

VISUAL ESSAY

SALLY E. DEAN

Where is the body in the costume design process?

ABSTRACT

Sally E. Dean has led the Somatic Movement, Costume & Performance Project in collaboration with costume designers/visual artists Sandra Arròñiz Lacunza and Carolina Rieckhof since 2011. This project offers an alternative costume design methodology that starts from the body or 'soma' (i.e. a sentient, perceiving person), whereby perception is inherently active and relational. This approach is thus multi-sensorial, somatic and holistic, and is based upon Sally's background as a somatic practitioner, performer, performance-maker and teacher. This visual essay gives examples from the project's design approach, working with a live, moving and multi-sensorial body to create Somatic Costumes™ through co-creation, collaboration and participation. Costume designers are actively engaged in trying on materials and costumes through all stages of the process in order to answer the following overarching question: what are the materials/costumes doing to the body (i.e. body image and body schema)? Through these experiential methodologies, the project aims to return and relocate the body into the costume design process.

KEYWORDS

live body
somatic
sensorial
costume design
collaboration
performance

INTRODUCTION

The Somatic Movement, Costume & Performance Project proposes pedagogic, choreographic and costume design methodologies based on creating and using Somatic Costumes™. These processes lead to workshops, performances, installations, films, talks and publications.



Figure 1: 'Something's in the Living Room' (2014). Performance with Sally E. Dean. Photograph by Luna Pérez Visairas.

The project started in 2011, and is led by performer, performance-maker, teacher and somatic practitioner Sally E. Dean in collaboration with founding costume designers/visual artists Sandra Arrònz Lacunza and Carolina Rieckhof, as well as with other guest artists.

This article focuses specifically on the costume design methodologies that are used as part of this project. Our methods aim to return and relocate the live, moving and 'multi-sensorial body' (Dean 2015: 161), or 'soma', into the costume design process. A 'soma' is defined as a sentient, perceiving person – which we explore through a somatic, movement-based practice and approach. I use the term 'somatic' following Thomas Hanna (1988) to refer to a collection of bodily practices that began developing in the 1970s within the fields of education, therapy and dance, and which have a similar holistic approach to the body and perspectives on embodiment. These practices give value and attention to subjective perceptual bodily experiences. All senses are important within a somatic approach in that they integrate a multi-sensorial body. Although we include all sensorial experiences in our somatic approach, we often start with what tends to get overlooked in the costume design process, namely our sense of touch (i.e. the haptic system), which includes the kinaesthetic. How does the weight, texture, form, movement of the costume – creating a direct and tactile experience – affect our bodies (Dean 2014: 114)?

WHAT IS A SOMATIC MOVEMENT PRACTICE?

Somatic movement practices were influenced by existentialism and phenomenology, and advocate experiential, process-based learning and body-mind integration. They typically begin with bringing awareness to the 'inner body' – the body underneath the skin – as opposed to the outer form of the body and its aesthetic style or placement. Examples of somatic practices include: the Feldenkrais method; Skinner Releasing Technique; Alexander Technique; Body-Mind Centering; Scaravelli yoga; and Klein Technique, among others. They each aim to create movement re-patterning, changing movement habits through conscious awareness (Eddy 2009).



Figure 2: Workshop with the Balloon Spine-Leg costume led by Sally E. Dean at the Dance & Somatic Practices Conference 2015, Coventry University. Costumes worn by Klara Lucznik, Diego Maranan, Oliver Scott and Jackie Adkins. Photograph by Christian Kipp.

One way to create awareness and movement re-patterning is through touch and imagery. The costume embodies and integrates both: it touches the body, providing a haptic and kinaesthetic experience while simultaneously instigating a plethora of images, associations and meanings. Costume is an essential somatic resource, and yet it has been largely unnoticed, underdeveloped and under-researched within its field.

WHAT IS A SOMATIC COSTUME?

Embedded within sensation and imagery, somatic costumes are designed to generate specific body-mind experiences.

For example, we created the Balloon Hat to give the head a sense of volume and buoyancy, while the Tube/Boundary costume aimed to sense the boundary of the skin.



Figure 3: Balloon Hat costumes worn by Laura Chiabolotti (facing front), Caitlin McAfee, Margherita Carlotti and Aura Saxen. Photograph by Luna Pérez Visairas.



Figure 4: Tube/Boundary costumes worn by Kate Pyper, Iris Chan, Emily Jeffries and Lavanya Denéha Aisu.

Somatic costumes have the potential to change our relationship to ourselves, others and the environment. This applies to both body image and body schema.

We incorporate this somatic approach into our design process and research questions.

COSTUME DESIGN METHODOLOGY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do we design costumes that generate body-mind awareness, revealing movement vocabulary that might be missing from our repertoire?

How do we design a costume not from our eyes or a preconceived visual aesthetic, but starting with our sense of touch and incorporating all our sensations?

How do we design a costume not based on a still body, a mannequin or 2D sketch, but from a moving, live soma, wherein body and costume are perceived in a changing context?

How do we design costumes co-collaboratively between costume designers, performers and the materials itself?



Figure 5: 'Boundary Costume Prototypes' from the Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop at the Jazar artist residency, Pamplona, Spain, 2014. Video still by Maddi Barber.

HOW DO WE MAKE A SOMATIC COSTUME?

Examples of costume design methods

We start with the ludic – a sense of play – and collaboration.

We typically use cheap materials from daily life to create the costumes, such as cloth, plastic pots, bin bags and foldable laundry baskets.

Costume designers and performers are actively engaged in trying on materials and costumes through all stages of the process. In doing so, they ask what are the materials/costumes doing to the body?



Figures 6 and 7: Somatic practice and dance/movement artist retreat Movement Sense CIC, Carmarthen, Wales, 2013. Sally E. Dean, Sandra Arròñiz Lacunza and Carolina Rieckhof.



Figure 8: Jazar artist residency, Pamplona, Spain, 2014. Photograph by Sandra Arròñiz Lacunza.



Figure 9: Beginning process of the Tube/Boundary costume for the heart. Costume worn by Irantzu Sánchez at the Jazar artist residency, Pamplona, Spain, 2014. Video still by Maddi Barber.

We emphasize multi-sensorial experiences and typically start with the sense of touch (i.e. the haptic or kinaesthetic). This is because 'vision' dominates our culture, so we aim to rebalance the sensorial hierarchy. What if we start with a costume design methodology that doesn't start from the visual sense?



Figure 10: Jazar artist residency, Pamplona, Spain, 2014. Picture of Sandra Arrònz Lacunza. Photograph by Sally E. Dean.



Figure 11: Jazar artist residency, Pamplona, Spain, 2014. Picture of Marta Jiménez Salcedo. Photograph by Sandra Arrònz Lacunza.



Figure 12: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designers Berthe Fortin and Ester Mangas Fernandez. Video still by Jana Koelmel.

For example, please read this paragraph and then close your eyes to picture and experience it:

Notice your breath and your breathing (pause). Feel the weight of your body and what it is touching: the chair, the floor, etc. (pause). Now picture your spine from the tail bone to the base of the skull. You can move the spine a little if that helps you (pause). Sense each vertebrae (pause). Sense the spaces between each vertebrae. Breathing (pause).

What if we created a costume from here? Create a costume from the experience of the body?

SOMATIC INSTIGATORS

The above paragraph is an example of a somatic instigator and our approach to creating costume from a 'soma' body. Although the body has been incorporated into the costume design process in scholarly and artistic practices, there is a tendency, especially in practice, for the body to be approached more as an 'object' (i.e. referring to its external features such as shape and form), which is philosophically more of a Cartesian model of inquiry. There are also many discussions about the body framed in relationship to 'space'; in other words, the body in space. And yet, there is an absence of the body approached as having an 'internal space'. As in somatics, we aim to create costumes that invite a meeting between internal bodily awareness and the awareness of the external shape/form of the body.

Some examples of somatic instigators include creating a costume that brings awareness to the weight of the pelvis; the volume and buoyancy of the head; the sponginess of the feet; the space around the neck between the shoulders and face; the connection between the sit bones and the heels; the extension of the spine out the top of the head as an axis; the boundary of the skin; the wildness of the arms; the lightness of the shoulder blades; or the melody of the heart.

These somatic instigators bring different types of awareness to the body, such as a quality, orientation/direction, space, movement, relationship, volume, weight, dynamic, musicality and more. For example, 'the extension of the spine out the top of the head as an axis' would involve bringing an orientation/direction awareness to the body.

Somatic instigators aim to bring awareness to and start with the 'soma' body. Notice that we are not typically starting with story, text, character, image (at least not body-based) to create a costume, although starting with somatic instigators can lead to these and we encourage this development. We also do not start with a presupposed aesthetic, such as an image of the costume that we want to create. Instead, the aesthetic of the costume comes from the embodied experiences inspired by the somatic instigators.

Although the above list of somatic instigators is presented arbitrarily, they generally appear as 'accidents of perception' (a term used in Giovanni Felicioni's Scaravelli yoga classes) as part of personal life experiences, as well as from somatic-based workshops and practices, and during the process of playing with costume materials/objects.

'IN FLUX' COSTUME CREATION EXERCISE

Another method in our costume design process is working with a moving/changing costume in relationship to a moving/changing body, as demonstrated in the 'In Flux' costume creation exercise. This is an alternative



Figure 13: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designers Berthe Fortin and Ester Mangas Fernandez. Video still by Jana Koelmel.



Figure 14: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designer Ester Mangas Fernandez. Video still by Jana Koelmel.

approach to the more standardized costume design method of starting with drawings, visual images and mannequins. The live body is essential to the costume design process.

In this exercise, we prepare participants with a somatic-based warm-up (influenced by my background in Skinner Releasing Technique, Amerta Movement, Scaravelli yoga and more) to awaken the sense of our bodies and the materials. We work with our eyes closed for some of this to awaken the multi-sensorial, so that the visual does not dominate.

Participants are divided into two roles: (1) the costume designers and (2) the movers/performers. Costume designers create a costume on the performer out of simple materials (in this case, bin bags and tape), while the costume designer responds to the movement of the performer as opposed to a preconceived idea or visual aesthetic.

The performers respond in movement to how the materials affect their body/soma. The costume is co-created so that we have a moving/changing costume in relationship to a moving/changing body.

This exercise also brings awareness of habits. For example, costume designers notice where they tend to 'costume' the body and where they do not. Performers notice body areas they tend to move or not, or new movement qualities and characters.

Costume designers also move during the costume-making process, 'copying' the movement of the performer in order to experience their performer's soma, and thereby making the costume from a kinaesthetic response, rather than just a visual one.

The exercise ends with shedding the costume and moving as if you are still wearing it. This 'invisible costume' awakens the kinaesthetic memory of the costume experience. (This term 'invisible' refers to the work of the Skinner Releasing Technique's use of imagery and its use of 'invisible strings'.)

The 'invisible costume' reveals the movement material, qualities and characters generated in the process, as well as the potential choreographic material to be used in the future.



Figure 15: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designers Berthe Fortin and Ester Mangas Fernandez. Video still by Jana Koelmel.



Figure 16: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designer Ester Mangas Fernandez. Video still by Jana Koelmel.



Figure 17: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of performer Paul Hughes. Video still by Jana Koelmel.



Figure 18: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designer Ester Mangas Fernandez and performer Esther Mok. Video still by Jana Koelmel.



Figure 19: Somatic Movement & Costume Workshop led by Sally E. Dean at Clarence Mews Studios, London, March 2015. Picture of costume designers Berthe Fortin and Ester Mangas Fernandez and performers Paul Hughes and Esther Mok. Video still by Jana Koelmel.

OTHER COSTUME DESIGN METHODOLOGIES

Other costume design methodologies we use focus on designing costumes for more than one body, as in our 'Companion Costumes'. For example, we created a Balloon Hat for two people which can be worn not only on the head, but also around other body areas, such as the waist. This focuses participants to connect to each other through different body areas, bringing awareness and movement to these places. Companion Costumes orchestrate a dance between people, activating their peripersonal space through the costume design's specified allowable distance. For example, with the Balloon Hat, the heads are only about one foot apart, restricting the wearers' ability to move more than that



Figure 20: Somatic Movement & Costume Class led by Sally E. Dean at Independent Dance's improvisation series, Siobhan Davies Dance Studios, London, February 2015. Photograph by Sandra Arrònz Lacunza.



Figure 21: Boundary/Tube costumes worn by Laura Chiabolotti, Caitlin McAfee, Margherita Carlotti and Aura Saxen. Photograph by Luna Pérez Visairas.



Figure 22: 'Tree Skirt' costume worn by Sally E. Dean at Middlesex University artist residency, Trent Park Campus, London, May 2012. Photograph by Sandra Arrònz Lacunza.

distance away from each other. Companion Costumes are also designed to inherently ignite the movement of the other person. The movement of one person travels through the costume into the body of the other person, meaning they must respond in some way, shape or form. Lastly, Companion Costumes are designed not only to be extensions, connections and part of another's 'body', but also as a 'third body' to be explored while either being worn or removed.

We also design costumes in response to the meeting between body and environment. These include our 'site-specific' costumes inspired from the environment itself, such as the 'Tree Skirt'. Other somatic costumes are designed to act as 'gateways' into the environment, facilitating how the kinaesthetic experiences of environment and body either meet or are juxtaposed (cf. Dean 2015).

APPLICATIONS: PERFORMANCE/INSTALLATION AND EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

These costume design methods lead to workshops and outcomes in the format of performances/installations. For example, a bin-bag skirt was



Figure 23: 'Something's in the Living Room' on display at Critical Costume 2015, Aalto University. Photograph by Eero Erkamo.

designed and created for the performance called 'Something's in the Living Room' (2014), with its 'sheddings' shown at the Critical Costume Conference 2015.

COSTUME DESIGN AND BODY CONTEXT: IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Building on the research of Donatella Barbieri and Aofie Monks, who advocate the centrality of the costume in performance, and the integral relationship/live encounter between the costume and the body, the Somatic Movement, Costume & Performance Project aims to extend their research further by returning and relocating the body into the costume design process itself. Historically, a parallel theme presents itself in the scenographic and performance context: absent body/absent costume.

Just as costume design has been relatively absent in both scholarly and artistic reviews, the live soma/body has been absent in both the creation of the performance material and the viewing of costumes after a performance event, as well as in the costume design process itself. As Monks (2010) recounts, the actor is approached as 'already dressed' or 'already undressed'; although the performer's body is 'at the centre of the scenographic construct' (Barbieri 2012), it is relatively absent in the performance and design process.

The Somatic Movement, Costume & Performance Project aims to bring a 'presence' to both the body and the costume, removing this 'absence' through reuniting their integral relationship with each other.

CONCLUSION

To end, I would like to invite your bodies into the somatic experience of costume:

Close your eyes while sitting. Notice that your clothing is touching you and you are touching your clothing. Can you sense this? Can you sense the places where you feel compression and restriction coming from the clothing? Can you sense the places where your clothing is lightly touching you, or where there is space between your skin and the clothing?

Now bring your awareness to your feet. How do they feel inside your socks and shoes? Cold or warm? Dry or moist? Do you have space to move your toes, or do they feel quite contained? What is the texture like of the material touching your feet – soft, itchy, slippery or smooth? Wiggle your toes. How does the material around your feet respond?

Allow yourself to slowly come to standing on your feet. How does this sense of weight on your feet shift your experience of the material surrounding them? Are you standing more on your heels or on your toes? Gradually allow your shoes to walk you around the room. See where they want to go. How does your body follow and respond? Follow your shoes as a costume.

Gradually allow yourself to accentuate the movement and rhythm of your walk, as guided by your shoes. Can you sense a character emerge? What character will you feel to be and what will we perceive you as?

This encounter between the design of a costume and the body's somatic experiences is a rich resource of future scholarly and artistic research.

REFERENCES

- Barbieri, D. (2012), 'Encounters in the archive: Reflections on costume', *V & A Online Journal*, 4: Summer.
- Dean, S. E. (2014), 'Amerta Movement & Somatic Costume: Sourcing the Ecological Image', in K. Bloom, M. Galanter and S. Reeve (eds), *Embodied Lives: Reflections on the Influence of Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*, Axminster: Triarchy Press, pp. 113–36.
- (2015), 'Amerta Movement & Somatic Costume: Gateways into Environment', in S. Whatley, N. Garrett-Brown and K. Alexander (eds), *Attending to Movement: Somatic Perspectives on Living in this World*, Axminster: Triarchy Press, pp. 155–80.
- Eddy, M. (2009), 'A brief history of somatic practices and dance: Historical development of the field of somatic education and its relationship to dance', *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, 1: 1, pp. 5–27.
- Hanna, T. (1988), *Somatics*, Wokingham: Addison-Wesley.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2005), *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge.
- Monks, A. (2010), *The Actor in Costume*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Reilly, S. (2009), *The Body in Contemporary Art*, London: Thames & Hudson.
- Reeve, S. (2011), *Nine Ways of Seeing a Body*, Axminster: Triarchy Press.
- Storm, P. (1987), *Functions of Dress*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Williams, Simon and Bendelow, Gillian (1998), *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*, New York: Routledge.

SUGGESTED CITATION

- Dean, S. E. (2016), 'Where is the body in the costume design process?', *Studies in Costume & Performance*, 1: 1, pp. 97–111, doi: 10.1386/scp.1.1.97_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Sally E. Dean has been an interdisciplinary performer, performance-maker and teacher for over fifteen years in university, professional and community settings across Europe, Asia and the United States. Her teaching and performance work is highly informed by somatic-based practices, her cross-cultural projects in Asia, and her background in both dance and theatre, integrating site, costume and object. Sally has been supported by the Arts Council England and the British Council. She leads the Somatic Movement, Costume & Performance Project, designing costumes that create specific body-mind experiences. She is an MPhil candidate in the drama and theatre department at Royal Holloway University, London. For more information, visit www.sallyedean.com / www.kolaborasi.org.

Contact: 304B Alexandra Park Road, London, N22 7BD, UK.
E-mail: info@sallyedean.com

Sally E. Dean has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.



intellect

www.intellectbooks.com

publishers
of original
thinking

Clothing Cultures

ISSN 2050-0742 | Online ISSN 2050-0750
3 issues per volume | Volume 1, 2014

Aims and Scope:

We all wear clothes. We are all therefore invested at some level in the production and consumption of clothing. This journal intends to embrace issues and themes that are both universal and personal, addressing [and dressing] us all. Following the rise of fashion theory, on an everyday level, we all understand that our clothes 'say' something about us, about our times, nation, system of values. Yet clothing is not fashion; clothing is a term derivative from 'cloth', to cover the body, whereas fashion alludes to the glamorous, the ephemeral and the avant garde. We wear clothes, but imagine fashion – an unattainable ideal.

Call for papers:

Clothing Cultures brings together discourses pertinent to the study of dress practices. From design to manufacture, to shops and shopping, and performance and display, clothing in all its guises is analysed and discussed here.

Submissions are solicited for this new and exciting inter-disciplinary academic journal. These include:

Full articles of 5000 words in length; Object analysis of 1000-2000 words in length; Research in progress – 750 words; Exhibition and book reviews of 500 words.

This journal is not available through any other channels, to find out how to order visit the subscription information page of the Intellect website
www.intellectbooks.co.uk



Editors

Jo Turney
Bath Spa University
j.turney@bathspa.ac.uk

Alex Franklin
University West of England, Bristol
Alex.Franklin@uwe.ac.uk

Half Price Personal subscription

Print only: £18 / \$34 USD
(Full price: £36 / \$68 USD)

Please contact
Turpin Distribution,
quoting 'HALF PRICE PC':
☎: +44 (0) 1767 604 951 (UK & ROW)
☎: +1 860 350 0041 (US & Canada)
✉: custserv@turpin-distribution.com

Institutional subscription

Print and online: £132 / \$185 USD
Online only: £99 / \$140 USD

* Postage is included for UK, US and Canadian orders. Please add £9 postage for EU orders and £12 for ROW orders.

HALF
PRICE