

Introduction

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Despite being eminently visible among the things that are visible, both on stage and on screen, costume lurks in invisibility. As Paola Bignami is quick to point out, “the dramatic text” — together with the screenplay — “habitually remains silent about costume, leaving actors, directors, and costume designers the task of transforming the unsaid into visible matter” (our translation). Paradoxically, clothing made for the actor on stage, that spectacular object called costume, is so insistently visible as to become invisible, so much so that “for centuries [...] it is not even mentioned.”

In fact, critical theatrical and film literature rarely show any interest in costume. Within performance studies, costume has frequently remained overshadowed by scenography or direction, as Aoife Monks maintains in *The Actor in Costume*.¹ And despite the centrality of visual spectacle to operatic performance, opera costume has long occupied a marginal position within academic scholarship. Traditional opera studies have historically privileged musicological analysis, dramaturgy, vocal performance, and authorship, often relegating costume to the status of ancillary decoration rather than recognizing it as a crucial component of meaning-making.

At the same time, while the intersection of opera and film spans a wide range of genres and behaviors, and the remediations of the operatic spectacle have become the subject of recent investigations,² little space is given to the study of costume. With a few exceptions, such as Bruna Niccoli’s groundbreaking research in this field (2014; 2018).³

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1. Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
2. Giulia Carluccio and Stefania Rimini, “Media Opera: ‘A Riveder le Stelle’ tra Scena Virtuale e Regia Televisiva.” *La Valle dell’Eden*, no. 43 (2024), 5–12. Cf. Joseph Attard, *Opera Cinema: A New Cultural Experience* (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2024).
3. See Bruna Niccoli, “Vestire l’Opera nell’Ottocento: Il Costume d’Arte Italiano nel Confronto Europeo.” In *Fashioning Opera and Musical Theatre: Stage Costume from late Renaissance to 1900* (Venezia: Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2014), 203–24; “Il Costume di Scena. Il ‘Fantastico’ Patrimonio Archivistico Italiano.” *ZoneModa Journal*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (2018), 27–41.

As for fashion studies, only recently have they begun to engage seriously with the operatic stage as a site of sartorial experimentation and cultural production.⁴ This relative neglect has contributed to the fragmentation of archival preservation and critical discourse surrounding costume practices, obscuring the labor, craftsmanship, and aesthetic innovation embedded in operatic dress.

Yet, as Sofia Pantouvaki and Peter McNeil's fundamental collection *Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods* shows,⁵ costumes do not merely illustrate narratives; they shape corporeality, mediate historical and cultural identities, and participate actively in the construction of operatic worlds. In this context, the goal of this issue of *ZoneModa Journal*, entitled *Fashioning Opera. Stage and Screen Costumes Across Cultures*, is to make them visible. To this aim, it explores the dynamic intersections between costume, performance, and cultural imagination across operatic traditions and their visual reinterpretations. Moving between theatre stages, cinematic screens, and performers' wardrobes, the contributions gathered here investigate how costume functions not merely as ornament or historical reconstruction, but as a critical language through which identities, narratives, and political imaginaries are negotiated.

By bringing together perspectives from fashion studies, performance studies, celebrity culture, and media studies, this issue seeks to foreground costume as an active agent in the construction of operatic meaning across diverse cultural contexts. Opera costume emerges as a site of translation between music, body, and spectacle — capable of mediating between local traditions and global circulations.

The essays in this collection address a wide geographical and methodological spectrum, examining how stage and screen costumes articulate questions of gender, exoticism, nationalism, craftsmanship, and technological innovation. Particular attention is devoted to the dialogue between fashion and performance industries, revealing how costume design continuously reshapes the boundaries between haute couture, theatrical practice, and audiovisual media. This dialogue creates a synergy between the globalization of taste, certain cosmopolitan-inflected practices of consumption, and an apparently antithetical phenomenon: rooted, localized tailoring practices. At a moment in which opera increasingly circulates through digital platforms and global audiences, *Fashioning Opera* proposes costume as a privileged lens through which to reconsider the cultural afterlives of opera and the enduring power of dress in staging emotion, identity, and collective memory.

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4. See Helena Matheopoulos, *Fashion Designers at the Opera* (New York & London: Thames & Hudson, 2011).

5. Peter McNeil and Sofia Pantouvaki, *Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods* (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

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