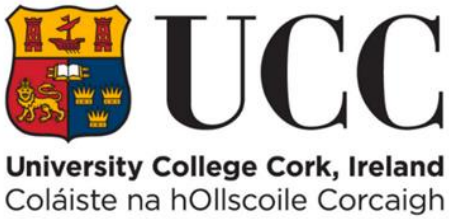
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Animal-Woman Journey(s)

Posthuman embodiment of zoomorphic folk tales

Roksana Niewadzisz

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork

Department of Theatre

Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies

Head of Department of Theatre: Dr Yvon Bonefant

Supervisors: Dr Helena Buffery and Dr Róisín O'Gorman

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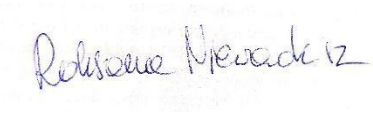
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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.



Roksana Niewadzisz

ABSTRACT

Diverse folktales passed down across the generations in different languages tell of Seal Women, Selkies, Mermaids, Dove Girls, She-Wolves, Swan Women: all zoomorphic or semi-zoomorphic beings able to remove their animal coats or skins and take on human shape. Liminal creatures capable of transformation, they embrace the wild and the civilized, animal and human, aquatic, aerial and terrestrial, natural and supernatural, archetypal and individual. They have the ability to move between worlds. Across a vast range of stories, these creaturely women are deprived of their animal skin; losing their integrity and ability to transform, they are doomed to incompleteness, foreignness, otherness and longing. They get "stuck" in human form and are forced to function according to imposed human rules. They are trapped somewhere between subject and object, "I" and "Other", between their body and its image.

Such tales offer rich territory for performative exploration of the normalized processes of oppression underpinning both human exceptionalism and the environmental crises associated with the Anthropocene, as well as compelling alternative formulations of our relational co-existence with non-human others and "othered" humans. This thesis re-imagines these tales, in and through processes of carefully researched and documented performance practice, not as warnings to instruct women to behave, but as sites of remembrance, mourning and even liberatory enactment of other ways of being. Adopting a broadly eco-critical perspective sensitive to place, resilience and relatedness, this thesis attends to post-human-animality through a process of literal and figurative interrogation of skin and language, translating these stories of Animal-Woman transformations as markers of otherness and vehicles of change.

Alongside careful attention to the ethno-linguistic, socio-cultural and environmental specificity of these tales, the core of this thesis explores performative research modes capable of weaving an alternative post-humanistic discourse into embodied practice. It employs an original iterative methodology, deployed across each of the tales and their psychic, social and environmental territories in a spiral journey that interweaves reading, theoretical reflection and different forms of artistic research and performance practice. In the process my/the performer's body becomes both a potent site of multiple identities and an experimental laboratory for exploring affective, relational and political processes of othering, introducing polyvocality through interdisciplinary arts practice, and traversing bodily, linguistic, cultural and geopolitical borders.

See video: Animal-Woman Journey(s). Abstract

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Animal-Woman Journey(s)

Posthuman embodiment of zoomorphic folk tales

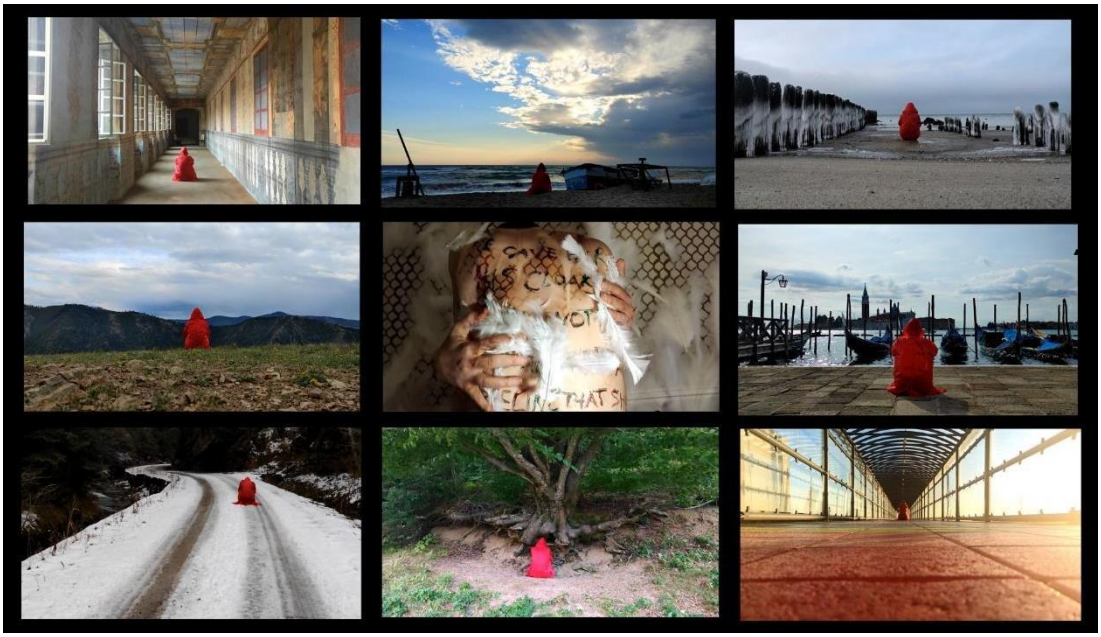


Figure 1 “Animal-Woman Journey” collage with frames from “Animal-Woman Journey”

To all Animal-Women who are searching for their skin(s)

INTRODUCTION

This artistic practice-based thesis explores pressing contemporary challenges: the multiple impacts of the environmental, political and economic crises associated with the Anthropocene on the relationship between humans and with non-human others. Inspired by posthuman, new materialist and ecofeminist thinking, and drawing on scholarship from a myriad of disciplines (philosophy, history, biology, physiology etc.), it turns to zoomorphic folktales, as retold over the centuries, to explore ways of (re)imagining animal-human relationality: from the Seal Woman Stories I explored in my MA, to Swan Women, She-Wolves, Mermaids and Dove Girls, crossing diverse territories, languages and environments. The particular concern with tales that involve taking or losing animal skin, often as cautionary tales for women to behave, produced a focus on 'skin' that ultimately became the central motif of my research. Skin as a container of our inner flesh, organs, bones, that marks us out as recognisable individuals; skin as a barrier that protects us and preserves our autonomy; but also as a porous, permeable organ that enables our interaction with the environment around us and is inhabited by multiple different forms of life.

Combining careful research into the diverse affordances of these stories and (their) skin/s, between languages, bodies and worlds, together with performative explorations of how to get under their skin, this thesis explores questions of how women/animals have been othered and rendered non-human through processes of literally and figuratively depriving them of skin; how their skins contribute to their (in)ability to travel, cross borders, and live liveable lives; but also how close engagement with skin, hospitality, openness and affect can transform these relationships and enact other ways of being in relation.

Central to my research is an embodied interdisciplinary methodology that situates the body of the artist/performer at the centre of explorations as a medium for acquiring, translating and/or creating knowledge. This methodology draws both from "embodied philosophy", that is, a range of somatic and eco-somatic approaches and practices I will discuss in more depth in chapter 2, and also from multidisciplinary arts practices involving video, sound, objects and deep engagement with space, to introduce other bodies, voices and environments in ways that push beyond the unitary

point of view of the "One" to introduce and elaborate through polyvocality. These embodied interdisciplinary explorations through the medium of the materiality of the body constitute the spine of this practice-based PhD thesis. Deployed iteratively across each of the Animal-Woman tales selected as case studies for this thesis, they support the journey of the researcher's body literally and figuratively, in a series of movements that traverse linguistic, living animal/human, cultural and geopolitical borders. With each folk tale, I work from the limits of my body and my skin, in contact with other languages, stories, environments and skins, to examine established and repetitive patterns of oppression and propose alternative, more connected and relational, ways of being and becoming. This iterative methodology, combining close attention to what lies beneath the layers of skin(s) and moving out in a spiral to explore beyond what lies beyond, shapes the Animal-Woman journey(s) of this thesis, as a form of mobile post-human mediation, made up of alternative rituals and performances that bring creativity into desk-based research and post-human thought into artistic practice.

Origins

My immersion in diverse cultures and languages, as an interdisciplinary polylingual artist and researcher with a background in Art History, Translation and Theatre, has been incredibly enriching, but is not without its challenges: metaphorical homelessness, otherness, longing, the sensation of not belonging and in-betweenness. With time I realized that these sensations stemmed not only from my "nomadic" way of life but also from the fact of being a woman entangled in deeply socially ingrained patriarchal structures. In October 2018 I created a short poetic performance about a woman squeezed into an imposed suit. Further on, trying to find a way to extend this "embodied(bodying) experiment" (Drum, 2017) through writing I attended a somatic movement workshop, and the Seal Woman folk story came to my mind.[1] I felt that this Animal-Woman creature deprived of her seal skin and trapped in a human world was a mythological representation of all these concepts. The Seal Woman story provided a lens of feminist critical analysis and performative practice from where I began to re-

[1] It was a version written by Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) that led me to explore other iterations of the Seal Woman folk tale from different countries. In the end I created my own version titled "Seal Woman Story" that became a narrative core for my MA thesis.

discover and explore the pervasive patriarchal mechanisms of othering manifested in sexism, xenophobia, racism, classism. Embodying the experiences of marginalized, traumatized women, alongside the suffering of aquatic animals, I was able to see the impact of both the mechanisms of patriarchal control and the capitalist exploitation of the Earth, non-human "others" and "othered" humans, which brought us to the point of Anthropocene. This awareness completely changed my vision of the world and awoke in me a need to look for modes in which performative practice can resist imposed patriarchal structures, and transform our ways of knowing, understanding and thinking. My PhD research emerged from this need to investigate ways of exploring and re-imagining markers of otherness through embodied practice – skin, language and body – in order to connect with the liminality of Animal-Women, their relational and transformative potential, and for them to regain their integrity and find "home".

Since then, these Animal-Women have accompanied me on a creative and personal transformative journey through inner and outer patterns within which the human and non-human "others of modernity" (Braidotti, 2013) function; journey(s) into and through different skins, languages, cultures and places; negotiating internal and external patterns and structures. This thesis gathers together in written and audiovisual form some of the footprints of my thinking as well as the processes of performative, visual and sound practice that unfolded during this research journey. It follows and recovers traces of stories that are vanishing in this Sixth Mass Extinction due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and is deeply inspired and informed by posthumanist, ecofeminist and feminist thinkers as well as somatic and artistic practice.

Research Context

> *The time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational first principles.* (Tsing, 2015, p. VII)

Faced with global environmental catastrophe, posthumanist scholarship asks us to seek alternatives both in our thinking and in our ways of living. How can we change the deeply ingrained hierarchical structures we live by? Can the structural "Others of modernity" actually provide some of the answers? This thesis addresses these questions through the transdisciplinary analysis of human-animal and human-othered relationality. Continuing the long tradition of "fabulists, including non-Western and

non-civilizational storytellers" (Tsing, 2015, p. VII), I explore that which is often termed the posthuman turn through performative modes. By focusing on non-verbal creaturely life, as recounted and transmitted in zoomorphic folk tales of human-animal transformations, questions of who is deemed human, and by what powers, are brought to the fore.

This research project aims to recover, translate and reimagine these tales through a process of embodied and creative research responding to Donna Haraway's reminder: "it matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts" (Haraway, 2015, p. 160). Folktales are often treated in contemporary society like they do not matter. Despite having been passed down across the generations orally in many cultures, they tend not to be considered knowledge in a world where things are explained only by science and justified by industrial or technological impact. They are often disposable, marginalised, or dedicated to children. They are often changed, softened or universalised, as in the case of Disney Productions, becoming a repetition of harmful patterns (of stories that originally are often anti-feminist, patriarchal and misogynous). But since there is no "proper" version, there is no one "accurate" interpretation, as they often depend on the gender and personal experiences of the storyteller (Almqvist, 1990).

At the core of the artistic research developed across this thesis are four folktales: *Swan Maiden* (Jacobs, 1916), *The Little Mermaid* (Andersen, 1837), *She-Wolf* (Wratislaw, 1890), and *The Dove Girl* (Calvino, [1980] 2012). In these, Selkies, Mermaids, Dove Girls, She-Wolfs, Swan Women, among others, are zoomorphic or semi-zoomorphic beings able to remove their animal coats or skins and take on human shape (Almqvist, 1990). They represent liminal creatures capable of transformation who embrace the wild *and* the civilized, animal *and* human, aquatic/air *and* terrestrial, natural *and* supernatural, archetypal *and* individual, etc. This ability to move between worlds is their power and their potency.

There are myriad stories of humans transformed into other animate or inanimate beings, or vice versa, due to some external supernatural miraculous power. In the chosen folk tales, however, dubbed Animal-Women transformation folk tales for the purpose of this research, what makes these women transform is their animality. Their protagonists are initially able to change their form and inhabit both human and

animal worlds according to their will. However, across a vast range of versions, their skin is stolen by a man and they need to follow him and live only in a human world. When one day they recover their animal skins they rush back to their animal world.

In my explorations I focus on the Animal-Woman as a liminal creature. I imagine who or what the "hunter" (*Swan Maiden*), Soldier (*She-Wolf*), "lad" (*The Dove Girl*) who steals the Animal-Woman skin is and what this animal skin could be. I examine the moment when these creaturely women are deprived of their animal skin, losing their integrity and ability to transform, and are doomed to incompleteness, foreignness, otherness and longing. I imagine them "stuck" in human form and forced to function according to imposed patriarchal rules; stripped of their identity, image and subjectivity, and trapped somewhere between subject and object, "the I" and "the Other", between their body and its image. Silencing and hiding their origin and multiplicity in order to survive, they are consigned to a perpetual loss of integrity, the memory of which is inscribed in and on their bodies and passed on for generations.

This research proceeds in a deliberate yet speculative way, allowing the processes of creative practice to foreground new ways of thinking about these stories and their significance in addressing current societal and environmental challenges. In my embodied interdisciplinary methodology these Animal-Woman folk tales became case studies to frame diverse discussions about contemporary crises that relate to heteropatriarchal hierarchies, xenophobia, racism, othering, environmental collapse, and intersect in/on and affect bodies of women, animals and Earth others. They became lenses through which not only to read other texts, stories and performances, but also to observe, listen to and live in the world. In the process, I also wonder how these Animal-Women may regain their animal skin through the materiality of their own human skins and relationality with other skins. And because skin is a focal point of this research, this has led to wide-ranging investigation of the different somatic, scientific, linguistic and metaphorical discourses and affordances of skin. Skin ultimately became a structuring motif in writing (and wrapping) up my thesis.

Animal-Women Transformation Folktales

As Jane Gary and Hassan M. El-Shamy have shown, there are multiple versions of Animal-Woman folk tales embedded in diverse cultures and languages, many of them

"strikingly similar despite local coloration and variation" (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 94). For Bo Almqvist, the purpose of folk legends was not only to entertain but also to educate by shaping aesthetics and moral attitudes. While emphasizing the realism of the tales in their reflection of "nature, society and livelihood… in which they are so firmly anchored", he also draws attention to the deep "psychological insight" they offer into "the fears and hopes of the people who tell them and listen to them" (Almqvist, 1991, p. 1). In joining "wild" nature with "civilized" humans, folk tales embrace dualities, such as the real and the imaginary, the universal and the individual, the mythological and the contemporary. They are always also firmly embedded in specific locations and environments. The story of the Seal Maiden, for example, was common in northern maritime countries where the sea was a "joining link" and exposed the social issues facing those places (Almqvist, 1990). The *Swan Maiden* type, which sometimes takes the form of a duck or goose, was told where people saw the urgency of these birds' migration to different territories. As Arthur Thomas Hatto surmises, "the first true 'swan'-maidens must have been migratory and aquatic" (Hatto, 1961, p. 333). For the eminent American folklorist Stith Thomson, "[i]n folktale everywhere the human world and the animal world lie close together, and we easily move from one to the other, hardly noticing when the transition is made" (Thompson, 1946, p. 353). Furthermore, the animal- and earth-others in these tales do not just provide the background for human activity but have agency and influence on events. In them, human and non- human others often find ways to communicate.

Animal-Woman transformation folk tales are multi-layered and rich in elements that can be interpreted in myriad ways. They embrace Felix Guattari's three ecologies (Guattari, 2000), linking the psychic, the social and the environmental, via the body and different modes of embodiment. Although they are firmly embedded in a specific natural environment and raise issues facing specific cultures, they address thorny questions like foreignness, xenophobia and non-understanding, honing in on people's relation to non-human others and othered humans. They are realistic and romantic, embracing a variety of themes and shrouding them in mystery and magic. Such tales offer rich territory for performative exploration of the normalized processes of oppression underpinning both human exceptionalism and the environmental crises associated with the Anthropocene, as well as compelling alternative formulations of our relational co-existence with both "othered" human and non-human others.

Returning to the example of Seal Woman, for instance, Almqvist speculates that different versions of the story could have provided reflection on forced marriage in the case of premarital sexual relationships, particularly those by which girls become pregnant, or those in which the partners have not seen each other until the day of the arrangements. But it was also probably a warning before marrying a person who is not from one's own local culture (Almqvist, 1990). For instance, Hatto interprets it as having to do with "the pitiable lot of a girl from another tribe and territory who has been trapped into an unsuitable union through the guile and strength of a man" (1961, p. 333), making him suspect that "its first tellers may have been women"(334). Other scholars indicate that the tale could offer a form of explanation for "often minor physical disfigurements" by recourse to supernatural ancestry (Darwin, 2015, p. 125), reminding us that "even the gentlest animal brides bring with them an element of fear or distrust" due to their ties to nature and capacity to "call up forces with which civilized beings had lost touch" (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 94). Whereas Garry and El-Shamy agree that it could embody "women's desires for autonomy and equality in marriage", they also indicate it might "reflect men's fantasies of captured and domesticated power; and … male anxiety about desertion or abandonment by women" (94-95). In Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés's interpretation, the Seal element of the tale is a symbol of a wild soul, the animal skin being the skin of this soul and the thief of the skin standing for the ego in the woman's psyche (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 192-195). In her reading, the animal skin is not an object, but rather a state of coherence and harmony with a wild, soulful, female element, which women lose due to their naivety and lack of awareness.

A significant number of scholarly readings and interpretations of Animal-Woman tales focus on sexuality and gender relations, where the "One" possessing the skin of "the Other" takes control over them (Darwin, 2015, p. 125). According to Barbara Fass Leavy, for instance, "the burning of the animal wife's skin [as in Italo Calvino's account of the Dove Girl folk tale] is a representation of the triumph of culture over nature" and "almost always implies a loss of status, a transition from freedom to control, not only the internal control that society demands of all its members but also the specific control of her husband" (Fass Leavy, 1994, p. 228). For her, this process of domestication is designed to tame "women's desire for some power", which is held against her by society and, hence, "translated into a pernicious

feminine trait that justifies man's endeavour to keep her in her place" (197). This taming may start early, as a "disobedient daughter" can become a "deviant woman" (198), and is linked by her to an equal fear of nature (240). Likewise, Pinkola Estés writes of a "wild time" (childhood) when we lived within nature cycles and seasons that "calmed us, danced us, shook us, reassured us, made us learn creaturally" and were "part of our soul-skins—a pelt that enveloped us and the wild and natural world—at least until we were told that there really were only four seasons to a year, and that women themselves really only had three seasons—girlhood, adulthood, and old womanhood" (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 188). She considers the loss of this wild skin as part of the process of initiation in life, often introduced by other women previously initiated by their female ancestors. Unfortunately, in her view, many of these initiators often copy a male style of initiation, using shame and humiliation as toughening tools (360). It is this ingrained model of cohesive force that is passed on for generations, while living according to imposed, established and unnatural cycles, far away from our natural wild soul-home makes us "suffer from dryness, tiredness, and homesickness" (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 188).

My own approach to these story-types relates to these interpretations, but, in line with posthumanist thought, I view this desire for possession and control as a more pervasive mechanism of a heteropatriarchal capitalist system that operates on relations between different nations, as well as between humans and the natural environment. Braidotti urges us to look for interconnections between mechanisms that are structures in which the world is entangled, stating that "the subject is ontologically polyvocal" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93). In line with her call, the practice explored in this thesis is a continuous fabulation that consists of reimagining other ways of being. Through embodied practices (somatics, butoh, psychophysical practice) my research process links stories of Animal-Women with experiences of excluded and marginalised women, minorities, animals, places. These embodied patterns are externalized and explored through traversal connections within the psychic, the social and the environmental spaces and forces that surround them. Ultimately, my research aims to speak with their silenced stories; not to speak *for them*, "constituting the Other as a Self's shadow" (Spivak, 1988, p. 70) but "learning how to talk with [them], let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself" (Derrida, 1994, p. 221). This manifests through intermedial practice

integrating movement, images, video, sounds, installations and most importantly spaces in-between – the untranslatable "gaps" (Cronin, 2019) in which the spectator can engage in their own conversation with these *specters* (Derrida, 1994, p. 221).

Methodology

In posthuman philosophy there is a call for metanarratives which unify theory, poiesis and praxis where "the processes embedded in revealing knowledge, production, and action are intrinsically and extrinsically cohabiting each other" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 59) In my research the critical apparatus outlined in chapter 1 is deeply entangled with processes of thinking through creative practice, each mutually informing the other. Rooted in an extensive literature review that spans posthumanist, eco-critical and eco-feminist scholarship, more specific investigation of animality/human-animal relationality, and archival work on zoomorphic folk-tales, my selection and analysis of the stories for subsequent phases drew on interpretive models from anthropology, ethno-linguistics and translation, while aiming to ensure representation of different environmental, linguistic and socio-cultural contexts.

Across the chosen performative case studies, I maintain literal and figurative focus on two key elements: skin and language, as both manifest as markers of otherness and liminal vehicles of transformation simultaneously. Through these material elements, my thesis explores touch and the embodiment of language, both as cultural markers and forms of transversal cross-species communication. Drawing on debates over cultural translation, eco-translation and translatability, I set out to explore ways of mediating different worldviews in ways that do not simply appropriate and domesticate to a dominant, hegemonic language. Through somatic practice, which focuses on direct embodied experience, I have been deeply investigating the embodiment of skin and language, in order to move beyond solely representational modes of "reading" and marking. Rather than a single incremental project, my thesis presents as a series of interlinked experimental and experiential multimedia projects which make space for these overlooked experiences and stories.[2] This allows space for the silences and the voices of "the Othered", as accessed through tales in diverse

[2] The link provided here pertains to the full portfolio of practice submitted for examination with this thesis. Further links will be provided to specific items in the relevant sections of this thesis.

languages, to potentially or partially regain their subjectivity, liminality and power of transformation through visual art and performance.

See also Portfolio of practice Collection. Animal Woman Journey(s).

Selected folktales

My PhD focuses on four folk tales, chosen to allow me to explore a range of different processes and psychic, social and environmental contexts. At the beginning of my PhD research, I planned to focus on a wider range of stories, but those that became a core of my practice came to me through the influence of readings undertaken at each stage of the research process, as well as through different aspects of my developing somatic practice, but above all through the way in which they resonated with contemporary events locally and globally.

The Swan Maiden (Jacobs, 1916) was the folk tale I focused on during the first year of my research, coinciding with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was itself referred to by some experts as the Black Swan (Zwick, 2020). During this time, I was "stuck" alone between the four walls of my room, unable to fly and be with my close friends and family, my kin. *Swan Maiden*, this liminal migratory and water being (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005) trapped on foreign, human ground, became suddenly a very close companion. Moreover, in this period, I was participating in a translation of *En el principio*, a monodrama written by Catalan-Argentine playwright Victoria Szpunberg in June 2020, which talks about domestic violence during the pandemic. The main character in the play, Eva S., also a migrant, also a foreigner, is stuck with her aggressive partner in a small flat in Barcelona. Through this translation process, Swan Maiden became a haunting spectre not only in my life but also in my work.

See: Portfolio of Practice: Sub-Collection: Swan Woman.

"The Little Mermaid" (Andersen, 1837; English translation 1949) is a story about a woman with a fishtail who trades her voice for legs in order to marry a prince (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 71). The story came to me when I was on the Italian coast enjoying the view of the sea and open horizon for the first time in months, but my thoughts immediately went to those who, in the midst of all the beauty of the Mediterranean sea, perish in their search for liveable lives. Specifically, the passage

"and she felt her body dissolve into foam" (Andersen, 1949) came to mind. So, even though Andersen's version does not contain the "animal skin robbery" motif,[3] I decided to include it because of the way it resonated with childhood dreams and memories. Andersen's Mermaid—"a softened, Christianized, and domesticated figure" (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 98)—risked her life to follow her dreams, marry a prince, and become "fully human", not knowing the outcome of this journey, like so many racialized "Others", dispossessed of their homes, lands, families, language and voice, who attempt to cross the Mediterranean on overcrowded boats and at the mercy of human traffickers. The story evokes and embodies a new materialist ontology—the protagonist transforms from mermaid into woman to ultimately become foam, whose particles are rising up from the sea—not only connecting with the core idea of the relationship between body and skin at the heart of this thesis, but also with the posthuman idea that we are "bodies of water" (Neimanis, 2016) in a process of continuous transformation.[4]

See: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: Little Mermaid.

The **"She-Wolf"** folktale can be found in *Sixty-four Folk tales from exclusively Slavonic sources* gathered by A.H. Wratislaw (1890). In the story, the She-Wolf is observed by a soldier in an enchanted mill, while she takes off her skin preparing herself to sleep. He steals her skin and forces her to become his wife, trapped in human form inside the mill. Finally, thanks to her son, she finds her skin and runs away. In my interpretation, however, the She-Wolf escapes the mill without her wolf skin, trying to survive in the forest, and becomes an archetype both for the racialised others trapped on the Polish and Belarusian border and for wolves displaced by human encroachment.

See: Portfolio of Practice: Sub-Collection: She-Wolf

In "**The Dove Girl"**, as recounted by Italo Calvino ([1980] 2012), the Animal-Woman is bathing with other dove girls in human form in a fountain, when her skin is taken by a "lad". In this story, "The Dove Girl" of the title is reduced to one of the

[3] Such as Thomas Crofton Croker's story of a "merrow" captured by an Irish fisherman who became a perfect wife but run away when found her mermaid's cap (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 98); or present in Seal Woman tales, such as the ones explored in my MA.

[4] Donna Haraway's notion of human and non-human compost can be related to this idea, as will be explored later in chapter 2. See Haraway (2015)

male hero's conquests, as even in the story's structure she is being marginalized and deprived of subjectivity. Simultaneously a pigeon and a dove, as embraced by the Latin term Columbidae, she became an inspiration to explore the relationship between humans and pigeons/doves—feral and domesticated—which are both a symbol of peace, purity and eternal love and also unwanted inhabitants of our cities, associated with dirt, excrement and germs. Pigeons and doves became "my guide" (Haraway, 2016) in re-telling the story to interrogate human exceptionalism. Who are the contemporary Dove-Girls whose feathers have been stolen? Who are the marginalized, often hidden inhabitants of our cities? Who are the domesticated and cherished white Dove-Girls and who, the dirty, unwanted ones?

See: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl.

Thesis Structure

My thesis is structured into four chapters which interlink with a series of creative objects and explorations documented and contained within separate files in a separate portfolio of artistic practice.

Chapter 1, entitled **"Skin of the Trouble"**, begins with a discussion of posthumanist and ecofeminist critiques of human exceptionalism. It begins by taking us through the crux of the "trouble" (Haraway, 2016) identified with the pressing societal, environmental and necropolitical challenges facing our planet, by identifying and scrutinising Humanist constructions of concepts of the Human, Animal, Woman and Earth- Other. The final part of the chapter discusses my in-depth embodied investigation of these same themes through iterations of the *Swan Maiden* folktale, focusing in particular on my video-adaptation of a play by Victoria Szpunberg, *En el principio* (2020), translated into English by Helena Buffery and a group of MA Translation students in 2021. The chapter interweaves excerpts of more personal, performative/auto-fictional writing, styled as "Letters to K.", to provide a glimpse of the process of translation and interweaving between academic discourse and embodied practice and between psychic, societal and environmental ecologies. This device is repeated across the other chapters in the thesis.

Chapter 2, "Skin of Practice", delves more deeply into the layers of creative and embodied practice developed and explored across the course of my PhD research.

It includes my approach towards practice, from artistic practice seen as a process of intersemiotic translation to the transformative potential of the theatre and performance for reflecting on ways of embodying other "skins" and stories, through different modes, such as somatic and ecosomatic practices, and other intermedial modes, processes and techniques, such as interlingual translation, directing and devising other voices, video-documentation, composition and the haptic. The written discussion of research context intermingles with performative exploration, through two different iterations of "The Foam/La Schiuma", inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*.

Chapter 3, "Matter of Skin", engages deeply with writings and scholarship on skin from a range of different perspectives. Core to the folktale types I have chosen to explore, this intense focus on skin enables me to attend to the different layers and functions of what is now considered the body's largest organ, the matter that both contains us and affects how we are seen as autonomous, individual beings, and that constitutes our openness and contact to the world around us. At the end of this chapter I delve into my performative exploration of the She-Wolf story to reflect on how the multiple layers and affordances of skin were explored in my practice. However, as with each of the stories, the iterative process means they simultaneously involve engagement with other questions, such as language, embodiment and video and performative practice.

Chapter 4, "Skin of Language", engages deeply with writings and scholarship on translation, pre-verbal language, translanguaging, self-translation and 'broken languages'. It culminates with analysis of my embodied and performative research of the folk tale *The Dove Girl*, inspired by my explorations of the dove/pigeon 'binary' discussed above across a range of iterations, including Calvino's version of the tale, such as Patrick Süskind's *The Pigeon,* Sergio Blanco's *Kassandra*, classical texts on Cassandra, *The Dove Girl/La Plaza del Diamante* by Merce Rodoreda, *Pigeon Fly!* by Leonora Carrington, *How to skin a bird* by Chelsea Biondolillo and other literature in which the core motifs are birds and women.

The concluding chapter presents a reflection on this practice-based thesis that has been continuously moving in-between different borders of skins, languages, lands and disciplines. It reflects on different ways in which I explored territories of human

and non-human skins through the lenses of Animal-Women folk tales, eco-somatics and the transformative potential of theatre/performance. The chapter, and my thesis as a whole, culminates with a piece of creative writing entitled "Animal-Women Journey". This piece is intended to provide a moving and intermingled overview—a kind of vade mecum—of my research, bringing together the different motifs, inspirations and reflections that were my companions on this multilayered, border-crossing journey.

The **Appendices** contain more extended reflection on my artistic research process as well as elements of the visual documentation of the practice, thus forming a bridge between the written part of this thesis and the **Portfolio of Practice: Collection. Animal Woman Journey(s)**.[5] Within the body of this thesis I indicate different moments in which the reader could look at the Portfolio of practice and particular pieces, however these are only suggestions, as each reader can choose their own way to navigate through it composing their own journey.

Although writing requires a certain linearity, the ideas developed in each of the different sections described above will be traceable in other parts of my writing and practice. As Rosi Braidotti said, "Thinking and writing, like breathing, are not held into the mould of linearity, or the confines of the printed page, but move outwards, out of bounds, in webs of encounters with ideas, others, texts" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 166). The writings thus "wrapped in the skin of this thesis" are translations, with all its losses and gains (Venuti, 2002, p. 6), of a process of continuous creating and re-thinking through and with-in of who I am/was/will be-ing, present, past and future continuous.

[5] Some frames from the pieces included in the Portfolio are interwoven into the body of this thesis to provide 'glimpses' of my body of practice.

PORTFOLIO OF PRACTICE

While I have selected and curated the pieces that offer greatest insight into the research questions and practice addressed and developed across the thesis, they form part of a far larger body of work that has emerged from my PhD research process. An overview of this work is provided below. In each case, the link takes the reader to the description of the pieces housed in a specially designed collection for the Digital Repository of Ireland, each of which is followed by a further link that enables viewing of each piece.

Collection: ANIMAL-WOMAN JOURNEY(S)

Animal-Woman Journey(s). Abstract (video-piece 1:43 min.):

Sub-Collection 1. SWAN WOMAN

In the Beginning (video-piece 13:57 min.)

Sub-Collection 2. LITTLE MERMAID

The Foam/La Schiuma (1st iteration video-piece 3:35 min.)

The Foam/La Schiuma (Breathlessness) (2nd iteration video-piece 3:33 min.)

Sub-Collection 3. SHE-WOLF

She-Wolf Skin (video-piece 09:33)

She-Wolf Performance & Installation (video-documentation: 9:39 min)

Triptych Cold. She-Wolf Lullaby (video-piece 5:40 min)

Sub-Collection 4. THE DOVE GIRL

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Trailer (curated video-documentation: 6:18 min.)

The Dove-Pigeon Girl (video-piece/projection 15:46 min)

Feathers (video-piece/projection 11:14 min)

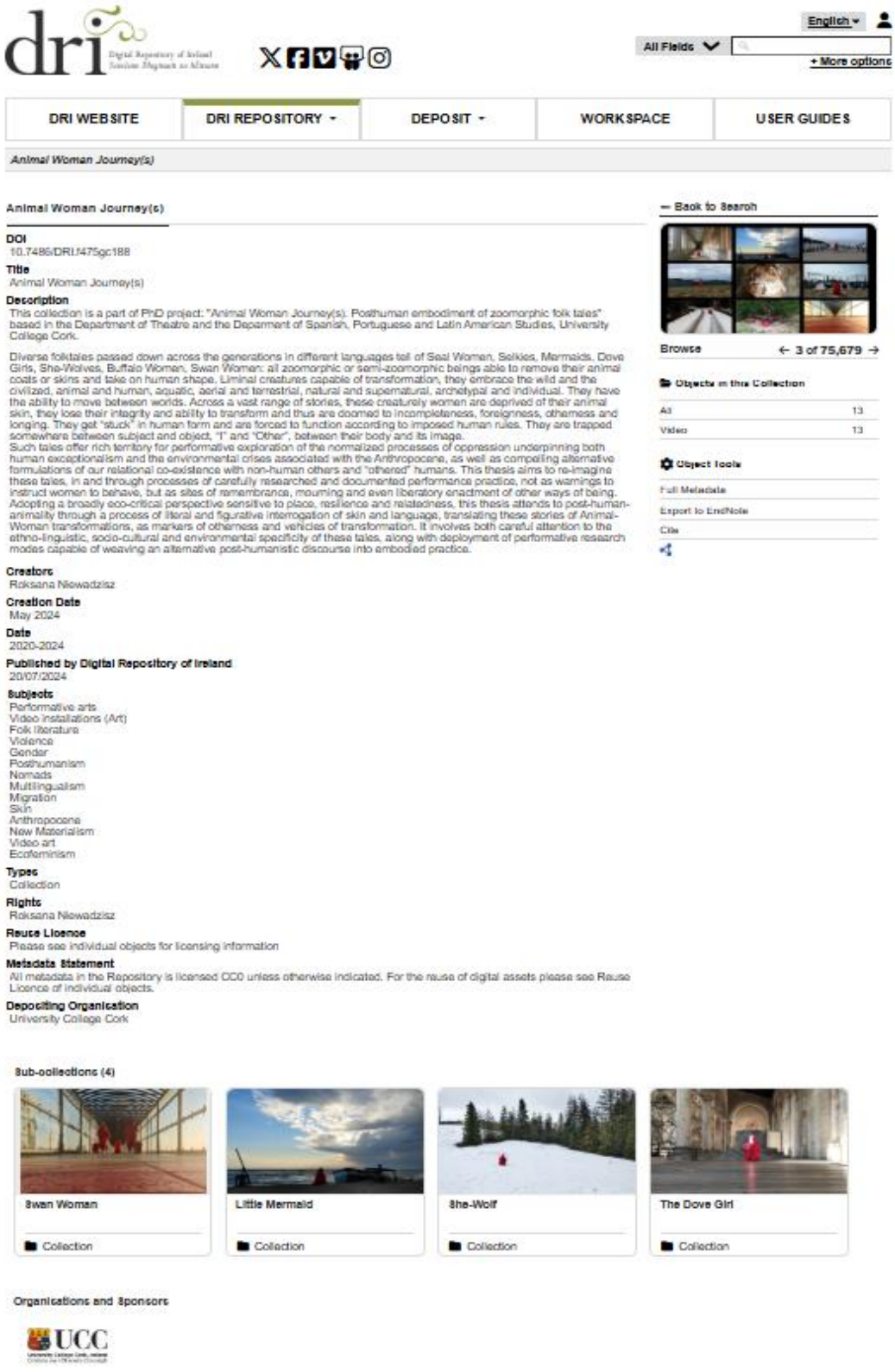
Confession(s) (video-piece/projection 05:11 min.)

Dove Girl's Journey (video-piece/projection 26:17 min.)

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Footage from the performance (video-documentation 1:33:33)

Structure of DIGITAL REPOSITORY OF IRELAND

ANIMAL-WOMAN JOURNEY(S) (Screenshot)



The table below presents the range of outputs of this research and events where they were presented to academic and non-academic audiences.

"**In the Beginning**" (2021)	- International Online Symposium for Artistic Research: Intra-Activity: The Posthuman, Fabulation and Matter with a paper "Folk Tales as Territories for Post-Human Exploration" as a member of the fictitious *International Committee to Save the Earth through Speculative Fabulation*; - Conference Reading in Translation: Approaches to the Study of the Reception of Translated Literature, UCC, Online, 2021 - 68th Annual Conference of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland; with a paper "An Intersemiotic Translation of Victoria Szpumberg's" 'In the Beginning'", UDC/Trinity, Dublin, 2023 - Fifth Biennial Conference of the Iberian Theater and Performance Network (ITPN): Performing Without Limits, London, 2024
"**The Foam/La Schiuma**" (**1st** iteration) (2021)	- Global Water Dances Cork 2021 digital exposition - Webinar: Re-imagining Rain, Water and Our Environment I with contextualising it paper "The Foam", Cork, 2021
"**The Foam/La Schiuma**" (**2nd** iteration "Breathlessness") (2024)	- Publication in: Green Trainings Special Issue Blog within the publication Extending embodied explorations on "What takes your breath away"? by Roisin O'Gorman, forthcoming 2024
"**She-Wolf**" Performance (2022)	- University of Montana, Missoula, MT, USA, 2022

"**She-Wolf Skin**" (2022)	- Online digital exhibition *How to become a Posthuman*, 2022/2024 - Roxy Cinema in Missoula, MT, USA, 2022 - International Federation for Theatre Research Conference (IFTR). *Shifting Centres: In the Middle of Nowhere* within the Feminist Research Working Group with a paper "Reclaiming She-Wolf skin: Investigating the corporeal impacts of crisis through an Animal-Woman transformation folk tale", Reykjavik, Iceland, 2022 - TENT Biennale, Kolkata (Calcutta), India, 2022 - Somatic Movement Education Course, Tuscania, Italy, 2023 - *Jinen Butoh* Winter School, Spazio NU, Pontedera, Italy, 2023 - Interdisciplinary Research Symposium: *Uncharted Territories.Contemporary Ecopoetics in/and Translation*, UCC, Cork, 2024
"**Borders**" Performance (2022)	- *Jinen Butoh* Summer School, Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, Italy, 2022
"**Dove Girl Performance**" (explorative iterations) (2023)	- *Jinen Butoh* Winter School, Spazio NU, Pontedera Italy, 2023 - *Jinen Butoh* Summer School, Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, Italy, 2023 - International Ecological Arts and Eco-Somatic Residency at "La Selva", Ostia Antica, Italy, 2023
"**Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl Journey**" Performance (2024)	- Granary Theatre Studio, 2024.

"**Animal-Woman Journey**". Abstract (2023)	- Somatic Movement Education Course, Tuscania, Italy, 2023 - Interdisciplinary Research Symposium: *Uncharted Territories. Contemporary Ecopoetics in/and Translation*, UCC, Cork, 2024 - Publication in: Green Trainings Special Issue Blog within the publication "Extending embodied explorations on 'What takes your breath away'?" by Roisin O'Gorman, forthcoming 2024
"Animal-Woman Journey" collage (2023)	- collage "Animal-Women Journey. Post Human embodiment of zoomorphic folk tales" was awarded the Research Image of the Year 2022 at the UCC, 2023
"Seal Woman Story" (2019)	- Published in Coastal Atlas of Ireland, 2022

Below I present other outputs presented to diverse audiences, which though not directly related to the Animal-Woman focus of this thesis, are inspired by the methodology developed during this course of my research.

"**Dating a Tree**" (2022)	- Online digital exhibition *How to become a Posthuman*, as part of the collaborative project "Dating a Tree- Dating a Composition", 2022/2024 - TENT Biennale, Kolkata (Calcutta), India, with collaborative video "Dating a Tree- Dating a Composition", 2022 - *Jinen Butoh* Winter School, Spazio NU, Pontedera Italy, 2023
"**Lichens**" (soundscapes and poetic writings) (2022)	- Online digital exhibition *How to become a Posthuman*, as part of the collaborative project "Lichen Encounters", 2022/2024
Performative Reading of Sergio Blanco's ***Cartography of a Disappearance: Panegyric for Joan Brossa***	- University College Cork, October 2022 - Translation Studies Network of Ireland. 3rd Annual Conference: *Radical Translation(s)/Translating the Radical* with paper "We all live in Translation", UCC, Cork, 2023

CHAPTER 1

SKIN OF THE TROUBLE

In this chapter I focus on how posthumanist, ecofeminist and new-materialist thinking resonates with more embodied intuitions, sensations and feelings of liminality and in-betweenness experienced through practice. Based on an extensive literature review undertaken in year 1 of my PhD process, it both sets out the theoretical framework for my thesis and begins to explore the ways in which this guided, shaped and merged with my developing practice-based research. At its base, this chapter questions the ontology of who/what we are, as disseminated and contained within the idea of human exceptionalism, and addresses the urgency of re-thinking this in the face of the environmental catastrophe associated with the Anthropocene. The second part traces how my theoretical reflections translated into a developing multi-layered practice, through parallel work on the *Swan Maiden* folktale (Jacobs, 1916) and the way this resonated with interlingual translation work on a play by Catalan-Argentine playwright Victoria Szpunberg in conjunction with MA translation students via a virtual classroom. These stories of women trapped indoors, either because their animal feathers had been stolen by a hunter, or because of successive Coronavirus lockdowns, and unable to fly and return to their home, in turn resonated with the necropolitical crisis of that moment, as it played out on women's bodies across the globe. In many ways this is where I began to fully explore, develop and deploy the embodied interdisciplinary methodology that became core to my thesis journey as a whole, intermingling extensive reading, theoretical reflection and different forms of somatic training with experimentation with different artistic media and performance practices. My embodied explorations of the layers of psychic, social and environmental impacts evoked by my readings of the Swan Maiden story, translated through the lens of Szpunberg's *En el principio* (In the Beginning, 2020) in the context of the Covid-19 global health crisis are what made me aware of the power of the Animal-Woman transformation tales as lenses to understand and navigate the consequences of the Anthropocene for contemporary human and other-than-human bodies and skin(s).

See: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: Swan Woman.

The chapter began during the Covid-19 pandemic when most of my life was constrained to a single room which became my studio, office, bedroom and a dining room. The person with whom I talked most was myself projected onto other bodies, imaginary interlocutors. Not one, but many, depending on the subject, the language and my mood. In a desperate attempt to exteriorise this incessant cacophony of voices, I started to write them down in the form of letters (extracts of some of which are intertwined within this thesis in form of postcards together with frames from "Animal-Woman Journey"). These letters are personal, subjective, important and casual; they contain stories. Together with the images captured on my camera, they became a way of documenting the embodied experiences that accompanied my research journey across a wide range of sites, both real and imaginary. They enabled me to experiment with performative modes of writing in the form of speculative autofiction, similar to that in Haraway's "Camille stories" (2016) or Despret's *Autobiographie d'un poulpe* (2021). The K. they address stands for Kin: my many selves and my connections with imaginary and material others.



Dear K.

I woke up anxious today. I don't know what I was dreaming about. I meditated. I said to myself: be positive, be connected. Drinking my coffee with soya milk from a carton, I am checking some news. Abortion ban, Covid, vaccines, Syrian refugee camps 10 years later, comments, weather, volcano exploding, hurricanes, tornado, droughts, floating houses, pollution, happy family eating happy ham in a happy car taking happy pills to make them happy. Sexy woman putting sexy cream on her sexy body. Some nature videos. Penguin couple. So funny. Did you know that penguins make matches for life? Like humans? Do people mate for life? Another one. "Lion saving a baby gazelle from hyenas and taking care of it as if that was her baby". It looks for me like he is playing with a prey. My horoscope is Leo. Am I like Leo? What is it like to be Leo? Oh, how beautiful it would be to run through the savannah instead of being here. Stuck to the screen within my four walls scrolling through social media walls. New walls we have. Walls that are windows. Definitely not screens. Past holiday photos, children's photos, playful cats. Etna explosions. My anxiety grows. I'm hungry. I pick up a piece of soya ham. I'm not eating meat. OK maybe I had some slices of mortadella last time I was in Italy, but a slice won't change anything, right? I feel guilty. Probably, because it wasn't a happy ham. I'll apply a bit of this sexy cream. Yes, I read feminist books and I agree. But a little bit of cream won't hurt. Still not happy and not sexy. I'm making myself a coffee from the supermarket. Not fair trade. If I had more money I would buy more consciously. Should I or should I not vaccinate? Why do I feel so anxious? I take vitamin D and Magnesium. Every day. I will do some yoga. I follow this perfectly shaped woman on screen. Yes, I want to be like her. I'll do yoga every day. Later I'll go for a walk, to a park, to see some green, to connect with nature.

Time to work. My handwriting is illegible. Thank god for the computer. This is a brand new one. The fourth I have in my life. I will need to dispose of the others at some point. I am writing this and dreaming about running in the savannah. I'm Leo, aren't I. Leo is Wild. What is my carbon footprint? Before people lived better. More simply. I am a carbon footprint. I am a predator. Killing with every step I make. Every breath. I'm trying not to kill spiders. I have a moral dilemma about the silverfish cohabiting my bathroom. Am I a killer? I have a few flat people in my room. It's good they're flat because this room is quite small. Are they even real? Am I a Leo? Am I a lion? Running through the savannah. Just running. Maybe I will go running. Am I... Who am I? Who are we? Who are "we"? What are we?

Yours,

K.

I am a human… am I?

Am I a human and, if so, what kind of human am I in these challenging times of the Sixth Extinction and the Fourth Industrial revolution? What is my role as a person/artist/performer in these times and contexts of the Anthropocene? Who am I/we in this? This deeply embedded ontological question draws me to explore the concept of posthumanism. The umbrella term of posthumanism includes diverse and often contradictory and antithetical perspectives and approaches—posthumanism, transhumanism, antihumanism, New Materialism, Object Oriented Ontology—but what they all have in common is the deconstruction, redefinition and reformulation of the notion of the Human. Because, according to posthumanism, the Human is not a fixed term but an open notion (Ferrando & Boilen, 2020). This notion does not refer only to the future and the present, but also to the past, examining processes which "have brought the emergence of what will be later defined as the human species, that is, the process(es) of humanizing" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 67).

HuMan[6]

In the opening of *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti writes "Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history" (2013, p. 1). This inevitably provokes the question of who is deemed human, and by what powers?

The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about "human nature" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). Francesca Ferrando, in *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019, p. 89), presents a very clear etymology of the term Human, coined from the Latin *humanus,* which stems from *humus* meaning "earth, ground, soil", to provide a notion of "earthly beings". Alternatively, according to Vito R. Giustiniani (1985), it stems from the word *homo*, which can be translated as: "man, human being, person, fellow" (Mahoney, 2002-2024). Whichever version we accept, most dictionaries give a definition of human as "civilized" and/or "refined". This nomenclature comes from ancient Rome where those who were considered humans were those who were not "the divine, the bestial, and the barbarian" (Ferrando, 2019,

[6] When I write "HuMan"/"huMan" I emphasise that the term human has been for centuries to white male fully abled body.

p. 89). This classification in turn comes from classical Greek culture which was highly influential for ancient Romans.

In Greek, the word for human is *Anthropos*, which is not equivalent to the Roman *humanus*, although they share some principles. Anthropos, according to the Greeks, was connected to the *polis* (city) which represents civilisation, and, in Plato's formulation, considered a "political animal" placed above not only external but also internal others, such as women, slaves and all those excluded from the political life of Athens. Meanwhile, for Aristotle, what placed humans above animals, was their ability to speak, enabling reason and providing moral structure. However, this ability actually referred to a particular linguistic form: the Anthropos had to speak Greek, meaning that those who spoke different languages, such as Persians or Egyptians, could not be considered as such despite their developed civilization. The fact of belonging to the city gave another privilege, namely access to *paideia*, education (again, something not accessible for women and the enslaved), and "the informal shared 'culture' promoting a process of identification of the individual with the political ethos" (Ferrando 2019, p. 91). This became a foundation for the Roman notion of *Humanitas* which "emphasized the interrelation between being moral, educated, and actively involved in public life", drawing a close connection to other "notions such as 'culture', 'reason', and 'civilization'" (ibid). But being *humanus* was not only related to inner and outer moral and hierarchical structures, but also to the exercise of power, as "Romans trusted that their gods destined them to rule and civilize the world, providing a 'human' unity to its ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity" (92). And that is where we might say it all began, in view of the pervasiveness and repetition of these concepts and patterns for millennia in the Western world.

From these etymological reflections we can see that the notion of the human was firstly based on distinction from that which it excluded (not-gods, not-animals, not-woman, not-uneducated, not belonging to the specific civilisation). Secondly, the term human was directly related to power, a power given by god(s) to rule above "Others" within and beyond their borders. This is what for Ferrando (2019, p. 92) means that "the roots of the word (…) have been mostly traced by free adult male intellectuals implicitly referring to other free adult male intellectuals"(92). All other beings became the "Others", and the deeper and clearer the separation between the human and his others, the stronger the position of the huMan.

As we can see, the term with which humans denominate themselves, and is taken for granted, was exclusive from the very beginning, leaving beyond its very delimited borders a multiplicity of human and non-human beings. This resonates with the biblical Genesis, one of the best known stories in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Whether God created both man and woman in [his] image (Genesis 1)[7] or woman was created from Adam's rib (Genesis 2), it was always she who was responsible for god's anger and the loss of paradise forever due to her affinity with a snake.

[7] Jacques Derrida analyses the ambivalent narration of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2 "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" (Derrida & Wills, 2002).



Dear K.

Never trust language!

Yours,

K.

I am woman…am I?

At the start of all there is He: the classical ideal of "Man."
(Braidotti, 2013, p. 12)

The classical concept of humanism becomes a foundation for the development of Renaissance Humanism. In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti analyses the construction of man as "the measure of all things" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 13), as first formulated by Protagoras and renewed over the centuries as a universal model in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. This perfect man's body embodies "mental, discursive and spiritual values", and therefore provides a source for a "specific view of what is 'human' about humanity"(13). The consequence of this for woman, "[w]ithin the frame of the phallic mark" is that "she sees that which she is not" (Phelan, 1993, p. 17) —experiencing her-self as incomplete. As in Simone de Beauvoir's famous phrase, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 273); woman becomes a socially constructed "Other" that is "posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One" (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 17). This is consistent with logocentric structures of thinking that organize concepts into "dual, hierarchized couples of oppositions", a two-term system which Hélène Cixous relates back to "*the* couple man/woman" (Cixous & Clément, 1986, p. 64). In this couple, man (signified by/as speech, high, civilized, human, superior) is considered as the opposite to woman (signified by/as writing, low, wild, animal, inferior). This ascription of living bodies as concepts on the opposite poles of dichotomies is what leads to non-identification and facilitates objectivization, possession and control over those who are not "One".

According to Peggy Phelan, the One needs the Other to see Oneself and constitute his own being, as "[a]ll seeing is hooded with loss – the loss of self-seeing" (Phelan, 1993, p. 13). In this process, woman is rendered a "concave mirror" (Irigaray, 1985) for men, serving to reflect and validate the male Self, and hence becoming an object of man's projections. John Berger's analysis of representations of men and women in art over the centuries observes that a man's presence in paintings depends on the "promise of power which he embodies" (Berger, 2008, p. 45) over the object which is always exterior to him, suggesting what the represented man can do to—or for—the object. In turn, a "woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself and reflects what can or cannot be done to her" (46). Being dependent on men, from

childhood, a woman is taught to watch herself and to be continuously aware of her own image. According to Berger, what constitutes a woman's identity is surveying and being surveyed at the same time. Men look at women and the women look at themselves being watched. In the phallocratic order the gaze is masculine and what is gazed upon is feminine (Young, 2005, p. 65).

At the same time, according to Iris Young, in patriarchal culture men compensate for the loss of the maternal womb-house by building, gathering and preserving things in order to find in them the reflection of their Self. Longing for wholeness with a mother, men project the idea of home onto woman, giving her the role of "home by being at home" (Young, 2005, p. 129). Woman becomes a new womb enveloping men's existence and giving them comfort and nutrition, once again an object whose purpose is to confirm men's identity, justifying for them their need for control over these women 'others'. Women's struggles to decide over their own bodies and reproductive rights have a long history. Yet despite immense achievements, these rights remain to be fully addressed in many countries, such as in my own country, Poland, where the introduction of a complete ban on abortion forced women to demonstrate on the streets despite Covid-19 restrictions in 2020.[8] In the "Letter to K." I wrote in response to these events, I coined a new word, "rageous", that combines anger and outrage in a performative process of continuous affective recognition and response.

[8] For further information, see the following articles: https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/14/poland-abortion-witch-hunt-targets-women-doctors
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/06/a-backlash-against-a-patriarchal-culture-how-polish-protests-go-beyond-abortion-rights



Dear K.

Have you heard about the abortion ban in Poland? I am rageous. The rage transforms into sorrow. I have a melody for this.

There's this thread she said
As long as me thread she said
Long red thread she said
Can't see any thread I said
This is me thread she said
Leaving my guts she said
Crossing the still she said
Leading through fields she said
Running through lands she said
Going through woods she said
Entering houses she said
Dinner tables she said
Cooked in their soups she said
In their bread she said
Filling their wine she said
Their grassy lips she said
On their teeth she said
Wiping their mouth she said
Dirty hands she said
Under their nails she said
Staining their pants she said
Bleeding on feet she said

In front of your eyes she said

Yours,

K.

Humanizing

We can see clearly that the processes of constitution of the notions of human and gender take place in parallel, as "the same hegemonic subjectivities that had symbolic access to the normativization of epistemic roles and social functions assigned to different genders were also the (only) ones that were granted access to the definition of the human per se" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 68). Therefore, drawing from the gender theories of de Beauvoir, Irigaray and Judith Butler, and following Donna Haraway's statement that gender is not a noun but a verb (Haraway, 2004, p. 328), Ferrando states that rather than a noun, "human" should be considered a verb, a process of humanizing.

Am I an animal?

Environmental historian Harriet Ritvo, in analysing the history of the relationship between people and wild animals, concludes that there was never a time of harmonious relationship between animals and humans: "literally or metaphorically, no garden of Eden" (Ritvo, 2007, p. 131). That is not a surprise, as we can read in the biblical Genesis that after creating the human God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26).[9] Or, as Derrida notes; "Man called all the animals by their names" (Gen. 2:20) (Derrida & Wills, 2002).[10] According to whoever wrote these words, God had already established a hierarchy in the world before Eden.

The ongoing debates on ethical and philosophical aspects of this relationship reach as far back as Ancient Greece (Derrida & Wills, 2002; Tokarczuk, 2020). Aristotle's *History of Animals*, written around 350 B.C.E., proposed the classification of beings, therefore species, in a hierarchical order with humans at the top and insects at the bottom. The Greek philosopher considered that animals and humans shared some physical organ resemblance, as well as there being characteristics of humans and animals which differ only qualitatively. He believed in animal intelligence,

[9] This fragment is also used in Victoria Szpunberg's monodrama *In the beginning* (Szpunberg, 2020, p. 29), which will be further analysed later in this chapter.

[10] Again, Derrida provides illuminating analysis of the fragments from Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 on the creation of people and animals (Derrida & Wills, 2002)

"something equivalent to sagacity" (Aristotle, 2007, p. 5), although he denied them reason, which became a key source for the denial of human-animal relationality. Aristotle's work was authoritative until the eighteenth century when Linnaeus created his magnum opus *Systema Naturae* (1758), which scandalized religious authorities by classifying humans among animals as a species. In the tenth edition of his taxonomy, Linnaeus also classified five taxa of Homo sapiens, "based on continent, skin colour, and specific characteristics, plus the taxon Homo monstrosus, which embraced a variety of cases, such as dwarfs, giants, and people with congenital abnormalities" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 95).

This rigid hierarchical concept of the natural world based on speciesism has been contested in recent philosophical elaborations. The oppression of animals has often been linked to the oppression of non-human others. For instance, philosopher Peter Singer wrote that: "If there are any rights possessed by all human beings, those rights are also possessed by nonhuman animals. For any rights possessed by all human beings cannot be possessed in virtue of such special human characteristics" (Singer, 2007, p. 15) but rather by the fact of being "living creatures". In his *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Jeremy Bentham considered that the question should not be whether animals can speak or reason but rather whether they can suffer (Bentham, 2007, p. 9). Responding to this in more recent times, Derrida answers that "no one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that humans witness in certain animals" (Derrida & Wills, 2002, pp. 396-397).

As seen above, speciesism has also underpinned the "othering" of human "Others". For Cary Wolfe, animality, based on "the traditional ontological distinction, and consequent ethical divide, between human and nonhuman animals" (Wolfe, 2003, p. XX) has served as a strategy in human oppression, as in the case of the "bestialisation" of members of racialized groups. As Ferrando notes, in the historical process of humanizing the human, the animal has been placed, more than as the antithesis of "man", as "another gradient in a hierarchy" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 74) where all the Others are subjugated to the power of those who are rendered Human.

In exploring the emergence of the notion of the witch in early modern Germany, Sigrid Brauner reveals another process of exclusionary construction of the human through "bestialisation" of that which is to be considered non-human. The

moment of creation of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian man coincided with a change in ideas about women's nature, their social behaviour, and roles, which together with the Judeo-Cristian tradition of misogyny observed previously, led to centuries of oppression and repression against women, culminating in the frenzy of witch hunts from the fifteenth century (Brauner, 1995, p. xiv-xv). Supposed witches were believed to have supernatural powers, and so considered a threat to "normal" humans. Perhaps paradoxically, by ascribing women to otherness, together with what is "wild" and "animal", patriarchy at the same time deprives them of their animal "skin", forcing them to continuously prove their right to be human. The concept of women's animality thus reinforced the idea that women needed to be controlled (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 95).

Likewise, Majorie Spiegel writes that in the seventeenth century it was commonly claimed that domestication was favourable to animals as "it civilized them and increased their number" (Spiegel, 2007, p. 10). Similar propaganda was urged about plantations, presenting enslaved people there as happy and protected from harm and worries by their guardians. Both cases provide examples of how the physical and emotional reaction to "bestiality" became a way of subjecting others on the basis of difference and power, even at the same time as the development of human rights placed "a justified limit on what people are free to do one to another" (Regan, 2007, p. 25). Just as history shows us how human status has been withheld from others, during the Conquista, Chattel slavery, the Shoah and more recent genocidal waves, so these same double standards allow racism, xenophobia, classism and ableism to continue to be "doing fine", propagated by populist political discourses worldwide.

Anthropomorphic others with different modes of embodiment, together with zoomorphic and Earth Others, "are rendered as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 68). Across all these processes of domestication, regulation, cultivation and so-called civilization, we can see that the subjectivity represented by the Eurocentric, heteronormative, body-abled man "is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart" (15). What has this form of reason brought us to?

Am I… Earth?

For Braidotti, in *The Posthuman* (2013, p. 67), "[t]he dialectics of otherness is the inner engine of humanist Man's power, who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance" and this is also reflected in the relation of human to Earth, another non-human "Other". Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* firmly established a body and mind division based on reason. Newton's discoveries in mathematics gave humans reassurance that they could understand that which until his time was considered God's creation: "The world became an apparatus, a bloody great automaton, a gigantic performance where the various parts whirred as if in a machine" (Marçal, 2015, p. 11). In parallel, Adam Smith created his economics based on the power of self-interest as a force of gravity. The domestication of woman was taken a step further, to create an invisible "second economics" of domestic labour where women were consigned to sustaining men's work in the name of Progress, while their own labour was not itself considered a "'productive activity' in the standard economic models" (16). This was further underpinned by the secular turn brought about by the French revolution, separating personal concerns from the public sphere. In Braidotti's analysis, this further marginalized women by assigning them "to the pole of un-reason, passions and emotions, including religion" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 34). But there were other reasons presented to domesticate women. For instance, Beth Fowkes Tobin (1990, p. 209-210) describes a switch in the eighteenth century from woman as an "ornament of the species", whose aim was to please men, to a construction of a new concept of motherhood as "selfless and even self-sacrificing" in their efforts to promote their children's welfare.

Since the Enlightenment, Nature has been portrayed as a resource, a mere background for Man's intentionality (Tsing, 2015). The concept of a culture represented by Man, and separated from Nature, allowed Western human society to tame and exploit in the name of Progress, a secular version of Christian providence (Braidotti, 2013, p. 31). Self-interest and Progress have been the ideas which since the beginning of capitalism entangle societies together "with the spread of techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources" (Tsing, 2015, p. 19). As Marçal observes, "Economics wasn't about money. From the beginning it was about how we view people" (Marçal, 2015, p. 9). And in this case, not only people. Capitalism converts "Others" into tradeable, exchangeable, disposable bodies

functioning on the market according to their usefulness. Today, traffic in animals constitutes the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms but ahead of women (Braidotti, 2013, p. 70), but also "the market prices of exotic birds and quasi-extinct animals are comparable, often to the advantaged of the plumed species, to that of the disposable bodies of women, children and others in the global sex trade and industry" (141).

In lots of cultures, Nature is associated with the feminine because of its capacity to generate and breed. Earth has been personified as Gaia, Terra, Earth, Mother Earth, Matka Ziemia, Madre Tierra, etc., which reflects the social imaginary of Earth as a mother, a nurturer, an "invisible hand" (Marçal, 2015, p. 17). But like the "self-sacrificing mother" described by Fowkes Tobin, currently the Earth is being "sacrificed" and exploited by "her children" to the point of no return; abused and mistreated, like all the women and other domesticated beings that have been forced to breed to satisfy men's desires. Myriad women have lost their lives at the hand of sexist violence, and, in fact, violence towards the Earth has reached the point that it "cannot work much longer to sustain extraction and production in and of the contemporary world because most of the reserves of the earth have been drained, burned, depleted, poisoned, exterminated, and otherwise exhausted" (Haraway, 2015, p. 160).

The transformative effects of human activities on the earth have reached such a point that for some scientists we are living a new geological epoch subsequent to the Holocene, called the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), but also Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), Plantationocene or Chthulucene (Haraway, 2015; 2016), where it is not clear if life on this planet can continue (Tsing, 2015). Today, more than ever before, we live with-in the consequences and crisis of a Humanism with man as "the measure of all things", with its exceptionalism, self-centredness and epistemic and "real-life violence which was and still is practiced against non-human animals and the dehumanized social and political 'others' of the humanist norm" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 30). The 'invisible hand' has been becoming more and more invisible.

Staying with the Trouble

Posthumanism's aim is to redefine a Western hegemonic discourse currently based on humanistic, anthropocentric and dualistic principles. But instead of relying on oppositions, the aim is rather a mediation, a reconciliation, in search of a constructive way to embrace contradictions in a continuous dialogue with past, present and future. Faced with this spiral timeline with continuous repetitions of mechanisms of oppression, we might turn to Judith Butler's writings and see these processes as repetitive performances: "a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and [...] the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler, [1990] 1999, p. 178). By creating and repeating different performances and rituals, can we inaugurate and inhabit completely diverse social habits?

Braidotti urges the "need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing", to "learn to think differently about ourselves. [...] to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (2013, p. 12). To do this, firstly, it is necessary to reconceive and re-orientate traditionally established hierarchical relationships. As philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood observes, "[t]o counter the "Othering" definition of nature… we need a depolarising reconception of nonhuman nature which recognises the denied space of our hybridity, continuity and kinship" (Plumwood, 2006, p. 129). The conceptualisation of the human as separated from nature is what brought us to the point of the Anthropocene. The idea that Braidotti presents is that the opposition between culture and nature needs to be replaced by the interaction and intertwining of what was previously considered as given, rejecting dualism to stress "the self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 3).

In my project I set out to perform the intermingling called for in posthumanist philosophy through my own re-writings, but above all through my creative practice. Can I do bodily research into these philosophical questions? How can I make them resonate in my own body and performative practice so they may reverberate with the bodies of others? How can I translate them into pieces that resonate with spectators not only cognitively but also sensorially, vibrating on their skins? In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace how my readings on posthumanism during the first year of the

Covid-19 pandemic translated and echoed across iterations of one particular Animal-Woman story, the Swan Maiden, resulting in the creation of a video piece based on the play *En el principio* (2020) by Victoria Szpunberg. Full documentation of this practice can be found in the Portfolio: Sub-Collection: Swan Woman, video In the Beginning. However, I have also interwoven frames from the video in my account of the creative research process here.

SWAN MAIDEN – IN THE BEGINNING

When the hunter saw them fly away he came forward with the feather robe in his hand; and the swan maiden begged and begged that he would give her back her robe. He gave her his cloak but would not give her her robe, feeling that she would fly away

(Jacobs, 1916, p. 98)

Swan Maidens were accompanying me silently during the second and third waves of the pandemic through 2020-2021. The Irish government urged citizens to stay home to protect their loved ones. But what if you have no close people to protect and those you have you cannot protect because they are dispersed across far away seas and lands? You cannot take a plane to reach them. You are stuck between the four walls of your tiny rented room having continuous (often dramatic) monologues in your head. About yourself, about them, about everything. It seems to be the only action you can actually undertake. Swan Maiden became one of my interlocutors.

There has been extensive research about the motif of the Swan Maiden (Silver, 2004; Jacobs, 1916; A.T. Hatto, 1961), including an entire monograph by Barbara Fass Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden* (1994), that demonstrates the resonance of these Animal-Woman creatures in and beyond Europe. Swan Maid (AT400) is one of the most popular versions of the animal bride folk tale (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 95), dating back to the Indian *Rig Veda*, in which the robe of a swan woman is stolen while she bathes and she is forced to wed "in a 'marriage by capture' (perhaps based on actual practice or ritual in early societies)" (96). According to Hatto, type II of these Swan Maiden folk tales can be found in a variety of places: China, from 300 A.D.; Scandinavia, where Swan Maidens were also battle-maidens; Japan; Korea; Northern Siberia and North-America, from Alaska to East Greenland. The motif also appears in the *Thousand and One Nights* (Hatto, 1961, pp. 326-327) and is common in art, through representations of the mythical union of Leda and the Swan by artists from Da Vinci to Cezanne. Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* made the Swan Maiden famous all over the world (Garry & El-Shamy, 2005, p. 97), and for being *Black Swan*, Natalie Portman received an Oscar for Best Actress in 2011.



Figure 2.. Frame from "In the Beginning", Italy, 2021

Jacobs' Swan Maiden

The version of the Swan Maiden story I used in my practice is the one retold by Joseph Jacobs in *Europa's Fairy Book* (Jacobs, 1916). In Jacobs' retelling of the story, a hunter hunting for ducks encountered seven maidens who took off their robes made of feathers and "bathed and sported in the lake"; although they were all beautiful, the "youngest and smallest pleased most the hunter's eye" (Jacobs, 1916, p. 98). The hunter took her plumage, and so, when the maidens came out of the water and put their feathers on, the youngest could not find hers. They helped her search, but at dawn the sisters called out to her, "'We must away; 'tis the dawn; you meet your fate whatever it be". So they put on their robes and "flew away, and away, and away". When the hunter saw that she was finally alone, he left his hiding-place, and even though she begged for her feather-robe, he covered her with his cloak and made her marry him. "So they were married and lived happily together" (98) and had children, but one day the Swan Maiden's daughter found her feather robe and brought it back to her. As soon as the woman got her cloak, she flew away, leaving a message for her husband that if he wanted to see her again, he must find her in the "Land East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon". The remainder of the story tells of the hunter's adventures in a range of mythical lands, overcoming many obstacles. The final challenge, set up by her father, was to recognise his wife among other sisters. The husband asked if he

could touch their hands, knowing that the "forefinger of her right hand had the marks of the needle"(103). And again, they lived happily together.

I chose this version, because of the fragment cited in the epigraph to this section, where the woman desperately begs the hunter for her skin. How cruel he must have been not to respond to these cries; how scared she must have been when she was abandoned by her sisters; how vulnerable. These questions resonated for me with accounts of toxic and violent relationships, where the oppressor physically and emotionally isolates his victim from her loved ones and environment. She becomes a foreigner on his ground, dependent and easy to domesticate. Moreover, all of this often happened behind closed doors, and when tragedy struck, neighbours would often say that they were a "normal couple", "happy family"—as in Jacobs' account of the Swan Maiden. Given his "second chance", the hunter also knew where to find marks on her skin—were they actually needle marks?

En el Principio

All these elements of the story resonated with me in the context of the monodrama *En el principio* (In the Beginning, 2020) by Victoria Szpunberg, which I had the opportunity to co-translate with a group of MA Translation students in UCC in 2021. Szunberg's play was completed in Barcelona in June 2020, just as Spain was coming out of its first lockdown, and staged later that summer as "Eva y la conmoción", as part of a project with the Centro Dramático Nacional in Madrid in which nine Spanish playwrights created short pieces about confinement during the Covid-19 pandemic. Performed without an audience and streamed online, it tells the story of an Argentinian immigrant in Barcelona whose savings were lost due to the Covid-19 crisis, making it impossible for her to fly back to her native Argentina. Or escape from the flat she shares with a violent and abusive partner.

The process of translating the play was very intense as it brought to the fore questions related to the location/relocation of the character, domestication or foreignization of the text, double meanings and other issues and challenges that make translators' work so complicated and so exciting at the same time. But for me, as a performer and a translator myself, the main layer was to comprehend the bodily emotional and situational content of this performative text. Reimagining the action and emotional content of the text from the perspective of the main character, Eva S.,

encouraged translators to look for intralingual solutions, as it raised an awareness of the importance of each stop, pause, rhythm and even the length of the phrases for them to express what lies with-in and beyond the words. While the student-translators were engaging with these linguistic inquiries via a virtual classroom, my head was already wondering about the ways in which this piece could be translated into a performative reading that would take place on screen; how to "transmute" (Jakobson, 2007, p. 182) the text's richness via visual and aural signs without losing its essence. This forceful mutation of the medium of communication that we had been undergoing for quite a long time, but never so intensely as during the pandemic, intermingled with a process of re-telling the *Swan Maiden* tale through *In the Beginning*, or vice versa, in which "intralingual", "interlingual" and "intersemiotic" translations (Jakobson, 2007, p. 182) were happening all at the same time.



Figure 3. Frame from "In the Beginning", Italy, 2021

In the Beginning

In the Beginning is a call for action, a desperate call for help, a scream of an instinctive "Pang" (Linklater, 2006, p. 20) in danger, a Swan Song. Therefore, when I read for the first time Szpunberg's piece about domestic violence during Covid-19, Swan Maiden clearly manifested herself in the main character: Eva S. Szpunberg's Eva is an Argentinian immigrant in Spain, who supports her elderly parents in her native

country. She's an economic emigrant and immigrant at the same time, depending on the side of the "charco" one is looking from.[11] She dreams about flying home and rejoining her family. She had already bought a ticket… But now she is stuck in the apartment which became her cage, unable to communicate with anyone, desperately crying for help through the flat screen of her computer (presented as "el muro"- a wall - in the source text); surrounded by people in a densely-populated city but so invisible and alienated at the same time; with-in a body in continuous danger because she shares her cage with an oppressor who threatens her physical and mental integrity. Eva's *oikos* is her cage and her situation demonstrates how Guattari's three ecologies interweave and directly impact the body of this and other women.

The piece is created as a monologue. In theatre it is said that even a monologue is always said to someone, whether they listen or not, whether they are present or not. In fact, this monologue often takes the form of dialogue, as Eva S. is dialoguing with another Eva, Eva V., in her head.[12] Something, I risk to state, that we all do, whether talking with images of other people or our different selves in our head, and something that became much more prominent during the first months of the pandemic when in-person encounters were prohibited. The situation of Eva S. also dialogues with so many other Evas' stories of violence that were told and silenced, in this period of time; stories of those for whom home was not a safe space and Covid-19 not the biggest threat, as they faced a more dangerous virus in their house. These Swan Women were violated not only by the pandemic, not only by a violent partner but also by the patriarchal system propping him up, the inaction of others, as well as by socio-economic and also ethno-linguistic circumstances.

Violence

Earlier in this chapter, we have seen how the fact of woman representing for man "home by being at home" (Young, 2005, p. 129), a new womb enveloping his existence, renders her one of the objects whose purpose is to confirm men's identity

[11] "[C]harco" is the term used by Eva S. in the play, to refer to the body of water between Argentina and Spain, therefore the Atlantic Ocean, represented as a "pond", in a clear instance of distinctive Argentine Spanish usage.

[12] In fact, when the play was staged in Madrid (together with two other plays) this monologue was converted into a dialogue and there were two actresses embodying Eva S. and Eva V. *La Pira 1. La conmoción*, directed by Alfredo Sanzol, Centro Dramático Nacional, 18-19 of September 2020.

and over which they need control in order to preserve their own integrity. A need for control which too easily translates into the power to destroy. Because woman's identity is created in relation to man's subjectivity, she has no Self to deal with the loss of her integrity with the maternal body; we could say that she is doubly skin-less, homeless, *oikos*-less. This patriarchal mechanism, however, does not only reflect an external system of domination of men over women. Ingrained through generations of "his-story", this system was and is still working internally/psychically, as an incontestable truth, "divine hierarchy" or "natural order of things", that impacts and shapes the bodies and minds of "the Others". In this patriarchal "home" these Others often become trapped, encaged and dependent on the "One": a dependency that creates outer and inner barriers that are immensely hard to cross; barriers that, although often invisible to the eye, have a material influence on their skin. During the Covid-19 emergency, barriers, walls and screens became much more visible; borders much more impermeable.



Figure 4. Frame from "In the Beginning", Italy, 2021

Swan Woman, deprived of her feathers and trapped in human form in the hunter's dwelling, became a representation of Eva S., and vice versa. She, like a biblical Eva, became an archetype of all women condemned by patriarchy; all those who will "die in pain, for you have sinned!" (Szpunberg, 2020, p. 32), as the character

of “The Man” shouts in the play. The man, who also represents the God of Genesis. This is why this piece is not only about the times of the pandemic. And not only about this particular Eva. It’s about the multiplicity of Evas: Eva V., her account manager, but also Lilith, another bank employee who (according to Eva S.) deceived her into investing all her savings. Is Lilith the antitype of Eva as a submissive wife and carrier of sin? The one who found her swan feathers and flew away instead of taking the blame and passing this debt to generations of women to come?

This multiplicity meant that, although the piece, as written by Szpunberg, is a monologue I immediately felt that it could not be read by only one person. I asked six women (myself included) to read parts of the monologue. One story told by many: one French woman with Algerian roots who lives in Spain; one Croatian who lives in Ireland; one Argentinian with Italian roots that lives in Ireland; one Bolivian who lives in Italy; one Valencian who was previously living in Ireland; and myself Polish, living between Ireland, Italy and Spain. I asked them to read the text but to feel free to refuse the invitation. This piece covers harsh material and I did not want to retraumatize anyone during such a difficult period. But after some reluctance—I mostly heard “I’m not a professional actor. I don’t know if I can do it properly!”—they immediately connected with the situation of Eva. They put on Eva’s skin and/or found the complexity of her situation and emotions under their skins. This particular Eva’s story was resonating with the stories inscribed on/in their bodies; each of them different. For me they are also Swan Women, “the Others”, living in a certain in-betweenness in a foreign country. They recorded their voices in their homes on their phones and sent them to me: their stories with-in and through Eva’s story.

The idea of recording their voices on mobile phones and therefore not being fully in control of directing the reading,[13] was on the one hand due to the Covid-19 circumstances, but on the other an opportunity: to listen to their ways of reading, their translations of the story, their bodily connections to Eva’s voice. It was also an opportunity to cross the walls of different houses, screens and borders; for their and Eva’s voices to fly across the lands, seas and countries. To explore Otherness and the interchangeable being of One and the Other, I often play, in my practice, with

[13] My input was to organise them, choosing the versions of the recordings that felt the most suitable, and modifying slightly the pace of some of them in post-production.

understanding and non-understanding by introducing a multiplicity of languages.[14] This time, however, I mostly maintained the translated English version of the text read with diverse non-native accents, aiming to expose the otherness and often alienation of a foreigner within the hegemony of a dominant language, the language of the "One". The intention was also to give this foreignness an artistic value and recognition. Accent is a marker of otherness. How many times have I, maybe you as well, experienced that someone who speaks English with a foreign accent, particularly from countries with a lower economic level, has been considered as less qualified, less important, less intelligent, less…?

There are six women readers, and the seventh is a man. "On the sixth day God created a man" (Szpunberg, 2020, p. 25) and on the seventh God rested, according to Genesis. Man took up his role. This man is the only native English speaker and professional actor, chosen to expose the difference between women and the Man/God position, their dependency, and also the vulnerability of their voices struggling in a foreign language as compared to the powerful and flawless sound of his voice in his language.



Figure 5. Frame from "In the Beginning", Italy, 2021

[14] Such as in *Varadas/Stranded* (2018/2019) performed at UCC and Kings College, London (2019); *Seal Woman Story* performed in UCC and in the Graffiti Theatre (2019); *She-Wolf Skin* video and *She-Wolf* performance performed in the University of Montana (2022) (explored in chapter 3 of this thesis), *The Dove Girl* performed in the Granary Studio (2024) (explored in the chapter 4).

Accent(s) as a form of othering

According to Michael Cronin (2006, p. 45), "[t]he condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being. He or she moves from a source language and culture to a target language and culture so that translation takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another". Trans-location implies a translation of the ways and modes one knows from previous location(s) into new one(s); from a previous container into a new one, requiring an examination of the source patterns in relation to new ones. And this does not just refer to verbal language, but also to pragmatics: the language of habits, places, relations, such as the distance between bodies in public spaces, whether you say hello with the hand or with kisses, how many and on which sides; something seemingly funny and obvious for the One, but for the Other a continuous process of deciphering not only a language but all the *oikoi* to which the different words, phrases and gestures belong.

Accents make the One immediately recognise Otherness; a difference within a hegemony of one sole mode. One of my Swan Women, from Bolivia, when offering Spanish classes in Italy, was rejected by a potential client who was looking for a "real native speaker", meaning for him a person from Spain. She was denied her right to consider native the language of her ancestors, the one she heard in her mother's womb. The hegemony and universalisation of a standard accent is also a remainder of colonial and socio-economic structures. Another Swan Woman—French who lives in Spain—was told by a butcher that she has quite a strong accent for a person who has been living in Spain for over 20 years. It is like hearing that you still do not belong; you are not good enough, you are not "enough". Because of her Algerian roots she is often asked where she is "really from". Ethnicity, like race, is yet another way of othering, one of the diverse modes of violence that migrants have often had to integrate into their lives. And yet, in times of immense inter- and intra- continental migrations, the question of who is considered native—who bilingual, who a proper language speaker—remains huge. What is a "proper" language?

Language has never been something fixed but rather a process. It is always "as and in a state of becoming" (Connelly, 2018, p. 163). Like skin, it is another *oikos* we live in and its essence is flow and transformation. Or maybe this urgency to know

where the Other is from is rather a question of location? What dust their body is made of, from whose rib did they come? What is their flock? Level of vulnerability? Are they here alone? What is their level of similarity, vicinity, assimilation? There are families of migrants who decide on purpose not to teach children their native languages. There are also people who decide on purpose to keep their native accents to resist the hegemony of the One.

At the end of my version of *En el principio* these Animal-Women sing their Swan Song in their own languages. Whether the spectator understands the dialogue or not they can still perceive a difference in timbre, tone, colour, sureness of voice when speaking, as if they were leaving the cage of these foreign walls and spreading their wings in their own language.



Figure 6. Frame from "In the Beginning",, Italy, 2021

Visual Skin

The visual skin of the piece was created in Italy (April/May 2021) where I managed to fly as a desperate act of escape. And where I finally got stuck, again, because of Covid-19 restrictions. My Swan Woman flew with me and she was accompanied by Eva. I started to think bodily and visually about the piece and, just as my reading of Eva's story inspired these Swan Women's readings, their voices inspired my form of embodying it and thinking through images. I covered these voices with my skin. My performer's body became a home for a multiplicity of voices, a multiplicity of Evas,

a multiplicity of stories dislodging at the same time the centrality of the hegemonic voice.

Although my circumstances were different, I was also "stuck" in a foreign country, in a small flat located in the neighbourhood of Naples that could resemble the Barcelona one. Every day the same repetitive actions, movements, views. My routine and that of my neighbours, which I could follow from my window. Suddenly the objects we take for granted became everyday companions; what was obviated when the gaze was mostly outside, suddenly became much more relevant when it went inside. I translated these experiences into a piece working with-in the walls and with what they contain. Often limitations incite creativity and resourcefulness. The video camera in my phone became a witness of my actions.

Graceful Swan

The Swan is associated with grace and beauty. As well as with ballerinas, perhaps because of *Swan Lake* or the fact that their costumes are often associated with Swans. Having feet en pointe, gracefully jumping and pirouetting with their perfectly shaped bodies and swan necks as if flying. This is what audiences want to see and look at. They do not see hours of rehearsals, problems with bone structure, diet and eating disorders, feet destroyed and often deformed. Like Swans gracefully swimming on the lake, they swim on stage. But have you ever seen a swan walk? We associate different beings with what has been ingrained in us culturally, often through representations. Icons that have been created for centuries.

Walking on my tip toes brought me to think of high heels. I rarely wear them, I do not feel stable; it hurts my nails and toes. I feel that anyone can actually push me over at any moment, destabilising and decentring me. That I will fall. I'm afraid of falling, ashamed of falling, of losing face, literally and figuratively, or the ground under my feet while others are watching, saying, "you were asking for it". Was I? Maybe because of all that, high heels seem sexy—a mixture of fear and excitement, continuously fighting for balance, verticality, exposed to any sudden movement. Like a feather ready to fly. Like a bird ready to take off. But have you ever seen swans' webbed feet? They are grasping the soil with their claws. Like soles/souls of the feet, souls that feel.

Eva S. does not wear heels but she walks on the tips of her toes. As if walking on a tightrope. More and more on the edge: the edge of the balcony, the edge of life. More and more unbalanced by physical and verbal blows—the ones that she resisted and the one that is yet to come. She's on the edge of her soles, on the edge of her soul. Her feet are in continuous movement to discharge her distress while she is waiting. Or maybe just to cling to the ground resisting the fall?

As Barbara Fass Leavy writes, "Ibsen used the swan maiden as a model for Nora, whose escape from her doll house commences soon after her maid finds the seemingly lost costume in which Nora will dance the tarantella for the delectation and status of that archetypal patriarch, her husband" (Fass Leavy, 1994, p. 3). But it is difficult to leave when your feathers are brutally stolen. Or picked up, one by one, day after day, hour after hour. Physically and emotionally, verbally and psychologically. Jacobs in his commentary on the Swan Maiden folktale refers to other versions uncovered, where "the captured wife returns to her original home, not when she recovers her robe of feathers but when the husband breaks some taboo", by striking or chiding her (Jacobs, 1916, p. 191).

Eva's partner is marking her skin with violence. She is trying to cover with her shoulders her body, the rib cage which protects her lungs, her breath; this cage that also encloses the heart fluttering like a thousand wings. But she cannot fly away.[15] She does what she can to fight, but when she cannot, she freezes waiting for help, waiting for him to execute the patriarchal ritual of fathering; waiting while scratching her fingers, fidgeting with her feet, biting her lip. "You have to have thick skin", to "grow a backbone", they say. What if the bones are broken and the skin is worn? Then they do not say anything. There is a silence behind the wall, behind the screen. And time marks its passing on her skin. They lived happily together… Day after day. And on the seventh day, when God was taking his rest day, another Swan Maiden flew off the balcony.

Jacobs' *Swan Maiden* escapes because her children lead her to her feathers, and then the man needs to prepare for the adventure and overcome diverse challenges to regain her. How many women wait for their partners to change, overcome their ego, ingrained patterns and aggressivity? How many come back "for the sake of the

[15] Flight, fight or freeze are the three main bodily responses to trauma.

children", in tension waiting for him to change? Eva S. has no children; she cannot go to the hospital so her wounds can be healed; she cannot run away to her safe space. Her safe space is her un-safe space. Her home is unhomely. She's been locked with the oppressor in her psyche, social nexus and environment. And her body is being mistreated by him, by patriarchy and by the environmental crisis. Covid-19 was considered a Black Swan (Zwick, 2020), but scientists and economists have been warning that the Green Swan, that is, environmental crisis, has been happening for a long time due to human abuse of the Earth. Can we change something before it is too late? Before there have been one too many blows, one too many punishments, one too many flights, one too many falls?

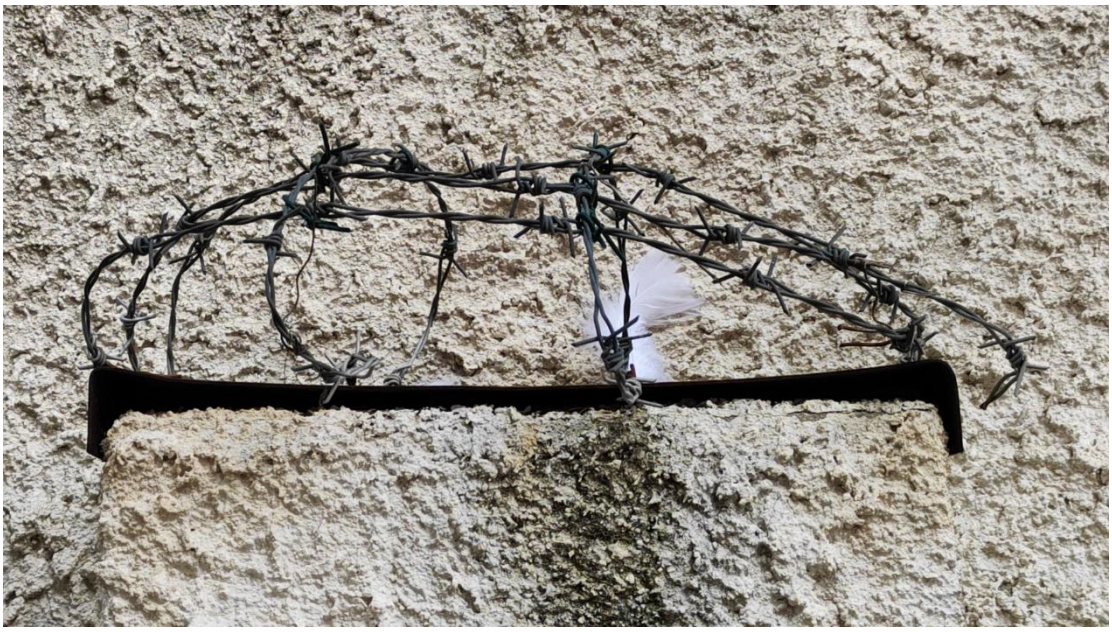


Figure 7 Frame from "In the Beginning", Italy, 2021

Eva S. will finally take off in flight. She leaves this "paradise" in which man, after God, rules over everything that exists. Whether she jumps or "is jumped", she cannot stand this cage anymore. She doesn't care that her feathers are scattered. She is getting on her tiptoes higher and higher. Like a prima ballerina, she jumps, even though there is no one to catch her. She does not care whether it is her last jump, or that she may be damned for eternity, like Lilith, the woman whose independence from Adam meant she is remembered as a representation of "chaos, seduction and ungodliness"; "the night hag", "the night-monster", "[h]ag and snatcher" (Gaines,

2001). Hag in Polish is *wiedźma*—wiedz-ma—the one that possesses knowledge; in Spanish the word *bruja* is similar to brújula—a compass that helps one to find a direction. Lilith is feared because she was bold enough to reject Adam's and God's union in ruling over women and other wild animals and creatures.

Although feeling deceived by the Lilith of the play, Eva follows in her footsteps. She crosses the edge, spreads her wings, and takes off. Flying she sees all the creatures and flats of Barcelona and blocks of cages from a birds-eye view. And, shielded with courage, she flies to god, to tell god to "look back and think again" (Szpunberg, 2020, p. 33). I was once told by a prison guard that a prisoner is like a bird who will always try to fly away from the cage. Like the Swan Maiden, who when she regains her feathers, flies away. Maybe Eva S. will come back and, instead of on tiptoes, will walk through the house in high heels, even if only to break the silence and to be heard, over the insults, over the tv set on high volume; to reach the ears and consciousness of all the neighbours, all the inhabitants of Barcelona, Spain, Europe and all the continents. And then maybe she will take them off. Relieved she will feel the ground with the heels of her feet. And then she will fight back—high heels can become an effective weapon—and regain her feathers herself.

Chapter 1 – Conclusions

In this chapter I have synthesized a diverse range of critical scholarship in order to establish the theoretical framework that has informed my research. At its base is the critique of human exceptionalism at the heart of posthumanist writings, through the revelation of its origins, history and effects on all the beings left beyond its constructed legitimacy. This chapter also offers an introduction to how these readings intertwined with my developing artistic research practice, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2. Above all, it shows how the framework provided a lens for understanding what was happening in the world around me in 2020-2021, which was reflected and crystallised in my readings of the "Swan Maiden" folktale and Szpunberg's *En el principio*. The latter especially reflects many of the critiques of heteropatriarchal capitalism that I found in the theoretical texts. It enabled me to both explore the ways in which the narratives of human exceptionalism are imprinted on our skin and devise modes of evading its objectivising gaze, through a commitment to multiplicity, difference and relationality.



Dear K.,

Already quite petite Natalie Portman lost 20lbs for her role in Black Swan and was practicing ballet up for 8 hours a day, I read. But she won an Oscar.

I was waiting at the airport in Rome in already post-Covid 19 era because my flight was delayed. At the gate next to mine people were boarding for Buenos Aires, Argentina. Long lines of people. I wonder how many Eva S's. were there. I wondered how many didn't. I hope they fly high.

Black Swan is temporarily gone. Waiting for a green one. I hope you're safe.

Yours,

K.

CHAPTER 2

SKIN OF PRACTICE – METHODOLOGY

If the environmental crisis is "the crisis of the imagination" as argued by Lawrence Buell and other proponents of ecocriticism, then tending to our individual and collective imaginations is an urgent task. (Fiedorczuk & Beltràn, 2020, p. 210)

This chapter explores the layers of creative embodied process and intermedial practice developed as the key methodologies of my PhD. The question at its heart is the extent to which it is possible (or legitimate) for me to speak from my (female human animal white eastern European nomadic and polyglot posthumanist) bodily perspective, while also listening to and allowing for a polyphony of "othered" voices? How can my performing body speak with the voices of others that have a different skin colour, that are from different cultural backgrounds, or represent different species? And how can I engage with others' painful, often traumatic experiences, without explicit realism and repetition of the abuse? Artistic practice-as-research opens up spaces of imagination as well as the material situatedness of the researcher. This enables the limits of these challenges to offer further opportunities for new ways of thinking and approaching the devastating climate, social, and political crises which this thesis addresses. The range of methods that underpin the practice as research elements of this thesis include my approach towards practice, from artistic practice seen as a form of intersemiotic translation, the figure of the performer as a "shapeshifter" for reflecting on ways of embodying other "skins" and stories through embodied practices (or philosophies) such as actors training, *Jinen Butoh*, somatics and ecosomatics, to other intermedial modes, processes and techniques, such as interlingual translation, directing and devising other voices, video-documentation, composition and the haptic. This chapter journeys through all these methods alongside the particular understanding of touch that I developed during this research as a key methodology. Haptic touch is a visual and tactile register that traverses all these modes of practice, as well as characterising the intermedial outputs of my artistic research.

To provide an initial example of my developing method, the chapter ends with discussion of a performative research piece entitled "The Foam/La Schiuma", in which

I engage with childhood memory of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" to explore the matter and voice of the sea, interweaving layers of embodied practice to reflect on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea as well as the environmental catastrophe that threatens all of the oceans and their inhabitants.

See: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: Little Mermaid.

We all live in translation

Fundamental for this project is thinking about performance and art practice as translation. It comes from my continuous translanguaging from one language to another (in and between Polish, Spanish, Italian and English), but also as an artist moving from one discipline to another, from thought to practice, from soma to body and so on. It also extends to the idea that we all live in translation, as we continuously translate our feelings, emotions and thoughts into verbal or non-verbal signs in order to express and communicate with others (as discussed in chapter 4).

The idea of a performer being a translator came to me during my MA when I started to play with the double meaning of the Spanish word *intérprete*, which represents both an actor and an oral translator/interpreter. In their craft both need to often fill the untranslatable "gaps" between different languages but at the same time produce singularity (Cronin, 2019, p. 198). In my practice I approach this problematic gap, or "trouble", as an opportunity to explore new figurations and ways of understanding; to create artistic bridges in these gaps between one language and another, understanding and non-understanding, the stories of Others and my own and the audience's; between image and body, fantasy and reality; between performer, video and spectator; between image and image; to bridge the gaps between other bodies and mine without erasing difference. But my work also explores how to create connections within the gaps between different media; how to move between their languages in order to invite spectators to fill the gaps with their own translations: with their own imagination, sensibility, experiences and connections.

The performer as a shape/skin shifter

The process of these artistic explorations is intrinsically embedded and embodied within me, not only as an actor but also as a creator, writer, director, filmmaker, editor and critic. Thus, it often requires the capacity to look from inside – from soma, that is, a perspective that combines simultaneously the direct first person experience with one that sees the body as an object from the outside or third person point of view. This project explores these positions and their attendant perceptions in different ways: through processes of embodying the skin stories of different Animal-Woman, but also by embedding them into the skin of film, space, textiles, so as to resonate with spectators. Throughout this PhD, my research has negotiated a variety of skins and selves in a continuous conversation with Other stories. Shapeshifting lies at its very core and is a key methodology for this project, as well as being a theme at the core of all of the stories.

Actors/performers are shapeshifters. Like the mythical Avovang from the Eskimo folk tale who "let himself be born in the shape of every beast on earth" (Rasmussen & Worster, 1921, p. 101), they put on the skin of "the Other" and/or shed the skin of their selves, leasing their skin to the intangible presence of another character/spirit/energy to use as a container and move according to their needs. Through the mediation of their bodies, using imagination and often words, they shape the materiality of events, making the intangible tangible. Therefore, their role is not that different from that of shape-shifting shamans; often 'possessed' by the character's soul and consciousness, living for a determined time a diversity of lives, undergoing a process of re-incarnation, which requires shadowing a part of their self and identity while allowing the appearance of the other selves to speak.[16] In this liminality of multiple selves, actors choose an alternative one, exploring other ways of being, ghosting some of the others.[17] Performing, even with Stanislavski's often contested

[16] With this resistance towards essentialism an actor's work resonates for me with the concept of autofiction where writers lie about themselves. The term is explored by a Franco-Uruguayan creator Sergio Blanco, whose plays, *Cartography of a Disappearance: Panegyric for Joan Brossa* (2017) and *Kassandra* (2002), I was exploring through practice during the second and third year of my PhD.

[17] In this, the actor's process mirrors the experience of translanguaging/self-translating described by Sylvia Molloy, as discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, where "la elección de un idioma automáticamente significa el afantasmamiento del otro pero nunca su desaparición" [where the choice of the tongue/language automatically means ghosting of the other but never its disappearance] (Molloy, 2016, p. 13).

"what if", may open the doors to the haunted house allowing the multiplicity of ghosts to speak through the body of the performer. It is about un-naming, dis-identification, so that the polyphony of multiple other's voices can be heard.

As Braidotti wrote, "Becoming-imperceptible is the event for which there is no representation, because it rests on the disappearance of the individuated self. Writing as if already gone, or thinking beyond the bounded self, is the ultimate gesture of defamiliarization" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 137). The same can be said of performing: the act of leaving aside one's self and leasing a performer's body to a variety of human and non-human others can be seen as a radical form of defamiliarization.

In my artistic practice I do not pretend to be someone else as in the classical psychological understanding of acting. Instead, my practice combines embodied awareness of the deeply ingrained inner and outer patterns affecting the body together with extensive research, imagination, embodied empathy and affect, to make my own skin and the skin of my practice a site where Others' voices, images, texts and experiences can reverberate in a way that invites spectators to fill the "gaps". The creation is happening from being attuned to the inner movement of the body and the "outside" as it "arises, not from self-absorption and interiorized motivation, but in the attentive reproduction of gesture, voice, and mannerism" (Kondo, 2000, p. 96). Animal-Women are invited to appear with a particular posture, gesture, inner or outer movement influenced by a particular space, touch of texture, sound or the repetition of a pattern or element, such as a red emergency coat that became a visual leitmotif of this project.[18]

For my bodily explorations, I have employed some actors' techniques encountered during many years of training in diverse countries. One of these is the psychophysical acting technique, which aims to overcome Descartes's mind-body dichotomy by basing actor's work "not on acting as representation, but exploration of the 'energetics' of performance" (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 1), through activation of energy, highlighting perceptual/sensory animal-like awareness, where the body "becomes all eyes", and how all this can be applied in devising and dramaturgy. For me, this process can be seen as an actor's research approach to what Braidotti calls the *force of Zoe* (Braidotti, 2013), that is the finding and following of flow in performance, bringing

[18] As explored in more detail in "Animal-Woman Journey" in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

presence, focus and energy within the vitality of live performance. In my particular research process, this form of psychophysical actor's research is echoed in and supported by embodied somatic practices, including *Jinen Butoh* (as discussed in the following sections), and connected with the outdoor environment. These approaches have been cultivated in key practices in psychophysical training such as Michael Chekhov (1985; 1993), with his "Chart for Inspired Acting" (Powers, 1993), the techniques of Tadashi Suzuki, Antonio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski. Each of these in different ways focus on awakening and activating capacities, and often exhausting the body, in order to silence the "critical" mind, opening themselves to the creative force that comes from this animal body; to be fully present.

Towards an embodied philosophy: *Jinen Butoh*, somatics and eco-somatics as a situated methodology

In the following sections of this chapter, I delve into each of the embodied philosophies that informed my thinking and practice.

Butoh

"*Bu* means dance and *to* means step. Most simply speaking, butoh is a dance step" (Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006, p. 1) with metamorphosis and transformation as one of its most recognizable characteristics. It was created as a resistance to the rapid modernization, capitalization and Westernisation of post-World War II Japan as well as a rejection of traditional Japanese dance, but it was at the same time influenced by European art, particularly surrealism, expressionism and German Expressionist Neue Tanz and connected to Japanese dance tradition. It draws from shamanic and meditative practices to which it metaphysically connects (see also Fraleigh 2010, 1999), as with the new-materialist idea that everything in the world is created of the same particles and atoms and "everything is part of me and I am part of all".[19] Therefore, it resonates with the idea that our bodies are inscribed with stories of the whole universe, with which we are connected. Butoh draws from phylo- and

[19] Takenouchi, A., 2020. *Notes from Online Jinen Butoh Workshop* attended in November 2020.

ontogenesis, not as something vertical and hierarchical but rather horizontal, or maybe spiral, so rejecting speciesism and embracing the biological inextricability between the Self and Others. Butoh dancer Tadashi Endo said that on stage he does not feel like man, woman or human but "simply a form" and he "[c]ould even be an animal" (Dörrie, D., 2015). In my research I attend particularly to the form developed by Atsushi Takenouchi—*Jinen Butoh*—where association with nature is the most important aspect (Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006, p. 129).

Jinen Butoh

> *Like Nature butoh body is metamorphic, never solid in spacetime, but constantly transforming.*
> (Fraleigh, 2005, p. 330)

"*Jinen* is an old Japanese word. Its meaning encompasses ALL that is even larger than nature" (Takenouchi, 2006). To clarify this concept to a western reader Atsushi explains the term through what *Jinen* is not. He refers to the western concept of God, Man and Nature which are separated and located in a hierarchized structure, differently to Japanese culture where Nature is a god/goddess and the human is a part of nature (2020 Workshop). This idea is not completely detached from Western culture, as Nature and its elements were an intrinsic element in pre-Christian European beliefs and mythologies. "ALL" embraces the universe, nature, the human, but also things that are made by humans, such as houses, plastic, computers etc. This concept resonates for me with post-humanist calls not to reject our development, but rather to rethink and transform our relation to it, as well as with Braidotti's view on vitalist materialism, in which "[l]ife is cosmic energy, simultaneously empty chaos and absolute speed or movement. It is impersonal and inhuman in the monstrous, animal sense of radical alterity: zoe in all its powers" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 131).

In butoh dance performer's body becomes a conduit free from the performer's self, removing "the wall of consciousness that perceives dance as the individual "I" dancing" (Takenouchi, 2006). Through the body the performer removes the self in leasing their skin as a container for the intangible presence of the "Other", and this emptying is a basis for transformation. Not dancing, "but being danced with" as *Butoh-ka*, Tadashi Endo, said (Dörrie, D., 2015).

Jinen Butoh has many points of connection with somatic practices, being with-in the non-human other and deeply listening to it through the whole body. We can see this in Takenouchi's transformation practice in the example of dancing with the tree; when he looks and dances with the tree, the tree is looking at him, and this dancing becomes "melding with a tree" (2020 Workshop). Butoh is not about copying or imitating the "Other" from our human perspective but rather remembering, re-imagining bodily, morphing, melting, moulding, rediscovering the energy of the "Other" driven by the *force of Zoe* (Braidotti, 2013). Through this remembering butoh challenges "vertically-based polygeny" (Boem, et al., 2021), as performers are invited to transform from one being to another: from stone to mythical hybrid monsters; from water creatures—octopuses, shrimp, fishes—through birds to mammals. They do it through movement and often imaginary skin transformation in the process of morphing from one animal to another. In this, it is both a practice that actually makes one realise how much skin texture affects movement and body structure, and brings awareness of the ways in which differences of skin are environmentally bound, as the epidermis adapts to the environment in which a particular being is immersed to enable its survival (Ebling, 2024a, 2024b)

Apart from polygenesis, *Jinen Butoh* resonates for me with un-naming, the a-linearity of time, and modes of defamiliarization through the body. It also often revolves around dancing the cycles of life and death. The way in which *Jinen Butoh* imagines dying is quite different to the inert lifeless body we often think of. Butoh, through the form of dying, the flower/animal/human shows the way in which they were living. The form of dying becomes a quintessence of life, of movement, even in stillness. After death, the spirit leaves the body and moves freely until ready to start again. As Atsushi underlines, "Butoh death form contains the fullness of life and death itself is a transformation into new life" (2020 Workshop). *Jinen Butoh* Dance is also about healing. Takenouchi has also performed in places which bear post-cataclysmic wounds.[20]

[20] This connection of dance with environmental healing brings to mind Anna Halprin's Planetary Dance, which is an annual all-day ritual of healing and community renewal, where people all over the world are invited to dance for peace in communities and with the Earth. Planetary Dance draws from traditional cultures where people gather together and dance in common purpose. The origin of this gathering comes from the healing dance she made with some participants after six women were murdered on Mount Tamalpais. After the event, however, she was told by the shaman that to be

Performing, translating/interpreting, mindfulness, somatics and butoh are different entry points in a search for presence, for animality, for body, for being, for the *force of Zoe*; whether as oneself or as another. All these are explorations of how to get to presence, to the materiality of the body, to find bridges across the gaps between One and the Other. It is not about erasing difference, but rather respecting it, looking for points of connection and expanding points of view through noticing differences. To get this deep affect into our bodies and selves and, through it, to connect to others.

New materialism and Somatic Practice

Somatics is another practice that brings us towards explorations of the animality of the body, and therefore it has become fundamental for my research. I have been exploring it in depth during the Somatic Movement Educator programme with Body Mind Centering (BMC).[21]

Tomas Hanna defines the somatic as "the art and science of the inter-relational process between awareness, biological function and environment, all three factors understood as a synergistic whole" (Longley, 2016, p. 231). Focusing on one's bodily experience, one becomes aware of body-environment relationality; by extending the internal sensations, one can attune bodily to what is not a proper body, thus producing a different form of knowledge: "immediate proprioception—a sensory mode that provides unique data" (Hanna, 1986). This switch of perspective escapes the objectivization of the body through the external male gaze, giving it back its subjectivity as a site of ongoing processes and changes that resist "fixing" (Hall, 2003), reading and "marking" (Phelan, 1993). Although it focuses on processes that occur with-in one's own body, it raises bodily awareness of developmental and physiological patterns and provides deep understanding of human and non-human relationality and their "entangled intra-relating" (Barad, 2007, p. ix).

successful in purifying the mountain they needed to return to it and dance for five years. For further reference see: https://planetarydance.org/the-story/.

[21] See https://www.bodymindcentering.com/.

Skin in/and Body Mind Centering

During the Somatic Movement Educator Programme within Body Mind Centering, human anatomy and development is examined in depth with the aim of "knowing" it not only on a cognitive, but rather on an embodied and experiential level. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, a founder of Body Mind Centering, starts her workshop *How Do You Embody Your Skin?* with embryological development,[22] as patterns and relations that begin to form during this period can be traced in the body systems throughout life.

In Bainbridge Cohen's explanation, the ectoderm creates a form for the body, and wraps the future endoderm and mesoderm. The endoderm will create some organs, such as the digestive and respiratory systems that will give nourishment and energy, allowing the body's softness and flow. But this softness can only be achieved thanks to the outer protective layer of the skin which will be in contact with the amniotic fluid in which the body swims in the womb.[23] This also shows that the different qualities in the body are not opposite but complementary, and their cooperation is what enables the body to function and flourish, thus challenging "lethal binaries" (Braidotti, 2013).

This process of exchange with-in the body is happening simultaneously and continuously on the cellular level. Products of digestion and respiration–-sugar and oxygen–-work together in every cell in the body to form mitochondria that create energy. As Bainbridge Cohen says, "the nerves are not directing the process but are rather recording it from the cells – the heartbeat is heard after three weeks and brain waves after six months. The body by six months is pretty much developed; babies can survive before the brain is developed". We could say that this scientific perspective actually challenges the hegemony of the logos in the Cartesian Body-Mind hierarchy.

Cells have their own mind, the inscribed memory of their functions. They are undifferentiated at the beginning before dichotomising and specialising. It is not a brain that leads these processes but rather a memory, a material wisdom, at the cellular level. These processes resonate for me with concepts of vitalist materialism and the *force of Zoe* (Braidotti, 2013) and reinforce a vision of the body as intelligent matter.

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[22] Online workshop with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen - How Do You Embody Your Skin?, Saturday 25th of June, 2022 within Body Mind Centering Association Conference 2022. For further information see: https://bmcassociation.org/conferences/2022-bmca-conference/Program.

[23] Or dances, as Atsushi Takenouchi would say, referring back to the sections on *Jinen Butoh*.

Each cell might be considered an organism by itself, covered with a membrane that, like skin, is a porous structure that allows the passage in and out of nutrients and metabolic remains, while being in continuous contact with other cells. These same cells will later on form the three *-derm*(s) that go on to constitute a human or non-human animal. The skin is not a thing, it is a series of processes, a complex set of phenomena.

The pattern of the cell's inner structure will repeat itself in the creation of the embryo from three layers (endo-, mezzo- and ectoderm) where the front body which is responsible for nourishment, back body for protection, and the middle body for structure, is reflected further on in the layers of the skin. The ectoderm will develop into the epidermis (the outer layer), the dermis will carry the structure of the skin, and the inner layer is the hypodermis.[24] This repetition of patterns recalls Guattari's interlinked levels in *The Three Ecologies*, helping us to place the *oikos* of the body within the psychic, social and environmental layers he observes. Importantly, this realization is what allows us to access and change patterns and re-pattern the body through somatic practice (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012) However, it is not only about cognitive understanding, but rather conscious embodiment, as Body Mind Centering is defined as "An Embodied Approach to Movement, Body and consciousness" (BMC). But how do we achieve this? The offer of somatic-informed performance practice is not about how to exhaust ourselves, but instead, how to actually get inside and embrace this new awareness of (somatic) anatomy, touching it bodily with our consciousness. Performing and creating through this mode then opens up a gentle, responsive way to being (with) an other. It makes space for presenting and presencing the other in an affective and sensitive way, which in turn enables connection and listening in diverse social and political contexts.

Bainbridge Cohen explains that "the consciousness is bigger than structure, so even if the layers are thin, in our consciousness they are very deep, because the smaller the structure, when we embody it through consciousness, is bigger than a bigger structure" (Bainbridge Cohen, 2022). As explored in relation to the formation of subjectivities in chapter 1, we cannot ever see ourselves fully. During the Somatic

[24] This is the name it is given by those who categorise it as a part of the skin and/or subcutaneous fat that lies below the skin; in other approaches, it is given the name of superficial fascia.

Movement Educator (SME) courses 2D anatomical drawings or 3D models of *spellati* (it) are often used. It is not easy for me to see them externally and at the same time locate them in my own body using my "inner eye", that is, an image projected in my mind. Instead, I need to focus on not creating an image at all, but rather sensing fully part of my body-skin which I can then connect with the image constructed in my mind in the process of somatisation. The image that emerges is not clear, but rather diffuse, appearing, changing and vanishing without any imposed logic, like memory flashbacks. Perhaps the point is to practice this inner eye gazing from within? Or perhaps it is a reminder that the soma resists the hegemony of the eye.

Of course, each person will have their own vision and perspective, their own intuition and somatic experience. In Body Mind Centering, students are not told how they should feel or how they should apply this knowledge in their own life and practice. The process is rather based on shared exploration, observation and expression. Sometimes it is difficult to name, sometimes it is just expressed in the body, in the materiality of sound and/or silence. For me somatic practice is a practice of perspectivism, of polyvocality, of multilingualism, translanguaging and self-body-translation, re-examining what has been for centuries examined by and fixed as science. Rather than a fixed method, as many would like to take it, the somatic practice presented by BMC teachers is an approach. Ultimately, it is, like *Jinen Butoh*, an "embodied philosophy" that enables participants to become conscious and explore patterns of relationality within their own bodies, at the same time gaining greater awareness of other bodies and their relationality.

As Bainbridge Cohen indicates, her study of skin does not necessarily agree with science. But nor does it reject it; in fact, its basis lies in a scientific approach to anatomy. But here we need to think of what science actually is? We often consider it as something truthful and objective, fixed and given. But even from a very lay perspective, we can see that concepts and ideas have been changing over time, and now develop even faster due to new technologies. What was "true" yesterday is being challenged today, as we have seen in the case of Linnaeus's classification, Darwin's categories, or scientific racism, as glimpsed in chapter 1. Again, as Haraway reminds us, "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway, 2016, p. 12).

BMC practice also introduces polygenesis particularly in its explorations of Basic Neurocellular Patterns, where participants are invited to recover bodily memory of other ways of being, not in a vertical, or hierarchical way, but rather horizontal, or even maybe spiral. Spiral phylogeny? We are different, but not better or worse, less or more developed. We are just different. Even spiders use devices of complex webs that extend their cognition, and some animal-constructed devices may be helpful for the constructor to perform cognitively challenging tasks (Japyassú & Laland, 2017, p. 376).

The BMC somatic approach uses the language of science but it also uses movement, drawing, touch, sound, sensing and feeling, to liberate us from scientific hegemony. It introduces creativity and imagination to approach hard science. It values perspectivism and sharing, giving back the subjectivity to bodies and skins which science often uses as exhibits. It reminds us that the elements, systems and patterns of the body we explore separately to be able to understand and embrace them consciously, are already happening within us: with-in, under and on the skin. Past, present and future continuous are happening with-in the skin; within matter.

Matter

Somatic practice changed my perspective towards matter. As Karen Barad expounded in her interview with Rick Dolphijn, "Eros, desire, life forces run through everything. […] Matter itself is not a substrate or a medium for the flow of desire. Materiality itself is always already a desiring dynamism, a reiterative reconfiguring, energized and energising, enlivened and enlivening" (Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012, p. 59). Human bodies are also matter; Haraway's "compost" (Haraway, 2015, p.161), mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, highlights for me the coexistence of life and death. We are dying since we are born, we are in a process of continuous decay. Decay is something that we can understand bodily and explore through somatic practices, as proposed by artists and somatic practitioners Glenna Batson and Susan Sandler in their project The F/ol\d – *Human Origami*.[25] All matter is in the continuous process of dying and becoming, as we can observe for example in human skin, or decomposing food which is becoming compost. As Ferrando reminds us, "humus is etymologically related to

[25] For further information on their work, see https://thfold.net/About.

the term 'human'" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 108). A mass of matter has the potential to become everything.

Eco-Somatics

We transform the territory we inhabit with and through our touch and skin—with flaking-off skin, inspiring and expiring, absorbing water and releasing liquids. But also, by flaking off toxic residues, polluting the air and water. Just as we mistreat our skins in the name of beauty, we mistreat the skin of the Earth in the name of Progress. We scrub, deforest, dig, extract, cover with concrete, fertilise with chemicals, organise. Just as we sanitise our bodies, we sterilise the earth of plants, animals, and other non-human beings; just as we avoid touch we create borders, wire fences and walls, occupying more and more space. And we consume, consume everything: "It's the first society in history that doesn't have alimentary taboos: they/we eat mountains, washing machines and museums" (Alba Rico, 2017, p. 60). Insatiable hunger, followed by incessant defecation in the form of pollution, toxic residues, plastics, radioactive waste etc. When we are tired of this civilization and its diseases that affect our skin, we escape to "the wilderness", or, like the billionaires who gain their fortunes from all this consumption and expulsion, on Mars. As there are many of us, we colonise, to start everything all over again.

I wonder if an Ecosexual position (Stephens & Sprinkle, n.d.) [26] could be an answer, or question, for this human exceptionalism that justifies ruling over animals and Earth, as in the biblical Genesis? This Earth that we call mother, perhaps precisely to be able to take for granted her self-sacrifice, while sucking her milk to the depths, pulling her 'invisible hand'? The idea would be to treat the Earth as a lover. Not looking for unconditional love, but mutual care, passion and affection. It is about touching, caressing, giving the lover space to be themselves and choosing to be with them. Ecosexuality can be embraced by any sexual identity, any identity at all: the community of any "critters and other entities from diverse walks of life" (Stephens & Sprinkle, n.d.). This is not about anthropomorphizing the Earth again, but about embracing this exchange of touch, this "trans-corporality" (Alaimo, 2010), this "viscous porosity" (Tuana 2008, 188) in order to understand the rich interactions

[26] To read the Ecosex Manifesto see: https://sprinklestephens.ucsc.edu/research-writing/ecosex-manifesto/.

between beings. As Stacey Alaimo notes "'nature' is always as close as one's own skin—perhaps even closer" (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2). In my practice I explore ways of incorporating these diverse layers of embodied knowledge and ways of experiencing the world and translating them into my thinking, writing and artistic practice in order to share and invite others to perceive the world differently.

Because the artistic projects gathered in this thesis are usually solo performances/actions, I deeply engage with space and everything it contains as if they were my co-performers, whether water, soul, light, fire or spider. I worked outdoors, on shores, in forests and city spaces, as well as indoors in different studios, but also airports, stations and churches, as can be seen in the "Animal-Woman Journey" reproduced at the end of this thesis. Each place has a different atmosphere, sounds, light, temperature and air. Sometimes I bring space/matter from outside inside the studio through projections and sound recordings (see Portfolio of Practice. *She-Wolf* and *The Dove Girl*). Sometimes I am just dancing and living in the forest, as in the butoh explorations described above, or sitting and being with-in the space. And sometimes by space I mean the square of the screen. In this way, space is also a place of transformation. When creating, my first instinct is to get in touch with the space and work with its limitations and potentialities, materiality and structure, exploring the liminality of (t)here. [27]

My somatic explorations are intrinsic with the ethos of eco-somatics that "[combine] principles from ecology and somatics to enhance our connection and felt sense of self to include the natural world and our own bodies" (Rozek, & Cudney, 2023), with key concepts and practices, such as: embodied ecology, sensorial awareness, movement practices, mindfulness and ecological consciousness. While somatic practices mainly focus on the human body, eco-somatics go beyond the human. My project's incessant weaving of the psychic, social and environmental with and through the body recognises that these perspectives and practices are in continuous touch; the "healing" should be happening within all these ecologies. Furthermore, somatic practice frees us from the hegemony of the visual on which the Western world

[27] The Spanish word *ahí* has no direct equivalent in English, as it is a term between aquí/here and allí/there that indicates a relation in terms of the space or distance between the speaker and what they refer to. Helena Buffery in her translation of Sergio Blanco's *Cartography of a disappearance* used this 'gap' creatively and coined a word (t)here, that relates to the liminality of the space, distance and other aspects researched in this project.

is constituted (Beugnet, 2007, p. 72), continuously gazing on surface ¯¯ skins. Eyes, of course, constitute part of the body, but here I am referring to the visual denomination of things: biblical Adam's naming as habitual looking, which often has nothing to do with actual seeing. Looking permits one to appropriate visually and mark from a distance, while smelling, tasting, touching requires contact. As discussed earlier in this chapter, somatics raises awareness of the proprioceptors and offers practices to deepen our special senses (Olsen, 2002) in order to unlearn habits of using them in an automatic way.



Dear K.

We learn at school what animate and inanimate is. The more we grow the more we can supposedly distinguish between the inanimate, called object, and the animate, therefore full of life. But I still remember considering my dolls full of life or a stone or a wardrobe as living creatures. For adults that was called imagination. I remember when during a writing contest I wrote a fascinating story about living furniture having vivid discussions when people were gone. Obviously, I humanized these objects but in this way I gave them the significance in my young anthropocentric life. Finally, I tore this story up considering it silly and childish, and composed a piece of writing trying to meet the expectations of the "rational" and the "adult". This moment marked for me "un antes y un después" in my life. From this moment on writing became a struggle.

But apparently our clearly established concepts of animate and inanimate are being challenged even by scientists! Look at Viruses! My inner child was right!

Sincerely,

K.

Matters of touch

Touch is inseparable from the skin. Felt inside and outside, it is experienced by the subject as a "double sensation" (Lafrance, 2018), passive and active, that is peculiar to the skin. In the womb we are "all contact" with the mother (Anzieu, 1989, p. 9) who envelopes us in her skin. We sense and are being sensed, rather than directly seen. Through this sensing we are also being imagined. Immersed in the fluid environment, touch is our first mode of perceiving the world and ourselves. We are in continuous touch with our skin and what surrounds us. The cutaneous sensations are what introduce the new being to the world.

We are born vulnerable, unprotected and dependent on our carers who take on the function of our temporary skins, enveloping us in their skin through touch. Being fed, held, picked up and washed gradually leads us "to differentiate a surface which has both an inner and an outer face" (Anzieu, 1989, pp. 36–37). At the beginning, the sensations that the skin provides is diffuse and undifferentiated, but with time "it transforms the organism into a sensitive system" (Anzieu, 1989, p. 14) capable of experiencing, connecting, differentiating and locating sensations as well as exchanging signals with people in their immediate environment.

Even before we recognise images, it is touch that makes us instinctively reach with our mouth for the mother's breast, to calm the pang of hunger, but also to sense the touch of warmth from inside and the touch of the skin from the outside. Then we reach with our hands for things that awaken our interest. We crawl on the floor trying to translocate, we hold firmly to surroundings trying to resist gravity while our feet are trying to grasp the floor. All the sensorial and motor functions intertwine in these processes. The whole body and all the skin is activated and stimulated. Babies live with/from their skin.

Centuries of ingrained disconnection from one's own body, through internalization of the "male gaze" and objectification of the skin that leads to violence and dangerous touch, the sexualization of touch, the ubiquity of technology substituting physical contact, has converted people into separate, lonely islands, convinced of their exceptionalism and self-sufficiency. And this was even more visible during the crisis associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, when touch became almost

a weapon and, to survive, we needed to protect each other from touching and being touched.

When touch is pleasant, the body releases oxytocin that lowers levels of stress and anxiety. Lack of touch increases levels of cortisol—the stress hormone—that may lead to higher blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and accelerated breathing (Benisek, 2023), as in fight or flight mode. It also diminishes sleep quality and increases the risk of infections. Deprivation of touch can lead to developmental delays (Ardiel & Rankin, 2010), and not without reason touch deprivation is also called "touch hunger" (Golaya, 2021), "touch starvation" and "skin hunger" (Benisek, 2023). In order to deal with it, particularly during the pandemic, specialists advised, apart from online contacts and exercises, singing, dancing but also the use of heavy blankets, self-massages, spending time hugging/sitting close to loved ones and interacting with pets. All to make us sense our skin. To confirm that we exist. But what about those who had no one close? Those who were not allowed to have pets in their rented apartments? Those who kiss the screens after the online chat, those who after a moment of emotional closeness and being (t)here, turn off a shiny device and stay in silence? They all fall out of touch. Numerous studies show that touch starvation can lead to "aggressive behaviours, impairment in speech and communication, lowered self-esteem, and increasing anxiety, depression, self-injurious behaviour, and eating disorders" (Golaya, 2021, p. 362). In the long run, it can also trigger "post-traumatic stress disorder " (Benisek, 2023).

In my practice I wondered how to "reach" and emotionally "touch" spectators who engage with my practice through the screen. Emotional touch is fundamental – it "enhances the perception of the I" (Lyman, 2020, p. 167). The brain, enhanced by senses of seeing and hearing, continuously analyses the situation—whether the touch we are about to receive might be pleasurable or painful—and changes the structure of the skin awaiting pleasure or pain. For Lyman, touching the skin is also touching the brain, as these two organs are in continuous contact (Lyman, 2020, p. 167). At the same time he discourages us from thinking that the brain dominates the skin, as it is rather the brain that adjusts to the needs of the skin (118). In all my audio-visual projects I explore how through my embodiment of touch I can invite spectators to touch with their eyes and ears and be emotionally touched.

In BMC touch serves to re-pattern the body systems, raising awareness of processes and movements within the body and enhancing their embodiment. Through hands-on practice and visualisation, one can connect with the body of the other on the cellular level, perceiving the flows and movement of the systems and even "touch the organs"; it also introduces sound and vibration into practice. But to do all that one first needs to connect with one's own cells and systems, through visualisation, sensing, proprioception. In this kind of touch, two people's systems talk with each other through the hands, making conscious use of mechanoreceptors that can "detect stimuli such as touch, pressure, vibration, and sound from the external and internal environment" (French & Torkkeli, 2009). It requires closeness. Entering the space of the body and soma of one and the other. Marcella Fanzaga, one of the SME Teachers who led a class of repatterning through touch said that when we touch the body of the other, we are touching their story.

In my research I also explore ways of rediscovering the phenomena of touch through embodiment of our skin; exploring gentle skin-full touch to connect with our own and other skins. Can we feed our starving skin through opening ourselves to this "double sensation", through connection and communication with diverse lives around us, on us, with us? Could this conscious gentle touch transform our relationship and convince us to validate them as our kin, rather than expelling them as "the Other", whether they are human or non-human animal, Earth or any other kind of matter.

T**echnological extension of the skin**

At the beginning the idea to translate my performative explorations into an audiovisual mode came from the need to document my work as well as find ways to keep creating when public performances were prohibited during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, considering that "performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive" (Phelan, 1993, p. 148), this very process unfolded ways to explore how embodied experience can be extended, becoming something new, "something other than performance"(145), yet "maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before" (Haraway, 2016, p. 10). I was later able to re-introduce these multimedial texts as part of live performances, bringing polyvocality to play on/across one performer's body, extending and multiplying my own body and exploring the relationality between image and body.

In this research, the technological voice of the other becomes a part of the conversation and it speaks in a multiplicity of voices. Central to posthumanist thinking is the idea that "[h]uman embodiment and subjectivity are currently undergoing a profound mutation" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 196); indeed, some humans cannot live without technological tools which help their organs to function (Shildrick, 2015). We have always been transformed by our environment as we ourselves transform it, proving the nature-culture continuum. Not only are we in a process of continuous transformation: we are a process, like all matter, of becoming and composting, as recognised by Braidotti and Haraway. As Margrit Shildrick observes, "Donna Haraway's enduring question—'Why should our bodies end at the skin?' (Haraway 1990, 220)—is ever more relevant in the postmodern era, where issues of bodies, boundaries, and technologies increasingly challenge not only the normative performance of the human subject, but also the very understanding of what counts as human" (Shildrick, 2015, p. 13). Although she focuses on the tools used as extensions of the body of people with disabilities, we could extend this to all human bodies. Already in 1991 Haraway claimed "our time [to be] a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). Over the last 30 years the use of technology in everyday life has increased drastically.

Ferrando observes that "the strict border placed in the Western hegemonic tradition between organic/inorganic, biological/artificial, and physical/virtual has been radically challenged not only by different cultures and age perspectives but, more in general, by current developments in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and virtual reality, among others" (Ferrando, 2019, pp. 11-113). Since the Covid-19 pandemic we have merged with technology even more, as it became fundamental for carrying on with some forms of work, keeping in touch with loved ones, and surviving the isolation. We functioned as flat avatars and most of our social activities were happening in a virtual world. Mobile phones have become an extension of our hand, and "computers and a variety of so called intelligent gadgets" (Japyassú & Laland, 2017) have become an extension of human cognition: a substitute for other bodies which we sometimes caress and kiss to say goodbye to loved ones that are far away.

In my research I use a camera, almost always the one in my phone. Having this tool always with me allowed me to capture moments while doing everyday activities.

This aligns with the somatic idea of awareness and paying attention to what is (t)here, rather than staging scenes according to a previously written script. It allows me to come closer, to be in touch with the environment, sometimes with hands freezing with temperatures below zero in Montana, sometimes burning my feet on the hot sand of the Mediterranean. Sometimes receiving voice messages from Animal-Women readers to be woven with visual explorations later on; sometimes recording soundscapes of pigeon "discussions" adding to the noise of the cities. The camera became an extension of my eyes, ears and skin; it shakes together with my hands, and resonates with accelerated breathing. It also allows me to be here and there at the same time. She became a companion and a witness of my Animal-Woman journey.

An effect of this creative documentation process was hundreds of hours and gigabytes of recordings, most of which do not appear in the "final" pieces. Every time I watch them I am (t)here: I am taken to the place where they were taken. Those that were used in the form of curated videos and installations are brought into a completely different space—whether the space of the viewer's screen and room or projected on the wall of an exhibition studio. The image captured by the camera, especially from up close, often becomes something else, it transforms. When projected on walls, or on bodies, it becomes something else again. Context gives it a new meaning.

Touching gaze

In my practice, I try to explore how to touch spectators, emotionally and bodily; how to invite them to connect to the stories of Animal-Women through their skins and bodies. I invite them to touch and be touched by the image and sound, in order to connect with their own materiality. How to translate the touch of skin into the skin of the film to make their skins reverberate, to make them touch with a gaze? For Laura Marks, "[h]aptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure—a sensory-motor reaction—so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image" (Marks, 2000, p. 164). Drawing on psychologists' definitions of haptic perception as "the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies", she observes that in "haptic visuality the eyes themselves function like organs of touch" (162). Haptic cinema, as explored by many filmmakers, such as Alain Resnais, Robert Bresson, Krzysztof Kieślowski, challenges mainstream cinema's fascination with

likeness and recognition (Mulvey, 1989, p. 17). This is because “haptic images can give the impression of seeing for the first time, gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is” (Marks, 2000, p. 178).

In my audiovisual projects, soundscapes and installations, I introduce haptic visuality and sonority; I use extreme close-ups, disconnection of sound/text narrative from the visual, transformation through adjacent images, and an a-linearity of time, skin and touch. Close ups cut the distance, the gap between One and the Other. They motivate us to look without grasping the image of the whole, to pay attention, to figure out without direct naming, something that resonates with Braidotti’s call for de-familiarisation. In this they mimic the process of somatisation described previously in the BMC section; as in somatic visualisation the detail becomes much bigger than in reality and, thus, more difficult to grasp as a whole.

The haptic usually moves over the surface of the object, not focusing on form but rather on texture. It is “more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze” (Marks, 2000, p. 162), privileging materiality over representation. According to Jean Luc Nancy it “can only ever be thought, at most, as an offer or promise of contact which can never be consummated” (McMahon, 2012, p. 9). This idea of touch, perceiving the image with the whole body, and yet not being able to consummate it fully is what particularly attracts me in haptic visuality and what I explore in my videos.

In Robert Bresson’s film *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), the lives of the main characters, the donkey and Marie, intertwine, but the affinity between them is not explained or psychologically justified, but rather constituted by acts of caressing and touching. The film is full of close-ups of hands, objects, elements of nature, fragments of human and animal bodies, which serve as an exposition of the materiality of the world’s elements and incessant contact between them. Through touch Bresson is discovering forms of “being-with between the animal and the human, destabilising the anthropocentric” (McMahon, 2012, p. 49). Likewise, in *Hiroshima mon* amour (1959) directed by Alain Resnais, hands are full of meaning, and the quality of touch expresses characters’ emotions – from caressing lovers' hands, to clawing and scraping the wall, when the main character is imprisoned. Seeing such a sensitive zone exposed to self-aggression may provoke a sensation of pain and abjection, but at the same time

it allows spectators to connect with their own physicality and bodily understand the emotional suffering of the character (Resnais, A., 1959).

Touch constitutes a fundamental part of my practice. Apart from my bodily explorations of touching (and being in touch with) my/other's soma and body, bare hands and feet, together with my back and lips, became a leitmotif of my videos. Medical writer Monty Lyman writes that "[t]he human brain 'reads' the world of touch impulses from two maps: the skin and the sensory homunculus that is in our brain" (Lyman, 2020, p. 162). Comparison of these maps shows that the size of the areas of brain and skin are not correspondent and that the areas of the hands, feet and lips have much more mechanoreceptors then other parts of our body, such as the back. Mouth, hands and feet allow Animal-Women to reach, to pull, to grasp; to caress and to punch; to caress and kiss, but also to bite and scratch. Bare feet with red nails on which Animal-Women walk their journey(s) sensing the texture of the ground, barbed wire, feathers, plastic and snow. Lips that kiss but are also bitten to hold in the words. And the back being often exposed, touched by hands, a pen, feathers, cold; being often a shield hidden under an emergency red raincoat.

Touching sound

According to Didier Anzieu (1989, p. 65), "the tactile envelope, which is also an envelope of warmth, softness, and firm holding (but also of cold, roughness, and slackness), articulates with the sonorous envelope (the bath of words, music, and the melody of the mother's voice), with the envelope of tastes and smells, and later with the envelope of colour". My practice aims to offer spectators the touch of these envelopes, so that Animal-Women skin stories can reverberate within their skin: skins that are maps of their stories; stories that are also envelopes.

Through sound recordings and repetitions I give aural presence to a range of different voices, both of human and non-human others: voices of the sea, pigeons, or sounds that are not directly recognisable, like the soundscape of snow. How does this matter sound? In my videos the visual narrative does not illustrate the sound/text, but rather invites spectators to create their own connections and meanings. My commitment to working with-in different languages has a similar purpose. The challenge or "trouble" of not understanding the signifier can on one level give the One a sense of the experience of the migrating Other, forcing the audience to pay attention

to details, movements, gesture, pitch and tone, in order to grasp at the signified, at what lies beneath. It also enables immersion into the texture of the sound, its breath and pace; to listen with the skin and imagine. Moreover, the disembodied voice may also bring uncanny sensations, as if one were listening from the womb. Kaja Silverman notes, "[t]he fantasy of the maternal-voice-as-sonorous-envelope" can be an "emblem of infantile plenitude and bliss" or "of impotence and entrapment" (Silverman, 1988, p. 73). My research plays with what lies in between these binaries, often weaving them in through breath and other material sounds.

Skin of Composition

My practice also activates touch through the process of composition, attending to the importance of relation and contact between adjacent images, and the mutual transformations produced by their inter-actioning. As Robert Bresson wrote, "[a]n image must be transformed by contact with other images as is a colour by contact with other colours. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation" (reproduced in McMahon, 2012, p. 47). McMahon connects this vision with Jean Luc Nancy's concept *transimmanence*, as the *immanent* and *transcendent* together, a negotiation between "the incarnate and the ineffable" (48). In my form of practice images are juxtaposed and often merge, creating new images in-between. This mode does not relate only to the skin of the film, but also to the space in which images are organised and curated. I explore a performative space like a 3D-canvas, where all the elements (videos, soundscapes, actions, architecture) can be looked at separately but are also in dialogue, together creating a new piece, bigger than the sum of its parts.

In relation to the aesthetics of reception, art historian Wolfgang Kemp considered that the receiver-spectator is a factor that constitutes a work of art, thus their gaze is already implied in the structure of the work. This requires the artist to create from the point of view of a spectator, the Other and oneself simultaneously (Bryl, 1990). Kemp distinguishes two systems, Representation (*Darstellung*), being a manner to connect the elements within the image to approach the theme, and Presentation (*Prasentation*) which is the form given to Representation in order to present a particular point of view to the spectator. As an art historian, Kemp refers to a two-dimensional image, however, his model is also applicable to layers of theatre

composition. Being a director, and at the same time a performer, I needed to put myself in a place of a viewer, the other, and the performer simultaneously. When working to make a specific space into an art gallery, such as in *The Dove Girl* or in *She-Wolf* performances, I was continuously aware of both Representation and Presentation, body and soma, and the atmosphere being created. It is not only about what, but also about how themes are presented. Composition becomes part of the content of the pieces and has its own materiality and narrative. It resists linearity and can introduce simultaneous actions, where following "every a, b, c contains the entire alphabet" (Bogart & Winer, 2004).

Although my performances are usually solos, introducing projections of videos allows me to multiply my body, interacting with them as well as creating a spatial tension and liminality (t)here. It allows me to bring these human and non-human Others into space, to merge "nature" with "culture". Above all, it creates spaces where, as in the case of She-Wolf, where spectators became an intrinsic part of the installation, continuously transforming spaces within and in-between.

Gaps for imagination

In my research, I align with Alain Resnais's idea, expressed in relation to the representation of violence: "I always felt that this horror could only ever be suggested. Whenever anything absolutely real was shown on the screen, the horror disappeared. So the imagination of the viewer had to be brought into play by every possible means." (Lagier, L., 2004). Through translanguaging in diverse artistic modes and languages which I am composing, juxtaposing and merging in diverse rhythms, sounds, breaths, paces, images, videos, and bodies, my practice creates untranslatable gaps between what is seen and heard, what is here and there; between what is presented and only imagined, inviting spectators to create their own meanings, connections and bridges within these gaps; to create their own games of String Figures (Haraway, 2016); their own translation through their bodies and imagination.

So far, in this chapter, I have presented just a few of the myriad potentialities, just a few of the choices of different selves that came to the surface of my practice and are gathered in the portfolio. In what follows, I present one example of this multiply-layered process of creation, which emerged in parallel with my eco-somatic explorations and relationality.

LITTLE MERMAID

THE FOAM/ LA SCHIUMA



Figure 8. Frame from "The Foam/La Schiuma", Ionian Sea, Italy, 2021

See: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: Little Mermaid.

Water inspires me to move. Every time I am close to water I feel my inner water reverberate in my body, asking to be immersed in a 'bigger' water flow, to follow its movement and become a part of it. This is probably why I love to swim although… I usually choose the controlled environment of the swimming pool. Water obscures my vision, transforms my hearing, impedes me from breathing. Immersed in water I have access to a different world, with bizarre gravity rules, unfamiliar resistance and inescapable touch. Open water scares me. What if I let myself be taken up by its mystery, overwhelming power and unknown depth? What if I allow myself to lose this illusory sensation of control that living on the ground gives me?

My family town is located on a bay 7 km from the Baltic coast. Water has been an intrinsic part of my childhood. Stories of leisure in the water were always intertwined with the stories of those who have been taken by the water. Water has always been something that should be respected, if not feared.

When I decided to do a video for the Global Water Dances Cork 2021, I had myriad ideas of how I could dance and flow with the water. But when I finally got to the shore, I just stayed there breathing its vastness. Deeply listening to it with my whole body. Feeling the water in me resonating with the water of the sea; the inter-, intra- and extracellular fluid, the cerebro-spinal, the rivers of my blood and lymph all wanting to join but being unable to because of the container of my skin. Skin that was becoming moist with salty sea particles.

I allowed myself just to be there, perceiving the song and movement of the waves. And it was so… relaxing? No, not relaxing but rather profoundly appealing as if this sound was a mythical Mermaid song leading sailors astray. It awoke a desire to follow, to join the sea and dissolve in its song. Waves were stroking my body on their way to the land, trying to take me with them on their return, as if saying: come with us for a while and we promise to take you back soon. I thought that gravity was grounding my body in the land but the miry sand was engulfing me as if supporting the sea's desire to take me with and in it. And the touch of the waves caressing my skin… I was falling into and for the sea; dissolving. In touch, in smell, in sound, in sand, in water, in foam.

At this moment the sea whispered into my ear "…and she felt her body dissolve in foam" (Andersen, 1949). I do not remember whether it was said in Italian, in English, or maybe in Polish. Little Mermaid, I thought—not the Disney but the Andersen one—appeared on the horizon of the sea of my memory with the smell of a worn book that was always on the shelf. A liminal creature from the underwater world who to obtain human shape had to sacrifice her voice, identity, body and familiar environment, and because she didn't fulfil her dream to marry a human prince, yet also refused to kill him, was transformed into foam.

I was on the shore of the Ionian Sea where I had escaped from the flat walls and screens that were the urban experience of Covid-19 in search of an open horizon, breath, space. The shore is a place of transformation, a liminal space where water becomes land, and vice versa. The shore is also a place of migration, a natural frontier which is both a barrier and access to the land and to the sea—the sea as a separating element and a joining link (Niewadzisz, 2021). When I am on an Italian shore, it is impossible for me not to think about its liminality and betweenness. This place of great

beauty intertwines stories of joyful leisure with those of the struggle and suffering of the people who try to reach it. The story varies depending on whether one is coming from the sea, like the Little Mermaid, or from the Land, as "human". The sea becomes this transformative power. Those who like La Sirenetta come from the sea are dispossessed (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) of their country, place and family, following a dream of a 'better' place, "land of opportunity" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 135), shaped by colonialism. Like her they lose their voice, language, identity and often their body.



Figure 9. Frame from "The Foam/La Schiuma", Ionian Sea, Italy, 2021

But water does not respect countries, nationalities, laws. It flows fuelled by the generative energy of *Zoe* (Braidotti, 2013), tempting, engulfing and embracing everything. Human, animal, stone. Water does not distinguish between 'one' and 'the Other', for ultimately "we are bodies of water" as "the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves" (Neimanis, 2016, p. 1).

Standing there, immersed in this Sea, that connects to other seas and oceans; with my feet immersed in this "archive of breathlessness" (Sharpe, 2016, p.109; Neimanis, 2019, p.492), the same fragmented memory takes me to my native Baltic sea. This cold greenish water that is so present in the cells of my memory; this sea

that is asphyxiating (Staniszewska, 2018). And with it, the non-human others that inhabit it, who like the Little Mermaid, dispossessed of their voice and habitat, become deprived of their right to breathe. And their bodies dissolve into foam…

According to dictionary definitions, foam consists of a mass of small bubbles that are formed when air and liquid are mixed together (Collins Dictionary, 2024). Foam is liminal and always transformable, shaped by the power of water and the quantity of air. Foam is something between and with-in, but being water and air is neither and both, becoming something more than just a sum of its parts. Being at the same time airy and watery it is ephemeral and always in transition in its unformed form.

Foam is what the Little Mermaid becomes and then like an air bubble she rises as "a daughter of the air" (Andersen, 1949). Although this was probably intended to represent a "happy ending" according to Christian values (Vitkune, 2022), for me it resonates with the ideas of posthumanist and New Materialist thinkers. Becoming foam is not some kind of punishment or final end, but rather a change of state in a continuous process of transformation and transition of matter; its continuity and intra-connections with-in the world underline the coexistence of life and death. Matter that "feels converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 48).



Figure 10. Frame from "The Foam/La Schiuma", Ionian Sea, Italy, 2021

All of this reminds me of one of the *Jinen Butoh* practices proposed by Atsushi Takenouchi. At the beginning the performer is invited to merge through the body and imagination with the Mother Sea from which all life emerges. With time they transform, embodying a variety of creatures—octopuses, shrimps, fishes, mythical creatures, land animals, humans—and they continue morphing from one form to another, to return in the end to the Mother Sea.

While editing a video for Global Water Dances I compared translations of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* in diverse languages (Polish, English, Italian, Spanish) focusing on the same fragment of her transformation, in order to introduce the most appealing vision. But I did not introduce any narration, as this seemed unnecessary. I preferred to leave space for the powerful voice of the Sea Water to speak and tell us those silenced stories in its own language—a language of movement, breeze, air, smell, foam and continuous transformation of this infinite body, this immense womb. The language of a gentle and rocking lullaby of waves that accompanies their transformations. The language of foam.



Figure 11. Frame from "The Foam/La Schiuma", Ionian Sea, Italy, 2021



Dear K.,

These sea-stories have lived in me for much longer. Like lullabies or folktales they were transforming and coming to the surface in different moments... In November 2021 I was participating in student workshops to create new artwork for the UCC Art Collection at the Glucksman Art Gallery with dancer Imma Pavon. At one point, we were playing with clay, creating pieces that were coming from the body. Mi piece was titled *Anxiety*: this lack of breath, feeling of continuous danger, nervous system in continuous Flight or Fight mode; the hyperventilation when struggling to breathe. At some point, I placed it on the painted blue table, and this sculpture became something else. On this sea-like blue background, these entangled hands and bodies were in actual danger, reaching for help, grasping the air. We are all bodies of water... and yet, " breathing together rarely means breathing the same".

They also took me to document a struggle with the power of the waves in a rough Mediterranean sea, previously gently luring me in, now dragging me more and more into its depths. Following this Little Mermaid Spectrum, I have also joined fishermen, in this case not in the sea but on a bay located in my native town Kamień Pomorski. Individual Fishermen who also suffer the anxiety of asphyxiating waters, economically and morally, as their lives are intrinsically connected to them, as they select the fish that are jumping and grasping for air.

We are all bodies of water... A commonly known Biblical phrase says, 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'. What if we change dust for water? Maybe that is what attracts and scares me in water. An intense inexplicable call of the womb of the Mother Sea.

Sincerely,

K.

Images of the different tactile explorations mentioned in this postcard, including the sculpture *Anxiety*, are presented in Appendix I, and two different iterations of the video "The Foam/La Schiuma" are contained in the Portfolio of Practice: Sub-Collection: Little Mermaid:

The Foam/La Schiuma (1st iteration video-piece 3:35 min.)

The Foam/La Schiuma (Breathlessness) (2nd iteration video-piece 3:33 min.)

Chapter 2 – Conclusions

Through narratives of Animal-Woman folk tales I aim to give voice(s) to the variety of "Others of modernity" while at the same time resisting the centrality of the hegemonic voice and recognizing centres of interest which are plural, multi-layered, mutable, fluid and open (55-56). I give my body, literally and figuratively, as an *oikos*-home for the multiplicity of other voices, as a creative approach to Braidotti's nomadic "post-individualistic notion of the subject, which is marked by a monistic, relational structure" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 87). This chapter has provided an overview of the different layers of somatic, translational and performance practices I have woven together in my artistic research to move beyond humanism's hierarchized dichotomies and "lethal binaries" (Braidotti 2013) towards a more interwoven, interconnected world of "assemblages" (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015) in order to create alternative modes of storytelling and worldmaking (Haraway, 2016).

My artistic practice often comes from the body, space, intuition and memory; from the knowledge that has been absorbed through years of diverse performative practices in different roles, contexts and languages, as well as from previous translation and art history studies. This knowledge, which I came to view as an "embodied philosophy", fed my cells and impregnated my skin, even though some of its sources have already been forgotten. The reflections in this chapter attempt to present and distinguish the multiple layers of embodied knowledge that have been informing my PhD practice and are looped into the process of thinking, making and creating simultaneously.

In the next chapter, I will focus more closely on exploring and interweaving different theories and discourses on skin, in order to incorporate them more effectively into an open, ethical and relational artistic approach to the stories of diverse human and non-human others.

CHAPTER 3

MATTER OF SKIN

Leaving the Vitruvian frame once and for all, the subject becomes relational in a complex manner that connects it to multiple others. A subject thus constituted explodes the boundaries of humanism and anthropocentrism at skin level"
(Braidotti, 2013, p. 137)

Give me back my skin! Dammi la mia pelle!

In this thesis, skin is considered as a liminal membrane and space where the materiality of the body and social and cultural imaginary touch, sometimes through gentle caress, sometimes through violent strokes.

The chapter ends with discussion of the re-tellings of the *S*he-Wolf folktale that emerged in parallel with my readings on skin, in the context of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border (2021-2022) where thousands of migrants were trying to enter the European Union, lured and deceived by smugglers and travel bureaux as part of a Belarusian government project to destabilise the EU's political situation (Milosevic, 2021). While many representations of this and other migration situations tend to foreground the experiences of men,[28] I was drawn to uncover and attend to the more marginalised experiences of women and children, in line with the overarching themes of my thesis. I reflect on how the multiple layers and affordances of skin unfolded across my practice. However, as with each of the folktales, the iterative process means they simultaneously involve engagement with other questions such as language, embodiment, and video and performative practice, that are addressed in more depth in other chapters.

See also: Appendix II and Portfolio of Practice: Sub-Collection: She-Wolf

Across a vast range of stories, Animal-Women are deprived of their animal skin and acquire new social ones in a huMan world. Skin is the matter that allows

[28] See, for instance: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/briefing/poland-belarus-border-crisis.html or https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59253376.
In both these articles (BBC & NY Times) images of migrants are mostly male.

Animal-Women to transform and live as human and animal interchangeably, and its loss dooms these liminal creatures to incompleteness and longing. But what is this loss of the skin that dooms them to incompleteness, foreignness, otherness and longing and at the same time gives them the potentiality to transform?

Skin is not only the container and frontier of the body but it is also the most visible organ that shapes human appearance, influencing identity; it is simultaneously socially, emotionally and politically charged and taken for granted as a "veil of individuality" (Jablonski, 2013, p. 4). At the same time, what lies beneath that surface layer is a multiplicity shared across all animate forms of life. How can we get under our skin to experience, maybe not only "universal humanity", but an individual yet pervasive experience of animality, kinship, connectedness, shared materiality, dis-individuality, multiplicity, relationality and radical compassion with human and non-human others, while respecting its/our/their integrity?

Skin as a space of transformation

Skin is a multifunctional organ, the largest of the integumentary system, which protects us from damage, keeps liquids and heat inside, and provides sensations through contact with the environment. It is a container that functions by "enclosing and separating what is me from what is not me" being "crucial to our sense of identity and our capacity to interact with what is around us" (Tufnell & Crickmay, 2004, p. 138). In *The Skin Ego*, psychologist and psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu defines skin as "a basic datum that is both an organic and an imaginary order, both a system for protecting our individuality and a first instrument and site of interaction with others" (1989, p. 3). At the same time it is in continuous contact with the outside in a double transaction: when it touches it is being touched. It is a porous barrier, a liminal border that protects while allowing access.

Skin is in a continuous process of movement and action, dying and rebirthing continuously. It is a space of change and transformation not only on a physiological level, but also within the world, as its liminality goes beyond physiological skin itself. Roles and concepts that are projected on the epidermis of our skin from the outside are often internalised and shape the skin's representational response. Skin is intrinsically connected with our psyche which at the same time shapes and influences its form;

social projections are projected onto it and it often represents social modes. It is continuously surveyed. Skin is ours and not ours, personal and political; a space of boundary and access, warming and cooling, individual and collective, human and animal; an entity that continuously touches. It is a place of encounter of body and soma, poetry and anatomy, pain and pleasure, identity and transformation, stillness and movement. A liminal space that has the potential to place the subject within "lethal binaries", with racial division being one of the most harmful of these, and to go beyond them at the same time.

Derm – Cut

According to online dictionary definitions, skin comes from Old Norse *skinn*, meaning "animal hide, fur", from the Proto-Germanic *s*kinth-* (…) meaning "to peel off, flay" (Ethmonline, 2001-2024). The prefix derm- and affix -derm come from a Greek word dérma which means skin or hide. Further explanations include that derm stems from the Proto-Indo European root "der-, meaning to split, flay, peel, with derivatives referring to skin and leather", with the following hypothetical sources: Sanskrit *drnati* "cleaves, bursts"; Greek *derein* "to flay"; Armenian *terem* "I flay"; Old Church Slavonic *dera* "to burst asunder"; Breton *darn* "piece"; Old English *teran* "to tear, lacerate". Together these different sources make me wonder whether the destruction of the integrity of skin is already implied in the name. Is it because of language that so many Animal-Women skins are taken? Is it because when we think about the skin we think about a cut? Is skin, then, really capable of hiding and protecting the individual from, literally and figuratively, flaying the skin by the knives or gazes of patriarchy?

EXTERNAL GAZE

We experience the world first through skin, touch and tactility, and we are continuously shedding and losing our skins, literally and figuratively. And gaining and/or being squeezed into other ones. Skin, as a "veil of individuality", is exposed and contained within a container of the environment and social context. Skin is being seen and continuously "marked" (Phelan, 1993) and "read" by others, through the

lenses of similarity and difference; lenses that are impregnated by representations, stories and language.

Psychologists such as Phillip Zimbardo (1999, p. 235) hold that "we look with our eyes but see with our brain". In his classic textbook, *Psychology and Life*, the process of seeing is divided into different stages of sensation: as a reception of information; of perception as interpretation of the information and identification with it; and recognition, which matches what we see with our knowledge. The last stage, however, is usually influenced by context, as well as by the expectations and experiences of the viewer, exposing the subjectivity of seeing and its susceptibility to falsification and deformation. Despite demonstrating how susceptible to falsification and deformation human sight is, most people determine their reality based on what they see, believing that the world can be controlled by the gaze (Phelan, 1993, p. 25). And for centuries it has been controlled by the "male gaze" (Mulvey, 1989), objectifying, commodifying, trapping and possessing the skin of Animal-Women.

The most visible part of the skin is the epidermis, the outermost layer of cells that consists mostly of hardened keratinocytes called corneocytes that are "packed closely together and seal the skin off from the outside environment" (IQWiG, 2009, 2019), keeping toxins outside and water inside of the body. However, in a world "controlled by a gaze", this thin skin layer, whose thickness varies between 0.3 millimetres and 4 millimetres, depending on the function of the body part it covers, became a denomination of identity.

Male Gaze

According to cultural studies pioneer Stuart Hall (2003, p. 3), "we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualise them, the values we place on them". The Biblical creation story, humanity's banishment from paradise, Vitruvian Man and other examples mentioned in chapter 1, are only a few of the stories and images that render women inferior to man and in consequence turn them into an object rather than a subject, a "prize" or "invisible hand" supporting men in the Progress and Development of huMan-ity. In this interdependent relationship, "incomplete" woman becomes an

object whose appearance mirrors men's identity, and therefore is continuously marked, surveyed and evaluated. According to Berger's analysis of the nude in Art History, woman is always an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 2008, p. 47). And a sight, as in concepts of the natural landscape, is to be seen. The more "virgin" this natural sight is, the more scope for exploration (and exploitation). Women's youth has a value.

So women look at their reflection in the mirrors hung by a patriarchal eye and compare their similarities and differences to promoted icons. Exposed to fragmented representations of female bodies, they often self-impose 'torture', starvation, surgery, extreme exercising, harmful cosmetics. Manipulated, women mentally and physically self-assault their own skins, consuming and being consumed more and more within this never-ending race to inexistent "perfection". They "*der*-"—*flay*, plunder, shave, skin, strip, lace and excoriate the old corneocytes, excrescences, marks, bruises and scars but also hair, sweat, mucosae and smell from *the endoderm* to get rid of all death, all the traces of a lived life, so it can be repainted and rewritten again and again. Patriarchal societies seem propelled by the concept that the body and skin are not living matter but an object, which can be modulated and ameliorated piece by piece,[29] smoothing, cleansing, scrubbing, rubbing, massaging, sucking, pinching, injecting, slapping, piercing, cutting to keep skin soft, smooth, glowing, awake and calm like an uterus ready to embrace and envelop men's existence. As if it was not an organ that protects existence but an external product that needs to be improved. Patriarchy makes women dissociate their own skin and bodies from their own being as if it was "the Other"; the Other possessed by the gaze. Women have also inherited an elaborate system of ornamenting their skins through clothing, make-up, jewellery, as if these were their second skins. This allows them to hide and expose themselves at the same time; to demonstrate their socio-economic status; to control their image.

S(k)in

Skin is our largest sensory organ that carries out sexual functions. It is charged with desire, pleasure, contact and connection but these sensations and affects are what are

[29] In the same way as people consume more meat because they do not associate it with a living animal. Sold in butchers and supermarkets in pieces it becomes an object, a product produced to be eaten, and even the name is changed as, for example, pig becomes pork.

lost in Animal-Woman stories of loss of skin. In paradise, Eve's and Adam's nakedness is a symbol of their animality, their innocence, until Eve, tempted by the snake (probably the most famous skin shedder), made them commit "original sin". Gaining the knowledge of good and evil, they became aware of their nakedness: where naked signifies evil, and clothed signifies good. Naked skin thus became a reminder of sin and of a lost paradise. Shame on her skin!

But while representations of female nudes are considered an object of sin and carnal desire, the exposed skins of male martyrs, together with probably the most famous body on the cross, represent transcendence and resurrection. According to patriarchy, women's bodies were not capable of transcendence. The more skin on display, the more sexualised the body. Her vs. His skin. Hell vs. Heaven. Body vs. Soul. Carnal vs. Transcendent. In his introduction to a special issue on Skin Studies, in *Body and Society*, Marc Lafrance (2018, p.8) attests that "[e]ven a cursory consideration of the cultural politics of gender indicates that women in the west have long been expected to show more skin than men". Representations of skin have been depicted for centuries. The history of the nude is actually a history of skin. How much skin was on display was also a mode of situating women in a socioeconomic system. At the same time, in some cultures women must hide their skin and hair, hiding what can be desirable for their righteous husband. In others, women are mutilated to deprive them of desire. Skin can provide incredible pleasure, but also immense pain. Touch can bring life, as we learn looking at the Sistine Chapel, but also physical and emotional death.

Lustful gaze

Before their animal skin is taken Animal-Women are closely observed and evaluated by a voyeuristic eye. Their human skin is already touched by the male gaze; like Susana's by the gaze of two lustful Elders (Tintoretto *Susana and the Elders*; 1555-1556) or the Maja's, whether naked or clothed, by almost 2.5 million visitors to the Museum of Prado.[30] They are carefully selected as an object of desire, like Swan Women or Dove Maiden; like actors/models at castings; like women from Porntube seen by 42 billion visitors in 2019.

[30] Francisco Goya *The Naked Maja*, c.1800, *The Clothed Maja*, 1800-1807

"Watch yourself", "look out for yourself", "watch out". Look out to see if you are being watched. Women are continuously being instructed to pay attention to whether they are observed or not, to evaluate if they are safe or not; whether that means (not) going out at night, (not) wearing such a short skirt, (not) even 'provocative' under-wear, or just (not) losing control, because their vision may be blurred, leaving them unable to see clearly who is watching and planning to steal their skin. I imagine most women know the fear and vulnerability deeply ingrained in their skin that places them as potential victims of men. Dove Girls are playing in the fountain, Seal Women are dancing on the shore, She-Wolf is preparing herself to sleep. All of these Animal-Women are enjoying the intimacy and joy of their own human skins, unaware of a voyeuristic eye gazing at them and evaluating their skin.

Analysing Hans Memling's *Vanity* (1480), Berger unveils one of the paradoxes and manipulations of the patriarchy: the male painter depicts a naked woman in order to enjoy viewing her, but puts a mirror in her hand and calls the painting Vanity in order to morally condemn the woman whose nakedness he has painted for his own delight (Berger, 2008, p. 51). While I agree with Berger's observation, I think that perhaps she is not actually looking at herself. Perhaps she is just checking that there is no one behind her. Knowledge of the need to look at themselves as seen by the male gaze, with the skins covering their bodies perceived as a product, has been passed on from generation to generation of women not only as a vanity or choice but rather as an intrinsic mode of survival within a patriarchal world of surveillance. These are reflections that returned to me insistently in the process of re-reading and re-telling the Dove Girl folktale, discussed in chapter 4.

White Gaze

There are women who not only need to struggle with the male gaze, but also with the white gaze, which marks their skin because of its colour. According to Lafrance, "like the cultural politics of gender, the cultural politics of race indicate that racialized skin is inscribed by power relations, objectified by oppressive stereotypes and all too often assaulted by state violence in ways that the non-racialized skin is not" (Lafrance, 2018, p. 8). Lafrance draws on the work of Frantz Fanon who, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, writes of a "racial epidermal schema" (Fanon, 1986) which reduces black individuals to their skins, and to the systemic violence that is enacted on their skins

because of this. Just as in the Animal-Women stories, their subjects were often considered Other because of coming from different countries and cultures or because of physical difference in respect of the community they were coming to, difference in the colour of the skin was one of the most visible examples.

What decides the colour of the skin is the level of concentration of melanin and is related to our ancestors' migrations. However, the resulting classifications of whites and not-whites have led societies to commit atrocities for centuries, from Aristotle's concept of "natural slaves", through the Conquista, Chattel slavery, and more recent genocides based on racism. None of these have a basis in science; research on human genetics shows that there are no genetic distinctions between people of different skin colour (Yudell, et al., 2016). In fact, the DNA of even the most genetically different people in the world is 99,8% identical, and we are genetically different from neanderthals by only 0.5% (Krause & Trappe, 2021, p. 38). However, as Lafrance reminds us, "[f]orgetting about the skin is, in many respects, a privilege – one from which those with racialized skin are less likely to benefit" (Lafrance, 2018, p. 8). Many women lose, shed and acquire different skin when they cross borders. From citizens they often become foreigners, and all the power relations and hierarchies of misogyny, racism, xenophobia intersect on their skins. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote, "I wasn't black until I came to America" (Ngozi Adichie in Reese, 2019).

Independently of the racialization of skin colour, most women have lighter skin (because of more need for vit. D and calcium) and their skin is usually thinner than that of men because of less concentration of testosterone. Women's skin is also usually less hairy than men's. These physiological characteristics and differences have also been socially used to create standards and hierarchies of "beauty". "In many cultures pale and delicate skin is characteristic of women and suggests their innocence and honesty" (Lyman, 2020, p. 267). And this has a long historical and cultural origin where white is related to shyness and light, and dark to evil and hopelessness (Berne, 1959). As Barbara Fass Leavy (1994, p. 329) notes, "[t]he racist implications of an equation of blackness with loathliness or evil are obvious".

Only a few years ago Merriam Webster challenged as racist the definition of the word "nude" as "having no clothes on" but also "having the colour of the white-person's skin" (Torres, 2017). Because of centuries of colonisation, reflected in the

global domination of whiteness in the mass media, such definitions have also influenced the skin of non-white women. Women in Africa, for example, often use toxic ingredients to whiten their skin (Adams, 2023).

Stereotypes

Hall explores modes of stereotyping difference in representational practice (Hall, 2003), showing how "people who are in any way significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than ·us'" tend to be represented "through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes and are often required to be both things at the same time!" (229). Following Derrida he points out that binaries are rarely neutral but rather contain and reflect relations of power (235). Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference, excluding "everything that does not belong" (258), which Kristeva (1982) calls the abjected.

Hall writes that in the Middle Ages, the European image of Africa was more ambiguous, which is why black saints have their place in medieval Christian iconography. However, this changed gradually as they started to be identified with nature and characterised as "the primitive" in opposition to the "civilised world" (239). All of this had its source in the justification of slavery, conquest, colonisation and other horrors that the white oppressor effectuated on the "Other". While the "white man's burden" was to subdue nature, he placed the racialised Other as a part of it in order to justify his actions, aided and abetted by "scientific racism" (244),

The depiction of men and women from the Americas, for example, has changed at different points in history. As Anna Fausto-Sterling writes,[31] at the end of sixteenth century native Americans were portrayed by Theodor de Bry in idyllic scenes, farming in a background of representations of Adam and Eve (both white) in Paradise, but afterwards they were transformed into "savage and monstrous" beings (Fausto-Sterling, 2002, p. 68). Americo Vespucci's writings represent images of Native American women as immoral, "naked and libidinous", because of their knowledge of "enlarging their lovers' sex organs, induc[ing] miscarriages and control[ling] their own fertility" (Sterling after Tiffany and Adams, 1985). There are still countries where

[31] Faust-Sterling starts her chapter with a very important question, asking, "how to be faithful to the language usage of earlier periods without offending contemporary sensibilities?" (66)

women are being considered immoral for the same reasons. “The early explorers linked the metaphor of the innocent virgin (both the women and the land) with that of the wildly libidinous female” (Fausto-Sterling, 2002, p. 68). But with the start of the industrial revolution, nature/Earth started to be seen as female, which facilitated its exploration and rape and gave rise to a “need” for differentiation of “the ‘savage’ land/woman from the civilized female of Europe” (69). This need for differentiation and the urge to find scientific proof for it is what led to the comparative exhibition of white and non-white bodies in museums of sciences and human zoos.

In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan analyses the work of Lorna Simpson in *Guarded Conditions* (1989) in which the artist presents repetitive images of a black woman’s body in a white dress seen from the back with the words “Sex Attacks/Skin Attacks/ Sex Attacks/Skin Attacks” (Phelan, 1993, pp. 158-159). As Phelan reminds us, “racial and sexual violence are an integral part of seeing the African-American woman”, situating Simpson’s work as a “response to a perception which seeks her disappearance or her containment within the discursive frames of criminality or pathology, [that] is to turn her back. In the middle of her back, the woman clenches her fists and repeats”(158).

The animalisation, victimisation and sexualisation of racialised Animal-Women with other than white skin and other than western cultures has not ceased – “antiblackness is a total climate” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 21). These processes are often propelled by populist governments who, through repeating harmful stereotypes, create narratives of migrating others as being dangerous for “civilised societies”, as I explore in the She-Wolf project, described later in this chapter. Racist, ethnocentric and xenophobic discourse is becoming more and more normalised. Propagated by the media, particularly after 2001, islamophobia fuels stereotyping narrations of war, ISIS, terrorism, and the oppression of women. This narrative violence impels individual and systemic physical violence, as was seen on the Polish-Belarusian border, but also on the US-Mexican border, in Melilla, on the Mediterranean coast, in Gaza, and so many other borders, walls, wire fences, zoos all around the world where skin loses its fundamental function of hiding or covering, implied in the prefix *derm-*. Instead, it is skin that must be hidden, because the mere concentration of melanin is considered a threat, a danger, abject. So many women are escaping patriarchal and political violence, dreaming about a better life, for them and for their children; about finding a

safe space for their homeless skins. Escaping violence, misogyny and domestic violence, they encounter the same patterns reinforced by racism and xenophobia. Their skin becomes a danger. Because of the colour of their skins they are literally and figuratively flayed, watched, peeled, looked at, pierced, lacerated, cut, ”pushed back”.[32] Re-imagining and re-framing these ongoing colonial legacies is a part of my project, where Animal-Women lose their skins, and often lives, because of skin colour.

Returning into the skin

It is no surprise, then, that women often want to escape their skins, and bodies, when for centuries it has been flayed, plundered, shaved, skinned, striped, laced, excoriated and/or criticised severely by patriarchal culture. Can we rebel against all that by establishing a different relationship with our skin? Can we actually consciously go back, yield and make a homely *oikos* with-in our skin?

In my own practice. I use dance, body movement, performance/acting to reimagine oneself in the skin of the other; I also use dis-placing technology – a camera eye and projections – and I play with language. But the aim of all of this play is to go back to the body, to connect and listen to what my own and other bodies may be saying. How can we return to the body without necessarily experiencing hunger, boredom, death?[33] Or rather how can we have and give flavours of these experiences through art and the imagination? Through the gaps that are left for spectators to listen to their own bodies and create images engaging with poetical storytelling? In my practice I play with time – through the repetition of images, that could bring some boredom; or the idea of differently perceived time while waiting; through varying the pace, timing and intensity of presented images, with black-screen gaps in between; through the intermingling of slow motion and intense dynamism; through micromovements and the apparent stillness of the body, while the interior and the environment are always moving.

Most of all, I return to the body through somatic practice. I listen to what my soma is saying and exteriorise it through image, sound and language, interconnecting

[32] “Push-back” is the term coined to refer to the action by Polish guards of capturing and taking the migrants back beyond the Polish Border to Belarus, where they were often captured by Belarusian guards and moved towards the Polish border.

[33] For Santiago Alba Rico these are modes through which people “relapse” into their bodies (Alba Rico, 2017)

them so that they reverberate in spectators' bodies. Therefore, in both my external practice and the inner research that is often hidden under the skin of the "body" of practice, I explore if and how we can return to our skins; through imagination, art and somatic practices. How can skin mediate our return to the body? How can we learn to desire and gently touch our own skin and, through connecting with it, connect with the materiality and emotionality of other skins? By acting and performing, can we inhabit our skin while inhabiting others' skins? Can we explore dance, sexuality and sensuality not by escaping but by yielding to our skin and bodies? And even by using language and sound, which after all, is a material expression of this "mispronounced phrase" (Alba Rico, 2017)? Instead of reproducing the external male patriarchal white gaze, can we find ways of looking at the skin from within? Can we re-discover a function and organisation of the skin and through this explore our relationality to other human and non-human beings?

Perhaps science can bring some answers. How can we open ourselves and our skins to the processes that are often "veiled" by over-complicated scientific language, "othered" through a scientific jargon, as if they were not ours, as if they were not happening continuously? Can we translate this scientific knowledge into experience? Or rather can we use science to recognise processes that are happening anyway, led by a *force of Zoe* (Braidotti, 2013)? How can we experience the skin proprioceptively so it becomes a "first-person", individual yet plural experience? How can we embody touch and perceive it as material experience?

Perhaps by rebelling against objectifying the skin through "understanding" and instead embracing it as a series of processes; a continuous game of string figures of births, death, breaths, exchange, movement and communication. How can we live and encourage a process of rebirth of our skins, rather than be participants of our own skinning? How can we make skin our kin? Surely, by embodying it as a living being; not looking on it from far away but from very close; not from the outside but from within. Through re-discovering its liminality and porosity we can perhaps return to embrace our own liminality, porosity and embodied empathy towards others' skins? S-kins.

I ask and wait; and I realise that just asking already makes my skin respond bodily, through sensation, perception and gentle warm wrapping.

INNER GAZE

Skin Matter(s)

In the words of new materialist theorist Karen Barad, “Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter. (…) How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?” (Barad, 2003, p. 801). Language is closely related with the gaze – we name things to give them meaning, to embrace them with our knowledge, and to denote their place in the world. But what about those things that are difficult to name; those that are intangible, those we cannot embrace with a gaze?

As the epidermis is the most visible part of the skin, most of the patriarchal and racist discourses and narratives focus on it, projecting and inscribing concepts onto it. Although verbal, these concepts are often translated into actions that materialise on the skin, leaving bruises, marks and scars that endanger the continuity of not only the epidermis, but also other layers of the skin and body that it protects. As Neimanis (2019, p. 491) says, “racism and colonialism are understood not (only) as discursive constructs, but as material phenomena that imprint on bodies”. Words mark the skin, as I explore in all my projects but particularly in *In the Beginning*, the *She-Wolf Skin* videos and *She-Wolf* Performance, where words are literally written on the skin.

My research explores how to stop taking skin for granted and to repattern our perception and the embodiment of skin. Through this process skin is observed closely with an inner gaze. The aim of this research then is how through conscious embodiment we get back to the materiality of our skin so that it “feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers (Barad in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 59). It investigates how regaining the power of touch we can regain our identity, subjectivity and relationality and at the same time reimagine ourselves in others’ skin so we can bodily engage with radical empathy and affect. This embodiment practice allows us to re-discover its phenomena using imagination—an extension of our skins, including un- and/or re-naming skin.

Land of Skin

We connect skin with individuality. But a part of the biological, material, personal and social boundary that we decide to touch (or not) as skin is also, or maybe predominantly, a habitat. Not only a habitat for our organs, skeleton, muscle, systems and all that constitutes a human body. It is also a habitat for other beings that inhabit our skin, which also constitute that which is 'us'. Microbes that inhabit on, in and with our body, outnumbering the number of human cells and regulating all living processes, are "integral to who and what 'we' are, and complicate any simplistic sense of (an indivisible) self" (Vanouse, 2020, p. 32).

New technologies have enabled scientists to challenge concepts of animal individuality showing that animals "share" their bodies with numerous "species" of bacteria and other microbes' (Gilbert, 2014, p. 33), and this includes human animals. For Gilbert, from the point of view of developmental biology we are not individuals but we co-evolve and co-develop thanks to interspecies communication (Gilbert, 2014, p. 203). The organization of the animal body "is seen to be accompanied by the increasing division of labour among organ systems" that cooperate for the benefit of the whole (Gilbert, 2014, p. 203). This concept resembles Adam Smith's conceptualization of social-economic progress as a result of a division of labour: the "invisible hand" of Adam Smith's mother (Marçal, 2015, p. 17). And although lately gut microbiota have been more and more respected because of the recognition of their "labour" in digestive processes as well as being "also.. a functional extension of our cognitive system" (Boem, et al., 2021), the symbionts co-existing with humans on their (our?) skin remain less visible – not only unacknowledged, unappreciated, but mostly not wanted.

Host

Gilbert refers to an animal body as a "host", explaining this as "the larger, eukaryotic, multicellular organism in or on which the 'symbiont' resides" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 204). According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary definitions, a "Host" is: "a living organism on or in which a parasite lives", "the larger, stronger or dominant member of a commensal or symbiotic pair". The term probably derives from the social construction of the idea of host as: "a person who receives or entertains guests socially,

commercially, or officially", "a place or organization that provides facilities and services for an event or function", "a country, government, etc. that agrees to allow an outside business, organization, group of people, etc. to operate, function, or live within in its boundaries, jurisdiction, or population", "a person who talks to guests on a program". Host can also be "a mineral or rock that is older than the minerals or rock" or "a computer that controls communications in a network or that administers a database" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). All these definitions set out the power of the host as a kind of owner/manager of a place of encounter with a smaller, dependent, younger and/or less powerful visitor. The host has their duties (such as "entertaining" the visitor) but also the power to "allow" their access or not. Interestingly in some languages host means both the "host" in the sense discussed previously and guest. This is the case in French, Spanish and Catalan, for instance.

Monty Lyman (2020, p. 45) writes that looking at the skin of our hand is like looking at the earth from an aeroplane window from a distance of more than 9 kilometres, with hills and valleys created by marks, scars and tendons, mountain ranges of knuckles, blue rivers of veins and some areas of hairy forests; you can see a terrain but not the life that is happening there. But these are terrains re-inhabited by diverse populations of microbiomes—from commensals, through those that bring mutual advantages, called pathobionts, to the pathogens (45–46). Is this our-host skin, on which the microbiome lives? What is "our", "my" skin? Maybe in fact it is "their" skin that I am temporally inhabiting and/or which we temporally cohabit.

Perhaps because of their appearance, or rivalry for the ownership of the terrain, or because we are protecting ourselves from "their" attachment—from crossing our borders, destabilising our stability, vitality and wellbeing—we do not like to share our skin. Becoming aware of their presence brings an uncanny sensation of haunting defamiliarization; although they are not visible they are (t)here. The very image that other creatures in their millions could touch our body with their little legs and tendrils can make us shudder. They are (t)here in quantities that we cannot get rid of, overbearing, out of control. The word host also means "a great number: multitude". Hence, particularly in times when cleanliness and "purity" of the skin are advertised everywhere, we wash, scrub and disinfect our host-body, getting rid of all "the visitors", independently of whether they are pathogens, commensals or those bringing

mutual advantages. The idea of purity of the body and its sanitisation intensified even more during and post-pandemic, pushing us to protect ourselves from others in extreme ways; even those that are co-habitants of our skin, even those that constitute what we are. In Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* the main character woke up one day having been transformed into a cockroach, one of the 3,500 species that was born 365 million of years ago, "an animal which, according to Linnaeus's classification only shares with humans… its animality" (Alba Rico, 2017, pp. 57–58). Spanish writer and philosopher Santiago Alba Rico reflects on this transformation as something we, as humans, cannot escape—we cannot escape our bodies, however hard we try. Our body has its complexity and it is not only "ours"; our skin is not only "our" land, boundary, container; it is also a land, a terrain, a food for a multiplicity of beings.

Migrants on "our" borders

Microbes and bacteria are also the reason for some changes on the skin that are commonly regarded as disgusting and condemned socially. They bring about notions of the unclean, impure, unhealthy, and cause stigma for the people with skin changes. For we are often afraid of changes, mutations and migrations. The protection of our bodily borders brings to mind the protection of a country's borders. Fear of the "Others" crossing them makes us create impermeable walls, peeling them off, scrubbing, pushing-back to preserve our "purity". The word *host* is a root of the word hospitality but also hostility. Trying to keep this "purity" we often lose what is intrinsic to our skin. We lose a sense of touch. We lose senses, and we lose touch. They lose their skin.

Language of/for Skin

The presence of the skin in the collective imaginary is revealed in language. In plenty of languages there are phrases or proverbs related to skin: having *skin in the game*, *saving your own skin*, *being skinned alive*, *getting under the skin*, *sleeping in a whole skin; having thick or thin skin, skin deep, jump out of your skin; in Polish: czuć coś* przez *skórę, skóra mi cierpnie, dobrałbym się im do skóry, wyłoić jej skóre, estás hecho de la piel del diablo* o italiano*: chi non ha forza abbia la pelle dura, chi non sa scorticare intacca la pelle, ognuno c'è per l'ossa e per la pelle.* Marc Lafrance writes that such colloquial expressions "make use of the skin as a metaphor for human

subjectivity and, in doing so, point to its considerable significance" (Lafrance, 2018, p. 5). They are phrases that are used mostly figuratively; however, their commonality in so many languages reveals an important function of the skin, and the relation between the physiological, emotional and spiritual it embraces. As well as translating into embodied language the intensity of sensations, emotions and experiences evoked by skin, they expose the real and material impact of events on skins/bodies. Just as in our era of the Anthropocene we need to learn to stop talking about phenomena such as the weather (Neimanis, 2019) or animals (Adams, 1996) merely in terms of figurative expressions of human subjectivity, we should stop using skin in this way or at least not to take it for granted and re-think what and how it figures, as the language we use can have a material impact on human and non-human bodies. Can we begin to think (about) what such phrases mean if we do not take them for granted? Can we, through imagination and embodied practice, "think" about their material meaning? In the performance *She-Wolf* I create a layered soundscape of phrases about wolves and migrants on the Polish-Belarusian border that I found online, to scrutinise the way in which they manipulate and shape reality, before requesting spectators to read them out and write them on the skin of the performer. In this way figurative language about skin materialises on the surface of the body: symbolic violence is imprinted on living skin.

How to talk *to* and *about* skin?

This also brings me to an important question: How to talk *to* and *about* skin? What pronoun can we give to skin in order to give it back its subjectivity instead of continuing to objectify 'it'? In Spanish, Polish, Italian and German skin is female—*la piel, la pelle, skóra, die Haut*?

But skin is not a single organ but rather a system of sense organs (Anzieu, 1989, p. 14) that "fulfils several other biological functions: it breathes and perspires, secretes and expels, maintains the tonus, stimulates respiration, circulation, digestion, excretion, and, of course, reproduction" as well as "play[ing] its part in the metabolic function" (15). Therefore skin is not an object, a fixed term, merely a noun. Even proprioceptively it is difficult to sense skin as a whole. Skin, like a body, Earth, language or land, is a sum of inter- and intra-connected processes that involve many agents in continuous multidirectional movement. Skin, like these other phenomena, should be a gerund. I know that the terms *skinning* or *skinned* exist but their meaning

refers to the process of depriving or being deprived of the skin; likewise *skinhead* refers to one that hates racialized others. Can we find new forms of everyday expression to replace the complicated scientific and medical language that veils skin? To express more positive experiences, such as the process of gaining a skin? S-Kin? Being kin-d to my own skin and other-s-kins? S-kinning instead of skinning?

An important element throughout my explorations is a phrase that expresses empathy and also performing: "putting oneself in the skin of the other", to mean the experience of sensing and perceiving the experiences of the other, and also *znaleźć się w czyjejś skórze* – to find oneself in someone else's skin, or put on someone else's shoes, so we can feel the imprint of the souls of their feet.

I often think that everything lies within and beyond language at the same time, as is the case with skin; it just needs to be re/un-covered, re/un-named and gently touched. Deeply heard, seen from close up, smelled. Gently. No rushing. Skin will find her way to recover from the male, white patriarchal and capitalist gaze. It will shed old cells and create new ones.

For now I will just direct myself towards my skin as to a *her*.



Dear K.,

These three layers of cells and three layers of skin take me into thinking of my frequent use of triptychs in my art compositions, such as in She-Wolf Skin and Dove Girl. My fascination for triptychs comes from medieval cathedrals I visited as a child and from art history studies. The magic of three images, juxtaposed, transforming one. The meaning of the middle one changes according to what is on the sides. The middle image embraced, and also trapped by them. Middle image as a spine, sustained by the sides of the body; middle part sustaining sides and extremities. I think my fascination for the triptychs comes from the body.

Yours,

K.

SHE-WOLF

Skin down ! skin down ! skin down !' She raised herself upon her hind-legs, and her skin fell down. She took the skin, and hung it on a peg, and out of the wolf came a damsel.

(Wratislaw, 1890 , p. 290)

This part of the chapter tells stories of my performative and audiovisual explorations of the She-Wolf folk tale (Wratislaw, 1890) through the embodiment of skin and language in the context of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish and Belarusian border. The very polarised narratives around migrants (on this and often other borders) reverberated for me with narratives about wolves' and their "right", or not, to coexist with humans. In parallel with my reading about skin, the second year of my research (2021/22) was a year of exploration of media stories about the region that were reaching me in different parts of Europe and the US. Many of these stories reproduced the kind of gender binaries we have seen critiqued in chapter 1 of this thesis, with men being presented in active roles and women often invisible in media representations of migration flows. My project aimed to respond to the plethora of discourses in different languages, and to try to reach beyond surface representations to the psychic, social and environmental impacts interwoven in this humanitarian crisis. I call it a project, as it is the result of continuous research into skin through reading and somatic practices, body and mind, embodied and informative research on wolves, hours of recordings and hundreds of pages of creative writings, butoh explorations and thinking: hours of thinking and feeling. The tip of this iceberg is what can be found in the Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: She-Wolf: a video: She-Wolf Skin, the visual-collage triptych *Cold* with the soundscape *She-Wolf Lullaby*: Triptych Cold. She-Wolf Lullaby and performative actions that were woven into a performance installation entitled "She-Wolf": She-Wolf Performance & Installation.This writing aims to give a flavour of the creative research process and is further developed in Appendix II, which contains a fuller description together with photo-documentation of the process and a short film script entitled *Cold.War.*

She-Wolf folk tale

The She-Wolf folktale (Wratislaw, 1890) tells the story of a liminal creature, able to remove her wolf-skin and take on human shape. She has the power to move freely

between worlds and beyond borders. One day, however, when she goes to an abandoned mill in search of food and refuge, she takes off her wolf skin and falls asleep not knowing that she is being observed by a soldier. The soldier takes her wolf skin and nails it to the mill-wheel so she cannot find it. Deprived of her skin she loses her integrity and ability to transform. She cannot go back to her wolf life and is trapped in the mill at the mercy of a soldier. In the Wratislaw version of the story she marries the soldier and regains her wolf fur after many years, thanks to her son. In my version of the story, the She-Wolf runs away and, without her skin, crosses the woods in search of freedom. Tracked by those who want to trap her and those who want to help her, she encounters cold, pain and hunger, as did so many migrants who tried to cross the border from Belarus to Poland, and as do so many wolves. The mill is not a place for a wolf, woods are not a place for unprepared human beings to live in—especially in winter.



Figure 12. Frame from "Tracing wolves" , Karpaty, Carpathian Mountains, Poland, 2021

Cold

A definition of the word "cold" refers to a "relatively low temperature" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022) of a "body" of animate and inanimate matter, but dictionary entries also indicate that cold is an experience of 'soma'- "a sensory mode that provides unique data" (Hanna, 1986), with definitions like: "having or being a temperature that is uncomfortably low for humans", "temperature lower than normal

or expected", "marked by the loss of normal body heat", "bodily sensation produced by loss or lack of heat".

Cold is an abstract noun but at the same time it has many visual synonyms, such as "freezing", which embraces a transformative process of solidification of water, "glacial", "icy", "gelid", "arctic", "wintry". It also has synonyms that express different qualities of the touch of cold on the skin: Cutting. Sharp. Keen. Stinging. Blasting. Nipping. Numbing. Piercing. Penetrating. Frost bites. All these words, even if only imagined as being inflicted on the skin, bring discomfort or even fear. Other synonyms of cold—"crisp", "frosty", "frozen", "brumal", "shivery"—because of their vibrating 'r' make the body shake gently. And the body shakes when it is cold, as a "decrease in peripheral temperatures, primarily skin, and core temperature elicits the primary cold thermoregulatory responses (vasoconstriction and shivering)" (Castellani & Young, 2016, p. 64).

I do not like the cold too much. "Friolera", my Spanish friends call me, and I do not even recall how many times I heard expressions of disbelief that a Pole can feel cold in Spain. I mean, I do not mind cold that much while walking briskly, covered with layers of clothes and isolating boots. But even layers cannot help when I am sitting still in a cold building or waiting outdoors in winter. My body tenses up, trying to wrap itself up; to enclose itself in a shell made of skin, subcutaneous fat, and skeletal muscle (Castellani & Young, 2016, p. 64). It shakes and tries to bring all the extremities close to the core but although I do my best to delay the decay of their dexterity and tactile sensitivity (Castellani, et al., 2018), my fingers and toes usually become stiff, some of them white and red.[34] And numb.

In winter 2021/22, when my body and soma were experiencing cold or hiding from it, my thoughts were wandering in the woods on the Polish-Belarusian border where thousands of refugees were trapped between two countries by wire fences, rows of soldiers and border guards, "push-backs" and frostbite. For the purpose of this project I decided to engage with cold more consciously. In 2022 I went on a research trip to Missoula in the USA where temperatures often fall to 30 degrees C below zero. Once I decided to walk on snow "to make the skin of the sole, which feels everything"

[34] Only during this skin research did I learn that the condition that has affected me for years is called Raynaud's Syndrome.

(Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 25) immerse itself in this solidified water. I resisted for about 30 seconds. Pain, anxiety and the sensation of vulnerability and abandonment. Cold. These experiences of cold were later on translated into a performative writing that became part of the She-Wolf Skin project (see Appendix II. *She-Wolf*).

Another meaning of cold indicates distance, non-contact, detachment: "marked by a lack of the warmth of normal human emotion, friendliness, or compassion" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). It conjures the figurative and literal coldness of the Ones who push-back the Others into freezing conditions. This repetitive mechanism works like a mill-wheel that is powered by cold, that is distant, aloof, unwelcoming, unfriendly and hostile; behaviours and attitudes often executed "in cold blood" on the bodies of the Others. This algid "weather" (Neimanis, 2019) and/or "climate" (Sharpe, 2016) of hostility towards Others from different countries and cultures—Syrian, Afghan, and other non-European migrants—has a real material impact on their often cold—unprepared, unready—bodies, which with time are becoming more and more benumbed, stuck, trapped, frozen, still. Dead is another synonym for cold.



Figure 13. "Tracing wolves", Karpaty, Carpathian Mountains, Poland, 2021

Migrant Narratives

Since the summer of 2021, the Polish and international media reported on groups of migrants who were trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border in a geopolitical context in which "orchestrating migration has become the Belarusian regime's tool to inflict vengeance on the European Union—including on Poland—for their political decisions" (Klaus, 2021). News programmes and media reports spread images and videos of groups of migrants surrounded by soldiers, pushed-back, trapped behind barbed wire fences, with soaked feet, in provisional camps, crying for help. The Polish border—a place on the margins—became a centre of world attention. The Polish government took "a series of radical steps: introducing the state of emergency, restricting freedom of media, banning activists from entering the border area, without exception for those providing medical and humanitarian aid" (Klaus, 2021). But it was unable to prevent debate within an already divided society. Debate and discussion ensued in the media, social networks, and at kitchen tables; speculation about migrants' intentions, whether they should be called refugees or just migrants.

All this information in different languages from different parts of the world commented on the situation of the migrants but also the political implications of their placement there. As explored in *She-Wolf Skin* even if someone could not understand all the introduced languages they may perceive its atmosphere, through an urgency of tone, signalling imminent danger; through sounds of helicopters, shouts, gunshots and sinister music. People trapped there, including numerous women and children, are not treated as individuals but rather as masses or numbers, sometimes called "some of the world's most vulnerable people", "weapons in a political battle" (Engel, 2021), "pawns in a game" (Glensk & Vulliamy, 2021) but also "human torpedoes" (Engel, 2021), "living shields" (Morawiecki, 2021), "aggressive illegal immigrants" who as a group cannot be considered refugees (Bosak, K., 2021) or "hordes of bandits" rather than "refugees seeking asylum" (Charlish & Erling, 2024).

For some they are wolves, for others they are sheep. Soldiers, border guards and other forces continuously searched the woods, tracking, capturing, pushing-back and removing migrants from Polish territory. On the other side were the activists, journalists and other citizens who were trying to "re-humanise" migrants, exposing the vulnerability of being trapped on the border to appeal to citizens' humanity.

In the midst of this media-frenzy, there were bodies trapped between countries, soldiers, media manipulation and incomprehension, but also between what is human and animal, as "another gradient in a hierarchy which would pose a whole spectrum of human others between the animal and the human" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 74). Among them, women like Gul, Nargis, Mariam, Hajera (jok, 2021) and others, who had escaped whatever the "soldier" or "mill-prisons" represent in their own countries, now found themselves trapped in woods, tired, cold and soaked to the skin. "They don't want to be treated as refugees, but as free people who have a freedom of choice. Paradoxically, it would be easier for them to name themselves as a commodity (…) as then it would be easier for them to cross the borders and travel" (Tokarczuk, 2020, p. 38). Deprived of their identity, often their dignity, and voice, with skins exposed to violence and hostility because of their colour and provenance. The body shivers from cold and fear. The breath shakes from cold, pain and anxiety.

Watched by a million eyes from behind wire fences and flat screens, while they embrace to keep warm, while they eat, heal their wounds and trench foot condition. While they wait. And wait. "They do not even want to drink water because they have no place to relieve themselves" a Polish activist is heard to say.[35] How harrowing it must be for women to organise themselves to meet this fundamental physiological need. And what if they are menstruating? How humiliating to look for some bushes, hidden trees. Wire fences block the body but not the eye.

These women are losing their skins on wire, and snow, and under the white patriarchal gaze. They are losing their skins because of the colour of their skin. No skin left. Only a colour. A colour that for governments becomes a wall, a wire fence. An impermeable barrier. No exchange. No breath. Only retention of water that freezes with cold. Without the skin the body is dehumanised. Deindividualized. They become numbers, masses, hoards. Packs of wolves.

[35] Extract from the media included in *She-Wolf Skin* film.



Figure 14. Frame from "Tracing wolves", Karpaty, Carpathian Mountains, Poland, 2021

Wolf narratives

The narrative around the migrants reverberated for me with stories about wolves. Here also activists and biologists who fight for the protection of the wolves meet other groups—hunters and ranchers or farmers, for whom wolves represent a danger for their interests. Wolves are wild predators but their image has been culturally constructed and demonised for centuries, from the commonly known phrase in the Gospel of St Matthew "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves" (Matthew, 10:16), through stories of Little Red Riding Hood in the versions of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, and the Three Little Pigs, to stories about werewolves. In many languages there are common phrases where the wolf is a main character who represents what is cunning or evil: *Wolf in sheep's clothing; wolf at the door, Junta de lobos, muerte de ovejas; Wilk zmienia sierść, ale nie zmienia natury; Homo homini lupus,* and so on.

There are also commonly known stories, legends and myths that show the approach to wolves was not always negative. There is La Lupa who raised Remus and Romulus or La Loba who "collects the bones of lost valuables and sings them back to life" (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 337). In some cultures, wearing elements of wolves'

bones or skins was thought to bring good luck (Wild, 2018, p. 11), in others they could imbue a person with magical powers (12).

Because wolves arouse a lot of controversy, wolf-related stories are often covered by the news media. Unfortunately, the information is often inaccurate and biased and "the extreme views of opponents and supporters of wolves are often highlighted, further polarizing the issue" (Fritts, et al., 2003, p. 298). This cultural perception of wolves strongly influences the wolf-human relationship leading to a persecution of wolves that "has often been out of proportion to the threat it actually posed to people" (289). Trapped between 'lethal binaries' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 37), wolves' very existence is in danger. Like other animals they often die because of parasites, lack of food, wounds or old age, but humans create the most danger—whether through the fragmentation and isolation of their habitat or through poaching and hunting (Pierużek-Nowak, 2020).

Tracing wolves through tracking systems and cameras is often done by those who protect wolves. But also by those who protect themselves from wolves, particularly ranchers. These latter insist on wolf control, often oblivious to the fact that it is wolves whose pack members have been culled that are more likely to attack farm animals or approach human dwellings, in search of easier food. Wolves usually fear humans and those who come close to people are usually wounded, sick or were raised by people. Moreover, wolf habitats are shrinking because of deforestation and human infrastructure expansion. What was previously a periphery, a "no-man's" land, has become a centre for human life, fragmented by wire fences and protected by security systems. Wolves are more and more pushed-back to the periphery, a periphery that is constantly shrinking. And if they dare to cross the border of 'no-man's' land, their bodies, that for centuries have been killed for the valuable wolf-skin, are in real danger. Colonialism has not ceased.

In order to learn about wolves and their habitat, I went with a guide to the woods in my native Polish Carpathian Mountains to actually track wolves' paw-prints.[36] What struck me most about this experience was that when I became aware of

[36] With Michał Figura Wildlife Seminars, Polish Carpathian Mountains, Węgierska Górka and surroundings , 16-17 of December, 2020. I chose this organiser, because he is a member of Stowarzyszenie dla Natury "Wilk" which saves and helps to protect wolves in Poland.

the animal traces my focus was entirely on the ground, on the snow. I ceased paying attention to the landscape or the sky, unless the crows could be heard (often an indicator of the carcass of a wolf's prey). On the basis of traces, excrement, and the shape of the terrain, we speculated about wolves' whereabouts, directions, prey, sketching mind maps of their movements in our imagination. I lost all notion of time and orientation. At the same time, my thoughts were with activists and citizens from the restricted areas on the Polish side of the Belarusian border, who often walk through the woods looking for and deciphering migrants' traces in order to help them. Guards are doing the same, but with quite an opposite purpose. I wonder what it is like to be hidden, with the body shivering from the cold but also from fear of other humans. Wolves fear humans, they can smell them from a very long distance and will try to avoid the encounter at all cost. I was glad that we did not find any wolves.



Figure 15. Frame from "Tracing wolves", Karpaty, Carpathian Mountains, Poland, 2021

Barbed wire fence on the border

What divides the "Ones" and the "Others" is a barbed wire fence. When the wire fence was invented and patented in the 19th century it was soon announced as a "game changer" (Smith Thomas, 2017) for the lives of farmers and ranchers, as it allowed

them to delimit their properties and protect their flocks from wild animals, at the same time preventing farm animals from leaving the property. Soon it became of interest to the military and was first used on the battlefield at the end of the 19th century by the Portuguese army during the uprising in Mozambique, where Portuguese soldiers enclosed themselves in barbed wire and, using machine guns, massacred several hundred thousand of Tsonga people (Duch, 2021).

On the border of Poland and Belarus 419 km of wire fence was extended to prevent refugees from crossing the border. Since then, tons of concrete have been brought and then a wall constructed—a barrier that is already a threat to the ecosystem of these protected woods and all their inhabitants. A border, like skin, is a liminal entity which delimits the terrain but is also permeable. A wire fence is also liminal—it protects farm animals from wolves but at the same time it limits their freedom and makes them dependent on people. A wire fence constructs a physical border between what is "mine" and "theirs", "us" and "them", "one" and "the other". The barbed wire fence of the border hurts. It imposes a distance, aloofness, hostility. Barbed wire on skin hurts. It impedes passage and inflicts pain on those who try to cross it. Barbed wire is sharp, keen. It can cut, sting, blast, nip, numb, pierce, penetrate. It can bite others' skin. Metálico, azulado; metalowy, stalowy, niebieskawy; metallic, bluish, steely—cold can also be a colour.



Figure 16. Frame from "Unrolling the Wire", Młyn Gorzanów, Gorzanów, Poland, 2021

Unrolling the wire

I unroll a roll of barbed wire in what was formerly a mill.[37] It is a harrowing job. It pierces and scratches my hands and legs, makes cuts and bruises. It is cold in the mill although it is only September in Poland.

And while I am unrolling this wire, I wonder, how a performer, engaging with her own skin, could reach these She-Wolves' stories bodily, with their howls lost amidst so many languages and words? Could she create the kind of "representation as a mediation necessary for those who cannot articulate their discourse directly because their discourse cannot be heard or understood?" (Sànchez, 2017, p. 34)



Figure 17. Frame from "Unrolling the Wire", Młyn Gorzanów, Gorzanów, Poland, 2021

In particular, I wonder about the legitimacy of representing with my own white skin those who are in this situation because of racism and islamophobia. How to do this being Polish? Being the one who unfolds the barbed wire, can I also be the one who tries to cross it? Being the one whose white face blushes with embarrassment while thinking about these wolf-women with skins darker than mine; skins that may now be pale, "white", because the blood has run out of their faces to pump the muscles

[37] Młyn Gorzanów, Gorzanów, Poland where I did my own research residency (20-24 of September, 2021) thanks to the owners: sculptor and ceramicist Aga Ciszewska and sculptor Wojciech Batko. Some of the frames from the footage of these performative explorations were included in the *She-Wolf Skin* video and *She-Wolf* performance.

(Lyman, 2020, pp. 200-201). Because they are in fight or flight mode. Or freezing as they wait for help and/or deportation, for soldiers and/or activists. As they wait for government decisions to be made, in this "civilised Europe" they dreamed of; for those making Christmas gifts, Christian believers who according to Polish tradition put out an extra plate on a Christmas Eve dinner table for an unexpected guest, the Holy Family lost at night in Egypt. For those spreading racist hatred online. They wait for them all to make up/change their minds. And what about their bodies? These other bodies, which are escaping wars, poverty, persecutions, environmental disasters, other soldiers, other governments, other cultural imprisonments, dissolve. Bodies waiting for better "weather" conditions (Neimanis, 2019) in this "climate" (Sharpe, 2016); waiting for spring, for the thaw when their bodies dissolve along with the snow; for a time when, as unstoppable water, they will be able to run through these and other lands. Cross all the borders and wire fences. Soak the land. Not with clear but with "coloured" water, stained with blood and unfrozen tears. The Polish flag is white and red.



Figure 18. Frame from "Unrolling the Wire", Młyn Gorzanów, Gorzanów, Poland, 2021

And I am thinking

what if,

just a magical Stanislavskian *what if,* all those who are watching, would stop talking for a moment from their comfortable position of white citizens, connect with their somas and imagine their own bodies in these freezing "given circumstances"

(Stanislavski, 2008) of the others. What if they imagined with their bodies the hit of adrenaline when rushing through the woods with hearts beating to the point of exploding; fleeing death or deportation (which for many would mean the same); fighting for life grasping icy air. Red from exhaustion and exposure, with their hair standing on end, sweat cooling their already freezing bodies. Looking for a Wolf-Moon to light them the right path in this vastness of the land. Or hiding in its shadows. But as they are not wolves anymore, their ability to see in the dark, their *tapetum lucidum* (Sinclair, 2021) is gone. They changed their shining eyes for colours. But dark night does not discern colours; all is black.

What if it is they who must put their eyes into their feet and hands, like a monster from *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) to discern the surface of the bark, holes in the ground, the hand of their daughter in their hand. But what if the blood has rushed from the periphery to save the heart, leaving toes and feet numb? Their mechanoreceptors are frozen? Their feet and hands beaten by long runs, bitten by cold, eaten by the frost. Waiting, they swallow their howl to keep the warmth in. Talking through looks, body movement and touches of what is left of their temporary furs. Cuddling, sleeping, hugging to warm up.

What if "miraculous" (Lyman, 2020, p. 158), and so obviated, skin cannot save them? What if it is skin that puts them in danger? Or rather the external gaze on skin. Of the wire fence. Of men with torches. Of those with suits. Of those with guns. Shooting pictures with their cameras. Fiercely barking with steel claws. Biting their muscles and bones so that the rivers of their veins become red seas on the snow.

Maybe they are wolves.

Not seeing but being seen as in a zoo, sniffed out by "dogs",[38] beaten, bitten, pulled and pushed-back when they are trying to reach this safe space, this "paradise". Welcome, make yourself at home! Watch out for dogs. They can protect but also attack. It depends on which side of the world-fence you are on. It depends whether you are the One, or "the Other".

And what if this "Other" was me?

[38] The Polish word Psy [Eng. "Dogs"] is also a slang word for police. This means that "dogs" here can actually stand for tamed human and non-human wolves.



Figure 19. Frame from “Unrolling the Wire”, Młyn Gorzanów, Gorzanów, Poland, 2021

Beyond the Polish and Belarusian border

The She-Wolf story goes beyond the Polish and Belarusian border. It is also about the Mediterranean African-European border, the Mexican-United States border, the Belarusian–Latvian border and so many other borders where women are losing their skin. “Total heat loss during resting cold exposure would be greater in the women” (Castellani & Young, 2016, p. 63). Probably because they have already lost more than one skin.

Created by humans, the barbed wire fence extends beyond personal properties, beyond borders, beyond woods, beyond species, reaching the most peripheral parts of the planet. It encloses the dispossessed (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) “structural others of Modernity” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 37) in an asphyxiating trap. What was before the space of the periphery where non-human species could live according to their rules and cycles, is now being observed, possessed, taken by humans. There is very little of the periphery left. The barbed wire fence was advertised in the 19th century as “The greatest invention of the Age!” (Duch, 2021), an age we might now identify as that of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), Plantationocene and/or Chthulucene (Haraway, 2015; 2016), in which barbed wire is just one of the tools used to separate human and non-human others and it is no longer clear whether life on this planet can continue (Tsing, 2015). Today, more than ever before, we live with-in the consequences and crisis of Humanism, with man as “the

measure of all things" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 30). We are all weathering cold weather, but we are doing it differently.

Chapter 3 – Conclusions

In this chapter I have synthesized a diverse range of critical scholarship on skin as seen from the outside with an external, often voyeuristic, heteropatriarchal and white gaze, that led to the objectification, commodification, appropriation, stereotyping and oppression and othering of women's bodies and psyche. What is more, I went on to reflect on whether it would be possible to establish and experience a different relationship with our own and other's skins by engaging with an inner, proprioceptive gaze, a gaze that connects with skin as matter, as an organ that feels, senses, transforms and is in continuous touch with the body's interior, with other beings and with the environment in which it is embedded. An embodied gaze such as this might enable us to go beyond the dominant narratives around skin, and become more sensitive, affectionate, respectful and open towards other skins. I also wondered how we could un-name extant "markers" and "labels" on skin and find a new language to speak to/from/with/about skin.

The latter part of this chapter presented my artistic explorations of these questions and their impact on human and non-human bodies through the lens of She-Wolf folk tale, combining exploration of discourses about wolves and about the particular migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, which then led me to undertake embodied research that would enable me to imagine myself into the experiences of migrant women trapped on a freezing border without refuge. It also involved thinking deeply about thorny questions of representation, once more through a combination of scholarly research and practice. In this case, through the incorporation of critical distance that encouraged reflection on the exclusionary force of much of the discourse used about wolves and refugees, and through curating audience participation to enable them to embody different roles and positions in the installation.

In the following chapter I will take a closer look at language which, like skin, is a territory of contact and communication but also an impregnable border and tool that propels xenophobia, stereotyping and othering of those whose communication differs from the "rules" of the dominant tongue.



Dear K.,

Barbed wire is almost impossible to roll back up.

Yours,

K.

CHAPTER 4

SKIN OF LANGUAGE

Properly linguistic relapses in the body are called grammatical errors and poetry.
(Alba Rico, 2017, pp. 58-59)

Language is, like skin, a point of contact and a barrier simultaneously. This chapter explores languages as skins for identity, difference and multiplicity, that is, both in relation and in process. In my approach, human creatures live in continuous translation as through language we try to express the intangible yet material needs, desires, sensations and emotions of the body in the world and communicate with the other. Language tries to name, to explain that which is unpronounceable, but there is an enormous gap between what this bodily experience is and how it can be named; language is therefore a translation with all its losses and gains (Venuti, 2002, p.6) but its hegemony not only often puts the body in the shadows, but in fact it often silences its needs and obscures communication. The use of languages and voice in my practice aims to develop somatic perception of direct bodily experience rather than remaining within established linguistic codes and hierarchical categories. It brings to the fore not only translanguaging between human, but also animal and Earth-other languages and stories, introducing the voices of the sea, snow or pigeons in their first language without anthropomorphising or translating. The polyvocal practice outlined in this thesis fabulates, riffs, and co-creates within these linguistic landscapes, as will be explored in most depth in this chapter.

This chapter engages scholarship on pre-verbal language, translation, translanguaging, self-translation and "broken languages" such as the pidgin English that is also my own, and often other foreigners', everyday experience. It explores the origin of language developed as a tool for communication and expression of the intangible, a point of contact, rather that separation, as well as the potentialities of moving in/between languages in order to bring to the fore a multiplicity of voices and points of view, deepening the capacity to listen beyond linguistic understanding.

Following my established interdisciplinary methodology of combining theory and embodied practice, this chapter focuses on these ideas about language and skin in relation to processes of re-telling "The Dove Girl" folktale. The dove as a part of the

Columba genus, and thus kin with all wild and urban pigeons, led me to explore the pigeon/dove binary in cultural representation, mapping the ways in which it reflects anxiety about contemporary urban territories through the borders it evokes and enshrines between public and private, foreign and proper, nature and culture, abject and pure. This also dovetailed with reflections in the first half of the chapter about the form and function of "pidgins", the survival languages that often accompany experiences of migration, transculturation and marginalization, and their unsettling presence in contemporary superdiverse cities. Cities are, of course, both the most common dwelling places of feral pigeons and hybrid spaces of encounter for diverse species, nationalities, languages, skins and landscapes, where culture-nature divisions are clearly blurred.

The final part of this chapter reflects on embodied performative research inspired by the dove/pigeon "binary" through Italo Calvino's retelling of *The Dove Girl* ([1980] 2012), in dialogue with a range of other dramatic and literary texts, such as Patrick Süskind's novel *The Pigeon* (1988), the essay "How to skin a bird" by Chelsea Biondolillo (2019), *The Pigeon Girl/La Plaza del Diamante* by Mercè Rodoreda (1962), the story "Pigeon Fly!" by Leonora Carrington, and classical representations of Cassandra and Sergio Blanco's *Kassandra* (2008), in order to explore "lethal binaries" that are ingrained within ecologies of environmental, social and particularly women's psyche.

See: Appendix III and Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl.

In these creative experiments, doves and pigeons are "my guides" to explore human and pigeon relationality, my companions in my wandering through cities, wondering who the contemporary Dove-Girls whose feathers have been stolen might be. Who are the domesticated and cherished white Dove-Girls and who, the dirty, unwanted Pigeons?

The sound envelope

The maternal womb created by the endoderm is our first skin: the first home-*oikos* of the sea of our prenatal unconscious state. All communication between the embryo and the mother happens through the skin and movement, the first senses to develop.[39] As if underwater, we are unable to see, smell, sound or speak. But from the 18th week on, an embryo starts to perceive sounds: first the mother's heartbeat and organ sounds, then her voice and surrounding environment. From then onwards we are touched by sounds, enveloping our existence: the "bath of melody"(Anzieu, 1989, p. 169), such as the mother's voice or the songs she sings, and that later the baby will try to echo. When a baby is born, they grasp their first breath followed by a cry.

As Kristin Linklater writes in *Freeing the Natural Voice* (2007), after the "first experience – life or death. Breath gives life" (20). When the baby is born there is an array of first impulses whose aim is to ensure the baby lives. The baby needs sustenance, signalled in their bodies by what she calls "the Pang" which is situated in the baby's belly and connected to the breathing mechanism and acts upon the larynx and the lungs producing a very powerful wail or cry that ceases when comforted by warm milk. The baby learns that the wail works and every time that it is in "danger", they use this same voice of "the Pang"'. It is a life-or-death lesson; breath and voice as fundamental "tools" for survival; "from this first simple physical pang of hunger and the contrasting warmth and contentment that come when [it] is removed, the roots of all later emotional feelings… are formed"(20). This resonates with a story that Chelsea Biondolillo heard from her mother and recalls in her poetic essay "about the day I choked on a bottle of milk while lying in my crib, and how the sound of it sent her running to me; how afterwards, I would choke and gag whenever I wanted her to pick me up. It was a sound she could never ignore" (2019, p. 3). During the first period of life, babies express their feelings and necessities through inarticulate and pervasive crying, babbling, touching, smiling, moving (180-181) and communication between them and carers is based on bilateral awareness of body expressions and the quality of emitting sounds in order to decode intentions and necessities, attuning to the whole communication world that lies beyond words.

[39] In BMC, movement is considered as one of the senses (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012)

Taming a voice

According to Linklater, "the animal instinct to respond emotionally to stimulus is largely conditioned out of us as children" (19) by family, carers, teachers and other adults. Humans, together with only a few other animal species, such as songbirds, would not speak without exposure to "the communicative signals of adults of the species" (Doupe & Kuhl, 1999, p. 568). Humans are "consummate vocal learners" (Doupe & Kuhl, 1999, p. 573) but they still need to learn to speak, whether it's written, spoken, or signed (571). Children develop their language in macro and micro contexts, learning it from "dynamic and multimodal conversational exchanges in complex environments" (Rowe & Weisleder, 2020, p. 211), extracting from the speech they hear and creating maps of meanings. These maps also include other languages learned in this period such as social norms and patterns of behaving, which further on "often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice to the point of distorted communication" (Linklater, 2007, p. 7).

Linklater portrays the process of repressing the natural voice in what she calls the "Chocolate-Chip Cookie Story"(20), located when the child is around 2-3 years old and has already acquired some words, normally related to food and survival. This child suddenly "feels a life-or-death *need* for a chocolate chip cookie" and "with all the force of the Pang fuelling [their] body and voice" yells for it. The parents will try to stop this shouting in a variety of ways; they will teach the child to "Ask nicely", "Say please". And so the child's organism will learn that "to follow the Pang can lead not to life and survival but to the equivalent of death"; they will learn "how to deploy a secondary set of neurophysiological impulses that bypass the primary ones" (21). The next time, recalling previous lessons, they will suppress the Pang, detaching the breath from the pang-centre in the belly and finding it instead in the upper lungs. They will reroute the *need* into a smile, and ask for the cookie "in light, high tones of beguiling sweetness"(21) using "proper", "nice" words. There is a high probability that this time they will get the cookie, as they learn to follow these "secondary neurophysiological impulses" (23): "Yes. Please. Thank you" (Biondolillo, 2019, p. 5), in order to survive. According to Linklater this voice is not connected with natural impulses; "[t]he person is heard, [but] not the person's voice" (2007, p. 8). Just as we

adjust, control and manipulate our skins, as seen in chapter 3, we adjust, control, manipulate and cut off our voices.

Losing the voice

As can be seen, although the mother-tongue develops around the age of two as a tool to improve communication, it often obscures it. Women, especially, are inculcated from childhood into patterns of behaving and speaking "properly"; they learn to conceal, silence, civilise and tame this "Pang" of emotions, feelings, needs and instinctive reactions. They smile while they clench their jaw, hold their breath, suck their belly in, and tense vocal cords to seal off the sound of their guts. Language thus becomes an "uncomfortable suit" (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 201), or a corset: an obstacle for the expression of their selves, their "breath and blood" (Linklater 2006, p. 7). How many breaths do women hold to fit in this "proper" linguistic skin? How many voices are lost when their animal skins are stolen over and over again?

Through the hegemony of language as a dominant form of expression women often lose their animal sound-skin. This becomes even more prominent if women, like Animal-Women in human territory, are foreigners and do not speak the hegemonic language. Some versions of the Seal Women story tell that she refuses to speak on dry land, so the men forced her to speak with methods of torture and abuse (Darwin, 2015, p. 125); others, that the Seal wife becomes speechless on land because of the "Seal Wind" (Jochelson, 1904, p. 425). The She-Wolf in my version of the story "loses her howl" (*She-Wolf Skin*). The Mermaid trades her voice for human legs. The screams of Eva S. (in chapter 1) are not heard through walls and screens. The Cassandra of classical myth loses her voice because she is not believed and considered mad. Animals are "the wholly other" (Derrida & Wills, 2002, p. 381) also because of their inability to speak human language, a status that in the case of *Anthropos* was reserved for those who spoke Greek.

In what language does Italo Calvino's Dove Girl scream when her feathers are stolen from her and later burnt? Whose voices can be heard when speaking correctly becomes a basis for separation, segregation and a void between people. Speaking differently, and indeed the very ability to make oneself heard or understood or not, often feeds fear, xenophobia and segregation in populist and nationalistic discourses, marking the borders between "us" and "them", "citizens" and "foreigners", "One" and

"the Other". In what ways can artistic practice use language and voice to re-reconnect with the bodies in the contemporary environmental and geopolitical crises of global forced migration? These questions, like the folktales, return to be addressed repeatedly in different contexts.

Migrations and othering through the language

> *For if two men meet, and are forced, by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other's language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings..*
> (St Augustine, 1984, p. 861)

For me, the Dove Girl story resonates with and is informed by the devastating global migration crisis. According to the UN World Migration Report, the current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, with numbers increasing over the last five decades (IOM, 2023). Noting that nearly two-thirds of these were labour migrants, McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou (2021, p. 2) highlight that "the last two years also saw major migration and displacement events; events that have caused great hardship and trauma, as well as loss of life. Foremost have been the displacements of millions of people due to conflict (…), or severe economic and political instability (…). There have also been large-scale displacements triggered by climate- and weather-related disasters in many parts of the world in 2020 and 2021". In 2020 there were 135 million international female migrants globally (3.5 percent of the world's female population). There were also 26.4 million refugees globally in 2020 and around 3,900 dead and missing (3-4).

"To migrate is to move, whether from a rural area to a city, from one district or province in a given country to another in that same country, or from one country to a new country" (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 28). Migration involves action—not only physical movement but also mental, emotional and cognitive displacement. It involves trans-location, trans-portation, trans-lation, trans-formation. As mentioned in chapter 1, following Michael Cronin, "[t]he condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being" (2006, p. 45). Translated and translating, I would add, even if this translation refers "only" to a self-translation. Migrants are liminal beings, who inhabit a space of in-betweenness, being simultaneously emigrants and immigrants, here and there, (t)here, from everywhere, from nowhere.

The opening chapter of Cronin's *Translation and Identity* (2006, p. 1) begins with the abovementioned citation from St Augustine's *The City of God,* arguing that introduction of the figure of the translator could have avoided this lack of communication and made imposition of common language unnecessary. But perhaps the passage is just another justification of the processes of "humanisation", "civilisation" and colonisation of the "barbarians" (literally, speakers of gibberish, *barbar* (Pérez Firmat, 2003, p. 1)) that we have seen previously. The same pattern that has been happening for millennia. Immigrants are often devalued because of their grammatical mistakes, accents and intonation. Many elements of the process of stereotyping (Hall, 2003) outlined in chapter 3 could also be applied to language. As discussed in relation to "In the Beginning" in chapter 1, there are some accents, particularly from countries of lower economic status, that are more devalued than others. They are often perceived through the lens of misconception(s) and (mis)translations of their speaker's culture, politics and history. It is difficult for a foreigner to shed the skin of stereotypes.

Translation Modes

It is often forgotten that most humans have to learn language to speak, whether written, spoken, or signed, in order to translate their intangible emotions, feelings, sensation, or what Linklater calls the "Pang", into words, phrases and gestures; in order to express and communicate; in order to survive.

The Russian linguist Roman Jakobson famously divided translation into three types: intralingual translation, or rewording, that is, "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of the other signs of the same language"; interlingual or so-called "proper" translation, defined as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language"; and intersemiotic translation or transmutation—"an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of a non-verbal system" (Jakobson, 2007, p. 182).

From birth we are continuously and often simultaneously carrying out all three types of translation. When we are preverbal, as seen previously, we instinctively manifest the needs and feelings of our body through different sounds and actions. Acquiring language, we learn how to translate these sounds into words understandable by others, and then we learn how to rephrase them to be understood better, before translating them into actions. Again and again we rephrase, reword, re-code bodily

and verbally to be better understood, accepted, to satisfy our needs and desires. Language is about action, communication, com(m)-union with the other. Language is about this bi-directional movement, double transaction, reaching for and pulling, as in Basic Neurocellular Patterns (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012). Whether we use elaborate or simple language, we want to get something from the other. On stage this is made clearly visible, as in the theatrical exercise of *Yes and No*, where the protagonist through using only the word "yes" must convince the antagonist, a "no", to do something of more importance. This is like a simplified version of what foreigners go through when verbal communication is limited. But there are always elements that are untranslatable. One of the roles of art is to express not what is said, given and/or taken for granted, but precisely what lies beyond, or beneath these untranslatable "gaps" (Cronin, 2019). In my re-telling of selected Animal-Woman stories, seen already in *Swan Woman* and *She-Wolf Skin*, I like to resist the hegemony of one language, spoken "properly", to invite spectators to pay attention and attune to other ways of "listening". I use diverse accents and languages that are an important aspect in migration, alienation, Othering. This allows play between the denotative and connotative meanings of words in different languages, amplifying the world of images and connections between ideas, as well as opening ways to new interpretations. I also recognise with Emily Apter (2006) the ethical need and importance of non-understanding and non-translation alongside the urge to translate everything. In my practice, I often employ non-translated languages as a way of impelling bodily understanding of the linguistic alienation of the Other, attending to ways of helping spectators to understand the *signified* without necessary understanding of the *signifier* through repetition, melody, composition, tone and other performative modes. I do this to help them/us to decipher what lies beyond the language(s) we/they take for granted, to help make us more sensitive to place, resilience and relatedness, as in Cronin's manifesto for *Eco-translation* (Cronin, 2017, pp. 15-17).

Self-Translation–the Translation of Selves

This self-translation of ourselves, and/or our selves, within diverse modes, is clearly much more visible in people who live in foreign countries within a language that is not their native one. Studies on self-translation focus mainly on literary translation, that is, when writers/authors translate their original work into another language.

Anthony Cordingley (Cordingley, 2013) gives a brief note on self-translation history from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, showing that this process has a long legacy across the globe. There are numerous studies that try to classify the compositional process of self-translated texts. The primary ones take into consideration the level of freedom taken by the self-translator. Others may consider, for example, the effect on the reader, directionality, the time between the composition of both texts, collaborations, language relationships, as dictated by personal reasons. As a polylingual and multidisciplinary artist and researcher, I tried to find my own process of self-translating among these different classifications, but as usual when things are classified, most of these "types" or categories intersect and so many processes lie in-between.

My project uses self-translation and translanguaging as a form of artistic expression in order to play with language, often creating new words, forms of expression and opening potentialities of meaning going beyond one singular point of view. In fact, experiments with self-translation can be "a part of a broader aesthetic project of writing in a single language, as well as being a phase in the writing of the published text" (Cordingley, 2013, p. 356). This brings with it the question of the self or selves that appear in diverse languages. Some self-translators, such as Julien Green, write of the experience of becoming a different person when writing in another language. I understand this clearly, as in my experience this also applies to the performative activities of multilingual creators. When acting a given text in English or Spanish, I often translate the text into Polish or Spanish, in order to be able to go deeper into imaginary and bodily associations and emotions that lie behind the words. Equally, for me, the effects of embodying the same text and character in different languages are completely different, even though the imaginary remains the same. A different language = a different self/selves = a different skin. The timbre of the voice changes, the intensity of expression, the body language. The body resonates in different ways in different languages, inside and outside.

We have all heard the clichés about a certain language (Spanish, say) being a language of passion, or another (English) being the language of business. But in my experience, it probably has more to do with one's emotional relationship to the language in a particular moment. More visceral expression of thoughts, contacts, passions, loves, may depend on the linguistic sea womb one is immersed in, although

for immigrants and nomads these seas are very fluid, merging one with another. As Cordingley writes, "[a]rticulating the world differently as they switch tongues, self-translators tend not to experience the self as a unitary subject that expresses and represents a single *Weltanschauung*" (Cordingley, 2013, p. 357). He gives an example of some bi- or multilingual writers in whom the division between the writing selves is not clear, such as Tawada who links "her own self to a permeable web threaded with Japanese, German and English language. The structure of this 'multilingual web' gets denser when new traits are incorporated. [..] a new pattern is formed. There are more and more knots, tight and loose spots, irregularities, uncompleted corners, edges, holes, or superimposed layers" (Tawada 2003, p. 148 in Cordingley, 2013, p. 357).

This layered and thickening connectivity reminds me of the fascia, our connective tissue and our "inner skin", as I like to call it. Simplified graphics of fascia make it look like a chaotic array of components, a bit like one of Jackson Pollock's action paintings. Under the microscope, however, fascia looks like a spider web, the kind we can find in the deepest corners of our cellars. Because it is also "sticky, gloopy and gets in the way of looking at the muscles, bones and organs they cover" (Williams, 2022), the fascia has been cut off and chucked away by anatomists for centuries. Only in the 1970s, as BMC teacher and fascia researcher Thomas Greil recounts,[40] did scientists start to pay attention to its vital function. Despite or maybe precisely because of its irregular and chaotic structure, this connective tissue envelops and permeates organs, muscles, bones and nerves. It connects and supports them, holding our inner body, or soma, together. Like skin, with which the fascia is connected, it is not just a wrapping but the "site of biological activity" (Williams, 2022), and it may even be a new type of sensory organ. Like skin, fascia is also a site of memory, which is encoded in its structure (Tozzi, 2014).

I often wonder where all these languages dwell inside my body. Which parts are inhabited by my Polish, Spanish, English and Italian? In what part of my brain and/or fascia, does my German language hide itself so well that I can recover only its traces? How is it that particular languages are connected to particular memories, or that particular memories are inscribed in the body in these particular languages? These experiences and questions drove the explorations in the Dove Girl performance where

[40] During an SME module dedicated to fascia, held in Tuscany in March 2023.

I allowed my body to speak, voice and silence what came in each particular moment and breath during one hour and the half of its duration, while immersed in the space and sounds of pigeons voices composed in a soundscape with human breath (see: Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl and Appendix III).

The passage from Tawada brings me also to thoughts about my own translanguaging in my thinking, writing, speaking and practice. Translating words into different languages allows me to go beyond the meaning that immediately comes with a word in one language – a taken, and/or given, for granted *signified* – and expands the viewpoint, opening to different ways of understanding. It allows me sometimes to see from a bird's-eye view, yet with the soles of my feet still immersed in the sea; to acquire a micro-cosmopolitan perspective that is "a cosmopolitanism not from above but from below" (Cronin, 2006, p.15). Multilingualism and translanguaging is a form of defamiliarization of "known" concepts and "givens" that also characterizes nomadic subjects, as Rosi Braidotti (2014, p.167) indicates: "My work as a thinker has no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, displacements and adaptations to changing conditions. Nomadism for me equals multilingualism". It means attuning to voices that are other than human, such as the chatter of pigeons in *The Dove Girl* or Sea stories in *The Foam,* Snow matter in *She-Wolf Lullaby*. It means exploring how much can be said by the texture and pace of the breath, the quality and tone of the voice, the melody of a simple lullaby and sudden silence.

Cordingley notes that works by those whose *self*—or plural selves, I would say, considering that one is inhabited by diverse selves even in a single language—is *in translation* "are populated with characters that traverse borders or live in a no-man's-land, who filter life like Tawada and her web, through their complex and often conflicted hybridity" (Cordingley, 2013, p. 357). They, too, are like Selkies, Mermaids, She-Wolves, Seal Women, Dove and Pigeon Girls on their Animal-Women Journey.

Vivir entre lenguas/Living between languages

In her memoir, *Vivir entre lenguas,* Sylvia Molloy (2016) recounts her experience as a trilingual person. For her, "[c]ada idioma tiene su territorio, su hora, su jerarquía"(10) [Each language has its territory, its time, its hierarchy]. Talking with her mother in Spanish, her father in English, and her sister in both (when no one can

hear them), she goes to bilingual English/Spanish school while living in Argentina. At some point she regains her mother's family language, French. This movement between a variety of languages makes her reflect on language and plurilingualism. In this very personal account, however, she often slips into wider, but also more mundane, questions, such as: In which language does the bilingual person wake up, and speak to animals? What name should one give to a child when it will probably be bilingual? What to do with surnames?

Molloy writes that when people who are bilingual choose one language, they often feel that there is something missing, that they are in a continuous state of necessity, which she calls an *état de besoin*, that is, the state of a drug addict who needs another dose (Molloy, 2016, p. 13): "Siempre se escribe desde una ausencia: la elección de un idioma automáticamente significa el afantasmamiento del otro pero nunca su desaparición" [One always writes from an absence: choosing one language means 'ghosting' the other but never its disappearance] (Molloy, 2016, p. 13). In other words, these other languages are always there, creating a tension, whispering in the ear, sometimes indicating solutions and/or doubts, as well as the realisation that the choice may lead to one being mis-construed. Like Derrida's specters, speaking "in the other in oneself " (Derrida, 1994, p. 221) or in-between selves.

Although I do not consider myself bilingual—I haven't grown up immersed in different languages—I have been asking myself the same questions as Molloy a lot. In what language do I dream/think/wake up? In which language do the variety of my selves speak? Once again, I think it depends on where and about what; on time and space. It is a bit like changing environments: breathing will be different on land and in water; during a run and a calm stroll; in warm and icy conditions. Yet I still need to breathe. Breath means life.

Molloy was not allowed to mix languages at home but she was doing it with her sister when no one was listening. This reminds me of the biographical drama *The Silent Twins* (Smoczyńska A., 2022), based on the lives of June and Jennifer Gibbons, who were raised in an immigrant family that moved to Wales from Barbados in the 1960s (Naidoo, 2023). Because they looked different in the society they were surrounded by, and felt isolated from their community, they created their own imaginary world and language, refusing to communicate with anyone but themselves.

As Naidoo notes, “both girls had always spoken a sped up version of Creole” and after being “mercilessly ostracized and bullied at school for looking different and sounding different, they took this language idiosyncrasy and sent it into a new dimension” (Naidoo, 2023). By the age of eight they became silent for the world. When they were 19 they were taken to Broadmoor Hospital, a high-security mental health hospital, (BBC News, 2023). As Naidoo concludes, “In some ways, their entire life was an allegory for discrimination and a world that would rather choose to ostracize, hate, and fear what it doesn’t understand” (Naidoo, 2023).

Their story could represent so many individual, human and non-human lives and bodies that were lost through not being understood. And yet, so many of us have our own language, often from some cobweb-covered corner of childhood memory, created from gibberish, “stupid phrases”, songs memorised in English when we did not yet speak this language, movements that we could not show the world (Molloy, 2016, p. 16). A language that, like fascia, hidden under the skin, intimate, is our little rebellion against a dominion of “proper” words. “Too embarrassing” to share with anyone except perhaps animals – “con los animales se puede ser cursi” (Molloy, 2016, p. 15) – as they are considered deprived of reason. I do not know why but when I speak to animals I cannot avoid talking to them in Spanish. Maybe because for me it is a language of *cariño,* affection.

As Molloy writes, “El inmigrante y el hijo del inmigrante se piensan en términos de lengua, son su lengua” [The immigrant and the child of the immigrant think of themselves in terms of language, they are their language] (Molloy, 2016, p. 4). What accompanies them is a fear of not understanding and not being understood. As the base for being considered human is speaking the language of the place and speaking it properly, people are often afraid of being considered less – intelligent, prepared, human… And that does not happen only to immigrants but also to people with disabilities. The fear of verbal non-understanding and social misconceptions leave people with disabilities beyond a “silent screen”.

Pidgining

Translanguaging and moving in-between languages on a daily basis may come with not speaking “properly”, correctly, according to the rules; it often comes with pidgining. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Word Origin, a simplified version

of English termed “pidgin English” stems from “the supposed Chinese pronunciation of the word ‘business’ and was created in order to facilitate communication between the British and Chinese in trading tea (Cresswell, 2021). More scholarly definitions hold that “[p]idgins and creoles are languages that developed during sporadic or prolonged economic and cultural contacts between people who did not speak the same language and in social situations that made it impossible for one existing language to be used as a common language” (Jourdan, 2021, p. 364). Their development is associated with European colonization between the 16th and 19th centuries, and the displacement of miners and plantation workers, often slaves, across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. This is where Donna Haraway locates the beginning of the Plantationocene, “as planetary impacts of the exploitation of natural resources, monoculture expansion, and forced labour” (Edwards, Graulund & Höglund, 2022). Pidgins are immensely varied languages, developed and coalesced by people living in continuously changing complex social conditions and with diverse linguistic inputs, or, as Salikoko Mufwene terms them, “language ecologies” (Jourdan, 2021, p. 367). For a long time, like other minorized and non-written languages, pidgins and creoles were denied the status of “real languages” and considered as “jargon”, “charabia” or broken English (Jourdan, 2021, p. 369). “Broken language” has a long legacy across the globe, like lingua francas, that were used as means of communication between people speaking vernaculars that were not “mutually intelligible” (Mufwene, 2023 b). For Mufwene, pidgin functions as a lingua franca, but not as a vernacular language for ordinary interactions (Mufwene, 2023). Here he refers mainly to pidgin languages that are still in use in some post-colonial countries. However, does his statement apply in the contemporary use of pidgin (or “broken”, also sometimes called “global”) English? Yes, it is developed on the basis of a variety of languages, and is often used in “business” matters. But in times of current migrations, movements and multilingual environments, it is often used for ordinary everyday interactions. There are people who have been living in a “foreign” country for decades and still speak a “broken” language. And I do not refer here only to immigrants in English-speaking countries, but also English-speaking migrants in foreign countries. Often people live for decades in their newly created multilingual “families” and choose one language to communicate, often English, often pidgin. There are many migrant children who, due to a process of assimilation and gaining more linguistic skills, become translators for their parents in new countries. So many translators all around us whose work “while

it isn't always for pay and it doesn't always explicitly fall into neat literary categories, [..] gets to the heart of the literary translator's labor: reworking, reimagining, and reviving stories across languages and cultures" (Berkobien, 2020, p. 69). And this often involves "pidgining".

Pidgin vs. Full-Fledged

Pidgin, therefore, is still a language of business but it is also a common way to communicate. The basic words in pidgin language are no longer employed to avoid losing money, but more often to save lives. Pidgin is a survival language. Pidgin is originally a language of trans-portation, trans-location, trans-formation, self-translation. For those migrating with-in languages and countries, multilingualism, translanguaging and self-translation are an everyday experience, particularly within the increasingly superdiverse urban settings that are drawing ever-growing numbers of diasporic communities. People who self-translate from one language to another already have at least two languages, two worldviews, but are often considered less under the hegemony of the "official" language. Most pidgin speakers would like to speak the target language proficiently: to belong to a new place, to be "from here" and not always "from there". Pidgin English is still a reason for jokes and othering. Are those who move in-between languages "tongueless" (Pérez Firmat, 2003, p. 5)? Is it really the case that we "are what we speak?"(2). Are we all pigeons?

Pidgins have been considered "broken" and often "chaotic" because of their lack of grammar and communal conventions in contrast to "full-fledged" (Mufwene, 2023 a) languages from which they derive, or rather which they modify. Analysing the structure of pidgins, Mufwene notices that their "different degree of normalisation within their often reduced system" depends on the circumstances in which they were developed and functions they had in communication (Mufwene, 2023). I would say that current "pidgining" depends on a variety of reasons: from which and to which language the person is "pidgining"; where it is spoken; the speaker's background and life story; the relationship between speakers, their circumstances, time of day, mind and body state. Pidgin, as a form of self-translation, is a very individual language. And for each person their pidgin changes every day, in every moment. They transform with-in the new environment. They grow their feathers. Therefore, pidgin is deeply material, linked to the body and to soma, time and environment, as migrants often

learn like infants, echoing and mirroring the "bath of sounds" (Anzieu, 1989) in which they are immersed. Pidgin is a language of liminality, of poly-identity, that contests ethnocentrism and the hegemony of a dominant language. Pidgin is a language of transformation that confirms again that language is a noun and a verb—a process—transforming and undergoing continuous transformation. In times of increasing global migrations and burgeoning urban superdiversity as a result of the so-called "age of accelerations", the "fourth industrial revolution" and the "age of change" (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 5), can Pidgin be a form of decolonisation and transgression of the hegemonic language, that does not render the speaker inferior? Can it be a language of affect and care that allows us to look beyond the borders of words? And between worlds. By looking more closely at those other ubiquitous urban dwellers, the pigeons that are often despised, persecuted and marginalised by their human neighbours, I will now explore different iterations and alternative translations of the Dove Girl animal-woman transformation story.



Dear K.,

I found a baby pigeon today, a *pichón*, on the pedestrian path. Tiny naked body with gently blooming seeds of feathers. They probably fell off the nest. I didn't know what to do. My human saviour self went into panic. I googled, I searched; all information so confusing. Internet, a new Babel. I finally managed to speak with a vet. She said that their only hope is that their parents would pick them up. Yes, before cats do. She said that it would only have chances to survive with a human if it was fully- fledged.

Yours,

K.

THE DOVE GIRL

This part of the chapter presents my research on "The Dove Girl" folktale by Italo Calvino and other writings, such as *The Pigeon* by Patrick Süskind (1988), the essay "How to skin a bird" by Chelsea Biondolillo, *The Pigeon Girl/La Plaza del Diamante* by Mercè Rodoreda (1962), the story "Pigeon Fly!" by Leonora Carrington, and, classical representations of Cassandra and Sergio Blanco's *Kassandra* (2008) as representations of contemporary dove girls. These writing and concepts became an inspirational and reflective framework for my performative explorations of the pigeon-dove "lethal binaries" ingrained in the psyche, social nexus and environment, sound and language. This process culminated with the installation "Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey" in the Granary Theatre Studio on the 23rd of February, 2024. For the documentation of the performance and reflection on the practical development see: Appendix III and Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl.

"Give me my dress!" shouts the Dove Girl, in Italo Calvino's version ([1980] 2012), when a young man steals her dove-cloak. Deprived of her feathers she loses her transformative power and becomes the "hero's" trophy, possession, a wife. In Calvino's retelling, "The Dove Girl" of the title is reduced to one of the male hero's conquests. Even in the story's structure she is being marginalized and deprived of subjectivity. In my analysis of this Animal-Woman tale, I both reflected deeply on the way in which a dove/pigeon binary was often embedded and reproduced in its many retellings and on the plethora of contemporary Dove-Girls whose feathers have been stolen. Who are the marginalized, often hidden inhabitants of our cities? Who are the domesticated and cherished white dove-girls and who, the dirty, unwanted ones pigeons?

The relationship between humans and pigeons/doves (*Columbidae*) has a long legacy. Feral and domesticated, they are both a symbol of peace, purity and eternal love and also unwanted inhabitants of our cities associated with dirt, excrement and germs. Pigeons and doves became "my guide" (Haraway, 2016) and companions in re-telling the story to interrogate human exceptionalism, language, translation and

translanguaging, but also the narratives and patterns of "lethal binaries" (Braidotti, 2013) in which woman and non-human Others are externally and internally trapped.

Playing String Figures with Companion Species

Ecofeminist thinker Donna Haraway dedicates the first chapter of *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) to pigeons. Or rather, she announces pigeons as her guide though the explorations of world of Terrapolis—an "n-dimensional niche space" (Haraway, 2016, p. 10) inhabited by all kinds of critters, all companion species, including humans but not "as Homo, that ever parabolic, re- and de-tumescing, phallic self-image of the same; but for the human that is transmogrified in etymological Indo-European sleight of tongue into guman, that worker of and in the soil"(11). In her chapter, titled "Playing String Figures with Companion Species", she explores entanglements of human and pigeon spaces and lives. Pigeon – so familiar and ubiquitous and so often overlooked. Or ignored, kicked, chased away. Or exterminated.

Doves vs. Pigeons

Jean Hansell thinks that the remarkable history of the Columbidae genus of birds is obscured by the dove/pigeon division, which means that "in general, 'dove' is traditionally reserved for use in the aesthetic contexts of religion, literature and art, and 'pigeon' for much more mundane matters, such as sport, fancy breeds and culinary use" (Hansell, 2009). Both the dove Noah released as a symbol of peace in the Old Testament and the New Testament dove are ancestors of both the dovecote birds and today's urban pigeons. This dual aspect of pigeons places them in a liminal space, reflected in the ambivalence expressed towards them culturally. In some European languages the distinction between what in English are doves and pigeons is clear, but not so much in others. In Italian, for example, you have "piccione/a" for pigeon and "colombo/a" for dove; but Spanish has only one word "la paloma" unless it is a baby, called "el pichón". In Polish there is "gołąb" for both although we traditionally speak about the "dove of peace" in feminine: "gołębica". I was told that Czech is similar. The German name for both is "die Taube". This pulling of name string figures may be really confusing.

Haraway points out that pigeons are "sorted in English terms into wild and domestic worlds, but those particular oppositions are not general or universal, even in the so-called West" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15). Mostly encountered in cities, Columba Livia Domestica, called also, somewhat paradoxically, Feral pigeon, is often confused with the domesticated Rock Dove (*Columba Livia*), a species from which it evolved. Both are commonly called pigeons. The wild Rock Doves are almost identical, but the domesticated ones live in and around towns and cities while the wild ones live and breed in remote areas, are "shy", "and difficult to observe" (BirdWatch Ireland, 2023), something that would be difficult to say about feral pigeons from the cities. As Haraway observes pithily, "kinds of pigeons vary, and vary, and then vary some more, with kinds for nearly every spot on terra" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15). Just like humans.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, pigeon refers to "any of several hundred species of birds constituting the family Columbidae (order *Columbiformes*). Smaller forms are usually called doves, larger forms pigeons. An exception is the white domestic pigeon, the symbol known as the 'dove of peace'" (Rafferty, 2023). That fascinates me – the white and pure "dove of peace" is a pigeon, "just" a pigeon.

Becoming-with-Pigeon/Pidgin

Haraway notes that pigeons have "very old histories of becoming-with human beings" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15). The earliest show an intrinsic connection between this bird and "the all-powerful Mother Goddess" as confirmed by the archaeological discoveries of images of pigeons beside goddess figurines in Sumerian Mesopotamia (the Bronze Age 2400-1500 BC), her depictions in Crete, or pigeon representations on the temple roof-tops of Cyprus. In the Greco-Roman classical world, pigeon offerings were made to Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of love, while Demeter (Ceres), "another version of the Mother Goddess, sometimes borrowed the dove symbol". There are also Ancient Greek legends about the sacred oak grove at Dodona, a place where "the god Zeus (Jupiter) and his dove-priestesses made oracular interpretations based on the flight and behaviour of birds" (Hansell, 2009).

A very interesting analysis of different versions of the story of the Dodona oracle is reproduced in Michael Cronin's *Translation and Identity* (2006, p. 7), as recounted by Greek historian and geographer Herodotus of Halicarnassus. Herodotus

was told by the priests of Jupiter at Thebes that "two of the sacred women were once carried off … by the Phoenicians, … one… was sold into Libya, and the other into Greece, and these women were the first founders of the oracles in the two countries" (Herodotus, 2013., p. 119). However, the women who delivered the oracles at Dodona related the same story differently: "Two black doves flew away from Egyptian Thebes, and while one directed its flight to Libya, the other came to them. She alighted on an oak, and sitting there began to speak with a human voice, and told them that on the spot where she was, there should henceforth be an oracle of Jove. They understood the announcement to be from heaven, so they set to work at once and erected the shrine. The dove which flew to Libya bade the Libyans to establish there the oracle of Ammon" (119-120). The explanation Herodotus gives is that the women were originally called black doves because they were foreigners from Egypt and their language sounded for natives like the noise of birds; the first one only gains a "human voice" when she acquires the local language; rather than speaking in pigeon/pidgin, we might add.

The Old Testament Dove of peace motif was adapted and introduced into early Christian Dogma and can be found in a variety of New Testament passages, such as when Jesus says to his disciples: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew, 10:16) (Bible Hub, 2011). The snakes and doves recalled here are actually symbols of ancient goddesses (Hansell, 2009); however, while the dove became a materialisation of the Holy Spirit, the snake became an embodiment of evil.

Pigeons were used as messengers, both during peace and war, from Greek and Roman times until the World Wars of the 20th century. Recently they have also been used as drug smugglers–flying 'mules', carrying drugs in little backpacks (BBC, 2017). The Pigeon and the Dove are repeatedly mentioned in the works of Shakespeare, as letter-carriers, food, an example of fidelity and attachment to offspring; an emblem of peace, modesty, patience, innocence and love (Harting, 2013)

The white dove as a symbol of love, innocence and purity has a long history that persists today. Just as the world is filled with representations of ideal women, iconified by and for the Male Gaze, as discussed in chapter 3. Of course, as Berger, writing about aesthetics, notes, "the range of what a given community finds beautiful

in nature will depend upon its means of survival, its economy, its geography" (Berger, 2000, p. 150). If we extend this to women's bodies, too, we can see that images of commercialised "perfection" were never more ubiquitous, getting into our houses, homes, private spaces and bedrooms. Women and girls comparing themselves to these (often illusory) images of "white doves" cannot help but feel like street pigeons.

In other words, the division between pigeons and doves reflects social expectations and roles for women, models that are so ingrained that women can lose sight of what they actually want to be. On the one hand, they are surrounded by role models of white, pure, tender mothering dove messengers that represent and bring love, purity and peace; on the other, immoral, irresponsible, individual spinster pigeons, the dirty and deformed inhabitants of cities, transporting bacteria and diseases.

Doves and pigeons, Eva and Lilith, Holy Mary and Mary Magdalene, are all iconic representations of binaries that leave real flesh-and-blood women in-between; patterns that are often deeply ingrained in women's psyche, social nexus and environment, and have a material impact. Pigeons "tie their people into knots of class, gender, race, nation, colony, post colony, and—just maybe—recuperating terra-yet-to-come" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15).



Figure 20. "The Dove-Pigeon Girl"

FEATHERS LOST IN THE CITY

Terrapolis

In Terrapolis, shed of masculinist universals and their politics of inclusion, guman are full of indeterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making, full of significant otherness. (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

In *Staying with the Trouble* Haraway coins the term Terrapolis that is, among so many things, an "n-dimensional niche space for multispecies becoming with" (Haraway, 2016, p. 11), inhabited by all the "critters", by which she understands microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even machines (169). The word itself is constructed from a word *terra* that in Latin means: "country, region" and "earth, land, ground" (Mahoney, 2002-2024). This indicates that it has a political use which is delimited to some established borders on the map, but it also refers to something bigger that goes far beyond this—Earth as a planet in a solar system of the Cosmos, whose satellite image "from the bird's-eye view" we can recall in memory (since the moon-landings of 1969) —and something more immediate and very tactile, the soil we have under own feet. In Polish the word for both, the Earth and soil, is Ziemia. Terra.

The second part of the compound word Terrapolis is *-polis*, that is an "ancient Greek city-state" (Etymonline, 2001-2024) that is "also commonly translated as 'city' or simply anglicized as 'polis'" (Miller, 2022). The polis (city) was a representation of civilisation, inhabited by the Anthropos—Aristotle's "political animal" placed above not only the others who lived beyond the polis borders, but also othered inhabitants, such as women, slaves and all those excluded from its political life, and, of course, animals. *Political* stems from the Greek *politikos*, "of, or pertaining to, the polis" (Miller, 2022). The polis was, then, on the one hand a material place but on the other also a concept, an idea. *Polis* was inhabited by many who did not pertain, were not "proper "to the polis; by many others who did not belong.

This external, but particularly internal, hierarchical politics of the polis makes me think about current situations in contemporary cities—these particular hybrid spaces characterized by the continuous fluctuation and migration of people. Places of incessant encounters and translation of Haraway's "critters", some of which "have the

right" to belong, are citizens, and some of which are marginalised as not-citizens. The doves and pigeons of the city.

The city as a territory, a zone, is one of the sites that Emily Apter defines in *The Translation Zone* as being "'in-translation', that is to say, belonging to not one single, discrete language or single medium of communication" (Apter, 2006, p. 6). The city with its opportunities and dangers, where natureculture intermingles continuously; the city with all types of human and non-human inhabitants, although mainly the first claim their citizenship. The city with its velo-city, capa-city, techni-city, authenti-city, more than one ethni-city, overwhelming toxi-city. On the one hand, cities usually provide better healthcare, on the other, they were often designated as the most dangerous and restricted places during the Covid-19 pandemic. The city where thousands or millions of people live and yet one can feel more lonely than anywhere else. The city, where anonymity may be a gift but also a curse. The city with its merging borders between bodies, languages and economic levels; with its translanguaging, multilingualism and multiculturalism. The city with its roots and borders. Planning and chaos. With its doves and pigeons. Cleanness and dirt.

Pigeons in the city

> *"Companion species infect each other all the time. Pigeons are world travellers, and such beings are vectors and carry many more, for good and for ill*"
> (Haraway, 2016, p. 29)

Pigeons went out as colonizers and conquerors, or rather have been taken, "all over the world, including places where other varieties of their kind were already well established" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15) despite the fact that they are birds that, unlike many others, usually do not migrate. This owes to a variety of reasons: they don't have one annual cycle for breeding and mating, they deal well with low temperatures (Dan, 2023); they also feed their youngsters not with found food but with "crop-milk", which means that if the adult pigeons can eat, their fledglings will be fed. Human centres such as towns and cities can give them food in abundance. Living in cities allows them to avoid aerial birds of prey, who they would encounter during their migrations. However, it does not protect them from ground predators, such as dogs, foxes or snakes (depending on their dwellings), climbing predators such as cats, rats and humans or some other bird inhabitants, such as crows (Książek, 2023) and seagulls. However, "[i]n the case of pigeons, it may be better the devil you know than the one

you don't" (Dan, 2023). There are some "devils" that they share with humans inhabiting the city – cars, bicycles, other humans, pollution, intoxication. The city is a dangerous place for both human and non-human pigeons.

Pigeons with-in the city

So many roles have been given to pigeons over the centuries but what remains prevalent among human city inhabitants is a prejudice against feral city pigeons. It seems like all the collaboration between pigeons and humans have been forgotten. We do not need them as messengers anymore; we almost do not even use white envelopes anymore as we send most of our messages by email, WhatsApp or Instagram. There are some humans that still race them, or release them at weddings, or appreciate them as a symbol of love and peace. But many people are disgusted by them, particularly in city spaces.

As Hansell notices "the feral city pigeons in towns all over the world today are largely refugee birds from abandoned dovecotes of yesterday" (Hansell, 2005, p.51). The history of the dovecotes stretches back to Romans times and they became very popular in Europe in the ensuing centuries. Dovecotes were houses for pigeons that were kept mainly as a source of food, but also as a source of guano that has always been considered a very powerful fertilizer (Hansell, 2009). Paradoxically, it is pigeon guano that probably disgusts humans the most nowadays. Guano is something spread by pigeons all around the city and which they walk in; not jump lightly like some other birds but walk, like humans. We associate guano with bacteria and disease, and we project these ideas onto pigeons. We do not need this fertilizer anymore, particularly in cities where people rarely cultivate edible food, where soil and grass has been exchanged for hard and flat asphalt. We clean our bodies and we clean our cities, so that they are in order.

Humans often romanticize birds associating them with freedom, high-tone singing in the morning, nature that is "clean". Pigeons, however, perhaps so perfectly adapted to the urban environment, are often despised. Because they show us the "dirty" side of the city while the dream is a "clean" perfection. Or maybe their existence reminds us about our own ways of living? Our own vulnerability, mortality, the danger that is on every street? Maybe it reminds us about other inhabitants of the city; those who like pigeons are on the "the margin". Those who dwell in dodgy alleys, make

their beds in dark corners, niches. Pigeon-holed immigrants, drunks, junkies, homeless people: those who share their spaces with pigeons, reminding us that the border between "us" and "them" is often very thin. Maybe their presence resonates with the potential lives of our other selves.

Pigeons make visible what we would like to hide—a dark, smelly and dirty side of the city where "the differential burdens of urban air pollution that contribute to different rates of human (and other-than-human, but that is not rated) mortality and illness, [are] often distributed by race and class" (Haraway, 2016, p. 20). I wonder how so many of them were coping during Covid-19… I often think of how thick the border that separates "us" and "them" is and how thin at the same time. Us and them. The same bird family. Different circumstances. When pushing ourselves to reach the idea of the white dove, they remind us that we are all pigeons.

Pigeon

The literal example of this abjection towards human and non-human pigeons is a novel *The Pigeon* by Patrick Süskind (Süskind, 1988), that recounts the unexpected encounter of Jonathan Noel, a bank security guard encaged in his routine, with a pigeon on the corridor of the building. "He was frightened to death—that was probably how he would have described it moments later on, but that would have not been correct, because the fear came only later. He was, rather, amazed to death" (Süskind, 1988, p. 15). An amazement to death that later on brought fear. Was not this what so many people felt at the arrival of the "Black Swan" of the pandemic (Zwick, 2020)? The amazement and fear that comes when there is a disruption in the established routine? I wonder how he could be amazed when he was living in Paris, which like urban centres is filled with pigeons. Scientists, economists, and environmentalists have been warning us continuously about the "Green Swan (Zwick, 2020)" of environmental disaster for decades but most of us ignore it. Instead, amazement and fear appears when some more immediate disturbance, like Jonathan Noel's pigeon, sits in front of the door of our 'island of security', "not eight inches from the threshold" (Süskind, 1988, p. 14)

The encounter with the pigeon started an immense revolution in Jonathan's solid routine. The disproportionate amount of fear that this creature's body, its ruffle, even

the movement of an eyelid blink provoked in Jonathan, led him to think about solutions to get rid of the bird. His level of growing paranoia contains common prejudices toward pigeons, as the "epitome of chaos and anarchy"(19), a dangerous monstrosity that "sets its claws in you, picked at your eyes", and so on (Süskind, 1988, p. 19). It continues with visions of Jonathan's suicide, humiliation and exclamation to God. The fragment in which he reveals what he thinks about the pigeon and how this one creature could endanger his life and dignity, reminds me of the narratives spread by right-wing media and citizens about immigrants, refugees and other Others. Where, for those enclosed in their own concept of what is "natural" and traditional, the Other is "pigeon-holed" and made to bear on their body, skin and feathers all the clichés, stereotypes and misconceptions that awaken fear and abjection. As Julia Kristeva wrote, "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

Territories

Many animal species mark their territory. As Vinciane Despret writes in *Living as a Bird* (2022), songbirds mark their presence and delimit their territory through their singing. There are however other animals, such as carnivorous mammals—tigers, dogs and lions for example, that mark their territory through "harsh, stinking urine or with their howling" (Despret, 2022, p. 21). Why is it that these others' fluids disgust most of us, even though we are "bodies of water" (Neimanis, 2016), while we generally disregard appropriation through pollution of the air, visual and sound space of our cities? We are so afraid of viruses and bacteria in dirt, not noticing that we are continuously appropriating spaces, locally and globally, through dirt. Is that why we avoid people living on the street, just as we avoid pigeons because of their excrements? Is it because we get lost in these moments where public and private spaces merge together? Or because, when put on display, we encounter "'a life'" that "is ontologically different to techno-living and industrial-living, to the extent that it is synonymous with a more-than individual process involving decay, death, and decomposition of the individual body" (Salazar Sutil, 2017, p. 5)? This abjection towards touching another body that we know is not ours: the smell, sweat, ruffle of the wings, underneath which, we do not know what is hidden.

This angst-ridden division between public and private domains that emerges in the city, brings to mind the work of Spanish artist Alicia Framis who created a piece *One Night Tent/Mueble*—a refuge for a quick space for sex in the city—to engage with "questions about safety and about public and private space in the city" (Rommes & Plate, 2007). Cities are particularly hostile spaces for women; from there often not being enough establishments in which to urinate, to the unwanted contact and touch that is enabled by crowds, and the dangers of being in the streets at night. All the more dangerous for those who have no home to come back to.

Smell is often a reason for shame for women unhomed by the homelessness crisis.[41] This is even more difficult when they menstruate; as they are sometimes ashamed to ask for sanitary pads: they are ashamed of their smell. Their period reminds them that they are still women, something which they often need to forget. Some of them need to decide if it is better to be in a relationship with one man or exposed to violence from other men (Sulej, 2023). Even light make-up or a nice blouse can expose them to sexual violence. Beauty is dangerous in this environment. They keep their hair short and wear additional layers of clothes to avoid men's attention (ibid). They try to become more masculine. Often because of tiredness, inappropriate nutrition, stress hormones, even their menstruation often disappears. Treated as pigeons in society, they do what they can to become even more pigeon. Sometimes abjection may give some hope for safety.

Skinning a Dove

In her essay "How to skin a bird" (2019) Biondolillo intertwines the process of skinning the bird with autofictional stories of how her "psyche" had been skinned by her parents' relationship (Biondolillo, 2019). Skinning can be a physical act but also these layers of skin can be embodied (as soma) and taken into the ecology of the psyche, having an influence further on in life. I will explore this process of "skinning" through looking closely at different iterations of the Dove Girl figures, in/as Colometa, Eleonora, Cassandra and Kassandra whose voices have been overlooked.

[41] As recounted by the participants of the action of Metamorphosis for women in Warsaw, the thing that troubles homeless women most is how to keep themselves clean. In shelters the bathrooms are often mixed for men and women, so they try to wash themselves in public bathrooms, shopping centres, where there is no space for intimacy (Sulej, 2023).

La Ragazza Colomba

Recounted by Italo Calvino, the Sicilian folktale titled *La Ragazza Colomba* (The Dove Girl) tells us very little about the actual Dove Girl, instead focusing on the adventures of a "lad" who used to lead a miserable life, but through cunning, arrogance and theft, was able to improve his lot. Encountering some enchanted horses, who were actually once men, he learns of a pond where Dove Women went to play in their human form. As advised by the horse-men, the lad takes one girl's dove clothing so that she could not fly away. As with the Swan Maiden, the girl begs him to give back her feathers, but he instead flees with them toward his home, forcing the girl to follow. On arrival, he announces the girl to be his future wife, and insists that his mother should not let her out under any circumstances. During his absence the girl cries and yells so much for her skin that the mother, in frustration, helps her to find her dress. The Dove Girl escapes, but the man steals her feathers again. And this time, he burns them. After undergoing a series of challenges she sets for him, they are married, and it turns out that the girl is in fact the daughter of the King of Spain. In the end the man won his prize. I imagine he became a prince.

The story contains so many elements that make interpretation problematic. It is difficult to believe that someone who is stealing and cheating is to be considered a 'hero', but maybe he was just resilient, trying to survive. The word "picciotto", translated into English as "lad", in Italian used to mean "young", but it can also refer to a gangster at the bottom of the Mafia hierarchy, as was explained to me by southern Italians. Maybe the Dove Girl is just another prize in his *mala vita*. Maybe this is a story that describes a way to deceive local power; maybe the enchanted horse-men are representations of the government, the church, and those who work for them, just as we saw before in the case of the Black Doves representing Egyptian foreigners.

My research asks, what would the story be like from the Dove Girl's perspective? How would she feel looking for her skin? After twelve doves dive into water, they return "to the surface as twelve beautiful maidens, who resembled angels from heaven, and began running and frolicking" (Calvino, [1980] 2012, p. 593) or, in Italian, "a giocare tra loro, correndo e facendo le pazze" (Calvino, [1956] 1993, p. 908). "Fare la pazza" means "behaving like crazy"; frolicking (of animal or person) playfully and moving about cheerfully, excitedly, or energetically; in Polish, *figlować*,

baraszkowac or *swawolić*, which has a mostly sexual meaning. Is that, then, the moral of her story? Flying high, pure as doves, they are like beautiful angels, but when they enjoy their bodies, dancing and playing, maybe enjoying their sexuality, they become vulnerable. Easy prey. Having your skin stolen once, as in this tale, may have no consequences. But the second time, the consequence of bodily and sexual liberty was that she could not be pure again. Does burning her skin equal losing her virginity?

Was the Dove Girl raped? She yells repeatedly, "Give me my dress, give me my dress!". Then, in the man's house she cries and screams for it again, and through the use of her voice she manages to convince another woman to allow her to regain her feathers. But only this time. Afterwards there is no escape. Somehow accepting her situation, she places some conditions for her domestication. A price for her skin, freedom and liminality. She asks him to behead the Wizard and turn the horses back into men. Perhaps the meaning of this story actually reflects the Italian political situation, particularly from the South. Perhaps it is a representation of the beginnings of the mafia in Sicily, or has references to it being a part of Crown of Aragon until the 18th century? Alternatively, perhaps this is a story about the practice of "rehabilitating marriage" in southern Italy, when women had to marry the man to whom they lost their virginity, even if he they had been raped. The first time, the Dove Girl managed to refuse and fly away, but the second time, he burned her feathers to ashes.



Figure 21. "Feathers"

Dove Girl Language

The Dove Girl story is also a story about language. The Dove Girl is a foreigner, Spanish, in Italy. Is this why she becomes more vulnerable? In what language was she screaming in distress? Was the mother of the lad able to understand her? Did she react to what she understood or was she just annoyed by the intense screams—the voice of the Pang. They could have probably understood each other as there are similarities between languages in the Romance family. The girl could even probably speak or understand Italian. Or maybe she was mimicking the Italian melody with Spanish words. The need to communicate makes one forget about shame and ridicule. The need for survival is stronger. And being in a foreign country is usually about survival. Foreign language, customs, maps and architecture. Foreign dangers that create the need for connection with others, the need to not be "the invisible other". And what tools do the invisible have? Beyond language, other modes of communication come to the fore: "smile and nod", so that maybe they will think you understand, maybe that you are stupid, but at least you will come across as *simpática*—a nice and domesticated dove. Screams may not be welcome, but they might work as a last resort: to be understood without the need for words.

Thinking about this story, I could not stop thinking about so many cases of gender violence all over the world. Stories of women forced to marry their rapists (Cullen, 2015) or killed by jealous men (Latza Nadau & Mortensten, 2024). Stories of women who wanted to choose their path and break up the relationship but were instead murdered. Crimes of passion, they are sometimes called. Burning passion, as in "The Dove Girl". Stories about women who are are raped, left behind by other doves, facing one or multiple "picciotti". Or foreigners who do not even report violence and abuse to the police through fear of not being understood. But is there a language for that? Is there even a native language for these experiences? Femicides, domestic violence, coercive control, abuse. So many feathers, so many dove-women burned in a fire of passion.

For me this story is a multilayered exploration of who these Dove Girls could be. Those whose voices are not heard, because they are women, because they are "stained", because they enjoy their sexuality and bodies, or use them to work; those whose voices are being stolen, because they speak a different language, or just because

they don't represent the "ideal" role of home-caged purity that patriarchal culture imposed on them (as explored in the chapter 1). It is an exploration of the ubiquitous presence of these patriarchal structures, whether in the environmental or social nexus (as explored in the chapter 3) and/or deeply ingrained in women's psyche.

The Polish artist Dorota Nieznalska played with the liminality of the word "Passion" (2001) in an installation where she juxtaposed a cross with an image of male genitals on it and a video of a man's face expressing extreme effort while exercising. She was charged for offending religious sentiment and found guilty by a court in Gdansk in 2003, before finally being acquitted by the Court of Appeal in 2009 (Culture.pl, 2016). This was a case that raised many questions, such as an artist's freedom of speech, particularly when their art contests the established hierarchy and morality. In the context of so many women's suffering because of this male 'passion', it is women's genitals that should be on the cross.



Figure 22. "Feather Bath"

Colometa

Another story about domestication of the Dove Girl can be found in Mercè Rodoreda's *La Plaça del Diamant* published in Catalan in 1962. In this story Natàlia even receives a new name, Colometa, which is Catalan for little Dove. The life of Natàlia/Colometa, recounted from a first-person perspective in simple yet evocative language, gives us insight into her everyday struggles, losses and traumas, in her household and the wider

city of Barcelona during and after the Spanish Civil War. This insight into private and public space gives the reader a feeling that there is not only one, but a multiplicity of Colometas. Different dictatorships, different Natàlias, different Colometas subordinated within a patriarchal society, domesticated into their gender roles, relationships and stereotypes.

The dictatorship in Natàlia's life started before Franco, and before the war. It started when she met a man who would become her husband. The novel starts with a scene full of colours and vibrant energy of people dancing in the Plaça del Diamant, which we experience through Natalia's sensory impressions. She's like the Dove who "went in white from top to toe" (Rodoreda, 1967, p. 7), dancing surrounded by other colourful birds – her friend in "a canary-yellow dress with green embroidery"(8), "the girl of the lottery dance, all in blue, turning round and round"(9) and so many other women-birds "running and frolicking", many of them unaware, that this square on festive nights becomes a market where the most inexperienced and unaware girls are more likely to be "bought" for wives. There she meets Quimet, another young man who through his persistence and arrogance managed to "hide" her dove clothing, as he literally runs after her through the streets to the point that her petticoats fell on the ground (Rodoreda, 1967). Maybe this was the moment when she lost her dove feathers for the first time. The second time happens through language. Quimet not only convinces her that she should become his wife. He erases her previous identity. Taking his privilege as a son of Adam, he re-names her Colometa—and she is ready to be domesticated, caged in her apartment, as a wife and mother. One day, her life starts to literally intertwine with the life of pigeons, as her husband decides to breed them. Colometa and the pigeons become one flock under the same roof. She takes care of them, cleans up after them, rebels against them, talks to them, loves and hates them, and dreams about them. Her children were growing with-in this flock, whose cooing woke her up and accompanied her throughout the day. She smelled of them. "The pigeon girl" (Rodoreda, 1967, p. 99), she called herself .

When she cannot cope any more, she begins to get rid of the pigeons, just as later she plans to release herself and her children from starvation during harsh postwar years by taking poison. But unlike Eva S. in *In the Beginning*, she does not fly away, or leave like Ibsen's Nora. In the end, Colometa marries another man who can provide for them, exchanging her life, body and affect for her own survival and that of her

children. Pigeons were Colometa's intimate companions but also a reflection of her own Animal-Woman struggle.

By the end of the novel, when she is older, she still thinks of pigeons and often recounts stories about the dovecote she used to have. She suffers from agoraphobia and limits her movements to the closest neighbourhood, and her journeys to the park, to spend time with feral pigeons. People see her as someone "homesick for the pigeons, the lady of the pigeons, she only lived thinking of the pigeons (…)" (Rodoreda, 1967, p. 180) As the translator explains in a footnote, there is a play of words here, as in Catalan *senyora*, meaning lady, sounds like *s'enyora*, meaning she is homesick. Dove/Pigeon ladies are always home sick.



Figure 23. Photo-documentation of interactions with "The Dove-Pigeon Girl" projections

Pigeon Fly!

One of the most mysterious stories that makes reference to pigeons is a short story "Pigeon, fly" by Leonora Carrington. In this first-person auto-fictional story, Leonora probably portrays herself in the characters of a deceased wife, Agatha, and an artist, Eleonora, who is hired to paint the former's portrait but by the end realises that, in painting Agatha, she has painted herself. In the story, Eleonora finds Agatha's diary, in which she describes her husband as some translucent feathery angel creature with wings and recounts that he and his companions were often playing the game of

‘“Pigeon Fly!”: “Pigeon, fly!”, “Angel, fly”, “Celestin, fly!”’ (Carrington, 1937-40, p. 68). But she does not imagine him as a dove of Annunciation or peace but rather as “the Angel of Death”, that makes her disappear little by little.

In this deeply symbolic story Carrington explores her different selves, as an artist and the wife of a husband, Max Ernst, “who occupied her in every sense: her art… no longer under her command, nor… her body” (Crawford, 2017). Crawford observes that “[t]he woman artist of ‘Pigeon, Fly!’ has been partially erased, but she isn’t dead yet”. Likewise, Leonora Carrington managed to fly away—first to Madrid, then to a sanatorium in Santander, where she was incarcerated on the orders of her father, then to Lisbon, before making the transatlantic crossing to Mexico. Carrington’s search for her own identities as woman and artist instead of being “pigeon-holed” as wife, femme-enfant or madwoman by family, society and her husband and mentor required and shows her courage, resilience and strength. But it also had its price. She merged her skin so deeply with that of others that for a while, she could not find her own. Women surrealists “tapped into a long line of mythic female figures—the nymph, the witch, the fairy, the crone—who have used metamorphosis in order to outwit, and outpace, their more solid, and literal, male kin” (Crawford, 2017). I wonder if with today’s development and understanding of neurodiversity, this highly sensitive person could have avoided such suffering. I wonder if she was a Cassandra of her times.



Figure 24. “The Dove-Pigeon Girl”

Cassandra

Stories of how Cassandra acquired (and lost) her gift of prophecy vary. According to most sources she received it from Apollo [Lioxas]. Apollodorus mentions that "when Cassandra refused to grant her favours to Apollo in return… he spat into her mouth and so prevented her from convincing anybody of the truth of her prophecies" (Apollodorus, 1921, p. 313). But he also gives another possible account where after being left with her sister as children in Apollo's temple, they are found in the morning with snakes licking their ears, through which they acquired prophetic powers (86). According to Aeschylus, Cassandra was never believed because she "deceived" Apollo (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 45) in refusing him her body. In *Agamemnon,* Cassandra reveals her encounter with Apollo to the Leader of the Chorus, when she tells that "He came like a wrestler, magnificent, took me down and breathed his fire through me and (…)—I yielded, then at the climax I recoiled—I deceived Apollo! (…) Once I betrayed him I could never be believed" (Aeschylus, 1984).

The above passage has a very sexual character that strongly suggests a rape: "Apollo did not… contend for her heart or… favour, but actually wrestled with her. The god set himself to overpower the maiden, who feels and acts like a true maiden" (Fraenkel, cited in Mitchell-Boyask, 2006, p. 273). Whatever "true maiden" means, Cassandra managed to defend herself from her aggressor, and yet, in Aeschylus' version, she considers herself the one that "deceived" Apollo. Maybe because, as Peter Levi writes, "[i]n spite of his democratic politics… Aeschylus was terribly conservative" (Levi, 1984, p. IX).

This time she managed to defend herself from Apollo, to protect her feathers. But she lost her credibility, the power of her words. But this was only the first time she had to fight for her dove feathers. When the Greeks had taken the Troy, it was Ajax who would rape her. This scene has inspired the painterly imagination of some painters, with Cassandra's portrait by Tischbein (1806) as being dragged from Athena's monument, and by Solomon (1886) as carried away on the arm of a man. In both she is seen as a victim not as a fighter. I hope that "feels and acts as a true maiden" means to kick hard with anger.

Virgil describes this scene as:

Behold the royal prophetess, the fair
Cassandra, dragg'd by her dishevel'd hair,
Whom not Minerva's shrine, nor sacred bands,
In safety could protect from sacrilegious hands:
On heav'n she cast her eyes, she sigh'd, she cried-
'T was all she could- her tender arms were tied. (Virgil, 2009, pp.66-67)

Did she cry "Give me my dress?" Did she shout? Did she fight back? These are questions that are often asked when women are sexually assaulted, to try to prove that the sexual encounter was consensual. Were they "playing", luring, tempting, showing themselves to be sexually available before changing their mind? What were they wearing? How much skin was shown? "Friends –I cried out, not from fear like a bird fresh caught, but that you will testify to how I died" (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 51) says Cassandra, and it is explained in scholarly notes that, according to Attic custom, "only if … the cry of distress has been raised, can evidence of the deed of violence be later laid before a court of law" (Fraenkel in Aeschylus, 1984, p. 173). Still today, "fight", "flight", and screams are considered as self-defence and signal a victim's credibility but "freeze" often does not. In Aeschylus, at least the Leader of the Chorus says, "We believe you" (1984, p. 45). Cassandra's story resonates with current discussions on sexual harassment, rape and the #MeToo movement (Farrell, 2021)

After this rape she was taken and "led home to be Agamemnon's mistress" (Hyginus, 2007, p. 137) or rather, as noted by an editor of *The Aeneid*, "she became the war-prize (read, rape victim and sex slave) of Agamemnon" (Virgil, 1994-2000). Like the many women who have been raped as war-prizes. Like the Dove Girl taken "home" by a treacherous "picciotto"? But what is "home" and for whom?

Madness

Whatever the procedure for acquiring these gifts, Cassandra's prophecies were not believed and she was considered "mad". Like so many women who had the courage to denounce an abuser but also those who feel more, sense more, know more and speak a truth that is not aligned with social standards. Since Cassandra the thesaurus of names has extended immensely: centuries filled with lives of *pazzas*, crazy, locas, mad, oversensitive, hysterics, witches. With the current change in social narrative frames around neurodiversity and mental illness, engaging with Cassandra's story made me think more attentively about those whose sensibility and perception of the

world is different than the established norm. Those who cannot find themselves in society; those who are silenced by ignorance; not heard because they do not fit in with what is taken for granted. Unable to adjust, they often look for escape into substances or death. Cassandra got a gift and a curse. Being between worlds and words. Between different languages.

> Aieeeeee! –
> the pain, the terror! The birth pang of the seer
> who tells the truth –
> it whirls me, oh,
> the storm comes again, the crashing chords! (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 46)

But there is also another layer of her madness. Desire, or what for others seems like desire. The image of Cassandra given by Euripides in *The Trojan Women* (Euripides, 2000) with her "psychotic 'celebration' of impending sexual union with her conqueror" (Hall, 2000, p. XXIV). Her joy, set against the cry of devastated Hecuba' in fact seems like madness. Is her reaction like that because she knows that her relation with Agamemnon will bring him death? Maybe it is her form of resilience. Something that will not be understood even centuries later, as in *Hiroshima mon amour*, where we see women who had intimate relations with the enemy during World War II were considered traitors, ostracised, imprisoned and had their heads shaved. Another Dove Girl, another Cassandra. Here, too, Cassandra instead of continuing to be a white dove, turns out to be just a mad pigeon.



Figure 25. Photo-documentation of the Performance

Migrant Cassandra

Just as Cassandra was not understood or believed in her home polis, she continues to be misunderstood in Argos. The madness that is attributed to her in her place of exile owes in part to knowledge of her history, but mostly due to her speaking a foreign language. In *Agamemnon* Aeschylus puts emphasis on her being a foreigner. For instance, Cassandra refuses to talk to Clytemnestra or react to her invitation. But is Cassandra silent through choice or because she does not understand Greek, as Clytemnestra thinks (Counts, 1973, p. 35). Clytemnestra humiliates her because of her lack of language, saying that Cassandra, is "possessed [o]f her own barbaric song, strange, dark" (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 38), asks her to "Give her a sign, one of her exotic handsigns" (39) and when the Leader of the Chorus suggests that Cassandra may need an interpreter, says:

> She's mad,
> her evil genius murmuring in her ears.
> She comes from a city fresh caught.
> She must learn to take the cutting bridle
> before she foams her spirit off in blood –
> and that's the last I waste on her contempt! (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 39)

Here she is being compared to different animals, and rendered less than human, because of her gift and because of her inability to speak their language. The more compassionate Leader of the Chorus calls her "wild creature fresh caught", attributing her speechlessness to recent trauma. However, Clytemnestra dismisses her again. Only when Clytemenestra is gone, does Cassandra speak, with a repeated cry: "Aieeeeee! Earth—Mother—/ Curse of Earth—Apollo! Apollo!" (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 46). Here she may be referring to her rape, to the rapes of the women of Troy, but also to the rape of Earth. Her cry resonates with contemporary wars and exploitation of the planet by men whose "lust for power never dies – men cannot have enough" (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 51)

Further on Cassandra speaks:

> Oh the grief, the grief of the city
> ripped to oblivion. Oh the victims,
> the flocks my father burned at the wall,

rich herds in flames… no cure for the doom
that took the city after all, and I,
her last ember, I go down with her. (Aeschylus, 1984, p. 44)

She may be talking metaphorically about human citizens, but of course, non-human others are so present here, as in all wars. Humans have brought death to all inhabitants of the city, the polis, Terrapolis. This resonates with the current environmental catastrophe, associated with the Anthropocene. Like Cassandra, so many scientists, thinkers and environmentalists draw attention to the impending disaster, yet are disbelieved, silenced or ignored. So many Cassandras announcing the Green Swan and still so many people do not heed their words.

Cassandra ends up as "the swan of the gods [w]ho lived to sing her latest, dying song" (57). Like Swan Woman, She-Wolf, Dove Girl: a messenger of peace and love, not loved and cherished, but rather a pigeon-holed feral pigeon.



Figure 26. Frame from "Confession(s)" video-installation

Sergio Blanco's *Kassandra*

There are some analyses of Cassandra's character which suggest that her subjectivity, voice and importance are often overlooked, placing her as a background for others (Counts, 1973); a white-dove-silent-heroine that, just as the Dove Girl, becomes a trophy for *il piccione*—little mafioso or male hero—remaining somewhere in between men's words, worlds, wars; politics and the public sphere being mainly "men's burden" while women are ascribed to the domestic sphere. What if there is no house, no home anymore?

Sergio Blanco in his monodrama *Kassandra* (2002) gives back Cassandra her voice, subverting at the same time the heroic story of Troy. In his version Kassandra tells us her side of the story in language of survival, pidgin English. Kassandra is a prostitute. Kassandra is an effigy of experiences of many women: women that through their bodies satisfy men for money; many migrating sex workers who find themselves in a different country, a different culture, a different world, yet the same world. Often they have been lured with a vision of work abroad and ended up as sex workers; deceived, coerced, raped (O'Connor & Pillinger, 2009), encaged in brothels in Italy, Spain and other Western European countries, so many migrating women disappear during their journey. Taken from the Ukrainian, Mexican, Greek borders to… no one knows. Encaged in brothels, but also through debt, shame, guilt, threats. Or by the money they need to send back to their families.

> Yes. I need money. Cash. To eat, to sleep, to smoke. To live. *She intonates the famous ABBA song*. Money, money, money. You know? I not love the money but I need. For me and for my sisters. Yes, for all my sisters in the world. I give money to my sisters in Filipinas, Zagreb, Europe, South America, New Mexico, Maghreb, United States, Iraq. I help my sisters and my sisters help me. I need money, money, money, money, money, money, money, money, money. Yes. (Blanco, 2008; 142-143)

Kassandra is an effigy of those who inhabit the liminal "grey" space of the economy; those who often being nomads, are yet trapped between the freedom of woman to make money with their bodies and becoming a commodity in human trafficking; between legal and illegal, freedom and imprisonment, between state and non-state violence,

between individual and general, verbal and psychic violence; between procurers and human traffickers and governments and police; trapped between clients' bodies, criminal and legal bodies; between choice and no choice; pleasure and pain; animal and woman, human and blow-up doll; exposing their skin and hiding it at the same time somewhere in the legal gap, grey pigeon-hole or dodgy corner. Their skin has a price. Desired and despised. Like pigeons associated with vermin, dirt, sickness and bacteria that can be transmitted to the "morally clean" society.

But Blanco's Kassandra is also an ancient priestess, the Other who is not believed, an oracle, a messenger, a migrant; a character from myth, an icon, an archetype. Like a plastic Holy Mary bottle for holy water from Lourdes; but she is not holy, she is not Mary, she is definitely not a Virgin. Then she becomes an anti-Mary. A Mary Magdalene. She was a dove, and now she became a pigeon. Or maybe she always was both. Kassandra is not even "fully" a woman according to a cis-gender vision of the world. She is a trans woman. She is in transition. In this dodgy bar on the highway where Blanco located her. In translation on the stage, a place itself in transition. She is in transition from one client to another. Between life and death. Future, past and present. She is also moving across time, through the reenactment and repetitions of patterns (Butler, [1990] 1999) and the alinearity of time on stage. She is being born again and again, so that you could even think that when she leaves the stage she will be back at any moment. The terror that has been happening in the past continues in the present and into the future. Will it ever cease? Kassandra is a dove messenger, like the priestess from Dodona who comes to tell us what has been and will be happening.

Kassandra is also the Dove Girl, like so many others, whose feathers have been lost so many times. And will be lost again. And born again to start this Odyssey again; an Odyssey in which she tells us about the past, present and future and in which different temporalities continuously entangle.



Figure 27. Frame from "Confession(s)" video-installation

Dove Girl embodied explorations

See: Appendix III and Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl.

All of these stories and reflections on pigeons and doves "lethal binaries" were accompanying me for a long time, often in parallel with other folktale explorations. Calvino's *The Dove Girl* came to me because, during the years of my research, I often travelled to Italy to do my SME course and *Jinen Butoh* Schools. I was walking there with pigeons/doves, traveling with them, meeting them in train stations, parks, gardens, streets and temples. I was picking their feathers up from the narrow streets. Listening to them and observing, sometimes with a loving gaze, sometimes with a little disgust.

Some of these pigeon's conversations I recorded with my phone, but mostly with my body exploring how their low and vibrating sound resonated with my skin, my guts, my throat; this deep vibrating *rrrrr* that expands within me, unsure if it is reverberating from inside and/or from outside. This bath of sound, as if from some uncanny womb, was speaking directly to mine, even when I could not see the pigeons themselves. Often during mornings or siestas deprived of human sounds, it was the

sounds of pigeons that broke or rather merged with the silence, impregnating the walls of this town with their stories.

I continued tuning into pigeons' lives while observing them in the cities of Cork, Kamień Pomorski, Venezia, Szczecin, where I visited a dovecote. Pigeons fed by people, pigeons fighting for food with seagulls, pigeons picking up food on the green grass and from the bins. As for humans, for pigeons the city is a place of possibilities, providing a dwelling and often fast food, as they often feed on what we eat or leave without a second thought of whether it is nourishing or not. Cities are also perilous places—I found bodies of pigeons in the middle of the streets after their encounters with cars, bikes or cats.

Maybe it was this sound, maybe whispering Kassandra, or mythical Cassandra, maybe all of these stories of pigeons and dove girls, feral and domesticated, pure and dirty, cherished and hated, that made me think about the power of female sexuality and repressed desire to set us free from the domestication that is so deeply ingrained as to repress the psyche, breath, blood, voice and body. Patterns integrated for centuries and repeated for generations. This longing for other ways of being, together with the courage that may come from acceptance of skin and body—however monstrous, however abject—as matter that yearns and desires. The ways in which a breath of anxiety can also be a breath of excitement.

Following the feathers and ghostly images of all these Dove Girls—Natalia/Colometa, Eleonora/Leonora/Agatha, Bionodillo's accounts, the experiences of sex workers—embedded in my imagination and also in my fascia memory, across different iterations of practice where I tried to free my body from the plastic emergency coat that replaced stolen skins—feathers, furs, scales – and became an imposed social suit (as documented in Appendix III), have also led to feelings of anxiety, exposure and nakedness. In my bodily explorations for some video pieces, I actually wanted to hide from the Dove Girl, from Guattari's ecologies, from she-wolves, swan women, mermaids, doves and pigeons; from all these internalised voices and selves that were shouting in my mind from all directions. Entangled in lethal binaries: Lilith and Eva; Cassandra before and after the rape; all these doubles that are multiplying in diverse languages. All these different selves that are talking, often incessantly; needing to say so much, and to be heard, but rendered speechless, because caged in age-old patterns:

the power of domestication, of feathers burnt again and again for so long that they forgot how to fly. See: Portfolio of practice: The Dove-Pigeon Girl

As Barbara Fass Leavy writes, "the burning of the animal wife's skin (…) represents the triumph of culture over nature" (Fass Leavy, 1994, p. 240) because the animal bride reflects the ancient fear of women and the anxiety "that woman… exercise an ever-present potential for widespread destruction of the social order". Comparing stories about Animal Grooms and Animal Brides, she notes that the animal groom generally goes from a monster to a "handsome youth" while men that wed an animal bride perceive her as a monster. In other words, "[h]is disenchantment is based on the assumption that the human form is the true form, while the basic assumption about woman is that her beast form defines her essential being" (221). See: Feathers.

And so the world is full of these monsters: disobedient daughters and deviant women concealed under dove-white skin. But the smell of burnt feathers is a reminder that they were there. As are the thousand wings that flutter in our/her/their chest. So maybe the key is to accept this monstrosity, this animal skin, this body, with care and love and gentleness. Like all these Dove-, pigeon- and other Animal-Women, shedding their skins and re-imagining themselves again and again; like skin itself, being born from themselves again and again. Picking up their scattered "ugly" pieces, and claws, and setting off on their journey. Step by step, breath by breath, they walk with this "monster that is always within" (Shildrick, 1996, p. 6).

Monstrous Dove-Pigeon Girl

In my Dove-Girl Journey Performance (see also Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl. and Appendix III) my monstrous Dove-Pigeon Girl was not planning to speak, as there were already so many pigeon words in the air and all these stories that her body had absorbed had rendered her speechless, "tongueless" (Pérez Firmat, 2003, p. 5), moving in-between all these languages. If we "are what we speak?" (2), she has probably lost all idea of who she was. So, she decided to allow the words to come naturally, to find out what might come from the corners of fascia, the inner depth of hidden memory. And so she hummed the pidgin lullaby about the red thread, and moved only when her body wanted to move. And suddenly she spoke allowing what

vibrates in her fascia to echo in the room. Like flashbacks. Without cohesion or coherence allowing what vibrates in her fascia to echo in the room. She “pidgined” in English, Spanish, Italian and even her native Polish.

And so the past returned, and it repeated and came again and again, every time different... Less power, less need. Sometimes just fragments and pieces appearing, sometimes just a sigh, or an intention, the opening of the mouth. Like the significant experiences of childhood memories that, according to Freud, “are omitted rather than forgotten” and “are represented in memory by the inessential elements of the same experience” (Phillips, 1994, p. 65). Like these haunting languages. All these spectres that appear in the gaps.

Chapter 4 – Conclusions

In this chapter I engaged with scholarship on pre-verbal language, translation, translanguaging, self-translation and “broken languages”, as a form of analysis of the foreigner’s everyday experience, as well as to present the potentialities of translanguaging and ways of speaking which are often considered “incorrect” or “broken” from the perspective of hegemonic languages and their speakers, to widen the perspective and open diverse points of view towards established norms. These explorations were intertwined with explorations through the lens of different versions of The Dove Girl, where research into language as simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary, a marker of translatability and untranslatability (as recognised by Apter 2006), provides the frame for approaching the Pigeon/Dove binary – understood to stand for one of the “lethal binaries” interrogated by this thesis. Once again, my process (documented in Appendix III and the Portfolio of Practice) involved extensive excavation and interpretation of different versions of the Dove Girl story, alongside research into the experience of vulnerable, especially migrant women and sex workers, in urban environments. It also involved other readings and research into the Columbidae family, including careful attention and attunement to their relation to the environments in which they are found, inspired by the work of Haraway and Despret, as well as diverse multimodal and performative explorations.



Dear K.,

I still remember seeing this pigeon dwell at the kitchen window. Encaged behind the crystal. Drowning her words in burning water, relieving her pain in chemical mixtures, burning her scream in the smoke. She was a pigeon of few words; di poche parole. A few were enough to choke.

Her pichona puts out her feelings with hot water, burns them in the smoke. She's not a pigeon of few words; é di 'poche' parole. But she keeps them on a leash that tightly embraces her neck. To survive.

Sincerely,

K.

CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter presents a reflection on this multilingual, multidisciplinary and multimodal project in which I continuously moved in-between different borders of skins, languages, lands and disciplines. It reflects on different ways in which I explored territories of human and non-human skins through the lenses of Animal-Women folk tales, eco-somatics and the transformative potential of theatre/performance. It culminates with a creative reflection on the project of "Animal-Woman Journey" which I have undertaken across the past four years (traces of which are captured in images reproduced across the entire thesis as "Postcards to K." and in this chapter as stills from the video-documentation), bringing together motifs, inspirations and thoughts that accompanied me over the course of my research.

See also Animal-Woman Journey(s). Abstract and Dove Girl's Journey

From the beginning of my project, Animal-Women personae have been continuously accompanying me throughout my research and life journey. With these diverse Animal-Women, my research has evolved across different environments, times, countries and states of being, and this writing carries some of these traces on its skin. Each piece of territory is a biodiverse polyculture that is being experienced, sensed, perceived in ways that language often cannot explain. This thesis therefore translates a spiral process where writing comes from the practice that comes from the body that comes from the readings that comes from writings that comes from the body that comes from the practice, and so on. It is an attempt to translate a multitude of configurations that sometimes follow the structures of linear time and causality but mostly happen simultaneously coming from the inner and outer territory, touching the skin and resonating in the fascia, and/or vice versa; crossing disciplines, boundaries, structures and patterns continuously. It is multilingual, multidisciplinary and multimodal, continuously moving in between different artistic languages.

Posthumanist thinkers argue that to engage in posthumanist thought, it is necessary to go beyond desk-based analytical scholarship and introduce creativity and imagination (Braidotti, 2013). This thesis engages fully with this idea: investigating the transformative potential for performative modes of practice to create alternative

modes of knowing, and positioning my/the actor's body as a potent site of multiple identities, as an experimental laboratory for exploring affective, relational and political processes of othering. The methodology became a combination of a variety of theories and approaches coined into a performative practice, and vice versa. Resisting an "opposition between 'pure' theory and concrete 'applied' practice", as Spivak comments after Deleuze (Spivak, 1988, p. 70), practice became a site of knowledge. Questions, solutions and more questions were enfolding during the entire research process, often informed by and deeply embedded in the places, languages and enveloping socio-political context, as well as the folktales that came to the fore at each particular moment.



Figure 28. Alboran Sea shore, Malaga, Spain, 2022

As seen across this thesis, Animal-Women folktales, often dismissed and infantilised, offered a very powerful archetype, a skin for exploration of pressing contemporary issues. Sometimes I would like them not to be so; for them to not to be relevant anymore, representing problems that have already been solved centuries ago. Instead, many issues such as violence toward women, xenophobia, racism, hostility toward the Other, worldwide migrations, environmental disasters, extinction of species, are issues that are more alarming in our contemporary times of the Anthropocene. Animal-Woman folktales embracing the individual and collective, realistic and poetic, language and body, may show us that de-hierarchised binaries do not need to be oppositions but are rather complementary elements of the one; that difference does not

need to be a reason for othering. They also indicate that current challenges, the "trouble", may be approached in a poetic, almost beautiful way. Animal-Women can give voice to myriad silenced stories reminding us that the trouble is (t)here;

The first chapter of this thesis addressed questions of the "trouble" (Haraway, 2016) identified with the current societal, environmental and necropolitical challenges facing our planet, by identifying and scrutinising Humanist constructions of Human, Animal, Woman and Earth- Other which I investigated through the *Swan Maiden* folktale and my video-adaptation of a play by Victoria Szpunberg, *En el principio*. Swan Maiden became an urgent affective response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic during this period.

The second chapter offered a reflective review of the layers of creative and embodied practice developed and explored across the course of my PhD research and which resonate for me with the posthuman predicament, such as artistic practice seen as a process of intersemiotic translation and reflection on ways of embodying other "skins" and stories. The examples of performative exploration chosen to exemplify this process, in two video pieces inspired by H.Ch Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, investigate the materiality of a sea wounded by environmental crisis as well as the continuing necropolitical catastrophe in the Mediterranean sea, caused by the boundaries between fortress Europe and its southern Mediterranean others.

In the third chapter I engaged deeply with writings and scholarship on skin, from external perspectives that seek to objectify, categorise and control it, to new materialist perspectives that see it as a shared and permeable material territory cohabited by multiple beings. In the course of my research for this chapter, I wondered if by changing the language around skin, we could change our approach to it/her. While the performative work related to this chapter delved into the multiple layers and affordances enfolded in my practice, it particularly focused on the migration crisis and situation of racialized women trapped between the Polish and Belarusian border.

In the fourth chapter I turned to writings and scholarship on pre-verbal language, translation, self-translation, translanguaging, and 'broken languages', culminating with analysis of my embodied and performative research of the folk tale *The Dove Girl*, inspired by my explorations of the dove/pigeon "binary" discussed across a range of iterations. This project reflected on the "lethal binaries" in which

women are trapped whether in their psyche, social nexus or environment; or, indeed, across all three ecologies.



Figure 29. Myrtleville Beach, Celtic Sea, Myrtleville, Ireland, 2023

These Animal-Women have lived, slept, travelled, dreamt, thought, moved with me. I have been seeing them everywhere in dozens of human and non-human others. I have seen them in myself. They allowed me to have courage to see the trouble, stay with it in a creative and sensitive way. They became my life and practice companions taking me on their journey while being companions in mine; in my journey through affordances of skin, languages, lands, spaces, human and non-human skins; through blows and caresses. Their resistance and f*orce of Zoe* were also reminding me about the power of transformation, that always happens with-in. Animal-Woman folk tales therefore became my embodied philosophy, an underlying narrative for my experience of the world teaching me how to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016)

With each of the folktales, the iterative process means they simultaneously involve engagement with other questions such as language, embodiment, and video and performative practice. These practices all focused on skin and language and landscape, on the nexus between the psyche, the social and the environmental, but in diverse ways. In "Swan Maiden" I collaborated with different women with different accents; in "She-Wolf Skin", more poetic voices were contested with brutal media narration, and it was not only what was said, but also the timbre and the tone of the different languages in which it is being presented. The deep voice of the words coming

from the body and all the voices of voyeuristic eyes. Skin observed and presented to the world. In “The Foam” it was the sea that was speaking, and language appeared in the form of a carefully chosen font. In “Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl Journey”, a pigeon/pidgin- English lullaby that was talking about transgenerational trauma and pain was contested with images and in the main space there were pigeons speaking alongside the pre-verbal language of the breath.

At the same time, these Animal-Woman transformation stories were not “used” as a single resource to explore the posthumanist predicament but were rather accompanying me in this research (and life?) journey. They were coming to me according to their resonance with contemporary events or questions that were troubling me, as if they were whispering that they needed to be told. They were gaining voices through re-telling of these other stories, while the other stories were voiced through Animal-Woman folktales. Each project, although different, is connected with the others thematically and visually as well as through some motifs such as hands, feet, back, mouth, as well as the leading roles of material elements such as feathers, red heels or nail polish, alongside snow, ice, river, plastic, the red coat and modes of composition and presentation. Indeed, some elements are “recycled” and used again in a different context.



Figure 30. Venezia, Italy, 2022

To explore these connections I engaged with a variety of environments, spaces and places, indoors and outdoors; in which these Animal-Women transform not only from animal to woman, but also according to diverse skins and representation. I engaged with them with my senses and with my skin consciously sometimes through caresses of grass and feathers, but also through scratches and bruises made by branches or wire fences; pleasure and pain. I explored approaches from somatics, eco-somatics and *Jinen Butoh* through workshops, seminars and my own artistic practice. Through visits to parks, where I came into closer contact with trees, pigeons and other human and non-human others, forests, where I travelled and danced with my animal-women selves. Some of these encounters, where I explored different ways of being in touch with the environment are collected in Appendix IV. All these explorations of places and spaces made me bodily aware that the culture-nature division is a myth that has a deep material influence on bodies and territories. The environments I spent time in, sat in and breathed in, where I stopped paying attention or which I visit(ed) frequently, made me feel uncomfortable with giving them the singular name place. Because it is a name that goes nowhere near capturing the complex phenomena of movements, actions, reactions, elements, sounds, I felt and touched with my skin. What can we call these bodies, when each of them is a land, a territory, in themselves. What can we call the air, the grass, the different kinds of plants, and insects, and humans, and soil, and metal benches, and sound that is continuously varying. Each with their skin, their history, their somatic memory. Each like skin, continuously transforming while transforming the place simultaneously. Transformation is always multidirectional; multidimensional.

Animal-Women folk tales, with all their layers, have also allowed me to re-think my performative practice – whether indoors, outdoors and also on the territory of screen; to explore its liminal potential to fluctuate "within and between the real and imaginary, told and silenced, seen and intuitive, understanding and not-understanding" (Niewadzisz, 2021, p. 304), visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, hidden and exposed, animate and inanimate and so much more. They made me see more clearly the material presence of the *force of Zoe* and the transformative potential of the atmosphere, this invisible body that is artistic (Chekhov, 2010) which like skin envelopes all the bodies of and within the space. They made me re-discover performative practice as translation, Jakobson's transmutation (2007), carried out by

all the *intérpretes*/translators, including the directors, performers, light designers, dramaturgs, translators and each and every spectator who are continuously translanguaging with-in the stories presented and their own. They helped me to embrace the performer's/performance body as a "mispronounced phrase"(Alba Rico, 2017). They allowed me to explore in and through artistic practice Haraway's String Figures (Haraway, 2016), Cronin's "gaps" (Cronin, 2019) that may make us sensitive to place, resilience and relatedness (Cronin, 2017, pp. 15-19), and Tawada's web of multiplicity of languages. To play with the idea of untranslatability while, with care and passion, exploring what lies beyond words; translating these loose threads, omitted spots, dusty corners and dark holes into a body, actions, emotions, sounds and therefore attending differently to not only human but also non-human others. They made me re-discover performative practice as a territory that goes beyond a geographical "belt" (Apter, 2006, p. 111); beyond linear temporality, in this case linguistic confines; a territory that can also "in certain circumstances and for certain animals, be linked as much to time as it is to space" (Despret, 2022, p. 17). A territory that is ahí, (t)here.



Figure 31. Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, Italy, 2023

At the beginning the idea to translate my performative explorations into an audiovisual mode came from the need to document my work as well as find ways to keep creating when public performances were prohibited during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, with time the videos became an essential part, as they were re-

introduced into live performances. These diverse modes not only promoted inclusivity, allowing me to "reach" and emotionally "touch" spectators who could not be present physically during my performative explorations, but also carry it across borders to disseminate in different environments and audiences (as can be seen from the list of outputs in the introduction).

Animal-Women folktales became lenses through which I was seeing, sensing and staying with the trouble as well as becoming a narrative layer for almost all my projects, including those not closely related to my thesis, such as performative reading of Sergio Blanco's *Cartografía de una desaparición. Panegírico a Joan Brossa/ Cartography of a Disappearance: Panegyric for Joan Brossa* where Dove Girl in a red coat and projections from Animal-Woman Journey intertwined with Earth Other elements formed a visual skin of the reading. Folktales and elements of the embodied methodology of this project became a framework for a research-led module for theatre students Pigeons and Performance which finished with a performance W*hen I think About Pigeons*…. Elements of the 'embodied methodology' explored in the chapter "Skin of Practice" were introduced in the classroom as a framework for creative writing and thinking workshops for language teachers, or to encourage translators to think differently about translating for the stage. The visual outputs allowed me to bring art into conference rooms; the visual into theatre space; embodied philosophy into classrooms; and posthuman concerns into theatre.

The methodology and outputs of this research have been presented to audiences from Theatre, Translation, Hispanic Studies, Theatre Research, Film Makers, Dancers, Researchers, Somatic and *Jinen Butoh* community as well as people from all walks of life through screenings, performances and online exhibitions in different countries. The very fact that it moves in-between borders of disciplines/languages shows that this fluidity is possible and may offer perspectives for audiences from diverse fields. It brings creativity, body and art into the conference and classrooms and research and philosophy to the artistic world, provoking a variety of cross-disciplinary discussions and proposing different points of view. And this is particularly relevant in current times, as, paraphrasing Rosi Braidotti's words, we are not all the same but "We" are in this together (Braidotti, 2012, p. 120). In the times of the Anthropocene, radical empathy and 'being in touch' is a must.



Figure 32. Karpaty, Carpathian Mountains, Poland, 2021

My PhD research of course presents only a few of the myriad ways in which these Animal-Women stories can be re-told. As seen, these "dispossessed" folk tales, because of their complexity and multiplicity of layers, can become a source of creativity and can be applied in a variety of fields; in both professional and personal journeys. As I was exploring all these practices and readings to re-tell these Animal-Woman stories, they actually became for me a skin to look at the world differently. In other words, this research and practice transformed, changing my ways of seeing the world, to not just see trouble but also wonder. Animal-Women were there with me whispering to me in diverse languages through breath, wind, grass, and pine trees but also through burning asphalt and excrements, and overfilled bins in the city spaces. When I looked at the surroundings with Animal-Woman eyes, listened to the stories through their ears, nose and was in touch through her skin I perceived the complexity of these places, their liveliness and trouble. They asked me to stop sometimes and let them slip for a moment under my skin and just be (t)here. Or maybe it was me who was asking them to allow me to perceive the world through theirs.



Figure 33. Celtic Sea, Ireland, 2023

The documentation of these moments and the journey gave birth to an overarching "Animal-Woman Journey" project, which consisted of a journal, containing academic, creative and performative writings, and extensive photographic and video documentation. This "Animal-Woman Journey" became a leitmotif of my thesis. It feels appropriate, then, that to conclude my thesis I offer a piece of creative writing which presents an overview—a kind of vade mecum—of my research, bringing together the different motifs, inspirations and reflections that were my companions on this multilayered, border-crossing journey. The piece is organised according to a playful decomposition of the word *skinning*, and the creation of new words such as s-keening, which refers to tradition of keening as lamenting, wailing and mourning, and s-kinning, as a way to engage with a kin through the skin as a counterpoint to it. In the end, for a pidgining foreigner like myself these words all sound the same.

ANIMAL-WOMAN JOURNEY



Figure 34. Venezia, Italy, 2022

From the beginning of my project, Animal-Women personae have been continuously accompanying me throughout my research and life journey. I carry them with me when I have a walk in the city, on the shore and when I cross continents and fly over the ocean. I meet them on the streets, in the news, hidden in woods, apartments and corners of micro or macro worlds; inner and outer words. They became companions not only of my outer but also my inner journeys, integrating as some of my selves. Or perhaps they were there long before. I can just see them more clearly now.

Ever since a workshop on "Unhomely places: refuge and hospitality in contested spaces" in March 2019, the red emergency raincoat became one of their temporary skins, but then from my trip to trace wolves in Poland onwards, I began to record videos and images of a figure in a red coat sitting in the landscape. It started with the red figure sitting waiting in the snow; red like a stain of blood. Since then I have seen her everywhere, always in a red emergency raincoat. She became an embodiment of my seeing and staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016): the trouble that once seen, cannot be unseen. The trouble started to accompany me. I saw them

everywhere, and even in the most beautiful landscape they were accompanying me. So I carried my red coat with me almost every time I was going to a new place.

Like the Kin contained in Letters/Postcards to K., Animal-Women were accompanying me through different places and times, pandemic and post pandemic: on the shores of the Mediterranean and Baltic seas, flying with me over The English Channel/La Manche and the Atlantic; walking through Montana's and the Carpathian Mountains and crossing bridges of Cork, Missoula, Venezia, Milan, Malaga, Naples, Kamien Pomorski, Krakow, Tuscania and many others. Being within and passing over so many tombs. Capturing and collecting images as stories; places that were always there but seeing them as for the first time; merging with images that are in me; so new and so familiar at the same time. Rediscovering other cartographies through mine. And vice versa. Each of them becoming a land for Animal-Women.



Figure 35. Dziwnów, Baltic Sea, Poland, 2023

S-Keening

Animal-Woman searches for her skin. And for the place called Terrapolis she heard about; an "n-dimensional niche space for multispecies becoming with" (Haraway, 2016, p. 11)—she learned by heart—inhabited by all the "critters". She escapes houses, flats, palaces, mills, zoos, brothels and wars. She walks through wastelands, deserts, cities, villages; through seas, rivers and meadows; through malls, operas and squats. She sees and feels zoos, where seals swim in circles in tiny ponds and wolves hide themselves from being seen. She searches and researches the land. She checks every mailbox, looks under the stones, behind the curtains, in the pigeonholes. She misses her scales in the sea, her fur in the forests, her feathers in the air. She loses her skin on shores that are losing their skins, on the disappearing barks of deforested trees. The soles on her feet cry blood; her soul drops tears when she finds carcasses of she-wolves on overheated asphalt. Tears come again and again: when she finds dove girls drowned in fountains and pigeon girls sleeping in dodgy corners; mermaids that drown in the seas; selkies asphyxiated in fishing nets; swan women lying under balconies. In Barcelona, Montana, Puglia, Gorzanów. Berlin, London, Caracas, Buenos Aires, and all these cities, houses, flats, palaces, mills, zoos, brothels of the human land. She walks through. She walks and keens. She crosses Gaza, Bucha, Amhara, Essequibo and other liminal zones. Zones in war, zones where translation failed. Her skin keens. She enters polluted rivers and seas, melting glaciers, industrial farms, the Amazon forest. And she weeps. She s-keens.

She has no place to go. So she wanders and searches; wanders and wonders. Is her skin her own or not? Is she her kin, or "the Other"? She wonders if she can be re-embodied through embodied imagination, embraced as a shelter, a map of memory, her life trace? And so she imagines that skin is appreciated as a wonder, cherished because of *her/their* beauty and diversity. And she imagines that we/ she is a human now, looking at skin as kin. Stop looking at the skin and start looking from the skin. Look at kin from the s-kin? Cartesian reason holds that "I think, therefore I am". Eye am. How about "I sense, touch, perceive, therefore I am. Skin am". Animals that have been deprived of consciousness through human exceptionalism: are they or are they not? Maybe not, because they cannot say *eye am*. Maybe yes, because they sense,

touch, perceive. Maybe because they *skin are*. Like she was. Like we all once were. Are. Will be?



Figure 36. Lagastrello, Italy, 2023

Escaping in hurry she took what she had at hand. An emergency raincoat. A temporary skin. She can be any body, every-body, no body, somebody and anybody else. She could also be any "One" taken for the "Other". She could be from anywhere and everywhere. Any and every (t)here. She could also be no body. What is underneath? She can be of any and no colour, gender, species, label. Any skin. Any noun, any verb. No foot, no fingerprints, no trace. No body, no crime.

She is a gerund in her process; still, yet a moving image. Skin of film happening within time and place. Not captured by a still. Yet.

She is a moment that is only in this very moment. Outdated while happening. Movement that changes continuously, yet not linearly. Multidirectional. Liminal time. Inexistent before and after. Time without time. Just presence. In (a) being that is in continuous transformation. When captured in a still it is suspended. Trapped in stillness forever. Like a suspended in-breath. Like a change of direction. Like the fear that we feel when about to fall. Moment of life.

We need an image to capture the intangible in form, in a noun, in a still. So we can analyse, compare, name and find relation. It takes time. The brain is slower than the skin.

Moving images are stills in motion. And/Or vice versa. They capture and express. Take in, digest and expel. Breathe in and breathe out the subjects, colours, nouns, compositions. When in motion they can convey even more. Movement(s), atmosphere(s), transformation(s) in the body; of the sea; of a tree moved by the air; gentle strokes of the grass; clouds passing by, drops of rain, melting ice. And unexpected accidents: unexpected, unpredictable, *imprevisible*. Filming takes more time. It's not a quick snapshot, eating mountains and museums (Alba Rico, 2017). It is staying there with them. Maybe not too long. But sometimes it requires a wait.

The eye wants to know what is hidden there. Under the red. To read. *It*.

Is she waiting there? A transitioning woman in her state of transit. Can transition be a state?

Can waiting be an escape? Escaping the capture of the soldier, a hunter, a lad, a fisherman, a man; all of them armed, with a rifle, a gun, a pistol, spear or knife able to pierce, prick, stab, needle, jab, dart or cut the skin. To traverse her skin. Pass over her boundary. Encage, enmesh, put her/their liminality in shackles.

What is her name? Who is her hunter? What is her mill? Who will bring her back the kidnapped skin?

Can she even be seen when the eye of the One cannot see the Other's eye? Can you see her? Can you see me?

An avoided mirror of society. Like Angelica Festa's mirror faces (Phelan, 1993)

(T)here is no face but a mirroring back. A reflection of those who turn their face to the other side. Who cross the street, look the other way, escape into screens, hide behind the walls. And comment.

Although not seen, she is (t)here. Although not looking into the eye, “the artist is present”. Not seen, yet present. Seen but not seen.

The back that can hide (and protect) the breath and a heart, kidneys, face, intestines. Hiding, wrapping, embracing.

So vulnerable to attack.

Yet, you never know what lies beneath. Underneath the coat.

Maybe Valkiria, maybe Lilith, maybe Baba Jaga, maybe a Witch, maybe la Zorra, maybe a Bitch. Maybe Mary—whether the holy virgin or Magdalena? Maybe She-Wolf? Or Red Riding Hood? Maybe a woman who has her fist ready to punch you in the face. Maybe. There is no face.

Maybe she’s preparing to push back.

Maybe she’s an embryo in a warm spot.

Maybe she’s warming her hand close to the core.

Maybe just hugging, caressing her skin.

And maybe she’s a lonely character from a Hopper canvas

Or Abakanowicz’s ‘Back’ figure’

Maybe she’s this Lady in Red who travels through the world taking pictures in a red dress with an open back! She’s glamorous, fun and enjoys her life!

Maybe she’s the one who found her skin?!

Maybe just a mushroom.



Figure 37. Lago Paduli, Italy, 2023

"Rückenfigur, German for "figure from the back," is a compositional device in painting originally used to convey the sense of longing, emotional isolation, and existential restlessness characteristic of the Romantic movement" (Thipphawong, 2020)

"bridge for the viewer" (*ibidem)*

"the threshold where the scene opens up, but at the point of exclusion, where the world stands complete without me." *(ibidem*)

A thing.

Maybe just a figure.

Maybe just *Ibidem.*

What is your projection? What's your fantasy?

That's creepy, someone said.

Uncanny? As it slips away from the eye?

Monstrous?

So there she/they are.

Waiting.

Maybe on the run, maybe on human land, maybe near their home.

In transition

longing, missing, nostalgically looking back into the lost life

forests, seas, rivers, sky(s)

maybe art?

Maybe just

maybe she just sits before going home to postpone the moment to enjoy

the smell of the sea womb;

green grass

skin tickling the skin, rain moistening the hair

or fur or feathers or scales

or nails or hoofs or claws

just maybe

longing for freedom, freedom of choice, movement and transition; external and internal freedom

Maybe dialoguing with the oppressor that is bigger than just one man that captured them;

asking the 'saviour' asking "to look back and think again"

asking him to "give them back their dress"

or skin "wrap them up"

Or maybe just contemplating the poetry of the landscape.

Watching a Tarkovsky movie live.

Or humming a lullaby

Or recalling how lovely it was dancing in human form. And smiling. It was worth it.

Or maybe not. Maybe waiting is the worst. Waiting when you still have the opportunity to leave. To not be trapped in a moving vehicle. Trapped in waiting. Suspended in the moment. On standby when the world is moving. Captured in an image.

Breath of running can also be a breath of waiting.

Waiting gerunds. Always in action, always in process.

Yet, thingified

Maybe

What is your fantasy?

In cities, in forests, shores, mountains and caves. I can see you. I see you. I see you everywhere.

Once seen she cannot be unseen.

Do you see?

To satisfy your curiosity you need to come closer. Closer. Lower. A bit lower to look in my eyes. Touch my kin from your skin. Lean forward a bit so you can hear. Are you brave enough?

You don't know?

So wait. Wait for me to turn. Wait with me for the world to turn.

Waiting is acting. Waiting is living, breathing, digesting, listening, checking. Fidgeting the toes. Feeling the ground. And air. Living, breathing, digesting, listening, transforming

Living, breathing, digesting, transmuting

Dissolving

Living, breathing

Breathing

dissolving

disappearing

dis-

appearing



Figure 38. Dziwnów, Baltic Sea, Poland, 2022

On her way she also encounters those who invite her for dinner and do not want anything in return. Activists searching for She-Wolves in the woods; hunters that help her to search for her skin, neighbours that hear and care, soldiers that look the other way, when she crosses the border; men that walk with her so she is safe, just in case; families that invite her to stay for a night or two; and those with whom she wanders. Wandering and wondering, what if…

In some cities she encounters thousands of tiny human ice sculptures. She smiles and waits with them, dissolves with them; dissolves into this material yet ephemeral human existence and inter-dependency with what is not human. And then she becomes her tears.

She dances with Annette Arlander and with her trees and plants.

She comes back and dates this one tree.

And looks at photographs that show the relationality of human bodies and Earth-Others.

And those of Mónica Carvalho. And she smiles, and she checks. And it's true.

And on the meadow where wild horses graze, she sees people dancing. And she joins them to see if they have seen her skin.

And she crosses beautiful places created by humans. And beautiful places that created themselves. And she enters museums, but not to "consume" them, as Albo Rico said, but to stay for a moment with the Absolute.

The white cubes of the galleries, and black theatre boxes.

And she climbs Mt. Jumbo with bear spray.

And she smokes with Mr. Jumbo every morning in the snow.

And she finds places where people meditate in silence. She sits with them to be. Be with

And she visits the same place every week. To sit. With-in. Skin with-in. Breathe within a place. Breathe out. Deeply listening to them. She refuses to call the place *it*. She decides to stay with *them*, working the pronoun until she imagines a better one for a dictionary of Terrapolis.



Figure 39. Alboran Sea, Malaga, Spain, 2022

And she thinks about Leonora Carrington when she was in a mental Hospital in Santander.

And she wonders if she was feeling what she is feeling, that sometimes the boundaries between what is her and what is not are very blurred

And sometimes she just sits and waits.

And she recalls a pigeon who hit her in the head in daylight in a city centre

And the one that almost did yesterday

And she walks into the churches to meet the Absolute. In silence.

And then she thinks that any thought can be a Pandora's Box

And that she pronounces weaving like waving but in the end they have the same wavy movement pattern.

And she cries for pigs that turn into pork and cows that become beef and sheep that become mutton.

And for Avovang who "let himself be born in the shape of every beast on earth" (Rasmussen & Worster, 1921, p. 101)

And Big-Raven, the first man and an organizer of the Universe, who could transform himself into a raven by putting on a raven coat (Jochelson, 1904, p. 416)

Lucky them

And about Frida with her 'Broken Column'

And the woman from the West Indian folk tale *Black Ice* who was leaving her skin to enjoy the night and slipping back into it in the morning to carry out her duties as a wife. And whose husband, following the advice of an old woman from the village, rubbed her empty skin with salt so the skin wouldn't yield, and she became trapped in a state of betweenness.

And she allows a projected river to materialise on her skin, because it makes her lymph flow faster.

And she wonders, maybe for too long, if she could be Kassandra.

And that her thoughts are sperm-like frenetic and that sometimes she would like them to be more like an egg.

And sometimes she just sits to wait.

And while she is waiting she is doing her small dance

And she encounters humans from La Selva. And she heals trees with them, and the ruins of ancient and contemporary cities; and she eats with them, and dances, and laughs so much.

In symbiosis.

And together they wonder. They wonder how *Terrapolis* might be.

And she goes to a liminal place of theatre.

And dances with Damien Jalet immersed in the mass of bodies that do not seem to know if they are human or animal. Is she becoming an animal again, at least just for a little while?



Figure 40. Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, Italy, 2023

And while waiting she knows that her skin is moving, cells are breathing, heart is beating so she needs no music

And she watches the fields like Tarkovsky's films

And immerses herself in Kieslowski's colours

And look into the eyes of Marina Abramovic.

And cries when Ulay comes.

And tries on one of Amanda Coogan's dresses.

And dives into Dorothy Cross's Worm Hole. Or is it a Warm Hole?

And she talks to her skin like to her animal. In Spanish. Con cariño.

And she wonders if Lilith is a lie.

And whether she cares.

And she looks at geological Earth layers and touches her skin and knows that the Anthropocene is a disease of the Epidermis.

And she presents Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens *Blue Wedding to the Sea* in Venice, knowing that Venice has a long tradition of marrying the sea, *Sposalizio del Mar*e, as a symbol of their maritime dominion.

And then she admits that she didn't know it. That she found it on Wikipedia.

And wonders if transformation hurts

And remembers that it does very much

And she wonders if joy can be a form of resistance.

And lightness.

And blushing she remembers the tree she was dating. And that it's a pity that Fitzgerald Park was closed at night.

And she remembers that she left the barbed wire unrolled in a mill and now the owner doesn't know what to do with it.

And she realises that her left axilla smells worse than the right one.

And wonders if it’s true what Viking said that if we formulate questions the mind will do everything to find the answer



Figure 41. Museo de Picasso, Malaga, Spain, 2023

Where is my skin? How far away is Terrapolis from here?

And sometimes she just sits to wait.

And be.

Was were will. Has been

Lichen-like

Or mushroom

And she walks and she contemplates

That she is very coherent in her incoherence

Like memory

Or her selves speaking one over another



Figure 42. St. Matthews Templebreedy Church and Graveyard, Kilcolta, Ireland, 2023

And then she walks.

And she thinks that maybe it is just question of time when self-translation, translanguaging and multilingualism, of any kind, will enter into an 'official dictionary'. Maybe an official dictionary of Terrapolis?

And then she drinks gin & tonic with Rosi.

And dances on the Californian beach with Donna.

And picks mushrooms with Ana.

And swims in the sea with Peggy.

And then she wanders again.

And sometimes, for brief moments she may even sense that maybe, just maybe, she found a bit of her animal skin in her human skin.



Figure 43. Basilica di San Pietro, Tuscania, VT, Italy, 2023

And then she realises that she's being joined by Colometa, Eleonora, Eva S., Nisha, Frida, Eva V and Lilith, Gul, Nargis, Kassandra, Mariam, Hajera, Holy Mary and Maria Magdalena and so many other Seal, Buffalo, She-Wolf, Swan, Selkie, Mermaids, Dove and Pigeons women, girls, maidens, grand- mothers, daughters.

And so they drink

And eat

And dance

And pick mushrooms

And swim

Together

And so they talk, and reflect that, actually, posthuman concerns have a long legacy in this human world. And they just need to be recovered, translated and reimagined in this crisis of the Anthropocene.

And so they imagine that Terrapolis is not that far away

And they imagine that it is just (t)here

And that it always

has

will being

past, present and future continuous



Figure 44. Venezia, Italy, 2022

APPENDIX I

Little Mermaid

Since “The Little Mermaid” tale came to me on the shore, she has stayed with me reminding me of her presence every time I was thinking about the shore. In November 2021 I was participating in student workshops to create new artwork for the UCC Art Collection at the Glucksman Art Gallery with dancer Imma Pavon. At one point, we were playing with clay, creating pieces that were coming from the body. My piece was titled *Anxiety*: this lack of breath, feeling of continuous danger, nervous system in continuous Flight or Fight mode; the hyperventilation when struggling to breathe. At some point, I placed it on the painted blue table, and this sculpture became something else. On this sea-like blue background, these entangled hands and bodies were in actual danger, reaching for help, grasping the air.

It also took me to document a struggle with the power of waves immersed in the rough Mediterranean sea, previously gently luring me in, now dragging me more and more into its depths. Following this Little Mermaid Spectrum, I also joined fishermen, in this case not in the sea but on a bay located in my native town Kamień Pomorski. Individual Fishermen who also suffer anxiety of asphyxiating waters, economically and morally, as their lives are intrinsically connected to them, as they select the fish that are jumping and gasping for air.

We are all bodies of water… and yet, “breathing together rarely means breathing the same”.

Sub-Collection 2. THE LITTLE MERMAID

The Foam/La Schiuma (1st iteration video-piece 3:35 min.)

The Foam/La Schiuma (Breathlessness) (2nd iteration video-piece 3:33 min.)

ANXIETY

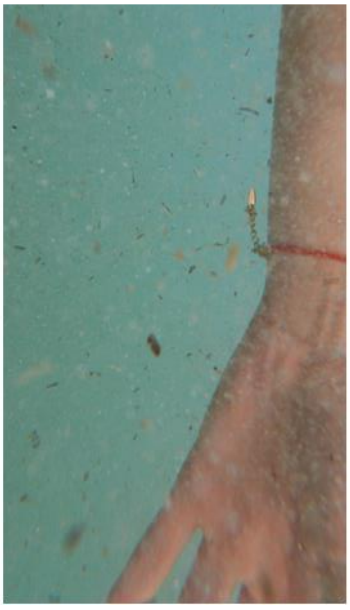


BREATHLESSNESS











APPENDIX II

She-Wolf Project

This Appendix proposes more detailed description and reflection on the process of researching Skin and She-Wolf folktale through practice informed by the ideas contained in the chapter 3, as well as its documentation which became also an output of this research.

Audiovisual pieces are presented in the Portfolio. 3. *She-Wolf* Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection: She-Wolf and consist of:

- video *She-Wolf Skin* (a part of online exposition *How to become a Posthuman*[42]*; screened in* Roxy Cinema in Missoula, MT (2022) at the Feminist Research Working Group within the International Federation for Theatre Research Conference: Shifting Centres: In the Middle of Nowhere in Reykjavik, Iceland (2022) and at the Interdisciplinary Research Symposium: Uncharted Territories. Contemporary Ecopoetics in/and Translation, (2024))

She-Wolf Skin

- a performative and participatory installation *She-Wolf* that was showed to the audience in May 2022 in Missoula, MT,

She-Wolf Performance & Installation

- *Triptych Cold* with a soundscape of *She-Wolf Lullaby* that explore the materiality of snow and cold

Triptych Cold. She-Wolf Lullaby

Below there is also a script *Cold.War,* as a different way of presenting this research on screen and photo documentation of the process.

[42] Digital exposition *How to Become a Posthuman* took place from the 11th of June, 2022 until the 23 of November, 2024 https://www.fabulationforfuture.net/exhibition/

-

She-Wolf Skin

"My imperative to help did not appear on the mind level, it is on the body level," said one of the activists looking for migrants on the Polish and Belarusian border (Szczęśniak, 2021). I, too, explored this subject, this "trouble", not only through my empathy and feelings, but also by exposing myself to bodily experiences and then transmuting them into a video and performance. Walking like La Loba and searching for the traces of the dispossessed (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013).

I searched for she-wolves in the Polish Carpathian Mountains. Not to find them but to immerse myself in their environment and learn about them; to follow their traces that were melting with the snow: so material, yet so ephemeral at the same time—just like performance. I am not naked, as I have a pair of new shoes and heavy jacket, yet I am vulnerable on this territory whose map I do not understand and on which I would not make it into the morning without my experienced guide. And I listen to the space. And breathe its air. And I fall on the snow. And I get cold. And I imagine all the Others inhabiting this space looking at me, a host in their home. Allowing them "to look at me" (Derrida & Wills, 2002). The camera on my phone walks with me.

My camera accompanies me when I walk on snow barefoot in my backyard in Missoula, when Russia invades Ukraine; and when, on my way to the supermarket, I stop and look over melting Clark Fork River or when I fall in the snow on the Lolo Pass, where Montana and Idaho meet. It walks with me, sits with me, shakes with me and breathes with me, catching up with my steps, and my eyes. Through the skin of the film/image it contemplates with me the beauty of the view while my skin is getting red from the cold. Sometimes not being able to grasp what I see and perceive; sometimes seeing much more. Seen from very close, snow, water, skin become something different, familiar yet un-familiar. Even barbed wire may give aesthetic pleasure. Even a beautiful landscape can be dangerous. And this beautiful landscape is in danger. Material yet ephemeral like melting icebergs, disappearing forests, washed-out species, and other humans who, together with their politicians, melt. Just like in the installation "Follow the leaders" or little Nelo Acevedo figures. And I think about these bodies trapped between the snow and barbed wire and all these politicians and media narratives around them. I am ahí, not here, not there; (t)here.

Tracing Wolves









Collage Tracing Wolves presents some of the frames from the video-documentation of tracing wolves in Polish mountains. Some of those videos were introduced in the *She-Wolf Skin* piece and some, together with others were projected on the wall during the performance She-Wolf.

And so I unroll the barbed wire, place myself behind it and wait; like a She-Wolf in the mill; like she-wolves on the border. I smell this place embraced in its currents. I touch the wooden walls and, impregnated in them remains of the flour, make my hands white (or rather "even whiter", I should say). I try to be gentle with the wire but it leaves red scratches on my skin anyway. My arms and legs become a collage of red and white (Documentation In the Appendix B She-Wolf). Alba Rico said that boredom, hunger and illness make us relapse into the body. The people from the border relapse into their skins very quickly. I relapse into my skin just for short moments.

I also spent time with snow, listening to its sound and to the other sounds surrounding me. The sounds of the forest, of the mill, wire, airports and also to this new vast space of US land, that attracted me from the first moment I set my foot on Montana's snow. I make collages of the image-places I encountered, and record sounds of the snow, of the river, of lullabies of the women I live with. I write scripts about the she-wolf, and make performative actions.

And so I write and re-write the story of the She-Wolf but in this writing I cannot free myself from the rhythmic repetitive sound of the wheel mill. This "once upon a time" is also ahí, here and there, now and then; it happens all over again like the mill's wheel to which She-Wolf skin is nailed and which is powered by the water of centuries and millennia of patriarchal violence. "Once upon a time" are these dispossessed stories, often passed down verbally, and bodily; too incredible to be believed. These howls that become disembodied, turned into numbers, data, news. These howls of pain that come from the body that dreams about this warm home, but finds nothing but cold—"I cannot wrap myself in dreams" (*She-Wolf Skin*). The howl that it is echoing through the mountains, forests, fields and borders but gets lost in the embodied noise of words spilling out of screens, ideas, political fights; mouths selling products, commodities, aims and objectives; barking cars, helicopters, claws, dogs and gunshots.

So many disembodied howls are getting lost in the embodied noise. Noise, so much noise in which the howls are lost.

And then I go back again to the skin, this matter that feels and yearns and shakes; and I think about the skin of the Other that is dispossessed from happiness, joy, history, desire and becomes another number, another carcass, another Other lost somewhere on the border. And I embrace this skin through my skin, and caress it, and breathe with it, and whisper to it some poetic stories. Beautiful stories, and terrible stories which cannot be shown, which are escaping the linearity of the time, or specificity of place. “Once upon a time” is happening (t)here.



So I re-write visually the *She-Wolf Skin*, choosing carefully from dozens of hours of videos. I choose with my body, weaving all these experiences and creating something different that wasn't there before (Haraway, 2016). I intertwine the noise with the silence, the intensity of the images with the black screen, and breath with a text. It is not only what, but also how. How to expose yet not repeat the narratives; how to show their ubiquity across languages; how to play with the spectator's understanding and not understanding. How to re-tell this horror that surpasses my imagination; how to invite spectators to listen without shouting at them; how to invite them to lean in and come closer: to feel this cold, these she-wolf skins as if they were their own. How to awake in them this bodily empathy. I explore these questions through juxtaposing images, some of real beauty, like the images of the flowing river; yet when juxtaposed with the body, or wire, they bring other associations. There is no art without a transformation: the a- linearity that contains all the alphabet in the a b c (Bogart & Winer, 2004), the repetitiveness of the mill to which the she-wolf-skin is nailed. With noise and silences. And also with the black spots. Like blinking just for a second, and taking a rest, and digesting and breathing and checking what stayed under the eyelids. Yet not for long -- when one thinks it is already finished, it starts, over and over again. Poetry lies in the gaps.

The *She-Wolf Skin* was originally created for the digital exhibition How to Become a Posthuman, but I had the opportunity to present it earlier to the audience in Missoula, MT in the Roxy Cinema (on the 5th of May, 2022). The reception of the video by the audience was very favourable. When talking further on with some of the professors I mentioned that the volume of the video was a bit too low, they told me that this potential "error" resulted to be an advantage, as from the first breath in the film the audience "leaned into" the screen and "held their breath" .

Barbed Wire











She-Wolf Performance

The day after the first showing of the video in the Roxy Cinema on the 5th of May, 2022, I presented a site specific performative installation "She-Wolf" at the University of Montana within the showing on Digital media module. In the space, there were three installations, including mine, and the audience was moving from one to another. "She-Wolf" opened the showing.

I used one of the corners of what was previously a university gym, where separate yet open space was available, and the open space next to it in order to create different atmospheres—outside and inside. When the audience entered they encountered a She-Wolf/Figure in red (myself) standing in a triangle delimited by a red and white tape that suggested the border, with her feet buried in pieces of paper inscribed with common sentences about wolves, skin, but also words and sentences extracted from online commentary about the immigrants on the Polish border. She stands in a quite vast and empty space under the spotlight, stuck in this paper snowdrift. Next to her, delimiting the space, there is a big TV set with instructions for the audience on screen, entitled "The Game – She Wolf". Is it a game, or is she a game they follow? It invites the audience to take a handful of papers, read out loud and write on her skin/coat what they just voiced. At the same time, the TV emits recordings of sentences about skin and wolves read by different people in different languages, such as English, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Polish. The idea of intermingling these sentences and languages, as in the *She-Wolf Skin* video was first, to show their pervasiveness, but also to show the relationality between narratives around wolves and migrants. Wolves and the Others that became the game.

On the two walls, two separate arrays of videos were projected. On one wall there were videos of Missoula's river carrying melting ice. On the other—with a window that leads to a 'homely space'—videos from "Tracing the wolves": carcasses, looking for threads, forest, snow. To get to the small 'homely' place spectators had to cross between the projectors and the walls, meaning that for moments they were becoming a part of the images. The images were moving on their skins and clothes, and their shadows marked out black shapes on the projected images: negative space. In this way, on the one hand spectators were animating these projections, making them 3D in the space; on the other, they were creating new ones on the wall. This moment

of crossing usually produced in them a moment of doubt or confusion as to whether they should enter 'the piece' or not. This feeling of spectator uncertainty and slight discomfort was intentional. Under the lights of the projectors they were at the same time more visible for others, who at the same time could see these images dancing on their skin, which provided a way of reminding everyone about the material and intra-actioning connection of human and environment. The projections also helped me to bring the outside environment into the room, bring a flavour of the cold, and thus underlining the un-homeliness of this big empty space.

The small space was filled with things: sofa, armchairs, old tv set, bookshelves, mirrors and other furniture, arranged to resemble a homely space that contrasts with the big empty one. At the entrance, my recorded voice, "Welcome, make yourself at home", was inviting people to come in, referring also to the idea of (Polish) hospitality of which most of the Poles are so proud of. On a small old TV set the *She-Wolf Skin* video was projected, inviting spectators to gather around the tv and give company to the plastic mannequin placed there. Above the tv there was a window through which a red figure standing "outside" was clearly visible. Meanwhile, on one of the walls of this 'home' a wire fence was projected, progressively becoming more and more dense, and giving the impression of enclosing them in that space. As I mentioned before, a barbed wire fence is a liminal matter.

These places that were re-presenting outside and inside, public and private, outdoor and indoor, warm and cold, hospitality but also hostility, the double side of the barbed wire fence and the duality of the word "host", were continuously intermingling through projections of the wire that were "escaping" from the walls of the house to the ceiling of the "outdoor" space through the window. They were continuously intermingling through the sounds that were coming from both spaces, and through mirroring between the figure in a red coat that was standing outside and inside, and that was part of the *She-Wolf Skin* video, together with images of river and snow, presented in small scale in the film and on the walls. And, of course, through the bodies of the spectators. Thus, this artificially created, imaginary yet material space of the installation/performance became a representation of the political situation that is happening in Poland, and also an extension of what is in the film/video. Not re-enactment, but re-presentation and extension with the spectators that became an intrinsic part of it, simultaneously creating and filling the gaps.











Towards the end, the figure in red takes off her coat and hat, walks to the switch, and turns it on and off, off and on, a couple of times. The aim is on one hand to underline that this is a performative representation of the situation, that I am a performer who is creating this, and not pretending to be "the Other". On the other hand, it is intended to take spectators from the illusion of atmosphere' and performance, reminding them that this is a reality, that whether they close their eyes or not, the She-Wolf story is happening.

As I was told by the adjunct professor Tobin Addington, who watched the *She-Wolf Skin* video in the cinema and took part in the performance, these two forms of presenting the video give him a completely different experience. When he watched it on the big screen, it was visually appealing and gave him a set of visual, sensorial and emotional experiences. When he watched it within the atmosphere of this "home" with the sounds around and surrounded by walls of wire, and all the other elements, it affected him bodily in a different way, giving the sensation of being more and more trapped. In the end, this performance was presented a few weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine, which became worldwide top news for months. Almost no one knew what was happening on the Polish and Belarusian border, that is, this particular border between the EU and non-EU.

COLD.WAR

This is a script of the short film inspired by the migrant crisis on the Polish and Belarusian border and She-Wolf folktale as a different form of reimagining these stories for screen. The script was written in April/May 2022 within the Screenwriting module at the University of Montana in which I participated as a listener.

COLD.WAR

Roksana Niewadzisz

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FADE IN

EXTERIOR. MEADOW IN THE WOODS. DAY.

LEILA'S POV: Blue sky with sparse clouds passing. A cloud of steam slowly comes out of her mouth when she breathes.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK

(O.S.) Agitated wolf breathing. In the distance, dogs barking and men shouting indistinctly in Polish.

EXTERIOR. WOODS. NIGHT.

SHE-WOLF's POV: Snowy woods. Following other WOLVES. They stop, perk their ears up and sniff the air. Path on the right. Bushes on the left. Noise of men and dogs is becoming louder. They turn to the left. She follows.

CUT TO BLACK

DISSOLVE TO:

EXTERIOR. WOODS. DAY.

LEILA'S POV: Cloudy sky. White petals of snow are landing gently on her eyelashes.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK

INTERIOR. KITCHEN. MORNING.

LEILA (26, wears a colourful tunic) hurriedly packs a sandwich and a Tupperware with grapes into a pink school backpack. She drinks the rest of her coffee over the sink, waters her cup and leaves it there.

LEILA

Mara, come here honey. We’re already late!

INTERIOR. CORRIDOR. DAY.

LEILA leaves Mara's backpack next to the door and puts her leather sandals on. She puts on a green headscarf.

LEILA

Mara! I count to three! One. Two…

MARA (5) is running down the stairs. Her nails and toes are all scribbled with red marker.

LEILA

Really?! (tries to sound angry but she can't keep herself form smiling)

CUT TO BLACK.

(O.S) After a bit, loud men's shouts and dogs' barking.

EXTERIOR. BUSHES. DAWN.

SHE-WOLF'S POV: Leaves and branches. WOLVES' fur. Agitated breathing. Bristling and snarling.

CUT TO BLACK

DISSOLVE TO:

EXTERIOR. MEADOW IN THE WOODS. DAY.

LEILA'S POV: Snow falling intensely on her face. She moves her head to the right and to the left trying to figure out where she is. She moves her stiff fingers immersed in the snow. She tries to push herself up. She moans.

CUT TO BLACK

INTERIOR. BEDROOM. EARLY MORNING.

Subtle light enters through the curtains. LEILA lies in bed caressing her round belly. She's smiling. AMIR rolls over to her side. Half-awake he kisses her in the arm. He moves his hand slowly towards her breast. LEILA takes it and puts it on her belly. AMIR approaches his lips to her belly.

AMIR

Party pooper...

LEILA spanks his head gently. They laugh.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXTERIOR. BUSHES. DAWN.

SHE-WOLF'S POV: Dogs burst into the bushes. Aggressive fight between dogs and wolves.

Men in uniforms surrounding the bushes. A whining wolf PUP trying to get out of this turmoil.

SHE-WOLF picks up the PUP and runs like a shot out of the bushes.

(O.S.) Gunshots.

CUT TO BLACK

(O.S.) WOLVES' whining.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXTERIOR. MEADOW IN THE WOODS. DAY.

LEILA'S POV: Opens her eyes. She rolls to the side with an effort. She spits out some bile. She touches her belly. She clumsily scoops up a bit of snow into her mouth. The flavour gives her nausea. She looks at her hand. White and red snow on it. She starts to breathe agitatedly. She pushes herself from the ground and sees a stain of blood under her lower body. Breathing intensifies. Panic grows. She is about to scream....

EXTERIOR. MEADOW IN THE WOODS. DAY

(O.S.) WOLF'S long howl in the distance.

Wide overshot of the meadow in the woods with LEILA (in winter garment) on a stain of blood surrounded by some unidentifiable from above objects.

CUT TO BLACK

EXTERIOR. MEADOW IN THE WOODS. DAY.

The WOLF PUP rummages in a pink school backpack. SHE-WOLF sniffs some clothes, an empty crackers box and water bottles scattered around. She sniffs LEILA'S face. LEILA opens her eyes and instinctively moves back. SHE-WOLF jumps away and growls. PUP follows SHE-WOLF entangled into a green headscarf dragging it together with a pink backpack. LEILA reaches for a backpack.

SHE-WOLF makes a few steps forward growling. LEILA instinctively takes her hand back but after a bit she emits an outrageous scream. SHE- WOLF distances herself and PUP runs after her leaving the headscarf and the backpack behind. LEILA decisively crawls towards the backpack.

FADE OUT

Borders

She-Wolf was also accompanying me during the *Jinen Butoh* Summer School in 2022. At the end of the residency each member is expected to prepare their dance as an offering, a ritual, in a selected area of the Forest. Although everyone is working on their individual piece, usually around 5 people share their performances simultaneously, accompanied by the live music by Hiroko Komyia and Tomo. My performance—ritual, offering—was dedicated to all She-Wolves that try to cross forests and borders. It was born from and embedded in the particular place of the forest were there long and heavy tree branches were delimiting the space, rather than from any planned idea. She-Wolf in her red emergency coat appeared from the depth of the forest lured by music and dancing people. To join them she climbed the hill and tried to cross a heavy branch-border made, but she got stuck underneath. Fuelled by the desire to become a part of this community, strength and resistance of her body she managed to pick up the branch, and stumbling under its weight she continued her walk with the branch on her shoulders. With this heavy cross-like border on her arms she started to dance. Amazed and delighted by people and the music, she wanted to come even closer, to be with them, to touch them, to look them in the eyes but she got stuck in between the trees. Despite all her effort and resistance, the border became too wide for her to pass. So, at the end, She-Wolf came back to the forest.








APPENDIX III

The Dove Girl

EMBODIED EXPLORATIONS

This part of Appendix presents more detailed process of embodied explorations of "The Dove Girl" folk tale during my stays in Tuscania, Italy during SME training, during *Jinen Butoh* Schools and Eco-residency La Selva, visiting cites and a dovecote, home and studio practices. It culminates with a multimedia performative installation *Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl Journey* presented to the audience in the Granary Theatre studio on the 23rd of February, 2024.

Sub-Collection 4. THE DOVE GIRL

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Trailer (curated video-documentation: 6:18 min.)

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Footage from the performance (video-documentation 1:33:33)

Performance consisted of variety elements and projections, that are also contained in the Portfolio of Practice. Sub-Collection. The Dove Girl. such as:

The Dove-Pigeon Girl	(video-piece/projection 15:46 min)
Feathers	(video-piece/projection 11:14 min)
Confession(s)	(video-piece/projection 05:11 min.)
Dove Girl's Journey	(video-piece/projection 26:17 min.)

As well as installation and Monstruous Dove Girl.

Tuscania

Pigeons and doves were accompanying me for a long time, often in parallel with other folktale explorations. The Dove Girl came to me because, during the years of my research, I often travelled to Italy to do my SME course and *Jinen Butoh* Schools. I was walking there with them, traveling with them, meeting them in train stations, parks, gardens, streets and temples. I was picking their feathers up from the narrow streets. Listening to them and observing, sometimes with a loving gaze, sometimes with a little disgust.

In April/March 2023 during my SME training in a small town Tuscania, in Italy, I was living in an old Italian house with a garden. Every morning, I woke up to the vibrating cooing of these birds. After the course I decided to extend my stay in order to spend more time with these pigeons. This medieval town, with its churches, ancient walls, bricked streets and fountains allowed me to live with and follow the ghosted traces of "The Dove Girl", as pigeons were dwelling everywhere there—in between the buildings, occupying churches, streets, parks and even the horizon of the landscape that resembles a renaissance painting. I walked with them through tiny streets, listening to their courting and quarrels, finding their feathers, and sometimes corpses. At the same time, I was also listening to the medieval walls, along tiny streets and arcades. Pigeons were everywhere, filling this space with their cooing and ruffle of the feathers; with this *grrr grrr* sound from the depth of the belly, from the deep womb, that is reverberating on skin, with blood, lymph, and cellular fluid; like a water that is getting warmer on a fire, releasing tiny bubbles that are coming to the surface.

Some of these pigeon conversations I recorded with my phone, but mostly with my body exploring how this low and vibrating sound resonates with my skin, my guts, my throat. How this deep vibrating *rrrrr* expands within me, not sure if its reverberating from inside and/or from outside. this bath of sound, as if from some uncanny womb, was speaking directly to mine, although I often couldn't see the pigeons themselves. Often during these mornings or siestas deprived of human sounds, it was the sounds of pigeons that broke or rather merged with the silence, impregnating the walls of this town with their stories. That SME course was dedicated to fascia, the "inner skin" that contains so much of bodily memory, and that was so dismissed by researchers for centuries. Pigeon sounds were shaking this inner web, which like a

spider's web is sometimes beautifully crafted and shines in the sun, and sometimes is entangled and dusty in pigeon-holes and dodgy corners. I was translating these moments into words through my writing.

I continued tuning into pigeons' lives while observing them in the cities of Cork, Kamien Pomorski, Venezia, Szczecin. Pigeons fed by people, pigeons fighting for food with seagulls, pigeons picking up food on the green grass and from the bins. As for humans, for pigeons the city is a place of possibilities, providing a dwelling and often fast food, as they often feed on what we eat or leave without a second thought of whether it is nourishing or not. Cities are also a place of perils—I found bodies of pigeons in the middle of the streets after their encounters with cars, bikes or cats. I have also visited a home-made dovecote where the owner was recounting me histories of its inhabitants deconstructing many myth about pigeons, such as their fidelity.

In the Dovecote







Jinen Butoh Dove Girl(s)

Maybe it was this sound, maybe whispering Kassandra, or Cassandra, maybe all these stories of pigeons and dove girls, feral and domesticated, pure and dirty, cherished and hated, that made me think about the power of female sexuality and repressed desire to set us free from patterns that are so deeply ingrained as to repress the psyche, breath, blood, voice and body. Patterns integrated for centuries and repeated for generations. This longing for other ways of being, together with the courage that may come from acceptance of skin and body – however monstrous, however abject – as matter that yearns and desires. About this breath of anxiety that can also be a breath of excitement.

During the Winter and Summer Jinen Butoh School (2023) I had been exploring these concepts bodily and performatively. The emergency red plastic raincoat that accompanied me throughout the project as a shelter, a temporary skin for all these dispossessed Animal-Women, started to become asphyxiating. During the Winter final performance/ritual I created a movement score where the Dove Girl was hidden underneath like in an egg, with only the toes of one foot showing, in constant movement, revealing her anxiety. She finally stood up and tries to free herself from the red coat fighting its materiality. After she removed this temporary skin, instead of a bird she becomes some reptile creature crawling on the floor and exploring her monstrosity through a quality of movement. By the end, she stood up on her feet but this full "human" exposure brought back her old and well-known shame and embarrassment. She felt exposed, metaphorically naked, she felt human again, so she ran back under her red coat to hide. But she could not fit underneath it anymore. Sometimes getting free, losing the imposed suit, regaining and losing skin, is not a sudden revolt. Sometimes it is a repetitive process of trying, going back and trying again.

Further iterations of this performance, that like all these stories was haunting me, happened at the Jinen Butoh Summer School 2023 in the forest. Working in this context and space obviously changed its form completely, although the core of freeing oneself from the red coat skin remained the same – just as in folktales elements vary across the world but main motifs remain the same. Place informs, inspires, gives textures and context. This time the Dove Girl was immersed in a forest. In this

iteration, she was going out from the nest of the trees, starting with her hands – an image that was deeply inspired by the video "Dating a tree" (2022) where I explore the relationality with this Earth-Other (see Appendix IV). It was like giving the video tridimensionality and a body, as from the outside it might look like human hands were emerging from the bark of the tree; that this bark – *kora* in Polish – was transforming into a human *skóra*: skin. The Dove Girl coming out of the trees falls in the leaves, and after a while she manages to remove the red suit. She is drawn to the light of the sun and inspired by the forest and sky slowly spinning in a circle with subtle joy and pleasure. She does not, however, realise that the red coat is still stuck to her through a "long red thread" that is wrapping her legs up, restricting her movements and making her lose balance. But she resists, savouring her freedom, and finally decides to move towards the light of the sun dragging her coat with her, as if it were a placenta connected to her navel via the umbilical cord.

These various iterations, although they had the same "core", were explored in different moments and contexts. Like folktales, they vary and have diverse layers of meaning – for me and for the spectators. These were different spaces that these explorations were carried out and each space informed the performance differently and awoke a variety of the ideas. Each iteration becomes something else when embodied and embedded in a different place, when the performer is open to listen and to integrate these elements together.







The Dove Girl in *La Selva*

I also explored The Dove Girl during the International Ecological Arts and Eco-Somatic Residency at "La Selva" where more than 40 researchers gathered in Ostia Antica area in Italy to engage with the local environment and community. One of the places where we spent time was an Archeological Park, the Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica that contains remains of Roman Imperium, dating back to 4 BC. In this enormous ghosty and silent ancient city place, the Dove Girl walked accompanied by doves and pigeons. Listening to their cooing and to stories contained in a single brick; walking through the spaces where private and public merged because of the absence of many walls.

One spot captures her attention as it resembled to her some ruined cathedral from her childhood. Or maybe it resembled a dovecote? She decided to explore it through the soles of the feet walking on the overgrowth that had once been a floor; with her hands listening to the stories of the walls and through her skin absorb the atmosphere of this silent place. A little window-hole captured her attention, and she tries to reach the spot of light in the little window, maybe just to see what was behind, maybe like a dove grasping with talons the edge of the brick, maybe to have a bird's-eye view on the space or maybe to fly away.









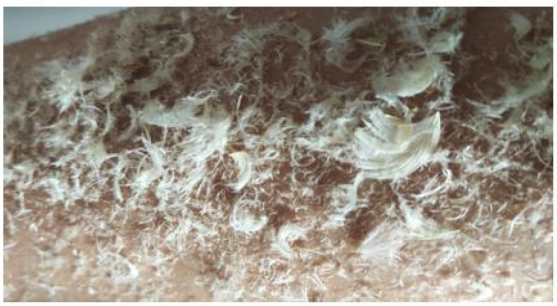



Ugly Feathers Video

For this piece, I had in my head an image of a body immersed in feathers, and when I was in Kamien Pomorski, my family home, I immersed myself in feathers in a bathtub. I had an image of the body immersed in beautifully white fluffy feathers, but what I found when I opened the pillow I was given (working with what I find, as in all these projects) were very old, crushed and dirty ones. I felt disgust, abjection; a fear of myriads of micro-beings inhabiting this environment delimited by the border of a pillowcase. I was imagining them touching my skin, entering my ears, eyes, mouth; dancing on my skin… My body shivered with disgust. The look of these feathers was terrifying. But when I closed my eyes, letting my skin immerse in their softness, not judging, but letting them tickle my skin, caress my face, this abjection converted into care and softness. I felt embraced and comforted by these ugly feathers.

See also Portfolio of Practice. Feathers








Studio work

Following these feathers and the ghostly images of all these Dove Girls—Natalia/Colometa, her friend, Eleonora/Leonora/Agatha, Bionodillo's accounts, Nieznalska, sex workers, and also other She-Wolves, Swan Women, Mermaids, spectrums, my fascia memory and so many other stories I have encountered in my life, I worked 3 days in the studio to see what traces these experiences and stories left in me.

See also Portfolio of Practice: The Dove-Pigeon Girl, Feathers, Confession(s)

I covered the floor with plastic to protect it from potential damage, I threw the feathers down, I pressed the record button. And I got stuck. I got stuck with these feathers, with so many stories, so many ideas, images and expectations pulsating in my skin and mind. So much interior movement of the blood, pumped by an accelerated heart. Yesterday was mixing with the tomorrow enclosed in this beautiful place in the centre of Cork City. I wanted to hide from Dove Girl, from Guattari's ecologies, from she-wolves, swan women, mermaids, doves and pigeons; from all these internalised voices and selves that were shouting in my compulsive-obsessive mind from all directions. I pulled the plastic from underneath and covered myself with it, frenetically grabbing the feathers, wanting to go back to the womb, its warmth and silence. Suddenly this plastic protector surface became the protection for my skin. Like the red coat, it became a temporary cover, a hide, a skin, a womb, to which I escaped to hide from my selves and from the world calling me names. I immersed myself with feathers caressing my skin and listening to the Viking lullaby I had just found on YouTube, Zygmunt Preisner's soundtrack for Kieslowski's *Blue* that I recovered from some corner of my memory, merged with a deep loneliness I experienced when I lived abroad for the first time, and the soundtrack of pigeon conversations and breath.



I moved in this womb and allowed my skin to dance according to this outer but also inner soundtrack of my heart and breath; following the directions of the lymph, the blood, and cellular fluid. But soon I felt that I couldn't breathe, soon I felt the absence of the oxygen while the particles of feathers were are getting into my nose and throat. So, I broke the shell and went out into the world. I unveiled myself like nature in front of the science, like in Louise Ernst Barrias's "La Nature devoilant davant science" (1899). But it was lonely out there, and cold. And so I tried to cover myself with feathers, but they were flying all around the room leaving me exposed. I felt naked in front of these walls, ceilings and cold. And my skin shivered, and my breath shook. And the stories were flying with these feathers. And I tried to go back under the plastic, to cover myself. But the plastic lost its continuity so I grabbed some shattered pieces and I hung on to them, rocking to the melody of the lullaby, not knowing where in this chaotic web of fascia and stories I am. Or what. Lonely pigeon lost in the city of patterns that is asphyxiating and dangerous, yet familiar and known. Homely and unhomely at the same time.

This double nature, entangled in these lethal binaries: Lilith and Eva; Cassandra before and after the rape; all these doubles that are multiplying in diverse languages; Natalia(s) and Colometa(s); Eleonora(s) and Leonora(s); Animal and Woman. All these different selves that are talking, often incessantly. Fighting, negotiating, going out of the plastic womb and getting back into it. Incoherent.

Overstimulated by the incessant cacophony of voices speaking. Containing so much but rendered speechless. Encaged in old patterns that are so ingrained that even if external pressures are not so strong, the internal ones keep guard. The power of domestication, of burning the feathers again and again for so long that they forgot how to fly. Like an ugly monstrous bird from my dreams that got so used to looking through the iron bars of her cell that she was not able to see that there are no walls around her but just an open meadow.



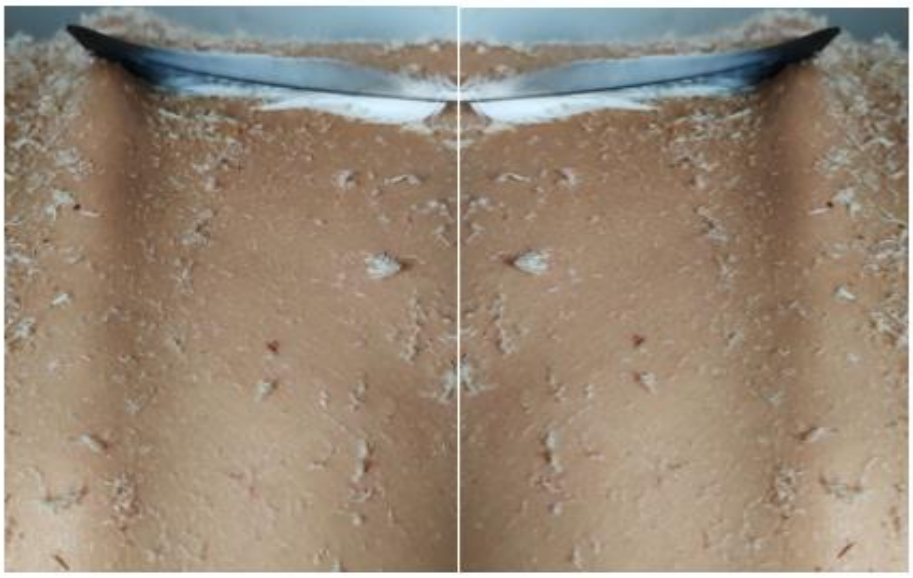
As Barbara Fass Leavy writes, “the burning of animal wife’s skin (…) represents the triumph of culture over nature” (Fass Leavy, 1994, p. 240) as the animal bride reflects the ancient fear of women and the anxiety “that woman will exercise an ever-present potential for widespread destruction of the social order”. The fear of woman is a fear of nature (240) and her sexuality is associated with nature only (while male is nature and culture) and may pose a threat to male sexuality (353). Comparing stories about Animal Grooms and those about Animal Brides, she notes that the animal groom generally goes from a monster to a “handsome youth” while men that wed an animal bride perceive her as a monster. In other words, “[h]is disenchantment is based on the assumption that the human form is the true form, while the basic assumption about woman is that her beast form defines her essential being” (221).

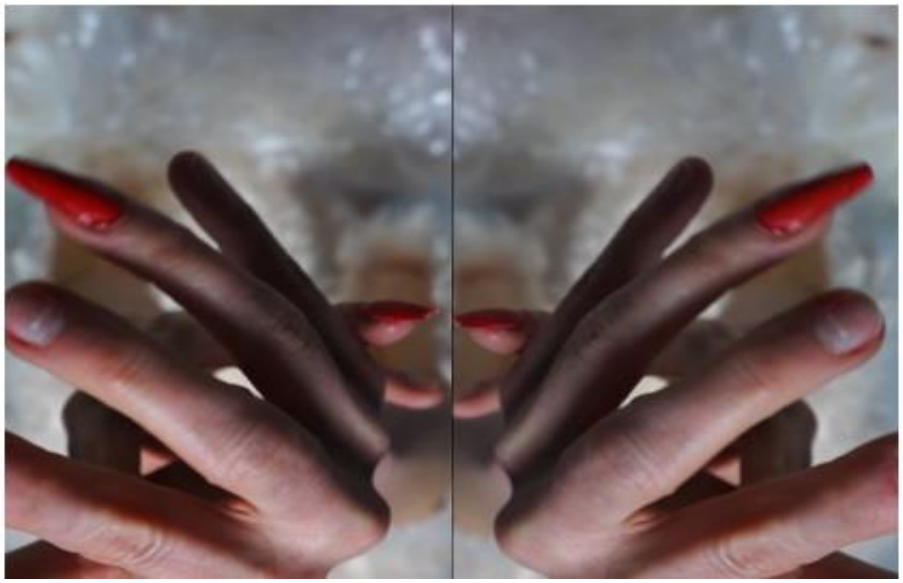


And so the world is full of these monsters: disobedient daughters and deviant women concealed under dove-white skin. But the smell of burnt feathers reminds her that they were there. And of the thousand wings in her chest. So maybe instead of this need to prove her humanity, her right to be human, she should just accept her monstrosity, her animal skin, her body as a source of her strength, with care and love and gentleness. Maybe she should just accept these nails that grow ugly and are broken, these feathers that sometimes are old and crushed, this liminal being as an animal-woman where her animality is not repressed or abjected but integrated, welcomed and cherished.

Like all these Dove-, pigeon- and other Animal-Women shedding their skins and re-imagining themselves again and again; like skin itself, being born from themselves again and again. Picking up their scattered 'ugly' pieces, and claws, and setting off on their journey. Step by step, breath by breath, they walk with this "monster that is always within" (Shildrick, 1996, p. 6).







PERFORMANCE

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl Journey

The performance took space in the Granary Studio area. Already the circular staircase leading to it gave a glimpse of the performance, with feathers lying around, plastic curtains in the windows and red-coated plastic figures hidden in between. At the landing at the top of the stairs, there was a little glass and wooden miniature representation of a dovecote, that resonated with the architecture of the studio. From there spectators could go directly to the studio or to a little room where the piece "Confessions" was screening.

In the main room there were diverse elements organised as in a gallery, resisting "the powerful center" (Bryl, 1993, p. 58) and purposely playing with the borders of the room. In the middle there was just the projecting equipment and a few feathers scattered on the floor.

On the main wall, just in front of the big windows, I chose to project "The Dove/Pigeon girl" video and on the smaller wall to the right a triptych "Feather" (both from the studio practice recordings described above). The idea of a triptych, which I often use in my practice, came naturally form the positions of the window blinds on the wall.



The third side of the room was occupied by windows, which I covered with plastic curtains and positioned red figures made of plastic raincoats on the sills. On the final wall, where there was an originally set up TV set, the video of the Animal-Woman journey was playing on a loop, as if it were a TV documentary of the journey watched by all the pigeons trapped inside.

In the corner I positioned a monstruous Dove girl – a body on the top of a high ladder, covered by red emergency coats/dove girl skins, with a drapery arrangement inspired by some medieval paintings, as if they had left them on their way up.

Each piece could be watched individually like a separate piece or from a wider angle watching different pieces juxtaposed, as well as the videos on screen of the computers in the centre of the room. Benches were set up in front of the pieces as if in a gallery, park or ornithological garden where visitors can take a peek into the life of these birds and could sit a while with them surrounded by feathers. On the one hand, they were spectators, but, on the other, they also became a part of this installation as if they were doves/pigeons themselves, trapped in this bird house, surrounded by the sounds of pigeons, accelerated breathing and a diversity of images. In fact, one of the spectators said that she felt the asphyxiating atmosphere of the space.



See also:

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Trailer (curated video-documentation: 6:18 min.)

Lost Feathers: An embodied intermedial exploration of The Dove Girl's Journey. Footage from the performance (video-documentation 1:33:33)

Confessions

When Animal-Women are on their journey, there is a thread following their steps. The thread that I sing about in this rocking lullaby, a thread of violence that has been executed for centuries—on women and other human and non-human others.

Mum

There's this thread she said
As long as me thread she said
Long red thread she said
Can't see any thread I said
This is me thread she said
Leaving my guts she said
Crossing the still she said—
Leading through fields she said
Running through lands she said
Going through woods she said
Entering houses she said
Dinner tables she said
Cooked in their soups she said
In their bread she said
Filling their wine she said
Their grassy lips she said
On their teeth she said
Wiping their mouth she said
Dirty hands she said
Under their nails she said
Staining their pants she said
Bleeding on feet she said

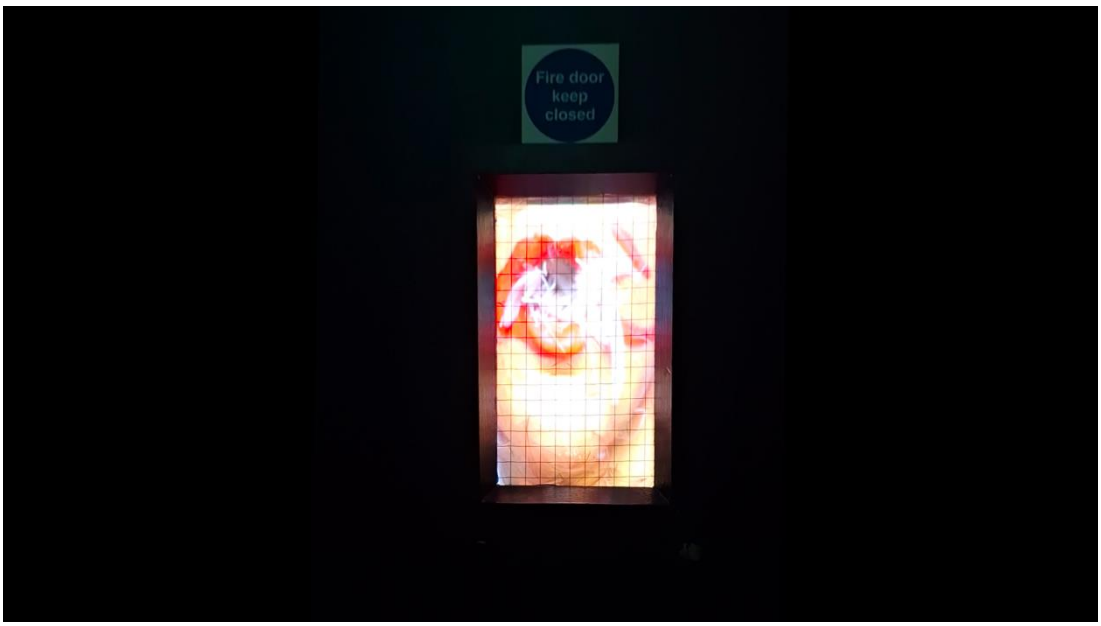


In front of your eyes
she said

This text was written in this same studio during the lockdown restrictions, when there was an abortion ban in Poland, and where I was bodily dealing with the rage. But it is not only about the abortion ban; it is also about all the physical and mental, external and interiorised, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible violence that is visited on bodies and passed on in skin memory for generations. Violence that exterminates, silences, and dispossesses women over and over again. The violence contained in all these stories, like so many contemporary and ancient folktales, but that is dismissed. Like Cassandra's words, left in the oblivion. But they are there, echoing, cooing like pigeons, no-one knows from where, but they are there. Like Derrida's spectrums, like the hidden languages following with their ghosting presence. Vomiting these words to get some relief, words and names that women have been called for ages; vomiting these norms, rules, icons; vomiting to truly purify the body.

This is a one-person space, a confessional where spectators can enter one by one. Or Blanco's *Kassandra* sex show for one. This little window of which they can see only a bit, a piece; painted in red mouth and feathers falling to a music of words in barely recognisable pidgin English; with a melody that sticks to the ear and will be repeated by the monstrous Dove Girl in the main space.

See also: Confession(s)



Dovecote- an embodiment of the space

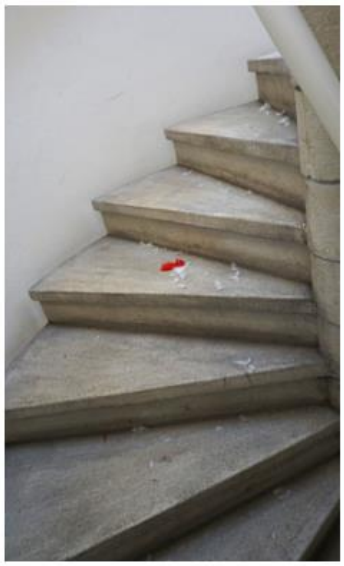
I chose the studio for the performance because, for me, it resembled a church. A cathedral with huge windows allowing light to get in and dance. These white walls with drafted bricks that resemble the walls of cathedrals, imbued with the voices of prayers and confessions, hopes and pains, heaven and hell. It has a high ceiling that with its beams resembles the skeleton of a dove or pigeon. Or the inside of a dovecote. A dove coat. It has huge windows that expose the interior and let in the exterior. This space where private mixes with public. As in the striptease bars where women dance outside to lure in the clients, or the windows in the Red Light District of Amsterdam where sex workers sell their bodies. Exposed but enclosed, covered but unveiled, private yet public. There is something naked in this space.

The lightness of the space brought into question how to make the projections visible on these walls. How to keep their majestic beauty and exposure, while allowing the gentle appearance of the projections on the white walls. The kind of tension that always emerges when working with a space that is not strictly theatrical. Un-safe space/ un-controllable space. Monstrous space.

In the end, this space resembled a bird house/a dovecote, and/or bird cage. With effigies of Animal-Women in the windows like pigeons resting on the windowsills. Or doves looking through the bars to freedom.

I entered this space with all these pigeon stories. But a place is itself a story. Working with a space, its limitations and possibilities, is what attracts me the most. Making from this space a different space yet the same space. Space from (t)here. To achieve this, it is necessary to listen to the space, to speak with space. Space as another enveloping skin. There is a negotiation between all its potentialities, and all the imaginary potentialities of the art piece when they wander in a space of ideas. But practice is always something different. Materiality is something different. In my opinion the posthuman resides in doing research, explorations and yet entering the space of practice almost forgetting it all and opening oneself to the new ideas/solutions/troubles that appear. Trusting that the body remembers. It is the same with acting—one prepares, researches, learns the text but when standing in front of the other actor they are encouraged to forget everything and just be there. Trusting the

process, trusting the body that remembers, and making choices in this very moment. (T)here. Trusting the *force of Zoe*.









Windows ‘trouble’

It took me five days to figure out the way in which I could obscure the windows, so the projections would be visible on the white walls, while not concealing them or obscuring their monumental presence. Five days of negotiations with matter. Climbing, trying out different coverings, different ways of fixing them, just to find they had fallen down the next day. It took five days of embodied negotiation with a matter of glass, silicon, tape. The light and heat of the sun, with feathers flying around, and falling, electrifying against the surface of the plastic. Like birds, like dove- and pigeon-women. Like me. Falling and failing, yet going up and trying again to negotiate with gravity, air, weight. Like a pigeon’s flight during the windy day.

It was an amazing spectacle of matter. Plastic and feathers were falling yet dancing, breathing with the movement of the air and heat from the heaters located beneath the windows. Me trying to tame them, but they were not keen to relinquish their wildness. Open to the idea that during the performance all this construction might fall. Fragile as the tape with which they were fixed. Fragile as a fabric. Fragile and exposed in the space. Noting was ‘fixed’, everything in a state of transition. The tension of the moment of flight. The tension of a potential fall. But it was worth it. The dance of this moving matter of semi-transparent plastic with air and light was itself a spectacle of continuous movement and transformation. You could see this non-transpirable matter breathe.





Becoming tongueless

And I used all this patriarchal fear, embodied in as monstruous woman standing on a ladder that has been converted into a big red dress. This ladder onto which climbing dove-girls have shed their emergency red coats, maybe because they were re-growing their feathers on the way up. This ladder where they finally took off their red heels and left them on the ground. Perhaps because, like Aristotle said, children resemble animals, and they followed this flying up balloon as a symbol of playfulness and frolicking around, up up up to the sky!

The Dove Girl cannot see properly as there are feathers obstructing her vision, but she does not need to see – she guides herself with the touch of these plastic skins like a map, with all the stories and voices guiding her. Her bare feet measuring the distances and following the traces that so many other Others left so that she could follow, and those after her. But there is always a danger of falling. Fragile like these plastic curtains. Like the feathers flying around her. So gentle yet difficult to break.

She wasn't planning to speak, as there were already so many pigeon words in the air and all these stories that her body had absorbed rendered her speechless, "tongueless" (Perez Firmat, 2003, p. 5), moving in-between all these languages. If we "are what we speak?" (2), she has probably lost all idea of who she was. So, she decided to allow the words to come naturally, to find out what might come from the corners of fascia, the inner depth of hidden memory. And so she hummed the lullaby

about the red thread, and moved only when her body wanted to move. And suddenly she spoke. Two lines of a Sarah Kane monologue she learned 15 years ago in Polish. And then she listened and a story of a Spanish friend emerged, through which she spoke about her own engagement in Spanish. And then her anger at her borders being crossed in Polish; a dream she recently had in English; the fragment of a monologue in Spanish… And she repeats allowing what vibrates in her fascia to echo in the room. Like flashbacks. Without cohesion or coherence. Like automatic writing or psychoanalytic free-association, which is "a memory in its most incoherent and therefore fluent form; because of repression, the past can only return as disarray in de-narrativized fragments" (Phillips, 1994, p. 66).

And so the past returned, and it repeated and came again and again, every time different... Less power, less need. Sometimes just fragments and pieces appearing, sometimes just a sigh, or an intention, the opening of the mouth. Like the significant experiences of childhood memories that, according to Freud, "are omitted rather than forgotten" and "are represented in memory by the inessential elements of the same experience" (Phillips, 1994, p. 65). Like these haunting languages. All these spectres that appear in the gaps

She might have gone down to sit with the people who came. Or walked and maybe danced in the space. But she did not. When she climbed the ladder, although the grate of the ladder was digging into the soles of her bare feet numbing them, although she was becoming more and more tired, she felt that if she went down she would not be able to climb back up again. And she could not go down. This time she is not going back under the asphyxiating red coat or plastic. She decided to remain as this monstruous creature on display, with incomplete claws, with a runny nose, with moments when emotions were overwhelming her. (T)here she was, present in her body and allowing it to lead. Just doing a minimal dance, and caressing her big dress, and embracing this monstrous body, her body, and echoing these fragmented stories into the space. This church-like, dovecote-like, brothel-like space. These incomplete stories. These dispossessed haunting stories of doves, pigeons, girls and women. Through the voice, through the body. The body that became a site for all that. A hybrid and monstrous body.

APPENDIX IV

Inter-weaving: Other Outputs

This Appendix presents practices and projects which, although not necessarily connected directly to Animal-Woman folk tales, have constituted an important part of my emerging methodology and explorations of trans-corporality, and were also a part of the research on how to engage with new-materialist theories through touch, eco-somatic and somatic practice, in order to translate them into artistic projects.

Dating a tree

In the first year, following the invitation to regularly spend time in and with a chosen space made by Andrea Olsen in *Body and Earth. Experiential Guide* (2002), I was regularly visiting Fitzgerald Park in Cork. It was the time of the Covid 19 pandemic, and these moments of spending time in this place with one particular tree gave me the sensation of not being alone; of being in touch with something more than the virtual world. I spent hours on these eco-somatic explorations, visual, and sensorial engagement, and my camera as an usual extension of my senses. An effect of this was a piece "Dating a Tree" that further on became a part of "Dating a Tree – Dating a Composition" that contained the audiovisual piece and a guided practice to "Encountering a Tree" in different languages as an invitation for other people to engage with these beings. This project became part of the digital exhibition, *How to Become a Posthuman*.







Lichen Encounters

For the same exhibition I participated in a collaborative digital project “Lichen Encounters”, which involved eco-somatic encounters with these Earth-others which I translated into images as well as creative writings, soundscapes and narrations, some of which were then introduced into the interactive project.



Body like a thesaurus
So many lives we can
Not remember
With-in-and-out

Flora(s) and fauna(s)
hidden and exposed
at the same time

I try to recall the lichen being
in my being
a liken
in me
being
lichen a-like

hybridity is our ontology



Listen to the Clay

Another exploration of touch involved the matter of skin and clay and water, undertaken in conjunction with Aga Ciszewska, a sculptor and ceramicist based in Młyn Gorzanów. Clay is shaped through touch and imagination. It also carries symbolic associations with the concept of humans having been created from the soil, reminding us how social and environmental patterns shape the psyche and body and at the same time how they are shaped. As Aga explained to me, when creating ceramics, one needs to listen to clay. This is a conversation, where one is not imposing one's own will but rather mutually exchanging information through touch, where all the body and mind participate in the process. When she paints and glazes her ceramics and then burns them in a special oven, although she has a very deep understanding of the process and technique, she cannot ever fully predict an effect of this work. Every time she opens the oven, she is excited as if it was happening for the first time.

The documentation of this process gave an output of diverse iterations of Listen to Clay layered video as a representation of how social and environmental ecologies shape the body and psyche, blood and breath. It was also a continuation of clay explorations I did with this artist in the 2019 output of which became one of the elements of Seal Woman Story performance (2019) and my MA Thesis. This shows me how much is yet to be explored in matter of touch and how much these explorations, although touching similar subjects or forms, proceed differently and give different outputs. It also shows that touch and matter are an infinite source of inspiration and how attractive (and pleasant!) it is to explore them bodily in a myriad of ways.







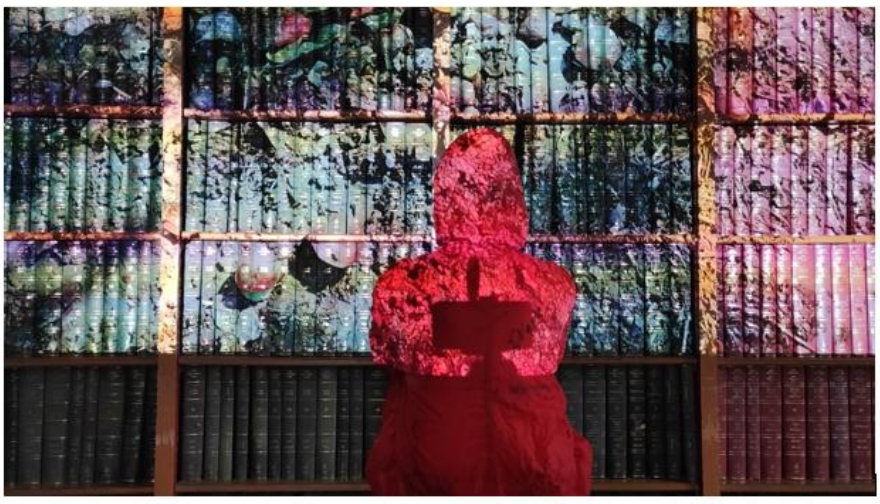
Performative reading

of Sergio Blanco's *Cartography of a Disappearance: Panegyric for Joan Brossa*

These pictures are flashes from the performative reading of Sergio Blanco's *Cartografía de una desaparición. Panegírico a Joan Brossa/ Cartography of a Disappearance: Panegyric for Joan Brossa* (2017) that took place in October 2022 and April 2023 at the UCC. It culminated a process of translation and creation of a performative reading of this text together with Helena Buffery and 2021-2023 MA in translations students and investigates diversity of translator voices. The visual skin of this reading has been influenced by Animal-Woman Journey(s) particularly that year's theme of my artistic research —Doves/Pigeons—inspired by *The Dove Girl* folk tale by Italo Calvino ([1980] 2012) where I explore human and non-human "Others" relationality, through a process of translation, in-betweenness and liminality of territorial, epidermic, linguistic and identity borders.







APPENDIX V

Skin of Land: Excerpts of auto-ethnographic writing from embodied somatic workshops

Jinen Butoh School *in* the Forest

Other explorations included reflections and practice during the *Jinen Butoh* Summer School I attended in 2022 and 2023, situated in an Italian forest in the Toscana region. The Summer School has been taking place there for more than ten years, welcomed by the local community because of the special care and attention the organisers give to the place. It is a completely immersive experience, where participants live in the forest in tents, sleep on the ground, bathe in the river or lake without any cosmetics, take water from the stream, and cook vegetarian meals over fire. Apart from collaborating on organising the living there they dance/practice *Jinen Butoh* guided by Atsushi Takenouchi, immersed in the sound of the environment and live improvised music by Hiroko Komyia. They dance with each other, with inner and outer selves; dance with trees, animals, sky and stars, recovering memory of other ways of being in their bodies. Dance with deep appreciation for the work, this land and its creatures of which they are part. Cohabiting with insects, leaves, currents and weather that is not always predictable. This deep immersion also meant overcoming the lack of everyday comforts of "civilisation"—what to do with remains, such as sanitary pads; how to find comfort in defecating in improvised toilets. Suddenly these things we take for granted living in the apartments and cities that secure a certain intimacy, in the forest became something different. One can feel observed, while doing basic and usually intimate actions. The body truly was a part of nature, not only because other humans might be watching, but because all the other beings hosting this place are. A place that could be so homely during the day but at night became something different, with its darkness, and the sounds and smells emerging from it. These experiences allowed me to bodily understand human limitations. And those that we impose on ourselves living in "civilisation".






La Selva

In October 2023 I participated in the International Ecological Arts and Eco-Somatic Residency "La Selva" in the Riserva Naturale del Litorale Romano'(Rome, Central Italy) where more than 40 artists and researchers from all around the world gather to re-discover "a deep knowledge of ecological connection within the human experience, as a necessary process of care, re-connection and cultural resistance" (Rufo, 2023). During the residency we were healing trees with rituals and dance and touched ruins of what used to be a Roman Empire and urban ecosystem in recovery injured by organised crime. And I think that it was really important, as we did not limit ourselves to 'our' bubble, but organisers put an effort to make a creative exchange with local groups, getting to know each other with a place on a variety of levels. We shared laughs and moments living and eating together but also encountering local eco- and cultural organisations that often need to stay with the "trouble" that are national and local at the same time. We breathed the sea and the pine trees there. And although it was a lot for three days, I think it was an inspiring beginning for the collective of people who care. Like so many others I met during this Animal-Woman journey.





These are only a few of the myriad experiences that show the possibilities of being in-touch with matter, listening and staying within a body and with the animal and Earth-Other.

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