

## The Underbelly of the Essay

By Sosha Stuckey

I am struggling to write-and live-some other corporeality. If I succeed I will butcher the tendency toward both textual and bodily assimilation. The underbelly cut open, vulnerable, fragmented, and inconsistent, is astutely mine. A body or a text without normative punctuality is obscene, unrequited. It arrives late to the masquerade, attracts fearful attention during the dance, and absconds alone and abashed. Textual mortification signifies a death of possibility. The text and the body entangled so that centuries of repression of the body spawn infinite chapters of standardized discourse. If the ears repeatedly hear the phrase "remember", the purveyor (us) is less likely to produce dreary and banal discourse. Yet the cultural mantra most often heard is "forget", whispered hypnotically while we squirm through institutions. Forget what enraptures you and do what everyone else has done. Walk down a corridor enclosed by walls, enter a lackluster room. The docile body begins here. Construct yourself as you have already been constructed; repeat what you have remembered; develop ways to cope with the cemented punctuation of your body (or text).

Knowledge I knew but embodiment evaded me. McRuer infers that I should be able to encapsulate bodily difference inside text\*. Cixous did it. Many have dug a deeper trench than I am about to dig. I am writing the body into the ground. The embodied feminized earth, dark sin (without) an association with war. Strategic disembowling or as McRuer writes, de-composition. Though its not of any body nor is it anybody. It's a specific body. One unencumbered by any other. Pleasantly unadjudicated. The phrase itself-*the body*-evolved as a linguistic conundrum. Many have said that no universal entity exists called *the body*. It would bewilder us if some iconoclast referred to every tree as-*the tree*-yet we constantly legitimate a universal body without ever remembering the fallacy. This anomaly of universalizing many bodies into one body signifies the extent to which culture demands that all bodies measure up to the universalized One. Greek god hails judiciously from past centuries. Most of us flee.

I choose content, voice, and tone and steer discourse and materiality away from what is familiar. That's what scared the anonymous him. Not just its mention, but mostly its significance. Writing vulva n(ot any old vulva but a vulva that resembles no other vulv)a. Putting vulva back into the equation. Googling it (try it), understanding it, staring at the photos in its irregular, incoherent, loose wet state. The response was one of "hmmm" (himmm) "what do you mean, this writing on the body?" I am told not to-that it won't get me published or it won't be appropriate or neat or nice. We need information instead "we are looking for objective information. An (al)maniacal deluge would not be enough information. Can't you write nice?"

When Cixous wrote the body 30 years ago she wanted women to put themselves into the text, dig deep, write out-loud, and reconfigure phallogentric language (try

google-ing "phallogentric language" and you'll find "step outside phallogentric language" under the heading of "alien"). Strategic disembodiment happens at birth when they slap it out of you. You were a body now you are a gender. The third gender puzzles doctors everytime as if something that happens naturally somehow is not a natural happening. Stagnant. Still. Everything is fine in its little box, tightly concealed. From womb through the canal squeezed out into space (defined by matter) while momma is sewn back together. You were a gender now you are a worker. Not any worker but a worker that resembles no other worker. Punctilious.

Freelance will do that to you. Digging a deep trench, I shove corpus animus down into the earth and feel the muck and sludge of so many failures. Can't you write nice? As the one universalized body must be ideal, so must the text. Even the term "the essay" fondles modernist rhetoric. The literary essay is known both quantitatively and qualitatively as the great warrior Hannibal (who was actually black). I want to write the body because it is dangerous and erotic. Writing matters only when I write the underbelly of the essay. Bodies and texts are socially constructed so that I do not wish to replicate uniformity or able-bodiedness in my writing. This essay is not to be judged against an ideal yet it is meant to be embodied in a person, a voice, hands typing, sexuality, ethnicity. Ideology is unveiling the skin beneath your clothing. Concepts are the fullness of your curve. Embodiment happens when events occur, when reality of the body is the presiding phenomenon at that time. Bodies have been extracted from history and reality except as 1) ideal or 2) disfigured, deformed, or abnormal. No. 1 exploits no. 2. Embodiment is agency when mind/body subject/object public/private coalesce. The scene is institutional hegemony and the act is resisting the compulsion to submit to anything other than what is safely erotic. You are the agent. As Burke writes, the bodily overlaps with both the intimate and the institutional. Foucault's "docile body" stiffens with today's perfunctory education and we have lost contact with our underbellies.

Hang on. The health of this text is at risk. It is at risk of being scorned by neocons and traditionalists-or worse-of not being published. This text as my body might be colonized or forgotten. The cultural practice of composition offers no protection against vulnerability or perfectionism. The body must be strengthened, manicured, and fixed...continuously. The text must be primed for the swim suit competition. Only those without prior health conditions need apply as if there is this other universal thing called "health". Show me the perfect person and I'll show you the perfect text. I am hobbling away now.

### **Works Cited**

\*McRuer, Robert (2004). Composing Bodies; or De-Composition: Queer Theory, Disability Studies, and Alternate Corporealities. *jac*, 24.1, 47-78.

**Sosha Stuckey researches, writes, and lives the interactions between bodies and texts. her current research identifies classroom spaces, and the bodies in those spaces, as hegemonic discourse. She is a graduate student in baltimore maryland.**