

Prague Quadrennial 2011 has embraced costume this year like never before. Under the artistic direction of Sodja Lotker, the layered and complex meanings of the costumed body in performance have been brought to the fore and have found expressions in a variety of different ways in the recently concluded Quadrennial.

# Costume Expanded

The Intersection Project, part of PQ11, which included the series of 'Scenography Expanding' symposia amongst the events under its umbrella, prides itself with a specific research agenda, with the clear intention of questioning the status quo and exposing, if not creating, new contexts of practice and ways of making performance. To support this expansion of the field, the Intersection Project and PQ11 nurtured distinct areas of scenographic practice into separate events, projects and exhibitions, running contemporaneously with the national exhibitions. Amongst these, 'Extreme Costumes' foregrounded for the first time in the Quadrennial history dress in performance in an exhibition curated by Simona Rybáková, selected from proposals from around the world, shown in the abandoned cinema space in the basement of the Veletržní Palace. By finding costume in its extreme representations, this exhibition and the accompanying series of talks, sought to both expand the meaning of costume and to re-define its role in performance. It also provokes further discussion by asking more questions than it answers, and certainly stokes in me the desire to continue the process started here.

Amongst the extreme costumes exhibited were those for major opera productions such as Paul Brown's priest from *Aida* from Bregenz, in a papal mitre and

vestments, as if half melting in water, or Constance Hoffman's scaled-up action-man bodysuit, with exaggerated, plastic, tanned musculature for *Ercole Amante* for Nederlandse Opera. Eloise Kazan's Queen Tamora, from *The Titus Procession* (based on *Titus Andronicus*), Theater de la Paz, wore a farthingale and bodice entirely made up by bullets on a frame, a design which sent me looking for the designer in the Mexico exhibition who then proceeded to show me the storyboard of the different transformations of the same character in the play.

These elaborate creations, rooted in character based—work, sat side by side with work made out of lace, trapped in clear plastic and wire, by Konstantinia Vafeiadou, from Greece, in which one performer becomes three through costume, or Cristina Valls and Franscisca Rios', UK, disappearing muslin costume, or Marie Jiráskova's costumes, from the Czech Republic, only rendered visible by strings of lights sewn on them or by projections. All these are not created around character or concept, but rather rely on the impact of the relationship between material, body, movement and viewer to create a moment of performance.

The performance work exhibited by artist Misha Le Jen, from Russia, forces us to

further question the definition of costume as he transforms himself, wearing an old raincoat which conceals interconnecting tubes, into a living fountain; or as he ice-skates, wearing a diving suit, upside down under water and underneath a layer of ice in the filmed performances he presented in the Extreme Costume talks. In this work the costume completes, aesthetically, the intention of the artist at work, whilst also being essential to the performance, both technically and to ensure the survival of the performer! Is this perhaps, costume as a dramatization of human existence in multiple ways?

The Gold Medal for Costume went to 'Inhabiting Dress' by Emma Ransley from New Zealand, who also exhibited in Extreme Costume. In her short, filmed performance a dress is gradually being picked apart by its wearer as if it is a skin disease, in a repetitive movement that is sad and compelling to watch, mapping progressively its disintegration across the body though movement. Here again dress makes the performance: the camera shot is fixed on the dress only – no head or legs are seen, and yet this is enough to create a powerful self-contained piece of costume-based performance.

The Mareunrol, the fashion designers' duo from Latvia, created a costume-based



Costume for Alice in Wonderland by DAMU student costume and mask-maker Tereza Kopecka

installation in one of the thirty boxes constructed for the intersection project, which they filled with a series of smaller boxes, animated by lighting, containing scaled down versions of the surreal bodies inspired by their fashion designs. These seemed to be trapped in individually created door-less rooms. As fashion designers, they made use of model-making and scale, to explore ideas through space and the body.

Their presentation in the costume talks further expanded the notion of costume beyond conventional performance and performance art into fashion, presented here with a clear sense of costume as an agent in the promotion of a fashion brand by reflecting the designers / artists' vision of the world.

Reet Aus, also a fashion designer, representing single-handedly Estonia in the National Exhibition, created a documentary for PQ, showing how her work in theatre productions uses only up-cycling - an environmental process of converting use-less materials into products of value. The reuse of existing material, locally sourced, from the off-cuts of industrial production of clothing and from recycling old costumes and second hand clothing works holistically. The ethical dimension of dress production, its impact on the environment, is embodied in the costumes she produces out of the leftovers of the feeding frenzy that fashion can be.

The desire to minimize the footprint of costume was also reflected in the Scenofest costume workshops – such as Kazue Hatanoto's work with Japanese calligraphers' waste products, and many of the other costume workshops which insisted on the use of paper for their temporary, often extraordinary, costume ideas developed in a few hours under the supervision of costume artists such as Mariaelena Roque, from Spain, Georg Meyer-Wiel, from Germany, Pirjo Valinen, from Finland, Jana Preková from the Czech Republic and Sofia Pantouvaki from Greece.

However the costume based-performances produced by colleges this year, concentrated on the identification of costume with artistic practice as in the performance *The Triadic Ballet* created by Peter de Kimp's students from TheatreSchool, Amsterdam, working with Maya Schröder, and *Costume Behind the Mirror* created by Jana Zborilova's students from DAMU, a surreal rendition of Alice in Wonderland. Both reminded us that there is nothing new in considering costume as the articulation of the body through visual practices that go well beyond the functional definition of character, having drawn respectively from Oskar Schlemmer and Lewis Carroll for their inspiration for these extraordinary projects.

*Old into New*, the performance that I pro-

duced for the opening of the UK exhibition drew on new technology – such as laser cutting – to explore transformation, as a way of disrupting the notion of the ordinariness of dress and public spaces. Created between London College of Fashion and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, with sound design by Steve Brown, costume here became the impetus for collaboration in creating performance.

The long standing collaboration around dance, dress and space, between Dorita Hannah and Carol Brown was celebrated daily on the New Zealand stand with *Mnemosyne*, a performance which, as stated in Carol Brown's website, 'both archives and animates memories and histories of three productions', which were devised between 2005 and 2011. Here performance arises from the objects left behind, e.g. costumes and phrases of movement, reconstructed into a new piece.

To conclude, this selection of examples does not do justice to the extraordinarily varied manifestations of costume, which have begun to redefine the notion of what costume is, whilst also redefining ways of making performance in this unforgettable Prague Quadrennial. Within the agenda of the Intersection project, the quadrennial has made space for costume, space that allows it to be more than it has been, and, in this way, has begun to re-instate the visual body in performance to centre-stage in debates around performance.

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Eloise Kazan, Queen Tamora  
Theater de la Paz, San Luis, Mexico