



Second Skin: A Place for Encounter

MA Contemporary Dialogues: Surface Pattern Design

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INTRODUCTION

Skin is both a barrier and an encounter. My interdisciplinary praxis investigates the interplay between being a body and having a body. I explore how skin acts as a site of memory, how skin leaves traces with age and acts as a visual record of a remembered past. While making connections to theories that informed my practice, with key readings taken from 'The Skin Ego' (Anzieu, 2016), 'Thinking through Skin' (Prosser, 2001), 'The eyes of the Skin, Architecture and the Senses' (Pallasmaa, 2012) and 'Skin-on the Cultural Border Between Self and the World' (Benthien, 2002).

While studying the skin closely, I was struck by how the largest organ of the human body is often overlooked and taken for granted. Benthien (1965) captures this sentiment by describing the skin as *"something that is worn, the inescapable garment"* (Benthien, 1965). I seek to push the boundaries, encapsulate "Body Prison" (Benthien, 1965) and challenge the point of connection all stemming from my almost abject latex human skin materiality.

I seek to create an immersive experience for a sensual encounter evoked through participation on the interaction the viewers have with my materials. The intertwining of the human form and materials turning these static pieces into a motion of performative play.

SECTION ONE: BODY AS A HOUSE

In the last two centuries, the body has been referred to as a model of a house and that *“we tend to interpret a building as an analogue to our body, and vice versa”* (Pallasmaa, 2012). My work with creating moulds was a crucial turning point in my practice as I could form my own skin like materiality, with the engraving leaving a trace of the intricate details. With my growing interest with the material latex, I looked into the swiss Avant Garde artist Heidi Bucher (1926-1993) particularly her mouldings and the relationship between architectural space and body. Below is an example of one of her works entitled, ‘Herrenzimmer’, a skinning of an architectural space containing a trace of a wall and a door. Like the spaces she coats in latex, the latex decays and hardens as well as, *“dragging away the patina from their surfaces”* (Zeiba, n.d.) revealing, *“the dust and dirt and grease collected, the wounds these structures have endured”* (Zeiba, n.d.). Like these architectural surfaces, is the surface of the skin which is marked or scarred by ageing or disease leaving the remains of life. Skin records, like architecture and *“brings to its surface a remembered past”* (Prosser, 2001). It shows what happened as much as what did not. *“In its colour, texture, accumulated marks and blemishes, it remembers something of our class, labour/leisure activities...our most intimate psychic relation to our bodies”* (Prosser, 2001). For example, a cut you get when falling out of a tree as a child which scars the skin into adulthood, reminding you of childhood misadventures, or during pregnancy, the stretchmarks on the skin from growing new life.



(Bucher , 1979)

Image taken from (Lee, 2021)

SECTION TWO: THEORY OF THE ABJECT

Julia Kristeva, a French psychoanalyst developed a concept, 'Theory of abjection', *"that is often used to describe bodies and things that one finds repulsive or disgusting, and in order to preserve one's identity they are cast out"* (Anon., n.d.). As my work investigates the body, with my materiality being so much like skin but so unlike at the same time, it's, *"hard to draw clear boundaries between what is of the body and what is outside it"* (Folio, 2019). An essay entitled, 'In Powers of Horror' discusses the *"loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other"* (Anon., n.d.) and this interplay of merging boundaries is something I would like to push within my practice. Thinking of boundaries, the skin, which is the largest organ that acts as a barrier of protection as well as being the only external sense of the body, is also objectified in society. One example of this is in Claudia Benthien's book in the chapter 'Colour' Benthien states that *"skin is continually read and interpreted in all social situations, that human beings have understood and misunderstood it as an expression of depth, of soul, of inner character"* (Benthien, 2002). Skins are categorised and divided into 'good skins' and 'bad skins' and are stigmatised in *'Thinking Through Skin'* (Benthien, 2002). Skin records and reflects our lives and is *"as much of a fabrication of what didn't happen as a record of what did"* (Prosser, 2001). Bad skin being *"skin that is marked both by memory and as memorable; we do not forget bad skin"* (Prosser, 2001) and good skin being *"unmarked by the passage of time"* (Prosser, 2001). In biblical language, *"The bodily garment, as the garment of the soul given by God, must remain unstained, should it become soiled, it must be cleansed by penance (col.978)"* (Benthien, 2002). 'Good skin' and 'bad skin' are subject to historical, cultural, and social change.

"Everyone has their own original card, like their thumbprint or dental record, no map resembles another, each one changes through time" (Serres, 2008).

An example of this change is in western culture, where the number of skin/body procedures, modifications and embellishments have increased. To name a few, this could be skin lifts using botox to get rid of wrinkles or tanning, tattoos, and piercings. These surfaces become canvas's, with their original card being adjusted, to achieve what they consider in their society to be 'good skin' or to rebel against societies interpretation of 'good skin'.

“Skin re-members, both literally in its material surface and metaphorically in resignifying on this surface, not only race, sex and age, but the quite detailed specificities of life histories” (Prosser, 2001).

Alongside race and age, there are illnesses that affect the skin, *“whose bodies malfunction highlight this fact; such subjects cannot forget their bodies but are constantly reminded of their mortality”* (Prosser, 2001). Butcher uses this skinning process on architecture to free herself from the emotions and things that surround her, *“peeling off the skin is detachment from the past. From marked matter, from conventions and other compulsions”* (Anon., 2018).

With touch being the mother of the senses, tactility will play a vital role in my practice to create this idea of trying on, wearing, and taking off this second skin. Even once the latex is lifted from the mould, it will not feel exactly like skin but, *“even the eye touches; the gaze implies an unconscious touch, bodily mimesis and identification”* (Pallasmaa, 2012).

SECTION THREE: PROCESS AND AGING

“It’s not just coating the structure with latex but the very physical — almost violent — act of peeling it away, struggling against the material to pull at first small chunks with fingers, and then leveraging the strength and weight of the whole body to skin and unskin the structure itself” (Zeiba, n.d.).

The process of my work was extremely repetitive and time consuming, being careful not to apply too much force and being constantly on edge, hoping it comes off in one piece. The feeling of relief if it went well or the disappointment of spending hours peeling to end up with crumbled pieces of latex was intense. As I am engraving the surface of the wood to create my mould, it results in the wood sticking to the latex, transferring the colour, texture, and memory of the wood onto the latex. From testing laser technology to engraving on a variety of types of wood, to exploring the thickness, scale, and depth of colour. Peeling this off must be done with care and slowly so there are not any breakages. Different to Butchers skinning’s, she pastes the architectural surfaces with thin sheets of gauze before applying the latex. Butcher applies the latex heavily, so the result is a lot thicker. Due to this, it results in the peeling being a lot easier, as more force can be applied.

Whilst working with the latex, I compared its properties to the skin; the temperature, touch, thickness, markings, and colour, I started to draw parallels between both. With skin, there is a warmth when touched which is lacking in latex. One side of the latex is smooth, like young skin whereas the other side which has the texture from the wood is quite rough and dry giving it similar properties to aged skin. There are 7 layers to the skin: Stratum corneum, Stratum lucidum, Stratum granulosum, Stratum spinosum, Stratum basale, Dermis, Hypodermis. I wanted to do 7 layers of latex to represent this, and after testing this number of layers, it was a sufficient thickness without the need to add thickener liquid latex. The application of the liquid latex was done with a paintbrush in long, sweeping strokes, going in the same direction as the image on the mould. This results in an added texture, forming lines like wrinkles alongside the occasional bit of wood or dust that would get trapped in the mixture causing a bump. These imperfections in a latex go in hand with the imperfections in skin which make it unique. Using the paintbrush was a conscious decision. I tested out different methods like pouring the liquid latex onto the mould and using other tools like a squeegee, but I liked the lines and the dust caught by

the paintbrush to mirror how skin and wood contain memories. By brushing it on carefully, these memories were captured in my skin. Additionally, I wanted the process to link to how skin is prepared before surgery. Usually, an antiseptic is brushed onto the skin to disinfect before any insertions are made to reduce the risk of infection.

I tested the mould, to see if it could be used to create more than one skinning and if there was any change in the outcome. The mould had deteriorated with age, like skin, with the latex being significantly lighter and with less contrast. This is due to the initial engraving, and the first layer of wood being peeled off with the first try, doing it a second time the liquid latex seemed to be sucked into the wood even more, making it nearly impossible to peel away. This meant breakages and holes in the latex. Also, the wood had been exposed to the environment for a longer period of time, which could have resulted in the change of surface.

Drawing on the similarities between how latex and the skin respond in the same environment, when I left the latex in direct sunlight, it deepened in colour. The surface of the skin changes too when exposed to in direct sunlight for an extended length of time, *“the outer layer of the skin has cells that contain the pigment melanin...these can burn the skin and reduce its elasticity, leading to premature aging”* (Anon., n.d.). Each skinning is different, even if taken from the same mould. The older the mould, the skinning becomes more fragile and duller in colour, which reminded me of aged skin which I could show with these skinning's.



An image of my various skinning's from my moulds.

(Dineen, 2022)

Each skinning is unique, like our fingerprints. Everyone has skin that is different, and even one mould creates a set of different skins which is almost generational, family of skinning's from the same mould. Reflecting on this, according to Kafka, *"the process of growing old and becoming dirty and wrinkled is a matter of negligence and fault"* (Benthien, 2002) and *"process of remaining captive in the skin which marks the individual for a lifetime"* (Benthien, 2002). This rigid dichotomy between being captive and the letting go, detachment from the past. Pulling the latex off the mould is almost like shedding skin. The skin shedding is part of a natural process that the body has, and this casting off, letting go and new life is I would like my work to represent.

SECTION FOUR: BODY PRISON

Body Prison is the idea that you are locked into one's skin, with the skin being the barrier, and this skin becoming your identity. Linking back to 'body as a house', the walls of this house being the skin and the house being the body, the walls, *"preventing both knowledge of others and emotional connection"* (Benthien, 2002). In 'Thinking through skin' Syliva Path writes she *"feels the wall of her skin, or that she is imprisoned in the cage of her body"* (Benthien, 2002). The experience was, *"passive captivity, as a depressing but largely self-inflicted condition"* (Benthien, 2002). Growing old is inevitable and this ageing can be portrayed *"as a sad and ridiculous process of remaining captive in the skin"* (Benthien, 2002). In chapter 6, Franz Kafka describes the skin as a 'natural fancy dress'. You have the same body for an entire lifetime, and it could be seen that *"The skin is not only a garment but also a straight jacket and fate"* (Benthien, 2002).

With body prison in mind and the idea of trapping someone, I started to visualise how I could use a body bag. To see the potential as well as practicalities, I used white body bags, as this would act as a plain canvas which I can project different ideas on. I started to think about clothing as a metaphor and central to this is the process of putting on and taking off garments. Someone getting into a body bag, let alone one made of a skin like materiality is evocative. When you think of a body bag, you think of death and end of life but having this performative element of people getting out and emerging, it acts more of a cocoon, giving life rather than taking and becomes quite playful.



An image of someone getting into a body bag.

(Dineen, 2022)

A cocoon represents the start and transition of life which contradicts the idea of a body bag. By having a zip in the body bag, this fastening acts as a tool to demonstrate the emergence of the human form. I purposely unpicked the zip in the white body bag, to use in the body bag I created from latex.

Alongside the sustainable elements of re-using and re-cycling, by giving it a new purpose, it has a new life. The colour white also has connotations of sacrifice and virtue and associated with freedom.

The contrast of the white zip, the colour of purity and unblemished, will highlight the engraving on the latex even more. Rather than the idea of entrapment, I would like to emphasis the breaking free and

release, and as Butcher describes, *“the metamorphosis is completed in the act of hatching, because it symbolises the breakthrough”* (Baumann, 2022). Additionally, in religion at Easter time, the colour white is used to symbolize new life, and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. By capturing this experimental feeling in the space adds to the sensorial experience of the smell of the latex, the touch of the material, the sound of the zip enclosing your body, reduced visibility, and the restriction of movement, all evoked through participation. The putting on skin, skin to skin, latex to skin and taking off the skin. Alongside this, in chapter 2 (Benthien, 2002) it continues discussing the skin in language and in biblical language it has the expression, ‘to put on the flesh’ and ‘to put on a body’ and ‘to put on the human being’ so this continues the interplay of skin and how it is both a body and outside of body and having a body and being a body. In the adult hideaway collection, where there is a clear presence of a human form shaping these structures, the garments prevent both knowledge of others and emotional connection, an absence to the outside world. Even the process of making the latex, the removal and peeling goes hand in hand with the idea of getting in and out of this body bag/cocoon silhouette, which you could do by yourself however, there is some difficulty getting out unassisted linking back to the theory of body prison, *“Skin is conceptualised as something that is worn, the inescapable garment”* (Benthien, 1965). Linking back to skin as a place of encounter, the interaction between the two subjects touching but not touching brings about this mingling. In ‘The Five senses: A Philosophy of mingled bodies’ (Serres, 2008). Serre’s discusses to the extent how the soul is on the surface of the skin and is the exterior where *“the soul and world commingle”* (Serres, 2008).

“The skin is a variety of contingency: In it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge” (Serres, 2008).

Touch is used to open, get inside and out of the body bag, touch being “the virtue of closing and outlining an interior” (Serres, 2008).



(Bucher, 1983)

Image from (Zeiba, n.d.)

Alongside Butcher's skinning's of buildings, I was drawn to this garment which was featured in the exhibition entitled 'The Site of Memory'. Hanging off a broken rusty hanger, a lifeless garment, *"empty and frozen"* (Zeiba, n.d.) revealing an absence of a body. In 'Skin', Alba D'Urbano uses the word "Hautnah" and goes on to describe a *"lifeless shell draped on a hanger like a dress and could*

theoretically be worn by another person” (Benthien, 2002). This influenced my decisions on how I would like to capture my work.



Image of the final two samples on a white clothes rail.

(Dineen, 2022)

The transparency of the latex when the light is shone through creates evocative imagery which is maximised by having the photography isolated and minimal, creating a tense atmosphere. The graphical perspective, the latex draped on the white rail gives the visceral suggestion of skin grafts, hanging without a body. The material, for anyone to touch and the freedom that you could try on someone else's skin gives an uncomfortable feeling as *the "boundaries we use to categorise the world are transgressed"* (Kristeva , 1984). This brings back the theory of the abject.

"The abject is a concept that is often used to describe bodies and things that one finds repulsive or disgusting, and in order to preserve one's identity they are cast out" (Kristeva , 1984).

SECTION FIVE: THE SKIN EGO

The 'Skin Ego' developed by Dider Anzieu refers to the *"mental image used by the child's ego during its early stages of development to represent itself as an ego containing physical contents, based on its experience of the surface of the body"* (Anzieu, 2016). The notion of this theory was determined by four sets of data, ethology, group theory, projective testing and dermatology with this leading to the hypothesis that is now the 'Skin ego' released in an article in the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* in 1974. In Freud's bodily ego, it suggests the idea that the skin ego takes shape through memory and is *"formed through our first experiences of our skin"* (Prosser, 2001). Due to my first experiences of skin being the contact I had with my parents, I decided that the imagery on the latex would be a combination of the skin from my father and mother. Alongside this, the skin ego is supported by the various functions of the skin, and these functions informed my practice and acted as a starting point. The key words/phrases I took from the passage, *"contain and retain inside itself...the interface that marks that border with the external world...barrier that protects...primary mode of communication and registering traces left by others"* (Anzieu, 2016).



An image of placing one of my latex samples alongside my body bag.

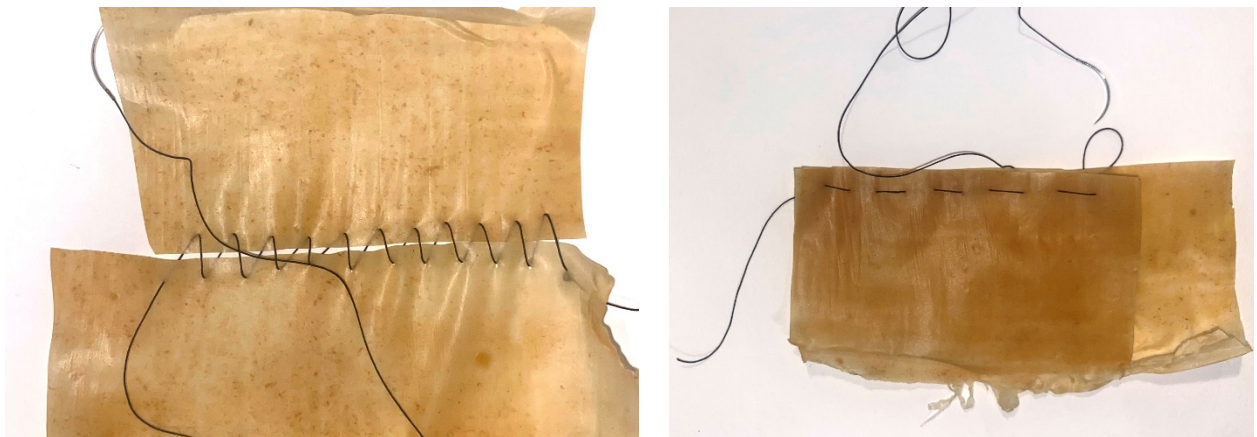
(Dineen, 2022)

I started to see how the body bag would look using my latex samples, thinking about it visually as well as practically. Scale of imagery was one of the main elements I considered, between having repeat patterns or one large image spread across the body bag. The skin does not repeat itself. Our

skin is continuous so I felt a placement would translate this. So, to achieve this I started to think how I could construct this physically. Due to the laser bed, the maximum size of the design of one panel is 950mm x 1450mm, so I am restricted to these dimensions. Ideas of forming a jigsaw, joining the panels of wood before pouring the liquid latex was discussed but after testing this process out, the join was still visible, and a seamless finish was essential so the imagery would flow. The scale it would need to be was too large to be transported easily around the building and having one large piece of material would result in the body bag having restricted movement. I considered panelling the body, in horizontal rectangles, like the scale of my previous samples, but felt this would look more like a sleeping bag rather than a body bag. I decided to think back into the theories I have investigated, and ideas started stemming from the word cocoon. This led me to think back to the Skin ego, and where that stems from, the womb. In the womb, the skin grows and connects in the centre. Additionally, how the body curls and connects in the foetal position, so having flexibility in the middle would be essential to allow the body to bend and contract in this position. I decided to split the imagery in half in the centre to relate to the skin ego but also to give this flexibility, allowing for a seam allowance so the imagery would join and flow organically.

SECTION SIX: STITCH OR SUTURE

Looking into the construction of the body bag and the links that stitch, body and skin share, I considered my choices between industrial and hand. Doing it by hand meant I would have more contact with the latex, with touch being an important element within my work. All decisions are heavily influenced by my concept and theories, so reflecting on this, I started to think about different methods of repairing the skin in surgery. Staples, tape, glue, stitching are all hand methods of constructions for the skin, however not all worked with latex. Due to its rubber materiality, glue did not set, tape and staples would prevent the flexibility of the bend of the zip in the body bag so decided that stitching would be the best method. In medical terms, stitching is called suturing, the thread that links body and material, joining of two pieces of skin, so they align and heal. Using the tools, threads and techniques doctors used, I considered a continuous over and over suture.



Two images of my samples, testing out different stitching methods. Stitching done in black and enlarged so it is visible.

Left hand side – a continuous over and over suture

Right hand side – A running stitch

After completing my first joining, a horizontal stitch joining the top and bottom panels together, a gap formed. This is due to the weight of the latex once suspended or the gap would have formed when tired on due to the tension. I decided I needed a seam, so the imagery is continuous. I decided to use a running stitch but still utilising the tools.



An image of the medical tools I used whilst suturing

The tools included: A needle holder, tooth forceps which hold the skin when taking a bite through the skin of the wound, Iris scissors that cut the thread, a scalpel holder and mosquito forceps that clamp the thread. Like the peeling process, the stitching took quite a long time to complete and because it was the repetitive, at times it could be quite tedious. There were mixed emotions while completing this. The excitement of it all coming together as well as the pressure I put on myself to make sure the time I spent on this was justifiable. Additionally, by using the tools that are usually used in repairing skin, I felt like a surgeon, being careful where I pierce the latex.



An image of the front of the body bag, showing the joining and aligning on the imagery across the seam.

(Dineen, 2022)

The combination of a stitch used in garment making alongside using the medical tools to complete this construction, continues this interplay between being able to try something on but it not being a fashion garment. Additionally, the body bag could be turned inside out, showing the raw edge and detailing of the stitch. This touches on deconstruction fashion, “...*exposed seams, raw edges, displacement of certain components and some sort of treatment to make it look distressed.* Deconstruction fashion is meant to challenge the traditional perception of beauty” (Emily, 2012).



An image of someone inside of the body bag.

(Dineen, 2022)

This could be developed in the future by videoing the performative movement of someone getting in and out of the body bag. I was limited to one person trying it on, so in the future, I would like to capture more individuals of different sex, race and age, all trying on the same skin and finding out how it makes them feel. When I took photographs of this, I introduced and explained the body bag and how it goes on. However, on reflection I feel it would be interesting to leave it in the space, without any interference and see how they move, react, and interpret this piece of material.

SECTION SEVEN: THEORY OF TRACE AND BEING IN-BETWEEN BODIES

Similar to my body bag, I created some other materials that people could interact with. The trying on this second skin, being trapped and then freed.



(Gormley, 1995)

Initially taking inspiration from Antony Gormley's work entitled 'Critical mass' and influenced by the 'Theory of trace' developed by Derrida where *"trace is the absent part of the signs presence"* (Mambrol, 2016), I created a mould of my lower arm, the sign, and then used this mould to apply liquid latex onto which reveals the trace. I then extended this work into a sheet of latex, showing the interplay between the presence and absence and how the *"meanings can be located only in these traces"* (Mambrol, 2016).



Image: Left hand side – arm mould

Image: Right hand side – developed arm mould into a sheet

My body, my skin, my trace could be worn by someone else. The trying on of my skin, the passing to others and then hanging this work to be alongside other pieces.

During the engraving process, I captured imagery which I wanted to translate to other materials. Initially, I half-toned my image using dots and as I have not done this process before it took some experimenting with scale to see what would work. On reflection I changed this to lines. During this year, I have developed my knowledge in different printing methods, and my theories influenced which one to use. Linking back to the 'Skin ego' the *"ego inherits the double faculty of setting up barriers and filtering exchanges"* (Anzieu, 2016). In reactive printing, the reactive dyes form a resist to the cellulose devore print paste. In this instance, the reactive dye acts as the barrier and the devore filters through the gaps. I wanted to use a subtraction printing process, devore, so parts of the human form to be visible through the material. By changing the design to vertical lines, when someone stands either side of the fabric, the lines would represent the bars in a cell in prison, encapsulating one of my theories, 'Body prison'. Additionally, I realised that all my processes consisted of lines. For example, when the wood is being engraved by the laser, it goes back and forth in lines, applying the liquid latex

is done in brushstrokes in lines, and when I peel it off, I go back and forth in this uniform way. When stitching the body bag panels, this is done in lines.



Image of fabrics suspended in space and someone walking in-between them.

(Dineen, 2022)

I created three different prints which were then suspended just above head height and close together but at different depths. This was done to create this feeling of being in-between skins, in-between bodies. If I had more time and funding, I would have made them full length, covering the whole human form. I would have more of them, filling the room from ceiling to floor creating this maze-like experience walking through these materials.

For the exhibition, I have selected my body bag, being suspended in the air, resting on a block which will take the weight on the bag. This will allow a 360 degree view. On one of the walls, there will be one of the wooden engraving moulds which the latex came from. So, the audience can understand the connection, next to it, there will a qr code which they can scan using their cameras on their phone.

This will send them directly to my website, where there will be a video of the process of the making of one of my panels. On the other wall, will be a rail with my latex samples and experiments, using S shaped smoking hooks as well as pattern hooks. By having the materials hanging on a rail and using both types of hooks, it questions what the materials are and their purposes, hopefully triggering a strong emotional response.

CONCLUSION

Second Skin, a place for encounter, has pushed me into new territories of thinking and making. By looking into Heidi Butchers work with latex, it made the connection of architectural space and body, and how both leave traces on their surfaces. With my materiality being so much like skin, the theory of the object was researched, discussing the boundaries and how the skin is objectified in society. I looked closely into the properties of both latex and skin, which informed my decisions in the making process. Growing old and being locked into one's skin, 'Body prison' made me start to visualize how these latex samples could be turned into something larger, as well informing my decisions on print processes, to encapsulate the human form. By having a body bag, a mould of the lower arm and hand, and the material hangings, the person can step into this immersive experience of putting on, wearing, being in-between and taking off this trace of a second skin. By having someone to assist you in this process, it challenges the point of connection, the touching of skin to skin against the touching of skin to latex as well as the interplay of being a body and having a body.

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