

mgr Raminta Bumbulyte
Instytut Sztuki
Polska Akademia Nauk

Thesis Title: Dance Costume Perception: A Case Study of the Lithuanian Contemporary Dance in 2012-2016

Abstract

The study analyses the phenomenon of the dance costume invisibility in the critical discourse, and tests the potential and the limits of the dance costume communication. The subject is tackled through multiple perspectives, including the case study of the critical dance reviews, historical-theoretical overview, and a close reading of the dance costume in performance.

The introductory chapter covers the brief history of the performance costume, discusses the lack of the methodologies for studying the costume, presents the newly emerging research strategies, introduces the bounds of the case study, explains why the study subject is twofold— includes the stage garment as well as the perceivers of these stage garments,—and provides a descriptive list of the performance costumes participating in the research, as well as the list of the participating reviews.

The scope of the study revolves around the Lithuanian performances premiered between 2012-2016 and the accompanying reviews. The work dives into the Lithuania's contemporary dance reviews and claims that the obtained insights are common to the whole Central Eastern Europe. This particular area has similar historical, economic and political background that influenced and shaped the development of the dance practice and dance criticism.

The first part of the work utilises the case study investigation method. It aims to verify if, and to what extent, the contemporary dance costumes are visible or invisible in the critical press. Searching for the reasons behind the invisibility, the sampled dance reviews are dissected and presented as trends across the years, authors, publication sources, performances, costume designers and stylists. Each cut is interpreted and contextualised, providing a better understanding of the (in)visibility status and influencing factors. The findings related to the performance review content are presented, explaining the currently existing mode of the perception of the stage costume, and, consequently, suggesting the signifying markers for the neglect.

The second part of the work refines the understanding of the factors of the multi-faceted perception process that governs the costume (in)visibility, by providing the historical-theoretical overview. Drawing from the key theories of communication,

gaze, reader-response, the role of the spectator, fashion, semiotics, visual culture, and psychology, the study embeds the multiple converging aspects of the costume spectating within a wider philosophical discourse. This solidifies the framework of the factors, that contribute and determine the outcome of the observation process. An in-depth understanding of the perception process, the scope of it, the dynamic forces in action, contextualises and sets the foundation for test case study.

The third part of the turns back to the dance costume as investigates the possibilities to observe and decode meaningful signs of the physical and visual costume — performing body relationship. The observations show that the relationship between the costume and the performing body is based on the dynamic ruptures. The spectator is exposed to the vigorous field, where both entities are constantly struggling for dominance and negotiating the collaboration terms. The description of the objective features bleeds into the sociologic, cultural, economic considerations. The performing bodies on the stage become inseparable from the performing bodies in the real life. The roles, that the dressed bodies perform, become intricately tangled with the social customs and former cultural production. The dynamic nature of the body — costume relationship prevents the meaning to become fixed. Every aspect of the relationship is constantly mutating into a complex system, full of the interrelated, interdependent elements and conditions.

With the imperceptible transformation of the character role to the stage persona, the work shows how the costume functions have shifted from the character creation to the vague and obscure status of “just being there”. With this, the perception of the costume changes from the character analysis and definition, to the commentary about the mundane experiences of being clothed. The work analyses the potential of locating the meaning of stage costume in the relationship between the performer and the rather, rather than outside of it.