

## **FASHION MEETS PERFORMANCE: COSTUME, CLOTHING AND THE PERFORMING BODY**

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This interdisciplinary collaborative paper looks at the ways performing arts and fashion practices have impacted each other, such as the performative nature of some of the recent catwalk shows, including Dries van Noten's 2021 collection and the late work of Alexander McQueen. The Body as presence, matter and meaning has become central to the arts both creatively and theoretically, with a sensory turn being emboldened by, for example, Affect Theory. Our paper notes the performative and body turn in fashion studies, and the way theatrical performance has emancipated the presence of costume – thinking of, in the UK, for example, the way Michael Clark's early work collaborated with artists such as Leigh Bowery, the ethos of punk as an aesthetic, and the legacy of this innovation. We consider the move from the dominant gaze (director as uber author) to a more inclusive model, which recognizes that all participants, including costume designer, contribute to the ensemble creation of a performance – theatrical or catwalk. We also discuss the more recent move from made-from-scratch costume to the (adapted perhaps) found object as sustainable practice, from new and bought to second-hand, customised, recycled and upcycled. We include in our discussion the way some current theatrical costume designers have insisted on bringing their presence in the creative process to the fore, arguing for an insubordination of costume; and finally, we reflect on the difficult and slowly emerging issue of body emancipation, with changes in the modelling business including more faces and body types, and contrast this with examples of inclusive casting in theatrical performance. Finally, we consider practice as research as understood in UK universities. This model is used to capture what constitutes practice that should be taken seriously by the academic environment: the creation of "new knowledge" in ephemeral practice and durable reflective – and possibly argumentative – analysis. In writing this collaborative piece, speaking about performance fashion, about practice, and practice as research, the authors have inevitably mentioned resistance to isolation: isolation between disciplines, isolation between artists and theorists,

isolation across boundaries, and the necessity of articulating ourselves so that we can speak the same language, understand each other and work together.

**Keywords:** fashion, performance, body, punk, prosthetics, dance, catwalk, Practice as Research.

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## МОДА ВСТРЕЧАЕТСЯ С ПЕРФОРМАНСОМ: КОСТЮМ, ОДЕЖДА И ПЕРФОРМАТИВНОЕ ТЕЛО

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В данной совместной междисциплинарной работе мы рассматриваем, как повлияли друг на друга исполнительские искусства и модные практики, и обсуждаем конкретные примеры, в которых выразило себя это взаимное влияние. Тело как присутствие, материя и смысл давно находится в центре искусства как на творческом, так и на теоретическом уровне, а сенсорному повороту способствовала, например, теория аффекта. Мы прослеживаем разворот теории моды в сторону перформанса и тела, вместе с тем наблюдая, как присутствие костюма придает свободу театральному действию, – на британском материале, включая раннее творчество Майкла Кларка, работавшего с такими художниками, как Ли Бауэри, эстетику, пронизанную духом панка, и наследие этих новаторских идей. Мы рассматриваем переход от доминирующего взгляда (режиссера как сверхавтора) к более инклюзивному подходу, предполагающему осознание, что все участники, включая художника по костюмам, вместе участвуют в создании перформанса – театрального или подиумного. Мы рассматриваем и недавний переход от костюмов, изготовленных «с нуля», к «найденным объектам» (порой адаптированным). Этот переход совершен, благодаря экологическому движению, и означает переход от нового, покупного к поддержанному, приспособленному под конкретные нужды, переработанному или переосмысленному. Мы остановимся на том, как некоторые современные театральные художники по костюмам стремятся выйти на первый план, утверждая, что костюм не подчинён остальному действию и обладает собственной агентностью. Наконец, мы размышляем о трудном и медленном становлении дискуссии об эмансипации тела, благодаря которой в модельный бизнес проникают новые и многообразные нормы тела, раз-

ные типы лица и фигуры, несуразные позы, прежде вытесненные за рамки модной нормы, и сопоставляем этот процесс с примерами инклюзивного кастинга для участия в театральном представлении. Наконец, мы рассматриваем практику как исследование в интерпретации, принятой в британских университетах. Такая модель позволяет понять, что составляет суть практики, требующей серьезного к себе отношения в академической среде: создание «нового знания» посредством мимолетного действия и продолжительного, вдумчивого и – желательно – аргументированного анализа.

Совместно работая над данным текстом, рассуждая о сценической моде, о практике, о практике как исследовании, авторы не могли не сказать о сопротивлении изоляции: обособленности отдельных дисциплин, стене между художниками и теоретиками, взаимной изолированности разных стран и необходимости выражать свои мысли так, чтобы говорить на одном языке, понимать друг друга и работать сообща.

**Ключевые слова:** мода, перформанс, тело, панк, протезирование, танец, подиум, Practice as Research.

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Not so long ago, fashion as an embodied practice started to interest fashion theorists. Joanne Entwistle, whose seminal work *The Fashion Body* (2000) marked the embodied turn in fashion studies, speaks about the way fashion does not exist without a body: “Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters” [Entwistle 2015, 1]. She adds that “dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the living, breathing, moving body it adorns” [Entwistle 2015, 9]. Chris Hesselbein notes that “shifting the focus from the ‘dressed body’ towards ‘dressed embodiment’ and from the surface of the body to the entire embodied self and its lived experience opens up a wide range of research possibilities for Fashion Studies” [Hesselbein 2019, 2]. This interest in the “living and moving bodies that animate clothing” [Wilson 1985, 1] brings fashion and performance very close to each other. This in turn invites questions about the chronology of creative practice with clothing/costume and live performance. Susan Marshall speaks about the relationships between a costume designer and the director<sup>1</sup> to ask: what if we start from the costume, not from the text? What if the costume is the starting point for the performance?

<sup>1</sup> Marshall’s practice research PhD thesis *The Insubordinate Costume* was passed at Goldsmiths in 2021.

How does this proposition connect to experimental performance making?<sup>2</sup>

Performance Makers/Live Artists<sup>3</sup> tend to start the performance making process with a concept that will drive the work. So we might say that form will follow function, in a Bauhaus sense. What is worn – or not – is as important here as in any theatrical consideration of the role of costume. Then, we have witnessed many live practitioners perform naked, which in itself is a costume statement. What characterizes Live Art and its use of materials, costume, clothing or nudity, could be said to be the auratic. Walter Benjamin wrote in his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935) that the “aura” of a work of art, that is, its authenticity, can only be found in an original that is “tied to <...> presence” [Benjamin 1999, 223]. What concerns the Live Artist, who is seeking to disrupt commodifiable ideas of representation and make-believe through their own visceral presence, is often not so much the making of a costume, as one would for a theatrical performance, but the finding of clothing, as one would in an objective way of finding the material, the authentic (auratic) object. Of course, this is not a hard and fast rule. We could find many exceptions because Live Artists sometimes work with costume designers. But this would tend to be in a deliberate way, rather than what we refer to as costume design “serving” a production in traditional theatre – an order of priority in the development of a piece of work that Marshall is contesting in positing “the insubordinate costume”: the costume that refuses to serve and insists on the function of initiator. One might compare this to the shift from the consumer purchasing finished products paradigm to the wearer’s experience within a more open and inclusive fashion scenario. According to Elyse Stanes, “Clothes are never stable, finished commodities but rather assembled items: assortments of fabric, threads, buttons, and zippers in temporary coherence, awaiting further use and adaptation, and subsequent ridding and decay” [Stanes 2019, 229].

“Considering clothes as always in-process, subject to transformation and flux, materially and temporally, lends itself to the sensorial, emotional, and haptic unfolding of individuals’ relationships with clothes” [Stanes 2019, 229]. Our knowledge and understanding of the past is

<sup>2</sup> Marshall put performance work from the UK and internationally. It was here that London audiences first saw the work of Robert Lepage, Jan Fabre and Forced Entertainment, their theory into practice not only in workshops but in production, notably *Alice* with the Danish performance maker Tilde Knudsen of Teater Asterions Hus. Here the costumes successfully led the way in the creation of the show (see <http://www.susanmarshall.info/?p=649>).

<sup>3</sup> Live Art is a term coined in the UK in the 1980s to define autorial work that defies strict formal categorization.

rooted in the body and clothes and textiles play a special role in recalling the past due to the way they take an imprint of the body that wears them and are left marked by the “sweat and stains of everyday life” [Hunt 2014, 208]. Clothes and costume and the bodies that wear/have worn them are therefore markers rich in social meaning to decode. As Lauren Berlant declares unequivocally in her book *Cruel Optimism*, “It’s a political problem of course, the body” [Berlant 2011, 267]. Whatever the point of view on the body as a political presence and how the performer controls its representational message or not, corporeality is freighted with ethical questions. Regarding Affect Theory, Sara Ahmed’s model regarding the tactile sense is presented as “how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” [Ahmed 2004, 10]. Worn clothes leave the enflashed patina of those who have worn them, a story of people’s relationship to clothes. Clothes have affect on the wearer as well as on those who observe the wearer. The quotidian relationship to clothes carries over into the professional performer’s choice – or that of the costume designer – in theatre and dance as well as how these are read by the spectator. The gamut in both clothing and costume is from the discreet to the deliberately shocking.

In the 1980s and 1990s in the UK, experimental artists played with outrageous and flamboyant costume, putting this centre stage, such as Leigh Bowery and Michael Clark’s respective work and their collaboration. At the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA)<sup>4</sup> artists were putting what would normally be on a catwalk onto the stage of a major performance art venue. In a project called *Performing Clothes* (1994) three choreographers (Mischa Bergese, Stewart Arnold and Paul Henry) worked with eight fashion designers. At the time, Steve Rogers wrote of this: “The traditions of wafer-thin mannequins and their highly stylised gait has given way to an altogether more dramatic enactment of the designs, drawing on the visual shockery of performance work and rock video” [Rogers 1984, 28]. But he was critical of the fact that, however disruptive and “alternative” this performing event might have been, in the end it was still designed to sell clothes without intervening in the ethical questions of the fashion industry and how the young “are pressured to turn over their clothes quickly. This stretches visibly the gulf between rich and poor” [Rogers 1984, 28–29]. He concluded: “The wide range of designs reflected nicely, if predictably, the fact of our post-modern

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<sup>4</sup> An Arts Centre in London that in the 1980s and early 1990s ran a particularly influential performance programme run by John Ashford, Michael Morris and Lois Keidan respectively, showcasing the most avant-garde.

polyculturalism, but it failed to make any comment on it" [Rogers 1984, 29]. There has been a journey since then to now, a moment from which we authors are talking today, where we can compare catwalk, fashion in performance, and theatrical costume/clothing in performance, all as arts with shared features in common as well as noted singularities.

Concurrent to the above performative disruptions there was much experimentation in the fashion world: about the cut, the construction and, vitally, the body. We recall the growing interest in the non-normative, or the non-adorned (with artifice) body as a response to another trope emerging in the 1980s: the repressive power-suit, and the concurrently wide popularity of aerobics to create the lean tough body – yet another climax of designing (on the self) a perfect body. Already in 1980s a Japanese fashion designer and founder of *Comme des Garçons* Rei Kawakubo started to experiment with body borders, undermining Western ideals of beauty and femininity. In her spring/summer 1997 collection 'Body Meets Dress', which is often referred as "Lumps and Bumps", Kawakubo introduced a non-normative and deformed silhouette. According to Francesca Granata "this collection, like much 1990s experimental fashion, can be understood as a response to the 1980s and particularly to the image of the über-healthy, wholesome and powerful body that was promoted with particular force throughout the period" [Granata 2017, 51].

Leigh Bowery, an Australian London-based performance artist, was also very much involved in the experiment in exploring the fluidity of the body's borders. Based on Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body, Granata notes that in his penchant for humorous and irreverent critiques of social conventions and ridiculing the existing social order with its normative bodies and well-regulated costumes "Bowery's 'costumes' and performances, in their excessive and carnivalesque character, are even more in line with a Bakhtinian grotesque, and fully exploit its liberating and subversive potential" [Granata 2017, 59]. Actually, even earlier than Kawakubo, British designer Georgina Godley had started to criticise fashion for its repressive attitude towards bodies, and how it excluded non-normative bodies (ideas of "perfection" being assumed in the fashion world). Opposing prevailing fashion discourse with its focus on the body-hugging silhouettes, Godley "starts the process by transforming the sealed and contained body of the Barbie doll, which is perhaps the ultimate representation of normative femininity and unattainable bodily ideals" [Granata 2017, 43]. Such fashion artists disturbed aesthetic assumptions, and it is from such provocations that the relationships between performance and fashion became so intensely interconnected.

We might understand this shift as the consequence of – or the historical development of – Punk, that was explosively disrupting all previous aesthetic paradigms. In the early 1970s, we find a continuation of the idea of what was a romantically hippie ideal of beauty: flowing, ethnically-inspired feminine women (and feminine men). Fashion, of course, echoed this. Punk came along and blasted this all apart, particularly for women<sup>5</sup>.

Vivienne Westwood profoundly shattered that beauty ideal. She celebrated what the French call *jolie laide* – ugly beauty – in compelling and transgressive hair, clothes and makeup. Disrupting the soft pacifistic terrain set in the 1970s, designers like Westwood declared that we can push the prosthetic of the body. We can extend the idea of where the parameters of the body lie: what are the edges? Let's delve into a territory of making the ugliest and most aggressive beauty desirable, in a subversion of good taste and bourgeois respectability, which of course, as Marshall reminds us, we can find historically in many innovations from, for example, Dada and Futurism. Thus, the precursors to Punk were already interrupting the status quo some decades earlier. Punk, and much that has come after, is an expression of political anger and social outrage. We find this unruly unsettling of safe assumptions in fashion, and we can find it equally in performance, always and consistently played out on the body itself: its flesh. In extreme forms, for example, in body art that became popular in the 1990s, artists brought their own flesh and blood and its cutting, piercing, tattooing and bleeding right into the theatre space. Such artists and designers refuse the idea of beauty as tranquil. The carefully ordered, able-bodied, gender-specific world of what is considered to be lovely disappears. We are no longer in the realms of charm. We are in another space, more truthful and brutal, or simply direct and unadorned. British designer Alexander McQueen whose collections (i.e. Dante, The Highland Rape, Horn of Plenty) some found aggressive and disturbing fiercely experimented with form and cut finding beauty in ugly. The designer insisted in one of the interviews: "I think there is beauty in everything. What 'normal' people would perceive as ugly, I can usually see something of beauty in it"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Discussing the work of Kawakubo and Westwood, Evans and Thornton note that both "manage to escape the controlling discourses of patriarchy. Both designers seem to deal exclusively with femininity and not with femininity of the binary opposition referred to earlier but a more radical and challenging version concerned with issues to do with women's bodies, women's sexuality, even with female identity. Furthermore, they appear to do so without a reference to the so-called norm of masculinity. It is precisely this 'failure' to refer to the patriarchy surrounding them which makes the work of both designers so radical and challenging" [Evans & Thornton 1991, 57–58].

<sup>6</sup> Alexander McQueen's words cited on: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/museumofsavagebeauty/mcq/necklace/>

In the last forty years we can, in retrospect, see how several movements have been travelling alongside each other, and how they have sometimes intersected. If Punk was frank and “in-yer-face”, it was also highly contrived, whilst other artistic movements chose to express political and cultural discontent in other modes. Postmodern dance in the 1970s, and some two decades after, proposed the non-costumed dance performance as beautiful. The pedestrian was beautiful and this became an ethic about both how the body moves and how the spectator gazes, or is refused a gaze. Reflecting back to the 1980s, the refusal of what we called then “body fascism”, was, for female dancers, a refusal to subscribe to the Jane Fonda workout hyper-fit body in lycra or its classical equivalent: the emaciated ballerina. This seeped across from fashion and daily life into the performing arts. Certainly, in the professional dance community, people were insisting that the dancer’s body does not need to be an anorexic, hard muscular body in leotard. We started to see the acceptance of the Fat Dancer, which was a real taboo breaker. Mark Morris’s work in America, with all different shapes and sizes in his company, was revolutionary. Similarly some fashion designers introduced experimentation onto the catwalk: like Jean Paul Gaultier who is known for his irreverent approach to fashion and bold experimentation with all kinds of cultural taboos exploring the forbidden and celebrating the bizarre and inclusive politics of his shows casting and showcasing diverse models (curvy, tattooed, aged)<sup>7</sup>.

We also saw the rise of minority groups insisting on visibility in the performing arts, such as disabled artists performing more prominently in the cultural landscape. In the UK, disabled dance and theatre started in the 1970s, but really took off in the 1980s, and has since become mainstream. We have highly established disabled artists, such as Jenny Sealey, the co-director of the 2012 Paralympic Ceremony in London. Sealey was cast in the first women-only disabled production<sup>8</sup> for the UK’s pioneering theatre company GRAEAE. She is now its artistic director and a prominent figure in the UK performing arts scene. For the Paralympics Closing Ceremony, Latvian-born British singer-song writer Viktoria Modesta, performing live with Coldplay, appeared as the “Snow Queen” with “her extraordinary, sculptural, prosthetic leg glittered with thousands of Swarovski crystals” [Jürgens 2015, 42] created by the designer and visual artist Sophie de Oliveira Barata, who has created a range of reimagineered bespoke prosthetics with her company The Alternative Limb Project. If we now see disabled artists on stage and screen, we also

<sup>7</sup> See Frankenberg (2006).

<sup>8</sup> This was *A Private View* by Tasha Fairbanks, directed by Anna Furse in 1988.



hear the voice of the unwell performance maker, who is outside healthy society's idea of the fit, and even heroic body artist, such as the work of Martin O'Brien<sup>9</sup>. Different minority movements have been rising up and protesting, insisting on fully participating in the culture. And here we are now, in a moment of intersectional political understanding of different identity groups, who are all arguing for their voice and their place in the culture today. What they present with their bodies, clothed or not, remains significant.

Such voices who establish visibility through their own effort, are also supported by academic research and funding policies. In the UK 30 years ago, disabled artists were never cast on television and film. Today, we are just beginning to see a disabled actor being cast, not as a disabled person, but just as a character in television. Even Hollywood is beginning to cast disabled performers, such as the current release of Joe Wright's movie *Cyrano* with Peter Dinklage in the title role. For all this emancipation, equal access to the culture for disabled people continues to be a political struggle. Again, we can trace comparable developments happening in parallel in the fashion world, despite fashion's intensely repressive approach towards the body, with emaciation as the ideal, and all consequent eating disorders. Avant-garde fashion and experimental fashion have remained present, exploring borders, gender, the body.

In comparing fashion to theatrical performance it is also interesting to note that, in a postmodern turn, fashion started to be seen to be worthy of an academic paper at the same time that performance studies became an academic subject. Postmodern theory made it possible to include new disciplines as objects for cultural analysis, critical analysis, and theoretical respect. Cultural forms that were hitherto invisible, because they did not fit into the canon of what was considered to be culturally valuable, slowly but surely began to make their presence felt. In 1997, fashion historian Valerie Steele in the editor's letter for the very first issue of the *Fashion Theory Journal* noted that "scholars across the disciplines have begun to explore the relationship between body, clothing, and cultural identity" and fashion was no longer "regarded as frivolous, sexist, bourgeois, 'material' (not intellectual), and, therefore, beneath contempt" [Steele 1997, 1]. A few years before a cultural historian Elizabeth Wilson in her groundbreaking work *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985) questioned the position of those academics who found fashion and clothing not a worthy: "To despise fashion as frivolous is therefore the most frivolous posture of all" [Wilson 1985, 277].

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.artsadmin.co.uk/profiles/martin-o-brien/>

Performance studies, which support the kind of enquiry we are making in this paper, arose out of sociological investigations that started in the 1950s, notably the idea of the performative through Erving Goffman<sup>10</sup>. Beyond theatre and performance disciplines, humanities subjects began understanding the performative as a description of power relations and social function, of the distinction between the private and social self. Richard Schechner, a director and academic at NYU, insisted, innovatively, that we did not need to do theatre studies in the way we used to as the study of a literary canon and its history. He looked at performance in the widest sense, opening the possibility of bringing in other criteria and theories to analyse and critique it, because contemporary performance had begun to radically reject the playwriting theatre and needed a different critical apparatus. Schechner's influential book was first published in 2002, and has undergone several editions since: "Performance studies – as a practice, a theory, an academic discipline – is dynamic, unfinishable. Whatever it is, it wasn't exactly that before and it won't be exactly that again" [Schechner 2013, 12]. Performance itself, in contrast to dramatic theatre, and performance studies thus became a distinct field.

More recently, critics and theorists began to refine this broad interdisciplinary perspective and, given a widely applicable performative vocabulary, to invite the question: How might one identify what is specific to performance in the art sense i.e. in terms of theatre and dance and live art practice? This brings us to theories of presence, resonance, form, and content such as in the writing of, for example, Fischer-Lichte, who in her project to "root an aesthetic of the performative in the concept of performance" [Fischer-Lichte 2008, 29], asks, saliently, when exploring the materiality of the body, "Is it *the* presence of his [performer's] phenomenal body or a more specific quality of this phenomenal body?" [Fischer-Lichte 2008, 97] that draws the spectator to sense the performer's presence? Considering some of these key shifts over a few decades, we can now see the emergence of the idea of performance, in theatre and on the catwalk, as a kind of a great arc of unfolding innovation, both creative and critical.

A specific example today in the UK of overlaps between fashion and (theatrical) performance within the higher education environment can be found in an MA in Costume Design at the University of the Arts in London. This was the costume designer and pioneering theorist

<sup>10</sup> Goffman's influential book *The Performance of Everyday Life* was first published in 1956.

Donatella Barbieri's creation<sup>11</sup>. Her successor, Agnes Treplin, came from fashion to costume design. Each year, her students for their Final Show create costumes, and dance and performance artists are invited to animate these for a live performative graduation show. Directors start with the costume and have to make that costume perform, showing the costume thematically, and contextualize and demonstrate that costume in its best light<sup>12</sup>.

We understand a dialogic relationship between the body, theatrical performance, costume and fashion garments, and even the idea of clothing that represents professional function: the medical or military uniform, for example<sup>13</sup>. As above, it can be that the costume starts theatrical thinking in the same way that fashion clothing starts the question of what the body who wears this fashionwear is, and how they should perform the clothes on the catwalk? Alexander McQueen, in his crazy, zany way, even insisted that the costume in performance was completed *in* performance, such as his 1999 spring collection which ended with a powerful metaphorical performative piece with model Shalom Harlow's emergence on a revolving wooden platform wearing a white strapless dress with a tulle underlay while two robots sprayed her with black, green and yellow paint, staining her pure white dress. There is a kind of generative action in his catwalk performance. For all such invention, very often when you see models doing their job on the catwalk in the ways they did 50 years ago, you feel like something is missing. In the Performance Artistic Research Laboratory (PeARL)<sup>14</sup> online session, spring 2021, the top model Lily McMenemy spoke about the way she

<sup>11</sup> Barbieri's groundbreaking book *Costume in Performance, Materiality, Culture and the Body* was published in 2017, its Russian translation in 2022. She has just completed a PhD by publication at Goldsmiths.

<sup>12</sup> Furse directed one of these in 2016. One piece she was working on was a costume for Macbeth. The student had made a huge magnificent Japanese Noh theatre influenced costume for this character. She worked with the performer on the idea: what were you (Macbeth) as a person before you inhabited the costume? Because the costume is your power, the costume stands as an architecture of your power. This became a from-fetus-to-costume-wearing-adult choreography. The costume stood on its own until the actor inhabited it. Macbeth was "born" into the costume (power). When his body came into the costume, he became enormous. So he went from a small, vulnerable baby to the man who has the power to wear the costume.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of costume as status and performative evidence of role, status was brilliantly satirised in Federico Fellini's 1972 film *Roma*. He staged a hilarious Vatican fashion show. He satirises ecclesiastical garments – huge and self-important costumes. These are uniforms that people also wear for ritual purposes that signify what Goffman called "The Performance of Everyday Life" [Goffman 1999].

<sup>14</sup> Performance Artistic Research Lab is a collaboration between Art & Design School Higher School of Economics (Moscow) and Goldsmiths, University of London. It is an interdisciplinary laboratory investigating myriad meanings in the term "performance" within academic contexts today. It probes how research can inform artistic practice and vice versa. Our praxis is informed by contemporary knowledge accumulated in the field of performance studies.

experiments all the time on the catwalk because perfect bodies are not interesting anymore. Modelling is becoming increasingly inclusive with fashion photography and catwalk shows demonstrating “the change in the posing body from poise to awkwardness, from graceful to graceless” [Shinkle 2017, 212]. Lily wants something else to happen. She wants some provocation. She voices the thirst for the new. She also suggests the rise of the feminist model. They are rarer, but there are top models like Lily and her mother, the supermodel Kristen McMenamy, who have taken their work as an argument against the traditional role of the silent, traditionally beautiful model. Lily herself has suffered some very abusive media about her looks that are not those of a classic beauty, but much more interesting and striking, and therefore differently beautiful<sup>15</sup>. Lily has spoken about how younger models are voiceless. It is the same in the dance world. For years the female dancer was a speechless object of beauty. We are now seeing the rise of the articulate and assertive female dancer, who also has begun to occupy powerful positions of leadership in the arts and distinction in the media.

All such innovations are the inevitable confluence over time of politics: gender politics, disabled politics. Culture is a virality. Its progress can sometimes be slow, but it is constantly developing. At this point we will turn to practice as a research methodology in the fields of costume and fashion, performance and catwalk, art and everyday life. For it is within such research endeavours that light is shed on our topic. Within the area of new Live Art performance we notice young people increasingly attracted to express their view of the world through performance in the broader hybrid sense than traditional theatre, dance or fine art as we understand it. Practice Research (PR) in higher education, opening to this new emerging field of hybrid performance, remains hostage nevertheless to tension and unresolved ambiguity. PR is constantly being redefined. It is still, sometimes impossibly, measured against scientific paradigms that contemporary creative practice eludes. PR has been defined as “doing-knowing” [Nelson 2013, 40], which we might redefine as doing-thinking or doing-questions. But doing-thinking is arguably what any serious artist does when preparing an artwork. Because good practitioners, serious artists, are researching within their practice. We do not just make art or fashion. It is a craft. It is research. It requires finding out. It requires original thought to put ideas together from what’s gone before to make good fashion design/performance.

<sup>15</sup> Lily McMenamy is now a student on the MA in Performance Making programme Furse directs at Goldsmiths, and she is exploring, for example, elements of the grotesque.

What is it that is very specific to PR? It is understood academically above all as the ability to elaborate a research process through a supporting academic piece of writing. The practice and the writing are meant to interact, to inform each other, explicitly. This model is used to capture what constitutes practice that should be taken seriously by the academic environment: the creation of “new knowledge” in ephemeral practice and durable reflective – and possibly argumentative – analysis. But this still does not necessarily really bring creative practice into its rightful place in the scholarly environment because this is still dominated by frankly patriarchal values of knowledge production and dissemination.

So, what is the perspective of this methodology in an academic context? What is going on here? When it is pure academic research, it is clear, you have references, you have durable outcome. You have conventions. In the UK, what characterizes the practice-based PhD is that its author is negotiating the totality of the research to defend the practice and explains the practice, whilst the practice explains the research – or evidences this. It can be a slippery and arduous process to perfect. Practice based PhDs are not just artistic testimonials. What characterizes an artist who moves into a practice PhD is their developing understanding of the theoretical apparatus by which they can put a lens on their practice. Practice PhDs include traditional theoretical writing references, just as if it would be a full written thesis. Whereas for a scholarly PhD thesis you would expect 100,000 words, for a practice based thesis you would expect around 40,000 to 60,000 words, the remaining word quantity being read and examined as the practice itself. It is a reflexive exercise in which the writer of the PhD thesis is demonstrating that they are capable of both artistic practice and scholastic reflection on that practice. Even though the format does not exist in Russian academia, there is a growing demand for it in the field of art and design which needs to be addressed and recognized. In the end, in establishing practice in the academic environment we are firstly respecting the practitioner’s right to be there; secondly, we are encouraging a high level of intellectual inquiry.

By way of example, feminist, postcolonial new materialism theories bring new ideas to the fore about clothes and costumes. Barbieri’s pioneering book on costume provides a salient and highly detailed historical examination of costume as agency, marking also the sometimes clear but often cloudy distinction between costume and clothes. In her final section, in which she writes about, for example, the historical link between couture and costume pre-World War Two, she raises the question

of the link between Britain's colonial past and its stagings of Shakespeare. Here in the 19th century, for example, costuming would seek historical accuracy in conscious "antiquarianism" in ways that were in fact "design-led Romantic re-invention of history" [Barbieri 2017, 177]. Barbieri's PhD thesis by publication<sup>16</sup> takes feminist, postcolonial and new materialist theories to extend and complicate the already extensive and ground breaking research investigations in her book.

Despite such vibrant research where there is a manifest and successful braiding of professional practice, scholarship, publication and back again, the academic environment can create solipsistic practice, where the work does not need to address itself outside of the academic environment at all. In the field of professional performance, there is no such privilege, there is always an obligation to connect to a (paying) public. In the UK's National Research audits (REF)<sup>17</sup> we are now compelled to address the "impact agenda": the question of how socially useful any research can prove itself to be. Many academics dislike and resist this instrumentalising of research. The impact agenda requires practitioners to think outside of any bubble of academic research, where people can just talk to each other within the academy and do not need to test whether their practice has any import, significance or meaning outside of this. Academic thinking in terms of performance practice that stays in a hermetic and privileged space speaks to an elitist environment. So it remains exclusive. The authors contend that it is possible to write lucid academic prose *and* be accessible (maybe not accessible to everybody, because you would need a level of education, but to non-academics). We, authors, dare suggest that the obscurantism of much scholastic writing is not interesting, and we remember tears shed over some of the books we could not get through as students. PR can, in short, contribute a level of accessibility to academic research.

So, in sum, first of all, practice research in the academic environment is about including artists in this space. Also, it is a conversation between academics and across disciplines. This means that we need a language to understand each other. We have a useful term in English – the articulate practitioner. Articulacy becomes the way we can find the connective tissue between ourselves and others who are thinking within and beyond our discipline as well. Being articulate is vital. We must find points of contact because, if we do not understand each other across disciplines,

<sup>16</sup> *Reading Feminism, New Materialism and Post-colonial Thought Through Costume in Performance* (unpublished). Universities sometimes permit an artwork to serve as a thesis, to be supported and contextualised with new writing, much shorter than the normal word-requirement.

<sup>17</sup> The Research Excellence Framework. The latest audit was delivered nationally in REF 2021.

across cultural and geographic borders, there is little hope for creativity in the scholastic system. Creative education and practice is being threatened today because it is not considered useful to society that focuses on the proven instrumentality of knowledge. Vitally, critical thinking educates people who question authority, which is threatening to the status quo. We have to argue for why creative critical thinking-doing is useful, not purely in instrumental terms. We have to demonstrate that the culture needs thinking artists. Society really needs this, more so than ever.

Culture is inexorable, we hope, but vulnerable at this time. So we have to insist on defending it at the highest levels of our national institutions. In this crisis we are in globally, we need contexts in which we can think how to act well. We need to find places where we can find the right actions. Communities are vitally important. Here in this writing, speaking about performance fashion, about practice, and practice as research, we have inevitably mentioned resistance to isolation: isolation between disciplines, isolation between artists and theorists, isolation across boundaries, and the necessity of articulating ourselves so that we can speak the same language, understand each other and work together. As people paid to teach, research and introduce new knowledge into society through our universities, we also insist that we cannot any longer stay safely in our disciplines. This is part of our effort, consciously or unconsciously, to suture the split that evolved from the Cartesian model of knowledge and everything that followed from the Enlightenment, which carved and divided knowledge systems, insisting on borders. Creative thinkers transgress borders. As do fashion designers and performance artists who explore and stretch the body's borders. Transgression is not just a matter of taste. It is a vitalising action because without transgressive creative thinking we are not going to find our way out of our problems. And we have huge problems to face. Transgression is just a sign that we are in crisis. This is the only way to proceed.

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