The Spectral Cloth: Textile Readings of Queer Identity

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Abstract

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This thesis rethinks queer reading as textile reading as it traces instances where queerness appears as represented through clothes, becoming textile. After demonstrating through historical examples how clothes create meaning and can be subverted in their wearing, the thesis turns to cinema to argue that queer representation appears on screen as a textile coding. The thesis enacts a survey of queer textile representation in cinema's history, from *Morocco* (1930) to *Queen Christina* (1933), *Rebecca* (1940), and *All About Eve* (1950), to argue that queerness and sexuality are partly textile constructions. While elevating textiles from their designation to costume and mise-en-scene to a category of signification of their own, the thesis conceives of textiles as signifying spectrally, through coded representation. The third chapter synthesizes textility and spectrality, to question how queer representation, and representation in general, manifests. The thesis offers a textile approach to queer theory: one that synthesizes essentialism and constructionism through the queer visions conjured by textiles. Through an understanding of "style" as a defiant queer practice that can enact change upon the world, the thesis offers new ways of thinking about our identities and their textile constructions. It champions a reading of textiles for meaning, constructing the method of queer textile reading, that it then applies to later films such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), *Personal Shopper* (2016), and *Barbie* (2023), to show the method's utility throughout film history and today. What also becomes visible in these queer textile readings is the textility and spectrality of the film medium itself: its textile-like qualities, but also its ability to make ghosts appear through the cloth.

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Introduction: A Textile Approach to Queer Theory

"The way we dress creates identity, at least as an outward signal about our identity to people we meet. I remember as a teenager I had some garments that were very important for me to be able to signal who I was in the right way. But at the same time I thought: What happens if I lose those garments? If I one day wake up somewhere and I have to dress in some other borrowed clothes, what will happen to my identity then?"

-Lisa, participant in *Collection L* (2007), a textile photography project on lesbianism and clothes by designer and academic Maja Gunn (McNeil 2009)

"Who would not like to know more about this garment?"

–Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2002)

Clothes express identity. We put them on every day, fashioning ourselves in styles and outfits that not only express who we are, but also allow others to read us. When we see someone on the street, their clothes—which can be markers of gender, class, age, occupation, sexuality, and more—allow us to quickly categorize them. Clothes show the world who we are, and in turn, allow us to make sense of it. Whether intentional or not—a skirt communicating femininity, a clean cut that subtly communicates class status, a suit meant to portray authority, a dress that says "I think this is a date"—clothes communicate.

Identity is textile. If clothes communicate identity, our identities are constructed partly through clothes. The connection between identity and textiles raises important questions. Which one came first? If clothes communicate identity, do they make visible a quality that exists prior to its textile expression? If you wear an old cheap suit, are you still a rich man? If you cut off all your hair, put on your brother's clothes and wore a cap, would you still be a woman? Do clothes simply express identity or do they construct it? What we wear represents who we are, and in fact, becomes synonymous with our identities. As Lisa quoted above asks, who would we be without our clothes? If clothes make visible identities that may or may not exist prior to us putting them on, clothes' appearance reaffirm and even inspire those very visions. Clothes in fact construct the very thing they are said to make visible.

One might go as far as to claim that identity is a textile construction. The clothes we put on our bodies are assigned meaning, and in turn communicate our identity, which too becomes something textile. Here, I use the word "textile" to visualize the transformation that happens when clothes as objects expand in meaning and become signifiers of an identity that is textile-like, material, and in motion. The word "textile" also points towards *a textile practice*, one that goes beyond the object of clothes and the act of putting them on, and brings us closer to an ever-changing and evolving relationship to our shifting, textile identities. A textile approach allows us to visualize identity in all its complex, material—and at times spectral—conditions. What ultimately arises in this conception is the term "textility," which can be defined as the quality of identity to be constructed through clothes and the condition of the rich queer practices that arise from such textile constructions. But textility is so much more than that: it is also a rich connection and commitment to textiles, and an attendant textile-like quality, that we will locate in the essence of queer identity, as well as in the medium of film.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige defines subculture as the subversion and reclamation of elements of dominant culture. He writes: "These 'humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination." (Hebdige 1979, 18). My work is interested in those "secret meanings" which I characterize as part of a *spectral* meaning making practice. As I explore more in Chapter 2, "Spectrality and Textiles," there is an intrinsic connection between spectrality, queerness, and textiles. And while clothes might be material, the ways in which they communicate are often coded (which I later compare to the logic of The Production Code as discussed in Patricia White's work (1999)). I use the concept of spectrality to imagine the ways in which clothes might signify, resulting in coded textile representations of queerness.

The combination of the theories of queer spectrality and queer textility culminates in a queer reading practice that can *see through* the fabric, and extract queer meaning that is otherwise fleeting. Such a reading reclaims and preserves queer meaning through the visions conjured by the textile. Additionally, the connection Hebdige makes here between the conception of subcultures and style is crucial to my work. Style—which can be conceived of as a practice characterized by textility— is not only the expression of a subcultural identity, but as I will argue, identity itself. Here the concept of textility allows us to make the connection between identity and textiles, and think of identity through its textile expressions and constructions. As identity and textiles becomes entangled in fascinating ways, it becomes clear that there needs to be a new way of approaching identity characterized by textility.

Who would we in fact be without our clothes? In this thesis, I want to explore the complex ways in which clothes are crucial to expression and construction of identity—especially queer identity. Clothes have represented, expressed, and made visible queerness throughout history. I propose queer reading as a *textile reading*, for I argue that queerness has been and is often textile. And because clothes propose such conflicting conceptions of identity—does identity arise from the clothes we put on or exist as an essence within?—a textile approach to queer identity can be very productive. Thinking about identity through clothes allows us to simultaneously hold two conflicting positions that have existed within feminist and queer theory—that of essentialism versus constructionism—and think through the complexities of identity expression.

Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) has been an essential text in queer theory, and is taught in Gender Studies classes around the world. In this paradigm-shifting work, Butler argued against an essentialist view of gender, the belief that gender arises from an essence that exists within. In fact, Butler offered, gender was constructed, constituted through the very acts that were thought to externalize it (Butler 1988). These gender acts were performative, meaning they constructed the thing they were supposed to externalize. A constructionist view was ground-breaking and liberatory, for it meant if gender was constructed, it could also be constructed *differently*. This constructionist logic soon spread around queer theory, being applied to other aspects thought essential and unchangeable, such as time and space (Halberstam 2005; Ahmed 2006), which were also revealed to be constructions after all—characterizing queer theory with the imaginative pulse that allows it to conceive different worlds. The constructionist approach was freeing and life changing, what was there not to like? But if identity was constructed, constituted through the acts that made it visible, did there not exist an identity beyond its construction after all? Were we just empty vessels, waiting to be constructed through the next thing that would make us who we are? This was, of course, not what Butler argued.

There have been many approaches to and conceptions of essentialism and constructionism. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* argues for the need to identify the axioms in our arguments, which in her case is constructionism, although she crucially adds that her work wouldn't have been possible without the work made by essentialist approaches (Sedgwick 1990). While most post-structuralist work has argued in line with constructionist ideas, there has also been attempts in queer theory to synthesize the two approaches, or at least to move beyond them. Trans scholarship certainly has questioned and deepened our understandings of gender and identity. Works by Jack Halberstam (2005), Susan Stryker (2006), Dean Spade (2006), Cáel M. Keegan (2020) offer novel and differing ways of conceptualizing identity and gender. Butler also reformulated their conception of performativity in later iterations (2015).

The constructionist approach itself was notably critiqued in the context of Western queer theory's one-sided approach. Jaspir Puar and Gayatri Gopinath are among some of the theorists that argue that Western queer theory's approaches might be inadequate to capture non-Western sexualities (Ula 2019). Samar Habib too, in the Introduction to *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations*, reconsiders essentialism instead of constructionism, arguing that it might be more suitable to describe the Middle Eastern lesbianism she theorizes (Habib 2007). She argues that the overlooked position of essentialism might be better suited to describe Middle Eastern homosexuality, which Western constructionist positions often prove inadequate to capture (Habib 2007). Duygu Ula also argues for a different understanding of queerness to describe the Turkish homosexuality she observes in Nilbar Güreş's photographs, expressions of queerness that become invisible when examined through paradigms of Western queerness (Ula 2019).

And yet, there might be another way of looking at things through the textile. When students read Butler's essay for the first time, they often find it difficult to parse through the at times convoluted language of philosophy to appreciate the complexities of the argument. How do professors explain concepts such as constructionism, performativity, and essentialism to first year students? They give examples. In fact, they can easily illustrate 30 or so dense pages of theory with one simple, everyday example. Your gender does not come first, they might say, but is constituted through everyday acts. Students look confused. Gender is performative, they add. Silence. They now add: You are a woman because you put on a skirt, it is these everyday acts that constitute gender. Suddenly, theory is textile. Students might nod in understanding at the image of a skirt and all that it conjures up. The complex argument is easily illustrated through the example of the skirt, for a skirt is so firmly rooted in femininity and constructions of womanhood that it is able to reveal gender as the construction it is. A textile effect. The students in their youthful identity-affirming attire can surely appreciate how clothes might aid in the construction of an identity. But why exactly does this example flow so easily, illustrate dense pages of theory and complex concepts with so much as the rustle of fabric? How do clothes make visible entire concepts and elucidate ways of thinking about identity?

I argue that what happens in the example of a skirt illustrating complex concepts is that theory becomes textile. It is not only explained through clothes, but also becomes textile in the sense that it becomes material one can touch, even put on. A textile example brings theory closer to everyday materials that can be embodied. And the reason that a textile example elucidates gender performativity might be that there is something textile about gender and its construction after all. While Butler's performativity is easily explained through clothes, the idea that gender itself might be similarly woven seems unacknowledged. My aim is to pay attention to moments where clothes both construct and make visible different identities, including how they can be used to subvert expression. Throughout this thesis, I look at moments where clothes expand in meaning and become textiles, and where a textile approach might contribute to a better understanding of gender and sexuality. I will argue for a textile approach to queer theory, an approach that focuses on textiles as foundational to the expression and construction of queer identity.

A textile example might elucidate Butler's theory, but can it also tell us more? At the end of the year, students move onto other classes, yet that moment where theory was momentously textile, when it left the page and was suddenly material on our bodies and made perfect sense, might stay with them after all. It certainly did with me. Can queer theory simply begin from clothes, not just as an example but as its foundation? I argue that a textile approach to queer theory allows us to hold two conflicting positions at once—that of essentialism and constructionism—through the very complexities of the fabric. Clothes construct identity, yet there is also something essential and intrinsic to the textile. This is the question of whether clothes or identity comes first. Clothes express our identity, some essence within us that must be there before we put them on...or does that identity come after the fact of putting them on? This ambiguity of the textile in fact becomes very useful when thinking about identity and its myriad expressions. It is possible that there can be both something intrinsic and essential to the textile, and a performativity to clothes and style that allows people to construct their identity—and construct it differently in a Butlerian sense—through clothes. A textile approach to queer theory adds onto our understanding of identity and complicates it through an acknowledgement of identity's textile construction and spectral essence. A textile approach weaves together constructionism and essentialism to reach something more complex, something more textile.

A Textile History

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed focuses on objects as a primary site where queerness emerges, conceptualizing sexual *orientation* as compromising the real life positionings of subjects (Ahmed 2006). In *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* Ahmed also theorizes about "queer use," a practice that happens when people use objects for unintended purposes, revealing the objects' inherent queerness (Ahmed 2019, 198). I am inspired by this impulse of queer theory to take up objects as important and significant, as well as the accompanying attention paid to materiality and embodiment. And that queer identity might arise in tandem with real-life materials and coordinates—and their myriad intersections. My object of significance is clothes, and I take up these objects as a site where queerness might emerge in a textile manner. But more so than examine clothes as an object, I'm interested in instances where clothes become something *more*, and signify various meanings through the fabric, as well as constitute rich and varied textile practices. I am also interested in the "queer use" of clothes, people wearing clothes in ways that they were not meant for, queering textiles and their significations in the process. In such a queer use, a textile practice comes into view. As I will later show, the textile history of queerness is a history of people taking more than what was allotted to them, daring to ask for more: for a better, different world, radically imagined through acts of textile defiance. In the second part of the Introduction, I trace the history of how women's use of pants and suits during the 20th century was an act of textile defiance that soon connoted feminism, socialism, and a desire for women's freedom (Steele 2013, 173). I then look at how such textile subversion came to be associated with queerness, to demonstrate how clothes develop meaning and come to signify queerness. I also take up the object of the monocle, a curious piece of eyewear that once stood in for masculine wealth and later for lesbian sexuality, to examine how clothes come to signify, and be appropriated and subverted in their meanings.

The way that clothes communicate, especially in their appropriated forms, is not always straightforward. In fact, their messages can be coded. To think about the way clothes communicate, especially when they denote the shrouded visibility of queerness, I take up the concept of *coding*. This word is used both in the sense of a queer coding, but also referencing the historical coding of homosexuality under the Hays Code. To this end, Patricia White's *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* is foundational to my argument, especially for the ways in which White shows that coded representations might proliferate under discursive conditions of censorship (White 1999). Her argument allows me to theorize how a queer coded language emerged under censorship, both in terms of cinema, as she argues, but also in terms of textiles, as I add to her argument. I argue that the coded representations of homosexuality have often been textile, that it is clothes that made visible the image of queerness under The Code. White examines *Rebecca* (1940), and I add a textile dimension to her argument, to explore the textility of "lesbian representability" (White 1999). When I look at *Rebecca,* and then later at *All About Eve* in Chapter 2, "Spectrality and Textiles," I argue that clothes might be that very object that makes the visibility of queerness, and in fact queer conjuring, possible.

In Chapter 1, "Queer Textile Coding in Film," I argue that, starting with "the masculine woman," who through her textile subversion presented a vision of proto-queerness (Halberstam 1998, 186), representations of queerness have been a matter fabric and fabrication, something expressed through the very act of wearing clothes. I argue that in instances where queerness was not able to be represented on screen, it still became visible through clothes—in fact, it was its textility that aided in this visualization. And thus, we find textility to be an essential condition of queer representation. I trace such instances of queer textile coding in *Queen Christina* *(*Mamoluian 1933)*, Morocco* (Sternberg 1930)*,* and *A Meeting of Two Queens* (Barriga 1991). Looking at Greta Garbo's masculinely dressed Swedish queen, whose royal authority and sexual freedom seem to arise from her textile expression, I argue that an (un)dressing might be the thing that reveals gender as textile construction. Later, I look at *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Avnet 1991) as an example of a more recent film that uses textile coding, and that can greatly benefit from a queer textile reading. Looking at this film, which loses part of its queer context in its adaptation from novel to film (Proehl 2018), I argue that it is clothes that nonetheless make visible a queer subtext that is otherwise subdued. I look at the way the film pays attention to clothes and in fact trains its audiences to do the same through its camerawork and editing. Close ups of shoes precede identifying close ups of the face while introducing a character, suggesting that it is clothes and accessories that primarily define a character. Such textile-oriented scenes reveal a film that is attendant to textiles not only in its content, but also in its form as well, as a cinematic gaze that moves in accordance with textiles emerges. It is through such instances where an attention to textiles upheld stylistically can allow us to read texts and textiles more closely, enacting a queer textile reading.

Throughout this thesis, I conceive of queer reading as textile reading, as I look at instances where queerness becomes associated with clothes, and becomes something textile. I want to explore what it means to "become textile," or what happens to both clothes and our identities when they enter a symbiotic relationship with each other. For our identities to become textile is to become one with the objects that represent them, and to become part of a living and breathing practice that is remade every time someone puts it on. A textile reading does not only read clothes and accessories for meaning, but also teases out the practices and meanings that arise from the movements and contradictions of clothes as they signal in real life and on screen. A textile reading takes textiles as central to a text's meaning, transforming texts themselves into textiles—something one can put on their body and make their own. A textile reading is after all a resistant reading, it is a reading otherwise, a reading that reclaims everyday objects as one's own. A textile reading adds onto a rich history of queer people representing and making visible their identities through textile objects and practices.

The scope of this study is an attempt at a brief survey of textile expression across film. In practice, this takes the shape of lesbian and queer textile readings of women loving other women and non-binary people, as this presents as my area of identification and knowledge. I use the word "queer" to open up my theory to this set of identifications, relations, and textilities, and I encourage others to apply and test out queer textility in instances outside the scope of my study, such as gay male textile identities. Alongside filmic examples, the thesis makes reference to real-life queer objects and their history to showcase how textile representation of queerness on screen has its roots in the history of queer people's use of textiles in expressing their identities. Starting from the 1930s, with *Morocco* (1930) and *Queen Christina* (1933), the thesis also looks at Brassaï's photographs of the lesbian bar Le Monocle from 1920-30s and the object of the monocle as an example of a historical queer object. In doing so, the thesis aims to connect real-life expressions of queerness and their cinematic counterparts. The thesis then examines *A Meeting of Two Queens* (1991) as an example of a text that brings together two textile icons, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, through the edit's textile stitching—ultimately revealing the textility of the film medium itself. Chapter 2 moves along in history as it looks at instances of spectral textile queerness in *Rebecca* (1940) and *All About Eve* (1950), to demonstrate through the concept of spectrality how textiles might conjure queerness. What emerges is a conception of queer representation that is rooted in textility and spectrality. Having established methods of queer textile reading, the thesis applies them to more recent examples such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) and in the context of spectrality, *Personal Shopper* (2016) to demonstrate the usefulness of this method. The aim is to trace queer textility as an intrinsic and ongoing expression of queerness across history, offering a brief survey of queer textile representation. While conceiving of queer textile reading as methodology, the thesis demonstrates its various applications through various texts. It traces similar patterns of representation across different texts to show that there is something intrinsically textile to queerness, arising from a large history of in real-life textile queerness. And in the context of spectrality, it considers the possibility of a somewhat mystical, and yet affirming, connection between queerness and textiles. All in all, the aim is to explore this wonderful, at times confounding, link between queerness and textiles in all its complexity and to ask: why clothes?

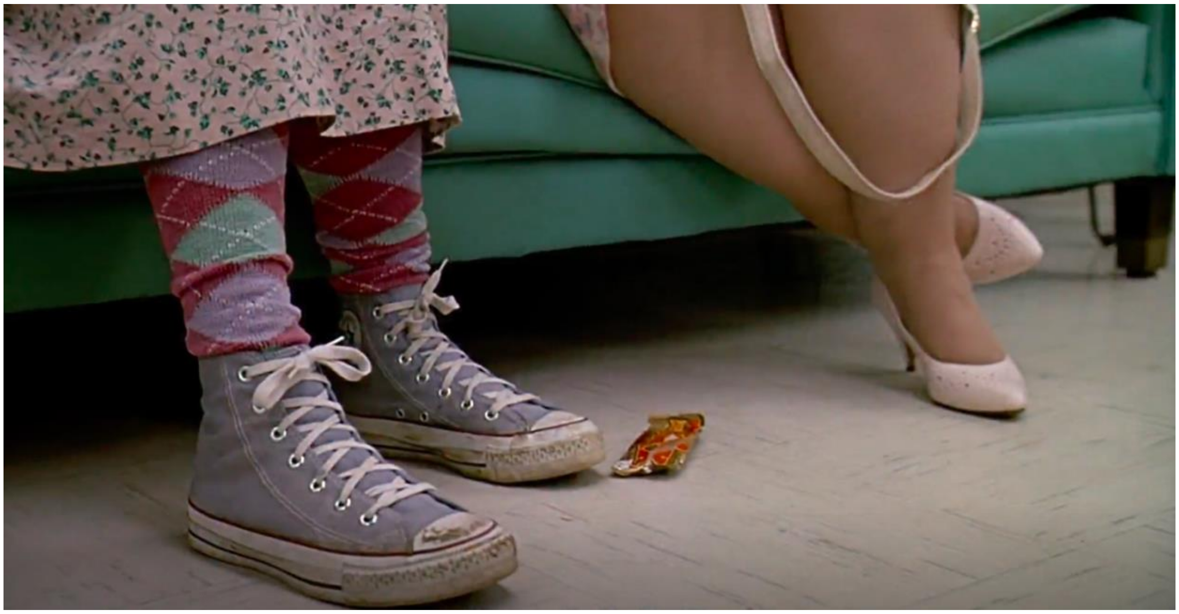


Fig 1. In *Fried Green Tomatoes,* close up of shoes precedes an identifying close up of the face while introducing a character, suggesting that it is clothes and accessories that primarily identify a character.

The concept of spectrality is especially crucial to my conception of how textiles signify. In coded representations, queerness is there and not there at once, ready to dissolve any minute—spectral. In *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993), Terry Castle constructs a theory of lesbian spectrality by tracing the history of spectral lesbian representation in literature and film since the 18th century. As Castle argues, lesbian desire has existed and has been represented as a spectral desire, that which is barely there and ghostly, often expressed as a haunting. Other works by Patricia White (1999), José Esteban Muñoz (2009), Carla Freccero (2015), also acknowledge this connection between queerness and spectrality. The concept of spectrality is useful for my argument for characterizing the ways in which queer textile representation might appear, and the manner in which clothes signify, or conjure. In Chapter 2, I explore the relationship between spectrality and textility on film, arguing that spectrality on film is a *textile effect*—whose presence is intimated and conjured through clothes. I look at films such as *Rebecca* and *Personal Shopper* as instances where the spectral and the textile coincide in their representation of lesbian desire. All in all, this work adds onto the wonderful, currently out of print work initiated by Terry Castle, and champions its further readership.

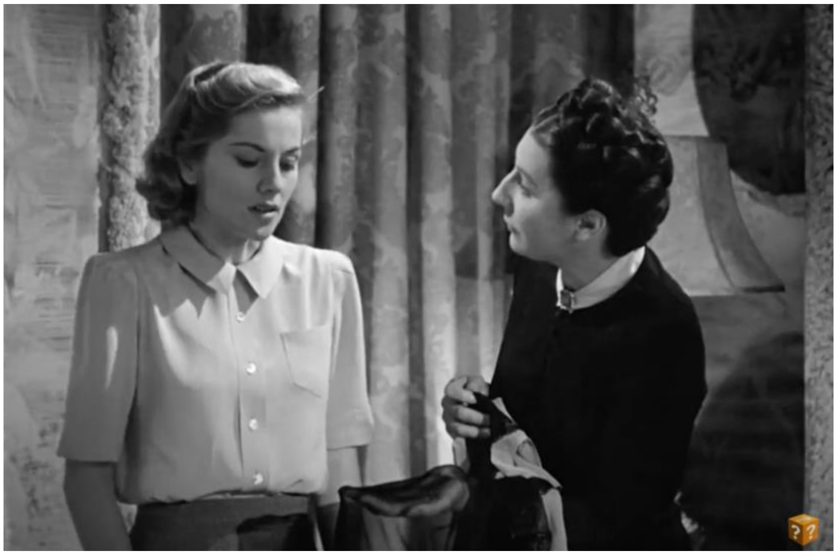


Fig. 2. In *Rebecca,* Mrs. Danvers' handling of Rebecca's clothes conjures her ghost, as clothes mediate the spectral lesbian desire between the women.

Throughout this textile theorization, there are some texts that guide my way. Valerie Steele's essay collection *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Sidewalk* (2013) is illuminating for the connections it makes between queerness and clothes, a connection which I bring a step further in this thesis. Jack Halberstam's work in *Female Masculinity* (1998) is foundational to my understanding of how proto-queerness makes itself visible through masculinity (and as I add, masculine clothes) on film and other cultural forms. Alice Kettle and Lesley Millar's excellent book *The Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles* (2018) is fascinating in the ways it brings up the tactile and bodily dimensions of textiles, and the textile's ability to activate the haptic and the erotic (8). Yet more, McNeil, Karaminas, and Cole's *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film and Television* (2009) contains an excellent array of essays, significant for their exploration of how clothes "perform" on screen. Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (2000) is one of the key explorations at the intersections of lesbianism and clothes and offers an extensive study of English lesbian culture. It was in a first-year class in 2019, while writing an essay on a Cindy Sherman photograph (#6) that the practice of reading textiles for meaning first occurred to me. Ever since then, I have had the honour of having incredible professors who showed me both endless support and a new world of knowledge. This project has been a long time in the making—from clumsily reading textiles as a first-year student to conceptualizing my own theory on textile reading—and I'm thrilled to share the results.

So, why textiles? Clothes are everywhere. As an object of study, they have been taken up in disciplines as varied as Philosophy, Art History, Cultural Studies, Communications, History, Fashion Studies, and more. They are also everywhere on screen—my focus in this thesis. I would like to elevate clothes from their delineation to the background as part of mise-en-scene or costume, and instead approach them as critical agents that contribute to and create meanings of their own. I argue that clothes are essential to constructing meaning on screen, and that they should be studied as objects of their own right when looking at film. I argue that a textile approach to Film Studies, as well as to queer theory, has a lot to offer. The intersection of queerness, textiles, and spectrality is a fruitful area that requires further examination.

Clothes are the site of rich meaning, complex expression, and intricate construction. A textile approach can allow us to illuminate dense concepts by translating them to textiles, such as in the Butler example, where theory becomes textile. In making concepts textile, both material and also something closer to the skin, we can elicit ways of easily understanding and even embodying complex concepts and theories. I argue that we pay attention to clothes as sites of meaning-making, and take them seriously for their representations. I argue for a queer textile reading, a method I further demonstrate in Chapter 1, as a way of making sense of queer texts and of film. A textile approach to film and theory not only allows us to read clothes for the queer meanings they code, but it also lets us transform complex concepts into everyday materials. After that, one only has to put them on.

Queerness and Textiles

Clothes communicate messages about our identities constantly, but they are especially crucial to queer identity. Throughout history, queer identity often had to be hidden, expressed as a whisper to others. José Esteban Muñoz writes that queerness has had to exist in a state of ephemerality: as "innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility." (Muñoz 1996, 6). As queerness had to be hidden, its expressions were subtle, ephemeral, even ghostly. Under such conditions, a certain visual code developed, one that queer people could use to signify their queerness to others. Such visual coding was like a secret language: codes were subtle enough to communicate one's queerness to other queer people, while "largely being indecipherable to straight people" (Steele 2013, 34). I argue that these subtle clues that alerted another to one's queerness, were often textile codes. A certain style, an accessory, a specific haircut, a way of dressing that signaled something more—these visual codes spoke, carrying messages of queerness.

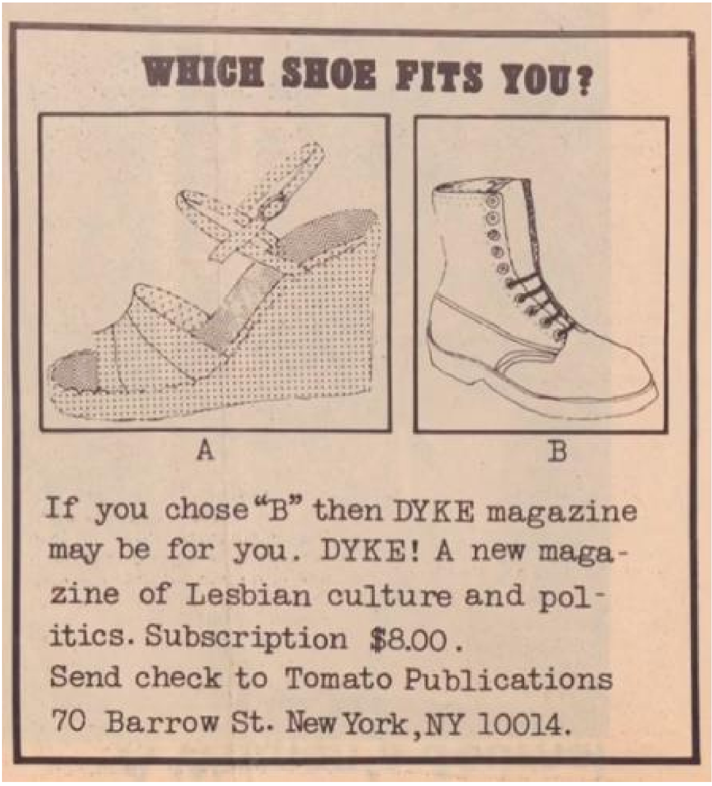
Today, it seems that these codes which were supposed to disappear, much like the ephemera Muñoz talks about (1996), have stuck. Queerness still seems to be visualized through clothes. As queer people today use clothes to make visible their identities, they are engaging in an historical continuation of the textile expression of queerness. At the same time, as clothes continue to be used to signify queerness, so much so that two become inextricable, identity itself also becomes something textile. It is something stitched, something woven, to be put on, and to be taken off. And what do the textiles of queerness look like today? To some, the answer is obvious, knowable in a glance. One only has to look out for certain items, a way of dressing, a certain style. For queer women, this might be a flannel shirt, thumb rings, a buzzcut, a mullet, birkenstocks, doc martens, keys on a carabiner, tattoos, piercing, masculine clothing, feminine clothing, coloured hair, a certain hairstyle...It's all in a look and it's all in the look. If looking becomes an identifying act, looking gay is all about textile identifiers. But just how do queer people use clothes to communicate? How is it that some clothes come to connote queerness, while others not so much?

Sometimes clothes signify easily. A piece of clothing comes to be associated with a certain idea so strongly that it becomes difficult to pry it apart from the visions it conjures. Let's take a skirt: that emblem of femininity and womanhood. A skirt often easily signifies femininity and a female identity. In fact, the skirt's firm conflation with gendered expression is part of what allows for its subversive uses as well. Some clothes and accessories, on the other hand, do not signify as easily and require some decoding by the onlooker to extract their meanings.

It is the ability of clothes to signify that allow them to be used to generate such rich meaning, to make visible what is otherwise ephemeral, spectral. But it is the ability of queerness to be expressed through clothes—its textility—that allows for this rich textile conjuring.

If a skirt is worth a thousand words, then a shoe might be worth a thousand more. A 1976 ad for DYKE magazine uses identification with work boots as an indicator of a lesbian identity. Presenting the choice between two shoes, one high heeled and the other a laced-up boot, the ad asks: Which Shoe Fits You? The answer, apparently, is more telling than it might seem. As the ad playfully suggests, if you choose the work boot, which is more utilitarian and masculinely coded, you just might be the right audience for DYKE magazine. The fact that this ad seems to suggest that identification with a shoe would translate to a sexual identification speaks to just how much clothes and accessories have been essential to queer identity.

The ad's message is more complex than a rudimentary binarization of femininity, and not as simple as the second shoe dismantling everything the first shoe stands for. In fact, something happened when a woman picked the second shoe, picked the second option out of what she was offered and expected to do—a freedom and a refusal all symbolized through a shoe. The identification with another choice marked her as queer, suggested something deviant about her. Perhaps there was something incongruous about her gender, symbolized by the very utilitarian shoe she chose. If she put on those boots, who knew what else she might do? Throughout this chapter, I will be looking at instances of textile defiance and discordance, which stand in for a refusal of traditional identities and norms. I will be examining the textile meanings that emerged when a woman chose to wear something that traditionally did not belong to her, and how such textile defiance ultimately translated to an embodiment of freedom.



WHICH SHOE FITS YOU?

If you chose "B" then DYKE magazine may be for you. DYKE! A new magazine of Lesbian culture and politics. Subscription $8.00.
Send check to Tomato Publications
70 Barrow St. New York, NY 10014.

Fig. 3. "Which Shoe Fits You?" A playful advert from 1976 for DYKE magazine suggests identification with a certain shoe might translate to a lesbian identification (1976) (Medhurst 2020).

How do certain textile codes develop? Patricia White in "Reading the Code(s)" writes about the curious phenomenon of censorship, namely in the context of "representability" of homosexuality in Classical Hollywood. The Production Code, or The Hays Code, was a self-censorship mechanism used by US studios in 1934-1968, which among various things, barred depictions of homosexuality (White 1999). White argues that while The Production Code supressed expressions of homosexuality, it also caused coded representations of queerness to emerge (1999). Under the limitations of the code, Hollywood had to find other ways to represent these sexualities (1999). As such, these representations developed to be "coded"; certain signs or codes communicated queerness in a covert way (1999). Queerness stayed hidden yet visible at the same time, able to be decoded once you knew where to look (1999). White argues that The Code barring depictions of homosexuality instead caused a new language to emerge, with specific codes signifying lesbianism (1999). I will add onto her argument by arguing that these codes have largely been textile, and that queerness on screen was visualized through clothes, in Chapter 1, "Queer Textile Coding in Film".

What I find useful here is to think about textile expressions of queerness in everyday life through a similar logic of (self)censorship and its attendant coded expressions. I will argue that the visual coding of queerness, in real life as well as in cinema, has been textile. We can think of the textile expressions of queerness as developing under censorship, some of this being self-censorship, or the threat of being outed. Certain clothes, accessories, and styles, because they present an incongruity that suggests a subversive identification, or because they have been worn by and associated with queer people, come to signify queer meaning over time. If queer people at a certain point wore certain clothes or accessories because it was the only way to make their queerness visible, queer people today still continue on these textile traditions, not only because similar threats still continue to exist, but also because those textiles have over time developed into a language that communicates queerness. A rich textile history of queerness, which I will argue exists, means that certain articles of clothing have gained significance through recurrent use to visibly signify queerness today. This suggests the existence of an intricate sartorial code, *a queer textile coding*, that queer people have and continue to use to identify each other.

Lesbian painter Hélène Azénor seems to suggest the existence of this textile recognition of lesbian identity in 1920s when she writes: "we wore tailored suits and our hairstyles, which had something indefinable for others were, among us, a sign of recognition" (Steele 2013, 28).

This quality of being "indefinable” to others, yet “recognizable” within a community (2013, 28), was crucial. This is where a textile coding emerged. Something as small as a ring could be enough to know that someone’s a lesbian, but only if you know the signal, if you are the intended audience; to a straight person, those clothes or accessories might not have any special meaning. Such textile signals, much like coded representations on screen, speak to their queer audience, and often not so much to others, not only protecting their wearer from being outed, but also functioning within the rich language of textile coding.

Textiles continue to signify extensively in real life and in film. A recent example shows interesting similarities to the 1976 DYKE magazine ad. In Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie* (2023), Barbies live in Barbieland, unencumbered by patriarchy or beauty standards until one day, one of the Barbies (Margot Robbie) notices something wrong when her perpetually upturned heel suddenly becomes flat and her shoes no longer fit her. Exasperated by these changes, Barbie visits Weird Barbie (Kate McKinnon), a non-traditional Barbie exiled to the outskirts of Barbieland because of her looks. Barbie is faced with the choice of staying in Barbieland, or leaving her home to find out the truth. Here, Weird Barbie visualizes this choice with two shoes: one a pink high heel, and the other a Birkenstock sandal, asking Barbie which she will choose.

The question does not seem much different from the one the 1976 DYKE magazine ad asked. The former choice represents going back to an old way of living and closing their eyes to truth; while the latter promises a new knowledge and previously unknown ways of living—symbolizing a queer impulse in its emblematic sense. The pink high heel, with all that it stands for and seems to easily conjure, is almost a cliche for traditional femininity. Here, because of those associations, it is able to stand in for traditional beauty standards, and traditional ways of living for Barbies in Barbieland. It is important to note, all this and more is signified easily through the image of a shoe—speaking to the vast capacity of textiles to signify and to conjure. It is also important to note that the shoe that represents the unknown and the reorganization of their lives is a Birkenstock, a shoe that has traditionally been associated with lesbians and have served as a symbol of queerness. For Barbie, it is this queer shoe that represents the possibility of leaving and drastically transforming her life, under the freedom offered by a defiant textile choice.

That the contrast between two different visions of life can be represented through shoes speaks to the communicative power of clothes and accessories. Clothes and accessories continue to signify in film and in real life, communicating complex messages through their context and history. What a shoe symbolizes is more than a look; here the Birkenstock stands in for an alternative way of living and is able to conjure the vision of a new life for Barbie. It is also significant that Birkenstock is associated with queerness, for this new knowledge offered to Barbie might go against everything she's known before. And in fact, as with the DYKE magazine ad and with Barbie's textile representation, there might be something queer in the act of reaching across and picking the other shoe, choosing the option that might take her somewhere else. If we look closer at Weird Barbie, who herself is queer coded through her outfit, we can see a little symbol drawn around one of her eyes. One of Barbie's eyes seems to be circled by the drawing of a certain accessory, a monocle, which was a lens worn on one eye. In the context of textile significations of this scene, the vision of a monocle might suggest more than we think.

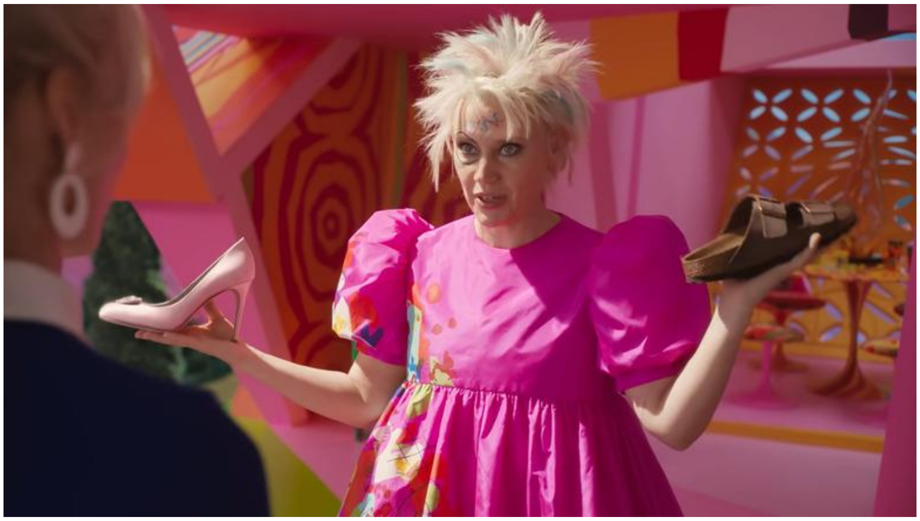


Fig. 4. The choice of a shoe stands in for much more in this scene in *Barbie* (2023) where Weird Barbie asks Barbie whether she will stay home or leave and discover a new knowledge, represented through two different shoes.

Le Monocle

It is in the photographs taken of a bar in 1920s Paris that we come across our queer little object, offering visual clues to what queerness looked like at the time. Le Monocle was a bustling lesbian bar active in 1920s and 30s Paris, where women could dance and openly kiss each other (Ulyces 2016). The lesbian bar was documented in a series of photographs by Brassaï in 1932 (Steele 2013). These photographs are extremely valuable for they not only offer us a window into how lesbians and queer women interacted at the time, but also how they dressed. Curiously, we see several of the women supporting a single lens over their eyes. This is the monocle, the queer symbol that gave its name to the bar (2013). In the rest of this chapter, I focus on specific objects and how lesbian and queer people's use of them, consisting of appropriation, subversion, and resignification, has resulted in different cultural meanings. My aim is to first establish how objects come to signify through association and history, and then to demonstrate the connection between queerness and textiles.

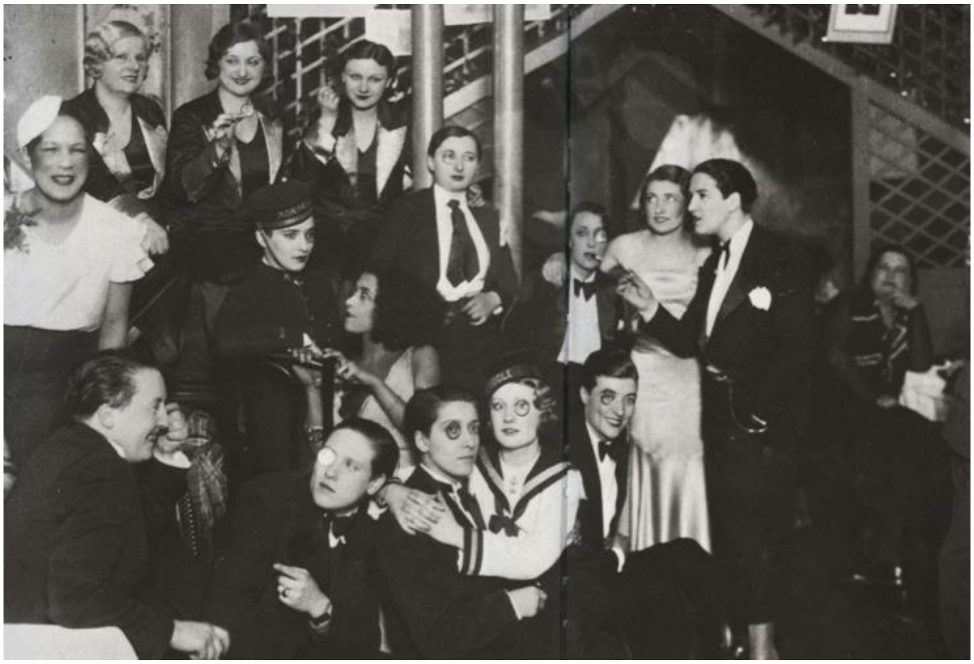


Fig. 5. Brassaï, Untitled (Le Monocle), 1932.

The monocle is a queer little object and its transformation by lesbians can offer clues into how cultural signification of queer objects develop. The monocle first became popular in the 1820 and 30s, then experienced a revival in the 1890s (Lowder 2021). It was created to correct vision in a single eye, and was primarily held up by the facial and eye muscles, often accompanied by a string to prevent its falling out (Lowder 2021). Because a monocle was held up by face and eye muscles, it required custom fittings, which could be costly—which, according to Lowder, might explain how it came to be associated with a certain class (2021). In the 1900s, monocles were associated with aristocracy, elegance, and British dandyism (Grossman 2019). They were the emblem of wealth, specifically masculine wealth (2019). Already we can observe how a piece of corrective eyewear might evolve to communicate specific meanings about class and gender, and their infinite intersections. The monocle stood on men's faces, signifying their status and power through accessorial association. When a wealthy man in the 1900s wore a monocle, he perhaps intended more than just correct his vision, but to project a vision of himself as embodying a specific intersection of masculinity and class. He could afford a monocle because of his financial status, but the presence of a monocle on his face also confirmed his financial power, a symbiotic association where the act of seeing and being seen became similarly entangled. The little object was able to symbolize and conjure a vision of masculine wealth, but its signifying powers were not yet exhausted.

Citing the styles of famous lesbians through history like Radyclyffe Hall, Una Lady Troubridge, Romaine Brooks, and Marquise de Belboeuf, Valerie Steele writes: "it is striking to see how the tailored clothes of upper-class men were also experienced as liberation for many lesbians" (Steele 2013, 24). And in fact, these lesbians, who were mostly also upper-class or aristocratic women who had more freedom due to their economic status, adopted the styles of upper-class men (2013, 24). In the photograph of Le Monocle above, at least six of the people photographed can be seen sporting the object that not only gave its name to the bar, but also served as a symbol of lesbian identity. Once the emblem of masculine wealth, the monocle in the 1920s and 30s became a symbol of lesbianism, and the namesake for the bar where lesbians could openly dance with each other in Paris (2013). A symbol once entangled with masculinity and wealth, the monocle could then be worn by lesbians and be associated with a certain sexuality. The transformation of the monocle from a symbol of masculine wealth to one of lesbian identity showcases a common phenomenon in how sartorial codes develop, and are appropriated and subverted by queer people.

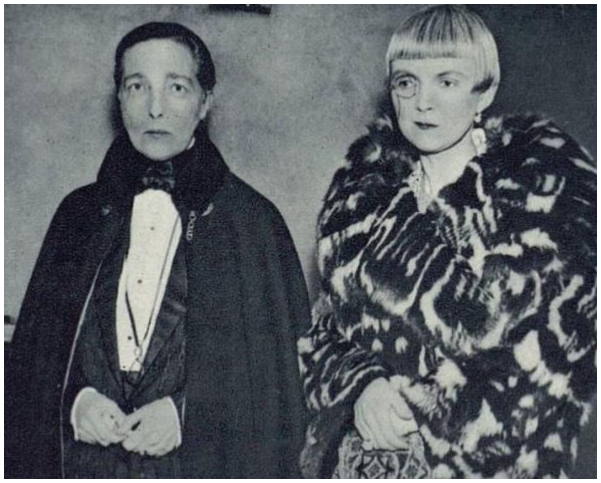


Fig. 6. Radclyffe Hall and Una Lady Troubridge. Una can be seen sporting the monocle, a symbol of lesbianism in the 20th century (Steele 2013).

The women in the Le Monocle photograph are seen holding each other, while dressed in the queer fashions of the time, and a number of them are wearing some iteration of the eyewear accessory. Does something else catch your eye? There's something interesting about their style. The monocle is a little over the top, a little funny looking. To our eyes today, the monocle is a little ridiculous. Grossman, when describing the associations that the monocle inspires today, calls the accessory old-fashioned, theatrical, and pretentious (Grossman 2019). The eyewear piece has come to connote a certain kind of man, often a slightly villainous one (2019). Grossman points out, the monocle in the past 50 years has only ever been worn as part of a costume, always communicating some artificiality (2019). But what is interesting to discover is that perhaps the monocle itself did not always signify so easily, and did not so straightforwardly communicate wealth and class.

The vision of masculine wealth signaled by the monocle did not always transpire so easily, in fact, Lowder seems to argue that there was always something stilted about its presentation. He notes that the monocle carried "an air of conscious elegance," suggesting that the symbol was not quite so easily read. He cites a 1950 article from *Optical Journal* that offers a rather unflattering view about the eyepiece:

> "[O]ne had the feeling the wearer was being a trifle foolish, an attitude which resulted to some extent from the fact that monocles frequently did not fit and kept dropping out of place." (Lowder 2012).

The monocle as a symbol was in fact not very firm: it kept dropping out of place, once fitting the face of a wealthy gentleman, then that of a lesbian American in Paris. As early as 1855, the monocle was being scrutinized as a symbol of pretentiousness, when Charles Dickens characterized his monocle-wearing Mr. Barnacle and his eyewear as such in *Little Dorit* (Lowder 2012). Perhaps, even before lesbians took the monocle and reveled in the possibilities of textile constructions, the monocle had something performative about it. It stood in for the wealth it seemed to construct, yet that very vision was apparently artificial, and the monocle fell short of delivering the straightforward image of rich masculinity that it promised.

If monocles were meant to be symbols of masculine wealth, but often felt too consciously elegant and fell short of their vision, then we can see the monocles worn by the lesbians in Le Monocle in a different light. Once we realize that the accessory carried an air of conscious elegance and an element of performativity, we can begin to understand better what meanings it carried for the lesbians who wore them. Susan Sontag defines "camp" as "a sensibility that revels in artifice, stylization, theatricalization, irony, playfulness, and exaggeration" and this would be a useful framework for looking at lesbians' use of the monocle (Sontag 1966). Perhaps, there was something ridiculous about the monocle after all—a stilted vision of gender that fell short—and when lesbians wore it, they weren't completely serious about it. Perhaps, it was something playful, a little camp, an inside joke, a little something glittering in the eyes of Le Monocle lesbians, parodying the very gender roles they were undoing. There is something over the top with the outfits of the Le Monocle-goers, daring you to look closer, defiantly laughing at men and their visions of grandeur in the face. Lesbians' use and appropriation of the monocle could be said to reveal the performativity associated with the accessory, how it promised to create a vision of masculine wealth but often fell short, and became something else on the faces of the lesbians that wore it. There was something funny about it, an element of play, that poked fun at the man, and suggested that there were new ways to see, and new ways to be.

Traditional masculine clothing has often been adopted and appropriated by lesbians to communicate their sexual identity. In order to understand the meanings that could be communicated by appropriating masculine clothing, it is first necessary to examine how women have historically used masculine clothing. As Steele notes, women's fashions have from time to time borrowed and/or parodied masculine fashions, and always to communicate a variety of messages (Steele 2013). It was especially when masculine clothing became less elaborate (as opposed to Regency fashions) that it "differentiate[d] sexes more rigidly," and "could the more readily be deployed to suggest sexual identities" (2013, 173). As clothes designated gender more and more, and ultimately became essential to gender expression, it became possible to more readily use them to communicate gender and sexuality. And in fact, clothes played a major part in the construction of gender, and its subversions. Esther Newton writes:

"In the nineteenth century and before, individual women passed as men by dressing and acting like them for a variety of economic, sexual, and adventure-seeking reasons. Many of these women were from the working class. Public, *partial* cross-dressing among bourgeois women was a late nineteenth-century development." (Newton 1984, 558)

Dressing "like a man" allowed women to pursue freedoms, economic and sexual, alongside textile ones. By wearing clothes that men wore, or disguising themselves as men, they were able to pursue freedoms not afforded to women at the time. As such, dressing masculinely became associated with women's defiance and freedom, and became synonymous with feminist connotations (Steele 2013). Because clothes often so firmly designated gender, it also became possible to make them signify otherwise, to communicate non-heteronormative identities. Masculine clothing worn by a woman was always loaded with meaning: "For a woman to dress like a man was to invoke secret different associations, all of which alarmed the dominant forces in society, feminism, socialism, sexual inversion" (2013, 173). The use of masculine clothing by women historically was often a shock, and suggested affinities with antipatriarchal forces and other sexualities, as well as political affiliations. Thus, women often used masculine clothing in order to protest or make a political point—such as when they started wearing pants to advance women's freedom.

Le Smoking

In 1966, designer Yves Saint Laurent introduced Le Smoking, a tuxedo for women, the suit that would soon be mired in scandal. Women wearing a suit in France were denied entry to establishments, citing a French law forbidding women from wearing trousers (Hughes 2023). When Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain wore Le Smoking, she was denied entry to a casino in Normandy; Françoise Hardy, on her way to the Paris Opera donning the garment, was heckled by the audience (Hughes 2023). When Nan Kemper was denied entry to Manhattan's La Côte Basque while wearing the suit, she styled her jacket as a mini dress, essentially dining "trouser-less" (2023). Apparently, it was preferable women wore no trousers, if it meant they wouldn't be wearing the pants that threatened societal norms. The sight of a woman wearing a suit was so shocking at the time, it was able to be used for protest. According to Hughes, this further emboldened women who wore pants and suits as a political statement (2023).

The fact that pants at one point were specifically reserved for men demonstrates the gendered construction of clothes, which is at once time and place dependent. What is also striking is the performativity of clothes, that they seem to be constructing the very gender that they seem to represent. Perhaps women wearing suits were so shocking because by disturbing heteronormative norms, they threatened to dissolve the very illusion of gender—which in itself was partly a textile construction. This might explain why a mis-wearing of a suit threatened the gender binary so much and resulted in outrage and protest. If as Steele argues, women wearing traditionally masculine clothing were alarming, because their textile defiance suggested affinities with "feminism, socialism, sexual inversion," women wearing Saint Laurent's tuxedo engaged in a defiance that threatened the gender binary (Steele 2013, 173). The sight of a woman wearing pants today might seem banal and won't necessarily carry an element of protest, but it's necessary to remember the history of how this textile defiance came to be normalized, and in turn, opened up freedoms for women, textile and beyond. At a time when it was shocking to do so, women who defiantly wore masculine clothing used the very clothes on their bodies to protest against an order that oppressed them, communicating messages about women's empowerment, agency, and freedom—through textiles.

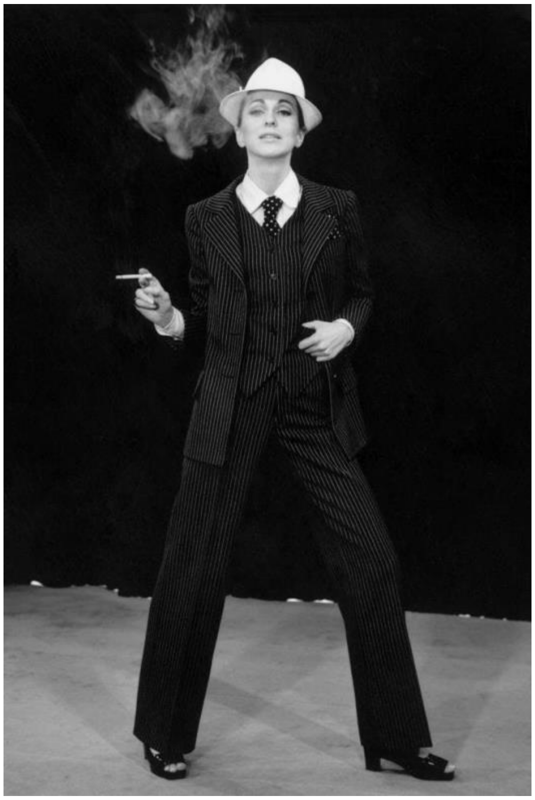


Fig. 7. Le Smoking, Helmut Newton (1966).

What did Le Smoking disturb exactly? Yves Saint Laurent has said of the tuxedo: "A woman wearing a suit is anything but masculine. A strict, clean cut accentuates her femininity, her seductiveness, her ambiguity." (Hughes 2023). When citing one of his inspirations however, he admitted to having been inspired by an image of Marlene Dietrich in a suit: "I was deeply struck by a photograph of Marlene Dietrich wearing men's clothes. A woman dressed as a man must be at the height of femininity to fight against a costume that isn't hers." (2023). Though Saint Laurent is careful to reiterate the femininity of the suit, it is curious that he cites the influence of Dietrich's cross-dressing performance for *Morocco,* which has become its own queer moment (Castle 1993). Dietrich, who has famously been in relationships with both men and women, has become an important figure in queer film history (Castle 1993), not to mention queer textile history. Dietrich's gender-bending performances and crossdressing were crucial to constructing her image, and she was once described as "the best dressed man in Hollywood" (Steele 2013, 29). Perhaps, Dietrich's use of masculine clothing communicated something else about her after all, something more queer. After all, when she puts on the suit in *Morocco,* she does kiss a woman on screen (a scene I look at more closely in Chapter 1 when I talk about queer textile coding). Was it the suit itself that enabled such freedoms?

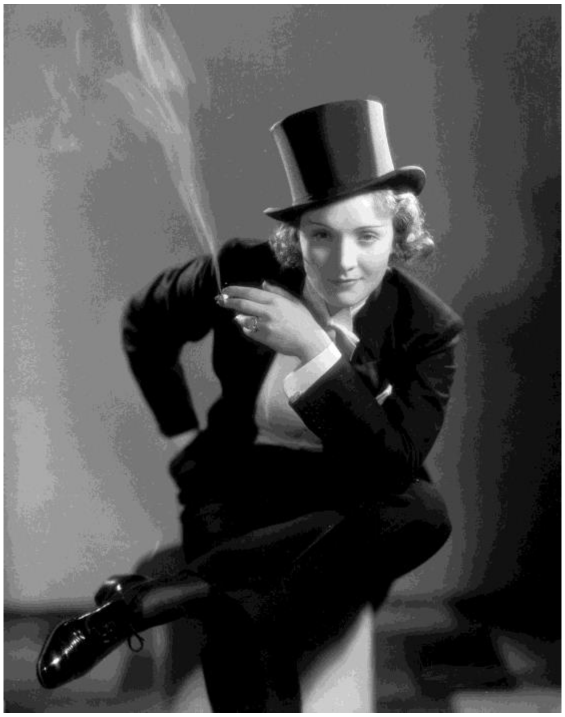


Fig 8. Marlene Dietrich, *Morocco* (1930).

So, was Saint Laurent wrong? Was a woman wearing a suit "anything but masculine"? Perhaps he was right, because the image of a woman wearing a suit did not conjure masculinity exactly, but not quite femininity either; in fact, it culminated in something else that threatened to dissolve that very binary. There in fact was something bizarre happening to one's femininity when it came into contact with traditionally masculine garments—suggesting that gender itself might be textile-like after all. The resulting image wasn't quite masculine, but it wasn't fully feminine either—instead it was the synthesis of a new gender expression. Though society imposes binary understandings on gender and its expression, clothes made to signify otherwise enact a deconstruction of gender. It was in moments where clothes signified otherwise, undoing the signifiers of feminine or masculine—because gender seemed to arise from the very clothes that were supposed to represent it—that gender and its boundaries came undone.

If the appropriation of masculine clothing allowed women to communicate antipatriarchal and feminist messages, then there was something queer about such textile defiance after all. Because they went against heteronormative norms, they offered the possibility of new ways of dressing, living, and being—among which might include queer existences indeed. Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* writes:

> "Sometimes female masculinity coincides with the excesses of male supremacy, and sometimes it codifies a unique form of social rebellion; often female masculinity is the sign of sexual alterity, but occasionally it marks heterosexual variation; sometimes female masculinity marks the place of pathology." (Halberstam 1998, 9)

So how did the clothes that once shocked and disturbed gender norms come to stand in for feminism, then to connote queerness? In fact, in their disturbance of the binary, these clothes made visible a queer disruption. Because these clothes carried a history and the political power of communicating counter-cultural messages, it was no surprise they were also worn by queer women who have also often supported causes like feminism and socialism. Not only did queer women also very often supported the causes associated with women's use of masculine clothing such as feminism and socialism, but they also upheld the queerness their disruption presented.

The history of how pants and other masculine clothing once stood in for protest, and then feminist and social causes (Steele 2013), and evolved to represent queer identities, is an example of how clothes might develop meaning. Often, as in this example, these meanings can be rather complex and coded. Much like the monocle that once stood in for masculine wealth, but not firmly so, and for this reason could be appropriated by lesbians, textile signifiers as signs are malleable. Often, political messages or signs of protest become visible when people dare to wear clothes they are not supposed to, thus subverting their meaning. Textile coding develops when clothes are worn otherwise, signifying differently. All of this is possible because of clothes' ability to signify, to construct meaning and make complex ideas visible. The history of textile coding is full of examples of protest, defiance, and freedoms claimed through textiles.

The same clothes took on different significance when worn by lesbians and queer people. When a woman wore a suit, she could be sending a message about feminism, women's freedom, and the constructed nature of gender—messages which might include queerness. But when a queer woman wore that same suit, those messages took on a different significance. Female transgression in wearing masculine clothing was transformed into something definitively queer on the bodies of women who loved other women. When Saint Laurent's models wore Le

Smoking, it caused uproar in society, because a woman wearing pants was untraditional and dangerous. But when Marlene Dietrich wore a suit in *Morocco* and kissed a woman on screen, her masculine attire also communicated other freedoms, such as queer expression, especially to a lesbian and queer audience. It is the genderbending of masculine clothing on a woman's body that results in a protest that might be categorized as queer, but it is the proximity of such clothes to a queer transgression that makes them definitively queer.

On the iconic 1998 Vanity Fair cover, cited in Halberstam's book (1998), lesbian singer k. d. lang is pictured alongside supermodel Cindy Crawford. Not only are k. d. lang's clothes masculine but their actions—sitting in a barber chair, being shaved—are masculinely coded. Coupled with the famous and highly desired supermodel's touch, the image that results is decisively queer coded. The textility of this queer coding is what fascinates me. In lang's wearing a suit and being shaved, there's an element of parody, a parody of masculinity that culminates in something like queerness. It is not only lang's positioning or Crawford's desiring hands that construct the queerness of this scene—but also their clothes. k.d. lang's wearing of the suit is what immediately characterizes this scene as queer and designates the intimacy between them. It is the image of a suit that is able to construct the appearance of queerness and the queer intimacy of the Vanity Fair cover seems to be textile coded. lang's and Crawford's outfits complement each other, just like the identities the clothes symbolize—her femme to their butch. It is the accordance of clothes that make this union seem scandalous, and natural at once—sartorially concordant. Because lang puts on the suit, it is possible that they might sit in that chair, and be held by Crawford. What appears is a vision of queerness that cannot be extracted from the textiles that make it visible, and possible.

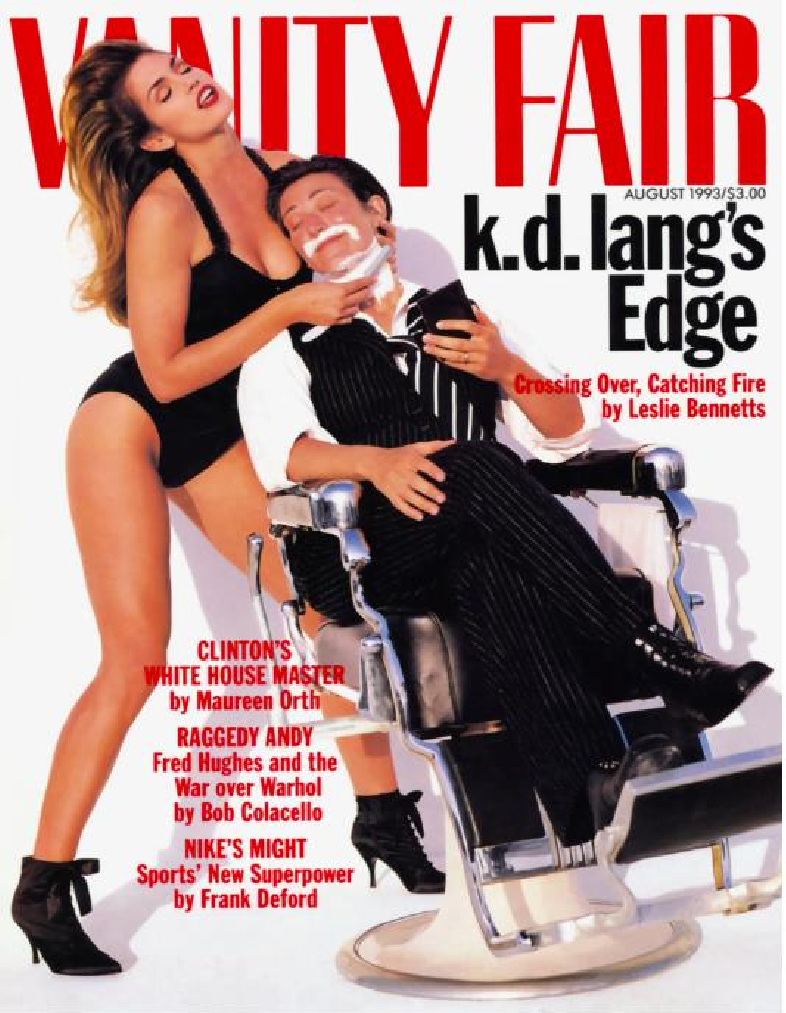

VANITY FAIR
AUGUST 1993/$3.00
k.d. lang's Edge
Crossing Over, Catching Fire by Leslie Bennetts
CLINTON'S WHITE HOUSE MASTER by Maureen Orth
RAGGEDY ANDY Fred Hughes and the War over Warhol by Bob Colacello
NIKE'S MIGHT Sports' New Superpower by Frank Deford

Fig. 9. There is something textile about this representation. The queerness of the Vanity Fair 1998 featuring k. d. lang and Cindy Crawford arises not only from their positioning, but also their clothes.

Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* writes that "Tomboyism," which is masculinity in young girls, is "associated with a 'natural' desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys." (1998, 6). Women, and girls, have historically used masculine clothing not only to strive for freedoms but also to acquire them. The sight of masculine clothing on a woman's body connoted an element of protest (Hughes 2023), but also allowed her to pursue greater freedoms. If gender produces itself as a textile effect, as I argue, it was also possible, through textiles, to produce great effect on the world. When queer women used masculine clothing, they sometimes parodied masculinity, subverting traditional gender and sexual roles, and were able to communicate queerness. The textile defiance that characterized feminist and political freedoms were inextricable from the gender and sexual defiance it connoted, and did not only stand in for feminist protest, but its wearing was the protest itself.

Masculine clothing was worn by lesbians to communicate their lesbian identity, and in turn, characterized them as lesbians. It is easy to see the symbiotic relationship between wearing masculine clothing to communicate queerness, and queerness being associated with masculine clothing, to see how certain items worn in defiance of heteropatriarchal norms—like pants and suits—come to be associated with queerness. So, when the lesbians photographed in Brassaï's historical records put on their monocles, they were defying gender norms by wearing an accessory typically reserved for men, and were defying societal norms by daring to love women. It was through this little accessory that the defiance of gender and sexual roles culminated in a queer vision. The glasses look different on the lesbian's faces, and the world, too, might look different through them. The lesbians in the Le Monocle photographs are playful; the "consciously elegant" (Lowder 2012) accessory is campy on their faces; it dares to poke fun at not only men, but also at what these women are supposed to look like and who they should love. Along the way, the connection between looking and loving became inextricable, and the connection between queerness and style became essential. While I focus on the freedoms and transgressions afforded by women's use of masculine clothing in this chapter, it is important to note that I do not argue that queer and feminist transgression passes through masculine clothing. There are instances where traditionally feminine clothing has been utilized for the same purpose;

the examples in this chapter simply serve as historical examples of repurposing of clothes and gender roles through textiles. In discussing the queer transgressions afforded by masculine clothing, I do not aim to uphold the masculinity of these clothes, but rather affirm their malleability, that it was the redefining of clothes that allowed a redefining of gender.

What emerges is an understanding of "style" as essential to gender construction and the creation of subcultures (Hebdige 1979). When style becomes inextricable from gender and its subversion, the textility of identity comes to the forefront. Ultimately, gender and identity reveal themselves to be textile constructions, producing themselves in the world as a textile effect. The clothes that we wear to make visible our gender seem to construct the very thing we are trying to represent. Representation itself is characterized by textility; it is textiles themselves that make things visible. And at times, it is textiles themselves that make certain things possible, such as when women's and queer people's freedom became entangled with textile defiance. In such examples, feminist and queer defiance became entangled with textile defiance in a way where it became impossible to unravel one from the other, or determine which one came first. Masculine clothing worn by women did not only signify freedom, refusal, and protest, but also brought about change in the world. In such examples, it is style itself that can affect change in the world, and what emerges is an understanding of style as a defiant queer practice.

Examples presented in this chapter suggest the existence of a long history of queer textility—the condition of queerness to be expressed through textiles. A textile approach to queer theory, and reconceiving of queer reading as textile reading, can allow us to not only recognize the textile expression and construction of queerness, but also to synthesize the different ways we think about identity and gender. A textile approach, with its synthesis of an intrinsic and a constructionist condition, allows us to combine an essentialist and constructionist approach and overcome the potential shortcomings of the two positions alone. As I will continue to show in the following chapters, it is through the imaginative and illuminating readings revealed to us through textiles that we can begin to imagine new ways of seeing ourselves, and our identities in all their textile variety.

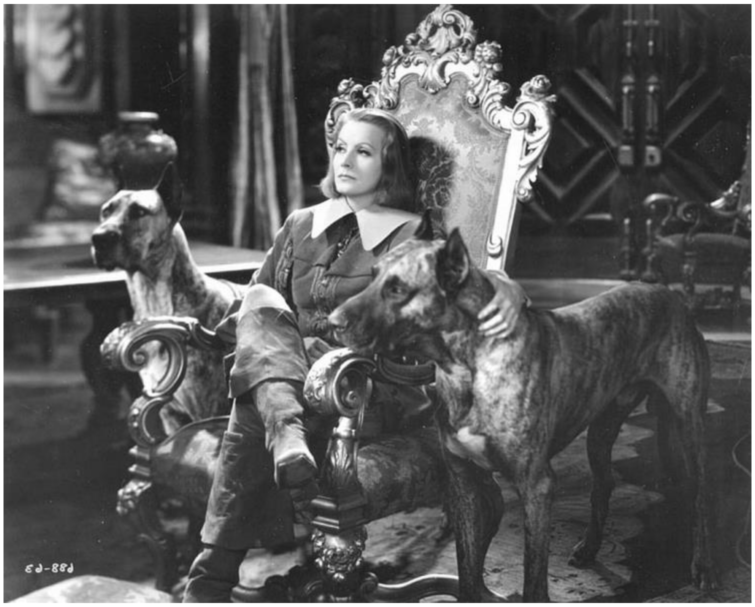
Chapter 1: Queer Textile Coding in Film

In "Looking Butch: A Rough Guide to Butches on Film," Jack Halberstam observes that the first representations of queerness on cinema were masculinely coded women: "before there were lesbians, there were butches." (1998, 186). His claim presents the butch as a proto-queer figure in cinema: "Before the emergence of an independent lesbian cinema, the butch was the only way of registering sexual variance in the repressive environment of Hollywood cinema." (186). If the butch figure represented sexual variance long before lesbians appeared, what did this butch look like? He describes:

> "The masculine woman prowls the film set as an emblem of social upheaval and as a marker of sexual disorder. She *wears the wrong clothes*, expresses aberrant desires, and is very often associated with clear markers of a distinctly phallic power. She may carry a gun, smoke a cigar, wear leather, ride a motorbike; she may swagger, strut, boast, flirt with younger and more obviously feminine women; she often goes by a male moniker: Frankie, George, Willy, Micky, Eli, Nicky." (Halberstam 1998, 186, italics mine).

The masculine woman represents sexual difference because her behaviour and very existence threaten a heteronormative order. It is very fascinating to me that the description of this woman begins with her textile refusal: "She wears the wrong clothes" (186). Before the masculine woman performs the actions that threaten to dissolve a traditional order, she must also put on the clothes that are not right. Does the queerness of her clothes precede the queerness of her actions? And what might these wrong clothes look like and how do they characterize this woman firstly as masculine, then as the emblem of sexual difference? If the very first representations of queerness on screen have been masculine women, characterized through the clothes that were *wrong*, then were these first representations textile? If her clothes are the thing that made her visible and marked her as queer, what was the relationship of her identity to her clothes? Did the masculine woman not embody a form of queer refusal which was primarily textile? What these early representations revealed was a vision of queerness that became visible through its textility. To bring this a step further, we have to ask: were these representations not characterized by queer textility, inexecrable from the clothes that not only represented them, but also made them possible? In other words, did queerness emerge from its textile expression?

One answer lies in *Queen Christina* (1933)'s masculinely dressed queen who engages in transgressions, textile and sexual alike. Greta Garbo is the young Swedish queen who spends most of the film dressed in masculine clothing as she rules over Sweden with a sure hand. The young queen is said to have been "raised as a boy" to replace her father, however, her masculine clothing does more than characterize her as the replacement of masculine authority. Christina, dressed like a young prince, kisses her lady-in-waiting on the lips twice, while rejecting a royally acceptable marriage. She is in drag, which obscures both her gender and royal status (Halberstam 1998), when she meets the Spanish envoy, Antonio at an inn. After falling in love with Antonio, Christina's wardrobe undergoes a significant change. Once masculinely coded prince is now conspicuously seen in frilly dresses, as she declares her love for the Spanish envoy, and soon denounces the throne to be with him. Christina's textile transgressions communicate her gender and sexual differences, which later, through a significant wardrobe change, get subdued under the tyranny of heterosexual romance.



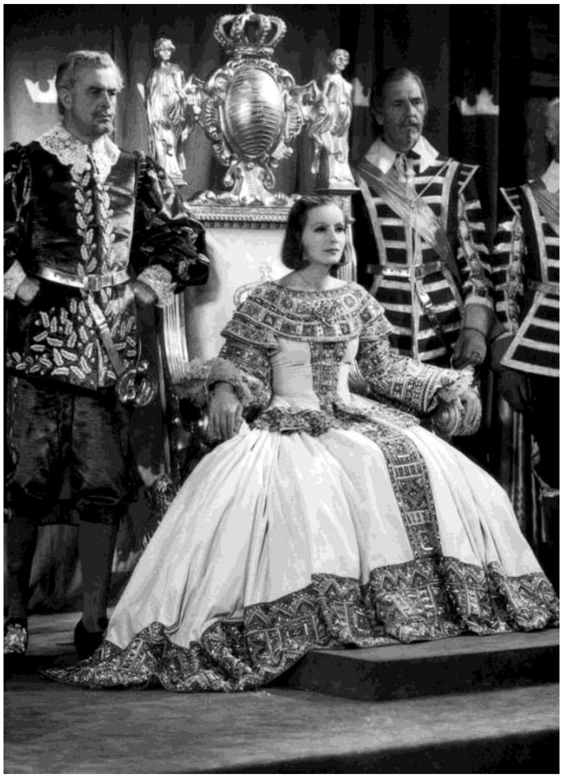


Fig. 10 and 11: Compare Christina’s textile transformation from her previous masculine attire to her dresses, which follows her heterosexual romance arc, and the film’s ultimate subduing of her textile and gender transgressions.

The butch in Halberstam's descriptions is a woman who not only "acts like a man," but is also dressed like one. Her disturbance of the heteronormative order might be signified through her actions, but is communicated primarily and visually through her appearance. As I've shown in the Introduction, masculine clothing on a woman has historically characterized a societal transgression, and in turn, could communicate political and feminist messages (Steele 2013). This textile history can also be extended to on-screen representations: masculine clothing on a female character is often used to suggest transgression, as Halberstam suggests. The butch is the masculine woman who communicates sexual variance because her masculinity gets associated with defiance of the heteronormative order—which itself is partly a textile construction. When she appears on the screen dressed in the "wrong clothes," we already know she is going to cause trouble. If the masculine woman precedes representations of queerness because her masculinity gets coded into sexual difference, then masculine clothing on a woman has long signified sexual difference. Before there were lesbians, there were butches; and before there was a butch, there was her clothes. Her textile characterization suggests her transgressive potentiality, and in fact, makes the conjuring of such queerness possible.

I will bring Halberstam's argument a little further: if the very first representation of sexual variance in cinema were butch, then they were also textile. Not only was queerness represented through clothes, where the two often became conflated, but queer representation was also inseparably tied to textiles, where the question of which one came first was unclear. Such findings seem to suggest an intrinsic connection between textiles and queerness, and a textile provenance for queerness. The fact that queer identity was not only represented and symbolized by clothes, but also inexecrable from the clothes that made it visible has long reaching implications. In these textile representations where the queerness of a woman's actions and her clothes become conflated, what emerges is a conception of *style* in its broader sense—as a practice that creates a subculture (Hebdige 1979). This intrinsic connection between style and queerness makes possible new, textile ways of thinking about minority identities.

Queer/Textile Reading

What do we mean when we say that a character is "queer coded"? Mostly, we mean that a character displays characteristics that hint at their queerness in a subtle manner. After all, being queer coded requires some decoding. Vito Russo in *The Celluloid Closet* writes that while queer viewers are able to read queer coded characters on screen, straight audiences often remain oblivious (Russo 1981). The point of being queer coded is that the same character might seem straight to straight viewers—though those characters might still have something a little "off" about them—but to queer viewers, they are easily recognizable. What are the coded signs that aid viewers in recognizing a character as queer? I will argue that queer coding is mainly a textile coding and that it is the textility of these representations that characterize them as coded.

What I have done in the Introduction is to show that the logic of coding explored in Patricia White's work (1999) on lesbian representability in Classical Hollywood applies to queer textility in everyday life, as well as in film. What I would like to add in this chapter to her argument is that the lesbian and queer representations that appeared under The Code were often expressed through textiles, and that the filmic language that she argues emerged in the wake of The Code (White 1999) was in fact a textile language. When Steele writes of clothes "send[ing] coded messages to other gays…unreadable to most heterosexuals," we can see that clothes in everyday life and throughout history have also followed a logic of queer coding (Steele 2013, 34). When a lesbian put on a monocle, the representation that resulted was a coded one, appearing at the intersection of the history of the object and its subversive potential. Lesbian's claiming of the monocle with its myriad meanings, which is demonstrative of the power of textiles to conjure up meaning, and using it to signify queerness is what constituted queer textile coding. I would like to extend the history of these queer textile practices to cinema as well, with its textile expression of queerness.

When a character appears as queer to us, through an intricate construction of coded messages that are nonetheless easy to spot by queer viewers, I will argue that it is not only a textile effect, but significative of a larger textile practice that conflates identity and style. Clothes are the number one thing that allowed viewers to clock a character as queer, and we can categorize queer coding as functioning primarily through textiles, naming it a queer textile coding. As I've already suggested, queer coding implies that there exists a viewer who does the decoding. In fact, because queer representations have been limited, it has often fallen on the viewer to do the work of *queering*. The queerness of a text sometimes existed outside of it (Ng 2017)—as in instances where an actress like Greta Garbo brought a queer context to her roles arising from her real-life queerness (Castle 1993)—or was sometimes imagined into being by viewers themselves—such as in the fan edit by Cecilia Barriga, which I discuss later in this chapter. In order to decode the intricate language of textile coding, the queer viewer looked closely, enacting a viewership which included a close reading of textiles, as well as an embodiment of textures on screen. If queer coding has been expressed through clothes on screen, then the relation of viewers to queer representations in film has been a textile relationship, enacted through a queering of clothes. The entanglement of these rich textile expressions and their reading seem to suggest the existence of a practice of *queer textile reading* which needs to be further established.

Queer reading is to read texts for coded messages of queerness, to uncover or to bring into vision queer representations. I will argue that to do a queer reading can often mean to do a textile reading, which I will show are in some cases, one and the same. A textile reading is to read clothes and accessories in film for meaning, paying attention to the ways in which clothes function and signify on screen. It is to be attentive to the queer history of textiles and to extract meaning from objects on screen. It is also to approach texts in a way that takes them as dynamic objects that are woven with meaning, that can be unraveled in different ways—it is to think of texts themselves as textiles. In such a textile relationship to films which brings the materials on screen closer to our bodies, there exists the possibility of reclaiming texts through an embodiment of their textiles.

Fried Green Tomatoes (1991) is a film adaptation whose veiled representation of a lesbian relationship has often been contested (Proehl 2018). I will argue that the film does signify queerly, if only covertly through its textile representations. A textile reading can uncover, and in fact recover, queer signification otherwise obscured. Not only that, but to do a textile reading, to read clothes on screen for signification, is to read texts closely and queerly, paying attention to materials. It is perhaps a closer relationship to film, one that pays attention to objects and materials, and to things that we might ultimately put on our own bodies. In the vein of the body genres that Linda Williams theorized, listing among them the affective and titillating genres of horror, melodrama and pornography (Williams 1991), a textile reading of films can also allow viewers to feel cinematic affects on their bodies, through a sustained attention to tactile on-screen materials. What I ultimately argue in this chapter is that not only that queerness has been textile and represented through textiles in films, but that applying a textile reading—which I will be demonstrating as a method in the following pages—can be a different, queer way of relating to films that can offer textile and bodily relationships to cinema.

Queen Christina's (Un)dressing

In *Queen Christina*, Greta Garbo is Sweden's masculinely dressed queen. When she first appears as a little girl, to replace the king after his death, she is assured to be fit for the job because she has been "raised as a boy". In the first half of the film, Christina is a sure, confident ruler, dressed in masculine attire and sporting an androgynous look. She kisses her lady-in-waiting on the mouth, refuses a royally attractive heterosexual marriage, and exercises her sexual liberty. And importantly, she is a successful ruler and exudes a sense of authority and confidence—which gets conflated with her masculine manner, which itself arises from her clothes. Christina exercises a royal authority that seem to exude from the very clothes she's wearing.

Yet, Christina's clothes do more than characterize and make visible her royal authority. Christina's cross-dressing also constructs the queerness of the film. Halberstam writes of the film:

> "*Queen Christina* remains a queer classic, not simply for the full-mouth kiss that Garbo plants on her lady-in-waiting Countess Ebba Spare (Elizabeth Young), but rather on the account of the swagger that Garbo injects into this *trouser role*." (Halberstam 1998, 211, italics mine)

Again, I'm struck by the textile nature by which Halberstam characterizes Garbo's performance. Though he does not explore the possibilities of a textile coding, it is interesting to see his descriptions of butch women and masculinity in film almost always bordering on the sartorial. Why might Garbo's portrayal of the Swedish queen be characterized as a "trouser role"? What do Queen Christina's clothes mean and how do they characterize Greta Garbo's portrayal of the character, so much so that her role becomes synonymous with the pants that she wears? What does a trouser role look like, and most importantly what do Queen Christina's trousers look like? And why is this of outmost importance?

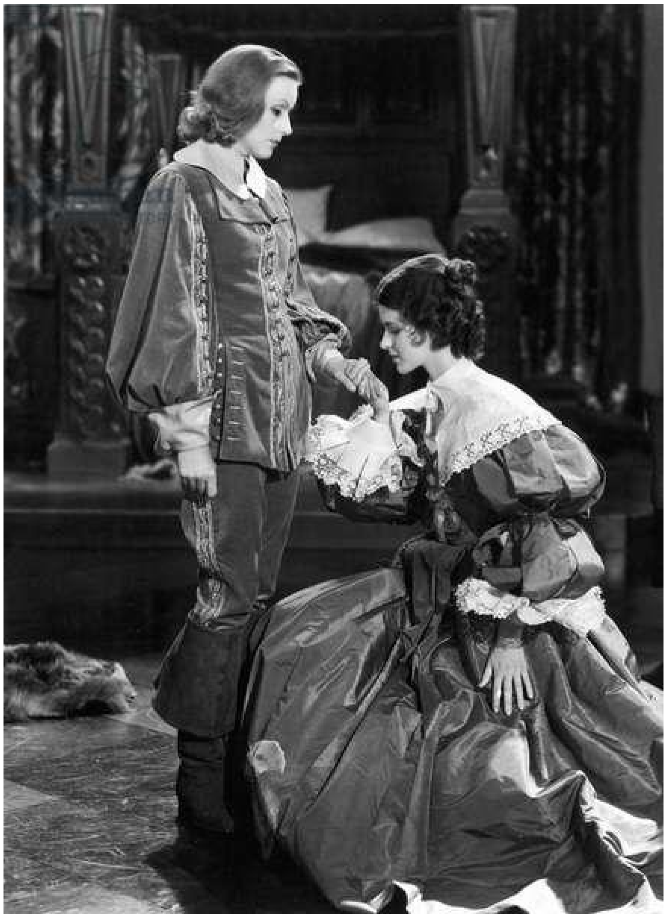


Fig. 12. Christina's masculine attire contrasts with those of her lady-in-waiting, with whom she shares two on-screen kisses.

Christina’s textile characterization evokes more than royal authority. Once she puts on the pants, and rules the country, it only follows that she might kiss a lady. White describes Christina’s outfit: “In her Adrian-designed courtier clothes, she looks today the very dream of the ‘mythic mannish lesbian,’ whom Esther Newton describes as a figure who allows the lesbian to become visible as a sexual agent.” (White 1999, 14). I believe that this becoming “visible as sexual agent” happens through those very courtier clothes. In the scenes where Christina interacts with Countess Ebba Spare, her masculinity is underscored with the help of her femme counterpart. Her masculine attire contrasts with those of her lady-in-waiting and just like the butch might accompany the femme, it is Christina’s clothes that render their union as common sense and in fact natural. After all, neither Christina’s authority, nor the kisses she gives Ebba, are presented as anything out of the ordinary. Christina’s clothes, which aim to make her role as a ruler more seamless with her appearance and identity, also have the effect of naturalizing her attractions to women. The queerness of the film emerges from its textility, suggesting that what makes queerness appear might be the textiles that both represent, and make it possible. It is evident that her masculine clothes characterize her queerness and gender expression, because it is after a scene of (un)dressing that her identity will unravel, and she will give up the very things that make her who she is.

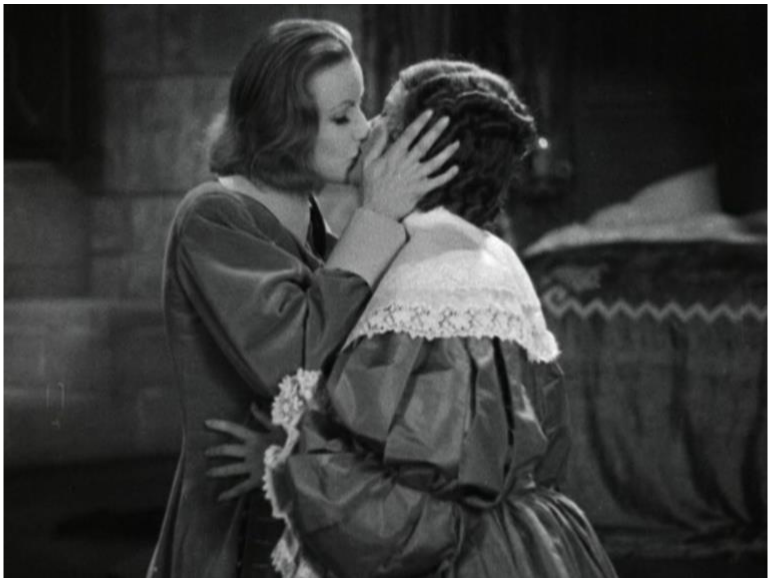


Fig. 13. Christina, dressed in the fashions of a young prince, plants a passionate kiss on the lips of her lady-in-waiting.

At a local inn in town, Christina's gender masquerading and eventual undressing take place, in a scene characterized by its textility. On a snowy day, Christina rides her horse out to a local inn where her masculine attire disguises both her femininity and her royal status (Halberstam 1998, 212). She plays up her masculinity, puts on a lower voice and fraternizes with the men, presenting as a respectable gentleman. One man especially, the Spanish envoy Antonio, holds a lengthy conversation with her. All is well, until it is suggested by the owner of the inn that Christina and Antonio share the one remaining bed. Christina hesitates, thinking that her cover will be blown, but eventually agrees.

Back at the room, a maid asks to undo Christina's boots in a flirtatious manner. What unfolds is a scene that signifies queerly through its textiles. The maid asks a masculinely dressed Christina: "Shall I help you with your boots sir?" Christina refuses, but it is not clear in this moment whether the maid takes Christina for a man, or if her undressing—and the grand “reveal” of her femininity—will diminish the maid’s desire. The queer tension of this scene is withheld through its textility, namely the meanings arising from Christina’s masculine attire. It is the question of taking off boots that stands in for the expression of a queer desire, its ghostly suggestion. But is there something textile about the desire itself beyond its expression and visualization through clothes?

Let’s consider the many readings that are possible of this scene, which are all dependent upon the meanings that clothes conjure. Should one characterize this interaction between Christina and the maid as a lesbian interaction, considering Christina is a woman and the maid’s textile suggestion is a subtle flirtation? Or because Christina is dressed as a man, and seems to pass as so, it is a heterosexual scene; or a scene queered by the act of Christina’s passing and transness? Does the essence, or the construction, of Christina’s gender arise from a predetermined position, or from the clothes on her body? Either way, this scene can be characterized as queer, because by inspiring such gender and sexual confusion, Christina’s textile transgression disrupts boundaries of normative desire. Moreover, the desire that emerges in this scene is fluid, and dependent upon an unravelling of clothes for meaning, suggesting that there is a textile quality to the desire that makes itself visible through clothes. It is the textility of this scene that inspires various readings and boundless imagination, opening it up to queer possibility. The desire itself is akin to something textile, not only enacted and experienced through clothes, but also constantly shifting with the movement of fabric. Thinking of desire itself as textile allows us to conjure the field of possibility that becomes available through the material possibilities afforded by textiles. Through such textile viewership, the film itself becomes something like textile too: unravelling and woven, presenting representations at once texturally material and spectrally ambiguous.

The scene that follows is similarly characterized by gender and sexual confusion, and their textility, originating once again from Christina's cross-dressing act. As Antonio starts undressing, Christina continues to stand fully clothed, except for her hat, which came off after her introduction. Finally, Antonio looks at Christina and asks: "Aren't you going to undress?" Christina's undressing follows. First, she throws down her sword. Then she fumbles with the buttons of her coat. Then she takes off her coat and is left in white shirt and underpants that "reveal" her as a woman. Antonio looks at her, discerning her femininity and says: "Of course, it had to be. I felt it."

Similar to the scene with the maid, this scene also makes use of gender confusion arising from clothes. Through it all, gender and sexuality seem to be endlessly entangled with textiles, appearing as an effect of their textility. The minutes leading up to Christina's delayed undressing is characterized by the undercurrent of sexual tension. It is curious because for the viewer, the origin of this tension—at least for a dominant reading—partly arises from the risk of Christina's imminent reveal. The tension that marks these scenes has to do with a reveal of gender. However, for the characters, and for Antonio who doesn't know Christina is a woman under the clothes, the sexual tension seems to have a much queerer origin. Halberstam in fact argues that this scene carries a "homosexual tension," as visually we are to believe these are two men interacting on screen (Halberstam 1998, 212)—a queer visual resulting from its textile expression. Christina's crossdressing confounds carefully delineated boundaries of gender and sexuality, where the effects of her textile disguise is to inspire alternative interpretations. Independent of where we place the origin of the sexual tension, it is clear that Christina's sartorial cover confounds and disrupts boundaries of desire, both for the characters and the audience. Once again, what emerges is a queerness that becomes visible and possible through clothes, and a queer field of potentiality that opens up through its textility. The queer significances of this scene are dependent upon a putting on and taking off of clothes, where queerness becomes something textile.

Perhaps, Christina's initial refusal to undress is an effort to hold onto something else. After the maid leaves, Antonio tells Christina: "She prefers you. You'd have a better chance." Christina replies: "I'd give her up gladly. If you're interested." What is Christina giving up exactly? Christina's undressing corresponds to a metaphorical undressing, as after this scene she will fall in love with Antonio and give up both her masculine clothes and the royal authority that comes with it, ultimately giving up the crown to be with Antonio. The narrative is of a woman who while masculinely dressed explored freedoms, royal and sexual alike, but upon falling in love with a man gives it all up, along with her clothes, to succumb to a heterosexual and common, non-royal life. As in the first part of the film, Christina's royal authority seemed to be constructed through her textile expression, it is fitting that an undressing would correspond to a loss of power. It is the loss of clothes that strips Christina of her freedoms, royal, sexual, and textile alike. In the second half of the film, Christina is conspicuously dressed in more feminine dresses (which the film conflates with diminishing power) as the film's sartorial coding takes a regressive turn. After falling in love with the Spanish envoy, the queen's wardrobe changes dramatically. Once an androgynous prince, the queen is now seen in elaborate dresses, looking up lovingly at Antonio. Where once her masculine attire signified her authority and freedom, her undressing and textile transformation symbolize her transformation into a docile, heterosexual woman. She takes off her pants and denounces her royal and sexual freedoms—which as I've argued seem to be conflated with her textile transgressions. The taking off of the masculine attire corresponds not only to a loss of authority, but also of the queer sexual freedom that accompanied it. Thus, it is the undressing itself that unravels Christina's queer freedom and authority which is revealed to be dependent on textiles.

The androgynous queen has fallen in love, revels in her femininity, and leaves the throne for the man of her dreams. Is it really that simple? What to make then of the first half of the film, where the queen walked around dressed as a handsome prince, ruling the country, kissing women and playing the part of the young man in humble town inns? The question of whether we take Christina as a heterosexual woman who comes to her sartorial senses; or a butch woman; or a trans man, is a question of essence versus construction. When Christina takes off the masculine clothes, and Antonio confirms what he apparently knew all along, with a naturalizing "Of course, it had to be. I felt it." he affirms an essence within Christina that let him know all along that Christina was a woman. He affirms an essential view of gender, that despite the clothes or the masculine manner Christina employed, she carried an essence that unmistakably marked her as woman. Such a view of gender would downplay the textile construction of gender. For, when Christina walked around in common, masculine clothes, Christina did not just play the part, but Christina *was* a common man. In such moments, what identity did Christina have besides the one the clothes marked? What's more, Christina's undressing, while it is an uncovering of masculine attire, is not a complete undressing after all; in the end, Christina is still left wearing the shirt and underpants that in fact allow Antonio to confirm her gender. It is this identity that is traced back to an essence within, that nonetheless still arises from a textile construction. So, when Antonio sees Christina in the clothes that now mark her as a woman and confirm her identity, does he see a womanly essence that resides within Christina, or yet another textile construction of gender? And if we believe that gender is a textile construct—as the film encourages us to do so in terms of Christina's masculinely coded royal authority—then in these moments of textile transgression, is Christina a woman dressed as a man, or do her textile transgressions culminate in another gender expression entirely?

The idea that Christina is a woman who cross-dresses and is "mistaken" for a man would be a traditional gender reading of the film. Yet such a reading erases some of the more nuanced gender expressions that become visualized throughout. It is through a textile reading of the film that much significant queer meanings become available. The film tries to assure that there is an essence to Christina's gender: Antonio claims there was something about Christina that let him know Christina was a woman all along. The narrative tries to support an essential view of gender in these moments, where Christina's gender as a woman is an essence that cannot be erased by the most elaborate of princely wear, however, in having depicted her royal authority as arising from her masculine wear also seems to suggest that royal and gender identities are both textile constructions.

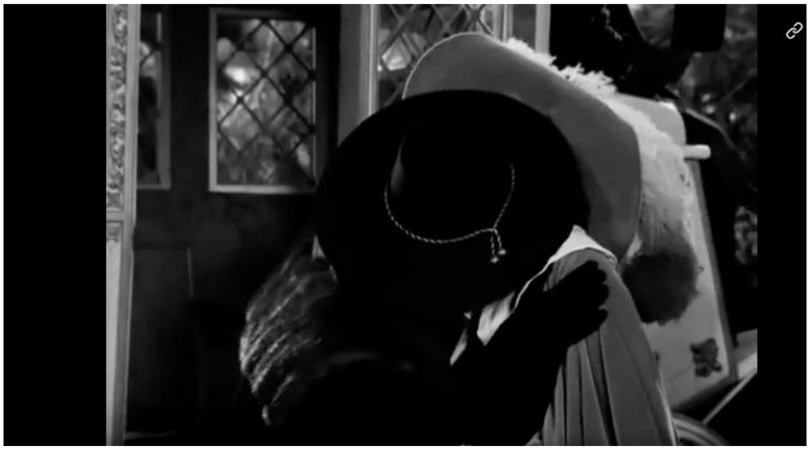


Fig. 14. The second lesbian kiss in Queen Christina signifies sartorially through its hat action.

It is clear that an attention to textiles and a close reading of clothes uncovers queer meanings and the origin of gender and textile constructions. What follows is an enactment of a more elaborate textile reading to show the possibilities that might appear when we read textiles closely, to show how a textile reading facilitates, and sometimes even makes possible, a queer reading. When Christina kisses Ebba next, after her undressing and textile transformation, the textile elements of the kiss take a different turn. In this second queer kiss, Christina's black hat obscures both their faces, resulting in a queer intimacy that is obscured sartorially. This is after Christina has fallen for Antonio and went through her regressive wardrobe change, and her clothes no longer signify her power, but instead her lack thereof. Here, Christina's loss of power and freedom, previously represented as the giving up of clothes, becomes visualized through a disembodiment of fabric. In almost expressionistic fashion, the textiles on Christina's body take on her own disembodiment and spectralization after a loss of royal and queer freedoms, as her hat becomes a free-floating object, obscuring her image. The figure in the all-black outfit stands disembodied, barely there; once in charge and confident in her royal and textile power, now stripped of both, she appears as not more than a ghost haunting her own clothes.

If the film has signified sartorially until this moment, as Christina's gender masquerading and authority arising from her clothes made clear, we must continue to read the fabrics in a similar fashion. If the film has been teaching us how to enact a textile reading, doing so in this moment might uncover a queer meaning. Because Christina's identity has been signified sartorially throughout, it is significant that she becomes one with her textiles in this moment. The resulting image reveals more textile intimacy, a queer moment upheld through clothes, than it does so their faces. This might suggest that there is something textile about the kiss, and something textile to the queer interactions within the film after all. In a way, in this moment the previous Christina—her old self dressed in masculine attire, kissing women—has become a ghost. If we look closely, it is not easy to distinguish between the woman and the hat and the costume, as they all blend into one another. Her hat becomes spectral for a moment, hanging in the air, as if there's no one inside it. If she once carried the clothes with power and authority, filling the pants of her "trouser role," now the clothes hang on to her as she stands powerless. Just like it was through her clothing that Christina became a masculine prince, now it is her clothing that communicates her regressive transformation and the "ghosting" of her queerness (Castle 1993). As Christina is on her way to marry Antonio, this queer kiss cannot be sustained. The textiles of the two women blend together to signify the ghosting of queerness, which once became possible through those very clothes.

It is evident that the film associates gender identity with dress and it is through an (un)dressing that underlying identities are revealed, or rather, constructed. The masculine clothes construct the boyish nature of Christina, and the transformation of her wardrobe not only symbolizes but also catalysts the change in her character. While the progression of the plot and of her wardrobe seem to suggest a traditional narrative, it is in moments where Christina is sporting a masculine look and kissing women that her image as a queer icon is established (not to mention Garbo's real-life queerness (Castle 1993) which serves as subtext to these queer scenes). It is in these textile moments where a queen whose queer and sexual freedom seem to arise from her textile defiance comes into view. The film serves as an early example of how clothes construct gender and sexual identity on screen, and a textile reading of the oft-analysed film reveals new understandings. All in all, it is a textile approach to film and queerness itself that offers novel meanings.

A Sartorial Meeting

Queen Christina's lesbian kiss featuring a hat can be comparable to another lesbian kiss with some hat action. It is the iconic kiss that Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* (1930), dressed in the suit that inspired Yves Saint Laurent's creation of the female tuxedo (Bazaar 2023), plants on the lips of a woman in the audience. Similar to the above-mentioned hat that Garbo wears while kissing her countess, Dietrich's hat here also communicates queer meaning. It is the visual association between Dietrich's masculine attire and the kiss that renders the moment queer. Dietrich's queer transgression seems to arise from the clothes she's wearing, once again suggesting that there is something textile to the queer intimacy presented on screen. It is fitting that Garbo and Dietrich both perform similarly sartorial queer moments on screen, as they were soon to meet on screen, with the help of a fan edit—and a careful stitching of clothes and of film.

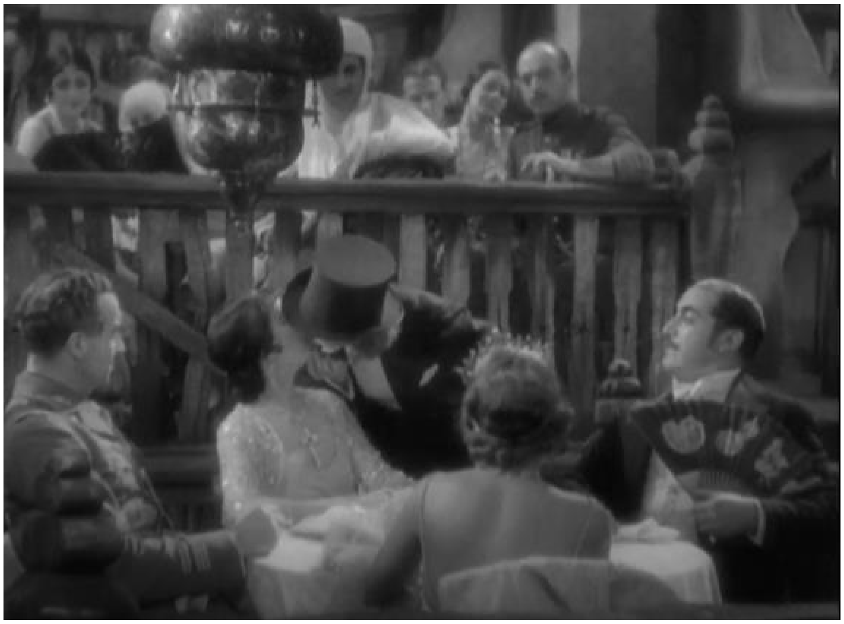


Fig. 15. What is queer about this iconic scene in *Morocco* (1930) where Marlene Dietrich plants a kiss on the lips of a woman is not only the transgression of her kiss, but also the queerness of her suit.

In *A Meeting of Two Queens* (1993), Cecilia Barriga edits together images of Garbo and Dietrich to imagine and bring into vision the queer desire between the two actresses. In one specific instance, it is with the help of clothes that such an intimacy becomes visualized. Barriga obviously reads into the sartorially constructed desire present in the two women's work, as it is the editing together of scenes of dressing and undressing—resulting in a filmic stitching—that constructs queer meaning. What also becomes visible in these stitched scenes is the textile-like qualities of film itself, as the queer text emerges as something woven. The video consists of several different sections, each bringing together the two women either through an on-screen similarity or a shared object, and it is two of these sections that especially draw my attention as they use textiles to conjure the desire between the two women.

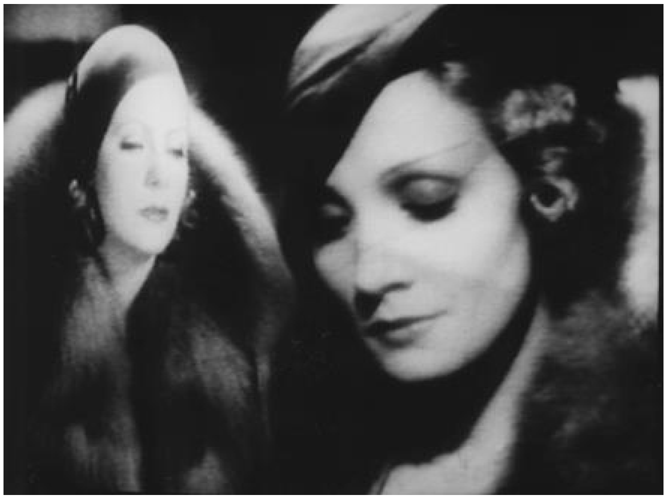
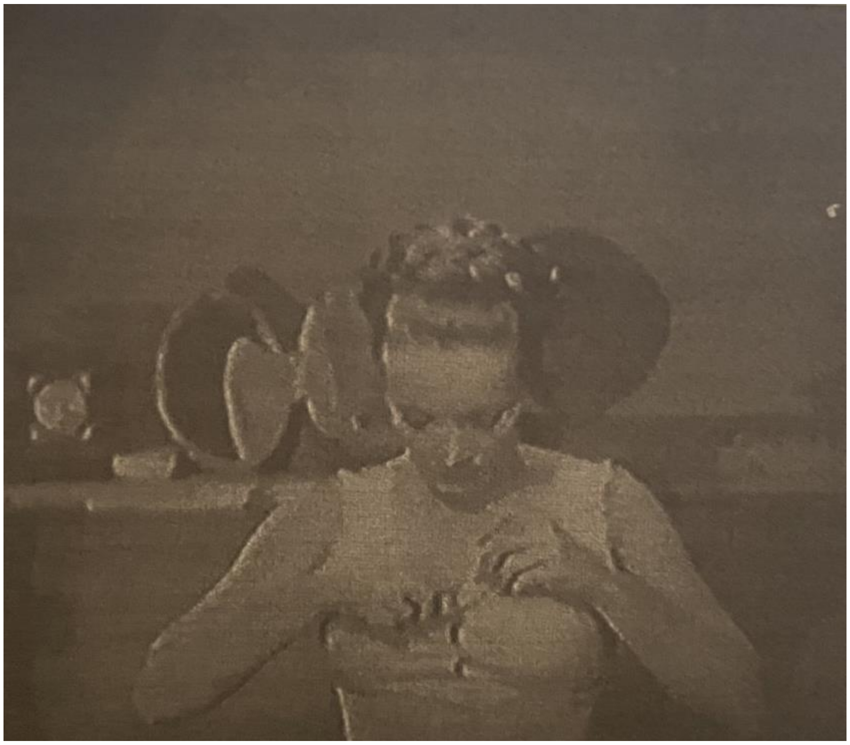


Fig. 16. In *A Meeting of Two Queens* (1993), Cecilia Barriga edits images of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich together to imagine into existence a queer intimacy between the two actresses.

In a section titled "The Hat," images of both women wearing hats are brought together. But it is in the section titled "Alcove" that their textile desires come into full fruition. An image of the undressing in *Queen Christina* that I explored above is repurposed to tease out its queer meanings. Garbo's undressing in *Queen Christina* is edited together with scenes of Dietrich's undressing in *Dishonored* (1931) to bring the two women together on screen. Through the powers of fan edit and queer viewership, it is Marlene Dietrich that "arrives on the scene to make good the serving maid's proposition" (White 56). That proposition, as you will recall, was the maid asking Christina if she might remove Christina's boots, as the objects of Christina's masculine clothing mediated the queer desire between the maid and Christina. Dietrich's transportation into this scene carries out that textile suggestion, and the queer intimacy that rested on it. Ultimately, what Barriga makes visible is not only a queer desire that is textile, but also a film object that is textile-like in its qualities.

The sequence begins with the image of Garbo throwing off her hat in the room of the inn, and her textile transgressions continue from thereon. Her unbuttoning in *Queen Christina* is crosscut with Dietrich's undressing in *Dishonored*, using their clothes and acts of undressing to link the two women and their desires together. Cut together, these scenes culminate in a queer desire that is conjured through textiles. As Barriga edits together the respective undressings of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich together, what she engages in is a stitching together of film, a crosscutting that makes visible queer intimacy through the interlinking of clothes. Barriga's edit reimagines cinema both through a lens of queerness, but also through its clothes, daring to ask what cinema would look like when its intimacies and textiles are examined closely. And perhaps more importantly, she also asks what cinema would look like if it became something textile-like itself, stitched in queer signification, and what kind of queer meanings would become possible through such text(iles).



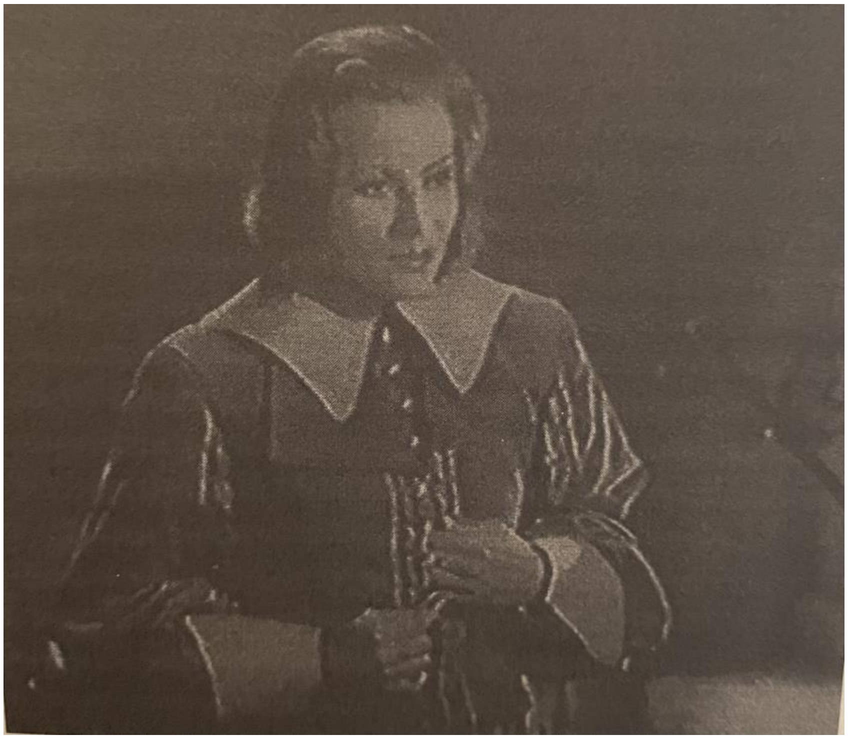


Fig. 17 and 18. Queer textile desire. As Barriga edits together the respective undressings of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich together, what she engages in is a stitching together of film, a crosscutting that makes visible queer intimacy through the interlinking of clothes.

Barriga's edit decisively asks different questions than *Queen Christina* did. White describes the edit as reimagining the film:

"In a gesture of erotic capitulation, Garbo removes her dashing masculine outer grab to reveal—a passionate vulnerable butch. Whether she's a woman is not in question; the suspense is about how much she will take off." (White 1999, 56)

White here might as well be talking about the question that *Queen Christina* made central to its plot—whether Christina is a man or a woman—and concluding that Barriga's edit lets go of such essentialist questions and instead revels in the sartorially conjured queerness that Christina's outfits—and their ultimate removal—inspire. It is through textiles that we are able to reimagine essentialist and constructionist views to arrive at something more comprehensive.

It is the acts of undressing linked through the crosscut of the fanfiction edit and the queer textile undertones of the scenes that inspire the queer desire that is brought forth in these edits. But what in fact allows these scenes to conjure up queer desire is the very existence of textile coding of queerness on screen. It is through clothes that a lesbian intimacy is imagined, and ultimately brought into vision. If clothes are what makes visible queerness on screen, it is fitting that Barriga makes use of textility to make her imaged queer intimacy visible. Ultimately, the fact that these scenes are interlinked through their textile content seems to suggest something about the history of textile expression of queerness in cinema.

The queer intimacy between Dietrich and Garbo might not actually appear on screen, but as long as Christina wears the pants and Dietrich her suit and hat, such a queer moment might be imagined. Barriga's fan edit betrays a hopefully speculative viewership and, in this sequence, a queer reading of clothes. In the spectrum of queer readings, it seems that reading clothes queerly is extremely conducive to conjuring moments of queer intimacy. Whether it is Christina's gender-bending textile transgressions that disrupt boundaries of normative desire, or the linking of Garbo and Dietrich's desires through their respective undressings, it is clear that textiles allow queer desire to be visualized on screen. Even when Christina takes off the pants of her trouser role, visions of sartorially mediated queer desire remain. It is the textility of film, and the closeness of the filmic object to a textile object, that allows for such imaginative readings and for the text itself to be transformed into a textile.

Textile Queerness in *Fried Green Tomatoes*

Let's see an example of how we might apply a textile reading to a more recent film in order to recover queer significance. *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) depicts the relationship between two women, Idgie and Ruth, retold by Ninny in her old age in a nursing home to Evelyn, a visitor who finds herself entangled in Ninny's story and life. Ruth and Idgie meet when in their youth, in a tragic scene where Idgie's brother, and Ruth's potential suitor, dies. Ruth then finds herself in an abusive relationship with another man, from which Idgie saves her. Ruth and Idgie start living together and raising Ruth's baby, essentially acting as a couple as they also operate the Whistle Stop Café (where the famous fried green tomatoes are served). When Ruth's husband returns to try and take the baby, his murder will be the reason Idgie goes to trial, from which she is eventually deemed innocent. Later in their story, Ruth gets sick and dies from cancer, as Idgie holds her close, and eventually raises their son.

Though their pairing and lifelong partnership have the markings of a romantic relationship, this film depicting a lesbian relationship might be empty in its centre. In a case study of *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) and *The Color Purple* (1985), Kristen Proehl examines the two film adaptations for their depiction of lesbian relationships (2018). Both films are based on novels, by Fannie Flagg and Alice Walker respectively, that focus on the lesbian relationships at times obscured by their film adaptation (Proehl 2018). As Proehl argues, both film adaptations downplay those lesbian relationships, and have often been critiqued for "eliding" their source text's depiction of lesbian sexuality (2018, 17). *Fried Green Tomatoes'* "degaying" of the lesbian relationship between Idgie and Ruth especially has garnered controversy over "its tendency to transform the lesbian scenes into representations of friendship." (22). In another paper on the film, Naomi R. Rockler notes:

"*Fried Green Tomatoes* employs the strategy of polysemy—in particular a kind of polysemy that Ceccarelli (1998) defines as *strategic ambiguity*—to transform the fairly unambiguous lesbian relationship in Fannie Flagg's book into a relationship that can be defined by different viewers as either a lesbian relationship or a close female friendship." (Rockler 2001, 91).

How does this ambiguity play out and in which moments does the lesbian relationship materialize? One scene that might signify in more ways than one is the beehive scene where Idgie walks up to a beehive and grabs a piece of honeycomb with her bare hands, simply to offer for Ruth's picnic, as she watches on. Idgie reaches towards the bees with her bare hands and is soon swarmed by them, but nonetheless stands calm and collected, and Ruth watches on in fear. The tension and sheer weight of the scene swells around Idgie's significant, yet enigmatic, sacrifice. Here is a woman, sacrificing it all for the woman she loves, just to get a piece of honey for her, and the contrast between the weight of her sacrifice and the perceived smallness of the object seems to suggest that her offering might in fact stand in for something else.

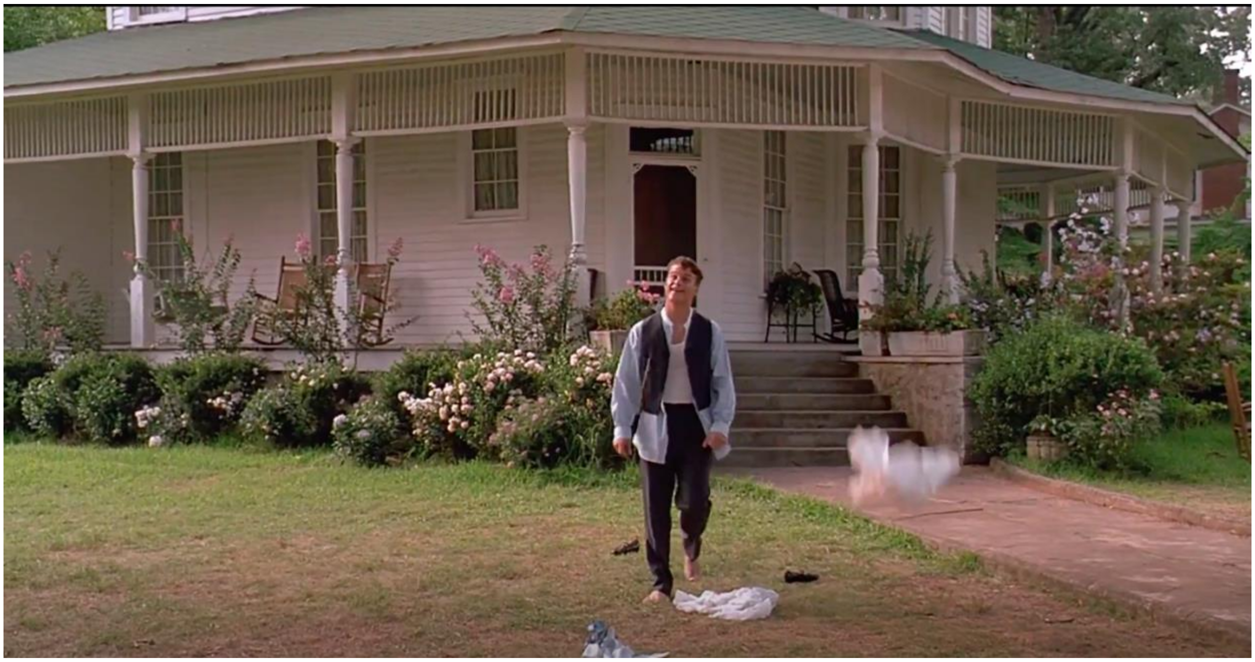
Murray writes of the beehive scene in *Fried Green Tomatoes* as "one of the swooniest erotic moments in mainstream movies" (1994, quoted in Rockler). And yet, some audiences have reported that they were not aware that there existed a lesbian relationship between Idgie and Ruth, and that the two women were simply presented as friends (Rockler 2001, 91). How does the beehive scene fit in with such a reading? On the surface, if one were to ignore the intimacy between the two women and the emotional undercurrent of the scene, it might simply be read as a woman acquiring honey for another, curiously through a wildly dangerous act. What Rockler describes as a "strategic ambiguity" is also what lies at the heart of queer coding. Idgie's daring is much too significant to just be about honey; here stands a woman who will risk it all for the one she loves, and the emotional weight that the film otherwise won't show clusters around such scenes. Though it comes out in ambiguously emotional moments like this, it is clear that most of the queer significance of *Fried Green Tomatoes* has been subdued in the process of adaptation—resulting in the possibility of viewing this film without ever being aware that Ruth and Idgie are anything but friends. Proehl notes that in the novel, the emotional significance of the beehive scene is made much clearer, as it is accompanied by the declaration that "this is the moment at which Ruth falls in love with Idgie," a line conspicuously missing from the film adaptation (Proehl 2018, 97). And yet, the ghostly suggestion of such a love declaration emerges in the film as the erotic undercurrent of such scenes.

If the queerness of Ruth and Idgie's relationship is occluded in the film, it is also highly visible for the queer viewer. While it is true that the film shies away from depicting outright romance or sexuality between the two women, it speaks loud and clear for those willing to look.

What gets lost in queer significance in the adaptation from novel to film, becomes visible through coded representation, just like the procuring of honey serves as a veiled metaphor for queer sacrifice. As I've established, clothes often use a coded textile language that offers plausible deniability, which can be likened to Rockler's "strategic ambiguity" (2001). *Fried Green Tomatoes'* queer signaling happens through clothes. What the film obscures in terms of queer representation, it makes visible through its textile coding. A closer look at Idgie's clothes might in fact reveal the queer significance of the film.

Idgie's queer coding happens mostly through her clothes as the film insists on her textile characterization. When we first meet Idgie as a young girl, it is in a scene depicting her textile rebellion. Idgie is seen causing trouble, refusing to come down the stairs to attend her sister's wedding because she doesn't want to wear a dress. When she finally does come down, her image in the white dress is contrasted with the cuts on her legs suggesting excursions in the woods "unsuitable" for a young girl. As her relatives try to affirm how pretty she looks, a young boy makes fun of her, causing her to attack him and have a breakdown. Later, her brother Buddy follows Idgie to the yard, tracing her up to a tree by the clothes she keeps discarding and throwing down. First comes off her socks, then her stockings, then the dress that caused her so much anguish. While she is offscreen, it is her clothes that move across screen, akin to a body disembodied, creating various meanings (Fig. 19). It is in such moments that clothes move beyond their objectness, and oscillate somewhere between costume and character, embodied and simultaneously spectral in their appearance and movement. In the end, the clothes overcome the two categories, and emerge as something else: a textile. Such moments where clothes on screen seem to impossibly possess an agency of their own suggest their potential for meaning making, and the need for textile reading practices to read films.

Our first impressions of Idgie are of a young girl in the throes of textile defiance, who would rather throw a dress down a tree than wear it. “Who wants to wear that stupid old dress anyway?” she tells Buddy. Eventually, Buddy convinces Idgie to go to the wedding by letting her borrow his clothes. The next image we see of her is almost unrecognizable: Idgie, dressed in her brother’s clothes, undistinguishable from a young boy in the new outfit. Idgie, who will soon be overtaken by grief, is the “queer child” (Proehl 2018, 21) whose nonconformity is characterized through her textile defiance. In signifying her nonconformity through clothes, the film characterizes Idgie’s queerness as a textile problem—one that is explicitly visualized in our introduction to her. Halberstam writes that “Tomboyism,” or masculinity in young girls is “associated with a ‘natural’ desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys” (Halberstam 1998, 6). Idgie’s tomboyism is associated with her seeking greater freedoms and activities often not available to women and girls, suggested by the scars on her legs and her textile refusals. It is also this gender transgression and its attendant textile expression that will soon have her seeking greater, queer freedoms. Idgie will continue her textile rebellion, and enact a sexual one of her own when she starts living with Ruth and her son, conflating her queer transgressions with her textile ones—allowing us to trace back her queerness as originating from the very clothes that she wears.



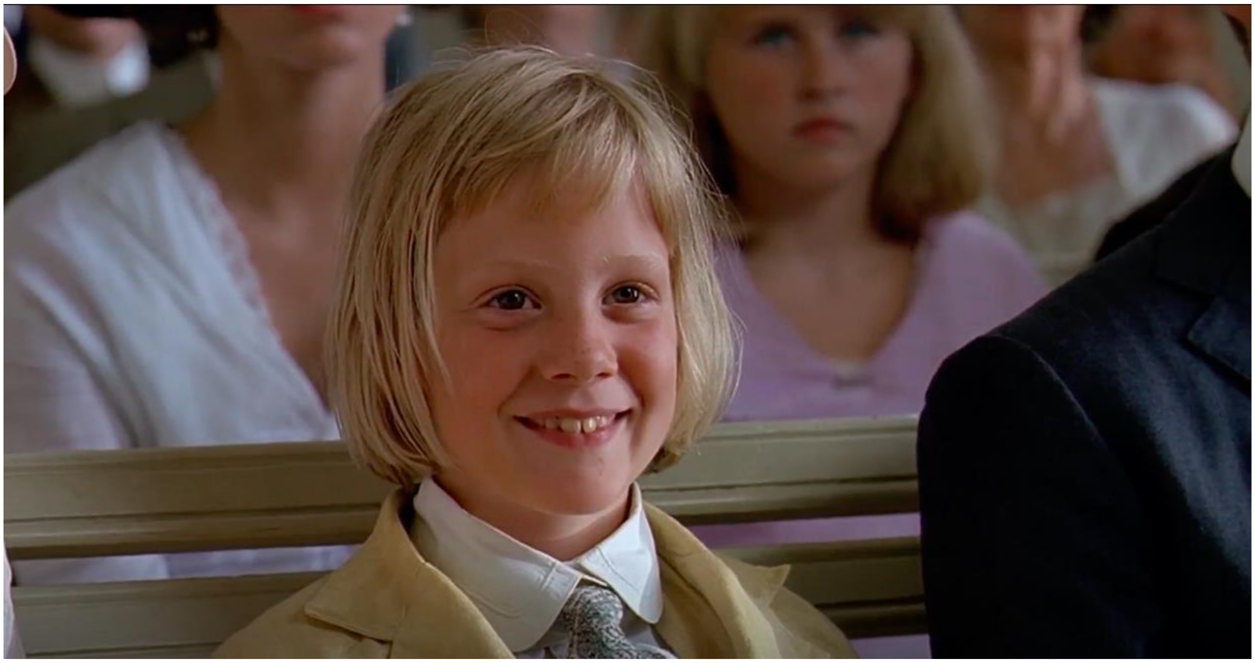


Fig. 19 and 20. From the first moment we meet Idgie, which has her throwing her dress down a tree to avoid wearing it, her nonconformity is characterized by textile defiance, visualizing her queerness as a textile problem.

The way that Idgie's outfit as a boy at the wedding is revealed is also stylistically significant in the way it privileges clothes and accessories over other identifying markers, culminating in a film that is structured around its textility. Before seeing Idgie, we are presented with a shot of man's shoes, *conjuring* the attendant image of a man. The camera then slowly pans up to reveal, much to our surprise, Idgie's face. This affect of surprise is a textile effect: in presenting man's shoes first, the scene aims to dissemble our textile expectations. By placing the shoes in a close up while delaying the appearance of the face, the scene is intending an affect of surprise at Idgie's face and gender expression. The incongruity revealed between the shoes and the face characterizes the textile transgression and stylistically amplifies the shock of Idgie's textile nonconformity. Yet this scene is also significant for other reasons. The order of presentation serves to prioritize textile representation over anything else. By having a close up of shoes precede the identifying shot of a close up of the face, the film seems to privilege textiles in identifying a character. The editing of this scene valorizes a textile characterization and identification, and having a shot of shoes precede an identifying face shot even seems to suggest that it is textile signifiers that primarily identify a character. So far, Idgie's characterization has been mostly textile, where the textility of her queerness seems to not only shape the content, but also the form of the film text itself.

The same kind of pan that introduced Idgie's tomboy attire can be seen in other scenes. The film employs the shot of showing one's shoes, then panning up to reveal their face again when we get a similar close up of Ninny's shoes at the nursing home, which are funky and quirky, hinting perhaps at her own nonconformity and even queerness. In fact, many audience members admitted to thinking Ninny was an older Idgie, a reading supported by the final scene where Ninny shows a note left at Ruth's grave (Rockler 2001, 98). What these shots also do in showing shoes in a close up that replaces a face close up, is to use clothes to identify characters, often to characterize their transgressive identities. In these shots, the clothes and accessories take precedence to someone’s face in identifying them, amplifying the textility of identity. Compared to the essence that Antonio tried to affirm behind Christina’s clothes in *Queen Christina*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* seem to suggest that it might be clothes that construct one’s identity and that identity might be a textile matter after all. With such sartorially identifying shots, the film visually encourages us to pay more attention to clothes, to read them closely for significance. Because the close up of the shoes replaces the traditional close up of the face that usually identifies a character, the film upholds that it is through clothes and accessories that a character is characterized and identified, encouraging us to read textiles for significance throughout. What is significant in these stylistic choices is that the textility of queerness and identity is extended to film style itself, where stylistic choices arise from a condition of textility. Framing and camera movement all seem to be affected by a textile impulse, organized around clothes and following a textile logic. Ultimately, the textility of queerness does not only shape film content through textile representations, but also seems to shape a film’s form, which through an entanglement with clothes becomes something textile-like as well.

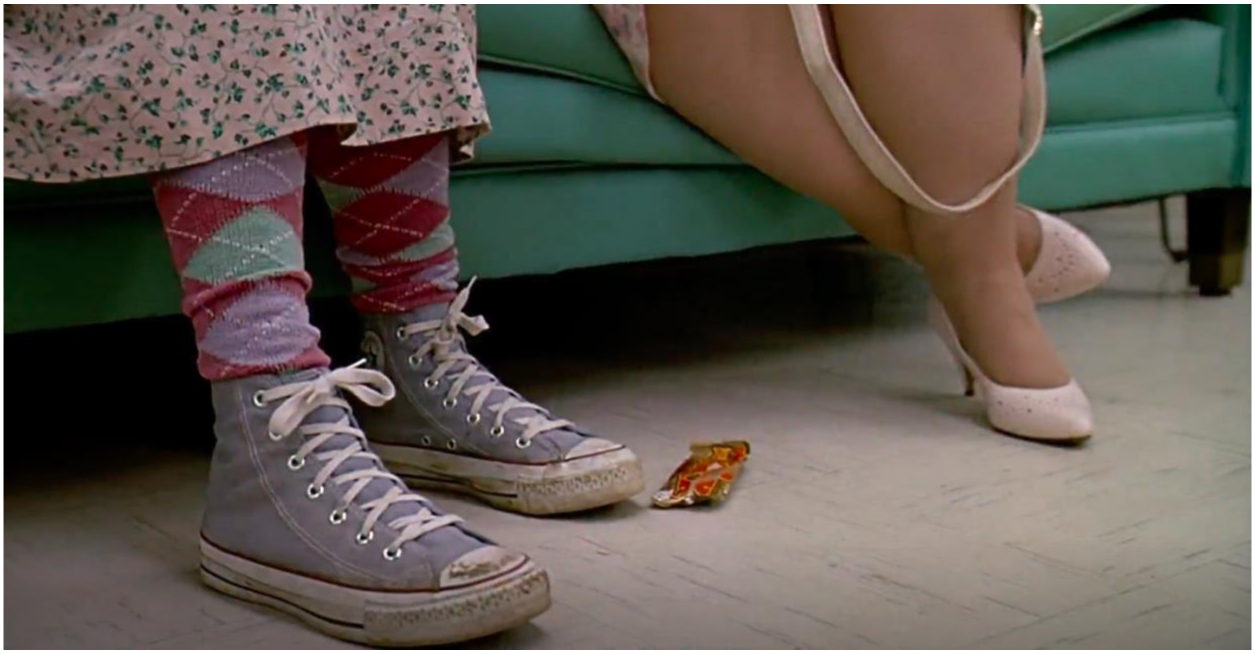


Fig. 21. A close up of shoes, followed by a slow pan up to the face, establishes textile identifiers as replacing the face shot, suggesting that it is clothes that identify a character.

If we are introduced to Idgie in a moment of her textile rebellion, the queerness of her outfits follows her into older age. Idgie's odd behaviour and "unladylike" exercise of freedom bother her mother who invites Ruth to help her. Idgie as a young woman is wonderfully butch; she arrives in her tomboy combo, rejecting the advances of a man who deems her beautiful. Her masculine outfit is complete with a fishhook and the fish she caught for the day which she hands to her family. As Proehl notes: "Idgie, more so than Celie, might also be characterized as gender nonconforming because of her resistance to early twentieth-century Southern gender norms for young women." (Proehl 2018, 19). Idgie's nonconformity begins with her fishing, playing poker, and jumping on trains and redistributing food to the poor, and extends to her living with a woman, running her own cafe, and employing and serving black people in 20s South. It seems her nonconformity is eased by, if not arising from, her textile defiance which feeds into a greater transgression.

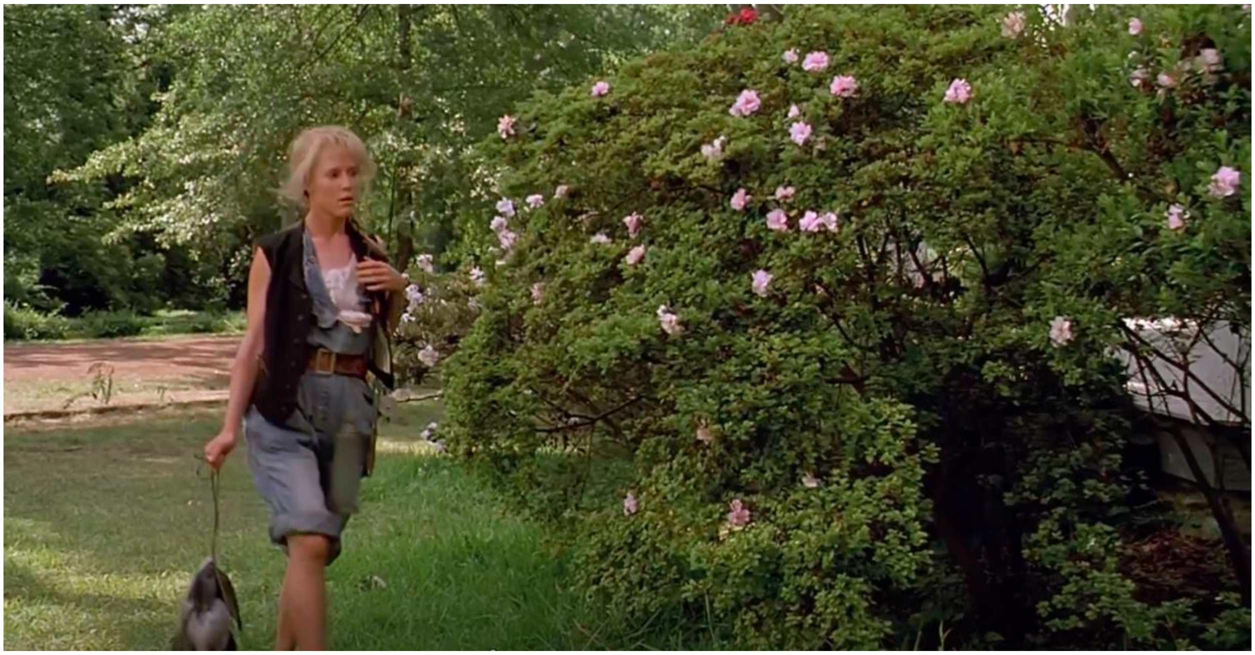


Fig. 22. Idgie as a young woman is wonderfully butch and it seems her nonconformity is eased by, if not arising from, her textile defiance which feeds into a greater transgression.

It is easy to read Idgie as a lesbian when we take into account her actions, and the fact that she lives with Ruth and raises a child with her. It is also easy to read her as such when we look at her clothes. What the film shies away in depicting of Idgie's homosexuality, it makes visible through coded representation of her textile transgressions. Idgie's masculine clothing and butch outfits seem to characterize a woman who doesn't comply with norms, who is seeking greater textile and sexual freedoms. Additionally, where scenes of queer intimacy do appear, they also contain textile elements. Rockler describes one of the first romantic scenes between Idgie and Ruth: "Idgie watches Ruth, who is intoxicated, swim in a lake. Ruth's dress clings erotically to her wet body as she bathes, and she tenderly kisses Idgie on the cheek." (Rockler 2001, 99). It is interesting that it is Ruth's dress clinging to her body that gets the mark of "erotic" in this description while the origin of that eroticism in fact resides between the two women's interaction. And in fact, the textile object, just like the honey in the beehive scene, seems to hold the erotic weight of the scene. Where it becomes impossible to show eroticism between women, it falls to clothes, or other objects, to carry the charge of queer tension. The queer meaning *of Fried Green Tomatoes* seem to reside primarily in its textile characterizations. As a film that communicates sartorially what it does not show outright, *Fried Green Tomatoes* is one example of a text that can benefit extensively from using textile reading to recover queer meaning. Not only that, but the film also reveals how a textile logic might affect not only a film's content, but also its style and form—furthering the connections between queerness, cinema, and textiles.

If the masculine woman, whose identity and rebellion become visible through her clothes, is the first queer figure on screen, then queerness has always been constructed through textiles. *Queen Christina* reveals some of the first examples of a queer textile coding, where royal and sexual identities arise from their textile constructions. In such representations, clothes, identity, and queerness become infinitely entangled, so much so that it becomes impossible to extract one from the other. What ultimately emerges is a representation of queerness that has its origins in its textile expression, where its textility is intrinsic, and at the same time characteristic of its construction. The textility of queerness becomes a governing quality that not only shapes representation, but film form itself. In *A Meeting of Two Queens*, Barriga exploits the textility of queerness and of film to stitch together an edit that at times uses clothes to conjure up queer intimacy. What appears is a vision of queerness that is made possible through its textility, expressed by appropriating the film medium like a textile. In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, we face an occluded vision of queerness that becomes visible when read through its textiles. Clothes gain new meaning and agency of their own, in scenes where they move beyond the designation of costume and signify extensively. All of this seem to suggest the need for queer textile reading as a viewership practice that can take texts as textiles, and extract meaning through fabric, clothes, and accessories. Such a reading practice would make use of the defining qualities of queer representation: its textility, but also its spectrality.

Chapter 2: Spectrality and Textiles

Terry Castle in *The Apparitional Lesbian* draws out the connections between lesbianism and spectrality, as she traces the ghostly existence of lesbianism in texts, arguing that lesbianism has haunted our culture (1993, 46). I have slowly been teasing out the spectrality of queer textile representations throughout this thesis, comparing coded representation to spectral apparitions. But in this chapter, I fully explore the spectrality of queer textile coding. If queerness has always been textile, then it has also always been spectral; before there was the lesbian, there were her clothes, but even before that, there was her ghost. Before the visualization of queerness happens through textiles, it exists as a spectral presence, waiting to come out.

Carla Freccero in "Queer Spectrality" underlines the connection between queerness and spectrality (2015). Queer people might feel an affinity to ghosts, for their queerness has also often felt like a haunting (2015). There might in fact be something spectral about queerness, just like there is something textile about it. As Castle also explains, the "ghosting" of lesbianism was an effort to make it disappear, to disembody its "carnal threat" (Castle 1993, 62). But as any ghost movie can attest, what becomes a ghost in fact becomes quite hard to dispel (1993, 62). In fact, the spectralization of lesbianism meant it was also free to haunt; lesbianism appeared everywhere, haunting texts and people (62). But what spectrality also offered was possibility: "of other worlds that might one day be conjured up" (7).

If queerness has existed in a state of spectrality, the queer viewer's approach to a queer text can be described as "ghost-work" (Carson 2002). The viewer is sitting in front of a screen looking for "signs," some barely visible, some barely there, and she is perpetually haunted by a presence. We can also read White's argument about "lesbian representability" as characterizing a spectral condition, to infer that Classical Hollywood Cinema has been haunted by the spectre of lesbianism (White 1999). White's exploration of lesbianism in Hollywood featured a "central absence," these ghostly visions were a "representability" and not a "representation" (1999) and it is in this absence that lesbianism is spectralized. If coded representations occlude visions of queerness while also allowing it to signify, what queer viewers engage in is "ghost-work," looking closely for apparitions, even at times conjuring queerness (Carson 2002). Thinking about queer textile coding and its attendant reading practices in terms of spectralization can be productive. Queer viewers look for coded signs that are barely there, and see the lesbian that is often barely a spectre—the work of queer viewership has been ghost-work, for the act of queering is no less than a conjuring itself. If the visualization of queerness happens through clothes, what clothes do in queer representations is to conjure.

Murray Leeder writes in *Cinematic Ghosts* that cinema is "a haunted medium, a haunting medium, a medium that puts us in touch with ghosts" (Leeder 2015, 4). How does cinema, as a haunted medium, make ghosts appear? Textiles are more prevalent in representations of spectrality than we might think. A ghost is primarily unrepresentable, because it is more often a manifestation of an absence. It is something felt, something inferred, a conjured affect. As ghosts are not directly representable, certain objects often stand in for them. What cannot be outright shown, is represented and visualized through objects (one can already see the parallels to queer representation and its textiles). One particular object that has stood in for, that has successfully conjured ghosts, is a white cloth. This textile approximation might be the first image that comes to mind when trying to conjure up the image of a ghost, even in one's head. Children on Halloween put on white sheets to dress up as ghosts, where the image of the white fabric is enough to conjure up an apparition. Ghosts on film also often appear under a white cloth, where the cloth itself becomes spectral. Ephemeral as ghosts are, what tethers them to visualization, what makes them visible and in fact conjures them, is the textile that makes them visible and conjurable. I argue that spectrality on film is often a *textile effect*. It is not only conjured up through textiles but also thoroughly entangled with them. And in fact, that clothes are so readily able to conjure ghosts seems to suggest a fundamental connection between textiles and spectrality. How can this connection between ghosts and clothes, and between spectrality and textiles, be explained? In short, why does a ghost haunt the cloth?

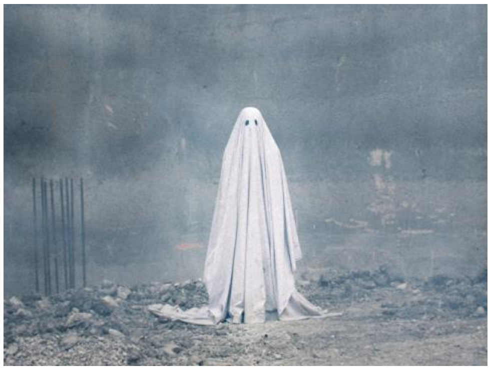


Fig. 23. Spectrality on film is often a textile effect, conjured with the help of textiles which tether ghosts to visualization, seen in this visual from *Ghost Story* (Lowery 2017).

Why might clothes be conducive to conjuring ghosts, so much so that they become the very thing that stands in for the apparition of a ghost? The answer to spectrality's association with textiles can be traced to the potential of textiles to signify and make visible—a quality I have been demonstrating throughout this thesis. I have been arguing that it is textiles which make queerness visible, a vision that is at times occluded by its own apparition. What I would like to explore in this chapter is the spectrality of those appearances and apparitions. Alice Kettle and Lesley Millar in *The Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles* write that fabrics can "activate haptic memory," causing a "somatic shift to other times and places" (2018, 11, 8).

There might in fact be something intrinsic to fabric that renders it conducive to mediating spectral encounters that are nonetheless embodied. Not only that but fabrics can also “activate the erotic through remembrance of the forgotten” (2018, 5). Fabric’s touch on bodies is conducive to transportation to other times and places, making them the perfect object for conjuring. Fabric’s relation to the body thus makes possible “re-embodiment: of uncanny return to the flesh” which is a crucial aspect of a ghost’s appearance (Castle 1993, 62). As I’ve been arguing throughout this thesis, fabrics and clothes possess a unique ability to signify, characterizing them as objects that can aid in the visualization of identity and queerness, conjuring the presence of queerness on screen. Moreover, the manner in which textiles make visible can be likened to a conjuring, making the concept of spectrality essential for understanding how queer textile representation manifests.

We can draw the parallels between the (un)representability of spectrality, which results in its conjuring through clothes, and the unique case of how queerness appears. As White argued, the appearance of lesbianism in Classical Hollywood features a condition of “representability,” and not quite representation, for it crucially contained a “central absence” (1999). As such, the appearance of lesbianism has been more an apparition, with clothes being the objects that conjure its presence, as I argued. If cinema has been a haunted medium, queerness has been its ghost, and the spectral cloth its costume. If clothes make ghosts which are unrepresentable otherwise appear, the fundamental condition for the ghost’s representation has been its textility. It is this ghostliness that textiles are able to conjure, that which is able to appear because it intrinsically is textile. As the connection between spectrality and textility becomes more apparent, it becomes necessary to think one through the other.

Often, when queerness appears as a ghost on screen, visualized with the help of fabrics, it signifies the haunting presence of queer desire, or its impossibility. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), Marianne is tasked with painting Héloïse and soon falls in love with her. Throughout the film, Marianne is haunted by the impossibility of the affair, and one night, Héloïse appears to her in a vision conjured by its textility. Héloïse is soon to marry someone else, characterizing the impossibility of their own union, and when she appears to Marianne as a ghost, it is the white dress of a bride that spectralizes her appearance. Héloïse appears in the white dress suggestive of matrimony, yet to underline the impossibility of the queer union, she appears ghost-like—an effect achieved through the spectrality of her dress. Her dress is dissolving at the edges, spectral and ghostly, much like the possibility of a union slipping from Marianne's hands. Here, the ghost of lesbian desire appears as a *textile effect*, as the dream for their union is spectralized. And yet, it is the textility of this desire that allows it to be conjured up through the white cloth. The desire that Marianne feels for Héloïse is at once spectral and textile, conjured up through the fabric which also suggest its impossibility. Such a reading is the work of queer textile reading, which reads ghosts and clothes for expressions of queerness, and which brings us closer to understanding the ways in which queer representation might appear, at once occluded and texturally visible.

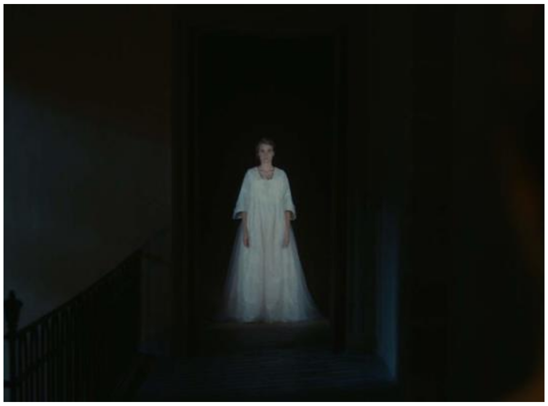


Fig. 24. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, when Héloïse appears to Marianne in a vision, it is in a white dress suggestive of her matrimony that spectralizes her appearance and the possibility of their union.

Textility and spectrality go hand in hand. In the entanglement of textiles and spectrality, not only do fabrics make ghosts appear, but they also become ghostly themselves in the process. In the above example, what characterizes Héloïse as a ghost is not only the visuals of a white cloth, but also the spectralization of the fabric itself. The fact that the fabric seems to be dissolving at the edges, floating around her and characterizing her ephemerality, is part of what makes her appear as a ghost. I have argued that not only queerness, but also spectrality on film is a textile effect. But what is also curious in such apparitions is the effects of spectrality, or of representation, on the materials themselves. In their making visible a ghost, clothes themselves transform from material into something ghostly—they too become spectralized. Clothes are otherwise inarguably material, objects whose concrete and solid presence can be felt on the skin. Yet on screen and in their representation of queerness and spectrality, textiles too become ghost-like.

Perhaps what makes textiles visualize ghosts is this spectralization of fabrics. In the sartorially spectral ghost film *Personal Shopper* (2016), a text I examine more closely later in this chapter, a neo-Victorian ghost appears early on in the film to haunt medium and personal shopper Maureen. What I would like to examine more closely is the appearance of this ghost, and how she is made visible and conjurable. When the ghost appears, it is not exactly her floating around the room, her ephemerality and incapturability, that characterize her as a ghost. But it is this ghost's textility, and the spectrality of the textiles that make her visible, that allows her to be read as a ghost. In other words, because she is visualized through clothes, and because those clothes are ghostly, she appears to us as a ghost. Her ghostliness is a textile effect, characterized at once by the textility and spectrality of representation. The materials that represent her are also ghostly, the fabric's ephemeral threads dissolving around the edges. What is curious is that it is the condition of her unrepresentability which also makes her appear. She is unable to be visualized or conjured otherwise, without being tethered to a piece of cloth. And thus, it is because she is unrepresentable, that she appears through the cloth. Much like queerness, which now begins to appear to us much like a ghost.

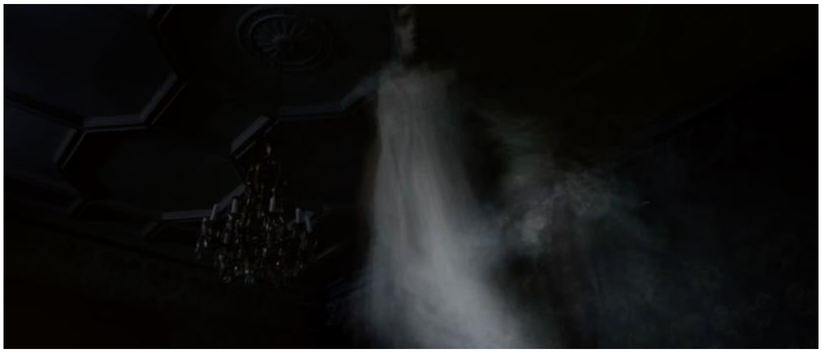


Fig. 25. In *Personal Shopper*, when a ghost appears, it is the spectralization of a white dress that allows her to be read as such. Her spectrality appears as textile effect.

It is clear that there are many parallels to be drawn between the spectrality of queer representation and its appearance through textiles, and the way that ghosts appear. The fact that in their conjuring of ghosts, fabrics are material and yet spectral at once, also allows us to address one of the main issues explored in this thesis: that of constructionism and essentialism. Does the ghost of queerness seem to arise from the materiality of clothes or from a spectral essence that precedes the ghost's textile apparition? This is simply another way to ask the question I asked at the beginning of this thesis: does queerness arise from the clothes that construct it, or from an invisible essence that precedes its textile appearance? The paradox of spectrality and textiles becomes an apt analogy for the contradicting qualities of queer representation. Ghosts are spectral, yet their very spectrality depends on the materiality of clothes. But in such representations, clothes themselves also become spectral, and it is fabrics' spectralization that makes ghosts appear as such. Queer representation has been coded and spectral, yet constantly visualized through the appearance of clothes. Thinking about queer representation through spectrality and textiles allows us to explore the contradicting processes through which queerness is materialized. A spectral approach to queer identity might allow us to appreciate the ways in which queerness appears simultaneously as construction and emerging from an essence, spectral and material at once. Not only that, but it is also useful to explore the spectrality of queer textile representation in order to understand the ways in which textiles conjure up meaning and to grapple with a queer textile reading practice.

Eve's Closet

Trying on another woman's clothes is almost always a shorthand for trying to get closer to her, so much so to embody her, and this is what Eve does with Margo Channing's dress in *All About Eve* (1950). In the film where Margo's dissolving career and Eve's youthful performance come at odds with each other, it is scenes where Eve is not only imitating Margo, but performing a textile imitation of her that catch my eye. Eve's imitation of Margo, where she will eventually embody her role and take her place, begins as a textile impersonation. *All About Eve* is a great place to start to explore the conjuring power of clothes.

Patricia White's reading of the film at the end of *Uninvited* is useful here. She argues that Eve is a lesbian and her admiration of Margo—and I would add, her admiration of her clothes—goes beyond a "case of identification" as Teresa de Lauretis had once argued (White 1999, 205). Eve, after many nights of watching Margo's performances, is invited up to her dressing room—a place that is significant as most crucial female interactions during the film will take place in dressing spaces, later conspicuously in Eve's "closet" (1999, 215). At this first meeting, Margo identifies Eve as an audience member from her outfit: "The mousy one with the trench coat and the funny hat? How could I miss her!" (204). In the room, Eve "comes out" as a fan and is immediately taken in by Margo; her "going home with Margo that first night" potentially standing in for something else (205, 206). Already, Eve's relation to Margo possesses a textile quality, unfolding in the intimacy of dressing spaces, remembered through one's clothes. But it is only later that the extent of Eve's textile relation to Margo will become clear.

It is possible to read the clothes in the film for meaning throughout. I would say, much like *Queen Christina*, *All About Eve* is a "costume drama" (White 1999, 14). I say this not only because clothes add onto narrative meaning, but because they also localize the source of the drama that will unfold between Eve and Margo. Even before Margo's career starts declining, there are some telltale textile signs something might be amiss. Margo's clothes just don't seem to fit right. Her boyfriend asks her to fix her seams, her girdle is too tight, her jacket is "where she left it," as her maid tells her, which is on the floor. Margo's declining career is suggested and signified through her sartorial misgivings, as the film draws our attention to its textility. It is when Eve comes along and puts herself in Margo's shoes, figuratively and literally, as she becomes first Margo's understudy and then takes her place, that the significance of Margo's textile deviations become clear. The misfit between Margo's presence and the clothes that don't fit her opens up a space where Eve can fill in and take her place. It is in this textile opening that much becomes possible. And as such, Eve's imitation of Margo begins with her clothes.

Soon, we find out Eve is not just a fan. She wants to get much closer to Margo, in fact, to replace her, or as White puts it, she wants "[t]o put Eve in Margo's shoes—indeed in her wig and her costumes" (1999, 209). Does Eve want Margo's life, her clothes, or Margo herself? The distinction might not be so clear cut. Once Eve starts working for Margo, she is able to get much closer to the outfits she once appreciated from the audience. Now she watches Margo from backstage, as Margo walks towards her in a white dress sloppily dragging behind her. Her crinoline promptly comes off and is handed to the wardrobe worker. Eve zips down the dress and Margo walks towards her dressing room, half undressed. What appears before Eve's eyes is a woman who occupies the coveted world of stardom and yet treats its clothes so carelessly. Eve sets on to make things right. When the dress finally comes off and is left in front of her, she delicately touches it before insisting to Margo on returning the dress to wardrobe. As Eve goes off with the dress, Margo decides to follow her upon her maid's urging, and this is when she catches Eve in textile imitation.

Eve is standing in front of a mirror holding Margo's dress against her body. as if it's a delicate little thing, a thing that still carries traces of Margo and her power—a thing that could conjure all that and more for her too. This is how Margo catches Eve, in full textile fantasy. Much like the vision Eve sees in the mirror while holding the dress, it is in this moment that we, the audience, get a visualization of what Eve might be after. White describes this moment of Eve holding the dress as "superimposing its form on hers" (White 1999, 211). Eve's textile trick is a superimposition indeed. Soon she will be wearing that same dress as she takes on Margo's role, slowly slipping into her life. Her desire to replace Margo is first communicated sartorially; it is the superimposition of the dress that suggests Eve might hope to take Margo's place. And crucially, it is the textility of its representation that makes such a desire visible. The textile imitation, which marks the start of Eve's transformation from trying on Margo's clothes to filling in her shoes, becomes synonymous with Eve's imitation of Margo.

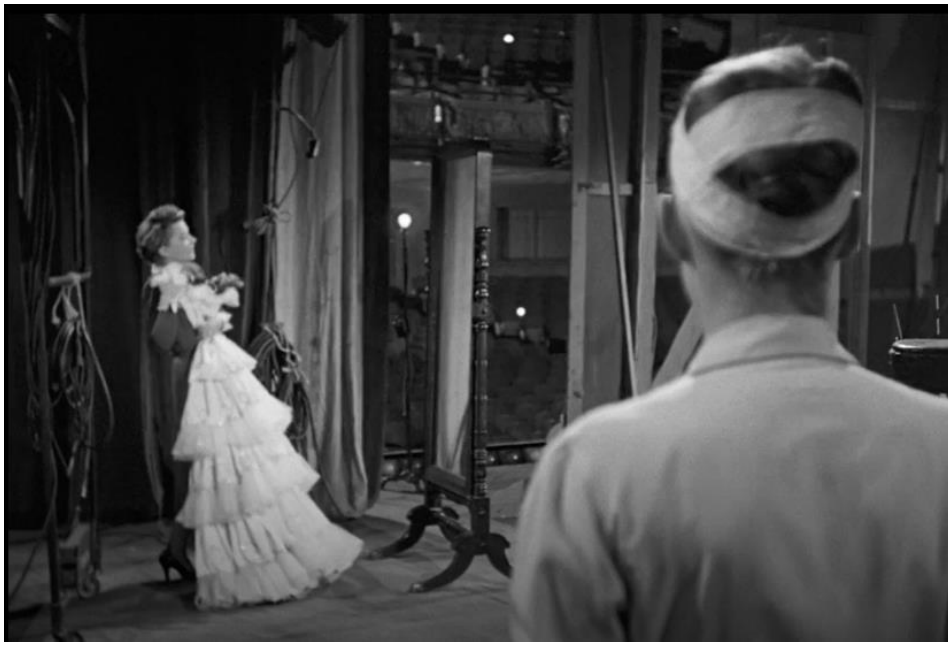


Fig. 26. Eve's imitation of Margo Channing begins with her clothes in *All About Eve* (1950).

When Margo catches Eve in the illicit textile act, her reaction is gentle. But does Eve's performance with the dress simply stand in for her desire to take Margo's place or is there something more to the textility of Eve's desires? The desire to imitate Margo is not only represented through textiles but is intrinsically a textile desire: to put herself in Margo's shoes, and her dress, so to speak. And once Eve holds the dress that carries the weight and scent of the woman she idolizes, it is the textiles that makes the conjuring of something more possible.

White argues that *All About Eve* is a film with a “displaced center” (1999, 205). The film’s opening promises to tell us about this woman, to tell us all about her in fact, but Eve’s secrets mostly stay with her (205). As White argues, in a film that is supposed to be all about Eve, we actually learn very little about her (205). And in fact, while Eve is set to replace Margo, it is Bette Davis who “upstages” Anne Baxter and becomes synonymous with the film (203). We don’t find out about the nature of Eve’s desires; her obsession with Margo is explained away as a compulsion for her own success. We never do hear the whole story about Eve, and White argues that it is a queer one. In a footnote, she lists the confirmations of Eve’s lesbianism:

“Mankiewicz agrees that the character was conceived as a lesbian...Eve is seen with her arm around her female roommate... [and when Addison] claims he and Eve are two of a kind; homosexuality might be the basis of that identification.” (White 1999, 242)

In fact, Eve, as the woman with a secret, the woman who wants and desires, often more than she is ought to, might be queerly coded. If Eve’s lesbianism is the “all about eve” that we do not get to find out, the spectre of her desire hides at the displaced center of the film, or haunts it. It is this absence where her desire ought to be that becomes visible in the sartorially coded scenes, scenes that might tell us more once we start reading their textiles queerly. Let’s look at the language White uses to describe the scene where Margo catches Eve in textile imitation:

“Under Margo’s gaze Eve tenderly returns the dress, carrying it in her arms as if she were bearing a bride over a threshold.” (White 1999, 211).

Once again, like in the description of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, it is the clothes that the mark of desire, which in fact describes the female relationship, clings to. In the absence of full-fledged representation of queer desire, it often falls on clothes to carry the weight of that intimacy. While Eve's performance with the dress could be written off as manifestation of her desire for success, it is undeniable she acts tenderly towards the dress. The dress here might conjure something more than her vision of success, a vision of queer intimacy that appears through textiles. White writes: "the empty dress Eve clutches is, like the image, a fetish for the body of the absent star" (1999, 211). So, while Eve holds the dress and conjures her vision in the mirror, which might be identification or imitation, she also experiences a closeness to the actress through the very fabric of her dress. It is significant that the dress is "empty": much like there is an absence in the film where Eve's lesbianism ought to be, the vision that Eve conjures is emptied of Margo herself. This dress, which she now holds tenderly against her chest, stands in for the body of the actress she may not touch—so she touches her clothes. It is this textile intimacy that makes visible the very lesbianism that the film does not represent. The spectre of Eve's lesbianism becomes visible as a textile effect, through the representations conjured by clothes which stand in for more. It is also significant that it is this thesis' titular white dress that conjures this ghost—which is none other than the ghost of lesbianism itself.

It is in the final scene where Eve receives her own textile imitation, that her lesbianism comes out in the open, White argues (1999, 213). Phoebe, much like Eve once did to Margo, exists in an intimate and imitative relationship to Eve: she is a fan of her. And much like Eve with Margo, Phoebe's admiration for Eve stands in for her desire to become a star in her own light—and maybe something more. When Eve finds the admirer in her apartment, she is surprised but soon unfazed: White notes, after realizing Phoebe lives in Brooklyn, Eve suggests she spend the night (213). If their interaction is another lesbian fantasy that never fully unravels, it is once again acted out sartorially. Phoebe goes into Eve's bedroom and tries on her white cape and looks in the three-way mirror—recalling the earlier scene of Eve's textile imitation/admiration of Margo. Phoebe touches the fabric and engages in illicit textile pleasures, which might conjure her own future, but also the image of the star. While neither Margo, nor Eve, nor Phoebe, explicitly touch each other, they do touch each other's clothes intimately, experiencing textile pleasures that might stand in for queer ones. As clothes once worn by another might be haunted by their presence, rewearing these clothes translates to a conjuring of the lingering body that may never be touched directly. What these textile encounters ultimately conjure is the spectre of lesbian intimacy that otherwise stays contained within the film, an intimacy that is characterized by its textility and spectrality.

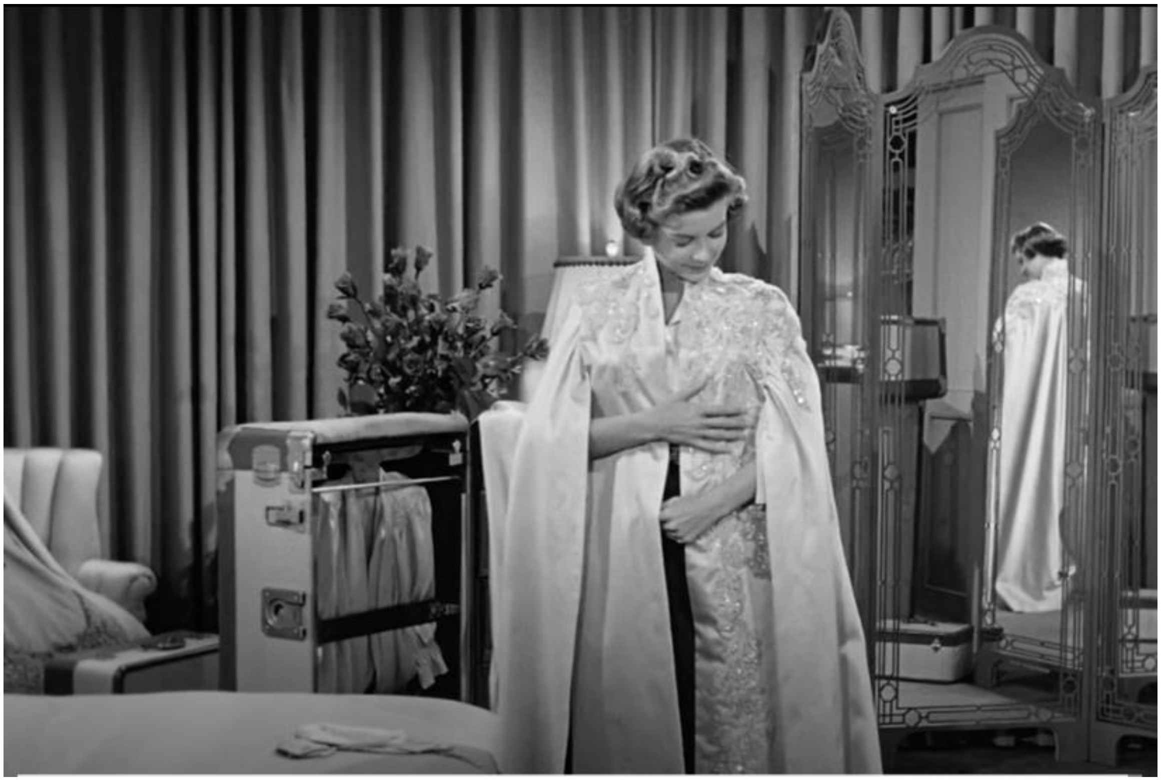


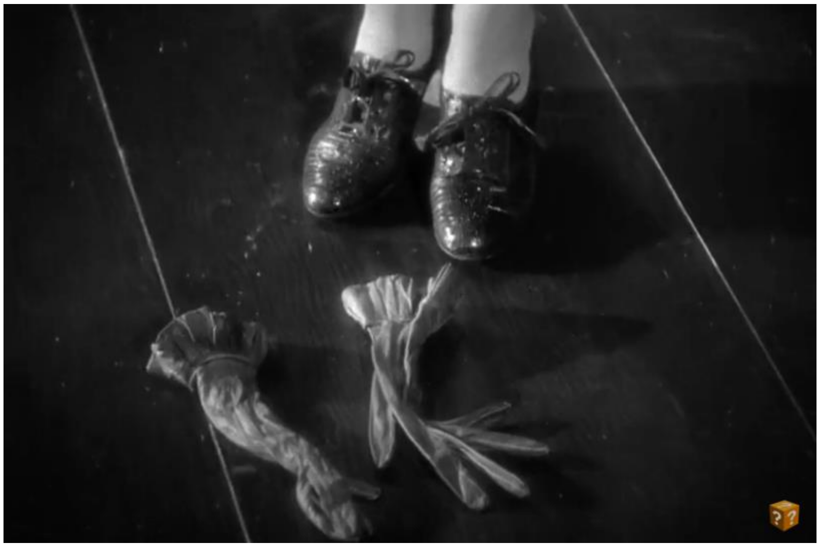
Fig. 27. Phoebe (Barbara Bates) trying on of Eve's white cape mirrors the earlier scene of Eve's textile imitation and conjures its own lesbian visions.

All About Eve is a costume drama. But the costumes stand in for much more than the drama that unfolds between two actresses, they are in fact where a lesbian intimacy gets displaced. Through fabrics, a lesbian intimacy becomes not so much visible, but able to be conjured. It is the unique ability of fabrics to signify that allows this vision of lesbianism to be imagined. If the visions Eve, and later Phoebe, have while looking in the mirror, holding the clothes of the women they admire, contain traces of lesbianism, it is the clothes that allow this vision to be conjured. The lesbian intimacy that never quite unfolds within the film is visible in the fabric once we look, reflecting visions of lesbian desire. Adding a spectral aspect to our queer textile reading practice allows us to extract the spectral queer representation that textiles conjure. Spectrality becomes the framework through which we might imagine the queer representation that otherwise stays coded, hidden. And surely, it is textiles themselves that allow the visualization of an otherwise unrepresentable queer desire. Spectrality and textiles, when brought together in queer reading practices, bring us closer to understanding the ways in which queer representation, and representation itself, might manifest. Ultimately, it is the textility of film, its textile-like quality and its proximity to textiles, and the ghostliness that seems to haunt the medium of cinema (Leeder 2015, 4), that makes such on-screen conjurings possible. It might be the medium of film itself that is spectral and textile at once, a textile medium that "puts us in touch with ghosts" (2015, 4).

Spectral Textile Lesbianism in *Rebecca*

If we want to think about spectral and sartorial lesbian desire, a quintessential text will be Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940). In *Rebecca*, an unassuming young woman marries a widowed man, Maxim de Winter, and moves to his estate, Manderley. She will soon find Maxim's first wife, Rebecca, haunting the house, and their marriage. She meets Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper who once dutifully served Rebecca and still harbours strong loyalties towards her, demonstrated through her obsessive "preservation" of Rebecca's room and clothes (White 1999, 67). Throughout the film, clothes conjure up various ghosts, making visible Rebecca's haunting presence and the spectral desire "between the three women" (1999, 67). White in "Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter," adding onto Tania Modleski's argument, writes that there is a "triangulation" between Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers, and Mrs. de Winter where they both desire Rebecca (67). She also argues that Mrs. de Winter "takes the place of Rebecca not only by marrying Maxim, but by handling and living among her things, preserved in fetishistic detail by Mrs. Danvers" (65). As White points out, Rebecca never appears in the film, though haunts it extensively, and because she doesn't appear, it is not the object of desire, but desire itself that is "made representable" (67). And it is this desire that is spectralized, that threateningly haunts Mrs. de Winter. It is through clothes that the ghostly vision of a desire between Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca, and Mrs. Danvers is "mediated" (67). Rebecca is an especially textile ghost, whose spectrality is conjured by her textility, through Mrs. Danvers' keeping of her clothes. In a film that is characterized by its spectral textility, Mrs. de Winter's initial arrival at Manderley is significant as it sets the tone for the sartorially conjured lesbian desires that will follow.

As Mrs. de Winter arrives at Manderley during a rainfall, she is nervous and frazzled by the towering presence of Manderley and its wealth. It is Mrs. Danvers that greets her with her commanding presence. Upon meeting her, Mrs. de Winter's shaky hands drop her gloves. A scene that is constructed through its textility follows. The camera cuts to the gloves on the floor, giving us the first of the textile focused shots that will ease us into reading textiles throughout the film, not to mention a close up of shoes similar to ones we've analyzed before. Here what these textile close ups characterize is a vision of spectral lesbian intimacy. Mrs. de Winter and Mrs. Danvers both bend down to pick up the gloves at the same time, and for lasting seconds, their faces obscure one another, resulting in the illusion of kissing. It is the act of picking up the gloves that initiate this moment of fleeting lesbian intimacy, and it is gloves that mediate this queer encounter. Such a kiss is not really there—spectral—though it might haunt the queer viewer. As the lesbian intimacy is not there and yet visible, its appearance is much more an apparition, conjured through gloves. What begins to transpire is a lesbian intimacy that is sartorially conjured. Here also, film form is affected by the textiles it makes visible, as it is around textiles that shot composition and order is organized. Moreover, it seems to be textiles that are centered in shots and guiding the movement of the cinematic gaze, as if it is fabrics themselves that guide the vision of the camera and the structuring of the film itself. What then textiles on screen make possible is a gaze that is in movement, textile-like, like a fabric billowing in the wind. In the encounters between queerness, spectrality, and textiles, it is the medium of film itself that also becomes something spectral and textile.



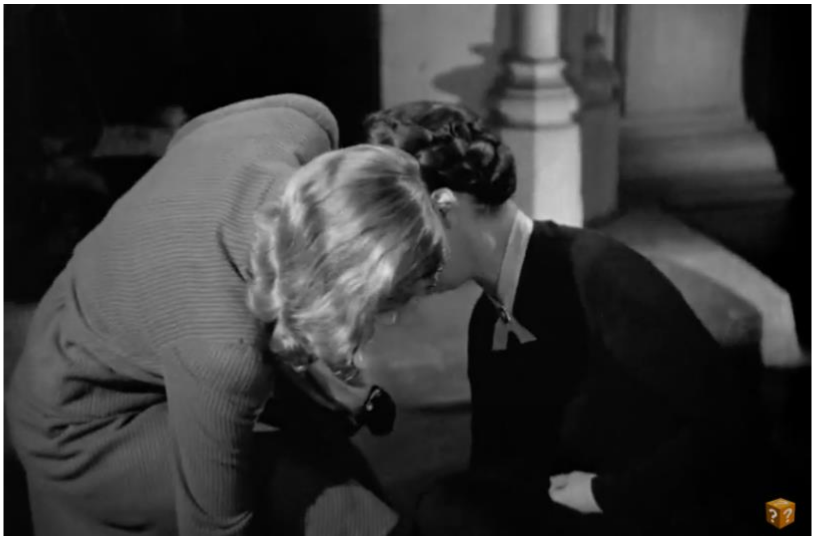


Fig. 28 and 29. Gloves mediate the conjuring of lesbian intimacy in one of the earlier scenes in *Rebecca*, setting the scene for a sartorially conjured lesbian desire.

Rebecca never appears but her clothes do. Once again, the unrepresentability of spectrality—and of lesbianism—is mitigated by delegating it to an object. By doing so, it is not only lesbian desire (White 1999, 67) but also textiles that come to the forefront. It is clear that Rebecca haunts the film, but what these readings fail to account for is the textile nature of this haunting. It is through clothes preserved to exactness, tulle curtains moving out of will, costumes that conjure her exactness, that Rebecca is conjured and haunts the characters and the viewer. Mrs. de Winter is even able to conjure Rebecca when she wears the costume that Rebecca once wore to a masked ball—after being tricked into doing so by Mrs. Danvers—and is shunned for her faux-pas, but what is more alarming in her textile imitation, and what terrifies Maxim, is her conjuring of Rebecca through the costume. In an especially spectral and textile scene, Mrs. Danvers shows Mrs. de Winter Rebecca's clothes, as Rebecca's textile ghost becomes especially palpable.

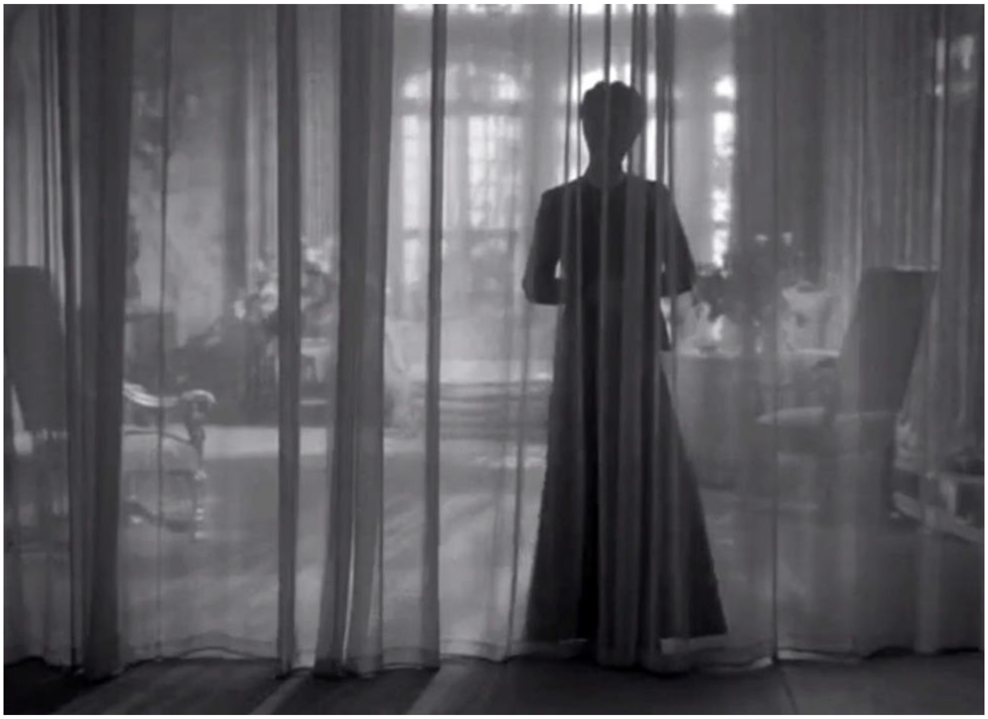


Fig. 30. Rebecca is an especially textile ghost. To look into her closet is to conjure her presence.

We enter Rebecca's room and look into her closet, where we might find a ghost. As Mrs. de Winter enters the room, she parts the white tulle curtains and shakes her head as if she felt something, conjured through that very spectral fabric. Danvers follows her and confirms her suspicions: “I sometimes hear her...it’s unmistakable”. She is of course talking about Rebecca’s haunting presence within the mansion. Danvers continues the tour: “This is where I keep all her clothes. You’d like to see them, wouldn’t you?” her question both a threat and an invitation, her sinister tone suggestive. The desire for Rebecca’s clothes is threateningly disposed on Mrs. de Winter, but it is the full range of Mrs. Danvers’ own textile yearning that becomes visible in this scene. The horror that Mrs. de Winter feels, however, is queerly coded. When we step into Rebecca’s closet, what we are being invited to do is an illicit looking that corresponds to an illicit desire. Mrs. Danvers pulls out a mink jacket that she rubs against her cheek before bringing it to Mrs. de Winter’s face. Mrs. de Winter once again recoils from the touch of the fabric, as if she can sense the presence of the woman there. It is Mrs. Danvers who, with her spectrally queer desire, conjures Rebecca through the clothes she perfectly preserved for her, as if she might return one day. And return, she does.

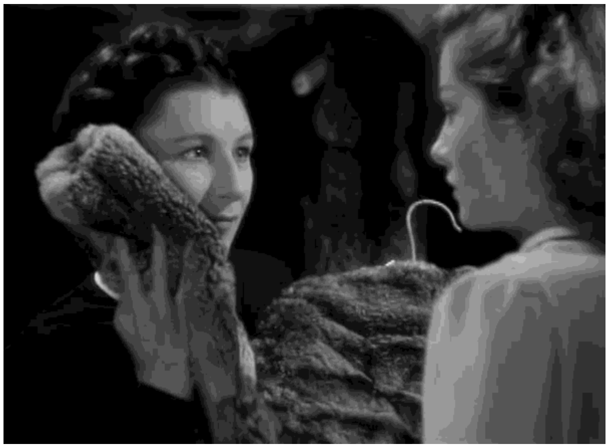
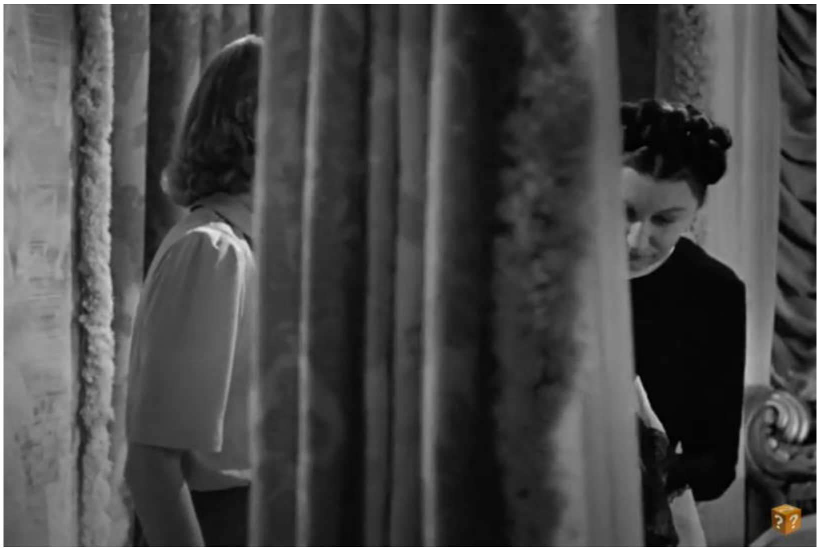


Fig. 31. Clothes conjure up the presence of Rebecca and the spectral lesbian desire between the women.

Rebecca as a ghost is sartorially conjured. As the scene becomes increasingly spectral, Mrs. Danvers points to a pillowcase, with the letter R embroidered upon it, which she says to have embroidered herself. She then reaches beneath the pillowcase to pull out a black nightgown. Mrs. de Winter coils away again, until Danvers forces her to look. "Have you ever seen anything so delicate?" She then puts her hand inside the black transparent fabric and observes: "you can see my hand through it". This scene is especially resonant of spectres—seeing one's hand through a fabric is evocative of a ghost. What Danvers calls delicate might be the gown itself or the spectral presence it conjures up. Interestingly, just as Mrs. Danvers conjures the presence of Rebecca through her clothes, a towering piece of curtain that is part of Rebecca's bed comes into view and blocks our visibility of the two (three?) women (Fig. 32). Blocking our vision, seeking it, it is once again fabrics themselves that gain a certain agency and demand our attention. It is this piece of cloth that visualizes the paradox of queer representation: unrepresentable, visualized through textiles, and yet at times obscured by the fabric. Moreover, a piece of fabric urgently blocking our view forces us to pay attention to textiles, to read them closely—it is through them that we might enact a closer relationship to the cinematic text itself. The intimacy visualized between the women is at once obscured and mediated by fabrics, where a spectral approach to queer textile reading becomes helpful for designating the lesbian representation that becomes simultaneously visible and occluded.



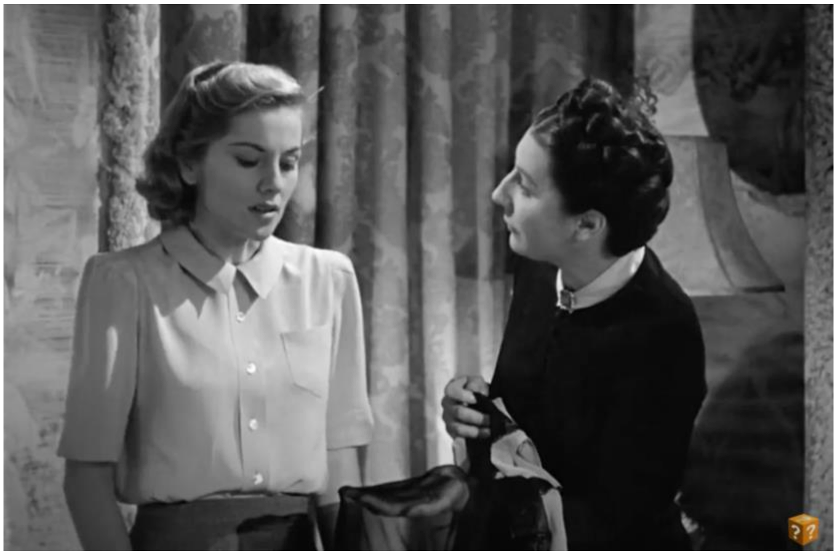
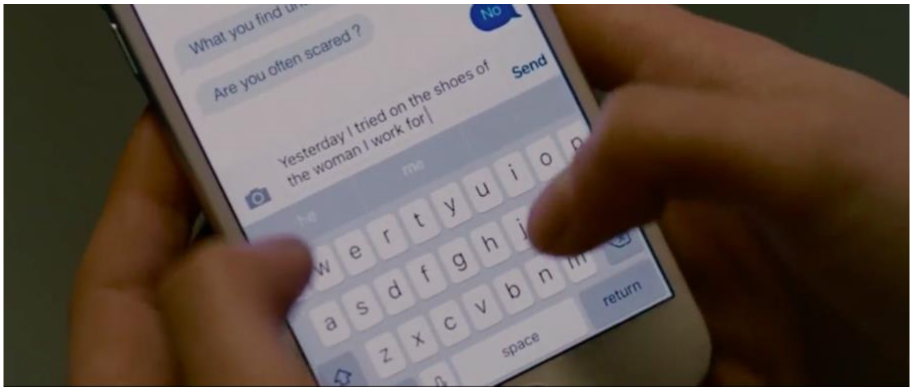


Fig. 32 and 33. Mrs. Danvers conjures Rebecca through her preserved clothes, as in the same scene, the fabric of a curtain obscures our view, our looking interrupted by the textiles that demand our attention.

Much like the ghost of Rebecca, the lesbianism of the film is one that is sartorially conjured. It is her perfectly preserved clothes that invoke the presence of Rebecca, and it is clothes that mediate the desire between Mrs. Danvers, Mrs. de Winter, and Rebecca. These clothes at once obscure, at once materialize, conjuring the ghostly presence that nonetheless continuously haunts. Mrs. de Winter is a haunted woman. And isn't that what lesbian desire feels like? Danvers' desire for Rebecca, enacted through her preservation of clothes, is presented as a textile desire for a ghost. What clothes conjure is not only the presence of Rebecca, but also the haunting presence of lesbian desire itself. Rebecca's conjuring through clothes speaks to the textility of spectrality, its ability to be conjured through clothes. But what the extent of Rebecca's conjuring also speaks to is the ability of cinema to conjure through its textiles. It is the vision of a ghost that haunts the text(ile) of the film.

Forbidden Textile Pleasures in *Personal Shopper*

Personal Shopper (2016) is a more recent example of a film which presents its lesbianism as a spectral textile desire. Maureen is a medium and a personal shopper for a supermodel named Kyra. The film begins with Maureen at the house where his brother, Lewis, has died, trying to communicate with his spirit. The house is surely haunted, but not by her brother. After various spectral encounters, the ghost reveals herself to be a Victorian female spectre—analyzed previously for her spectral textile representation. Maureen runs from the house yet continues to be haunted by mysterious text messages on her phone, potentially connected to the female spectre and her own spectral queer desires. The texts encourage Maureen to try on Kyra's clothes—something she has been forbidden from doing. Encouraged by the ghost's texts, Maureen soon gives in to the forbidden textile desires which as by now you can tell, conjure something more.



What you find u

Are you often scared ?

No

Yesterday I tried on the shoes of the woman I work for

Fig. 34. Maureen receives texts from a spectre that encourages her to engage in sartorial pleasures.

In an extended textile sequence, Maureen’s forbidden desires play out with the help of the texting ghost. Maureen arrives at Kyra’s apartment with her clothes but doesn’t find her there. Following the ghost’s suggestion, she starts trying on Kyra’s clothes. Later, she finds Kyra’s worn undergarments and the dress she had picked out for her. Interestingly, the fabric made out of silk organza is see-through, much like the spectralizing nightgown of Rebecca. Maureen puts the dress on and goes on to masturbate on Kyra’s bed while wearing the clothes. The touch offered by worn clothes is a spectral one, where the previous wearer has become a ghost. Maureen never explicitly pursues Kyra; however, she spends quite a bit of time trying on her clothes, seeking a presence on the textile surface. Her queerly coded desire to get closer to Kyra is one that is at once characterized by spectrality and textility. It is the ghost’s suggestion that pushes her to pursue the queer textile desires, and yet the ghost might be her queer desire itself. Ultimately, it is with the help of a ghost and textiles that the occluded vision of a lesbian desire becomes visible.

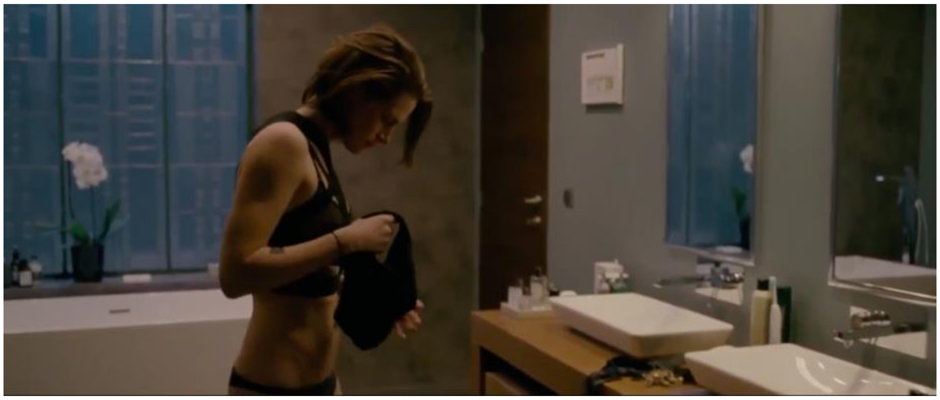


Fig. 35. Maureen’s lesbian desires are expressed sartorially as she tries on Kyra’s clothes.

Maureen’s repressed desires only come out through the help of a spectral presence, and when they do, they are expressed sartorially. In *Personal Shopper,* fear is coded queerly: the ghost that Maureen is scared of is the spectre of her own desire. The texting ghost asks Maureen what she is afraid of, and then makes her face those fears: trying on Kyra’s clothes, and embodying the spectre of her desire. The desires that she experiences are both forbidden and illicit: she has been forbidden from trying on Kyra’s clothes, and is constantly threatened by a haunting presence. Yet she puts on the clothes.

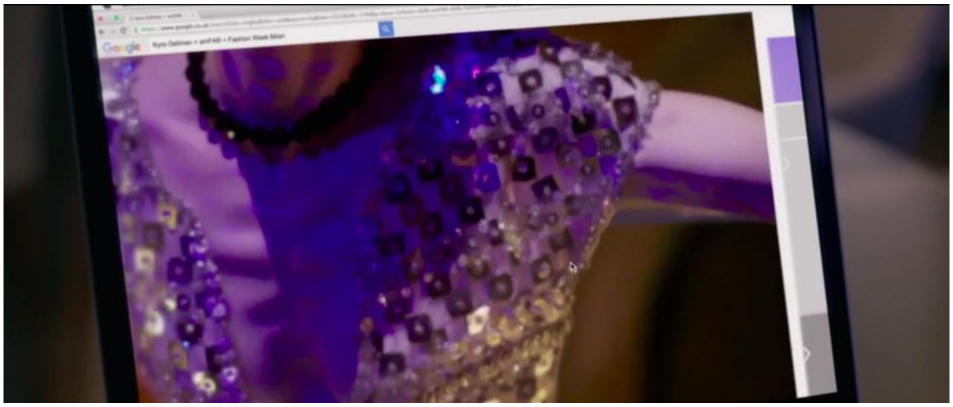


Fig. 36. Maureen zooms in on Kyra’s clothes and enacts a close textile viewership, not unlike the queer viewer.

Later, Maureen looks up Kyra's appearance at a gala and zooms in on her clothes. Here, Maureen's desire for Kyra is translated to a textile reading, or a close textile viewership of her clothes. Maureen, just like the queer viewer, is a viewer who reads fabrics queerly. Most of the films I've explored train their viewers at some level to read fabrics closely for meaning. Once we start reading fabrics queerly, we recover meanings that might not be visible otherwise. As queerness is conjured through clothes, we must enact a queer textile reading to recover apparitions of queerness. Moreover, a queer textile relationship to cinema brings us closer to its materials, to something beyond its surface, to the ghost of a touch that we might reach across and feel. A textile viewership offers us a closer relationship to cinema, one in which we might enact more embodied readings through an interaction with on-screen textiles.

As texts become textiles, through a close attention to the textiles that populate films, new possibilities appear. Sara Ahmed writes that "queer use," which is "refusing instructions" and using objects for unintended purposes, makes "use itself strange" and "inherits a feminist and queer project of living differently" (Ahmed 2019, 198). Queer viewers have made screens out of queer objects, projecting desire on unlikely surfaces. Whether it be a reading of a fabric or an encounter with a ghost, such queer projects of viewing make viewership itself strange. Queer reading, as the practice of seeing things where some see nothing, and seeing and conjuring beyond the screen, offers new possibilities for vision. A textile reading can find new textures in film. In spectral and textile relationships to texts, new possibilities for cinema appear. As a project of conjuring up new worlds, textile viewership is an effort of reading film differently, one that can recover images that are at the risk of disappearing.

It is in the closet—Eve's, Rebecca's, or Kyra's—that we find the lesbian, at once spectral and textile. She is sometimes a ghost sighting, or a ghost within, she is borrowed clothes, she is the conjurings of a fabric. If the lesbian remains a “ghost effect” (Castle 1993, 2) in cinema, it is the ghostliness of cinema (Leeder 2015) that makes her appear. To look into the closet is to conjure the lesbian hiding beneath the clothes, ghostly and yet infinitely material at once.

Adding spectrality to our conception of queer textile reading allow us to open up our understanding of how on-screen fabrics and film might conjure. Thinking of representation in terms of spectrality lets us imagine beyond what is on screen, that which is there and *there*, opening up the conjuring powers of cinema. Like the ghost of Rebecca which haunts the film, cinema makes visible its ghosts through textiles—an apparition that we might extract through a queer textile reading. What a spectral and textile relationship to cinema ultimately makes visible is that which is already there, but requires the imagination and conjuring of queer viewership to be seen.

Conclusion: Textiles of Cinema

On July 21, 2023, *Barbie* (2023) was released—inspiring a large-scale movie-going event with textile implications. There was something interesting about *Barbie*'s call to watch: audiences were not only encouraged to gather and watch, to enact viewership as a communal event, but also to dress up, to wear pink or Barbie-inspired outfits during their viewing. In the wake of the pandemic, it wasn't the images of Barbie on screen, but of people gathered around in their pink costumes that revitalized movie-going as a textile revival. Such a textile enactment of viewership not only draws attention to films as textile objects, but also encourages viewers to become textile participants in their viewing. Dressed in costumes that act as an extension of on-screen textiles, audiences might pay more attention to the clothes and textiles on screen—*Barbie* being a sartorially visual delight. A textile re-enactment of on-screen objects offers a closer relationship to film, one in which audiences might become textile participants and viewership can become something textile.

The revival of movie-going through its textile re-enactments suggests future possibilities for post-pandemic cinema that simultaneously speak to the textile nature of film and its viewership. That *Barbie*'s large-scale viewership should be enacted at such a highly textile level points to the intrinsic textility of film and of viewership itself. As I have suggested, there is something textile to film itself, and it is through a textile re-enactment of viewership that this textile quality of film can be revitalized, and in turn bring us closer to the film text. Textile re-enactments for cinema, in an increasingly distanced world, offer an invitation to embody, to feel, to touch. On the other hand, such a textile relationship to cinema is one that is nonetheless entangled with consumerism, with several brands releasing Barbie-themed items and clothes. Such a consumerist approach to textile viewership flattens the radical potentials of queer textile viewership and the queer potential of textile defiance. It is nonetheless in such textile re-enactments, where movie-going is revitalized as a communal event of large textile signification, that new possibilities of relating to film texts appear—at once textile, personal, and communal.

Throughout these three chapters, I have made my case for queer textile reading as viewership practice that can extract meaning through textiles. But queer textile reading is also an invitation to be more than a viewer: to look more closely, to embody, to have a closer relationship to film through its textiles. Queer textile reading is participatory. In the Introduction, I looked at certain queer textile objects throughout history, namely the monocle and the suit, to show how textiles produce meaning and finally, how queer people come to subvert such meanings. I have argued that clothes and accessories are part of a complex textile language we can learn to read and understand. And that when we do, so much meaning becomes available to us. Whether in straightforward significations or in coded messages, the governing principle has been that clothes signify and communicate identity. There is a textility to our identities, suggesting that a textile approach to identity and sexuality might allow us to better understand ourselves.

The fact that sexuality and identity might be textile constructions that nonetheless arise from a spectral essence offered a new way of approaching identity that synthesized the essentialist and constructionist approaches. Essentialism has argued that gender is an essence, while constructionism insisted on the construction and performativity of gender (Butler 1998). While queer theorists have contested and subverted each approach, it soon became clear that there might be more to essentialism than we think (Habib 2007). However, it was necessary to synthesize both approaches to arrive at a more complex understanding: that gender might be a construction that nonetheless might arise from an essence. It is through textiles that a way of synthesizing the two viewpoints becomes available. The way that textiles signify exhibit both performativity, as they construct gender and sexuality as textile constructions, and spectrality, as they point towards an invisible, spectral essence. This is *the spectral cloth*, the material that is palpable and spectral at once, which becomes a metaphor for how queerness appears on screen. Infinitely material, and still dissolving at the edges, queerness on screen appears underneath a spectral cloth, visible and yet spectral at once—a ghost sighting that is nonetheless felt on the skin. It is this spectral cloth that queer textile reading aims to see through, to unravel.

In Chapter 1, I applied the concept of textility to film, to argue that we can read textiles on screen for queer meaning. I argued that queerness, when it wasn't even able to be visualized, nonetheless became visible on screen through textiles. Textility was revealed to be the defining condition of representation—what made queerness visible, and in fact possible. I argued that queerness appeared as a textile coding on screen, which translated to the practice of textile reading as viewership. Reading fabrics, clothes, and accessories on screen allows us to recover queer meaning. A textile approach to film can make new relations appear, not only queer ones on screen, but also novel ones between the viewer and a film. A textile relation to film can allow us to encounter new textures and materialities on screen. A textile relationship to cinema offers a closer and more embodied relationship to film, through which we might reclaim texts.

Such relations become even more imaginative when we apply a spectral approach to textile reading, to imagine queer viewership as a conjuring of queer meaning. In Chapter 2, I argued that spectrality on film has been a textile effect; that the appearance of ghosts on screen has been produced through textiles. I made the connection between a ghost, which is ultimately unrepresentable, and is conjured through clothes, and queer representation which has often been a "representability" (White 1999). As I argued that queerness on screen has often been a ghost sighting, conjured by the queer viewer, I showed that such visions of queerness are often conjured through textiles as well. I insisted on the contradictions of the textile, conjuring that which is visible yet ghostly at once, to explore a queer intimacy that appears on screen mediated by textiles, and all the while obscured by them. It was these complexities produced by textility and spectrality that deepened our understanding of how queer representation might appear.

What has been equally fascinating in this textile exploration was that it was the textility and spectrality of film itself that came into view. In making queerness visible, films privileged textiles, where textility became a governing condition that not only shaped a film's content, but also its form. Cameras moved to follow textiles, centered them in shots or were otherwise edited to follow textile movement, resulting in shot compositions and editing styles that had a quality of textility to them. In edits where film was stitched together to create a woven text, or in films where it was textiles that guided the camera's movement and attention, resulting in a gaze characterized by textility and its movements, film itself became textile-like. That there is a ghostliness to the medium of cinema has long been known (Leeder 2015). Spectrality on screen has been a textile effect, produced through the ghostliness of textiles. Ultimately, it was the spectrality and textility of film that has been one of the revelations of this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I have also argued for a queer reading enacted as a textile reading, because I argued that queerness is often textile. And as a broader application, I argued for a textile relationship to film as a new way of looking—and feeling. A textile viewership of films opens up different ways of relating to film as a sensory experience. A sustained attention to textiles on screen means an attention to everyday materials, which also allows viewers to confront their own materiality and embodiment. The textures that become available to us when we read the textiles of cinema both for what they are, and for what they can conjure, present new understandings. An attention to the materiality of everyday objects on screen translates to a closer relationship to film, and closer to ourselves, where texts become textiles that we could put on our bodies. Just like the queer theory that became domesticated once translated into the language of textiles—*suddenly theory is textile*!—, a textile relationship to films allowed a closer relationship to films. Reading textiles allowed us to see both what's there, and what exists beyond, conjuring new possibilities for cinema.

A textile approach not only acknowledges the rich history of queer textility and pays homage to it, and synthesizes it to allow for meanings that are sensitive to this history. It also acknowledges the textility of queerness, that beyond this historical association between queerness and clothes, there might also be something textile-like to the way queerness appears and is expressed. That our identities are so entangled with the textiles that make them visible, so much so to be inexecrable from them, is testament to this deep connection between queerness and textiles. Queerness is textile. Becoming aware of this history, and taking a textile approach to queer theory and film studies can allow us to extract meanings that are woven within texts.

Adding a spectral aspect to our queer textile reading practice allowed us to understand how textiles might signify, or conjure. Spectrality became the framework through which we might imagine the queer representation that otherwise stays coded, hidden. And surely, it is textiles themselves that allow the visualization of an otherwise unrepresentable queer desire. Spectrality and textiles, when brought together in queer reading practices, bring us closer to understanding the ways in which queer representation, and representation itself, might manifest. Textility and spectrality are revealed to be fundamental conditions of queer representation.

The goal of this project has been to pay attention to textiles, to take their materiality seriously, and to make theory textile, to bring it closer to everyday objects that we put on our bodies. To investigate the history of clothes and their signification is to look at everyday materials and to think extensively about them. It is to look at the clothes of everyone I see on the street, searching for meaning; it is to make extensive textile arguments about almost every film I see to my friends and family. It is to look at the world and try to read it through clothes. One might discover more beneath the surface when looking through, and with textiles.

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In the 18th century, two upper-class Irish women eloped to live together, confounding and fascinating their peers (Steele 2013, 170). Charles Matthews said of them in 1820:

"There is not one point to distinguish them from men...the dressing and powdering of the hair, their well-starched neckcloths, the upper part of their habits...made precisely like men's coats, and regular black beaver man's hats." (Steele 2013, 170).

Of course, there were several points that distinguished them from men: The Ladies of Llangollen loved and lived with each other, and perhaps their masculine clothing served to signify this transgression. However, not everyone believed these two ladies were actually a couple. So, Anne Lister, a wealthy landowner who penned diaries detailing her lesbian relationships (Castle 1993), had to visit the Ladies to confirm for herself.

After her visit, Lister declared that yes, they were lesbians; she had "sensed a 'je ne sais quoi' that convinced her they were lesbians" (Steele 2013, 171). What was this unnamed and spectral quality that was decidedly queer? Was it a certain aura, a way of speaking, a silence uttered too long, a hoping for a world otherwise? Or was it a man's hat worn in defiance, a fabric not sitting quite right, a defiance of textile norms that corresponded to another way of living? Surely, I would argue, there was something textile that convinced Lister of the two women's lesbian identity. What Lister must have seen in the attire of the two women who loved each other was a textile defiance that was undistinguishable from its sexual counterpart.

It is this unnameable, and yet palpable, textility that this project has attempted to decipher and to unravel. Look around: at the shirts, pants, skirts, dresses, coats, hats, scarfs, shoes, the small textile choices and the big ones, that come together to make us who we are, and you too might see it. Ultimately, this project is a call to look more *closely* at the world itself, to pursue a textile relation to our surroundings, that we might cultivate through an engagement with cinema and its textiles.

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