# Promotion: Digital Fashion Film

Despite the growth in online video-driven journalism through forms of reporting, blogging, and editorial, the use of moving image by the fashion industry is still generally considered as a predominantly promotional tool for designers, brands, celebrities, and models. Karlie Kloss, to take a popular example, uses her Instagram feed to post staged videos and photos of her life to her 7.4 million followers. Given the widespread commercial use of the application by creatives from across the spectrum of the fashion industry, it could be argued that the incorporation of video to Instagram in 2013 (with the later addition of widescreen in 2015 and the creation of Instagram Stories in 2016, which allows users to post ephemeral moving image) made the notion of the fashion film, as a discrete textual category, seem increasingly obsolete. By the mid-2010s, video had become the dominant vernacular of social media, an integral part of online activity and interaction, and of the larger cultural conversation. As well as thinking of fashion film historically as a textual object of inquiry—by considering fashion films as individual film texts—it is also important to consider how content, the currency of social media platforms, defined as a form of entertainment devised through the visual storytelling of the brand, is shaping and changing fashion communications. Fashion houses now operate as brands that have effectively become content producers—indeed, brands are increasingly operating as media themselves—under pressure to maintain a constant flow of imagery across digital platforms by slicing it up and rolling it out frame by frame or scene by scene in an attempt to sustain campaigns for the duration of the season. It could therefore be argued that the more generic category of the fashion film no longer caters for the range of moving-image practices or experiences of fashion in today's reconfigured online social media culture. Instances of integrated digital moving image that transcend a straightforward understanding of the fashion film include Burberry's experimental use of the mobile messaging app Snapchat for content provision, and designer J. W. Anderson's innovative use of gay geo-social networking (or "hook-up") app Grindr to live-stream a menswear show
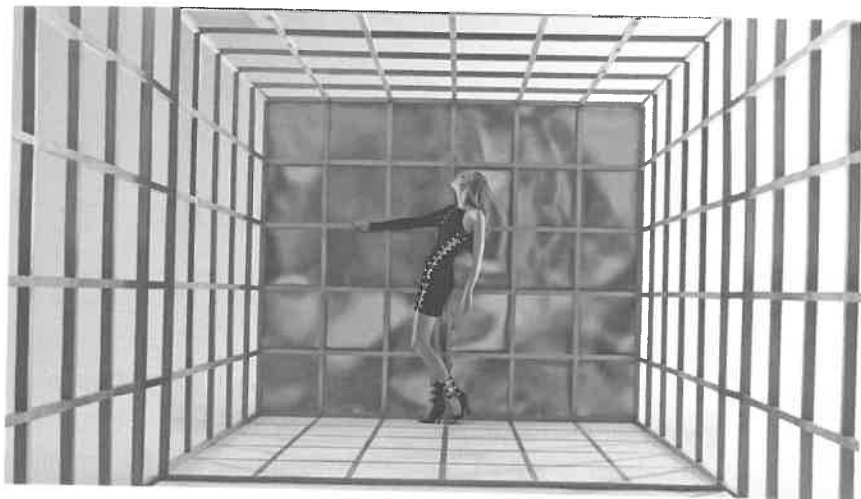
Figure 1.1 Marie Schuller's film showcasing the SS 2015 Versus Versace collaboration with Antony Vaccarello, produced by Dazed Digital. Credits: Marie Schuller (director) and Dazed Digital (producer).

in 2016. One might, then, legitimately question whether the use of one generic umbrella term can possibly cover the range of commercial practices through these types of platform-specific initiatives that blend design with media. These practices also indicate the potential relocation of contemporary fashion moving image within a digital culture of data processing and its potential disconnection from forms of film narrative.

Visual communications

There are a number of recent cases of high-profile fashion houses that have made use of online motion content to rejuvenate their brand image. In the age of advanced luxury, in which the fashion designer now operates as a creative director, who oversees design strategy and visual communications, moving image plays an increasingly important role in the construction of seasonal campaigns. Films are now routinely supported by a range of visual paratexts: for example, posting teaser shots—still and moving—of individual looks from a collection, which are to be shared or reposted on the brand's Facebook or Instagram feeds, aims to build up momentum until the release of the campaign film, which is now conceived as a social media event complete with a traditional cinematic release date. It is also a way of padding out and prolonging a campaign across the season by drip-feeding imagery as spreadable content to audiences.

Some fashion houses have used motion content as a strategic means of rebranding both creative design and visual communications. Take the Italian global luxury giant Gucci. The promotion of an unknown accessories designer Alessandro Michele to the position of creative director in 2014 signaled a radical departure from the label's signature manipulation of overt sexuality, which had been so lucratively exploited under the tenure of Tom Ford from 1992 to 2004, but which had become stuffy and bourgeois under his successor, Frida Giannini, in the decade since. Ford drew his success from a commercial update of American-style seventies glamour—the Halston look rebooted for the nineties—conceived to revive the fading aura of the prestigious Florentine leather goods company known principally for its status-symbol loafer shoe. Michele replaced Giannini's polished iteration of Ford's template with a new design proposal that reengaged with the brand's European heritage through a form of assemblage that ranged from Italian Renaissance high culture to English post-punk pop culture. Michele proposed a patchwork of tonal influences that revived an alternative vision of the 1970s to Ford's postmodern take on Studio 54 glamour, one that articulated gender insubordination and sexual ambiguity through a less assertive and more romantic lens. Where Ford's era promoted frontal views of the body as merchandise, encapsulated by photographer Mario Testino's famous shot of the brand logo on the model's pubis, Michele's promotes indeterminacy as both the form and content of his designs: he opted, for example, to blend women's and men's wear for the Fall/Winter 2017 show following similar attempts to surpass binary gender at Burberry, Tom Ford, and Vetements. He has also discussed his work as a form of costume design and expressed a desire both to direct and design for the cinema emphasizing the importance of narrative to his design process.[1] This interest in storytelling has been adapted to the task of reinvigorating the brand's visual codes through the promotion of fashion, accessories, fragrance, and eyewear. The commercial results of the revitalized brand were remarkable: by 2017, Gucci was posting record revenue growth of over 50 percent with strong global performance across the spectrum of products.[2]

The task of translating Michele's disjunctive style and radical juxtapositions into campaign imagery has fallen largely to photographer Glen Luchford and art director Chris Simmons, who have collaborated on the series of campaigns since 2015 that assemble a collage of dissonant elements such as animal wildlife, adolescent insouciance, and urban transience:

Over the seasons, these have become rich and complex tableaux, layering disparate elements and ensemble casts together in the same way that Michele

does with his collections and catwalk shows. Where nature and the animal kingdom run wild over the clothes and accessories—printed bumblebees, snakes, tigers, flamingos, birds, petals, vines and fanciful flora—so they are then placed in resolutely urban settings such as the Los Angeles subway or on a Berlin rooftop, creating a jarring tension that underscores the experimental mood of the Gucci studio.[3]

Photographer, model, and ambassador for the brand, Petra Collins, has also contributed to the campaign imagery by shooting a dreamscape for Gucci eyewear and appearing in the film for the launch of Michele's first fragrance, *Bloom*, in 2017 with other on-trend faces, American actress Dakota Johnson and transgender actress and model Hari Nef. Gucci's campaigns to date reflect a clear strategy to produce digital content continuously, and they engage with a specifically European artistic heritage and the generic forms of narrative cinema. Locations have included Florentine villas, Berlin shopping malls, and English country estates, all of which conjure up a surreal pop sensibility: the Spring/Summer 2017 film was shot in Rome to the soundtrack of Italian pop culture, fast food, savage animals, and iconic locations. Set to the sound of English pop (The Undertones' 1980 track "My Perfect Cousin"), the 2017 Cruise collection was shot as pastiche home-video footage at Chatsworth House in England and mixed aristocratic class tradition with post-punk rebelliousness, channeled through the shrewd casting of British actress Vanessa Redgrave, who combines the classical and the revolutionary and who gamely modeled looks from the collection surrounded by the androgynous teens. This was followed by the pre-Fall 2017 film, *Soul Scene*, shot at the Mildmay Club in London, which dynamically reproduced the underground black Northern Soul movement of the 1960s and 1970s through a dance video setting the designs in motion. The call for all-black casting for the campaign on social media was accompanied by behind-the-scenes photos and teasers before the online release of the film in multiple formats: the regular "cinematic" edit and a longer director's cut, accompanied by a 360-degree 3D version to be viewed via the brand's virtual reality app, which added an immersive documentary feel to the viewing experience.

The intertextual references to cinema are similarly eclectic. The official campaign films have been supplemented by director Gia Coppola's four-part series of fashion films for the online Gucci Stories, *The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice*, which starred Lou Doillon and was styled by Arianne Phillips. The film imagined the pre-Fall 2016 collection through a narrative transposition of the Greek myth to modern-day New York. Luchford and Simmons have

tended to translate the collage sensibility of Michele's designs through a more economical style of visual storytelling. The commercial for the 2016 Cruise collection, entitled *A Fashion Story*, filmed in New York, collapsed a basic boy-meets-girl scenario into a presentation film as the model walks directly from the sidewalk to the catwalk. The Fall/Winter 2016 campaign lensed in Tokyo offset the floral psychedelic imagery of the city against a parallel commentary on its formal construction as film by grafting fantasy subtitles onto the images that describe the different sounds envisaged to accompany them like scenes from an imagined feature film. The Autumn/Winter 2017 developed this cinematic concept into a pastiche b-movie trailer for a futuristic sci-fi feature. The most ambitious engagement with cinema to date were the campaign visuals for the Spring/Summer 2016 collection shot in Berlin. The commercial replayed a scene from the German film *Christiane F.* (Edel, 1981), a bleak tale of drug addiction among errant teenagers in Berlin of the late 1970s, which included a prolonged sequence filmed at David Bowie's *Station to Station* concert performance as the Thin White Duke persona. The homage to Bowie's Berlin suggests a similar path to Hedi Slimane's earlier lucrative scavenging of youth subcultural histories at Dior Homme, but in a less preprocessed manner. The Gucci film documents a group of carefree kids as they roam, falling and stumbling, through the corridors of a retro shopping mall before escaping to a rooftop, which allows for ensemble shots of the collection against the panoramic backdrop of the city. The original scene is a montage sequence set to the music of Bowie's hit single "Heroes" from 1977, and the Gucci ad conveys the dynamic sense of movement of the original, but it is purposefully less fluid. Instead of the deep, geometric tracking shots through the long corridors that accompany the kids as they ransack the mall and escape from the police, the ad uses commercial continuity through a quicker-paced montage of shots to splice in the close-ups on product, thereby subtly switching between cinematic and promotional styles.

Hyper-advertising and the mini-film event

Since 2015, Gucci's advertising campaigns have shown innovative ways of engaging with moving-image content to rejuvenate a brand's visual codes by tailoring imagery more specifically to online social media consumption. Other brands have pursued different strategies, however, in an attempt to blend the online fashion film with more traditional media advertising.

In an era of intensified promotion, in which consumers are saturated by conventional forms of push marketing, there has been a drive to develop editorial content devised by fashion brands to give the illusion of an audiovisual experience, akin to the consumption of cinema or the visual arts, which masks the more obviously promotional logic of commerce and sales. In short, unlike the frequent interruptions of push ads that pester online consumers, vehicles of "advertainment" like branded fashion film have been developed according to the logic of convergence to suit the more actively participative ethos of social media consumption. Alongside strategies of covert communications—through a type of content in which the brand is on mute—comes the parallel resurgence of a residual form of spectacular hyper-publicity that amplifies the brand by collapsing online content into media advertising. For example, the lavish three-minute film, *L'Odyssée* (2012), a PR event directed by photographer and filmmaker Bruno Aveillan for the luxury jeweler Cartier, is emblematic of this trend, as is the director's grandiloquent film for the classic French perfumer Guerlain, *La Légende de Shalimar* (2013), starring Russian top-model Natalia Vodianova as Mumtaz, the consort of a seventeenth-century Indian mogul emperor. In her analysis of this type of hyper-advertising spectacle, Karine Berthelot-Guiet explains how the large-scale Cartier film, which was produced at a cost of some four million euros by two agencies belonging to the *Publicis* group,[4] glorifies the brand through its animated staging of myth and magic in the journey made by the brand's emblematic panther across the globe, and by paraphrasing overtly cinematic effects—at least those that signify the Hollywood blockbuster in shorthand—such as overwrought orchestral music and spectacular postproduction animation.[5] Both ads for Cartier and Guerlain reroute the form of the contemporary fashion film back to the traditional advertising film by limiting its potential to a straight pastiche of blockbuster entertainment cinema. In obvious ways, they stand as grotesque homages to familiar theories of the postmodern as a specific type of cultural production linked to consumer capitalism and preoccupied with forms of blank parody, hyperreality, and stylistic cannibalization.[6]

Cultural theorists Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy have posited the notion of the "global screen" precisely as a form of hyper-cinema, a product of image-excess in the age of information technology and economic globalization. Under the influence of Jean Baudrillard's philosophy of postmodernity, Lipovetsky and Serroy's "hyper-cinema" signifies formal proliferation and stylistic excess: the ever-expanding repertoire of technological prowess, multi-platforms, tonal plurality, high speed, and the battery of formal editing techniques that film

historian David Bordwell denoted in US mass-audience entertainment vehicles as "intensified continuity," which is to say the amplification of classical continuity techniques for formal emphasis.[7] Lipovetsky and Serroy also situate contemporary branded communications as a sort of tribute to the Hollywood star-system and its seductive ideal of femininity as a form of hyper-spectacular beauty, which is reanimated through the excessive glamour of stars like Nicole Kidman or Charlize Theron in high-profile fragrance ads for Chanel (*N°5*) and Dior (*J'adore*). With the advertising spectacle comes "the combination of overstatement and artistic quality, idealization and savage beauty, perfection and exploding budgets, elegance and over-mediatized outrageousness. A blockbuster-beauty in service of the brand."[8] Beyond fashion, they date the emergence of digital branded entertainment back to the start of the millennium, when, in 2001, BMW commissioned a series of short films, *The Hire*, from a pantheon of famous film directors (all male) from across the spectrum of international cinema, such as Tony Scott, Ang Lee, Wong Kar-wai, Alejandro González Inárritu, John Woo, and Guy Ritchie. At the time, the films were downloaded some fifty million times and released as a collector-item DVD, signaling the start of a process of cultural elevation of advertising through the redefined digital cinema, which, according to digital media theorist Lev Manovich, testifies to the return of animation techniques that supersede the indexical nature of classic cinema as a recording medium.[9]

Despite its length, the Cartier film also tried to recapture the opulent visual style of the commercials of the late twentieth century, now seen as a golden age of the media advertising spectacle, arguably best remembered through the work of photographer and director Jean-Paul Goude in the 1980s and 1990s, who, rather than blandly aping Hollywood, developed his own creative signature through a style of promotional film that knowingly referenced the codes—particularly the tonal composition and generic conventions—of classic cinema without simply photocopying them. He blurred the boundaries between high art, design, and commercial imagery through a number of films made to promote the Chanel fragrances *Égoïste* (1990) and *Coco* (1991): in the former, he erected a vast fake hotel façade in Rio de Janeiro to shoot the patchwork of disjointed, nightmarish images of violent door-slamming, conceived as a feminine rebellion against male egotism; while in the latter, he imagined pop star and actress Vanessa Paradis as a fragile bird imprisoned within a giant cage, watched over by a predatory cat and the iconic spirit of the founder of the house.

Goude's creative (rather than imitative) take on brand imagery is sometimes paralleled by the commercial work of contemporary video-artists, such as the evocative commercial shot by Chris Cunningham to promote Gucci's *Flora*

fragrance in 2009. It represents one of the more successful attempts to combine scent, fashion, and brand through a poetic image of the model in a field of twenty thousand fake flowers morphing into a butterfly of moving fabric that documents the origins of the fragrance in the label's floral silk scarf from the 1960s, and, in so doing, making a haptic-visual link between sensation and garment. More generally though, there is less formal difference between the heritage of the pre-digital commercial and the newer cross-media model, in which the short film is at times simply reconfigured as a branded cinematic event that overshadows the print campaign. In the case of the hyperbolic Cartier and Guerlain films, one might well consider the new-style commercial more as a pale facsimile of earlier visual creativity. The point of the big-budget fashion film commercial is to acquire the symbolic value of cinema in both its entertainment and high-art formats. The advertising film is quite clearly a mercantile form that traditionally lacks the perceived cultural prestige of narrative cinema, or even a coherent generic history of its own, drawing as it does indiscriminately across genres and taking inspiration from other media arts. Florence de Mèredieu labels this feature the form's parasitical nature, which feeds off popular cinema in particular.[10] Like fashion films and music videos, advertising films such as fragrance commercials tend to operate through a kaleidoscope effect in how they condense and paraphrase forms of feature filmmaking. Pastiche, as defined by film scholar Richard Dyer as "the kind of imitation you are meant to know is an imitation,"[11] is the key to the intended self-consciousness of much moving-image advertising, be it new fashion film or old-school commercial. Guerlain's earlier ad for the Shalimar fragrance in 2001 starring Brazilian supermodel Fernanda Tavares openly imitated the distinctive visual style and tonal palette of one of world cinema's hits of the previous year, Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (Wong, 2000), celebrated for its languid use of music and slow-motion camerawork.

Branded experience, artistic exploration, and cultural critique

In grouping these short formats together, the broader term "promotional film" better captures the commercial nature of much contemporary moving-image production by differentiating types of fashion communication that are straightforwardly commercial from those that are more conceptual, artistic, or experimental. However, the problem with conflating promotional film—both

old and new—with fashion film tout court is precisely the omission of non-branded, less commercially viable projects that seek to make more prospective or critical statements about fashion. At times, the commercial fashion film also takes its inspiration from more conceptual artistic forms. For example, Kevin Frilet's four-minute, crowd-funded, ambient mood piece, *Under* (Frilet, 2014), which consisted of black-and-white images of bodies floating underwater, was shown at *A Shaded View of Fashion Film* festival in 2015, where it won the award for best emerging talent, and was subsequently shown at short film festivals around the world and on the editorial platform *Nowness*, which granted the filmmaker's work wider visibility. Armani subsequently hired Frilet to shoot an ad campaign for the brand's Acqua di Gioia perfume in 2016 with the aim of transferring the loose style of his art film to the formatting of branded fragrance advertising. Armani transposed Frilet's creative signature on *Under* to four twenty-second clips sensuously entitled air, sun, sky, and aqua, which were filmed using the square 1:1 aspect ratio for maximal traction on Instagram. Frilet has also collaborated on art fashion projects such as *MOVEment*, a series of films investigating the relationship between fashion and dance, commissioned by Jefferson Hack, the cofounder of the Dazed group, for *Another Magazine* in 2015. Hack invited designers and choreographers to collaborate on short explorations of clothing and the body in motion through the medium of film. Frilet's atmospheric contribution, *Fallen*, filmed ten dancers from the Pina Bausch Tanztheater Wuppertal company, who were dressed by Miuccia Prada. In a deserted theater, the dancers perform a sequence of poetic duets while feathers rain down on them; the film culminates in a beautiful aerial shot of the ensemble of dancers in repose.

This type of artistic-commercial project spanning dance, design, and motion editorial is illustrative of the productive dialogue between forms of performance and promotion in contemporary fashion communications. To be sure, the idea that the framework of marketing has now been fully mapped onto the landscape of moving-image culture is not a new one. From a theoretical perspective, the term "promotional culture" was first coined pre-internet by Andrew Wernick to examine promotion historically as a rhetorical tool,[12] a semiotic part of the cultural expression of capitalist economics channeled through the specific art of advertising, which is conceived as an outfacing form of communication, "an institutionalized system of commercial information and persuasion"[13] in a consumer society structured around the primary goal of selling. "Advertising," wrote eminent Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams, "was developed to sell goods, in a particular kind of economy. Publicity has been developed

Figure 1.2 *Under* (2014). Credits: Kevin Frilet (director), Human Films (producer), and Nicolas Petris (director of photography).

Figure 1.3 *Fallen* (2015). Credits: Kevin Frilet (director), Psycho (producer), and Nicolas Petris (director of photography).

to sell persons, in a particular kind of culture."[14] Echoing Williams, who critiqued the underlying "magic" in the way advertising transforms material objects into collective fantasies through a chain of symbolic associations, Judith Williamson also saw advertising as a language with a life of its own. "It exists," she explained,

> in and out of other media, and speaks to us in a language we can recognise but a voice we can never identify. This is because advertising has no "subject," no speaker; it's self-perpetuating; it works because it feeds off use value giving goods symbolic meaning.[15]

These analog conceptualizations of promotion relied on analysis of advertising's textual significations within the context of mass-media representations (print ads or TV spots bought as discrete categories of media production). What we are witnessing in the digital media context of online fashion film is the confluence of traditional practices of advertising directed at consumers with strategies of non-advertising, the forms of which "radically blur distinctions between commercial and non-commercial media symbols."[16] So, by blending above-the-line and below-the-line forms of marketing, fashion brands are engaging with content and entertainment vehicles such as the fashion film to forge some kind of "conversation" with networked consumers (displaced across various platforms) about the brand, its values and ethics, and the real and virtual worlds that surround them. This has meant reconfiguring in PR terms the relationship, if less often the actual balance of power, between the designer/brand and the consumer/audience, and rethinking the issue of online participation more precisely in the context of fashion branding as more than an illusion of access to the world of the storied luxury brands and couture houses. As Helen Powell explains in her more general discussion of cross-media promotion, "Media convergence challenges traditional models of assembling and delivering commercially viable audiences to advertisers specially due to their displacement across a plenitude of screens, stationary and mobile."[17] By moving away from the invasive methods of push advertising toward participatory networked spaces into which they strive to "converse" with online consumers, brands are now obliged not only to predict the type of content that will spread, but also to create content that will allow consumers to access the "experience" of the brand. This signals the shift from a brand pushing information about its products through transparent campaigns to more diffuse forms of communications fashioned around the emotional experience and response of online users and the diversity of content.

The branded "experience" often seeks to take consumer publics beyond fashion through content that engages with adjacent political, ethical, or ecological issues, which are articulated through films that interrogate models of cultural representation or intersect with globalized patterns of consumption. In this context, we might mention films from across the media spectrum made by brands, designers, and artists—from the corporate communication of the fast fashion giants to independent films from small production companies—that actively seek to challenge the sociocultural, ecological, or economic status quo rather than to uphold the aesthetic ideals and commercial norms of the industry. At times, however, these are cynical vehicles for corporate communication that try to blend the commercial with the ecological. Despite their opportunistic attempt to recuperate the sustainable agenda through green-washing, two eco-films made by H&M are seductive examples of this trend: *Close the Loop: sustainable fashion through recycled clothes* (2015) was followed by *Rewear It* (2016), a hybrid type of fashion/music video featuring a performance by the controversial musician M.I.A. Both are sleek productions that promote the recycling of garments—ironic, given the retailer's position at the pinnacle of fast fashion—in tandem with a progressive take on minority identity politics (of race, religion, gender, and sexuality) that is processed through the stylized lens of globalized consumer individualism.

Beyond this type of packaged corporate communications, other more oppositional examples testify to a growing critical awareness of the potential use of online film to spread a progressive ecological agenda. In the short film *Handprint* (Nighy, 2013), commissioned by Eco-Age and produced by White Lodge, director Mary Nighy asked viewers to confront the origins of their clothes to unpack the ethical issues in the fashion supply chain. The film premiered at London Fashion Week in 2013 for the launch of the Green Carpet Challenge Capsule Collection on sale at Net-a-Porter, and was an exercise in consciousness-raising around the industrial challenges faced by garment workers around the world. It visualizes the manual imprint from production to consumption to highlight the traceability of the garment by surrounding the idealized (white, Western, female) consumer with the nonwhite faces of production, embodying the invisible masses, and returning the gaze to the Western consumer. The idealistic thinking behind the project is that if only consumers would universally acknowledge the hidden faces behind manufacturing there would be a collective shift away from the excessive consumption of fashionable clothing.

Visual artists also use the medium critically to address the social politics of identity but in more politically radical and formally experimental ways. To take an example beyond commercial fashion film, Jessica Mitrani's video installation *Headpieces for Peace* (2011) drew on eleven interchangeable testimonials to celebrate the links between fashion and feminism through a gendered critique of the politics of religion and style. In a nod to Michel Foucault's preface to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipe*, *Headpieces for Peace* is described in a mission statement as "a non-hierarchical, nomadic organization on a tandem bicycle that seeks to initiate free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia. The organization consists of eleven interchangeable and fluctuating members who belief that collective expressions of desire are possible."[18] The film was first commissioned by the threeASFOUR fashion collective as part of their exhibition *Insalaam Inshalom* at the Beit Ha'Ir Center for Urban Culture in Tel Aviv in 2011. Designers Gabi Asfour, Adi Gil, and Ange Donhauser covered the entire exhibition space in fabrics containing motifs from their collection and invited artists including Mitrani to develop the project theme of religious and cultural cohabitation between Judaism and Islam.[19] Taking scraps and remnants from the prints that mix sacred geometry from Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, Mitrani used the material to design and produce the eleven headpieces in the video. Since the overarching concept was peace, the film also contained references to the US civil rights movement to situate the artist's and the designers' lives in New York City within a larger transnational historical canvas. The video was later shown alongside the individual headpieces as an independent installation at the French Institute in New York in 2014. Mitrani's

Figure 1.4 *Headpieces for Peace* (2011). Credit: Jessica Mitrani (director).

contribution to the original project was an ambitious attempt to think through fashion beyond the commercial realm through its articulation with social questions of gendered norms and its inscription in geopolitical contest around religious belief and cultural belonging. *Headpieces for Peace* interrogates these weighty issues humorously by relying on stop-motion animation techniques. In so doing, it makes a graphic link between the contemporary fashion film and the trickery and special effects of "the cinema of attraction"—film historian Tom Gunning's label for the specific qualities of spectacle and exhibition of very-early-twentieth-century film.[20]

In more commercial settings, fashion filmmakers such as Kathryn Ferguson (resident filmmaker for the London department store, Selfridges) and Marie Schuller (formerly head of fashion film at SHOWstudio) have similarly sought to engage more critically with questions of gender, identity, culture, and heritage within a number of their branded fashion films and ads. Ferguson's work for Selfridges has consistently interrogated the corporeal norms of mainstream fashion imagery within the framework of a number of special projects commissioned by the retailer. Ferguson's film *Incredible Machines* from 2016 explored the unseen relationship five diverse women, including a trans activist, a Thai boxing champion, and a business-woman/fashion muse, have with their bodies and their undergarments to interrogate the widespread reproduction of a male heterosexist gaze within dominant forms of fashion imagery. In 2014, the *Beauty Project* included films aiming to celebrate and redefine the concept of beauty within contemporary consumer culture: *Beauty I See You Everywhere* explored the notion of regional beauty within the UK giving a platform to discussions of gender, race, and faith in relation to fashion and consumption, while *Change Is a Beautiful Thing* questioned received wisdom on notions of femininity and aging. In parallel, Marie Schuller's collaborations with Selfridges have also combined conventional editorial campaigns such as *The Masters* in 2014 with more progressive social initiatives such as the talent platform *Bright New Things* in 2015 to champion ecologically sustainable UK labels. Schuller's contribution, *Babyface (Am I Ugly?)* (2016), to the Nowness editorial series, *Define Beauty*, further exposed the pressures faced by preteen girls to respond to unrealistic and unvaried cosmetic ideals of femininity propagated through the techniques of digital modification that inform popular vlogger tutorials and contouring culture.

As much as all these diverse forms of fashion moving image—blending the critical with the commercial—are concerned with communicating fashion

in motion or making artistic statements about dress, fashion, and beauty as vehicles for social identity, any attempt to define the specific visual language or stylistic grammar of the new genre of fashion moving image invariably requires us to think about its cultural significance beyond a merely aesthetic or semiotic consideration of its style, meaning, form, or content. Essential to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural value of fashion films are their various production contexts, both commercial and artisanal. To grasp the meanings of the fashion film, we also need to take into account commissioning, financing, and technology: the creative intention of the project and degree of authorial freedom, the commercial framing of the brief and the overall economic constraints, and the technological means available to realize it. The digital technology of the contemporary fashion film is also an integral feature of its consumption, because, as Gary Needham notes, "fashion in all its guises is now wholly integrated and synergistic with aspects of information technology, thus affecting the ways in which we access and participate in fashion culture as digital citizens and consumers." As semiotic producers of digital imagery on both desktop and mobile screens, we mediate fashion as spectacle precisely through the transformative apparatus of the screen. "The digital fashion film," Needham continues, "presents itself as the most recent tension in which the screen is in a creative tussle with the culture it appears to represent; it continues to pose those ubiquitous questions of how to see, how to evaluate, how to display, and how to experience fashion on screen."[21] To further transpose an argument earlier formulated by film theorist Aylish Wood, who emphasizes the *encounter* between viewer and image not as a straightforward access to a transparent story-world or document but more as an interface "created by elements that work to organize a viewer's attention,"[22] a critical engagement with the content projections of contemporary fashion brands requires not only a textual attention to meaning, form, and content, but also a recognition of the wider industrial contexts of production, circulation, and reception.

The Italian fashion filmmaker, Luca Finotti, whose clients have included a diverse range of brands from established and emerging high fashion labels (from Moschino to MSGM) to global sportswear giants like Adidas and Nike, recognizes the financial incentive of fashion film for contemporary brands. Whereas brands previously invested heavily in media advertising space for TV commercials, they can now increase investment in production costs for viral video alongside the additional media costs such as paying for YouTube advertising. In a profile of

the director in 2015 for the economic magazine *Forbes*, which raised Finotti's profile beyond the fashion industry, the filmmaker underlined the importance of finance to assure the quality of his productions.[23] The winner of best film at a number of fashion film festivals including Berlin and Istanbul in 2017, Finotti's *#WeBelieveInThePowerOfLove*, made to promote Riccardo Tisci's designs for a line of sneakers for NikeLab, chimed with both the technological aesthetics of social media, particularly its emphasis on color and speed, and the cultural politics of gender fluidity and sexual diversity of the millennial and postmillennial generations Y and Z. There is a notable difference between the campaign version used by Nike, coauthored by Italian directing duo SÄMEN, which is more conventionally product-focused and narrative-driven, and Finotti's own more conceptual, extended director's cut. The original ambition of the Nike project was to demonstrate the functionality of the product in movement through the lifestyle sensibility and visual codes of younger consumers, a brief Finotti interpreted in his own version by superimposing neon glitch art animation over images of various couplings (both hetero and queer)—insistent plural images of sexual identity that are more peripheral, but nonetheless present, in Nike's commercial edit. In its hybrid mash-up of the viral codes of contemporary street art, music video, and fashion film, *#WeBelieveInThePowerOfLove* attempts to connect the post-digital structure of feeling—particularly the promotion of postmillennial social tolerance on questions of sexual identity—to the broader commercial exigencies of the global sportswear brand.

Hybrid content: Fashion film and music video

Despite much talk of a digital "revolution" in fashion through the proliferation of online editorial platforms and the increased branded investment in motion content, the online fashion film has not always been greeted with praise by the industry. Back in 2012, Quynh Mai, the founder of Moving Image & Content, a digital marketing agency in New York focused on fashion and beauty brands, wrote an op-ed piece for the online industry news and analysis platform, *The Business of Fashion*, in which she asked the polemical question: "Are we failing to fulfil the potential of fashion film?" Criticizing brands for piggybacking their creative digital content off print shoots, passing off shoddy behind-the-scenes footage as actual film production, Quynh cited weak content, misallocated budgets, and neglected distribution strategies to explain why, arguably, the

genre had not taken off as predicted.[24] In her view, a commercially successful fashion film requires good storytelling not just aesthetic appeal; targeted distribution across different social media channels and digital platforms; a technical proficiency in film to avoid producing a moving version of still visuals; a reallocation of advertising budgets away from print to video; and the need to track engagement metrics more qualitatively through comments, feedback, and shares, rather than purely numerically through clicks.

Cited by Quynh as an example of good practice was the one-minute video by photographer Steven Meisel for Alber Elbaz's Fall/Winter 2011 for the revived house of Lanvin, in which the genre was used to mock the codes of fashion advertising by filming models Karen Elson and Raquel Zimmermann, who dance out of rhythm to the beat of the rapper Pitbull. To crown this parody of the pretensions of the high fashion image, Elbaz himself made an unexpected cameo appearance in a cheeky tribute to gangsta rap. The much-needed injection of humor into the serious business of fashion marketing suited the ironic sensibility of social media memes and the need for bite-size content, which in turn raises the broader strategic question of how brands struggle competitively to engage and entertain online consumers by operating in ever-reduced time frames, on multiple mobile devices and across different media channels. The incorporation of music and dance also signaled the fashion film's intermedial debt to the music video, particularly through the ironic use of a presentational performance style.[25] Meisel's more experimental video the following season for Lanvin (Spring/Summer 2012) built on this convergent use of the fashion film to showcase emerging music trends in parallel by offsetting images of a decadent dinner party shot in juddering stop-start animation to the sound of a teenage YouTube phenomenon, Maxine Ashley's first hip-hop single "Cookieman."

The development of this type of hybrid fashion film/music video has become a common feature of online production. Designer Alexander Wang's campaign clips, for example, resemble music videos in their staging of hip parties and their use of ultra-accelerated montage. For his 2016 Fall/Winter campaign, Wang used Instagram to tease consumers with a film, shot by Director X with music by Skrillex, which unveiled his "Wangsquad," a group of celebrity influencers that included Kylie Jenner, who party in a deserted Beverly Hills mansion. At times, pop stars also co-brand with fashion designers. Lady Gaga released her cover of the disco classic "I Want Your Love" through a video directed by Nick Knight that promoted Tom Ford's Spring/Summer 2016 collection in motion by blending

the dance floor with the podium. Such fashion and music collaborations have a history. Photographer Bruce Weber provided imagery for a number of Pet Shop Boys' videos, including the pair's elegiac masterpiece "Being Boring" in 1991, which embedded shots of the duo within a melancholic black-and-white evocation of past parties, and which stylishly translated the bittersweet lyrics of memory and loss to the seductive imagery of the lithe bodies on screen. In the contemporary digital context, in which music videos are used as fashionable multiscreen vehicles of self-promotion to create a connection between pop stars and their fans, consumers, or publics,[26] there is intense focus on the fashion content of the video's imagery, particularly centered around the star's body, used to translate their spectacular desirability through the visual terms of fashion branding—take the press coverage of Iris Van Herpen's avant-garde designs for Björk's *Biophilia* album (2012) or Beyoncé's shape-shifting transformations for her visual album *Lemonade* (2016).[27] Three years earlier, she had co-branded with H&M on their Summer 2013 campaign film directed by Jonas Åkerlund, "Beyoncé as Mrs Carter in H&M," which was shot as a hybrid film to promote both music and fashion, and which tied-in the collection with the release of the singer's single "Standing On The Sun." Beyond specific campaign commercials, auteur-branded projects like Spike Lee's short film *Brave* for the high-end winter sportswear label Moncler in 2016, while not promoting specific collections or even featuring any actual garments for sale, also combine editorial-style stills with music and dance performance. Invited by the brand to make a film about his personal vision of New York (to transpose his political focus on racial representation to fashion communications), Lee crafted a six-minute film that in parallel promoted the single "Brave (Suffering / Beautiful)" by Stew & The Negro Problem.

Both fashion film and music video operate as cross-media forms that are framed and conditioned by their online delivery modes. Indeed, "the definition of music video," writes Laura Frahm, "seems to be intrinsically linked to the question of how it positions and articulates itself within the context of other media and art forms."[28] What do these two modes of communication have in common? They are both attractive to audiences but underfunded forms of cultural production. It could be argued that style—as both fashion and form—is as integral to the music video as audio—both sound and music—is to the fashion film. The generic porosity and aesthetic borrowings between these two relatively marginal forms of filmmaking, show both to be intermedial, readily absorbing influences from other media arts, particularly other screen and

performance practices.[29] Music videos have been historically classified into two types—those that emphasize performance and those that emphasize concept or mood.[30] In the mid-1980s, cultural critic Peter Wollen explained the hybridization of the genre as part of the postmodern breakdown of the distinctions between live spectacle, television programming, and advertising, between the discrete formats of performance, journalism, and promotion. He added the fashion event as the fourth element in this generic mash-up. "Fashion," he explained,

> already had a close relationship with music performance and with the packaging of musicians as "images"—witness the straddling of the music world, the performance world and the fashion world by David Bowie and Malcolm McClaren. Fashion, in its turn, has been moving into performance as the traditional catwalk has been supplemented by music, lighting, dance and even embryonic narrative. Music video is the culmination of this trend.[31]

Historians of the music video view fashion's glamorous intrusion in different ways: for Saul Austerlitz, the form became showy and shallow due to the influence of fashion; its lucrative attractiveness to photographers such as Herb Ritts, Jean-Baptiste Mondino, or David LaChappelle in the 1980s and 1990s led the form toward the superficial hyper-spectacle, "turning the genre into an expression of breathtakingly lovely uselessness";[32] whereas Richard Dienst celebrates Mondino as the emblematic "postmodern video auteur" of the period, arguing that his clips for Prince and Madonna drew on "not only the techniques of still photography, but also the contemporary functions of fashion and architecture."[33] Earlier in the 1980s, eminent film critic and theorist, Serge Daney, an early adopter, had elevated the music video to the status of minor art form, one whose foundations were built on fragmentation and instantaneity. Like fashion, the beauty of the clip is fleeting and ephemeral; it draws on the fragmented memories created by the rapid montage of shots. Daney wrote clinically of the music video as a sort of biopsy taken from a larger body of cinematic work—a sample that concentrates feeling and emotion through a short, sharp burst of energy.[34] In the contemporary context of both the spreadable online fashion film and the instant sampling of music video via video-sharing platforms, it is precisely through what Carol Vernallis has termed the accelerated aesthetics of the digital "media swirl" that the nonlinear mood board approach of fashion joins the mixing-board culture of music video in shaping today's "intensified audiovisual aesthetics," in which the boundaries and distinctions between online platforms, forms, and technologies are increasingly blurred.[35]

Editorial convergence and spreadable content

Why, then, has such a hybrid form of fashion moving image emerged in the early twenty-first century as both a commercially viable way to promote fashion and to experiment with the potential shape of the fashion image itself? One concern about the promotional film—in both branded and concept videos—is whether it has the aesthetic impact and commercial durability of the still image in both fashion advertising and editorial. This might well explain the persistence of the still as the dominant image for fashion, a format that has also been digitally reactivated by online image-sharing and curatorial practices. The Lanvin example also illustrates the importance of inclusive humor and an illusion of spontaneity, which operate as a digital structure of feeling to ensure the maximum circulation of motion content by online audiences. By 2012, video already accounted for some 57 percent of online consumer traffic due mostly to video and image-sharing platforms. By 2019, video content is set to account for some 80 percent of all traffic according to US information technology giant Cisco.[36] This marks a dramatic generational shift from print media toward video content and entertainment platforms dependent on more active audiences participating in content production and circulation through video-content sharing channels like Flickr, YouTube, or Vimeo, where the audience is no longer the target but also the medium through which to communicate.

Brands no longer need the editorial filter of established media to communicate with consumers. As we have seen, the adoption of fashion film by the global designer brands toward the later part of the 2000s is clearly embedded in the rise of social media, particularly visual platforms, as the defining media practice of our age, part of what Kate Nelson Best has reviewed as fashion's central position as *the* cultural conversation of the 2010s. "Digital technology and social media give advertisers direct access to their customer base, reducing the need for mediated marketing. . . . Fashion film, for example, has been co-opted by international brands, e-tailers, and fashion magazines as a primary form of publicity,"[37] she explains, noting that the profound shift from fashion as a closed off industry to its current mode of mass entertainment has seen the rise of video to its current status as the digital's storytelling medium. The launch in 2013 of *Dazed Digital* and Vice Media's *i-D* platforms or interfaces, which are funded by branded content, licensing deals, and online advertising, signaled a move away from the conceptual experimentation of earlier forms of fashion film toward narrative, a drive that dovetailed with the immediate marketing requirements of fashion brands.

This trend signals changes to the economic structures of editorial content production within the practices of fashion journalism. The growth in investment in online branded content is part of an ongoing search for an economically viable model for journalism. Both magazines and brands were initially wary of increasing investment significantly in forms of digital marketing without a clearer indication of financial sustainability. The role of the fashion magazine was always essentially to relay fashion imagery and desirable products to an avid consumer public. In the transitional phase through the shift toward electronic media, emerging cultural forms such as online moving image are inevitably affected by broader shifts in the communications strategies of the corporatized luxury sector as we move into a fully "post-print culture."[38] This has involved the creation of advertorial platforms since the early 2000s. Initially part-financed by Condé Nast, *Fly 16 x 9*, for example, was created in 2003 as a platform to provide a digital motion magazine across art, beauty, and fashion. The original mission statement for the portal explains the intended strategic role of social media in relaying branded content elsewhere at a fraction of the cost of mass-media ad campaigns:

> FLY16x9's members now have the unique experience of viewing original never before seen films on the web each month. This elite web-based portal delivers full resolution art, and style-related content to home computers, iphones, ipads, and web enabled televisions. This platform also provides the viewer with the ability to share, to post or embed content on blogs or social networks.[39]

Media theorist Henry Jenkins details the historical background for such common forms of convergence by arguing that practices of participatory culture that actively work across media were rooted in technological developments that began in the 1980s when companies choose "to distribute content across various channels rather than within a single media platform."[40] Jenkins emphasizes the active participation on the part of savvy consumers in hunting out entertainment and information across dispersed media platforms. Accordingly, convergence is now seen as the widely accepted term to denote "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment they want."[41]

The specific emergence of the online fashion film is therefore part of a much broader commercial inquiry into the fragmentation, orientation, and sustainability of the practices of fashion journalism and the role and potential

efficacy of forms of digital marketing that are directed at younger influencers, who do not necessarily connect with the conventional forms of media advertising and who are the future consumers of high-end fashion and luxury goods. Alongside residual forms such as the big-budget commercial there are also more diffuse formats that communicate with consumers more covertly through aspirational lifestyle initiatives such as the media channel *Nowness*. Founded in 2010 by luxury conglomerate LVMH, which later sold its majority stake to Modern Dazed in 2017, *Nowness* ditched the blatant e-commerce of its defunct sister-site *eluxury.com* in favor of a more conceptual video channel. Originally launched as an editorial platform, now promoted as a global media channel, *Nowness* claims to curate contemporary culture through storytelling, through a transversal interest in lifestyle, design, art, and music. Narrative is therefore promoted as the key to video content that audiences will want to spread, share, or repost. Budgets for commissioned films are low but the filmmakers benefit from the visibility of the channel. Beneath the veneer of luxury and the aesthetics of aspiration are basic forms of customized entertainment that revise the commercial synergies, extensions, and franchises highlighted by Jenkins as key components of trans-media convergence culture. The channel also ties in more traditionally with e-commerce. In 2010, it commissioned Italian film director Luca Guadagnino, who had woven fashion by Fendi and Jill Sander into his feature *I Am Love* (*Io sono l'amore*) in 2009, to shoot model Mariacarla Boscono in a short film *Chronology*, an abstract piece that showcased a variety of pieces on sale at luxury fashion e-retailer Net-a-Porter.

As Jenkins, Ford, and Green note in the context of convergence culture's production of "spreadable" media texts, unlike the former broadcast models of media piping out content to audiences, spreadable content depends on an actively participatory environment of audiences. "Content spreads," they explain, "when it acts as fodder for conversations that audiences are already having."[42] For example, unlike the commercials posted virally on a brand's website or Instagram feed, the more targeted use of a niche film might succeed qualitatively as an exercise in brand awareness because it interacts with an existing public or select fan base. Even "slow" films like the educational documentary *The Hands of Hermès* (Laffont and Dupuy-Chavanat, 2011)—online content that requires considerable time and concentration—tap into the spirit of participatory engagement and public interactivity that contemporary brands seek to adopt in their attempts to communicate directly with consumers without the editorial filter of traditional media. Indeed, beyond the creation of branded spaces intended to

promote online content as non-advertising such as the *Nowness* platform, the next step in this competitive process of remediation between "old" and "new" media is for fashion brands to become media channels or production studios themselves to rival platforms like Netflix by producing their own entertainment content to ensure loyalty through serial frequentation.[43]

Film and branded entertainment

The diverse forms of contemporary fashion film—from the commercials and promos to the catwalk films and e-look books; from the linear narrative to the nonlinear concept—show how brands and designers have followed Christopher Bailey's lead as (former) chief creative officer at Burberry by repositioning themselves as part fashion and retail designers and part image and content producers. The leading high-end fashion houses have morphed into content providers of both material products and digital images. Such a move also involves articulating a creative relationship between fashion and film to give the fashion brand added symbolic value and cultural capital.[44] The ultimate English heritage brand produces old-school fragrance ads like the 2016 *Mr. Burberry* commercial, directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker and visual artist Steve McQueen, who was listed by *TIME* magazine in 2014 as one of the hundred most influential global personalities and whose signature is stamped on the ad in the opening shot, second only to the brand logo. It was shot on rare 70 mm high-resolution film for cinematic effect and set to the soulful soundtrack of musician Benjamin Clementine. Paratexts included an online behind-the-scenes film, *Mr. Burberry–The Art of Film*, which contained testimonials from the models and musician.[45] The same combination of film and behind-the-scenes material was also used for the brand's project *The Tale of Thomas Burberry*, shot by filmmaker Asif Kapadia, who is celebrated for his documentary portraits of Ayrton Senna (2010) and Amy Winehouse (2015). *The Tale of Thomas Burberry* reimagined the brand's history inspired by the discoveries of its founder, using film as an online communications exercise in brand archaeology. Both the perfume commercial and the branded film are packaged as promotional events that share the same temporal format of a three-minute ad, but differ in tone and style: McQueen's *Mr. Burberry* is a clichéd product film rooted in the stylistic history of the fragrance ad with its focus on surface and emotion, casting two fashion models for their physical allure. In its text-book mise-en-scène of sensuousness and the

spectacular staging of the label's emblematic trench coat, the ad recalls Gillian Dyer's explanation of the basic semiotic structure of advertising, whereby an object is transformed "into something which is given meaning in terms of people. The meaning of one *thing* is transferred to or made interchangeable with another *quality*, whose value attaches itself to the *product*."[46] By contrast, Kapadia's new-style elliptical branded film functions as a commercial trailer for an unmade film. It is narrative-driven and character-based, and stars-recognizable screen actors (Domhnall Gleeson and Sienna Miller) to encode the brand, however superficially, within the history of cinema rather than advertising.

At the time, Burberry was leading the product-driven changes to the fashion industry's calendar by promoting the concept of "see now, buy now" as a new frontier in retail practice. As Silvano Mendes argues in his discussion of these changes, "Within the confines of fashion's consumer-driven economy, we are witnessing a U-turn from a symbolic system structured around the circulation of signs and immaterial goods back towards a more product-focused system dominated principally by sales."[47] Indeed, one point at which fashion and moving image converge, beyond the routine production of online advertorial content, is precisely in the context of retail. "E-tailers" from the luxury/high-end Net-a-Porter to the mass-market ASOS use short ten-second videos to preview most products in movement through the display format of an embedded podium that strips back the editorial staging of clothing. These micro-fashion films generally follow the same formal pattern: the model enters the frame from the left to provide a full-body display of the look before we cut to a closer shot of the garment on sale, then back to the frontal view as the model revolves three hundred and sixty degrees to show off the product from the rear before exiting the frame. Along with catwalk videos and e-look books, these generic e-commerce videos are perhaps the most mundane but widely viewed forms of commercial fashion film today.

To return to the more specific question of the fashion film as content for branded entertainment, it is also worth considering the diverse reasons for designers and brands to produce creative motion content through the production of short films. The financial imperative behind such a move to the online fashion video is clear: rough estimates suggest that a thirty-second television commercial can cost anything up to and beyond one million dollars depending on the stars and filmmakers' commissions, while a short internet video can average as little as fifty thousand dollars with none of the attendant distribution costs.[48] However, fashion brands do not always differentiate media advertising from

spreadable content, which explains the lack of focus of many of the branded fashion films. The commercial advantage of film for a brand lies in its potential to capture the attention of online consumers through the look, style, or affect (in nonnarrative films) or the story, performance, or characterization (in narrative films) as a means of communicating indirectly through the generic structures of entertainment and through artistic forms like cinema that bestow on the brand more cultural legitimacy than is the case with conventional advertising.

The question of investment is central to fashion branded content. Traditionally more cost-effective than full-blown ad campaigns, online films nonetheless attract ever greater investment, particularly by more product-driven US labels such as Tory Burch, for example, which now invests heavily in digital. Made to coincide with the brand's flagship store opening in Paris, the cross-cultural film *L'Américaine* (Agron, 2015) starring US TV star and model Margaret Whalley, efficiently blended narrative with advertising by recounting a French boy's love story with an American girl in flashback to provide advertorial-style shots of Whalley displaying Burch's functional designs. In the absence of any distinctive cultural heritage beyond its national provenance, this type of symbolically weak brand projects its image through the discursive manipulation of its codes and values to consumers by integrating moving content into brand-building or product-led campaigns. The economic key is the versatility and flexibility of motion content for a brand that can embed its production within a broader communications strategy. If the end product is successful, high-definition stills can be taken from the film to create a print campaign; it can be rolled out across boutiques and online platforms and traditional advertising space can be bought to broadcast it on cinema, television, and public transport screens.

Conceptual fashion film

Beyond the commercial logic of marketing, there are also formal and aesthetic factors to consider within the more conceptual forms of fashion film. How to explain the haptic materiality or the surface appeal of the non-narrative display mode of fashion film? Before it went mainstream through branded communications in 2010s, digital fashion film was more often associated with experimental art and performance practices, prototypes for which included the videos shot by the designer Hussein Chalayan, who has been described

as an "architect of ideas"[49] and whose futuristic video installation *Place to Passage* (2003) followed the migration of a woman across time and space in an aerodynamic pod, and, in so doing, visualized the theme of displacement that is more concretely expressed elsewhere in his garment designs. However, it was the launch of photographer Nick Knight's pioneering website SHOWstudio in late 2000 that opened the way for the digital development of fashion moving image. At the time, Knight was a celebrated print-based stills photographer, previously named Kodak photographer of the year twice in 1985 and 1987, who had worked on high-profile editorial and advertising imagery for designers such as Yohji Yamamoto and Jil Sander in the 1980s and Alexander McQueen and John Galliano in the 1990s. Knight has collaborated throughout his career with a broad range of practitioners from musicians and performers such as Björk and Michael Clark to stylists and designers such as Simon Foxton and Peter Saville, with whom he co-founded SHOWstudio. Frustrated by the editorial channels of mediation in print press between the image-maker and the audience, Knight and Saville launched the website to explore visions of fashion through the intersecting mediums of moving image and performance, through the conception of prospective and interactive fashion-based collaborations. Working with creatives from across the audience, Knight, together with Penny Martin, the platform's editor in the early years, established a noncommercial platform to debate, reflect, communicate, and share visions of fashion. By eschewing narrative, early experiments dealt with the kinetic relationship between fashion and the moving image. *The Sound of Clothes: Synaesthesia* project (2006) conceived and directed by Knight with Daniel Brown and Nick Ryan, explored the haptic appeal of clothing by drawing on the full range of senses to suggest possible soundscapes for fashion. This idea has since been successfully transplanted into the commercial realm by the Dutch duo Lernert & Sander, whose two-minute campaign film for high-street label COS, *The Sound of COS* (2014), staged a behind-the-scenes fantasy of the sound engineers dubbing the track to accompany the images. In their sharp advertising and editorial work for Jean-Paul Gaultier, Phillip Lim, Brioni, *Nowness*, and *Fantastic Man*, the duo has consistently honed visual concepts to translate ideas to the commercial sphere through performance and installation art.

Indeed, many of the formal experiments in moving image first developed through the SHOWstudio platform in the 2000s have gradually crossed over into mainstream communications in the subsequent years, particularly the "performative" dimension to the processes involved in creating the fashion image. One of the very early attempts to experiment with 3D imaging technologies to capture fashion in motion was *Sweet* (2000), in which Knight and stylist Jan How recreated looks from the year's collections to allow for an interactive exploration of the garments from all angles. Two of Knight's early time-based experiments indicate the influence of Andy Warhol on the emerging genre. In *Sleep* (2001), Knight made an attempt (pre-streaming) at live image broadcasting by feeding live stills of nine models who were dressed and styled for a photo shoot but were in fact asleep in hotel bedrooms. The piece marks a continuity between digital fashion film and the analog avant-garde preoccupation with time, famously problematized in Warhol's video installation *Sleep* (1963), which, despite the illusion of authorial nonintervention, manipulated time through the repetitive montage of consecutive shots of the poet John Giorno sleeping.[50] Rather than direct the famous models chosen for *More Beautiful Women* (2000), in Knight's homage to Warhol's screen tests, *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women* (1964), he passively captured them posing continuously for two minutes, thereby reconfiguring the formal construction of the photo shoot and evacuating it of the photographer's directorial framing. By rejecting the auratic myths of the photographer, Knight relinquishes authorship of the image to communicate his ideas through the processes of collaboration—with models, stylists, hair, and makeup artists—through the laboratory setting of SHOWstudio, rather than by imposing his authorial signature on the finished product.[51] Knight has filmed some of the biggest names in contemporary fashion and pop culture including music promos for Björk (*Pagan Poetry*, 2001) and Lady Gaga (*Born This Way*, 2011) and prospective films examining the fame and iconicity of supermodels Naomi Campbell (*Naomi*, 2009) and Kate Moss. The *Editing Kate* project (2010) invited video editors to interpret the model's image from the footage captured during Knight's editorial with her for *Vogue Italia*. Shot from the perspective of a stalker, one of Knight's early pre-digital films from the mid-1990s, *The More Visible They Make Me, The More Invisible I Become* (1995), had previously used the superstar as a vehicle to comment on celebrity, voyeurism and surveillance culture, and included footage of the pair's first session working together, historical testimony to the performance and process of creating the fashion image.

One of the ambitions of SHOWstudio was precisely to establish a digital archive of fashion imagery, which has included curating the experimentation of earlier generations of photographers such as Erwin Blumenfeld in the 1950s and Guy Bourdin in the 1970s—both important pre-digital precursors to contemporary fashion film. Titled *Experiments in Advertising*, Blumenfeld's

motion imagery, which included ads for Dayton's department store chain, was ordered into a triptych of films edited by filmmaker Adam Mufti and sound designer Olivier Alary that explore the commercial and conceptual aspects of the photographer's legacy. The *Compulsive Viewing: The Films of Guy Bourdin* project in 2002–03 curated eleven noncommercial process films that captured the photographer's sessions. Bourdin also took home-video footage out scouting for locations.[52] Like the hypnotic quality of Blumenfeld's imagery, Bourdin's films captivate the viewer's attention through their open-ended structure and cyclical rhythmic patterning, by animating images of his models at work in front of the camera. The space used to exhibit Bourdin's films at the Bon Marché department store in Paris in 2009 was designed to enhance their hallucinatory effect by inhabiting a circular room and by using floating screens, panoramic projections, and infinite mirrored boxes. The montage of clips from the newly edited and digitized films produced an uncanny effect that cultural theorist Elizabeth Wilson has described as "magic fashion"[53] by immersing the viewer in the photographer's world of editorial and advertising images, as if enveloped within the pages of *Vogue* magazine—a total immersion in the fashion image through the medium of film.

Bourdin's stills photography has been perceived as a form of arrested cinema—stills from moving narrative tableaux frozen in time that plunge the viewer into the action in media res, before or after the moment of suspense. [54] Bourdin's staging often resembled a film set by channeling cinéphilic references to Hollywood glamour through the codes of b-movies, noirs, and crime thrillers. "Each image," Christian Caujolle explains,

> is a little narrative, each composition has a script, the setting is a décor and whereas in the past models had first and foremost served as extras presenting dresses and fur, they become actresses. We see it immediately from their body language: previously, models posed for the camera, which resulted in a series of more or less extravagant conventions. Here instead, under Guy Bourdin's direction, they perform roles so that each image tells us a story.[55]

Two of these films from the mid-1970s feature actress and model Dominique Sanda, known for her prestigious roles in European films of the period such as Vittorio de Sica's costume drama *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970) and Bernardo Bertolucci's political drama *The Conformist* (1970). In his advertising imagery for Charles Jordan shoes, in which "an arresting image—and a mood— may be as, if not more, alluring than the product itself,"[56] Bourdin's models are often sadistically contained by their macabre surroundings. However, in the

two films with Sanda that picture her swinging back and forth on a chair in pink lingerie or immobile in a doubling trompe l'oeil of her dismembered body, Bourdin established an ambivalent tension between constraint and freedom: the model is objectified through clothing and pose and literally contained within the frame, but the fluidity of her movements and stylized gestures allude to her contextual agency as a film actress and star performer.

Figure 1.5 *The Waist* (2012). Credits: Kristian Schuller and Marie Schuller (directors), SHOWstudio (producer).

Figure 1.6 *Noir* (2013). Credits: Marie Schuller (director) for Dice Kayek (designer) and SHOWstudio (producer).

Bourdin's impact on contemporary film is evidenced in two ways. First, it makes a connection between digital film and early-twentieth-century surrealism. For example, Kristian and Marie Schuller's film *The Waist* for SHOWstudio's site-specific installation series, *The Fashion Body* (2009) blended the still imagery of Horst's photograph of the "Mainbocher Corset" (1929) with the animated statues from Jean Cocteau's film *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930). The impact of earlier twentieth-century cinema is also apparent in Marie Schuller's SHOWstudio collaboration with designer Dice Kayek, *Noir*, in 2013, in which she drew inspiration from the film styles of film noir and German expressionism. Second, the hypnotic style and open-ended structure of Bourdin's motion imagery has been transposed to the type of abstract promos made by filmmaker Ruth Hogben for designer Gareth Pugh, in which the aim is to display clothing in motion by using film to convey the sensorial tone of the collection through movement. The spatiotemporal specificities of film—the editing and sound effects—work to enhance the visual presentation of the designs. Hogben's promos for Pugh since 2008 are at the vanguard of this more conceptual vein of fashion film, providing a dystopian accompaniment to his designs. *Insensate* (2008), codirected by Knight, transposed the brutal geometry of Pugh's collection to the backdrop of digital experimentation. Hogben's imagery is noted for its technical expertise such as the intricate layering, editing, and coloring of shots into a synthetic kaleidoscope that is both threatening and alluring, and that toys with the viewer's visceral response to the image.[57]

This focus on sensorial spectacle was also visible in Hogben's collaboration with Knight on Alexander McQueen's Spring/Summer 2010 collection, *Plato's Atlantis*. The show was live-streamed, and accompanied by a video set to an eerie electronic soundtrack that depicted the naked body of Brazilian model Raquel Zimmermann coiled in snakes before cutting to a series of multicolored images projected back onto her flesh. These images in turn mirrored the motifs printed on the McQueen dresses, part of a dystopian collection that referenced human mutation and environmental meltdown. Making use of the kaleidoscope effect that was subsequently brought into the mainstream by Knight in his video for Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" single in 2011, the haptic visual for McQueen's show enhanced the theatricality of the live event. It is one of the most ambitious attempts to date to merge the visual potential of the moving image with the sensation of the live catwalk show. The parallel streaming of the show was made apparent by the appearance on stage of two huge robotic cameras positioned on mechanical cranes that ran along tracks on both sides of the runway. They filmed

the stage and audience, images of which were back-projected onto the huge screen. The decision to project images of the garments onto the screen as the models walked the runway highlighted the mediation of fashion from material garment to digital image. The self-reflexive acknowledgment of the various audiences that simultaneously consume fashion in both actual and virtual spaces also signaled the future shift in retail practice from print to the immediate online consumption of both image and product.

As Nathalie Khan has argued, SHOWstudio's nonnarrative approach essentially "pays homage to the still image"[58] by formally exploring the tension between stillness and movement in digital film production. Knight has insistently defined the parameters of the emerging genre in opposition to mainstream cinema. "Just as fashion photography is a very different beast to photography, fashion film is very different to conventional film. Fashion film doesn't rely on narrative. . . . The subject of the film is the clothes."[59] Consequently, SHOWstudio's understanding of fashion film as motion imagery rather than digital cinema precludes any possible dialogue with other practices of fictional or nonfictional filmmaking. In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to challenge the assumption that digital fashion film is divorced from mainstream cinema by exploring the creative links and commercial synergies between feature filmmaking and promotional culture.

Narrative fashion film

When Kris Van Assche, at the time the creative director of Dior Homme, asked cult photographer and independent director Larry Clark to work on a short film for the house, Clark reminded him that he was not, after all, a fashion photographer, which, it transpired, was precisely the reason Dior wanted to hire him.[60] One way for a fashion house to avoid a straightforward moving version of the print campaign and to augment their artistic credibility is to co-brand with a named director, an "auteur" whose artistic signature can complement the brand's projected identity. A major reference point for menswear since the influential tenure of Hedi Slimane at Dior Homme through the early 2000s, Clark's distinctive take on urban youth subcultures is shot through an ambiguously voyeuristic lens—an aesthetic approach that simultaneously exploits and neutralizes the predatory nature of much of his photography and film. Clark's imagery also provided the visual template for some of the codes that were slickly reprocessed by luxury labels such as Dior Homme and imitated by high-street

labels like The Kooples to communicate menswear through the display of skinny white teenagers since the start of the millennium.

The director's explicit feature film *The Smell of Us* (2015), shot around the Trocadéro in Paris, conjured up a libidinous fantasy of a group of gay-for-pay skater boys, who meet to practice, film each other, and turn perverse tricks with older clients. The film stared Lukas Ionesco, son of photographer and filmmaker Eva Ionesco, whose own stylized account of childhood sexual exploitation at the hands of her mother had previously been transposed to the screen in *My Little Princess* (Ionesco, 2010). Fashion was not far from Clark's masturbatory fantasy—he even features in a cameo role as a toe-sucking client—and, as critic Peter Bradshaw explained in his review for *The Guardian*, *The Smell of Us* was less preoccupied with skating and more interested in the boys' bodies: "Whatever the actual skating skills of the actors on screen, Clark makes them look like male models pretending to skate."[61] A subsequent collaborative book project with designer Jonathan Anderson saw Clark create images of the cast of the film shot in Paris in a self-styled edit of Anderson's retro-futurist pre-Fall 2015 collection as a commercial means of connecting brand and film to a young demographic.[62]

Clark's imprint on contemporary visual culture largely derives from the success of his first film *Kids* in 1995, trenchantly labeled by feminist critic bell hooks as "transgressive subject matter—reactionary film,"[63] one that not only displayed an authentic array of hip street wear labels but also launched the career of the fashionable actress Chloë Sevigny, who has also modeled and directed her own film, *Carmen*, for the Miu Miu "Women's Tales" series in 2017. *The Smell of Us* included an incongruous scene that featured the privileged female protagonist in the audience at avant-garde designer Rad Hourani's Fall/Winter 2013–14 couture show, testimony to the director's interest in high fashion as well as street style. His earlier film *Wassup Rockers* (Clark, 2005) had also included a cameo from designer Jeremy Scott, who appeared as a predatory gay photographer, whose swanky Beverly Hills pool party is crashed by a group of down-at-heal Latino skater boys, whom he offers to shoot for an ad campaign. Clark's mini-film for Dior, *A Larry Clark Project—Paris Session*, appropriates the director's brand identity and persona as a recognizably "edgy" and "countercultural" image-maker for the fashion house, thereby commercially piggybacking off the earlier feature film while glossing over its more contentious content. The film juxtaposes slow-motion presentational shots of the fashion models and close-ups of the details of the garments alongside more dynamic accompanying shots of the skaters in motion, which include a lascivious close-up of a nude tattooed to anchor the brand's commodity fetishism in the world of the auteur's body fetishism.

To be sure, Clark is far from the first film director to work in fashion communication. Directors-for-hire like David Lynch and Wong Kar-wai have consistently produced commercials for fashion houses and brands in between feature film projects. Wong has made numerous commercials for Christian Dior with Sharon Stone and Eva Green, for Lancôme with Clive Owen and Daria Werbowy, and another for Lacoste in 2002, the soundtrack for which echoed Shigeru Umebayashi's melancholic refrain from the director's signature film *In the Mood for Love*.[64] His commercial imagery, however, goes beyond the purely cinematic: in 2011, he coauthored a makeup collection with Japanese cosmetics brand Shu Uemura, for which design imagery from the campaign film starring French-Taiwanese star Sandrine Pinna was reproduced on the product packaging. Conversely, there are also cases of "admen" who later became renowned Hollywood directors, such as Ridley Scott, whose commercials for the Chanel *N°5* perfume in the late 1970s and early 1980s first expanded the advertising format to the mini-film by incorporating a lifestyle narrative that relied on glamorous, aspirational settings to display models at the poolside of luxurious villas. It thereby retained the setting for the fashion editorial but took the commercial beyond the conventions of fashion photography, hitherto reliant on the film star's fame, charisma, and face, as illustrated by Helmut Newton's earlier ads for the Chanel scent, which were built around head shots of film star Catherine Deneuve.

David Lynch, for his part, shot numerous ad campaigns through the 1980s and 1990s for fragrances by Giorgio Armani, Calvin Klein, Karl Lagerfeld, and Yves Saint Laurent without lending his creative signature to the product or brand. The advent of twenty-first-century fashion-film content altered the communicational process by conveying the brand through the authorial imprint of the director—through the practice of co-branding—thereby repositioning the commercial beyond media advertising within the realms of PR, as part of a broader artistic project intended to bolster the reputations of auteur, brand, and star. Lynch's project with Christian Dior in 2009, which featured French film star Marion Cotillard, *Lady Blue Shanghai*, was packaged as a fifteen-minute motion picture by the house. As John Berra explains in his discussion of the project, this type of convergent film amalgamated the roles to date of the transnational star Cotillard into a condensed version of Lynch's brand identity, "repositioning the trademark tropes of [the director] within the context of a promotional piece."[65]

The commercial brief was to promote the product—the Lady Dior handbag—in the context of Shanghai's old city and Pearl Tower. Beyond the prescribed product placement and touristic locations, Lynch chose to adapt the drama in line with his claustrophobic interiors, which consisted of the eerie corridors and rooms of a corporate hotel. As Justin Nieland observes in his analysis of Lynch's cinema from the perspective of interior design, his approach is a "matter of engineering atmosphere and producing dynamic, totally synthetic affective environments."[66] The attempt here to psychologize space through the film's attempt at plotting—the handbag is used as a surrealistic prop to jolt Cotillard's repressed memory of a former affair in Shanghai—is, however, circumscribed by the commercial format. The film's dramatic impact and narrative credibility are undercut by the audience's awareness from the opening credits of the commercial framing of the piece ("Dior presents *Lady Blue Shanghai*") and its basic function as advertising, which is indeed the main sticking point for the efficacy of much narrative fashion film. The semiotic confusion derives from the fact that brands strive to position fashion films creatively as artistic endeavors by hiring named directors and by casting A-list stars, but, despite the fact that they are often branding rather than campaign tools, marketing rather than advertising, the audience still tends to decode them automatically as promotional products, as new-look commercials, as *just* advertising.

Rather than opt for dramatic plot and embed the campaign film within the "art" of cinema, Larry Clark approached his Dior project more as a conventional editorial that emphasized the model, pose, and look of the garments. Elsewhere, however, branded collaborations on creative projects with film directors have tended more often to rely on the dramatic effects of storytelling, a fact that underlines two intersecting trends in cinema and fashion branding: first, the return of narrative dramatization to high-end fashion imagery; and second, the impact of branded entertainment on the conception, direction, and style of contemporary feature films. Penny Martin, editor-in-chief of *The Gentlewoman*, first detected the narrative trend in fashion advertising and editorial imagery in 2010, when she analyzed the photographer Steven Klein's cinematic techniques for the Spring/Summer ad campaign for Dolce & Gabbana, which made, in her view,

> a timely point about the shifting state of fashion imagery. After a decade of excess characterised by deathly dull campaign imagery where the only factor distinguishing one studio shoot from another was the time spent in post-production, it is interesting to see characterisation, narrative and performance creeping back into fashion photography at the highest end.[67]

Martin put this turn down to the relentless demands of digital content production and the need to roll out imagery across multiple media platforms. Diane Pernet has also been quoted as saying that "what makes a good fashion film is exactly what makes any good film: direction, lighting, acting, script, sound,"[68] returning to underlying formal questions concerning the quality of fashion film content in terms of performance, storytelling, and cinematography—questions of aesthetic value that indicate the difficulty of assessing the output of an emerging genre without reinscribing entrenched and often elitist critical divisions between (high) art and (popular) consumer culture.

Some uses of narrative film by fashion brands indicate a conventional reliance on dialogue to promote product and brand through failed attempts at dramatic storytelling that overshadow the fashion. Take Karl Lagerfeld, whose mini-dramas for Chanel are analyzed later in more detail. His short campaign film *Remember Now*, made for the 2010/2011 cruise collection, featured classical French actor Pascal Greggory, who arrives at an ostentatious St. Tropez nightclub, where he is introduced to various models including Baptiste Giabiconi, Lagerfeld's muse—a meeting that makes for an inchoate collision of fashion and cinema, in which the actor's dramatic performance is undermined by the awkward presence of the nonacting models. The commercial point of the film is to sell the Chanel lifestyle. The story's glitzy setting allows Lagerfeld to make a detour through the resort's cultural heritage by referencing historic figures from Colette to Brigitte Bardot, names that are superficially dropped onto an artistic backdrop to promote the designer's Riviera-inspired collection.

However, there are films that straddle the categories of art and advertising in more creative ways. Justin Anderson's short film *Jumper* (2014), commissioned by British designer Jonathan Saunders to celebrate the tenth anniversary of his label, self-consciously engages with queer visual history by blending references to the designs of a number of David Hockney's pool paintings—particularly "Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool" (1966), "A Bigger Splash" (1967), and "Portrait of an Artist (Pool With Two figures)" (1972)—and the visual style of Jack Hazan's biographical film about the painter, *A Bigger Splash* (1974) with the tense drama of Pier Paolo Pasolini's intellectual art film *Teorema* (1968), in which a handsome visitor, played by the fashionable actor of the period, Terence Stamp, transforms the members of a bourgeois family by seducing and then abandoning them to their own devices. Described by Pasolini as a religious experience, the visit "demolishes everything that the bourgeoisie knows about itself, which the guest has come to destroy. . . . After the guest leaves, each member of the family is left

with an awareness of his or her own inauthenticity or inability to be authentic because of class and historical limitations."[69] Anderson's commercial rerouting of queer visual history lays bare the erotic component to the visitor's clothing in Pasolini's original film, the controlled tone of which is ruptured by what film theorist Stella Bruzzi has described as *Teorema*'s "exemplary clothes moments in which the specific conjunction between desire, sexuality, and Terence Stamp's quintessentially cool 60s look is made central."[70] *Jumper* was also styled by the designer Saunders, who picked representative pieces from his colorful archive to convey the symbolic emotional effect of the narrative through the visual impact of the clothing. The film starts in the lush garden as the visitor strips naked before diving into the pool. A woman watches him swim; her red dress with a botanical motif evokes the passionate mother, played in *Teorema* by Silvana Mangano, whose true sexual nature is unleashed by the young man's seductive presence. In *Jumper*, the erotic appeal of the visitor, who observes the family members as they dine in silence, is channeled through haptic shots of his naked body, which stands before them as a haunting personification of their repressed desires. As in traditional melodrama, in the absence of dialogue the hectic geometric prints and bright color block garments articulate the story intertextually through the visual communication of fashion.

Contemporary brands like Kenzo, Prada, and Miu Miu have become particularly known for their moving-image productions, having commissioned films by some of international cinema's most prestigious names. The arrival of designers Humberto Leon and Carol Lim, cofounders of the Opening Ceremony boutique and brand, at Kenzo in 2011 saw a change of direction. Known for their accessories and sweatshirts, the creative directors gradually rebooted the brand's imagery to make it feel more urban and contemporary in tone. Spike Jonze's ad for the launch of the duo's first fragrance, *Kenzo World*, in 2016 featured Margaret Qualley wildly breaking out of the generic conventions of the fragrance ad by free-styling to a dancehall track called "Mutant Brain." The campaign won a number of prestigious awards at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2017, including the Titanium Lion prize, which rewards a campaign that aims to break with industry norms. In parallel, Leon and Lim also explored the possibilities of short film promos with collaborations with a number of indie directors including Gregg Araki and Sean Baker, whose work resonates with their casual Californian sensibility. Araki, who emerged through the early 1990s New Queer Cinema and whose film *Mysterious Skin* (2004) consolidated his reputation for encasing alienated queer adolescents within a pop framework,

filmed an offbeat skit called *Here Now* that displayed the psychedelic Fall/Winter 2015 women's and men's wear collections by nostalgically referencing the lost teens of his cult film *Nowhere* (1997).

Following *Tangerine* (2015), a film shot entirely on an iPhone, which depicted the friendship between two black trans sex workers in downtown Los Angeles, Sean Baker contributed an eleven-minute piece called *Snowbird*, which drew on naturalistic performance and dramatic characterization to promote Kenzo's Spring/Summer 2016 collection. Model and actress Abbey Lee—whose elongated physique was on prominent display in the reboot of the *Mad Max* franchise, *Fury Road* (Miller, 2015)—is filmed making her way through Slab City, a trailer park for winter sunseekers in the Californian desert; she goes from caravan to caravan sharing her homemade cake with the residents. The loose and unscripted feel to these everyday encounters is contrasted by the series of choreographed shots of her outside crossing the sun-drenched desert. This spatial contrast underlines the difference between the look of the fashion editorial and the structure of the narrative film, and, in so doing, exposes the tension between the opposing visual languages of drama and style. As we follow Lee through the trailer park as she switches between character and model, the shifts between spectacle and story become seamless and the expansive exterior shots of the garments in motion to provide an affective release from the more intimate interior encounters.

The trend for collaborating with directors and artists on digital fashion films has been particularly associated with the Italian designer Miuccia Prada. Her labels Miu Miu and Prada have been at the vanguard of artistic, technological, and commercial developments in fashion film. Her extensive patronage of the arts has been instrumental in positioning luxury fashion within the corporatized reconfiguration of the visual arts and the "appropriation" of the avant-garde by fashion branding.[71] A collaboration with visual artist James Jean on a four-minute animation film *Trembled Blossoms* in 2008 using motion-capture technology was seen, at the time, as a watershed moment in the history of digital fashion film, as the first piece commissioned by a luxury brand to promote garments and accessories from a specific collection (Spring/Summer 2008).[72] A subsequent collaboration with Chinese visual artist Yang Fudong in 2010 allowed the brand to shift its communication toward cinema proper by linking its image to the heritage of modernist art film—Yang's *First Spring* was a silent, dreamlike film noir shot with atmospheric black-and-white cinematography to promote garments from the Spring/Summer 2010 menswear collection.

As well as her patronage of moving image through the *Fondazione Prada* in Milan and the itinerant *Transformer* structure that promotes cinema across the globe, Prada has herself also appeared in front of the camera in Baz Luhrmann's *Impossible Conversations* series, an extension to the MET museum's exhibition in New York in 2012, in which she performed an imaginary encounter with Elsa Schiaparelli, played by actor Judy Davis. Prada's prestigious position as the world's most influential female designer is inflected through her "Women's Tales" series of films for Miu Miu since 2012, which have premiered each year at the Venice Film Festival. Aiming to discover and empower female directors, the films are entirely financed and produced by Prada and loosely promote (or are inspired by) Miu Miu collections. The series has included short films by emerging talents in international cinema such as directors Naomi Kawase and Alice Rohrwacher, together with those by veteran artists such as Agnès Varda, whose film *The Three Buttons* (2015) playfully embedded dress within a whimsical fairy tale. One of the most remarkable of the "Women's Tales" series to date has been Argentine director Lucrecia Martel's unsettling hybrid genre film, *Muta* (2011), which mixes sci-fi futurism with low-key horror. *Muta* depicts the corporeal mutation of fashion models into insects, a dig at the industry whose products it ostensibly seeks to promote. While the label's accessories and dresses are prominently filmed in close-up, the bodies of the alien mannequins mutate into butterflies and float free from their designer carapaces.

Prada's media advertising has frequently referenced cinema—the 2017 eyewear reveled in the escapism of the movies and Steven Meisel's ad for Fall/ Winter 2013 parodied the casting process of film production. Furthermore, the brand's film collaborations have consistently sought to promote both the auteur's symbolic value along with the brand's commercial clout. Despite relatively low budgets, the Prada movies have generated much media interest, particularly the high-profile examples such as *A Therapy* (2012) with Roman Polanski and *Past Forward* (2017) with David O. Russell. While Polanski's film transposed the classicism of his narrative cinema to a dialogue between fashion and psychoanalysis shaped around the conventions of character and situation and enhanced by the dramatic performances of Helena Bonham Carter and Ben Kingsley, Russell's more abstract film embedded an homage to Alfred Hitchcock within a multiscreen collage installation. If the symbolic objective is for the fashion brand to acquire the cultural capital of the big screen by association, its commercial ambition is to extend the brand's activities into film production by transforming it into a post-digital studio rather than simply

operating as the commissioner of media advertising. As we have seen, while conventional campaigns to promote cosmetics and fragrances have frequently involved celebrity directors and film stars, thereby historically underscoring the commercial ties between cinema and marketing, the new digital films aim to sustain a more fluid relationship between fashion and the moving image. In short, artistic collaborations with film directors enable the brand to shore up its luxury positioning to project an aura of immaterial timelessness beyond the more ephemeral nature of seasonal campaigns.[73]

Director Wes Anderson's multiple collaborations with Prada illustrate how a filmmaker's signature style can complement the brand's visual identity and adapt to its commercial needs. As well as designing the space for the café at the Prada Foundation in Milan, Anderson has also been employed for film campaigns. In addition, the house financed his short 1950s pastiche, *Castello Cavalcanti* (2013), filmed at the Cinecittà studios in Rome for the "Prada Classics" series. The film was intended as a concentrate of Anderson's style in homage to Italian culture and cinema, particularly the ambient nostalgia and rural setting of Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973).[74] While photographers Jean-Paul Goude and Steven Meisel shot the media campaigns for the *Prada Candy* and *Prada Candy Florale* fragrances with the French actress and "face" of Prada, Léa Seydoux, the three accompanying vignettes for *Prada Candy L'Eau* were codirected by Anderson and Roman Coppola. Anderson's directorial signature consists of a trademark style of meticulously designed and over-framed shots of actors, who perform artificially as if marionettes rather than characters. Written in French and shot in a mock-up studio set of Paris, the *Prada Candy* episodes allude to the heritage of the French New Wave and make affectionate pastiche nods to the triangular amorous relationship in François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1962). From *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) onward, Anderson's pop cinema has had a considerable impact on fashion—on the new-look Gucci among others—and the director's obsessive attention to decorative detail makes him an obvious choice for fashion communications. Short-form film and advertising commercials have been described as the "perfect vehicle" for Anderson's "heightened reality" film style, because it allows him to express his oblique worldview through condensed set pieces.[75] The Christmas holiday TV ad, *Come Together*, for H&M in 2016, which starred Adrien Brody, made obvious reference to the emblematic train from *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) and succinctly transposed the director's whimsical aesthetic, in particular the artificial color palette and quirky art direction, to the business of promoting seasonal fast fashion.

Beyond the transposition of authorial style and narrative drama to the film commercial, there is also the further question of the impact of the diverse online formats on feature filmmaking practice itself. To what extent is an auteur film now conceived as a product in a director's line to be communicated through the techniques of marketing? The conventional way of perceiving product through the symbolic means of branding, that is to say through the semiotic economy of names, symbols, and concepts, which are routinely categorized in marketing terms as the "codes" and "values" of the fashion house,[76] indicates the potential cross-fertilization between the different forms of storytelling—both *visual* and *narrative*—used by the adjacent industries of cinema and advertising. According to the conventional wisdom of marketing, consumers do not buy products; they buy into the stories spun by advertisers that are conveyed through products. They do not buy brands; they buy into the myths and archetypes symbolized by the brand. Hence the importance of forms of narrative communication, which focus on emotional engagement with the brand's actual or invented histories. This explains why the lure of narrative cinema is still so potent for the discursive economy of designer brands, not purely as a one-way channel of communication from brand to audience, but equally as a dynamic means of experimenting with moving image and forms of visual storytelling in the promotional context. [77]

Commodity auteurism

The intersection of narrative cinema and fashion branding is not, however, always unproblematic, and it can at times produce contradictory tensions between the staging of a lifestyle aesthetic and the structure of narrative drama. Yet, with the rise of fashion as a central feature of the reconfigured landscape of imagery produced by the intersecting pop and consumer visual cultures, film directors are now generally less inhibited about discussing their commercial work in advertising since they are now routinely marketed as brands themselves and have incorporated the notion that contemporary independent filmmaking is as intrinsically linked to marketing as it is in the Hollywood studios. The fact that directors are also no longer required to strip their commercials and fashion films of an authorial signature—take Wes Anderson's self-parody, *My Life, My Card* for American Express (2011)—illustrates a working relationship between cinema and promotion for contemporary directors; a trend which,

according to film historian Thomas Elsaesser, originated in the shift from a European auteur theory of stylistic classification to an American type of directorial self-definition.

> One could say that the term "auteur" in the 1980s makes a fascinating journey from critical category to brand-name and marketing-device, mainly because in the uncertain world of the cinema in the age of television, of blockbusters, mainstream cinema and independents, of art-cinema and new waves, there are very few sign-posts and markers, and in the end, it is the market that demands labels and recognition-signs: whether they like it or not, directors cannot just be directors—they have to advertise themselves, promote themselves, create a brand-identity for themselves: the filmmaker as superstar and the filmmaker as cult director are some of the most familiar results of this process. It makes the term "author" in one sense almost meaningless, and in another so indispensable that we hardly question its assumptions.[78]

Some directors attempt to appeal to a more mainstream audience via the importance of fashion and advertising, not simply through conventional strategies of product placement, but also through extensive creative collaboration on production and costume design to create a type of lifestyle or advertorial aesthetic for narrative drama. For example, Luca Guadagnino's incorporation of Raf Simons' disruptive designs for actress Tilda Swinton in *I Am Love* (2009) and *A Bigger Splash* (2015) ensured both movies a broader communications platform across online and off-line media. For *I Am Love*, Simons' design team at Jil Sander collaborated with the film's costume designer, Antonella Cannarozzi, who was Oscar-nominated for her work in fashioning the supremely elegant wardrobe of a family of rich Milanese industrialists, including most notably the Fendi furs worn by actress Marisa Berenson. Alongside this spectacular inclusion of luxury, the Jil Sander pieces are memorable for their formal subtlety and chromatic expressivity. Swinton's character Emma, a Russian émigré and the adulterous wife of a rich textile industrialist, is delineated by Simons' austere tailoring, which on a purely narrative level indicates her social status, but which on a symbolic level distances her from the surrounding opulence through the maximal color coding. Emma's transformation from a female clotheshorse to a passionate woman is overscored by Simons' designs, which act out, rather than merely accompany, the character's narrative arc. Her transformation from a style icon to a woman in love is conveyed through the precise cuts, luxurious fabrics, and tonal range of Simons' designs.[79]

In certain scenes in Guadagnino's subsequent collaboration with Swinton, *A Bigger Splash*—a modern variation on the chic sixties romantic thriller *La Piscine* (Deray, 1969)—the narrative playfully dissolves into advertorial fashion and lifestyle imagery, particularly the shots of Swinton as a reclusive rock-star, who is dressed throughout by Dior, and the scenes that display semi-naked bodies by the pool. Guadagnino's postmodern approach combines the design aesthetic of the original film, which exploited the physical charms of Alain Delon and Romy Schneider, with the pop sensibility of Jack Hazan's documentary portrait of artist David Hockney, which was also titled *A Bigger Splash* (1973). The initial framing device for Guadagnino's film was to have included a scene shot at the Tate Gallery in London featuring Hockney's actual painting.[80] Guadagnino's aestheticized imagery, however pleasing to the eye, is not in fact intended to pastiche the glossy visual language of lifestyle advertising. The decision to relocate the narrative to the Italian island of Pantelleria, in close proximity to the coast of North Africa, was meant to work in ironic counterpoint to the bourgeois drama at the villa and the film's satire of local corruption by contrasting the spectacular composition of Swinton's glamour looks, which include a beachwear combo of knotted dress-shirt and oversized *DiorSoReal* shades, and the character's touristic imperialism with the anonymous faces of the African migrants who seek refuge on the island. Sarah Gilligan has argued that the use of aspirational luxury costuming "plays a pivotal and disruptive role in fashioning identity."[81] In collaboration with the costume designer Giulia Piersanti, Simons' capsule collection of resort-wear commodifies the audience's potential ambivalence about fashion. The designer's spectacular off-duty looks for Swinton, which are stiff and ill-fitting, loosely reference Ingrid Bergman in Robert Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (1954), while the flashback scenes of her character at work in the recording studio or on stage show her dressed in gender-neutral zipped sequined suits. Swinton's pale aloofness, her distinct brand of upper-class whiteness, contributes to the character's elitist image and reference Bowie's iconic seventies looks for the Thin White Duke persona and the alien figure from Nicolas's Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976). As feminist film theorist Jackie Stacey observes, Swinton's otherworldly "off-gender flux" falls under the aesthetic influence of the late pop star, with whom she collaborated on the retro-design video for *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* single in 2013. By "off-gender flux" Stacey means less the "in-between-ness of androgyny and more the capacity to move across, to embody the mobility of temporal flux,"[82] a shape-shifting characteristic

put to remarkable effect elsewhere by director Jim Jarmusch, who cast her as a supremely stylish vampire in *Only Lovers Left Alive* in 2013. Guadagnino's own ease in fashion communications—making advertising films through his production company, Frenesy, commissioned by luxury brands such as Armani, Cartier, Ferragamo, DKNY, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, and Pomellato (again with Swinton)—illustrates the extent to which his commercial work in advertising acts as the experimental ground for some of the formal ideas, which are more fully developed through dramatic narrative in his feature films.

In his inquiry into the convergence of branding and mainstream cinema, Paul Grainge asks: "What modalities does branding assume in cinematic culture and what do these modes reveal or imply about the patterning of film experience?" Taking the extended example of branded entertainment in the form of the alliance of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, he cites examples from the earlier 2000s of branded consumer interactivity through experimental digital initiatives in brand content since BMW's series *The Hire* in 2001 and Baz Luhrmann's event spectacle, *Chanel N°5 The Film* in 2004. As we saw with the hyperbolic Cartier mini-films, the convergent blending of the experience of Hollywood entertainment with branded promotion transforms the extended commercial into a filmic event in itself—Luhrmann's film was made at a cost of some thirty-three million dollars and given a global cross-media release. Thus, Grainge argues, the residual format of the advertising spot is superficially transformed into a "new" or emergent type of cultural product.[83]

The Chanel *N°5* film, leaning on the director's earlier musical film *Moulin Rouge* (2001) through self-referential casting, setting, and diegesis, has also been read through the lens of the director's oeuvre and its productive relationship with fashion, style, and glamour. As with Luhrmann's other film productions, the costumes were designed and coordinated by Catherine Martin. Nicole Kidman, dressed by Lagerfeld, returned as the star who is pursued by the paparazzi to a Paris rooftop, where she enjoys a tryst with her secret lover, a setting adorned by the mammoth Chanel logo. As Pam Cook has observed in relation to the director's feature films, despite the lavish scale of the production marketed as a PR event and its success in promoting the brand, "the mini-film's relationship to a commercial is tangential."[84] Narrative coherence and plausibility were absent and the original dramatic tension between commerce and creativity was diluted by the condensed format.

Fashion was also central to the conception and reception of Luhrmann's later adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's melodramatic novel *The Great Gatsby* in 2013, the production and costume design for which included some forty pieces

designed by Prada, which were inspired by some of the 1920s inspired cocktail and evening gowns from her 2011 and 2012 collections. Catherine Martin also curated an edit of the costume designs for a peripatetic installation at the Prada Epicentres in New York, Tokyo, and Shanghai.[85] The rebooted *Gatsby* was, in effect, a strategic vehicle for trans-media entertainment, the PR for which included a co-branding operation with Tiffany & Co, with whom Martin created and sourced jewelry for the production and who created a tie-in collection to mark the film's release. Mainly due to the adaptation's pyrotechnic visual style and frenetic editing rhythms—particularly its dizzying use of 3D and jarring use of sonic counterpoint through contemporary hip-hop commissioned from Beyoncé and Jay-Z—more conservative critics dismissed it as shallow and vulgar in its apparently demagogic attempt to seduce a young consumer demographic: "It suggests that [Luhrmann is] less a filmmaker than a music-video director with endless resources and a stunning absence of taste"[86] as the critic for the *New Yorker* bluntly put it.

Similar charges of style over substance have also been levelled at the work of director Sofia Coppola, who is emblematic of the centrality of fashion branding to contemporary cinema in that her films highlight an underlying tension between narrative and consumption, which positions her as a type of commodity auteur, one whose status is inflected by gender and an ambivalent relationship with questions of female agency and commodification. Through her modeling and one-off collections for Marc Jacobs and Louis Vuitton, which have included a luxury line of "Sofia" handbags, together with her own Japanese teen fashion label, MilkFed, Coppola has been described as a new type of celebrity auteur, one who exploits the marketing potential of her personal brand.[87] As Pam Cook argues, Coppola's authorial profile fashioned through popular consumer culture is "characterised by high levels of transmedia public visibility similar to those experienced by stars."[88] This publicly curated profile is bolstered by her work in advertising. The commercial exigencies of conventional media advertising often either limit directors to a generic brief (Coppola's commercial for Marni's co-branded collection with H&M in 2012, shot at a luxurious Moroccan villa, combined her trademark evanescence with a series of romantic lifestyle clichés) or to a processed concentration of their authorial signature. Her commercial for Dior's *City of Light* fragrance in 2010 effectively redeployed the nostalgic filters reminiscent of the cinematography of her film *Virgin Suicides* (1999). Released to coincide with *The Beguiled* in 2017, Coppola's lifestyle commercial for the relaunch of Cartier's "Panther"

watch bridged the gap between an all-American iconography of L.A. with luxury French jewelry by alluding to the director's preferred style of dress through the casting of a model who adopts her low-key look of white made-to-measure dress shirts.

The seductiveness of Coppola's cinema has led to criticisms of her promoting surface glamour, despite the clear satirical intent of a film like *The Bling Ring* (2013) with its deceptively accessible style, or the pleasurable subversion of the historical costume drama in *Marie Antoinette* (2006) with its anachronistic attention to branded apparel, which included a fetishistic close-up of a pair of Converse high-tops included in the queen's extravagant "I want candy" shopping scene. In her monograph on Coppola's cinema, Fiona Handyside concurs that fashion is an essential part of the "management" of her public persona.[89] The spectacular visibility of fashionable lifestyles leads her to situate Coppola's cinema within the realms of the twenty-first-century fashion film, which, following Hilary Radner's definition, purposefully draws on the popular appeal of fashion for audiences who are receptive to consumer culture and advertising imagery. *The Bling Ring*, however, was adapted from a critical journalistic account of the story of a gang of hyper-connected, label-obsessed L.A. teens, who break into celebrities' homes to bag their hordes of luxury goods.[90] Despite Coppola's measured distance from these real-life events—a position articulated through the ambiguous viewpoint of an extreme distance shot of the gang at work looting a palatial glass-lined villa—the film's final verdict is more ambivalent, since, through the use of montage party sequences, the film tends to glamorize the same milieu that it attempts to critique—a milieu that on the evidence of the voyeuristic media coverage of the trial was seemingly less aspirational in reality than in this polished adaptation.

The intersection of celebrity and lifestyle, intentionally critical in the case of Coppola, leads us to the door of fashion designer-turned-film director Tom Ford, who presents a more problematic case study for the conjunction of contemporary fashion and film because he takes commodity auteurism to the next level. The target of much critical suspicion of fashion on screen comes from the sort of production design that submerges the narrative in a stagnant aesthetic coding, which is reliant on the clichéd look of editorial or advertising imagery, structured around the model's pose and a level of surface perfection more attuned to fashion photography than to narrative film. Ford's directorial debut *A Single Man* in 2010 is revealing in this respect for it self-consciously straddled the codes of advertising and art cinema. The film, a prototype for the promotional

film in long form, described aptly by one critic as having been "designed to death,"[91] raises pertinent questions around the definition of authorship in the convergent mediascape of fashion, moving image, and consumer culture. What does the fashion designer bring to the creative and collaborative process of directing? Is this type of cinema a spin-off of a commercial approach to fashion that "channels" or appropriates visual sources pell-mell? Is the film simply part of a broader self-promotional strategy with the product rolled out along with fashion and fragrance to promote the designer's own label? Pamela Church Gibson has written extensively about Ford's strategic positioning of his self-financed film within the revised consumer culture of branding and celebrity that he helped to forge as creative director of Gucci through the 1990s.[92] Following in the footsteps of the celebrated US television series *Mad Men*, Ford's glossy adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel was criticized for its contrived shots of designed interiors and its over-insistence on immaculate garments.[93] Isherwood's cruel realism was replaced by Ford's luxury aesthetic, the elegant clichés of which served to neutralize the existential angst and affective allure of the original story.

Ford's subsequent film, *Nocturnal Animals* (2016), adapted from Austin Wright's 1993 novel *Tony and Susan*, was a complex meta-thriller with a tripartite structure that allowed the director to airbrush the more realist elements of the novel out of the picture in search of a perfect aesthetic vehicle through which to launch a curated critique of the same luxury lifestyle that he had forged a career promoting through fashion branding. In her reading of Ford's film, Church Gibson argues in a similar vein that this is, in essence, an advertorial approach to film, in which the aesthetics of promotion "infiltrate" and "disrupt" the conventional narrative. "The narrative strands of the film proper," she explains, "are moving against and in conflict with the viral-film aesthetic that seems to dominate at times."[94] Rejecting the academic setting of the novel for the art milieu of the film, Ford's intended critique of the shallow existence of the superrich L.A. gallery owner, Susan Morrow, who in the moralistic adaptation finally accepts that she has missed her chance for happiness years earlier, is untenable because of the filmmaker's own branded celebrity—in particular his techniques of self-promotion and his public performance of the high-stylist; an image that is fashioned around Ford's nonchalant elegance and the projection of a formal dress code that he commercializes through an eponymous menswear label.[95] The idealist ambitions of the film's romantic narrative—having read the manuscript of her ex-husband's harrowing book, Susan offers to meet him in

the hope of rekindling their relationship—are here undercut by the audience's contextual knowledge of Ford's status as the archetypal commodity auteur, an image of good taste embedded in promotional culture. From a purely commercial perspective, one could, of course, argue that Ford has simply managed to circumvent the inherent problem of the branded fashion film in the world of convergent media entertainment: how to persuade an audience to overlook the commercial intention of the film altogether and to consider it as art rather than advertising. In one sense, Ford's authorial posture as a director is a commercial "breakthrough" because it repositions and extends his brand identity through adjacent forms of artistic production. Beyond Arianne Phillips's on-point styling for actor Amy Adams, Shane Valentino's production designs for the character's sterile home—inspired by one of Ford's own luxurious properties—transpose the steely look and empty affect of Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Red Desert* (1964) to contemporary Los Angeles, and, in so doing, lay bare the production's more calculated grounding in imitation, replication, and consumption.[96] The artistic product placement alone included artifacts loaned by the stars of contemporary art such as Sterling Ruby, Jeff Koons, and Damien Hirst.[97] Unlike the apparent vulgarity detected by critics in Luhrmann's literary adaptation of *Gatsby*, Ford's ultra-tasteful film takes a mood board approach in which narrative drama, however deftly deployed, is ultimately subordinate to the stylistic coding and value system of branded communications.

Promotional genres

In the pantheon of directors who have made branded films, one of the most unexpected examples is that of Kenneth Anger, the pioneering gay experimental filmmaker of the American avant-garde, who, in 2010, made a short promo for the Italian house Missoni, known for its expressive colorful knitwear. Born Kenneth Anglemeyer in 1927, the artist changed his name to Anger as a way of branding himself and his work. He also appeared in front of the camera in a cameo role for an arty film, *Vox Humana*, directed by Griffin for the American label Rodarte in 2009, part of SHOWstudio's exploratory *Future Tense* project that promoted the work of emerging designers through moving image. Commissioned by the Italian fashion house to promote its Autumn/Winter 2010–11 collection, *Missoni by Anger* transposed the filmmaker's trademark hypnotic dissolves and homoerotic imagery to the straight world of corporate promotion by shooting members of

the Missoni family who display the garments in motion, in what amounts to a pastiche homage to his earlier work. The piece alludes to the more experimental historical lineage for twenty-first-century fashion film in earlier forms of queer underground cinema such as Anger's midcentury esoteric explorations of sexual dissent, magic, and the occult, in which clothing and adornment were integral to the style, tone, and atmosphere of the short films.[98] *Puce Moment* (1949), an early prototype of the fashion film, began with a shot of 1920s vintage dresses sliding toward and away from the camera as a woman (Yvonne Marquis, the director's cousin) selects one before getting elegantly dressed up to take her dog out for a walk. *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954) began with an enigmatic close-up of jewels being sensually wound around a woman's hand; and the voyeuristic pleasure of Anger's "water film" *Eaux d'Artifice* (1953), filmed around the garden fountains at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy, was largely derived from the contrast between the fetishistic exuberance of the woman's eighteenth-century costume and the earthily erotic allusions to golden showers. With its fetishistic imagery of violent leather-clad bikers, *Scorpio Rising* (1963) defined the queer S/M look on film in conjunction with the more mainstream, but nonetheless ambiguous, rebel icons of the era such as Marlon Brando and James Dean. And, in an original e-tail initiative, Anger now sells the branded merchandise from his films online. Chiming with the designer trend for satin souvenir bomber jackets produced by the likes of Louis Vuitton and Saint Laurent following actor Ryan Gosling's quilted version in the film *Drive* (Winding Refn, 2011), limited edition "authentic copies" of the original black leather jacket hand-stitched with a multicolor motif of the occult triangle, which had been prominently displayed in the ritualistic *Lucifer Rising* (1972), and which has since been reimagined in black and gold satin imitations that are personally signed by the filmmaker, now retail for just under three hundred dollars on his website.[99]

Notwithstanding Anger's interest in fashion and his cultivation of costume, the luxury industry's embrace of his work—sequences from his films were incorporated into the staging of Valentino's Fall/Winter 2010/2011 runway show—is indeed striking given his reputation as an artistic maverick and outsider figure. In a critical study published in 1999, French screenwriter and director Olivier Assayas celebrated Anger's low-fi production for having provided an exemplary alternative to the commercial triumphalism of Hollywood.[100] It is precisely the ritualistic aspect of Anger's imagery that gives it its unique structure, and it may indeed be the magical spectacle of the trance that lends itself so well to the communication of consumer fashion.

Plate 1 Early experiments in digital fashion film. *Sweet* (2000). Credits: Nick Knight (director) and Jane How (stylist).

Plate 29 "This is not a show": fashion presented through film (Gareth Pugh S/S 2018). Credits: Nick Knight (director), Gareth Pugh (designer), Younji Ku (editor/art director), Katie Shillingford (stylist), and Olivier de Sagazan (artist).

Plate 30 "This is not a show": fashion presented through film (Gareth Pugh S/S 2018). Credits: Nick Knight (director), Gareth Pugh (designer), Younji Ku (editor/art director), Katie Shillingford (stylist), and Olivier de Sagazan (artist).

Assayas's films *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014) and *Personal Shopper* (2016) also provide critical commentaries on the tension between image and consumption by problematizing the nexus of celebrity, performance, and materialism that underpins contemporary fashion. Both films alternate between fascination and repulsion, which is surprising given their production contexts: both were part-funded by the house of Chanel and both contain manifest product placements by Cartier, Christian Louboutin, and Vionnet. *Personal Shopper*, an esoteric meta-thriller, sets the subject of spiritualistic philosophy (perhaps under the influence of Anger) against the backdrop of luxury fashion's brutal hyper-materialism. The director's shaded view of luxury is not puritanical, however; it is not directed at fashion per se, but rather at the excessive "financialization" of the industry.[101] (Incidentally, Assayas is the son of Catherine de Karolyi, the Hungarian-born fashion designer who launched Hermès's first ready-to-wear collections in the late 1960s and invented the house's emblematic H buckle.) This type of accommodated critique would seem emblematic of the creative tension between independent cinema and corporate fashion that has taken hold of moving-image production: Assayas's films lay bare the contradictions of contemporary screen and consumer culture, in which the fashion house sponsors the feature film, thereby ensuring it broader publicity platforms and distribution networks, while giving the auteur free rein to develop a partial critique of its ethos or practices.

In 2017, Assayas collaborated with Chanel on a product film for the launch of the *Gabrielle* handbag staring French model and music producer Caroline de Maigret, known for her display of a nonchalant French aristocratic chic—she is the coauthor of an aspirational volume titled *How To Be Parisian: Wherever You Are*—here filmed drifting around an apartment preparing for a photo shoot with Lagerfeld. (She also makes a fleeting appearance in *Sils Maria* as a Chanel PR.) The characters in Assayas's feature films, however, are more openly skeptical about fashion. Maureen (Kristin Stewart), the cash-in-hand personal shopper who works for a vain A-list celebrity called Kira, hates her job, which she sees as futile and vacuous. When a job opening comes up at *Vogue*, she complains about how magazines just sell things for advertisers rather than catering to their readers. Bemoaning the fashion photographer's lack of freedom, she is herself subservient to a tyrannical boss, who refuses to return the garments she borrows for gala events. Secretly trying on the prized pieces, Maureen even has to stand in when Kira fails to show up for a photo shoot. When she mysteriously receives anonymous texts that coerce her to transgress by discarding her no-look attire

and slipping into the sexy Vionnet harness dress and the vintage Chanel metallic gown, Maureen's spiritual powers as a medium start to increase. Fashion, the film elliptically suggests, empowers her to contact her deceased brother in the afterlife.

In *Clouds of Sils Maria*, Stewart plays the quick-witted assistant to a star of stage and screen, played by Juliette Binoche, who is also elegantly dressed by Chanel. Like the Cartier jewels in *Personal Shopper* that are partially used to resolve the ghost story-cum-thriller, the brand is here woven into the narrative for descriptive effect—simply to present the character of Maria Enders as a modern star. The spectacular staging of the fashion shoot toward the start, at precisely the moment when the actress learns of the death of her former mentor, is intended to underline the opposition between her plastic image as an icon of beauty and glamour and the conflicted performer and individual beneath the mask.

The meta-effect of both films depends on a contextual recognition of Stewart's international fame: in *Sils Maria* her character debates the car-crash celebrity of a postmillennial teen starlet played by Chloë Grace Moretz, which provides a pointed commentary on the public scrutiny of Stewart's private life since the global success of the *Twilight* film franchise since 2008. The intended critique of *Personal Shopper* is, however, circumvented by Stewart's prestigious role as brand ambassador for Chanel, for whom she has appeared in advertising campaigns and online fashion films for the brand's eyewear, makeup, accessories, and fragrances. The much-publicized launch in 2017, at a time when the brand started to experience a dip in sales,[102] of Chanel's first perfume for fifteen years, *Gabrielle*, was accompanied by an advert with Stewart, which rejected the romantic clichés of heterosexual coupling that traditionally underpin the genre by positioning the "out" queer star as the actively transgressive face of the brand. Stewart is shot struggling to break through a wall of glass perfume flacons.

Assayas's collaborative relationship with the world of branded fashion highlights a formative fault line running through contemporary cinema, one that is rooted in consumer culture. Film critics have historically been hostile to such collusion, and fears of the artistic corrosion of cinema by fashion are not a recent phenomenon. At the start of the millennium, articles appeared in the *Cahiers du cinéma* lamenting the "contamination" of cinema by consumerism, recognized as a move from MTV to Fashion TV, a position that incorrectly hives off cinema as a pure artistic practice untainted by commercial considerations.[103] On the contrary, to accept cinema as a popular art form requires an acknowledgment

of its creative synergies with forms of consumer culture. The critical receptions of both Coppola's *Virgin Suicides* (1999) and Wong's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) were also framed, at the time, within theoretical discussions about the impact of consumerism on film and the perceived "temptations" of the video clip aesthetic.[104] And, long before the inception of digital cinema and the fracture of media platforms, Assayas, writing in the context of the *cinéma du look* in 1983, had already addressed advertising and fashion imagery as blind spots in the history of French cinema.[105] Fast forward to the digital media age, by which time "advertising is so ingrained within the public consciousness that is has become an intrinsic part of popular culture,"[106] when cinema is often defensively seen as threatened by ambient digital imagery, there are signs of continued creativity and innovation in the blurring of formal distinctions between film genres and fashion narratives. An excellent example of the visual importance of styling to storytelling is Brando De Sica's sinister short film *L'errore* (2014), which embeds high glamour in the horror format: a beautiful film star returns incognito to the rural farm of her abusive childhood only to be unwittingly slaughtered by her desperate poverty-stricken parents.

One last example of the genre-fashion film, intended to segue into our consideration of nonfiction representations of the fashion industry. Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon* (2016) binds the supposed symbolic violence of fashion to the gory horror of cannibalism. The film consolidates a number of stereotypical ideas about modeling and image-making by distancing them through an ultra-stylized aesthetic, which mixes nods to fashion photography, installation, and video art, one that is encoded within the generic conventions of gore. The film—branded from the opening credits with the director's initials NWR—tells the story of an ingénue model, Jessie, played by Elle Fanning, who arrives in L.A. with big dreams and who embraces the mythical cruelty of the modeling industry and its morbidly narcissistic fascination with physical perfection. Agents, photographers, and designers instantly admire Jesse's youth and charms; she is envied by two other predatory models and lusted after by a make up artist who works shifts in a morgue. The self-consciously editorial look of the film makes reference to the cynical blend of style, eroticism, and death associated with 1970s photography through the artificial staging of shots that echo the sensibility of image-makers like Guy Bourdin and Helmut Newton. From its arresting opening shot of Fanning on a gaudy fake interior, her blood-stained body laid out on an ornate sofa, the film flips back and forth between photography and cinema by artificially animating the model's pose

through slow-motion and highly saturated neon lighting effects. Jessie's first photo shoot staged in an expansive bleached-out interior turns into an art installation as the predatory photographer smears her body in gold paint. Her transition from naïve waif to glamour puss at the hands of a manipulative designer is punctuated by a series of hallucinatory shots of her embracing her multiple reflections, thereby underscoring the film's more general conflation of narcissism, voyeurism, and fetishism. Following a gory death at the hands of the cannibal models who consume and then regurgitate her, the film ends with an extended pastiche of the poolside photo shoot, a commentary on the revolting underside to the surface gloss of the fashion image—a critical point of view that is contradicted by the director's lucrative work in advertising, which to date has included NWR branded ads for Hennessy cognac financed by *Nowness* and unsigned ones for Lincoln cars (with Matthew McConaughey), H&M fashion (with David Beckham), and Gucci perfumes (with Blake Lively). Like previous generations of directors-for-hire, there is a disconnect between the artistic and the commercial work, a barrier that is increasingly permeable in the era of advanced digital communications. Nevertheless, a residual dismissal of advertising by those in art cinema and photography remains. When asked to comment on his practice of advertising, photographer and film director William Klein once bluntly replied, "I have nothing to say. Like everyone else, I just did it for the money."[107]

Notes

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11, 2017 and http://o.nouvelobs.com/mode/20120427.OBS7247/videos-quand-la-pub-se-fait-un-film.html, accessed August 11, 2017.

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11 Richard Dyer, *Pastiche*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 1.

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14 Williams, "Advertising," p. 183.

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Part 2

Process: Documentary Fashion Film

Behind the scenes

When he launched SHOWstudio in 2000, Nick Knight intended the platform to document "the entire creative process from conception to completion."[1] Showing the studio meant exploring the multiple forms of fashion through the conjunction of moving image with text, illustration, and photography. From the late 1980s onward, Knight had begun the practice of capturing his photo shoots on video, providing a behind-the-scenes insight into his working practice. His ambition to position fashion communication as dynamic, changing, and interactive, was manifest in the 2007 commission, *24 Hours*, which exposed the process of a high-end fashion shoot from start to finish, with online viewers encouraged to participate in the creative process by influencing the direction of the shoot's narrative. In collaboration with designer Stefano Pilati, then in tenure at Yves Saint Laurent, model Jessica Miller, and set designer Gideon Ponte, Knight created a catalog and series of fashion films to inaugurate the brand's "Edition 24" collection, with each of the twenty-four films representing an hour of the live broadcast. Rather than conceiving of the fashion still as divorced from the process of its production, Knight has consistently emphasized the live broadcasting of online content as an integral part of its elaboration. The process films accompany the staging of the shoot to provide contextual insight into the art of making the fashion still. This view of image-making as a collaborative process aims to be more accessible to online audiences by debunking certain myths of creativity and personality that surround the fashion industry. SHOWstudio's behind-the-scenes footage instead highlights the excitement, enjoyment, and work involved, showcasing the editorial decisions, flashes of inspiration, and wrong turns necessary to produce the desired end product.