ISBN 9789079269044

SYMPOSIUM 2: SEAM & STAR — MALE ELEGANCE

SYMPOSIUM 2: SEAM & STAR — MALE ELEGANCE

MoMu – Fashion Museum Province of Antwerp

FIGURE 1
Kurt Russell & Silvester Stallone in *Tango & Cash* (1989), directed by Andrey Konchalovsky

6. AGAINST MALE ELEGANCE

Tamar Jeffers McDonald

INTRODUCTION

An early scene in *American Gigolo* (1980) reveals the eponymous hero, Julian (Richard Gere) getting ready for work; his clock reads 12:05. Coupled with the night shots outside his windows and the film's title, the line of work of the central character is highlighted: he is a male escort who works at night, catering to wealthy women. Although Julian's job requires him to attract members of the opposite sex, this scene where he is trying to decide what to wear seems to take much longer than needed; the camera lingers over both Julian and the sartorial details on display, revelling in the array of tantalising trinkets, while showing that Julian enjoys being well-dressed—both for himself as for his prospective clientele. Mirrors abound: in a fluid gesture the camera moves from the little mirror where Julian cuts his cocaine to the mirrored wardrobes by his bed, over to the freestanding mirror showing his fully-dressed reflection. However, the insistence on clothes and the abundance of mirrors are not the only signs of narcissism; the music Julian is playing is of equal significance. The soundtrack features the song by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, "The Love I Saw In You Was Just A Mirage," and that this is intended to be a diegetic sound within the world of the film is underlined by Julian who is singing along to specific lines. Significantly, the lyrics centre on someone who does not really love the singer, but just pretends to; Julian is thus narcissistically singing about himself here, since, while singing along with the line "kisses you only pretended to feel," his lifestyle and affluence —the affluence that allows him to buy expensive Armani clothing like those display—are made possible by feigned passion: he is also the subject of the song. In this scene, Julian is engrossed in finding the right outfit for the evening. He selects four jackets from a stuffed wardrobe and tosses them on his bed; he heaps shirts and ties onto the pile, having already picked out the trousers. Abundance is the key: the shirts and ties—shown with a flourish, lying in orderly lines drawer after drawer—are tossed nonchalantly onto the bed as well. Julian then occupies himself with getting the perfect matching combination of colour and tex-

ture, while giving little nods and pursing his lips to convey his satisfaction with the various arrangements. The clothes provide a spectacle, as does the topless and ripped figure of Gere, but he seems, as he is dancing and posing, if not unaware, at least unconcerned with the camera—unselfconscious. In short, he is totally self-absorbed.

This is how Hollywood often views the man who is interested in clothes and able to match them in interesting colour combinations. He is feminized by his mastery of the supposedly female skill of combining colours, his concern with looking good, his care for appearance. *American Gigolo* takes the analogy further by associating the film's hero not only with what tradition has decreed to be female aesthetic qualities, but also with the traditionally female career of the prostitute. Julian's sartorial elegance and his adept clothing choices thus confirm his fitness for his chosen occupation, and, as the story takes a turn for the worse, his ineptness when required to play a role requiring more intellectual skills. Julian is helpless as the scheme unfolds around him: as a purely physical creature with eyes only for the surface, he is useless when it comes to the intricacies of subterfuge—to the substance underneath the facade. Ultimately, Julian is punished, and perhaps also redeemed, as the narrative takes him from the narcissistic pleasure of dazzling Armani outfits to the sober self-reassessment as exemplified by the denim prison uniform.

This short scene from *American Gigolo* provides a snapshot of the way most Hollywood films—early as well as contemporary ones—seem to feel about the elegant male. It also gives me the opportunity to introduce my central thesis: the majority of films within Hollywood genres distrust male elegance. Male heroes, action heroes—the role models mainstream cinema dishes out—are usually unkempt. Male elegance, by contrast, has been traditionally associated with narcissism, deemed inappropriate for men.

The trope of the woman staring into a mirror, perhaps exemplary of the notion of narcissism, occurs throughout art history. Yet, images of men doing the same are much less numerous, and are usually self-portraits. Thus, for men, the mirror aids both art and work. The male artist can gaze at himself because by looking he can know and reproduce, but the woman just tends to stare: she is immersed in the trappings of cosmetics rather than those of labour. This is exemplified when comparing two films by Norman Rockwell, i.e. *Girl at the Mirror* (1954) and *Triple Self Portrait* (1960). In the former, a young girl pensively contemplates her own reflection as she compares herself unfavourably with Jane Russell; lipstick and a hairbrush are close at hand. By contrast, *Triple Self Portrait* humorously depicts the artist peering at his own reflection while busily committing it to canvas, cross-referencing the mirror reflection with thumbnail sketches, inspired by earlier self-studies by other male artists such as Rembrandt, Picasso, Van Gogh and Dürer. Unlike the girl, he does not seem dismayed by what he sees; although he does not portray himself with glasses on canvas out of vanity, his frown is one of concentration rather than disappointment. If narcissism is associated with the female, then for a man to gaze at himself, to ponder his looks or pay them any heed at all is thus also to feminize him. Throughout Hollywood history this strategy has been used to blemish his character as well as his masculinity—both his identity and sexuality.

In general, Hollywood narratives, from thrillers to westerns to melodramas, favour the action hero whose physical labour shows on his body, while clothing is deemed inessential. The clean, tidy, suave, and elegant man who does not put himself into danger but relies, effetely, on the labour of other men, he—so Hollywood films never cease to warn us—is the man to be wary of: the elegant crime boss, like Jules Amthor (Otto Kruger) from *Murder My Sweet* (1944), the epicene art connoisseur such as Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb) in the film noir *Laura* (1944) and the polished Easterner out in the Wild West—Gene Hackman as John Herod in the contemporary western *The Quick and the Dead* (1995)—are all associated with the decadence supposed to adhere to the fashionably dressed male. Hollywood films make it easy for us to make the right assumptions about their moral failings by contrasting the aesthetically pleasing, smartly outfitted villain with the dusty and grimy but ethically sound hero. Against his suave nemesis, the hero, whether he be Philip Marlowe (Dick Powell), Mark McPherson (Dana Andrews) or gunslinger Cort (Russell Crow), appears crumpled, battered, mud-stained and weary; his griminess bespeaks bravery and heroism.

We are used to seeing male action heroes like Bruce Willis, Nicholas Cage and Sylvester Stallone stripped to their undershirts and covered with scars and blood. The pumped and muscular upper torsos of these men are frequently on display: throughout both the *Rocky* and *Rambo* franchises, Stallone's body is ostentatiously exhibited to the audience: in action, at work, fighting. The vest or tank tee top is the garment of choice for displaying the macho hero: the sleeveless shirt permits a view of the muscular arms as well as allowing those muscles the space to work. The white vest is the ultimate device for showcasing the

hero's activity: it becomes filthy in order to reflect the hard work involved in being an action hero. Grimy with sweat, it testifies to physical labour, while bloodstains—both the hero's as those of others—attest to the physical endurance of the active man. Such movies seek to assure us that our gaze is neither narcissistic nor erotic because we are watching not just a male body, but the very narrative in action.

The following paragraphs will examine Hollywood's stance 'against male elegance.' In conclusion, this essay will explore one genre where, conversely, the sartorially superior male has traditionally been featured as desirable.

Film Costume, Transformation and Male Elegance

Whether we know it or not, as film viewers we are competent at absorbing information and making inferences from costume. Even if not consciously aware that we are 'reading' the characters' clothes for hints about personality traits, we do judge them by what they wear. For example, presented with the entrance of Cameron Diaz onto the scene of the film *The Mask* (1994) in a tight red dress, we already make assumptions about her character: she spells danger. The tight, figure-hugging red dress connotes sexual attractiveness, experience and power, implying she is a femme fatale. While the film goes on to show that Diaz as Tina Carlyle is actually generous and kind, it initially plays with our assumptions because of her style of dress. Similarly, seemingly 'good girl' Peggy dresses demurely and we judge her accordingly; her meek demeanour only proves to be a masquerade when she later reveals to be in league with the villains.

Costume is thus an element within the *mise-en-scène* filmmakers can employ to provide information to viewers, and from which spectators take cues about screen characters. Edith Head, chief costume designer at Paramount during the 1940s and 1950s, called costumes used in this way "story telling wardrobes" (Turim 1984, 8) and she voices the idea that costume delivers character information in an article she wrote for The Hollywood Quarterly in 1946, "A Costume Problem: From Shop to Screen". In it, Head sketches 'before' and 'after' versions of the same sample outfits, the former being the one as it would be worn "in real life," while the latter is its adapted version including character information (44). In commenting on this system, Head acknowledged what was then standard industry practice. However, up to this day costume designers still work according to this idea and often plan schematised wardrobes for characters that follow their own developmental arcs. Moreover, clothing is used to delineate individual characteristics and even demarcates sexual experience (cf. Jeffers in Moseley 2005). Jane Gaines (1990, 180–211) asserts that men's costume is not usually employed in such a way; while male characters have the narratives to illustrate what their personalities are like, as they are usually judged on their actions and decisions, female characters, who are typically positioned with less power and agency, are the ones summed up by their clothes:

> [A] woman's dress and demeanour, much more than a man's, indexes psychology; if costume represents interiority, it is she who is turned inside out on screen. (181)

While I agree that in Hollywood cinema it is often woman's clothing that endows character detail, there are films where the man's psychology is indexed and exposed on the screen through costume. To illustrate this point I will turn to male outfits that have been crafted to make a statement. In doing so, I will examine a trope that runs across genders, genres and time periods in Hollywood cinema: the sartorial transformation (cf. Jeffers 2010).

The transformation scene can be found in Hollywood cinema from the silent days onwards and, most fascinatingly, it has tended to play out along the same tropes and conventions ever since. From early romantic comedies such as *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920) and *It* (1927) to contemporary films, the transformation scene makes use of similar iconography, themes and underlying messages, instructing characters and audiences that wearing fabulous clothes is good, shopping for clothes is good, and that it is always one's duty to look one's best—if female. The transformation moments stage-manage the revelation of a sudden change; the narrative sets up a 'before' and 'after,' allowing us to view a character at both moments and to account for any personality changes, such as increases in confidence and status, through the change in clothes themselves. The usual female transformation, achieved through sartorial alteration and new grooming, thus takes an unattractive unconfident woman and turns her into a groomed, chic and desirable one.

It should be stressed that female sexual allure is traditionally enhanced by the concomitant improvement in appearances, as with former frumps Beth Gordon (*Why Change Your Wife?*, 1920), Charlotte Vale (*Now, Voyager*, 1940) and Loretta Castorini (*Moonstruck*, 1987). Occasionally, the overt sexuality of the woman is toned down, her seamy past erased through the donning of more demure clothing, as with tawdry Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) and hooker Vivien in *Pretty Woman*

(1990). Both playgirls metamorphosed into decent wives through a change in costume and coiffure.

Films relating the improvement in men's exterior are much more rare but can still be found. However, we should note that in these narratives the improvement in elegance is inevitably accompanied by an equal decline in morality, something that is definitely not part of the usual trajectory of transformation for women. In transformation scenes featuring women—as with the mirror paintings—there is an implicit assumption that the exterior form reflects the interior essence; while there may be a disjunction between the woman as she is at present and the woman she wants to see in the mirror, any transformation will inevitably be presented not as one endowing her with new beauty, but rather as a change that brings out the beauty that had always been dormant inside.

In the case of the male transformation on the other hand things are constructed differently: attention to the exterior tends to reflect neglect of interiority. Whereas the female transformation brought inner and outer into alignment, the interior and exterior are connected in a different manner for men: they are still connected but only obliquely so, which means that narratively speaking the elevation of the one necessitates the decline of the other. This might explain why so many male transformations work their magic in the opposite direction than those for women: in order to maintain the hero as likeable, the journey for the man is from neat to messy, stylish to slobby—not the other way around.

Thus even in the transformational moment, a scene enshrining narcissism and self-regard in Hollywood films, the impetus against male elegance is strong: for men, a space allowing characters—and by extension also audiences—to tap into their fantasies of sartorial self-improvement is barred since the inevitable consequence of superior clothing is inferior morality. Overall, male self-improvement signals the decline, not the elevation, of his appearance. Men are thus blocked from enjoying the dream of simple sartorial enhancement fostered by the transformation scene. Films imply that the male hero's attention should be directed elsewhere, as, in a puritanical gesture, movies punish those who allow themselves to be concerned with costume: the tacit injunction against male narcissism and elegance is thus reinvigorated.

I will briefly discuss four films spanning a wide array of Hollywood history attesting to this anti-elegance stance, and which feature a male sartorial transformation. These films employ similar visual and thematic tropes for this purpose.

Aggie Appleby, Maker of Men (1933), an interesting film made before the imposition of the industry-wide Hays Code, contains elements which would soon become too risqué for inclusion in mainstream fare, with a woman entering into serial unmarried sexual relationships without punishment. However, the movie already reveals the contempt for the tidy and elegant man that now typifies Hollywood. The film earnestly suggests that the smartly dressed man is somehow rendered effete and ineffectual by his expensive and tasteful clothes, inferior in his masculinity through his sartorial superiority.

Aggie (Wynne Gibson) is the girlfriend of Red Branahan (William Gargan), a rough brawler; when Red is imprisoned for fighting, she is thrown out of their shared rooms and has nowhere to go except the apartments cleaned by her friend Sibby (Zasu Pitts). Sneaking in to have a nap, she is caught when the rightful inhabitant, Adoniram Schlump (Charles Farrell) returns; he is much too gentlemanly to evict her however, and the pair shares the apartment overnight, platonically. Although from a wealthy family, Schlump has come to New York to make it on his own, and is trying to find a job, though his lack of experience is a handicap, and his meek personality prevents him from inventing or exaggerating his skills. The next morning, Aggie suddenly decides that she can make something of him, and immediately begins with the first necessary step: changing his appearance. First, she makes sure that his eyesight is not too poor so as to render him totally blind without his glasses; reassured on this point, she throws them out the window. Next she criticises his clothes: his neat suit of matching jacket, waistcoat and trousers, dark tie and plain white shirt are too fussy and understated to her liking, so she takes him out to a nearby second-hand clothes shop and has him buy a loud striped shirt and suit. She rumples his hair, gets him to speak out of the corner of his mouth, and renames him "Red Branahan." In this way, Aggie transforms Schlump from an upper-class milquetoast into the replica of her boisterous previous boyfriend. In this new guise and with Aggie's help, Schlump successfully gets a job as a gang boss on a building site. His new masculinity beginning to take effect, he then also successfully makes love to Aggie, and they become a couple. Although Schlump is shown to be deficient in manliness from the outset, the film does not end with unequivocal approval of coarseness and working class machismo. The real Red Branahan is released from prison and goes looking for Aggie. Although she loves him, she renounces her "Schlumpy" because she realises that their backgrounds are too far apart, and she does not want to hold him back. While he reverts to his former class-appropriate girlfriend, she returns

to Red but now rebukes him for his old rough ways of talking and fighting. She will only agree to stay with him if he gets a job and renames himself "Adoniram Schlump".

The film is a compelling variation on the usual *Pygmalion* story, and contains a double inversion: here, the creator is a woman and her creation is male, and, unlike Eliza Doolittle, he is not lifted from a working class origin into a more ethereal middle class; instead he makes the opposite journey. Moreover, Aggie Appleby 'makes' two men, turning the Fauntleroy-like Schlump into a 'real man', while converting her boorish boyfriend Red to more gentlemanly ways. The film therefore suggests a middle-of-the-road kind of masculinity: Adoniram's culture and education mixed with Red's more aggressive personality. However, no such compromise is allowed when it comes to clothing. Schlump's original elegant three-piece suits are not things Aggie wants Red to emulate; instead, both men end up dressed in loud striped suits.

Despite its different historical setting and storyline, *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* (1968) maintains the emphasis on the elegant male as a deviation, as almost monstrous. The central character, a wealthy, uptight Jewish lawyer called Harold Fine (Peter Sellers) wears tight-fitting three-piece suits of black and dark blue, despite living in a hot and swinging Los Angeles. The streets are crowded with people enjoying the summer of love: mini skirts, loons, love beads and flowers abound. Harold seems the only person immune to the siren call of sex and drugs pervading the city; even his business partner Murray and staid fiancée Joyce are willing to cavort with the rest. Only Harold, immaculate in his impermeable armour of dark wool, remains aloof, elegant, or 'square'. Once having tasted the "groovy brownies" made from Alice B.'s recipe however, he swaps his suits for kaftans and lets his hair grow long. Much like Adoniram before him, Harold has a woman to thank for this transformation, a young hippie girl called Nancy (Leigh Taylor-Young). Not only does she make the cannabis-spiked brownies that release Harold from his customary dull rectitude, she also works in a dress shop, which gives her access to the new clothes Harold will need for his transformation. Abandoning Joyce at the altar, Harold runs off and takes up with Nancy. First he lives in his car with her, but then returns to his old apartment with half the population of Venice Beach. It is here that he becomes disillusioned with the hippie lifestyle and Nancy's commitment to a freer form of love than the one he embraces. Under the influence of more and more brownies, his other uninvited flatmates, mother, brother and even law clients start to party; Harold can only stare in misery at the merrymakers. With his long and unkempt hair held back by a band, wearing a torn orange sweater matching his dangling love beads and loose black trousers, Harold is as uncomfortable with his new self as he is disillusioned by the sexual revolution. In the following scene we see him having renounced hippiedom and back to his old sartorial ways. Reunited with Joyce, with his hair neatly trimmed and wearing a suit, a swift montage shows Harold reverted to his previous way of life. We are taken back as far as his wedding ceremony. Was everything a hallucination, a fantasy or dream? The wedding guests are all dressed the same as before, while Harold is wearing his morning suit, and the bride walking down the aisle is dressed in the same gown. Only Joyce's wary grimace as she approaches him indicates that the events of the last half hour actually did take place within the diegetic world of the film. She expects him to bolt again, and he does, storming out of the hotel. Tearing off his restraining clothes, he calls out and takes off heaven knows where.

While *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* suggests that the hippie movement may not be the answer to Harold's problems and pokes fun at his trippy garb—giant fur coat, salwar kameez and top hat—it exposes his old world, the world of suits and law offices, of the passionless couplings with Joyce on their nights out, as infinitely worse. The elegance of his clothes in the first part of the film shows Harold as an uptight square, and in the film's world, which rather self-consciously embraces a swinging carefree attitude, this is a much more heinous crime than the freeloading and emotional immaturity that is representative of the hippie lifestyle. Although neither the uptight, affluent middle class Jewish culture to which he naturally belongs nor the counterculture that he temporarily espoused turn out to satisfy him, Harold's final onscreen act, as he is tearing through Los Angeles on the run from his own life, is to start removing the clothes associated with his sedate former self. While he may not be going back to wearing ankhs and velvet loons, he is still in essence rejecting elegance. His desperate flight is somehow valiant and valorised by the film, with kinesis winning out over his former uptight stasis. The implication seems clear: suits are elegant, and elegant is immobilising, unmanly even. Though he may be a rascal by leaving Joyce at the altar again, he is at least bursting out of the static shell that was unmanning him.

In a similar vein, the Sylvester Stallone vehicle *Tango & Cash* (1989) regards male elegance as an effete problem, as a restraining stasis from which real men must break free. Although it appears to be a straightforward action buddy pic, it is so bent on

using costume as a defining trope throughout its narrative that it warrants a closer look. At first, the film teases the viewer by subverting the usual association of Stallone as the ultimate muscled hero; universally known for his roles as *Rocky*, *Rambo* and a host of other topless heroes, Stallone begins this film elegantly dressed in a grey suit, white shirt and dark tie. He also wears glasses. His stylishness is associated with an uncharacteristic tranquillity, which links him thematically to Schlump and to Harold in their demeanour prior to their transformation. At the start of the film, Stallone, playing detective Ray Tango, attempts to stop a truck loaded with drugs; although he swiftly races past the truck in his car, when stopping the vehicle the action seems to come to a halt too: instead of duking it out with the men driving the truck, Tango takes steady aim with his handgun and shoots through the windscreen with minimal movement. The truck slams on its brakes and crashes, only to stop inches away from Tango, who is calmly waiting. As the bad guys sail through the windscreen Tango stays still, dangles his handcuffs in front of them, asking, "Do you like jewellery?"

This association of Tango and the sartorial, from suits to accessories, continues throughout the entire film. His sole rival for top status within the police ranks, Cash, dismisses him as "Armani with a badge", distracts him during a case by complimenting him on his tie, and later tells a friend that Tango is upset because "he misses his wardrobe". Other policemen also notice Tango's fashion expertise, calling out "nice suit!" and "nice work!" Although Tango is as skilled in police work as he is in dressing, as these paired comments suggest, he is presented as excessively preoccupied with his appearance and in need of a lesson in order to realise what a real man should look like and care about. Gabe Cash (Kurt Russell) is the man who can teach him those lessons, and the film sets up a number of obvious contrasts between the two. Although Chris Holmlund (1993) uses the quip "Stallone clones" to refer to the men who star alongside the actor, it must be stressed that in *Tango & Cash* it is Cash who sets the sartorial stakes: while the film does turn the two into doppelgangers at certain points, it is Tango who has had to change his outfits.

Cash is introduced directly after Tango. Like Tango he arrives on the scene in a moving car, but unlike his counterpart he exudes motion: he leaps from the roadster, trots up flights of stairs and traverses hallways. Contrasted with the static Tango through his incessant movement, Russell's character is also defined by his clothes. While Tango wears an impeccable suit, shirt and tie, with expensive looking shoes, Cash is dressed in jeans, a slouchy tee shirt and a canvas jacket and suede boots—in short, his whole outfit cries out 'casual' and 'uncaring.' Interestingly, Cash himself seems aware of the differences in wardrobe; upon seeing a newspaper photograph of Tango, he sneers that he is merely a designer suit with a police badge. Turning the paper over and seeing his own picture, he laughs delightedly, then gazes at himself in the full-length mirror on a closet door. He draws himself up a little, and pauses, smiling contently at his reflection. However, his narcissism is instantly reprimanded with violence, as the close-up of Cash's grinning face is ruptured by the sudden shattering of the mirror by a bullet. A criminal hiding in Cash's closet bursts out and shoots him. Cash was caught out in a moment of quiet enjoyment of his own looks, much like Tango's static vanity, and was punished by an attempt on his life. Luckily, Cash always wears a bulletproof vest under his slouchy tee shirts, so he lives to fight another day.

The film has thus established that male narcissism is dangerous; the repose allowing for the admiration of one's reflection makes one vulnerable. Just two scenes into the film, *Tango & Cash* has already instituted several of its major themes and tropes: the vulnerability attendant on mirrors and their narcissistic users, the polarisation between Tango, the figure of stillness, and Cash, who gives body to movement, as well as their radically opposed dress style. It should also be noted that the thugs Tango apprehended who were driving the drug truck are dressed, much like Cash's assailant and Cash himself, in casual shirts and slacks; the big bosses who run the city's drug business, by contrast, are, like Tango, always pictured in immaculate suits. From the outset the film thus suggests that the elegant and expensive garments that are so out of character for Stallone are really not right for him; we are used to seeing him bloody and sweaty, with muscles tense. This film clearly relies on our pre-existing knowledge of Stallone's star persona to make us feel ill at ease with his outfits. This ingrained assumption that the star belongs in dirty vests plays upon the prejudice that real men, manly men, do not dress this way, do not care about their clothes and appearance, and never "miss their wardrobes."

The narrative thus proceeds to make Tango aware of this. This is achieved through the plots of the bad guys in suits who decide to deal the two cops a blow by dishonouring their reputation. As the villains spring their trap, the film again hints at the danger associated with mirrors. The two cops arrive separately at a building where a drug deal is supposedly scheduled. Tango sees the assumed perpetrator, a man with a ponytail, and follows him

into an abandoned building. Simultaneously, Cash arrives at the other end of the building and makes his way in. As Tango tracks Ponytail, he passes a huge tarnished mirror throwing back his reflection; shying away into the shadows, Tango waits until the man has passed; he then continues, and the camera records his reflection disappearing down one of the corridors at the same time as Cash appears, coming down the stairs in front of the mirror. With both men now caught in the mirror's frame, the trap is in place. Although not using the mirror to look at themselves, they ended up making themselves vulnerable and are framed for murder.

During their arrest and prosecution, Tango and Cash are again contrasted through their behaviour and reactions, with the former remaining rational, polite and acquiescent. Called upon to make a statement to the court, he apologises for bringing the department into disrepute. Cash behaves completely different. He is outraged by this travesty and their arrests; his statement to the court culminates with his shouting that the whole case "fucking sucks." This is met with a round of applause from the courtroom audience. The film's message is clear: politeness, patience and rational responses are not manly; when faced with oppression, the right thing to do is to shout, protest and swear. Cash's approach to clothes is mirrored by his approach to language as well as his behaviour: he represents spontaneity, freedom and a certain level of macho aggression. Letting out his anger is the right thing to do; Tango unwittingly becomes complicit with his enemies by not venting his anger.

The film thus frowns upon elegance in language as well as clothing. Tango still has not learnt this lesson, so the next stage of his education is to force him out of his customary couture and clothe him into the bright orange jumpsuit of a transported criminal. Taken to prison, Cash and Tango both wear identical jumpsuits; arriving, they have to strip before their shower and as such, they are even more clearly reduced to a level of sartorial equivalence—even Tango's customary spectacles are removed. After their shower, both men are ordered to put on their prison uniforms: a plain tee shirt under a blue denim over-shirt, and dark trousers. They will be wearing this standardised wardrobe for quite some time, the only difference between them being the skimpiness of the tee once the denim shirt is removed for work or fighting. The two seem to take turns sporting the most muscle-revealing apparel; finally both end up in dirty and bloodstained vests.

Eventually the two escape and head off in different directions to minimise the risk of recapture. Tellingly, Cash goes

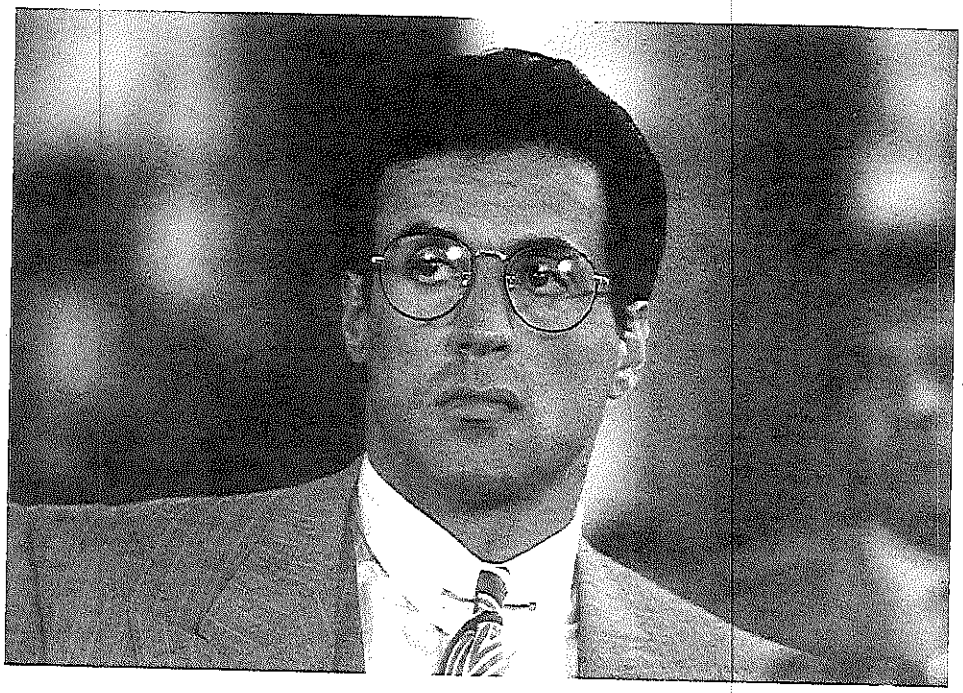

FIGURE 2
Silvester Stallone in *Tango & Cash* (1989), directed by Andrey Konchalovsky

straight to visit a police colleague to borrow weapons and fresh—if grimy—clothes. Tango on the other hand seems to have learnt at last that clothes do not make the man: he does not try to change out of his prison-issue vest and trousers before getting to the bottom of the mystery about who framed them. Tango's change of outfit occurs by chance and was not planned: when he makes a phone call in a garage he spots the attendant's shirt and borrows it. It is a milestone in the movie: he has learnt his lesson about his real job and simultaneously about the value of male clothing. Clothes are not meant for self-glorification or enhancement but hard work.

When he finally changes his clothes for the last time in the film and in what first appears to be a return to his old ways, Tango dons a smart dark blue suit. However, he has chosen a more relaxed cut and fit, and pairs the suit with a more casual short-sleeved shirt that does not hamper his movements when fighting. Together with Cash and armed with this more practical outfit and the knowledge of the identity of the arch-villain, Tango goes out for revenge for having his career put in disrepute. In the final scenes the pair is again faced with the danger and vulnerability exuding from mirrors; the archenemy lies in wait in a mirrored room, reflecting multiple images of himself to the policemen. Now however, both Tango and Cash have learned all about vulnerability and male vanity. They look into the mirror but not to see themselves: they look at the villain for telltale signs that will distinguish the real him from his reflection. While both find different indications—Cash sees where a monogram on the villain's clothing is reversed, Tango notices that his ring is on the wrong hand—they use the same method to work out and then shoot the man and not one of his manifold likenesses. When mirrors are used correctly, that is to say, when they point to true identity rather than pander to one's own vanity, they are no longer dangerous as they do not reflect male narcissism.

Although the final image of the film shows the pair joining hands in triumph in a newspaper photo showing Tango in suit and tie, the joint power salute requires a more relaxed fit; unlike his former uptight, static and immaculate self, Tango is now content with his wrinkled sleeves, as an index of kinesis. Tango has thus learned to moderate his obsession with designer clothing and flawless style, while Cash has also slightly moderated his usual messy appearance by putting on a smartish jacket—at least for the photograph. The narrative takes Stallone's character on a journey away from his unaccustomed elegance back to his familiar blood-stained action vest; it simultaneously gives him a pal,

a buddy, whose personal style of clothing and demeanour are a guide to what real men should look like.

Finally, a more recent example of Hollywood's habitual distrust of the elegant man can be found in the contemporary film *The Shape of Things* (2003), directed by Neil Labute and based on his own play. This version of the male transformation story returns the responsibility for the metamorphosis back into the hands of a woman, much like the two films discussed. However, the movie adds misogyny into the mix as it heavily underlines that the enforced sartorial elevation of the male is matched by moral decline. The woman is therefore responsible for the ethical degeneration of the inherently sweet character played by Paul Rudd; we can chart his downfall through his incrementally improved appearance.

Rudd plays Adam, a nerdy student who has a part-time job in an art gallery to help pay his bills. His appearance connotes character. Accordingly, we first meet him with heavy glasses, unkempt hair, layers of clothing and some extra weight: we know he is supposed to be a nice loser. He meets the iconoclastic Evelyn (Rachel Weisz) who helps him transform, first losing the glasses and his indoor student pallor, getting his hair styled as well as a new wardrobe, and advising him to get a nose job, lose weight and spike his hair. As she documents these outer improvements, Evelyn also notes that Adam, having gained confidence, is now able to fulfil a crush he has had for years on his best friend's girlfriend. He kisses her passionately, lies about it both to Evelyn and his best friend, while not telling the truth about his plastic surgery. Evelyn accepts that Adam's changes have made him "cuter and sneakier"—and in the end Adam and the audience discover it is because her entire relationship with him has merely been a means to an end. He was her MA project, as she demonstrates in a public 'viewing': his refashioning and to see just how far she could push him to change, sartorially, physically, and morally, was the whole point.

Adam is publicly humiliated for believing he ever had a relationship with Evelyn but also for letting her alter both his exterior and interior. While the film maintains its theatrical roots through its stagy acting and talky feel, it does chime with Hollywood's overall distrust of men who take their appearance seriously. It is the reverse movement of the usual trajectory in female-centred transformation film, as with, for example, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), where heroine Andy also capitulates to the pressure to change. While her new glamour may be miti-

gated at the end of the film, it is not abandoned altogether. The movie's lesson is to show that the 'before,' pre-glamour Andy who did not care about her looks was as wrong as Andy the fashionista, obsessed as she is with labels. What is needed is not a reversion to her former state but the integration of the two. The film ends with an Andy who looks slender, with elegant hair, high heels and wearing jewellery, but an Andy who also still wears jeans and a jacket. The transformed female's life is improved by her newly gained access to sartorial success; but the man who increases in elegance ends his life in ruins.

The last trope to tackle operates within all four of these male transformation films, namely the trope of spectacles. This is equally a recurrent motif in those narratives of female 'refitting,' and has in fact become one of the most well-established signs of transformation, to the point that films mock it as a cliché. *Not Another Teen Movie* (2001) revisits the transformation of its heroine, and harks back to the characters of *She's All That* (1999) with almost clinical precision, right down to the moment where the young girl, acting as fairy godmother, removes the heroine's heavy glasses to reveal a beautiful face. However, earlier films had already made fun of the convention. *That Touch of Mink* (1962), a Doris Day and Cary Grant feature, contains a moment where one character, played by Gig Young, encourages his secretary to let down her pinned-up hair and to take off her glasses. Unlike the heroines of the two other films and the above-mentioned male heroes however, she really cannot see without them. With her messy hair clumped around her shoulders, she peers wildly at her boss until he hurriedly shoves the spectacles back at her and flees.

In the four films considered above, glasses are used in two different ways. For Adoniram Schlump and Adam, glasses are disposable; it stands as an almost affected sign of the intellectual and effete traits of their characters. The spectacles are thus removed to reveal the rougher, tougher, and more ruthless men they become. However, in the case of Harold Fine and Ray Tango, the glasses remain a fixture of the man's wardrobe, while other items of clothing come and go. These two films seem to use glasses differently; although the habitual use of spectacles in the transformation film is to serve as a sign that their wearer will eventually remove them to become glamorous in the process, *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* and *Tango & Cash* eschew this procedure and allow their leading males to keep their glasses. It might prove interesting to speculate why this is so. With Harold, the decision might have been for comic value, as there is something particularly droll about Peter Sellers in full hippie garb, love beads, fur coat, and headband while wearing heavy black-framed glasses: the incongruity provokes a smile. With Tango, however, the glasses are there to alert the viewer to a different kind of Stallone. Although he switches from smart three piece suits to his usual action muscle vest, the glasses remain with him throughout the film, even at moments when they would probably be an impediment to his fighting or other movements. While other theorists (Holmlund 1993) discard the film as just another conservative star vehicle, I think *Tango & Cash* reveals the desire of someone wishing to extend his range, as Stallone would try more radically a few years later with *Oscar* (1991), a Mafioso comedy, and *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* (1992), a police-cum-smothering mother pic. Moving away from his monolithic virile persona, Stallone attempts to subject his roles to a transformation. Unfortunately, since it is a movement in the opposite direction from the one Tango undergoes, it has proven more difficult, although *Cop Land* (1997) illustrated that the actor could indeed perform in different territory.

A Conclusion and an Anomaly

From the 1930s onwards, mainstream Hollywood cinema has been suspicious of the man who spends too much time grooming and pondering what to wear. In most genres the elegant man is dubious: he is either a phoney or a villain. However, there has always been one genre where it is deemed acceptable for the hero to be elegantly and beautifully dressed: the romantic comedy. It can be posited that this is the case because the hero is not required to exert physical labour: witty banter is his trade, and the dialogue is the driving force of the narrative. For witticisms and innuendo, a smart suit is never a hindrance.

Elegance and inertia are usually coupled, especially in comedies from the 1930s, such as *The Awful Truth* (1937), which focuses on life amongst the rich and jobless, as well as the glossy sex comedies from the 1950s where heroes and heroines do have jobs but glamorous ones requiring little physical labour. In such films, the central characters are advertising execs and interior designers, and live in a Manhattan constructed out of back-projections and matte shots, like *Pillow Talk* (1959) and its unofficial sequel *Lover Come Back* (1961). In these circumstances the hero's labour is suitably cerebral, which entails that ele-

gance does not constitute a disadvantage. By contrast, the clothes and general sartorial splendour of the hero of the romantic comedy are, in combination with his wit, chief in the arsenal in the battle with his female adversary.

Generally speaking, elegantly dressed men or women are easy targets for slapstick in comedies. By contrast, romantic comedies, and especially during the screwball and sex comedy eras, feature male elegance as character enhancing rather than detrimental. In all Cary Grant films for instance, his elegance augments his desirability in the female lead's eyes. Both *Indiscreet* (1958) and *That Touch of Mink* (1962) contain almost identical scenes where the first sight of the man, handsome and elegant as he is in his well-cut suit, makes the lead women of the films, Ingrid Bergman and Doris Day respectively, catch their breath and stare in awe.

Let us instead focus our attention on Rock Hudson, a star who offers a smaller and more manageable case study. From the start of his career in the early 1950s and possibly because of his height and proportions, Hudson had been cast in a series of westerns. After that, three popular Douglas Sirk family melodramas, namely *Magnificent Obsession* (1954), *All that Heaven Allows* (1955) and *Written On The Wind* (1956) ensued. These films all cemented his star persona as the strong silent type, a symbol of reassuring grandeur and immobility, about whom Sirk once observed: "In melodrama, it's of advantage to have one immovable character against which you can put your more split ones" (Meyer 1991, 271).

His appearance in *Pillow Talk* (1959) opposite Doris Day thus did more than add comedy to his range and remake Hudson's persona into the loveable Lothario. For the first time, it allowed him to be an elegantly dressed lead man. Indeed, these sex comedies make no bones about his attire as essential to his seductiveness. The elegance of the hero of the romantic comedy is equivalent to his position within what David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have called the "hierarchy of knowledge" (2003, 96) in Hollywood cinema. In this genre, a ruse concerning identity is used against the heroine, with the hero hiding his true self behind a mask of different characteristics and personas. The audience is aware of this masquerade, so both the hero and viewer rank higher in the "hierarchy of knowledge" than the woman. In *Pillow Talk* (1959), *Lover Come Back* (1961) and *A Very Special Favour* (1964), Hudson knows more than the women he is pitted against, and his knowledge concerning plot is linked to his knowledge of male elegance, and his ability to manipulate his appearance to suit the circumstances of his lies. He operates in disguise—and sometimes this disguise is literally sartorial.

In *Pillow Talk* (1959), Brad Allen, played by Rock, is initially fighting with Jan Morrow (Doris Day) over their shared party line telephone: the framing of shots, including the witty use of split screen, highlights their mutual antipathy—until their eyes meet that is. Brad then masquerades as a shy Texan millionaire named 'Rex Stetson,' so that he can wine, dine and woo Jan. Her reaction when meeting this tall, handsome and beautifully elegant man is the same as the other women in the film: swooning excitement. As Jan remarks to herself: "You know, you've gone out with a lot of men in your time but this, this is the jackpot." Until she finds out his real identity, Jan's enthusiasm for Rex is not explicitly geared to his wardrobe. Yet, his elegant apparel is vital to Brad's urbane playboy persona, and his appearance makes him superior to, and the envy of all other males, who are deficient in height, stature and style when compared to him.

In *A Very Special Favour* (1964) Hudson's character is not only established as the elegant alternative to all other men in the film, he is also more elegant than the lead woman, Leslie Caron, even though the film acknowledges that she is French, and should therefore know all about couture. Even in the bedroom, Hudson's character remains elegant while Caron's is simply dishevelled, which definitely underscores his superior position within the film's hierarchy of knowledge: he knows that they have not had sex, whereas she is unable to remember anything and fears they may have.

However, it is *Lover Come Back* (1961) that makes the most of the trope of Hudson's elegance. His character Jerry Webster, advertising executive and dashing man of the world, is presented as a super-male equipped with cunning, arrogance and a fabulous wardrobe. The film highlights that this is part of his charm, while simultaneously digging at the conventions of the transformation film. Webster has been on a moose-hunting trip with his friend and boss Peter Ramsay. This enabled him to relax, unwind and let his beard grow. Summoned back to town through a plot twist, he meets his nemesis, Carol Templeton (Doris Day) whilst he is still somewhat shaggy. Realising who she is, Jerry allows her to mistake him for the reclusive Nobel Prize winning scientist Dr Linus Tyler. Carol takes 'Linus' under her care and shows him around Manhattan, dining and wining him, taking him to the races and the beach, and slowly falling for this seemingly awkward and inexperienced man, despite his desperate need to

socialise. To torment the chic Carol even further, Jerry picks an appropriately awful suit for his first dinner date with her, and finds a hideous affair in grey nubby fabric with bobbles of white, red, orange and blue woven into the mix. This, plus his beard, keeps her at a distance, even though Carol politely tries to feign her real feelings about his appearance:

> 'LINUS' — You hate this suit, don't you?
> CAROL — Oh no! No, of course not, it's very... colourful.
> ...
> CAROL — Um... Linus?
> 'LINUS' — Yes?
> CAROL — How long have you had that beard?
> 'LINUS' — Don't you like it?
> CAROL — Oh yes I do. It's very impressive.
> Makes you look so distinguished. So intellectual.
> So handsome... It's magnificent.
> 'LINUS' — You'd like me to get rid of it.
> CAROL — Would you?!

While within the diegesis Jerry's ruse to masquerade as a hairy and sartorially-challenged scientist is designed to ensure Carol wastes an exorbitant amount of her expense account on him, on a larger level it also enables the film to poke fun at the trope of transformation. With a newly acquired wardrobe and his beard removed, 'Linus' is revealed as an elegant and handsome man, or, as a woman remarks at the barber's where he gets his shave, emerging from swathes of towels, "a real doll without the beard!" The film mocks the transformation convention decreeing that simple cosmetic alterations affect not only the way the transformee looks, but also the way others relate to him: not only is it the first time Carol has thought of him as handsome, but, more significantly, as the camera lingers over her delighted face with twinkly music playing in the background, it also intimates that this is the first time she has thought of him romantically. Unfortunately for Carol, this is just another one of Jerry's machinations with a view to cause her downfall. The transformation is false: there is no connection between Jerry's exterior changes and his state of mind. Masquerading as Linus, he fails to learn to be a better, kinder, and gentler man in the same way Brad did in *Pillow Talk* (1959). Jerry's transformation returns him to his real self, and reaffirms the dominance of his manipulative side.

Although Jerry does not have to don that dreadful suit again or stop shaving, the film punishes him in other ways: by making him fall in love with Carol at the moment she rejects him, and, in a rather misogynistic twist, by eventually subjugating him to her in the marriage that closes the narrative. Given that the hero of romantic comedies is permitted to sport elegant clothing, Jerry's domestication cannot be seen as a consequence of and punishment for wearing sophisticated clothing; the romcom has always been the outpost genre where a hero is allowed to look fabulous in a suit. Setting aside this genre however, the standard practice in Hollywood is to have the man eschew finery if he is a heroic male: *Die Hard*'s John McClane (1988), Rambo, and Cameron Poe in *Con Air* (1997) all triumph in dirty vests. The transformation film underlines this tendency, reversing the trope's valence as it ope-rates for women, so that, for the man, an enhancement of sartorial splendour entails a decline in character and moral value. Apart from the romcom, Hollywood disapproves of the elegant male and delights in besmirching him.

Bibliography

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Gaines, Jane. 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress tells the Woman's Story'. In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, edited by Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, 180-211. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

Head, Edith. 'A Costume Problem: From Shop To Screen'. In *The Hollywood Quarterly 2*, no. 1 (1946): 44-44 [sic].

Holmlund, Chris. 'Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade: The 'Mature' Stallone and the Stallone Clone'. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 213–29. London: Routledge, 1993.

Jeffers McDonald, Tamar. 'Under All Those Dirndls: *Pillow Talk*'s Repackaging of Doris Day'. In *Fashioning Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, edited by Rachel Moseley, 50–61. London: British Film Institute, 2005.

_____. *Hollywood Catwalk: Costume and Transformation in Mainstream Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010.

Meyer, Richard. 'Rock Hudson's Body'. In *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, edited by Diana Fuss, 259–88. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Turim, Maureen. 'Designing Women: The Emergence of the New Sweetheart Line'. In *Wide Angle 6*, no. 2 (1984): 4–11.

Filmography

Aggie Appleby, Maker of Men, VHS. Directed by Mark Sandrich, 1933, Atlanta, GA: Turner Home Entertainment, 1992.

All That Heaven Allows, DVD. Directed by Douglas Sirk, 1955, New York, NY: Criterion Collection, 2004.

American Gigolo, DVD. Directed by Paul Schrader, 1980, London, UK: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2001.

Awful Truth, The, DVD. Directed by Leo McCarey, 1937, London, UK: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2003.

Con Air, DVD. Directed by Simon West, 1997, Burbank, CA: Touchstone Home Video, 2006.

Cop Land, DVD. Directed by James Mangold, 1997, Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004.

Devil Wears Prada, The, DVD. Directed by David Frankel, 2006 Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006.

Die Hard, DVD. Directed by John McTiernan, 1988, Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000.

First Blood, DVD. Directed by Ted Kotcheff, 1982, London, UK: Optimum Home Entertainment, 2008.

I Love You, Alice B. Toklas, DVD. Directed by Hy Averback, 1968, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

Indiscreet, DVD. Directed by Stanley Donen, 1958, London, UK: Universal Pictures UK, 2001.

It, DVD. Directed by Clarence G. Badger, 1927, New York, NY: Kino International, 2001.

Laura, DVD. Directed by Otto Preminger, 1944, Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005.

Little Shop of Horrors, DVD. Directed by Frank Oz, 1986, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2000.

Lover Come Back, DVD. Directed by Delbert Mann, 1961, London UK: Universal Pictures UK, 2006.

Magnificent Obsession, DVD. Directed by Douglas Sirk, 1954, London, UK: Universal Pictures UK, 2008.

Mask, The, DVD. Directed by Chuck Russell, 1994, London, UK: Entertainment in Video, 2005.

Moonstruck, DVD. Directed by Norman Jewison, 1987, Los Angeles, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2006.

Murder My Sweet, DVD. Directed by Edward Dmytryk, 1944, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

Not Another Teen Movie, DVD. Directed by Joel Gallen, 2001, London, UK: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.

Now, Voyager, DVD. Directed by Irving Rapper, 1940, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005.

Oscar, DVD. Directed by John Landis, 1991, Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2005.

Pillow Talk, DVD. Directed by Michael Gordon, 1959, London, UK: Universal Pictures UK, 2006.

Pretty Woman, DVD. Directed by Garry Marshall, 1990, Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2009.

Quick And The Dead, The, DVD. Directed by Sam Raimi, 1995, London, UK: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006.

Shape of Things, The, DVD. Directed by Neil Labute, 2003, London, UK: Momentum Pictures, 2004.

She's All That, DVD. Directed by Robert Iscove, 1999, London, UK: Cinema Club, 2003.

Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot, DVD. Directed by Roger Spottiswoode, 1992, Los Angeles, CA: Universal Studios, 2003.

Tango & Cash, DVD. Directed by Andrey Konchalovsky, 1989, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

That Touch Of Mink, DVD. Directed by Delbert Mann, 1962, London, UK: Universal Pictures UK, 2004.

Very Special Favour, A, DVD. Directed by Michael Gordon, 1964, Los Angeles, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006.

Why Change Your Wife?, DVD. Directed by Cecil B. deMille, 1920, Los Angeles, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005.

Written On The Wind, DVD. Directed by Douglas Sirk, 1956, New York, NY: Criterion Collection, 2004.