrative that paradoxically we scarcely notice it is happening" (Lavery and Landis, 2012, p. 266). Referring to costume design as a semiotic art means, that costume provides a visual language that communicates through elements like silhouette, texture, colour and movement, subtly influencing the audiences. Within the first appearance of an actor on screen or stage, the costume might tell us whether it is cold or warm, what season it is and what time of the day, because we understand the code that costume uses to communicate. Susanne Stehle describes this as "the vestimentary code". She states

Vestimentary Codes visualise the structures of a society. These signs can be transferred to stage costumes, which makes their study so fundamental. The costume designer makes use of the language of

everyday clothing to make the character on stage understandable to the audience (Stehle, 2023, p. 11).

We must also differentiate costume from fashion as they serve a very different purpose. Fashion is part of our everyday lives, it is influenced by cultural and social trends and is a form of personal expression, while costume is rooted in Film and the Performing Arts and follows a scripted narrative and is a device for storytelling. Reporter Booth Moore differs fashion and costume with the following words.

Fashion designers pull inspiration from the ether and translate the Zeitgeist. Their currency is desire, and their stage is the catwalk. (...) Costume designers pull inspiration from the script and translate the director's vision. Their currency is truth and they set the stage (Moore and Landis, 2012, p. 151)

However, costume and fashion might serve very different purposes, a costume designer is required to study and understand fashion trends, as this can be helpful to create a believable personal style to for a character, this relates back to the "vestimentary code" Stehle speaks of. A personal fashion style is something that evolves over time. In most cases our wardrobe is not something that consists of only items from a shopping trip to Paris last weekend, but it is put together over a span of years. And over time we keep making decisions over and over to keep or to get rid of the items in our closet. To quote Landis:

In the same way our own clothes take our life journey with us, we all wear an amalgam of stories each item telling its own unique tale. Everything including our earrings, shoes, socks, watch, trousers, shirt [...] have been purchased, inherited, gifted, stolen or borrowed at different moments of our life [...] Clothes function as social and emotional signposts (Landis, 2012, p. 48).

Therefore, our own wardrobe could be considered a summary of our choices. And so is the costume for a character, a carefully composed outfit of choices made by the costume designer. The costume for a film character however does not have years to arise, it is the costume designers' job to recreate this complex idea of personal style to give their characters a multifaceted background through the garments they're wearing. While fashion can reflect the wearers personality, simply as it is an expression of what the wearer likes and prefers on their body, costume is purposefully aiming to tell the viewer a story about the character. Every detail is considered and full of meaning.

1.2 COSTUME AND THE BODY

Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson both have discussed the relation between dress and the body and how dress comes alive as Entwistle quotes herself and Wilson in *The Fashioned Body*: “Without a body, dress lacks fullness and movement; it is incomplete” (Entwistle, 2023, p. 11)

Wilson (2007, p. 1) even goes as far and describes the costume and fashion pieces that are displayed in a museum, still and lifeless as an uncanny experience:

For clothes are so much part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture, they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening, the atrophy of the body, and the evanescence of life.

The nuances about the dress missing information is “half understood” can be transferred to costume, for the costume is specifically designed and made for an actor in an explicit moment in a play or scene in film, without the actor wearing it, we’re missing the information how the costume is supposed to move. Is the skirt of a dress dragging over the floor or only reaching the ankles? Is the jacket a perfect fit, or does it barely close over a big belly? We can only answer questions like this, when we see a costume on the actor it was intended for. Clothing on hanger or a mannequin is not providing us with this information. How Aoife Monks (2010) describes it: “after all to talk about costume in distinction from the actor and the audience, we would have to speak about a bunch of dead fabric on a hanger.”

This concludes that a costume needs the body of the actor to achieve its full potential as a storytelling device, as the interaction of the body and the costume can provide us with additional information that the still costume cannot.

In relation to the body in movement, I found it beneficial to look at Aby Warburg’s theory of the “moved attributes” (*bewegtes Beiwerk*). The German art critic analysed

paintings regarding their dynamic elements like hair, fabric or expressive gestures. His theories suggest that these movement imbedded in the painting serve as expressive tools that convey emotions. Arguing that these animated details carry a psychological energy and are able to evoke strong emotions in the spectator of the painting (Michaud, 2004, chapter 2). In Renaissance paintings these moved attributes would often contradict each other. Studying Botticelli's "Birth of a Venus" (Fig. 1), Warburg describes the wind that seems to move the hair as well as the cloth and garments as "brise imaginaire", the imaginary breeze as the wind seems to come from three different directions, which by the laws of physics would not be possible. Warburg therefore argues that the painter might have used the wind simply to create movement so that the movement would arouse an emotional response by the viewer. A female figure like the Venus with flowing hair or drapery, painted in motion was a recurring motif for Warburg that he referred to as the nymph (Michaud, 2004)



Fig. 1: Sandro Botticelli, Birth of Venus, tempera on canvas, 1484. (Uffizi Gallery)

Putting Warburg's idea into the context of costume design, it supports the idea of the costume in motion enhancing the performance of an actor by having an emotional impact.

1.3 MATERIALITY AND CONSTRUCTION

The choice of material and construction techniques will have a direct impact on the movement of a costume as well as on the actor or performer wearing the garment. A lightweight habotai silk will behave different on a moving body than a heavy wool tweed. A well-constructed garment made from high quality textiles will be more comfortable for the performer than an ill-fitting costume made from cheap synthetics. While the costume designer always has to work on a budget and needs to consider the overall spendings, they would always aim to achieve comfort for the actor as much as possible.

The four-time academy award winner for Best Costume Design Colleen Atwood speaks about the challenge of constructing her design for Edwards iconic leather suit (Fig. 2) in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* from 1990.



Fig. 2: Jonny Depp as Edward is found by Peg in *Edward Scissorhands*, 1990. (Burton, 1990)

Atwood's design featured a tight-fitting black leather suit with buckles, but in order to stop the leather from bagging out she needed it to be stretchy around the seams. Atwood describes how challenging it was at a time when there were barely innovative and technical fibres around to find a tailor that understood her vision. It took Atwood several failed attempts with skilled tailors until she found a Russian tailor with experience in constructing ballet costumes who was able to help her find the right construction technique: "What was really hard at that point in history was

to find somebody who knew what I was talking about. I had two or three tailors trying to make a costume and they didn't get it." (Atwood, 2021 08:50)

If we think about all that movement (Fig. 3) Jonny Depp's character Edward needs to undertake in his leather suit, we can understand why Atwood pushed for several attempts.



Fig. 3: Jonny Depp as Edward creating his ice sculptures in *Edward Scissorhands*, 1990. (Burton, 1990)

This example also shows that creating costume is always a collaborative process with many people involved. While the costume designer Nowadays the fabric market is flooded with all kinds of innovative and stretchy textiles. Inventions like the highly durable Dyneema fibre and the use of 3D-printers to create textiles making it easier to create extravagant costumes that also allow maximum movement of the performer. What has not changed is that we probably still find some of the most skilled costume makers working for the ballet as this form of performing art requires more movement from the performer than any other. Ballet dancers are athletes performing on stage, but while a figure skater at the Olympics might need a pretty and flexible bodysuit, a ballet dancer often requires a costume with a historical silhouette, that still provides the same flexibility as the figure skaters bodysuit. The high demands for both, maximum functionality and graceful beauty forced costume makers to think beyond.

To discuss costume construction techniques in relation to movement, I found it very beneficial to take a closer look at ballet costumes as the techniques used have without doubt inspired more costume designers like Colleen Atwood.

The costume plays a central role in a ballet. The stage is an artificial place, and it relies on set design and costume design for constructing the world and the characters in it, to make the story we see on stage believable. In ballet even more so than in other performing arts as there are no spoken words. The language of ballet are music and movement.

From the material gestuality and the tactile communication of its stitches and folds, to the structural links that trace the wide-ranging contours of concepts [...] the journey of costume from the cutting table to the stage is reflected in the makings, wearings and readings of it. In this hands that make, limbs that wear, and eyes that watch implicate the body as its central shared core, as costume becomes an object in movement (Barbieri, 2017, p. 20).

Barbieri describes a costume for a performer that needs to be both functional, comfortable and nonetheless full of meaning and character.

In ballet the costume for a dancer faces multiple challenges. It needs to allow the dancer full movement of their body, which requires expert tailoring and a close fit to the body. The costume needs to be extremely durable as it also needs to last multiple seasons and is often shared with another dancer. The costumes features should also be recognized from everywhere in the audience, from the parterre to the backrow on the balcony and most importantly the costume should extend and pursue the dancer's line, meaning it should support the movements of the dancer and emphasize them. This requires expertise and practical knowledge in textile material science. Creating costumes is always a collaborative process with many people involved. While the costume designer is the creative mind behind the costumes, they need a team of assistants, costume technicians and artisans to bring their ideas to life. How Pollatsek writes in her book *Unbuttoned*:

The best costume technicians do not merely execute the design, they add their own artistry as they interpret it. This is really important to see that the Costume Designer needs to collaborate well with their team and also inspire and give the skilled makers the space to be creative in their own field. (Pollatsek, 2017, p.22)

At the example of the Stuttgart's version of MacMillan's "Mayerling" I'd like to share some of my observations about construction techniques in relation to movement. This was the second full length-ballet I got to work on as a costume assistant. With "Mayerling", Kenneth MacMillan choreographed a full-length ballet in four Acts, telling his version of the story around the mysterious double suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria-Hungary and his mistress. Taking place in the very late 19th century, the costume and set designer Jürgen Rose faced the challenge to create costumes for characters of the Austrian-Hungarian court in Vienna with the distinctive Victorian silhouette.



Fig. 4: The company of the Stuttgart Ballet performing the Ballroom Scene at "Schloss Schönbrunn" in *Mayerling*, 2021. (Novitzky, 2021)

Costume Designer Jürgen Rose has a lifetime of experience designing sets and costume for the theatre. He designed both for most of John Cranko's full length ballets like *Romeo and Juliette*, *Onegin* and *Swan Lake*. For *Mayerling* Rose had to

find a way to create this silhouette for the female characters without the use of a bustle or corset in order to not restrict the dancer's movements in any way.

Interviewed for by the Stuttgart newspaper by A. Kachelrieß he mentions:

This [the historical accuracy] was exactly my problem: No fiction, this ballet takes place in historical places, the characters actually existed. The costumes had to be historically accurate, as that's what MacMillan wanted, but they also had to be danceable (Rose, 2019)

To create these costumes, fabrics played a decisive part. Months were spent in pre-production to choose and test all kinds of fabrics. Many fabrics were specifically made and printed for the production.

You don't first make a sketch and then go hunting for a fabric that will do what you want it to do. You get that piece of fabric, and you hold it, you play with it, you throw it around to see how it moves, how it reflects light, then you know how you are going to use (Plunkett, 1982, quoted in Landis, 2012, pp. 24–25)

Plunkett's quote demonstrates how important it is for a costume designer to understand materiality, a special fabric might even inspire you to create a look very different from what you imagined. The texture of a fabric can hold so much information on its own, how can the fabric be manipulated, how does it interact with light, how does it look combined with other fabrics. For "Mayerling" the biggest challenge was the cohesive historical silhouette throughout the ballet, even though each Act would demand a different choreography. A lot of it was trial and error. We would try out different prototypes in almost every rehearsal until the right construction and materials were found. After these test runs rehearsal skirts were made for the soloists as well as the corps de ballet to imitate the original costume. That way the dancers could get used to the unbalanced weight on their back. To let the silhouette appear bigger even bigger Rose skilfully draped multiple skirt layers and added bows and flower details to the back of these dresses to create

more volume and a more exaggerated silhouette. Skirt and bodice of a dress were separate pieces, but the skirt would always be buttoned into the bodice by using buttonhole elastic. With this technique the length of the skirt could be slightly adjusted, when dancers had to share a costume, skirts and bodices could be mix and matched together and costume changes were a lot quicker, having just one piece of garment to put on.

Chapter 2: MOVING COSTUMES IN FEATURE FILM

For the second part of my thesis, I'm going to study moments in Feature Film, where the moving costume is playing a primary role, for it is contributing to the storyline and is representing the characters' identity. To help me analyse these moments I chose to sort them in three categories depending on what the moving costume is trying to achieve. Space occupying movement, refers to a costume that fills the frame and is set in focus, creating exaggerated and dramatic effects (e.g., *Cinderella*, *Crimson Peak*) By supernaturally moved costumes I'm referring to movement that can't be explained by the actors' actions and suggests the presence of a supernatural force (e.g., *The Cell*). Transformational movement looks at the transition of an actor from one form into another (e.g., *Snow White and The Huntsman*)

2.1 SPACE OCCUPYING MOVEMENT

In this second chapter I chose four films that feature scenes with exaggerated costume movement that stood out to me the most. The two films in my first category will depict costumes from the films "Cinderella" and "Crimson Peak" that interact with the space around them by expanding and filling the frame, which creates a dramatic effect.

CINDERELLA (US 2015, D: Kenneth Branagh)

Disney's live adaptation of the 1950 animated classic is retelling the story of one of the most popular Disney princesses. Like the original cartoon the screenplay is based on Charles Perrault's version of the popular fairy tale. While the film paid tribute to many of the iconic moments in the animated version, it made significant changes to the storyline and characters. The well-considered deviations leave room to give the characters more in depth background stories

Oscar-winning costume designer Sandy Powell who is known for her intricate and designed period costumes seen in *Shakespeare in Love* or *Orlando* was tasked with creating the costumes for this Disney fairy tale. With her take on Cinderella's stunning blue ballgown she brought one of Disney's most beloved characters to life. Ella our main protagonist is a spirited young girl who lives with her mother and her father, a wealthy merchant in a little fictitious kingdom. The family's happiness is overshadowed by the death of Ella's mother. On her deathbed Ella promises her mother to always have courage and to be kind.

Ella grows up to be a beautiful and goodhearted woman who is portrayed by Lily James. When her father tells her he wishes to marry again, Ella supports him, but when her new stepmother Lady Tremaine and her two daughters arrive to come and live with Ella and her father, they meet Ella's kindness with mockery and condescension, fuelled by bitterness and jealousy.

When Ella's father does not return home from a business trip, things change drastically for Ella. In order to save money Lady Tremaine fires the domestic staff and has Ella do all the work.

Trying to keep her promise and her good faith Ella seeks salvation in the woods, where she eventually encounters the prince who is riding with the Royal Hunt. The prince calls himself "Kit" and lets Ella believe he is an apprentice at the palace. Both keep thinking about their encounter and when the king urges "prince Kit" to host a ball to find a woman he should marry, he makes sure to invite everyone to the ball, not just the nobility, hoping Ella would come. When the day of the ball arrives, Lady Tremaine refuses to take Ella to the ball, tearing her dress to pieces.

Devastated, Ella runs into the gardens. She is about to lose her courage as her fairy

godmother appears. Soon the pumpkin and the greenhouse become a carriage and Ella's animal friends become footmen and horses and then it is time for the ballgown.



Fig. 5: Lily James as Ella twirling in her new dress in *Cinderella*, 2015. (Branagh, 2015)

The multi-layered dress in cornflower blue worn by Lily James quickly becomes the centre of attention, even before the film hit the cinemas. Powell breaks down her design process and ideas behind the dress as a guest of the Podcast “Dressed, The History of fashion” with hosts April Calahan and Cassidy Zachary. She explains that the dress is actually not just one blue colour tone but made from different layers featuring green, turquoise, lavender and blue tones through in order to achieve a watercolour effect as well as several layers of iridescent taffeta that would catch the light. She wanted all these layers to become one colour when James would start to move in the dress. The butterfly motive that we find on the bertha of the dress, the draped fabric on the neckline, was a nod to Cinderella's love for nature and animals (Powell, 2024). On Powell's initial costume sketch (Fig. 6) we can see the butterflies and the different hues of blues and purple. Powell also talks about all the work and craftsmanship that went into the dress. It took 18 people and 550 hours to make it and they used 273 yards of fabric. She mentions: “the dress itself is a feat of structural engineering, the way it does move and the way it does settle back exactly how it should do every time (Powell, 2024, 48:50)



Fig. 6: Costume Sketch of Ella's ballgown for *Cinderella*, 2015. (Powell, 2015)

When Ella arrives at the palace in her ballgown (Fig.7), the viewer finally sees the full dimensions of the gown and it puts Ella into the centre of attention.



Fig. 7: Lily James as Ella arriving at the ball in *Cinderella*, 2015. (Branagh, 2015)

Ella's big entrance is noticed by the prince and Kit finds her overjoyed "the girl from the woods" indeed came to the ball. He asks her to dance, and they dance the first waltz together in the middle of the huge dance floor, surrounded by all the other guests. That's when the ballgown truly unfolds its magic and all the details that Powell so carefully considered and put into her design become visible (Fig.8)



Fig. 8: Lily James as Ella and Richard Madden as Kit dancing at the ball in *Cinderella*, 2015.
(Branagh, 2015)

The many layers of finest organza are flowing around the Ella and her dance partner like waves and when Ella spins, we see the many different layers and iridescent colours on the skirts appear as the dress becomes a lighter blue almost white like seafoam swirling up the hem of the dress. The flowing fabric also achieves to create a more intimate atmosphere for Ella and the prince as the swooshing skirts lap around the dancing couple and seem to shield them from the crowd. We can see the thousands of Swarovski Crystals catching the light as well as the incredible response to movement of the dress. The dance scene proved to be Powell's biggest challenge when designing for *Cinderella* (Powell, 2024). To create a huge gown for the ultimate Cinderella moment, that everyone was expecting and still have a dress that would not restrict the actress too much and respond to movement really well when Ella and the prince dance the waltz and then later when Ella runs away from the ball. In an interview with Emily Zemler for "ELLE" in 2015, Powell talks about how the movement of the dress influenced her design:

For me, how the dress would move was the most important part, aside from the silhouette. She dances at the ball, which is obviously

really important, and she runs away. I wanted it to look gorgeous as she was running away.

Looking at Fig. 9, it is clear that Powell successfully mastered this challenge. As Ella runs off at the first strike of midnight and her gown flowing behind her as the light shines through the outer delicate layers of the skirt, a true moment of costume magic comes to live.



Fig. 9: Lily James as Ella runs off the ball in *Cinderella*, 2015. (Branagh, 2015)

The Cinderella dress is a great example of “the power of costuming” Aoife Monks refers to. “We can consider the power of costuming to shape identity and form bodies” (Monks, 2010). Putting on a huge dress like that will naturally change the way someone moves, in comparison to a pair of jeans. In James’s case it really helped her to become the character, to become Cinderella as we can tell from the moment when James tried on the finished gown for the first time that she describes, when interviewed by Jacqueline Andriakos in 2015 for the People Magazine:

I put on that gown for the first time and looked in the mirror and sort of gasped, James said. I couldn’t believe it was me. I kind of felt invincible in it and I felt like I could really be a princess. It changed how I walked.

CRIMSON PEAK (US 2015, D: Guillermo del Toro)

Writer and director Guillermo del Toro described “Crimson Peak” as a Gothic Romance with horror elements. The director is known for bringing fantastical tales to life through visually striking concepts, like Pan’s Labyrinth or Hellboy. For Crimson Peak, del Toro worked with production designer Tom Sanders and costume designer Kate Hawley to create a dark scenery full of symbolism and meaning in every choice of colour and material.

The main character is Edith Cushing, portrayed by Australian actress Mia Wasikowska, a young intelligent woman and aspiring author, that lost her mother at a young age, now living with her father Carter Cushing, a wealthy businessman in buffalo. We learn from the start that Edith has the ability to see the ghosts of the dead, when it is her own mother seeking Edith out after her death and warning her of “Crimson Peak”.

Edith’s character is energetic and optimistic. Her personality is well represented in her playful costumes. Hawley (2023) talks about her and del Toros inspiration behind the characters in an interview for the podcast “The art of costume” hosted by Elizabeth Joy Glass and Spencer Williams.

The inspiration for Edith was the monarch butterfly with its golden wings as Edith is a vibrant character, full of optimism and joy for life (Fig. 9).



Fig. 10: Mia Wasikowska as Edith Cushing in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Del Toro, 2015)

When the handsome English baronet Sir Thomas Sharp arrives in Buffalo together with his sister Lucille, Edith is immediately drawn to him. Thomas Sharp presents himself to Edith's father seeking funds for his minding machine, hoping to revive the family's old clay mines. Edith's father refuses to invest, but Edith and Thomas get romantically attached. Edith's father is suspicious of the Sharp siblings and hires a private detective to investigate their past but is mysteriously murdered before he can warn his daughter. Edith's grief only tightens her bond with Thomas, and they get married soon after her father's funeral and Edith returns with Thomas to the Sharps' estate "Allerdale Hall" in England.

Allerdale Hall is the realm of Lucille, once a majestic Victorian estate, it is now decayed, rotting from the inside out and slowly sinking into the clay mines underneath. The scenery is dark and romantic at the same time.

There is a clashing contrast between the golden aesthetic and warm lights in Buffalo and the dark, gloomy atmosphere in Allerdale Hall. This contrast is found in the costumes as well.

Lucille is portrayed by Jessica Chastain and is the villain in *Crimson Peak*. Growing up, surrounded by cruelty and no one to love and protect but her younger brother, Lucille never experienced what it meant to be loved for who she was. While the inspiration behind Edith's costumes was the golden monarch butterfly, it was the grey moths living in Allerdale Hall (Fig. 10), that served for the inspiration behind Lucille's garments (Hawley 2023, 15:20). The motive of the moth is also found repeatedly found in Allerdale Hall itself, like in this wallpaper (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11: Mia Wasikowska as Edith discovering the moths living in Allerdale Hall in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Del Toro, 2015)

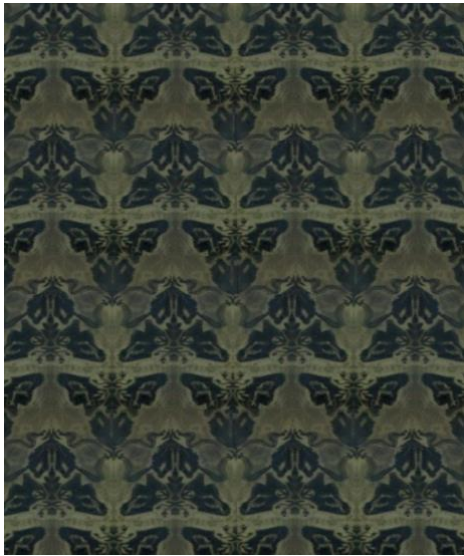


Fig. 12: Wallpaper in Allerdale Hall *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Del Toro, 2015)

While Edith is dressed in the latest fashion of the early Edwardian era with outrageous sleeves and bright colours, Lucille is wearing very tight, shaped dresses in dark tones with a late Victorian silhouette that feature a high collar and long sleeves. Her outfits seem very restricting and only allow little movement. Her dark hair is always strictly tied back. Her signature dress is made from heavy blue velvet, mirroring the colour tones of the house and is draped with brown wine leaves that seem to cling around the body just like the house is covered in wine leaves as well. This represents Lucille's attachment with Allerdale Hall. The texture of the velvet reminds of the moth's wings.



Fig. 13: Jessica Chastain as Lucille Sharp in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Del Toro, 2015)

As it becomes winter Edith learns that the estate is also referred to as Crimson Peak, as the red clay swelling up from the mines turns the snow bright red. Wandering through the house at night-time Edith eventually finds evidence of other women that have lived in Allerdale Hall, the ghosts leading her to the clues. She discovers that Thomas has been married many times before to finance the estate and Thomas machines with their dowry. The women have all been poisoned by Lucille and Edith is to meet the same fate as she is already sick from the tea Lucille served her.

The following scene is the one I want to focus on when Lucille's appearance makes a complete shift.

It is the night Edith discovers the final part of the puzzle when she finds the siblings in an incestuous embrace. Lucille seems relieved all of her dark secrets have been revealed and furiously tries to kill Edith by pushing her off a balcony from the second floor. As Hawley mentions in the podcast it was Jessica's understanding of Lucille's character that influenced this costume.

She felt like Lucille needed to finally break free in this moment, when her darkest secret is uncovered, after hiding and restricting herself for years (Hawley, 2023).

Lucille is wearing a flowy white nightgown with a greyish green overcoat, held together by a red ribbon. Her long dark hair is loosely braided at the back, loose strands framing her face.

Edith survives the fall, but Lucille wants her dead. When Thomas confesses Lucille, he has in fact fallen in love with Edith and wants her to survive and leave Allerdale Hall forever. Inflamed by his disloyalty to her, Lucille kills Thomas in a rage. Furious as in a killing spree Lucille now chases after Edith who tries to escape, by taking the elevator. To follow Edith Lucille runs down the corridor and hurries down the stairs with incredible speed, her nightgown billowing behind her.



Fig. 14: Jessica Chastain as Lucille chasing after Edith in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Del Toro, 2015)

Hawley states that they wanted this moment as dramatic as possible. “We wanted to exaggerate every single movement” (Hawley, 2023, min 55:50).

And that is exactly what the costume is doing. Until this moment we never see Lucille moving excessively, her previous dresses clearly wouldn’t allow her to run like this. While those dresses reflect Lucille’s effort to restrict her feelings and hide her true intentions as she knows her love for her brother is wrong. Towards Edith she uses the following words to describe her feelings:

“This love burns you and maims you and twists you inside out. It is a monstrous love, and it makes monsters of us all” (Lucille in *Crimson Peak*, 1:40:00).

Lucille’s loose nightgown finally represents her true character when all her oppressed feelings break through, causing her to fall into a mad rush. The nightgown

also clearly represents Lucille's moth theme, the most of all her costumes as the flowing fabric in grey and green shades resembles wings as Lucille runs down the stairs.

2.2 SUPERNATURALLY MOVED COSTUME

At the example of “The Cell”, I’m looking at costume movement that cannot solely be explained by the movements of the actor or natural forces such as wind. These are flowing and floating fabrics that seem to be moved by a supernatural force we cannot see. These costume movements have a ghostlike quality to them.

2.3.1 THE CELL (US 2000, D: TARSEM SINGH)

The Cell is a science fiction psychological horror film and the directorial debut of Tarsem Singh. His work on “The Cell” explores the twisted, disturbed mind of a serial killer on screen, a dark and visually stunning world. To bring this world to life Singh partnered with production designer Tom Foden and costume designer Eiko Ishioka. April Napier was brought on as an additional costume designer to design the characters in the real world while Ishioka created the Phantastic.

Child psychologist Catherine Deane who is portrayed by Jennifer Lopez is working with a new experimental technology referred to as “Neurological Cartography and Synaptic Transfer System” that allows her consciousness to enter the mind of a comatose patient. Initially Catherine is treating a young boy trying to wake him from his catatonic state, but then she is approached by the FBI and is asked to enter the mind of Carl Rudolph Stargher instead. A serial killer who was finally captured by the FBI, but he fell into a catatonic coma before he could be questioned by the FBI.

Stargher’s victims are only female. He drowns his victims in a specifically built glass cell that is automatically filled with water over time. He doesn’t stay to witness the cruel death but records it via camera and comes back to retrieve the dead body. In his basement he treats the body with bleach, so the body seems to resemble a doll. Stargher uses metal rings on his back that are inserted into his flesh to suspend himself in the air with the use of a hoist, hovering over the corpse and while watching the recorded video he finds sexual gratification.

Now Stargher’s latest victim has not been found and the FBI is unable to find clues that could lead to her location. Because of the recordings they’re aware about the

glass cell and the time sensitivity, therefore they turn to unconventional methods, hoping Catherine is able to discover the location of Stargher's victim.

While the film was often criticized for its not fully believable plot and its lack of logic, it is praised and remembered for the depiction of the surreal world of Carl's mind that unfolds on screen as soon as Catherine enters.

The neurological technology requires Catherine and her patient to wear a blood-red bodysuit made from rubber that resembled the strings of muscle tissue

Entering Stargher's subconscious for the first time, we immediately realize that the mind of a serial killer is very different from the mind of a young, traumatized boy.

While the dream landscape of Catherine's previous patient featured endless sand dunes and trees, Catherine finds herself in a bizarre and dark basement with life-size dioramas where doll versions of Carl's victims move like clockwork automatons. She encounters two versions of Stargher within this dream landscape. Him as a young boy who seems frightened by his surroundings and King Stargher who is Carl's evil persona and seems to rule over this strange world and everyone in it. Catherine is captured and dropped at the very end of long stairs in an enormous throne room dressed in deep purple fabric panels on the walls. King Stargher residing on top of the stairs. The camera perspective let's Stargher appear enormous, an illusion that is not only created by perspective, but also by his costume.



Fig. 15: Vincent D'Onofrio as Stargher in the first dream sequence in *The Cell*, 2000. (Singh, 2000)

He wears a floor length crimson red skirt and black leather straps wrapped around his arms; his chest is bare. It is only until the camera shows us the next shot from a high angle that we realize the massive panels of purple fabric are not just wall decoration, but a massive cape attached to his body (Fig.14). Stargher slowly starts to move down the stairs while tension is building up when the fabric panels snatch from the mounts on the wall with a screeching noise, the music intensifies as the cape glides along the walls.

The fabric quickly rushing through the mounts feel like evil that has been unleashed, like we know something bad is going to happen when the fabric reaches the end of the wall. When Stargher stands next to Catherine screaming at her, she is frightened and leaves Carl's consciousness by pressing a pressure point on her left hand.

This costume of the Stargher king is a great example how "The Cell" uses costume and set design to portray the uncanny and twisted world of a serial killer's mind. In this case the costume is not only interacting with the set, but it also becomes an actual part of the set. The moment the actor moves and by that extension his costume, the whole room is set in motion. Catherine is frightened and wakes herself up by stimulating a pressure point on her hand.

At the second attempt Catherine manages to advance even deeper into Stargher's mind, so deep she almost loses herself, not being able to tell the mind landscape from reality anymore.

The second dream sequence starts with Catherine finding herself trapped in a tiny glass box, wearing a red chiffon dress and her hair tied up in a bun. The box leaves her no space to move and when she starts to feel claustrophobic, a cupola above her head opens and Catherine falls upwards as if gravity was inverted. Her fall is abruptly held back by a string wrapped around her ankles. The red nuances of her flowy silk dress, standing out against the cool grey tones of the background. When the string eventually breaks, a wide shot shows Catherine fall through a grotesque scenery of tunnels and light wells.



Fig. 16: Jennifer Lopez as Catherine Deane in the second dream sequence in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Singh, 2000)

A close up (Fig. 15) off the delicate fabric pulled around her body, tells us about the immense speed of her fall that comes to a sudden hold, when Catherine enters a huge hall through a hole in the ceiling.



Fig. 17: Jennifer Lopez as Catherine Deane in the second dream sequence in *Crimson Peak*, 2015. (Singh, 2000)

Now Catherine sinks down in slow motion, while her loose hair and the lightweight fabric are floating around her body, suddenly creating a moment of tranquillity, in high contrast to the abrupt fall.

The way her fall is slowed down suggests the change of the viscosity of air or the presence of water, even though there is clearly no water to be seen on screen. The other components in this scene create the illusion of an underwater scenery. The beam of lighting from above reminds the viewer of daylight breaking through the water surface. Sound effects of actual water complement Catherine's movements that are now slowed down, as if they meet resistance, her hair now loosely flowing around her head and the red chiffon of her dress is gently moved by an invisible force like waves tugging at the skirt. This moment appears very calm and peaceful and gives Catherine a ghostlike presence. This is where Warburg's theory of the moved attributes comes into practice. While Catherine herself is barely moving, her attributes like her hair and her dress are in motion, evoking a state of peacefulness and tranquillity in the spectator and let Catherine appear like a supernatural creature that resembles Warburg's idea of the nymph that he identified in various Renaissance paintings (Michaud, 2004).

If we consider that everything that happens to Catherine is imagined by Carl, this scene gets some deeper meaning as water is strongly connected to Carl's childhood traumata. During a christening ceremony, the young Carl was almost drowned by his father. It remains unclear if water is something Carl is terrified of or if he seeks to overcome his trauma by interacting with water from a distance. His ambiguity with water also shows in the way he tortures and treats his victims. Letting them drown, makes the water his murder weapon, but then he carefully bathes the dead bodies, with water taking on a cleansing purpose.

The scene with Catherine's red dress however suggests that it is the more innocent part of Carl's mind that is portrayed as a young boy, who is seeing Catherine as his salvation.

2.3 TRANSFORMATIONAL COSTUME MOVEMENT

SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN (US 2012, D: RUPERT SANDERS)

Rupert Sanders adapts the classic German fairy-tale “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” for the big screen. Sander’s version puts “The Evil Queen” Ravenna (Charlize Theron) into the centre of the plot by giving her a conceivable background story. Ravenna is a powerful sorceress and has a supernatural dark army under her command. She and her brother Finn leave a path of destruction behind them and now turn towards the kingdom of Snow White’s father, the widowed King Magnus to gain new power. Enticed by Ravenna’s beauty and innocent looks, King Magnus marries Ravenna, only to be betrayed in their wedding night when Queen Ravenna kills her newly wedded husband and conquers the kingdom with the help of her brother and her dark powers. The young princess Snow White is locked up in a tower, where she’s imprisoned for the following years to come. As the years pass by Ravenna builds her reign of tyranny. She prevents her own decay by devouring the youth of other women, staying young and beautiful. With Snow White (Kristen Stewart) reaching the age of eighteen, Ravenna’s power seem to fade and by questioning her Magic Mirror, Ravenna has to learn that Snow White has surpassed her as “the Fairest” and is a threat to her reign, Snow White’s death however and the consumption of her heart will grant Ravenna true immortality in return. Before Ravenna can get hold of Snow White to translate these cruel plans into action, Snow White manages to flee into the Dark Forest, a strange and dangerous place. When Ravenna’s brother fears to enter the forest without guidance, they hire “the Huntsman” (Chris Hemsworth) who has wandered the Woods before, to help them retrieve Snow White. The Huntsman turns against Ravenna, when he meets Snow White and helps her to escape by leading her through the Dark Forest. Queen Ravenna’s character feels like the most developed character in this adaptation. This is due to Theron’s captivating performance, but also thanks to the exquisite wardrobe choices of Queen Ravenna. Costume designer Colleen Atwood created the most stunning medieval goth-couture for Queen Ravenna. Death is

literally clinging to the queen as Atwood carefully has woven symbols of death like bones and bird skulls into all of her outfits (Fig. 18)



Fig. 18: Charlize Theron as Queen Ravenna in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, 2012. (Sanders, 2012)

In Fig. 18 we can see the tiny bird skulls draped around Ravenna's neckline, standing out pale against the black fabric, as well as the intricate metal jewellery on her fingers that seem to resemble the claws of a raptor. These morbid details on Ravenna's outfits not only indicate her cruelty and darkness, but are also hinting her shapeshifting powers, that are mainly relevant for this thesis. These powers unfold when Ravenna's brother Finn and his men were able to track down Snow White and the Huntsman, but Finn gets killed by the Huntsman, before he can seize Snow White.

Furious with anger and grief and weakened by her brother's death. Ravenna is now determined to take things into her own hands and kill Snow White herself.

We see Ravenna standing in the throne room dressed in an opulent golden damask dress and a floor length cape with the most dramatic standing collar (Fig. 19) The image demonstrates power and dominance, Ravenna channelling all her remaining powers to finally end her nemesis.



Fig. 19: Charlize Theron as Queen Ravenna in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, 2012. (Sanders, 2012)



Fig. 20: Raven Cloak designed for Ravenna in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, 2012. (Atwood, 2012)

The cape is entirely covered in black feathers with an iridescent sheen (Fig. 20).

As Atwood is interviewed by John Horn for the LA Times, she mentions the elaborate work that went into the cape:

“It took a milliner two weeks to sew hundreds of black cock feathers into Theron’s avian outfit for the scene. “Each feather is individually placed and manipulated” (Atwood, 2012)

In this attire Queen Ravenna visits Snow White, disguising herself as Snow Whites childhood friend William and poisons her. The moment the queen wants to cut Snow

White's heart out, the Huntsman rushes to her rescue and Queen Ravenna disperses into a cloud of raven birds with just one big movement of her cloak (Fig. 21).



Fig. 21: Chris Hemsworth as Huntsman attacks Charlize Theron as Ravenna as she transforms into raven birds in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, 2012. (Sanders, 2012)

Even though this transition is mainly created by the department for Visual Effects, the costume played a decisive part in making it believable. As a guest of the Costume Guild's podcast, hosted by Chris Laverty, Atwood mentions that this costume was the first one that had to be finished, as it would be handed over to the Visual Effects team.

Ravenna's raven cloak was the starting point for the VFX team to create colour, texture and transition of Ravenna's transformation. The movement of the cloak we can see in the screenshots, "prepares" next shot, the images of the cloud of birds. In the podcast Atwood also speaks about the importance of movement in her work. "I try to make costumes, so they move, which is very important to me. You can make a big costume but if it doesn't move and people can't do anything in it, it becomes redundant" (Atwood, 2021). This highlights how she considers the idea of movement in her work, like we have seen before, with Edward's costume in *Edward Scissorhands*.

In the next scene of *Snow White and The Huntsman*, Ravenna transforms back, the ravens dropping lifeless to the floor in the throne room, Ravenna emerging from a

pile of feathers and black liquid (Fig. 22). Her entire only costume is covered in thick oily liquid, the feathers of her cape are matted and dull. When the feather cloak looked majestic and mystical before, empowering Ravenna, it now seems to drag her down. Heavy from the black liquid it binds her to the floor. Concealing her body features, the cloak is now taking away her beauty and letting her appear more like a creature than a human. The feather cloak is again the link that connects the “real world” with the visual effects of the ravens.



Fig. 22: Charlize Theron as Queen Ravenna crawling towards the Magic Mirror in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, 2012. (Sanders, 2012)

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that the movement is a fundamental yet often overlooked aspect of a costume design, that has an impact on the actor as well as the way the audience perceives costume. Movement alongside colour, silhouette and texture, serves as a semiotic tool, that enhances character development, emotion and storytelling

Through an analysis of key cinematic examples of the moving costume, we could see the varying effects that the excessively moving costume can have and how it might be decisive to the narrative of the scene. In *Cinderella* and *Crimson Peak*, expansive, exaggerated garments occupied space, creating striking visual moments, that reinforced character identity and emotional depth. In *The Cell*, movement transcended natural forces with the costume manipulated by unseen supernatural powers to evoke a dreamlike and ghostly atmosphere. Finally in *Snow White and The Huntsman*, movement became transformational, enabling Queen Ravenna's metamorphosis.

Initially, I struggled to find literature that directly addressed the intersection of movement and costume in film. But the more I delved into this very specific topic, the available material and sources seemed to expand more and more.

By recognising movement as an essential aspect of costume design, I gained a deeper understanding of the impact of costume on cinematic storytelling, and I will continue to expand my knowledge in this area, for I believe it will strengthen my abilities in costume design.

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