

Eyes, Sight and the Senses on Film and in Fashion: Crossmodal correspondences and sensorial empathy between Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) and Johan Ku's "Selma" Collection S/S (2014)

Abstract

Sensory studies have emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century as a significant influence upon the arts, humanities and the social sciences. Study of the senses naturally tends towards the interdisciplinary because such studies provide a point of convergence between a broad range of scientific and socio-cultural research. Fashion theory is a subject area that is inherently concerned with issues of sensorial response. This article explores the concepts of sensorial empathy and crossmodal correspondences – whereby one form of sensory experience generates (or corresponds with) a response in another sense – through a case study of the relationship between film and fashion. In particular, this article analyses Johan Ku's "Selma" fashion collection for Spring/Summer 2014, which was inspired by the character of Selma (as portrayed by Björk) in Lars von Trier's 2000 film *Dancer in the Dark*. The article suggests that the filmic experience (of watching and hearing) evokes certain textural and sensorial responses that Ku thematically and conceptually transforms into physical and tactile designs as the basis for his "Selma" fashion collection.

Keywords: senses; film; interdisciplinary; crossmodality; perception

Introduction

[Figure 1. Selma emerging from a tunnel of hands: the significance of touch as a sense in *Dancer in the Dark* © Official film still courtesy of Zentropa Productions, Lars von Trier and *Dancer in the Dark* 2000]

We do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium (Sobchack 2004, 64)

Johan Ku's "Selma" fashion collection for Spring/Summer 2014 takes its inspiration directly from the character of Selma, as portrayed by Björk, in Lars von Trier's 2000 film *Dancer in the Dark*. Fascinated by the idea that a fashion designer can create a collection for the catwalk evoking the essence of a film character and the world she inhabits onscreen, this article explores crossmodal correspondences and sensorial empathy to help explain how the sensory experience of a film can be given material form in a fashion collection. The term crossmodal correspondences is used within neurology to describe the effect whereby perception in (at least) one sense interacts with and generates a response in another (Spence 2011; Deroy and Spence 2016). Sensorial empathy, following the work of Kathryn Guerts (2003; 2005), challenges the model of five senses (sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste) broadly established within West European/Anglo-American culturesⁱ by progressing a deeper understanding of 'feeling [and knowing] in the body that includes both internal senses [...] and external senses' (2003, 166). In this case study, seeing and hearing *Dancer in the Dark* onscreen has generated (or corresponded with) a series of spatial and tactile responses that have been given material form in fashion designs on the catwalk. The purpose of this article is to show the relevance of crossmodal correspondences and sensorial empathy to the analysis of creative practice and fashion design. In addition, the central case study might also add to the ongoing discourse about the relationship between fashion and film in an increasingly interactive world.

The article is structured in three parts. The first section selectively outlines the rise of sensory studies at the start of the twenty-first century, as progressed by David Howes (1991; 2005) and Constance Classen (2002; 2012; with Howes 2014), among others (such as Guerts 2003; 2005), providing the broader context within which the interrelated function of the senses and analysis of the “sensory world” in areas such as history, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies has become prevalent. In relation to fashion theory it is also important to note the impact of Joanne B. Eicher’s anthropological research into the inclusive concept of “dress”ⁱⁱ, selectively presented in the edited collection *Fashion Sense*, which explores emotional and sensory experiences of the body through dress and clothing (Johnson and Foster, 2007). With these ideas in mind the first section of this article contextualises the impact of sensory studies and the application of terminology from neurology within film studies, drawing upon Vivian Sobchack’s neurologically-informed phenomenological approach to film. Sobchack recognises the filmic experience as a full body experience, whereby sights and sounds experienced onscreen generate (and blur with) other sensorial responses, notably touch, that are simultaneously experienced offscreen. Sensorial empathy and crossmodality between the senses (‘crossmodality’ is an equivalent term to crossmodal correspondences, so the terms are often used interchangeably) are central to this process, providing a theoretical (neurologically-informed) model whereby the sensory experience of a film and its narrative themes can inspire a tactile and material response of corresponding themes and concepts.

The second section looks specifically at *Dancer in the Dark* as a film preoccupied with the senses – particularly the significance of limited vision and alternate ways of knowing the world when sight is a damaged or limited sense. Selected formal and conceptual innovations and themes are explored, including reference to Oliver Sacks’ neuro-anthropological studies relating to diminished sight, blindness, hallucinations and the reallocation of brain functions within the visual cortex (whereby loss of sight is to some degree compensated by increased tactile and/or other sensory awareness). Whilst Sobchack and others (Marks 2000; Barker 2009) engagement with sensorial and bodily responses to film potentially applies to any onscreen movie experience, *Dancer in the Dark* has some comparatively unique qualities as a filmic experience that enhance the significance of sensorial empathy with the protagonist, Selma. These qualities, which relate to issues of perception, misperception, and judgement – in essence, how much more Selma “sees” and perceives beyond the way she is otherwise perceived or “seen”, and how this perception is communicated to and can be “felt” by the filmic audience – are central to Ku’s fashion designs.

The final section looks specifically at Ku’s catwalk show for “Selma” S/S 2014, analysing the material and conceptual qualities of his designs as crossmodal and sensorially empathic responses to the themes and concepts that define *Dancer in the Dark*.

[Figure 2. Models emerge from darkness into light towards the end of Johan Ku’s “Selma” catwalk show © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

The Twenty-First Century Sensorial Revolution

[...] sensory meanings and values form the *sensory model* espoused by a society, according to which the members of that society “make sense” of the world, or translate sensory perceptions and concepts into a particular “worldview” (Classen 1997, 402)

David Howes uses the term “sensorial revolution” to describe the “rise of sensory studies at the turn of the twenty-first century” (2006, 115). The emergence of the senses as a focal point within cultural studies (and beyond) is shaped by Constance Classen’s “sensory model” (1997, 402), which promotes a socially integrated examination of how the senses inform (and are themselves informed

by) cultural meanings. This “turn” towards the senses simultaneously draws upon and critiques previous turns in the social sciences and humanities over the last forty years. As Howes suggests, sensory studies both engages with and challenges the limitations of “verbocentrism”, which is associated with the linguistic model favoured in the 1970s advocating reading cultural products as “texts”; the “ocularcentrism” of the visual culture model and “the society of the image” prevalent in the 1980s; and the “holism” of the corporeal and material culture models of the 1990s, which tend to engage with the physicality of a body or object without fully relating it to an interconnected series of experiences and properties (Howes 2006, 114-115).

At the heart of the sensory model is the notion of “communal perceptual orientation” (Howes 2006, 114). Communal perceptual orientation offers a way of “ordering and understanding the senses that is not purely cognitive or limited to individual experiences” (114). Instead, it recognises the importance of social interaction and context to create, shape, evolve and inform how sensory experiences construct meaning and “make sense”. As such, a given experience has a communal quality that, whilst always open to contestation, enables it to be situated and shared between people with relatable social and cultural reference points. The sensory model therefore encourages empathy and the need for cultural understanding, which provides a framework for socio-cultural insights even when encountering an experience beyond an immediately familiar or known frame of reference.

Guerts’ ethnographic research similarly recognises the importance of community and context to sensory perception. Her work promotes sensorial empathy by challenging the traditional five senses model, which was first determined by Aristotle and remains pervasive within Euro-American cultures, emphasizing that the human sensory system is capable of (and is known to engage with) full body responses to a situation or stimuli (2003; 2005). Guerts asserts that the five senses model, which tends to impose a division between the senses informed by a mind-body dichotomy, is the result of an acculturated model of learning and thinking about how we relate to and perceive our relationship with the world. The West encourages belief in a particular division of sensory experiences, including distinguishing between certain types of internal and external sensory information, through cultural narratives that Guerts considers a form of ‘folk ideology’ (2003, 7).

Guerts’ research reveals clear limitations within the five senses model because it potentially closes down or overlooks significant aspects of sensory experience as form of knowledge. By studying a West African community, the Anlo-Ewe people, who acculturate their senses in a more fully embodied and inter-subjective manner, Guerts’ research broadens awareness of the sensory system’s ability to combine and integrate experiences across and between the senses, including shared empathy or “mingling of subjectivities” between individuals (2005, 168). Guerts’ research highlights the manner in which feeling and knowing can take place in the body, rather than as a distinct cognitive exercise that separates experience from knowing (2003; 2005, 166-169). This awareness of sensorial empathy – of how knowing and feeling can occur within the body as an integrated response commensurate with external experience – is therefore an important concept that helps to connect crossmodality between an onscreen audio-visual experience and a corresponding offscreen experience that enlivens touch, as well as potentially taste and smell (although this study focuses upon the haptic and the tactile rather than the olfactory or gustatory).

Within film studies there has long been a perceptual and theoretical gap between experiencing a film and articulating the emotional and sensorial responses it engenders. Richard Dyer, when writing about the sensational motion of action “movies”, like *Speed* (1994), relates this back to the beginnings of cinema when audiences allegedly ducked in fear at the sight of the Lumière Bros’ *Train Arriving at a Station* (1895). Dyer’s recognition of the “still unclear sense of the ‘as if real’” (Dyer in

Arroyo 2000: 18) reflects the way films can “move us” physically and sensually. Our sensory response to a film is a full body experience, revealing a reversible (or looped) process of perception whereby the ability “to feel the world we see and hear onscreen” is not mutually exclusive from film’s “capacity to ‘touch’ and ‘move’ us offscreen” (Sobchack 2004, 66).

The “as if real” blur that subverts notions of division between onscreen and offscreen experiences is achieved through far more than just seeing moving images and hearing their accompanying soundtrack. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener’s *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (2010) provides a concise but thorough historical survey of the sense organs as “active participants in the formation of filmic reality” (2010, 11). While their primary focus is to provide a selective overview of the philosophical shifts that consistently redefine film theory, Elsaesser and Hagener acknowledge the extent to which contemporary studies in the humanities show “interest in the senses and in mediated experience” (79). Importantly, they recognise the larger cultural context of an increasingly networked and digital age as one that gives rise to the “uncertain status of the body in mediatized and technological environments” (79). In other words, while filmic experience has always blurred the boundaries of reality, newly immersive and mobile technologies – which might include Oculus Rift, Google Glass and other integrated “virtual windows” (Friedberg 2006) – suggest ways in which cinema “seems poised to leave behind its function as a ‘medium’ (for the representation of reality) in order to become a ‘life form’ (and thus a reality in its own right)” (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010, 12).

The move towards the senses within film studies therefore seems timely in its potential to reappraise previous approaches whilst informing any newly emerging or evolving ontological models. Laura Marks’ work on the reciprocal relationship between “touch” and cinema in *The Skin of the Film* (2000) focuses upon what she describes as “haptic visuality”; Jennifer Barker’s *The Tactile Eye* (2009) examines the links between onscreen images and embodied responses, whereby “touch [...] is enacted and felt throughout the body” as part of a “tactile world” of experiences; and Vivian Sobchack proposes the idea of the “cinesthetic subject” (2004, 67) whereby distinctions between subjectivity and objectivity, the onscreen and offscreen, and the figurative and the literal all lose their “presumed clarity” (66) as part of the filmic experience. The reversible exchange of experience between film and viewer instead engages instinctive and constant activities of “reciprocal re-alignment and inflection” (del Río in Sobchack 2004, 65) – a form of sensorial empathy whereby external and internal responses become integrated as a sensory experience.

Sobchack’s “cinesthetic subject” is particularly interesting because it is derived from two neurological terms, *coenaesthesia* and *synaesthesia* (2004, 67), which offer a bridge between cultural analysis and cognitive science without advocating a traditional cognitive film studies approach. Cognitive film studies, which is most associated with David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, tends to focus upon how emotion and understanding is elicited in an audience through cognitive processes. This approach is historically based upon the cognitive science metaphor of the mind-as-computer, with specific areas of the brain designated to process particular types of data. But this model for understanding the brain has increasingly been challenged. The unique genre of medical writing developed by Oliver Sacks, termed neuro-anthropology, is probably the most widely known body of work that undermines both “the notion of the brain as a computer, and the notion of the specialization and localization of brain functions” (Howes 2005, 21). Sacks rejects the idea that the brain operates like a computer and suggests that neurological responses to stimuli work across the senses, thereby advancing “a highly cultured critique of the cognitive sciences” (21). He overturns the lack of attention paid to “matters of feeling and judging” (21) within his discipline, promoting the role of cultural and social experiences as significant factors in cognitive perception:

One does not see, or sense, or perceive, in isolation – perception is always linked to behaviour and movement, to reaching out and exploring the world (Sacks 2012, 111 ft 3).

In short, Sacks' neuro-anthropological writing supports the broader notion of a sensory revolution by bringing culture into science whilst simultaneously helping to bring cognitive science (and a developing understanding of the senses) into mainstream culture.

Although cognitive film studies continues to evolve from its initial impact in the 1980s it is not currently mainstream within film theory; but, as Carl Plantinga has suggested, it did crack the pre-existing film theory shell, challenging psycho-semiotic models of analysis and opening the door to a wider range of approaches (2002, 18). Sobchack's engagement with neurologically-informed phenomenological analysis is one of the approaches that has emerged. The scientific terms Sobchack draws upon, *coenaesthesia* and *synaesthesia* (2004, 67), are worth discussing in more detail because they help contextualise the concepts of sensorial empathy and crossmodal correspondences central to this article.

Coenaesthesia relates to the sum of bodily sensations that collectively generate a sense of bodily existence. It describes the "general and open sensual condition of the child at birth" (68-69) when all senses are equally available and refers to the way in which some senses become heightened and others diminished through cultural and historical experience. This gives rise to an individual whose sensorial boundaries are regulated into a functional hierarchy, reflective of their culture and the social context of their experiences (69). Coenaesthesia is the ordered interaction of senses that provides awareness of inhabiting a body and is at least partially informed by acculturated knowledge. Within this process, awareness of a "sense" of self and of inhabiting a body is a necessary state to enable crossmodal correspondences. Coenaesthesia is essentially recognition of the existence of the "self" through the senses.

Synaesthesia, by contrast, can be defined as an "involuntary experience in which the stimulation of one sense cause[s] a perception in another" (Cytowic 1993, 52). Clinical synaesthesia manifests itself in an array of fascinating and idiosyncratic forms, consistent only to the individual (whereby the number "5", for example, might always be associated with the color blue, or the word "plastic" always brings a taste of earwax to the mouth); however, ongoing neurological research suggests that a more general form of "crosstalk among the senses" is probably an intrinsic, day-to-day, part of normative perception (Guterman 2001). Sobchack briefly refers to crossmodal correspondences (using the equivalent term "cross-modal transfer") as a common perceptual process that is related to synaesthesia (2004, 68). As Barry C. Smith clarifies, unlike the idiosyncratic nature of synaesthesia the connections formed by crossmodal correspondences are broadly "reliable and shared" (Smith 2013, 185); crossmodality as an experience therefore accords with the idea of communal perceptual orientation within Classen's sensory model.

Crossmodal correspondences are defined as "non-arbitrary associations between features in one sense modality with features in another" (Smith 2013, 185). Put more simply, they refer to automatic associations that are consistently and widely culturally shared. So, for example, lemons are "sharp," and also "fast" rather than "slow"ⁱⁱⁱ; smells, like music, can have low notes or high notes, just as people can feel low or high; and, according to Heinrich Wölfflin (in his nineteenth century tract on the psychology of architecture), because we have bodies subject to gravity we can appreciate the shape of buildings and columns by feeling an empathy for their weight and strain (Smith 2013, 185-186).

In the work of Charles Spence and Ophelia Deroy, crossmodal correspondence is defined as “a compatibility effect between attributes or dimensions of a stimulus (i.e. an object or an event) in different sensory modalities” (Spence 2011, 973). While laboratory research into crossmodality focusses upon highly specific and quantifiable variables (such as crossmodality between effects of light and sound), it is acknowledged that crossmodal correspondences between stimuli “may also be established at a more abstract level, such as in terms of their pleasantness, cognitive meaning or activity” (973). Such abstractions extend to the way in which stimuli can consistently generate the same sort of effect or impact upon “an observer’s emotional state, mood, or affective state” (973). While multisensory research is ongoing, it has “hardly touched on the topic of crossmodal correspondences” (Deroy and Spence 2016, 29) until the last few years. Within this emerging field of research a core quality of crossmodal correspondences is the way in which they “seem to afford no further explanation – at the explicit level – than the fact that they just ‘feel right’” (35). Whilst this quality appears to differentiate crossmodality from metaphorical connections that require semantic or other cognitive justification, one part of the ongoing investigation into this area recognises that “correspondences offer a general entry into issues about the origins of metaphorical thinking, the distinction between the senses or the existence of multisensory interactions across objects” (40).

Within the array of multisensory approaches emerging across the arts and humanities, crossmodal correspondences have therefore been comparatively undervalued for the potential connections or sensations they might provide between and across media – especially in relation to design^{iv}. As Smith infers, graphic designers seem to intuitively exploit crossmodality to create mood and meaning. Advertisements make use of associations between abstract shapes and particular products, or between sounds and sights: “angular shapes conjure up carbonated water, not still” and “an ice-cream called “Frisch” would be thought creamier than one called [the more sloshy sounding] “Frosch” (185). Crossmodal correspondences working across media to generate sensorial empathy enable a designer, such as Johan Ku, to create a set of garments, in this case his “Selma” collection, inspired by the experience of a film, in this example, von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark*.

[Figure 3. Selma’s experience of disrupted vision is suggested by the bright reflections off the thick lenses of her glasses © Official film still courtesy of Zentropa Productions, Lars von Trier and *Dancer in the Dark* 2000]

The selective overview of ideas and theory presented above identifies a set of emerging “sense-based” connections between film studies and fashion theory. Sensorial empathy and crossmodality provide a theoretical model for contextualising the “as if real” elements of cinema, whereby sight and sound appear to engender a more embodied type of experience (more intimate than the “distance senses” of hearing and seeing might otherwise be expected to deliver) by engaging a wider range of physical and sensorial responses – including a distinct sense of offscreen physical and tactile responses to an onscreen experience. Such responses offer a bridge between film and fashion through a clear preoccupation with bodily experience and social context; through the recognition of “touch” as multisensory and intrinsic to culturally situated meaning; and through expansive awareness of intuitive and sensorial empathy as important aspects of our perceptual processes.

What makes Ku’s “Selma” collection insightful as a case study through which to explore these connections (between the sensory qualities of film and how those qualities can be given material form) is that *Dancer in the Dark* is itself preoccupied with the senses – particularly the significance of limited vision and the relationship between knowledge and sight when it is a damaged or limited sense. The next section will focus upon the thematic role of sight and the senses in *Dancer in the*

Dark to identify the sensual and textural qualities of the film, which formulate the essence of Ku's "Selma" collection.

Seeing is feeling: *Dancer in the Dark*

[O]nce we understand that vision is informed by and informs our other senses in a dynamic structure that is not necessarily or always sensually hierarchical, it is no longer metaphorical to say that we "touch" a film or that we are "touched" by it (Sobchack 2004, 80)

Blindness is the strongest melodramatic effect imaginable (von Trier in Fortbert Petersen 2000, film)

Dancer in the Dark is a provocative and highly sensorial film. Set in America around 1963/64, the lead character, Selma Jezkova (played by Björk), is a Czechoslovakian immigrant living in a trailer with her 12 year old son, Gene Jezkova (played by Vladica Kostic), behind the house of Bill and Linda Houston (David Morse and Cara Seymour). Selma works in a factory, machining kitchen sinks using heavy industrial equipment in a monotonous and repetitive process, where she is supported/protected by her friend Kathy (Catherine Deneuve). Selma suffers from a congenital eye disease that is sending her blind ("a family thing [...] I have always known it, since I was a little girl"). Gene has the same condition, which is why Selma emigrated to America because he can have an operation there (when he is 13) to prevent him losing his sight.

Selma saves every penny she can to pay for Gene's operation, telling him that he "can't have things" like other boys ("I'm not that kind of mother"), knowing she has limited time before her eyesight fails and she will lose her job. Selma reveals her secret to Bill ("I'm going blind... not yet, but soon, sometime this year") after he confides in her that he is near suicidal due to financial problems. Bill, a police officer, then takes advantage of Selma's blindness to find where she hides her money, steals the cash she has painstakingly saved for Gene's operation, and lies to his wife – telling her that Selma "made a move" on him and that it was Selma who was trying to steal his money. When Selma attempts to recover her savings, Bill pulls a gun on her. In the struggle, Bill is shot and he forces Selma – now blind and scared – to put him out of his misery.

Selma kills Bill under duress, recovers her money and makes the payment for Gene's operation (which must be kept secret to ensure it will go ahead) and then faces arrest, imprisonment, and harsh moral and legal judgement: Selma is (mis)perceived as an uncaring mother who attempted to instigate adultery (inspired by avarice), then became a thief and murderer when she was spurned. She is represented in court as an ungrateful outsider who is deservedly sentenced to death and hanged for her perceived crimes; Selma offers no defence or explanation fearing that Gene's operation could be cancelled. As a silver lining, Gene receives his operation and is looked after by Selma's friends, Kathy and Jeff (Peter Stormare), who understand the sacrifices she made for her son.

[Figure 4. Dance sequence from *Dancer in the Dark* with heightened color showing Selma with eyes closed, simultaneously immersed in the fluid sensations of music and water © Official film still courtesy of Zentropa Productions, Lars von Trier and *Dancer in the Dark* 2000]

As the synopsis of the film suggests, issues of sight, perception, misperception and judgement are central to *Dancer in the Dark* both thematically and as a core part of the narrative. What is "seen" and how it is "seen" determines Selma's fate: the moral weight of the film comes, in part, from how much further and more clearly she appears to "sense" or "see" the reality of her situation (compared to the other characters) despite her loss of physical sight. This concept tallies with

Classen's astute observation that within "the visual panoply of modern, or postmodern, Western society while the blind may lack the sense of sight, the sighted are often out of touch with their other senses" (2002, 139). In addition, the film plays with notions of spectacle and performance by mixing genres, bucking convention, and eschewing celluloid by shooting on digital video, which makes the image "feel thin" in keeping with the grimness of Selma's life (Arroyo 2000, 15-16). As a "musical melodrama" – a paradoxical mix of genres drawing upon expression and emotion from opposite ends of the scale – *Dancer in the Dark* subverts audience expectations as the (traditionally joyous and spectacular) dance sequences are woven into a tragic series of events. These sequences are introduced as escapist daydreams instigated by Selma ("I've got little games I play when it gets really hard. I just start dreaming and it all becomes music"). The result is a film in which Björk's performance has been described as being "felt", rather than acted, and *Dancer in the Dark* is widely considered an unsettling sensory experience (Arroyo 2000, 15). As José Arroyo observed of its premiere:

[...] the wildly different receptions this film received there [at Cannes] were probably not between individuals but *within* them: *Dancer* is as exasperating as it is extraordinary. (2000, 15)

The theme of perception is introduced in the opening title sequence. A series of abstract forms and gestural marks morph, through overlaid imagery, from painterly and hand drawn shapes to minimalist fields of color. Björk's "Overture" integrates with the forms onscreen, causing the mood to rise and fall then rise again. The sequence has a textural quality, seeming to prefigure some of the patterned fabrics and colors that construct Selma's world, whilst also feeling fluid and organic, alternately bringing to mind notions such as underwater imagery, cells under a microscope, and distant birds flying or leaves blowing in loose natural formations. Everything seems impressionistic, indistinct, and yet suggestive of something tangible that is felt but not visually perceived; it is the nearest the film comes to offering the immediate and subjective experience of diminished or fading sight from Selma's perspective.

Dancer in the Dark tends to resist the typical melodramatic moments that might be expected in a film where the protagonist loses her sight, such as Selma straining to see her son's blurred face for the last time. Instead, the film experiments with formal and conceptual innovations related to the senses and the filmic experience. The majority of *Dancer in the Dark* was shot using handheld cameras, operated by von Trier, which meant the director was unusually close to the action and the actors. As a result there is an intimacy to the filming, with a number of close-ups of faces – especially of Selma. The close-up traditionally carries with it the belief that the "unmediated personality of the individual" and, by extension, their sensory experiences are being captured on film (Dyer 1979, 17). The handheld camera often blurs as it zooms in on particular details, sharpening as the focus adjusts, giving a sense of struggling/working to find the right depth of field or focal length. The camera also jerks around and the frame is frequently cluttered with objects or views its main subject(s) from an obscure angle or awkward position. Shot sequences subsequently feel slightly disjointed. There is a consistent sense of difficulty in perceiving Selma's world or, at least, of constantly overcoming visual obstacles and complexity in order to perceive what is going on.

[Figure 5. Kathy partially obscured through wire-netted glass: one of the many visual obstacles that fragment or consistently complicate perception throughout *Dancer in the Dark* © Official film still courtesy of Zentropa Productions, Lars von Trier and *Dancer in the Dark* 2000]

The musical sequences were not filmed by hand but were instead captured by one hundred "stationary unmanned cameras" (Zentropa 2007, online) – a conceit termed von Trier's "100 eyes" in

a “making of” documentary by Katia Forbert Petersen (2000). The one hundred “eyes” were intended to free von Trier and the performers from the usual technical complexities of filming musical dance sequences, with the added bonus of capturing “surprise moments” that would be missed by a conventional storyboarding process. The result is a fragmented and fractured sense of the choreography as the combined perspectives collage together a disjointed set of saccade-like jumps. Rather than experiencing the fluid and poetic harmony of camera and motion conventionally communicated by filmed dance (Arroyo 2000, 16), the one hundred eyes create a sense of self-conscious difficulty in perceiving what is happening. There are unconventional surprise moments, as von Trier intended, but very little comprehension of what is happening in the scene as a whole.

If the one hundred eyes is a metaphor for the director’s omnipresent vision, then the resulting experience onscreen is an apt metaphor for someone with limited vision who can only focus upon selected details and who then faces the challenge of putting the pieces together, in relative context, to perceive the larger whole; a sort of three-dimensional mosaic of information. In fact, von Trier’s partially-improvised approach to *Dancer in the Dark* means similar collage or “jigsaw”-like qualities (to use von Trier’s terminology) become evident throughout the film as a whole. Because the scenes were not storyboarded, von Trier would work with a couple of pages from a scene and then encourage the actors to play around with the text:

[W]e make different games with this text and then we end up with a lot of little cuts that I can use and put together for a film. It’s a jigsaw puzzle [...] (von Trier in Kaufman 2000, online)

Taking this approach gives *Dancer in the Dark* an unpredictable and raw quality. Without the slick fluidity associated with Hollywood cinema (especially traditional musicals) the seams of the film are more visible; the collage-like element adds to the texture of the experience.

The musical numbers suggest the transference of sensory awareness within Selma as she loses her sight. Her escapist fantasies, partly triggered by repetitive noises that become beats and syncopated rhythms building into songs, are broadly suggestive of the way other senses often become heightened when sight is diminished or lost. This is because the visual cortex within the brain often remains highly active when no longer “limited or constrained by any visual input” (Sacks 2010, 219). As Oliver Sacks explains:

[...] isolated from the outside, the visual cortex becomes hypersensitive to internal stimuli of all sorts: its own autonomous activity; signals from other brain areas – auditory, tactile, and verbal areas; and thoughts, memories, and emotions. (219)

From a neurological perspective, blindness cannot be reduced to any one universal type of experience – not least because the conditions of blindness are so varied, from being born blind to losing sight at a comparatively advanced age (after many years of experiencing normal vision); the loss of sight may also occur shockingly quickly or degenerate slowly over time. The general presumption, from a non-specialist point of view, is that someone who can no longer see simply experiences darkness or “nothingness” as a form of absolute absence. While some blind people do experience what John Hull has called “deep blindness” (1990) – a profound “loss of visual images and memories [as well as...] the very *idea* of seeing, so that even concepts like “here,” “there,” and “facing” seemed to lose meaning” (Sacks 2010, 203) – being blind or purblind is often accompanied by a range of potentially changeable neurological responses as the visual cortex continues to be stimulated.

As Sacks has observed, hallucinations are “not uncommon in those with blindness or impaired sight” (2013, 5). Hallucinations at an elementary level include seeing shapes and colors, sometimes patterns (potentially like those seen in the opening sequence to the film), whilst some people with Charles Bonnet Syndrome experience complex hallucinations, visualising formed images or whole scenes (Sacks 2013, 9-11). Such scenes can be remarkable in their detail, as well as their surrealistic qualities, and can include the sense of seeing a performance – including aural hallucinations that can take the form of musical accompaniment (20). While people experiencing Charles Bonnet Syndrome do not interact with their hallucinations, making them distinct from Selma’s integrated and context-related hallucinations, they are (like Selma) often aware that what they see is a construct of their mind’s eye.

Sacks also discusses the “prisoner’s cinema”, whereby a sighted person suffering deprivation of normal visual input “can stimulate the inner eye instead, producing dreams, vivid imaginings, or hallucinations” (2013, 34). Such hallucinations do not require total visual deprivation but can be triggered by visual monotony or by undertaking a task that is visually monotonous; similarly, aural monotony may lead to (accompanying) aural hallucinations (34-35). Whilst von Trier cannot be credited with overtly exploring the prisoner’s cinema in *Dancer in the Dark*, the concept of hallucinatory escapism brought about by monotony appropriately describes Selma’s first (and therefore quite unexpected) “daydream”. The scenario Selma finds herself in as a partially-sighted shift worker lacking visual stimulation whilst surrounded by the monotonous, repetitive, sounds of industrial machinery provides a compelling neurological context for the first of her musical hallucinations, which she visualises on the factory floor accompanied by the other workers in a dance sequence (recorded by the one hundred camera eyes). The concept of the prisoner’s cinema also seems especially apt as a description for Selma’s capacity to blur reality into fantasy – given her passion for both Czechoslovakian and Hollywood musicals – because it brings together a mixture of limited sight; sensory deprivation/monotony; and an active visual cortex drawing upon thoughts, memories and emotions to formulate an escapist vision.

[Figure 6. Dance sequence on a train showing the intensity of color through Selma’s mind’s eye © Official film still courtesy of Zentropa Productions, Lars von Trier and *Dancer in the Dark* 2000]

Selma’s hallucinations are richer in color than the rest of the film, which has a faded or washed out quality, helping to identify them as daydreams. As von Trier commented, “[we] had to turn up the colors in the dance sequences to make people feel that there were different levels of the film” (von Trier in Kaufman 2000, online), conveying a sense that Selma’s mind’s eye perceives greater depth and tone than can be registered in the world around her. This plays into the idea that Selma somehow “feels” and perceives more – she literally senses more – than the other people inhabiting her world. As neurological studies suggest, in addition to formulating hallucinatory experiences some areas of a functional but underutilised visual cortex “may be reallocated and used to process sound and touch” (Sacks 2010, 206). When parts of the visual cortex are reallocated in this compensatory manner, Sacks suggests that “hearing, touch, and other senses in the blind can take on a hyperacuity that perhaps no sighted person can imagine” (206).

In addition to hallucinations, Selma’s particular situation might therefore lead to an increased sensitivity and awareness of tactile, spatial, and aural stimuli. In this context, the casting of Björk is significant. Björk’s star persona as a hyper-intuitive sensory-based musician and performer, who composed the soundtrack for the film in direct response to empathising with the character she portrays, provides consistency with Selma’s sensibilities. It is worth noting that the album Björk released in 1997, *Homogenic* (roughly two years before she was invited to take on *Dancer in the Dark* as her next project), is renowned for its sensuous sonic qualities – using huge rhythmic beats to

connote the epic landscape of Björk's native Iceland. *Homogenic* therefore draws upon crossmodal correspondences to convey physical forms through sound^{vi}, suggesting that Björk's creative impulses were already attuned to sensory exploration and crosstalk between the senses before she took on the role of Selma.

One of the paradoxes of *Dancer in the Dark* is that much of the world visually presented onscreen appears washed out and meagre, due to the use of digital video rather than celluloid, yet as an experience the film is capable of producing a profound depth of sensation. In her essay, "What My Fingers Knew: The cineasthetic subject, or vision in the flesh" (2004, 53-85), Sobchack discusses how films commute the experience of seeing to touching and back again. This occurs through sensual and crossmodal activity, whereby a viewer literally "feels" the textures of the cinematic world in their fingers (by drawing upon personal experiences from offscreen that generate a sensory response) even while viewing and empathising with a character experiencing those textures onscreen (71). As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has suggested, the intercommunication of senses means that seeing the form of objects appeals to senses other than just sight – so "[the] form of a fold in linen or cotton shows us the resilience or dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material" (Merleau-Ponty in Sobchack 2004, 71). By extension, Sobchack adds that we can sense these qualities through film, at the very least in a diffuse way, leading to sensual perception of the world presented before us, whether it be "the weight and slightly scratchy feel of a wool dress, the smoothness of a stone, [or] the texture and resilience of another's skin" (77).

[Figure 7. Woollen designs in rusty brown color, reminiscent of the factory floor © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

The capacity to hear, see and thereby feel *Dancer in the Dark* through the medium of film and then take from that experience a set of sensory responses that can be transfigured into another medium, such as fashion design, is a compelling example of how crossmodal correspondences and sensorial empathy can relate to creative practice. The viewer is visually and sensorially encouraged to empathise with Selma's fragmented and fading vision; with the imposing atmosphere of industrial machinery and the coldness of the factory floor, a space of harsh concrete and rusting metal with piles of torn cardboard and rundown machinery; with the sparse and claustrophobic spaces of Selma's home and work; with the sense of a world that must be experienced through heightened awareness of the tactile, the spatial and the aural to compensate for the loss of sight; and with Selma's capacity (perhaps a necessity as a coping mechanism) to transcend the darkness and alienation of her reality to find a comparative richness and beauty in hallucinations and fantasy. The viewer feels these spaces and experiences because of the heightened emphasis upon Selma's mind's eye. Even the washed out imagery prompts the viewer to work harder to "feel" the texture of Selma's world. In addition, the qualities identified above are intrinsic to both the form and content of *Dancer in the Dark* – making sensorial empathy with Selma a necessity in order to "make sense" of the film. As the final section will show, these essential themes are explored and communicated by Ku's "Selma" collection. Ku's designs intuitively draw upon the sensorial experience of the film to create fashion designs, informed by crossmodality, taking sensory cues from onscreen to create equivalent tactile and physical responses on the catwalk.

Fashioning the Senses: "Selma" on the Catwalk

In the movie, Selma loses her eyesight little by little then is driven to death through false accusation. I was moved by the sentiment of "one who is innocent yet misperceived." This collection ["Selma" S/S 2014] makes use of a mix of materials to depict the blur of vision and the differences in perception depending on distance. (Ku in Oku 2013, online)

I've seen it all, I've seen the dark... I've seen the brightness in one little spark... (Selma in *Dancer in the Dark* 2000)

Describing his design work, Ku acknowledges a strong sensory response to *Dancer in the Dark* by highlighting empathy with Selma and the thematic importance of sight, perception and misperception within the film. He relates this set of conceptual themes directly to his decision to mix carefully selected materials in textures and forms that engage with blurred vision and blindness; differences in perception; and the gap between Selma's innocent world (of daydreams and fantasy) and the grim reality of her life, including the tragic sequence of events that ends it. The audience for Ku's catwalk show (Ku 2013, online) in some ways correlates with the audience for the film, where both groups are encouraged to conceptualise Selma's world as it is mediated before them. The concepts and themes that define Selma's world in *Dancer in the Dark* are consistently recognised in the shared critical responses to Ku's collection:

[T]ranslucent glossy materials, electric graphic prints, and kaleidoscopic collages of small plastic shards and pieces of fabric [...] skilfully symbolize Selma's blurred vision. (Rofi 2013, online)

Consistent recognition of the qualities of Selma's world as it is communicated through the designs on the catwalk is important. This helps to confirm the "shared" nature of the crossmodal correspondences projected by the film, which are broadly recognised by viewers and critics of the catwalk show, as well as fitting in with the communal perceptual orientation of the senses as culturally and socially informed. In the physical and tactile forms Ku creates there are elements of a universal mode of design, due to the inclusion of the blind experience at the core of the collection. In addition, both *Dancer in the Dark* and Ku's "Selma" designs engage with what Classen has termed "[a] feel for the world" and the importance of learning more about aesthetics and sensory engagement from the experiences of the blind (2002, 138-160). It is important to recognise that not all fashion designs inspired by Selma's world from *Dancer in the Dark* would necessarily produce the same or even similar garments or staging. Just as graphic designers might use a myriad of abstract angular shapes across numerous and varied advertising campaigns to suggest the "fizziness" of different carbonated drinks, the form of the fashion designs can be varied and changeable; what is important is that the concepts and sensations they communicate are consistent and recognisable.

Ku's "Selma" catwalk show of womenswear (S/S 2014) is presented in three interrelated segments. The staging of the show remains consistent throughout and takes an understated pared-down approach, reflective of the sparseness of *Dancer in the Dark* that shapes Selma's existence. The audience initially sits in darkness, deprived of sensory stimulation until the show starts, with the exception of the subtle lighting that focuses upon the length of the runway with the boldest spotlights positioned at the end of the catwalk. In relation to issues of perception, a run of lights appear to be refracted (through a prism) in order to subtly project the color spectrum along the periphery of the catwalk. Throughout the show, the models emerge from the distant blackness advancing towards the light – causing the garments and accessories to take clearer form as their movement progresses. Details of the motifs and materials; the impact and importance of color; and the sculptural forms of the garments as well as their drape and movement visibly changes as the models come towards and fully into the spotlight. The models and the designs then fade back into the darkness as each figure recedes, even as the next vision emerges. As the show progresses, the theme of fantasy and escapism builds; this provides a sense of narrative, based around transcendence from reality, leading to a distinct finale and definitive conclusion.

The staging evokes and enhances the conceptual themes of the show, playing with notions of depth, perception, and the sensory engagement of the audience. It also bridges between the literal and the metaphorical. The audience is literally encouraged to empathize with Selma's physical perception of the world by sharing something of her limited visual capabilities (what is seen comes out of the darkness and half-light) whilst metaphorically appreciating that the designs themselves are conceptualised as a sensory response to what unfolds within her mind's eye in the film (including elements of fantasy and transcendence of the everyday). As a combination of ideas, this enables Ku to evoke Selma's world by focussing upon her ability to find beauty in the mundane. From the grim world and dark tale of suffering presented by *Dancer in the Dark*, a fashion collection engaging with aesthetic and sensory appeal has been created. As one French newspaper suggested, *Dancer in the Dark* has a "surrealistic elegance" that is "modern and stimulating" (*Libération* in Stevenson 2002, 151). Ku's designs give material form to these qualities.

The first section of the show primarily displays jackets and skirts that introduce and combine together key elements of the collection: patterned prints with industrial motifs; highly textured materials made from a mixture of scraps to create a collaged, "mosaic-like", quality (Stevens 2013, online); and translucent vinyl coverings that distort and reflect light to appear transparent, opaque and/or refractive depending upon movement and context. The music track "Ted" by Clark (2006), which accompanies this first segment of the show, combines samples, distortion, and other electronic effects in a complex layering of sound appropriate to the bricolage aspects of the designs and the machinery-related themes.

[Figure 8. Collaged textures and photorealistic quality metallic prints © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

The prints depict nuts, bolts and screws in a repetitive pattern. The silver and copper metallic tones on a black background have a photorealistic quality, described as a "stereoscopic graphic [pattern]" (Oku 2013, online), that relates symbolically to being on the factory floor. As a machine-made print (which is very distinct from the handmade fabrics in the collection) the process of production is highly relevant because the material and printed images are the result of functional methods of industrial manufacture. The repetitive content of the prints suggest a potentially endless flow of mechanical parts, reflecting the monotony of Selma's job moulding identical kitchen sinks in dull steel. These prints convey the mundane practicalities of Selma's life. Metallic and neutral in color, in stark contrast to other fantasy elements within the collection, they are comparatively minimalist and tend to fit closely to the body – depicting the straightforward and "real" physical form of the wearer. Symbolically grounded in reality, these two-dimensional prints therefore offer a flat replication of quotidian experience – the "nuts and bolts" of reality; in both a tactile and a visual sense they represent the basic parameters of Selma's world as a factory worker.

[Figure 9. Metallic and neutral colors, indicative of Selma's world as a factory worker © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

[Figure 10. Mosaic-like handmade fabrics, "sometimes clear, sometimes ill-defined, like Selma's vision." © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

By contrast, the mosaic-like materials that are handmade from a range of carefully selected scraps (including cotton, silk, plastic and polyester) are rich in both color and texture, making their appearance/impact a complex sensory experience (Oku 2013, online). As the models emerge from the darkness their silhouettes have quite a "fuzzy" indistinct quality because the feathered appearance of the material (used for jackets, skirts and some shirts and dresses) produces a blurry

outline. As the designs move into the light, fragmented shapes and the multiple small sections that build up each surface become more discernible; however, the mixture of colors and forms is so highly textured that it remains difficult to perceive all of the elements that are being combined together. The designs are “sometimes clear, sometimes ill-defined, like Selma’s vision” (Stevens 2013, online). Sequins are also worked into the pattern of the handmade fabric to add sudden sparks of reflected light that stand out in the darkness; an effect that has been described as “flirt[ing] with the eye [...prompting] the viewer to take a closer look” (Stevens 2013, online).

Even while looking more closely is encouraged by the designs – drawing the viewer in as they attempt to perceive the details – the unusual appearance and texture of the surfaces appeal to the haptic, provoking a desire to touch the garments in order to (literally) make “more sense” of their qualities. From the difficulties of perception, due to the changeable aspects of each design depending upon the light, through the invitation to get closer in order to feel the texture – and thereby more fully comprehend the experience that is being evoked – Ku places the audience into Selma’s position of needing to rely upon alternate senses to help compensate for the limitations of (her fading) sight.

Described as part of Ku’s “true signature”, the “complex handmade fabric treatment” (Stevens 2013, online) is highly individualistic. Whilst indicating Ku’s artistry as a designer with a distinct style, this quality also invokes – in the context of the collection – Selma’s uniqueness as an individual. Where the hardness of the prints connote sensations of machined smoothness, repetition and monotony, the handmade surfaces are imbued with depth of feeling, rich variations of form and texture, and sensations of the extraordinary or exceptional. These “collages of plastic and small pieces of fabric with intricate details” (Stevens 2013, online) introduce the fantasy aspect of Selma’s perception of the world, where sensory experience and transcending the everyday (scraps of familiar material becoming more than the sum of their parts) are key.

[Figure 11. Kaleidoscopic color and the complex texture of Ku’s handmade fabrics © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

Heightened color is a significant part of Selma’s fantasy hallucinations. Accordingly, within the handmade fabrics a kaleidoscopic effect of greens, blues, yellows and purples combine with silver and black in bold contrast to the neutral metallic tones of the patterned prints. Within the collection, as within the film, the color levels in the handmade fabrics are “turned up” to help signify the escape into fantasy; the more neutral tones of the prints are therefore necessary to provide an understated comparison with “reality”:

Ethereal colors that were dream-like were contrasted with hard metal printings and jewelry, showing the fight between fantasy and reality. (Stevens 2013, online)

The mosaic-like quality of the handmade fabric similarly correlates with the formal experience of the film. The filmed dance sequences, edited together from the “one hundred eyes” of von Trier, build up a visual mosaic or collage of Selma’s hallucinations. The “texture” of the film, edited together with a jigsaw-like approach, tallies with the attributes of the material: many small fragments, carefully chosen to be joined together, building up a much larger whole from discrete segments.

The handmade always includes an element of risk (because the outcome is not predictable in the same way as a machine-made material or print) and therefore shares certain characteristics with the improvised and unpredictable aspects of the film; this includes the “surprise moments” von Trier embraces in *Dancer in the Dark*. Ku’s collection generates surprises because of both the staging of the show (due to how the lighting is set) and the construction of the garments. The random sparks

of light from sequins recall Selma singing, “I’ve seen the brightness in one little spark”, whilst making an iconic link to the industrial sparks seen in the factory (these feature noticeably in the first dance sequence due to their visual impact, timed to coincide with beats of sound within the song). The indistinctness or apparent changeability of the material is also surprising, sometimes appearing organic and feathery; sometimes appearing sharp, like shards of metal. But the most impressive “surprise” or unexpected moments are provided because of the semi-transparent/translucent vinyl used to create segments of garments or entire garments in themselves.

[Figure 12. Sparks and reflections produce unpredictable visual and tactile appearances © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

[Figure 13. Translucent vinyl coverings distort, refract and reveal materials and patterns © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

Introduced from early on in the show, the translucent vinyl coverings provide unexpected sculptural forms. In addition, they are transparent enough to reveal distorted glimpses of the materials and patterns beneath; however, they also retain a highly reflective surface that can suddenly become opaque, and almost iridescent, as light refracts and rebounds. The plastic is malleable but robust, with enough elasticity to allow movement yet with the density to maintain a series of loosely creased and bluntly emerging sculptural forms – as though the vinyl has been pulled outwards or upwards or sideways to construct an irregular shape. The peaks and troughs created by the drape of the vinyl reflect and distort light as movement of the garments and the level of spotlight exposure constantly shifts.

Once again, Ku brings both a literal and metaphorical quality to his designs. The vinyl acts like a veil over different parts of the body – by turns obscuring and then revealing half-seen details before appearing to change again as the model approaches, turns in the spotlight, and recedes from view. Metaphorically, a veil is coming down on Selma’s sight as though her vision is being masked or clouded by her congenital condition; in a literal sense, the audience is further encouraged to empathise with the protagonist’s diminishing and distorted vision through their own sensory experience. What can be seen and perceived is (to some extent) beyond the audience’s control because the physical veil created by the vinyl can be transparent or opaque depending upon the viewer’s perspective and relative position to the light. Like Selma, the viewer sometimes has to experience brightness and beauty in half-perceived sparks and flashes.

The second section of the show focuses upon loose patterned knits that are predominantly colored “iron rust and black, in the image of the [...] factory where Selma works” (Oku 2013, online). The yarns appear quite thin, often taking on the appearance of netting, and their stripped back quality gives them an industrial feel. The accompanying music track “Spl9” by Autechre (2013) has an electronic/glitch sound, using repetitive beats to add a further layer of sensory input themed around machinery and industry. There is comparatively little decoration or embellishment to the knits, and the minimalistic aspect of the designs is in keeping with the sparseness of Selma’s world, which has been described as “drab” and “so bare, a tin chocolate box becomes a symbol of richness; the non-musical sequences are shot in dreary browns and metallic greys” (Arroyo 2000, 16).

[Figure 14. Thin patterned knits in dark color palette, suggesting the sparseness of Selma’s world © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

[Figure 15. Loose knit rusty brown woollen dress, suggesting escapism through buoyancy and movement © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

The thin yarns are elegant and have a stripped back aesthetic, but they do not project a feeling of being cosy or comforting – evoking instead the sense of coarseness sometimes associated with wool. The yarns do encourage movement through the looseness of the patterns, bringing a more flowing quality into the collection in keeping with Selma’s love of dance and motion. The final piece in this section features a body-length free-flowing dress in rusty brown. Selma has a shapeless, chunky knit sweater in a similar reddish-brown color that she frequently wears throughout the film – it is as if this garment has been deconstructed and repurposed to transform it into something more liberating. The drape allows for substantial sway and more bounce than the preceding designs, evoking lightness and sensations of something more ethereal or escapist to lead into the final section of the show.

The final section of the show features dresses in “voluminous shapes” (Anderson 2013, online) that bring the key themes of escapist fantasy and transcendence to a crescendo. This section of the show is accompanied by Mark Bell’s “A Salute to Those People Who Say Fuck You” (1998) which “chains the unrestrained glitch of IDM [Intelligent Dance Music] to the 4/4 discipline of techno” (Poe 2014, online) and has sonic qualities reminiscent of Björk’s soundtrack inspired by Selma’s life^{vii}. Patterned prints and the handmade fabrics continue to be combined together, but the translucent vinyl becomes increasingly dominant: necklines rise as it reaches up to cover the face; simultaneously the plastic veil extends down, full length, to envelop the body; and the sculptural forms become larger, bolder and more fantastical. As a metaphor for Selma’s loss of sight the veiled effect of the translucent vinyl takes over “with the use of shiny plastic and drapery, which [is] wrapped over fabric forms [...to encase] the models in a cocoon-like shape” (Stevens 2013, online). All other materials and textures become masked or covered, so any details of the prints and fabrics are filtered through the reflective, semi-transparent, haze of the veil: “at close sight the graphic patterns of the material inside were visible, but from a distance the translucent cover made them hard to discern” (Oku 2013, online). Much like the opening sequence to *Dancer in the Dark* everything becomes impressionistic, indistinct, yet highly tangible – in these final designs the drive towards feeling over seeing is pushed towards its natural conclusion.

[Figure 16. Translucent vinyl creates sculptural forms that can simultaneously reveal, distort and refract details and light © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

[Figure 17. Cocoon-like forms, metamorphosis and transcendence through fantasy and escape. Selma’s world reaches a climatic ending on the catwalk as in the film © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

The cocoon-like structures have a somewhat claustrophobic feel, as though the models are being encased by the vinyl. At the same time, these designs are the grandest and most surreal within the collection. They embrace the sense of transcending the rusty browns and metallic tones of the factory floor to escape into the fantasy world Selma constructs in her mind’s eye. Even as the veil comes down, Selma becomes increasingly free. Unburdened by the actual, dull, reality that surrounds her, Selma’s loss of vision frees her visual cortex to engage in hallucinations. The cocoon-like dresses are therefore also suggestive of metamorphosis. Selma transforms the monotony of her existence into something extraordinary, with a surrealistic elegance of its own. By visualising a future for her son, unblighted by the congenital eye disease that has limited her engagement with the real world, Selma sacrifices her life by yielding to a final gesture that is brutally unjust but ultimately transcendent. Within *Dancer in the Dark*, Selma moves from being a visionary to becoming a martyr when she is hanged. Perhaps in homage to this, the end of the show falls into pitch blackness for a short period before Ku and the models return to take their applause accompanied by Björk’s uplifting “New World”, which is also the final song from *Dancer in the Dark*.

[Figure 18. The final moments of the catwalk show, indicative of the darkness and light of Selma's world © Official image of the Selma collection courtesy of Johan Ku 2014]

Conclusion

Ku's "Selma" collection provides a compelling case study through which to highlight the role of crossmodality and sensorial empathy within and across fashion and film. Whilst any film has the potential to go beyond seeing and hearing to become a full-body experience, as suggested by Sobchack's cinesthetic analysis, *Dancer in the Dark* is comparatively unique in the way it engages with the senses thematically, through both form and content, to be immediate and evocative in its rendering of Selma's visually limited but transcendent world. The film encourages, perhaps even demands, that the viewer engages a range of senses and sensorial empathy in order to "make sense" of the film. Concepts of perception, misperception and judgement – all of which rely upon the senses – are coherently explored and communicated through the texture, "the feel", of Selma's world. The sensorial responses the film engenders are consistently and widely culturally shared, conveying a sense of what it might be like to lose sight; empathy with the sparseness of Selma's existence; the sense of monotony and repetition found within industry on the factory floor; and awareness of the transcendence and richness experienced through Selma's mind's eye. All of these qualities are integral to the texture and feel of *Dancer in the Dark*. Some of these qualities are communicated conceptually, as thematic concerns within the narrative, others are communicated literally, through the formal and experimental elements of the filming and editing process. The crossmodal aspects of the filmic experience, centred around Selma's loss of sight, therefore occur when seeing and hearing correspond with touch, feel, and texture – and Ku's fashion designs give these crossmodal correspondences a physical and material form.

One aim of this article is to suggest that crossmodal correspondences and sensorial empathy are comparatively undervalued for the connections they provide between and across media, especially in relation to design. Fashion design, by definition, is an area rich in sensorial experiences due to its essential nature as a bodily-orientated, tactile and immersive form of design. Whilst some remarkable insights into the senses and fashion have been progressed, notably the range of issues covered within *Dress Sense* – due to the explicit focus upon 'touch, smell, hearing, and taste [...] instead of the more usual sense of sight' (Johnson and Foster 2007, 2) – the interdisciplinary field of enquiry uniting sensory studies with fashion studies will surely continue to expand.

Another aim of the article is to add to the theoretical discourse about the relationship between fashion and film, with one eye on emerging and developing technologies that offer much more than a visual experience when a viewer looks at or through a screen or projection. Technology continues to blur reality and experience in ways that raise complex and fascinating philosophical and ontological questions. The postmodern question of whether we are "seeing what we are seeing" might soon commute into issues of whether what we are "feeling is what we are feeling", due to the perceptual difficulties in how effectively we can really differentiate between a neurological response generated by a simulated world and a neurological response generated by the physical world. As a case study, *Dancer in the Dark* and Ku's corresponding tactile response, through a highly sensory and empathic set of designs, demonstrates how a filmic experience can be transformed from a medium (representing reality) into physical life (as a life form or reality in its own right) through fashion. By drawing upon crossmodality and sensorial empathy to explore this transformation, this article hopefully provides insights into some of the larger questions fashion theory and sensory studies might increasingly explore.

[11,137 words, inc. figure headings, abstract and title]

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ⁱ As Guerts has asserted: 'Despite the belief of many Euro-Americans, the five-senses model is not a scientific fact, and the enumeration of the senses has been a subject of debate among scholars and philosophers for many centuries' (2003, 7). The BBC Radio 4 series *The Uncommon Senses* (2017), presented by philosopher Barry C. Smith, disseminates current research suggesting up to thirty-three senses: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08km812> [Accessed 21 March 2017].

ⁱⁱ In 1992, Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins advocated use of the term "dress" to encompass – besides clothing – cosmetics, tattoos, jewelry, nail polish, hairdos, scarification and many other socio-cultural practices relating to the body (Johnson and Foster 2007, 2). "Dress" became "the standard term to use for the ways in which anyone, anywhere covers or uncovers, adds to or subtracts from, her or his body" (2). By broadening the definition of dress to include what is taken from the body as well as what is added, "Eicher and Roach-Higgins greatly expanded the means by which material culture scholars examine the human body" (2).

ⁱⁱⁱ Further research based upon Paul Walker's "initial anecdotal confirmation that design students would consider lemons to be fast rather than slow" has shown that "lemons are twice as likely to be considered fast than slow" (Deroy and Spence 2016, 30).

^{iv} Notable examples of crossmodality explored within design include "crossmodal eating utensils" produced as a result of collaboration since 2014 between Andreas Fabian, Charles Michel and Daniel Ospina, supported by Charles Spence (<http://michelfabian.com/science>); and Sarah Hyndman's ongoing studies of "multi sensory typography" (2016), including research into the relationship between type and taste (<http://sarahhyndman.com/>).

^v Catherine Deneuve commented of Björk: "She is not an actor but plays on her feelings" (Deneuve in Stevenson 2002, 152). Significant creative differences between Björk and von Trier reportedly made the production process extremely tense. These tensions are arguably evident in the film, as the stress of portraying Selma blurs with the stresses her character endures in the narrative, and they became central to the publicity and mythology surrounding *Dancer in the Dark* (see Jack Stevenson's *Lars Von Trier* 2002, 148-163).

^{vi} *Homogenic* also represents a conceptual development in Björk's artistry that includes her multimedia project and interactive album *Biophilia* (2011), which explores links between nature, science and technology. One of the many interrelated releases generated by *Biophilia* includes the documentary *When Björk Met Attenborough* (2013), which features a section where (in the context of Björk's integrated sensorial creativity) Oliver Sacks discusses the relationship between music and the brain.

^{vii} The similarities in style are not a coincidence: Bell produced Björk's 1997 album *Homogenic* and became a longtime collaborator, producing all of Björk's studio albums from that point onwards (including the *SelmaSongs* (2000) soundtrack to *Dancer in the Dark*), up until his death in 2014.