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# 100 Years of the Fashion Film: Frameworks and Histories

**Marketa Uhlirova**

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Marketa Uhlirova is a senior research fellow at Central Saint Martins College, University of the Arts London, and Director of an exhibitions and education project, Fashion in Film, where she oversees all of its programming. She has recently edited the book *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle* (Koenig Books and FF, 2013).  
m.uhlirova@csm.arts.ac.uk

## **Abstract**

This article outlines a preliminary history of the fashion film, a multifaceted form that can be traced as far back as the emergence of cinema but has only recently “exploded” thanks to advances in digital image production and dissemination. The article carefully negotiates the fashion film as a form that must be considered within multiple frameworks, namely cinema and the new media, fashion industry, entertainment, and art practice. Above all, the fashion film has come to embody a growing interest, within the realms of fashion promotion, image-making, and experience, in the expressive and marketing possibilities of

movement and time. Unlike photography and other static imagery, the fashion film unfolds in time (as if somehow fulfilling a potential only suggested in photography or illustration), and, unlike the fashion show, it fixes fashion as image. Still, the fashion film is understood here not in isolation from these forms, but rather through their intermedial links, which have intensified in the “digital age”: fashion shows were among the vital early platforms for the exhibition of the fashion film, and fashion photographers were in the early 2000s their principal producers.

**KEYWORDS:** fashion in the moving image, cinema, new media, art, analog and digital fashion imagery, fashion shows, fashion photographers, fashion promotion

As the contemporary fashion film has over the last decade gradually solidified its presence within the fashion industry, it may be useful to chart something by way of a preliminary, introductory history of the form, examining both its analog and digital incarnations across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It may also be illuminating to sketch out, at least roughly, some ways of locating the fashion film within broader intermedial practices and discourses of fashion, cinema, art and the new media, for there is no doubt that film was embraced as part of twentieth-century fashion’s growing tendency towards temporal experience and greater mobility, appearing in a variety of contexts and in hybridized multimedia forms. In another article (Uhlířová 2013) I have asked questions about the specificities of the fashion film as a genre (if it can be posited that way), its unique “fashion-film effect,” and—admittedly, to only a limited extent so far—its conditioning by digital technologies. Identifying movement, time, rhythm, and metamorphosis as some of the vital features of the recent fashion film, I have suggested parallels between its aesthetic and that of some subgenres of early cinema that over 100 years ago foregrounded the theme of clothing in perpetual change. Finally, I have argued that the contemporary fashion film phenomenon we are currently experiencing is inextricably linked with the new possibilities of moving image production and, crucially, dissemination that were opened up by the digital technologies in the 2000s.

In her recent analysis of the fashion film, Nathalie Khan (2012) similarly addresses the significance of the digital, emphasizing the more active kind of spectatorship it has engendered. Drawing on new media theorist Lev Manovich’s notion of digital cinema’s “permanent presence,” Khan (2012: 238) argues that the fashion image is now not only animated in the digital realm but also “constantly renewed” and “caught in the here and now”—qualities that seem to fit our contemporary sensibilities. While the implications of the digital for the

aesthetic and spectatorship of the fashion image are indisputable, my aim here is to look deeper into the past and to trace many of the fashion film's key characteristics back to the "pre-digital age," so as to understand the motivations and practices of today's fashion filmmakers within a larger framework of close interactions between fashion and different moving image cultures since the emergence of cinema.

With notable exceptions, the contemporary fashion film has principally been motivated by the kinetic and metamorphic possibilities of dress and adornment. It is therefore worth considering, at least briefly, how time, movement, and change have been vital to the presentation and representation of fashion since before the beginning of cinema, and throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At a fundamental level, movement and change are the touchstones of the everyday "performance" of fashion—the wearing, the gesturing—as well as its life cycle and eventual decay (the idea of clothing as organic, ever-changing matter was explored in the 1990s by the fashion designers Hussein Chalayan and Martin Margiela, among others). In terms of industry-devised presentations of fashion, movement was already integral to such late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century promotional practices as the theatrical "fashion play," the use of live models (mannequins) in the fashion salon and the fashion show, their parading at the races and other society events (see Evans 2001, 2005, 2011, 2013; Kaplan and Stowell 1994; Rappaport 2000), and the deployment of moving mechanical elements and live models in retail displays, especially shop windows. Emphasizing movement as an underlying feature of turn-of-the-century visual culture, fashion historian Caroline Evans has linked the early fashion show to contemporary technologies aimed at visualizing motion, especially Muybridge's and Marey's chronophotography and the cinema. If, as Evans argues, movement was a "trope of modernity from the beginning of the [twentieth] century" (2005: 133), then the fashion industry too displayed a growing tendency towards mobility in its presentations of fashion and the body. Many fashion photographers (and photographers of fashion) throughout the twentieth century were interested in representing the fashion body as a mobile, dynamic entity, or otherwise injecting movement into static images (Harrison 1991). Informed by the modernist and avant-garde obsession with depicting motion and speed, or, later, the postmodernist interest in the "non-event," and in "staged photography" as a storytelling device (in both cases, art photography was exemplary), photographers deployed a broad range of strategies: they captured fashionable subjects in motion (Jacques-Henri Lartigue); staged energetic, sometimes athletic actions for the camera (Martin Munkacsi, Herman Landshoff, John Cowan, Bruce Weber); directed dressed bodies in simple choreographies so as to study their performance in motion (Richard Avedon, Jerry Schatzberg); explored the fluidity of

body and gesture against transitory urban environments (William Klein, David Bailey); used the reportage technique (Bruce Davidson); fabricated dramatic moments that appropriated the aesthetic of the film still (Guy Bourdin, Helmut Newton, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Ellen von Unwerth); and embraced the deliberately anti-glamorous, *unprivileged moment* of the instantaneous, intimate (and often raw) snapshot, as if it was a random frozen film frame (Nan Goldin, Corinne Day, Juergen Teller, Wolfgang Tillmans).

Film's potential to promote fashion began to be exploited very early on because the new medium was so adept at recasting consumption as seductive visual entertainment. Although sporadically at first, the two quintessentially modern industries of fashion and cinema courted each other, resulting in a variety of direct, and regular, interactions that were sustained throughout the twentieth century and continue today. Even if we discount fiction film here (it had its own links with the fashion industry, both direct and indirect) and only consider films that were either commissioned and financed by fashion houses and manufacturers or were to explicitly serve the fashion industry and community, there are multiple micro-histories tucked away in archives, many of which are still waiting to be told. To evoke only a fragmented spectrum of different film types that are most relevant to the fashion film's history, I will refer to some of the examples that should be included in its pantheon. Some time between 1898 and 1900 the pioneer of the trick and *féerie* film Georges Méliès made amusing commercials for *Mystère corsets*, using music hall dancers, and *Delion hats*, using reverse motion, now presumed lost (Bessy and Duca 1961: 142–3). The films were reportedly projected onto the street outside the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, his magic theater in Paris (Evans 2005: 133; Robinson 1993: 45) which, although not entirely unique at the time, makes them an early example of an extra-cinematic presentation of a “fashion film.” It is telling that both of Méliès's films promoted ready-made items, rather than the work of couturiers who may have considered cinema too industrial, democratic, and unsophisticated (pedestrian) a match. Other preserved fashion commercials from the following decades are also for ready-to-wear businesses. The *Warner Corset Advertisement* from the 1910s, for example, deploys a conventional short comedy sketch format and concludes with a striking stop-motion animation sequence that shows the corset folding, unfolding, and rotating, in order to emphasize its design and unique properties in detail (Figure 1). Another, Pathé-Frères' tinted film, *Women's Shoes in Lafayette Galleries* (1912), statically frames a woman's foot as it displays, with minimal movement, a series of shoes and boots (Figure 2).<sup>1</sup> Finally, there is the remarkably rich archive of the Bat'a shoe commercials of the 1920s and 1930s, short narrative films made by an eclectic group of Czech filmmakers including those associated with the interwar avant-garde such as Elmar Klos (Figure 3) and Alexander Hackenschmied (Uhlířová 2010:



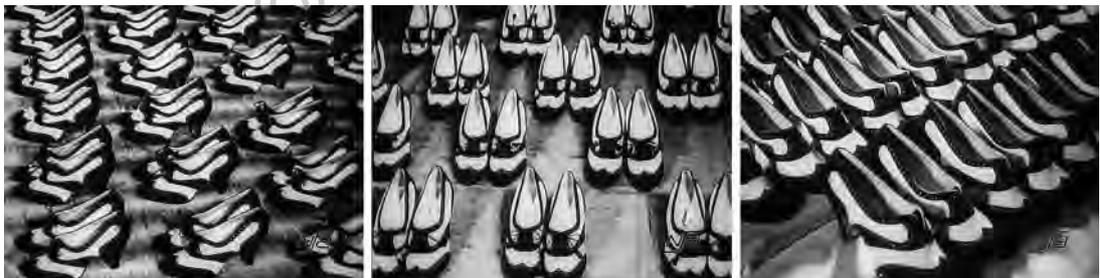
**Figure 1**

Frame enlargements from *Warner Corset Advertisement*, dir. unknown, USA, 1910s. Courtesy Fashion in Film and the Library of Congress.



**Figure 2**

Frame enlargements from *Women's Shoes in Lafayette Galleries*, dir. unknown, Pathé-Frères, France, 1912. Courtesy Fashion in Film and Gaumont Pathé archives.



**Figure 3**

Frame enlargements from *A Lady's Shoe*, dir. Elmar Klos for Bat'a, Czechoslovakia, 1935. Courtesy Fashion in Film and Národní filmový archiv Prague.

139). Possibly the earliest example of a couturier's foray into cinema is Paul Poiret's 1911 promotional film "covering the full history of his designs" and including footage of his mannequins from *The Thousand and Second Night* (Evans 2011: 120). Evans notes that two years later, when touring internationally, Poiret also used a colored film as a *substitute* for a live fashion show (with himself as a presenter-lecturer), in order to avoid paying customs-related fees for physical dresses. This practice would reemerge in the 1990s and again in the 2000s, with the contemporary fashion film asserting itself as a viable alternative to the fashion show.

Fashion has sporadically featured in "actuality" films since the beginning of cinema (Tolini Finamore 2013) and increasingly began to be treated as a subject in its own right. From the 1910s, the newsreel (which soon evolved into the "cinemagazine") became the most popular format for displaying and promoting the latest fashions while also offering sartorial advice to women. In the newsreels, women were framed either individually or in small groups, usually performing slow, limited movements, so as to allow the spectator's eye to study the fashions in detail. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the traditional practice of placing a static camera before moving subjects (often enacting a society gathering) gradually gave way to more complex editing techniques where long and medium shots were interspersed with close-ups or extreme close-ups and more mobile shots and effects were used (panning from top to bottom, zooming in and out, the use of the iris effect, dissolves, superimpositions, etc.). It is evident that rather than displaying the dressed body in uninhibited movement, the newsreels sought to rest on, and arrest, the slowly moving body, part by part, in order to convey details of the items on display from multiple angles. The sense of bodily fragmentation is further underscored by the insertion of intertitles, which served to direct the eye and the mind of the spectator. Informative, topical, indulgent, and at times entertaining, the newsreel was a perfect marriage between fashion and cinema as it demonstrably benefited fashion businesses (through naming and sometimes through direct commercial tie-ins) and at the same time boosted cinema attendance by female spectators.<sup>2</sup> The newsreel and the cinemagazine (and, indeed, cinema in general) offered a mediation of fashion characterized by an open-to-all kind of visual consumption that married scopic pleasure with calculating attention. The blueprint for this heady mix of desire, escapism, and specialist knowledge had already been established by the nineteenth-century World's Fairs, and even more importantly so the department stores, with their combination of phantasmagorical spectacle and new opportunities to study merchandise in detail, and so it is no surprise that the cinema experience has frequently been posited as a form of window shopping (see, for example, Eckert 1990: 100–21). Crucially, the fashion newsreel and cinemagazine appealed to the exacting, sophisticated female spectator, doing its bit to elevate the cinematic experience to a more

middle-class pursuit.<sup>3</sup> The idea of a mutual attraction between fashion and cinema soon translated into the “soft-sell” strategies used in mainstream fiction films (Allen 1980: 481–99). The most prolific producers of the fashion newsreel were Pathé-Frères and Gaumont in France. Pathé launched its regular weekly newsreel *Pathé Journal* in 1909, and in the same year first featured a fashion-related item (Evans 2011); from 1910–11 it was distributed in some English-speaking countries via *Pathé’s Animated Gazette* and *Pathe’s Weekly*, with their formats varying from country to country. As the film historian Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (2009) has noted, one important aspect of the development of the genre in the 1910s and 1920s was that it stimulated the application of various color technologies in cinema, from the stencil-based Pathécolor to the two-color system of Kinemacolor to Gaumont’s Chronochrome, an early natural color process. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the fashion newsreel evolved only subtly in style (although it varied considerably in length and incorporated the voiceover in the sound era).<sup>4</sup> During the Second World War, the genre continued to flourish; “re-purposed” for the needs of national propagandas, it principally served to “dress” political and social issues while also providing much-needed light relief (Uhlírova and Bakhit 2006: 66–9).

Alongside newsreels and cinemagazines, more substantial documentary films about various behind-the-scenes aspects of the fashion industry emerged in the 1930s, usually hybridizing the documentary with publicity and avant-garde techniques. While not necessarily direct advertisements, these films were made largely for promotional and educational purposes. Humphrey Jennings’s 1939 *Making Fashion* (originally shot under the title *Design for Spring*) is one such extended advertisement for couturier Norman Hartnell, who was the film’s co-producer (Hodgkinson and Sheratsky 1982: 20; see also Brown 2002). The short film documents the preparation of Hartnell’s Spring/Summer 1938 collection, interspersing shots of his studio at work with images indicating the designer’s inspiration (a polished mix of classical sculptures, spring flowers, and nineteenth-century fashion plates). It is an intimate yet highly idealized portrayal of the behind-the-scenes of one of England’s grandest and most successful fashion salons, showing a perfectly coordinated team of busy skilled workers demonstrating a range of design processes, from draping on a dummy to the execution of a sample, to fitting on a model and encrusting with sequins and jewels. Shot in Dufaycolor, a color process especially suitable for enhancing pastels tones, and with color harmony makeup by Max Factor, the sumptuous film culminates in two substantial modeling sequences—one internal, staged in the salon; the other a fashion show for a small audience (Figure 4). Released the same year, Marcel L’Herbier’s government-sponsored *La Mode rêvée* was to endorse French *haute couture* at the New York World’s Fair at the outset of the Second World War. Set in the Louvre and in the streets of Paris, it

**Figure 4**

Frame enlargement from *Making Fashion*, dir. Humphrey Jennings, UK, 1939. Courtesy Fashion in Film and the BFI.



sees figures from a Watteau painting jump out of the canvas, eventually changing into modern-day models who flaunt creations by leading fashion houses including Nina Ricci, Lucien Lelong, and Elsa Schiaparelli. L'Herbier's stylized oneiric fantasy (the film idea and format was suggested to him by his cousin, the couturier Lucien Lelong; see *Le Figaro* 1939) mobilizes the dresses using a set of poetic display techniques that emphasize dynamism, layering, and rhythmicity. Frederick Wilson's Technicolor film *The Dancing Fleece* (1951), sponsored by the National Wool Textile Export Corporation, is another remarkably experimental advertisement-documentary, this time celebrating Britain's wool production. The film, costumed, again, by Norman Hartnell, is a riot of color as it combines a ballet/modern dance choreography (by Harold Turner of Sadler's Wells), Lotte Reiniger's charming animations, a quasi-surrealist *mise en scène* populated by mannequins, and detailed, almost caressing shots of wool yarns and fabrics. All these elements showcase the various processes of wool manufacture, from shearing, spinning, dyeing, and weaving to a final "fashion show."

While established filmmakers seemed the obvious choice for official documentary and promotional films, fashion photographers too took an interest in extending their practice to the moving image. George Hoyningen-Huene, for example, made a handful of short films in the early 1930s, including a plotless, title-less (and unfinished) "underground" domestic drama starring Horst P. Horst and Lucien Lelong's wife Natalie Paley (Lawford 1985: 89–90). In 1933 he also made a documentary about French *Vogue*, now lost (Ewing 1998: 34).

In the early-1960s, William Klein, a photographer with a long-term (if somewhat uneasy) involvement in the world of fashion, made two short documentaries about it: *Le Business et la mode* (1962) and *Aux grands magasins* (1964). He followed these with the 1966 feature *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?*, a biting satire of the fashion industry and the media, starring the young American model Dorothy McGowan who, like him, was enjoying great success in Paris. The same year in London, John Cowan and David Bailey, fired up by their close links with Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* (1966), also made films: Cowan's *A Pox on Both Your Houses* featured his principal model Jill Kennington (Garner 1999: 19) and Bailey's *G.G. Passion* starred Jean Shrimpton's younger sister Chrissie, also a model (neither film was a critical or commercial success and both remain obscure).

Among the most comprehensive and striking experiments in the fashion moving image by a photographer are those of Erwin Blumenfeld, whose film archive from 1958 to 1964 was recently re-edited for SHOWstudio by Adam Mufti. The 16-mm films, most of which were shot in vivid color, were intended as "pitches" to Blumenfeld's existing clients including Helena Rubenstein, Elizabeth Arden, and Dayton's department store (Martin 2006) and expanded on some of Blumenfeld's trademark graphic and optical effects as seen in his photography. The films experiment with body distortions—splitting, multiplying, overlapping, or otherwise fragmenting images of body parts—kaleidoscopic and collage-like abstract compositions, and more purely filmic techniques such as reverse motion. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Guy Bourdin too produced a corpus of fashion reels, shot on various stock during photo shoots, all of which he left as raw, unedited footage. The films are erotically charged formal explorations of his models posing and enacting simple movements and choreographies for the camera. In the 1970s and 80s, Serge Lutens, Richard Avedon, and Helmut Newton all created short commercials for their visionary client, the Japanese clothing brand Jun Ropé.

During the course of the 1980s, just as television began to recognize the appeal of programs dedicated to fashion,<sup>5</sup> designers and retailers began to incorporate atmospheric videos in their catwalk shows and shops (Jean Paul Gaultier's flagship boutique in Paris's rue Vivienne, for example, had video screens installed in shop windows as well as the shop floor). Then, during London's Fashion Week held in the Spring of 1990, Rifat Ozbek, Jasper Conran, and Antony Price made the deliberate gesture, radical for its time, of bypassing a live fashion show and presenting videos (or, in the case of Conran, a video and a happening of sorts) instead. The designers cited mainly creative and economic reasons. Ozbek's twenty-minute "music video," made by the filmmaker John Maybury, was undoubtedly the most ambitious among them. The video showcases models in Ozbek's brightly colored clothing against the backdrop of their "equivalents" in video special effects, from

image multiplications and rotations, to throbbing kaleidoscopic abstractions, to chroma keying. The video was played at regular intervals in a makeshift theater/cinema, which had an adjacent showroom displaying the clothing.<sup>6</sup> Somewhat predictably, the press at the time generally bemoaned the absence of a conventional fashion show, pointing above all to the inadequacy of the moving electronic image in conveying the *information* of the clothing (see for example Aarsteinsen 1990: J7).<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, smaller London-based clothing labels such as Bella Freud and Vexed Generation made collaborative films (*Strap Hanging*, 1999 and *Lady Behave*, 2000; *Wrap Liberation*, 1999) as an alternative to the limitations of runway conventions. It was also at this time that the fashion designer-artist Anna-Nicole Ziesche began to explore video and its effects as a device with which to manipulate clothing and “design” on the virtual body while bypassing the creation of a physical end product. In her first film *Infinite Repetition* (2000), Ziesche used the mirror effect to create endless dress shapes as she draped fabric on one half of her body. In her later films (*States of Mind and Dress*, 2002; *Unicorn, Uniform*, 2003) she began to focus on the emotional complexities of the intersections between body and dress. Similarly, Hussein Chalayan produced an extensive body of films and video installations as a way to expand on some of the themes he was also exploring as a fashion designer. His highly stylized meditative films *Place to Passage* (2003), *Anaesthetics* (2004), and *Absent Presence* (2005) exist in parallel to his fashion work and extend his practice into not only another medium but also another mental space altogether, via the art world within which they “operate.” Another fashion designer (turned journalist), the Paris-based Diane Pernet, began in the early 2000s to make short documentary vignettes under the label “Disciple films.” For these largely unscripted interview encounters, Pernet chose to feature those small experimental labels she perceived as true fashion mavericks (among them Bernhard Willhelm, Marjan Pejoski, and As Four). Her jerky handheld camera and deliberately “messy,” low-production-value editing style, combined with her curiosity, humor, and a sense of the surreal, result in an irreverent, poetic aesthetic that presents afresh the designer’s world of creative process while eschewing the usual conventions of more formal fashion reportage and documentaries (Pernet has, in fact, a degree in filmmaking).

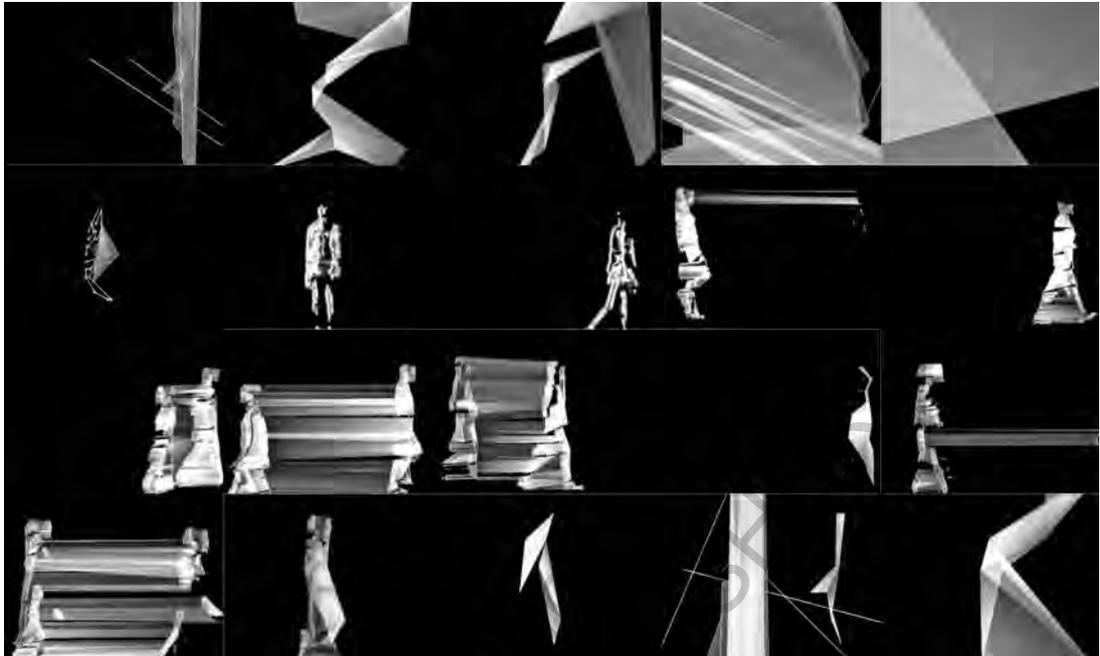
The turn of the century was when designers began in earnest to incorporate video projections into their shows, from the collaboration between the photographer Mark Borthwick and Maison Martin Margiela that featured large video projections of three women wearing Margiela garments at the designer’s Fall/Winter 1998 show, to Stella McCartney launching Chloé’s horse-themed Spring/Summer 2001 collection with footage of running horses and Matthew Williamson projecting sunrises for his Spring/Summer 2002 show, to Chanel’s

“TV belts” with miniature screens playing Chanel perfume advertisements from within the belts’ buckles in their Spring/Summer 2005 show. Among the designers to most consistently employ film as a “backdrop” to shows was Alexander McQueen who usually art-directed the footage himself. In his Spring/Summer 2003 collection *Irene* he featured a dreamy underwater choreography, shot by John Maybury, that captured the effects of a chiffon dress on a drowning body, and in his Fall/Winter 2007 show *In Memory of Elizabeth Howe, Salem, 1692*, he displayed footage of naked, Amazonian bodies, bees, and what one observer described as a “Satan-like figure whose face melted in flames” (Diderich 2007). The designers’ growing interest in the moving image was of course propelled by the technological possibilities—the now easily accessible electronic and digital production techniques and editing equipment—but also, and perhaps more importantly, coincided with the shift of the fashion show towards a theatrical spectacle, a multimedia, multisensory experience that was to forcefully impress upon the audience the concept and the creative process behind a collection.

The tradition of a moving image projection embedded in a fashion show has its archetype in the famously extravagant fancy dress soirée “Bal Blanc,” hosted in 1930 by Countess Anna-Letizia Pecci-Blunt and co-organized by the artist Man Ray. Together with his then-assistant Lee Miller, Ray installed a 35-mm projector at an upper-floor window of the Pecci-Blunts’ Parisian townhouse, and from this station projected a hand-tinted found film by Méliès onto guests, all in strictly-white dress code, dancing on a white floor that had been constructed in the garden. If Méliès’s own commercials had utilized the outdoors as a kind of cinema space for the public sphere, Ray’s was a much more radical intermedial gesture that anticipated the “expanded cinema” tradition, for it destabilized the aesthetic coherence of the found film footage and at the same time turned guests’ bodies into dynamic screens—or, in Ray’s words, “moving screens” (1963: 168). In his autobiography, Ray remembers that the effect was “eerie—figures and faces in the film were distorted but recognisable” (1963: 168–70). His “added attraction” foreshadowed the kind of meshing of film projection with fashion and live performance that would later reappear in contemporary fashion shows. It also serves as a reminder of the old affinity between fashion and art, typical of Ray and his time, that again resurfaced with a new intensity in the 1990s and 2000s.

The designer duo Viktor & Rolf, who perhaps best exemplify this recent “crossover” between the two disciplines of fashion and art, staged in their 2002 show another witty “inter-fabrication”<sup>8</sup> of fashion, film, and art. The designers sent their models down the catwalk wearing black dresses with blue panels, conflating the blue color of the fabric with the blue-screen technology used in video chroma-keying. As the models marched to simultaneous video projections of them on giant

twin screens, their projected bodies showed the blue parts of their dresses substituted with video images of swimming fish, moving clouds, or busy New York streets with a “dematerializ[ing]” effect (Menkes 2002: 8). In reference to the artist Yves Klein’s famous dictum “Long live the immaterial,” and in the context of post-9/11, the designers wanted to “go beyond the product” (quoted in Menkes 2002: 8), with a “need for fashion to escape reality ... [to] use fashion for fantasy ... to create [their] own utopia” (Kelly 2002: L1). Another fashion designer to have staged a show that merged, in a clever loop, the experience of physical and virtual clothing is Hamish Morrow, who for his Spring/Summer 2004 collection collaborated with the image-makers Warren du Preez and Nick Thornton-Jones and the artist collective United Visual Artists (UVA) (Figure 5).<sup>9</sup> The creative team used digital technology to capture models walking down the catwalk and simultaneously projected them onto the back wall as “digital spectres” (H. Morrow, personal communication by email, 2012), processed and modulated through a computer code, in a set-up that UVA’s Matt Clark (interviewed by Keeney 2004) compared to “playing a kind of visual musical instrument live.” For the show’s finale, Morrow sent out four models in all-white dresses to momentarily rest in front of a projector. As the lights went out, the dresses once again became screens, only this time the projected images were abstract animated digital prints. Unlike Ray, Morrow and his collaborators thought of the projected images more explicitly as fashion design: for them, the moving image became a pattern to “print” onto the blank dresses/canvases (and indeed, selected frames were later printed onto dresses and thus returned, full circle, to the realm of static commodity). Recalling the practices of video artists of the 1960s and 1970s, this closed-circuit video system highlighted the unique real-time presence of the fashion show while at the same time recasting the experience in a virtual time-space (*nota bene*, yet another dimension of the show’s reality/virtuality was SHOWstudio’s live streaming of it). Where Viktor & Rolf and Morrow intermixed the real with the virtual by applying two-dimensional images onto three-dimensional bodies, Alexander McQueen created an illusion of a real body using virtual, two-dimensional imagery. For his Fall/Winter 2006 show *The Widows of Cullogen* he collaborated with the filmmaker Bailey Walsh and Souvenir’s Simon Kenny to produce an *impressive* film installation that imitated the effects of the nineteenth-century theatrical illusion “Pepper’s Ghost.” For the show’s finale, the stage was darkened and to the poignant theme from the soundtrack for Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, a faint amorphous swirl appeared in a large glass pyramid that had been constructed on the stage. The image gradually metamorphosed into what seemed to be a three-dimensional apparition of the model Kate Moss, as if suspended mid-air inside the pyramid. As she subtly moved, the multiple ruffles



**Figure 5**

Hamish Morrow's Spring/Summer 2004 show, in collaboration with United Visual Artists, Warren DuPreez, Nick Thornton-Jones, and Suzanne Lee. Courtesy Hamish Morrow.

of her chiffon gown swirled around her in a ghostly, dreamlike manner, leaving the audience mesmerized.<sup>10</sup> As one attendee wrote: "McQueen created a fantasy that made his audience believe in the wizardry of fashion and its ability to move the spirit" (Givhan 2006: C01).

The role of SHOWstudio as a champion of this emerging fashion-moving-image culture cannot be underestimated. Launched in 2000 by the fashion photographer Nick Knight and graphic designer Peter Saville, it pioneered the concept of a fashion magazine-as-website that from the outset programmatically tested the aspects of "electronic logic" such as time, duration, movement, sound, and participation through interactivity and dialogue. It was the first platform to systematically encourage fashion designers (at first these were often UK-based) to make films as a way of showcasing their collections, to interrogate the filmic means of re-presenting fashion. In reality, however, the fashion film was relatively slow to establish itself on the Internet, and the high end of the fashion industry was at first rather resistant to it (the reasons for this again mirrors couture's initial lack of interest in cinema). In fact, it seemed for a while that the industry was heading into the "technological past" rather than "future," embracing the distinctly *cinematic*, as opposed to the *digital*. In 2004 and

2005, for example, two of the leading luxury brands, Chanel and Prada, commissioned acclaimed directors, Baz Luhrmann and Jordan and Ridley Scott to make a film that would help market their respective fragrances. Both Luhrmann's *Chanel No. 5* advertisement and the Scotts' *Thunder Perfect Mind* were conceived for exhibition in cinemas. With these films, the brands hoped to depart from existing advertising conventions, the "mass banality" of the mass market (Prada quoted in Hopkins 2005: 68), and to elevate the commercial to an exquisite cinematic experience. Luhrmann's three-minute vignette especially was an epic, uber-glossy production, shot on celluloid and reportedly costing £18 million (Edwardes 2004: 18).<sup>11</sup> It was a knowing exploitation of Nicole Kidman—the celebrity, the face of Chanel, and the star of Luhrmann's earlier successful feature *Moulin Rouge!* (2001).<sup>12</sup> *Thunder Perfect Mind*, the collaboration between Prada, Jordan Scott, and her father Ridley, had artistic ambitions of a different nature. The four-and-a-half-minute film unfolds to a voice-over recitation of an ancient Gnostic poem and features a cast of characters led by the model Daria Werbowy, all immaculately dressed by Miuccia Prada (with a discreet shot of a perfume bottle ending the film as an "afterthought"). It was premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2005 and was only subsequently re-edited into shorter commercials for television and Prada stores.

According to Penny Martin (2009: 54–5), Editor-in-Chief of SHOWstudio between 2001 and 2008, the online fashion film developed relatively slowly, and in certain formats, due to tangible technological limitations (above all inadequate bandwidth for streaming large data packages), but also due to the lack of technical skill sets and a certain reluctance to embrace the digital even among the more progressive photographers and image-makers. Broadly speaking, perhaps the greatest hindrance was the industry's initial reluctance to incorporate digital media into their core marketing and advertising strategies. Indeed, it would be wrong to readily conflate the fashion film with advertising (for more on this see Uhlířová 2013), if only because the promotional potential of film online clearly was not taken very seriously at first. The earliest digital fashion films were much more likely spurred by the unvented (if not frustrated) creative ambitions of their makers, faced with restrictive fashion industry formats and platforms. With the launch of SHOWstudio, for example, Nick Knight's initial aim was "to 'show' the 'studio'" (Knight 2009: 3)—in other words, to put the spotlight on the behind-the-scenes creative process of fashion and fashion image-making, highlighting its importance alongside the finished work. It is this interest in artistic process as performance and the aesthetic of the unfinished that most inform SHOWstudio's early production. But it is also important to emphasize the background of many of the practitioners in photography—indeed, the fashion film emerged out of an impulse to animate a world that was for the most part mediated through (static) photography. In films

such as *Sweet* (Knight and Jane How, 2000), *Dolls* (Knight and Camille Biddault Waddington, 2000), and *Sleep* (Knight, Simon Foxton, and Jonathan Kaye, 2001), the moving camera is posited as the eye of an immobile observer, producing a statically framed visual field within which the action is staged (animated). Such a conception of framing, combined with the usually plain background, not only privileges but also visually isolates the central action. Here, most of the contingent details of the moving image “information,” the “hundreds of subtle micro-expressions,” as the journalist Robb Young put it (2008: 18), are limited to those of the movements of the dressed body. Other early SHOWstudio films pare down the cinematic excess of visual stimuli by resorting to what Martin calls “moving stills” (2009: 55)—*Shelley Fox 14* (Shelley Fox and SHOWstudio, 2002), *Martin Margiela AW 2004* (Nigel Bennett), *I Feel* (Jean-François Carly, 2005), and the Warhol tribute *More Beautiful Women* (Knight, 2002) all create a deliberate dialogue between the stasis of a photograph and the movement of cinema.<sup>13</sup>

When in 2008 Prada launched its next film, *Trembled Blossoms* (dir. James Lima and based on James Jean’s illustrations), the fashion film was beginning to enjoy something of a boom: from dozens of isolated works it was beginning to assert a greater presence. There were now also many more new platforms for its production and exhibition, among them *tank.tv*; *Specialten* magazine; Fashion in Film; You Wear It Well which changed in 2008 to A Shaded View On Fashion Film; *FLY Magazine*, now *FLY 16x9*; Birds Eye View Festival’s “Fashion Loves Film” strand; and *Dazed Digital*. Perceptions of the fashion film began to change, at least within the industry, and its move towards the mainstream came about largely due to two changes. First, the practice of replacing live fashion shows with films that represented the collections was becoming more common. For its Fall/Winter 2004 show, Maison Martin Margiela had staged a multiple film happening across nineteen Parisian bars and cafes, all of which played, at a set time, a film by Nigel Bennett featuring the Margiela collection. For his Spring/Summer 2008 collection *Readings* Hussein Chalayan presented a film in a small room above the Galerie Magda Danysz in Paris. The film was made in collaboration with SHOWstudio’s Nick Knight and Ruth Hogben, and the musician Antony Hegarty of Antony & the Johnsons who “curated” a soundtrack composed using suggestions submitted to SHOWstudio by the participating public. Such gestures were soon replicated by a major fashion brand: Yves Saint Laurent’s Fall/Winter 2008–9 menswear collection was also shown as a film (directed by the music video-makers Chris Sweeney and Sarah Chatfield) on three large LED screens in the YSL showroom. The “trend” peaked with Gareth Pugh’s Fall/Winter 2009 womenswear collection, a collaborative eight-minute film made by Pugh and Hogben that was shown as part of an on-schedule presentation. It was this

film that particularly resonated with the fashion press, in spite of—or perhaps because of—its more radical manipulation of the clothing on display.

Second, around the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, fashion's major brands were beginning to invest bigger budgets in fashion films, and disseminating these online, alongside—or instead of—the more traditional channels such as television, cinema, and retail spaces. Enlisting cult icons of the film world has continued to be common practice from Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Martin Scorsese for Chanel, to David Lynch for Dior, and Kenneth Anger for Missoni. As in the Chanel and Prada fashion film advertisements of the mid-2000s, these new advertisements by major brands have generally presented more sleek and polished versions of each director's trademark aesthetic; they are relatively long and decidedly cinematic, only this time they have been made with the Internet more explicitly in mind. It is no surprise that the power of the Internet has finally been felt across the entire fashion industry. Placing a film (and a product) online reaches not only an immense audience (and so is a marketing "no-brainer" given current e-commerce figures); it is also practically cost-free and permanent, at least notionally. Brands have recently been approaching the possibilities of online presence with a new enthusiasm. Their motivation has generally been to connect with a greater consumer base although they have often sought to legitimize these efforts by stressing such values as greater openness and accessibility (to otherwise elitist shows), technological innovation, enhanced user experience, participation, and democracy. When Alexander McQueen streamed his Spring/Summer 2010 show live on his website [www.alexandermcqueen.com](http://www.alexandermcqueen.com), it was perhaps nothing too unusual by the standards of the more progressive fashion sites; but he took this idea further, expressing a wish to create special capsule collections for the public to buy immediately after seeing his collection (see Graham 2009: E08)—a wish that was soon realized by Burberry, who for their Fall/Winter 2010 Prorsum Collection streamed live on the company website, with an immediate option for viewers to click and buy the items on show. Referring to this development, Burberry's head designer Christopher Bailey commented: "We are now as much a media-content company as we are a design company, because it's all part of the overall experience. So it's a big deal. It's changing the whole system of buying, and the whole cycle of production" (quoted in Alexander 2010). During the 2011 London Fashion Week, Burberry reportedly streamed live to stations in 150 countries; in London the company "invaded" public spaces, showing its collection on the giant digital screens at Piccadilly Circus as well as on many screens on the London Underground (Alexander 2011: 24–5). Another such attempt at bringing together new media, spectacle, and commerce is the recent collaboration between the Italian luxury brand Ermenegildo Zegna and James Lima, whose

experience in special effects art direction includes involvement in James Cameron's 3D blockbuster *Avatar* (2009). For Zegna's Fall/Winter 2011 collection, titled *In the Mood for China*, Lima created a "Live-D" show where models filmed backstage were projected onto a huge backdrop of the Great Wall of China, simultaneously to their appearing live on the catwalk. According to Menkes (2011: 10), Lima called this show "a sort of 21st-century fashion show—half cinema, half fashion." Soon after, Lima and Zegna transitioned to the e-commerce platform, creating a virtual store app featuring a 3D simulation of a shop with everything on sale, complete with the model and actress Milla Jovovich as a host who meets the shopper.

Given the role that new technologies and new media have played in the various practices of production and presentation of the fashion image, there is no doubt that the character of the fashion film in the "digital age" has changed remarkably. Perhaps the most striking change resulting from the shift towards the digital has been the new ubiquity of fashion-as-moving-image. Still, we cannot afford to ignore the many striking overlaps and parallels that exist between contemporary and older fashion film practices that go back as far as the early cinema of the 1900s. The very term "fashion film," after all, was already being used by the press in connection with Pathé-Frères' newsreels in 1911 (Leese 1976: 9). The practice of expanding fashion advertising into the realm of the moving image goes back to Georges Méliès, as does its public presentation outside the confines of the traditional film viewing sites. The idea of replacing the live fashion show with a film was most probably Paul Poiret's (characteristically, necessity was the mother of invention here), and the incorporation of fashion and film into an ambitious multimedia spectacle can be traced to Man Ray. The link between cinema and commerce was already solidified by the 1920s through numerous examples of direct commercial tie-ins between department stores and other retail chains, cinema, and fan magazines. In its many incarnations and guises, the fashion film has, generally speaking, always sought to mesh commercial interests with entertainment and visual pleasure. But, importantly, at times it has gone beyond such a scope, into a world of genuine experimentation and innovation.

## Notes

1. To be precise, the "commercial" was shot for the *Pathé Journal* and so is in fact a newsreel item. The two genres were not strictly differentiated at this time. In this context it is also worth noting that in 1912, the year of the opulent relaunch of the Galeries Lafayette, and for several subsequent years, Gaumont produced a number of newsreel items to promote its merchandise. This "special relationship" between the film company and the department store

- may have been brokered by Benjamin Rossier, Senior Executive Officer of the Banque Fédérale S. A., who had been financing both (as well as Pathé) since the late-nineteenth century (Pohl and Freitag 1994: 260).
2. For a discussion of commercial tie-ins between American newsreels, department stores, local shops, and newspapers, see Tolini Finamore (2013). I would like to thank the author for sharing an unpublished version of her manuscript with me.
  3. Sarah Berry (2000: 54), for example, mentions a *Moving Picture World* article from as early as 1910, which suggested that the film industry imitated the way theaters used fashion for publicity, in order to attract the right kind of refined woman interested in fashionable gowns.
  4. Among other popular titles were the British *Kinemacolor Fashion Gazette*, *Topical Budget*, Pathé's *Eve's Film Review* (with the motto "Fashion Fun and Fancy"), the American *Florence Rose Fashions* and *McCall Fashion News*, and the German *Messter-Woche*, *Deulig Wochenschau*, and *Emelka-Woche*. For more detail on the fashion newsreel see Ganeva 2008: 124; Hammerton 2001; Leese 1976; Tolini Finamore 2013.
  5. Among the first regular television fashion programs was the American *Style with Elsa Klensch* (CNN), produced since 1980, and the Canadian *Fashion Television*, since 1985. Nicholas Charney's *Videofashion*, which launched in 1976, was originally conceived as a moving image fashion magazine for the industry as well as the general consumer market, distributed on videotapes.
  6. It subsequently also played on MTV and other television channels, giving Ozbek and British fashion extended exposure.
  7. Among the few journalists to identify the Fall/Winter London shows as progressive was Sarah Mower. She wrote: "[P]erhaps the future will bring new solutions and new formats for putting over fashion to Press and public. [The Ozbek video] was fresh, it was exciting, it opened up new possibilities ..." (Mower 1990: 17).
  8. I have borrowed this term from Annalisa Zox-Weaver (2011: 169).
  9. My thanks to Caroline Evans for reminding me of this show, and Hamish Morrow and UVA's Chris Bird for helping to clarify their concept and use of technology.
  10. The illusion of three-dimensionality led many journalists, and most recently the Metropolitan Museum, to wrongly describe the image as a hologram. The effect was in fact achieved by projecting film footage of Moss (shot by Bailey Walsh) from four sources onto four black screens (all suspended and hidden just above the pyramid), which were then reflected in the angled glass of the pyramid panels, giving an illusion of a ghostly image inside the pyramid. Thanks to Simon Kenny and Penny Martin for their assistance in clarifying the workings of this mechanism.

11. According to the American press, the film was also released in shorter, two-minute versions.
12. At the launch the Chanel publicist insisted: “It’s a film, not an advert” (Edwardes 2004: 18), while Lurhmann himself professed: “*Chanel No. 5* is part of the story, it’s not what the story is about” (Fitzgerald 2004: 7). Chanel’s and Luhrmann’s insistence on the status of *Chanel No. 5* as *film* proved crucial in Chanel-hired agencies’ approach to cinemas to separate the screening of the film from that of other advertisements, and their approach to Channel 4 in 2004, requesting a combined screening with Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!* and an inclusion in television listings, while dodging ASA regulations for television (Claire Murphy marketing, quoted in MacRury 2009: 228).
13. For further discussion of the implications of movement for the fashion image, and the relationship between still and moving image in the fashion film, see Khan (2012) and Uhlirova (2013).

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