

# **Somatic movement and costume: a practical, investigative project**

## **Abstract**

This article is an introduction to the possibilities of the field of costume and somatic movement. It is a reflective account of my first stage of research in this area, which culminated in a workshop presentation at the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference at Coventry University. The project centred on costumes created and designed in collaboration with Sandra Arroniz Lacunza and Carolina Rieckhof (visual artists and costume designers with an MA in Costume Design for Performance from the London College of Fashion). The aim was to consider how costumes can link internal sensory and imaginary experiences to our perceptions. This article traces the background of the project, its research methodologies and structure, the costumes designed and experimented with in the workshops and performances, and considers the project's potential applications to performance, creative process and dance training.

## **Key Words**

somatic movement, somatic costume, somatic performance, somatic education

## **Introduction**

Costumes have been under-utilized as a tool in somatic practices<sup>1</sup>. This project aims to create bridges between somatic practices, costume design and performance, thereby instigating new possibilities in all of these fields. It hopes to offer new methodological approaches for somatic movement education; to shed new light on socio-culturally informed psycho-physical habits; and to offer new ways of moving, being and performing.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use the term 'somatic', following Hanna (e.g. Hanna 1988), to refer to bodily practices and perspectives on embodiment that give attention and value to the subjective experiencing of the whole self and its perceptions, and emphasize the role of the body in that experiencing. The kinaesthetic sense - our perception of the body and its movements - is of obvious importance in somatic perspectives defined in this way, but not to the exclusion of our other senses (vision, hearing etc.).

In our daily-life observations, we see how what we wear affects the way we move and how we are perceived. If I wear high heels, for example, I walk in an entirely different way than if I wear boots. My experience of my feet, and indeed of my whole body, is different; I create a quite different 'character', and the basis for my interactions with my environment and with others around me also changes. This project attempts to explore these kinds of differences in depth by using insights and approaches drawn from somatic practices – particularly, Skinner Releasing Technique, Suprato Suryodarmo's Amerta Movement and Scaravelli yoga.

### **Context**

Dance has always incorporated costume, as a stimulus for choreographic process, as a scenographic element, in the creation of character and in support of a particular artistic aesthetic or style. Across different cultures, from ballet to Balinese dance, dance-training is typically done in attire similar to that used in performance, and influences what kind of movement is possible. Taking a glance at the last century, there is already a rich legacy of performance companies and performing artists working collaboratively with costume and fashion design. To select a few examples: as early as the 1890s the French Lumière brothers created *Danse Serpentine II* as a film and performance: 'the popular Loie Fuller enjoyed immense fame at the turn of the century, creating a "living sculpture" as she whirled in her elaborately constructed Robe' (Royal Academy of Arts 2011). In the 1950s, the American choreographer Alwin Nikolai used costume to support his 'decentralization' theory - 'depersonalizing dancers through costume and design' so that 'they could be liberated from their own forms' (PBS 2011). William Forsythe's *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991) involved collaboration with Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake, and Merce Cunningham's *Scenario* (1997) with Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons (Fukai, Vinken, Frankel and Kurino 2010: 16).

This project, however, gives particular attention to the kinaesthetic experiences

involved in wearing different kinds of costumes, and intentionally influences and enhances these experiences by the use of selected exercises drawn from the earlier-mentioned somatic practices. Consequently, the movement and aesthetic of the performance work arising from this approach derives from the ensuing somatic experiences of the costumes, rather than the costumes being designed to enhance an aesthetic already established in advance.

## **Background**

The initial impetus for this project came from my experience of living in Java in 2007-08, and witnessing and learning traditional Javanese dance forms. I noticed a quality of 'containment' in the movement of many Javanese people, both in daily life and in dancing and performing, which I could clearly see and sense, but found I was unable to embody for myself - until I tried on the traditional Javanese dance costume. The costume itself created a kinaesthetic experience of 'containment' in the mid to lower body: a sarong tightly wrapped around my legs and pelvis, held in place by a *stagen* (sash). The costume helped me to find an experiential understanding of the feeling state of 'containment' inherent in the movement I was seeing around me.

This experience inspired new reflections on the role of costume in work as a performer, dance/theatre-maker and teacher. Over the previous twelve years, costume had often been a key element in my performance work. More recently it had been integrated into my teaching of independent performance and somatic movement workshops for professional artists. I began to wonder how costumes could act as 'portals of perception'<sup>2</sup>, supporting people to find gestures and movement qualities that might otherwise be missing from their repertoire.

In pursuing this question, I started to collaborate with costume designers Sandra Arroniz Lacunza and Carolina Rieckhof (visual artists and costume designers, both graduates from MA in Costume Design for Performance at the London College of

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<sup>2</sup> Hubert Godard - an internationally renowned Rolfer®, movement teacher and researcher - used this term to describe one of his workshops on perception and movement (McHose 2006: 32).

Fashion). Thanks to their unending support and creativity, we conceived and created a series of 'somatic costumes', designed to offer enhanced awareness of particular possibilities for experiencing the embodied self, working in conjunction with practices and principles drawn from the somatic approaches that I use in my work.

The somatic approaches that we have drawn upon are primarily Skinner Releasing Technique, Amerta Movement and Scaravelli yoga. My methods of using imagery, touch and music to support somatic movement often draw on Skinner Releasing Technique, and I have directly applied some Skinner Releasing images to the costume work in this project. Amerta Movement has inspired my methodologies in working with somatic awareness in relationship to the environment and to other people. My use of somatic principles relating to weight and space orientation, and of anatomical imagery and awarenesses, draws on my practice of Scaravelli yoga, as taught by Giovanni Felicioni. I have also been influenced by Hubert Godard's tonic function theory (McHose 2006) and Sandra & Matthew Blakeslee's concepts of body-mind maps and peripersonal space<sup>3</sup> (Blakeslee & Blakeslee 2007).

### **Outline of the Project's Process**

The project began with a period of discussion within the collaborative team to include playful creation and trying-out a variety of make-shift costumes out of inexpensive or 'found' materials. This culminated in two full-day workshops in which participants from dance, theatre, somatic movement and art backgrounds were invited to explore moving in the costumes to a variety of scores and stimuli drawn from the above-mentioned somatic practices. The workshops were held at the London Buddhist Arts Centre in Bethnal Green, London and documented through photography, video, drawing and writing by both the participants, costume designers and myself as facilitator.

3 A term used by neuroscientists to describe the invisible, changing volume of space around the body that expands and contracts, depending upon one's actions and perceptions: 'Your self does not end where your flesh ends, but suffuses and blends with the world, including other beings. Thus when you ride a horse...your body maps and the horse's body maps are blended in shared space....Your brain also faithfully maps the space beyond your body when you enter it using tools. Take hold of a long stick and tap it on the ground. As far as your brain is concerned, your hand now extends to the tip of that stick. Its length has been incorporated into your personal space' (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 3-4).

I also used one of the costumes ('Pointy Hat' - see below) as a basis for devising two structured improvisations which were performed, respectively, at the Centre for Creative Collaboration in London (as part of the symposium for Participatory Research and Learning in the Performing Arts), and at 'Stranger than Fiction', a platform for improvised performance work at Siobhan Davies Studios. In the former, the performers were drawn from the conference participants, and both performers and spectators wore the hats. Both performances involved a written score incorporating invitations to the performer to respond both to their sensations arising from wearing the costume and to the material drawn from somatic movement practices. Esbjörn Wettermark, an ethno-musicologist and musician, improvised clarinet music also based partly on imagery from somatic practices.



*'The Order of the Hats' Performance, Stranger Than Fiction, Siobhan Davies Studio, May 28, 2011.  
Photo credit: Sandra Arroniz Lacunza*

Building on the experience of these events, a workshop was then offered as part of

the Dance and Somatic Practice Conference in July 2011, involving two of the costumes ('Hula Hoop Skirt' and 'Bin Bag Skirt' - see below). After the workshop, all conference participants were invited to try on any of the costumes and, after the experience of wearing them, could then witness or participate in an open improvisation while wearing one of the Pointy Hats.



*Dance & Somatic Practices Conference- 'trying on' costumes at Coventry University, July 9, 2011. Photo credit: Christian Kipp*

### **What the Costumes Are and How People Experience Them**

At the outset, we decided to devise costumes of three different kinds:

- 'Inside' costumes, that increase and influence the wearer's kinaesthetic awareness of certain parts of their body, i.e. their awareness of their body from the inside;
- 'Outside' costumes, designed to heighten awareness of the form of the body in space, i.e. in the space outside the wearer's body; and
- 'Space in between' costumes, which enhanced the wearer's awareness of the space between their body and the costume.

This section describes the costumes we created in each of these categories, and outlines some of the somatic movement exercises applied with each costume. It also reports some of the workshop participants' experiences in three areas: the wearer's experience of themselves, their relationship with others, and their relationship to their environment.

### 'Inside' costumes

For the 'inside' costumes, we chose to focus on three regions: the head, the pelvis and the feet. Two costume designs were created for each region, acting as paired opposites around a specific theme (weight, quality, size, texture, material, dynamic).

#### 'Inside': Pelvis: Hula Hoop Skirt and Bin Bag Skirt



*Workshop at Dance & Somatic Practices Conference at Coventry University, July 9, 2011.  
Photo credit: Christian Kipp*

For the pelvis, the theme was weight. We created costumes we called Hula Hoop Skirt, designed to give a sense of weight and orientation towards the ground, and Bin Bag Skirt, intended to create experiences of lightness and orientation towards space and sky. Bin Bag Skirt was a layered skirt composed of twelve to fifteen large black inflated bin bags attached with string to an elastic band wrapped around the pelvis at the hips. Hula Hoop Skirt was made of yellow tubing tied into a ring of a radius of about two and a half feet, attached at the pelvis and suspended from there to shin level by four black straps. The hula hoop was weighted by the attachment of four socks filled with rice. The skirt was reminiscent of the framework inside a hoop skirt.

Before putting on the costumes, workshop participants were given somatic material to increase their awareness of their pelvis. This included instructions of walking while feeling their pubic bone, tail bone, iliac crests, sit bones through touch, and noticing how these shifts of awareness affected the movement of the body.

For Hula Hoop Skirt, participants' written feedback mentioned both experiences of weight, as intended, but also of rhythm, image, quality, opposition and balance. For example, one participant wrote, 'Pelvis heavy but movement engaged from circle underneath. Waves on a Sea. Pelvis like a boat floating on the sea. Back and forth. Weight centred but spread out in the circle' (Participant writing, Workshop I). For some participants, the costume became an extension of their own pelvis: 'Deep sensation of opposition...As if the skirt was the invisible continuation of your pelvic movement..Sense of spiral, infinity and of balance.' (Participant writing, Workshop I).

For Bin Bag Skirt the quality of 'air' became a central feature and theme expressed in participants' writings. For example: 'I thought I was flying for some instants'; 'Every moment becomes a big breath... BREATHE AIR WIND...The pelvis contains the wind which makes you move'; 'Hello, air, nice to meet you'; 'My hips are free free & heavy heavy with promise I fall fill I run I run fall I fall I am filled with air' (Participant writing, Workshop I).

### 'Inside': Feet : Spongy Shoes and Lentil Socks





*Costume and Somatic Movement Research Workshop, London Buddhist Arts Centre, June 12, 2011.  
Photo credit: Sandra Arroniz Lacunza*

For the feet, the theme was texture and quality. The costume 'Spongy Shoes', was created to enhance an experience of suppleness in the feet. It was inspired by imagery of spongy feet drawn from Skinner Releasing Technique. The Spongy Shoes were made of one inch thick semi-soft foam, cut into rectangular shapes of various sizes, with an elastic strap (like in flip flops) for the toes. 'Lentil Socks', by contrast, were intended to awaken the sensitivity and responsiveness of the feet, and through them the whole body, to the texture of the ground. The Lentil Socks had an inner layer of nylon sewn inside and the space between the layers was filled with dried lentils.

Once participants were wearing one or other of these types of shoes, I led them through a 'moving check-list' (body scan with images associated with certain body parts) from Skinner Releasing Technique while they shifted their weight from one foot to the other, feeling the sensations in their feet. As they brought awareness to different body parts, I encouraged them to translate the sensations of texture and quality in their feet to other parts of themselves, and allow this to become a stimulus for moving.

One participant expressed their experience of the spongy quality of the Spongy Shoes translating into their whole body by writing 'it's like my body has no bones' (Participant writing, Workshop I). Others experienced an altered sense of weight and balance: 'Drunkness, no control over my centre, feeling lazy and soft, feeling proud; but pride in its darker side'; 'the weight is on the back of the foot, rather than the front'. The shape of the shoe also had an effect: 'the form of the shoe made me more parallel' (Participant writing, Workshop I).

While many of the participants moved quite actively in the Spongy Shoes, with a bouncy quality that often took them into the air, the Lentil Socks seemed to create

more of a relationship to the ground, as one participant's writing conveyed: 'my feet are very grounded'. Another wrote: 'grounded, attached to nature...like molecules – constantly moving and reaching, taking different shapes in relation to the surrounding - BODY' (Participant writing, Workshop I). Although there were quick, sudden movements - often instigated by the feet from the rattlesnake-like sound quality of the Lentil Socks when shaken - many participants spent long periods of time moving slowly, simply walking or moving on the floor.

'Inside': Head: Balloon Hat and Pointy Hat



*Left Photo: Costume & Somatic Movement Research Workshop II at London Buddhist Arts Centre, July 1, 2011. Photo credit: Carolina Rieckhof*

*Right Photo: Improvisation Performance at Dance & Somatic Practices Conference at Coventry University, July 9, 2011. Photo credit: Christian Kipp*

For the head, one costume called the Balloon Hat was created to experience the buoyancy and volume of the skull. It was influenced by the Skinner Releasing image of 'floating skull' and 'buoyancy' as well as the word 'volume' from yoga classes with Giovanni Felicioni. This voluminous hat, about one-and-a-half feet wide and one foot high, made of stretchy Lycra material in various patterns, resembling the shape of a large molecular structure, filled with six to eight inflated balloons, was tied

around the chin like a bonnet. Another costume called the Pointy Hat was created to give an experience of the direction of the skull in space as a development of the spine as an axis - inspired by McHose and Frank's 'Cone Head exercise' from *How Life Moves* (McHose and Frank 2006: 54-55). This cone-shaped hat covered the top of the head and extended upward by about two feet. It was constructed from thick beige canvas-like material and bamboo sticks. The hat was held in place by a black elastic band and velcro wrapped around the chin.

To prepare the participants for both hat costumes, they were invited to move while sensing the weight, volume and buoyancy of their skull while it was being cradled by another participant, and then to follow their skull as they moved. For the Pointy Hat, I added the image that they had 'eyes at the very top of their Pointy Hat' as well as that 'the hat was an extension of their spine as they travelled through the space.'

Carolina Rieckhof, one of the costume designers, commented that the Balloon Hat seemed to be 'more about the body', while the Pointy Hat seemed to be 'more about the space' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). In her writing about the Pointy Hat she states 'space awareness through costume - space consciousness, exploring it through this *new body*' (Participant writing, Workshop II). Other participants in their writing described a clear directionality in the space as they moved with the Pointy Hat: 'star pointing the sky.. point here...point there.. precision spot, clear, straight forward, corners and streets.' In contrast, the Balloon Hat seemed to evoke rhythm, a 'bouncy state' with a playful quality in their movement. As one participant reported in her writing: 'melting directional guides. .embrace. embrace...the fullness of women'; and another participant, 'bouncing, merging, indulging, constant bouncing, rhythm all over... all in' (Participant writing, Workshop II).

## 'Inside': Connective Tissue: Elastic Costume



*Costume & Somatic Movement Research Workshop II at London Buddhist Arts Centre, July 1, 2011.  
Photo credit: Carolina Rieckhof*

After focusing on the previously discussed three body areas (head, pelvis, feet), I began to ask how we could create a costume that would connect them and integrate the body as a whole. I wanted this connection to be anatomically based. While reading *Anatomy Trains: Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists* by Thomas Myers (2009), I became intrigued by the pathways of connective tissue in the body. Was there a way to create a costume that followed the pathways of the connective tissue, such as the 'superficial front line', the 'superficial back line' and the 'spiral line' (Myers 2009)?

These questions inspired the Elastic Costume. We created a pattern of elastic bands of one-and-a-half inch width and Lycra material on the body following the superficial front, back and spiral lines of the connective tissue, wrapping around the legs, torso, and head to exclude the arms.

However, the costume generated unexpected results. The participants' feedback focused more on the sensation of the stretch and push of the elastic itself. Although they experienced an interconnectedness (e.g. 'when you move your feet, you can feel the effects all the way to your head'), their experiences seemed to be more

reminiscent of the muscle system. From their responses in the feedback circle, one participant said 'it was like working with a different muscle system, like an ostrich,' and another participant described the resistance and tension that the elastic creates, as activating 'the action of push' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). Again, there were different emotional responses to this experience. One woman shared how the constriction of the elastic 'made her feel uncomfortable' while another was excited by the sense of 'stretch in her own body that the costume created' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). I am curious in the future to experiment with other materials that might create more of a 'web-like' quality, both to the costume design and to the participants' movement experiences. At the same time, I would also like to explore further this link between the elastic material and the muscular system.

#### 'Outside': Arms and Legs: Body Extension Costume



*Costume & Somatic Movement Research Workshop II at London Buddhist Arts Centre, July 1, 2011.  
Photo credit: Carolina Rieckhof*

For the second category of costumes, 'Outside', we designed costumes to experience the form of the body in space - for example, the 'Body Extension Costume'. This costume was comprised of cardboard tubes attached to the wrist, elbow and shoulder joints so that they jutted out into space roughly perpendicular to the arm. These tubes were joined together by further tubing that ran roughly parallel to the arm. A similar arrangement was also created for the legs.

As expected, the joints became a prominent feature in the wearer's experience when they moved: 'Elastic Joints expression. ARTICULATION!' (Participant writing, Workshop II). One workshop participant said how wearing this costume was like 'looking from the outside how the inside works' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). At the same time, the costume also created a heightened experience of the mechanical aspects of the body: 'Extra Body, Prosthesis, Robot, Mechanical' (Participant writing, Workshop II).

### 'Space in-between': Skin: Tube Costume



*Costume & Somatic Movement Research Workshop at London Buddhist Arts Centre, July 1, 2011. Photo credit: Carolina Rieckhof*

For the third category of the 'Space in-between', we created the 'Tube Costume' to explore the space between the costume and the body. This is referred to by Japanese fashion designers, by the term 'ma'. 'To the Japanese, the superfluous “space” between the garment and the body, referred to as *asma*, is more than simply a void: it is

a rich space that possesses incalculable energy' (Fukai, Vinken, Frankel and Kurino 2010: 16). The costume was made of thick stretchy material (a cotton and Lycra blend) of varying textures sewn into a rectangular shape, twice the size of an average human body, with small openings for the legs, arms and head to emerge. Workshop participants were invited to move while 'sensing the form of the second skin or outer skin' and 'exploring the dialogue between the inner skin (person skin) and the outer skin (costume skin).'

Since our skin naturally acts as a moving, permeable boundary between our inner world (inside the body) and our outer world (outside the body), it became a metaphor for this costume and category: the Tube Costume became a 'second skin' in participants' experiences. 'A maze between pseudo skins uninhabited' and 'DOUBLE SKIN ON... EXCITE...volume, big extension, edges' (Participant writing, Workshop II). A theme of conceal and reveal also emerged. Emotional responses varied. Some participants felt pleasantly held, others felt restricted: 'cocoon'; 'relief when you take it off' and 'a gorgeous dream to come out of it' (Participant writing, Workshop II).

## **Experiences of Others and Environment**

### Costume and relationship to others

An interesting aspect of the research was how the costumes changed participants' experience not only of their own selves, but also of their relationships with others around them. Wearing the same costume often seemed to create a sense, among participants, of togetherness or likeness. I experienced this myself when performing with a Pointy Hat at the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference. As conference participants, dressed in the same kind of Pointy Hat, arrived to witness or move in the same environment, I automatically felt that we were 'of the same species'.

However, the strength of this effect seems to depend on the type of costume. For example, one participant spoke of feeling automatically 'part of the group', or as if he 'already belonged', when everyone was wearing Balloon Hats; whereas with the

Pointy Hat, he felt 'more alone' and 'like an outsider' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). For one performer in the Siobhan Davies Studios improvisation, the Pointy Hat also evoked this quality of being in isolation: 'I feel blind.... and alone' (Directors Notes). Further, a participant in the workshop referred in her writing to the Pointy Hat costume as being 'blind mice' (Participant writing, Workshop II).

More broadly, for some participants, a heightened awareness of the effects of costume on their body and movement created self-consciousness - a new awareness of how much of ourselves we may reveal through our moving bodies and how this may be highlighted or hidden by what we wear: 'Your movement usually hidden by clothes, attitude, codes, is now highlighted... Awkward exposure to others' (Participant writing, Workshop I).

There is much material to continue to explore in the terrain of costume and relationship to other. In the future, we hope to create a costume for more than one person and to explore its effects on 'peripersonal space'.

### Costume and relationship to environment

Wearing a costume also can evoke new relationships to one's environment. For example, as part of the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference, those who decided to participate in the improvisational performance (as performer or spectator) needed to journey from the Assembly Room to the Oval Space in Coventry University's Ellen Terry Building, while wearing the Pointy Hats. Many participants spoke afterwards about this journey as a key element in their experience. As they passed through corridors and stairways, their Pointy Hats would run into the environment, creating new limitations and requiring them to move in new ways. One of the principles of Suprpto Suryodarmo's Amerta Movement practice is that a new or complex environment, such as an outdoor site, can evoke a new vocabulary of non-habitual movement compared to how we may move in a familiar studio. In a similar way, a new costume can turn a familiar environment into a new one, changing one's



embodied relationship with it and the way one moves in it.

### **Reflections: How the Costumes Work**

The costumes seem to affect their wearers in three distinct ways. First - directly through the kinaesthetic sense - the material, texture, weight, form, movement of the costume itself typically creates a direct and tactile experience for wearer. For example, if the costume is heavy, the person will experience a 'heaviness' in their body.

Second, the kinaesthetic experience from the costume, triggered or merged with a visual experience. For example, in the Balloon Hat costume, participants knew and saw that the hat was filled with balloons. This image of balloons is often associated with air and with the sense of 'floating'. In fact, the Balloon Hat had weight, even if it was relatively light compared to the Pointy Hat; but this additional weight was not reflected in the participant's movement or in their writing. Instead, they had kinaesthetic experiences of lightness that must have been triggered by their visual experience of the costume. In the future, in order to understand more about the effect of the visual component of the costume on kinaesthetic experience, I would like to remove the visual experience through blindfolding participants when putting on and moving with somatic costumes.

The third way that participants seemed to be affected by the costumes was through associations not directly mediated through the kinaesthetic sense, but which nonetheless affected their experience and their movement. Thus metaphors, feelings and even philosophical questions appeared in their writing: 'I felt like a strange animal coming out of darkness to hunt' (participant wearing Bin Bag Skirt, Participant Notes, Workshop I) and 'What flows in when the foam expands after the air is expelled? Senses into the spaces to discover how to move with + against + together' (participant wearing Spongy Shoes, Participant Notes, Workshop I). The associations could be triggered by any of the five senses, including sound and smell:

'Beautiful sound of wind in the leaves or wings flapping' (participant wearing Bin Bag Skirt, Participant Notes, Workshop I). Another workshop participant described how she associated the 'plastic-smells' from the Bin Bag Skirt with 'suffocation', and how this influenced how she moved and experienced the costume (Teacher's notes, Workshop III).

It is important to note that the framework of experiencing costumes as 'paired opposites' in the category of 'Inside' was a significant aspect of participants' experiences. One participant commented on how she 'understood' the 'movement language' or 'world' of the Pointy Hat once she experienced the Balloon Hat (Teacher's notes, Workshop II). Another stated that 'one enriches the other costume [sic]' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). Experiencing contrasting costumes in pairs seemed to create another level of kinaesthetic understanding.

It is interesting to reflect on the role of kinaesthetic empathy in the effect the costumes had on wearers' relationships with each other. We may tend to feel a sense of kinship with people who wear similar costumes to us - as, perhaps, in the case of uniforms. Beyond this, however, it seems possible that when particular costumes create similar postures and ways of moving among wearers, they cause a stronger sense of commonality through encouraging a greater degree of 'mirroring'.

The somatic instructions which I gave in the workshops also played a key role in the participants' experience of the costumes. One reoccurring instruction was: 'after moving with a costume, move without the costume as if it is still there (moving with your invisible costume).' When witnessing the effects of this direction, it became quite clear that moving after removing the costume can be just as significant as moving while wearing the costume. This was especially so with the Elastic Costume. As one participant put it, the Elastic Costume was 'constricting', but after she took off the costume, she found herself 'moving in new ways which were entirely unexpected' (Participant oral feedback, Workshop I). However, participants also

made similar observations about other costumes (e.g. 'new movements appeared when you removed the hat' (participant wearing Pointy Hat, Participant oral feedback, Workshop II). This highlights how costumes that might initially appear restrictive can actually serve as catalysts for generating new movement patterns.

### **Applications: Creative Process, Performance, Dance Training and Therapeutic Benefits**

Somatic engagement with costume offers a rich resource for creative process and for performance practice in a number of ways. Firstly, it readily generates performance material, as movement with the costume awakens imagination and playfulness. As one participant describes in her writing when working with the Bin Bag Skirt, 'There is a big theatrical quality to it, at some point I gave myself a flower bouquet' (Participant writing, Workshop I). During the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference, simply inviting conference participants to try on the costumes transformed them into a group of individuals laughing and playing with all the creativity of children. If a performer becomes stuck in their own movement habits, a somatic costume may assist by stimulating other ways of moving. The performer and or performance maker can then choose to keep the costume used as part of the performance, or to remove it and keep only the movement material generated. Somatic costumes can also act as 'scores' - a framework in which to explore, create and move from.

Secondly, somatic costumes can serve as a bridge between inner somatic experiences of performers and outer form as perceived by an audience. Since they operate aesthetically as well as kinaesthetically, they tend to create a particular performance 'world'. For example, wearing a Pointy Hat may create particular kinaesthetic experiences and generate particular creative material for the performer; but at the same time, aesthetically, tall hats in the space also create a very particular spatial relationship to the environment. Thus somatic costumes can allow both the performer and audience to experience visually, in space, reflections of the

kinaesthetic experiences a performer is working with. A performance maker could also choose to subvert this relationship between outer form and inner kinaesthetic experience. For example, a performer and maker might work somatically to generate movement material from the Balloon Hat costume, but then perform the material wearing the Pointy Hat costume.

Thirdly, creating and performing with somatic costume can also change the performer/audience relationship. A more participatory experience can be cultivated by giving the audience the opportunity to experience the kinaesthetic effect of the costume. In the first improvisational performance at the Centre for Creative Collaboration, we invited the audience to wear the Pointy Hats before the performance. One audience member spoke informally about how it changed dramatically her experience of the performance, once she understood what the hat felt like. In the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference, we went a step further: the audience (as well as the performers) wore the hats *during* the performance. This not only cultivated a similar kinaesthetic experience throughout for both audience and performer alike, but also blurred the boundaries between audience and performer through the very act of wearing the same attire. Who was the audience? Who was the performer?

Somatic costume may also have a useful role to play in dance training, where costume is often not considered except in relation to a performance event - and even then, typically only at the end of the creation process. As I have indicated, the movement and kinaesthetic experience of the performer, as well as the aesthetics of the piece, is very much affected by the costume choice. So not only is there value in considering costume at the beginning of a creative process, but also in deploying it as a resource in dance training - with particular costumes to support particular styles of moving, or to address specific difficulties students experience in embodying particular forms.

Somatic costumes may also have therapeutic applications, as comments by some participants suggested: 'My pelvis is healed' (Participant writing, Workshop I). There is already promising research in this area. Psychologist Martin Grunwald has investigated how clothing designed in particular ways may be of benefit to anorexics, who often have 'an abnormal response to touch'. Typically anorexics are unable to integrate the sensory information they receive, in that they often cannot match what they feel in touch with what they see (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 49-52). Grunwald created a 'full-body neoprene suit' in order to use the touch sensations arising from the suit to send 'corrective signals' to a patient's brain, with the aim of helping her overcome her distorted body image (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 52). The initial results were promising: the patient gained weight, brain activity in the right hemisphere increased, and the quality of body representation improved. But Grunwald has yet to find a way for the 'cat suit' to have lasting effects: 'A few months after the student stopped wearing it, her brain asymmetry returned' (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 52). Another costume with therapeutic benefits is 'vibrating insoles' in shoes created by James Collins, a Biomedical engineer at Boston University. It has been shown to improve the balance and posture of the elderly, as well as help golfers overcome the 'yips'<sup>4</sup> (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 31). This perhaps mirrors some of the effects of the Lentil Socks. There is much more to be explored here in the future.

### **Future Applications and Implications**

We would like to continue to develop and fine tune the costume designs based on participants' feedback and experiences. We would also like to design new costumes that address more specifically the effects of somatic costume on the wearer's relationship to others and to their environment. We eventually hope to create a 'wardrobe library' connecting different states of kinaesthetic awareness with specific costumes, including both 'found' somatic costumes (costumes which have a strong

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<sup>4</sup> Yips is "a condition that triggers uncontrollable spasms or other involuntary movements during specific swings, especially puts" (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007: 71-72)

effect when used somatically, even though not designed for this purpose) as well as costumes designed for specific somatic experiences.

Thus somatic movement and costume research has the potential to link to or branch into several fields: dance training, performance making, somatic practices and health/therapeutic practices. It also is accessible to a wide range of ages, backgrounds and abilities. Future workshops will test this supposed accessibility by offering it to children and the elderly. It also has the possibility to bridge many art forms: dance, theatre, visual art and live art.

Finally - and returning to my own starting point for this project- we would like to explore how somatic costume might act as a vehicle for understanding not only the experience of oneself, experience of one's relationship to other, and experience of the environment; but also how these kinds of experience vary across cultures and across different cultural forms of human embodiment.

The field of somatic movement and costume opens a doorway of possibilities-

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## **NOTES AND FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOPS**

Participant Writing, Workshop I, 12 June 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Participant Oral Feedback, Workshop I, 12 June 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Teacher's notes, Workshop I, 12 June 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Participant Writing, Workshop II, 1 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Participant Oral Feedback, Workshop II, 1 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Teacher's notes, Workshop II, 1 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Participant Writing, Workshop III, 9 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Participant Oral Feedback, Workshop III, 9 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Teacher's notes, Workshop III, 9 July 2011 - Sally Dean, teacher.

Director's notes, Rehearsal for performance at 'Stranger Than Fiction', May, 2011,

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

As an independent dance/theatre artist, performance maker, and teacher – Sally's ethos is interdisciplinary and trans-cultural collaboration. She is the Director of *Sally E. Dean Performing Arts Inc.* and the *Kolaborasi* project (which brings American, European and Asian artists together to create and teach performance work). Over the past decade, Sally has performed her work internationally in venues ranging from established theatres to site-specific settings. Her performance work is informed by her training in Amerta Movement (Javanese performer Suprpto Suryodarmo), somatic-based movement (Skinner Releasing Technique™), site-based performance, playwriting, Butoh, and body-based theatre. Sally has taught dance and theatre practices at leading universities, such as Laban; Central School of Speech and Drama; Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design; ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia), the national arts university in Surakarta/Java; Chichester University and Coventry University. She teaches independent workshops for professional artists in Performance Making, Training for Performers, Skinner Releasing Technique™ and Scaravelli Yoga.