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Donatella Barbieri. Encounters in the Archive

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An important dimension that might be opened up relatively easily are the links between the Bráts/Prattes–marionettists and the Prattes–musicians. What could be (re)constructed in this way is a vivid image of popular culture of early nineteenth-century central Europe. Dubská has laid a golden cornerstone for it.


 REVIEWS


Barbora Příhodová |
 Donatella Barbieri
Encounters in the Archive

<http://www.encountersinthearchive.com/>

Lately, we have been hearing voices pointing out that the phenomenon of (theatre) costume lacks sufficient critical attention. No matter how substantial a role costume plays in the whole of theatre performance, considering it co-defines the performer's body and its movement in space, it has been somehow neglected within the discourse on theatre and scenography. The sense of deficiency has led to projects initiated by costume designers and/or researchers that focus on costume 'itself' and its performative qualities, taking it out of its

original context of the performance and examining its potential to create meanings. One of those was the section called Extreme Costume within the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2011 curated by Simona Rybáková. *Encounters in the Archive*, a research project conceived by theatre designer and researcher Donatella Barbieri and presented via its web page with a documentary film, exhibition and an academic paper, represents one more contribution to this discussion.

Sponsored by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and London College of Fashion, this research project is based on the holdings of V&A Theatre and Performance archive at Blythe House and so combines the topic of costume with questions on archive and (dis)embodied memory now intensely discussed within academia.

The core of the project is to establish an encounter between 6 selected artists/researchers and objects – costumes from the archive within its space and so provoke an interaction and reveal the above mentioned performativity of costume. The project seeks to apply an alternative methodological approach, drawing on phenomenology, performance studies and cognitive science, and so reflects contemporary interdisciplinary trends in the humanities. As Barbieri explains in her paper accompanying the project, "the methodology of *Encounters in the Archive* proposed the

costume, an archived object, as ‘undressed’ from the body of the performer, yet still in conversation with its viewer” (BARBIERI 2012: unpaginated). It would be interesting to see how the proposed methodology could be used in larger complexes (a set of costumes for a performance, a performance as a whole, a costume within a particular social, political or historical situation).

The group of respondents includes a photographer, a curator and fashion historian, a costume designer, a fine artist, and a fashion designer. The costumes that the participants encounter were selected according to their individual interests. For instance, the fashion historian and curator Amy De La Haye, who has researched extensively Coco Chanel’s fashion work, is looking at Chanel’s design La Perouse for the Ballet Russes’ *Le Train Bleu*. On the other hand, Claire Christie, a costumer whose research interests lie in cut bias in costume, was confronted with original stage costumes, photographs and newspaper cuttings from the period between the 1920s and 1930s when the bias cut was used. The intention was that the participants – engaged experts – “should gain insights specifically inspired by the object in the specific moment of the encounter” (BARBIERI 2012: unpaginated). All of them reportedly made use of this experience in their following projects.

Obviously, the encounter of the project participants with ‘their’ objects is a performance on its own and as such were captured via photographs and documentary film and reflected on by D. Barbieri in her paper. The project is thus at least three-fold (webpage/documentary, exhibition, and academic paper) with all parts forming a complementary puzzle. It should be noted that before (or without) reading Barbieri’s paper, one can find it slightly difficult to learn something about costume and its agency from the selected fragments of the encounters as presented on the web and in the documentary.

Especially the film, seventeen minutes long, with its structure turns one’s attention from costume to the archive in spite of the fact that we get to see the beautiful rare costumes as well as glimpses of the participants’ reactions to them. Archives as spaces with objects where human memories are contained and confined, invoking one’s imagination of *those many potential stories to be told*, are indeed a fascinating topic being continually explored by variety of thinkers. This film gives a strikingly romantic/nostalgic vision of the archive, constructing the ‘aura’ of the vast space ‘filled with memories’ by means of long close-ups that show seemingly endless rows of folders (where one could possibly get lost and wander for hours or days), music (the spectator’s emotions are being stirred by the plaintive tones of ‘cello) and editing:

it uses ‘fade in–fade out’ effects of individual close-ups combined with ‘the voice of the archive’ – Kate Dorney, the curator of the performance collection listing the archives’ holdings in numbers. That information is also repeated in the form of subtitles running across the screen. At one point the curator admits the archives are often very difficult to access. This is where the camera gains its power in uncovering and, in a way, making accessible spaces that are commonly only open to a certain very limited group of people.

The strength of this project, however, rests in the fact that it draws attention to the importance of costume in constructing the performer’s body in space and elaborates the ways costume can be incorporated into contemporary critical discourse. As such, it is welcomed by everyone engaged within the field of costume and performance design.

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Barbora Leštáková |
Ivan R. V. Rumánek. *Japonská dráma nó: žáner vo vývoji [Japanese Noh Drama: Genre in Development]*

Bratislava: Veda, vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2010. 459 pp.

Dr. Ivan R. V. Rumánek, currently assistant professor at the Japanese Studies Centre at Masaryk University, received his Ph.D in Linguistics at Cornelius University in Bratislava. He specializes in Japanese language, theatre, culture and religion. He is also working on other Ph.D research on Japanese theatre at the Department of the Languages and Cultures of Japan and Korea at the University of London.

His monograph *Japanese Noh Drama: Genre in Development* is aimed at many different aspects of Japanese traditional Noh Drama with a focus on its development throughout the centuries.

The book is divided into three main chapters: Noh as living inheritance of Japanese culture, and both Noh drama and *Fūshikaden* in Slovak translation.