

# Costume and Research in Finland

National-level research seminar on Costume Design and related fields

**A meeting of researchers based in Finland**

**Thursday, 11 June 2026**

**Seminar at 9:30 – 17:00**

**Book Launch at 17:30 – 19:00**

Väre building, Otaniementie 14, Room F101

Aalto University, Otaniemi campus, Espoo

(Aalto University metro station, exit A: Otaniementie)

The seminar is organised by:  
***Costume in Focus*** Research Group  
Department of Film  
School of Arts, Design and Architecture  
Aalto University



Seminar Chair

Sofia Pantouvaki, PhD  
Professor of Costume Design for Theatre & Film  
Department of Film  
Aalto University



**Aalto University**

# Programme

9:00-9:30

**Registration**

9:30-9:45

**Welcome & Introduction**

Sofia Pantouvaki, Professor of Costume Design, Aalto University

## Session 1 COSTUME AND REPRESENTATION

**Chair:** Heini Granberg, Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

9:45-10:00

**Joanna Weckman**

Doctor of Arts (DA), Performance Costume Researcher, Costume Designer  
*Representations of ethnic minorities and people of color (PoC) in the Finnish National Theatre's children's theatre performances 1902-1969*

10:00-10:15

**Mari Kosunen,**

Doctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki  
*National costumes and 19th century folk costumes in Finnish visual arts*

10:15-10:30

**Sanna Levo**

Costume and Set Designer  
*Designing Representation: Costume, Character, and Context*

10:30-11:00

**Discussion**

11:00-11:30

**Coffee break**

## Session 2 COSTUME AND IDENTITIES

**Chair:** Ingvill Fosshem, Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

11:30-11:45

**Meme Korhonen**

Costume Designer  
*SKIRT-ART-WORK: On Costume Design, Femininity and a Film*

11:45-12:00

**Hugo Enkenberg**

Costume and Set Designer, Prop Maker  
*Animatronic and Puppet Characters: Visuality of Aliveness and the Materiality of Artificial Skin*

12:00-12:15

**Alyssa Ridder**

Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University  
*Fitting in: Re-fashioning costume practice in virtual reality*

12:15-12:45

**Discussion**

12:45 – 14:00

**Lunch break (at participants' own cost)**

### Session 3 COSTUME AND COMMUNITY

**Chair:** Sofia Pantouvaki, Professor of Costume Design, Aalto University

- 14:00-14:15**      **Charlotte Østergaard**  
Artistic Researcher (PhD), Malmö Theatre Academy / Lund University,  
Textile Artist and Costume Designer  
*Crafting Relational We's*
- 14:15-14:30**      **Nikolas Kanavaris**  
PhD Candidate, Marie-Curie Fellow, Hasselt University  
*Costuming in Participatory Urban Planning. Pukkelpop's urbanism on the N74 road axis*
- 14:30-14:45**      **Nadia Malik**  
Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University  
*'People Work' as Costume Pedagogy*
- 14:45-15:15**      **Discussion**
- 15:15-15:45**      **Coffee break**

### Session 4 COSTUME AND BODIES

**Chair:** Susanna Suurla, Lecturer in Costume Design, Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

- 15:45-16:00**      **Zuzu Hudek**  
Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University  
*COSTUME ACTIVATION FOR ALL: Inclusive, cross-disciplinary methods for theatre training and practice*
- 16:00-16:15**      **Suvi Hänninen**  
Costume Designer  
*Costume Materiality and the Performer's Body in Dialogue through Affordances*
- 16:15-16:30**      **Rike Zöllner**  
Doctoral Candidate, Research Assistant, Hochschule für Gestaltung  
*Reclaiming spectacle through costume dramaturgy*
- 16:30-17:00**      **Discussion**

### BOOK LAUNCH AND RECEPTION

Presentation of the new research monograph:

*Dress in Auschwitz: Clothing and Survival in the Holocaust* (Bloomsbury, 2026)

- 17:30**              **Welcome greeting**  
Paula Hohti, Professor of Art and Culture History, Aalto University
- 17:40**              **Book presentation**  
Sofia Pantouvaki, Author, Professor of Costume Design, Aalto University
- 18:00**              **Wine reception**

## Session 1

### **Joanna Weckman**

Doctor of Arts (DA), Performance Costume Researcher, Costume Designer

# Representations of ethnic minorities and people of color (POC) in the Finnish National Theatre's children's theatre performances 1902–1969

My presentation introduces my recent post-doctoral study which examines the history of representation of ethnic minority and people of color (PoC) in children's plays performed at the Finnish National Theatre. The focus is on the means that were used in the construction of ethnicity, especially those related to the appearance of the performers, such as costumes and make-up. During this study, several of the surviving costumes for the children's plays were identified and analysed for the first time and will be discussed in this presentation. By focusing on a previously unexplored genre of theatre, I highlight some of the values and attitudes in early 20th century children's theatre. The study was carried out in collaboration with Theatre Museum Helsinki between 2023 and 2025 and was funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

### **Biography**

Joanna Weckman has a Doctor of Arts (DA) from Aalto University's School of Arts, Design and Architecture and is an independent performance costume researcher, lecturer, and costume designer. Her research specialises in the history of stage and film costume and the costume design profession in Finland.

# Session 1

## Mari Kosunen

Doctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki

# National costumes and 19th century folk costumes in Finnish visual arts

This study examines how Finnish national costumes and 19th century folk costumes are seen in Finnish visual art. Finnish arts have not previously been studied from the perspective of costume tradition and this study increases knowledge of cultural tradition and our relationship to it. One of the tasks of art education is to increase knowledge of culture. In this study, 137 works containing national costumes or their prototypes were found and divided into four groups: history painting, genre painting, Karelianism, and contemporary art. The meanings of national costumes and folk costumes in visual arts were also interpreted and thirteen themes were found. National costumes and their prototypes in visual arts have served as symbols of an agenda or political message, served as a research tool for who we are and what our history is, and have reflected and questioned issues of Finnishness or femininity. The changes in the visibility of national costumes and folk costumes over time were also examined. National costumes and their prototypes appeared most frequently in visual art from the 1860s, when Finland gained independence, until the 1920s, and after that there was a long break in their visibility.

## Biography

Mari Kosunen is a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki, studying the natural dyes of historical rya rugs. Kosunen has worked in the BioColour, TRACTion and Colour4CRAFTS natural dye research projects. Kosunen is also a crafts teacher and recently graduated as an art educator from Aalto University. Kosunen works as a guide and workshop instructor for the Architecture and Design Museum and has a 20 year background in the fashion industry.

## Session 1

### Sanna Levo

Costume and Set Designer

# Designing Representation: Costume, Character, and Context

This presentation explores how representation operates within costume design, emphasizing that representation concerns how identities, cultures, and histories are portrayed or omitted. In character creation, costume embodies representation by communicating who a character is and what they signify to an audience. Designers act as interpreters and visual storytellers, expressing ideologies, making histories visible, and shaping or challenging perceptions of identity. Representation is never neutral, and costume choices can signal class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, and power. Designers must critically examine their assumptions and understand how their work may reinforce or resist dominant narratives. Ethical responsibility is central, as audiences may encounter unfamiliar or under-represented experiences through performance. Accurate, research-based portrayals are especially important for marginalized groups, avoiding stereotypes and clichés while supporting nuanced character development. Costume functions differently across theatre and film yet always operates as a language conveying meaning. The practice requires reflection, listening, and inquiry. Creating a respectful, open environment encourages discussion of complex issues such as identity, politics, and inequality. Ultimately, costume design combines creativity with responsibility, calling for informed, thoughtful, and courageous practitioners.

### Biography

Sanna Levo is a Helsinki-based costume and set designer whose work combines visual richness and strong dramaturgical thinking. Levo has created over 60 costume and set designs that have been seen at Kansallisteatteri, Q-teatteri, and numerous independent productions. She is particularly interested in questions of representation and the construction of immersive worlds.

## Session 2

### Meme Korhonen

Costume Designer

## SKIRT-ART-WORK: On Costume Design, Femininity and a Film

This presentation introduces the results of my 2025 study that examines femininity through the costume design process for the science fiction short film *Memorabilia* (directed by Roosa Vuokkola, 2025) from the perspective of a queer costume designer. The study discusses how androcentrism, the preference towards male and masculine, can affect both the artistic and social aspects of our work in the historically female dominated field of costume design. One of the aims of the study was to find means to represent femininity in the costumes of *Memorabilia*'s all-female cast, diverging from negative female character tropes within the science fiction genre. These tropes were identified and analysed by utilizing theoretical frameworks influential to contemporary conversations on femininity and gender, particularly in relation to dress and self-presentation. During the research process, the theme 'skirt' arose to carry through many historical conversations on femininity and dress. The study also examines femininity in the social aspects of costume design by discussing feminized labour, and how costume's history as a female dominated field affects the costume designer's status, tasks, norms, and methods. It also articulates personal wishes and aspirations for future work in costume in the film industry from the perspective of a designer at the start of their career.

### Biography

Meme Korhonen is a Finnish queer costume designer and a recent graduate from Aalto University. Their costume design is influenced by a professional background as a seamstress and a lifelong enthusiasm towards art, performance, and storytelling. During their bachelor studies, Korhonen minored in film history, taking an interest in overlooked genres and female-lead films among an abundance of celebrated male directors. This interest developed into wider curiosity towards the ways politics of gender impact costume both as an art form and female dominated professional field.

## Session 2

### **Hugo Enkenberg**

Costume and Set Designer, Prop Maker

# Animatronic and Puppet Characters: Visuality of Aliveness and the Materiality of Artificial Skin

This presentation highlights the visual qualities that were found to enhance the perception of aliveness, believability, and approachability in artificial skin: a topic discussed in great detail in the study, *Animatronic and Puppet Characters: Visuality of Aliveness and the Materiality of Artificial Skin*. The topic is situated on the cross-disciplinary intersection of costume design, special effects makeup, prosthetics, puppetry, and animatronics, and it reflects the ongoing resurgence of practical effects and material-based character creation alongside digital workflows. Furthermore, this is a topic central to the endlessly fascinating and challenging task of both character designers, with recreation of the human form, and creature designers, with a boundlessly vast and creative playing field. The presentation touches on the extensive artistic portion of the study, which consisted of the design and realization of an animatronic/puppet head, with a focus on examining the challenges of achieving high realism. The study used silicone as the skin material, and alongside its direct visual qualities, the presentation also briefly discusses its haptic qualities, which have a great impact on the movement of the material.

### **Biography**

Hugo Enkenberg is a Finnish costume designer, set designer and prop maker. With a particular interest in special materials and digital techniques, he graduated from a Costume Design Master's programme in 2025 and has worked as a freelancer in the field since.

## Session 2

### **Alyssa Ridder**

Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

## Fitting in: Re-fashioning costume practice in virtual reality

Virtual reality affords new potential for artistic research in costume design. My practice-based research explores how meaning is made between virtual costume materials and the physical bodies that “wear” them. While traditional costumes are designed for the third-person point-of-view, my research focuses on the first-person, embodied experience of costume. I am developing a costume practice which uses virtual reality technology to invite participants into the meaning-making process. In this presentation, I share how the virtual medium resonates with costume research on both the material and practical level. The virtual remediation, or “re-fashioning” of costume design into virtual reality, affords anyone with a willingness to wear a virtual reality headset into my research practice. It also affords the costume researcher to critically reflect on costume practice in both the traditional and virtual mediums.

### **Biography**

Alyssa Ridder’s virtual costume design praxis is rooted in 15 years of international experience in costume design and production for live performance. She is a leading innovator and educator integrating digital tools with traditional costume design processes. Alyssa is currently pursuing doctoral research at Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland.

## Session 3

### Charlotte Østergaard

Artistic Researcher (PhD), Malmö Theatre Academy / Lund University,  
Textile Artist and Costume Designer

## Crafting Relational We's

The artistic PhD research, *Crafting Material Bodies*, explores co-creative costume processes across artistic and participatory contexts. Initially, the project sought to define distinctions between collaboration and co-creation. However, this pursuit gradually dissolved. Rather than stabilizing definitions, the research unfolded as an exploration of how relational realms emerge through shared practices with costume and textile materials. Across three artistic projects, humans and more-than-humans engaged as co-creating partners in what I term communal doings. Here, connecting costumes became active agents in shaping encounters, attunements, and collective formations. The research highlights how situatedness—bodies, material, duration, location, and context—crafts these relational realms, and how co-creation is inseparable from the emergence of relational “we’s.” While the thesis leaves the question of co-creation open, subsequent reflection has allowed me to reframe it. I propose the Danish word *fællesskabelse* (commoning) as a more precise articulation of the processes at stake—foregrounding ongoing, situated, and shared world—making of a temporal textile—relational creative communities. In the presentation this concept will be further unfolded, pointing toward future artistic and research practices.

### Biography

Charlotte Østergaard is an artist-researcher working across textile art, costume, performance, and participatory practice. With over 30 years of experience, her PhD *Crafting Material Bodies* (Lund University) explores co-creation as relational, material practice. She investigates how textile encounters shape collective bodies, fostering shared, sensory, and more-than-human forms of commoning.

## Session 3

### Nikolas Kanavaris

PhD Candidate, Marie-Curie Fellow, Hasselt University

# Costuming in Participatory Urban Planning: Pukkelpop's urbanism on the N74 road axis

This presentation aims to reflect on urban transformation through costume as a participatory and performative method. The regional plan to improve the N74 road axis in Limburg, Belgium, is approached through the annual vehicular closure of a segment of the road for the Pukkelpop festival. Even though Pukkelpop is a highly commercialised (Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011) music event, it creates a temporary zone of gathering, festivity and alternative sociality (Anderton, 2019; Stevens & Shin, 2012). The research argues that on N74 and in the area outside the festival's gates, "grotesque costumes" (Barbieri, 2017) subvert the street's normal life. Portable food stalls, camping equipment, shared clothing, and nudity appear in the street, carried, worn or revealing bodies, shaping a body-object entanglement that creates performative opportunities for encounters, celebration, laughter and connection. The carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) "upside-down" is performed through various body objects-events (Hannah, 2014) that render the street "otherwise" in three interrelated scales: public, private, and personal. Festival attendees, organisers, and volunteers, following various "costuming" (Hann, 2016) practices, highlight the micro-material-affective arrangements that reorient bodies (Hann, 2023) and, by extension, the meaning of place. By examining Pukkelpop's transformation on N74 through the lens of costume (Pantouvaki, 2024), we can trace how embodied (Barbieri, 2020), mobile microinfrastructures enacted through costume practices function as bottom-up participatory interventions (Stevens et al., 2024) that activate space, challenge conventional planning, and suggest new models for equitable urban transformation.

### Biography

Nikolas Kanavaris (he/him) is an architect, performance designer, and researcher working at the intersection of participatory design, spatial planning, and performative practices. He holds degrees in Architectural Engineering and architectural theory from NTUA, with further specialisation in scenography at the NTG. He is a founding member of the BpM cultural group, where he works as a set and costume designer.

## Session 3

### Nadia Malik

Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

## ‘People Work’ as Costume Pedagogy

This research investigates costume pedagogy through ‘knowledge exchange’ (KE), an area of higher education arts and culture-related practice that promotes mutually beneficial learning through industry-academia partnerships. An emerging area of focus, KE can be seen as an extension of work-integrated learning (WIL), defined as ‘an educational approach involving three parties - the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder - consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum’ (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38). WIL aligns with the general collaborative signature pedagogies of art and design (Shreeve et al. 2010) and is commonly arranged as a continuing crucial part of costume curricula. However, there needs to be a clearer understanding around the aspects of costume learning that occur in WIL, to assist students and teachers to unpack its value and develop WIL into KE. This paper draws on a series of 16 interviews conducted with students and host-providers about their costume WIL (‘placement’, ‘industry experience’, ‘internship’ etc). These interviews aimed to explore the nature of the student-practitioner relationship by drawing out what kinds of costume knowledges are learned in a working environment, and how. The interviewee experiences span 30 years, 7 countries, 3 continents, BA and MA study, independent practitioner to national host venue, and range from 3 weeks to 12 months in duration. The interviews elicited personal reflections on what the interviewees considered to be the most valuable aspects of costume learning in work environments, namely, discursive elements, interpersonal exchange, and the development of soft skills, or ‘people work’. Drawing on the research findings, I suggest that an essential, or perhaps the essential, element of costume practice is ‘people work’, and that the personal attributes found in soft skills are critical professional costume competences that costume higher education may be underserving in the ongoing development of industry–academia communities of practice. In doing so, I propose approaches that may enrich future costume curricula.

### Biography

Nadia Malik is a costume designer and has exhibited and curated costume events and conferences. She is the Performance Department Head at London College of Fashion, UAL, and a Reviews Editor for the journal *Studies in Costume & Performance*. Her doctoral studies focus on academia-industry exchange through experimental pedagogical practice.

## Session 4

### Zuzu Hudek

Doctoral Candidate, Aalto University

# COSTUME ACTIVATION FOR ALL: Inclusive, cross-disciplinary methods for theatre training and practice

This practice-based doctoral research investigates costume activation methodologies that can be adapted to multipurpose, accessible training for a broader constituency. The focus is on students at early stages, amateurs, and practitioners from non-design fields, who often feel uncertain about integrating costume, materials, and objects into their creative process. The aim of the research is to find pedagogical strategies that support the creative potential of costume-centered methods in non-costume-focused training. The research aligns with the growing discourse on Costume Agency, which examines how costumes produce meaning, influence action, and shape both body and identity in performance. Drawing on Susan Marshall's notion of the "Insubordinate Costume," a garment that simultaneously functions as costume, set, and performance, this study investigates how such approaches can be extended through collaboration with performance makers. The paper shares findings from a series of workshops conducted between November and December 2025. These workshops lasted a total of six hours spread over three days. Participants were students from the Dance Theatre and Performance Department in Bratislava, including dancers and choreographers. The workshop activities aimed to empower participants to explore how materials, costumes, and objects shape and influence their movement vocabulary. They examined how costumes can highlight minimalistic movement and how physical limitations imposed by materials or garments can become a source of creative inspiration. The workshop revealed a clear need to train dance students to enrich their creative process through carefully structured activities focused on working with materials, objects, and costumes. The presentation demonstrates that the dramaturgical potential of costumes, materials, and objects can only be fully realized when all theatre and dance makers are consciously aware of their performative capacities.

### Biography

Zuzu Hudek is a theatre designer and lecturer, currently a doctoral candidate at Aalto University. Her designs are often experimental, employing unconventional materials and functioning as independent art objects. She combines professional practice with leading creative workshops. Her work has been presented at CC 24, WCiA24, and WSD 2025.

## Session 4

### Suvi Hänninen

Costume Designer

# Costume Materiality and the Performer's Body in Dialogue through Affordances

The presentation introduces the concept of affordances in relation to costume materiality through dialogical reading. The study is part of a broader research project by costume designer Suvi Hänninen, which includes three performers who created movements inspired by a costume designed specifically for the project. The theoretical framework is the concept of affordances. Psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) first coined the term to refer to possibilities for action. The presentation conceptualizes affordances as dialogical and transactional rather than simply relational, suggesting that the components between the performer and the material influence actions dynamically. The materiality of the costume informs the performer's body through a reciprocal exchange in which agentic powers come into play, leading to the conditions for subsequent actions. The research highlights that a variety of affordances are activated in the interaction between the performer and the costume. The main conclusion is that articulating affordances can reveal ways to communicate the agentic powers of costumes. This articulation aids performers in discovering significant ways to enhance movement in interaction with the costume. The research indicates that affordances emerging from personal experiences serve as valuable resources for collaborating with costumes, relevant to both designers and performers.

### Biography

Suvi Hänninen is a costume designer specializing in garments that facilitate movement. She has been active in the performing arts since 2003, and now mainly designs stage garments for Finnish pop artists. Her designs are deeply grounded in material exploration and she personally crafts most of her creations.

## Session 4

### Rike Zöllner

Doctoral Candidate, Research Assistant, Hochschule für Gestaltung

# Reclaiming spectacle through costume dramaturgy

Through a reflection on costume's entanglements with the spectacular, this presentation introduces my doctoral research into contemporary costume dramaturgy. Analysing contemporary performances and informed by art history and theatre studies, the dissertation examines how costume functions dramaturgically rather than decoratively. Understood as a dynamic and processual interaction of material and body, costume generates its own dramaturgy, one that directly results from costume-thinking (Pantouvaki, 2015). Rather than imposing a controlling framework, it shapes dramaturgy as an embodied, iterative artistic practice with political stakes. This doesn't mean however that costume, to produce critical work, needs to shed its decorative and somewhat seductive powers. Simultaneously semiotic and phenomenological, costume's spectacular effects expose it as a technology of the body (Brandstetter 2020, Hann 2023), one that is capable of orchestrating multiple stage elements. Assessing works of Lia Rodrigues and Ola Maciejewska, I argue that costume can effectively and affectively employ spectacular techniques to support artistic expression, and in doing so, counterpoints the lingering anxieties of spectacle as a shallow and excessive mode of production. Instead, costume's complications of entangling both semiotic *and* synaesthetic categories, of tangible object and event, broadens aesthetic reception by inviting both individual contemplation and collective engagement.

### Biography

Rike Zöllner works with costume for companies including Tanztheater Wuppertal, Scottish Dance Theatre, Malmö Opera, and Candoco. Past projects include collaborations with Dimitris Papaioannou, Tim Etchells and Alesandra Seutin. Currently a PhD researcher in costume dramaturgy, she works as research assistant in art history and holds degrees in Literature, Performing Arts (BA) and Costume (MA).

The seminar is organized by:



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