Film Costume as a Visual Narrative Element; Defining the Abstract Emotions of the Film Viewer via Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

Jelena VOJKOVIĆ

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Textile Technology, Department od Fashion Design, Student of Master's Programe Theory and Culture of Fashion, Croatia
jelena@rrgr.com

ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt to try to define the semiotic elements of film costumes that result with certain final feelings of the viewer. Looking through the semiotic theory of both Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin and the specifics of (theatre and) film costume as a means of influencing the viewer and his/her thoughts, feelings and overall catharsis, the identity of a certain film has been set through an analysis of various elements. Furthermore, it has been noticed that psychological results by one observing a film can be various and lean more on known philosophical and psychological tendencies i.e. Freud's theories or the ones of M. Merleau-Ponty or Lacan. To make it less verbatim, the example for the analysis that has been chosen is the 1982 science fiction film Bladerunner directed by Ridley Scott. With surreal messages and multi-layered meanings of its visual and audio presentation, it seemed like a perfect starting point for the research of the subconscious mind of the viewer. Finding a non-invasive approach to viewer's impression, the costume itself could be observed both independently and in correlation with other film elements. By combining the results of all film levels via a visual psychological test by Robert Plutchik, known as Plutchik's wheel of emotions, it is plain to see that a final impression still lies in a personal analysis. We find a prevalence of certain thoughts that lead the viewer to change his/her perception and, ultimately, to catharsis.

KEYWORDS

Film, aura, authenticity, psychoanalysis, emotion, catharsis

INTRODUCTION

Although the philosophical tenets of every film are complex, they favour a personal analysis. But the story itself comes from a book or a screenplay and it is very simple and easy to understand in its structure, which contributes to the atmosphere, as do other elements which will be presented in this analysis, including costumes as a very important piece of visual information. This approach is aimed at breaking down costumes in order to show the process of collecting impressions during watching which lead to a final catharsis in the viewer. The method whereby I will collect the impressions which appear while watching a film involves showing emotions via Robert Plutchik's method and his diagram, the wheel of emotions and theory presented in 2011 [1].

THEORETICAL FRAME

Aura of art form

In his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* Walter Benjamin looks on art and its existence in a world in which everything is gradually losing its value. I will use this theory in an attempt to link the notion of an exalted work of art and the notion of artificial repetition present in the film's dramatic composition and to show what the original means in relation to a replica.

The human sensory reaction to a work of art is not just biological or natural but also historical. In Marxist terms, Benjamin looks on changes in art that are provoked by changes in the economy. Through reproduction, a work of art becomes more produced and less unique, getting farther from its primary purpose, becoming a means. What makes the work authentic is the presence of a magical or supernatural force which stems from its uniqueness, and it is manifested in the perceptive space between the work and the consumer. Due to the mass reproduction of works of art in modern times, that aura is missing. The aura is a consequence of the existence of a work of art in space and time, and it is linked to the idea of authenticity, whereas a reproduced work (of art) is never fully present. Authenticity cannot be reproduced because, paradoxically, it disappears due to the very fact that everything is reproduced. At the same time, an original also loses in importance and authority because it is reproduced. The viewer constantly tries and needs to bring the work closer, thereby contributing to the loss of the work's aura. If the copy is near the viewer, he/she lives in a replicated reality and moves towards the destruction of uniqueness. Traditional art requires distance and contemplation, whereas modern approaches put themselves at the front and appear as imperatives. They become a distraction (as opposed to contemplation). The distraction has a social role: it replaces the viewer's thoughts with moving images and the viewer stops thinking. That is how the masses think, looking for a way out in what is empty; while contemplation is seen as the author's domination over the masses, art absorbs the viewer, while in the case of a distraction, the viewer swallows a work of art. Looking at that through film, dealing with art is actually a state of distraction or distancing – the audience examines but is mentally absent. The end result is ennui and loss of the time and space in which one can think.

Art originated from ritual and was dependent on its aura, whereas in modern times it is free of its dependence on ritual. As a result, experiences related to ritual and tradition are lost, and thereby the autonomy of art is lost, too [2]. Benjamin sees tradition and ritual as mostly negative, but both, of course, depend on the degree of localised knowledge, individual thinking and life circumstances, an individual's uniqueness in the same life circumstances. If a work of art is taken out of the context of tradition, it is put in an entirely new atmosphere and given new meaning. In that case, the link with ritual and tradition is lost and the work lacks autonomy.

Benjamin looks at ritual and tradition as a connotation of local knowledge, individual life surroundings, an individual's uniqueness and his/her personal world, and he has a markedly melancholic attitude because of the loss of said values [3]. On the other hand, the loss of tradition gives a work of art the opportunity to manifest itself in a new life environment for a reader, viewer or listener.

A work of art is separated from its past and is brought into new connotations via the consumer and his/her perception. It is given an entirely new function through the reaction of the masses, it is separated from the initial idea and policy, and is measured through an individual or a group reaction (such as viewers' reaction to a film).

A film frees the viewer from the limiting modern environment through acceleration or "entering the frame", thereby widely expanding images and notions. Benjamin compares that effect with Dada's intention to use caricature to show the absurdity of the modern world and point out unpredictability in creativity [4]. Dada-

ists shuffle the everyday and artistic segments and conventions in order to oppose dominant assumptions. Benjamin points out the importance of active use or tactile experience over optical or contemplative use. Art should be participative and interactive [4]. As an example, he mentions tourists who contemplate a building in an unknown city, while the participation of the building's user is tactile. However, tactile use does not come consciously but through habit – even an absent-minded person can develop habits. Thereby the art of today becomes art which educates or builds habits.

This dual process of the destruction and reconstruction of meaning becomes important for the renewal of humankind.

In film (television and photography), we notice that the scenes presented are understandable and acceptable only from the position and angle in which they are shot. An artificially created reality without the shooting equipment which appears completely real actually gives the false impression of a work of art because it is in truth a new reality. Works of art are also made of differently treated parts. For example, an artist paints a painting in segments, whereas a film is created by splicing previously cut parts. Films also contain aspects of the unreal and can be seen via the smallest segments (image, frame), stopped, accelerated and slowed down, analysed via the tiniest details.

Art has always been prone to reproduction. For example, before the age of mechanical reproduction, books were copied by hand. TV and radio are media manipulated by switches which turn on and off, accelerate and slow down moving images. But Benjamin does not think that every modern technology is progressive and that only certain of its consequences lead to the politicisation of art [4].

Humankind becomes a contemplated object in itself, an object of observation and, according to Benjamin, becomes alienating. This becomes the accepted form of creating and consuming culture. Every time a new medium experiences this progressive form, it distances people from expected reactions and provides new channels for experimental activity and new perspectives, creating a new and stronger system.

Benjamin calls this whole endeavour the "politicisation of art" – objects which are separated from the traditional and the conventional can be reshuffled in new ways by an active user. The art of reproduction is not just a result of technological development, but also a consequence of the political need to use art as a tool for the communication of certain ideas and rituals [5]. That is his response to the aestheticization of politics [6]. Perhaps originals have not disappeared completely, but the culture people experience in everyday life is generally mass-produced. Some segments are stimulated without the referenced original. The change Benjamin has noticed is the growing propaganda or mobilisation of the power of images (revolutionary newspapers, pamphlets, posters), but it is prone to manipulation and myth creation, notably if manipulated by power-wielders. In that case, imposed imperatives create an anxious world without personal reaction. The loss of distance between the primal meaning and its implementation into propaganda can create an indifferent world in which a revolution becomes a potential danger. If the audience consumes a work of art but is imprisoned in myth or imposed subjectivity, the revolutionary power of art is brought into question. Danko Grlić notes that the aura refers to the unrepeatability of a work of art which characterises a specific work as exalted and as one which carries some spiritual values, which is what we are looking for in every film analysis. Interestingly, Danko Grlić also notes that art has a human mission, to say what the human world must be like in order to remain human – art will be able to do that when the technical civilisation stops dictating what art should be like [7]. That once again proves the multiple layers of dramatic composition and experience, allowing us to undergo a catharsis and look at the film through theory and practice.

Authenticity of a work of art

Benjamin says that, with the appearance of photography, the artistic process of creating by hand was replaced by the eye looking through the lens. What ensues is the technical reproduction of the art of painting: the painting as the old form and the photograph as the new. Unlike a painting, which could be reproduced only manually, a photograph undergoes technical reproduction. What certainly contributes to the impression of and enriches the path to a catharsis is that in the case of photographs in motion (film), we add the sound impression by giving the ear a role in the creation of a work of art [8].

A specific work of art is comprised of the "here and now". They refer to the physical presence of the work (here) and the relationship to the work (now). Still, this research deals with feelings after watching a film, with how and why it is created, with explaining why the viewer feels the way he/she feels and why this is a long-lasting state, not just the state pertaining only to the moment of watching.

The abovementioned "one-off existence" of a work is certainly a prerequisite for the subsequent impression we are trying to trace. Talking about Benjamin, Grlić says that the progress of technique hides not just the loss of the authentic in a work of art, but also the inauthenticity of people and their survival [6]. Grlić says that technique has intended its development for the development of the technical, which will take issue with "humanity" because the later is unpredictable. Human individuality does not have the constant and standardised course that technical development demands, which is why said development brings its authenticity into question [7].

Regardless of the possibility to technically reproduce a work and its repeated use, this film certainly proves its auracity even after watching.

Film

Walter Benjamin dedicated his philosophical life to the changed role of art at the turn of the 20th century. The change was mirrored in the arrival of photography, and later film, and he claims that they led to the death of the aura and the expansion of perception [6]. The aura also refers to the meaning of symbols, which I'm showing in this analysis of the costumes within a certain science fiction film. Symbols always point to something outside or refer to a work's special status which ranks it as a classic [10].

Benjamin posits one of the most significant, broadest and bravest tenets in film theory. A text from 1920 in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project* deals with the past, the present and the experience of recognising an object through its imposed values at a specific moment of perception. He analyses *being in the now* and compares it to what we call the present in chronological time.

What introduces film into that theory is its dependence on the process of editing and editorial thinking. He examines the interaction of the present and the past through the historical-materialist philosophy of time. He defines the present as a distillate of the past, positing the following argument: the dialectic penetration and actualisation of the previous context brings into question the current action or view. Benjamin even compares such action with the lighting of the flame of the past by means of the latent ember of the past that is contained in the present. He also highlights the discontinuity of film in the continuity of film, using it as a tool in man's adaptation and his perceptive extensions in the age of modern progressive technology. It is necessary to learn to *read* images in motion, withstand the constant metamorphosis of photography and recognise the sequences which make a film. The ability to accept and process images which are presented to us, while being stretched in every direction, sets multitasking as a canon of perception, and this way of adopting information has been noticed in all the areas of art.

Semiotics

The semiotics in any film is connected and carefully worked out in every segment of its impression and leads to a complete catharsis caused by the viewer's understanding of the author's poetics. Such an analysis stems from my need to define the feeling which appears after the viewing and which cannot be linked to only one segment of the film. For example, the melancholy I experience while watching a film needs to be proven through an analysis of the segments and their semiotic values. I am of the opinion that such an analysis may be applied to any work of art which we can break down to units of its effect. If we approach a work selectively, we will collect a score of impressions which we place within a set form of research.

The psychologist Robert Plutchik considers eight unconventional emotions as basic: joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, anticipation, anger and disgust. His graphic model, the wheel of emotions [11], illustrates those eight emotions in numerous variations, showing how they relate to one another, including the possibility that at certain moments one emotion can very easily turn into another, even a complete opposite. In that way, we can clearly perceive emotions, which can sometimes be unexplainable and overwhelming. Ranked by intensity (colour) and oppositeness (position), they create an interesting illustration of a person's current emotional state – the darker the colour, the stronger the emotion. The more we know about emotions, the better we understand how various emotions are interlinked and how they can change over time.

A film's costume greatly affects the viewer and fashion itself. Clothes in the form of costumes which have great semiotic significance and influence sociocultural circumstances become iconic costumes. Since film, as a series of photographs in motion, contains sign language in all its segments, we find those values also in the costume which an actor wears, the clothes, the fashion within a film. In that way, viewers can relate to a certain character, thereby accepting a piece of clothing or the impression thereof as iconic. The costume is related to a number of exit forms: film, character, actor and the viewer's impression. Costumes are not just functional, they are images which function independently and, by not relying on a character, a body or narration, they have a metaphoric role and provide a deep/deeper context for a character's look [12].

A film character with iconic status necessarily gives the character's costume iconic significance – a viewer can recognise a character just by a picture of a piece of clothing, without having watched the film [13]. Thereby a (film) costume, alongside other elements, becomes a semiotic unit of a certain cultural context. As for the visual system code, visual communication is always coded in such a way that the community understands it – if a certain code is considered transparent, that is so only because all members of a community recognise and can read the code. The viewer, and thereby the community, is influenced by the image – the image in motion – of a film [14].

A film's costume is part of film's semiotics which divides language into linguistic and visual signs. I aim to analyse the costume through elements of Barthes's, Saussure's and Benjamin's theories and their previously mentioned semiotics, based on the signifier and the signified. I'm taking the example of the spoken and written word *tree,* which is a material image and the manifestation of a notion – the signifier and the material image (of a tree) that is attached to that word – signified – and which creates a kind of concept. *Tree* has different connotations with regard to the signified, i.e. the mental image of the person adopting the word. According to that key, clothes also carry certain meanings which create emotion towards and within a character, whereby iconic costumes represent a wider context, not just the one within a film. Moreover, it is understood that in every film (realistic or fictional) objects/costumes are not real objects/costumes, only references. Acting, especially non-verbal acting, in theatre and in film suggests that a costume assumes the role of a visual narrator. Such a costume must satisfy certain expectations on the observer's part and be visually satisfying. The clothes, hairstyle and fashion accessories within a costume are culturally coded and indicative, jointly creating the *artificial* personality of a character.

Below the mind

Film, being primarily a visual artform, serves us the psychological references in form and content, which lead us to our final result [18]. The fact that film and psychoanalysis originated together at the turn of the 20th century further emphasizes this connection. Film and psychology tend to be a base of the process; on the other hand, psychoanalysis becomes an upgrade of understanding the layers of viewers' impression. Freud's work *Interpretation of Dreams* is a key title for the development of psychoanalysis in film. It has helped Freud's theory of psychoanalysis gain an edge in serious scientific circles. Moreover, film is a scientific invention, and Freud has linked his innovative interpretation of dreams to the science of psychology. Another moment in the rise of the psychoanalytic film theory was Jacques Lacan and his revolutionary approach to Freud's base foundations [19]. The most common subject for understanding the given topic was his essay *Mirror Stage as Formative I function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience* that influenced the approach to the act of spectatorship. That brought us to understanding the self-identity and how we approach film *per se*, giving it a value that puts us in a role of a co-maker rather than just a viewer. Referring to a young child that has only one way to observe him/herself in the mirror, Lacan concludes that one sees the wholeness of itself without experiencing it entirely.

Freud's and Lacan's theories degenerated psychoanalytic film theory that fabricated a bridge between scientists and artists. In time when psychoanalysis was at the height of its impact on film, main novelties in analysing viewers impression were introspection and reflexivity [18].

This notion can be crucial for understanding the layers of a film and what it means for the viewer/spectator. The spectator looks for known semiotic keys (programmed by a specific social order) to translate the technical language of film into his/her Freudian subconscious area [19].

It is also important to point out another Freud's peer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who explains psychoanalysis as a certain form of subjectivation manifested in the creative conquest of ourselves. That being said, it is more than clear that the base for understanding any artform lies in the viewer. In his essay, *Film and the new Psychology*, he points out that one uses a certain film vocabulary, a syntax and that is why he/she is not influenced by it [18]. That brings us closer to the conclusion of this essay.

ANALYSIS BY EXAMPLE: Costume

In order to make the best analysis possible, we'll take as an example the two main characters of Ridley Scott's science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982). One of the most popular science fiction films that is constructed of a series of psychoanalytic intertextualities for the characters as well as the viewers. The direct link to its complex dramaturgical thread and how the dreams reflect our reality and vision sets Freud's "I dream, therefore I am" in a right perspective for this thesis. It also brings a new tool to analyse the film itself along with the aftertaste of the audience [18].

The two characters are a male and a female and their obvious polarity makes it easier to compare them with each other. They also give us the most information within the context of the story.

By merging and combining the results of respondent viewers we apply it to Plutchik's graphic wheel and along with other segments of the film come up with a solid graphic view of emotions.

Man's noir costume for the character of Deckard (Harrison Ford)

Characteristics: 1940s business clothes have a big influence on film noir - the good and the bad guys have a similar costume/clothing, a markedly elegant look - suit, hat, trench coat.

Inspiration and influences: Phillip Marlowe in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* and Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep.*

Woman's noir costume for the character of Rachel (Sean Young)

Characteristics: femme fatal; red lipstick, low collar, skirt, high heels, fur coat, long gloves, cigarettes.

Inspiration and influences: old Hollywood glamour, clothes with sharp lines and wide shoulders, a retro-futurist pastiche, the influence of custom-made suits – suiting, tailoring, shoulder pads, tight waist, soldier's silhouettes, achromatic grey and beige, the use of silver threads to create a subtle light play, references to the 1940s, 1950s and 1980s.

Given Barthes's classification of characters by five image codes, I will illustrate how we can read in the meanings of the abovementioned characters' costumes which bring us to a certain state or emotion [15].

The character of Rick Deckard in the context of a human

1. Hermeneutic code: composition of elements in an image - clothes intended for office work as well as protection from the rain, a man with a uniformed business style.
2. The seme of the image and its connotations: the smallest unit of meaning – the shirt signifies tidiness, uniformity, practicality; the tie signifies formality, sophistication, norm, professionalism in every occasion, courteousness; the brown leather belt signifies practicality; the tweed trousers signify tradition, being comfortable while working; the brown trench coat signifies a detective.
3. The symbolic and cultural code of the image: the context of the character, a servant of the law; for Deckard, the colour of the shirt signifies that, although uniformed, he is not subject to norms, he is a rebel; the tie signifies that he respects norms, it matches the shirt, because he is an individual after all; the brown leather belt signifies that he cultivates tradition and past times, it signifies wistfulness; the tweed trousers mean being comfortable while chasing possible replicants; the brown trench coat signifies that he is an unhappy wistful man doing an inhumane job.

The character of Rachel in the context of a 'positive' replicant

1. Hermeneutic code: composition of elements in an image – immaculate conservative business clothes, hair and makeup; womanly appearance.
2. The seme of the image and its connotations: the smallest unit of meaning – the jacket signifies a business context, professionalism, uniformity; the tight skirt signifies elegance, modesty, unavailability; the pumps signify a classic style, elegance, domination; the Pompadour hairstyle signifies attitude, courage, individuality; the red lipstick signifies elegance, femininity, nurture; the cigarette signifies vice, elegance (Hollywood's Golden Age).
3. The symbolic and cultural code of the image: the context of the character, a replicant or a human? For Rachel, the jacket signifies that she is obliging, cold, an assistant subject to human norms, an intelligent, strong and fatal woman who may at the same time, judging by the costume's lines, be non-human; the tight skirt signifies that she is submissive, quiet, feminine, unavailable, imprisoned, reserved; the pumps signify that she is boxed in, imprisoned, well-mannered, cultivated; the Pompadour hairstyle signifies maintaining an identity, copying what is in fashion, the need to dress up, the need for humanity; the red lipstick signifies maintaining an identity, attempting to prove her humanity, it's the result of a traumatic experience because she doesn't know her origin, trivialising the situation.

This model of breaking down the meaning of the parts of the costumes' visual context greatly contributes to understanding the characters, the dramatic composition and, finally, the film, as well as the other elements which create an impression and lead to a catharsis. In analysing a film, it is necessary to write down the emotions that appear while watching it.

Following is the conclusion of the costume analysis:

- key feelings elicited by the man's costume: trust, panic, fear, wistfulness, interest, anticipation, caution
- key feelings elicited by the woman's costume: calmness, admiration, wistfulness, sadness.

The final result in this case is visually presented by combining these two categories [16].

Moreover, we use a graphic presentation of the research and the findings; mentioned alongside every segment of the film during the research are the emotions elicited in the viewer, and I illustrate every segment separately so that eventually we can join them into a single graphic and a coloristic presentation, thus gaining insight into the atmosphere of the work of art, its aura, how it changes the viewer's state as well as perception and leads to a catharsis.

Colours are added to the emotions by Plutchik's method as well as the numerical value. The repetition of the emotions resulted in a specific graphic presentation in which the pattern and intensity of the colours point to the final result: which emotion (emotions) is prevalent and what quadrant of the diagram it is in.

CONCLUSION

Moving images can serve as vehicles of philosophical consideration. Many philosophers deeply negate the importance of the moving image, for example Plato's *Republic*, which mentions a cave and a shadow play that becomes a reality for those used to its manifestation [17]. The link with Plato's presentation and the elaboration of the film's impression is strong: in both cases we sit in a dark environment, listen to sounds and watch moving images, but in our case we do it voluntarily and we are free to move from reality to fiction and vice versa. We consciously allow ourselves to be seduced, we deliberately negate disbelief and toy with the impression of reality.

One can learn from film in every case: if it is like the real world, we learn new ways of dealing with it; if it is the complete opposite, we learn to understand and compare the possible and the existing, and we are aware of the limits of the real. Cinema was created for entertainment, but film is certainly a subject which provokes the thought process on the basis of the visual, and its potential to raise philosophical topics (aside from personal ones) has often seemed neglected and unappreciated in practice. Even when a film doesn't have the intention to convey a deeper thought via its screenplay, director, actors, visuals etc, the final product may result in a catharsis because the meaning and significance of any form of art is not entirely in the creator's control.

With this research, I arrive at an explanation of the sensations in the viewer with some overviews on various philosophical and psychological directions that could be stepping stones for this kind of approach to film analysis. Also, the personal feeling of melancholy I mention at the very beginning and the aura of this work of art can be explained through the repetition of wistfulness and anticipation while watching the film. That *something* which causes a change of the emotional, even spiritual, state must certainly be conditioned by something, and the fact that such a sensation is repeated in the same way every time we watch the film confirms its deeper intention. The poetics of the author (or a group of authors) is synthesised in a single message carried by every signified in the work, it is presented and implemented almost imperceptibly and has key significance for considering the film.

This theoretic and graphic presentation of the analysis of any segment allows for a deeper analysis of the material. It is important to decide at the very beginning what the starting research categories are, analyse each separately and finally make an analysis of all the set parameters (emotions that surely come from the unconscious mind) in order to get a graphic presentation of the viewer's abstract impression and relationship to the work of art.

By doing that, we can materialise any abstract artistic manifestation into a scientifically measurable category.

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