

Lydia May Hann

Syntese

THE SKIN WE WEAR

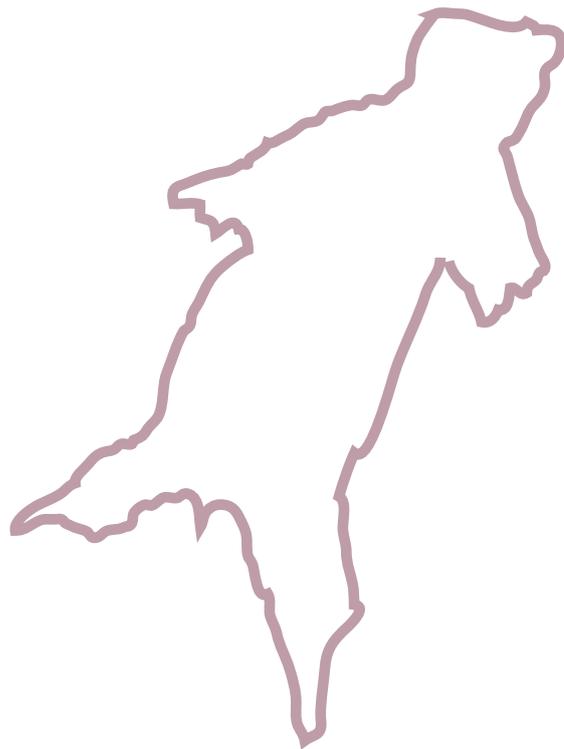
*Skin-specific Costuming through the narrative of the*

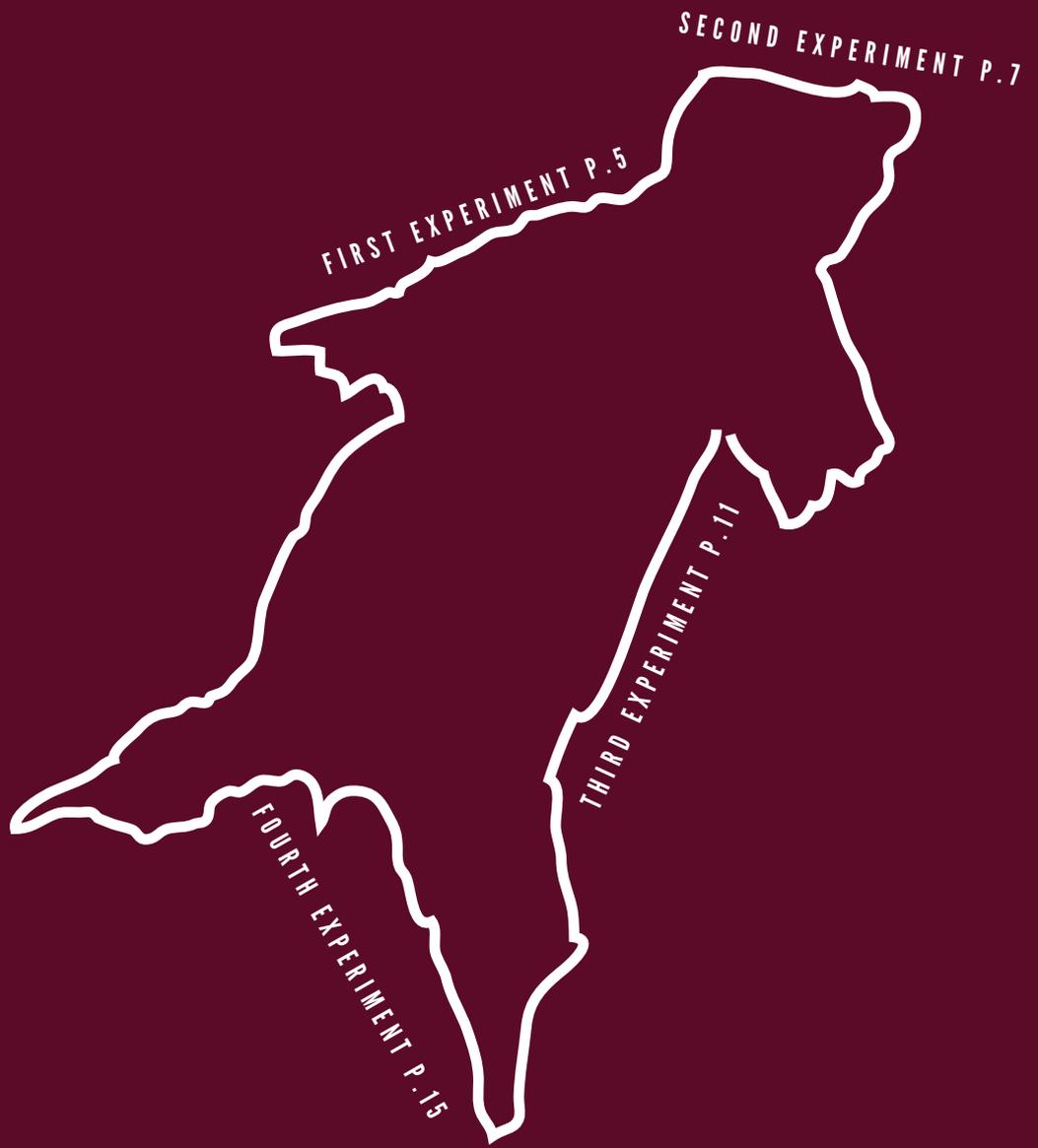
*Selkie*

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# Contents

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Point 1 – Material Ego .....page 6

Point 2 – See, The Body Needs .....page 8

Point 3– Visceral Empathy .....page 12

Point 4 – Poetic Faith..... page 14

Final Thought.....page 15



*b.*

# The Skin We Wear

## SKIN SPECIFIC COSTUMING THROUGH THE NARRATIVE OF THE SELKIE

Skin is a thing that touches and is touched. A thing that contains the motions of the bones and slides against the musculature. It is a thing to decorate and to deface. Skin contains everything that is considered 'you', the outward facet of the 'self' inside, the external that holds the internal and communes with the Other. The Other is everything that is not 'you' but that line may be an invitingly permeable one.

This essay proposes the exodermis (also referred to as skin-object) as a tool and protagonist in performance making. Like an exoskeleton, the exoderms will be outer coatings for the body, altering and extending the bodies movement through the world. In this essay, I will refer to the Exodermis, the Skin, and the Selkie as the moving parts in the development of a performance. The exodermis is the created skin-object in isolation, like an empty shell in wait for a hermit crab, the Skin (capital S) is the exodermis in assemblage with the body, and the Selkie is the body-skin assemblage in motion, developing character and intention. Beyond the Selkie is the Beach, and beyond the Beach is the Voyeur. The Beach is the performance space on the edge of worlds, to be established as a familiar meeting point for strangers. The voyeur is watching to gain something; to gain understanding of the Selkies experience, the (re)gain the skin-object for themselves, or to find their own Skin in the meeting point.

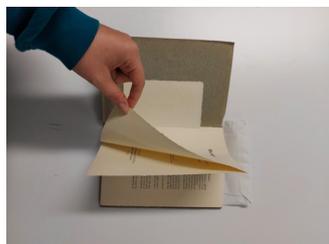
The Selkie is a creature of coastal folklore. They exist on the transformation line between sea and land, man and beast, and step cleanly between the worlds at will by means of the wearing or removing their seal skin. The Selkie Skin is not a costume but a biological extension of self that can be donned or set aside in accordance with the selkies goals. The 'human' and the 'seal' skin are both equally the creature's skin, connecting in a fundamental way to the symbolic and practical functions of their body.

FIRST EXPERIMENT  
Paper Skin

There are Selkies who were always Selkies, and there are Selkies who were once only human but always the Selkie is reliant on their removable seal skin. The skin must be kept safe while the selkie is in human form as any person who finds the skin gains control over the Selkie. Stories vary from infatuated humans holding their paramour selkie hostage, to true love accross the divide of land and sea. You learn to never kill a seal as it may hold the spirit of a loved one lost at sea. For this reason the plump harbour seal should always be treated as cherished kin.

You cannot tame that from nature which does not want to be tamed but you can hold it bound for a time if you're prepared to face the consequence.

There are many selkie texts, but a chance encounter brought forth *The Selkies* by F.S. Copeland to act as conduit for the spirit of the stories. The book, purchased from an antique book dealer in Inverness, is a curious object in itself; published in 1939 by an Irish-Scottish writer living in Slovenia credited as a significant mountaineer, diplomat, translator, and journalist, the pages have been assembled concertina-style but was never properly finished so many of the pages are enveloped together by the uncut fold lines and must be peaked into from the top or bottom. Like skin, the visceral instinct is to leave the flesh uncut. The interiority holds on to its secrets. Fanny calls the book a "re-invention" of the traditional stories written as an ode to her home country. "From the exile's perspective the outstanding moments of landscape and legend appear in a single plane, and discrepancies of time and place become immaterial" (Copeland, 1939, p.1). Copeland views the selkies as one with the landscape of her childhood and of the landscape of her imagination, her story is a remembrance in the spirit of the oral/aural tradition and so not shackled to the ethnographical concept of 'authenticity.' It is like and un-like the stories it grows from in the way that I hope my work will be like and un-like a seal skin on the sand.



SECOND PICTURE 25  
LADY INGOLD.  
How gracefully  
He glides through the green water!  
SIR ALEXANDER.  
Yet on shore  
These animals are most uncouth!  
IRIS (in an excited whisper),  
I saw  
His face! He looked at me as if he knew me  
And tried to speak!  
THE SAILOR.  
A selkie, and a friend  
To man—  
(A shout, followed by a cry of intense anguish.)  
SEVERAL VOICES.  
What's that?  
VERNON'S VOICE (he is just out of sight),  
I think I bagged that seal!  
LADY INGOLD.  
Oh, Vernon! What a heartless thing to do!  
IRIS (suddenly bursts into convulsive weeping),  
VERNON (appears, abashed),  
I—only grazed him—, Here he comes again!  
LADY INGOLD (indignant),  
Rolling in anguish! Look, he lifts his head  
As if to ask our help! His eyes  
Are full of dumb reproach—  
AURA (as if in a trance, recalling HAROLD'S sword),  
—And flecks of blood  
Like fronds of crimson weed upon the wave—

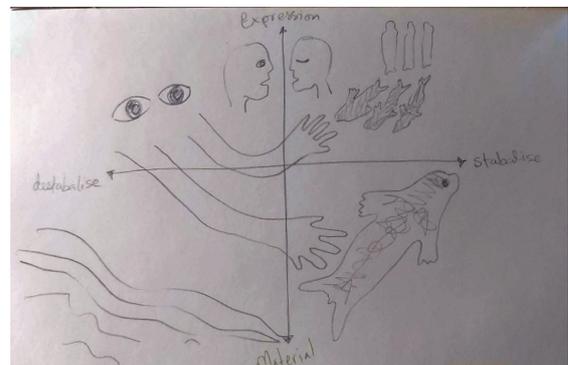


## Point 1 - Ego Material

Your body is the material you have latched the eponymous 'You' to. 'You' are a mechanical construction of bones and blood and micro-organisms and inhalations and excretions. 'You' are a walking ecosystem and a statistical improbability. When asked to point to the 'self' where do you look? Hand on heart? Finger to temple? The vague flailing of arms indicating the general body schema? When the human body is contently turning food into flesh and flesh into dust where do you draw the line? Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu proposes the 'Skin Ego' as the sense of self formed through and with the skin as an infant learns that they are separate from body they were birthed from. The Skin Ego is the overlapping of the psychic and physical boundaries enveloping the body, to Anzieu the skin is the "basic datum that is both of an organic and an imaginary order" (Anzieu, 1989, p3). The Selkie exists on both an organic and imaginary plane; the Skin is an object with weight and taste and smell but also a vessel for imagination and potential. The skin-ego is a material sense of self which the successful Selkie should be well acquainted. The Selkie has two skins, in a practical sense this creates two ways of knowing the world and, if we align with Anzieu, two ways of knowing the self. If the performer meets the skin-object (exodermis) with the same sincerity an infant meets their own boundaries for the first time, a new skin-ego may be formed which opens the performing body to new narratives coming from their new sense of self.

In her work in Somatic Costuming, Sally E. Dean replaces 'body' with 'soma' when referring to the "multi-sensorial" "sentient, perceiving person" (Dean, 2016, p. 98) centred in her design methodology. 'Soma' encompasses the body which is aware of its materiality and consciousness and can express that awareness, however the awareness of the soma does not downgrade the skin-object to something less within the performance space. On the beach the

seal and the Selkie are the same. This aligns with the New Materialist reprioritisation of human agency explored through assemblage theory. In New Materialism the world is built of constantly shifting material arrangements each with their own agency and power, the creation of an "assemblage is an act of fitting, a material performance of composing agencies together" (Nikolić, 2018). Assemblage theory, as laid out by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari recognises the fluid, interdependent networks that make up our material existence and creates a framework for understanding the open-ended potential to tangle and untangle, to simultaneously "reterritorialize and deterritorialize" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88), ways of being. Through the lens of the assemblage the Selkie is more than the sum of ego plus skin plus object plus time plus place. The performer does not become the Selkie just by passively coming in to contact with the skin but by meeting it as a power with equal agency and possibility as an aspect of their new assemblage.



2.

**"The identity of any assemblage at any level of scale is always the product of a process (territorialisation, and in some cases, coding) and it is always precarious, since the other processes (deterritorialization and decoding) can destabilise it"**

**(Delanda, 2006, p.28)**

SECOND EXPERIMENT

Material Hands, Prosthesis, Disease

I can see my hand. I know it like the back of my hand, this is my hand. But now this is new. "Uinction, not the breaking out of new life from within, but the folding in, or applying of new life from without" (Connor, p178). My hand is not the snake breaking its shed, I cannot claw a new hand out of the old, but maybe I can be protected by more hand. Maybe this glove will grow from the fingertips up until I am new. It will not dull but transmogrify. Let the body spread.

The glove is animal and other and familiar. It begs for pressure and friction., the in-between points closing on one another. I can hold this hand in mine. We are seamless.

wool finds equilibrium. It takes the flush of your heat, and it matches it until the sensations are homogenised. We are warmed by the same blood. Harmony.



3.



4.



5.



6.

## Point 2 - See, the body needs

Beyond the Selkie is the Voyeur. The Voyeur represents their own assemblage of social baggage, material past, and potential future which has the potential to destabilise the territorialised boundaries of the Selkie or to reconfirm its symbiotic homogeneity. The Voyeur is a part of the story; they have a gaze, a touch, a breath, an intention which alters the behaviour of the Selkie and can threaten or affirm their connection to the Skin. The Selkie has their own story developed from the Skin-Ego, the Voyeur is a compassionate and curious witness to the Selkies who may be ignorant to the Selkies internal narrative but by the act of witnessing may appreciate sympathetically some form of that narrative.

The therapeutic practice of Authentic Movement, originated by Dance Therapy pioneer Mary Starks Whitehouse (Whitehouse, 1958, pp. 42–43) explores, through improvised encounters, the act of being moved by forces other than the conscious decisions of the mind. The aim is to ask, what does the body need right now? and to explore the movements that arise from meeting those needs. Authentic Movement is a dance of counterbalancing forces, while the body explores its essential materiality the witness is more than passive spectator. The function of the witness in Authentic Movement is to observe without judgement or interpretation as the moving body attends to their own somatic experiences. The Witness “looks on, participating but not directing, cooperating but not choosing,” (Levy, 2005, p. 55). The witness is an embodied spectator in the phenomenological sense, touching with the eyes, hearing with the skin, holding the whole body accountable to the goal of truly perceive the meaning of the moving Other.

The relationship between the moving body and the witness may be interpreted as a ‘when a tree falls in a forest...’ scenario; the moving body is enveloped by their own experience and the presence of

a compassionate witness dedicated to reflecting the mover's experience allows them to process the revelations in a symbiotic way that would be lost if the practitioner was alone. The mover needs the witness in order to their action to find meaning, even if that meaning is beyond articulation. In the Deleuzian sense, these are two assemblages beginning to blur together at the edges. The roles will, in the course of the practice, flip, remaking the connection in a new orientation.

Authentic Movement is, in its original form, meant to be practised without artifice. It is primarily about exploring the depth of the body experience and the witness is not meant to be diverted by aesthetics. It is a Jungian approach to symbol reading tapping into the collective conscious and unconscious of the witness/soma pairing without analysis or judgement. Applying the notion of the assemblage first, allowing the soma to embrace the exodermis as Skin, opens up the pathways to practice Authentic Movement in communion with the Skin material. Sally E. Dean's somatic costumes “designed to give specific body-mind experiences” (Dean, 2016, p. 99) emphasise the haptic and kinaesthetic experience above the visual aesthetic to “rebalance the sensorial hierarchy” (Dean, 2016, p102). Rebalancing the hierarchy of the visual and the haptic brings the use of costume back in line with the intentions of Authentic Movement where the needs of the material of the costume, in this case the exodermis, can be explored on the same plane as the beating of the heart or the fluctuation of neurons but it does not neglect the optic richness of her creations. The bodies that feel her costumes with their skin have one experience, but the audience may touch with their eyes and not be without reward.

Costumes and props carry their own symbolism imbued in them by the designers' and makers conscious and unconscious choices. This brings a third energy into the soma/witness relationship which allows the building of a performance from the roots



7.

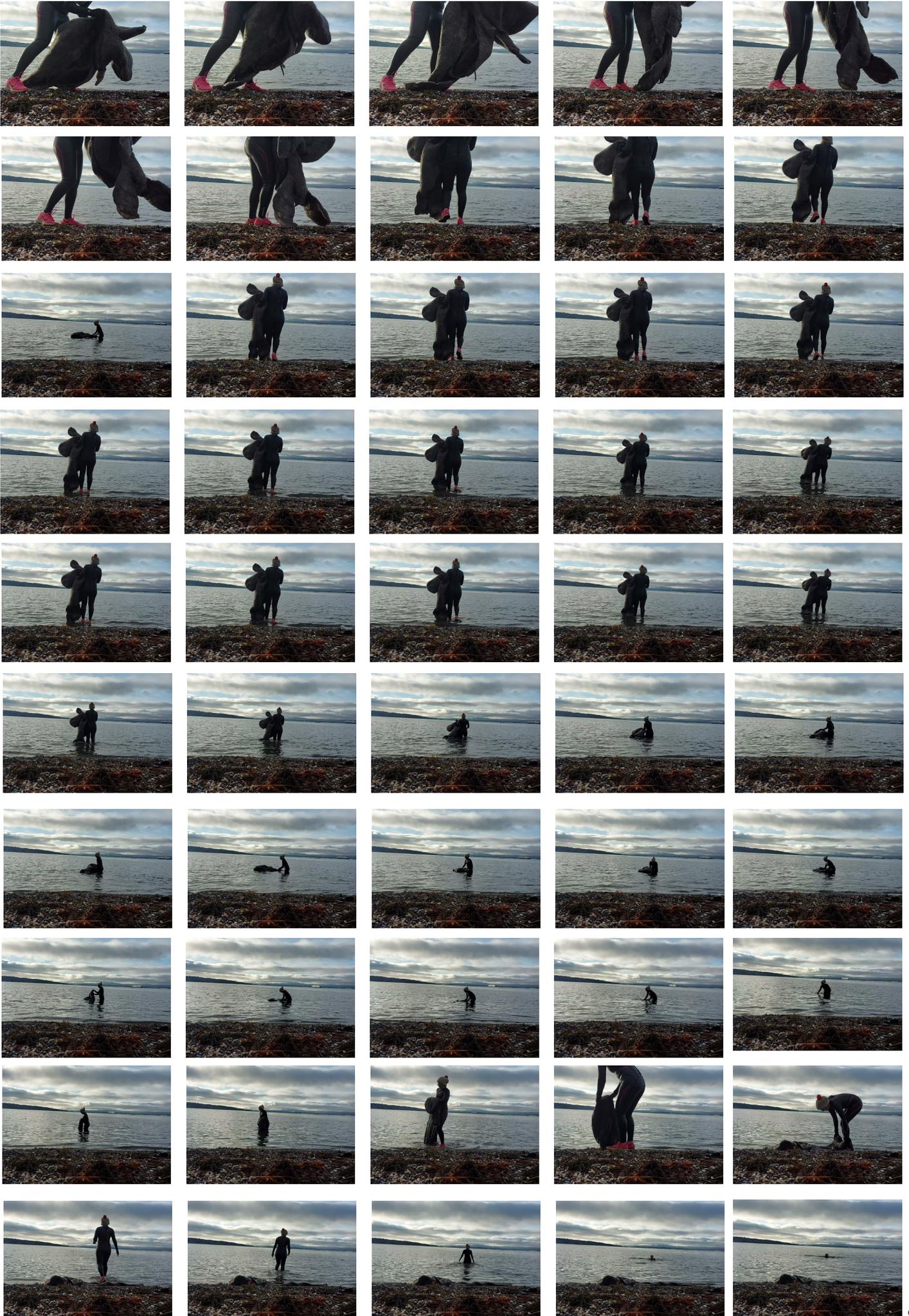
of therapeutic exploration. Where there is a designed object there are intentions. I want you to be the Selkie. I want the smell to take you back to nature. I want you to feel comforted. I want. I want. The hand of the designer must be the first to let go in order for the skin to be more than cloth.

Sally E. Dean's 2022 performance 'Give Them Wings' toys with the performing of a primarily somatic experience by dividing the 'audience' into groups of witnesses and blindfolded travellers aided through haptic experiences by guides in a ritual of dressing and moving. The witnesses are dressed in costumes meant to provide compression and comfort as they observe the travellers in their journey of material discovery. While the rich somatic experience of the

travellers is the priority, the witnesses sit at a complex intersection between intrusive voyeur, guardian, segregated audience and included performing body. There are two layers to the witness aesthetic experience: the pre-designed 'set' and 'costumes' created with texture, pallet and form in mind, and the somatic envy/empathy which arises from viewing the experience of the traveller. While Authentic Movement requires that the experience of the opposite is not analysed or judged, if the soma/witness duo are in tune with one another the witness may feel deep resonance with their partners experience leading to a greater desire to replicate it in themselves (Stromsted, 2009, p. 2).

Selkies Skins are often stolen.

The Skin We Wear



### THIRD EXPERIMENT

#### Cold Water Together, Love Sammy

Making a sealskin from wool is both paradoxical and congruent. Wool, in its various conditions, is waterproof, absorbent, dense, feather-light, pungent and luxurious. A seal's pelt is a seasonal moult of smooth bristles in dancing geometric patterns oiled to protect against wind and rain. It is also pungent and luxurious bulged against the functional fat of its belly. Wool is not the traditional choice for submergence in water. Wet wool is the gateway to hypothermia. But when that wool is actually a seal the understanding is different. The eponymous Sammy is a three-meter by one-meter (life size) harbour seal born from knitted lambswool and felted rustic waste wool in coarse greys and creams from Norway's native rough coated sheep. The wool is full of the remains of the pastures and shrubbery the sheep picked through when they wore their fibres long, vegetable matter adds to the variety of colours and textures worked through the layers of Sammy's skin. The smell is also woody, the pungent lanolin and outside-coded combination of scent and texture that reminds the hands that this was once a part of something which roamed. Is the wool any less sheep when it is sheared? What is a sheep without its coat? Sometimes I receive fibres with the previous hosts name written in pen: a piece of their ego holding on in the scratch of sharpie.

Sammy's insides are plastic, rescued from bins and other projects in an unintentional but much pocked at nod to the impact of plastic pollution on ocean ecosystems. The plastic was intended to exist only as a support for the creation of the skin but it's indelible sense of presence and personality sparks the question of the Two Sammy's - is Sammy the form or the skin? Will I be skinning poor Sammy or simply rearranging their common existence? I must not project troublesome human concerns on something as primal as Sammy, the Selkie will prevail.

On 6/11/22 the ferry tells us the water is 11 degrees. Balmy to a harbour seal and an experienced swimmer in a wetsuit but still a cold shock to the nervous system. Sammy travels tucked away in a blue Ikea bag layered with towels. Sammy has been cut away from their plastic endoskeleton, the first slice of the knife felt violating but the easy separation of internal and external eased my conscience: they both survived. Like shearing a sheep.

Sammy is not afraid of the water. The wool is crisp in the late autumn sun and the dryness invites the encroachment of water. Osmosis is vital to the survival of the body; water cross the membrane and bring balance.

Sammy floats. Wet wool is so heavy in the hands that you might expect it to sink, but instead the welcoming fibres create equilibrium in the water. Sammy is now a creature of the water. The movement of the currents lend agency and now Sammy is like every other wild thing under the waves; beyond my control. In this moment Sammy is the guide.

My seal-shiny, body-tight wetsuit is also a contributor to the material moment. The dichotomy of pink flesh and dark neoprene create a sea creatures' silhouette (jarringly broken by pink running shoes). The wetsuit is my skin today, it is the tool I need to survive.

Pulling Sammy back to shore is a disagreement. Sammy does not want to leave but the ritual is complete, and the press of human time invades from the ferry schedule.

Important to all seals is the time to dry off. Even creatures built to hunt the depths love the sun on their bellies. We dry off together, both icy and warm from water. Sammy is not exactly my skin, but they hold me safe as if they were. My Ego can take a break as the new outer takes over the burden of expression.

## Point 3 - Visceral Empathy

There is a mechanical, biological explanation of compassion and empathy: the mirror neuron. Mirror neurons fire when the brain views the actions of others, mirroring the way it would fire if the movement was that body's own. The brain experiences the ghost-feeling of the moving other on a cellular level. The skin also feels this empathy; goosebumps, shivers, phantom pains, clammy palms and wincing are all experienced in response to watching sensations inflicted on others. Performance theorist Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty calls upon the recovery of visceral spectacle in theatre, assaulting the senses to override the numbing diversion of "human interest" theatre and "recover the notion of a kind of unique language halfway between gesture and thought" (Artaud, 1958, p.90). Artaud's intention echoes the Skin-Ego as to him projected theatrical meaning is met on the body surface and "it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (Artaud, 1958, p.99). Here, the metaphysical is the act of being and identity-sensing within Artaud's performance space. The space between gesture and thought is like the bridge between the moving body (Selkie) and witness (Voyeur). The body is the conscious, perceiving soma but in contact with the skin-material it must traverse thought to allow the sense-identity passage through the skin. The place where gesture answers the need of the body the signs of need are read by the witness.

Theatre of Cruelty sits on the precipice of immersive theatre as understood in a contemporary context in that the audience is feeling the impact of the spectacle but there is no narrative imperative placed upon them, their role is only to feel. They are not in the story. While Artaud's manifesto demands the dissolving of "partition or barrier of any kind" (Artaud, 1938, p 96) the structure of the knowing and the unknowing remains. In the setting of somatic performance, the material-body meetings are beyond the usual experience of the uninitiated and so the

envious audience can only imagine the sensation they are witnessing, they have not felt these things before. In the Selkie narrative, the envy-driven Voyeur is the most likely to need to reach out and touch, to need to discover for themselves what they are missing. A potential mechanism for performance is to remove the performing body from the equation and create an environment where anyone might take on the role of Selkie, leaning into the action of reterritorializing the assemblages to produce new possibilities. The sensorial alighting of neural pathways from the skin-to-skin contact creates its own sparks which invite the witness turned performer to ask what to we bodies need? This is the line the Selkie/Voyeur must examine in contact with the skin-object: who is in control here? Mirror neurons cannot mirror what they don't know, activation "through observation depends on the observer's expertise in performing the observed action" ("Mirror Neuron," n.d.). The Voyeur learns by watching but must eventually co-opt the role of the Selkie in order to feel the full story.

Sometimes Selkie skins are borrowed. The Selkies are a (gender-fluid) sisterhood.

"THE QUESTION, THEN, FOR THE THEATER, IS TO CREATE A METAPHYSICS OF SPEECH, GESTURE, AND EXPRESSION, IN ORDER TO RESCUE IT FROM ITS SERVITUDE TO PSYCHOLOGY AND "HUMAN INTEREST." BUT ALL THIS CAN BE OF NO USE UNLESS BEHIND SUCH AN EFFORT THERE IS SOME KIND OF REAL METAPHYSICAL INCLINATION, AN APPEAL TO CERTAIN UNHABITUAL IDEAS, WHICH BY THEIR VERY NATURE CANNOT BE LIMITED OR EVEN FORMALLY DEPICTED. THESE IDEAS WHICH TOUCH ON CREATION, BECOMING, AND CHAOS, ARE ALL OF A COSMIC ORDER AND FURNISH A PRIMARY NOTION OF A DOMAIN FROM WHICH THE THEATER IS NOW ENTIRELY ALIEN. THEY ARE ABLE TO CREATE A KIND OF PASSIONATE EQUATION BETWEEN MAN, SOCIETY, NATURE, AND OBJECTS"

(Artaud, 1958, p. 90)

### Point 3.2 - Seamlessness and boundaries

In the process of becoming a Selkie, familiarity and novelty of haptic experience may dictate the success of the assemblage. The romantic poets wax lyrical about the longing to caress the skin of a lover, to know its softness and warmth as if they too are not bound in the same human wrapping of fats, proteins and minerals. There is a power in crossing the boundary between wondering and knowing what the skin of another feels like and the circumstances in which that boundary is crossed. Do not touch the seals on the beach. They bite. But maybe the Skin won't.

The exodermis, in isolation from the soma is an object. The object contains potentials of action and agency but is reliant upon its acceptance into the assemblage to live out that potential as a Selkie Skin. Is touching the skin-object crossing the same boundary as caressing the face of a compatriot? Is cutting it an act of violation? For the transformation into Selkie to be successful the transition from object to skin must be seamless. Stepping from the imaginary to the organic realms bridged by skin-ego, for the exodermis to be successful as a performance tool it must fulfil the sensory criteria the performer expects from a part of their own body. I propose these criteria as: a neutral temperature, non-synthetic material feeling and the impression of seamlessness. Humans don't always feel comfortable in their skin, skin is not consistently smooth or unbroken, it has folds and bends, but it does not (barring the scars of life) have construction lines. In the early beginnings of western medicine, it was the barrier that man must cross to access the knowledge of the body within. The epidermis was the physical manifestation of the line those early surgeons had to cross to deface Gods creation in the name of their own curiosity. Skin should be, at least on a macro-level, a complete covering opening only for the sense and excretion organs. At the micro level the material is far more complex, but this is simpler to allegorise in fabric. There

should be no illusion here that I will be growing living skin in a biochemical lab (possibly a few bioplastics), the technical challenge of the exodermis is to create an object that envelopes the soma in a way that the psyche can accept the new potential-skin-ego as an element of the whole without simply defaulting to the experience of putting on clothes. The execution of this is an open-ended question but seamlessness in simulation of growth must be central to the sensorial belief that you are the Selkie.



9.

#### Point 4 - Poetic Faith

Having an audience accept the reality that they are the Voyeur seeing a Selkie change its Skin on a wind swept beach requires the suspension of disbelief. The poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the phrase in 1817 when suggesting that a writer can “transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (Coleridge, 2004, ch. 14). For the sake of human interest, Coleridge emphasises the romantic, we are willing to ignore the artifice of entertainment in order to feed our imagination. This may be the same ‘human interest’ Artaud sought to escape but their intentions are the same; to create a place to feel alive, for a moment. Returning for a moment to the New Materialist decentralisation of the human in the assemblage, “human interest” can be re-written as ‘necessity’. The collective agreement to believe rises not from the breadcrumb engagement of “human interest” but because it feeds something. The audience gains something (catharsis, schadenfreude, anaesthetic) from accepting what the performing body and its surroundings have established are real. The ritual of theatre-going is the process of activating the suspension of disbelief; low lights, the fourth wall delineating performed reality from audience, established etiquette and heightened drama. A room decides together that in this time and place they will believe in magic.

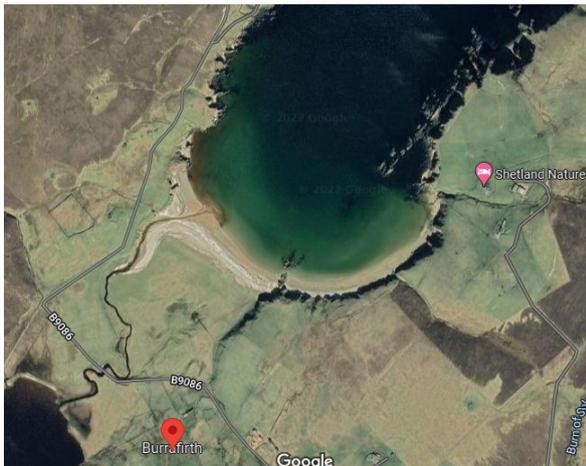
Through the research for this essay the question of what is a Selkie? has been levelled many times alongside the question of knowing in order the work to be desirable and understandable. Although many cultures have skin walkers and shape shifters in their folk repertoire the Selkie (or Silkie or Selkol) is particular the coastal inhabitants of the Scottish islands and west coast, as well as the Faeroe Islands and parts of Iceland. In these places suspension of disbelief is overtaken by genealogical

memory; for those who have lived and worked alongside the seal-folk the Selkie is real. In 1992 Scottish story collector Duncan Williamson published arguably the most authentic (unromanticised) collection of Selkie stories available. Williamson uses the west coast pronunciation of Silkie, referring to the silky coat of the seal, more than the Shetland derivative Selkie to retell all manner of meetings between man and seal told to him by firelight or between pulls of an oar. Williamson attaches truth and place to each of his stories with a short paragraph explaining how and when he heard it, printed below the title and an illustration for each story. This is Williamsons proscenium arch, the readers gateway to belief.

What the witness knows will alter what they see. As a theatrical tool the exodermis will not always resemble a seal in form or aspect (and the stage will not always resemble a beach) but it will always function as a Selkie Skin. This means that without introduction most may never know the connection between the enveloped performing body and the story of the seal-folk on a far-flung North Sea beach. This absence of pre-knowledge might provide a more authentic viewing of the Selkie assemblage as it is in the moment of viewing without the externally imposed narrative. It can be argued that the bar for suspension of disbelief is lower when the audience is given an idea of what to believe, sending them in cold requires greater emphasis on establishing an environment of belief and interactivity around the performing body.



10.



11.

#### FOURTH EXPERIMENT

##### Projection and place

The Selkies stage is the beach; this could be the literal seashore, any natural point of transition, or an imagined boundary created in a performance space. The Voyeur does not have the luxury of a proscenium arch to create the window of magic that suspends their critical analysis, they are at the blurred edge of being in and with the performing body and could at any moment step in and take the role of Selkie. The magic must exude from the Skin. Light is a kind of magic skin, a touch felt with the eyes, a fragment of the dystopian future of unreality. Light blurs the edges of being in and with, and being in blind shadow. Placing a hand in front of a projector steals the image for your own skin while shattering the illusion that the bulb is a portal.

The live image of Burrafirth hits a white-painted Norwegian kitchen as a group of Sellkie-Women prepare a winter dinner.

We have all agreed to these terms: we are Selkies, we are on this shore, today we are the voyeurs, the gulls that pass the mechanical eye cannot see us. The light hits our faces more than intended, blending us to our landscape. The whipping waves hit warm in candlelight.

This is artifice but also, truly, truth.

Final thought.

The potential of the exodermis is unknown until it meets the body, the potential of the story is unknown until it meets an audience. There is a Selkie on the beach that knows they're being watched. They drop their skin on purpose, it is good to feel with another skin, to open up the other ego to the air for a while. You can borrow the skin, you won't break it, it has its own reasons to be.

Skin is not a fixed surface. While it does contain it also converses and acts on impulse. As a performance tool the Selkie skin operates of the level of the organic and the imaginary to open up narrative transfer through sensation and spectacle. From here the possibilities branch out across the myriad of shifting assemblage arrangements. Wherever it touches, the seal skin finds a stage and what will grow upon that stage is still to come.

#### FOURTH EXPERIMENT

Boundry, You

In the water you are something else.

Your body is an overcomplicated mechanical solution for moving water around. Once, the whole ocean was your blood, passing through and through and through and you, just a dot in the vastness of the whole. The shoreline was the edge of you. The edge of your moon-pumped circulation. Time dragged us from the water, and we took the currents with us. Grew our own inlets and lakes, our own tides and chasms. The skin is our sandy beach, the line between the roaring waves inside and the tumbling salt outside. Saline. Salient.

Skin is the thing that floats between. The cellular tectonic shifts of a billion flecks of you slowly becoming something else. The dust passing through to dust as your personal ocean ambles to the end. You can slough off this skin on the sand and pull up a new one, you and the quartz have that in common. Crystallise in magma.

Over seven years, the human body regenerates. The skin that touched the water when you learned to swim is gone. But it left behind the memory of the song.

You will not drown. You will not fall. The flesh you scraped on rocky edges is with the water now. The old tongue fell out of your mouth, but you can still feel it's ripple.



c.

## IMAGES

- a. *Rest and Wait*, Selkie in stasis, Gressholmen, (Photo: Molly Andrews)
- b. *Am I a Selkie yet?* Minn Beach, Shetland (Photo: Lydia Hann)
- 1. *The Selkies* by F. S. Copeland, enveloped pages, unfinished, (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 2. *performance score on the de/reterritorialisation axis*, moleskin sketchbook, Lydia Hann
- 3. *the hand and the spaces between*, multimedia (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 4. Selkie hand in a coffee shop (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 5. *the hand that holds*, Design Grupperom 2, (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 6. *pressure, hand on glass*, digital scanner, Lydia Hann
- 7. *Give Them Wings rehearsal period* (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 8. *stills from Cold Water Together*, Gressholmen (photo/video: Lydia Hann)
- 9. Selkie/Seal/Voyeur/Beach, moleskin sketchbook, Lydia Hann
- 10. *Burrafirth, Shetlandwebcams.com projection in the kitchen of Langesgate 5*, (photo: Lydia Hann)
- 11. *Satellite view of Burrafirth*, Google Maps
- c. *Seaweed, borderline and multitude* (Photo: Lydia Hann)

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