

## The Hunger Games: Fashioning the future - costuming class (6621)

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### Unequal Worlds

'The Hunger Games' (THG) Suzanne Collins' dystopian trilogy of a post-apocalyptic society riven by extremes of pleasure and pain, excess and denial brilliantly dramatizes contemporary concerns about the widening gap between rich and poor across the globe. On one level it thus renders and arguably makes visible, in a most vividly accessible yet thought provoking way, a world in which class in Marxist terms – where one stands in relations of material exploitation - is the key divide. On another it raises wider questions about fashion's origins, meaning and work in relation to class. Beyond this it also spectacularly depicts the problematic of celebrity whereby despite the harsh disciplinary treatment meted out to existing working class celebs (see for example Tyler and Bennett 2009, Tyler 2013) by the wider media, celebrity remains one of the few bridges between the life of the many and the few. This article contends that in foregrounding such questions THG offers an important textual space in which we may think through and unpick some of the deeper contradictory dynamics of fashioning individual self-identity and 'personhood' (Skeggs 2004, p136) in deeply unequal class societies.

To begin with focusing on class, "Working for the few" (2014) Oxfam's report into global inequality reveals both the magnitude of the global wealth gap between rich and poor and the failure of any "trickle down" effect to lift the fortunes of the latter. The report points out just 85 billionaires own more wealth than the poorest half of the world's population - some 3.5 billion people. Moreover in the wake of the 2008 crash, subsequent long recession and the still hegemonic neo-liberal policies of cuts and austerity implemented by governments across the world this wealth gap has widened. Perhaps most significantly within this broad sweep of inequality it is the mid or median earning groups the 'intermediate' or 'middle' classes (Roberts 2001) who are suffering too as their income is 'squeezed'. As Henning and Dorling (2010) show between 1980 and 2010 the number of middle-income households in England declined by 27% whilst more widely British workers have, for example, seen the longest and deepest fall in the real value of their wages since the Victorian era.<sup>1</sup> Writing at that time Karl Marx argued in 'Capital: Volume One' (1993 [1867]) class was clearly definable. Though he can not tell us all we need to know about it and others bodies of work from Veblen (1957 [1899]) to Bourdieu (1986) through to Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) and Skeggs (2004, 2011 and 2014) have elaborated on its subjective dimensions, this article takes its lead from Marx's seminal argument that class was at heart a relationship of material or economic exploitation of one group by another. For Marx class referred therefore to your position at work in the production process or as he termed it the 'relations of production.' (1976, p3) Under capitalism the 'means of production' (Ibid) - the tools and machinery necessary to make things - were owned and controlled by one group, those he called the bourgeois or capitalist class. Given this situation the majority of people, the working class, had no choice but to sell their labour cheaply to the latter. So the few, the capitalist class were able to buy and exploit the labour power of the many, the proletariat, at a premium, while the former escaped the burden of daily toil.

Before I turn to the how class and fashion are brought together in the first two films of 'The Hunger Games' trilogy it is important to note the wider context of their production which coincides with a growing body of evidence of the damaging effects of widening social inequality, exclusion and division on almost every facet of our present social life. This has been systematically documented by the sociologists Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) and the social geographer Dorling (2014a, 2014b)

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amongst others. Perhaps most poignantly between September 2011 and February 2012 the 'Occupy Movement' in the United States and Britain gave physical form to these concerns. Rhetorically crystallising a rising tide of anger about global social injustice Occupy argued we live in a world where the '1%' who 'control' the planet's wealth dominate 'the 99%' whose collective labour creates it. (Anon 2011) Crucially therefore 'The Hunger Games' post-apocalyptic vision of social class dispenses with contemporary, and as Marx would no doubt see them, mostly rather superficial nuances and differences in terms of occupation, income, consumption patterns and lifestyles (Callinicos and Harman 1987), within classes. Instead it presents its audience with the divide between two major classes the elite of Panem and the workers of its districts 'writ-large' so that as the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton puts it class is shown as a matter of 'what you do not what you feel.' (2011,p261)

### **The Suvinian Sci-Fi dialectic: Costuming Class**

The way in which the Hunger Games trilogy - which its author points out draws its influence as much from Ancient Greek mythology as from concern with the damaging effects of inequality today (Margolis 2008) – cinematically depicts class society then and this ever-widening gap between the many and the few, marks it out in my view as classic progressive science fiction in the sense in which the Marxist sci-fi theorist Darko Suvin (1979) argued. For Suvin 'science fiction is a genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.' (Suvin 1979 in Freedman 2000, p16) Suvin believed therefore that, 'science fiction is premised upon a radical discontinuity from the empirical world,' (Bould and Vint 2011, p17) but crucially its features are 'not impossible.' (Suvin 1979, Ibid) THG I would argue very much works on the basis of such a Suvinian dialectic juxtaposing its representation of class and fashion in ways which both call to mind and yet also break with contemporary social life. Whilst class can appear complex as it is empirically experienced in everyday life especially when given the dominance of current discourses on class which associate it with categories and classifications (Roberts Ibid) - the films by contrast draw out Marx's key understanding of it as a much more fundamental underlying relationship of exploitation - one which has the potential to produce a clear polarisation between exploiter and exploited.

By presenting the audience with a continual play between what is and what might be its narrative simultaneously encourages and undermines our 'suspension of disbelief' playing with the tension between where we are and where we could be going socially, culturally and politically under 'late capitalism.' (Mandel 1978 [1972]) Offering up for our perusal a world which is both familiar and yet strange THG can be seen to straddle the real and unreal, blending the factual with the fictional in its inter-related treatment of class and fashion.

Central to its achievement of this is the way the cinematic adaptations of both the first and second film in the trilogy develop the tension and heighten the contrast between dress and fashion in their costuming and art direction. Whilst importantly both fashion and dress have symbolic and cultural dimensions Elizabeth Wilson argues change driven by infinite cycles of stylistic obsolescence differentiates fashion from its much less perceptibly mutable sartorial cousin. She writes 'fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles.' (2003 [1985],p4-5) Originating in court society in Europe in the late Medieval period fashion developed into 'the child of capitalism' (Wilson Ibid, p13) eventually spreading across all classes so that by the late twentieth century fashion was 'for all.' (Wilson and Taylor, 1989, p155) But crucially in the THG trilogy fashion is once again only for the few since whilst the many are dressed the rich alone are free to pursue fashion's vestimentary games. The differential between dress and fashion is then in my view of particular importance to THG Suvinian dialectic between recognition of familiar things,

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processes and practices and their estrangement, and pivotal therefore to its cinematic power and discursive 'cognitive effect.' (Suvín 1979)

Within Collins' putative proto-fascist dystopian state Panem<sup>2</sup> the disparity between dress and fashion serves two specific purposes. Firstly, it provides a key means of establishing and reinforcing the chasmic social difference between the 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen 1957 [1899]) of Panem's elite citizens in its capital 'Capitol' and the austere lives of the workers in its impoverished districts. The gap between the life worlds of the rich and poor means the latter, the workers of District 12 wear sober practical and roughly hewn dress reflecting the stasis of garments worn mostly for protection, warmth and utility. **(fig 1.)** Indeed their style of dress seems frozen in time, an amalgam of thirties American workers' clothes and British forties war time austerity. In stark relief the former, the rich, are turned out in a riot of fabulous styles **(fig 2.)** creating a spectacle in keeping with a life concerned only with ephemeral cycles of fashionable obsolescence. **[INSERT SCREEN SHOTS]**

Secondly, following on from this, by visually styling a social and cultural faultline present, but not fully elaborated in the novels, the graphic clarity and intensity of its cinematic adaptation encourages us to think even more deeply about the meaning of fashion in relation to class. What is so striking about the costuming of the THG therefore is that it turns fashion per-se into an object of scrutiny and an unstable and deeply ambivalent troubling signifier. This kind of role for costume design as one which can draw on, explore and disrupt audience expectations of genre and its iconography (Bordwell and Thompson 1980) has been analysed by feminist critics in relation to gender. (Beart 1994, Harper 1995 and Church-Gibson 2000) But significantly it is the role of the costuming of fashion and dress in relation to class and social division which is the focus of the THG. So the practice and pursuit of fashion distinguishes the excesses of the citizenry of 'Capitol' from the district proletariat whose lives are marked by hunger, poverty and scarcity and whose banal exploitation serves Panem's privileged enclave. This juxtaposition between the familiar and strange in Suvínian terms forces us to compare the similarities and differences between fashion as a social practice in our world and in the world of THG. The washed out ragged clothes of District 12's inhabitants intercut with shots of its central market, combined with a predominance of visuals steeped in sepia tones style its mise-en-scene to suggest a future past or post-industrial world. As a mythical place somewhere between Steinbeck's dust bowl and Springsteen's rust belt, and given a set which is redolent of Michael Radford's adaptation of Orwell's '1984' (1984) and the rail yard scenes in Spielberg's 'Schindler's List' (1993), District 12 portends fear and suffering. Shots of hard hatted miners faces blackened by dust, dressed in grimy overalls trudging to work, together with the rail wagons emblazoned with the logo of 'Capitol Coal' which frame 'The Reapings' scene in front of District 12's Hall of Justice underline the regime of hard physical labour, abject poverty and pain faced by its workers.

Yet for the urban flaneurs of Panem, who live amongst and range across the ultra-modern glittering glass and steel towers and skyways of Capitol its gilded capital city, their dress, has long fled any concern with the demands of work, habit and routine as function and utility give way to form and frivolity. Clad in a spectacular array of fashioned excess their appearance within this milieu acts as a powerful visual counterpoint to the material and aesthetic immiseration of District

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<sup>2</sup> Trotsky argued that were it not for the Russian Revolution the level of social and political crisis in early twentieth century Russia would have meant fascism would be a Russian not Italian word. Panem appears to be such a post-crisis society one where bourgeois democracy has been replaced by a totalitarian structure which works to amass and accumulate wealth from its workers but without them having any of the formal freedoms associated with the current form of capitalism.

12. When Katniss and Peeta's train speeds through Panem's streets on the way to the seventy-fourth annual Hunger Games contest and the prospect of near certain death, the crowds who cheer them on display a fashioned appearance which draws on the extremes of eighteenth century baroque and roccoco styles as well as more recent outlandish subcultural fashions and fads. **(figs 3. and 4.)** Peeta's gaze out of the window is met by an array of heavily made up faces, both male and female. The women of Capitol in garish headdresses wearing puffed, ruched and pagoda sleeved frocks in jarring shades of pink, purple and red return his look. Alongside them quiffed, moustachioed besuited men adorned in garments coloured from a similarly gaudy palette wave them on enthusiastically.

Returning to the eighteenth century, the seventeenth century and eighteenth century in particular were decades dominated by the intense sartorial competition between aristocrat and newly enriched bourgeois classes and the demimondaine. (Entwistle 2000 and Breward 2003) As such they were renowned for the extent to which the form of fin de siècle European style raced far ahead of the functional motivations of dress. The costuming of Capitol in contrast to that of District 12 thus effects a pre-revolutionary decadence similar to periods when fashion was drawn most explicitly into the dynamics of class struggle as Entwistle (2000) amongst others has noted. These first glimpses of Capitol's fashionable excesses present us with a Marie-Antoinette view of fashion as the willing accomplice to Panem's greed. Complicit with its decadent power this one-dimensional vision of fashion is synonymous with a range of critiques (Wilson 1985 [2003]) which see it as the very embodiment of waste, vanity and pretension, then and now, fit only for parody and derision.

So the luxurious extremes and conspicuous consumption of Capitol's crème-de-la crème parallel those of the global super-rich today, the 1% for whom money is no object. But as we will see the role of fashion in THG turns out to be much more complicated than this as it also plays a part in the unfolding resistance to Panem's ruling class. Such complexity in the costuming which establishes contradictory 'interacting positions' (Beart 1994) with regard to the role of fashion I would argue pushes us to consider further what its social role is not just in the imaginary rebellions and revolutions such as that which erupts in the trilogy, but what it might be in real social resistance to the deep injustices of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**[INSERT SCREEN SHOTS]**

### **Katniss and Effie: fashioning the great class divide**

THG costuming system, I would argue then, encourages us to see fashion as well as class relations through an extraordinary critical prism not as they necessarily are but as they very well might become. For a text to work critically as science fiction Suvin (1979) argued what we read on the page and see on the screen needs to be something possible, nascent or immanent within a thing or state of affairs but not the thing or condition itself, as it presently exists. As Freedman argues sci-fi which constructs this tension, 'by refusing to take our mundane world environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter.' (2000, p15) The stark contrast developed throughout the course of the first and second HG's films, between fashion and dress and between the meaning of each works to dislocate what is both familiar and comfortable about fashion as an everyday social and cultural practice. Central to this textual destabilisation of fashion and a key instance of the first film's Suvinian cognitive play with the familiar and the strange is Katniss's appearance alongside Effie Trinket District 12's lottery presenter/anchor-woman at the Reapings – the lottery 'show' which decides who will be selected to represent each district. **(fig 5.)** Whilst Katniss is merely 'dressed' Effie stands 'fully fashioned' from head to toe in all the finery of the Panem season. **[INSERT SCREEN SHOT]**

Katniss then wears a rather shoddy and cheap looking 1940s Tea dress typical of utility style a primarily practical mode of adornment, which as Zweiniger-Barlowska (1999, 2002), McNeil (1993) and others have shown, most if not all British women were forced to wear in the period of Second World War and post-War Austerity. Juxtaposed next to Katniss stands the illustrious figure of Effie. Her hair, her make-up, her Chanelesque purple twin set with its finely cut and tailored jacket, its puffed and ruched sleeves, her matching pencil skirt and mauve accessories, her fascinator hat and mauve fingernails set against her white powdered skin and carefully coiffured white wig work together to symbolise excess and a stylistic decadence synonymous with pre-Revolutionary France. So Effie embodies and personifies a life free from physical need and hunger and, just as significantly, the labour which secures this 'freedom'. For Effie, just like the other elite citizens of Capitol as for the 1% who make up the actually existing global super rich today, their life is that of a 'leisure class' to use Veblen's (1957 [1899]) still highly suggestive term. Freed from concerns about how things come to be including fashion and all its finery Panem's pampered class engage in wasteful and conspicuous consumption pursuing what Marx (1990 [1867]) once described as 'wants of the fancy' or imagination over and above 'those of the stomach'.

That the districts are still dominated by such wants whilst Capitol is driven by desires, fanciful fads and fashions can be seen again and again across both THG and *Catching Fire* (CF), the second film of the trilogy. Focusing on hair in THG games master Seneca (**fig 6.**) sports a carefully coiffured neat cut resplendent with trimmed and styled, curved sideburns and beard whilst the Karl Lagerfeld-esque presenter Caesar Flickerman's erasure head quiff come bun (**fig 7.**) when set alongside chief pundit Claudius's (**fig 8.**) outlandish triangular shock of frizzled centre-parted curls all impart the same message. For the citizens of Panem appearance is all and, moreover they have all the time in the world to devote to it. **[INSERT SCREEN SHOTS]**

In CF the sartorial foregrounding of Panem's great class divide continues. In the opening scene of their 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games Victory Tour Katniss and Peeta's off script eulogies for district eleven's two dead tributes Thresh and Rue are delivered to a huge crowd shabbily clad in the garb of nineteen thirties American workers. (**fig 9.**) Flat capped men in blue collar denim shirts, dungarees and buff jackets stand shoulder to shoulder with headscarved women in shawls. Their silence is broken only by the round of subdued applause which greets Peeta's announcement that they will donate a month's of their victor's wages annually to help the slain tributes families. Meanwhile Effie bewigged in a golden perm, made up with huge smudges of eye shadow which match the electric blue of her puff sleeved feathered dress looks on in horror while Katniss recalls the heroic sacrifice of the district's female tribute. Responding to Kat's description of Rue as a friend not foe who was 'too young and gentle' for the Games a lone man in the crowd whistles the mockingjay tune. Raising his hand to give the three-fingered salute synonymous with resistance to Panem the crowd join in before the peacekeepers wade in beating them and dragging the instigator out and shooting him.

As I have suggested above, there is an even deeper point to be made here. The ways in which THG and CF develop a contrast between fashion and dress to articulate the class divide in Panem takes issue with the orthodox view of fashion shared by a number of academic critics. For in its simultaneous engagement with fashion but also in the removal of the familiar pleasure of fashioning and refashioning the self from the mass of the population (bar its fashioned celebrity tributes) to the elite, THG deepens the tension between cognition and estrangement. Here its representation of the world of fashion unsettles our view of it challenging Gilles Lipovetsky's (1994) seminal argument that fashion is freedom - its most tangible material sign. This view that fashion "dresses democracy" (Ibid) that it provides the means to autonomously style ourselves and to overcome the habitual decline of routine through our engagement with its ever changing cyclical

aesthetic along with the much more widely held assumption that because 'fashion is for all' (Rouse 1989, p239) it will continue to be so, is rendered null and void. Thus Collin's creative imagining of Panem's fictional society points to one possible future for fashion far removed from its fetishistic search for 'the new' or its frantic future forecasting of what fashion will be. Rather in depicting fashion as a minority predominantly elite class pursuit it frames and implicitly asks the question who can and will still be fashionable in a world based on the continued exploitation of classed others and on an unfettered dynamic of class inequality.

### **Monstrous fashion, symbolic resistance and power**

Interestingly a number of writers have argued THG trilogy skilfully reworks, explores and reveals in an exaggerated form 'the dangers' (McDonald 2012b) they see inherent in the dynamics of contemporary capitalism and its cultural forms. Clemente (2012a), amongst others (Simmons 2012c, Burke 2014) analyses THG in the light of the current political and economic crisis in the US. Seeing in Panem parallels with the takeover of US government by a corporate elite, he argues, it offers a frightening presentiment of where further neoliberal deregulation (Harvey 2005), public spending cuts and the hollowing out of civil society through ever more privatisation - what the anti-capitalist writer Naomi Klein terms the 'shock doctrine' (Clemente C 1.L387) - could lead. For McDonald (2012b) because so much 'American idol-like' reality TV and popular culture, generally, 'entertains' rather than 'educates' the future of our culture looks bleak. Whilst not explicitly addressing the role of fashion in constructing the Games as a spectacle, he suggestively picks up on their 'decorative preparations' the pre-contest make-over of the tributes bodies. Katniss's response to the kind of body fashions and alterations common in the Capitol, 'do they really have no idea how freakish they look to the rest of us?' (Ibid, p13) is evidence, he argues, of its 'monstrous art.' For McDonald therefore fashion is a direct reflection of Panem's corrupting absolute or 'self-referencing' power (2012b, p16).

In a more nuanced way Van Dyke (2012b) examines the role of fashion as a distraction in THGs. Taking a Foucauldian approach she argues in Capitol fashion acts as a form of disciplinary regulation, a method of power which makes it 'capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes and life in general without at the same time making it more difficult to govern.' (Foucault 1990 p141 in Ibid) Exchanging the physical hunger of the districts for the aesthetic hunger or desire to stay fashionable means, for Van Dyke, the citizens of Capitol become "docile bodies" ( Van Dyke Ibid, p256) who ignore the suffering and injustice imposed by Panem and its Games. 'In a society that places a strong emphasis on fashion and entertainment,' she argues, 'constant practices of self-surveillance ... and self-correction...turn attention away from other concerns.' (Ibid) Here again then the salience of Collin's and Directors Gary Ross and Francis Lawrence construction of fashion in 'THG' and 'CF' reinforced by the costuming choices for both films asks the audience to consider the meaning of fashion and dress not just within each film's diegesis but beyond this in relation to its role within capitalism and our wider culture of consumerism. Importantly, however, as well as diverting attention from political and economic issues Van Dyke also argues the work of Cinna, Katniss's stylist, 'brilliantly demonstrates body modification can be both a genuine form of self-expression and an effective means of resistance to dominant structures of power.' (Ibid, p262)

So as well as using fashion to establish social distance and to dress up the Games and its contestants as a celebrity spectacle and diversion, it is important to understand how on another level fashion works through this process as a reverse discourse in THG. For Foucault (1980) power was more a matter of fluid and productive relations than a fixed asset or capacity possessed and exercised by one group over another. Just as the Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg argued in relation to workers' economic struggles and strikes, 'where the chains of capitalism are forged there they must be broken' (2015 [1918]), for Foucault more widely wherever power was

enforced it could be challenged. From this kind of critical perspective then both 'THG' and 'CF' reveal another side to fashion its empowering potential as a means of negotiating and resisting authoritarian order. Creatively reworked by her team of stylists (**fig 10.**) lead by Cinna, Katniss's body and dress is transformed and remade in a manner familiar to us as viewers of reality TV 'make-over' shows. (see Wood and Skeggs 2011) This reworking of her body through processes of depilation, epilation, manicure, pedicure and more, whilst initially reducing it to a further state of abjection also turns it into a 'symbolic weapon'. (Evans & Thornton 1989, p14) For Katniss whose fate depends, in part at least, on distinguishing herself from her fellow competitors so that she attracts enough sponsors to send the parachuted gifts which save both her own life and Peeta's, the importance of this refashioning of her body and the labour which goes into this in order to construct her as a celebrity tribute can't be overestimated.

Given that the rest of the tributes don district themed costumes similar to existing regional and national dress it is their uniquely fashioned initial public appearance and distinctive 'celebrity' or 'mediated personae' (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2006) which gives Katniss and Peeta the edge on their fellow tributes. When Cinna tells Kat the stock approach to their look won't do, "somebody as brave as you should not be dressed up in some stupid costume" fashion's ambivalent role in relation to power is revealed as her dress assumes a central role as a tool or symbol of individual come collective resistance. From humble beginnings when Prim, Katniss's sister, gives her a mockingjay pin badge (**fig 11.**) for taking her place in the Games, the symbolic possibilities of resistance through all forms of dress and fashion grow within the course of the first and second films. Enveloped in flames Kat and Peeta project strength making them stand out at the Tribute Parade, the pre-games runway show. When Kat is subsequently awarded eleven, the highest score in the sponsors 'Ratings', President Snow is in no doubt about her growing symbolic efficacy and that Katniss represents a threat to Panem's order. 'A little hope is effective a lot of hope is dangerous... a spark,' he tells Games-master Seneca, 'is fine, as long as it is contained.' Katniss's style and her dress in particular then come to embody the sparks of hope and resistance which Snow so desperately wants to keep in check. Growing in stature in the first film, twirling her incendiary red dress (**fig 12.**) during her interview with Flickerman, she becomes 'the girl on fire' who personifies non-compliance with and defiance of the fearful rule of Capitol and its nonchalant class. In this trajectory another pivotal moment occurs in 'CF' during her second 'quarterquell' pre-contest interview with Flickerman. As Montz (2012a) who also draws attention to practices of dress in THG notes, Cinna's wedding dress enables Katniss to rise phoenix-like from her signature flames to reveal a dress shaped into the form of the mockingjay. (**fig 13.**)

Thus in contrast to the initial one dimensional view of fashion as corrupt excess, means of social distancing and a prop to Panem's rule as a central part of its games of distraction fashion now returns to haunt its rulers as it imparts a semiotic power and reach which no amount of repression from Snow can smother. As a veritable visual feast which so insistently engages the gaze, fashion also offers the potential to reflect and deflect it back, creating possibilities for spectacular forms of symbolic resistance and problems for those wish to control and objectify, as a number of writers have suggested. (Entwistle 2000, Sturken and Cartwright 2001, Montz 2012a) Consequently, by reminding us of fashion's 'ambivalence,' (Wilson 2003 [1985], p13) - and that like all cultural forms its meaning is a matter of use, since it can provide a sartorial repertoire of resistance to power just as it can help to sustain it -THG again asks us to question how and for whom fashion's aesthetic force can work. **[INSERT SCREEN SHOTS]**

### **Celebrity, class and fetishism**

Other aspects of the trilogy in mirroring our world also shine an excoriating light on what Barthes (1977) once called its 'doxa' or ideological taken for grantedness. With regard to the format of the

games and the construction of celebrity THG presents us with much that is familiar in our popular cultural landscape of lotteries and reality TV game shows. But again it does so in a way which magnifies their contradictions. According to Skeggs (2011) and Tyler (2009 and 2011) one of the key ways class distinctions and tensions are currently affirmed, yet denied and so ideologically discharged is through narratives of celebrity which act as updated or modern renditions of class morality tales or pantomimes. In reality TV shows then working class celebs are interpolated as objects of scrutiny and forced to move within a life world in which they are entirely unaccustomed, for the pleasure of the normative 'middle-class gaze'. (Lyle 2008) Preparing for the Games amidst Capitol's towering skyscrapers bewildered by its 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1986) made up of ultra-consumerist menus of seemingly infinite choices in food, drink and all aspects of fashion, Peeta, much to the amusement of the studio audience, explains to Flickerman that it is Panem's 'weird' showers which strike him as that which is most different from home. **(fig 14.)** The structure of the Games thus reflect reality TV and its effects as they engender such symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1986) as an affective warm-up to the physical slaughter of the final contest in the Arena. For the hapless HG contestants, then, the preparations for the games tease them with a tantalising taste of a life hitherto unknown. As Effie puts it, "it's one of the wonderful things about this opportunity – that even though you're here and it's just for a little while you get to enjoy all of this." **[INSERT SCREEN SHOT]**

Spared the agony of making any sacrifice at all amongst the elite spectators and officials the Games cultivate a blasé hedonism and a consciousness which prioritises getting their fashionable self-presentation and its mannered protocols right, even in the face of the barbarity of its murderous denouement. Typically Effie is concerned to keep up appearances for the cameras and for her tributes to be coached so that they display the necessary cultural competency and capital; the deportment, decorum and etiquette befitting their role and disposition as its 'privileged' albeit temporary stars. 'Why don't you go and clean yourselves up a bit before dinner' she urges her charges who face the prospect of near certain death when the contest proper begins. When Katniss lands an arrow in the mouth of a spit roasted suckling pig, the centre piece of the sponsors' banquet Effie berates her for her 'bad manners.' **(fig 15.)** Unable to exist in the way they do without the labour of another class this fantasy elite just like the actually existing 1% have largely forgotten about them other than as a source of fun and entertainment. In this respect the trilogy parallels the devaluation and marginalisation of the existing working class noted by a range of critics. (Skeggs 2004, Jones 2010, and Tyler 2013) Thus the majority of the populations of the districts serve as what Stallybrass and White have called a 'low other' to the elite class, 'despised and denied at the level of political organisation and social being...they are instrumentally constitutive of the imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture.' (1986:5-6) So the tributes celebrity status emerges as an amplification of the contradictions which are already familiar in celebrity culture per-se as it acts as a dead-end conduit between classes in societies where other avenues to social mobility and have all been closed off. But in all of this it is crucial to note, however, that as well as depicting the intensification of its damaging effects, in the THG it is the very lens of celebrity and the fashioning of Katniss and Peeta as 'mediated personae' (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2006), in particular, that as we have seen the enables the tables to be turned on Snow and Panem's despotic ruling class.

Finally, and following on from this in Panem more generally, Collins, and the work of her cinematic interlocutors can be seen to both create and yet continually disrupt its fetishistic fantasy world of fashionable finery. By laying bare for the audience the gap between the conditions of production and consumption of its goods in the dichotomous worlds of Capitol and its labouring districts THG calls to mind the words of Marx's collaborator Engels one hundred and seventy years ago. 'It is a curious fact,' he wrote, 'that the production of precisely those articles which serve the personal



adornment of the ladies of the bourgeoisie involves the saddest consequences for the health of the workers.' (2009[1845],p12)<sup>3</sup> An ancient Romanesque world of 'bread and circuses' (Pan is the Roman for bread) Panem is simultaneously a futuristic land where the exploitative labour at the base of society in its benighted districts disappears from the view of its elite citizens. Thus the labour of the producers of all its finery is hidden away as its most high profile servant workers are de-humanised and turned into a de-facto 'sub-species' known as 'avoxes.' For the citizens of Capitol then the shiny world of consumption forms the main stage of their lives but the shabby world of production upon which this relies remains mostly hidden away in the districts. Yet by so powerfully visually juxtaposing the extremities of these two worlds the first two films of the trilogy asks the audience to consider what parallels there may be with our own world of consumption and to consider how the commodities we consume from fashion to food and furnishings are made; who makes them and how they are treated.

Perhaps most vividly in CF then we see a shot of Gale and the other miners in District 10 washing the filth off their hands after a days hard labour whilst Flickerman's Victory Tour TV special appears on an overhead screen. **(fig 16.)** Close-up shots of coal stained hands then cut to Effie walking tall in a grey sculptured furry frock and matching high heel boots. As she marches Peeta and Katniss towards the purple light of the Victor's reception at the Presidential Palace its blazing fountains are illuminated whilst blue floodlights pick out its high baroque walls. Here it is Marx's comment in 'Capital Volume One' (1990 [1867]) that under capitalism social creative labour exists in a 'hidden abode' (Ibid, p279) that seems most apposite. Such a social process whose set-up ensures the highest visibility and value is placed on the objects of labour rather than the creative labour and social relations of class which produced them Marx termed 'commodity fetishism'. (1990 [1867]) In Panem fetishism produces the fantasy because the separation of producer and consumer so necessary for the rise of capitalism has extended so far that for its privileged class of consumers it has reached its logical/illogical limits. Thus the products of the districts' labour alone emerge in full public view of its elite citizens not its producers. But, again, significantly when we look at the world of Capitol and the Games as they are represented to the audience this fetishistic denial of creative labour is disrupted by both films intense focus on the celebrity tributes, the district workers without whose 'participation' through forced labour qua ritual sacrifice the Games could not happen and by camera work which follows every detail of the work of Cinna's stylists who fashion their all important celebrity looks. **[INSERT SCREEN SHOTS]**

### **Conclusion: Fashioning the future - intensifying contradictions**

One hundred and fifty years ago Marx and Engels argued 'Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.' (1998 [1848] p 45) The resulting class relationships and divisions meant everything including labour and the person who exercised it came to be valued as a mere commodity amenable to the extraction of profit or surplus value. Such dynamics, they argued, encouraged and deepened 'commodity fetishism' the belief in the existence and power of things or commodities in themselves, rather than in the social collective labour which designed and created them. It is how these damaging polarised class relations might develop which is so powerfully prefigured in THG and CF.

<sup>3</sup> These words which applied to the scandal of sweated labour in the garment industry one hundred and seventy years ago, apply to garment workers today who cut make and trim clothing for global fashion brands in factories in Bangladesh like the Rana Plaza works which collapsed on April 24th 2013 killing 1,138 people and injuring over 2,000 more. See <http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/2014/04/24/rana-plaza-one-year-on> accessed on 7.01.2015 at 11.40pm.

As such they depict a post-crisis world which is both familiar and strange, close to and yet different from our own and that analysed by Marx and Engels. (Ibid) In Panem then as in our world today overwhelmingly one exploited class works for and is controlled by another who in turn own and enjoy the surplus product of their labour. So the first two films of the trilogy parallel the deepening sense of a 'them' and 'us' in class terms raising the prospect of a future where if present trends in income accumulation and concentration continue the legitimacy of the whole capitalist system may be called into question as the liberal economist Thomas Picketty (2014) argues.

This article has concentrated on the meaning of fashion in Panem. It has argued following Suvin's account of progressive Sci-Fi that the first two films of THG trilogy create a powerful 'cognitive effect' (1979) through the construction of its carefully crafted dialectic of similarity and difference between our existing and Panem's imaginary or figurative world. More specifically I have explained how the representation of fashion and dress as sharply differentiated class based social practices is integral to the development of this Suvinian effect as the tension between each creates an estrangement from the widespread view of fashion as a necessarily democratised cultural form. Within the films' diegesis we have seen how the contrast between dressing the workers of the districts and fashioning the looks of Capitol's elite opens up a textual space for a critique of fashion and class relations as our experience of both aspects of our contemporary culture is curiously similar to and yet distant from empirical experience.

Lastly we have seen how THG and CF amplify the existing contradictions of fashion, its fetishism and centrality to celebrity. Yet whilst refusing to ignore its banal but brutal dynamics of class 'othering' and 'distancing' (Skeggs 1997 and 2004, Probyn 2000, Jones 2010 and Tyler 2013) THG simultaneously presents us with the possibility that the abuse of power, deepening inequality and social injustice which prevails in our world might be resisted (as well as maintained) just as it is in Panem through the fashioning of Katniss and Peeta as celebrity tributes.

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## KEY WORDS

FASHION, DRESS, CLASS, INEQUALITY, FETISHISM, CELEBRITY, RESISTANCE, POWER

## ABSTRACT

This article contends that the first two screen adaptations of Josephine Collins' trilogy 'The Hunger Games' create a space for critical reflection on the currently intensifying levels of global inequality under late capitalism through its creative imagining of the future relationship between fashion and class. It argues that both the first film of the trilogy 'The Hunger Games' and the second 'Catching Fire' in their representation of a figurative dystopian state 'Panem' estrange our day to day experience of fashion by juxtaposing it with dress, restricting fashion as a social practice to the elite social class in Panem's capital city 'Capitol'. In encouraging the development of this Suvinian 'cognitive effect' (1979) it argues the films ask us to reappraise the basis of fashion in our own world as a fetishistic regime of consumption and also to look again at the class dynamics of society and the role of fashion and celebrity within these. In doing this however, importantly, both films resist any simplistic condemnation of fashion and celebrity instead pointing to how these spectacular cultural dominants might be used to ferment resistance to injustice in order to mount a challenge to the seemingly unassailable power structures which perpetuates it.

## BIOGRAPHY

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