

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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For the quinary issue of *Chiasma*, we ask what it means “To Be a Body?”. The theme of embodiment in theoretical and speculative thought is as broad as the subjects it comes into contact with. Yet, in almost all domains of experience and understanding, the conceptualization of embodiment and the body have been radically transformed by the past four hundred years—transformations that have continued to intensify in the last few decades. Embodiment, therefore, has become an unyielding issue to think adequately in the 21st century, and one on which there is as yet little agreement; not only as to what it means to be a body, but also on what is at stake in being one. The advance of technological dispersion and prosthesis, the speculative proposals of a world without bodies (or of technological singularity), a historical moment of unprecedented aging populations in the West, the discourses of health, biopolitical apparatuses and governance, the movement and diaspora of peoples throughout the world, as well as the increasingly diffuse regulation of bodies and their movement all pose dilemmas to the thought of the body.

On the other hand, embodiment poses equally profound questions about the status of the mind, of thought, and of the ‘nature’ or ground of epistemological, intentional, and agentic claims. To what extent is the particularity of our thought the artifact of our bodies? And to what extent can we exercise freedom over our

corporeal determinations? How does the artificialization of cognitive processes trouble traditional ideas about the inextricability of mind and embodiment? How do the policing and control of feminized and non-conforming bodies determine and articulate sexism and gender inequalities? What do queer theory and the study of trans identity teach us about embodiment? What relation should we have to the many historical “despisers of the body”<sup>1</sup> who nevertheless rank among the greatest thinkers in Western philosophy? To what extent should the field of phenomenology be taken up from the precept of embodiment? Is embodiment a real site of immediacy in lived experience or is embodiment itself mediated, abstracted, or alienated? To what extent are bodies and embodiment themselves theoretical constructs? Finally, how do we envision embodiment in the broader context of its environment (proprioceptive, cultural, social, political, ecological)? Any one of these questions could, no doubt, fill its own volume, but the gravity and scope of the issues here only impels us toward a general appeal in coming to terms with the problematic of embodiment. The ubiquity with which contemporary thought about the body touches on our social totality and intercedes into the fabric of our lives makes imperative the need to take stock of its theoretical breadth synoptically. Here we attempt only to begin such a venture.

Thus, in the pages that follow, many varying approaches to embodiment and its implications are thoroughly examined. Anne Van Leeuwen’s “Bodies That Matter?” ushers us into the issue with a discussion of the imbrication of embodiment, materialism, and Marxist politics in the work of Merleau-Ponty. There she argues against the tide of both historical necessity and voluntarist politics by reasserting the emergence of embodied subjectivity in the social interplay between historical conditions, forces of production, and acts of collective agency which make up the materialist dialectic of the proletariat, properly understood, as that of “the constitutive

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Despisers of the Body,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Penguin (1976), 146-8.

ambiguity... which cannot be resolved.” Thus, for Van Leeuwen, embodiment as class struggle—much like the ‘permanent revolution’—is that which produces its history by virtue of its own persistent interrogation.

Following in its course, we have Adam Lovasz’s “Distinction, Participation, and Empty Embodiment.” The article is a meditation on two apparently antithetical understandings of the body: as subjectified (or self-having) on the one hand, and the purely material (or inert and without self) on the other. Between these, ancient Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna’s *madhyamika* (middle way) provides a nonconceptual synthesis of these mutually exclusive conceptual understandings. Further, Lovasz employs the attendant notion of emptiness, alongside recent work on psychosexual behaviour, in ethology, and enactive cognition to experimentally rewrite an experiential, ethical, overcoming of this theoretical matrix of the body.

Third in the issue is an interview—conducted by Julian Evans, Jessica Ellis, and Sangie Zaitsoff—with Latina feminist phenomenologist Mariana Ortega entitled, “Embodied Experience of Multiplicitous Selfhood.” There she discusses her conception of ‘multiplicitous selfhood’ as it is tied to the lived experience of the Latina woman. Importantly, her concept allows an incisive critique of the three disciplines which have come to shape Ortega’s thought as an embodied thinker in the world: phenomenology, feminism, and Latinx studies. These latter two deploy important correctives—imbued with sensitivity to the singularity of lived encounter, and all the political weight that it comes with—to the neutral, transcendental, bodiless, subject of traditional phenomenology. Latinx experience, on the other hand, provides a useful critique and refinement of the work being done by intersectional feminists, in which the sections (race, class, gender, etc.) typically brought together in the intersectional approach are still thought as mutually extricable; the concept of multiplicity offers Ortega a way out of this implicitly divisive tactic without losing sight of the target it aims at, and the real and profound effects on the lived experiences of marked bodies that such precarious selves feel. Ortega of-

fers thoughts on her continued debt to Heidegger, fraught though it is, as well as on how her theoretical work makes contact with the politics of immigration and the escalating racism of Trump's America.

Next is Jessica Ellis' "The Relation of Temporality in Autobiography to Trans-Narrative Form." Ellis converges on recent Trans and queer theory as well as on a Bakhtin-inspired approach to narratology to delve into the embodiment of temporality as it is put to discourse. Using Bakhtin's 'chronotope' to analyze historical temporality in trans-narrative becomes itself a clarion call to revolutionary politics, and a theoretical point of departure in the analysis of historical-political paradigm shifts. Through it, Ellis aims for "a change in the diagnostic language from gender dysphoria to gender dissonance... In this way gender is not seen as an individual's internal—and pathological—struggle, but rather part of the greater social context from which gender is reinforced and how this oppresses non-cisgender folk."

Following Ellis, we have a translation—by H  l  ne Bigras-Dutrisac and David Guignon—of Quebec sociologist Alexandre Baril's "Gender Identity Trouble: An Analysis of the Underrepresentation of Trans\* Professors in Canadian Universities." Baril examines many of the parameters and case studies which concretely make evident the lack of trans\* persons in Canadian academia, even in the case of tenured experts in the fields which comprise Trans\* studies. Here Baril goes to great lengths, with extreme rigour, to problematize the very field of cultural production which should, by definition, be least susceptible to these systemic and structural biases. Baril's article is an invitation to assess the value of the organizational structures of our institutions and their hiring practices, as much as it is a brutal reminder of the unequal distribution of the precarity of embodiment in its social coding.

"Ways of Being in the All-Too-Present Body" gives us an elaboration of the phenomenology of chronic pain, and its philosophical dimensions. In it, A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone engages the work of Susan Wendell and Simone Weil, among others, in evoking the absurdity of life through pain, all the while affirming that

same suffering as an “accidental and material education” with profoundly moral, epistemic, metaphysical, and, indeed, spiritual consequences.

Lastly, our Contributions section is bookended by a title the inverse of that which inaugurated it. Anna Mirzayan interviews multimedia artist and thinker Katherine Behar in “Objects that Matter: Bodies, Art, and Big Data” where Behar details her thoughts on the relationship between embodiment and the contemporary technologies which affect it, her own contributions to the field of Object Oriented Feminism, the issue of speed in politics, as well as the ways in which the conceptual and algorithmic framing of big data identity markers in some sense mirrors the uses of intersectionality in recent feminist discourse. With the proliferation of ever more technological mediations of experience and embodiment, Behar’s indicative analyses here point toward the need for us to continue to think both widely and deeply about the meaning, value, and nature of corporeality as it is spread across the social body today.

Our Reviews section features a critical engagement with Brian Kim Stefans’ *Word Toys* where John Nyman relates the book to the history of avant-garde poetics and the technics of the text. The issue also includes Helen Fielding’s review of Ortega’s *In Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multicplicity, and the Self*, in which Fielding outlines and elaborates many of the conceptual themes discussed and applied in the interview. Lastly, Ali Alizadeh reviews an anthology—edited by Cindy Zeiher and Todd McGowan—on the relationship between philosophy and love, aptly titled, *Can Philosophy Love?* which discusses the major Continental thinkers on love of the past three centuries: Rousseau, Hegel, Lacan, Badiou, and others all find their place in the panoply of the love of wisdom of love.

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## editor's introduction

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Thank you.

– M. Curtis Allen, Chief Editor