

***Symbolism and Costume in The Hunger Games and The Ballad of Songbirds  
and Snakes.***

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***Declaration of Originality:***

This Thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Alannah Henry.

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### *Abstract:*

This thesis proves the symbolism of costume design throughout *The Hunger Games* along with *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Spanning over 10,000 words, this thesis goes through how *The Hunger Games* film adaptation presents themselves as a form of visual language that can communicate dominance and resistance while exploring how those creative choices can shape an audience 'understanding of the series' main themes. In *The Hunger Games*, their costumes serve as a signifier, that characterises deeper meanings linked to power, character development, and loyalty shifts, by applying Saussure's ideation of the signifier and the signified to many of the iconic costumes from the series. From the analysis of the costumes through a semiotic lens, the understanding of how meaning is constructed and communicated across the media becomes clearer.

The aim is to clarify and prove the costumes functions as a visual language from power relationships and character growth in Panem. Primary examples would include Katniss's transformation along with the Capitol's fashion used as a control mechanism, which are explored to answer the questions about visual communication of authority, the symbolic meaning of clothing, and the evolution of costume design across *The Hunger Games* timeline.

Another aim of this thesis is to investigate how the films interpret and create costume elements that are described throughout the novels. Exploring adaptation theory delivering an understanding of the creative choices that were made by the filmmakers and designers throughout the process of translating the novels into filmic reality. An example would be the notable visual distinction in Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy between the costumes of the Capitol's privileged and those of the working Districts.

The costume design for *The Hunger Games* along with *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* highlights that it is more than just visual world-building, but it is an essential aspect of narrative expression, empowering the underlying messages. Through a semiotic lens this thesis explains how costume can function as a symbolic language, displaying power, rebellion, and growth.

## ***Contents:***

### ***Chapters:***

Introduction: Happy Hunger Games!

Chapter One: Capitol Fashion

Chapter Two: District Fashion

Chapter Three: Rebel Fashion and Katniss's Evolution

Conclusion: May the Odds be Ever in your Favour

### ***Illustrations:***

#### ***Chapter One:***

Capitol Fashion – President Snow's Party – The Hunger Games. (Fig.1)

Effie Trinket and Katniss Everdeen – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games (Fig.2)

Effie Trinket – Reaping Day in THGCF (Fig.3. Left) - In District 13 in Mockingjay (Fig.4. Right)

Caeser Flickerman (Fig.5. Left) - President Snow (Fig.6. Right)

District 12 – Miners (Fig.7)

Lucy Gray Baird – Reaping Day. (Fig.8)

Katniss and Peeta – Before Tribute Parade – The Hunger Games. (Fig.9)

Katniss and Peeta – Tribute Parade – The Hunger Games. (Fig.10)

Katniss and Peeta – Tribute Parade – Catching Fire (Fig.11)

Katniss Everdeen – Opening Scene in hunting gear – The Hunger Games. (Fig.12)

#### ***Chapter Two:***

District 12 Citizens – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games (Fig.13)

Katniss Everdeen's Family in District 12 – Reaping Day – Catching Fire. (Fig.14)

Peacekeepers – The Hunger Games (Fig.15)

Peacekeepers – Mockingjay (Fig.16)

Capitol Citizens – The Hunger Games (Fig.17)

Katniss Everdeen – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games. (Fig.18)

Katniss, Peeta, and Effie – Reaping Day – Catching Fire (Fig.19)

Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay. (Fig.20)

President Snow – Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay (Fig.21)

District 8 – After the bombing – Mockingjay (Fig.22)

President Snow – Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay (Fig.23)

### ***Chapter Three:***

Peacekeepers vs Districts Citizens – Mockingjay (Fig.24)

Katniss and her family in District 13 – Mockingjay (Fig.25)

Rebel’s sneaking into the Capitol – Mockingjay (Fig.26)

Katniss in the bombing of District 8 – Mockingjay (Fig.27)

Katniss Mockingjay Pin – The Symbol of the Rebellion (Fig.28)

Lucy Gray Baird singing for the Capitol – The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (Fig.29)

Katniss Everdeen – Transformation – Catching Fire (Fig.30)

Katniss Everdeen – Tribute Interview – Catching Fire (Fig.31)

Katniss Everdeen – Mockingjay dress – Catching Fire (Fig.32)

Katniss and Rebel’s in her Mockingjay armour – Mockingjay (Fig.33)

### ***Introduction:***

## *Happy Hunger Games!*

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series, alongside its prequel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, has sold over 100 million copies worldwide. Effectively forming the dystopian young adult genre, this series explores a dystopian era in which the Capitol exercises control over the twelve Districts of Panem by hosting the annual spectacle of the Games – a brutal televised contest that forces children from the ages of twelve to eighteen to fight to the death, “although spectacle is one element in the dramatic arts, he thought it was the lowest, least important, and most dispensable element.” (Dunn, G. 2012 *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. John Wiley & Sons.) The Games are Panem's master sign system, in which the structures of dominance, identity, and rebellion are communicated, “not because it was better able to account for the 'crisis' in liberal-bourgeois ideology, but because it was able to impose the idea that there was a 'crisis'.” (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: *Live Theory*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.) Book-to-film adaptations often apply meaningful creative choices that manipulate an audience's interpretation of the story's themes and characters. Distinct, visual symbolism is noticed throughout the costume designs which are more than a surface detail; their costumes function as a form of communication that expresses a political and narrative purpose beyond what the dialogue can convey. The adaptation of the films displays the mechanisms of control in which individual characters reclaim presentation to then challenge and overturn oppression. Hence, this thesis will argue how the costume design within *The Hunger Games* film adaptations presents a visual language that communicates the dominance and resistance, along with exploring the process of how these creative choices shape the audiences' understanding of the series' main themes.

Adaptation helps us, as the viewer, to understand the transition of literary symbols, characters, and central themes into the visual language. Particularly, costume that acts as a link between the internal world of the novels and the external world of the film, from being able to communicate character traits, social positions, power relations, and themes visually and instantly. Costumes can serve as a signifier within *The Hunger Games*, characterising deeper meanings that trace back to power, character development, and loyalty shifts, by applying Saussure's idea of the signifier and signified to many of the iconic costumes throughout the series. A primary example, which is discussed is Katniss's dress that

introduces her as the “Girl on Fire.” The dress being the signifier, capturing the attention of the audience with its flaming design, meaning the signified is the rebellion and hope she later embodies. The moment itself is not only a spectacle but also constitutes an important point in Katniss’s transformation. From the analysis of costume design through a semiotic lens, we come to understand how the meaning is constructed and communicated across the media.

The main texts of this thesis are: The Hunger Games Trilogy, novels, and films. This is Collins’ original trilogy: The Hunger Games, The Hunger Games: Catching Fire, and The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, along with their film adaptations, create the core of The Hunger Games universe. These novels were published between the years 2008 and 2010, while their film adaptations, which visually brought this world to life between the years 2012 and 2015, expanding the core themes: character development, power, rebellion, and propaganda. Then, in the year 2020, Collins brought out the prequel to this universe, becoming the first expansion of the original trilogy, The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes, shining a light on the origins of the Games and the early life of Coriolanus Snow, the President of Panem in the original trilogy. Not long after, the film adaptation was released in 2023, bringing to life the novel that highlights the beginning of the core themes of power, identity, and spectacle seen within The Hunger Games universe.

This thesis is going to explore the following questions:

Question 1: How does costume design communicate the image of authority, identity, and resistance, visually?

Question 2: Explain the symbolic meanings that are woven into the character’s costumes?

Question 3: From across Panem’s timeline, from TBOSAS to THG, how does the costume design evolve?

Through investigation, this thesis examines the crucial role of costume design as both a symbolic and narrative tool in the film adaptation of The Hunger Games trilogy, along with the prequel, The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes. By using a semiotic approach, analysing how costume design can visually communicate the core themes of authority, identity, and rebellion in the universe. With the intention of clarifying and proving how costume design

functions as a visual language for the power relationships and character growth in Panem. By applying Saussure's ideation of the signifier and the signified, in addition to Barthes' theory of myth, this thesis will display how costume design is more than just a surface detail but highlights signs that interpret an audience's perception of the story and the characters. A primary example would be Katniss's transformations and the Capitol's use of fashion as a control mechanism. This will help answer the questions presented regarding, communication of the core themes visually, the symbolic meaning within characters costumes, and costume evolving throughout the timeline.

Another thought would be how the films interpret and create costume elements that are described throughout the novels. Adaptation theory creates an understanding of the creative choices that are made by the filmmakers and designers through the process of translating the novels into filmic reality. A visual distinction in Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy is the difference between the costumes of the Capitol's privileged and those working Districts. Capitol fashion uses very vibrant colours, dramatic silhouettes, and detailed accessories that create a division between the privileged and the suffering. Throughout the trilogy the costume designers use a combination of haute couture – Alexander McQueen for some of Effie Trinket's costumes, in addition with historical influences, to be able to craft an aesthetic that captures the Capitol's obsession with appearance and entertainment, "For most of our history, human beings have believed that true art not only entertains but also improves those who contemplate it." (Dunn, G. 2012 *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. John Wiley & Sons.) With the use of wealthy and exaggerated styles, can present a visual metaphor for the dominance of the Capitol, a concept that is often examined in conversations on power relations in dystopian narratives. This thesis will highlight the importance of visual narration in storytelling and thematic expression through an analysis of adaptation and costume design.

In *The Hunger Games* trilogy and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* costume design is an essential aspect of the narrative rather than just visual world-building. Through a semiotic analysis this thesis will showcase the function costume serves as a symbolic language, a display of power, rebellion, and growth. By examining the iconic costume choices, this research highlights how adaptation theory can improve the novel's original symbolism, impacting an audience's perception of characters and their role in Panem's political country. Strengthening the ideation that *The Hunger Games* and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*,

fashion is not a representation of one's style – it becomes a weapon, a statement, and tool of oppression and rebellion.

Throughout this thesis there will be an exploration of costume design in the film adaptation of The Hunger Games trilogy, along with the prequel The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes. With the analyse of how the filmmakers visually translate as well as expand upon Suzanne Collins' symbolic use of costuming by analysing central costume choices – such as Katniss Everdeen's transformation from the "Girl on Fire" to the "Mockingjay," to the Capitol's extravagant fashion as a tool of control, in addition to the evolution of tribute and rebel attire. This thesis will investigate how costume is a visual language of power, rebellion, and identity in Panem.

## ***Chapter One:***

### ***Capitol Fashion***

In Collins' The Hunger Games trilogy, the costumes in Pamen serve as symbolic tools that show and strengthen the division of class, control, and identity across the social spectrum within Panem. The Capitol citizens' costumes are defined by their excess and extravagance, wearing luxurious outfits that are embellished with detailed accessories, vibrant colours, and

extreme body modifications. (Fig.1) The Capitol citizens' costumes signify their immense wealth, along with their ignorance of the hardship that faces those in the Districts. This ignorance makes for a clear distinction between the Capitol and the Districts throughout the films, as Capitol citizens use very vibrant colours, with dramatic silhouettes, along with exquisitely crafted accessories. Whereas the District's citizens are coming from working-class families, meaning their costumes are sparse and few, with little bits of colour being that of greys or dull colours. These distinctions draw attention to the clear divide between those who are privileged and those who are suffering. An interesting aspect to consider is how these intense colours of the Capitol may be seen differently by an audience from a different socio-economic background. For those within Panem, the colourful costumes of the Capitol may present decadence and a detachment from reality, while citizens within the Districts may view these colours as symbols of oppression and luxury. Then, for a contemporary audience, these assorted colour perceptions may present insight into how the wealthy and the powerful are perceived and portrayed in various cultural settings, therefore deepening the cultural reading of the narrative.



***Capitol Fashion – President Snows Party – The Hunger Games. (Fig.1)***

This divide is seen very clearly within the first film, *The Hunger Games* (2012), when we witness the reaping of the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, and we are first introduced to Effie Trinket, the Capitol representative for District 12, “bright and bubbly as ever, Effie Trinket trots to the podium and gives her signature, ‘Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favour!’” (Collins, S. 2008 *The Hunger Games*. Hardcover, Page 23. New York, United States: Scholastic Press.) Her responsibilities include pulling the tributes’ names every year for the Games and thus escorting them to the Capitol and from there becoming an advisor for the tributes. Much like the rest of Panem’s residents, Effie initially appears very classy with her Capitol accent, ignorant, and entitled, shown when she reaps Primrose Everdeen, Katniss Everdeen’s younger sister who she then volunteers in place for. Effie gushes about Katniss’s

spirit and tries to lighten the mood and ease the tense expression of both Katniss and Peeta. Though the divide between the District and the Capitol is more than just mannerisms, it is also displayed through her costume. With her fuchsia pencil skirt, short blazer with puffed out shoulders, white lace socks and black heels, blouse, gloves, including a fuchsia pink flower on her head with a floral necktie, this is clearly different to the citizens of District 12 who had dressed in their simple dull colours also what was known as their reaping day clothes; meaning their best clothes because of the reaping being televised in the Capitol. (Fig.2) Highlighting the visual narrative of the dominance of the Capitol, forming a false consciousness, as the citizens of the Districts are forced to accept the annual Games as part of their normal lives.



***Effie Trinket and Katniss Everdeen – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games (Fig.2)***

Throughout the trilogy Effie’s costumes display her unshaken loyalty to the Capitol through her extravagant colours and silhouettes.’ (Fig.3) However Effie's costumes evolve alongside her ideological migration; as Katniss’s story progresses, Effie grows to like Katniss and Peeta and forms a true connection and relationship with the pair, meaning that her ideology shifts, which is seen in the subtle changes in her costumes, as they become less extravagant and more subdued. Through Effie's costumes, it showcase her gradual association with Katniss and the rebellion, in addition to her sensitivity for the Districts, “that Panem’s citizens are capable of finding the Capitol’s “weak spots” and exploiting them for their own ends,” (Connors, SP (ed.) 2014, The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres, Springer, Rotterdam.)

(Fig.4) Her choices in fashion throughout the trilogy act as a core visual narrative of her character arc; going from the control of the Capitol to becoming her own individual, who challenges the ideology of the Capitol, “ideology is the struggle over which of these elements not only is defined by its relationship with the others but also allows this relationship, is that medium through which they are organized.” (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.)



***Effie Trinket – Reaping Day in THGCF (Fig.3 Left) - In District 13 in Mockingjay (Fig.4 Right)***

Much like Effie, Caesar Flickerman, and President Snow’s fashion choices are deeply symbolic of their roles in Panem’s social spectrum. From Caesar’s immaculate, midnight blue sparkling suit, black lapels, exaggerated white collar and black tie, projecting confidence, and the illusion of neutrality, as he is the smiling face of the Games, while also keeping the sense of Capitol authority. (Fig.5) To President Snow’s black and deep red suit, white collar and rose, with grey gloves, capturing his approach to power, his black suit symbolises his control and intimidation, paired with his white rose, which traditionally symbolises purity, it is transformed into a tool of dominance in Snow’s hands. (Fig.6) Not only is Snow’s white rose a symbol of purity but it's true purpose is to conceal the fragrance of blood from his mouth sores, serving as a symbol of the corruption that is concealed under his pristine image of class and power. Both costumes of Caesar and Snow strengthen the description that the Capitol’s power is concealed under the facade of extravagance and purity to manipulate and control the citizens of Panem.



*Caeser Flickerman (Fig.5 Left) - President Snow (Fig.6 Right)*

The Capitol's early approach to fashion was visibly more restrained, as we see in the prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, where the Capitol is in the remnants from the war leaving a bleak aesthetic that is reminiscent of 1940s and 1950s America. Drawing a sharp contrast to the fashion we are used to from *The Hunger Games* trilogy, though, the prequel does foreshadow the decline to come. Trish Summerville, the costume designer who worked on both *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, spoke about wanting a more post-war feeling within TBOSAS, "They still have the nicest clothing, the nicest jewellery, everyone's hair is done, and they all have makeup, but it's a much more classic Americana look." (Jackson, H. 2023 *The New Hunger Games Prequel Brings Postwar Americana into the Future*. New York, United States: Vogue.) (Fig.7) For the Districts, Summerville expressed that for the everyday lives of the District citizens to be seen, outside of how the Capitol portrays them, displaying them enjoying life and how much of a community they were before the continual control of the Capitol took over. Whereas for the Capitol, Summerville wanted the costumes to feature a palette of very solid colours and more customised lines and subtle embellishments, presenting a society on the edge of its rise. This style is more controlled, classic, and contained, the kind that is communistic and concrete, which then plays well with the settings and locations. This also further foreshadows the styling of the tributes, through Snow's cousin, Tigris, as she displays a talent for fashion and styling: "Only his cousin's cleverness with a needle had saved him so far," (Collins, S.

2020 *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Hardcover. New York, United States: Scholastic Press.) This display of her imagination and calculated foresight, foreshadows the future Capitol’s obsession with their stylised appearances.



*District 12 – Miners (Fig.7)*

From the perspective of the earlier Games, the Games themselves lacked the elaborate spectacle that we are used to from Katniss’s storyline. Initially the tributes are presented in simple, plain clothing; whatever they had, however when we are introduced to Lucy Gray Baird, her costume becomes the turning point among tribute costuming, “dress made of a rainbow of ruffles; mentioned once fancy, now raggedy → raspberry, pink, royal blue and daffodil yellow,” (Collins, S. 2020, page 51, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Hardcover. New York, United States: Scholastic Press.) Lucy Gray’s dress and stage presence during the reaping is so captivating to those in the Capitol watching, which would later inspire the Capitol to treat the tributes as performers rather than unwilling participants, “Summerville wanted to keep the dress true to Suzanne Collins’s book, while still creating an engaging recreation.” (Jackson, H. 2023 *The New Hunger Games Prequel Brings Postwar Americana into the Future*. New York, United States: Vogue.) (Fig.8) Lucy Gray’s corset, with its hand painted katniss flowers and primroses, hints at the evolution of the Games and Katniss’s storyline, with the highly theatrical, stylised events, defining Panem’s future, where presentation and costume become a means of survival and entertainment.



*Lucy Gray Baird – Reaping Day. (Fig.8)*

Within the Capitol's hierarchy costume functions as both a visual enforcer and a resistance against it. The extravagances of the Capitol's attire, divides its citizens from those in the Districts, automatically creating a class division, while at the same time supporting the power spectrum throughout Panem. With an understanding about the dynamic between oppression and resistance, it is important to note how costume is not a decorative piece, but they are a part of system of social control and potential subversion. The unwilling transformation of the tributes into stylised celebrities for the Capitol's entertainment, styled by the designers of the Capitol, strips them of their own individual identity and strengthens the Capitol's dominance, "disciplinary power provides a set of social expectations for people: it tells us how we are supposed to act or fit in based upon messages we get from society," (Connors, SP (ed.) 2014, *The Politics of Panem : Challenging Genres*, Springer, Rotterdam.) These stylised costumes turned the tributes into tools of the uprising, an example, is when Katniss dons the "Girl on Fire" costume or when Lucy Gray captivates the audience's attention with her rainbow costume, showcasing a reclaim of their identity and protest the Capitol. These choices and

performances, show how the characters can use fashion to survive while simultaneously challenging the hierarchy that the Capitol enforces.

An essential element within Panem's hierarchy is the visual communication through fabric symbolism. The citizens of the Capitol demonstrate their wealth and separation from nature through their luxurious, synthetic materials, for example, the silks, satins, furs, and technologically enhanced fabrics like glossy, artificially coloured, these all strengthen the Capitol's idea of spectacle and artifice. Where in contrast, the District's citizens are limited to the natural, rough fibres, for example, wool, linen, coarse cotton, which reflects their struggle for survival. The divide appears more apparent during the Games, when the tributes from the Districts are transformed by their stylists in Capitol personas, by wearing luxurious materials, bringing to light their different origins, and Districts, through their temporary fame, "it is clear that the Capitol usually succeeds in dehumanizing and objectifying the tributes," (Connors, SP (ed.) 2014, *The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres*, Springer, Rotterdam.) The use of their fabrics becomes a shorthand for luxury versus deprivation, artificiality versus authenticity, thus becoming more than just a concern of design; becoming a matter of the power to control the narrative and their identity.

Within Panem these costumes not only act as commentary on celebrity culture but also on propaganda and the commodification of individuals, "the process of creating celebrity involves change beyond the physical. Instead, intrinsically tied up with power and ownership, it involves emotional manipulation and power of propaganda." (Morey, KA (ed.) 2013, *Bringing History to Life Through Film: The Art of Cinematic Storytelling*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, New York.) The Games transform these tributes from the Districts into celebrities, their images are created and marketed to satisfy those in the Capitol. Stylist, like Cinna, design the tributes' costumes not just for spectacle but to cultivate their personas that they know will capture the Capitol's attention, thus transforming the tributes into mascots for the entertainment of the Capitol and commercial gain. (Fig.9)



*Katniss and Peeta – Before Tribute Parade – The Hunger Games. (Fig.9)*

A prominent example would be Katniss’s “Girl on Fire” persona, which promotes her as a symbol; her outfits, designed by Cinna, are a manipulative sentiment used to gain public support, “her title as the girl on fire emphasizes the risk associated with the morals of reality TV as entertainment.” (Morey, KA (ed.) 2013, *Bringing History to Life Through Film: The Art of Cinematic Storytelling*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, New York.) (Fig.9) The costumes promoted by the Capitol, create propaganda, thus distracting the citizens from the violence of the Games and the suffering of the tributes by dressing them to fit the narrative the Capitol wants to strengthen the regime’s control, “Oh, that was nothing but a piece of propaganda.” (Szanto, GH 1977, *Theater and Propaganda*, University of Texas Press, Austin) Though sometimes the tributes and their stylist subvert these intentions, by using fashion as their form of self-expression and protest the Capitol's narrative, blurring the lines between commodity and individuality. Making costume an inseparable part of the machinery of fame, manipulation, and rebellion in Panem.



*Katniss and Peeta – Tribute Parade – The Hunger Games. (Fig. 10)*

How fashion within the Capitol is used to win both the audience's favour and to subtly go against the control of the Capitol is the fire motif in Katniss and Peeta's costumes. (Fig. 10) Designed by Cinna and Portica, their "Girl on Fire" and "Boy on Fire" ensembles transform them from District 12 tributes into celebrities, successfully capturing the attention of the Capitol with spectacle. The fire motifs correspond to the Capitol's demand for a spectacle and entertainment for the Capitol citizens, making Katniss and Peeta celebrities in the eyes of the viewers and increase their chances of sponsors, while simultaneously increasing their chances of survival. Though the motif is deeply disruptive; the fire symbolises rebellion, transformation, and rebirth. Cinna's design is clever as it walks a thin line between compliance and opposition, using the Capitol's obsession with appearance to plant thoughts of resistance and foreshadowing a change, "Thus, the scene illuminates a key weak spot in the Capitol's metaphorical fence: its disciplinary power can be used by citizens to foster their own agency." (Connors, SP (ed.) 2014, *The Politics of Panem : Challenging Genres*, Springer, Rotterdam) Therefore Katniss and Peeta's costumes serve to secure the support needed from the Capitol within the rules of the Games while also disrupting the Capitol's narrative from within.



*Katniss and Peeta – Tribute Parade – Catching Fire (Fig.11)*

From Roland Barthes' concept of mythologies, the costumes within Panem become a carrier of cultural and ideological meaning below the surface level appearance. According to Barthes, cultural symbols take on a deeper ideological meaning, "it is the cultural manifestation of the class system." (Rivière, M 2008, Barthes, Humanities-Ebooks, LLP, Penrith.) This helps to explain how the costumes in the films became tools of political messaging, for example, transforming everyday items, like clothing, into symbols that can communicate social myths. The Capitol fashion mythologies excess and power within Panem through transforming luxury clothing into a shorthand for their visual superiority and entitlement. Whereas the Districts fashion, by contrast, is mythologised as authentic and resilient through enforcing narratives of suffering and survival. Like the "Girl on Fire" costume, that has a mythic status, through how they shape individuals and events becoming understood by a society on a larger scale. (Fig.11) An example would be how Katniss's "Girl on Fire" costume functions as an expression of her identity and as a public symbol that are manipulated by outside forces. From these visual mythologies, costume can mediate the relationship between personal identity as well as a collective ideology, making every costume a tool for cultural values throughout Panem, "it is not something 'outside' or 'beyond' ideology, but that 'difference' that allows the master-signifier's naming of its own difference." (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.)

Also pulling from Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier and signified within The Hunger Games the costumes act as visual signs that can communicate complex meanings.

The costumes are the signifiers, like Katniss's flaming dress, Snow's white rose, or even Effie's flamboyant ensemble, serving as an outward expression, "following the linguistics of Saussure, is that there is no necessary relationship between reality and its symbolization." (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: *Live Theory*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.) The meaning of the signified, would be the rebellion, purity, and control, or even the loyalty to Snow and the Capitol. These construct an interpretation of costume as a dynamic process that is formed by the social context of Panem. An example would be Katniss's "Girl on Fire" costume, as it is a signifier of hope and rebellion, foreshadowing the change that is to come, while simultaneously signalling entertainment to the Capitol, "this ideological point de capiton, or master signifier, is not some underlying unity but only the difference between elements, only what its various mentions have in common: the signifier itself as pure difference." (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: *Live Theory*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.) (Fig. 11) The costumes become sign systems throughout the series, with each costume signalling its own complex message that evolves as the story progresses.

Meaning that costume works as a 'text' within Panem, that can be read for signs of power, gender, and identity. The costumes become a visual code, communicating their social status as well as the wearer's association with the resistance or the Capitol's regime. The sign of power can be seen through the Capitol's fashion or through the authority of Snow's thoughtfully picked suits. Where the sign of gender expectations is negotiated and often challenged, like Katniss's hunting attire (Fig. 12) it contrasts with the Capitol's hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine attire. Then the sign of identity is constructed and performed through each individual costume, for example, the tributes are transformed to fit a narrative that is entrusted upon them, but their choices of these costumes allow for small moments of self-definition. Within Panem's visual culture, costume functions as a legible 'text,' maintaining an openness to interpretation and staying rich with meaning for those who can read the signs, "metaphors are changed into images that are more comprehensible." (Trifonas, PP (ed.) 2015, *International Handbook of Semiotics*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht.)



*Katniss Everdeen – Opening Scene in hunting gear – The Hunger Games. (Fig.12)*

***Chapter Two:***

## *District Fashion*

The District costumes are distinguished by a persistent practicality: a strong rejection of extravagance in favour of common functionality and survival. The costumes are plain, solid, and created from coarse fabrics that can withstand the everyday demands of laborious work. The colour palette in the Districts are muted and melancholy (Fig.7); being shades of grey, brown, and faded blue, shadowing a drabness over their lifestyle and strengthening the sense of hardship that is imposed by the Capitol's rule. The simplicity is a notably important symbolic meaning, instantly important to the questions asked at the beginning of this thesis, more so regarding the visual communication concepts of authority, identity, and resistance. (Fig.13) The citizens of the District's costumes do a lot more than meet the utilitarian demands; through removal of markers of their individual wealth or social status, these costumes promote a collective identity steamed in a mutual struggle and solidarity. Therefore, the costumes of the District citizens function as a collective visual language that communicates their dominance while simultaneously expressing forms of alliance and latent resistance against the dominance of the Capitol.



*District 12 Citizens – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games (Fig.13)*

The District workers costumes exceed its functional use (Fig.7), becoming visual evidence of their steadfastness and solidarity. The lack of embellishment is a choice made by them as a society that draws strength from unity. The dullness of the costumes within the colour palette transforms them into a reserved strength of allegiance within their community. (Fig.14)

Through their costumes, they can subtly communicate their common difficulties and their firm commitment to each other.



*Katniss Everdeen's Family in District 12 – Reaping Day – Catching Fire (Fig.14)*

Throughout the novels, especially amid the uprising, these functional costumes begin to evolve. The functionality of the costume remains strong, as the costumes must continue to protect and endure, with the inclusion of small symbols to signify the beginning of the uprising. These small symbols are discreetly being added, for example, armbands, patches, and hand-sewn insignia, are added to the otherwise ordinary outfits, letting the Rebels express their solidarity and hope subtly, without attracting the attention of the Capitol. A symbol which is turned into the rallying point for those who are committed to the cause, is Katniss's Mockingjay pin, which makes an appearance from the first Games she appears in. (Fig.28) Throughout the three films, the pin transforms from a personal item into a symbol for the resistance, undermining the Capitol's propaganda. In conclusion the costumes of the Districts illustrates their hardships and their accord, coming together to weave the strands of their collective identity, endurance, and disobedience, that highlights their collective struggle. In contrast, the Peacekeepers' uniforms are deliberate, with their uniforms contrasting the Districts and the Rebels. Dressed in pristine white from head to toe, the Peacekeepers project an image of authority and hierarchy. (Fig.15) Underneath their exterior of cleanliness and control lies a more vicious purpose: a systematic cancellation of their individual character within the service of the Capitol's regime Their uniforms are a representation of the void of any personal touches; no effects of identity are allowed. Each Peacekeeper appears identical

to the next; their faces hidden underneath their helmets or caps, while their forms are made anonymous within the stark uniformity of white.



*Peacekeepers – The Hunger Games. (Fig. 15)*

The colour white is usually associated with naivety or purity, though within the Peacekeepers' uniform, it becomes a weaponised tool of psychological dominance. (Fig.15) Due to this, it then becomes a symbol of cancellation rather than the promise of renewal; the deletion of their personal preferences to the collective, including themselves into the faceless machinery of power. The militarised accuracy of their uniforms, with their pressed collars, and strict militarised movements, solidifies their submission to the regime. Personal touches from the Peacekeepers are suppressed, because of the Capitol's desire to diminish the will of each Peacekeeper into a singular mind. (Fig.16)



*Peacekeepers – Mockingjay (Fig.16)*

The lack of personal identity is psychological and visual. The uniforms' shields, depict the Peacekeepers are protected from any personal responsibility, securing being relieved of the burden of any individual conscience. This isolates the Peacekeepers from the citizens of the Districts, creating that divide from fear and estrangement. As the Peacekeepers serve to enforce the laws of the Capitol. Using all white uniforms the Capitol succeed with the transformation of the Peacekeepers from individuals into the Capitols pawns, from the demand for uniformity and control. (Fig. 16) This makes the Peacekeepers a symbol of militarised cancellation, due to the strict regime.

The contrast in colour palettes between the Capitol and the Districts becomes a strong visual that differentiates their settings. In the Capitol, colour is expressed, through their fashion which is dominated by electric tones, bright green, sharp blues, and neon pinks, which captivate and attract attention. (Fig.17) These harsh colours are usually paired with metallic fabrics, such as gold and silver. The citizens of the Capitol costumes become statements of their social status, with the metallic fabrics and neon colours signalling more than just an aesthetic choice become a signal of the Capitol's obsession with extravagance. Their individuality is showcased through this extravagance, with their wealth being measured by the ability to attract more attention and be the most extravagant.



*Capitol Citizens – The Hunger Games. (Fig.17)*

The Capitol's extravagance contrasts with the Districts' colour palette which is built around necessities and scarcity. Their earth tones, such as muddy brown, faded greens, and many shades of grey, take over majority of the District citizens wardrobes. These colours are due to the need for their costume functionality rather than attracting attention. (Fig.18) A symbol from the Districts would be the use of grey, depicting their hardships during everyday life under the Capitol's control, as the earth tones of their costumes signal their environment and mutual challenges. This palette serves to get rid of their individual distinctions, binding the citizens together, through visual storytelling of a collective endurance.



*Katniss Everdeen – Reaping Day – The Hunger Games. (Fig.18)*

These opposing colour schemes show the social divide. (Fig.19) While the Capitol's fashion is luxury and extravagance, the District clothing is humanity and alliance. Thus, colour becomes a language of power and endurance. Through the divide between the neon and metallics, against the earth tones and grey, the distinction between oppressor and oppressed is highlighted in every item of clothing and shade.



*Katniss, Peeta, and Effie – Reaping Day – Catching Fire (Fig.19)*

Tributes costumes are more than just costumes; they become a symbol of branding. They become a powerful instrument of control that is dictated by the Capitol stylists to shape the citizens' perceptions and strengthen the Capitol's power. All the tributes' costumes are designed to captivate the audience's attention and to build a sense of identity, as they are stripped of their individual identity and transformed into these Capitol celebrities, "One's identity isn't something that should be reinvented over and over again, even on the level of appearance," (Dunn, GA, & Michaud, N (eds) 2012, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Newark.) They become images made to market the entertainment value and emotional value of the Games. During the tribute parade, they are remade into living symbols, much like when Katniss dons the "Girl on Fire" costume, her identity is then woven with the flames and rebellion, without her willingness or intention, "the description of Katniss as "the girl on fire" carries contradictory associations. Fire is dangerous, just as the revolutionary ideas that Katniss inspires result in the deaths of many of Panem's citizens, even many innocents." (Dunn, GA, & Michaud, N (eds) 2012, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Newark.) With the costume not being picked by Katniss herself, but being entrusted to her, much like every other tribute, it highlights the Capitol's control over every

detail of their identity and image. Every tribute costume from District 1 to District 12, has dramatic effects and materials, creating a form of manipulation, a way in which the Capitol markets off the tributes and controls the narrative in their favour.

These costumes function more than a symbol of branding, they are tools of psychological control much like the Peacekeepers. They function as a signal to the tributes and District citizens into icons, by dictating the way in which the tributes are seen and choreographing the way a tribute will be remembered. Thus, succeeding in distracting the citizens from the brutality of the Games, “the pleasure in our lives of affirming creation is inverted into perversities of destruction, pleased in the pain of suffering and death” (Dunn, GA, & Michaud, N (eds) 2012, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy : A Critique of Pure Treason*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Newark.) Restructuring the violence as an extravagant entertainment, with the tribute costumes being more than a spectacle, but a domination of the Capitol and its President Snow. Through the use of branding and visual control that the Capitol can cement its dominance by showcasing to everyone, from Capitol citizens to District citizens, that even the most self-expression of their identity can be captured and remodelled by those in power.

In The Hunger Games universe, propaganda plays an important responsibility in forming public opinion and retaining power. The massive influence of visual media is recognised by both the Capitol and the Rebels. (Fig.20) By recognising this, they are both able to craft footage to sway the minds and hearts of the citizens in Panem, “Such a popular conception of propaganda can serve an audience member as an easy basis for dismissing the play and its intentions.” (Szanto, GH 1977, *Theater and Propaganda*, University of Texas Press, Austin.)



*Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay. (Fig.20)*

The Capitol uses its own propaganda films to employ similar techniques as the Rebels, though with very different aims. The Capitol, through newsreels and broadcasts, downplay those suffering in the Districts, or when the rebellion begins, they twist the Rebels' actions into villainy narratives. With the Capitol's control, they can produce an image of safety and strength, even while facing mounting unrest. (Fig.20) They sacrifice realism for effect, for it to help the regime's preferred storyline. Yet propaganda in the films, through the staging of appearances, becomes a battle of meaning over memory.



*President Snow – Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay (Fig.21)*

The Capitol's propaganda dominance is their defining mechanism of control and dominance over Panem's population. The Capitol's films are not entertainment or background information; the films are to shape the perceptions of the citizens around Panem, as well as their beliefs and to have them remain loyal to the Capitol and its regime. The Capitol understands how important it is to control the narrative, which becomes the reason why they invest so much into the staging of their appearances, particularly during the Games. This is shown during the Capitol's airstrikes on District 8. (Fig.22) The news broadcast for the Capitol (Fig.20) and its official footage is created very carefully, to make sure that the broadcast strengthens the Capitol's power. The damage that has been done by the Capitol's airstrikes is either downplayed or reframed; the Capitol never broadcast the true suffering that the citizens of District 8 are going through. The Capitol broadcast focuses on images that showcase that the order is being restored, with shots of chaos being replaced by shots of the Peacekeepers and their militarised movements, with their shining white uniforms, demonstrating to the population of Panem that their control has been restored and they still stand strong.



*District 8 – After the bombing – Mockingjay (Fig.22)*

Their propaganda does not document the events happening in Panem; it constructs them. Their wins are exaggerated, their losses are overlooked, and any rebellion is illustrated as pointless violence that could threaten the stability and prosperity nourished by the Capitol, “Katniss Everdeen survived The Hunger Games. Now the Capitol wants revenge.” (Collins, S. 2009 *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. Hardcover, Blurb. New York, United States: Scholastic Press) Spokespeople, much like Caesar Flickerman, are selected for their self-control and charisma and tasked with delivering scripted messages that can be at once reassuring to the population and quietly menacing to those opposed to the Capitol. Their language is chosen to summon pride in Capitol achievements and to cast doubt on the Districts’. His warmth is to help shape the audience's perception of the tributes, sometimes humanising them for the audience, evoking empathy for certain tributes at times to affect both the audience and sponsors, “The audience experiences only the emotions of catharsis and none of the insights. Caesar may cry out, “Oh, that is a piece of bad luck” with “a real edge of pain in his voice,” and the audience may produce murmurings and “some agonized cries,” but they don’t stop and think.” (Dunn, GA, & Michaud, N (eds) 2012, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Newark.)

The appearances of the Capitol are staged with dramatic flair. Panem's leaders, for example, President Snow, are shown in an environment that can strengthen the extravagance and security of the Capitol. Even through times of crisis, their films are set against backdrops that help strengthen the Capitol's image of untouchable and to show that they are still in control. (Fig.23) The struggles the Districts face is never broadcast in their raw form; rather, the focus is on Capitol's strength and stamina, with the assurance of tranquillity through that strength.



*President Snow – Capitol Broadcast – Mockingjay (Fig.23)*

The obsession the Capitol has with curating images and controlling the narratives holds a psychological effect. The population of Panem is flooded with images that promote the Capitol. The Capitol divides lines between reality and fiction begin to blur over time, therefore making it harder for audiences to distinguish between the two. With their staging of appearances and propaganda films, the Capitol can control the obedience and shape how its population sees the rest of Panem, securing the regime's survival through perception rather than force.

### *Chapter Three:*

#### *Rebel Fashion and Katniss's Evolution*

The costumes of the Rebels illustrate their hardships and fellowships, signifying their collective identity, endurance, and opposition, while also depicting their struggle. (Fig.14) The development of the Rebels' costumes is an absorbing narrative of adaptation, identity, and opposition. In the beginning, the Rebels' costumes are defined by functionality, over being stylish or an expression of identity. Their clothes are rugged and long-lasting, made from whatever materials they can get their hands on, scavenged, repurposed, or hand-made to withstand the life on the run. The highlight of the functionality is clear, with every piece serving a purpose, from warmth, camouflage, or protection from either the elements or the enemy. In the early stages, the Rebels' clothing is just about unnoticeable from that of the regular District citizens, endurance over their appearance.



*Peacekeepers vs Districts Citizens – Mockingjay (Fig. 24)*

As the rebellion progresses and the movement grows in conviction and cohesion, the costumes begin to progress and change as well. The functionality continues to be paramount, but there is new meaning threaded throughout the fabric. Small powerful symbols of resistance begin to appear, armbands that signal allegiance, patches sewn into their jackets, along with hand-sewn insignia. These little additions are not big and shiny, but subtle, designed with the intention of being concealed or shown depending on the circumstances. (Fig.25) Their symbols show power in their importance rather than their visibility, their language of resistance and their harmony that can pass under the radar between those who are willing to risk everything for the cause.



*Katniss and her family in District 13 – Mockingjay (Fig.25)*

The appearance of these symbols showcases a turning point with the Rebels' evolution. Their costumes are not their armour against the world of Panem, (Fig.25) but it is their symbol for hope, solidarity, and rebellion. Every symbol carries a message or story of belonging, with this the Rebels' costume changes; it continues to function for their necessary uses of survival, but it also proclaims that of a strong message of resistance. (Fig.28) The evolution of their costumes, cements their identity and purpose, creating functionality and protest in each stitch.



*Rebel's sneaking into the Capitol – Mockingjay (Fig.26)*

The Rebels' costumes change acts as a signifier of their identity and alliance. The individuals take on costume's alike utilitarian, functional costumes that stand for District 13 or coordinate uniforms to be worn during their propaganda broadcasts. The fact that the Rebels wear these costumes (Fig.25 & Fig.26) erases any distinction of class, district, or occupation. This visually nurtures the feeling of equality and that they share a collective aim, breaking the walls that had been previously dividing the Districts. Their collective identity strengthens the Rebels and their teamwork instead of creating competition. Unlike the Capitol, the Rebels costume changes are deliberately made for functionality rather than aesthetic choices. The costumes unite the Rebels internally, establishing their leadership and loyalty to the cause, in addition to broadening the movement to the wider population of Panem, switching their individual acts of resistance into a collective act of resistance.

Propaganda plays an important role in forming public opinion; the Rebels recognise this, therefore staging the appearances of the Rebels at crucial moments, “propaganda is a specific form of activated ideology; that is, ideologies are manifested in various ways, and one such manifestation is the kind of propaganda the subsequent explorations will deal with.” (Szanto,

GH 1977, Theater and Propaganda, University of Texas Press, Austin.) For example, when the Capitol calls in airstrikes on District 8, the films are not about documenting reality but are more concerned with controlling the narratives to serve their political narrative. This develops in a strong contrast between the chaos of destruction that is filmed and what the broadcast is told to present as a depiction of control and security. During Katniss's visit to those in the makeshift hospital in District 8, cameras are present, following her every movement and capturing her every reaction. The destruction brought on District 8 by the Capitol bombers becomes an opportunity for the Rebels to capture Katniss's grief, rage, and her compassion to evoke hope throughout Panem, "if we burn you burn with us." (Collins, S. 2010 *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*. Hardcover, Blurb. New York, United States: Scholastic Press.) The footage is then edited to maximise emotional impact on the citizens, shifting the tragedy's focus into a call for unity for rebellion and cementing the symbolic birth of the Mockingjay as the figurehead of the rebellion.



***Katniss in the bombing of District 8 – Mockingjay (Fig.27)***

Katniss's true emotion is exploited, the context thoughtfully coordinated to broadcast, making sure that the message impacts home precisely as intended: "effectively shape people's lives, a critical mass of citizens must buy into and enact the categories and definitions the state imposes on them." (Connors, SP (ed.) 2014, *The Politics of Panem : Challenging Genres*, Springer, Rotterdam.) From the ruins of District 8 or the extravagant studios of the Capitol, every camera motion, word, and facial expression is created to influence the citizens of Panem. Through these carefully created spectacles, both the Capitol and the Rebels look to determine the truth, fighting appearances to win the war for Panem's citizens.

A visual symbol for the Rebels would be Katniss's Mockingjay pin, her blazing costumes, and the progression of sombre and utilitarian costumes, serves as a strong symbol of the unity, hope, and resistance. When Katniss showcases her "Girl on Fire" dress, transforming her into the Mockingjay, identifying her as the living symbol of resistance. On a psychological level, these images help the Rebels in reframing their struggle so that they are no longer victims, but advocates of change. The empowerment is important in their long-term resistance, particularly when facing the regime of the Capitol. These images provide a feeling of validation and acceptance to those who may have felt isolated, and seeing these images being repeated in propaganda, clothing, and the media further supports their sense of validation and belonging. For the Capitol citizens, these images have a more destabilising effect. Seeing this Mockingjay symbol may cause the Capitol citizens anxiety and fear of the possibility of a rebellion because the imagery challenges the narrative of supremacy that the Capitol have created while exposing the breaks in their facade of control and order. The Capitol then attempts to censor these images, which only then heightens their mental effect and makes them more alluring to Capitol citizens who might have empathy, curiosity, or even guilt, making them then reconsider the ethics of the government's actions.



***Katniss Mockingjay Pin – The Symbol of the Rebellion (Fig.28)***

In all, the psychological power that costume symbolism and imagery have in The Hunger Games universe lies in the ability they must inspire optimism and solidarity among the Districts, while in addition instilling fear, doubt, and instability among those in the Capitol.

The dual effect is evidence of the importance of visual culture and propaganda in resisting political change.

This use of costume begins with Lucy Gray Baird in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, before Katniss. Lucy Gray's rainbow dress sets her apart from the other tributes. Lucy Gray's costume acts as an assertion of personal identity and performance, bonding her showmanship with self-expression. With her rainbow dress she can draw the attention of the Capitol, foreshadowing her power to mesmerise and disarm the Capitol audience, with her snake motif referencing her District 12 roots while implying the threat she poses underneath her charm. Whereas her lace parasol, shows her theatrical side, using the tradition of performers and drawing the Capitol's attention. Lucy Gray then becomes an early example of resistance through branding, by using the Capitol spectacle to make space for her freedom and survival in the Games, sixty-four years before Katniss and the *Mockingjay* era.



***Lucy Gray Baird singing for the Capitol – The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (Fig.29)***

The awareness Lucy Gray has for the spectacle foreshadows the Capitol's media culture we know from Katniss's era, when visual elements, representation and performance can write the way that becomes central to power. Many other tributes are caught up in the Capitol's manipulation, unlike Lucy Gray who is her own persona, as she acknowledges how she is perceived becomes just as important as what she does throughout the Games. Being able to gain popularity in the Games and public eye is through Lucy Gray's ability to perform, from her singing, dramatic gestures, and her theatrical costuming. This all signifies the Capitol's

obsession with popularity and their need to control the narrative, seen in Katniss's storyline. Like Katniss, Lucy Gray can master the spectacle, to show how rebellion and identity can be told through performance within a society that is obsessed with appearances.

The moment Katniss steps onto the Capitol stage in her "Girl on Fire" dress, the fire becomes a symbol known throughout the whole of Panem. Designed by Cinna, Katniss's Capitol stylist, who designed the dress with the intention of captivating the audience's attention and transforming Katniss into a display. The fire becomes not a means of extravagant entertainment but also functions as an instrument for the Capitol to maintain their power and dominance over the tributes. From the early scenes, the fire is not Katniss's, it is designed by Cinna, a Capitol stylist meaning it was designed by the Capitol first, only meant to transform Katniss into an object, a form of entertainment for the audience, just a pawn within the Capitol's game. Though as the films progress, the fire begins to symbolise more than just an uprising; it begins to draw attention to the Capitol's ability to manipulate images and symbols to strengthen their narrative. The fire shows the beginning of Katniss's story, as she began as a manipulated tribute to go on to become a symbol of the uprising, symbolising that the flames have developed coincide with Katniss and the rebellion.



***Katniss Everdeen – Transformation – Catching Fire (Fig.30)***

Highlight a key stage in Katniss's character arc would be Katniss's wedding dress transformation into the Mockingjay dress. (Fig.30) Katniss's wedding dress was originally to be another example of a Capitol spectacle, an extravagant garment that was meant to strengthen Katniss's role within the Capitol's narrative, a bride-to-be created purely for the entertainment of Panem.(Fig.31) Instead, Cinna's true design is revealed when the wedding dress burns away to reveal the Mockingjay dress beneath. (Fig.30) Showcasing Katniss's

growth from a manipulated tribute into a figurehead of the resistance, becoming more than just a transformation, showcasing to Panem that a resistance can emerge from within the Capitol's narrative.



*Katniss Everdeen – Tribute Interview – Catching Fire (Fig.31)*

As the rebellion gains momentum, Katniss's Mockingjay armour becomes a symbol of evolution within costume design. The Mockingjay outfit is a functional and military, designed for her protection and combat rather than just being created for a spectacle and entertainment, unlike her previous costumes. The functional and sleek design foreshadows Katniss's new position as the figurehead on the front lines of the resistance. Though being a production of propaganda, the armour is engineered to ignite encouragement among the Rebels, while igniting fear among those in the Capitol. The motifs and dark palette produce the image of the Mockingjay, (Fig.32) by combining utility with symbolism. This makes the armour become a dual tool, shielding Katniss physically while showing her status as the living symbol of the of the rebellion, the armour made for both function and meaning. The Mockingjay armour draws attention to where performance and reality combined; signalling Katniss's transformation into the symbol of the revolution is fully revealed.



*Katniss Everdeen – Mockingjay dress – Catching Fire (Fig.32)*

Together Lucy Gray and Katniss are shaped and styled by others for political means. Lucy Gray’s image is created and elevated by Coriolanus Snow; Snow seeing the power of spectacle and manipulates her presence to curate favour and influence, “ambition will fuel him.” (Collins, S. 2020 *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Hardcover, Blurb. New York, United States: Scholastic Press.) Like Lucy Gray, Katniss’s public image is created by Cinna and his team of stylists, though later she becomes staged by those in power; Plutarch Heavensbee, who uses Katniss as an asset to the resistance’s propaganda, “the Capitol and later some rebel leaders try to use metaphors to limit her understanding of who she is and what she’s capable of becoming.” (Dunn, GA, & Michaud, N (eds) 2012, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Newark.) Within both storylines, their costumes and performances are more than their individuality; they become pawns that capture the attention of the audience and play into political aims. This brings to light the dynamic between individual identity and the Capitol’s power and rebellion.



*Katniss and Rebel's in her Mockingjay armour – Mockingjay (Fig.33)*

Using costume in both Lucy Gray's and Katniss's journeys, the themes of agency, manipulation, and transformation are thoroughly shown. With Lucy Gray, her performance outfit (Fig.8) is a declaration of her identity, but with her experience, it becomes curated and elevated by Coriolanus Snow for his own political narrative. Though with Katniss, each individual costume is a different step in her journey, from the Capitol's "Girl on Fire" spectacle, to her Mockingjay dress, to then her Mockingjay armour. With each step her agency shifts: from being a pawn, to seizing the control, by using her costume to express rebellion or inspire hope. Throughout Lucy Gray's and Katniss's costumes, stylist, and political power; being Cinna, Plutarch, and Snow, they each shape Lucy Gray's and Katniss's appearances, blurring the lines between individual and orchestrated narrative. Within Panem costume are more than costumes; they become a tool to negotiate control, manipulation, and genuineness, for the characters to continually reimagine themselves in the face of power.

### ***Conclusion:***

***And May the Odds Be Ever in Your Favour.***

Thus, this thesis explains that costume design functions as a visual language as well as an instrument for political storytelling, as it can communicate concepts of authority, identity, and rebellion across the narratives of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and the prequel; *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, as well as their adaptations. Meaning that costumes are not only decorative pieces, but they work to express compelling messages of social divisions and status, character development, along with changes in allegiance. The contrast within Panem between the extravagant fashions of the Capitol and the functional costumes of the Districts showcases a visual message of their class divisions and the power of control. From applying Saussure's idea of the signifier and signified to many of the costumes, the costumes within *The Hunger Games* universe showcase as a signifier, due to the characterising deeper meanings that are traced back to power, character development, and loyalty shifts. The example presented within this thesis is Katniss's dress that introduces her as the "Girl on Fire." With the dress being the signifier, as it captures the attention of the audience with its flaming design, which makes the signified being the rebellion and hope that Katniss later embodies, repurposing the Capitol's spectacle into tools for the rebellion. To the evolution of characters' costumes such as Effie Trinket's transformation from extravagant to subdued attire, mirroring ideological transformations and her character progression. Whereas the Rebels' functional costumes become defined by subtle symbols of solidarity and hope. As displayed through this thesis, visual elements heighten the understanding of the narratives.

Also showcased in this thesis is how costume functions as an origin for political messaging and propaganda. The Capitol presents this through costume by dehumanising, branding, and controlling the tributes, therefore transforming them into celebrities purely for public entertainment and distraction. Though, through characters such as Katniss and Lucy Gray, with their curated adaptation and choreographed performance, they reclaim costume as a way of means of self-expression and protest, this challenges the regime's narrative from within. Overall, presenting costume as an important narrative instrument that visually presents political and ideological struggles, establishing costume as an important form of visual language that creates an audience's interpretation and deepens the impact of political storytelling.

This demonstrates that choices made for adaptation, within costume design especially, become key in highlighting, transforming, or reinterpreting the themes of Suzanne Collins' novels. Translating literary symbols and character descriptions into strong elements visually,

bringing conceptual themes like power, rebellion, propaganda, and identity into focus for the audiences. This makes the costumes a link between Collins' original internal worlds and the external visual language of the films. Through the creative decisions, of fabric, colour, and silhouette all of which contribute to the Capitol's luxury and the Districts economy, instantly visually strengthening the class division and the control of power depicted in the novels. This thesis processes how costume design is more than just a reflection of a character's development but is a strong tool in telling the story through visualising ideological struggles, showing a new insight to the relationship between the visual aesthetics and political plot lines. As explained, Katniss's transformation of her costumes, from the "Girl on Fire" phenomenon to the functional Mockingjay armour, visually presenting her development as a character, from the Capitol's pawn in their game to a celebrity icon of the resistance, reinterpreting and solidifying her arc of rebellion. By Saussure's signifier and signified, these examples explained within the thesis reveal the visual features that are introduced to the thematic conversations of power and resistance.

Highlighting that adaptation allows for transformation and expansion of Collins' original work. While the films do visually exaggerate contrast, through costume as a narrative tool and by using a semiotic theory, showcasing the means to construct across media. Elements like Effie Trinket's costumes or the small rebellion symbols within the Rebels' costumes are what add new depth to characters growth and resistance, depth that were clear within the text. Meaning adaptation choices do not recreate directly what was written in the novels; they reinterpret and at times subvert the themes. With adaptation, visual narratives, especially costume, highlight the power relations, propaganda, and ideological struggles in the centre of The Hunger Games universe, having the themes become more direct and present to a new audience.

As shown throughout this thesis, costume design is crucial to character development; for characters like Katniss, Effie Trinket, and President Snow, who are visually illustrated, and being able to trace their narrative through their every evolving costumes. With many examples like, Katniss's transformation from the "Girl on Fire" in an extravagant dress to the functional Mockingjay armour, illustrating her character arc from a manipulated tribute to the figurehead of the rebellion. To Effie Trinket's costumes, which as explained, progress from her luxury Capitol fashion to the subdued and plain costumes of the Rebels,' illustrating her loyalty shift in addition to her character arc. Along with President Snow's perfect suits and his iconic white rose trademark serving as a symbol of his power, and the facade of purity,

hiding the corruption beneath. Demonstrating costume as a visual story that presents a characters' inner changes and changes within ideology.

Showcased is the clear continuation, that links *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* with *The Hunger Games*, presenting costume as an important mechanism in Panem's cultural heritage. Not just functioning as self-expression but also functioning as a continuous visual language that can form and reflect Panem's society values, power status, and levels of resistance over generations. As explained, early fashion within the Capitol depicted in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is more restrained, though it shows the seeds of presentation and manipulation that are already present: through Tigris' talents, along with Lucy Gray's capturing rainbow dress. Through Lucy Gray's use of costume to draw attention while lessening the expectations foreshadowing the evolution of the Games into the theatrical, stylised events highlighted in Katniss's era. This opens the platform we see in Katniss's storyline, with the use of costumes as a survival tool and weapon of agency, customs that we later see Katniss embody and transform. Continuing into *The Hunger Games*, fixation with luxury and avant-garde fashion within the Capitol has become fully embraced, imprinting a clearer contrast between the privileged and the struggling. Enforcing the class division through costume and highlighting the Capitol's dominance, though it is later reclaimed by characters such as Katniss, as explained in the thesis where she transforms symbols of presentation, the "Girl on Fire," into the Mockingjay, a form of resistance, hope, and a collective identity.

Presenting that through *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* to *The Hunger Games* trilogy, costume evolves as a continuity and controversy. Through the manipulation of appearance, the power of silhouette and fabrics, to performance aspects of costumes all becoming a continuation of Panem's mythmaking. Persisting a legacy, a visual language understood through power, oppression, and endurance, with possibilities of resistance, connecting the characters and generations across the history of Panem.

Throughout this thesis, the evolution of the costumes throughout, display the impact visual communication can have upon, by reinterpreting or even subvert the themes presented in the original novel. Through the decision made in bringing the literary descriptions into the world of film demonstrating the meaning is not just transferred but it is transformed. The stories are redone for a new generation and audience, drawing attention to the vital role of costume design as one of the many main components during the making. Highlighting that costume is not merely a decorative piece, but it is an important tool within the narrative and carries

symbolic meanings, acting as a communicator for the characters, their social status, and ideology, through the uses of colour, fabric, and silhouette establishing the designers part in the world-building and storytelling process, expanding the film's aesthetic and political result. Thus, establishing just how much costume can be weaponised by both in power and resistance; mapping out the role costume can play for political messaging and social change. Concluding the layers of themes within Panem that costume can demonstrate as a visual language, from the Capitol's extravagance to the Mockingjay's representation of hope; costume design can lay out the narrative, ideology, and emotion subtly through the screen, "in the analysis of ideology, it is not simply a matter of seeing which account of reality best matches the 'facts', with the one that is closest being the least biased and therefore the best." (Butler, R 2005, Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.) Costume's ability of this symbolism goes beyond fiction, impacting the audience's interpretation and participation. Presenting that through adaptation, costume is more important than for the negotiation of meaning, identity, and power, not only for the characters and narrative.

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