

# **Volcanoes are Wet Holes : a Swell**

- The Medieval Body in Contemporary Dance



DEGREE PROJECT  
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## Abstract

In this degree project I study the research question: What potential has placing qualities of the Medieval Body in the contemporary dance field in Northern Europe today?

I study the potential of placing a historical body within the contemporary dance field today in order to recognise the subjectiveness of how I have been taught that my body is constituted. My understanding of my body is so deeply rooted in western anatomy, that I wanted to focus on sources from precisely that. So I found the medieval body; a body filled with liquids and shaped by and within the world.<sup>1</sup> In this Degree Project I study qualities of the Medieval Body and how that can inform my dancing rather than studying the whole medieval society as such. I have been struggling with how to acknowledge the injustices of the Middle Ages and still embrace qualities in the understanding of the body from that time.

In addition, I study the shift from the Medieval Body to a functional body. I find the functional body difficult to relate to, since I believe my body and identity is fluid and expressive. I discuss the capital value that came with the Industrial body and how the fluid and porous Medieval Body became illegal. Since the beginning of this project I have found many similarities between physical practices that I have encountered in the contemporary dance field in Northern Europe today and qualities of the Medieval Body.

For the physical presentation I studied qualities of the Medieval Body by dancing and writing. I also collaborated with Sofia Herelius to create art-objects called Personified Organs that were initiated as a response to the objectified female, trans and non-binary bodies. In the presentation I relate to the Personified Organs as my co-performers. I conclude by discussing how this project helped me reflect over my understanding of my own bodies (as I am not one thing), on how I use language in relation to bodies and on how to contextualise the position I write and dance from.

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<sup>1</sup> Karin Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal: Sex essäer om kropp, historia och kultur* (Stockholm Norstedts, 2015), 9-15.

<sup>2</sup> Karin Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal: Sex essäer om kropp, historia och kultur* (Stockholm Norstedts, 2013).

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## Presenting the Structure

In the introduction I will present my starting point for this study and my interest in the topic. I also try to be transparent about the requirements and concerns I had when I first started studying *The Medieval Body*.

In chapter 1. *The Medieval Body* I share some of the main qualities of the Medieval Body that I am interested in studying physically. I will try to frame the qualities, share my references and discuss why I am interested in applying those idea into the contemporary dance field in Northern Europe today.

In the second chapter, 2. *From Humour to Functionality* I describe bigger historical events that changed the understanding of the body.

Then, in 3. *Qualities of the Medieval Body in my Dancing Body* I share similarities between qualities of the Medieval Body and practices I have encountered when studying dance and performance.

After this, in chapter 4. *Volcanoes are Wet Holes: A Swell (Studio Practice)* I present materials that I have been working with for the physical presentation. I discuss how qualities of the Medieval Body have affected my dancing and writing. I also describe more closely how I have embodied qualities of the Medieval Body and discuss the collaboration with Sofia Herelius.

In the conclusion I describe my learning process of this project. Then follows the *Bibliography* (primary and secondary ) and the *Appendix* with pictures of the “Personified Organs” . Also the very first page of this project is a picture of one of the Personified Organs made by Sofia Herelius.

## Introduction

I have for long been impressed by how dancing and engaging in physical practices changes my perception of my body and other bodies. Studying dance allows the imaginary to enter and shape my understanding of what kind of an organism I am. Dancing makes me realise that seeing myself in the mirror or on the screen are merely vague reflections of the complexity that I am. And I keep wondering what is inside of me? Can it really be those cut out clumps called organs, that look as if placed into gingerbread forms? But where are the nervous systems, the menstrual cycle, the chakras and the glands? And what about falling in love? Or getting a fever? Where does that happen? How does the information travel? It must be more complex than organs placed next to each other. And why am I leaking from all of these places? Where do all the urine, saliva, blood and earwax come from? If I'm 80% water, how can I perceive myself as solid? My understanding of my body also includes my senses and how I organise and value my sensations and emotions. Dancing has been a crucial part in my life since my teenage years and without studying movement I would not perceive bodies and the world as I do today. Understanding that my body is fluid has helped me build my understanding of identity as well. I see identity as something fluid that is constantly changing and shape-shifting. This knowledge helps me unveil hierarchical structures that have formed me into certain shapes, which then so easily sediment to become norms. By dancing, I understand that my body is different every day, and I want to find out when we, here Northern Europe, got so concerned with finding singular solutions and definitions for our bodies?

So I found this book called *Kroppens Tunna Skal*<sup>2</sup> by Karin Johannisson, in which Johannisson discusses different understandings of the body here in Sweden and Europe before dissecting was common in the study of anatomy. That was my first encounter with the Medieval Body<sup>3</sup>. Johannisson writes about how in the Middle Ages folk medicine, alternative medicine and everyday medicine<sup>4</sup> were common treatment options for scientific medicine.<sup>5</sup> In relation to folk medicine

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<sup>2</sup> Karin Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal: Sex essäer om kropp, historia och kultur* (Stockholm Norstedts, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Also known as Pre-cartesian body. Pre-Cartesian is the time before Descartes came in and "famously declared in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) that, whatever he was, he was certainly not that 'assemblage of limbs' that constituted his body, the *res extensa* (extended thing in space), which had nothing to do with the self, *res cogito*, the 'I' as a thinking substance. In the Cartesian scheme of things, the sensory body may only function as a source of betrayal, obscuring the intelligibility of the mind's grasp of clear and distinct ideas."

Patricia Waugh, "Writing the Body: Modernism and Postmodernism" in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Ulrica Maude and Jane Macnaughton, (Great Britain; Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Orig. Vardagsmedicin. Johannisson, *Kroppens Tunna Skal*.

Johannisson mentions how the different fluids of the body (tears, milk, blood, seed, wound -and menstruation fluids) are part of a timeless universal stream.<sup>6</sup> This statement resonated with my experienced understanding of my body. I also got drawn to the idea of studying a topic that has formed the understanding on our bodies in Northern Europe today. But the more I read about life in the Middle Ages I came to the conclusion that I am specifically interested in studying qualities of the Medieval Body and how that can inform my dancing - rather than studying the whole Medieval Society as such. The middle Ages are referred to as dark times for a reason; in Europe there was plenty of illness and sorrow, not to mention the injustices regarding race, gender and social class.

I place this study of qualities of the Medieval Body in the context of Contemporary Dance in Northern Europe today because that is where I am placed myself. I am studying Dance Performance at DOCH and working as Apprentice for the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm. Honestly, I don't think it would matter where I would aim to place this historical body - it would end up in the contemporary dance field in Stockholm (with me) anyways.

I am aware of that there are many other options for studying a liquid body; for instance studying Eastern medicine and somatic practices, but since my perception of my body is so deeply rooted in Western anatomy I wanted to study precisely that. Also, as I will make a physical presentation I did not want to work with a somatic technique that is aesthetically recognisable. Nevertheless, the knowledge that I have from somatic practices has helped me a lot when aiming to embody qualities of the Medieval Body.

My two main mediums in working with dance are movement and language. To me, the two constantly keep informing each other. As examples of this I could use almost every dance class I have ever attended, since physical tasks most often are guided with oral instructions. Throughout my studies I have learned that bodies shape language and language shapes bodies. Very plainly put I mean that the way we talk, read and write about our bodies colour how we treat and move our bodies. And the way we move and use our bodies then affects the language we use to describe those sensations. This is why I insist on working physically - I know that movement carries information that can't be directly translated to language. In the physical presentation of this Degree Project I will by writing, speaking, listening and moving embody elements of the Medieval Body. In this text

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<sup>5</sup> Johannisson, *Kroppens Tunna Skal*, 183-218.

Jane Macnaughton, "Flesh Revealed: Medicine, Art and Anatomy" in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude and Jane Macnaughton, (Great Britain; Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Johannisson, *Kroppens Tunna Skal*, 197. *Kroppens Tunna Skal* is written in Swedish, I have translated the quotes myself. Orig. "Tårar, mjölk, blod, säd- och menstruationsvätskor ingår i ett allomfattande, tidlöst flöde."

I will gather material from different sources, including my moving body, in order to articulate what potential placing qualities of the Medieval Body with me here has today.

Most of my sources refer to the late Middle Ages (1300-1500) but certainly most of the beliefs and wisdom of the body that I have studied has existed already way before that. I have also studied the shift from the Medieval Body towards a structural body, with the aim to highlight how structural changes in society also changed the perception of bodies. I also want to mention that this is a degree project for the BA in Dance Performance and the outcome of this project is partly shaped by requirements of the University. Another aspect I'm considering is that most of the references that I have found from medieval times are not written by whoever, but by privileged individuals that have had the resources to get their studies written down and archived for over 500 years.

I want to place a historical body within the contemporary dance field today in order to recognise the subjectiveness of how I have been taught that my body is constituted. I attempt to expand the understanding of my body by approaching it from different angles and perspectives. Through studying dance I have come to the conclusion that I am many bodies.<sup>7</sup> I place different aspects of my bodies next to each other as a way to articulate what qualities I am interested in applying from the Medieval Body. I study and work within the field of contemporary dance so my main focus lies in finding information that can be applied on (or I have found from) a moving body.

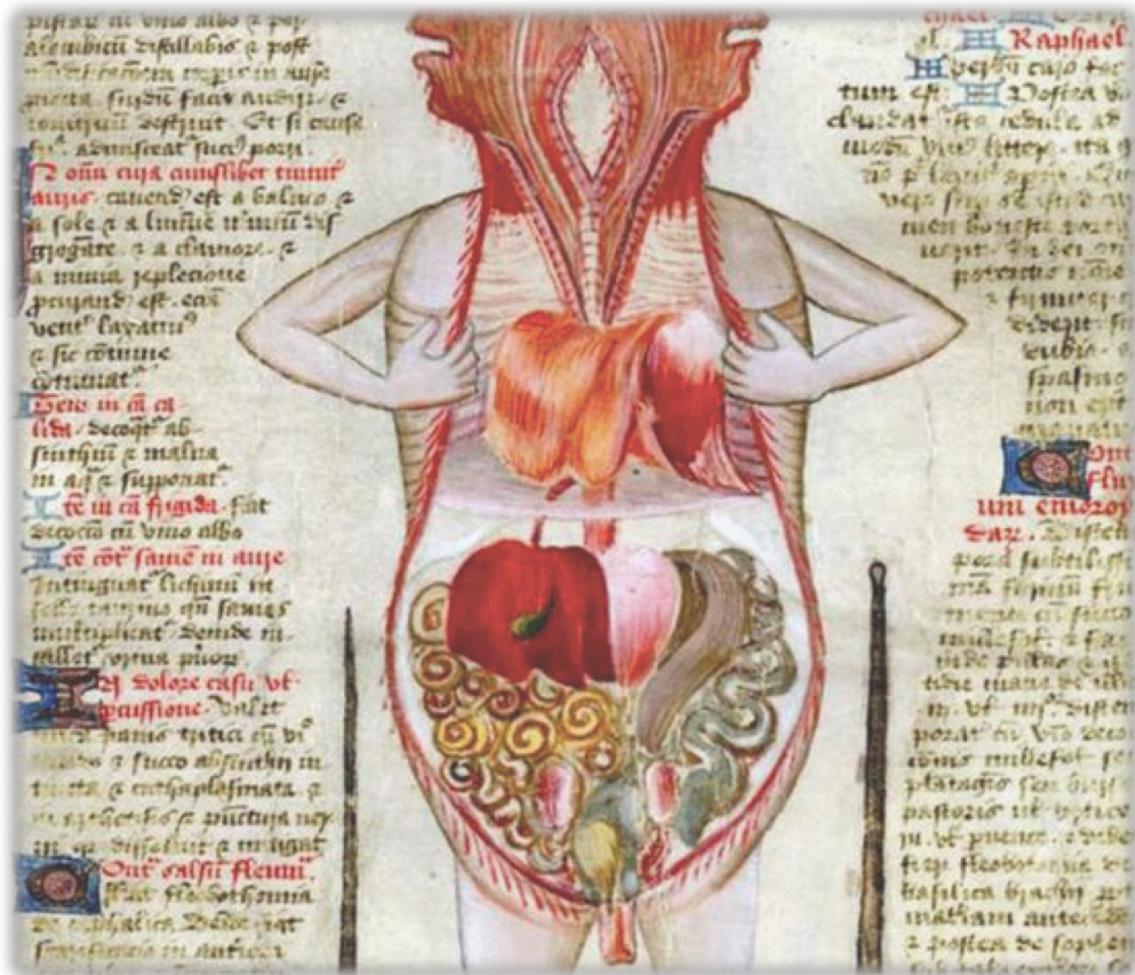
I also wish to practice a language that isn't based on comparing two binary options to each other. I believe there lies a gentle revolution in thinking beyond binaries. When using binary options, one of the options often becomes the norm or the goal, and the other option becomes "the other". And this is such a diminishing way to discuss the bodies - that are so complex. I see a strong potential in language to shift how we perceive our bodies today. To quote Jacques Derrida: "Each time a rhetoric defines a metaphor, not only is a philosophy implied, but also a conceptual network in which philosophy itself has been constituted"<sup>8</sup>. I read this quote as; when speaking of bodies, each time I name an experience, that name is an outcome of my beliefs. Those beliefs are reflections of the circumstances I have lived in and the patterns I have got used to living by, both consciously and unconsciously. I guess that is just a way of saying that the following observations are not "objective" and should not be read as if they were.

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<sup>7</sup> "The body is many; the craving body, the disciplined body, the narcissist body, the body of the industrial society, the body of pain and illness, the unemployed body. The body as shell, surface, language, myth and stage." Karin Johannisson, *Kroppens Tunna Skal* (Stockholm: Norstedts 2013), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: 1982), 230.

## 1. The Medieval Body



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”Both physical and mental health depended on the balance of the four humours, as did individual temperament and complexion, while each humour was also linked to the stars and planets. The distinction between mind and body was complex and more fluid than in post-Cartesian thought, complicated by ideas of the soul, different views on where in the body faculties were situated, and the integration of thought and affect.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> John Arderne, *De Arte Phisicali Et De Chirurgia*. Pinterest. 1425. Image. <https://www.pinterest.se/pin/407505466259274585/>.

<sup>10</sup> Corinne Saunders, ”The Affective Body: Love, Virtue and Vision in English Medieval Literature,” in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Ulrica Maude and Jane Macnaughton, (Great Britain; Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 87-88.

So I found the Medieval Body; a body filled with liquids and shaped by and within the world.<sup>11</sup> Johannisson refers to Corinne Saunders when writing about the Medieval Body, and Saunders became one of my main references for this project. I also listened to quite a bit of podcasts and read articles about the Medieval Body, focusing in qualities that excited me. One of my main interests in the Medieval body is its porosity in relation to nature. In Upper Secondary School I studied geography quite a bit and I was especially interested in population geography, which is a branch of human geographies. I was especially interested in how the geographical surroundings; climate, soil, access to water, winds, etc. defines how and where people live. The resources of nature direct how societies take shape, how the infrastructure is built, what people eat and even how they move. I found a connection to that interest when studying the porosity of the Medieval Body. The Medieval Body is in constant dialogue with the Cosmos, including nature and Supernatural forces and beings.<sup>12</sup> It is connected to and dependent on its circumstances. The circumstances include relationships, living circumstances, nature, society, religion and beliefs in what we today consider Supernatural beings. Demons, angels, fairies and gods were part of everyday life and they also framed how to live. On some days one simply shouldn't leave their house because there was a high risk of a demonic intervention. I get drawn to the idea that during the Middle Ages the belief that something would harm your body was a stronger indication for how to plan your day than working hours. Today I so often tell myself to "get my shit together" when going to work or school - no matter what is haunting me out there. I would truly enjoy days when I wouldn't need to deal with the "demons" of today, like, sexist cis-men, exhaustion and toxic relationships. And to feel out when those days are needed, instead of planning them according to my schedules.

In the Middle Ages, the most common treatment method was "blood-letting" which means cutting a hole in the body and letting the evil forces and diseases pour out. The Medieval Body consists of four different Humours (bodily fluids) and the balance between these humours defines an individual's well-being and emotional roller-coaster. The humours are directly linked to emotions, so in the Medieval body there is no idea of the mind as a "true self" or as a decisive organ. Today, a Humour is a functioning bodily fluid but the word also refers to a person's characteristics and to something that is designed to be funny.<sup>13</sup> This use of the word derives from the healthcare in the

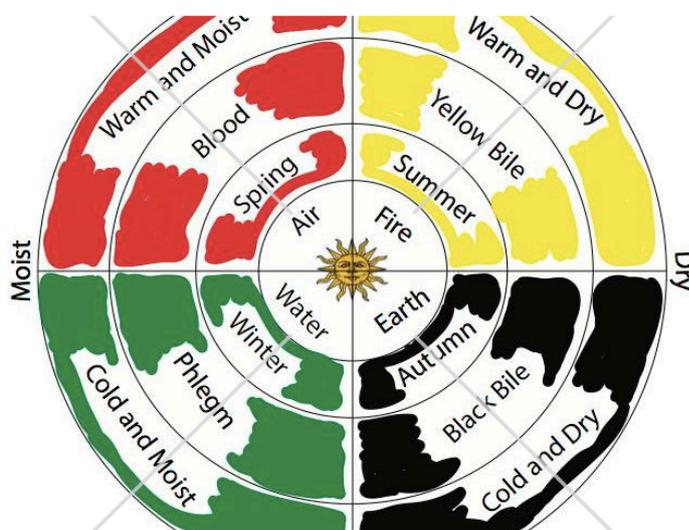
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<sup>11</sup> Karin Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal: Sex essäer om kropp, historia och kultur* (Stockholm Norstedts, 2015), 9-15.

<sup>12</sup> Saunders, Corinne. *Voices and Visions*, 413. Saunders, Corinne. 2016. *Critical Medical Humanities: Chapter 23 Voices And Visions: Mind, Body And Affect In Medieval Writing*. Ebook. Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK379259/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Definition of Humor", Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor>.

Medieval times, were the bodily fluids actually defined the persons temperament and personality. The humours relative proportions defend a persons health, and illness was often caused by imbalance in between the humours.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in the quote by Saunders in the beginning of this chapter, the humours are linked to the general movement of the Cosmos and are also directly in relation to astrology<sup>15</sup>. Each humour is also connected to the four elements of nature; Water, Earth, Air and Fire. The four humours are The Sanguine Humour, The Choleric Humour, The Melancholic Humour and The Phlegmatic Humour<sup>16</sup>. The Sanguine Humour (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius) is the easy breezy humour and its fluid is blood. The Sanguine is rosy, light, happy, sexy, youthful and it appears strongest during spring. The Choleric Humour (Aries, Leo, Sagittarius) is the angry humour, its sign is fire, its fluid is yellow bile and it appears strongest in the summer. Then there is The Melancholic Humour (Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces) which is well, melancholic, and has a temper "of sadness rather than spark"<sup>17</sup>. The Melancholic Humour is connected to the earth. The Melancholic Humour's fluid is black bile and it's season is autumn. The fourth humour is the Phlegmatic Humour (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn) and its fluid is phlegm and its element is water. The humour has the characteristics of apathy, being lazy, or just having a light touch to serious matters.



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<sup>14</sup> Melvin Bragg, "In Our Time: The Four Humours", BBC Radio 4, December 2007, Podcast. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008h5dz>

<sup>15</sup> I have mentioned the zodiac signs in brackets next to each humour for my fellow celestial nerds.

<sup>16</sup> Marcy J. Miller, "The Four Humours and the Integrated Universe: A Medieval World View," *Owlcation* (March 2014), <https://owlcation.com/humanities/The-Four-Humors>

<sup>17</sup> Miller, "The Four Humours and the Integrated Universe", <https://owlcation.com/humanities/The-Four-Humors>

<sup>18</sup> "The Theory of the Four Humours", TES, December 2016, <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/the-theory-of-the-four-humours-11467420#>

## 2. From Humour to Functionality

Before describing more closely how I relate to the qualities of the Medieval Body today, I will write about a few big changes in society that led to a very different view of the body. I am aware of that this is a very banal attempt to gather such a wide range of events, and I want to point out that I have only gathered information that I found relevant for this project. I write from my perspective as a dancer, and my focus is on the perception of the body both on an individual level and in larger contexts. I believe that the body is in constant dialogue with its surrounding so I felt a need to understand what was going on in those surroundings.

In the shift from the Middle Ages (end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century) to Industrialism and the Modern era the understanding of the body also changed. As technology developed, there was a growing interest to study the body more scientifically. People started to work in factories, and their bodies became parts of bigger machineries.<sup>19</sup> In those factories bodies needed to work as efficiently as possible; so an ill body wasn't only harmful to the individual, but it was a dysfunctional part of a bigger system. An ill body couldn't work as efficiently as a healthy body and therefore needed to be "fixed". Scientific studies also affected the position of religion and Supernatural beings in everyday life. To put it very simply: in the Middle Ages time had been structured by the flux of the Cosmos, and with the Industrial Revolution time became structured by working hours. With the development of technology and the privileging of science also Universities became more common. It was now possible to study and specialise in medicine. This meant that practising medicine was not an option for everyone anymore.<sup>20</sup> I also want to mention that, in the Middle Ages, consistency was very highly valued; which meant that technology and big institutions were viewed as sustainable, long-term solutions.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, there was of course a lot of resistance towards this new way of labour<sup>22</sup> but eventually everyone needed to make a living somehow.

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<sup>19</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: The Great Caliban – The Struggle Against the Rebel Body* (New York: Autonomedia 2004), 133-163, <https://libcom.org/files/Caliban%20and%20the%20Witch.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Macnaughton, "Flesh Revealed", 72.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Biagetti, "Middle Ages 11: The Pulsating Body – The Medieval World View," *Historiansplaining*, Podcast, Acast in July 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 134.

Now that the body had a capital value the only goal wasn't anymore to cure illness in order to feel well, but to be able to work as much as possible. Labour was paid by hour, which meant that salary was now defined by time rather than by craft. It was only men who could specialise in medicine and become doctors. They were highly educated and studied a language that wasn't accessible to the general public. Eventually, as religion's position in society slowly became replaced by science, previous beliefs in heroes and gods turned to a trust in doctors and medicine. Already in the Middle Ages men had a higher social status than women<sup>23</sup>, but healing and care-taking was traditionally practised by women. Now those practices became threats to scientific studies. In the Middle Ages the medical profession was traditionally practised by women in their homes, and now it became exclusively for men supported by big institutions. And the knowledge of the Medieval Body became alternative medicine that needed to be erased.

In order to treat these ill, dysfunctional bodies, practitioners needed to understand what bodies consisted of. A dissection is a study of a corpse which is done in order to learn more about the anatomy of the body. The word origins from Latin meaning to “cut to pieces”.<sup>24</sup> The first dissections were performed during the Middle Ages but back then they were not a common part of healthcare, as they were considered being shameful and unappreciative towards the body.<sup>25</sup> Dead bodies were not to play with since they were in close contact with Supernatural beings – especially with evil ones. It was also not rare that the assumed dead body would wake up during a dissection haunted by devils. Eventually this horror turned into entertainment (as it often does) and anatomy theatres were being opened for public. Back then anyone could be in the audience, even women. But as science steadily kept proving supernatural beings wrong, there wasn't a danger anymore in performing dissections - and they became a common part of studying anatomy and medicine in Universities.

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Biagetti, "Middle Ages 11: The Pulsating Body – The Medieval World View," *Historiansplaining*, Podcast, Acast in July 2017. Also; there are more than two genders. And gender is fluid. But I haven't found any references that would take that into consideration when speaking of the Middle Ages. I'm sorry it is so binary.

<sup>24</sup> "Dissection", Wikipedia, last edited December 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissection>

<sup>25</sup> Johannisson, *Kroppens Tunna Skal: 2. Den Anatomiska Teatern*, 17-62.



This is a picture of the anatomical theatre in Uppsala University, Sweden. What was specific to this theatre was that organs could be hooked on to wires, that then were pulled up and down for the audience to have a closer look at the body parts.<sup>26</sup>

When I read about these changes today I can't help but think that the Industrial Revolution and growing popularity of big institutions strengthened patriarchal structures. Women were still commonly considered to be care-takers, but they were not anymore receiving any pay for their work and effort. The fluid and porous Medieval Body became illegal. And even though practices of Medieval medicine still lives on through common house remedies, I am surprised by how little of the knowledge of the Medieval Body is left in our perception of bodies today. I think it has to do with how the language around bodies also changed.

During Industrialism descriptions of the body became similar to descriptions of machines. The Cartesian body-mind split became a general notion and people could now consider their bodies as tools and themselves being way more than those simple tools. When I am dancing I can not relate to that kind of a body at all as I find so much movement and expression in most of my organs, that go beyond simply responding to functions. But when I go to see a doctor the consequences of a study

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Von Bonsdorff, "The Anatomical Theatre at Uppsala University – A Short Cinematic Introduction," *Humanistportalen*, (February 2011), <http://www.humanistportalen.se/artiklar/konstvetenskap/the-anatomical-theatre-at-uppsala-university/>

based on dissection and functionality is obvious. My body is often viewed as a body where each organ has a function and only when that function is rubbed should it be taken care of. It is a body where I break my knee and I get a new, plastic one, instead of focusing on how to prevent that injury from reoccurring. This is a body where menstruation fluids are seen as flaws or "unnecessary bleeding"<sup>27</sup> and vaginal discharge should disappear into panty liners that smell like flowers.<sup>28</sup>

The functional body is gendered and treated accordingly. Still today, I find that Western Medicine values bodies according to their "functionality".<sup>29</sup> It is also not only diseased and ill bodies that are viewed as dysfunctional but all bodies that do not fit within the norm. This way of thinking about the body also has to do with the use of binary language that I mentioned in the introduction. We compare functional vs. dysfunctional, abled vs. disabled, male vs. female, white vs. black<sup>30</sup>, young vs. old, skinny vs. obese, us vs. them. I don't think that it is sustainable to live in a body that is structurally perceived as being dysfunctional or wrong - not to mention how that affects how we think and treat our own bodies. So by studying the Medieval Body, I also wish to keep studying a language that is more inclusive. I wish that we keep asking ourselves; Which bodies are valued? And by who? Which bodies are represented? Which bodies are being taken care of? Which bodies are still oppressed? And how can we keep questioning the "truths" that we believe about our bodies?

After all, only 500 years ago, the most common treatment method was "blood-letting", which most often literally led to bleeding to death. Today it sounds absolutely ridiculous. Just as ridiculous as denying someone healthcare simply because they have travelled across a boarder.

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<sup>27</sup> A gynecologist said this to me when I didn't want to eat hormonal contraceptive pills in Stockholm, April 2018.

<sup>28</sup> "ALWAYS DAILIES Singles To Go Fresh Panty Liners," Always UK, <https://www.always.co.uk/en-gb/shop-products/panty-liners/always-dailies-singles-to-go/always-dailies-singles-to-go-fresh-panty-liners>.

<sup>29</sup> "Meaning of "functional" in the English Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary: Working normally, working in the usual way. Performing a particular operation: a functional disorder (when an organ doesn't work as it should). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/functional?q=functional%2B>

<sup>30</sup> Racism should not be compared to gender or ageism or body positivity. They are all serious matters, but racism has a history of oppression that I am guilty of, because I have the privilege of being white. I mention race because racism needs to be acknowledged and to highlight how binary language supports racist structures.

### 3. Qualities of the Medieval Body in my Dancing Body

Since the beginning of this project I have found many similarities between physical practices that I have encountered in my dance studies and qualities of the Medieval Body. I have found these examples to be helpful tools for working on the physical presentation.

The first lecture I attended at DOCH was called “The Anus Doesn’t Exist” by Frederic Gies. At the time we also had a workshop with Fred in Body Mind Centering (BMC)<sup>31</sup> and in Technosomatics. In Fred’s lecture he talked about the silencing hierarchies of western anatomy, mentioning how pleasure in the anus and in the clitoris only recently got “discovered”. This lecture helped me understand that the medicine and anatomy I had been studying so far wasn’t “objective” but shaped by capitalism and power structures. This also brought me to question when alternative medicine became “alternative” and how important it is for me to keep understanding how my body functions rather than blindly trusting professionals. When studying paintings from the Middle Ages I see how sexual pleasure often was presented as complex, grotesque and public.

Osteopathic treatment is maybe the first time I experienced holistic treatment for my body. “The treatment involves treating the person as a whole and not just treating the part of the body that causes pain and dysfunction. In osteopathy we aim to find the cause of the problem rather than just treating the affected part.”<sup>32</sup> I first received osteopathic treatment from Eero Palevaara in Helsinki and later on from Susannah Rickman in Stockholm, as a part of the Practical Anatomy course in my studies at DOCH. I connect Osteopathy to the Medieval Body by how both consider the body’s surrounding and sensations as equally valuable information as anatomical facts.

Another treatment I encountered through my studies at DOCH is Cranial Sacral Therapy. The treatment is a gentle manipulation of the bones in the skull, spine, and pelvis, which normalises the flow of cerebrospinal fluid in the central nervous system. This removes “blockages” from the normal flow, which enhances the body’s ability to heal.<sup>33</sup> From Cranial Sacral Therapy I got more

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<sup>31</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling and Action . The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* (Toronto: Contact Editions, 2012), Introduction.

<sup>32</sup> “Benefits of osteopathy”, Holistic Osteopathy, <https://www.holisticosteopathy.com>.

<sup>33</sup> Ana Gotter, “Cranial Sacral Therapy”, Healthline, September 2017, <https://www.healthline.com/health/cranial-sacral-therapy>.

interested in the idea of a liquid body. Later on as a part of my apprenticeship, I practised Craniosacral Biodynamics with Shannon Cooney, which helped me embody the principles of Cranial Sacral Therapy. We studied how bodily liquids flow and spiral into multiple directions, creating energetic streams that initiate movement, and function as midlines .<sup>34</sup>

Also since I had to consume quite strong antibiotics this fall I have been studying the gut flora. Recent studies have proven that there is a huge amount of bacteria and fungus in our intestines that are in direct connection to our nervous system and regulates our mental health.<sup>35</sup> I am also starting to understand how my menstrual cycle affects my health. Of course not all people or even all women do menstruate, but each of us has hormonal fluids that are crucial to our well-being. I think there is a slow change in scientific studies to focus more on studying connections between different fluids in our living bodies. <sup>36</sup>

Also from the experience of so many improvisation-based dance tasks I have become used to working with the imaginary. When I look at Medieval drawings of anatomy I think that they must have been drawing what they sensed and imagined was existing within themselves. And in some way, in the Contemporary Dance field in Northern Europe, we are still doing that today.

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<sup>34</sup> Franklyn Sills, *Foundations in Craniosacral Biodynamics – The Breathing Life – Fundamental Skills vol.1*, Chapter 2. *The breath of life, Holism and Biodynamics* (California: North Atlantic Books, 2011)

<sup>35</sup> Soki Choi, ” 105. Soki Choi - Goda bakterier, surkål och hjärnan i magen,” Hälsosnack med Lotta och Victoria, Podcast, September 2018, <http://halsosnack.libsyn.com/105-soki-choi-goda-bakterier-surkl-och-hjrnan-i-magen>.

<sup>36</sup> Macnaughton, ”Flesh Revealed”, 77.

## 4. Volcanoes are Wet Holes: a Swell (Studio Practice)

### 4.1 Methods

I have found consistency and repetition as good tools for me when working on a dance. Practically it means going to the studio daily, and repeating the same task, score, practice or phrase everyday. The evolvement of that task or score is the main way for the dance to take shape. Allowing the dance to appear and analysing it while dancing by dancing helps me trust the material. Eventually I make most decisions regarding light, sound, and costumes so that they support the dance. For me, aesthetic choices have always been outcomes of the dance rather than starting points for performances. When working with Ian Kaler and Cullberg Ballet this fall on the upcoming performance *On The Cusp*, we practised “consequencing”, which is a method that can be applied to almost any improvisation-based physical principle. The method is to stay with a material until it changes, and to keep following through rather than applying more information. It is kind of a performative repetition.<sup>37</sup> I found consequencing a helpful tool for when I felt restless and could not trust my material in the studio. Throughout this project I have been insisting on sticking to the same tasks to find out their potential; and applying qualities of the Medieval Body to my dancing body in order to find out what the consequences are, rather than expecting a specific outcome.

This fall I haven't had a lot of studio time to work on this project. Which meant I needed to schedule rehearsals for this performance differently. In a way this was positive for the work since I really felt a need to spend the time dancing when finally making it to the studio, rather than procrastinating on decision-making.

I have applied tools from previously familiar tasks to find ways of embodying qualities of the Medieval Body. The physical presentation of this Degree Project will be a dance, probably a performance, but it will not be a representation of the Medieval Body. It is one possible outcome of what applying certain qualities in to a body with contemporary dance training could be. The work will still be in progress when the presentation takes place but I won't call it a “work in progress” because I believe that all dances, as they are ephemeral and happen in real time, are in progress.

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<sup>37</sup> When I think of it, probably all physically executed repetitions are performative?

## 4.2 Tasks

I will only briefly mention these tasks since I chose to spend a lot of time dancing them, but not describing “what they are” or “how to execute” them. I do write after each dance, but I don’t describe the tasks in the texts I write.

1. The Oral and the Anal openings<sup>38</sup> and whatever is in between them (as a liquid midline).
2. Being a Skin Bag filled with Liquids or Being a Wet Hole Inside Out. I also apply the knowledge of the four humours, aiming to balance them, in order to create an optimal dance. I pay attention towards which humour I might have too much/little of.
3. I create holes into my liquid body, and leaking from these holes.
4. (When I get stuck I ask) If I were a waterfall, where would I fall? From/To

These are the basic tasks that I use for the two dances I will dance in the presentation that I call *Soft Dancing* and the *Toxic Waste Ritual*. In soft dancing I apply a method that I developed during the subject specialisation course here at DOCH in the spring. When dancing I describe, narrate and justify my dancing in present time in third person. I gather the information from the dance, the space around me and my imagination. I also copy phrases from different literature to provoke my train of thought and the dance. I separately describe, justify and narrate the dance, the dancer and the circumstance. After dancing I write automatic writing by hand, avoiding to describe, narrate or justify the dance that just happened.

In the Toxic Waste Ritual I apply the porosity of the Medieval Body. The Toxic Waste Ritual is a sassy and dramatic dance. I ask the dance: What if,<sup>39</sup> with all the knowledge I have gathered through dance and performance training, I claim that my body is a part of the cosmos and can temporarily be visited by all kinds of supernatural beings?<sup>40</sup> What does that do to the dance and to my dancing body? What if I claim that my body is porous, that all of the visible and invisible holes that I have are not only there to transfer liquids but are also pathways for social conditions, environment,

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<sup>38</sup>Originally a task by Elina Pirinen that she taught in the workshop “Sukset Ristiin Susirajalla”, in Nurmes, Finland, July 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Deborah Hay often asks questions in her practice starting with “What if”. It is a good way to start a question.

<sup>40</sup> “These natural forces were complemented by supernatural ones; the possibility of divine intervention, the benign and malevolent powers of angels and demons and the amoral magic of the otherworld of faery.” Saunders, *Voices and Visions*.

particles, energies, ancestors, diseases, pain, burps, sorcery, air, and dirt. The Toxic Waste Ritual is a ritual with the aim to get rid of toxic waste, relationships, emotions, people, devils, fairies, liquids – basically anything that is unnecessary in the space at the moment. The Toxic Waste Ritual is juicy, expressive and it lasts for one track of music.

I have been writing as part of all of my studio sessions. For inspiration I read medieval poetry by Anne Bradstreet, who is the first known American poet. She was a housewife and a poet, and she wrote a lot about her experiences of the body, death, pain and love.<sup>41</sup> I also read parts of *The Book of Margery Kempe* by Margery Kempe.<sup>42</sup> Kempe wrote semi-autobiographically based on her experiences and emotions. The language she uses reminds me of to Helene Cixous description of “Ècriture Feminine”<sup>43</sup> and I found many similarities in style to both *I Love Dick* by Chris Krauss and *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson. In addition to reading Bradstreet’s and Kempe’s work I arbitrarily gathered and edited sentences from sources that I have used for this project. I use them as additional scores for dancing when I feel stuck, and as examples for the texts I write in the studio. They are all written as describing a “She”, since the voice of my dance is a she. Here are a few examples:

- Trough her porous outlines and mysterious openings she is in direct relation to the natures macrocosmic body.
- Her tears, milk, blood, seed, wound- and menstruation fluids are part of an all-embracing/universal timeless stream.
- She is a hot mix of supernatural beings including God, the Devil, angels, demons, ghosts and fairies.
- She is strange and unpleasant, especially on a silly and slightly frightening way. She has weird shapes and distorted forms.
- She simultaneously invokes in an audience a feeling of uncomfortable bizarreness as well as sympathetic pity.
- She has many wet holes. She’s leaking.
- Bleeding from the armpit is an utter success.

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<sup>41</sup> Suzanne Shaut, ”Anne Bradstreet”, August 2015, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1ulRRrjp8Q>

<sup>42</sup> Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe (Classic)*, (London: Penguin Classics, July 2005), Kindle.

<sup>43</sup> Hélène Cixous, ”The Laugh of the Medusa”, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* Vol. 1, No. 4 (The University of Chicago Press: Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893, [https://artandobjecthood.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/cixous\\_the\\_laugh\\_of\\_the\\_medusa.pdf](https://artandobjecthood.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/cixous_the_laugh_of_the_medusa.pdf).

In the presentation I also perform an associative text that I gathered from the texts I have written in the studio. They derive from qualities of the Medieval Body and its relation to nature. This also applies to the title, *Volcanoes are wet holes: a Swell*.

### **5.3 Personified Organs as co-performers**

In the workshop with Manon Santkin during the Methods course at DOCH we interviewed each other on the degree projects as if they had already happened. In that exercise I described a collaboration with a visual artist who made object-friends for my presentation, so that I wouldn't need to perform alone. And then I decided to make that collaboration happen. This was very exciting, as it almost felt forbidden for me to start the whole project based on aesthetic desires.

Working with the visual artist Sofia Herelius has somehow been a steady point for me throughout this project. When I know that someone else is working on the presentation besides me I find it easier to recognise the value and workload of this project. The idea of Personified Organs came up when we discussed the Medieval Body with Sofia and specifically the idea of the outside being inside and the inside being outside. Also when looking at anatomical pictures today, the organs always look somewhat similar in size, shape and colour - but then when I look at my friends were all so different. We wanted to propose organs that are personified, that have specific qualities, beyond their functionality which can not be reproduced. That doesn't make them more important than any other organs or objects but it makes them meaningful to me. It is also a response to the objectification of female, trans and non-binary bodies. If it is so easy to objectify a person; what happens if an object becomes personified? And how come can a constitution part of a person be considered an object? Am I not also my liver, my heart, my gut and my kidney? And before the mind even existed, what was the person in a person, if not the body? In the presentation I relate to the Personified Organs as my co-performers. I have attached pictures of the organs on the front page and in the appendix.

## 6. Conclusion

I always get a bit nervous when being asked to present a project that is in relation to dance but starts from a theoretical point. In the Contemporary Dance Field in Northern Europe today I have noticed a strong interest in working conceptually, by which I mean applying information from language-based theory to dance. I fear that the concepts overrule the knowledge of the dance, since they function in different durations. As each dance has a different language, my learning process of dance takes a long time and requires repetition, whereas texts are easier to approach because I already understand the language that they are written in. But in this project the two ended up supporting each other. I didn't try to ask the same questions from dance as from theory. As I didn't have access to studios most of the time, writing this text kept me close to the physical sensation of the qualities of the Medieval Body. Each time I returned to the studio I felt as if the dance had become specific. I think this was partly because I decided to study a historical body. I want to keep reminding myself, especially when something is impossible for me to understand, to get to know the very roots of the topic. Not that I believe that all actions are consequences of each other, but I think we are somehow always referencing and commenting on our past. I was struggling with how not to romanticise the Middle Ages, as the medieval societies were extremely unjust and filled with sorrow, but still embrace qualities of the Medieval Body that could positively inform dancing today. At times, I felt that I might have got lost in the world of medical humanities, but when I read this quote by Corinne Saunders:

”A properly critical medical humanities is also a historically grounded medical humanities. Such historical grounding requires taking a long cultural perspective, going beyond traditional medical history – typically the history of disease, treatment and practice – to trace the origins and development of the ideas that underpin medicine in its broadest sense – ideas concerning the most fundamental aspects of human existence: health and illness, body and mind, gender and family, care and community.”

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I think that what she describes as the ”most fundamental aspects of human existence” sound a whole lot like my studies in Dance Performance and the topics we work with in the Contemporary Dance field here in Northern Europe today.

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<sup>44</sup> Saunders, *Voices and Visions*, 413.

In this process I have also learned to use references and footnotes. It took some time, both practically with all of the dots everywhere, but mostly I struggled with the hierarchy of “who is important enough” to be mentioned. Some old, white, dudes (like Descartes) are mentioned everywhere all the time, where as my most important sources are my friends that haven’t published their thoughts in many places yet.<sup>45</sup> But it was helpful when Josefine Wikström reminded me that it also is important to refer to authors that I do not agree with. I learned that referencing is not about placing someone on a pedestal but rather a way of showing in which lake my boat is floating. But I got some good tools from my supervisors on how to keep contextualising this work in to the Contemporary Dance field in Northern Europe today.

My biggest concern for the physical presentation is that the dance won’t be specific enough. Specific can still be ”whatever”, but then it needs to manifest as ”whatever” – which with a body trained by habits and patterns is a difficult task. By manifesting I don’t mean representing the task or showing it to the audience but embodying the material. The physical presentation of this degree project is going to be two different dances initiated by qualities of the Medieval Body. I choose to dance, because when I dance I am working with the material - with qualities of the Medieval Body - even when performing. And even as I have prepared and rehearsed and planned ahead, depending on circumstances, I can never control what the dance will communicate. So I insist on dancing, because I believe that dance transparently materialises the precariousness of existing as bodies.

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<sup>45</sup> Yet. I might write a biography called DU19 - The United (class of 2016-2019 in the BA Dance Performance), as a quick fix.

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## Appendix

Close-up pictures of personified Organs by Sofia Herelius.

