

BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Embodied Rhetorics in Theory and Practice

EDITED BY
A. ABBY KNOBLAUCH
AND MARIE E. MOELLER

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1

INTRODUCTION

Bodies, Embodiment, Embodied Rhetorics

A. Abby Knoblauch (Kansas State University)
and Marie E. Moeller (UW-La Crosse)

In the early 2010s, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch postulated that rhetorical studies was on the precipice of (re)definition, one that was “much more fluid, shifting, and expansive” (139). Royster and Kirsch referred to these changes as “tectonic reverberations” that led to ways of “expanding and recasting our ways of seeing and being” (132). *Bodies of Knowledge* explores one such paradigmatic shift: “how lived experiences—such as, inhabiting specific places and particular bodies—can shape research and teaching” (Royster and Kirsch 93). The contributors in this collection focus on the impacts of the body and embodiment on our various interdisciplinary fields; collectively, our goal is to flesh out and flesh up—to be a shudder in rhetorical studies’ tectonic shift, to theorize embodied rhetorics.

That goal, however, proved more difficult than we initially anticipated. When we first started reading through submissions for this collection, we were struck by the difficulty of articulating the boundaries of our key terms: *bodies*, *embodiment*, and *embodied rhetorics*. These are complicated concepts, and the very act of defining them is problematic: Who gets to decide what “counts” as an embodied experience? Who gets to define the body? We begin our collection, then, by working to parse these three ripe and rife terms in order to reflect their complexities and to illustrate the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to embodied rhetorics.

BODIES

Debra Hawhee tells us that to understand bodies, “a clustering of terms would be the best place to begin” (5). She continues by saying that “when we talk about bodies . . . we talk about sensation, touch, texture, affect, materiality, performativity, movement, gesture, habits, entrainment,

biology, physiology, rhythm, and performance, for starters” (5). Yet, Eli Clare tells us, “I want to write about the body, not as a metaphor, symbol or representation, but simply as the body” (Clare 89). Despite Hawhee’s clusters, in some ways, perhaps, defining the body does seem simple. We know what we mean when we talk about our bodies or, more generally, a body. Or do we? As we become more attuned to the importance of the microbiome, for example, it’s harder to think of the body as a singular, bounded entity when the bacteria in our gut have their own relationships and life cycles. Are these bacteria (part of) our bodies, or do they *belong* to us? Are they *in* our bodies but not *of* our bodies? When we look inward, where do “our” bodies begin and end?

Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey argue that our skin, what we might think of as the outer boundary of our bodies, is actually a “fleshy interface between bodies and worlds” (1). They caution us not to fetishize the bounded body, but instead to think about “how the borders between bodies are unstable” (2). And Donna Haraway famously asks, “Why should our bodies end at the skin” (178)? Building on Haraway, Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree) notes that microbiology and pathology illustrate the “mythical” containment of the body (9). He reminds us that bodies “are inestimably constituted via leakages and exchanges that seep outside themselves, for better or for worse” (9). Molly Kessler’s work on fecal-matter transplant (FMT) illustrates this porousness, highlighting how biological bacteria that move from one body to another create complications for regulatory agencies (such as the FDA) that grapple with notions of bodily boundaries.¹ Such complications are reiterated in work such as Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect*, which further illustrates the body’s mutability. As she states, “The transmission [of affect] is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual” (1). A body can be changed by the shared feeling in a room, physically and chemically impacted by the affects swirling around and through us.

Even within these nuanced discussions, though, we encounter the difficulty of ownership: Who is the “we” who claims the body? Such a question leads us back to the persistent (and largely “Western”) Cartesian split, separating the mind and the body. And yet we know things are not so simple. The crux of Elizabeth Wilson’s *Gut Feminism*, for example, is that “the gut is an organ of the mind: it ruminates, deliberates, comprehends” (5). Wilson makes clear that she does not mean “the gut

contributes to minded states” but that the gut IS mind (5). In other words, while the brain is part of the body, the body is part of the *mind*. Similarly, Mark Johnson argues that the mind is the term for our engagement with the world, our desire and ability to make sense of that world and to communicate something about it to others (40, 42).

Margaret Price (via Babette Rothschild) prefers to think in terms of *bodymind*. Price explains that “because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other—that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two—it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term” (269).

Price calls us to recognize *bodymind* as “a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience” (271). Conceptually, *bodymind* hails notions of subjectivity, as Sami Schalk shows in her work *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction*. Schalk articulates how *bodymind* adeptly explicates the intersecting toll racism takes on people of color: as “experiences and histories of oppression impact us mentally, physically, and even on a cellular level, the term *bodymind* can help highlight the relationship of nonphysical experiences of oppression—psychic stress—and overall well-being” (7).

Schalk’s work emphasizes the intersectional nature (Crenshaw) of bodies and beings, reminding us again that there is no entity that can be singularly defined, no lived experience that cuts across subjectivities so as to be totalizing. Gail Weiss puts this pointedly when she states that there “is no such thing as ‘the’ body” (1). “Instead,” she continues, “whenever we are referring to an individual’s body, that body is always responded to in a particularized fashion, that is, as a woman’s body, a Latina’s body, a mother’s body,” and the list goes on (1). As we know, it is many of these things simultaneously. These bodies are judged, controlled, mediated, medicated, incarcerated, all in unequal ways, as those in power react/respond to the physical characteristics of the specific and culturally coded body itself. Bodies are always judged in concert with contexts.

Ahmed encourages us to think about *institutional* contexts and spaces and to recognize the ways that “some more than others will be at home in institutions that assume certain bodies as their norm” (*On Being Included* 3). This fact is keenly illustrated in much of the work in fat studies (Gay; Ioannoni; Lee; West) and disability studies (Dolmage; Kerschbaum; Mairs; Price; Yergeau), as well as in the germinal *Presumed Incompetent*:

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The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.) and its sequel, *Presumed Incompetent II* (Flores Niemann et al.). Texts such as these implicate institutional spaces, making clear that “the” body is an impossibility, as it erases (or attempts to ignore) how all bodies are differently welcomed or excluded, touched and shaped by power.

Such institutional constructions, Jasbir K. Puar reminds us, are often violent. In *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, Puar examines the construction of disability and disabled bodies, arguing that “the production of most of the world’s disability happens through colonial violence, developmentalism, war, occupation, and the disparity of resources—indeed, through U.S. settler colonial and imperial occupations” (xix). Movements to redress such bodily trauma—Black Lives Matter, anti-Dakota Pipeline protests, calls for socialized health care, protests against the U.S. imperial presence in the Middle East—are, as Puar says, “leading the way to demand livable lives for all” with bodily concerns at the center (xxiv). Such movements depend on bodies showing up, collectively and publicly; as we have seen recently (in Minneapolis, Portland, Louisville, and elsewhere), when (certain) bodies protest state-sanctioned violence, they are met with violence—the severity and frequency of which is impacted by protestors’ embodied identities. Bodies materially change other bodies.

Some theorists, though, encourage us to look beyond the relationships of bodies to bodies. Haraway’s blurring of the distinction between bodies and what we have thought of as objects creates opportunities for bodily connection and relationships to occur not between identities (female/female) but between affinities (feminist/feminist). Such a shift provides space for posthuman bodies, what J. Halberstam and Ira Livingston articulate as bodies that “emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context” (2). Posthumanism forces us to recognize the speciesism perpetuated by a privileging of the *human* body. Such an anthropocentric focus—white, Western, patriarchal—ignores, too, the connection of bodies to place, to *land*: speaking of the devastating impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous bodies, Belcourt explains that “when a population is corralled in land-bases not entirely their own and legally forced to make do with very little therein, bodies will revolt and sometimes shut down” (8). Such trauma has lasting and devastating effects on Indigenous bodies, even at the cellular level: “[W]hen the cell or the nervous system runs amok in response to histories of colonial trauma, there is little you can do to stop it” (10).

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Clearly, notions of “body” are complex. While “body” is not the same as “object,” it is also not the same as “person.” It is not solely biological material, not simply flesh, is not removed from intersecting matrices of institutional power. But bodies, at least human bodies, *are* also flesh, and this fleshiness can’t be sidelined or ignored. Whatever bodies are, they are socially constructed, discursively constructed, sociomedically constructed, technologically mediated and constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed, constrained, damaged.

EMBODIMENT

As we continue to grapple with definitions of body, Eleanor Rosch reminds us that “*body* is not necessarily the same as *embodied*” (xxxvi). Thus, we must also ask, What *is* embodiment? Perhaps the answer is simple: embodiment is the process of being a person in a body. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber explain it as “a *way* of living or inhabiting the world through one’s acculturated body” (xiv). Diction is important here, though. Elizabeth Grosz chooses her words carefully when she says, “[I]nsofar as I live the body, it is a phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible. It is the body as I live it, as I experience it” (*Volatile* 86). Note that Grosz writes “I live the body” rather than “I live *in* the body.” Here, the body and the living of it are one and the same. To have a body is to live the body; there is no disembodied “one” who lives within the body-object. And yet there’s slippage in the wording even here: “I live the body,” “the body as I live it, as I experience it.” We hear in this a distinction between the “I” and “the body” that the “I” lives and experiences.

For some, the space between body and embodying seems to hinge, at least in part, on motion. Merleau-Ponty points to the ways we move our bodies through the world as a key aspect of what separates bodies from objects (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 53). And of course bodies move even when they are still: air and blood circulate, bacteria mill about, autonomic reflexes twitch—the body moves without conscious effort, but not without bodily effort. But even here, bodies work differently one from another. As James Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson argue, we might even best define embodiment “as difference” (18).

Of course, to assume that embodiment necessitates motion reflects a troubling ableist framework. Weiss, instead, thinks of embodiment in terms of relationality and connection, pointing out that embodiment

“is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies” (5). Here, embodiment emphasizes the reciprocal nature of being, the interconnectedness of lives and objects.² This echoes Royster and Kirsch, who say that embodied experiences are “grounded in the sociohistorical context and cultural conditions of which they are *lived*” (94). N. Katherine Hayles agrees, arguing, “[E]mbodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture” (196). For these scholars, embodiment is a result of connection and interaction; it is a literal social construction. Such a configuration assumes embodiment is more than “simply” the experience of being a being with a body but is instead the experience of orienting one’s body in space and among others, as Ahmed might say, the result of objects and beings acting with and upon each other.

EMBODIED RHETORICS

Despite the tangled issues that arise when we try to define these terms, at the heart of this collection is the idea that, as Judith Butler reminds us, bodies, whatever they are, matter. And whatever they are, they are rhetorical. Knowledge and meaning are never disembodied—they are always made by *somebody*—and yet, as a field, we’ve often ignored the role of the body in knowledge production. As Karma Chávez explains, “[T]he abstract body on which rhetorical studies is based is, in reality, an actual body, that of particular white men. The white male body haunts rhetorical practice and criticism. But only due to its presumed absence do the actual bodies of different others become significant to rhetorical invention and study” (244). In other words, “only when actual bodies are *not* white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual, and male do they come into view as sites of inquiry” (246). The body is often only seen *as a body* when it is not the presumed norm. Knowledge, then, is often only seen as *embodied* when the body producing that knowledge is imagined as Other. The presumed “normative” body and the knowledge made of and through it has “become ‘universal’ in modernist discourses because the bodies producing the discourse have been effectively erased, allowing them to become metonymies of experience and knowledge” (Banks 33).

This erasure further marginalizes embodied knowledge: *that* knowledge, this academic paradigm says, is specific, particular, and limited because it comes from the body, while “true” knowledge is general, expansive, universal, and “pure” because it comes from a disembodied

mind. Knowledge for all, written by no one. “The command paradigm,” argues Brian Massumi, “approaches experience as if we were somehow outside it, looking in, like disembodied subjects handling an object. But our experiences aren’t objects. They’re us, they’re what we’re made of. We are our situations, we are our moving through them” (14). We argue the corollary is also true: our knowledge moves through us and is impacted by that motion. As Royster says, “[K]nowledge is produced by someone” (280). Those knowledge producers, she continues, “are embodied and in effect have passionate attachments by means of their embodiments” (280). It is through our bodies that we know the world, that we make meaning of our experiences. Knowing this is one thing; representing it in a text is quite another.

Drawing on the work of Banks, Jane E. Hindman, and Royster (among others), Abby has previously defined embodied rhetorics as “a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself” (Knoblauch 52). This is an attempt to render re-visible the ways in which all of our bodies play a role in knowledge construction. “All rhetoric,” says Jay Dolmage, “is embodied” (“What Is”). But embodied rhetorics cannot be simply “a celebration of bodies (which in themselves do not require academic celebration), but more an enjoyment of the unsettling effects that rethinking bodies implies for those knowledges that have devoted so much conscious and unconscious effort to sweeping away all traces of the specificity, the corporeality, of their own processes of production and self-representation” (Grosz, *Space* 2). Embodied rhetorics call for a recognition of that specificity and corporeality in the production and expression of knowledge. Hindman argues, “I can mark my body’s presence when I author(ize) texts by calling to the surface at least some of the associations that my thinking passes through, associations evoked by my gender, race, class, sexual orientation, politics, and so on” (104). This is not simply about perspective or experience; instead, it’s a recognition of how the body impacts the way we theorize, the way we make meaning because, as Bernadette Marie Calafell argues, “[W]e theorize not simply through experience, but through histories, and I would argue, the relations, that are written in and through our bodies,” (7)—what Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, drawing on Chrystos, call “theory in the flesh” (23). Thus ignoring the body is a political—and violent—act: Malea Powell (Miami) perhaps puts it most clearly when she says, “This is the biggest colonizing trick of them all—erasing real bodies in real conflict in the real world by separating mind from body, theory from practice to keep

us toiling away in the service of a discourse that disadvantages almost every one of us” (401).

Embodied rhetorics are textual, but the body is also text: “[A]ll *bodies* do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function,” Maureen Johnson, Daisy Levy, Katie Manthey, and Maria Novotny argue (39). Levy further describes embodied rhetorics in terms of the anatomical body, the flesh and bones: “[E]mbodied rhetoric travels through the bones, into the ground, and through all other organic things, which also harness physical energy” (Powell et al.). Ahmed also theorizes the reciprocal nature of bodies and rhetoric, explaining that “the impressions we have of others, and the impressions left by others, are shaped by histories that stick, at the same time as they generate the surfaces and boundaries that allow bodies to appear in the present. The impressions left by others should impress us, for sure; it is here, on the skin surface, that histories are made” (“Collective” 39). Embodied rhetorics are therefore multilayered, encompassing linguistic and textual markers of the body, the body itself as rhetoric, discussions of visual or textual representations of the body, and bodily communicative practices. The contributors in this collection engage (and critique) embodied rhetorics in multiple forms and in multifaceted ways, but always return to how bodies and meaning intersect and interact, creating and leaving impressions upon each other.

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

Throughout this introduction, we have tried to draw attention to just a few of the many scholars on whose work we build, providing context for the multiple definitions of bodies, embodiment, and embodied rhetorics. As we hope we’ve shown, these are slippery concepts, but this slipperiness allows for a “roomier” approach to bodies and rhetorics. We believe embodied rhetorics *must* be expansively imagined, sometimes requiring a different kind of looking, listening, writing, and feeling. We’re reminded of Shannon Walters, whose work “reveals the limiting ways in which the tradition has shaped certain bodies for rhetoric but also the more expansive possibilities for valuing the widest range of bodies and minds capable of initiating rhetorical identification and transformation” (13). Our rhetorical perspectives are always limited, but an attention to bodies can help us better recognize the bodies and rhetorics too often pushed outside the margins.³

We chose the format of an edited collection with this in mind, believing it allows for a breadth of voices, bodies, and frameworks. As you’ll

see, the contributors approach key concepts in various ways; we celebrate these differences: if our bodies impact the way we interpret and produce knowledge, then different bodies will construct and engage terms differently. By drawing from multiple disciplines and locations, contributors provide further exploration of the rich complexity of embodied rhetoric, its potential and limitations.

And yet, some voices and perspectives are missing. While we knew that no collection would be comprehensive, we recognize our failure to materially address recent critiques of how whiteness permeates the fields of rhetorical and communication studies (see, for example, Chakravartty et al.; Flores; Vega, and Chávez). We recognize the (mal)function of our embodied whiteness in this process: different editors would have written a CFP that might have called differently to different scholars, would have made different selections, different edits. We're particularly troubled by the lack of Indigenous and trans* voices, for example, and we wished to have a wider representation of the voices of people of color. These are glaring absences in our collection; these are often glaring absences in our fields.

While many voices are missing, we are proud of the work here, which we organized into three thematic categories. The first—"Affect, Permeability, Sense/s"—opens with Scot Barnett's chapter, "Violence and Beneficence in the Rhetorics of Touch," which focuses on "the implications violence holds for our emerging understandings of rhetorical touch" (chapter 2). Nadya Pittendrigh, in chapter 6, "The Role of Intrabody Resonance in Political Organizing," also discusses embodied violence in her analysis of supermax prisons and antiprison activism but concludes by arguing for the potential impact of what she calls *intrabody resonance*. In "Towards an Olfactory Rhetoric: Scent, Affect, Material, Embodiment," Sara DiCaglio theorizes the rhetorical work of scent, asking what it makes "possible for our understanding of what counts as sensation, as persuasion, as connection" (chapter 4). Both Julie Nelson and Katherine Bridgman also address forms of sensory rhetorics by illustrating how feelings of (dis)comfort can support or disrupt whiteness. Nelson's "Embodying History: The Bodies and Affects of Museum Rhetorics," analyzes the bodily impact of the International Civil Rights Center and Museum; Bridgman ("Disrupting Embodied Silence") examines her own response to the now infamous 2018 Watson Conference plenary speech.

As is so often true of the boundaries we draw in such collections, Nelson's and Bridgman's chapters might have been just as comfortable in the second section—"Advocacy, Policy, Citizenship"—in which

contributors address the confines and affordances of embodied positions within advocacy work, especially as it's intertwined with nation-state policies and understandings of citizenship. Leading off this section, Meg Brooker, Julie Myatt, and Kate Pantelides explore two seemingly disparate archives (the work of early twentieth-century movement theorist Florence Fleming Noyes, and the 2017 Tennessee "Women's Day on the Hill" protest) to illustrate how embodied rhetorics intersect with bodily discomfort in order to effect change. In a similar vein, Kristie S. Fleckenstein's chapter, "Fannie Barrier Williams's Citizen-Woman: Embodying Rhetoric at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," focuses on Williams's speech at the World's Congress of Representative Women, convened as part of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Fleckenstein argues that Williams practices "an embodying rhetoric, one that juxtaposes actual bodies . . . with aspirational bodies," (re)weaving identifications in order to argue for social change (chapter 8). Ruth Osorio's "Rewriting Maternal Bodies on the Senate Floor" brings us back to the twenty-first century by analyzing Senator Tammy Duckworth's maternal body as rhetorical text—one that illustrates "how multiply-marginalized people can position their biological bodies in rhetorical ways to imagine new rhetorical possibilities for embodied difference, identity, and human worth" (chapter 9). To close this section, Megan Strom's "Criminals and Victims: The Embodied Rhetorics of Unaccompanied Latinx Children as Represented in Spanish- and English-Language Media" investigates how media-located language shapes public policy that affects unaccompanied Latinx children attempting to cross the southwest U.S. border.

The final section—"Textuality, Multimodality, and Digitality"—opens with Vyshali Manivannan's chapter, "The Successful Text Is Not Always the One That Murders Me to Protect You." In it, Manivannan calls attention to how Western expectations of disembodied scholarly textuality perpetuate ableist frameworks, asking, "What becomes of the rhetoricity of a body chronically in pain?" (chapter 11). Next, in "Hooking Up Embodied Technologies, Queer Rhetorics, and Grinder's Grid," Caleb Pendygraft uses new materialist and queer theory lenses to show how embodied technologies shape users' bodies and expand the scope of embodied rhetorics (chapter 12). This kind of multimodal shaping is echoed in Temptaous Mckoy's chapter, "Avowed Embodiment: Psychological Transformation, Performative Strategic Attire, and TRAP Karaoke," in which Mckoy constructs a theory of *avowed embodiment*: "the rhetorical act of showcasing one's identity through the physical body" (chapter 13) and illustrates how the uses of performative strategic attire

within the TRAP Karaoke movement constructs and reflects collective action. And it is with collective action that this collection concludes. Kellie Sharp-Hoskins and Anthony Stagliano's chapter, "(Em)Body," looks to the past, present, and future to show how all bodies and embodiments are haunted by the weight of (often decaying) materiality in our digital world.

In total, the works in this collection reflect the belief that an attention to embodied rhetorics is vital, as embodied rhetorics attempt to make visible and audible the social identities and positionalities so often made to play ventriloquist to majoritized voices, privileging experiences and knowledges best captured by the languages and structures of the presumed norm: white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle/upper-class, able-bodied males. As language is always a reflection of culture, to attempt to erase communicative practices that reflect minoritized cultural experiences is an attempt to silence those ways of knowing. This collection provides space for an exploration of rhetorical practices not always valued, taught, seen, or heard.

OUR BODIES

As one of the underlying tenets of this text is that the experience of moving through the world in our specific bodies impacts the way we make knowledge, we felt it was important that we, as editors, attempt to make the impact of our own embodiments visible, as limited as those attempts must be.

Abby

In so many ways, I move through the world easily. I'm a white cisgender woman⁴ who is presumed hetero and is (mostly) able-bodied. I'm more welcome in many spaces than many others are, and I can approximate the embodied expectations in ways many others can't. But being a fat woman carries its own interconnected issues. As I navigate a world not made with me in mind, I'm very aware of how my body takes up space and how I respond to the expectations of bodies, especially women's bodies, in public. When I enter a space, I can't make myself small even if I want to, and some days I do want to. Other days I really don't. This push and pull of wanting to fit in (both literally and figuratively) and wanting to embrace the excess causes me to gravitate toward work that flows over those boundaries, embracing that which is often expected to be excised.

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I also grew up white and working class in a smallish rural northern Wisconsin town. Despite the significant Anishinaabe population in the area, my childhood was shaped by whiteness, and I still struggle with how easy that makes it for me to “miss” issues of race. My whiteness makes it easier to “fit” in academia, too, but my class complicates matters—another instance of push and pull. Despite being white and now middle class, I still feel out of place at those fancy restaurants where we take job candidates; I’ve never known which fork is which.

In so many ways, then, I move through the world easily, but as a child of the working class, as a fat chick, I am painfully aware (often literally) of how I don’t fit into places I sometimes desperately want to occupy: academia, the expensive restaurant, the tiny stool at the fancy coffee shop. I watch myself try to squeeze in; I feel myself sit gently, lightly—figuratively and literally—in places others seem to settle into. I look around me, wondering how many can tell that I’m nervous, barely balanced, out of place. And so I look, imperfectly, for bodies and texts that claim a different sort of space even as they bend, sometimes agonizingly, to be included.

Marie

I twice attended Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. As my family jokes, that’s the closest I’ll ever get to normal. I like to think that place spurred my intellectual work in disability studies, affect theory, body studies, gender studies, normalcy-challenging. Such study has helped me process my own embodied experience as it has shifted and morphed over time, moving in and out of constellation with bodies, activities, locations, experiences, spaces, emotions, and, of course, normalcy. As a white, fat, queer woman, I hold many markers of privilege and power; those privileges and powers have afforded me access (with student loans: easy to obtain but difficult to dispense) into the world of academia. I am middle class now—it feels odd and is a move I never forget in mixed company.

Others of my bodily experiences, however, have not been so graceful in normalization. I’ve been six feet tall since I was fourteen; I have gained and lost and gained hundreds of pounds. Anorexic in high school and a binge eater after that, my metabolism is nonexistent and my thyroid resigned. I was a college athlete—the structure of my body in concert with the activity ripped a knee to shreds. I have bone growths, no cartilage, and receive regular medical intervention. The intervention is a point of contention—it was a botched surgery that maimed me so

now I prepare for a knee replacement. I am also keenly aware of the inaccessibility of buildings, sidewalks, cities, and spaces. Accessibility shapes questions I ask at departmental search-committee meetings, how I read texts, how I understand people and the larger world.

My passing disabled body has also proved complex relationally—how do I tell potential partners about my mobility issues? Do I parse my body for them in a way that is easy on their ears, if not their eyes? Passing is a familiar phenomenon—my queerness has also given nuance by way of public perceptions, of passing impressions and reality shaping: I am attentive, for example, to the shifts in experiences that depend upon the varying embodiments of my partners.

My embodied reality has shaped the way I have responded to the texts within this collection—having assimilated into traditional academic rhetoric, as well as having experienced the stares of people on a street, I hold tight to the patterns and bodies that brought me power and access. I resist and struggle with pieces that do the very work I am doing in this essay right now. Those tasks fell to Abby, as I couldn't (much as I wanted to) respond without wanting to normalize. Normal is a pathology—as my embodied experience shapes how I interact with the world, it also propels me to grasp at perceived power in truly troubling ways.

CODA

As we revise this manuscript, we're in the midst of a global pandemic that is highlighting the complex nature of bodies. If we venture outside our homes, most of us are hyperaware of what we touch, and our skin has become a danger, something to be cleansed. We currently believe the COVID-19 virus cannot move through skin, but it can move *from* skin into our eyes, our noses, our mouths—the damp gateways of the body. We stay at least six feet away from others so we can't touch but also because this virus seems to be carried through airborne droplets. Our bodies are fluid; we cannot always contain ourselves.

As we write, horrifying decisions are being made around the globe. Ventilators are in short supply, as is personal protective equipment for medical professionals. When the need outstrips the demand, who is treated and who is turned away? In Italy, where cases skyrocketed, doctors refused care to the elderly and those with preexisting conditions. Similar conversations have happened in New York and also in Alabama, where the emergency operations plan explains that if the need for ventilators outnumbers the supply, those who have or have

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suffered from “cardiac arrest, severe trauma, dementia, metastasized cancer, severe burns, AIDS and ‘severe mental retardation’” would not be provided a ventilator (Impelli). In Austin, Texas, a quadriplegic Black man with traumatic brain injuries died after being denied medical treatment for COVID-19, his doctor citing the quality of his pre-COVID life (Shapiro).

In each case, the viability, utility, and value of bodies are being assessed by government officials and doctors; bodies considered nonnormative are deemed more expendable. In the United States, for example, Black Americans are three times more likely to die of COVID-19 than whites (Pilkington). Horrifically, alarmingly, this virus keeps reminding us that, as they always have, bodies matter in material and mortal ways. This is a reality that has recently come into high relief for the two of us as white cis women; for others, it has been omnipresent.

Such institutional and material violence is impossible to ignore, as we, as a nation, bore witness to the state-sanctioned murders of George Floyd in Minneapolis and of Breonna Taylor in Louisville. Over the last six months, we have seen protests and calls for action similar to those in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin that spurred the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013. These are calls for justice, as Puar says, for livable lives for all. But this work does not happen without people showing up and putting their bodies at risk—and, as always, some bodies are at greater risk than others. Such movements ask us to acknowledge that intersections of bodies, power, privilege, space, and access have serious, real, and sometimes life-ending consequences. They ask us to acknowledge that, for some bodies, it seems there are no consequences at all. As we mourn George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, we also recognize that they are only two of so many who were violently taken from the world this year because of prejudice, ignorance, hatred, and systemic inequities—including the twenty-one transgender people who have been murdered as of July 2020, already surpassing transgender homicide rates for all of 2019 (Aspegren).

These are just some of this year’s profound cultural impressions (Ahmed, “Collective”), impressions that leave deep and lasting marks on BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ peoples, and WOC (and on us all, but to such varying effect). As we continue to move forward, we must attend to the gaps, the histories that cannot be recovered or known, future impressions that will never be made. The lives lost. If rhetoric is a form of world-making, let us never underestimate the differences that bodies make in such creation, and in such destruction and violence.

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NOTES

1. This is being illustrated in clear and terrifying ways during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. It's important to remember that not all interactions or objects are available to all people (or bodies) in the same ways. Access to support systems, health systems, economic systems—all are tempered by embodied conditions such as race, gender identity, able-bodiedness, and socioeconomic class. In the midst of the social distancing, self-isolation, and quarantine that accompanies this pandemic, such distinctions are made, again, visible and undeniable.
3. We're reminded here of M. Remi's Yergeau's brilliant and paradigm-shifting work in *Authoring Autism*.
4. I see this particular privilege so clearly in my troubling use of binary gendered pronouns in my earlier work on embodied rhetorics. I am reminded of this privilege as I watch others cite that work and be forced to reproduce that exclusionary language.

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