**Working Magic: The Occupations of the Film Industry**Amelia Zontini, set costumer
Interview by Emily Vallerga
Spring 2013

**Emily Vallerga**: So how would you describe your job to someone who doesn’t know anything about it?

**Amelia Zontini**: As a key set costumer, you are a leader on set and your main focus is costumes. You consider yourself an extension of the designer. A lot of times the designer is otherwhere. She’s able to set up the look. Your job is to maintain the look. You are sometimes the last individual who has your hands on that actor’s clothing before the camera rolls. If the script calls for any special effects—like blood, or mud, or fire—then that’s all pre-discussed in preparation phase, but when it comes time to execute the special effect, you’re there alongside the other costumers. You are holding the costume blood, sometimes designing where the blood is going to fall, or you’re there being directed by the designer, in a specific role.

You also have to watch continuity. Continuity is the story of the clothing in the timeline of the script. A lot of times movies are not filmed in order. You have to be so organized in your brain and in your notes to know that when you’re shooting a particular scene, where it falls in the timeline. If it’s before the blood, or after the blood. Is it before he comes in and removes his coat in the scene, or is it after?

There’s extreme amount of preparation that’s involved, maybe even more so in a period piece. Because you don’t have duplicates a lot of times on these clothes. That’s when production decides how the scheduling of the filming is dictated as well, so that’s why it all happens in prep. They need to make sure in their scheduling they shoot the clean version before the dirty ‘cause they now know there is no option on this custom-built theatrical gown. Once it’s bloody, it’s bloody. They know they’re going to have to schedule so that they shoot out everything that involves that actor being in something clean and then shoot the bloody so there isn’t a risk.

So I maintain continuity. I maintain the integrity of the costume, in terms of what the designer has created. I also as a costumer have to consider the element of the actor’s comfort. For instance, if we’re filming a scene where I know the actor is going to get wet. When I pack my onset kit, it’s going to include now, in addition to my basic kit, it’s going to include towels. It’s going to include a robe, possible warm socks or shoes. So it’s being so in tune with what the production is calling for on that day, and even the day or two days prior.

And a lot of times you’re working with people you’ve never worked with before. You don’t know their work ethic, you don’t know how they process information or how they make their choices, but you all are in it. And you’re all in it to have a final product that you want to be proud of. So there’s constant creative ebb and flow with all these individuals who have their own talents. And at the end of the day, you’re just like, “How did we do this?” But there’s always a wrap day. So you have all these scheduled days to accomplish your goal, and that is to make that movie by the designated time.