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Costume

Tutor: Christina Lindgren

Falstaff

Modes of Design

ABSTARCT

I have used the opera Falstaff as a medium to explore material narrative. How does ones lived life materialise in costume. In the opera the singers are playing old people in a nursing home and by using a concept from realism have I created a method for designing the costumes.

INTENTIONS & AIMS

In this project the aim is to design and produce a full set of costumes for the opera Falstaff. I intend to use a method for designing based on a concept from realism.

“Realism rejects imaginative idealisation in favour of a close observation of outward appearances.” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2017)

My singers are young and playing old. My plan is to have a conversation with each singer and interview them. By interviewing them I wanted to hear their view and observations about becoming old. The interview would include questions like:

- Consider the life you are living now how do you see yourself when growing old (Health wise)?
- What are your grandparents like?
- Could I see a photo of your grandparents?

By using their knowledge and thoughts of becoming old as my “observation of outward appearances” I want to materialise their ideas of getting old into the costume.

For the choir I want a similar dialogue with each of them as I intend to have in the interviews with the main cast. I will have a one on one session with each of them where we create a character from a selection of costumes I have already found. The selection of clothes to choose from would be in the same landscape of clothes as the cast is wearing.

The goal is to have a range of just as striking characters in the choir too as in the main cast. As a framework for the design I have to follow the directors concept, text, libretto and music of Falstaff. I aim to have the costumes ready as early as possible in the rehearsal period. I will explain why in the objective section below.

The project will end in a performance at the Norwegian Opera and Ballet that will be documented and exhibited at the schools graduation exhibition.

OBJECTIVES

Explore material narratives: How does a lived life materialise?

By using my method of designing the idea is to create costume designs who create this feeling of internal change explained in naturalism by Monks.

“As a result of the desire to overcome the inauthenticity of theatre costume, Naturalism relied on a reconfigured relation to surfaces, presuming that the exposure to authentic dress and objects would produce equally authentic interior changes in both the actor and audience” (Monks 2010, p. 62)

I'm interested in what this authentic dress could do. I hope by doing a design inspired by the reality from the singers I could achieve a material narrative that creates “interior changes”. This makes it important for the costumes to be finished as early as possible for the singers to incorporate them in their way of acting out their character and for the director to create direction around the costumes (As a spectator in the rehearsal space he should also be inspired by the costumes).



Therese (Playing Alice) is testing costumes in in the beginning of the design process. To the left is a photo of her grandmother who in spirit felt she was never too old for anything.

SYNOPSIS

I started with the breakdown of the opera one for character information and one breakdown scene by scene what each character do. while developing a dialogue with the director and creative team I interviewed the singers as planned one by one.

having established an idea of every character I sat down and did drawings and found inspirational images which I presented to the director. We had already established that since we are working with readymades and a few custom made and altered pieces mood boards where more helpful than finished designs.

I managed to do the measurements of the singer in the second week of January so I had a month before rehearsals to start making the costumes. At this point I had already communicated with a costume maker to create a fat-suit for Falstaff since this would be an important piece of costume movement wise. I also communicated with a student who would assist me at fittings for then to be able to help the singers to get dressed backstage at the Opera during the final rehearsals so I would be able to observe. Things went according to plan.

3 weeks before our performance our show got cancelled and our director had to leave the country. So in fear of not being able to retrieve any costumes from school I started to draw down our ideas for documentation. Since I started early making the costumes most were ready to use at this point, but the chances of getting to use them before examination was unknown.

There was a possibility for a show later in June so I needed to find a way to view the costumes on the singers for documentation and eventually further development/ adjustments. I managed to access the costumes so I could deliver them to the singers at their door. for the zoom meetings I decided to view it as an object interview where the idea of the costume would trigger ideas when discussing character.

When school opened for the possibility of accessing the main stage where most of the set where I prioritised getting the singers on film/photo in costume on the stage. Instead of having a performance I decided to photograph/film the singers on stage in an empty theatre one by one to document my work. Right before handing this in I was informed that there will be a reduced performance without the choir. We will use the costumes there.

Learning Outcomes

For my chosen project I have designed costumes for the 2. year master students production of Falstaff. Through my project I have gotten familiar with concepts of realism and material culture. Theorists that have been inspiring are Aoife Monks, Belk, Sophie Woodward and Daniel Miller. I used the combined gained knowledge to create a design method for myself that I used to create the costumes.

I learned that through costume I can suggest direction of the actor using a material narrative to suggest character behaviour. Costumes have an agenda and the audience and actor are forced to engage with the presence of the object. Daniel Miller says things makes people as much as people makes things. Which has been an inspiration in my work as well as Belk who talks about the extended self. His theory has been in the back of my head when I'm coming up with costume ideas.

Using the opera as my medium exploring material narratives: How does a lived life materialise? I've listened to Sophie Woodward and was inspired to do object interviews by her. Using objects in interviews as sensory triggers that are reactional. For example when I talked to the singers in the beginning of this project I asked if I could see photos of their grand parents, or when i talked to the singers on zoom I asked them to wear their costume because we were talking about character. A reoccurring theme in my project seems to me to be our relationship to objects and how we engage and relate to them.

To me my role in the production team has been a great learning experience too. Learning to handle and cooperate with a larger production team. Being in charged of costume designe does not just mean designing costumes and making them. Being able to organise and communicate between all fractions of the production is a skill in itself and has been an incredible learning experience. Since I've been so lucky to be able to take a leading role in this production planning and controlling every step

Talking about roles is also important because I have had multiple. Because we had an exceptional experience this year (talking about corona) I went from the role of a costume designer to find alternative solutions to the show on the way. This ment becoming the scenographer, doing the filming/photographing, and the directing. Not the plan, but a good exercise.

SOURCES

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). realism | Definition & Characteristics. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/realism-art> [Accessed 18 Sep. 2019].

Monks, A. (2010). *The Actor in Costume*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 62

