Editorial

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Pausing for thought

This issue of *Studies in Costume and Performance* is the second to be brought to press under the international spectre of COVID-19 in a period in which participation in and production of performance and film ground to a halt on an international scale. As editors of this issue, we are both fortunate enough to live in a part of the world that has avoided most of the devastating effect of the pandemic. As this issue goes to press, Australian audiences joyfully return to 100 per cent capacity in theatres and auditoriums after, like the rest of the world, these places of cultural production and reception remained dark and dormant for most of 2020. Whilst the contributions to this issue were written prior to the coronavirus pandemic, as a collective it is impossible not to view them through this lens as we write about them in 2021. This pause in human activity more broadly has offered the opportunity for critical reflection from which a deep questioning of contemporary society has emerged. In the absence of *doing* about costume, the *thinking* about costume has been granted a reflective hiatus. The discussions within this issue offer a snapshot of this transitional moment in time and the fundamental issues being examined through the dexterity of costume scholarship.

In a continuation of the discussion begun in issue 5.2 of this journal, Hanna Järvinen, continues to unpack misconceptions about the Ballets Russes 1913 production *The Rite of*
In her previous article, ‘Historical materiality of performance: On the costumes of *The Rite of Spring* (1913),’ Järvinen (2020), challenged the credibility of Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer’s 1987 reconstruction of the ballet, as well as the canonization of the original production in our more recent history. In this issue ‘From historical materiality to performance: Choreographic functions of the costumes in *The Rite of Spring* (1913),’ Järvinen, shifts the critical focus to the materiality, cut and ornamentation of the original costumes in order to better understand how they functioned in Nijinsky’s choreographic process, exposing harmful omissions or assumptions made in the 1987 reconstruction. The examination of materiality in the article further highlights the contradictory reception of the original production by Russian, French and British critics, where the former recognized the integration of the arts and crafts movement in the materiality of the costumes as indicating a particularly contemporary, and Russian, production. The latter, however, remained fixated on what they perceived as an exotic, Orientalist aesthetic, and by missing the cultural connections in the costumes they misunderstood the choreographic intentions of the work. Järvinen demonstrates how a reliance by current dance discourse on these opinions and descriptions of the foreign critics has consequently perpetuated an inaccurate understanding of the original work, and how a study of the materiality of the original costumes can address this disparity.

Perhaps in a similar vein to Järvinen, Alexandra Ovtchinnikova uses costume as a vector to re-examine the collective identity of people. A nuanced understanding of the cultural and political contexts of a particular period in Soviet history is enabled by the study of the costumes in the 1965 film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. She draws particular attention to the ways in which film director Sergei Parajanov and costume designer Lidiya Bajkova navigated the
multilayered representational challenge posed to artists working in film by the 1935 *Friendship of Peoples Policy* and the political environment following it.

Exploring ‘complicated gender and social politics’ (X), Emerald King applies her unique perspective as a practitioner and scholar to the representation of characters in Ikeda Ryoko’s *The Rose of Versailles* in its multiple cultural forms as manga, live performance and in cosplay. She highlights the ways in which this text originally created in the early 1970s challenges heteronormativity and socially accepted notions of gender, which reach across geographic and cultural boundaries.

In another text related to the articulation of national identity through the circulation of costumed imagery, Margot Anderson’s richly illustrated conversation with designer Jennifer Irwin reveals the prolific vocabulary of form and textural syntax used by Irwin in her designs for Australia’s premier Indigenous dance company, Bangarra Dance Theatre. This conversation and the evocative images accompanying it are a record of the contribution of a non-First Nations artist in helping an important Australian company tell its stories through cloth and its interaction with the body in movements that combine contemporary dance with movement that can be traced back to 60,000 years.

Extending on the proposition that ‘costume is a body that can be taken off’ (Monks 2009), Ben LaMontagne-Schenck’s practice-based research activates a costume-led research methodology to explore the ways in which costume can be seen as a co-creator in developing character. Exploring the relationship between costume and disability from the unique perspective of a fully able-bodied performer LaMontagne-Schenck builds on a Stanislavkian proposition that costume and embodied appearance can allow performers to inhabit and be inhabited by costume. This ‘transformational acting-as-research’ (X) approach aims to de-problematize and enhance the
division between performers’ embodied coming to character and the work that designers do in creating the character.

The inclusion of Tina Kolenik’s visual essay ‘Organic entities, costume, human body and neo-liberalism’ addresses the impact of neo-liberalism on contemporary societies’ ideals relating to the body through a series of flesh-related costume interventions. Kolenik’s reflections on the essay’s four practice-based research projects challenge social norms relating to the ownership of one’s own body and identity. The impossible pursuit of perfection is highlighted in the repurposing of discarded human skin, the literal tailoring of the human body and the comparison of human and other organic skins. Kolenik observes the hypocrisy of the neo-liberal capitalist culture’s mandate for the freedom of human individuals as a sharp contrast for the demand that they also conform to a strict set of social boundaries. The use of the undressed, or naked, human body and its internal and external materials as the tool with which to question these demands engages a viscerally uncomfortable, and deeply embodied, approach to examining our shared cultural standards.

This issue includes two exhibition reviews from events, which occurred on the cusp of pandemic shut-downs. In the first, Grazia Colombini reflects on the work of the grand Roman Costume Houses exhibited in ROMAISON 2020 Rome, an Extraordinary Maison: The Archives and Creations of Its Costume Studios. Colombini suggests that alongside telling the story of the included Roman Costume Houses and their history of artisanship, the exhibition also highlights the unique collaborative relationship between fashion and costume design in the Roman film industry. The strength of the exhibition is suggested by its reviewer to indicate the need for an independent fashion and costume museum in Italy.
Julie Lynch then reviews *Innovative Costume of the Twenty-First Century: The Next Generation*, which was held across three gallery spaces in Moscow in the second half of 2019. By considering the meaning of innovation as a constant movement towards change, the exhibition aimed to bring together the work of the next generation of costume designers and promote international dialogue. Lynch reflects on the enormity of the project, participating as one of its 112 international curators, and notes promising shifts from the previous exhibition in 2015 in both the diversity of exhibitors and cultural approach to costume design and creation.

Heralding the theme of our forthcoming Special Issue on costume and fairytales next year, Hilary Davidson’s reflections on the text *Staging Fairyland: Folklore, Children’s Entertainment, and Nineteenth-Century Pantomime* by Jennifer Schacker (2018) highlight the essential role that costume has played in the history of pantomime. Davidson suggests the strength of Schacker’s analysis is in considering the complexity and power of costume’s cultural impact as traced back to nineteenth-century pantomime performances. In particular, the final chapter on cross-casting and cross-dressing examines how iconic items of dress can illuminate a deeper understanding of gender and power. Davidson commends the interdisciplinary approach to researching the subject of fairy tale and pantomime through the traditional staging devices as adding a fresh perspective, which challenges the stereotypical subjects.

Finally, Marlis Schweitzer’s review of *Spectral Characters: Genre and Materiality on the Modern Stage* by Sarah Balkin (2019) observes a challenge to conventional readings of modern theatre relating to the relationship between non-human characters and their costumes. Balkin analyses the work of a selection of key modern playwrights in a way, as recognized by Schweitzer, which offers an innovative approach to the analysis of the supernatural in theatre and performance studies, that of the materiality of their presence. Schweitzer does question, however,
the lack of diversity in regards to the gender and race of the case study playwrights, and wonders
if this risks unintentionally perpetuating damaging historical narratives.

The robustness of the scholarship and creative outcomes represented in this issue are
testament to the porous and generative nature of costume scholarship and its ability to continue
to weave together the past, the present and the future narratives in a soon to be post-COVID
world.
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