Some Like It Haute:

The Role of 1930s Hollywood Cinema in the Rise of the U.S. in the International Fashion Industry

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The year is 1936. The scene is a well-appointed space, looking a bit like a palace, perhaps, but not quite authentic enough to pass for true royal glamour. Nevertheless the walls shine with glints of gold in the dim light. There are seats covering most of the floor, in orderly rows, all facing the single stage at one end of the large chamber. There are hushed murmurs and quiet whispers exchanged through the still and pregnant air. The room is not empty; to the contrary it is packed with individuals, compensating for their lack of royal pedigree with airs and attire to rival society's most elite. The majority of the crowd is here to enjoy themselves, to behold the fruits of their labor. Others, however, have a much more malicious intent: the piracy of whatever fashions they are about to behold. These malevolent individuals will, for a handsome payment, relay whatever they have beheld to whichever garment manufacturer has paid them for this express purpose. What these eager onlookers await with bated breath, pens and notepads at the ready, is not a Paris haute couture show, however. They are in a movie theater, and the fashions they so ardently desire to replicate are those of the silver screen.

The above scene is a fictionalized depiction of events that very much occurred throughout the period known as popularly referred to as "Hollywood's Golden Age." "Fashion piracy" was not limited to that time and place, Los Angeles in the 1930s, but it was a particularly central component of the transformations that era saw in the landscape of the American fashion industry. What is unique about Tinseltown in that decade is that its influence in fashion was at its strongest point, before or since, in both the domestic and international spheres. Observers of the period, both contemporary ones and more recent scholars like Bernard Roshco, express the idea that "until the 30's there was an American garment industry, but nobody acknowledged there was such a thing as

American fashion."[1] The development of "American fashion" was linked hand-in-hand with the development of film and the influence of its costumes on the movie-going public of fashion consumers.

The fact that Hollywood costume designers and their work played a major role in what women put in their closets during the 1930s is well known and documented by historians of both fashion and film. However, the implications of that fact are little explored, and the various branches of media, economics, society, and international fashion relations that stem from that fact are not integrated by historical inquiries. Furthermore, while most scholars who analyze the development of American fashion point to the significant role of Hollywood costume design, they often fail to put it into an international context, where its importance is most vital. Curiously, many contemporary media sources recognized the power Hollywood had in fashion as a rising threat to Parisian design supremacy, though practically all recent scholarship fails to emphasize this important feature.

The following is an attempt to remedy to that neglect, a more internationally inclusive exploration of the ways in which Hollywood's American costume designers stimulated the emergence of an American fashion industry, one whose creative and technical sway rivaled that of the traditional fashion powerhouse of Paris. It begins with the essential background information required to understand the historical context and terminology of the 1930s fashion industry and segues into an examination of the key people, designs, and moments in film and sales that demonstrate the rise and power of Hollywood as a prominent force in fashion. The discussion will include analysis of the

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[1] Bernard Roshco. *The Rag Race: How New York and Paris run the breakneck business of dressing American women,* 109. Hereafter cited as Roshco.

ways Hollywood promoted and exploited to its sartorial clout, as well as how the media and the public experienced both the films and the fashion imbedded within them. In the process a greater understanding of how Hollywood built the U.S. garment industry into a influential *fashion* industry is made evident, and the importance and challenges of placing this historical development into an international context will be explored.

This paper seeks to root out to what extent the influence Hollywood films had on the American fashion industry increased that industry's share of the worldwide marketplace, and to address the problems that arise from examining that same influence. It explores how films played a role in the economic and artistic tensions between American (whose manufacturing industry was especially centered in New York, though inspired by Hollywood) power in the fashion world and that of the long-held style dictators in Paris. Susan Perez Prichard cites a 1933 Vogue article to support her conclusion "that Hollywood posed a threat to Paris as soon as 1931. Women that could afford to follow Paris did so, but the mass of women comprising the cinema audience followed the film stars, as did the couturiers themselves."[2]

As Prichard's comment indicates, contemporary media sources indicate an awareness of Hollywood's sartorial power in relation to that of Paris. Histories of the fashion industry written since that time, however, do not explore the issue with that global perspective, save cursorily (at best). This study does not intend to definitely state that Hollywood *was more powerful* in fashion than Paris, but merely to raise an awareness of the importance of the comparison, and to explore the ways in which such a discussion is of great validity and importance. This study relies on a variety of secondary

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[2] Susan Perez Prichard. *The Influence of Hollywood Film Costume on American Fashion in the 1930s*, 11. Hereafter cited as Prichard.

sources, mainly the same histories that neglect the transnational perspective of this paper, but couples them with contemporary media sources (films, newspapers, studio publicity materials) that support the necessity of maintaining that very perspective.[3]

The story of Hollywood and American fashion begins, not in the United States, but in France, where the most desirable and influential fashion in the industrialized world had originated for at least three hundred years. The words "Paris" and "fashion" are closely linked in the minds of many. Since the reign of Louis XIV, if not before, Paris has reigned as the paragon of society, art, and fashion across the Euro-American cultural landscape. In more recent times, however, Paris has faced various challengers to the title of "the Capital of Fashion." The greatest threat in the interwar years of the early twentieth century was not New York, or London, but Hollywood. During this period, fashion trends were fomented and set by films, particularly films from the Southern California "Dream Factory," and copied the world over. This stood in direct opposition to the way that designs that came from the couture ateliers in Paris were considered supreme. There was some interplay between Paris and Hollywood, with New York and London caught between the two, economically and artistically, as the highly profitable industry sought a source of innovation to guide the sartorial desires of the ever-widening marketplace of the "modern woman."

Fashion historian Bernard Roshco describes the fashion industry as "the most risky, competitive, and plagiaristic business in the world."[4] In his book *The Rag Race*, Roscho describes the development of the Euro-American fashion industries up to 1963,

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[3] The majority of the materials used for this study were obtained through the University of California library system. Most of the primary sources used were obtained from online databases or the Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills.
[4] Roshco 3.

when his book was written. In the years between the penning of that study and this one, the "why's", and often the "how's", of fashion's inner-workings have changed little. For that matter, they have hardly changed since the early twentieth century when "ready-to-wear" designs enabled the masses to possess fashions that only the wealthy had previously been able to obtain. A thorough understanding of the state of the garment industry (and the effects of films upon it) in the 1930s requires a survey of the decades of sartorial revolution that preceded it.

Looking back through human history, there has been one overriding trend in fashion: it existed, if at all, only for the highest sliver of elite society. Additionally, it existed more or less equally for both men and women of the small affluent circle that had the leisure and time to care about what they wore more than whether or not their crops would fail. Fashion as an aristocratic plaything, seen perhaps at its most potent in the French court of Versailles, began a slow erosion as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the bourgeoisie blossomed, greater numbers of people (increasingly, under Victorian gender ideals that labeled the field "feminine," women) garnered the interest and means to care whether or not their clothes were "in style."

Before exploring how "fashion" invaded the "clothing" closets of the masses, there is a vital distinction to make, one essential to any study of fashion. Clothing covers our bodies, protects us, and keeps us warm. Clothing refers to practical garments. Fashion, however, refers to transient, and not necessarily practical, preferences in style, cut, fabric, and other facets of a garment or its whole "look." Fashion is fueled by change and "evolution" and holds social meanings far beyond mere bodily covering. This study

deals with fashion, and the garment subset of costumes (designed for entertainment or disguising purposes with intent to convey a specific and singular idea in mind), yet it is important to keep in mind that clothing and fashion are not synonymous. Indeed, this is the tale of how the designs of the United States' "clothing" became "fashion."

SETTING THE SCENE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The roots to this story can be found as far back as collective human memory will allow, but the most vital seeds were sown at the turn of the last century. The importance of the occurrences in American fashion in the 1930s are seen most clearly when that period is compared to one just a generation earlier, a fashion era that was the precise opposite of that of the interwar years. The dawn of the twentieth century began much in the way of previous centuries, with fashion primarily accessible mostly to the moneyed. In fact, the glamour and impracticality of women's dress during the Gilded Age distilled fashion's influence even more, its excess limiting the availability of high fashion to only a very small segment of society. The bustled and corseted designs at the pinnacle of desirability required personalized fitting and customization for each client, and thus manufacturing was prohibitively costly and selective. Designers in Paris set the trends, and tailors and milliners the industrialized world over clamored to replicate Paris's decrees for the society women of Western capitalism who desperately wanted to convey their most sophisticated selves. Most women, however, did not have the luxury to know which bustle or ruffle was most desirable, let alone to afford to have it become their own.

However, in 1908 a shift began. In 1908 Parisian designer Paul Poiret introduced a new look, marked by straighter lines rather than the hyper-curvaceous cut of the early

Edwardian era. He loosened women's corsets and enabled manufacturers to start mass producing dresses that did not need the stringent personalization of more constricting styles. This trend grew, and in conjunction with the rise of department stores, meant "fashion was . . . being disseminated widely and with increasing speed."[5]

These changes occurred as women saw an increasing loosening of the social corset of Victorianism. The "New Woman" of the period was an empowered female, not the wilting flower idealized in decades past. As WWI approached, dresses came to reflect this freedom more and more as they became looser and looser. Women found employment and financial empowerment during the war, and while it abated when the men returned, women had reached a new and liberated status. This was also reflected in fashions of the period, which were by the 1920s marked by above-the-knees sack dresses and short bobbed (or boy-cut) hair for young women, much to the horror of ladies from earlier generations. Dresses in the height of fashion were simple, and a working-class woman could feel fashionable in a dress she could easily make herself. While the designs of Poiret, Chanel, and other French couturiers set these trends in Paris, the most popular looks quickly found their way into the closets of the masses. Manufacturers and department stores everywhere could construct and market these simply constructed styles with unprecedented efficiency and economy.

And as more and more newly empowered and financially emboldened women cared about fashion, they needed someone to set the standards of desirability. When fashion existed for the aristocracy, those privileged few had their own networks to set trends. A few elite women exhibited the most desirable "look" for a time, in conjunction

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[5] Elizabeth Ewing. *History of 20th Century Fashion,* 66. Hereafter cited as Ewing.

with designers, such as those in Paris, whose ateliers elite women could visit in person. The new marketplace, however, left a vacuum, for not every woman could see firsthand the tastemakers of fashion's hatching grounds. This, then, is the context in which films arose as the most powerful arbiters of fashion on a mass scale: films were "universal as no previous influence could have been."[6] As designer Elizabeth Hawes wrote in her 1942 book *Why Is A Dress?*, "A great mass of women in the United States are certainly influenced by the taste of a few rich women, either socialites or movie stars. I believe the movie stars have a far greater influence than the socialites."[7]

There are many reasons film had the clout that it did in disseminating trends, particularly during the 1930s. Some scholars, like Aristides Gazetas, emphasize the occurrence of the Great Depression, saying that "by 1935, it is estimated that close to 80 million viewers faithfully attended the movies each week. Some were escaping the hardships caused by unemployment and the Great Depression. What they viewed were film narratives depicting human beings triumphing over adversity, whatever the moral, economic or political causes."[8] This is a troublesome approach, despite the fact that many of the Hollywood films offered fictional narratives, grandiose sets and beautiful starring actors in stories of comedy or triumph. The Great Depression might have inspired some audience members to "escape" their perhaps bleak reality, but it also dampened the ability to pay for tickets. It is problematic to generalize that the Great Depression instilled a widespread desire, even need, for escapism, yet there was certainly a market for popular entertainments.

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[6] Ibid. 97.
[7] Elizabeth Hawes. *Why Is A Dress?* 33.
[8] Aristides Gazetas. *An Introduction to World Cinema,* 131.

The significant reach of cinema may perhaps be more easily attributed to its position as the only medium to portray visual images in motion—lifelike in ways that magazines, books, and the audio-based radio were not. The movies were a readily available outlet, despite rising competition from radio. Costume design was an especially attractive and alluring component of the movies, especially for women. Women could use fashion as a means of existing outside their given circumstances (a key use of fashion as a mode of expression). A wife might have children to care for and a husband out of work, but when she put on that one special dress she could tap into a fantasy where life was not so hard, and she could be just as strong or beautiful as her favorite starlet. The captivating antics of a dancing Ginger Rogers were greatly illuminated and emphasized by her swirling, outrageous dresses, a treat for the eyes and the imagination. Costume design also presented a practical showcase of templates women could utilize in creating their own clothes or selecting which to purchase. Radio may have been in-house entertainment for many families, but films offered an ocular diversion, the most effective means of disseminating fashion in motion.

The basic mechanics of how fashion was purveyed in film are at least as vital to this inquiry as the social and personal facets of consumer exposure and decision-making. During the 1930s a culture arose that unabashedly tied the studio system, its stars, and its fashions, to the fashion magazines and garment industry of the period. Newsreels included segments on the latest fashions and the stars who were wearing them. Where fashions in Paris were often linked to a designer's name, such as Chanel or Poiret, the fashionable women of the United States clamored not only for a designer, but for the designs themselves—designs given life and desirable meaning by stars.

The period's interplay between film and fashion was even more pervasive, for publicity materials generated by the studios were expansive in their marketing of fashions as well as films and stars. In some cases the marketing of fashion was incorporated into the narrative of the film itself. Films like *The Women* (1939) and the aptly named *Fashions of 1934* (1934) directly and bluntly showcased fashion as a lure to audiences, one that rivaled the considerable pull of star-power. The black and white film *The Women*, for instance, featured a single colored sequence—and it was nothing other than a fashion show! Films during the 1930s were a source of entertainment *and* marketing, as they were often accompanied by clever (if not subtle) marketing campaigns that made film fashions all the more desirable for the female audiences that consumed them. This was a symbiotic relationship that lured female audiences into the picture houses, and helped sell garments, as well.

The market was definitely ripe for this kind of exploitation. As described above, the Depression led to a large body of filmgoers, many of whom had reason to desire not only a good film in the theater but also the fashions shown in the film to take home. The shifting garment industry (shifting from older models of production to increasingly massed produced ones) hence found itself at high levels of production despite the dire economic straits of the period. Roshco notes that a report from the mid-30s claims that "'while the value of the product [dresses], exclusive of wash or house dresses, decreased from nearly $900,000,000 in 1929 to somewhere around $450,000,000 in 1935, the unit volume—the number of dresses actually bought—steadily increased."[9] Women were buying more dresses, but cheaper ones. This indicates a high interest level and desire to

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[9] Roshco 109.

purchase, though not the means. The very same escapist draw of high glamour that drew audiences into movie theaters, and also to department stores, was problematic because the glamorous films of Hollywood displayed an unadulterated luxury in costume design. Much of what women fell in love with onscreen, whether it was yards of silks and taffeta or ostrich feather gowns, was not transferrable to the closets of the average American housewife.

Considering the use of fashion in marketing campaigns and film narratives, it is evident many Hollywood studios were very aware by the 1930s that their films held immense power in the presentation and marketing of clothing via costume design. That was not the purpose of the film costumes, however, and denizens of Tinseltown remained quite estranged from the financial realities of the majority of the country. Paradoxically, it was often just this fanciful detachment that made film costumes so alluring. The costume designers and the stars who wore their designs during the Depression worked and paraded in a sort of bubble, wherein the possibilities of their expression were nearly boundless. Susan Perez Prichard describes the degree of agency and excess Hollywood's key sartorialists had at their disposal:

> The wardrobe budgets for films seemed almost limitless. This was evident with stars like Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo, who wore expensive and elaborately-made underclothes that only they could appreciate. It was not uncommon for an actress to wear a single gown that cost thousands of dollars. In studio wardrobe workrooms hundreds of seamstresses were employed. One costume might be worked on by a half-dozen skilled workers for weeks at a time.[10]

The actual designs worn by Hollywood's starlets were hardly practical for any market, let alone that in existence during the post-crash, pre-WWII years. However, the glamour

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[10] Prichard 9.

exuded by stars like Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Ginger Rogers was a siren call to many women, regardless of economic level. There existed, then, a vast and fertile market for the manufacture of garments similar in design to those showcased on the screen, but made via methods and of materials that kept prices low enough for the average consumer.

As much as Parisian designers set trends in design that were copied farther down the manufacturing chain by myriad manufacturers at various economic tiers, movies offered a desirable ideal that enabled the marketing of clothes the broader market could emulate, and sell. As Roshco states of the process generally, "the fashion business lives off imitation. Plagiarism is standard operating procedure and manufacturers copy higher-priced designs as soon as they show signs of becoming popular."[11] While popularity was hardly guaranteed in any production, for the business of filmmaking is always a gamble, much the same as fashion design, the garments presented in films were often (whether or not by the assurance of powerful publicity vehicles) insured visibility on a much broader scale than those of designers in New York or Paris. Paris may have stood as the summit of the fashion world, but its reach was blunted by its very nature as an exclusive enterprise. Classic Hollywood films were meant to reach as many individuals as possible, regardless of class, and were thus the most effective mode of sartorial dissemination up to that point.

More and more women could *see* fashions, then, but how did the garments they adored get from Greta Garbo's shapely torso into their own closets? There are a few processes by which this occurred, some more legally and morally acceptable than others. One way fashions were legally disseminated from the screen to the store was the

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[11] Roshco 11.

endorsed dissemination or replication of copies in fan magazines: "Modern Screen magazine offered copies of dresses designed by Orry-Kelly and worn by Olivia de Havilland as contest prizes. For women who sewed their own, magazines offered patterns of the stars' [sic] styles."[12] Studios sometimes authorized the spread of their designs (often altered to the available market, for the most glamorous screen styles were not often directly translatable into available mass-market materials), but there was a more insidious way the "average woman" would find the latest designs readily available to her.

The other tactic, one readily applied in both Hollywood and Paris and generally any- and everywhere else desirable fashions emanate from, was piracy. The pirating of clothing styles had been occurring in the wider realms of the fashion industry for decades, even centuries, as every designer and client had vied to create or wear the most "of-the-moment" designs possible at the earliest possible moment. However, with film's mass-communication capabilities Hollywood's costume design departments found themselves facing a new sea of potential for piracy. It was a huge dilemma for the film industry during the 1930s as the pressure to create new and important designs grew exponentially. Members of the press or others even closer to the film's production could and would, for a price, share sketches, swatches, and photographs with garment manufacturers, sometimes even before a film was released.

Hollywood costume designers understandably found this highly detrimental to the integrity of their creative processes, and the studios did not take it lightly, either. An M.G.M. publicity agent claimed in late 1933 that design piracy was a serious issue for the studio, but

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[12] Deborah Nadoolman Landis. *Dressed: A Century of Hollywood Costume Design*, 76. Hereafter cited as Landis.

> we are changing all that. Adrian's styles for Norma Shearer in 'Rip Tide' are so original and provocative that we have decided not to send out a single still, and Adrian's own drawings will only be seen by those immediately interested in connection with the picture. Everyone of this group is being sworn to secrecy. Other studios will likely take such measures to protect their style designs, too. We may even form a guild, with codes. We are also coming to a gentleman's agreement with the smarter shops throughout the country to boycott all copyists. They will agree not to purchase any designs known to have been pirated. If we can get the retailers to back us in this, and then advertise our styles as coming out of the U.S.A, instead of Paris, we should soon become the style center of the world.[13]

Some of these measures may seem rather extreme, and in fact the whole scenario can appear overblown. However, in a time when intellectual property laws were not so developed as they are today (though copyrights in the fashion industry remain greatly underdeveloped), access to the most cutting edge, and hence desirable, designs translated into a great deal of power and money. While not everything portended in the above statement came to fruition and design piracy continued in full force, the confluence of desirable and undesirable methods in creating what women wanted led to the overall effect of the rising prominence of the United States fashion industry, for a time in many ways fulfilling the publicity agent's desire that Hollywood "should soon become the style center of the world."

The contextual groundwork has now been laid for a more precise and specific understanding of just how, exactly, Hollywood became claimant to the title "style center of the world." The general modes and methods have been described above, but to understand how cinema costume design gained enough clout to rival designers like Coco Chanel, Madame Vionnet, and Elsa Schiaparelli, one must examine specific incidents,

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[13] Anna Whitaker. "Designers of Screen Fight Style Pirates: Copies of Stars' New Clothes Fill Shops Ere Film Released." Hereafter cited as Whitaker.

garments, and key figures in the industry. Before those facets of the tale come into play, however, it is also important to understand exactly where Hollywood stood at the beginning of the 1930s, particularly in regards to the dilemmas costume design presented at the dawn of this decade.

THE DESIGNERS: HOMEGROWN AND IMPORTED

Hollywood costume designers, like most cultural tastemakers in the Euro-American sphere (and probably other parts of the world over), were keenly aware of the power Paris wielded over the garment industry in terms of dictating fashions when and as it pleased, regardless of the implications for those who disseminated it. The film studios were victimized by processes and dictates of Paris, which could in a moment "decree" a change in shape or cut that rendered completely out-of-date already manufactured costumes or even an entire film. The pull towards the centuries old Paris-centric model of fashion design was strong, and even the studios could not help but turn towards the other side of the Atlantic from time to time. A group of Paris's top designers were drawn from their ateliers by studios eager for the "latest" creations from the most revered creators in the industry. From the early twenties onward, French designers with their presumably superior talents, were imported to Southern California. Curiously, however, very few of these transplants found more than brief, let alone extended, success while designing for the silver screen.

Major Hollywood studios like MGM and Paramount were facing financial trouble due to regular fashion caprice, fomented in Paris, and endorsed by the masses of blossoming fashion adherents that comprised the American film audience. In order to

combat the detrimental delays inherent in the filmmaking process (versus other forms of media especially), studio heads sought to fight fire with fire. It was in this way Coco Chanel found herself in Hollywood to fulfill the role of pre-emptive antidote:

> Chanel was signed up by Samuel Goldwyn in an effort to overcome the problems of shifting waistlines and hemlines that occurred in the 20s and early 30s. These changes had cost him a lot of money. His company had been forced to discard thousands of feet of film, because a change in hemline could make a film out of date in the interval between finishing a production and its actual release. Mr. Goldwyn blamed Paris for this, and decided he could beat them at their own game by hiring a French designer to predict the styles, and not leave him high and dry with a dated film.[14]

Coco Chanel, one of the most prominent designers in fashion history and the revolutionary founder of modern style, sky-rocketed to fashion fame and power in the early 1920s in Paris, where the once-milliner took simple styling, two-piece ensembles, trompe-l'oeil techniques, and men's knit fabrics and turned them into the essence of the new, emancipated woman. She was brought to Hollywood to work on a handful of occasions in the late twenties and early thirties. Pursued by studio executives like Samuel Goldwyn, Chanel agreed to come survey Hollywood for herself in 1930. She liked what she saw and agreed to lend her creative hand to a few films. She came onto the scene with enthusiasm and a fully formed philosophy towards the work she agreed to do. As she put it, "special fashion must be created for the cinema, or at least fashion must be interpreted, without its being lost from sight, since two traps can thus be avoided: that of making 'costumes,' artificial creations, or that of seeing the models rapidly outdated."

In Chanel's opinion, American movie stars did not understand fashion and felt adrift when confronting it, despite the enormous amounts of money they spent on

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[14] Elizabeth Leese. *Costume Design in the Movies*, 14. Hereafter cited as Leese.

clothing and the freedom they enjoyed when making their decisions. The result, therefore was a situation of

> anarchy and lassitude in the clothing world, something they would gladly leave behind. I am working considerably towards the creation of a cinema style. From another viewpoint, it is through the cinema that fashion can impose itself today. Until now, the cinema followed fashion, not through any fault of the artists, but through that of the directors, who either neglected the costume aspects or worked with second or third-rate establishments. Let's see—make me a few dresses worth six or seven hundred francs. And . . . what about the publicity benefits? No such thing! Publicity in the cinema context is not direct; designers who work for film can merely direct taste or create a trend . . .

Chanel's critique did not end here. She went on to assert that "female stars are not the only poorly-dressed [sic] individuals on screen. Too many walk-ons with ready-to-wear suits and borrowed tuxedos are utterly ridiculous in so-called evenings . . ."[15]

However, it seems that what had made her successful in her own right was not the recipe for success in costume design for the silver screen. Tensions were rife soon after the designer's arrival at Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer in 1931, where the well established star and noted fashion figure Gloria Swanson "insisted that Chanel knew nothing about designing for films."[16] After two films, Mervyn Le Roy's *Tonight or Never* (1931) and Lowell Sherman's *The Greeks Had A Word For Them* (1932), Chanel faced resounding failure as a costume designer for the American silver screen. Her designs were seen as lackluster and devoid of the filmic magic required in cinema wardrobes. Later critics echoed Chanel's sentiments of the time, writing, for example, that "the screen was devoid of elegance . . . these two films which were meant to show stunning fashion were of

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[15] Madelein Delpierre, et. al. *French Elegance in the Cinema,* 111. Hereafter cited as Delpierre.
[16] Leese 14.

surprising poverty."[17] This reception is surprising, considering that Chanel's couture designs in Paris were the pinnacle of fashion.

Perhaps her lack of success lay in the simplicity that had, across the Atlantic, made her so prominent. Prichard corroborates the suggestion that Chanel "was unable to adapt her rather simple clothes to the camera, which photographed them as plain and ordinary."[18] This points to an incongruity between film-based and high-end-designer fashions at a structural and design level, one that impacted to some extent the products and audiences Hollywood (and the U.S. more generally) and Paris could aspire to reach. This inspires the idea that as Hollywood gained momentum to rival Paris in terms of fashion design popularity, it was not merely the locations but also philosophies and approaches that were pitted against one another.

Scholars of Chanel's career have said that "to succeed, Chanel would have had to live in Hollywood and discuss things with the studio direction. But she did not have time, preferring to devote herself to her Parisian haute couture salon."[19] Chanel returned to Paris to continue her preferred work as a couturière, and Hollywood was back to fending for itself, innovating on the fashion landscape without the hand of the "high priestess of Paris fashion."[20] Chanel was not an utter and complete failure as a film costume designer, however, for despite her poor reception in the United States she had a healthy career designing costumes for French films. Chanel's greatest success in the United States as a film costume designer came from her last hurrah years later when, in the late 1940s, she collaborated on one more Hollywood production. Oddly, and tellingly, the costumes she

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[17] Delpierre 113.
[18] Prichard 13.
[19] Delpierre 114.
[20] Ibid. 111.

"designed" for that film were in fact pieces from a forthcoming Paris collection that she had shipped to Hollywood in advance of their debut in her store. This seems to provide only further evidence that her work for the Parisian catwalk was well accepted where her designs specifically fabricated for motion pictures were not desirable in the U.S.

Chanel was not the only Parisian designer to encounter difficulties when transplanted in Los Angeles at the behest of studio heads hoping to translate tried and proven French style onto the silver screen. The incomparable artistic fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli also fizzled in film costume design. The "Schiap," as she referred to herself and was known by familiars, was a groundbreaking designer who helped carry the new wave of fashion after Chanel broke the mould in the early 1920s. Schiaparelli ruled the 1930s as a great innovator of cut and style. The Italian-born, Paris-based designer is widely credited with the creation of the color "shocking pink." Schiaparelli was brought to Hollywood to design costumes for several films in the mid-thirties, but her efforts there fell flat and lacked the luster they enjoyed in couture salons. Despite her many credentials in the art and design worlds, and her undeniable influence on the shape of fashion (literally), costume design proved a match for her talents, just as it had for Chanel.

Another notable French designer who foundered in Hollywood was the Parisian stage costumer Erte, the direct predecessor of Adrian, the most renowned film costumer of the 1930s. Erte left MGM after a brief stint there in the mid- to late- 1920s, feeling the extravagance and sensibilities of his designs were not in sync with the whims of film producers that film costumers were subject to. Generally, and not exclusively in regard to imported French talent, costume designs found greater success beginning on that platform

rather than in their own right as just fashion designs, for "although some couturiers did create wardrobes for Hollywood films, it was more often the Hollywood costume designer who made a name in films and then established a business in custom or ready-to-wear design."[21] There were very few American designers outside of the film costume industry in this period however, and so the only ones successful enough to be invited to try their hand at screen work were those of Paris.

While Paris was prominent as an originator of many fashion trends and ideals, its designers "could not successfully promote new fashions in America and have American women accept them unless they were endorsed by film designers in films."[22] This implies that there was an initial advantage for Hollywood films in the United States rag industry, an advantage that in turn gave the United States as a whole greater prowess on an international scale. Paris, then, might develop its own fashions, but the power of marketing, and selling, seemed to lean more in favor of American efforts. The case of shoulder pads is an especially pertinent and interesting one, since their origins have been attributed to both Gilbert Adrian, in Hollywood, and Schiaparelli, in Paris. While debate still reigns, it is plausible that Adrian adopted the basic idea from the designs of Schiaparelli, "consequently influencing fashion world-wide through his costumes for Miss [Joan] Crawford."[23] That particular incident will be discussed at length shortly, but first it is essential to identify a few of the key talents at work in the American film costume field during the thirties.

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[21] Madelyn Shaw. "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context." *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, 122.
[22] Prichard 14.
[23] Ibid. 26.

First and foremost, the unquestioned leader of fashion during the period was Gilbert Adrian. Adrian (the sole name by which he was generally known), stands as the dominant figure in Hollywood costume design during the industry's early years and might be second only to Edith Head in esteem in the field. While not the only notable designer during the Golden Age of Hollywood Cinema, his designs were certainly the most replicated in the period. He "was probably the first American designer to gain acceptance as a fashion innovator on a par with Paris couturiers."[24] His undisputed role in the proliferation of exaggerated shoulders was a "unique achievement" and "the creation of a silhouette, something for which Paris had always been responsible before,"[25] was unprecedented in American fashion. His *Lettie Lynton* dress for Joan Crawford in the eponymous film is credited with significant economic impact: "Macy's in New York claimed to have sold over 500,000 copies of the dress."[26] Furthermore, Roshco notes that Adrian's career as a whole, "marked the American designers' [sic] entry into competition with Paris over the course of high fashion"[27]

Adrian Adolph Greenburg, who later chose the name Gilbert Adrian, was born in Connecticut in 1903 and worked in theater in New York assisting with costume design after studying at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (now the prestigious Parson's School of Design) and in Paris. A fateful encounter with Natasha Rambova, the wife of then major heartthrob Rudolph Valentino, led to his coming under the Valentinos' auspices west to California. Adrian worked at DeMille studios for a few years in the late twenties before transferring to M.G.M., quickly succeeding Erte as head of costuming for

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[24] Roshco 113.
[25] Ibid. 114.
[26] Leese 19.
[27] Roshco 114.

the studio. He worked closely with big stars in the M.G.M. stable like Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, and Katharine Hepburn. He was "one of the few top designers that could do both exquisite period costume and also provide the elegant M.G.M. stars . . . with fashionable wardrobes."[28] Adrian also designed periodically for great stage revues on Broadway, enourmous spectacle of showy excess that no doubt informed his glamorous (and painstakingly precise) designs for film.

Adrian became quite aware early on in his career as a major costume designer that what he created for the actresses and characters he worked with could and would be coveted by the imagination and wallets of the masses. Indeed, without imagining its impact he designed "a pert, audacious hat which Greta Garbo wore in a picture called *Romance* [that] left the women in the audience gasping with astonishment."[29] Dubbed the "Eugenie" hat it caught on like wildfire, a surprising development considering that it was a period piece, and "Adrian was astonished at the popularity of this hat."[30] Despite quickly becoming being fully aware of the power his designs had on the American (and global) fashion industry, Adrian always firmly asserted that his foremost concern was the needs of the actress and her character in the scene. Even if he did not aim to influence national trends, studio heads knew he could and did, and publicity for films Adrian worked on often stressed his designs as a particularly strong point of interest, hoping to entice female viewers to see the film and learn what the next big trends would be.

Adrian himself left M.G.M. in 1942 and opened his own fashion house in Los Angeles, where he worked until his death in 1959. Despite his relatively short tenure

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[28] Leese 19.
[29] Howard Gutner. *Gowns by Adrian: The MGM Years 1928-1941*, 80.
[30] Ibid. 81.

designing for the silver screen (the incomparable Edith Head designed for over five-hundred features in comparison) his mark on cinema, and the closets of the masses, is as great as it is astonishing. One of his most favored and regular collaborators, Joan Crawford (their alliance will discussed further shortly), once claimed, "If I am copied . . . it's because of my clothes, and Adrian does those. Adrian taught me so much about drama. Everything must be simple, simple, simple. He made me conscious of the importance of simplicity."[31] While to look at his designs today pushes the limits of the definition of "simplicity," it is undeniable that his style was distinctive, and highly influential, for simple or not his clothes regularly made their way from Crawford's angular frame into the closets of women everywhere.

Another significant designer in Hollywood during this period was Travis Banton, head of costume design at Paramount from 1927 to 1938. The Texas-born designer was nearly as admired and copied as Adrian, for he "had few rivals. He produced clothes of timeless beauty."[32] He worked extensively with big stars like Claudette Colbert, Marlene Dietrich, Carole Lombard, and Mae West. He obtained many of his many materials from the same sources used by Paris couturiers, leading to such incidents as when "a furor erupted when Schiaparelli discovered that Banton had bought her favorite supplier's entire stock of bugle beads and rare fish-scale paillettes. As a peace offering, Banton sent the designer enough trim to finish her line for the season."[33] Whose use of those bugle beads was, in the end, more popular sadly lies beyond the realm of this particular paper,

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[31] Robert W. Lavine. *In a Glamorous Fashion: The Fabulous Years of Hollywood Costume Design,* 166. Hereafter cited as Lavine.
[32] Ibid. 169.
[33] Ibid. 171.

but it would surely have been a close call considering Banton's designs were very well received and on par with those of both Adrian and Paris.

There were numerous other American designers of note operating in Hollywood during the 1930s that acted as tastemakers of the American wardrobe. These included Orry-Kelly (Warner Brothers), Howard Greer (various), and Walter Plunkett (MGM). Each made substantial contributions to the film costume, and civilian fashion, landscape, but their clout was not quite so significant as that of Adrian and Banton. However, all these men and their contemporaries made a strong group, a design force to be reckoned with, whose creative and technical talents alone were on par with those of Parisian designers, and given the wide reach of the medium they designed for, they were in a position to have their work not only seen, but for better or worse, emulated.

It was not merely the designers above, however, who made costume design a fashion force to be reckoned with. Cinema had an intimate connection that many other forms of artistic representation could not rival: the star. The studio system in Hollywood during from the 1920s through the 1940s (though also to varying extents beyond that time frame as well) was particularly involved in the creation of stars—that is, key talent, namely actors, around whom ideas and preconceptions were built into a persona that transcended the actual physical being of the person upon whom they were projected. These stars played a pivotal role in selling films and the ideology of Hollywood. Some of the biggest stars in the Hollywood sky included Cary Grant, Bette Davis, Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Gregory Peck, Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, and Katharine Hepburn. Each of them was a signifier of many things for cinema fans, and for many they embodied the ideal figures of fashion and style.

Many female stars were also fashion icons, both onscreen and off. Hollywood had seen its actresses become international tastemakers well before the 1930s. In the 1920s Louise Brooks became an icon of the flapper movement, with her striking black bob and racy vamp style. She was one of the earliest in a long line of actresses whose work transcended that of pure dramatic performance and entered a realm of significant social influence and impact beyond the realm of the movie theater. The sartorial clout of these women played an enormous role in the creation and marketing of the fashions coming out of Hollywood, and their involvement with the process and the designers they worked with should not be undervalued.

The role of the star in the Hollywood studio system in the creation of fashion ideals is a unique one. There had been various trend-setting women throughout fashion's history, women whom other women admired and sought to emulate in terms of styling and garment selection. However, many of those style-setters, especially in areas where visual mass media forms were not readily available, were known only to a select group of aristocrat's— the very people who could afford (both financially and pragmatically) to be concerned with fashion. These social leaders, sartorially ground-breaking women like Marchesa Luisa Casati in the 1910s and later the controversial Duchess of Windsor, persisted in coexistence with Hollywood's stylish starlets. However, it was the women whose images were emblazoned across screens all over America that exercised the greatest influence on what women wanted on their bodies and in their wardrobes.

The impact of stars on fashion was notably effective not only for the qualities posited within their personas and marketed by the studios that were thereby linked to the costumes they wore, but also because of the uniqueness of what they wore. When it came

to major stars, "the garments . . . were created for them alone and executed with painstaking care."[34] Designers (and the studio heads above them) went to great lengths to create garments that were tailored to a particular star and that star's presence, both in essence of personality and also tangible physicality. While this sometimes meant particular garment designs were challenging or impossible to transfer into a form that could be mass produced in the marketplace, it also inversely meant that the aura of a particular star could be, theoretically, transferred to the wearer of a garment similar to that worn by a popular actress.

The stars were aligned (apologies for the pun) for an effective confluence of talent in both design and presentation, and with film growing ever increasingly in popularity as an effective mode of creative dissemination, it is hardly surprising that costumes took hold on the fashionably minded population's imagination and desires. There is ample proof that this is precisely what occurred. One could spend years delving into all the evidence that exists linking clothing designs onscreen with sales and garments far from the studio lot, particularly sales data and business records, as well as correspondence and agreements between the fashion industry, studio heads, and costume designers. Such records are not included in this study due to access limitations. However, a few of the most important and notable instances (gathered from contemporary newspapers, press books, and secondary sources) effectively indicate just how very influential the designs of men like Adrian and Travis Banton were on America's closets.

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[34] Ibid. 28.

CASE STUDIES IN HOLLYWOOD'S INFLUENCE & THE MARKETING THEREOF

It is important to note that while fashion designers proper aim their work at a larger marketplace, many Hollywood costume designers prioritized first and foremost the presentation of the actress, and her character, in a certain film, in a certain moment. As Adrian stated,

> few people in an audience watching a great screen production realize the importance of any gown worn by the feminine star. They may notice that it is attractive, that they would like to have it copied, that it is becoming, but the fact that it was definitely planned to mirror some definite mood, to be as much a part of the play as the lines or the scenery occurs to them. But that most assuredly is true.[35]

However, the film industry knew that what was put on an actress could be put on the bodies of women the country, if not the world, over. Curiously, this had little to do with overt intent, as it did in the ateliers of Paris or even New York. Costume design is not synonymous with fashion design, however closely related and consistently overlapping they may be. Adrian particularly maintained his creative focus on the specific actress, character, scene, and moment he was designing for and had little eye for the wider public implications of his designs. He once claimed that "women can hardly copy every gown we create for the screen. Most screen gowns are designed for especially dramatic women, to wear in a series of dramatic scenes that comprise more drama than most women have in their whole lives."[36] Adrian, and others in the production offices, knew that members of the audiences who saw their films sought to copy their favorite looks, and yet for Adrian this was not a deciding factor in how he approached his work.

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[35] Landis 80.
[36] Landis 96.

This is especially curious as Adrian's designs were some of the most prominently influential and widely copied during the 1930s. One of the best-known and written about incidents concerning the confluence of film costume and real-world designs is that of the "*Letty Lynton* dress." Adrian designed the dress for Joan Crawford who played Letty Lynton in the eponymously titled film. Deborah Landis documents Crawford's comment on Adrian's working style: "[he] always played down the designs for the 'big scene'. For the lighter scene he'd create a 'big' dress."[37] Thus a tea dress for a minor scene in the film found its way, in one form or another, into closets around the world. Maybe the success of this dress is easier to understand if one understands not only the nature of Adrian and his career (described above) but also that of Joan Crawford.

Joan Crawford is perhaps the most notorious "clothes-horse" in film costume history. While her career was built on her laudable performances, her popularity was indeterminably intertwined with her sartorial prowess. Fox wardrobe director Charles LeMaire noted of Crawford that "Joan Crawford, I believe, could wrap a table-cloth about her, pin it with a safety-pin and make a sensational entrance to a crowded room, and people would cry, 'How gorgeous!'"[38] She had that *je-ne-sais-quoi* that makes great models great; it is the ability to sell clothes, sell an image, sell an idea. Part of the allure of Hollywood films during the Great Depression was the aura of glamour they embodied, and few projected it better than Crawford. The people behind the scenes of the films and the clothing manufacturers recognized Crawford's significant selling capacity, so that "the rag trade were always interested in Joan Crawford's clothes and with the full co-

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[37] Landis 89.
[38] Landis 86.

operation of the studio's vast publicity machine, would copy the clothes quickly enough to get them into the shops for the film's release."[39]

Crawford's facility for clothing salesmanship is relatively surprising, however, and could hardly have been predicted by the casual evaluator before it came to fruition. She did not have a perfect, traditionally beautiful face, nor did she have a perfect, traditionally beautiful body. Her shoulders were unusually broad, a factor Adrian took well into account when designing costumes for the star. In fact, it was with this in mind that Adrian decided to, rather than subdue her prominent shoulders, accentuate them even further, in a move that (depending who is asked, for some attribute the novelty to Elsa Schiaparelli) created the now ubiquitous shoulder pad.

Figure 1

Adrian found that accentuating the shoulder of a gown and tapering the lines down to the hips emphasized the waist and created an angular feminine silhouette. Millions of women noticed this effect as well, one that was most prominently displayed in the pioneering "*Letty Lynton* dress."

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[39] Leese 19.

The garment itself (Figure 1)[40] displayed the trademark broad shoulder-tiny waist tailoring of Adrian-Crawford collaborations, but was done in a frothy cascade of white organdy ruffles that culminated in giant puffs of short-sleeves. Within weeks of the film's release, "Macys in New York claimed to have sold over 500,000 copies of the dress."[41] It was wildly successful, and fostered countless spin-offs in addition to the more precise copies sold at such purveyors as Macy's. It succeeded in making "New York's Seventh Avenue acutely aware of the fact that Hollywood was a source for fashion exploitation that could out-sell Paris." [42]Adrian may not have designed the dress in order to see it copied, but he could have easily guessed it ran that chance. Certainly after that particular incident he was always keenly aware of the influential power of his designs in the American garment industry. "Actually," Adrian once noted, "we are the unpaid designers for the wholesale houses of the country—since their scouts manage to pirate our styles before the picture in which they will appear starts shooting."[43]

While couturier Schiaparelli in Paris may have some claim to shoulder pad designs, the impact of her garments that featured this cut was not so immediate nor so profound as that of Adrian, as far more sources link the innovation to the American costumer. In those few instants on screen a nationwide trend was born that spurred manufacturers into high-speed production and instigated a "look" that not only dominated the fashion industry for the rest of the Thirties and much of the Forties, and was revisited decades later in the Eighties and has continued in varying manifestations well into recent years.

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[40] *Goldenhollywoodera.com.* March 3, 2011.
[41] Leese 19.
[42] Lavine 45.
[43] Whitaker.

The instantaneous power and communicative capacity of film to influence fashion is underscored by the fact that the film was not long on screens. Due to a copyright infringement battle, *Letty Lynton* was pulled off screens and has virtually remained unseen since. Its influence, however, in the form of its most famous costume, has been seen in closets the world over ever since. This is fairly clear indicator that Hollywood film costume propelled the American garment industry to a prominence it had not had before, making it a fitting rival (and occasional victor over) the designers of Paris. The *Letty Lynton* incident in particular supports Wes Colman's assertion that "Paris may decree this and Paris may decree that, but when that Crawford girl pops up in puffed sleeves, then it's puffed sleeves for us before tea-time."[44]

Letty Lynton was not the only film that saw a successful sartorial collaboration between Crawford and Adrian. Most of their work together proved popular creative fodder for commercial fashion designers on both sides of the Atlantic. One film that highlights not only the power of costume design but also Hollywood's keen awareness of their eminence in the the world of fashion is *The Women* (1939). As the 1930s progressed, Hollywood took more and more steps to enhance the marketability of its films in conjunction with the fashion industry. Not only was film marketing highly incorporative of film costume's facility for wider inspiration and sales, but films themselves included spectacles and scenes and staging to particularly highlight clothes.

Films took the idea of a fashion show out of the ateliers and onto the screens. Curiously, this often happened within a film's narrative in the same sorts of venues and circumstances as in reality. A film that particularly exemplifies Hollywood's fashion

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[44] Landis 89.

fixation is *The Women*, most notable for its full Technicolor fashion sequence in the midst of what is otherwise a black and white satirical melodrama acted out solely by women. The title of the film, its cast (all female), and its content (catty gossip and fickle female friendships) are all aimed fully at a female audience, and so is the seemingly out-of-place fashion show sequence. It has very little to do with the story itself, save that the characters (who all have a healthy well-to-do married American woman of style's interest in the matter) who are in attendance, watching the show as filmgoers. Several key scenes in the film concern attire and some even take place in various dressing rooms and high-end shops, but the fashion show scene is the pièce de résistance, and was marketed by the studio's publicity vehicles accordingly.

Unless one is watching the one later restored edition that appears on television at times and has left the scene in black and white, it is impossible to miss the pointed exposure fashion receives in the fashion show scene, quite gratuitously. The characters, catty and feisty as they are throughout the film, enter a fashion show space and take their seats, the lines between them as characters and the audience as audience still clearly delineated in the traditional format. Suddenly, however, at the show's introduction the black and white of the film yields to a fully colored spectacle of all of the "latest fashions," as foreseen by Adrian and subsequently created and displayed on-screen. The segment is several minutes long and completely departs from the film's narrative, bringing all attention to the bright shades and perfect cuts of the clothes on display. The show blurs the lines between the characters within the film and the audience watching the film, for all are an audience for this show. It offers filmgoers the experience of attending the sorts of fashion spectacles only the wealthy could enjoy in person.

Furthermore, via piracy or permissible copying, the designs "Of The Future" seen on screen could be sought out and purchased at the height of their desirability, immediately after a screening. Of additional note is the fact that while cross-promotion still occurs today, the products a film generates rarely belong in the realm of an entirely different industry (in this case garments in the fashion industry) that stand alone quite outside of a relationship to the film. Also, the goods themselves almost never commandeer minutes of time within the film itself for the sake of display and advertising. Not merely that, but actual garments seen onscreen in *The Women* could not actually be bought as seen, with a label reading "Adrian." Similar garments, or perhaps authorized copies, could be purchased, instead, making this mode of salesmanship a unique variety far removed from traditional product placement—the marketing of these goods stemmed from "in-studio" sources.

Indeed, Hollywood was so keenly aware of the antics and mechanics of the fashion industry that filmmakers made films about it. William Dieterle's aptly titled 1934 film *Fashions of 1934* was not just any film, but a star studded vehicle featuring esteemed actress Bette Davis. The plot circles around fashion piracy. Two design bootleggers eventually put on a "legitimate" show after replicating the latest Paris fashions for mass production and bargain prices. The film is a curious one because it so ostensibly demonstrates Hollywood's awareness of the workings of the fashion industry and its desire to entice female (and, arguably, male) viewers with a sartorial eye to visit the cinema. The casting of Bette Davis, even then recognized as an important star of great magnetism, points to the high value studios would put on such "women's movies."[45]

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[45] I am still compiling a bit more on this topic before I include it.

Examples of the influence of Hollywood costume designs on the garment marketplace are not seen solely in the realm of "women's-wear." In fact, one of the more immediate and prominent examples of the direct interaction between film fashions and the fashion industry is the case of Clark Gable and his undershirt (or lack thereof) in the pioneering romantic comedy *It Happened One Night* (1934). In the film Gable is seen undressing for bed. However, when he disrobes, it is seen in the film that he has no undershirt on.[46] This occurred at a time when men's undershirts were a long-held standard of basic dress, and the sight of one of the leading male actors of the time without one threw all men interested in being on trend into a frenzy. The results were immediate and rather incredible, as "the appearance of Clark Gable bare-chested in *It Happened One Night* in 1934 led to an immediate drop in the American sales of men's undershirts of around 30 percent."[47] In the oft-disparate fashion realms of men and women film held sway, and it is surprising that in a matter of a few seconds a fictional character played by single man without a certain garment can have drastic economic effects for an industry (namely producers and purveyors of men's undershirts).

Figure 2

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[46] "Visual Humor in the Movies." http://classprojects.cornellcollege.edu/CLA364_Sept09/Humor/VisualMovies.html. Marhc 19, 2011.

[47] Landis 92.

Hollywood costuming saw its influence not merely in the sartorial sphere, but also in broader social realms, particularly in conjunction with the power of its stars' personas. Clearly, the creativity of Hollywood had consequences in economics spheres quite independent of the entertainment industry itself, as the sales of "*Letty Lynton*" dresses skyrocketed and, thanks to Clark Gable, undershirt production faced a precipitous decline. However, there were effects beyond the creative and the economic. Films helped popularize aspects of feminist culture and ideology (in its sartorial manifestations not the least) in ways not seen in Europe, including France. The most direct evidence of this can be seen in the case of pants, popularized most notoriously in cinema by Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn.

Feminism and empowered womanhood was not by any means a novel development in the 1930s. The women's rights movement had its roots in the nineteenth-century and found one of its greatest accomplishments in winning women the right to vote via the Nineteenth Amendment to the US constitution in 1920. The role of clothing in women's rights preceded the 1930s. Amelia Bloomer created the "bloomer" style of loose pants in the mid-nineteenth century, though the look never caught on with the masses. The "Gibson Girl" ideal of empowered, active womanhood that pervaded the late-Edwardian scene brought sportswear into women's closets, including many menswear-inspired styles. The gender-ideal upheaval of the 1920s saw women toying with their sexuality, flattening chests and bobbing hair. Some designers created loose pant ensembles, especially for wear at elegant event dinner parties no less, but they were rare and not found outside certain fashionable but also eccentric social circuits. However,

this changed in the Thirties, when a few prominent actresses achieved what some French designers had been fruitlessly attempting for years; they put the average woman in pants.

Given the mass-appeal of cinema, it may not surprising that it was film stars, not socialites, who most powerfully ushered trousers into the acceptable female consciousness. Two of the mightiest harbingers of pants for women were German-born star Marlene Dietrich and the female paragon of early American sportswear and Hollywood glamour, Katharine Hepburn. The start of a trend for trousers was not intentional or political in the ways that trousers had been propagated in the past. Referring to the choice to put Marlene Dietrich in a white tuxedo suit for the film *Blonde Venus* (1932), under the costume designs of Paramount design head Travis Banton, director Joseph von Sternberg claimed, "Having Dietrich wear trousers was not meant to stimulate a fashion, which encouraged women to ignore skirts in favor of the less picturesque lower half of male attire."[48] However, the choices of these women and their stylists led to widespread acceptance of trousers on a scale never seen before, and furthered those two women's own status as empowered and sporty feminine role models that the average film-going young lady could aspire to imitate.

A few instances in particular highlight the importance of films in creating a vogue, and demand, for trousers. These are *Morocco* (1930) with Marlene Dietrich, and Katharine Hepburn's panted stints in most of her films of the period, especially the cross-dressing comedy *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935). Dietrich's performance in *Morocco* is often discussed as an important moment in the gendering of cinema (Figure 3). [49], In a night

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[48] Landis 103.

[49] *Lamutamu.com.* http://lamutamu.com/2010/09/21/fabulous-fierce/. March 19, 2011.

club scene, Dietrich appears in a perfectly fitted top hat and tails, a positively exquisite black and white tuxedo ensemble. The style was undeniably masculine territory (seen at some of the most gender-coded affairs: formal ones), but the cut and line were so snug and molded to Dietrich's body that her identity as a woman was unavoidably obvious. This, coupled with her precisely made-up visage, created a direct assault on sartorial gender norms that was still wholly desirably to both men and women.

While the *Morocco* look did not catch on in women's formalwear, it unlocked the door for more women, in more settings to follow suit (sometimes literally). One of the most notable (and best dressed—an accolade she was formally awarded on numerous occasions) actresses to popularize trousers was Katharine Hepburn. Hepburn was born well-off, grew up well-educated, and came into her own well-

Figure 3

trousered. An avid athlete she incorporated various sporting activities, including golf, into her life onscreen and off. This fit nicely with her appreciation for pants. Hepburn was often lauded as stunning in any of the sorts of gowns her contemporaries were incessantly garnished in, but Hepburn preferred menswear-inspired looks and often threw together a high-waisted trouser ensemble as soon as the cameras stopped rolling. She was well known for this affinity and some of her earliest roles even capitalized upon it.

In *Sylvia Scarlett* Hepburn plays a young woman who due to a series of quirky circumstances involving illicit crime and a petty thief played be Carey Grant must dress as a man for a significant portion of the film. Once again the sartorial gender play in the film is still remembered for its simultaneous gender-play, as in it Hepburn briefly kisses another young woman. Advertisements of the film also highlight, more than any other aspect of the film, Hepburn's androgyny and transvestitism (Figure 4). [50] Regardless of social commentary, the costume design of the film was highly notable and embodies the trousered look Hepburn so favored in her personal life. Considering that she was one of the most popular actresses of that, or any, day, her approval of pants helped introduce them across the US and the world.

Figure 4

The examples of Dietrich and Hepburn highlight the importance of the star's persona, on-screen and off-, in abetting the studio machine that put forth and marketed not only films but fashion as well. "Pants" and all they represented to American society at the time when worn by women was inextricably caught up in the personas of Dietrich, Hepburn, and for that matter Greta Garbo as well. In that sense, whether they were in character in a film or just being "themselves" (the "real them" studios chose to publicize) stars operated in the manufacturing of desire for clothes that evoked the things they themselves evoked. This power was well used in the various fan magazines and publicity materials put forth by the

[50] *Flickr.com*. http://www.flickr.com/photos/suzysputnik/2635245077/in/faves-annabananabobaloo/. March 29, 2011.

studios that linked stars, their clothes, and sales of clothing like they wore on screen and in their grandiose homes in Beverly Hills.

Costume design and commercial fashion were mixed purposefully by both the entertainment and fashion industries. It is notable, however, in looking at other materials available for films, namely reviews in newspapers, that explicit references to fashion were not ubiquitous. Many reviews and film-centric press articles created to increase audience interest and awareness did not discuss costume design. This is understandable, considering that there are many more aspects of films and filmmaking in addition to what the stars are wearing. The actors' performances, the direction, and the cinematography received attention with regularity from the press in the 1930s. It seems notice of fashion was primarily reserved for audiences that could be counted on to be mostly female. Women held the financial clout (or at least interest in persuading their husbands to purchase clothes for them) that the fashion industry needed to survive: clothes were a woman's affair.

This same reasoning undoubtedly underpins the choice of films that displayed fashions as a centerpiece. Such films, from *The Women* to *Fashions of 1934*, were geared towards a female audience (a category of the population filmmakers were eager to attract and please). While this is indicative of the reigning ideology's gendered allocation of social interests, it also reinforces the notion that Hollywood consciously directed its efforts to attract female audiences as well as use their increasing fashion clout to market their films. This divide is illustrated in the publicity materials for such films as the Irene Dunne, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers vehicle *Roberta* (1935).

The publicity surrounding *Roberta* points to a very important factor in marketing film costumes and fashionable garments, which is publicity. The marketing of films, their costumers, and jointly their stars and costume designers, was essential in not only drawing the fashion-oriented potential audience members, but also in selling them the latest looks as decreed, not by Paris, but rather by Tinseltown. Newsreels played before films celebrated the latest fashions, and as seen in *The Women* films themselves had fashion marketing scenes imbedded in them. Not only were the characters/actors showcasing the latest garments, as in the case of *Letty Lynton*, but the very *films* themselves operated as commercials for clothes. Other commodities were not sold in this way. There were not myriad films with entire sequences dedicated to displaying the latest models of cars or telephones or canned soups. Fashion had a special place in the minds of Hollywood's studios, and presumably the audiences as well who clamored to see films like *Fashions of 1934* and *The Women.*

One of the most important ways, besides the films themselves, that knowledge of the cinema, its contents, and its power players was spread was through fan magazines, like *Photoplay*. This mode of journalism was at a peak during the 1930s and found great success because the magazines "indoctrinated their readers with the fantasy that in Hollywood all women were beautiful, crime did not pay, husbands and wives lived happily ever after, and that it was possible for anyone to become a movie star."[51] This directly paralleled the messages the studios energetically propagated and furthered the ideology that made films such excellent vehicles for escapism. These same concepts also leant themselves perfectly to the marketing of film costumes and star style as desirable

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[51] Lavine 41.

civilian fashion, for "always, too, there was a fashion page with photographs of stars wearing their latest film costumes and with tips on how to emulate their glamorous apparel . . . photographs of actresses modeling their personal wardrobes were particularly popular, as were the elaborate creations they wore for premieres or important social events."[52] Fan magazines like *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture* built up and sold the fantasies that linked ideal narratives, glamorous stars, and Hollywood wardrobes in the minds of film fans.[53] Considering the vast number of film fans in the American population, it is not surprising that this was an effective means of spreading not only fashion knowledge, but also desire.

BEYOND THE THIRTIES & WHAT THEY MEAN

The 1930s are an especially intriguing period of historical inquiry in fashion history as much as any other subject. The societies and their fashions that came before, WWI and the debauched disillusionment of the Roaring Twenties, and after, WWII, were startlingly different (especially for the United States) from the Great Depression period. This was reflected in their clothes, from the shapeless liberation of 1920s sack dresses to the "ultra-feminine" New Look of the late forties and fifties. This being said, the groundwork for sartorial creation independent from the dictums of Europe that was laid firmly by the designers of Hollywood in the Thirties realized its potential at the dawn of WWII. A fashion historian pointed out that "nothing did more to liberate American

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[52] Ibid. 42.

[53] Multiple fan magazines were analyzed for this paper, including: *Photoplay, Motion Picture,* and *Stage Door.*

fashion from the domination of Paris than Germany's conquest of France in 1940."[54] While this was hardly a positive development considering the tragic history of that conquest and its toll on human life and happiness, it nevertheless was a boon for the American fashion designers and manufacturers who were increasingly gaining in capacity and prominence at home and abroad.

World War II led to increased economic prowess for the U.S. The wartime blossoming of factory production in conjunction with the need for male soldiers meant that women were leaving the home and heading to the workplace, all in support of the national cause. This had significant implications for fashion, which were foreshadowed in the twenties but especially the thirties, as America increasingly grew in design prominence and women began increasingly, "wearing the pants," if not always literally, figuratively as well. These trends came to fruition during the early to mid-forties. The "Rosie the Riveter" figure, that of the empowered and patriotic female working hard outside the home to preserve the home front and her man abroad, was an image reinforced by the strong, traditionally masculine lines and cuts of women's clothes during the forties. Adrian's broad-shouldered silhouette reached new heights of popularity as everything from formal gowns to skirt-suits displayed the bold and angular shape. Pants, a la Hepburn and her fellows, also saw increasing popularity.

However, as the war drew to a close and men returned home, they reaffirmed their traditional position as head of the workplace and family, and women were pushed back into the domestic sphere—and into reactionary ultra-feminine styling epitomized by Dior's New Look. Since 1939 there had been some hints of a longer skirt-length, marked

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[54] Roshco 112.

by emphasized curves and deemphasized shoulders, but the instances were far apart and fleeting. Adrian's silhouette held sway from California across Europe (and presumably well beyond) until 1947, the fateful year that young Parisian couturier Christian Dior introduced a broad skirted, wasp-waisted, sloped-shoulder look. Dubbed "The New Look," it "was a complete reversal of Adrian's silhouette. Shoulders already had begun narrowing, as the pads got smaller. Dior moved all the padding down to the hips."[55] This design was the revolution that dictated the supreme look for the following decade until the riotous sleek modernism of the Sixties emerged. Dior's entrée halted the ascent of American fashion, and "the New Look restored Paris as the capital of international high fashion, a position it had been losing in the aftermath of World War II."[56] Despite Paris's return to the forefront of fashion, the United States did not recede into the anonymity of its previous state, but continued to cultivate a new tradition of distinctly American sensibilities, albeit one that relied more on the design studios of New York's Seventh Avenue than on Hollywood's costumers.

Despite the waning of much of what 1930s fashion, as exemplified by the styles of Hollywood and its glamorous starlets, stood for in subsequent decades, fashion is highly cyclical and the legacy of that era and designers like Adrian and Travis Banton remains strong. The glamour and style of the "Golden Age" of Hollywood recurs with regularity everywhere from red carpets to office buildings. Innumerable starlets have copied the beauty trends and bias cuts of the 1930s and the sort of fantastical opulence seen in dresses like Travis Banton's ostrich feathered concoction for Ginger Rogers in *Top Hat*.

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[55] Ibid. 119.
[56] Ibid. 119.

The legacy of thirties cinema costumes design is seen in everyday contexts as well. The 1970s hearkened back to the period some forty years prior, with designers (curiously, French ones) like Yves St. Laurent evoking the graceful androgyny and slim lines of costumes for stars like Katharine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich. St. Laurent's "le smoking" ensemble is iconic—as are the women and designers who adopted it long before it hit the runways. In the attire of later film style icons, like Diane Keaton's character Annie Hall in the eponymously titled Woody Allen film from 1977, the influence (in this case Katharine Hepburn's, again) is easily discernible.

Even more obvious is the appearance of the shoulder pad in the 1980s. Having taken a bit of a hiatus for about a quarter of a century, the design quirk originated (disputably—see above) at MGM by Adrian was covering the shoulders of women as they filtered into the workplace and the club scene. The "power suit" was identified by its masculine aesthetics (once again, traces of Hepburn, Dietrich, and Garbo are easily discerned) and exaggerated shoulders. That particular trend continues well into the current collections coming from Milan and Paris, and few women have not at some time or another benefited from the same shaping and slimming affects designed for Crawford all those years ago.

Distributing indisputable responsibility for sartorial influence is tricky, and in many respects inadvisable. There are so many sources from which the tides of fashion stem that even if one particular innovation can be pinpointed to a single individual source, there are so many contextual and historical developments involved (or at least potentially) that while it is tempting to delineate the trends and their beginnings, it is unwise to insist on perfect clarity in which everything is either black or white. There is a

lot of gray area in fashion. For example, an article from *The New York Times* on January 23, 1930 reported on the latest Parisian designers' decision to "widen shoulder with various cape and puff sleeve effects."[57] While the described alteration is not exactly the shoulder-pad technique of Adrian several years later, it does indicate that Adrian's concepts had European forerunners. Notably, however, the article which mentions the built-up shoulders focuses primarily on the longer skirt lengths of the season—providing evidence that such commentary was as fleeting as the ever seasonally fluctuating hemlines.

The fashion zeitgeist is often in sync from one region to another (at the time principally between the U.S. and Europe), and thus it is hard to distribute credit for a particular design. The only aspect of design truly creditable is who makes the most of a technique, who does it best and most influentially, though even that is sometimes impossible to determine for certain. Bernard Roshco made this point well:

> Whatever else fashion may be, it is not a single-minded conspiracy. Conflicting forces are likely to be working for and against any radical change, just as Adrian was a bitter opponent of the new silhouette ushered in by Dior. Depending on their own taste and their estimate of what their customers want and will accept, fashion editors, store buyers, and garment manufacturers speculate on which of the competing new modes seem most likely to be embraced by the ultimate judge—the woman who buys and wears what the garment industry produces.[58]

If the woman, then, the consumer, is the ultimate tastemaker and dominant force in the world of fashion (a strong, yet still debatable claim), then it certainly seems her tastes leaned far more towards the glory of Hollywood's starlets than Paris's couturiers during the Great Depression. Perhaps it was the proximity of the screen's fashions versus

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[57] "Paris Sets Tighter Waist." *New York Times.* January 23, 1930.
[58] Roshco 128.

the showrooms of Paris that inspired admiration and desire in so many women. It was easier to experience, and replicate, Hollywood's designs, and there was plenty of persuasive material to do so, given the films themselves and studio publicity.

The degree to which Hollywood eclipsed Paris as *the* center of fashion is a great point for debate. If such was the case at any point, this author would argue that it was during the 1930s, and there are others who support such a claim, especially writers contemporary to that period. Peggy Hamilton, **the** fashion editor of the Los Angeles Times, wrote in 1927 that "already . . . Hollywood has influenced the dress of more women in all parts of the world than Paris ever did."[59] While she may have made such a claim preemptively, it is telling that anyone would dare make so bold a claim as that even *before* the period in which that claim came closest to fruition. Not all, even at the time, were entirely certain of the matter, for even Adrian himself stated in 1936 that while "there is no question that Hollywood has a great influence on the spread of style ideas . . . Paris remains the great center of style."[60] This points to the challenging dilemma that is at the heart of this entire inquiry: whether or not Hollywood had more power in the fashion world than Paris during the 1930s. It is a very difficult question to definitively answer without extensive examination of detailed personal accounts and correspondence, financial and business records for both the film and fashion industries, and a broad variety of marketing and advertising from both the studios and retail outlets. Additionally, fashion is a fickle and highly subjective business, and given the constant feedback and interplay between fashion designers on both sides of the Atlantic, it is

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[59] Peggy Hamilton. "Film Fashions Displayed."
[60] Gutner 51

difficult to distribute a specific design's origins anywhere concretely, as fashion is highly derivative.

Despite this, it is undeniable that Hollywood greatly influenced fashion, if not as its originator (though that was often the case), then certainly as its greatest distributor, up until the advent of television and later the internet. Hollywood also positioned itself in opposition to the workings of the Parisian fashion world. The common woman was included in films; she could relate to the ideas of fashion Hollywood perpetuated, and was no longer alienated by the elite culture fashion had constituted in previous eras. This may seem a contradictory association, given the excessive glamour and luxury often seen in studio films of the decade, yet the marketing of these films was pointedly aimed at making the glamorous approachable, adapting the highest levels of design and materials and reconfiguring them in ways that every woman could utilize.

When watching the twirling skirts of Ginger Rogers in *Top Hat* or the sparkling of Greta Garbo's sequined bodysuit as *Mata Hari,* one might not think of such garments as anything more costumes, meant for show and play; pure entertainment. However, film and its stars have a great deal of power outside of just purveying a respite from reality, and just such a distraction was needed during the Great Depression more than perhaps any other time in U.S. history since the invention of cinema (WWII is a close second, but that is a another story). Fashion, like film, also offers an escape, the promise of transformation, even if such a change is only fleeting. Although Parisian designs had glamour and prestige, they also carried the historical and social baggage of the Old World, a fact reinforced by the fact that only the wealthy (just as in the Old World traditional systems of fashion) could afford the latest Parisian designs. Film, however,

particularly American Hollywood film, was a medium for all people, or at least most of them. Fashion was made desirable, marketed paradoxically by fabulous and wealthy women, and also relatable via modes of both narrative and publicity. American fashion, creatively designed and marketed clothing stemming from American minds and manufacturers, did not appear until there was a way to present it to the American consumers. That way was cinema, and whether or not cinema made American fashion for a time greater than Parisian fashion is difficult to assert, but it is doubtless the case that the cinema of the 1930s was instrumental in enabling American fashion to exist at all.

The topic of the rise of American fashion is a tricky one, for while the importance of the cinema is regularly cited by many historians, the cinema's interaction with foreign fashion generators and markets is not often addressed. This study has barely scratched the surface of the material and topics available, and there is certainly significantly more room for further inquiry. While the importance of cinema in fashion at home, and its interaction with Paris, has been demonstrated above, more questions exist than answers. What was the exact economic influence of Hollywood's costumes on the American ready-to-wear industry? How did the sales of those designs in the U.S. compare to those in Europe? Can creative influence *be* measured, and if so, who technically reigned supreme in the 1930s, Hollywood or Paris? These are merely a few of the questions raised by this study, which has hopefully also indicated the importance of the answers to such questions. Fashion in the twentieth century was a global affair, and cinema was a global medium. Links between the two are easy to make, but details remain elusive until more historians resolve to take a global approach.

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