

Affective Images

SARA GROTFELT



Huldra. Photo: Vilma Rimpelä.

ABSTRACT**DATE:**

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<p>ENG</p> <p>In this written part of my master thesis I approach the making of choreography through what I call affective images. I use the artistic part of my thesis, <i>Huldra</i>, as an example of how I have worked with affective images and how I wish to work with them in the future. Both the structure and the content of this thesis fluctuate between the inside and the outside of the artistic work, inspired by the image of the Möbius strip as presented by philosopher Elizabeth Grosz. As theoretical discussion partners I use e.g. philosopher Brian Massumi's writings to contextualize my use of the word 'affect' and writings by painter Tarja Pitkänen-Walter, film critic Laura U. Marks and performance researcher Ric Allsopp to contextualize my use of the word 'image'.</p> <p>In chapter 1, I go through the process of making <i>Huldra</i> and lay out a base for the reflection further on. At the end of the first chapter I introduce the idea of the Möbius strip and explain how I use it for describing the interactions between making and writing as well the flow of affects in choreography.</p> <p>In chapter 2, I elaborate on what I mean with the concept of affective images in dialogue with theory and suggest how it can be dealt with in the practice of choreography</p> <p>In the third chapter, I describe three scenes from <i>Huldra</i> in detail, painting affective images from the piece for the reader through text. I will elaborate on what constitutes affective images in those scenes and I will propose a seed of a method for how to work with affective images in the future.</p> <p>In the final chapter, I will speculate upon the possibility of making <i>Huldra</i> again and the choices I would take after having written this thesis and thoroughly reflected on my artistic interests.</p> <p>FI</p> <p>Tässä maisterintutkinnon opinnäytteen kirjallisessa osiossa lähestyn koreografian tekemistä affektiivisten kuvien kautta. Taiteellinen opinnäytteeni <i>Huldra</i> toimii käytännön esimerkkinä työskentelystäni ja peilaan sitä vasten ajatuksiani affektiivisista kuvista. Sekä tämän kirjallisen osion muoto että sen sisältö ovat saaneet innoitusta filosofi Elizabeth Groszin Möbiuksen nauhan metaforasta. Ajatukseni aaltoilevat taiteellisen työskentelyn sisä- ja ulkopinnoilla. Teoreettisina keskustelukumppaneina toimivat mm. filosofi Brian Massumin kirjoitukset, jotka kontekstualisoivat ajatuksiani affektista, ja taitelijia Tarja Pitkänen-Walterin, elokuvakriitikko Laura U. Marks ja esitysteoreetikko Ric Allsoppin kirjoitukset, jotka kontekstualisoivat ajatuksiani kuvista.</p> <p>Ensimmäisessä luvussa käyn läpi <i>Huldra</i> tekoprosessia ja luon pohjan tekstin myöhemmälle reflektiolle. Luvun loppupuolella esittelen Elizabeth Groszin idean Möbiuksen nauhasta ja selitän, miten käytän tätä metaforaa kuvatakseni taiteellisen työn ja siitä kirjoittamisen suhdetta, sekä affektien virtaamista koreografiassa.</p> <p>Toisessa luvussa kuvailen, mitä tarkoitan affektiivisilla kuvilla ja kuinka ne toimivat koreografisessa praktiikassani, keskustellen teoreettisten lähteiden kanssa.</p>			

Kolmannessa luvussa kuvailen kolmea *Huldran* kohtausta yksityiskohtaisesti, piirtäen affektiivisia kuvia lukijalle tekstin keinoin. Pohdin, miten affektiiviset kuvat syntyvät näissä kohtauksissa ja ehdotan metodin siementä työskentelylle affektiivisten kuvien parissa tulevaisuudessa.

Viimeisessä luvussa leikkittelen mahdollisuudella tehdä *Huldra* uudestaan ja pohdin, millaisia valintoja tekisin nyt, kirjoitettuani tämän opinnäytteen ja pohdittuani taiteellisia kiinnostuksenkohteitani perusteellisesti.

ENTER KEYWORDS HERE

Affect, image, choreography, performance, Möbius strip, haptic, optical, inside, outside

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INTRODUCTION

On my 28th birthday, March 16th 2020, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic. The schools, theatres, museums and libraries were closed and the future of the precarious field I had decided to study was put into question. During the weeks leading up to this event, I, together with the other dance and choreography students at the Theatre Academy of Helsinki, had been composing performative gifts in a workshop lead by Spanish choreographer Cuqui Jerez. This workshop affected me very much, both personally and artistically, and my thoughts often go back to it as a nostalgic reminiscence of the pre-pandemic era. Jerez's approach to artistry and art making made a significant impact on me. I remember her saying "You need to fall in love with your work". Fascinated, but simultaneously provoked, I read this statement in a more elaborate form in an interview by Soili Huhtakallio with Jerez in *Koreoblogi*, the blog of the choreography programme at Teak:

For me desire is something absolutely crucial in artistic practice – desire and pleasure. So, we're talking a lot about how important it is that the motor of your practice is desire, something that you really need to explore, really need to learn – that there is a kind of urgency. We even talked about artistic practice as a kind of object of love. Me personally, I'm in this kind of in love state when I'm creating. (Huhtakallio, 2020)

My primary reaction was: how naive is that? How are we supposed to fall in love with what we do when the planet is literally burning and anxiety and depression are lurking behind every corner? But then it struck me that perhaps falling in love with what one does is the only way to survive, to be connected to oneself at the same time as surrendering to one's object of love. So I began to think of art-making as a form of love that requires the same kind of tending and care as love in partnership. Passion might temporarily fade away but it can be re-ignited by staying curious, always looking at things from new perspectives and allowing oneself and the other to change. Or maybe loving art-making is more like loving an old friend, a form of love that can stay there for decades although one might not feel it every day. But when you meet your object of

love, there's always a shared place to begin a conversation, a certainty that everything's going to be ok.

In the aftermath of Jerez's workshop, restricted by the lockdown, I, together with two peer students, Sanni Kriikku (MA dance performance) and Maya Oliva (MA choreography), created an internet artwork called *Days with Daisy*. The work consisted of textual fragments, videos and drawings. Making this digital work made me realize how complex an artform choreographic performance actually is. Working with text, video and pictures made it possible to change the order of things very fast, which opened up a possibility for gradually figuring out what kinds of meanings and affects the work was suggesting, a possibility for allowing the material to guide the makers. Being able to manipulate the artistic material 'by hand', slowly crafting the work through cutting and pasting, made me ponder upon how the liveness, the unfolding in space and time, of choreography makes the artform very difficult to handle. Sometimes it feels like choreography is slipping away through my fingers, that it is on the verge of being ungraspable. I have often been thinking that I have chosen the most difficult art form to work with.

Despite this observation, choreography, in all its complexity, has seduced me. My choreographing is guided by a love for layering meanings to create new meanings, and an intuitive drive towards affective, bodily palpable events. Choreography, for me, is what happens when bodies (human and non-human) affect other bodies in time and space. Choreography is a multiplicity of inner logics created in the process of every performance, constantly redefining itself. Choreography is an unforeseeable pattern that emerges in and of itself while being in constant dialogue with the world around it. Making choreography is falling in and out of love, sometimes so much out of love that I have considered leaving it all together for other kinds of easier loves. But choreography keeps pulling me back and I let it take me.

My main topic and title for this written part of my master thesis is *Affective Images*. The journey to this title has not been a straightforward one and the arrival to the contents of this thesis has been a hazy maze of passionate but sporadic thoughts. I'm writing this thesis from the perspective of a choreographer reflecting on her performance in retrospect. My graduation piece *Huldra* forms the core of this written reflection and I will return to it over and over. I'm looking back through a messy, non-linear process,

which many artistic processes are. The performance is sent out into the world (although witnessed by a very limited number of people due to the pandemic) and I'm left with reminiscence, a video documentation and my thoughts. Looking back at the process of *Huldra* constantly changes the work and how it affects me. I find the after-life of a performance, and the possibility of bringing it back to life through text, fascinating.

I have attempted to write this thesis through some sort of artistic love-goggles, inspired by Jerez's idea of art-making mentioned above. With this I mean that I have allowed myself to occasionally drift away, to think about thesis-writing a bit more like art-making, so that the material (the text) sometimes leads me instead of vice versa. This has created a style of writing which fluctuates between rather intimate and more distant. I approach the things I write about at times from the inside, from an affective place close to my body and at other times from the outside, from a more analytical place.

In the parts where I describe *Huldra* and what kinds of associations and sensations the performance has created, I speak from a first person perspective. I cannot know how other audience members have perceived the work and I do not know which kinds of affects or meanings the work has generated for them. So I am not trying to make statements about what *Huldra* is supposed to do or how it should be perceived. I am speaking about what the process of making *Huldra* has done to me and how the work has fed my artistic thinking.

By moving in and out of *Huldra* through the text, I will develop an understanding of what affective images are and why I think it is important to work with images in choreography in a time already saturated with a constant flow of images. The topic of affective images has emerged through the writing process. It has come up through reflecting on an intuitive tendency of working with images which I have recognized in my practice. *Huldra* will travel through this thesis as an example of the practical work with affective images, tying reflection to practice and analysis to making. Towards the end of my writing, I will speculate on what kind of choices I would take if I were to make *Huldra* again. This is a way of shaping an understanding of how this written reflection has affected my thinking and what I will bring with me from this process into my future artistic practice.

As theoretical discussion partners I use writings and ideas from both scholars, such as feminist theorist and philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi, philosopher and film scholar Laura U. Marks and performance theorist Ric Allsopp, and artist-writers, such as performance practitioner Eirini Kartsaki and painter and D.A. Tarja Pitkänen-Walter. I have intentionally not built a theoretical framework for this thesis in any specific field, since I have attempted to let the art and the writing lead the way. I have turned to texts that I have encountered during my six years of studies within dance and choreography, first in Copenhagen and the past two years in Helsinki, and chosen to draw from those writings that feed my exploration of affective images.

In chapter 1, *Huldra and the Möbius Strip*, I go through the process of making *Huldra* and lay out a base for the reflection further on. I divide the process of making the performance into three phases: foreplay, play and afterplay, which I find joyfully descriptive of the nature of artistic process. Foreplay describes the planning and preparation for the rehearsals, play describes the six weeks of rehearsals in the studio and afterplay describes the work and reflection after the performances. I also write about the debris, the excess, the abandoned love children: ideas and materials which were left over from the making of *Huldra*. Towards the end of the first chapter I introduce the idea of the Möbius strip by Elizabeth Grosz and explain how I use it for describing the interactions between making and writing as well the flow of affects in choreography.

In chapter 2, *Affective Images*, I elaborate on what I mean with the concept of affective images and how it can be dealt with in the practice of choreography. I will contextualize the word 'affect' through affect theory, mainly drawing from Massumi and the word 'image' through writings by Pitkänen-Walter and Allsopp. With the help of Marks, I will open up the idea of the flow between the haptic and the optical as a crucial element for constituting affective images.

In the third chapter, *Affective Images in Huldra*, I describe three scenes from *Huldra* in detail, painting affective images from the piece for the reader through text. I will

elaborate on what constitutes affective images in those scenes and I will propose a seed of a method for how to work with affective images in the future.

In the final chapter, *The Remake: After Afterplay*, I will speculate upon the possibility of making *Huldra* again and the choices I would take after having written this thesis and thoroughly reflected on my artistic interests. I will fantasize about how a potential new *Huldra* could enhance its affective images even more, how the flow between the haptic and the optical could become more present and how the seductive elements of the piece could be brought a step further.

1. HULDRA AND THE MÖBIUS STRIP

Huldra was a performance for two performers in a light grey space with radios covered with hair, fake fur and flowers hanging from the ceiling. The atmosphere of the piece was meditative and calm, with an undertone of something hidden beneath the surface, something threatening waiting underground. The soundscape, the lighting and the movement were sewn together into a whole that created repetitive patterns through softness, slowness and delicacy. The two performers looked rather similar, with red, long hair and shiny grey anoraks, and the spectator was confronted with questions about their identity and relation to each other. The relationship between the performers was quite intimate, as if they were two individuals of the same species executing their slightly uncanny daily routine.

The performance premiered 27th of May 2021 to a small audience due to the pandemic. The wonderful working group consisted of performers Sanni Kriikku and Corinne Mustonen, sound designer Eetu Palomäki, light designer Saana Volanen and myself as the choreographer. The scenography was created by Saana and Eetu together.

I will now describe the process of making *Huldra* through three phases: foreplay, play and afterplay. With foreplay I mean the planning and preparation of the work, play describes the six weeks of rehearsals in the studio and the afterplay consists of the aftermath, the writing of this thesis and a reflection of the Möbius strip as a way of understanding the relations between the inside and the outside of artistic practice and thinking.

1.1. Foreplay

The starting point for the piece was the huldra, a seductive forest spirit in Scandinavian folklore. I encountered the huldra by accident as I was googling information about the meaning of hair in Nordic folklore for another project. She appeared to me through Wikipedia, planted herself in me and did not leave me alone. I interpreted this as a call for reincarnation of the huldra in the form of choreography. Before I discovered the

huldra, I had planned to work with affect in my graduation piece. How and through which means was not at all clear for me when I started the process. The huldra infiltrated my thinking and gave a clear frame for a broad choreographic interest. I began making the performance with the question: How could the huldra reincarnate in the form of a choreographic performance?

According to folklore researcher Tommy Kuusela, the huldra is a forest warden that usually appears in the shape of a fair young woman with long hair and the backside of a rotten tree trunk. Sometimes she is also depicted as a troll-like character with breasts so long that they are flung over her shoulders when she runs. The huldra has the tail of an animal, usually a cow or a fox, and sometimes she is depicted with hooves as feet. The descriptions of huldra suggest that she is a liminal being, partly human and partly beast. (Kuusela, 2020)

The stories of the huldra often include her alluring hunters deep into the forest and seducing them. These stories have been interpreted by scholars as sexual fantasies of men who have spent long periods of time alone in the forest. The huldra can be kind or viscous depending on how she is treated by humans. She has many names in different Scandinavian countries such as 'skogsrå' in Sweden and 'metsänneito' in Finland. In the Nordic countries the forest used to be a dangerous place where getting lost could be fatal. The huldra can be seen as an anthropomorphic manifestation of the power of the forest realm. In Finnish folklore also metsänpeitto, the forest cover, has a similar function as the huldra, although metsänpeitto is the forest itself and not a character living in the forest. Both the huldra and metsänpeitto have a similar function, they lead people astray or spirit them away. The name huldra derives from an Old Norse word that means 'hidden'. (Kuusela, 2020)

The huldra sparked a pondering in me upon the anthropomorphic manifestations of natural forces in pre-Christian belief systems. I was curious if a character such as the huldra could be translated into choreography and how this would be possible. The idea was that the performance would become a huldra in such a way that the performers, the scenography, light and sound would become her body, together. I was wondering if it would be possible to undo the process of personification of natural forces into a

character by distributing those forces into different elements of the choreography. By, in a way, deconstructing the character of huldra, I aimed to get to the bottom of the features and forces that have been appointed to her in folkloric tales and wished to investigate what they could look like today, in a different context. The most evident trait and force of the huldra is her ability to seduce and lead astray. Therefore I decided to work primarily with the idea of seduction when developing material for the performance.

1.1.1. Seduction

In the process of making *Huldra*, the working group spoke about seduction more as an atmosphere than a foreplay leading to sexual action. Our idea of seduction was one of getting lost, getting allured or being led astray. In Greek mythology the sirens seduce through their song, but from the tales of huldra I had not been able to pinpoint exactly by which means she seduces the unsuspecting forest-goers. In my understanding it is mostly her looks and her outer beauty that does the trick, which is not very satisfactory in relation to the complex forces of the forest and the art of choreography. The tales of the huldra brought up only one clear physical action, which was turning: the huldra turns her back, which looks like a rotten tree trunk, to humans in order to hide (Kuusela, 2020). As the tales of the huldra did not suggest other clear actions, we allowed ourselves as a working group to make them up through the process.

I was interested in ways of seducing that operated between the human and the non-human bodies in the performance space. I found out that the way to work with this kind of seduction in *Huldra* was through repetition. I will describe how we used repetition in the making of the performance further down in the section of *Play*.

1.1.2. Field Trip

In February 2021, the working group of *Huldra* made a field trip to the forest of Sipoonkorpi national park to explore the natural habitat of the huldra. This trip worked as a possibility for the working group to get to know each other and a way of laying common ground for the making of the performance. The forest was covered in shimmering snow which lit up the whole area by reflecting sunlight. This became a revelation, especially for the light design of the piece, of that the performance could be

flooded with light rather than happen in darkness as would be the obvious way to go when dealing with an environment such as the forest. Also on an atmospheric level, I realized that the huldra of our working group was not going to be lurking in the darkness but bathing in light. The daylight was eventually most present at the beginning of the performance, in the Pocket Seduction scene, which I will describe further down. An audience member later told me that this scene reminded him of the horror movie *Midsommar* (2019), directed and written by Ari Aster. In the movie a group of friends travel to a mysterious cult to celebrate midsummer. Little by little horrific things start to happen to the characters. The movie happens in full daylight but it has a very creepy and uncanny atmosphere. A similar undertone was present in *Huldra* although we did not engage actively with the horror genre.

During the field trip, the working group briefly discussed another important factor in the foreplay of *Huldra*, which retrospectively thinking has probably affected the content of this thesis more than I ever thought it would: the uncertainty of whether the performance would ever be made because of the pandemic, and the possibility of the work eventually becoming a video. After making the internet artwork *Days with Daisy*, which I mentioned in the introduction, I was very determined to make my graduation work a live performance. However, having worked with video definitely affected the way I approached the making of *Huldra*, through images. I realized that I get inspired by strong images, images that give rise to a multitude of associations and atmospheres. This source of inspiration has since developed into an artistic practice and the topic of this thesis, affective images.

1.2. Play

After the conceptual deconstruction of the huldra, which included pinpointing the traits and forces appointed to her in folklore, we started to patch her together again, not in the form of a story or narrative, but in the form of scenes, images and movements that would generate affects, forces and atmospheres that would create a feeling of the huldra for the audience. In its own artistic way, the piece continued the ephemeral, undocumented history of folklore, not as oral tradition but as choreographic performance. The piece could be described as immersive folklore, a space that sucks the spectator into its depths and reveals atmospheres that might have been forgotten.

1.2.1. The Performance

Huldra consisted of four scenes that slid into one another through the pulsating soundscape, the changes of colour, saturation, shape and brightness of the lighting, and the constant attunement of the performer's bodies. I use the word 'attunement' here to describe the delicate and concentrated way of performing that was present in the performers' bodies from the beginning to the end of the performance. It is my translation of the Finnish word 'vire', with which professor Kirsi Monni described the way of performing in *Huldra* after seeing the piece.

The conceptual starting point for both the sound design and the scenography of the piece was the idea of a forest of radios. This manifested in a scenography, created by Eetu and Saana, through radios hanging from their chords from the ceiling, covered with wigs, fake fur and a faded pink fabric with flowers growing out from the top.

The first scene was named Pocket Seduction. In this scene, the performers were standing with their backs towards the audience and slowly started to turn front and back, one by one, opening the zips of the pockets of their anoraks. This scene developed into a score that we called 'epähähmä', which could be translated into something like 'unfuzzy', where the performers danced away from each other and back together again during a time of ten minutes with soft, indulging and graceful movements. After this, Sanni and Corinne came together on the floor, one leaning against the other's pelvis and they whistled.

From there began the Tail Loop where the performers created a loop of positions, by sitting and lying on top of each other, which repeated ten times. Meanwhile the soundscape intensified and the lighting went from bright to blue. The Tail Loop eventually dissolved into another, shorter loop, where the performers shook their hair vigorously in a repeating pattern and ended up with their backs towards the audience, melting down towards the floor simultaneously, as the space around them filled up with colourful, rapidly moving reflections of light.

After a moment of darkness, a spotlight turned on in the centre of the space and Sanni and Corinne pulled out a lock of hair each from their front pockets. They brushed their fingers through the hair with long, persistent strokes and ended up with the hair in their mouths, pouring back into their pockets through their teeth, sometimes getting stuck, transforming the hair into a beard or a waterfall of dead cellular structure. In the end, the two bodies merged into one three legged creature with long red hair, which kept sliding its fingers through the hair until the spotlight slowly faded out.

1.2.2. Making-of

During the six weeks long process of working in the studio, I tried to figure out how the different features of the huldra creature, mainly her seductive force and her material qualities such as the hair and the tail, could be transformed into choreographic scores. I was interested in making the whole performance a huldra instead of having the performers play huldras. This created an interesting dilemma in terms of the bodies of the performers: if they were not going to be characters, then what would their bodies be? The question of the body also struck me when reading about the huldra: she is on one hand a product of human imagination, a metaphor for natural forces, but on the other she is a body of flesh and blood. Eventually we figured out that as the performers were performing, they could imagine that the two of them together are the huldra. In this way, we attempted to get away from the idea of two individuals towards an idea of a shared body.

One of the first scores we worked with had a quite concrete imperative: Be the other one's tail. From this score emerged the Tail Loop which ended up in the performance. The idea of the tail became more and more abstract as we crafted the scene, until the idea was present mostly in the way the performers were following each other's impulses when changing positions, one always giving the impulse and the other following it with almost no delay, like a very short tail.

Another physical trait of the huldra, that was present in the performers' actions, was the hair. Both of the performers, Sanni and Corinne, happened to have long red hair, which made them look rather similar. This was an accidental fact that we baked into the

performance and it enhanced the idea of a shared body. The hair of the performers gave birth to the hair motif, which eventually became a major factor in constituting the affective images of *Huldra*.

The hair was also present in the scenography, the wonderful radio clumps created by Saana and Eetu. Thinking about it in retrospect, the clumps and the performers could be seen as different sides of the huldra, the clumps focusing on her materiality and the performers focusing on a physical manifestation of her forces. A quote comes to mind that I read in a book by performance maker and writer Eirini Kartsaki called *Repetition in Performance* (2017): “How can one make invisible forces visible?” (Deleuze according to Kartsaki 2017, 3). The quote refers to what Francis Bacon tried to do in his art according to Deleuze in his book on Bacon. For me in the context of choreography, this question could be expanded to: How to make invisible forces visible, and then invisible again? Or to put it in another way: How to create choreographic material from affects and allow for new affects to occur through the material? This question in the context of *Huldra* led me to work with repetition as a way of manifesting certain forces in movement.



Huldra. Photo: Vilma Rimpelä.

1.2.3. Repetition

After reflecting on my new found love for repetition, I have realized that for me repetition is a state of mind, a bodily-intellectual source of pleasure and a meaning-making machine in the most positive manner. Repetition creates patterns that can be woven into choreography. Also oral tradition and folklore is based on repetition with variation: stories are told from generation to generation and they constantly change slightly while keeping something essential with them. Through this perspective, it made sense to work with repetition in *Huldra*.

In her book *Repetition in Performance* mentioned above, Kartsaki writes very passionately about repetition's force in performance, which she claims is an erotic one. One that invites the spectator closer but also pushes them away. She suggests that repetition in contemporary performance is a possible source of pleasure and she proposes four different ways of describing those pleasures. One of these spoke to me particularly, namely the experience of repetition as *jouissance*. (Kartsaki 2017, 1-17)

Philosopher and literary theorist Roland Barthes uses the term '*jouissance*' (translated into 'bliss' in English) in his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) to describe a different kind of pleasure than that of '*plaisir*' (pleasure). Barthes states the following about bliss:

Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Barthes 1975, 14)

It is a pleasure that is never really satisfied, a pleasure that alienates but simultaneously connects a reader to their body. For me *jouissance* is very much connected to seduction. Kartsaki explains how repetition sometimes takes control of her body, seduces her, and then she regains control again. For me seduction in performance, like *jouissance*, works through both bodily sensations and associations. Repetition in *Huldra* worked as a physical manifestation of the force of seduction, a way of making the invisible force visible. Repetition was present in the Pocket Seduction, in the Tail Loop and in the

soundscape. Also the fact that the performers looked alike could be seen as a form of repetition. That's the thing about repetition, once you start thinking about it, you see it everywhere.

1.2.4. The Debris

As with all creative processes, there was a big part of *Huldra* that never made it into the final piece. I will write here about some of the debris material, which I think deserves mentioning even though it did not end up in the piece. Through these descriptions it is also possible to create a sense of the hidden potentials of *Huldra* and what kind of performance it also could have become. I find the debris very interesting in terms of how much of it is created in all artistic processes. One could think that making a performance does not have to be about making up new things, but the artist could just return to their personal debris, think of it as seeds, water them and let them bloom.

We worked for a long time with a scene called the *Bird Dance*, which originated from a score which consisted of watching YouTube clips of mating dances of birds and composing movement sequences out of them by translating the movements into the human body. The score was inspired by the idea of seduction and what it could mean in a non-human context. This was an interesting and certainly fun part of the process but in the end I figured that the birds and the huldra were not that closely related after all. However, the Bird Dance echoed as an undertone in the final piece and fed the seductive atmosphere in its own humorous way. A reminiscence of the bird dance was the short moment of whistling before the performers started to do the Tail Loop.

Another debris material was something we called the Ritual. This was a scene where Sanni and Corinne, starting out as a multi-legged hair monster not showing its face, executed performative acts with objects such as antlers, whisks made of fake reed, plastic flowers and a mirror. The scene became a very beautiful, kind of kitschy image, which in the end did not find a place in the aesthetic realm of the performance. We had plans of projecting a video of a fireplace onto the mirror, which I would very much like to actualize if *Huldra* gets to see the daylight again. What was left from this scene in the final performance was the reflections of colourful light which took over the space for a moment after the Tail Loop, the hair monster, which ended up sitting in a different

position, and the flowers, which turned into real flowers and became part of the scenography growing out of the hairy radios.

One last piece of debris was a text that came out of a spontaneous writing session one late evening at the end of rehearsals. The task was to write about how one thing changes into another. Corinne wrote a text out of somewhere, in my interpretation a very intuitive place affected by the things we had done in rehearsals that day, which I fell in love with. The text created associations to a whole other world than that of the huldra, which was nice, but also the reason why we eventually chose to leave it out. We also did not find an appropriate place for the text in the composition, although some of it was still present as a whisper at the end of the piece in the first couple shows. Then we also cut that last piece of text, because we felt it was too random when there had been no other text in the earlier parts.

1.3. Afterplay: The Inside Out and the Outside In

The afterplay of *Huldra* manifests in this written thesis and the reflection it has provoked. I started writing already in July 2021, one month after the performance of *Huldra*, when I went to the countryside to walk around in the forest, the home of the huldra, and think about what I had done. When I was in the middle of the process of making the performance I could hardly understand what I was doing. The process was very intuitive and a combination of navigating the position of a choreographer-facilitator at the same time as trying to figure out my artistic interests. Only later on, with a good distance to the process, have I been able to understand what was going on and what it has brought to my artistic thinking.

During the process of my thesis, the artistic part first and now the writing, my thoughts have been following a certain kind of loop-shaped roller coaster where they circulate between the inside of making choreography and the outside of analysing the making. This fluctuation between the inside out and the outside in is a way for me of thinking about the relationship between theory and practice, the complex perspectives of a choreographer in an artistic process and affective images as something that flows between the body and the mind, the haptic and the optical and the material and the symbolic. I have found it useful to think of these relations through the image of the

Möbius strip, where the inside and the outside are the same but not quite. I am borrowing the idea from feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz and her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994)

In this book, Grosz adapts the model of the Möbius strip as a metaphor for the interactions of mind and body within the human subject. The Möbius strip is a three-dimensional surface that is twisted in such a way that it only has one side (see below). This means that its inside is simultaneously its outside. The Möbius strip is originally a mathematical figure but it has been used e.g. for illustrating the problematisation of binary oppositions in psychoanalysis by Jaques Lacan. (Grosz 1994, xii)



"Möbius Strip" by Andrew Gustar is licensed with CC BY-ND

Grosz describes her use of the Möbius strip as follows:

Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. (Grosz 1994, xii)

As Grosz focuses on thinking about the human subject, I am interested in using a similar conceptualization for thinking about choreography. I find the Möbius strip an

appropriate tool to depict the entanglement of two different perspectives that include each other, such as the making of *Huldra* and the writing of this thesis. Here I regard the making of *Huldra* the inside out and the writing of this thesis the outside in. The image of the Möbius strip is present in my writing as a reminder of the fact that things and their boundaries can be clearly definable yet blurry at the same time. Inside and outside are different but simultaneously present. The Möbius strip allows me to constantly shift between intuitive, affective reflection and analytic thinking, while writing and looking back at the process of *Huldra*.

The Möbius strip can also be seen as a model for the perspectives of the choreographer. Choreography is an art form where, for me, the inside and the outside become particularly mixed up, as both choreographic thinking and choreographic practice require constant fluctuation between being inside of the work and looking at it from the outside. I think that in choreography, the interval between being on the inside and being on the outside is longer than e.g. in the practise of painting, where the doing and seeing is almost simultaneous. In choreography, one has to actively feel the work from the inside, experience its materiality and gain knowledge from experience. Simultaneously one is analysing the meanings and the effects of the affects that the work is creating from the outside, looking in. So the movement between the inside and the outside is rather big but constant and without strict contours, like a wave. While choreographing, I see myself as a little figure, surfing the wave of the Möbius strip, not even noticing when the inside becomes the outside and vice versa.

It was by thinking through the Möbius strip that I found my way to the topic of affective images. The idea of the inside and the outside simultaneously made me ponder upon how these two manifest in my experience when watching performances. I was wondering what elements in performances that I have seen really touch me. The strongest kind of touch for me is a touch that is experienced through the eyes but felt in other places of the body, and a touch that triggers associations that generate emotions. This observation combined with my tendency to think through images led me to work with affective images. However, what is touching for whom is obviously highly personal. So creating affective images is a matter of following my intuition but simultaneously keeping a distance to the work so that the images I create could become affective for other people as well.

In this thesis the Möbius strip, the outside in and the inside out, will work as a tool to think through, both for me and the reader. The metaphor brings together several levels of my artistic practice and illuminates the complexity of both working with a choreographic performance and writing about it. As the image of the Möbius strip suggests, this work is an infinite loop and a constant coming and going that is never resolved. Therein lies the seductive power of choreography, the power that keeps pulling me back to making again and again.

2. AFFECTIVE IMAGES

Affect entered my life in 2015 through a reading circle in Copenhagen in the form of the essay *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995) by Brian Massumi. As I read this text I did not understand much about what affect was but it felt significant and my curiosity towards it started sprouting. The difficulty to define affect, or to capture it with words, has worked as an important motor for my artistic work ever since. For me, the idea of affect has played a key role in investigating my relationship with art and what it is about certain artworks that stays with me. It is rather wobbly to try to explicitly work with affect in one's artistic practice, since one could claim that affect exists everywhere all the time anyway. However, I believe that art can create the kind of affects that have the potential to shift the way we see the world ever so slightly.

In my work, I aim to create affects through composing affective images that both look like something and feel like something. By this I mean that affective images for me consist of layers of associations combined with bodily palpable, haptic elements. So the affective images I'm looking for appear through the flow between the associative and the bodily capacities of material (movement, bodies, sound, light, objects, space and other things). Affective images are images that unfold slowly and carefully, hold tension and release difficult pleasures. Affects often transform into emotional reactions or feelings either right away or after some time. Before this happens there is a moment of undefinable, bodily response that can be felt as a cold stream of water running against gravity through the spine and up to the head or as a warm gel-like substance slowly surrounding the chest and leaking between the ribs out through the skin. These kinds of sensations are such corporeal responses to affect that I am looking for when I make choreography. Images in a choreographic performance that give me such bodily sensations are what I call affective images.

2.1. Affect

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces - visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion-that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in

neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 1.)

Bindings and un-bindings, becomings and un-becomings, jarring disorientations and rhythmic attunements (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2).

The two quotes above summarize in a poetic and, in my opinion, rather choreographic way what could be meant with the word 'affect'. There are many different directions within affect theory, which is a constantly developing field of study within philosophy, the humanities, culture studies, psychology and other areas, which emphasizes bodily experience or capacities as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of representation. Two of these directions are often brought up as the main conceptions of affect, one initiated by psychologist Silvan Tomkins and the other by philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Affect for Tomkins is something biological, close to emotion but more instinctive, happening in the subject and lacking an object. In the Spinozist-Deleuzian tradition, affect is relational, something that happens in between bodies and is not locatable within subject or object, however it can engender feelings in the subject. (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 5-6.) In the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth describe the relationship between the two strands as follows:

There is, then, a certain sense of reverse flow between these lines of inquiry- a certain inside- out/outside-in difference in directionality: affect as the prime "interest" motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives (Tomkins); affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman (Deleuze). (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 6).

The idea of Tomkins's affect moving from the inside out and Deleuze's affect from the outside in makes me think of the Möbius strip. Perhaps affect is neither nor, but both, on the inside and the outside simultaneously.

Affect theory gained boost during the 1990's when the essays *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold* (1995) by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank and the above mentioned *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995) by Brian Massumi were published. Sedgwick draws from Tomkins and Massumi follows the Deleuzian line. (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 5.) I will focus on Massumi here since his idea of affect is what originally ignited my interest towards the topic. I will bring forward a few points from his highly complex essay that support my thinking of affective images.

In my understanding, Massumi sees affect as a force or intensity that causes reactions in the body before language takes over and categorizes the things we experience. In *The Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi refers to psychological studies where children's physical reactions to two versions of the same movie were compared with their reports of which kind of emotions the movies triggered in them. What was noticed in these experiments was that there was a discrepancy between the content and the effect of the images. The intensity of the physical effect of the movies was not logically connected to the nature of the content. Massumi also speaks about the "missing half-second", the delay between the beginning of a bodily action in the brain and its manifestation in physical movement. He lays out his philosophical elaboration on affect through the findings of these scientific experiments. (Massumi 2002, 23-29)

Massumi brings up the concept of the virtual, which for him means (simplified by me) the realm of potential in the body, and connects it to the missing half-second. Through referring to philosophers such as Spinoza, Deleuze and Simondon, he ends up defining affect as (among other things) "the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other" (Massumi 2002, 35) I can't help but be reminded again of the Möbius strip by this sentence, although virtual and actual are not equivalent to the inside and the outside. Massumi lays out an idea of affect as a sort of virtual perspective that is autonomous in the sense that it cannot be captivated in a body.

What I find relevant in Massumi is the fact that, although affect can be felt in the body, it is not really located there, since it does not have a physical location. I see affects as forces that fly around and can only be attempted to capture in movement or material.

However, this is a project bound to fail, as is the task of the question posed in the *Making-of* section in chapter 1 of this thesis: How to make invisible forces visible? If one tries to capture affect, it sort of evaporates, and new affects appear through the material. The paradox of trying to work with affect in art when it is such a slippery thing stimulates my artistic thinking.

During my studies I have also been drawn towards dealing with emotions in my choreographic practice and for a long time emotion was the planned topic of my thesis. For Massumi, emotion is affect captured by subjectivity and semantic structures, and he strictly separates the two (Massumi 2002, 28). I would like to think of these two a bit closer to each other, inspired by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed. According to Ahmed in a conversation with professor Sigrid Schmitz, affect and emotion can be separated on a conceptual level but if we think that they are separated in the actual world, which is a messy place, we might lose something essential in our thinking about reality. Ahmed is critical towards the way emotion has been reduced to being subject-centered, a subjective feeling in response to something, and she regards emotion as something “much more complicated and socially mediated than that” (Schmitz 2014, 97.) The conflict between Ahmed’s emotions and Massumi’s affect, as I understand it, is that the way Massumi thinks of affect as autonomous, outside of cultural codes, does not make sense for Ahmed’s feminist perspective and social constructivism.

However, after careful consideration, I have chosen to use the word ‘affective’ instead of ‘emotional’ to describe the images I create to avoid the connotation to the everyday use of the word ‘emotion’. In my view affect is also a broader concept than emotion and it includes both the human and the non-human things that are present in the performance event (although for Ahmed these are also present in the realm of emotions). The question about the relation of affect and emotion in art would be a good topic for my next research, however for now I will settle for the fact that I have chosen ‘affective’ to be my word based on mostly affective reasoning.

2.2. Image

Etymologically the word image derives from the Latin word *imaginem* (nominative *imago*) which refers to “copy, imitation, likeness” or “phantom, ghost, apparition” (Online Etymology Dictionary). The word image used in everyday language usually refers to either a picture or a mental image, an idea. All of these definitions suggest that an image is not the ‘real thing’ but only a representation or a reminiscence of something real. Although the visual arts have already since the early days of abstract art reached beyond representation, the word ‘image’ in my experience still has the negative connotation of something purely symbolic in the context of choreography. I wish to argue that the affective images I work with, although feeding on the symbolic connotations of things, become more than just representation through the layering of those symbols with the haptic capacities of the material. Due to the live, three-dimensional nature of choreographic performance, what looks like something also is something, does something and most importantly for me, feels like something.

Painter and D.A. Tarja-Pitkänen Walter writes beautifully about images in her doctoral dissertation *Liian haurasta kuvaksi* (Too Fragile to Turn it into Representation 2006). She writes about what in Finnish is called ‘mielikuva’, which means ‘mental image’ or ‘idea’ and how this mental image can work as a primary subject or even method for the artist. For Pitkänen-Walter, a mental image is a multi-sensorial thing that includes rhythms, atmospheres and sensations beyond language. She mentions dreams she has had about the most magnificent artworks that sadly were not created by her. And when she has woken up, she has realized that the artworks were created by her after all, through her imagination. (Pitkänen-Walter 2006, 18-20.) I have also had these kinds of dreams and it has made me ponder upon the power of imagination and mental images in art-making.

It is not only when sleeping that I make up artworks. I have fantasised about future events since early childhood through playing those events as movies in my head. Once I started to make choreographies, this tendency followed me. I often pre-plan the work in my head, which I’m sure many artists do at some level, but this is not always productive in the context of choreographic performance since the elements of a choreography are so complex that it is impossible to imagine what they will bring out

once actualized. And if one could plan an artwork in advance, there would be much less pleasure in actually making it.

I have tried to avoid following the urge to try to actualize my mental images for several reasons. One is that I hope to let the material generated together with the working group in the rehearsals tell me what to do, instead of pre-planning too much and asking the working group to execute my wish. Another reason is that the mental image, once actualized, might not be at all what I imagined it to be and this might cause discrepancy between me and the working group and also a lack of confidence in my own choices. And, of course, the unknown, the not yet defined element of affect and art cannot really happen if I already know what kind of images I want to end up with.

However, basing a performance on task based, open scores, which for some choreographers can work as the way to reach something unknown, hasn't really worked out for me. We worked on several scores in the process of *Huldra*, which eventually gave rise to the scenes and images in the final piece, but the scores always ended up in a set structure. In the performance of *Huldra* the emergence of affective images was based on atmospheres, association and the way of performing rather than open compositional forms.

Despite the problematics with envisioning choreography through mental images, I believe that there is potential in working through them. The potential lies in the possibility to find a clear seed for guiding the process which then will grow into different directions and transform. This seed for me is an image, which the creation process is expanding and stretching, messing up and weaving into patterns. The image is broken in the process, as Pitkänen-Walter also suggests: "Maalauksen luonne kiteytyy paradoksiin: *kuvan maalaaminen tarkoittaa kuvan rikkomista*. Se tarkoittaa ennestään tunnetun mielikuvan hajottamista ja uuden mielikuvan synnyttämistä." (Pitkänen-Walter 2006, 23.) Freely translated by me: "The nature of painting crystallizes in a paradox: *to paint an image means to break the image*. This means to break the preconceived mental image and to construct a new mental image" Maybe this thought could be observed parallel to my version of Kartsaki's question from chapter 1: How to make invisible forces visible and the invisible again? In my work the breaking of the

mental image happens through bringing it into movement and material. The breaking happens in the moment of attempting to actualize it. The image is broken because it is brought into another register and it can never look the same as in my head. Or rather, it can never feel the same as in my head. The breaking of the image can be seen as a pleasurable and crucial process in art that gives space for the material to speak for itself. It is a matter of finding the way from the inside out (my imagination to the working group) and again from the outside in (the material generated by the working group to my/our imagination). It is a matter of, on one hand the flow and on the other hand the discrepancy, between dreaming and working, potentiality and material, the virtual and the actual.

2.2.1. Flow Between Haptic and Optical

Through my pondering upon images I have been confronted with the question: why make a performance if it could as well be a movie? I believe that the flow of affects in the performance event effects the receivers, the audience, in specific ways that are not possible to experience without having many bodies in one space at the same time. I have been speaking about the layering of associations and bodily elements as the core of affective images. I have found a way to describe this layering through film critic Laura U. Marks' writings about the flow between the haptic and the optical. Although Marks works with film, I think her ideas can be adapted to performance as well.

Haptic visuality is a term used by Marks to describe the embodied dimensions of seeing, a sort of touching with the eyes. She draws from the concept of haptic from Deleuze and Guattari who use it to describe 'smooth space' which is "a space that must be moved through by constant reference to the immediate environment, as when navigating an expanse of snow or sand." (Deleuze and Guattari according to Marks 2002, xii.) Haptic visuality is a way of seeing with the whole body, coming very close to what one sees. Marks uses the term to describe certain kinds of films that focus on the materiality of the image rather than images that clearly represent something in the realm of language. (Marks 2002, 2-4)

The haptic is often understood in opposition with the optical, which would be vision without physicality, seeing at a distance, perceiving things in perspective, being able to

semiotically understand what one sees (Marks 2002, 5.). For me the haptic represents the inside out-approach, creating affects through embodied experience, and the optical could be seen as the outside in, when pre-existing systems of symbols create affects within us. Marks tries to overcome the dichotomy between the two and puts emphasis on maintaining a flow between the haptic and the optical, which she argues is lacking in our society today. “To maintain optical distance is to die the death of abstraction. But to lose all distance from the world is to die a material death, to become indistinguishable from the rest of the world.” (Marks 2002, xvi.) I, as well, would like to think of our vision as both haptic and optical simultaneously, one sometimes taking more space than the other.

The idea of the flow between the haptic and the optical allows me to think of choreography as both affective and representational at the same time. Although haptic is not synonymous to affective and optical is not synonymous to representational, there is something about the proximity or distance of the viewer to the viewed or experienced ‘object’ that connects the terms. My artistic intuition often works through a sort of symbolism, wanting to create performances that give rise to associations. I have not found it useful to attempt to escape representation, rather I would say that I long for it. However, I aim to work with such representations or symbols that are not clearly pointing towards one thing, that are not suggesting fixed meanings. Representation is always present anyway. The flow between the haptic and the optical is for me a way of understanding how the material and the symbolic, the bodily and the associative, operate in the affective images in my choreographies. In order to enhance the flow between the haptic and the optical I create images that have clear connotations or references to the world outside the performance but at the same time include kinaesthetically tingling features that allow the viewer to get lost in the haptic realm for a while. The play between these two modes of vision and the creation of images through them has been a key factor in the process of creating *Huldra*.

2.2.2. Choreographic Image

One last conceptualisation of images in choreography, that I wish to caress in this thesis, is the concept of ‘choreographic image’ that I picked up from the article

Something else: On Latency and Composition (2015) by performance researcher Ric Allsopp. I feel I need to comment on this concept, because it contains very similar elements as the concept of affective images, only the two are made through different means. In his text, Allsopp brings up the idea of latency in composition, which according to him is something that is present in performance but not physically manifested. He approaches the idea of latency from many perspectives and fields of which one interested me in particular, namely the idea of possessed and latent observables, which Allsopp draws from quantum physics and physicist Henry Margenau. Simplified radically by me, possessed observables have the same value all the time and latent observables take value only when measured. Allsopp applies this idea to choreography in suggesting that the material qualities of choreography could be seen as possessed observables and the affective qualities could be seen as latent observables. (Allsopp 2015, 125-132.) So, as far as I understand, for Allsopp, latency is what creates affect in the context of choreographic composition. The choreographic image is “the form that enables and allows immediate transfer of the latent, the “something else”, to become visible or affective” (Allsopp 2015, 148). So, again, we are dealing with making invisible forces visible or feelable. However, Allsopp seems to suggest that mainly open, task based forms of composition can do this (Allsopp 2015, 131-132). I would like to argue that very set choreography, which I have found myself working with, can also do this, through the affective capacities of the layering of associative and haptic elements. The latency then lies not in the absence of predetermined form but in the ways of layering forms so that they allow for complex associations and bodily engagement to emerge. The moment of performing always changes the flow of affects in the choreography anyway.

3. AFFECTIVE IMAGES IN HULDRA

When I look at *Huldra* from the ‘outside’, I would describe it as a series of scenes built from affective images that unfold slowly during the course of the performance and through accumulating tension, repetition and attunement generate atmospheres and affects for the audience to receive. In order to analyse what kinds of affects these are and how the work generates them, I need to place myself in the position of an audience member. Obviously, I cannot know much about the experience of any other spectator than myself. It is very well possible that something I find deeply touching is just awkward for someone else. The bodily response to what happens on stage also shifts according to one’s mental and physical state from one day to the other. Therefore there is no use in even trying to understand or analyse the audience’s experience in general. The moment of the artwork meeting its spectator is always singular and intimate, out of my control. Therein lies the potential of affect. Affect is neither in the spectator or in the performer. It circulates in between all the components of the performance event and contains a possibility for something unforeseen to occur.

Even though affect is not mine to control, I as a choreographer can have a clear intention of what kind of atmosphere I wish to create in a performance. Affect is said to be pre-literal, not yet captured by culture or language, yet systems of symbols also generate affects. My way of generating affect through choreography is by building images where the layering of (at least partly) recognizable things and materials brings out new meanings. So the affective images I’m looking for are a combination of the symbolic (or representational) and the affective capacities of the material (bodies, movement, sound, light, objects, space and other things). Affective images are images that unfold slowly and carefully through this layering, hold tension and release difficult pleasures. *Huldra* consists of scenes that are built through affective images. So each scene in the performance contains multiple affective images.

In the process, we worked with improvised scores that gave rise to seeds of movement or images that were then nourished and expanded into scenes. The scores were based quite concretely on the features of the huldra: seduction, her tail and the turning action.

Although I tried to approach the scores with no expectations, I always already carried an image with me of how the score would look like. As explained in the previous chapter, I tried to let go of that pre-image and pin point new images, generated by the material the performers were proposing. I spotted moments of significance, images that gave me a feeling of recognition and estrangement at the same time. These moments I call seeds of affective images. The seeds grew into images and the images into scenes. Finally the scenes were composed into a performance.

In this chapter, I will return to *Huldra* and draw some connective strings between the performance and my conception of affective images. I allow for a change of mode in my writing, switching from a mode of theoretical and, dare I say, philosophical contemplation into a descriptive and affectively practical mode. I will now dive into three scenes from *Huldra*: the Pocket Seduction, the Tail Loop and the Hair Eating. In the first chapter of this thesis I described these scenes briefly, in order to allow for the reader to get an understanding of the whole of *Huldra*, but now I will describe the scenes more extensively with the focus on affect. I wish for these descriptions to allow for images to occur in the reader's mind and through this process to make *Huldra* come alive again through text. I will show how each of these scenes use repetition and the flow between the haptic and the optical to allow for affective images to emerge. I have chosen to leave out one big part of the choreography, the part which we called Unfuzzy, because it does not serve the purpose of this thesis, although it was as important a part of the performance as all the other parts.

3.1. The Pocket Seduction

Two women are standing on the left side of the stage, next to one another with their backs turned towards the audience. They are wearing light grey anoraks with a silvery, reflective fabric covering the back side of the garment. Their long red hair is hanging on top of the shiny fabric creating a contrast between the synthetic canvas and the organic fibres of the hair. The space is gloomy with cold light, making the roundish multi-material clumps that are hanging from the ceiling visible, but in a mysterious manner. The clumps remotely resemble planets but with closer inspection, one realizes that they are made out of hair, fur and a faded pink, bubbly fabric that looks a bit like skin. Out of the top part of each clump grows flowers, delicate, graceful flowers, that

are reaching towards the ceiling of the studio, which likewise is grey in colour. Its walls are covered with pipes, radiators and acoustic plates that are supposedly masked to be invisible but catch the eye of the spectator more than once during the performance. A soundscape is playing, a circular, wave-like collection of dark tones, as if coming from the depths of the earth, that give the feeling that something dangerous is about to happen.

One of the performers starts slowly turning around and faces the audience with a gaze which is difficult to interpret. It is kind and calm but sinister at the same time. She starts opening the zip of her front pocket of her anorak and steers the gaze of the spectator towards her chest while sometimes looking up. She starts turning back again while the other performer starts moving and turning towards the audience. The action with the pocket repeats, only the presence of each performer is slightly different, on the level of attunement, although it seems like they have a common agenda. Meanwhile the light has started to shift from cold to warm, resembling an atmosphere of dusk. Sometimes the shiny surfaces of the anoraks catch the light in an angle which creates vibrating reflections on the walls of the studio. The performers keep turning, facing each other in the middle, and gradually opening their pockets more and more. Their hands start sliding into their pockets and in the end, once they have both turned around to face the audience, they pull out a lock of hair, which they flash to the audience and then gently place back into their gut.

This scene found its first seed of an affective image during a burlesque workshop conducted by one of the performers, Sanni Kriikku, quite early in the process. We dressed up in extravagant costumes and performed grandiose burlesque numbers for each other. I was curious about the seductive qualities of burlesque but I had a feeling that the aesthetics and context of burlesque was not very closely connected with the huldra. However, a seed of an affective image appeared: opening the zip of a pocket, seductively, and turning around one's axis slowly while sliding gradually sliding one's hand into the pocket. When Sanni and Corinne were doing this, I felt as if someone was sliding their hand into me, into my gut, through a wound or an opening. The haptic side of my vision was feeling the touch of the performer's hand while my optical vision was transforming the pocket of a garment into a metaphor of skin and body openings. The

materiality and the metaphor became one. This feeling was enhanced in the performance by the performers' gaze which graciously allured one spectator at the time to haptically engage in the action. It is only now, in the afterplay of the performance when I realize that what happened was clearly a moment of intense flow between the haptic and the optical.

The turning made sense to me since in the stories about huldra she has a front side of a fair woman and the backside of a rotten tree trunk. She is reluctant to reveal her backside to strangers and uses it as a camouflage to blend in with the forest. As mentioned in chapter 1, the turning was one of the few concrete actions proposed by the stories about the huldra.

In terms of repetition, it became obvious very soon that the action of opening the pocket should repeat for quite a while in order to make it seductive and 'teasing'. Repetition had several functions in this scene: it created a hypnotizing atmosphere, it introduced the performers to the spectators and it gradually revealed what was hidden inside the pockets. Repetition created expectation and tension. Together with the repetitive and uncanny soundscape, which felt like it was turning together with the performers, a feeling of jouissance started to emerge.

3.2. The Tail Loop

The two bodies are sitting next to each other, looking at the audience with sweaty faces and locks of hair sticking to their cheeks and foreheads. They are panting softly as they start to whistle, calling for something. One of them places her head on top of the other one's pelvis. They rest, merging into one long creature with two heads and they change position so that one sits on top of the other is standing on all fours and looking up at her partner. They shake their heads five times and their hair swings so that it covers their faces for a moment. The one on top glides onto the other one's back and balances there for a while. She pulls the one underneath to lie down in her lap and their hands touch gently on the floor. They alternate, one sitting in the other's arms, looking into the audience. The images repeat. The space starts to transform, from grey to intense

blue. The images speed up. The sound evolves from sweet bird sounds into strange whistling notes.

One rests its head on the other one's pelvis. They form a long body with two heads. One sits on top of the other. They shake: one, two, three, four, five. A stomach glides over a back. A hand touches a hand. They fall asleep. One wakes up. They look. They lie on top of each other. They look. A hand touches a hand. They fall asleep. One wakes up. A stomach glides over a back. One sits on top of the other. They shake: one, two, three, four, five. One rests its head on the other one's pelvis. They form a long body with two heads.

The Tail Loop played with repetition and acceleration, particularly the repetition of images. Through these elements together with the change in sound and light, the atmosphere of the performance changed from sensual and cute to charged and uncanny. Each of the positions of the performers was an image with both haptic and optical qualities. Already the fact that they were touching each other so intimately felt like a huge haptic element after the year of pandemic when touch had been taken away from dance studios. Thinking about it in retrospect it seems quite funny that the touching then seemed even quite radical, especially when repeating and insisting, forcing the viewer to engage on some level.

We worked on this scene originally through a score which had a simple imperative: Be the other's tail. This score came out of the fact that the huldra is said to have a tail of a cow or a fox, which she is trying to hide from humans. The 'tailness' of the score quite rapidly fell away once I spotted the images that ended up being in the scene. Those images, or positions, gave me associations to sisterhood, in a slightly naive but sympathetic way, and they also brought up a lot of thoughts regarding the relationship between the performers. How they looked at each other and how they looked at the audience raised questions about their intentions and what they actually were doing. There was an underlying feeling of arousal, as the scene unfolded and the movement accelerated, some kind of connection to the earth (or floor) through the two performers becoming one.

In the process of making this scene the repetition grew and grew until we ended up repeating the loop of positions ten times. It seemed like no amount of repetitions was enough. The repetition exhausted the images and the performers and changed the tonus of the performers' bodies and the tone of the whole space. In this scene, as well as in the whole performance, it felt like something was charging, accumulating but never fully released. After the Tail Loop, the performers went into another loop, shaking their heads, which eventually led to the performers melting down on the floor while the studio space became filled with reflections from a projection of light of different colours. This, for me, was the moment when the charged energy of the piece somehow got a release, out into the space but not quite in the performers' bodies. However, the moment after, they had somehow changed, as they started pulling out their pocket hair and brushing their fingers through it.

3.3. The Hair Eating

Darkness has fallen and the performers have melted into the floor, with their backs facing the audience, like many times before. The sound goes from rumbling and chaotic to a piano-loop which composes a melancholic melody. A spot of light emerges in the centre of the space and the performers find their way into it, slowly. At the same time they open their front pockets and pull out the lock of hair. It pours heavily out of the performers' stomachs and they begin brushing it with their fingers. Long, determined strokes. The hair starts immediately to get entangled, transforming the shiny, orderly locks into messy nests. Eventually, once the performers have reached the centre of the space, they put the hair in their mouths and start biting and chewing. The hair is caught between the pockets and the mouths and looks like tiny waterfalls or great beards. A strange feeling of pleasure emerges, a satisfaction of some kind, as the hair is slowly pushed back into the pockets while getting stuck in the performers' teeth. Once the hair has found its way back inside their bodies, the two merge into one by putting their heads together and covering their faces with their actual hair, the one that grows out of their heads. The stroking of the hair transitions from the pocket hair into the head hair and the lights start fading out while the performers' hands brush the long red hair continuously and calmly. The lights fade out and the hair monster disappears.

In *Huldra*, the hair is working as a codified symbol as well as haptic material, so again we are speaking about the flow between the optical and the haptic. Hair is present on the performers' heads, in the scenography and it is coming out of the performers' pockets. The huldra creature is said to have long beautiful hair, which plays a significant part in her seductive repertoire. Culturally, at least in the West, hair on the head of a woman is considered attractive and hair on other places of the body is often considered odd and even repulsive. Also, human hair separated from the human body is an object that can cause rejection and nausea. Especially hair in food can cause strong physical reactions. On the other hand, in Finnish and many other folkloric traditions, hair is considered to have strong magical powers. The hair is connected to sexual appeal and life force as well as the faith of its carrier.

During the process of *Huldra* the hair-motif kind of sneaked in, bubbling under the surface for a long time, and then eventually it was brought into the centre of the dramaturgy of the piece. The hair first became present through the hair monster, which had existed already in the early phases of the process when we worked on the ritual which became debris in the end. The hair monster was one of the clearest mental images I had during the process of *Huldra*, however it shifted shape many times. Of course, the image of a woman covering her face with her hair is a familiar trope from the context of horror movies, but for me the hair monster was more of a gentle than a scary creature. The hair worked as a gateway to enter the haptic realm, the materiality of that dead cell tissue.

In the Hair Eating scene, the action of putting the hair in the mouth gave me a strong haptic response. I could really feel the materiality of the hair in my own mouth while looking at the performers chewing on it. The action created in me a sensation of difficult pleasure, a feeling of being seduced by something uncanny that is not being resolved but more entangled as the hair becomes messier and messier. Again, we could call that sensation *jouissance*. Alongside the unsolved, difficult pleasure that repetition can create, it can also have a pacifying effect. The repetition of the strokes of the hair and the piano loop at the very end of the performance worked as a sort of lullaby for the audience.

3.4. A Seed of a Method

Through writing about the three scenes in *Huldra* above, a seed of a method has started to emerge. Although the method of creating a piece is always specific to the work in question, I believe I have come a step closer to understanding how working with affective images could be cultivated into a practice. What I will describe below is a somewhat generic score, which of course needs careful adaptation according to the situation where one finds themselves.

It begins with having a mental image, a sense of what I want to see in the performance. This mental image needs then to be translated into language in order to share it with the working group. This can be done through e.g. an adaptation of a practice which I got to know through my supervisor, Berlin based choreographer Juli Reinartz. In my version of this practice, another person, maybe someone from the working group, asks me questions about the future performance. I then describe the piece as detailed as possible, as I imagine it in that moment, through writing. The description might contain unrealistic or magical elements, any fantasies that might occur to me. The ‘interviewer’ can ask for more details or specifications. This speculative practise also includes sound, light, scenography and costumes. After writing down the description, I ought to choose three passages that are most important to me in that description. The importance could be measured against the topic/theme of the performance or the initial artistic question. Which of the passages in the text feed the starting point of the piece?

These three passages will be used as scores. The performers will interpret the scores and I will look at what they are doing. If I spot something of significance to me, I note it down on paper. These significant moments could be seen as seeds of affective images. So moments that give me a feeling of something important, again in relation to the theme or topic of the performance, focusing on the flow between the haptic and the optical qualities and associations.

These seeds will then be discussed with the performers and we will expand them first into affective images and then into scenes. To expand something into an affective image means to work on the layers of associations of the seed and form an understanding of which haptic qualities the seed is operating with. In order to work on the associative

layering, the working group needs to discuss, take turns in watching from the outside and develop strategies for expanding the associative horizon even further. Like this, the meanings of the affective image don't get stuck in some particular ones, but the affective images stay open to different associations. The tricky part is to keep the choreographic material specific enough in order for it to not become generic, but open enough in order to allow many kinds of associations. This requires breaking the image, and patching it together again, as described in chapter 2 in the passage about images.

Once the seeds have been developed into affective images, and the images into scenes, begins the big work of baking the scenes into a choreography that becomes more than a combination of its parts. The scenes need to be looked at in relation to each other and their meanings and affective qualities need to be placed next to each other in order for new ones to emerge. This work requires being with the material rigorously, looking at it and feeling it from different perspectives and openness for letting the choreography guide the choreographer.

4. THE REMAKE: AFTER AFTERPLAY

Now, as we are approaching the end, I will return to the wave of the Möbius strip and surf my way through my writing. I will think about what kind of practical implications my thoughts in this thesis could have. Throughout this thesis I have been oscillating between inside and outside, affective and analytical, haptic and optical, with my consciousness wandering between this digital document, the world outside of my window, the memory of *Huldra* and the coffee machine. In this chapter, I will fantasize about what I would do if I would get the chance to make a new version of the *Huldra*. I'm trying out the first step of the method described at the end of the previous chapter. I will go through the same three scenes I'm describing in chapter 3, but from a perspective of planning the future rather than looking back.

First of all, I think it would be wonderful to make *Huldra* again. The pandemic-situation around the time when *Huldra* premiered casted a shadow over the process and it would be very empowering to revisit the work in another time. I am not thinking of this speculative remake as a substitute or 'better version' of the piece, but more as a sequel. And who knows, maybe *Huldra II* will be made one day. The point of this remake through text is to recognize the potentials of *Huldra* and how these potentials could be brought further in order to complexify and specify the affective images in the performance.

4.1. The Audience

Due to the coronavirus situation in May 2021, there were very limited options for how to place the audience in the studio so that all 14 seats would have a two-meter distance to one another. Therefore I didn't give a lot of thought to any imaginative ways of working with the audience seating. This is something I would very much like to consider more carefully in the sequel. *Huldra* was described by several audience members as cinematic. Cinematic comes easily when working with affective images, however in the future I would like to think of these images even more three-dimensionally, so that the audience is part of the images, not just looking at them. I don't mean that they would actively participate in the performance, but I would place

them closer, perhaps on two sides of the stage. In this way, the haptic visuality of the performance would work stronger as the audience could look at things closer, zoom in.

4.2. The Pocket Seduction

If the audience would be placed on two sides, the beginning scene, the Pocket Seduction, could work so that the performers are turned towards different sides of the audience. The performers would have more pockets, in their trousers as well as in their jackets. By adding pockets, the tactile action of the opening of the zip would become more complex as the performers would have to put their bodies into different positions in order to open them. The ‘wounds’ that the pockets create would be all over the body, which would allow for very different connotations than if it is just the front pocket of the anorak. I’m still seeing the performers wearing anoraks and their pants would be some kind of hiking pants, with a touch of haute couture. For this, the working group would definitely need the help of a costume designer.

As in the original version, the Pocket Seduction would dramaturgically work as an invitation into the world of the huldra, a teasing that shows something that will be returned to at the end of the performance (the hair). In order to complexify this further, I would like to add another action on top of the turning and opening pockets, namely the making of cocktails. This action would sneak in gradually and the ingredients for the cocktails would come out of the pockets of the performers. The cocktail drinks would be made by the performers slowly adding every ingredient with piety. The performers would use cocktail shakers to blend the ingredients, which would add another layer of sound, rhythm and dynamic to the scene. Eventually the performers would hand out the drinks to two audience members to drink. In this way an element of danger is introduced through the suspicion of what the drinks contain and what they will do to their drinkers.

Cocktails came to my mind because of the association to making potions which suits well with the folkloric theme. Also, the very slow cocktail-making would add an element of contemporary culture and a layer of humor to the scene, as it brings to mind how the time slows down when one waits for a bartender to make a cocktail. The

cocktails are connected to the concept of a cocktail party, which is a contemporary ritual of sorts. The idea of a ritual brings me back to the debris-ritual I wrote about in chapter 1. The whole Pocket Seduction scene could be seen as a seduction ritual with different steps of leading the audience into the performance, to the insides the huldra. The idea, which I bring up in the first chapter, of the performance *Huldra* being a kind of reincarnation of the creature huldra, would still work as an artistic question in the remake and the audience would be enveloped by the seductive affects that the performance is generating.

The lock of hair, which in the original version of *Huldra* came out of the anorak-pockets would appear after handing out the drinks, but it would not be placed back in the pocket, like in the original *Huldra*. Instead it would stay hanging out, attached to the performers' garments and become a weird kind of front-tail.

4.3. The Tail Loop

The Tail Loop would work with similar principles as in the original *Huldra*, namely extensive repetition of positions constructing affective images, acceleration and slow change of atmosphere. I would complexify the positions in terms of both associations and haptic visuality. I see the performers changing location in the performance space so that the positions are taken again and again in different 'contexts', i.e. places in the room. The scenography would be built so that the objects or spatial constructions that the performers are executing the loop of positions next to, will give different associations about what they are doing.

It's difficult to imagine what the positions would be, so this would definitely be a scene to work on through long sessions of improvising with a score of creating positions seasoned with the idea of creating tension between the performers. I'm interested in working further with the power dynamics between the performers, which was already present in the original *Huldra*, although not very explicitly. I would base the score on questions around the idea of the performers having a common body, as was the case in the original *Huldra*, but emphasizing the contradictions and dissonance that could emerge in this setting. I would also focus more on the way the performers are touching

each other, in order to specify through which means the haptic engagement of the spectator takes place.

4.4. The Hair Eating

In the new *Huldra* I would bring in the manipulation of the hair earlier. In addition to leaving the pocket hair hanging out from the front pocket in the beginning, I would add more hair throughout the performance. I'm fantasizing about having the hair come out through the multiple pockets of the performers' garments and hanging there throughout the performance, as some sort of strange fur.

In order to enhance the haptic visuality of the hair eating, I would build a score in which the performers would, every now and then during the performance, get occupied with eating or chewing on the hair hanging from their costumes. The hair eating in the original *Huldra* contained for me strange associations to something erotic. This could be worked on further, exploring both the seductive and the repelling forces of the hair, so that the performers would sometimes get lost in eating the hair on their bodies. There would be different ways of eating the hair, such as sliding it between the teeth, biting and pulling or licking.

An interesting factor in the original piece was the way in which the hair changed shape during the brushing and eating. First it was smooth and shiny, then it turned messy and entangled and in the end it grew in volume and became more three-dimensional. These different 'forms' of hair could be explored more, so that the hair would associate with different things during different parts of the performance, such as a beard, pubic hair, fur, a nest etc. I would also like to explore further the ritualistic acts related to hair in Nordic folklore and see if they could work as a base for choreographic material.

4.5. The Whole Body of Huldra

Thinking through the idea of the performance being a kind of body of the huldra, the last part of this chapter is dedicated to imagining how the three scenes described above could merge into one 'body'. I have a feeling that this has a lot to do with duration. At

the beginning of the process of making *Huldra* there was some talk within the working group about the duration and whether *Huldra* in fact would be a long durational piece. I had completely forgotten about this, until I suddenly realized now that prolonging the duration of the piece could work as a way to allow the audience to immerse in the affective images more and to manifest a body of the huldra choreographically. *Huldra* already contains repetition and insistence which could be brought further. Thinking through the Möbius strip, *Huldra II* could in fact be a loop. A loop of scenes that melt into each other and change slightly in every round. A loop which allows the spectators to float in and out, both within themselves and the way they are watching as well as physically, moving in and out of the space. Repeating the scenes would be a way of allowing the unforeseen to emerge, as the performers bodies go through changes while performing. This idea in combination with an increasing layering of associative elements and haptic activities, could bring out a big, luscious huldra-body, which has been hiding in the materials of the original piece.

To end this chapter, I will briefly bring back choreographer Cuqui Jerez, whom we encountered in the introduction, and refer to her performance *Las Ultracosas* (2018) which I only recently realized is in fact precisely dealing with what I call affective images. Jerez showed fragments of the video documentation of this piece to us students when she was visiting Teak in March 2020. *Las Ultracosas* is a five hours long series of tableaux vivants, living images, which works with the “limits of language through an aesthetic experience of contemplation” (Jerez 2018). In the performance, seven performers wearing colorful clothes and body paint, execute various actions in relation to each other and different kinds of objects. At some point music comes in and the performers start lip-syncing to famous pop songs. The piece begins from a minimalistic setting and the space gradually fills up with stuff and more expressive actions. What makes the piece a series of affective images for me is the layers of associations emerging through the adding of different objects and music while the performing bodies at the same time engage haptically with the materials.

Although *Las Ultracosas* and *Huldra* have little in common in terms of theme and aesthetic, I could imagine the new *Huldra* taking inspiration from the compositional principles and way of dealing with time of *Las Ultracosas*. Allowing the affective

images of *Huldra* exist longer and develop slowly into different ones would support my work on affective images in a generative and exciting way and at the same time enhance the idea of the performance being her body, with different organs and functions. I'm noticing that remembering Jerez's performance has sparked an interest in me towards how affective images could be dealt with as a choreographic idea for the whole of the performance, not just elements that the performance consists of. This could be the topic of my next research.

5. CONCLUSION

Coming to conclusions in art is paradoxical. On the one hand, one could say that every artwork is a conclusion of a process. On the other hand, I don't think any artwork is ever a resolution. Etymologically, 'to conclude' implies to shut up or to enclose (lat. *concludere*) (Online Etymology Dictionary), however artistic 'conclusions' rather open up or disclose. This is what I have attempted to do also in this thesis, to open up and widen my thinking through oscillating between the inside and the outside and reflecting on what *Huldra* was and what it could become.

My initial artistic question for *Huldra*, which I presented at the beginning of this thesis, was: How could the huldra reincarnate in the form of a choreographic performance? In my reflection through this text I have presented two possibilities of how this could happen: one is the actual performance *Huldra* and the other is the speculation of a new version in the last chapter. In between these two versions of *Huldra*, another question that emerged from the first question is: How to make invisible forces visible? During the course of my writing, I explain how I attempted to answer this questions through creating affective images. The idea of affective images, and the understanding of what they are, has emerged slowly and gradually, through writing and thinking.

The process itself of making *Huldra* was very intuitive and it took a while for me to understand how to approach one's intuition in retrospect and translate it into text. I came across a lovely definition of intuition by art historian Gertrud Sandqvist:

Accumulated experience that is not immediately accessible to language, but which does affect our consciousness, is usually called intuition. An intuitive choice is thus as conscious as a considered choice, it simply uses aspects of consciousness that are not accessible to language. It cannot say, but it can show. (Sandqvist 1995)

This thesis has worked as a translation process of intuitive tendencies, that which cannot be said, into the form of writing. Intuition and affect for me exist in the same realm, somewhere beyond language, but also containing the possibility to generate language.

I have found out that what I call affective images are moments both in the process of making a performance and in the final 'outcome' that are made and experienced through the flow between the haptic and the optical and the layering of associations. How the observations of this thesis will affect my artistic work from here can only be examined through making. I believe I have collected some tools or strategies that I wish to sharpen and develop further. I'd like to think that this thesis has accumulated potential for further study and research.

Despite the catastrophic effects of the pandemic on the field of performing arts, I finish my studies at the Theatre Academy with a curious and loving mind. I'm not optimistic about the future, but I have hope. I step out of the structured institution into the messy freelance reality trying for once not to imagine what lies ahead.

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