

Studies in Costume & Performance  
Volume 6 Number 2

© 2021 Intellect Ltd Research Report. English language.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/scp\\_00047\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/scp_00047_1)

Received 11 January 2021; Accepted 4 October 2021

---

## RESEARCH REPORTS

**CHRISTINA LINDGREN**

Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO)

# Unfolding a vision embedded in a garment: Three tools from a toolbox for generating performance from costume design

### ABSTRACT

*Reflection and discussion on 'how' costume performs seems to be at the centre of inquiry of the research within the field of costume design, as presented at the Critical Costume conferences and the journal Studies in Costume and Performance. In various ways, costumes play an important role in most performances, a costume 'does' things, it performs and has agency. In recent years, we have experienced an increasing number of performances where costume acts as the starting element for a performance and, more often, we hear of costume designers instigating and leading creative processes in making performances. Costume-generated performances are about to be considered an established genre. This research report aims to share some 'tools' that form a methodological framework – a*

### KEYWORDS

costume-generated  
performances  
new materialism  
material agency  
costume agency  
costume performativity  
situated knowledges  
visual dramaturgy

Delivered by Intellect to:

Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo. Biblioteket (id23238439)

IP: 158.36.250.136

On: Wed, 15 Feb 2023 14:44:55

*toolbox – for generating performance with costume design as a starting point. The examples are drawn from my professional practice, informed by work undertaken in workshops held in the frame of the artistic research project ‘Costume Agency’ (2018–21), which I have been leading in collaboration with dramaturg and curator Sodja Lotker. I have found useful concepts in new materialism, as a critical framework that has opened up a new understanding of how humans and non-human actors interact and have adapted them for my use as a costume designer, director and researcher. The tools I focus on here are the following three: notions of ‘agency’ in the context of costume design; the concept of ‘situated knowledges’; and ‘visual dramaturgy’ from the performing arts theory. These tools have proven to be useful in the processes of generating performance from the costume in my own practice and are offered in this research report to the wider community of costume researchers for further debate and development.*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 100 years in the performing arts of western culture, the hierarchy that privileges text over visual elements, action over mood and narrative storytelling over staged, poetic images has been challenged, questioning the organization of the creative process. New hybrid forms of performance have emerged, creating opportunities for all contributors on more equal terms. The point of departure or driving force for a creative process is no longer text, as a matter of course, but can be set design, costume, music, documentary material or a political event – just to mention a few. These forms have released the collaborators from the task of simply serving the narrative of a text; as a result, it is possible to observe a higher degree of experimentation and exploration of each contributor’s potential. For example, light does not merely light up the ‘decoration’ (set design) and shift in accordance with the needs of the text-based narrative, but is also explored as an artistic expression in itself, with its own logic and concept. Likewise, costume does not merely dress actors according to the semantic requirements supporting the drama, but is explored through its many potentials for artistic expression, and as an object closely connected to the performer’s body and the other elements involved in the performance. This is seen in both the artistic practice in the field of costume as well as in costume scholarship (Barbieri 2012; Barbieri and Crawley 2019; Hann 2019; Pantouvaki and McNeil 2021).

Ideally, the initial phase of performance-making is a crucial period, filled with openness for the further development of the work and the final result. What is present from the start, or is defined as the main contribution, sets premises for the work and the team members meet the initial material with curiosity. For example, in the theatre, the actors read the dramatic text together as the first thing on the first day of rehearsals. The unfolding of the material starts and a vision for a performance emerges as the actors’ voices fill the space. A process starting in an untraditional point, such as costume, can offer even more openness for the further development and final result. When costume is the starting point or driving force for a performance, what is then important in the process of unfolding this initial material? This question has been at the centre of my artistic practice and research.

I am a costume designer and director. Since 2006, I have initiated several performances where costume has been a central part and often the starting

point of performances. My practice takes place within several collaborations; in relation to the topic of this research report, it includes the following two frames: Firstly, my ongoing collaboration with performance artist and organ player Liv Kristin Holmberg, with whom I have been working jointly and un-hierarchically as co-creators, directors and performers in various multidisciplinary projects.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, my work for Babyopera, a company specialized in creating experimental performances for toddlers and their adult companions.<sup>2</sup> In Babyopera, I have developed production concepts, designed costumes and sets; I have also directed and served as the company's CEO. Our work for Babyopera explores multiple genres, including operas, performative installations, physical theatre and dance; its aim is to offer children and adults an aesthetic and spiritual experience that appeals to all senses, where language is not a key to understand the performance.

In 2018, dramaturg and curator Sodja Lotker and I started the artistic research project 'Costume Agency' (2018–21) at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO). This practice-based project, currently underway, researches the agency of costume in performance by exploring how costume can be a central part of performance. Besides organizing a conference and an online exhibition on the topic,<sup>3</sup> one of the outcomes of the project is to bring together 36 designers and 36 performers who, working together in ten workshops, would generate 36 performances that use costume design as a starting point for their creation.

My practice and research around costume-generated performances in these frames have prompted me to seek models for understanding my work. I have found useful a variety of critical concepts, including three that I discuss in this report: notions of agency, situated knowledges and visual dramaturgy. Adapting these three concepts for my use as a costume designer, director and researcher, I have created a 'toolbox' using them as 'tools' that make up the methodological framework of my inquiry about costume agency. This inquiry is still ongoing; therefore, the current research report is a work-in-progress reflection on the methodology and process that has emerged from my artistic work and research, including my work within the 'Costume Agency' project. The content of this reflection stems from revisiting my own artistic practice in relation to work undertaken within the 'Costume Agency' project, especially by combining observations and findings from workshops, interviews and informal conversations with costume designers held in the project's frame. The aim of this research report is to share the proposed toolbox with a wider audience working in costume practice and research. It is my hope that it might be useful for fellow practitioners who wish to experiment with costume as a starting point. Possibly, the tools discussed here might also be useful to artists working in other time-based collective art forms.

## THE TOOLBOX

My toolbox is mostly informed by theories and concepts from new materialism, an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that explores what things 'do' and how human and non-human actors interact. New materialism emerged approximately at the millennium, as part of what may be termed the post-constructionist, ontological or material turns that cut across both the human and natural sciences. Theatre scholar Rebecca Schneider has argued for the relevance of new materialism for the performing arts. Taking the use of masks as an example, she reminds us that the performing arts have had a long tradition

1. Projects co-created with Liv Kristin Holmberg: *Nattens Lys* (*The Light of the Night*, 2013), an artistic, multidisciplinary and multimedia project; and *Memory Work* (2013–present) a project composed of historical research, art performances, an audio book, a performative installation and commissioned work of music and text. For more information, see <https://www.nattenslys.no>. Accessed 15 December 2021.
2. For more information, please visit <https://www.babyopera.no>. Accessed 15 December 2021.
3. Lotker and Lindgren were convenors of the *Critical Costume 2020 Conference and Exhibition*, which adopted the theme 'Costume Agency'. For more information, see <https://www.costumeagency.com>. Accessed 15 December 2021.

4. Worlding as a concept developed by several thinkers, as Haraway, Steward, Anderson and Harrison and others. For more information, please visit: <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/w/worlding.html>. Accessed 15 December 2021.

of animating things, and as such have a lot to offer to the current discussion on 'material agency':

Contemporary questions about the agency of objects and the forces of materialization have increasingly blurred the borders modernity had built up between the animate and the inanimate. [...] At base, the new materialism takes seriously the idea that all matter is agential, and that agency is distributed across and among materials in relation.

(Schneider 2015: 1)

As costume design is one of the performing arts disciplines that work with 'things', a theoretical framework on 'things' and their connections to humans can offer fruitful entries into understanding what costume does and how costume generates a performance. It is thus unsurprising that an increasing number of researchers within the field of costume design and scenography have used the framework of new materialism, for instance, Donatella Barbieri (2020; Barbieri and Crawley 2019) and Rachel Hann (2019). Barbieri and Crawley (2019) take a new materialist approach analysing the chorus in an opera performance. They apply concepts from thinkers, such as Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour and Karen Barad, to shed light on how the chorus can be perceived through multiple forms over three acts: as 'empty bodies', as extended bodily scenography and finally, as what the authors describe as 'a hybrid through costume, composed of various types of matter' (Barbieri and Crawley 2019: 156). In her book, *Beyond Scenography* (2018), Rachel Hann offers a scenographic reading of the new materialist concept of 'worlding'.<sup>4</sup> In her own words, the book is 'an argument for what scenography *does*: how assemblages of scenographic traits orientate, situate, and shape staged events' (Hann 2019: i, emphasis added).

Aligning with this emphasis on the dynamic and multiple interconnectedness of human and non-human actors, new materialism has been crucial also for my research. Writing by thinkers, such as Haraway, Latour and Barad, has eliminated my search for an objective 'truth' of what costume 'is' and at the same time triggered an interest in multiple truths about how costume creates meaning by what it 'does'. Importantly, new materialism offers an understanding of 'costume agency' as an ongoing process of 'becoming', referring to the possibility of change and its connectedness to the other elements of a performance. Exploring how costume can act as a starting point for performance is then a decisive test on what costume can do – its capacity.

The creation of a performance, with all its components, is a process in a constant mode of change, an intra-action in it is becoming, to evoke Barad's words. There is a huge potential for meaning-making in the space that emerges in the network of humans and things. New materialism offers a useful framework for understanding the act of becoming, in processes where costume is involved. The tools described in this report interlink and overlap in all phases of the process of creating performance from costume.

## TOOL #1 NOTIONS OF AGENCY

The centre of my interest is the agency of costumes. Agency is a core term in new materialist theory, with no singular definition. However, Felicity J. Colman claims that it is possible to

Delivered by Intellect to:

Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo. Biblioteket (id23238439)

IP: 158.36.250.136

On: Wed, 15 Feb 2023 14:44:55

identify a common sense of the notion of agency; as something that refers to the relationality of the political cultural position that and by which matter and things are defined, distributed, and organised – by their relationality to other matter and things; and which do not have a pre-existing ontology.

(2018: n.pag.)

Theorists from natural sciences, humanities and cultural studies, such as Karen Barad (2007), Jane Bennett (2010) and Tim Ingold (2007), have used the term 'agency' in multiple ways. In addition to that, Latour, a sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher, has developed the so-called Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) where agency is the central term. In his book, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005), he presents his version of the school of thought that rethinks the notions of society and social explanations. According to ANT, social systems are temporary and unstable and can be considered as movements of re-association and reassembling, where agency is distributed to human and non-human actors. Likewise, it is possible to use the concept of ANT to research processes of agency in the creation of a performance event with its non-human actors, such as light, the theatre building, the material used for light, costume and set in relation to human actors, such as performers, audience, the staff of the theatre, the theatre critics, the citizens and many more.

Particularly useful in my artistic practice has been the work of Barad, theorist, physicist and feminist, who argues that there are both human and non-human forms of agency. For her, agency is not an attribute of something or someone; rather, it is the process of cause and effect in 'enactments' (2007: 214). She claims:

The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. The primary ontological units are not 'things' but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/reationalities/(re)articulations. And the primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted. This dynamism *is* agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurations of the world.

(Barad 2003: 818, original emphasis)

How can Barad's understanding of agency as an intra-activity in a process of becoming be useful as a tool for understanding how costume generates a performing arts event? I propose that we stop regarding costume as merely consisting of physical garments but see it as garments intra-acting with other components of the performance, such as the wearer, the choreographic movement patterns, uttered words, the performance space with its sounds, light, acoustics, surrounding building and the current social-political context. I also suggest we regard costume as a dynamic entity of garment, body, action and context.<sup>5</sup> The way these components interact is an intra-activity in a process of becoming. In a like manner, the tool of agency enables us to see the processes of creating and experiencing a performance as processes of cause and effect in 'enactments'.

To further analyse these ideas, I will use an example from my own creative practice. In the performance *Up in the Mountains* (Dieserud/Lindgren 2011),<sup>6</sup>

5. With 'action' is here meant the movement, words spoken or music performed and the human and matter involved in creating the action, for example the dramatist, the choreographer and director.
6. Dieserud/Lindgren (2008–18), consisting of the actor/director Hanne Dieserud and scenographer/director Christina Lindgren, was a performing arts company specialized in creating performances for children aged 0–3 years. After 2018, the company Babyopera presents performances by Dieserud/Lindgren in addition to creating new performances.

7. Vietnamese language was chosen by the performance creators to offer a sense of 'mystery' of an unknown language to the Norwegian and non-Vietnamese audience. This was intentionally not published or otherwise shared as language was not supposed to be a key to semantic meaning in this performance.
8. The artistic research within the frame of the 'Costume Agency' project is primarily approached in workshops led by costume designers, which pursue a vision embedded in the garment. The workshop format follows a set dogma that involves four designers, four performers, a lighting designer and a reference group for

the starting point was a souvenir doll. I analysed the folk costume of this doll, observing both European and Asian elements in its craft, but could not conclude on its origin, other than that it was made around 1950. At the first step of our process, we had the dress of the doll constructed in human scale. Then the actress, Hanne Dieserud, entered the costume, completed with wig and makeup: the doll then became 'alive'. Our explorations of the costume resulted in a character of a storyteller, narrating a well-known Norwegian children's fairytale, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, in a random selected foreign language, the Vietnamese language,<sup>7</sup> together with costume and set, was material for the storyteller to express that she had something important, secret and beautiful to tell us. The costume involved all performance components – actor, space, directing, costume material, video projections, music and special effects – in an agential intra-activity, co-creating the sense of mystery around this old souvenir doll. This mystery found its outlet in a performance for children aged 0–3 years old.

Another example of how the notion of agency becomes helpful when working with costumes is a performance that emerged during 'Costume Agency Workshop #3, Performing Garment' in Oslo, in November 2019.<sup>8</sup> One task of the participants was to imagine and perform aged bodies, inspired by old persons they knew. Costume designer Fridtjof Brevik worked with two actors to create a performative transformation from a young to an old body through an interactive act of dressing. In the 30-minute performance, Fridtjof handed over garments to the actor who responded by trying them on, following the associations triggered by the garment and adjusting the body accordingly. As



Figure 1: The souvenir doll that was the starting point for the performance *Up in the Mountains* (Dieserud/Lindgren 2011). Actor and director Hanne Dieserud. Costume design, scenography and direction Christina Lindgren. Photograph by Ann Avranden.

Brevik reported,<sup>9</sup> he had realized that the costumes were agentic, and he, as costume designer, too, was agentic 'in the way' he handled over garments to the performers. His agency manifested itself in the proposals that he offered to the actors regarding ways to wear the garments and 'behave' with them. To use Barad's words, the whole performance was an intra-active act of becoming with agency in an ongoing reconfiguration of its participating, involved elements, including garments, actors, memories, expectations, costume designers, audience, light and much more. The performance became a beautiful piece that combined themes of trust, power, madness and playfulness.

rehearsals on two stages, over a period of twelve days of explorations, dialogue and development. At the end of the project, there will be ten workshops in total. For more information, please visit <https://www.costumeagency.khio.no>. Accessed 15 December 2021.

9. Brevik's reflections on the process are presented in the documentary film from the workshop: [https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page\\_id=69](https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page_id=69); see from minute 16:10 until 19:48. Accessed 15 December 2021.



*Figure 2: The designer and director Fridtjof Brevik handed over garments to the actor who responded by following his non-verbal proposal for use. Costume Agency Workshop #3. Performers Lenka Rozehnal and Tova Ekenberg. Photograph by Espen Tollefsen.*

10. Miskimmon in conversation with the team of Babyopera, 31 May 2018. 'I want to bring out as many voices and angles as possible', Miskimmon has also said in an interview when she announced the VoeX programme (Bjørnhovde 2018: n.pag.).

## TOOL #2 SITUATED KNOWLEDGES: SITUATED PERFORMING ART

As a supervisor, researcher and colleague of costume designers, I have witnessed capacity and desire for creating performances not only by the traditional instigators, such as dramatists, directors and choreographers, but by costume designers themselves. Some costume designers experience a wish to control the duration of a scene, editing of the text, the rhythm of the shift in light or the movement of the choir. Others, when working on production assignments, bring a plethora of ideas that do not always fit in the overall concept. Some costume designers have visions, ideas and concepts for entire performances, others miss a specific performance experience when attending performance as audience and realize that they want to create it themselves.

One of the tools for moving towards realization of these visions is the concept of 'situated knowledges', coined by historian of science and feminist Haraway (1988), that helps to identify one's location, context, competency and approach. In her essay, 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspectives', Haraway suggests that no science is 'objective' or universal, and all forms of knowledge reflect the particular conditions in which they are produced, including the concrete historical, cultural, linguistic and value context of the knowledge producers with their methods and tools of the knowledge production (1988). The concept of 'situated knowledges' can be applied in the performing arts. Replacing 'knowledges' with 'performing arts', I suggest that the location of the artwork that has been produced reflects its producer and the particular condition in which the art is produced. The starting point and the location of the instigators are formative for the process and result of the performance: a performance initiated by a costume designer will be created through a different process and have a different result, compared to a performance initiated by a dramatist, composer or a choreographer.

The understanding of the starting point as formative for the result, and the importance of the situated knowledges of the instigator, underpinned a formation of VoeX, The Norwegian Opera and Ballet's programme for fostering the creation of new operas. The director of the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, Annilese Miskimmon, who invited our company Babyopera to become a part of this innovative project, argued that the opera genre needs a renewal that can emerge from approaching the creative process not only from the libretto and music, but also from non-traditional starting points – as, for example, sets and costume.<sup>10</sup>

My situatedness as a costume designer and scenographer has highly influenced me as an instigator of performances. In my work, I create and explore aesthetic performative micro-universes. Each performance is a 'what if [...]', a fictional hypothesis negotiated between possibilities and limitations within the defined time and space. Costume and sets play a conclusive role in materializing the hypothesis. I enjoy both roles as creator and leader of the explorations. In the performances *Orpheus' Comfort: Opera for Babies* and *Amor's Ease: Opera for Babies* (both by Babyopera 2020a and 2020b), the aim was to create a Baroque micro-universe with a strange and mysterious mood. Through a wonderful collaboration with the workshops of The Norwegian Opera and Ballet, the beautifully crafted costumes and sets were present from an early point of the rehearsals and could be explored; as a



result, they inspired the team to create mysterious characters with a flair of a distant past.

As another example, during 'Costume Agency Workshop #3, Performing Garment', Signe Becker participated with her project 'Skeleton woman', a live sculpture of an archaic female figure: strange, ravenous and ragged, constantly changing. In an interview (Lindgren 2021), Becker, who is trained as a traditional scenographer and has mostly worked on the independent theatre scene, described her need to cross over several disciplines, such as dramaturgy, choreography, lighting, spatial design and costume (Becker in Lindgren 2021). The action of the performance, lasting 25 minutes, consisted of two figures awakening, exploring themselves and each other, unfolding their potential in an intra-activity in its becoming.<sup>11</sup> I argue that this performance was influenced by Signe Becker's situated knowledge, including her competence and interest as costume designer, and by her position as the creative lead of the process. According to Becker, the figure, 'Skeleton woman', needed time to develop, and she had to 'listen' to the emerging figure, exploring what movement and expressions were aligning with her own artistic ideas and visions for the figure and for the performance.

11. See the documentary from the workshop: [https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page\\_id=69](https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page_id=69), especially from minute 11:14 until 16:11. Accessed 15 December 2021.



*Figure 3: Designer and director Signe Becker instructing the performers of 'Skeleton woman' (Becker and Langgård 2020) during Costume Agency Workshop #3. Performers Nadege Kubwayo and Victor A. O. Pedersen. Photograph by Espen Tollefsen.*

12. *Dragon Zoo* was produced by Dieserud/Lindgren in 2017. After 2018 it has become a part of the repertory of Babyopera.

### TOOL #3 VISUAL DRAMATURGY

When costume, not text, is the starting point for a performance, questions emerge about how to begin the process and how to develop, analyse and refine what arises in the rehearsals. In other words, the task is to unfold the vision embedded in the costume. What is the nature of this meaning-making mechanism, of this dramaturgy?

Even though 'visual dramaturgy' has been popularized by Hans-Thies Lehmann, the term had been used within the field of performing arts and film for some time, including in the field of set design, lighting design and costume design. For example, Norwegian theatre scholar and critic Knut Ove Arntzen in his article 'A visual kind of dramaturgy: Project theatre in Scandinavia' (1990a) describes visual performance as a form of performance, in Europe and the United States, with other kinds of dramaturgy – visual dramaturgy. To me, Arntzen is particularly interesting, when he points at the visual arts, scenography and costume as essential to experimentation and innovation in the performing arts. According to Arntzen, visual performance originated in the wave of performances in the 1950s and 1960s as 'an extension of the historical avant-garde in Europe before the Second World War, especially dada and surrealism' (1990: 5). In this visual theatre, the elements are not arranged in hierarchical systems but are equivalent and on an equal footing. Arntzen further argues that there is a need for tools to understand this kind of performance that would 'interpret or describe [it] in a metaphorical or allegorical way, which is necessary when it comes to a performing art that no longer has the literary textual as a basis' (Bulandrová 2020: 166). We must include references and contexts that lie in the entire performances' web of images, sound and textual communication (Bulandrová 2020). Arntzen suggests a metaphorical use of the terms 'image' and 'memory' to describe how the dramaturgical layers in the productions can be comprehended. 'Image' can be both the concrete, compositional image, created by humans and objects onstage, but also an image as a stage metaphor; these images become connected with the tracks in the spectator's memory, creating possibilities for multiple meanings that the viewer transmits to the performance (Bulandrová 2020).

The idea of 'visual dramaturgy' is highly productive for costume designers who create performances. A creative process requires that we, costume designers, continuously alter the perspectives as both creators, creating and recreating scenes, and spectators, analysing and interpreting the work as it progresses. What happens on the stage generates meanings by mechanisms other than word-based narratives, and it is highly important to be sensitive to the moods, images and metaphors triggered in the rehearsals.

The performance *Dragon Zoo* (Dieserud/Lindgren 2017)<sup>12</sup> displayed three dragons in their fictitious natural habitat, inspired by a zoological garden. Its dramaturgy grew from the costumes, designed by me and produced by a highly skilled costume team at Det Norske Teater in Oslo, and almost finished by the beginning of the rehearsals. The performers then explored their possibilities and limitations in regard to material qualities and functionality, aesthetics and associations. They moved and used their voice in the space, while the whole artistic team was present. We explored agency, with the costumes at the centre, as the intra-activity in the process of the becoming of the dragons; we carefully observed and searched for their nature. Scenes were developed with different duration, timbre, density, tension and mood; decisions about the order of the scenes were

based on compositional principles, such as balance, contrast, unity, pattern, proportions and rhythm. Our process could be best described as a visual dramaturgy where an image of a mythical world inhabited by dragons was created. The dramaturgy was circular rather than linear, gradually letting the audience experience the unfolding of everyday life in a dragon habitat. The costumes materialized the mythical creature, dragon and were thereby crucial for the constitution of the fiction.

In the workshops of 'Costume Agency', we experienced similar processes of unpacking potentials of costume in terms of visual dramaturgy. In 'Costume



*Figure 4: The costumes materialized the mythical creature, dragon and were thereby crucial for the constitution of the fiction. Dragon Zoo (Dieserud/Lindgren 2017). Performers Katja Henriksen Schia, Sondre Pettersen and Daniel Rodrigo Nilsen. Photographs by Siren Hoyland Saether (top) and Christina Lindgren (bottom).*

13. Documentation from 'Costume Agency Workshop #4' is available here: [https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page\\_id=394](https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page_id=394). Accessed 15 December 2021.

Agency Workshop #4, *Performing Materiality*' in Helsinki in January 2021,<sup>13</sup> the designers brought textiles with different properties, such as weight, light-reflectivity or shape transformation. As this workshop showed, a costume, even when reduced to the smallest component, such as an uncut fabric, when performing with a dancer, can generate images and memories in the audience. Three designers and four dancers worked for ten days; through improvisation, they explored the possibilities of the fabrics in intra-action with the other components, such as bodies, movement, light, sound and use of space. The designers then selected the most interesting scenes and composed their order as a series of events. Following the work-in-progress presentations, the fellow researchers, taking the role of spectators, shared the many metaphors, images and memories that were triggered, forming a visual dramaturgy of the performance.

## CONCLUSION

The intention of this research report was to share three critical 'tools' for investigating costume as a starting point for performance; among the questions discussed is the role of costume designer as instigator and leader in the creative process. The first tool is agency, for identifying what costume 'does' and how it can be understood as agential intra-activity in its becoming. In my practice, I have been surprised by the ways in which every aspect of the performance is connected and can respond to costume.

The second tool is inspired by Haraway's concept of situated knowledges that recognizes the importance of the relationship between knowledge producer's location to what is being produced, which, adapted to my toolbox, highlights the costume designer as the instigator of a performance. Through my practice, I have experienced that, by acknowledging the starting point, including the background and concept for the costumes and the motivation for creating a performance, the direction for the development process has been marked out and the necessary methods have been found for the performance.

Third, I discussed visual dramaturgy as a tool for analysing performances that have departed from textual dominance of the classical and early modern theatre tradition. It is a tool for examining and developing all elements of a performance, including metaphorical and allegorical aspects of meaning-making. In my experience, I can rely on costumes as capable of creating meaning; 'listening to the costumes' is then a process that unlocks their meaning-making potential.

Costume design as a starting point for creating a performance is a non-traditional point of departure that calls for suitable approaches in order to unfold its potential. There are many areas we know little about, for example, what the notion of 'listening to the costume' includes and what tools are useful for the first days of the rehearsals. The toolbox can be expanded and new tools can be added in the future.

Costume has a crucial impact on a performance. Costume designers wish and need to explore their capacity to contribute to the performance. Delving into costume as the instigator is a decisive test, and it can bring valuable insight in its aptitude. Exploring the agency of costume design might inspire similar methods to other disciplines of performance. I believe 'other' contributors to a performance, such as light designers, the actors or mask designers,

might benefit from uncovering the possibilities of ‘their’ contribution in a similar way. What are the implications and premises embedded in light, the actor with their body and mind, or a mask; how do these elements trigger a process? Exploring and acknowledging the agency of all means of expressions is valuable to the entity of the performance as it potentially generates new performing arts forms.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ‘Costume Agency’ artistic research project (2018–21) has been supported by the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education and by Oslo National Academy of the Arts (DIKU funding number: 18\_00173-30). I would like to thank my partner in this research, Sodja Lotker, for the beautiful teamwork in the project. Thanks to all designers that joined us in experimenting with costumes. I am also grateful to Knut Ove Arntzen for conversations, elaborating on the concept of visual dramaturgy, and for sharing texts from his archive. Finally, I would like to thank the editors, Sofia Pantouvaki and Barbora Příhodová, for their constructive feedback and suggestions.

## REFERENCES

- Arntzen, Knut Ove (1990), ‘Visual performance og prosjektteater i Skandinavia’ (‘Visual performance and project-theatre in Scandinavia’), in K. O. Arntzen and S. Å. Birkeland (eds), *Fra Visual performance til prosjektteater i Skandinavia/From Visual Performance to Project-Theatre in Scandinavia*, Katalog vol. 1, Bergen: Bergen International Theatre, pp. 4–21.
- Arntzen, Knut Ove (2015), ‘Kritikk, bilde og minne: Performativ forestillingsanalyse av postmoderne teater – Hotel Pro Forma og Remote Control Productions’ (‘Criticism, image and memory: Performative performance analysis of postmodern theater – Hotel Pro Forma and Remote Control Productions’), in A. M. Otterstad and A. B. Reinertsen (eds), *Metodefestival og øyeblikksrealisme: eksperimenterende kvalitative forskningspassasjer* (‘Method festival and momentary realism: Experimental qualitative research passages’), Oslo: Fagbokforlaget, pp. 166–79.
- Babyopera (2020a), *Amor’s Ease: Opera for Babies*, Norwegian Opera and Ballet, Oslo, 10 September, <https://www.babyopera.no/video/>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Babyopera (2020b), *Orpheus’ Comfort: Opera for Babies*, Norwegian Opera and Ballet, Oslo, 10 September, <https://www.babyopera.no/video/>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Barad, Karen (2003), ‘Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28:3, pp. 801–31.
- Barad, Karen (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Barbieri, Donatella (2012), ‘Costume re-considered: From the scenographic model box, to the scenographic body, devising a practice-based design methodology that re-focuses performance onto costume’, in *Endyesthai (To Dress): Historical, Sociological and Methodological Approaches*, Athens, 9–11 April 2010, Nafplion: Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, pp. 147–52.

- Barbieri, Donatella (2020), 'Costume as archive of gesture and meaning: Its methods and ethics', *Critical Costume 2020 Conference*, <https://costumeagency.com/project/donatella-barbieri/>. Accessed 5 January 2021.
- Barbieri, Donatella and Crawley, Greer (2019), 'The scenographic, costumed chorus, agency and the performance of matter: A new materialist approach to costume', *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 6:2, pp. 143–62.
- Becker, Signe and Langgård, Ingrid (2020), 'Skeleton woman', Ingrid Langgård, <https://www.ingvildlanggard.com/skeletonwoman>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Bennett, Jane (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bjørnhovde, Hilde (2018), 'Operasjef Annilese Miskimmon lager babyopera', *Aftenposten Newspaper*, 24 May, <https://www.aftenposten.no/kultur/i/oRQ8mg/operasjef-annilese-miskimmon-lager-babyopera>. Accessed 13 August 2021.
- Bulandrová, Amálie (2020), 'Visual dramaturgy: Interview with Knut Ove Arntzen', *Theatralia*, 23:2, pp. 163–68, <https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2020-2-9>. Accessed 5 May 2021.
- Colman, Felicity (2018), 'Agency', 17 May, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/agency.html>. Accessed 11 May 2021.
- Dieserud/Lindgren (2011), *Up in the Mountains, Teater Innlandet*, Hamar, 7 May, <https://www.babyopera.no/video/>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Dieserud/Lindgren (2017), *Dragon Zoo, Det Norske Teater*, Oslo, 6 April, <https://www.babyopera.no/dragon-zoo/>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Hann, Rachel (2017), 'Debating critical costume: Negotiating ideologies of appearance, performance and disciplinarity', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 39:1, pp. 21–37.
- Hann, Rachel (2019), *Beyond Scenography*, London: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna (1988), 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspectives', *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, pp. 575–99.
- Ingold, Tim (2007), 'Materials against materiality', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–16.
- Latour, Bruno (2005), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lindgren, Christina (2021), 'Interview with Signe Becker', 7 January, [https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page\\_id=347](https://costumeagency.khio.no/?page_id=347). Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Nattens Lys (The Light of the Night)* (2013), [http://nattenslys.no/?page\\_id=13](http://nattenslys.no/?page_id=13). Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Pantouvaki, Sofia and McNeil, Peter (2021), 'Activating costume: A new approach to costume for performance', in S. Pantouvaki and P. McNeil (eds), *Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1–4.
- Schneider, Rebecca (2015), 'New materialisms and performance studies', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 59:4, pp. 7–17.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

- Lindgren, Christina (2021), 'Unfolding a vision embedded in a garment: Three tools from a toolbox for generating performance from costume design', *Studies in Costume & Performance*, 6:2, pp. 201–15, [https://doi.org/10.1386/scp\\_00047\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/scp_00047_1)

## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Christina Lindgren is a professor in costume design at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO). Lindgren is a costume designer and scenographer, as well as a stage director on self-initiated productions of opera and other hybrid forms of performing arts including music. Christina Lindgren and Sodja Lotker are the main researchers of the artistic research project 'Costume Agency' (2018–21). Lotker and Lindgren were the convenors of the *Critical Costume 2020 Conference and Exhibition*.

Contact: Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO), 0551 Oslo, Norway.  
E-mail: christina.lindgren@khio.no

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8848-9530>

Christina Lindgren has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

---