

# FrameWork 5/17

Katie Lyle on Shirley Wiitasalo

*To Begin,*



**To begin,** you might lie down with your eyes closed allowing all of the room to fall away except the floor beneath you. Letting the push of gravity sink your weight, feeling the horizontal leveling of your body as it settles against the hard surface. You might let your muscles relax, and each bone soften at its edges until your skin is slumped loose against the flat, cool surface. Taking a moment to let the nape of your neck relax and the back of your head flatten like a soft, old grapefruit. Let your head flop to one side, if it needs a resting place, and let the weight of your skull be supported by the bony cartilage of your outer ear and cheekbone. You might imagine that you are a soft puddle, an onion skin or body-shaped trapdoor. An intricate outline of a body traced, around each hair on your head and each finger from the tip of your nail into the soft webbed tissue between them. We might be careful to consider the difference between imagining the body and paying attention to it.

That being said, to think about something in detail (one part of the body at a time) involves the necessity of forgetting something else. To think about the body like this inevitably means forgetting another part of yourself, forgetting about associations or narratives except for the ones presented in the very moment. To be present in the physical body creates a hyper-awareness that is grounded in the immediate, but at the same time only visible in fragments. Proprioception is defined as a sense of self relative to the position of the body. A feeling about the position of the body based on a system of communication between your brain and sensory receptors using information derived from muscles, tendons and joints. The translation of information internally creating a feeling of a head tilted; without sight or touch we can sense our fingers suspended in space. There must be a connection between the unknowns of the body and our trust in things we cannot see, the back of our head, the shape inside an

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armpit when your arm swings. We see and experience everything of the body in parts and sections. Layers of surface like skin and hair, feelings like muscle ache or processes like digestion and breath. Looking and making involve a similar condition of isolation and paring away. To see something in detail requires a similar degree of dismissal. Imagining and seeing something are different but the same, thinking about the body we inhabit is a practice of mindfulness and presence. As individuals, the ways we make associations and connections relate directly to how the body is trained to react. The connection between tissue as well as the appeal or repulsion felt towards both feelings and images.

**Still lying on the floor**, you might start to recognize the precise points of contact where your body meets the surface below it. Where does it feel supported? Where does it make contact with something unfamiliar? Working up from the feet, try to identify these points of contact and also the areas where the body lifts and allows for lightness, the backs of your knees or the curve in your lower back. Let these points of contact make a pattern reflecting both pressure and support. Identify them as moments in the body of both entry and exit, points of escape and of growth.

A body scan is a somatic practice of connecting with the body on an intimate and internal level. Often associated with guided meditation and mindfulness practices, the practice promotes an internal consideration of the body, especially as distinct from the mind. In my own experience, by separating from thoughts, the experience of the body becomes both detached and familiar - creating an image of the self that is informed by tiny movements and internal sensation. The body becoming figure and ground, as something to be manipulated and created at the same time. The concept of mapping the body in this case is imagined but also incredibly visual and I wonder how it might be recorded. Without being defined by a body or a specific action, where is the body located in an image? In the creation of that image? Creating an experience that is both imagined and felt, that combines myth and desire with feeling to create an image of the body.

In airport security scans, figure and ground are recorded simultaneously creating porous images of bodies and objects that merge inside and outside. The x-rays methodically look inside luggage and underneath clothing, reflecting back a coded system of layered parts. In a CT scan: organic materials like paper, food and explosives are orange, and blue or green for metals and glass. The denser the material, the darker the colour.



**Now allow these points to darken** and begin to identify them as a pattern of bones and hinges, places where bald-shaped bones nest into gloved-shaped ones. Think of the way each bone leads to the next throughout the entire body, forming the long lines of bones that make up the rigid structure of your skeleton. This is the framework of your body as it fills out and up from the floor, each bone wrapped in a soft casing of muscle, veins and tissue. These soft and taut tissues connecting the entire body, creating lines of communication. Inside the body, there are very thin bands of tissue called fasciae that wrap each of our bones, muscles and internal organs in a thin layer of connective sheeting. While the gauzy and web-like substance is ubiquitous within the body, the classification and character of the tissue remains disputed. How it connects and communicates with the organs it touches is in certain ways unknown. It is a layer in the body with an undetermined role and thus is imbued with a sense of potential in the unfamiliar. Fasciae is not fully determined by its process, activity or location in the body, it is part skin part internal tissue.

Take a moment to consider the particular roll of hard curving bones that create soft protected spaces for your organs, like the pelvis and the rib bones. Your ribcage is an intricately domed cavity with a hard boned roof that provides a space for the soft balloons of your lungs to expand and contract. You might let your incoming breath fill not only your lungs but all the spaces and crevices inside your body. Feeling the connectedness of all of your skin as it tightens and stretches to contain your breath. When breathing out you might notice the glow in the backs of your eyelids from the light in the room. Returning to hints of the space around you, the floor, the shadows and the room.

In your own time, slowly roll onto your side, and come to standing.

*\*The research in this text is closely informed by conversations with dance artist Shelby Wright.*