



The Journal of Dress History
Volume 5, Issue 4, Early Autumn 2021

journal@dresshistorians.org
www.dresshistorians.org/journal

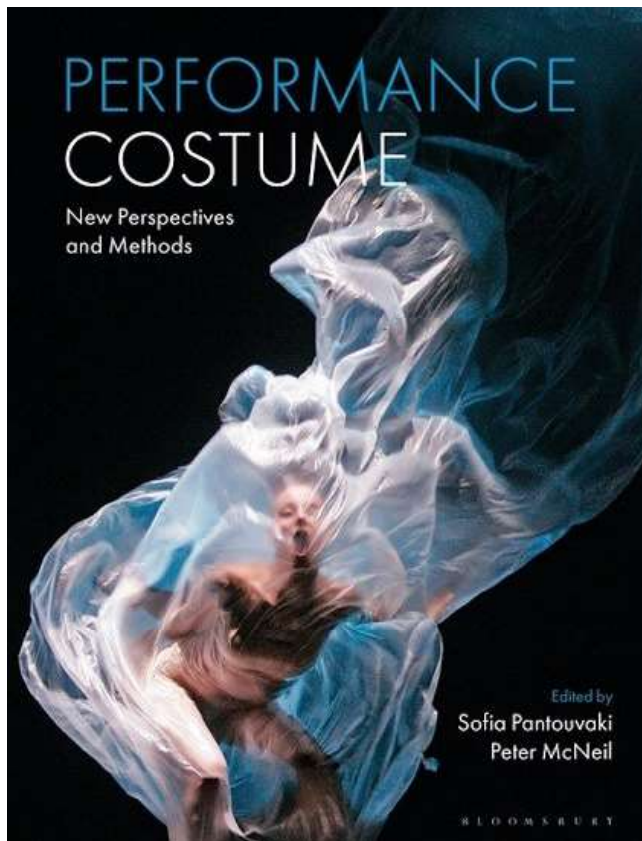
Copyright © 2021 The Association of Dress Historians
ISSN 2515-0995
Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) Accession #988749854

The Journal of Dress History is the academic publication of The Association of Dress Historians (ADH) through which scholars can articulate original research in a constructive, interdisciplinary, and peer reviewed environment. The ADH supports and promotes the study and professional practice of the history of dress, textiles, and accessories of all cultures and regions of the world, from before classical antiquity to the present day. The ADH is Registered Charity #1014876 of The Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Founded in 2016, The Journal of Dress History is circulated solely for educational purposes and is non-commercial: journal issues are not for sale or profit. The Journal of Dress History is run by a team of unpaid volunteers and is published on an Open Access platform distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited properly. Complete issues of The Journal of Dress History are freely available at www.dresshistorians.org/journal.

The Editorial Board of The Journal of Dress History encourages submissions for publication consideration from students, early career researchers, independent scholars, and established professionals. If you would like to discuss an idea for an article, book review, or exhibition review, please contact Dr. Jennifer Daley at journal@dresshistorians.org.

The Journal of Dress History is designed on European standard A4 size paper (8.27 x 11.69 inches) and is intended to be read electronically, in consideration of the environment. The graphic design utilises the font, Baskerville, a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706-1775) in Birmingham, England. The logo of The Association of Dress Historians is a monogram of three letters, ADH, interwoven to represent the interdisciplinarity of our membership, committed to scholarship in dress history. The logo was designed in 2017 by Janet Mayo, longstanding ADH member.



Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods, Sofia Pantouvaki and Peter McNeil, Editors, Bloomsbury, London, England, 2021, Notes on Contributors, Foreword, Acknowledgements, Chapter Notes, Index, 124 Colour Illustrations, 399 pages, Softback, £20.69.

Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods takes an in depth look at the relationship of performers with their costumes through contributions of 30 curators, costume designers, researchers, and scholars. The book is divided into six sections: “Interpreting and Curating Costume,” “Personalities in

Costume,” “Costume Voices,” “Costume Histories,” “Costume and the Body,” “Costume and its Collaborative Work,” and “Costume and Social Impact.” Each of these topics are followed by shorter related essays titled “snapshots” that provide even more insight into the multi-faceted world of costumes. No stone was left unturned by editors Sofia Pantouvaki and Peter McNeil, who curated this collection of incredibly detailed research and essays. These shine a spotlight on the endless processes related to costuming, including new and innovative research methods. Pantouvaki is a scenographer and Professor of Costume Design at Aalto University, Finland. She has designed for numerous productions throughout Europe and has curated many international projects. McNeil is an award-winning design historian who works at The University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. He is a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and section head for The Arts. The two editors note in their introduction that they hope the research gathered “enables a new awareness and dignity for costume when it is considered in and on its own terms” (p. 4).

The psychology of costuming is one of the most interesting reoccurring themes in this book. It is well known that costumes are a vital visual tool to guide audiences in forming their interpretation of a character. Costumes are equally important to the performers wearing them to assist in the development of the character they are portraying. There is often an undeniable transformation that happens the first time a performer inhabits their costume at a fitting. In “Fitting Threads: Embodied

Conversations in the Costume Design Process,” Suzanne Osmond recounts one of her experiences observing a fitting session at Opera Australia. Her fascinating analysis includes a breakdown of the prominent non-verbal forms of communication that transpired between the costume designer and performer which helped drive the collaboration process forward. These included gestures, paralanguage, space and distance, chronemics, perception in mirrors, and sense of touch. Haptics are extremely important in costume fittings because they often bring to surface an aspect the costume designer has overlooked. Osmond states that “Susan Davis, costume shop manager at the Seattle Opera, notes that she pays particular attention in fittings to the ways in which a performer ‘picks at or keeps touching’ parts of the costume, ‘as this can be a good indication that something feels odd’” (p. 290).

Especially intriguing are the multiple essays which discuss the afterlife and display of stage and film costumes. In “Costume Centre Stage: Re-membering Ellen Terry (1847-1928),” Veronica Isaac uses actress Ellen Terry’s stage costumes to explore the idea that putting costumes on display resurrects the magic and ghost of the performers who once inhabited them. Terry believed so much in the “talismanic function” of costumes that in 1888 she insisted a pair of shoes worn by the previous actress who had played Lady Macbeth be placed in her dressing room at the Lyceum Theatre (p. 70). Terry’s daughter Edith Craig stated that her mother felt so strongly about the power of her costumes that she hated for them to be cleaned for fear that they would lose some of their magic (p. 69). Isaac also features some of Barbara Hodgdon’s observations after visiting the Royal Shakespeare Company Collection where she was able to examine their costumes first hand. Hodgdon observed that many costumes survival odds are based on the level of fame of the person who wore them, stating, “In such cases the original wearer shapes not only the physical form of the costume but also its historical identity. These are garments which are ‘indelibly imprinted’ with both the physical and spiritual ‘ghosts’ of their wearers” (p. 70).

Exhibiting costume in a way that properly evokes both the character it was made for and the artist who wore it can be challenging. No one knows this better than Deborah Nadoolman Landis who spent five years creating the *Hollywood Costume* exhibition, which became the most successful show in The Victoria and Albert Museum’s history. In “Hollywood Costume, A Journey to Curation,” Landis walks readers through the creation of this standout exhibition and speaks of her tireless goal of honouring both the voices and craft of costume designers. Landis notes that when she shifted from costume design to scholarship, she sought to clear up public misconceptions regarding the role of the costume designer. She recalls that many in the field were underpaid and often credited behind their collaborators. Landis also points out that “In the recent past, scholarly fashion and

film theorists have cultivated the philosophy of spectatorship while neatly superseding the costume practitioners, whose creative practice and process remained uncredited in their books and journal articles. Women should credit women. Lately, this fashion for hiding costume design in academic writing seems to have ebbed” (pp. 73–74). This short but powerful snapshot is a highlight of this compilation, since in it Landis drives home the importance of costume designers joining together to ensure that their craft is indelibly accessible to students and their contributions are properly credited.

Overall, *Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods* does an impressive job at covering many areas in the complex world of costume design, although the vast number of contributors and topics covered made the reading experience feel somewhat disjointed and overwhelming at times. In spite of its expansive scope, this compilation can serve as a useful overview for aspiring costume designers seeking a deeper appreciation for the craft and any reader interested in academic costume theory and research.

Copyright © 2021 Renée Nicole Gray
Email: reneenicolegray@gmail.com

Renée Nicole Gray is a fashion historian, independent costume curator, artist, and fashion designer. Her research focuses on stage and film costumes of the twentieth century, royal dress, and the role of fashion in women’s rights movements past and present. Her popular writing includes *The Streisand Style Files* (www.streisandstylefiles.com), which celebrates the unique style of Barbra Streisand while connecting pieces of her wardrobe to the history of clothing and celebrating the many iconic designers who created them. Gray has a background in performing arts, having appeared in numerous theatrical productions, commercials, and films. She spent a decade performing internationally as a Lady Gaga impersonator in *The Lady Gaga Experience* and is a member of entertainment unions SAG-AFTRA and Actors Equity Association.