

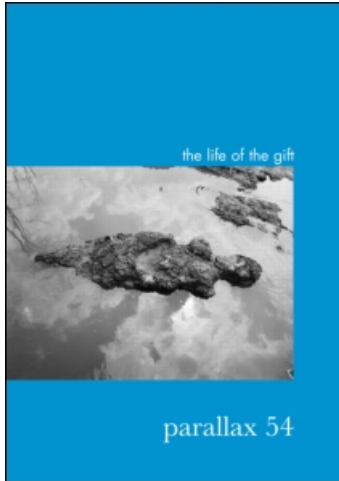
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Introduction: What 'body' works and what bodies do not fit

Eliza Steinbock and Maaïke Bleeker

The act of installing something requires not only a particular something to be installed and a particular place for this something to be installed, but also a purpose. What is installed is assumed to be a specialized and ultimately useful apparatus or machinery. Installing the Body call for papers.

For this special issue of *parallax* we proposed thinking about how the body functions as a kind of apparatus or *dispositif* in the divergent disciplines of dance studies, installation art and cinema studies. We envisioned the suggested task of reflecting on not what a body can do, but what 'the body' has done as a way to get a critical grip on the burgeoning bulk of body theories. Over the past thirty-five years, many versions of such theory have established 'the body' with a certain prestige in a variety of fields of theoretical, artistic and other inquiry. Now that the body has been set into a 'ready-for-use' position, installed as it were, this issue of *parallax* sought scholars and practitioners willing to evaluate the collective job. Our proposal, which did admittedly include an invitation to perverse routes, garnered instead the attention of theorists who slice the current edge of 'body theory'. Rather than assess body theories and the desires invested in using the concept of the body at all, the texts we selected further specialize and specify the body apparatus that they manufacture in the factory of their disciplinary field. Except that it is not easy to place with certainty any one text into a single field. Each text benefits from the successful installation of 'the body' as a central theoretical issue that brings into view the relational aspects of experience and meaning making. But, in their hands, the body becomes something else: an apparatus for political tinkering, a means of movement, a condense archive, choreography, resistance, a way out. What differentiates these texts from the bodies that regularly appear to veil the author's conceptual programmes is their reflexive, dare I say knowing, use of the body for other ends – they need the body, not just any body, but one that is carefully distinguished from a generally normative and vague container.

Still keen to do some 'assessment', we editrices, would like to spend this introduction giving a sort of ethnographic report from our time spent surveying the field of ethology, a term introduced by contributor Alanna Thain. Ethology is defined by the main research question (from Deleuze via Spinoza) of 'what can a body do?'. As we discuss each of this issue's texts, all ethologies of a kind, we transform this main question into the series (a) what does 'the body' do, (b) what does a theory of the body do, and (c) what is it that we (theorists/practitioners) do with the concept of the body? Since our correspondents in the field do not answer

the question directly, we will put these questions to their texts. In the spirit of Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's study of 'scientific practice', our method is somewhere between a heterodox ethnography and a straightforward discourse analysis, seeing as we are taking up our contributors' texts as an apparatus that installs the body. We invite you to join us in a participant observation of our own body culture. In this domain, our activities are a set of beliefs, oral traditions and culturally specific practices. Our methods and machines for observing our 'object' of the body constitute it. The heterogeneous body appearing and disappearing in dance theory, installation art and cinema studies is not a metaphor: it is immanently *real*, in a Deleuzian sense. To unpack what is at stake in installing the body we will follow the leading questions of: which field, which way and which 'body'?

Before we turn to the texts, it makes sense to briefly engage with a small auto-ethnographic account, a method also employed by contributor Susan Stryker to make use of embodied knowledges and knowledge of embodiment. We hope that it does bring us (not only Maaïke and Eliza, but theoreticians, practitioners, students, body-mongers and body snatchers alike) useful evidence for more widely applicable statements about the relationship between embodied subjects and theory. Maaïke was raised in an academic context where bodies were strewn about in theory. Looking over this fleshy landscape, Maaïke wondered 'why is this industry so heavily invested in producing bodies?'. When coming of publishing age, she wondered what it meant to do something with this thing people kept calling 'the body'. Eliza experienced going on a quest for the body, which consisted of consuming many body books and encountering adamant riddles. At some point, she realized that theory was not going to help her to find 'the body', but that, in fact, theory makes the body. With our new awareness, we shifted to emphasize how theories (rather than 'reality' or 'experience') produce and, further, install bodies. It seems to us that each usage of a body appeals to different desires of the theoretician. They are attracted by their need for a certain kind of 'body concept'. It is no longer possible, if it ever was, to talk about a mega-theory for 'the body'; theorists and practitioners have created a fractionalized field of body territories, where competition is stiff for whoever has the 'best theory'. If we were to list contents for a 'top ten body theories of all time' reader it would easily go as follows: Plato, Spinoza, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, Bakhtin, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze, plus newcomers (and living) Butler and Massumi. If the body is a mechanical apparatus, then it certainly doesn't seem rigid; this concept has demonstrated a remarkable plasticity and fuzziness complementary to a capitalist mode of production for ideas.

Our auto-ethnographies reveal our desire to make strange, queer if you like, the concept of the body. We want to upturn the assumptions behind the ability to install such a thing in the first place. What enables the ease, or the fruitfulness, with which the body is installed? Finally, why have certain theories taken self-evident precedence in the apparatus? At least in the body archive of this issue, desire is invested in thinking the body in terms of movement, laughter, intimacy, grace, the not yet, the emergent and to abstract uncontrollable flesh. Whose interests are served by installing this kind of body? It greatly differs from body texts published a decade ago where the grotesque, abject, material, leaky, visceral, performative and signifying body was popular. What has changed socio-culturally to produce the lightness of the new body's movement,

where the political field is entered by swarms, laughing, intimacy, soft technology, dys-embodiment, force as well as with an insistence on the ungraspable, ephemeral, wandering and on micro-perceptions, becoming aware of not being aware and double negatives? Are we still searching for a more 'true' version of the body? Do body theories, at their core, indicate a more overarching desire for truth? Why is it hard to reflect on this desire for truth? Why else would we install 'the body', if not to give us the pleasure of knowledge production?

It is pertinent here to say something about why we suggested investigating body theory through the frames of certain disciplines. We had been reading the discussions in dance, cinema studies and increasingly in installation art that take up the familiar set of body theories (gender performativity, phenomenology, psychoanalysis etc.) again and again. The rather banal fact occurred to us that perhaps these fields might not only need *these* body theories, but actually they needed the concept of the body itself. What is the dance without the dancer, the film without the viewer, the installation without the participant? This made our stance towards examining how and why the apparatus of the body has been installed in these places a rather tricky endeavour – how to separate out the body from these body-focused studies now that they have been clearly integrated into one system? It was this challenge to try to establish some distance from the most taken for granted, founding concept of these fields that attracted us. What better way to critically review the fields we are both deeply committed to, than to attempt to pull the cloth out from under the carefully set table of dance, cinema and installation art?

What we see unfolding throughout the contributions is an interest in different apparatuses that will install *the body of movement* or a closer, perhaps more 'true', account of the body's reality to be always in flux, in change. The response to the three disciplines of dance, cinema and installation art was thus in a way celebratory – 'yes, these are sites where the body can be experienced and understood in its own terms of *movement!*'. Unsurprisingly then, the major theorists of movement, Spinoza, Bergson and Deleuze in his wake, and now Massumi who interestingly recombines them, were often the proffered theorists of choice to explain what was at issue in the wide ranging cases. Not reigning feminist theorists, not queer theory. The body theory that seems in vogue empties out bodily difference in kind, sometimes reverting to a phenomenological thick description to refer to bodily difference in degree. We decided to take the most critical papers of the aforementioned trend towards unending transformation, those that may push an agenda of putting movement into the play of their analysis, but who recognize the necessity for also bearing in mind historical contingency, political preference and perception as much as the specifics of desire, gender and the moment. At this stage, we find it irresponsible to simply refer to 'the body', an implicit human body, one that functions, one that is where it ought to be, rather than one that eludes stasis, breaks down and causes a fuss over itself.

In our ethnographic experiment, facilitated by the helpful editors at *parallax*, we did want to get an answer to some of our burning questions. And perhaps this was our downfall (for nothing kills a discussion faster than a hard-to-answer question). There are, however, trends we can report on, in our rather unscientific quantitative method of putting out a call for proposals. We would like to share our observations

on the changing tides of body theory with an embarrassingly stable table (with room for you to add to it, if you like).

Guided by our proposed series of questions – (a) what does ‘the body’ do; (b) what does a theory of the body do; and (c) what is it that we (theorists/practitioners) do with the concept of the body – we see in our contributors’ texts new body apparatuses made to order. Some body theories, including approaches and focuses, seem especially fitting and ‘in’, while others are noticeably chucked ‘out’. In our survey of what issues are at stake in installing the current body of movement, we will follow the leading questions of which field, which way, and which ‘body’?

Our issue opens with Lise Brenner’s practitioner text ‘Dancing is Not Writing: Some Notes on Installing and Being Installed’; we were curious, what does the ‘outsider’

Out	In
Subject	Self
Performativity	Movement
Whole	Parts
Cinema	Dance
Gender	Transgender
Sexuality	Queer
Abject	Trained
Nature vs. Culture	Architecture
Hard Technologies	Soft Technologies
Positionality	Fields
Macropolitics	Micropolitics
Perception	Imperceptibility
Speculative thinking	Description of Material
Theories	Case Studies
Inference	Abstraction
Message	Suggestion

think we theorists do? In a complex reading of how her moving dancer body writes a language closer to an oral culture, Brenner pins the dance theorists who are busy with abstractions of *PLIÉ*. According to her, the oral, one-to-one, subjective dancer culture only can talk about *THIS plié*. ‘The body’ in her text is bound up in the dancer-choreographer’s different perception of time and space; this is felt from inside an unending, widening somatic attention. A dancer is this body, this literate object that can be installed in time and space to sensitively react to the organization and reorganization of oneself in accordance to shifts in the environment.

Ramsay Burt, who primarily writes on dance, detours in his text ‘Preferring to Laugh’ to recent performative installations by La Ribot, a dancer who crosses over into art galleries. The body we, with Burt, encounter is laughing, a physical act that is honed to a neuro-muscular-skeletal body technique. In an analysis of the staged laughing body, Burt looks for a way out of being a subject of reiterating practices. Through the paradox of passive resistance, this text expresses a desire to theorize a body resistant to the numbing grind of replicating norms; a desire to say in *Bartleby’s* voice ‘I prefer not to’ by laughing. Reading anthropologist Mary Douglas on laughter, ‘the body’ for Burt is something that we can ‘let go in the way we laugh’, due in part to laughter being opposed to social control. Key to this theory of embodiment is Blanchot’s insight that a loss of sovereignty can be turned into freedom from subordination. Laughter, then, is a dance that invites beholders to become a part of communal passive resistance.

In ‘Philosophy and the Bodily Arts’, Philipa Rothfield begins with the insight that dance attracts theoreticians who desire a truthful account of a reality continually in motion. However, dance precisely eludes the stasis our thinking tends towards. To advance through this seeming impasse on thinking dance, Rothfield offers that to install the trained dancing body in philosophy is a vital means to reconceptualize both fields. Her text produces a new field of values, shifting the philosophy paradigm to heightened somatic attention and the dance paradigm to an impersonal Nietzschean separation of corporeality and subjectivity. Hence, Rothfield advances that in philosophy and dance the body can open up to new modalities of perception – the meeting of world and subject through bodily practices – not through a lived subjectivity, but from the point of view of corporeal becoming. The appeal of movement lies in the risk that something new will surface. Dance is not like thinking, but both tempt a desire for something original to emerge.

For Susan Stryker in ‘Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadoomasochism’, the body is mobile architecture becoming installed by thickening in particular meeting points. ‘The body’ is auto-ethnographically considered in the practices of transsexual sadoomasochism as a means to rethink movement and architecture no longer in opposition, but integrated as two sides of experience. Taking the space of the dungeon as her prime example, Stryker recounts how this location defines transformation as a response to a situation (not driven by autonomous desire). Corporeal transformation is not calculated, but a matter of handing over a self to a surrounding; therefore, a body is that which allows something to happen with the after-effect of a subjective ‘you’. Through sharing some contents of her experience, Stryker textually opens her body so the reader may see the same landscape and feel what she

does. Stryker's argument for the poesis of transsexual sadomasochism becomes evidentiary through the reader's experience of being handed over to the dungeon, lured with the promise of body intimacy.

Steven Shaviro's rampant cinephilia and compulsive intellectualizing drive are to be thanked for his moving book *The Cinematic Body* (1993) and also for his reconsideration of it for us in '*The Cinematic Body REDUX*'. In observing his own conception of embodiment, Shaviro sees 'the body' in his first monograph as 'uncontrollable flesh' that escapes again and again from metaphysical slashings of speculation. He also admits that this polemic was in order to denounce the seventies' and eighties' film theory order of psychoanalytically induced image phobia. Shaviro questions how film theory's body tools and theories are tied to historical circumstances. Now polemics seem entirely beside the point in facing down a cognitive turn in film studies that he finds deplorable. Theories of the body, such as cognitivism, can try to censor opposing thought or, even worse, to make such thought unthinkable in the first place. As a progressive reading of body knowledge, *The Cinematic Body* did clear the way to build a new genealogical strand of affect and embodiment theories. Shaviro still maintains, cinephilia intact, that the cinema is a key site to look for answers to questions about not what the body can do, but what *bodies* the theoretician can sense abstractedly.

For Maaïke Bleeker in 'Passages in Post-Modern Theory: Mapping the Apparatus', theorizing the body appeals to the desire to (to speak with the Wachowski brothers' celebrated movie) 'see the matrix'. Like Susan Stryker, Bleeker argues for a sense of self as a subjective aftereffect of bodies engaging with the world. This bodily engagement with the world is what produces the world as we perceive it, including a sense of self in relation to it, but since this kind of bodily involvement largely precedes conscious perception, and is constitutive of it, it requires special strategies to bring to awareness its implications. Looking back at Rosalind Krauss's *Passages in Modern Sculpture* – a book that at the time of this writing celebrates its thirtieth anniversary – Bleeker observes a continuity from the artistic and theoretical questions posed by the works discussed by Krauss to present-day questions concerning the body as the absent present medium through which the world comes into being (from body art and performance, to theorists De Certeau, Leder and Massumi). This absent present body may dys-appear to our awareness or cause confusing experiences of dis-embodiment, thus alerting us, theorists, to account for newly recognizable aspects of the body apparatus, how they shape the meaning we make, and how this involves a certain corporeal literacy.

In Alanna Thain's 'Wandering Stars: William Kentridge's Err(ant) Choreographies', two of Kentridge's installations provide a case analysis of how animation, cinema, dance and drawing intersect as arts of movement. Thain proposes that Kentridge's special combination of techniques is an ethology, producing what she calls accidental 'dance films' that are primarily about how problems and solutions of movement always rely on the productive force of vagueness and uncertainty hanging about 'the body'. In arguing for a body theory of 'double vision' where the actual and the virtual can be perceived, Thain stakes out the possibility for Kentridge's so-called 'negative' erasure techniques to become fully positive. Kentridge's process, not what he draws but how he erase-draws, locates the body in the incorporeal between of its relations and

movement. In terms of actual displacements and virtual shifts, Thain sees that Kentridge plays for time as an invitation to chance, productively ‘stalling the body’ as it becomes so that the viewer can perceive the potential for something to happen that is unanticipated. This body is a swarm of vagueness, errant choreographies: a vision of the body of movement at once doubled and doubling.

Erin Manning’s piece ‘Grace Taking Form: Marey’s Movement Machines’ examines the work of Etienne-Jules Marey, an inventor bent on measuring the imperceptible, a task Manning sympathizes with from her position as a radical empiricist. ‘The body’ is caught up in imperceptibility, but Marey’s machines are able to make it dance in the sense of ‘moving the relation’. Manning’s dissection of Marey’s machinic experiments opens up how they work on sensation by addressing the kind of vision Manning describes as the experience of the play of duration on the retina. The machines are thus not simple producers of a body of movement, but a generator of potential for movement in the process of inventing new techniques. Since Marey’s machines provide movement with a constantly evolving future, Manning argues that they install grace, the experience of a becoming-movement taking form. In carefully following the intricacies of Marey’s life-long inventory project and ruminating on its future theoretical implications, Manning’s graceful text offers the reader another movement machine where the body recedes so we can see the movement, to feel the interval.

In ‘Swarms and Enthusiasts. Transfers in/as Choreography’, Gabriele Brandstetter picks up on the theoretical trend to use the ‘swarm’ and critically constructs its conceptual history, which sets off some alarm bells. Brandstetter questions the political efficacy of leftist theoretical adaptations of the swarm into a theory of embodiment by citing current tendencies in the adaptation of the swarm concept in the media, in markets and communication networks. In the basic sense, a swarm is a multiplicity that is also a unity: micro- and macro- structures overlap. To uncover the desire invested in the notion of the swarm, Brandstetter looks at how the swarm provides a model for co-emergence of subject and observed object, what she calls ‘performative aesthetics’. The etymological relationship between swarms and *Schwärmen* connects to an affective history of enthusiasm. The formation of the swarm as a mode of excitation enables her to rethink the relations between viewers and moving bodies as radically relational; swarms embody movement beyond mimesis. While it might be impossible to artificially create swarms, for Brandstetter, choreography can produce swarm-like transfer effects that interest the viewer in the transitions of movement, not in single steps or persons.

In an elaboration of Foucault’s sovereign and disciplinary regimes, Beatriz Preciado’s ‘Pharmaco-pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology’ stakes out the current body regime as the third part of this series. Drawing out the recent confluence of a global production, circulation and consumption of psycho-tropics, synthetic hormones and sexual material, Preciado names our society of control’s bio-power ‘pharmaco-pornographic’. Key to understanding how this new, intimate regime of sexuality works on and in the body, Preciado tracks down the context that gave rise to the concept of gender: the bio-technological discourse from the late forties. In fingering John Money’s keenness to disseminate the idea that ‘gender’ can be fiddled with in order to provide the basis to hormonally and surgically modify – i.e. physically

‘normalize’ – intersexual babies, Preciado raises the question of why ‘gender’ is used by late capitalist industries and feminism alike. In this history of gender, like Foucault’s upturned history of sexuality, the body plays a starring role. Currently the cyborgian body is what enables the regime to function by stalking toxic-pornographic subjects who ingest and incorporate its soft technologies of drugs, images and gender codes. Preciado’s desire to confront the reader with a cautionary reversal of historical fortune is itself moving. S/he concludes with examples from ‘self-determinationist’ movements. Citing transgender, crip and people diagnosed with ‘body integrity identity disorders’ as evidence of resistant mutations, s/he is able to formulate that a movement aimed at multiplying the possibilities for embodiment is already underway, shifting the pharmaco-pornographic regime’s drive to stuff and seal normalized bodies. Clearly in Preciado’s rendering of ‘the body’, there is no natural body. The body is a somatechnical apparatus shot through with competing politics.

But these introductions to the texts are highly idiosyncratic, and shuffled around according to our desires...

The editrixes would like to thank Daniel Blanga Gubbat for sending us the photo *La timidezza delle ossa* [*The Shyness of Bones*] as a submission and for giving his permission to use it as an ‘opening’ image in discussing the issue of installing the body. We would also like to thank the team at *parallax* (Ignaz Cassar, Mark Dawson and Eve Kalyva) for their kind and ever-helpful editorial contact. Finally, we wish to extend our gratitude to the contributors who are included for their hard work on the body and to all the people who submitted their ideas to us for unknowingly participating in our experiment to better grasp at the elusive apparatus that goes under the moniker of the body.

Eliza Steinbock is a PhD researcher at The Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) writing her dissertation ‘Shimmering: Towards a Trans-Erotic Film Aesthetic’. She also curates transgender film and video programmes (Netherlands Transgender Film Festival, Tranny Fest San Francisco), as well as creates genderqueer pornos that have screened internationally under the name of *Pornova*. More information about her project and publications can be found at <<http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/e.a.steinbock/>>.