

***SHOE REELS: THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF FOOTWEAR IN FILM*, (EDS.)
ELIZABETH EZRA AND CATHERINE WHEATLEY (2020)**

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Ignoring the age-old English idiom ‘don’t judge a book by its cover’, I was initially drawn to Elizabeth Ezra and Catherine Wheatley’s anthology *Shoe Reels: The History and Philosophy of Footwear in Film* by the jacket’s iconic image. The unmistakable close up, taken from *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming 1939), captures an ankle socked Dorothy Gale wearing the emblematic ruby slippers. She is blissfully unaware of the Wicked Witch of the West’s gnarly fingers sinisterly creeping towards her feet, lurking in anticipation, ready to snatch the magic shoes. Yet this is no ‘smoke and mirrors’ cover, but the compelling binding for a collection of works that push the boundaries of film, fashion, and performance studies.

Part of the film and fashions series for Edinburgh University Press (convened by series editor Pamela Church Gibson), Ezra and Wheatley’s edited text is crammed with contributions from notable scholars of film and media histories, philosophy, and cultural studies. Their book considers footwear, primarily through the medium of film, as signifiers of national identity, gender performance, individuality, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, along with the overtrodden subjects of shoes, ‘as tools of seduction’ and ‘commodity fetishism’. The overarching chapter discussions build on the contexts of aesthetics, symbolism and narrative (Ezra and Wheatley 2020: 1). There is a lack of the costume design practitioners’ voice throughout the text, however, some appeasement for this underrepresentation is provided by an insightful contribution from V&A Museum curator Keith Lodwick. Lodwick shares recollections of creating the epic *Hollywood Costume* exhibition in 2012 with co-senior guest curator and renowned costume designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis. Both Lodwick’s and Nadoolman Landis’s careful reflections of the designers’ process and the collaboration between director, producer, production team, and actors is a necessary and important tool in any study of film costume, yet disappointingly is occasionally overlooked in this anthology.

Structured on a conventional chapter framework that is well suited to such an expansive work, each of the twenty individual essays presents convincing, complex arguments that ‘think with shoes, and about shoes, through films unique focus’ (Ezra and Wheatley 2020: 12) and span the time period from cinema’s pre- First World War origins to the early twenty-first century. There is an emphasis on the literal and metaphorical representation in the wearing of shoes rather than their materiality, which is a dominant approach in fashion studies. This leads to a disconnect between object-based research, that considers the bodily imprint in the garment and on the wearer, and symbolic image-based analysis found in visual communication scholarship, which is left mostly unresolved. However, Ezra and Wheatley quote anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1986: 5) stating that ‘things-in-motion [...]

illuminate their human and social context', to evidence that shoes are extremely personal objects that define identities and 'they are more than any other garment one that manipulates a body into performing' (Ezra and Wheatley 2020: 5) both the fiction and reality of movement. This vestibular experience of wearing shoes is followed by Wheatley in the final chapter 'Isabelle's espadrilles', and will be discussed later.

There is an informal format to the book that gathers the essays under the loose descriptors of global film production pre- First World War, the classical era, and post 1960s. The first chapters focus on four silent films from France, Italy and the USA. Margaret C Flinn delves into 'Max's stylish shoes', worn in Max Linder's 1912 film, *Max lance la mode* (*Max Sets the Style*); Malgorzata Bugaj considers footwear worn in Marcel Fabre's 1914 *Amor Pedestre*, and Pamela Hutchinson, presents 'An intensive study of -feet' that focuses on the shoes in two Lois Webber films, *Shoes* (1916) and *The Blot* (1921). Each of these essays examine shoes as representative of social status and provoke discussions on the rights of women in an era of burgeoning consumer culture.

The following three chapters focus on films from the early decades of sound. Each draw on the enduring shoe metaphors presented within Fleming's (1939) *The Wizard of Oz*, lauded as a 'cultural signpost in American literature, film and popular culture' (66). Elizabeth Ezra's, 'Magic shoes' contemplates shoes 'as the stuff of fairy tales and fantasy', yet they reveal real world concerns (13), as presented in the slippers worn by characters Dorothy, Cinderella and Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City 2* (King 2010). She notes that there are both 'right shoes and wrong shoes', that are 'symbolic of peoples positions in social order; [...] to represent monogamy, class and even sexual preference- [...] may appear to offer fantasies of social mobility, but ultimately re-enforce traditional hierarchies and structures of exclusion' (13). Ezra focuses on commodity power trades to conclude that 'the value of Dorothy's ruby slippers is in part by the law of supply and demand' (54) and symbolises the capital system. Keith Lodwick's account, 'The ruby slippers at the V&A: an odyssey', continues to follow Dorothy's slippers, this time tracking the journey of the shoes from the USA to London for the *Hollywood Costume* exhibition. Lodwick exemplifies the importance of storytelling in conveying the meanings embedded within the ruby slippers and how their sequined-ness was literally a reflector of desire. He quotes an exhibition press release, when he states 'the ruby slippers transcend Hollywood costume design and have the power to transport us to the limits of our imagination. These precious shoes exemplify the best of cinema storytelling because they evoke memory and emotion' (66). Ian Christie's chapter 'Blood-red shoes?' makes links between Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz*, and Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's fairy tale inspired dance 1948 movie *The Red Shoes* to argue that Dorothy's shoes are a symbol of domesticity- in comparison to the bloody ballet that 'ultimately rejects domesticity'(13). Christie's analogies, however, are somewhat flawed, as the original shoes of Oz, as described in L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel, were silver, and changed to red by screenwriter Noel Langley for filmic aesthetic benefit. What flows through these three chapters are ideas of agency embedded in Dorothy's shoes and Ellen Sampson's observation that the 'ruby slippers' become a literal agent of life and death (Sampson 2020: 54).

Further chapters in this book investigate the classical era Hollywood film (1910-1960), building on the storytelling narrative. Kelli Fuery takes a philosophical direction in her astute analysis of shoes worn in *Sullivan's Travels* (Surges 1941), drawing on French philosopher

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to show how shoes allow characters to move between binary states- inside/outside, wealth/poverty, guilt/ innocence. Anna Salzberg closely reads the fashion show sequence in *How to Marry a Millionaire* (Negulesco 1953) and observes, poetically, how Lucite transparent heels provide a window through the film's visual spectacle and beyond. In a diversion from fictional film, Christopher Holliday's chapter unwinds animation and the cartoon. The importance of this entertainment medium in the film goes experience during the classical period goes unrecognised, however, this does not distract from the main purpose of this chapter. Holliday crucially brings attention to the animated shoes of the faceless African American housemaid, who appears in several of the cat and mouse duo *Tom and Jerry* short films. Holliday chooses to focus on one animation, 'Mammy Two-Shoes', to consider how shoes as objects 'can both describe characters and be characters in their own right' (14).

Eugenia Paulicelli's chapter is of particular interest to the fashion historian as she explores the creations of shoe designer Salvatore Ferragamo. Ferragamo worked closely with Hollywood studios between 1915 and 1927, utilizing film as a platform for his designs. Paulicelli astutely reflects on the reciprocal relationship between film stars, fashion designers and costume designers, and brings attention to the symbiotic relationship of the production crew in achieving a desired aesthetic. Yet this is not the core of her research. Her central argument is shoes as mirrors of social mobility, whilst the following chapter by Robert Rushing and Louise Wallenberg focus on footwear as embedded with gender tropes that give rise to 'the construction of multiple identities' (14). Continuing through the chapters, shoes in a geopolitical context and as tools of power and resistance dominate the conversation. Rachael Langford's exploration of footwear considers three African films on how both the shod and bare foot can convey power dynamics, and Kate Taylor-Jones's chapter unravels shoe wearing in East Asia cinema to 'highlight sexual, class and ethnic tensions.'

Jeff Scheible's innovative work 'It's gotta be the shoes' discusses Spike Lee's established relationship with brand *Nike*, through what Scheible labels the 'Spike-o-sphere'. Scheible argues the 'Spike-o-sphere' to be a blurred hinterland of multi-storytelling hyperreality through branding and adverts. A liminal place created by Lee that utilises a range of media platforms for promotion. At the centre of Scheible's proposed universe are Nike Air Jordan sneakers that propel the political contradictions of working within a corporate partnership and 'doing the right thing' by the African American community. Lee uses narrative film, promotion ads and Instagram posts to visualise the enmeshed symbolism within his choice of dress. In one Instagram post Lee holds the golden Oscar to one side of his head and to the other a golden Air Jordan sneaker, embodying the achievement of gaining both filmic and fashion accolades. Scheible concludes that Lee's Instagram posts, movies and advertising campaigns push narratives, blur boundaries and 'circulate fluidly across media', 'a cross section that no other film maker occupies in quite the same manner' (231). His chapter is a careful amalgamation of the relationships between the power of film culture, media interfaces and sportswear, embedded within racial, social and political tensions. The ideas of entanglement between footwear and film continue. Hannah Hamad chapter analyses shoes as makers of race and transcendence in two films, *I, Robot* (Proyas 2004) and *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Mucino 2006), to explore racial discourses of blackness and masculinity through the symbiotic significance of footwear.

Catherine Wheatley aptly finishes the book with her chapter that probes the relationship between shoes embodied in the lives of the constructed character and the identity of an actor. The work of Isabelle Huppert provides a case study through which to challenge assumptions about female stardom and performance. Wheatley's focus is the sensory experience of the shoe- tactile, gesture, vision, auditory, vestibular, yet sadly little on the olfactory or gustatory. What features heavily in her observations are the sounds of footsteps, particularly in Mia Hansen-Løve's 2016 film *L'Avenir (Things to Come)*. Through Wheatley's analysis of Isabelle Huppert's acting, footwear and the sensory take centre stage. Wheatley describes a scene from *The Lacemaker* (Goretta 1977) that sees Huppert's character 'crunching across the pebble beach in flat unflattering sandals or bare feet' (283). She writes of shoes affecting the vestibular and proprioceptive senses- 'teetering', 'tilting', 'wobbling', 'elongating', 'immobilising', 'mobilising', 'waddling', and 'wiggling' are just some of the adjectives Wheatley draws upon. She discusses how Huppert 'inhabits these items of costume', 'to tell us something about the character's tastes, disposable income and lifestyle' (283). Visualising sound is pivotal to the chapter, as Wheatley believes that footsteps are the soundtracks to Huppert's films, with 'shoes shaping the wearer's very being' (283). In fact, Huppert herself notes, 'I enter into a character's skin through the feet. Wearing [...] shoes hugely defines a role' (Koutchoumoff 1998).

As the wordcount of this review illustrates, Ezra and Wheatley's abundant and compelling text brings together studies of dress, film, philosophy, fact and fiction. Suitable for a range of audiences from the purely interested to the academic scholar this rich anthology will be an indispensable tool in exploring the widening parameters of cinematic studies.

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