

Role of Vogue Magazine in the Transformation of Screen Characters into Style Icons

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Published: December 29, 2017

Abstract

This article focuses on the role of Vogue magazine in the creation of style icons, which are primarily movie characters. Based on the theories of iconicity and conditions of truly iconic, it has been researched, how Vogue magazine transforms a celebrity and its screen character into a style icon through the cover images, profile stories and their correlation to the screen character portrayed in a movie. In the meantime boundaries between the on-screen and off-screen images of the actresses/icons get vague, with an emphasis on the fashion legacy of the characters in general visual culture. Main examples of this article are Carrie Bradshaw, played by Sarah Jessica Parker in TV-show and feature film *Sex and the City* (1998-2008), Satine (performed by Nicole Kidman) of *Moulin Rouge* (2001) and Marie Antoinette (portrayed by Kirsten Dunst) from *Marie Antoinette* (2006). With time the actresses and/or their heroines get established as style icons due to the features related to the style iconicity, such as embodiments of cultural myths and narratives through fashion; ambiguities; wide circulation and immediacy of recognition, as well as involvement with dense web of products and encouraging consumption. In this paper style icons demonstrate the process of transformation of actresses and their on-screen characters through fashion, visible in their embodiment of the cultural myths, indeterminacies and narratives of transformation and self-improvement.

Keywords: Vogue magazine; Style icons; fashion and film; Carrie Bradshaw; *Moulin Rouge*; Marie Antoinette

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Introduction

The authority of *Vogue* magazine for the fashion industry and cultural reflections has become indisputable. And while concurrent appearances of actresses coinciding with film releases can be seen as marketing strategies for movie companies looking to promote new releases, there is more to it. *Vogue* actually blurs the lines between the screen, the fashion world and everyday life. In 2002, Sarah Jessica Parker (hereinafter SJP) appeared on the cover of *Vogue* (February 2002) at the same time as an episode of *Sex and the City* (hereinafter SATC) aired. In the episode, entitled *Vogue idea*, Carrie Bradshaw (SJP's character) is getting a job at the magazine. This observance inspired this article, as *Vogue* magazine has a lot to do with the cultural creation of fashion icons. The magazine overuses the word "icon" in every issue, describing every "iconic cover" they produce and "iconic shades" of lipstick they advertise.

In order to find the answer to the question of the role of *Vogue* magazine in the creation of style icons, I looked at three vivid examples of movie characters and stars who play them, which are Carrie Bradshaw (played by Sarah Jessica Parker) in the TV show and feature film *Sex and the City* (1998-2008), Satine (Nicole Kidman) of *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) and Marie Antoinette (Kirsten Dunst) in *Marie Antoinette* (2006). They all appeared on the *Vogue* covers to promote their movies in the image of a character. So I researched their iconic movies, read profile articles about them in *Vogue* issues and tried to see how the general findings of style iconicity can relate to the findings from the features in *Vogue* magazine.

Condition of a true iconicity

My main research focuses on female style icons, which have been created through the film industry and have become cultural phenomena through their performance and fashion. Referring to my major research thesis, we must admit that today the term "style/fashion icon" is overused in popular media, literature and fashion publications, which makes it more difficult to confirm whether somebody is a true icon or not. Nevertheless, by style icon I mean a cultural icon, whose primary language of recognition and tool of operation is fashion.

The study of iconicity is an emerging domain, and as Marco Solaroli states, this area of research has emerged in the last two decades and icons "have been conceptualised, analysed and explained according to a variety of different epistemological traditions, theoretical assumptions and methodological strategies", (Solaroli 2015, p. 22) thus making it more complicated to narrow down and define.

Researchers, writers and journalists have attempted to single out some conditions and factors that can distinguish what is truly iconic.

Author Jonathan Meades in his article "*Iconic: Adjective of the Age*" singles out four conditions of the truly iconic, which apply not only to cultural icons that he researched, but precisely to style icons due to their visual language:

- *Condition A* "It affects us whether we like it or not" (Meades 2009). Some personalities are identified as style icons in the media and are promoted as such. They are regularly associated with the word "icon" and their status is perceived as common knowledge.
- *Condition B* is that "the image transcends its subject" (Meades 2009). Without knowing the actual story, motives and contexts, people might worship or follow styles of certain icons.
- *Condition C* is that "the subject should be legible in a sort of visual shorthand" (Meades 2009). With style icons, condition C is very strong as we observe truly iconic features to be referenced in fashion photography, advertisement and graphic design, when one single item of clothing (whether a blue buckled shoe, a corset, a rococo styled wig) encapsulates the whole concept or a text that it refers to. Marco Solaroli calls it "point of reference" (Solaroli 2015, p. 1). This condition leads to the fourth.

- *Condition D* is “immediacy of recognition” (Meades 2009). Style icons are recognisable and their influence on people’s behaviour is also usually evident through emulation “The icon has to be the visual equivalent of an unmistakable catchphrase”, says Meades. This could be the reason why iconic costumes can be easily recreated as Halloween costumes and are unmistakably recognisable.

Mike Parker’s central argument in his PhD research, *Cultural Icons: A Case Study Analysis of their Formation and Reception* states that “primary cultural icons are distinct, durable, reproducible images that reside in the collective memories of large communities of people” (p. 27). In his study, he also breaks down iconic qualities into four categories:

Cultural icons are always “distinct images” (Parker 2012, p. 12). This quality corresponds with Meades’s third condition of icons being “legible in a sort of visual shorthand”. Robert Hariman and John Lucaites call it “aesthetic familiarity” in their book about iconic photographs *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Parker 2012, p. 29). Viewers are familiar with the images of distinct hair-styles, silhouettes and accessories of certain cultural and style icons and can easily refer to them. The reference is understood from the cultural discourse with which people are familiar. This familiarisation helps to get across the message of what the outfit represents.

“These images are ... durable and reproducible” (Parker 2012, p. 12). In the words of researchers Keyan G. Tomaselli and David Scott, who Mike Parker references, this condition of iconicity is observed as “representing continuity” (Parker 2012, p. 53). Iconicity is achieved through constant media circulation, including magazines and their covers. Iconicity also requires consumption, through which reproducibility can achieve wider dissemination.

“They reside in the collective memory of people” (Parker 2012, p. 12). Collectivity is a major factor of contemporary mass culture. Depending on the sphere of activity (fashion, music, cinema or television) or a sub-culture (hip-hop musicians, bohemian artists or participants of reality shows), iconicity can be achieved through collective recognition of a large group of people.

Lastly, icons reflect “tragic-dramatic narratives that are formed and received by communities particularly receptive to the development of iconic meaning” (Parker 2012, p. 13). What Parker calls “tragic-dramatic narrative”, Hariman and Leicatus discuss as “emotional scenarios” of iconic photographs, that “provide the viewing public with powerful evocations of emotional experience” (Parker 2012, p. 35). In the meantime, Tomaselli and Scott suggest that essential conditions of iconicity are “accreting layers of meaning or connotation” (Parker 2012, p. 53), which, in the structuralist framework of Barthes is understood as “mythology”. This factor of iconicity includes narratives, scenarios and layers of meaning necessary for icons to exist in culture. Although my research examined the narratives embodied by style icons, such narratives are not necessarily “tragic-dramatic” but aspirational, because they show how one can achieve a better life through transformation and self-improvement in fashion (e.g., as in the “Cinderella” and “Pygmalion” narratives).

In the conclusion to his research, Parker states, “Cultural icons are used. They not only play an important part in the way modern cultures define their existence, their importance is also reflected by the manner in which distinct iconic forms are utilised in daily life” (Parker 2012, p. 229). Cultural icons are not only used, they are consumed. Consumption, as a factor in the way cultural icons function, is greatly discussed in the literature about iconography. Fashion followers consume style icons through images and goods, and they use consumption as a shopping practice to emulate a favourite star.

Mythology and Archetypes

Almost all researchers that speak about cultural icons (Holt; Rogers; Solaroli; Tomaselli and Scott) claim that in order to become iconic, one must include and reinforce certain cultural myths. As Parker states, “Mythology and meaning, created with the active participation of receptive communities, are essential characteristics of iconic phenomena” (Parker 2012, p. 142). Douglas B. Holt, who has a marketing approach and writes about brands and branding strategies, states that “icons come to represent a particular kind of story – an *identity myth* – that their consumers use to address identity desires and anxieties ... Icons perform a

particular myth society especially needs at a given historical moment, and they perform it charismatically” (p. 2). Holt identifies myths as:

... simple fictions that address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that consumers regularly encounter in their daily lives. The aspirations expressed in these myths are an imaginative, rather than literal, expression of the audience’s aspired identity (Parker 2012, p. 8).

Jeffrey C. Alexander, an American cultural sociologist and a researcher of celebrity icons states icons are

... Mythical characters in a rather strict sense ... Female celebrity icon carries the mythical meaning of its archetypically gendered forms. The female celebrity icon is a princess, a femme fatale, or a heroine, and her stories revolve around the myth of love (Alexander 2010, p. 330).

Despite the tragic-dramatic narrative, as discussed by Parker for cultural iconicity, the most popular narrative for female viewers is a princess narrative and a Cinderella story. Rachel Moseley describes the Cinderella myth as “a key trope” and “a staple of feminine culture” that offers “the magical spectacle of transformation and the promise of a better self and a better life” through finding a true love and marriage (Moseley 2002, p. 39).

Douglas Holt, in examining the advertisements of iconic brands, stated that “identity myths are usually set in *populist worlds*”, which “create credibility that the myth has authenticity, that it is grounded in the lives of real people whose lives are guided by these beliefs” (p. 9). As an example of the importance of this feature for the functioning of style icons, this mechanism is performed by the icons through their associative connections with places. SJP is described by Sally Singer as “our favorite embodiment of New York” (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 234) in the February 2002 issue of *Vogue* and Jonatan Van Meter in *Vogue’s* August 2003 issue writes that she has “become a kind of mascot to New Yorkers” (Van Meter, 2003, “Busiest Girl”, p. 228) similarly to Woody Allen. Meanwhile both Satine from *Moulin Rouge* and Marie Antoinette are emblematic of fin-de-siecle Paris and 18th-century Versailles, a location for both a movie and a *Vogue* photoshoot.

Ambiguities and indeterminacy

In her research on the Barbie doll as a cultural icon, Mary Rogers argues that “No icon represents only one dimension or axis of a culture. Instead, icons become such because of their versatility, thick folds of meaning, adaptability to diverse individuals’ needs or interests, ultimate ambiguity, and open-ended nature (Rogers 1999, p. 3). Researchers suggest that what makes cultural icons so powerful” is their indeterminacy” (Rogers 1999, p. 143), and suggest that they must target “the most advantageous contradiction in society” (Holt 2004, p. 63). Marco Solaroli adds that icons possess an iconic power, which is “intrinsically performative, as it implies the ability to arouse controversies and reveal latent cultural tensions” (Solaroli 2015, p. 2). During the research of the case studies of the images of Carrie, Satine and Marie Antoinette, dichotomies connected to their personalities and public perception arose. But I will discuss these in detail when I analyse every character specifically.

This argument of indeterminacy of icons is juxtaposed with the typology of stars, provided by the researcher of stars, Richard Dyer, whose book *Stars* in 1979 has become seminal in popular cultural studies. Dyer writes, “What is important about stars ... is their typicality or representativeness. Stars in other words relate to the social types of a society” (Dyer 1979, p. 53). He explains a social type as “a shared, recognizable, easily-grasped image of how people are in society (with collective approval or disapproval built into it)” (Dyer 1979, p. 53). While many famous people are stars, not all of them are icons. Style icons, therefore are stars, recognised by large groups of people. Dyer looks at stars and images, which is relevant to this research, where icons are also observed as images. However, stars are more typical and straightforward, as they follow archetypal roles, while icons are more versatile and ambiguous.

Vogue Magazine

Vogue magazine, started as a weekly gazette in New York, transformed into the ultimate authority in the fashion world (Konig 2006, Matthews David 2006). After Conde Nast purchased *Vogue* in 1909, he understood that the magazine had to have a distinguished look and branding. In 1911 a “*Vogue* girl” was created by the “first art director, Harry McVickar, a French-trained illustrator and clubman who belonged to New York’s highest circles” (Matthews David 2006, p. 26), which reinforced “her identity as the icon of the magazine”. (Matthews David 2006, p. 26) “The *Vogue* girl had appeared sporadically in the period from 1893-1908, but Nast moved her from the inside pages of the magazine to a starring role on its cover” (Mathews David 2006, p. 26-27). Later on, as the scholar notes “the *Vogue* girl had been replaced by an even more potent embodiment of idealized femininity, the supermodel” (Mathews David 2006, p. 33). According to Matthews David, “readers could interpret the *Vogue* girl in different registers. Her nationality was deliberately ambiguous and she might be a French shepherdess or a young American woman dressed for a costume ball” (Mathews David 2006, p. 27). What is notable is that in the 2005 issue of *Vogue* with SJP, renowned couturier Oscar De la Renta also emphasised the indeterminacy of the actress’s image. He notes that she “can be an ingenue, a flirtation lamb, a Marilyn Monroe type” (Sullivan 2005, p. 794), which has made SJP quite an embodiment of a *Vogue* girl recently, including lending the magazine her voice to narrate historical videos on their social media profile pages.

Carrie Bradshaw and Sarah Jessica Parker

On the whole *Vogue* magazine plays an important role in building an iconic status of Sarah Jessica Parker. On the show *Sex and the City* her character Carrie Bradshaw discussed the magazine very frequently. Once Carrie would make statements such as “When I just came to New York and I was broke, sometimes I would buy *Vogue* instead of a meal. I felt it fed me more” (Season 4 Episode 2). This phrase can be often encountered in the fashion blogs due to its aspirational value as well as an allegory of a spiritual food opposed to an actual food. One episode was fully dedicated to Carrie, getting a job to write a column in *Vogue* magazine, *A Vogue Idea* (Season 4 Episode 17). She enters the editor’s office in a pinstripe asymmetrical dress with a vintage brooch, wearing beige pumps. She looks professional, still with her individual twist. On the background her voice is saying “One of the most relevant and provocative magazines on the newsstands today, at least for me, *Vogue*”. When her paper was criticised and declined, another editor and herself would make comments, personifying Carrie and *Vogue*, in a way that Carrie herself is validated as a fashion authority. One editor tells her “*Vogue* is about vision. You are kooky and have vision”. As they get drunk in the office, Carrie would say “I didn’t have my breakfast and size 2, which makes me perfect for *Vogue*!”. Notably, this episode premiered on 3 February 2002, while Sarah Jessica Parker first appeared on a cover of the actual magazine for the February 2002 issue. This case also exemplifies the blurred boundaries of reality and hyper-reality. Hyper-reality as a concept was introduced by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. It is one of the features of postmodernism, when real and fictional are blended together, so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins (Oberly). Carrie’s character merged with the actress into one media personality, but also stresses the role of a magazine in building SJP’s iconic status.

This is exactly what the February 2002 profile article wrote about SJP:

“It is August 2001, and SJP is in the *Vogue* offices shooting the episode of *SATC* ... Carrie is writing an article about handbags at 4.50\$ a word, a rate nobody at *Vogue* is ever paid, and wearing a Vivienne Westwood pinstriped suit that nobody at *Vogue* would wear to work (too theatrically chic). Carrie is also drunk, which nobody at *Vogue* ever is, thank you very much” (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 234). But later the article observes that she “is a professional fashion insider” (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 234) and notes elements of the actress’s childhood, basically underlining the “rags-to-riches” myth of her road to success and fame. Her siblings remember that as a kid “looking stylish was a priority. My mother always made sure we were dressed to the nines”, says her older sister, Rachel. (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 234) and her brother Toby remembers, “We didn’t have a lot of resources. We didn’t have

a lot of money” (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 235). Nevertheless, “As Carrie Bradshaw, Sarah Jessica Parker has come to symbolize all that is possible in New York City: sudden fame, endless shopping and, yes, sex” (Singer 2002, “Manhattan Rhapsody”, p. 233). All these features including mythology, associations with locations, and authority, refer to her status as a true cultural and style icon.

The actress Sarah Jessica Parker would appear on the cover five more times – in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2011. In 2003 the show SATC was still airing and the article for the August 2003 issue was more focused on SJP’s involvement and authority in fashion.

Themes of ambiguities were also involved in the article, where Jonathan Van Meter writes that “A vampy sex symbol one minute, a modest mom the next For many, that dichotomy is pure Parker” (Van Meter 2003, “Busiest Girl”, p. 225). He quotes a director David Frankel, who says “Sarah herself is conundrum. She’s a very sexy person with a prudish persona” (Van Meter 2003, “Busiest Girl”, p. 225). He intentionally can’t define SJP as a type of a star, but refers to her in an indeterminate flexible terms. The author includes quotes by a fashion designer Narciso Rodriguez, who talks about SJP’s fashion expertise and that, designing her maternity dresses, “she became, in a funny way, his muse” (Van Meter 2003, “Busiest Girl”, p. 225). He says, “She knows about the craft ... I incorporated so much of what she’s given me, especially in the last spring collection ... I love a woman who is that deep” (Van Meter 2003, “Busiest Girl”, p. 225). Both off-screen and on the show, Carrie’s fashion expertise is expressed multiple times. Notably in this context it happened in the episode, when she explores the *Vogue* closets and finds the shoes. She excitedly exclaims, “Do you know what these are? Manolo Blahnik Mary Janes! I thought these were an urban shoe myth!” Here shoes again come up as a point of reference of her knowledge and authority. Still today SJP is strongly associated with both Manolo Blahnik’s brand and Mary Jane shoes.

In 2011 SJP wrote an introduction to the book *100 Shoes*, published by The Costume Institute of Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), which is affiliated with *Vogue* magazine. In addition she co-chaired with Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, an exhibition for the Met, “Charles James: Beyond Fashion”. She narrated the videos about fashion history on *Vogue* magazine’s Facebook channel. In 2014 she launched her own line of shoes, called SJP. One of the styles is named Carrie.

The case study of the relationship between Sarah Jessica Parker and *Vogue* magazine is intentional in the creation of the iconic status of the actress in the fashion world and consumers’ perception of her. Later in her career in 2012-2013, when SJP guest starred in another TV show, *Glee*, her role was as an editor-in-chief for *Vogue Online*, Isabelle Wright, where she hired Kurt Hummel, another fashion-obsessed teenager with a “kooky” personal style, to intern for her. The actress deliberately exploits the fashion legacy of her fictional character Carrie Bradshaw even today, as can be observed in her promotional public appearances, style and continuous affiliation with the magazine and the fashion industry.

Satine and Nicole Kidman

Nicole Kidman was first featured for a fashion spread in *Vogue* magazine in 1995, when she was a young actress, a newcomer from Australia. She was presented more seriously in June 1999 on a cover with a full article and a photoshoot entitled “Portrait of a Lady”. This feature included some hints of the actress to be promoted and presented in a more authoritative fashion position, at the time simply an actress and a wife of actor Tom Cruise as well as a model for beautiful couture. Even her biggest future project is announced, “...she was willing to audition to land a role in a film shooting later this year, a musical co-starring Ewan McGregor: she was burning to work with Baz Luhrmann, the flamboyant director of *Strictly Ballroom* and *Romeo+Juliet*...” (Sargent 1999, p. 215). According to the author, John Singer Sargent, “...the 31-year old actress takes pride in being as hard to define as kaleidoscope” (Sargent 1999, p. 210), which hints at her indeterminacy and that the actress is not a typical star. The article also talks about Kidman’s “fascination” with fashion.

The December 2000 cover basically established the character of Nicole Kidman, the French courtesan Satine in a realm of fashion iconicity. As discussed earlier, referring to conditions of iconicity by Meades,

such as “immediate catchphrase”, Kidman’s image is described as follows: “Pale to the point of translucence, with flaming red hair and fire-engine lips, she appears completely otherworldly, like some bizarre combination of Elizabeth I and Jessica Rabbit” (Van Meter 2000, “The Wildest Party”, p. 312). Not only Kidman’s persona is compared with some established iconic images of Jessica Rabbit, Elizabeth I, but in the academic article “*Moulin Rouge!* and the Undoing of Opera” her performance is compared to “a chain of iconic women – from the opera heroines Violetta and Mimì to the Hollywood divas Dietrich, Garbo and Monroe, and finally to the gender-bending pop star Madonna” (Yang 2010, p. 274), which associates her with familiar types for the audience to perceive and accept her. Notably all of them can be easily recreated for Halloween. Baz Luhrmann, the director of *Moulin Rouge!*, passionately praises Kidman and refers to her by saying “Nicole is iconic and beautiful” (Van Meter 2000, “The Wildest Party”, p. 316). Although he calls her that, we need more facts to prove that Kidman’s character is iconic.

Marina Della Giusta and Laura Scuriatti in their article “The Show Must Go On. Making Money Glamorizing Oppression” question “Why would the image of the courtesan not clash with the widespread social stigma associated with the phenomenon of prostitution?” (Della Giusta; Scuriatti 2005, p. 32). When prostitution is considered to be a vice, why is the image of Satine so aspirational, that it has become iconic?

One of the main aspects is that her figure and image is, as a matter of fact, ambiguous. Yes, she is a courtesan and her role is similar to Audrey Hepburn’s call girl Holly Golightly and Julia Robert’s *Pretty Woman*, speaking of comparison with other iconic female images. But, as Della Giusta and Scuriatti note, “Kidman’s role is constituted by multiple layers of different icons of femininity: her performance of ‘Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend’ contains both references to Marilyn Monroe’s act in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and to Madonna’s reinterpretation of the same act in her pop video ‘Material Girl’” (Della Giusta; Scuriatti 2005, p. 33). That was an introductory number of Satine for viewers of the movie. Even *Vogue* states, that she performs a “slutty version” of “Diamonds are...” (Van Meter, “The Wildest Party”, p. 314-315). In that scene Satine is changing her outfits right on the stage, she asks her impresario regarding a new client, the Duke: “What’s his type? Wilting flower? Bright and bubbly? Or smouldering temptress?”. During this change she sees Christian (Ewan McGregor’s character) doesn’t believe her eyes as he was so handsome, asks again “Are you sure?” ...and became infatuated with him. This scene represents the transformation of a courtesan through fashion into a tragic heroine of the movie’s storyline. What’s important is that she also typifies female characters according to males’ preferences. In the latter scene, when she is waiting for the Duke in her room, she is dressed in black corset, high stocking with a garter belt and a lace robe on top with glamorously styled hair à la Veronica Lake. As a smouldering temptress.

Satine’s character represents the dichotomy of “Whore/virgin”, notably ascribed to both Marilyn Monroe and Madonna. As described by the aforementioned authors, “The figure of Satine is constructed along a few main ideas: ... She is at the same time a courtesan, and a ‘virgin’: she is a virgin because she had never loved until she met Christian, and because she is sold to the Duke as a ‘virgin’ – a condition which increases her market value and heightens her dramatic sacrifice. It is also important to note that, throughout the film, Satine is presented also as pure woman in the moral sense, fundamentally out of place in the environment of the *Moulin Rouge*” (Della Giusta; Scuriatti 2005, p. 33). And while the narrative of love is a core for the female audience (Ang 1990, p. 79), “what Satine in *Moulin Rouge* aspires to is romantic love, and the romantic relationship between her and the writer relies on her taking on the characteristics of a virtuous woman” (Della Giusta; Scuriatti 2005, p. 36). In addition to this, the relationship and love between Christian occurs with Satine’s personality of indeterminate ambiguous character and not a type of a courtesan that she was presenting herself as.

Mina Yang in “*Moulin Rouge!* and the Undoing of Opera” referring to Richard Dyer notes that “a star’s image is always intertextual, so that as we watch Satine, we cannot help but to see Kidman beneath the makeup, and the extra-filmic discourses around the star work as yet another ‘text’ that helps to complete the development of her character” (Yang 2010, p. 274). After her heroine’s death in *Moulin Rouge!* and personal crisis with divorce from Tom Cruise, she reappears in mass perception as a leader – she won an Oscar for her next film, became the highest-paid actress in Hollywood (Yang 2010, p. 275) and on the September 2003 cover, *Vogue* magazine calls her “An Icon”.

The article is heavy with Kidman’s fashion involvements, quotes from Valentino and Tom Ford about how

“amazing and wonderful” (Singer 2003, pp. 644-658) and “gracious, elegant and thoroughbred” (Singer 2003, “Master Class”, p. 644) she is. In the closing paragraph, they note the ambiguity of Kidman. “The paradox is that this seemingly invulnerable fashion icon is famous for playing women who, if they’re not on the edge of a nervous breakdown, have actually fallen over the precipice This is why we can’t take our eyes off her, whoever she may be” (Singer 2003, pp. 658).

Later Nicole Kidman and Baz Luhrmann collaborated for an advertisement of the most iconic and significant perfume in the fashion world and from the consumer’s perspective, Chanel N°5. Kidman and her director took a character from the screen and the magazine, and her image as a style icon was reinforced in the public’s perspective.

Marie Antoinette and Kirsten Dunst

Kirsten Dunst has been acting since she was a child, but she first appeared on a cover of *Vogue* in July 2004 at the age of 22. It was a regular feature on an actress, which, like the article on Kidman, hinted that some big, new project was coming soon, Sofia Coppola’s new project about Marie Antoinette (Woods 2004, p. 173). Two years later, for the September 2006 issue, Dunst appeared on her second *Vogue* cover in full costume as the French Queen, which had been proudly shot on location in the newly renovated Grand Trianon at the Chateau de Versailles by Annie Leibovitz. However, the article does not talk about Dunst and her relationship with fashion, but refers to the director of the movie, Sofia Coppola, who was particularly interested in the queen’s love of fashion. “You are considered superficial and silly if you’re interested in fashion”, Coppola says, “But I think you can be substantial and still be interested in frivolity” (Fraser 2006, p. 641).

The film is about a Queen of France, a very ambiguous figure, who infamously was executed during The French Revolution and was despised for generations for her unbelievable spending, expressive fashions and excessive indulgences. Despite this, the Queen herself is an iconic figure in history and the film portrays it brilliantly. Fashion in film is used not only to please the eye of a viewer, but also symbolically, starting from the opening scenes of the movie, when “passage from child of Austria to Dauphine of France is registered through a ceremonial change of dress” (Ferris; Young 2010, p. 101), where she was changed from Austrian to French fashion. Scholars note, that “by becoming the ‘Queen of fashion’, by imposing the ways in which other women appear, and by building a setting in which she makes the rules, she forces the court to recognize her power” (Flores 2013, p. 61) and precisely “through fashion she created her image as Queen of France” (Ferris; Young 2010, p. 103)

The film was criticised for being “almost pornographically obsessed with fashion, jewelry and desserts” (Dudek 2006, quoted in Ferris, Young 2010, p. 111), and so it corresponds to the characteristics of iconicity that interest us in this paper. The character of Kirsten Dunst has become emblematic of the current generation and a reflection of third wave feminism. Scholars note that Marie Antoinette is an image of contemporary viewers. According to Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young, “cultural critics muse that, as consumers, ‘we’re an entire nation of Marie Antoinettes’ ” (Ferris, Young 2010, p. 98). Pamela Flores states, that “Marie Antoinette appears as a contemporary character whose conflicts are not that of the Queen of France on the eve of the Revolution, but of a teenager, foreigner, or woman who, in an inhospitable space, seeks beauty to construct a public image to express her identity” (Flores 2013, p. 621).

Mary Rogers in her research about Barbie, notes that an icon participates in a dense web of products that might not be directly connected with its primary activity. Since the construction of a cultural icon “involves a dense web of products identified not only with [an icon] but also with other corporate sponsors and popular culture” (Rogers 1999, p. 95), style icons can expand their influence in other industries, but the emphasis will still be on their stylistic recognisable cues. Through the dissemination of their stylistic features, the style iconicity gets its validation in culture due to the repetitive nature. This reinforces the consumer’s relationship with an icon on a daily and a very basic level. Just as a myth that is being recreated many times, the visual representations of style icons are consolidated and “naturalised”.

This argument provides an explanation to the huge popularisation of Marie Antoinette's iconic image as a popular selling feature. Ferris and Yonge note that the creators of the movie *Marie Antoinette* "were not shy about capitalizing on the consumerist possibilities inherent on such production ... the film's celebration of fashion was also exploited to sell both movie tickets and contemporary consumer goods [including] the September 2006 *Vogue* magazine spread that coincided with the film's release ... and the girly Juicy Couture line followed shortly with a pink-pouffed model advertising its latest fragrance" (Ferris; Yonge 2010, p. 111-112). This whole aesthetic is still popular in a dense web of products, like greeting cards and even pastries. And some people might not even know the real story about the French Queen. This is one of Meade's conditions of iconicity. The image of a vicious Queen, after 10 years from the film's release, is still aspirational to our generation.

Kirsten Dunst was chosen as an ambassador for the brand Bulgari. And while the actress did not directly exploit the image of her iconic character, Marie Antoinette, the resemblance and the mood of the photographs are very royal. The elements include the high up-do, massive jewellery, a regal colour scheme of dark reds, a French garden in the backdrop and a symbolism of a lion, her co-model in the advertisement. Whether the actress has become a true style icon is still subject to debate. But her character, that appeared on a *Vogue* cover, has definitely become an icon for the whole generation.

Conclusion

In this paper it came apparent that an image of a fictional screen character can be stronger than the image of an actress. Strong presentation and connection with a fashion authority is able to elevate a star to a proud title of a style icon. A style icon is a cultural icon in a narrower sense. Style icons are also reproducible and durable images, that live in the collective subconscious and embody myths. However, they must constantly recreate those myths through their works and fashion choices. Moreover style icons have strong associations with certain locations and companies, which reinforce their consumption influence.

Once the qualifications for being an icon are met – instant recognition, when image transcends the subject, when they possess a legible visual shorthand and it affects us whether we like it or not – the stars can be named iconic. The main difference between a star and an icon is that an icon must represent various themes of ambiguities, they are not strictly determinative. The characters of SJP, Nicole Kidman and Kirsten Dunst did not just have a distinct fashion sensibility and a look, but *Vogue* magazine in its profile articles repeatedly emphasised how actresses are hard to define, how versatile and indeterminate they are. At the same time, on screen they represented dichotomies of female archetypical roles, such as sex symbol/mother; whore/virgin; victim/culprit. They are universal in their appeal and perception of viewers who can relate to them, and are aspirational images. This cultural context has reinforced and established actresses and/or their characters as icons.

The affiliation with authorities – 1) *Vogue* magazine itself and 2) comments from fashion designers and involvement with fashion brands – position style icons on a plane that is higher than regular consumers, because they are involved in the production and spread of fashion. They provoke aspirations and cause desires within followers and regular people to emulate them, so that they visually appear on a higher level.

In this paper style icons demonstrate the process of transformation of actresses and their on-screen characters through fashion, visible in their embodiment of the cultural myths and narratives of transformation and self-improvement. These stories include a poor actress from Ohio becoming the embodiment of New York and its elite, a Parisian courtesan becoming the tragic love heroine, an Austrian Princess (young naive girl) becoming the Queen of France (powerful woman). Who wouldn't want to have a story like that? It all becomes a possible dream thanks to the power of style icons and *Vogue* magazine.

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