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Sarah Gilligan (2017) Sun, Sex, and Style in Smart Cinema: Tilda Swinton in *A Bigger Splash* (Luca Guadagnino, 2015).

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### **Abstract**

This article will examine the ways in which costuming plays a pivotal and disruptive role in *A Bigger Splash*. Through Tilda Swinton's virtually mute performance as recovering rock star Marianne Lane, the intersections between clothing, the body, and performance construct a visual language dominated by desire, touch, conflict, turmoil, and disguise. With costumes designed by Raf Simons at Dior, in collaboration with Giulia Piersanti, an aesthetic of stylish resort wear is showcased to a niche audience. Although *A Bigger Splash* attempts to position itself as a European version of the American "smart film," I will argue that it is a "Euro-pudding": a well-intentioned European coproduction with transnational scope, that aspires to art film status, but is devoid of broader social or political resonance. Through the casting of Swinton, ambivalence is commodified and used to promote luxury designer fashion to an aspirational audience rich in cultural capital, that wishes to distance itself from mainstream celebrity culture and Hollywood blockbusters.

**KEYWORDS:** Tilda Swinton, costume, Dior, Smart cinema, Euro-pudding

### **Introduction**

British performer Tilda Swinton is a beguiling figure of fascination; she is elusive and enigmatic, fluid yet familiar. Since the mid 1980s, Swinton has seamlessly segued between the art house, independent and mainstream cinema, numerous live performances, fashion editorials, advertising campaigns, and online fashion films. She is "a performer, actor, producer, activist, model, patron, advocate and general style icon" (Stacey 2015, 245). As an avant-garde icon who both pays homage to and disrupts the fashion system and celebrity culture Swinton's stylish personae provides further evidence of Pamela Church Gibson's discussions of the ways in which contemporary celebrity culture, fashion and consumption "bleed" across the media (2012, 11). Claiming to have a "beginner's mind," with "little knowledge" and "no real interest" in fashion, Swinton sees the couture shows as a "circus" (Matusik 2014; Radner 2016). Through Swinton's collaboration with Jerry Stafford (creative

director at the French production company Première-Heure and style consultant to Swinton), performance art and fashion collide as she graces the pages of editorials and glossy international fashion magazines such as *W Magazine*, *AnOther*, and *Candy* in addition to appearing in digital fashion films (for instance McGinley 2010; Ethridge 2014; Madigan Heck 2017). With Stafford as her guide, Swinton is dressed for the red carpet by her designer “friends” such as Viktor and Rolf, Raf Simons, and Haider Ackermann (Matusik 2014; Radner 2016; Woo 2012). Notions of friendship and collaboration become integral to the promotional discourses surrounding Swinton; she is granted agency and is frequently represented as a highly articulate, intelligent performer with an artistic vision, rather than yet another manufactured female celebrity whose *raison d’être* resides in her image.

The art house bride who tore apart her wedding gown in *The Last of England* (Derek Jarman 1987) may have now become a household name, but Swinton still sits on the margins as the outsider; the other who looks back and confronts the spectator with her penetrating gaze. As Hilary Radner argues, Swinton is “the expression of a new plastic European identity” in which she demonstrates chameleon-like capacities for border-crossing, self-transformation and “exemplifies an idealized process of self-creation” (2016, 402). With her unique style and unconventional beauty, Swinton moves between glamour, androgyny, the ethereal and the “utterly otherworldly” (Morgan 2016; Radner 2017; Stacey 2015; De Perthuis 2012). Swinton’s signature qualities of “flux and mutability” are characterized by her androgyny, yet the term does not fully account for Swinton’s “gender fluctuations” (Stacey 2015, 245). Niall Richardson argues that Swinton (in her work with Derek Jarman) queers gender into the “non-normal,” by evoking “an interrogation of the assumed stable continuum of the sexed body and gender” (2003, 427–429). More recently Jackie Stacey in her extended analysis of Swinton’s “flat affect,” argues that “off-gender” is perhaps a more appropriate term, as it “would be less the in-between-ness of androgyny and more the capacity to move across, to embody the mobility of temporal flux” (2015, 267). Swinton’s continuing on and off-screen explorations of identities are not confined to her blurring, unravelling, and queering of gender binaries, but extend to her performative representations of femininity. With each screen appearance, Swinton offers a different “Tilda”; yet it is when she is represented as “conventional,” such as in *Trainwreck* (Judd Apatow, 2015), that she becomes most unrecognizable (see Saner in Radner 2017, 102). Transformation, and particularly the “idea of gender,” is central to Swinton’s focus as a performer. She argues: “I enjoy walking the tightrope of identity, of sexual

identity, of gender identity. I'm happy to keep swinging it" (Swinton in Von Kreutzbruck 2009).

Through Swinton's continuing preoccupation with revealing the artifice, stylization, and transformation of gendered identities within her work, her "disturbances demand our participation" (Stacey 2015, 268). This article will argue that in *A Bigger Splash* (Luca Guadagnino, 2015) costuming plays a pivotal and disruptive role in fashioning identity. Through a focus upon Swinton's virtually mute performance as recovering rock star Marianne Lane, I will argue that the clothes speak for her and draw attention to the tactile, which in turn heightens our erotic and sensorial responses to the film, creating tension and drama through their juxtapositions. Rather than creating a seamless fit between character and costume (see Gaines 1990), the garments are intrusive and adhere to Stella Bruzzi's notion of costume's capacity to act as "spectacular interventions that interfere with the scenes in which they appear and impose themselves onto the characters they adorn" (1997, xv). While striving to position itself as a European version of the American "smart film" (Perkins 2013; Sconce 2002), the film I will argue can be read as well-intentioned "Euro-pudding" (see Baldwin 1997; Halle 2008; Liz 2014) that transports its audience to an idyllic European island oozing with sun, sex, and style. Through a resort wear wardrobe created by Raf Simons at Dior, Swinton offers an aspirational image of tourist attire that is created for those who might otherwise be ambivalent about fashion.

### **From *La Piscine* to *A Bigger Splash***

*A Bigger Splash* is an English-language, Italian–French coproduction, inspired by the stylish French New Wave thriller *La Piscine* (Jacques Deray, 1969) starring Alain Delon, Romy Schneider, and Jane Birkin. As a means of attempting to secure its credentials and authenticity as an independent European "art" film, the press notes for *A Bigger Splash* reference the "cult status" of the original movie in France, and the influence of Roberto Rossellini, Jean Luc Godard, Martin Scorsese, Jonathan Demme, Patricia Highsmith, and Paul Bowles (Studio Canal 2016, 4).

In *La Piscine* (with costumes designed by André Courrèges), it is French star Delon who is the primary focus of the spectator's lingering gaze; as the beautiful spectacle of his lithe, tanned body and chiseled brooding dark looks dominate the screen. As the star of *Plein Soleil* (René Clément, 1960), Delon was, as Bruzzi and Church Gibson argue, one of the "first male heroes

to be stripped and fetishized on screen” (2008, 164; Waldron 2015). As Nick Rees-Roberts discusses (2011), the enduring appeal of Delon in *La Piscine* was further secured and brought to a new audience on the basis of Dior’s heritage inspired “Eau Savage” campaign in 2010. Glamour, sexuality, fashion and lifestyle combine on and beyond the screen to both secure the film’s status as a fashion classic and repackage Delon as the iconic, nostalgic object of desire for contemporary consumers. While, in *La Piscine*, the character of Marianne (Schneider) as Jean-Paul’s lover is overshadowed by Delon’s star presence, in *A Bigger Splash*, Swinton’s role, as Marianne is far more central.

Released in the UK in February 2016, *A Bigger Splash* transports the spectator to a balmy sun-drenched Mediterranean island with endless blue skies and dazzling light. By relocating the movie from the Cote D’Azur to the windy volcanic island of Pantelleria (located between Sicily and Tunisia), Guadagnino wanted the landscape to embody “a very dangerous sense of otherness, and a sense of a natural urgency that creates another level of conflict with the characters” (Studio Canal 2016, 5). As a sensuous story of the dangerous allure and destructive power of an old lover, the film creates a “tangled nexus of sex and burning desire” (Studio Canal 2016, 2). Swinton’s Marianne, as a rock star in recovery from a throat operation, is holidaying with her partner Paul (Matthias Schoenaerts), only to have their idyllic retreat gate-crashed by her ex-lover and music producer Harry (Ralph Fiennes) and his teenage daughter Penelope (Dakota Johnson) (see Figure 1). As the temperature rises, Harry attempts to lure Marianne back, and Penelope seduces Paul, leading the characters into a web of secrets, conflict, and death.

Despite the glamorous cast languishing poolside allowing the audience to gaze at and fetishize their glistening bodies; the thematic focus upon love, desire, dysfunctional personal politics, “impossibly fragile” characters and emotional turmoil seemingly aligns *A Bigger Splash* with the American smart cinema “tendency” (see Perkins 2013; Sconce 2002). With their focus upon “the politics of taste, consumerism and identity” (Perkins 2013, 4; Sconce 2002), personal, rather than social politics, random fate, and dysfunction within the family, the work of directors such as Todd Haynes, Wes Anderson and Jim Jarmusch embodies a new “sensibility” that has emerged in American indie films. As Swinton argues, *A Bigger Splash* aims to offer a “sick satire” of the “solipsistic bubble-life” of “the overbearing and incessant babbling of the narcissist, the disengagement of the bereaved and disenchanting, the resentful

covering of tamed (suppressed) violence and the lethal allure of the undereducated, surface-sampling, oversaturated young” (Shoard 2016).

*Figure 1 A Bigger Splash (Luca Guadagnino, 2015) starring (from left to right): Matthias Schoenaerts, Tilda Swinton, Dakota Johnson, Ralph Fiennes. Credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures. Courtesy of Photofest.*

Through smart cinema’s use of measured and unobtrusive cuts, largely stationary characters, meaningful décor, and long takes with “straight on level framing,” a series of static tableaux are created. Such strategies emphasize “both the spaciousness and the confinement of the décor,” but rather than offering a critique, a distance from the spectacle is created (Perkins 2013, 95). There is a sense of clinical observation of the narrative’s unfolding events, and in films such as *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Wes Anderson, 2001), pathos dominates the characterization with a sense that their narratives existed before and beyond the film (Perkins 2013, 99). Such strategies are, as Jeffrey Sconce discusses, employed to reassure the audience that they are consuming a film that retains a level of authenticity and integrity as an example of “art cinema,” rather than consuming the “masscult monster” of the Hollywood blockbuster (2002, 351).

### **Communication, Touch, and Desire**

*A Bigger Splash* opens with a metallic jumpsuit clad Marianne exhibiting her disdain to a stadium of cheering fans as she spits, turns, and exits from the stadium’s stage. Channelling the generational influences of David Bowie’s androgyny, the uncomfortable narcissism of Chrissie Hynde’s stage performances, with a dash of Siouxsie Sioux and Nick Cave, Marianne’s jumpsuit and silver lightning bolt eye makeup creates dazzling defensive armor (see Lack 2016; Shoard 2016). Although this imagery is visually arresting, it seems overly familiar in the context of cross-media representations of Swinton, such as Craig McDean’s shoot for *Vogue Italia* (Pantano 2003), or Tim Walker’s Planet Tilda images for *W Magazine* (Solway 2011). Rather it is her subsequent transformation into silenced faded feminine glamour, eroticism, and desire that is more relevant to the film’s disruptive play with a fashionable identity.

Upon joining the project, Swinton decided that the film’s initial script should be changed and that Marianne should be virtually voiceless, in order to highlight the contrast against Harry’s manic sea of words (Studio Canal 2016). In an interview for British newspaper *The Guardian*,

Swinton was asked: “What did playing such a non-vocal character tell you about communication?” she replied, “That words aren’t the half of it” (Shoard 2016). Without a proliferation of dialogue, Swinton runs the risk of becoming another example of “celebrities-who-act,” where fashion and film “segue seamlessly into one another” (Church Gibson 2012, 78). Unlike “star-as-celebrity” figures such as Keira Knightley and Gwyneth Paltrow (Church Gibson 2012, 78; Gilligan 2011), Swinton conversely adheres to Christine Geraghty’s (2007) notion of the “star-as-performer.” Her comparative silence does not simply mean that she appears, poses, and pouts, but rather it draws attention to her costuming and the processes of performance through a narrative dominated by visual cues evoking eroticism and emotion through its emphasis upon the tactile.

As Claire Perkins argues, the smart film’s focus upon individual’s psychological states “resonates closely with the tendency in contemporary culture to make sense of the world through the prism of emotion” (2013, 10). For Harry, emotion becomes expressed through words and a voracious pansexual desire. Harry’s words are relentless, pervasive, and confronting, challenging Marianne in an aggressive dichotomy. In contrast, as Marianne struggles to speak, every emotion that she experiences becomes written upon her looks, gestures, movement, and posture. Her bodily performance shouts loudly, even when she cannot.

Additionally, Marianne’s interactions with her lover Paul create a language dominated by touch and desire, which through highlighting the intersections between clothing and the body heighten the spectator’s erotic and sensorial responses to the film. Before Harry’s disruptive arrival, both Marianne and Paul are lying in the sun by the pool with the island wind caressing their skin. In contrast to *La Piscine* where Marianne and Jean Paul are adorned in swimwear designed by Courrèges, in *A Bigger Splash* the couple are dressed in a costume of nudity. As they sunbathe, both lack the huddled, defenseless embarrassment that art historian Kenneth Clark argues characterizes nakedness. Instead, Marianne and Paul adhere to the notion of the nude as “a balanced, prosperous and confident body: the body reformed” (1960, 1). A silent language of desire is expressed as they have sex in the pool, later smearing mud over one another’s bodies and lying languidly on a remote beach. Wind, water, and mud become their elemental costumes, lovingly and passionately fashioned through their touch.



Marianne and Paul's intimate discourse of desire evokes Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985), in that "the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its difference, more complex, subtler, than is commonly imagined—in an imaginary rather too focused on sameness." Such an appropriation of an essentialist approach to gender highlights the conflicting gendered discourses at play within the film between performativity and the lived experiences of gender. Marianne and Harry seemingly become opposing poles in a gender binary of femininity and masculinity, whereas Paul moves between the poles, shifting along a gender continuum, able to respond to a language of touch that centers on satisfying female desire. To borrow from Irigaray, Paul understands that "woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost anywhere" (Irigaray 1985, 28). While lacking the soft-core sadomasochism of *La Piscine*, Paul attentively focuses on Marianne, fulfilling her wishes and sexual desires. Every part of Marianne's body becomes an erogenous zone, responsive to Paul's touch. Harry's arrival disrupts Marianne and Paul, marking a shift in the communication of their desire. In the privacy of their bed, Marianne whispers, "Don't let him know we can talk like this," to which Paul replies, "We can't be naked anymore." Whereas nudity and the elements had formed their costumes, the pair must now become conventionally clothed.

### **Costume, fashion, and the body**

Sconce (2002) and Perkins (2013) both discuss elements of mise-en-scène and cinematography within their analysis of the tendencies of smart cinema, but they (like many other Film Studies critics), do not offer a detailed analysis of costuming. While often incredibly stylish in terms of cinematography, décor, and costuming, smart cinema appears to exhibit a lack of interest, almost to the level of disdain, for designer fashion. Costume in the smart film functions in conventional terms as story-telling wardrobes, in order to support the construction of characters and to visualize their physical and emotional journeys (see Gaines 1990). For instance, in order to avoid audiences being able to "find those things on the rack somewhere," costume designers Karen Patch and Bina Daigeler were instructed by directors Wes Anderson and Jim Jarmusch to design and "make everything," rather than buy/source clothes for their characters (Harman 2014; Miller 2014) for *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Wes Anderson 2001) and *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jim Jarmusch, 2013). In constructing representations of casually chic characters, decades are blurred through edgy, often contradictory vintage looks that cannot easily be attributed to a specific period. For *The Royal Tenenbaums*, although Fendi constructed Margot's fur coat and Lacoste both provided the striped fabric and approved the use of the alligator logo, the garments were original costume designs and not retail fashion garments adapted for the screen

(Harman 2014). In seemingly renouncing the fashion industry, such films create a stylish, anti-fashion aesthetic. Such looks become ever more appealing to aspirational audiences high in cultural capital who exhibit ambivalence about the ever-shifting cycles and mass consumerism of fashion, in favor of cultivating their “own” individual style.

Conversely, *A Bigger Splash* is the second feature film collaboration between long standing friends, director Luca Guadagnino, Tilda Swinton, and fashion designer Raf Simons. In Guadagnino’s previous feature film, the sumptuously decadent love story *I Am Love* (2009), Swinton (as Emma Recchi) was dressed by Raf Simons and his team at Jil Sander to create an understated, elegant, stylish, and luxurious look. As Emma undergoes her exploration of desire, her costuming reflects her transformation through “stripping away the markers of status and wealth” (Radner 2017, 100; De Perthuis 2012). With *A Bigger Splash*, Simons had moved to Dior, and in collaboration with Giulia Piersanti created a “nuanced tale of subversion and transformation” through an exquisite wardrobe of impeccable, “lust worthy outfits” (Easley 2016; Lack 2016; McColgin 2016; Singer 2016). According to Guadagnino, “with costume, you can end up in the field of décor. So, to work with a designer became a natural path” (Brumfitt 2016). The Dior aesthetic of “old school resort wear” combines linens and subtle stripes, creating a Mediterranean feel (McGolgin 2016; Easley 2016). These are gleaming symbols of status; as beautiful as they are, these screen garments do not simply function as “décor.” The garments do not appear overtly lived in, broken down and marked with a palimpsestic narrative of stains, wear, and tear; rather they are impeccable, luxury designer garments. Simons and Piersanti wanted to make Marianne “more elegant than her surroundings”; to look like an “old movie star” who is wearing the clothes she’s packed in her suitcase with a “nonchalant lightness” (Easley 2016; McColgin 2016). Through the stylishly understated capsule wardrobe of the rock star in disguise, *A Bigger Splash* demonstrates its exclusivity through attention to detail, drape, movement, and coordination. This represents a paradox in which, to borrow from Stella Bruzzi (in her analysis of couture in *Belle de Jour*), “deliberately unspectacular fashion can still function in a spectacular way” (1997, 25).

An intermixture between fabric and flesh is created through Marianne’s costuming. Where sweat is inscribed upon the surface of Paul’s unobtrusive wardrobe of casual clothes, Marianne exposes her flesh, both marking her difference and construction as a cool, contained, and aloof character. She is not completely absorbed in and by her surroundings, but is marked by her difference. In revealing her neck and back, Marianne’s costuming is reminiscent of Courrèges’

designs for *La Piscine*. In particular, the twisted linen shirt dress (early in the film as Marianne and Paul go to meet Harry), with its exposed back and collar detailing fastening, evokes Marianne's yellow dress, which she wears before Jean-Paul strips her in the moonlight, caresses her breasts and gently whips her back with a fresh branch from a nearby tree. Both outfits simmer with overtones of a sadomasochistic slave collar and Paul (like Jean-Paul) strives to satisfy Marianne's sexual desires (see Waldron 2015, 24).

For instance, as Marianne prepares to go out for the evening with Harry, she asks Paul to choose a dress for her; he picks an understated, cream dress that she declares is "a bit plain." Knee length, double zipped with a Peter Pan collar and half sleeves, it is reminiscent of a housecoat—yet she is adorned in nothing but her nude knickers underneath. Zipped to the neck, the dress conceals and protects Marianne, seemingly disavowing the potential for her to be objectified by Harry. In the privacy of their bedroom, Paul bends and slowly unzips the dress from the bottom, pulling her knickers to her feet before crouching before her and performing oral sex. Stood straddled, with his mouth exploring her, Marianne's knickers hold her feet in place, and as she gasps with erotic delight, she reaches above her. As she presses hard against the archway, her bodily gestures speak where her voice cannot.

Rather than her dress camouflaging or repressing desire, in a similar way to Ada's costuming within *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), clothes "become the very agents through which desire is made possible." It is the "juxtaposition of clothes and the body" upon which the fetishistic emphasis is placed (Bruzzi 1997, 61). In the dark, quiet seclusion of their bedroom, the sound of the zip being opened and her knickers being pulled down act as an auditory foreplay. Held in place, but unable to fully vocalize her passion, she pulls Paul to kiss her. In their passionate kiss, Marianne becomes connected both to Paul and back to the taste of her own body. With her dress zipped to her neck, Paul asks her to promise not to speak that evening. Marianne's vocal cords maybe silenced, but her desire can still be uttered.

The displacing of desire through the intermittence between clothing and the body becomes increasingly integral to signaling generational differences. Penelope's costuming repeatedly draws attention to the flesh of her young body, particularly her nipples, naval, and thighs through sheer and crocheted fabrics, barely-there bikinis, and Daisy Duke denim shorts. Conversely, Marianne's costuming diverts attention and focuses upon the eroticism of fabric, creating a spectacular and erotic disruption to the expectations of the objectified female star-

character. Rather than the predictability of nipples and buttocks becoming the erotic focus, attention is drawn to Marianne's shoulders, neck, and back. Instead of voyeuristically peeking at the body through sheer fabrics, her draped body becomes eroticized as the island winds breathe life into the moving image.

As Marianne traverses the streets of Pantelleria, her clothes wildly flutter, flap and billow in the powerful wind (see Figure 2). The angry, violent movement of the fabric speaks for Marianne, as the destructive passions of Paul and Penelope's desire rise. Air becomes an immersive haptic experience—constantly felt against something. Air is intimate; it caresses the skin and marks its presence over the body and fabric. The presence of the fabric seemingly moves beyond the confines of the screen; tactile links are created through air and space, between touching and moving. As Marianne's clothes skim her body, touching becomes knowledge, understanding, and language. Every part of her body becomes an erogenous zone that is constantly caressed by air and fabric.

Emotions are produced from the fabric we touch; as we touch, we are touched in return. We cannot escape the contact, as touch always enables an affective return (Bruno 2014). Through touching, handling, and draping these surface key qualities of fabric manifest themselves, which characterize its behavior or the potential to achieve a desired silhouette (Black 2006). Through volume and movement, Marianne's garments create an interaction between fabric and the body. As her garments flutter in the wind, a fluid, constantly changing surface and shape is created by the landscape. Garments unfold and shift in a process of constant transformation that changes the silhouette of the body and becomes a modifier of mood in an unfolding metamorphosis. Fabric functions as sartorial architecture; it is an enveloping, fluid, ambiguous, ever changing structure of surfaces (Bruno 2014). It can become your home, as it refashions itself as different forms that constantly reshape it. In enveloping, swathing, and folding inwards, garments move backwards and forwards between inside and outside signaling both the impact of the landscape and Marianne's own emotional turmoil and conflict.

*Figure 2 Tilda Swinton as Marianne on the windy streets of Pantelleria. Credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures. Courtesy of Photofest.*

### **Emotional Turmoil, the Symbolic Mother, and Disguise**

Adorned in a white jumpsuit, Marianne kicks Harry as they squabble in the street. The more that Marianne moves, twists, and turns, the more that the swathe and drape expresses her exasperation. Confronting Marianne, Harry declares, “No doubt you’ll just reinvent yourself again. Is wearing your mother’s clothes that reinvention? You have your mummy phase; I’ll have my Daddy phase. We’ll grow old together.” Marianne may be costumed in her dead mother’s clothes, but she is not a mother. The garments do not fill the void and Marianne becomes defined by her lack. In accordance with the melodramatic tendency of smart cinema, there is sadness and a longing to restore a family that was “never that happy” (Perkins 2013, 92).

Through the adoption of a 1950s-retro resort aesthetic, a self-reflexive performance dominated by ambiguity is constructed. Rather than the contained, aloof image of icy coolness that pervades Swinton’s appropriation of “flat affect” in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Lynne Ramsey 2011; see Radner 2017; Stacey 2015; Thornham 2013), here she wears her mother’s clothes as a transformative disguise. In evoking an old movie star, she references not only her mother for whom she is grieving, but also the iconic image that informs the costuming.

According to the film’s press notes, Guadagnino self-consciously drew inspiration from the work of Italian Neo Realist director Roberto Rossellini, in particular *Journey to Italy* (1954) starring Ingrid Bergman (Studio Canal 2016). Rather than making intertextual references to pop culture’s very recent past, the film draws upon a “regime of knowledge” (Perkins 2013, 101) that reaches further back into European art cinema’s canon. In costuming Marianne at the end of the film Simons keeps the silhouette from Bergman’s two-piece outfit, subverting and twisting the check print (Lack 2016). Guadagnino discusses the sartorial subversion in terms of Marianne’s status as a rock star (Lack 2016), but it also skews the representation of femininity, to connote Marianne’s discontent and hysteria in accordance with smart cinema’s preoccupation with emotional dysfunction (see Sconce 2002, 358). Compared with Marianne’s vocal anguish at the poolside as she discovers Harry’s body (where she collapses and breaks down with gasping screams and tears), the checked dress seems understated. However, when considered in the context of the end of the film, Marianne appears to embody the stereotypical melodramatic excess of the sacrificial mother.

The layered pattern of Marianne's final outfit jars and shudders, expressing her inner turmoil. In fashioning her identity, she has been let down by all those around her. At the airport, the rain pours, and as Penelope walks away, Marianne is located behind the security grills. As the music sours, Marianne is the iconic woman at the window as she watches Penelope board the plane. Yet unlike the classic maternal melodrama *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor 1937; see Williams 1987), it is Penelope, rather than Marianne who is left out in the rain crying. Rather than Marianne's anguish being all pervading, she stoically turns and returns with Paul. It is he who she must look after. Penelope returns to her real, yet unseen and symbolically absent mother, rather than trying to build a bond with her father's ex-lover. Through the mid and long shots in a static take, the distance between Marianne and Penelope is palpable to the point of stylized exaggeration. The tone becomes one of parody in which the scene becomes so strongly marked to enable the audience to identify the cultural references of melodrama being stylistically cited (see Perkins 2013).

The cinematic figure of the mother (particularly within melodrama) signals the epitome of representations of feminine identity, the woman who would sacrifice all for her child. The mother figure is a haunting spectre over the narrative offering an unrequited, idealized image of femininity; Marianne's mother is dead, Penelope's mother is absent, and Marianne was never a mother. Motherhood acts as a queering effect. In a reversal of the typical melodramatic representation, it is her career, rather than her children that have silenced Marianne. Without her voice, she potentially has no career. Suddenly, she is left with only Paul to care for, the man who murdered her ex-lover.

Marianne may wear a costume of motherhood as a disguise, but the transmedia narrative also references Swinton's own off-screen grief. In the year following the death of her own mother, Swinton felt she had very little to say. Swinton does not strive to be someone else within her performances; rather her work is "sprung from autobiographical experience" (Hyland 2016; Leith 1993). As Swinton discusses:

She's doing this thing, which I've experienced myself and I've seen in many of my friends [as] a part of mourning: being drawn to the aesthetic of her mother. I certainly noticed it in myself when my mother died. I wore scarves for a certain period of time and I wore her shirts. In many ways, it was unconscious. I didn't choose it, it was just something that occurred. (Hyland 2016)

Such discourses draw attention to the processes of performance, leaving the audience wondering where Swinton and Marianne start and end. Notions of disguise and disruption are furthered through the wearing of her large mirrored Dior Sideral sunglasses (see Figure 3). The sunglasses act as a masking device, evoking the celebrity in disguise. As Radner argues, Swinton's notion of disguise played out across her broader body of work "reveals how the persona as a play of surfaces comes to constitute the essence of identity and individuality within contemporary life" (2017, 103–4). Rather than wearing classic black or tortoise shell frames, Marianne's "rock star persona" pervades her look, disrupting the classic feminine clothing that she wears. When Marianne briefly lends the glasses to Paul, we are both given the point of view of his shaded gaze and becomes objectified by Harry: "You look fantastic, you look sexy, you look kinda metro sexy." The comments not only further perpetuate Paul's fluidity within gender binaries (and Harry's voracious pansexual desire), but it also creates a sexual disruption. In a similar way to Delon in *La Piscine*, it is Paul rather than Marianne that becomes the perfect to-be-looked-at fetish. The glasses are returned to Marianne, but we are never again given the power of the shaded gaze; instead we see her, and what she sees reflected through a stylized and distorted lens. The mirror shades mean that we can gaze at the star-as-performer Swinton, without her returning the look. Yet, Swinton's lean androgynous figure disrupts our expectations of the fetishized female star-as-celebrity.

### **Swinton as the Star-Celebrity**

Throughout *A Bigger Splash*, the spectator's attention is continually drawn to the clothes that adorn the cross-media star-celebrity body of Swinton. Through her bodily movement and the absence of speech, coupled with long takes and "straight-on level framing" (see Perkins 2013, 95), we see the details of cut, tailoring, and drape, additionally surveying the ways in which clothing intersects with the living material body. For instance, the belted white jumpsuit worn with flat sandals, while understated, would be unwearable without a tall, lean, androgynous frame. Plunging details— hems to the waist at the front and sides, and into the small of her back— would be problematic (if not impossible) for someone with a larger bust than Swinton. This is after all impeccable haute couture designed for an idealized model body and showcased both on screen and across a range of outlets through the film's promotional film stills. The propensity for film stills to look like fashion editorial and vice versa is, as Church Gibson discusses, symptomatic of the current "interchangeability" and "flattening-out effect" that dominates contemporary visual culture (2012, 67). Such interchangeability is also further self-consciously explored in the transmedia discourses, for example where rock star "Marianne

Lane” lands the cover page and is interviewed within the AW 2015 issue *AnOther* magazine with a photo shoot by Collier Schorr (AnOther 2015). Fact and fiction, real and unreal, on and off screen are blurred into one, in which Swinton both is and isn’t Marianne Lane.

*Figure 3 Tilda Swinton as Marianne wearing Dior Sideral sunglasses and costumes designed by Raf Simons at Dior in collaboration with Giulia Piersanti. Credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures. Courtesy of Photofest.*

The casting of Swinton as Marianne brings both an artistic credibility and a transnational market to the film, through the audience’s intertextual knowledge of her work. *A Bigger Splash* becomes another version of “Tilda,” a performative transformation in which femininity is a disguise. While she has entered the mainstream with films such as *Doctor Strange* (Scott Derrickson, 2016), *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy, 2007), *Constantine* (Francis Lawrence, 2005) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Adam Adamson, 2005), to many she remains associated with the avant-garde and international smart cinema through her collaborations with directors such as Derek Jarman, Sally Potter, Wes Anderson, the Coen Brothers, and most recently Bong Joon Ho for *Okja* (2017). This “regime of knowledge” (Perkins 2013, 101) is integral to the perception of Swinton as different from other star-celebrities and thus both brings a key prestige factor to the film and its fashionable collaborations, together with shaping the audience’s reading of her performances.

Swinton’s intelligent articulations in promotional materials repeatedly highlight both her commitment to performance as art (rather than acting), and her ambivalence about fashion. Her “not-so-accidental” position as a fashion and style icon is therefore integral to Swinton’s “celebrity-commodity” status, in which the brand image must continually be constructed, updated, and transformed in order to both maintain the loyalty of existing fans and to reach and appeal to new niche audiences (Marshall 1997; Radner 2016). As Graeme Turner argues, “celebrities are developed to make money” both as “cultural workers” and as “property” (2013, 36–37). Swinton’s immersion in the synergy between film, performance art, and luxury brands therefore assigns her celebrity-commodity status a high brand value, which is perpetuated through her adornment in avant-garde, directional fashion signaling her as a member of the intellectual, edgy, arty elite. As a celebrity figure, she is far removed from reality TV celebrities such as Kim Kardashian who peddle an illusionary ordinariness (see Radner 2017). Yet all celebrities are, as Chris Rojek argues, “commodities in the sense that consumers wish to possess them” (2001, 14). The representation of Swinton as a beguiling, mysterious figure is



therefore integral to her aspirational brand appeal in which her elusiveness means that she fuels audience's desire to know and understand her through the consumption of her products from fashion brands to film.

### **The Refugee Crisis and the Euro-Pudding**

In attempting to position itself as a European example of smart cinema, *A Bigger Splash* self-consciously addresses an audience who wish to see themselves as consumers of art house and independent cinema, rather than voyeuristically indulging in an escapist erotic drama centering on the glamorous lives of the rich and famous. With references to the current refugee crisis (which allude to the fishing boats from North Africa that sank off the coast of Pantelleria in 2011 and 2015, and killed almost a thousand people), the film attempts to explore social and political issues rooted in a national context. As Swinton argues in an interview in *The Guardian* to coincide with *A Bigger Splash*'s DVD release:

The film we made was about a kind of solipsistic bubble-life lived by those that choose to edit out certain realities in an effort to fantasize the conceit of a “perfect”-ly self-centered narrative. . . . Looking at it now, it's all of a sudden—and somewhat dispiritingly—a darker and more recognizable portrait of a human landscape less rarified than we had thought when we made it. (Shoard 2016)

Despite such critical reflections, rather than the refugee crisis forming a central concern of the narrative, the refugees are constant presence on the margins on the frame. They are ignored, until they can be blamed for the actions of others. As the detective colludes with his idol Marianne to give a statement that implicates the refugees and exonerates Paul from Harry's death, the cult of wealthy Western celebrity culture maintains its power. In representing the refugee crisis in such a manner, the story does not ignore or overshadow the politics; instead, it worryingly positions the spectator as aware of its presence but committed to tuning out, turning off, and ignoring the plight of others in order to focus on their own more self-indulgent dramas. In accordance with smart cinema's “tendency” to focus upon the personal politics of “power, communication, emotional dysfunction and identity,” these prevail, rather than the narrative foregrounding social politics and using film as a means to fuel activism (Sconce 2002, 352).

As a European coproduction, *A Bigger Splash* was instigated by Studio Canal due to the cult status of *La Piscine* (to which they owned the rights), and the success of *I Am Love*. Guadagnino admits that *La Piscine* was “not exactly his cup of tea” (Pulver 2016; Studio Canal 2016) and thus the film is governed by a commercial imperative, rather than its creative vision. Through

Guadagnino working with established performers (Swinton and Fiennes), together with emerging stars Schoenaerts and Johnson, an ideal, timely commercial mix/recipe is created ripe with intergenerational appeal. Belgian actor Schoenaerts is the son of the “great Julien Schoenaerts,” who Guadagnino claims to be “one of the greatest European actors” of the 1970s. Additionally, it was Swinton’s agent, Brian Swardstorm, who recommended bringing *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015) star Johnson into the project (before the trailer for *Fifty Shades* had been released) and thus enabling the distributors to capitalize on the crossmedia publicity and the rising star’s profile (Studio Canal 2016, 7–8).

With its focus upon commercial imperatives, rather than creative freedom, *A Bigger Splash* can be seen as a “Euro-pudding.” As “commodities, rather than artistic expressions,” the Euro-pudding has more in common with mainstream Hollywood cinema, than European art cinema (Liz 2014, 78; Selznick 2008). Although a somewhat pejorative term (that emerged after 1989), the Euro-pudding describes well-intentioned English language co-productions that use an international cast and a crew from different European countries to explore stories of universal appeal. Featuring narratives of love and international travel, the films have transnational scope and cross border appeal, yet are strongly rooted in their national contexts (Baldwin 1997; Halle 2008; Liz 2014). Where the smart cinema “tendency” can be seen as a “drama born of ironic distance” characterized by “blank style,” “incongruous narration” and a critique of “bourgeois taste and culture” (Perkins 2013, 5–6; Sconce 2002), the Euro-pudding forgoes criticality in favor of commercial imperatives. The Euro-pudding becomes characterized as style over substance with the commercial constraints of co-productions reducing the potential for a complex, cohesive and creative critique of contemporary culture (Selznick 2008).

## **Conclusion**

While some critics (Baldwin 1997; Fisher 1990; Halle 2008; Selznick 2008) use the term “Euro-pudding” in a disparaging manner, Gwladys Fouché in *The Guardian* argues: “There’s nothing like a good, hot slab of Europudding. . . . It’s the cinematic equivalent of Eurovision: all together in perfect disharmony” (2008). Released in cinemas in the UK in February 2016, and then on DVD in December 2016, *A Bigger Splash* offered UK audiences an indulgent midwinter treat filled with a beautiful cast, bountiful eroticism, designer clothes, and fabulous sunny Mediterranean landscapes to an audience who are (or at least perceive themselves to be) rich in cultural capital and who might otherwise be disparaging toward mainstream cinema, celebrity culture, and the perceived frivolities of fashion. The film aspires to aligning itself

with smart cinema and while there are parallels, the focus upon sun, sex, and style overwhelms the film's critique of contemporary culture. The casting of Swinton is key to establishing the film's creditability in terms of performance strategies, creative collaboration and the intertextual, cross-media brand value that a "Tilda" project carries. Brand names, as P. David Marshall argues, "are attempts to structure continuities in consumer culture, where a sense of trust and security is indicated by certain symbols and companies." The celebrity provides the "connecting fiber" that runs between the "world of goods and the world of individuals using those goods" (1997, 245). For audiences, rather than quarantining Swinton's chameleon-like, liquid state, she becomes desirable as a point of ambivalent identification and aspiration. Dislocation and flux become integral to the formation of individualized identities, whereas consumer goods promise fluidity, mobility and changeability (see Binkley 2011, 93). Marianne's "nostalgic resort wardrobe" featuring the Dior Sideral sunglasses becomes offered up as an aspirational, yet "essential" look for "your own holiday wardrobe" (McColgin 2016).

Individual choice becomes lifestyle aspiration, as ambivalence becomes embraced and commodified within contemporary culture. No longer restricted to anti-consumerist practices, ambivalence has become a marker of niche-marketed products from fashion to film (Bauman 1993; Binkley 2011). As Sam Binkley argues, products bear the "stamp of rebellion" as a strategy to target the radicals, the intellectuals and those rich in cultural capital through the processes of "liquid consumption" (2011, 81)—in other words, the very consumers likely to watch Tilda Swinton, and be entranced and lured by her performances.

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