

Journal launch editorial.

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Towards a philosophy of costume

'[Costume] is never entirely neglected by theatrical artists, but usually it is treated as a necessary detail in the picture displayed in the proscenium frame; in few books is it discussed with an eye to the dramatic quality inherent in the actual costume itself. Books in plenty have been written on the costume of the stage, of course; on its history, its construction, its traditions, its contribution to and dependence on pictorial art. But few deal with that quality of costume which makes it theatrical material, the stuff of which drama is made. Costume has, or should have, a philosophy of its own, as certainly as architecture has; and theatrical costume more particularly than social costume, although the social tendencies influence both.' (Goepf 1928)

Despite Elizabeth Goepf's (1928) statement – which she made almost 90 years ago – the philosophical and scholarly attention that costume deserves, albeit finally emerging as a vibrant area of research, is still in the early stages of development, particularly if compared to more established fields such as architecture or drama. Even the title of the field has suffered from a lack of clarity, something that Goepf draws attention to. She distinguishes between 'theatre' and 'social', exposing the word 'costume' as a generic term that could be applied either to clothing for the distinct moment of performance, or to that worn offstage in the everyday of social life. To complicate things further for decades before Goepf's writing, and even beyond the publication of her article, the costume that books were written about (possibly the one Goepf is referring to) was focused largely on the 'accurate' representation of historical bodies onstage. Moreover, to add to the confusion, the word 'costume', when applied to what she calls 'social costume', has been used as a pseudonym for historical dress and fashion.

One can argue therefore that the changing meaning of the word 'costume' has hindered early scholarship on the subject, contributing to the lack of a distinct perspective from which to research and write about the performance of what Goepf defines as 'theatre costume'. This research journal – the first in its field – places the costumed body in the context of live and mediated performance. By separating it from the practice of dressing for the everyday, it reclaims costuming as a preparation of the performer specifically for performance. The editors of this journal share Goepf's desire for the expansion of discourse on costume as 'the stuff of which drama is made', in the knowledge, however, that the field of performance research in the twenty-first century reaches well beyond drama.

Corresponding to performance, costume has long existed as a field of creative practice, although its philosophical readings may, in Goepf's terms, remain rare. With the ubiquitous proclivity in human society to perform and watch performance, costume can be found in live

manifestations that include dance, opera, and text-based and physical theatre (as well as more recently embracing live art) throughout the globe and history. Over the past century, costume has expanded its cultural influence through its manifestations in the mediated storytelling of films, television and digital media. With its long history – more of which needs to be researched – it enacts an inescapable presence in the here and now of the performance. As an essential and integral part of the performing arts, its study draws on – and, by reflection, enriches – a wide range of contemporary and historical performance contexts. Writing around the relationship between theory and practice to expand discourse on costume engages the analysis of the sociocultural and political frames of reference implicit to its various geographical and historical contexts.

Furthermore, the implicit symbiosis with the performing body exposes the study of costume to other multiple and interdisciplinary starting points; ones that are not only performance-centred, historical, dramaturgical and sociocultural, but that can be addressed through theoretical frames provided by specific readings of anthropology, phenomenology, cognition and psychology. Equally, as a designed and made object, the study of costume can employ an analytical approach from the field of material culture, for which specialist technological knowledge is required. From the perspective of the study of practice, the relatively recent professionalization of the costume designer has gone hand in hand with educational provisions developed within art schools. Costume design has emerged from the first half of the twentieth century and out of modernism with an artistic mandate that, sited in modern and contemporary practice, looks also to the future. The connection of certain costumes with influential artists has transformed ephemeral costumes into treasured, collectable artworks that have been analysed from the perspective of art history and theory. Similarly, noteworthy fashion designers who have become involved in the designing of costumes have attracted fashion scholarship to the study of performance. On the other hand, from the perspective of performers, while costume has often been subsumed into their work, it has nonetheless remained a critical part of their performance, documented in visual records of their costumed enactments. These images have brought attention to its value, which has also been articulated in written records of their performances. The distinct areas of scholarship that engage with the study of dance, opera, theatre and film practice have often considered the performer as costumed, demonstrating the interdependence that exists between the costume and performance.

Costume as an expanded field can engage with a range of viewpoints, particularly those of theoreticians and scholars from a number of disparate, adjacent and overlapping fields, whose insights present various ways of thinking about performance through costume and vice-versa. At the same time, designers, artists, makers and performance-makers have endlessly redefined what the costumed body can be via the wide range of rearticulations of the body in performance. Critical to this field is the analysis of costume in performance from the perspective of the perceiving spectators, a group of sentient, dressed bodies sited in the present of the performance; an audience to which both theoreticians and practitioners also belong. As a layered and multidimensional subject of research, able to produce a wealth of knowledge and theory through the study of its practice, costume necessitates the nexus that *Studies in Costume and Performance* aims to provide.

While intending to gather up the diverse existing sources scattered in the various fields of more established scholarship noted above, the *Studies in Costume and Performance* research journal emerges from the desire to invite the articulation of new, unwritten thinking around its subject in order to further establish the expanded field of research on costume and performance. It originates from an awareness of the unstoppable advancement of scholarship from an ever-growing postgraduate and postdoctoral cohort, matched by the desire of practitioners to reflect on their practice, and of academics to extend the range of sources available to students of the subject. The ambition is to ultimately alter the way costume is perceived, being often subsumed into others' work and dissolved into a range of other different scholarly priorities. Exposing the complexity and variety of costume's *modus operandi*, as well as its influence, will give value to the practice of current and future practitioners and scholars, thereby benefitting all the other fields across which costume operates.

The three editors of *Studies in Costume and Performance* are well placed to nurture this ambitious project, having extensively worked on the advancement of the study of the subject over a period collectively spanning the last fifteen years. Of their many efforts in developing discourse on costume, three notable projects (one per editor) mark the research stage that has preceded the launch of this journal. Costume designer, educator and scholar Donatella Barbieri established the AHRB¹ funded 'Designs for the Performer' research project in 2002. Originating at the London College of Fashion, it included exhibitions and masterclasses centred on the work of ten designers, accompanied by their words, displayed in lengthy quotes throughout the exhibition of their costumes. As a result, Nicky Gillibrand, one of the designers, was awarded the Gold Medal for Costume at the 'Prague Quadrennial' in 2003. The designs of five of the practitioners exhibited continue to be influential, being currently included in exhibitions in Russia and the United States. In 2009, curator, theatre scholar and educator Kate Dorney curated the new 'Theatre and Performance' permanent galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), including an unprecedented number of physical costumes, costume designs and representations of costumed performances, exposing the breadth, importance and popularity of the subject. These new galleries, displaying several previously unseen examples from the V&A archives, also made present the multitude of costumes held in the museum archives, and the valuable research that can be undertaken through their analysis. Sofia Pantouvaki, designer, scholar, educator and principal investigator for the ongoing 'Costume Methodologies' research project, was responsible for the curation of *Critical Costume 2015* at Aalto University, which included experimental costume-based performances, a conference and an exhibition. This event has been a milestone in the exposure of the range of perspectives around costume, attracting researchers and practitioners from across the globe, and generating important debating and thinking, some of which is included in the current edition of the journal (with more to follow). The engagement of the voices of researchers in the early stages of their scholarly careers was particularly heartening, their enthusiasm and drive reflecting the open-ended nature of a nascent scholarly field and the possibilities it will generate. From this group, two researchers have joined the editorial team of the journal: Nadia Malik, who teaches at the University of Huddersfield, UK, has been tasked with editing the reviews of exhibitions and events; while

¹ 1. The Arts and Humanities Research Board, which preceded the Arts and Humanities Research Council, part of Research Councils, UK, and which supports research and postgraduate study.

Sue Osmond, from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Australia, is the editor of the book reviews.

A nascent field of research such as costume for performance has benefitted from the range of ongoing conversations permitted by the curation of scholarly gatherings and exhibitions such as the three highlighted above. Members of the editorial and advisory boards of this journal have themselves initiated new readings within their respective research fields, including through exhibition-making and via a renewed interaction with the archive, as well as with the publishing of research in peer-reviewed publications. For example, the advancement of discourse around fashion curation, which, through the analysis of dress as embodied meaning-making overlaps the work of costume, is demonstrated in the work of board members Judith Clark, Amy de la Haye and Claire Wilcox. Other members of our board – such as Jane Pritchard, curator of dance at the V&A; and Sodja Lotker, who collaborated with costume designer Simona Rybáková at the Prague Quadrennial – have, from very diverse starting points, exposed the contribution of costume to performance through exhibitions and concomitant publishings. Moreover, Deborah Nadoolman Landis has curated highly influential exhibitions on film costume that emerged from her research and from her writing of several books on the subject. Along with Landis, Simona Rybáková, Nicky Gillibrand, Fausto Viana, Alexandra Bonds and Margaret Mitchell are all board members who, as designers, approach scholarly research from a practice-led perspective. This is also the case for two of the editors: Pantouvaki and Barbieri.

Writing per se is crucial to the advancement of new fields, and our board reflects this in the publishing, transformative of discourse, of its members. Christopher Breward evidences the importance of research in the development of the field of dress and masculinity through his writing on culture and fashion, while Joanne Entwistle has spearheaded thinking about dress as embodied practice. Helen Thomas also contributes to our board, and her writing on dance has been fundamental in developing understandings of how costume is critical to the body in performance. Meanwhile, the application of cognitive approaches to costume has been explored by Melissa Trimmingham. Scholars from across the globe who have published on costume are included on our boards: Fausto Viana, writing on historical and contemporary costume SCP_1.1_Editorial_3-7.indd 6 5/2/16 8:59 AM Towards a philosophy of costume 7 in Brazil; Alexandra Bonds, researching around her own practice in the United States, as well as on Chinese Opera costume; Peta Tait, who writes on circus in Australia and beyond; and Aoife Monks, whose research centres on critical approaches to costume, as well as on virtuosity and stage Irishness. Our board has also engaged influential historian of dress Aileen Ribeiro, who has advanced knowledge in her field internationally over a number of decades. Readings of costume and dramaturgy in selected historical periods have been published by our board members: by Bella Mirabella and Patricia Lennox in relation to the early modern period; by Catherine Spooner in relation to the historical and contemporary gothic; and by Catherine Hindson in her explorations of costume in Victorian popular theatre. Costume as part of contemporary scenographic practice is being furthered by the conversation initiated with designers by Siobhán O’Gorman in Ireland, in the United States by Margaret Mitchell, and in the analysis of Barbara Kaesbohrer, in Germany. Meanwhile, Tiziana Ferrero-Regis writes on memory and history in cultural representations in film and fashion.

One of the desired outcomes of Studies in Costume and Performance is to strengthen and extend a global community around research in costume, and we feel its international board demonstrates this ambition. This group of researchers and practitioners, each connected by costume, aims to seek out and foreground experimental methodologies of practice that demonstrate the extent to which performance can be made through costume. The journal therefore invites contributions of academic articles; critical reflections; reviews of books, exhibitions, performances and other events; behind-the-scenes essays; visual essays from featured practitioners or researchers; and interviews with designers, makers and performers centred on specific performances. It also focuses on key practitioners by voicing the contribution their work makes to culture via the costumed body, and by developing discourse in the articulation of embodied knowledge through their artistic work.

Past and current practice is considered through the reading of the costumed body as a communication of embodied, cultural, social, artistic and historical narratives. As such, this journal is an articulation of practice on a conceptual, theoretical and philosophical level, responding to the call that Elizabeth Goepp addressed almost one century ago. Through this process, we hope that Studies in Costume and Performance will contribute to redefining the practice of costume itself.

REFERENCE

Goepp, E. (1928), 'An essay toward a philosophy of costume', *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 14: 3, pp. 396–411.

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