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Archive, Stage and Private Values: Textile, Dress and Costume

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Panel proposal for Intersections conference, CSSD

The teaching team on the Costume with Textiles BA at the University of Huddersfield proposes a 20 minute panel comprising of three research project presentations which take different approaches to exploring and documenting the communication of meaning through dress in performance.

Although the three research projects focus individually on specific facets of costume and textiles, and use different creative and unusual methodologies to explore them, we have identified overlaps in the investigation of the historical, social, anthropological, physical and psychological aspects of cloth and costume design and making. The projects **intersect** at the point of their **potential impact in higher education** and consequent **value for the performance industry** in general, where the significance of the contribution of costume design in storytelling often still goes unrecognised. It is a noteworthy occurrence that for the first time in Western social history Costume Designers are beginning to become household names to audiences (such as Janie Bryant and Colleen Atwood), and the broad body of knowledge in these three projects together (from cloth creation to garment and character design and making to data collection and archiving) could at the same time impact upon and enhance the understanding in academia of the value of 'costume' as a burgeoning research area for which there is currently very little academic scholarship in existence, indeed, a 'vacuum in discourse on costume' (Barbieri, 2012).

In the presentation we propose to explain each research project and the intersections between them whilst also talking about our own notions of 'value' with regard to the potential areas of impact for each project both separately and together. We would require access to Power Point and the internet if available and could only attend on Friday the 16th January because of teaching commitments.

Panel biographies and abstracts for the three individual projects are below.

Reference

Barbieri, D (2012) *Encounters in the Archive: Reflections on Costume*, V&A Online Journal [Online], Issue 4, Summer 2012. Available: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-4-summer-2012/encounters-in-the-archive-reflections-on-costume>

Toni Bate and Liz Garland

Precious?

This article will investigate the concept of the theatrical costume store as a living archive, the use of historical pieces as costume on the stage and the implications this has on the conservation and display of period clothing.

Through conversation with costume industry professionals, photography and examination of original garments found in theatre collections, the changing relationship between costume and clothing will be explored and analysed in terms of preservation, performance, research and education.

Issues concerning the use of 'vintage' and 'period' clothing for a performance will be raised as well as discussion around the importance of these garments in a social history context; the difference in perceived value between lower class and upper class wear and the journey these garments have so far taken. The ethics of using a surviving piece of period clothing as costume will be investigated as well as the purpose of such pieces; to be hidden away, preserved in a box with tissue paper, occasionally viewed by specialists or seen by a wider audience serving its original purpose- that of an item of clothing to be worn.

The reader will be motivated by a series of thought provoking questions to consider the value of a piece of original period clothing through its life in a store where it lives as an archived object, on the stage where it becomes part of the character's narrative and what it brings to the performance for the audience, the actor and the costume team.

Biography – Toni Bate

Toni joined the University of Huddersfield in September 2012 as Costume Construction Lecturer on the Costume with Textiles BA (Hons) degree. Prior to this she worked as the Costume Workroom Supervisor at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) where she supported students on their Theatre and Performance Design degree. Other further and higher education teaching work includes Specialist Costume Technician at Edge Hill University, Costume Lecturer at Liverpool Community College and Costume Designer and Wardrobe Supervisor at Arden School of Theatre in Manchester. She has also designed and delivered short courses in corsetry, sewing skills and pattern cutting.

Since graduating from Liverpool Community College's Theatre Wardrobe course in 1994 Toni has worked as a Costume Maker, Tailor and Wardrobe Supervisor for theatre, film, television and dance. Theatre work includes productions for Clwyd Theatre Cymru, Contact Theatre Manchester, Duke's Theatre Lancaster, Derby Playhouse, Chester Gateway and West Yorkshire Playhouse as well as for West End shows such as 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'Starlight Express'. Career highlights include Costume Maker for 'Gormenghast' for the BBC, Tailor for feature film of 'Vanity Fair', Wardrobe Supervisor for 'Shockheaded Peter' at the Albery Theatre in London, Cutter for production of 'Grease' in Curitiba, Brazil and Costume Co-ordinator for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

Biography – Liz Garland

Liz first started working for the Costume with Textiles course in 2006. Prior to this she was the Costume supervisor at Bretton Hall College and ran Costume construction projects for The University of Leeds.

Although her main career path is now within education Liz has had a wealth of experience both in live theatre work, film and television. As a freelance costume maker she still maintains close contacts and occasionally works within the industry. Liz has worked as a freelancer for many prestigious companies including; Sheffield Crucible, Manchester Library and Forum Theatres, Wexford Opera Festival, City of Birmingham Touring Opera, Oldham Coliseum, D'Oyle Carte Opera Company, York Theatre Royal, Northern Ballet, Theatre Clwyd, Angels Costumiers, Boda Television, SC4 and The BBC.

Liz has covered all aspects of costume work: pattern cutting, making and fitting costumes and accessories, fitting and dressing wigs, dyeing and breaking down, millinery, leather and fiberglass work, mask making along with organisation and maintenance of costume during production for theatre, film and television.

Nadia Malik

The Wear Project

When we meet a character in a performance, the implicit understanding is that they have existed until the point where we join their journey and will continue existing after we leave them. Their clothing tells a hi/story to the audience before we hear them speak and before any action takes place. As a Costume Designer and Lecturer, my awareness of costuming as an anthropological practice has led me to explore these principles using myself as the subject of scrutiny. For one year I am logging every clothing combination I go through along with memories, prices, locations and dates etc. in order to explore the sub/conscious clothing decisions I make and the stories, embedded in my clothes, that I am surrounded by every day. What does my wardrobe mean to me inwardly and reveal to my audience outwardly, and how does this 'me-search' extend my artistic practice?

The Wear Project will be a visual archive, a teaching tool, and a foundation for further academic research/writing through the questions it raises about storytelling, memory, dress and audience: a personal interrogation generating a critical framework for understanding the dramaturgical significance of costume. I welcome any interest, suggestions, questions, provocations, conversations or counter-projects that could lead my research, costume design or performance related teaching in general into unexplored areas. The Wear Project is available for anyone to view or use on flickr at <http://bit.ly/1kAYv74>

Biography

Nadia Malik is a Costume Designer, Lecturer and Researcher. Her work has encompassed new writing, original and adapted classics, opera, traditional folk dance, contemporary dance, musicals, period plays, site-specific and experimental devised work, live art and exhibitions since 2002. Recent credits include design for shows at the Greenwich and Docklands Festival, the Imperial War museum, the V&A and for the award winning company Elastic Theatre.

With a collaborative approach to performance devising, Nadia's strong design concepts explore the human body and movement, and develop character and narrative through visual experimentation. She is interested in how design practice can engage an audience and communicate meaning within performance. Nadia has taught at various universities including University of the Arts London and the Royal Academy of Dance and is currently a Lecturer in Costume at the University of Huddersfield.

She has worked nationally and internationally as a performance practitioner and in commercial fashion design and has exhibited costume work in group exhibitions. Nadia has a BA in Textile Design (Nottingham Trent) and an MA in Costume Design for Performance (London College of Fashion, UAL).

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Clair Sweeney

Life of the cloth: stories in the making

“(Storytelling) does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again” writes Benjamin (1999: 91).

The act of making cloth within a costume can be seen as a primary form of storytelling.

The cloth within a finished costume conveys a narrative which is threefold: the first is expressed in the language of the cloth itself, it is through the act of marking, staining, and stitching that the cloth speaks, it surprises. The second story that is told is that of the creator who gives life to the cloth and speaks of the material enquiry into the process of making; the learning through making, the mistakes, risks and accidents that lead to the final piece of cloth and third story is that of the activated and animated cloth in terms of life it has on the performer.

This paper will focus upon the first two, which are often neglected or forgotten. In the present work, the language of the cloth and the language of the making are explored by crossing the disciplinary boundaries of Textiles and Costume to achieve a novel perspective.

The theoretical discussion is enriched by the review of case studies in the form of creative process journals developed by final year students on the Costume with Textiles BA(Hons) course at the University of Huddersfield. These journals represent a data collection method that involves the students positioning their practice within the context of a specific performing art; then observing, recording and reflecting on the process of designing and making their costumes.

Reference

Benjamin W. (1999). *The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*. In *Illuminations*, Arden H. (ed.), Zohn H. (trans.). Great Britain: Pimlico.

Biography

Clair Sweeney is the Course Leader of the Costume with Textiles BA(Hons) course in the School of Fashion and Textiles at the University of Huddersfield. Clair joined the University as a Lecturer on Textile Crafts BA(Hons) and Costume with Textiles BA(Hons) in 2009.

Clair was awarded an MRes in Creative Practice from The Glasgow School of Art in 2007, for which she was the Glasgow and West of Scotland Postgraduate scholarship holder. She received a BA (Hons) in Textiles (2004) from the Glasgow School of Art.

Her art school education is grounded in the disciplines of both design and fine art. Research interests include: the use and interpretation of archival resources by creative practitioners, the practice of drawing, the relationship between traditional hand craft techniques and technology and the relationship between material, process and maker.