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The Body: Inscriptions, Porosities, Afterlives.

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The body is at once our most immediate point of contact with the world and one of the most unstable categories through which that world is organised. It is often treated as a biological given: the primary site of perception, selfhood and agency. Yet bodies are never simply given. They are interpreted, regulated, represented, and valued through social, cultural, and political structures that determine which bodies appear normal or deviant, familiar or foreign, vulnerable or threatening. Feminist, queer, postcolonial, disability, and critical race scholarship has repeatedly shown that embodiment is inseparable from histories of power. Judith Butler's account of the performative materialisation of sexed bodies, Sara Ahmed's work on orientation and belonging, and material feminist approaches attentive to the entanglement of bodies, matter, and environment have all unsettled the assumption that bodily difference precedes the structures through which it becomes meaningful.

If bodies acquire meaning through the structures that surround them, it also becomes difficult to say where a body begins and ends. Skin might appear to provide an obvious boundary, separating interior from exterior and self from world, but bodily life constantly troubles this distinction. Bodies breathe, ingest, excrete, bleed, and decay. They touch and are touched by other bodies and environments. They are also made meaningful beyond their material limits: a bodily feature can come to signify gender, race, nation or historical difference; bodily sensations can retain memories that resist linguistic expression; and bodies that are absent or dead may continue through objects, images, archives, and cultural memory. To study the body is therefore to ask how bodies are marked by meaning, how they cross their apparent limits, and how they persist beyond them.

We are grateful to Bradley Tooke for his guest contribution, which depicts the body as bound to habitual time and to rhythms of repetition, the pauses that punctuate them, and habits that resist interruption. His image serves as a visual threshold to the issue, presenting bodily form not as fixed or self-evident but as shaped by accumulated habit and time.

It is from this instability that the 37th issue of *FORUM* takes its point of departure. The contributions in this issue approach the body through fiction, poetry, film, and biography, examining how histories are inscribed upon bodies, how bodily boundaries become permeable, and how embodiment survives absence and death. We have arranged the articles accordingly in the following sections: Inscriptions, Porosities, and Afterlives.

Inscriptions

The first group of articles, Inscriptions, concerns how cultural identities, political conflicts, and regional and national histories take material form. In Alessandra Way's "The Limping Mother(land)", Immacolata's body in Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels* becomes inseparable from constructions of Southern Italian 'backwardness'. Her limp, domestic confinement, and maternal identity evoke longstanding representations of Southern Italy as feminised, culturally inferior, and impeded in relation to the North. Immacolata's body thus becomes an allegorical terrain on which regional hierarchy and the internalised shame attached to Southern identity are made readable. A similar movement between individual anatomy and collective history structures Danielle Blee's "Catholic Ritual and the Grotesque Moral of Trouble(d) Bodies: The Role of the Stomach, Digestion, and Bodily Experience in Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal* (1983)". The stomach, digestive tract, womb, and other organs become sites where the Northern Irish body politic, Catholic ritual, hunger, guilt, sacrifice, and sectarian violence intersect. Blee reads the body as an interpretive structure for national and religious history, one in which history is swallowed, digested, rejected, and suffered through flesh. Sarah Kenchington's "Hierarchies of Flesh" reads Darky Gardiner, an Indigenous Australian soldier, alongside Choi Sang-min, a Korean conscript in the Japanese army. Their positions reveal how the prisoner-of-war camp intensifies intersecting settler-colonial and imperial hierarchies, rendering differently colonised bodies vulnerable, disciplined, and expendable while complicating the distinction between victim and perpetrator. These three articles ask, in different ways: How does a body come to mean more than itself? A limp becomes a geography. A stomach becomes religious and political history. The beaten body becomes the material record of intersecting empires.

Porosities

The articles grouped under Porosities explore the permeability of bodies and their openness to other species, substances, and environments. This openness is central to Yufeng Li's "A Nonhuman Too Human: Posthuman Embodiment in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013)", which presents skin as an unstable interface. By placing an alien within a human body, the film disrupts the assumed alignment of embodiment, identity, and species. Yet Li identifies a paradox: even as *Under the Skin* reaches beyond anthropocentrism, its treatment of femininity and gender returns to humanist conventions. Porosity becomes political in Yi Song's "'Our Bodies are Hydrophilic': Queer Hydro-Politics in Robin Campillo's *120 BPM* (2017)". Tracing fluids from blood, sweat, and semen to the waters of the Seine, the article challenges the heteronormative conception of the body as a sealed container. Fluids associated with infection and contamination instead enable shared vulnerability, collective action, and trans-corporeal relations between queer bodies and their environments. Maeve Stemp's "Wot For? Rot and Fertility in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Woman at the Store' (1912)" places women, animals, and plants within an assemblage in which rot interrupts the logic of finite consumption. Decomposition does not signify bodily failure alone: it returns matter to circulation and creates limited possibilities for resistance to patriarchal and colonial exploitation. These articles ask what becomes possible when skin no longer guarantees the limits of the self, when fluids pass between bodies or when decomposition returns bodily matter to larger ecological assemblages.

Afterlives

The final group, Afterlives, asks what happens when embodiment outlasts physical presence and persists through memory, archives, spectatorship, and cultural translation. Isabel Schueler's "Spooks, Phantoms, and Blossoming Corpses: Corporeality in the Early Combatant Poetry of the First World War" considers poems in which damaged bodies, spectral figures, and material objects redistribute personhood after death. Letters, clothes, identity discs, and flowers carry traces of the self, challenging the body's capacity to contain personhood under the destructive conditions of war. Questions of persistence and recovery also animate Malissa White's "In/Visible Women: Transtemporal Black Lesbian Bodies in *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) and *The Mark of Lilith* (1986)". Through the concept of transtemporal visibility, White shows how self-reflexive filmmaking inserts Black lesbian

subjectivity into histories and mythologies from which it has been marginalised. Visibility becomes not simply representation in the present but a way of inhabiting past, present, and future simultaneously. Ximena Oñate Garcia's "Active Archive: Haptic Reconstruction in Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios* (2003)" turns to bodies made absent by political violence. Addressing the disappearance of Carri's parents during Argentina's dictatorship, the film's haptic and sensory address allows spectators to encounter the gaps and erasures of that history. The archive becomes an act of reconstruction rather than a repository of dead evidence.

Carlos Augusto Pereira dos Santos Junior and Marta Regina Maia's "The Mediated Body: Memory and Performativity in the Journalistic Biography of David Bowie" examines the retrospective construction of a public body. Bowie's gestures, clothing, sexuality, physical difference, and visual self-fashioning acquire coherence through testimony, affective memory, and biographical narration. Biography thus produces the embodied figure it appears to recover. Finally, Shiyuan Zhang's "The Aesthetics of Displacement: Sensory Experience and Cultural Translation in Transnational Cinema" describes the body as both an archive and a medium of cross-cultural experience. Sensation can endure even when it cannot be translated into language; cultural difference is not merely represented but perceived and remembered through the bodies of characters and spectators. Here, 'afterlives' names the ways bodies persist beyond their immediate material presence: through objects, film, biography, and sensation

Across these contributions, the body refuses to remain where we place it: it is boundary and crossing, matter and metaphor, presence and trace, made legible through histories and relations that exceed it. To encounter the body is also to encounter the relations through which bodies become legible and go on being read.