Introduction

Nicole Markotic

For this *Tessera* issue, we invited responses to the edged – and edgy – body, to the body coincident with the page, to the feminist body, to the disabled, and otherwise mediated and constructed, body. The essays / poetry / fiction / non-fiction, here, practically, theoretically, and creatively respond to the problematics of textual and paratextual constructs and representations of the body's edges and its social roles. This issue celebrates writers who confront physical existence, and who also resist / challenge societal reactions to specific bodies.

Writers here take on, and give form to, what I shall call the problem body, especially in relation to its figural overdeterminations. The disabled body, in particular, has been overlooked in critical discourse on the body. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, in the Introduction to their book *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, point out: "The current popularity of the body in critical discourse seeks to incorporate issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class while simultaneously neglecting disability" (5). Mitchell and Snyder make an important and useful point towards rethinking body discourse. So as not to prioritize the disabled body and thereby elide other equally critical factors determining the body, I shall use the term problem body to address variable determining factors defining the problematic relationship between "normal" and "abnormal" bodies. So the disabled body is not *merely* added as the next overlooked critical frame to the burgeoning literature on the body, nor does the problem body isolate the discussion to focus on either *this* [adjective] body or *that* [adjective] body.

In what has now become a well-known examination of metaphorical language, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, in their 1980 *Metaphors We Live By*, suggest that metaphor is not merely a political or rhetorical device, but one which shapes and defines everyday "reality." Metaphor, they write, is of central concern to "how language can reflect the conceptual system of its speakers" (xi). And this systemic conceptualization structures the very form of discourse. Physical "anomalies," are often

attributed to a "natural" or essential link between how the body operates, and what such operations *mean*. Metaphorical disability terms are often used to express negative political activities. As Simi Linton points out in her book *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, "*Cripple* as a descriptor of disabled people is considered impolite, but the word has retained its metaphoric vitality, as in 'the exposé in the newspaper crippled the politician's campaign'" (16). Widespread metaphorical uses, in the media and literature, of bodily depravity and unfitness perpetuate not only images of disability (or any body configured as deviating from an established norm) as fitting examples for moral correction, but also erase the actual physical body from representational visibility.

For example, in February of this year, CTV National News carried a story relating to the then-Reform Party's charge against the Liberals concerning imprudent spending of federal funds. During Parliamentary Session, MP Diane Ablonczy demands explanations from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Not satisfied with Chrétien's response, Ablonczy sarcastically remarks that, perhaps "the Prime Minister has a hearing problem." This House of Commons skirmish and insult-flinging offers me a way into a discussion of how bodies – particularly bodies that do not fit cultural stereotypes of the norm – are used as metaphorical relief in discourse to agree upon what, exactly, constitutes the problems or "flaws," and in a discourse that expects the human body to function flawlessly.

Interestingly, Chrétien's reply – that yes indeed he's had a hearing problem since childhood – takes Ablonczy's metaphorical reference to his hearing disability and reads it literally. The deliberate humour of his doing so shifts attention away from the attack on his party's economics, and onto the "rude" remark made by a political opponent. After the session, reporters enquire if Ablonczy's question was "inappropriate." She tells them that, "since I have the same problem [she herself wears two hearing aids], it wasn't meant as a personal attack, but rather as a political one" (CTV February 8). Because Ablonczy labels herself as having "the same" hearing problem, the matter is dropped from the news.

The line between the literal and the metaphorical becomes blurred in that comment by Ablonczy to Chrétien, in that she had not *meant* to comment on her opponent's disability, but she *had* meant to designate his *metaphorical* lack of hearing as disgusting – to her party, to the people of Canada, and to truth itself. Such is the nature of bodily metaphors that their use invokes the very stakes of truth and decency.

When her attack is reconstructed as a literal one, Ablonczy hastily ensures her alliance with all people who cannot *literally* hear well (and, therefore, should not *actually* be perceived as disgusting, despite her accusing tone), by revealing one of her own bodily "problems." At the same time, she gives herself permission to make such an attack out of an essentializing identification she shares with Jean Chrétien. Interestingly, not once did Chrétien, Ablonczy, other MPs, or any reporter refer to the metaphorical or figurative nature of Ablonczy's attack. That she herself also has a hearing disability apparently gives her license to use a physical reality as a metaphor for political unreliability. And so physical disability remains the faultless simile conveniently imposed onto political fabricators.

By reading Ablonczy's political attack as a personal one, Chrétien reverses the rhetorical coding to expose the lived reality hidden behind such metaphorical language (and, of course, to squirm out of a political reproach). "Hard of hearing" immediately ceases to be a code for the politically unfit and becomes an insensitive insult made by one politician to another. Ablonczy tries, by inserting her own lived experience of also being hard-of-hearing, to bring the discourse back into the political (and thus apparently metaphorical) arena. And though the reporters allow her words as a defence for what they have just deemed an inappropriate attack, the TV audience's sudden awareness of both Ablonczy's and Chrétien's hearing difficulties does *not* allow for a "hearing problem" to once again become *merely* metaphorical. Disturbingly, for viewers, two political "figures" are – literally – incorporated as corporeal.

What interests me most about this political anecdote is the convenient metaphorical *use* it makes of differently-abled bodies. The anecdote reveals the availability, within normative discourse, of the so-called challenged body in order to enact a public notion of corruption. Simi Linton also argues against well-meaning terms, such as "physically challenged" that merely patronize people whose main obstacles are social, rather than physical. She describes a bookstore with a section for Children with Special Needs as having one shelf devoted to "Misc. Challenges," indicating, as she ironically notes, its use as a convenient and universalizing organizing category (15). The body-corrupt presents the mind or soul or essence-corrupt. Rosemarie Thomson, in her book that designates disabled bodies "as extraordinary rather than abnormal" (137), says of the physically disabled body that: "Constructed as the embodiment of corpo-

real insufficiency and deviance, [it] becomes a repository for social anxieties about such concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity" (6). The writers in this *Tessera* issue are not afraid to confront or enact such anxieties and social concerns.

What fascinates me about the texts which here participate in *Tessera's* "coincidence of the page" issue, is how strongly they embrace the corporeal – from the body at its most lived, to the body as a textual construct. Each of the texts to follow (and, in many ways, the visual art pieces that depict feminine bodies as overtly textual and compositional) offers an artistic or critical analysis of lived bodies and the assumptions that automatically follow specific bodily realities. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder note in their recent anthology: "Analyses of disability in art, popular media, and history have much [more] to teach us about the role of disability in culture than the assumption that lives defined as disabling (and hence unlivable or unworthy) go unrepresented and un(der)appreciated by audiences and cultures" (12). The writers here take on the under-represented in fresh, quirky, and novel ways.

A great pleasure for me rereading these texts is not only their ability to speak to each other, but also the complicated and demanding ways that they speak and respond to prior bodily narratives. Debra Dudek's, "Part IV: Hearing – With a New Voice," asks the question, "How is the construction of gender a textured event?" Her piece is a ficto-critical response to Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*. As a short story and an essay, it critically writes beyond the ending of O'Hagan's text, refusing that text's ending, giving the final word to the female character, Ardith Aeriola. As Aeriola has little speaking presence in O'Hagan's novel, Dudek's piece thus projects the story beyond itself, while functioning on its own as a creative piece. It is primarily a critical response to a text that does not give voice to a female storyteller, allowing Aeriola to tell her own story where female desire is not "the death of heroes." Dudek reimagines a woman's tale spoken in her own voice. Another perfect illustration of figures spoken of, and not allowed to speak in return, is Jacques Lacan's seminars on feminine sexuality in general, and in particular, on Bernini's statue of St. Teresa of Avila. Méira Cook rereads the missionary position through Lacan's articulation of St. Teresa's orgasm. Induced by the male gaze, ~~The~~ woman is denied the phallic organ, here exposed as the eye rather than the phallus. There is an absence to the male gaze (Lacan, situating himself in the position of viewing patron, sets St. Teresa beyond his sight-lines) that demands

a misreading of Lacan's texts as performative and perverse. Cook looks to that performativity as representing not an actual interpretation of a woman's *jouissance*, but as an effort to redirect the redirected gaze – from material body to textual body, from textual body to social construct.

These texts reimagine how women's bodies are both linguistically and ideologically produced. Carole David, in her playful hagiography, "Histoire sainte," explores the intersection of the corporeal and the spiritual. Mystic and anorexic, the protagonist Corinne Gilbert cannot accept the changes in her adolescent body and becomes fascinated with the (self-) image of the suffering body. While she experiments with drugs in an effort to achieve new heights of devotion, her drug-dealer pretends to walk on water – and falls in. The metaphors of height and depth reveal what Lukaff and Johnson call spatial cultural valuations, including "good is up" and "more is up" (22). Corinne's story is not of saints, but is saintly, the very nature of the adverb shifting this narrative from noun of being to action verb.

Two essays first presented at the "Women and Texts" conference in Leeds in 1997, by Erin Mouré and Miriam Nichols, look at the cultural construction of the body through textual frames that rewrite notions of self and other, social space and temporality. Erin Mouré asks in her piece on framing the book, "what is the place/role of the skin? Does the skin mark the body's limit? How can one rethink the skin?" Her essay, an investigation into the nostalgia that apportions "fragments" as reflections of the illusory possibility of a previous wholeness, suggests that it makes no sense to talk of fragments as parts of an attainable whole. Instead, she proposes a discussion beginning with poetry and continuing through layers of discourse that reverberate: the textual body – gendered female, socialized female, and sexually lesbian – a complicated and roaming body, a body on the move towards and within the particles. Particles and the particular locate the connections between textuality and other materialities, bodies and cultures, history and difference. The polyvalent term 'difference,' in recent cultural criticism, varies across registers of political, poetic, and psychoanalytic theory. In her essay, "Tensing the Difference: Daphne Marlatt, Karen Mac Cormack, and Susan Howe," Miriam Nichols discusses these writers' figuring of difference in order to explore the political and textual effects of different differences. Rather than focusing on the figural difference, Nichols maps the three writers' use of time as signifying difference, and argues that the writers tense the present, future, and

past, respectively, in their texts: Marlatt's provisional, present-tense narrative in *Taken*, Mac Cormack's potential for disjunctive future-oriented combinations in her language-centred poetry, and Howe's investigation of the irreparability of the past in her narrations of history. This triadic essay structure comes together not to resolve the differences between the writers but to split it, to relate them disjunctively. Present, future and past converge in "Tensing the Difference" to suggest that no one strategy for thinking difference (both in a political or languaged world) is sufficient and that textual imaginings need to remain polylogical.

As one line in Karen Mac Cormack's poem, "GLAMAZON: At Issue XII," asks the reader, "What does it mean to be a lady anyway?" Her piece refuses the trap of attempting a linear and all-inclusive answer to a question that can be deconstructed in too many directions for it to point to any singular rejoinder. Mac Cormack brings disparate and mismatched discourses together so their individual words bump up against each other, create unexpected and shocking readings. This poem evacuates the trajectory of the left-hand margin and scours each line against its sudden and reckless extremity. Pamela McCallum, in her essay, "On Shoes and Committee Meetings," also questions how women value the physical within the social space of the literary and historical. Her essay pursues movement through various discourses that frame the social body. McCallum analyzes work by Canadian artist Gathie Falk as defamiliarizing and playful. By contextualizing this art through known urban surroundings, the artist probes and questions marginalized women's sites. McCallum points to the similarity between Falk's work, and the writing done by feminist scholars over the past thirty years, and discusses how despite numerical increases (in the art world, on the page, in academia), women continue to feel under erasure. This essay calls for contrasting pressures of attention to detail – the kind that Falk inspires – and collective coalitions, necessary for visionary thinking, that together might counteract the erasure of women within the institution.

Erased or disguised female bodies reveal a self/other edge that demarcates not only the borders of identity, but also the edge or limit of textual ego. Corinne Larochelle's essay, "Érotiques de l'identité : parcours de l'altérité chez Danielle Fournier," on Fournier's latest poetry, describes a gradual shift in the figure of the other from "loved one," external to the self, to "self-other," a strangely familiar part of the self. This negotiation between self and other forms the bridge between poetry and its analysis,

text and context. Feminized and interiorized, Larochelle discovers in Fournier's work that the latter figure of the other is no mirror image of the self but rather a movement toward the inconceivable and unknown within the self. The reconciliation of self with other in Fournier's poems, Larochelle argues, inaugurates a new understanding of identity, of alterity and of love. The conciliatory nature of self-love, though, is not always self-evident. In Sonia Smee's piece, "Active Tense," the narrator struggles to regain her subject space, once taken through what the "he" has done to the "I." The body becomes a site of discourse – both of desire and of disgust – as the pronouns shift from sentence to sentence, revealing the complicated coatings (and codings) of abuse. Replaying and rewriting fantasy sequences, the narrator prepares her pregnant body from the inside out. Her Kegel exercises will be for practical purposes. They will be about: active tensing, how the narrator leaves object space by traversing both the devotional and the pragmatic, and by leaving behind the "he" through a reinstatement of the recollected, and recollecting, "I." This piece is the beginning of her search to make passage out of passive, subject out of object space. She translates Prometheus into a woman, bulging under stomach and bladder, from between her hips. By exploring the convoluted ways in which victims are thoroughly implicated by their abuser's actions, Smee moves her narrator through a body transition that allows, also, for sexual transformation.

Ironically, much medicalized discourse surrounding illness and disability allows *only* for transformation. The sick body must repair itself in order to avoid spectacle; it is, otherwise, an intrusive and impolite body. That such a body may thrive on display as well as disguise thwarts conventional representations of sickness and recovery. Kelva, the character in Aritha van Herk's story, "Occasions of Decay," is constantly on the move, but her roaming is less an external wandering than a restlessness provoked and exacerbated by the jaundice that afflicts her body. What is this malady, asks the narrator, that isolates and quarantines a woman who does not wish to be sociable? Cautiously, Kelva peers around door frames, prompting textual enjambments that reach far beyond her grasp. Hers is a body dedicated to the liminal push-ups that will incite a cure at the same time as she resists cure and longs for the yellow. Perhaps cure is not the correct term such a character craves; is antidote better? or remedy? or even healing? The same questions come up repeatedly in Tillie Sanchez's poetry from her *CANCERous* manuscript. Sanchez writes poetry that confronts the ill body, and the medical discourse that surrounds that body. Through

nurses' cycles, doctors' notes, and apprehensive perceptions, these poems remind readers of the details that make up the everyday, colours that always signify rules, lips and belly and mouth become the corporeal text "Judas" through rabid words that fuel adjectival discourse. As the attempt to exhale requires relearning oxygen, the disease spreads and clots, forcing the body towards secret and hidden pockets of language. The bone skin man not only defines the sick body, he redefines questions / prayer / lungs that breach infected words.

In another Alliance Party gaffe (during the United Alternative Conference in January 2000), one conference delegate – complaining that conference attendees were not able to discuss certain issues – was caught on tape saying, "If we're talking about killing off our grandparents ... what do you call that ... oh yeah, euthanasia" (CBC January 27). Suzette Mayr and Sally Chivers write against constructed versions of a contingent or fragile or aged body in need of guidance or preservation. Language that confines the aging female body through stereotypical discourse is the subject of Sally Chivers's article on news coverage of the 1998 ice storm. Chastising reporters who perpetuate disabling images of the elderly, and especially elderly women, Chivers investigates ways in which scapegoating narratives about the "plight" of helpless old people comforted younger listeners who needed to contain and distance their own vulnerability. Women who refuse to leave their homes are continually ridiculed by reporters and other storm victims but, as Chivers points out, their behaviour is incomprehensible only when radio listeners think of their bodies as aged and needing of care. This division between those being spoken *to* and those being spoken *about*, is crucial for a discourse that constructs elderly people as helpless. "We" understand *what* old women need, and that they *do* need, in spite or because we are not ourselves old. The narrative that keeps the listener on the safe side of the age continuum is the narrative that projects necessary constructions of fragility onto the very body that listeners fear becoming. The older female body becomes a textual pivot for Suzette Mayr's fiction, *Reunion: A Revenge Comedy*. Ming – recently relocated, barely employed, and busing downtown surrounded by "suits" – swears that she, like the older women who fill the bus on her return trip, will one day ride the bus with curlers in her white hair. The story shifts to Johannes who, despite his own disgust, lusts after the elderly next-door-neighbour. She bakes him cookies and offers him expensive sherry while he prattles on and on, dismissing her body with terms such as "pendulous, withered breasts" and a "saggy belly" which he nonetheless sneaks

glances at. Johannes convinces himself that his lust will be a gift for the old lady, and his relegation of his neighbour into that kindly grandmotherly coterie becomes his ultimate downfall – for why else would old Sissy be so attentive to him if not for want of his young body?

Textual and corporeal "meaning," then, becomes a repository for cultural evaluations and judgments. Rosemarie Thomson points out that "the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships" (7). Thomas goes on to say that, "gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability are related products of the same social processes and practices that shape bodies according to ideological structures" (136). And the texts here all explore aspects of marked bodies – bodies that have been designated through social processes as somehow lacking or flawed or defective.

Whereas in normative discourse, "real" bodies are conveniently used to express a corporate alliance or collective ideal, providing a shared agreement of what bodies *mean*, what bodies tend to mean for these writers is complicated textured layers that deconstruct previous givens at the same time as they conceive and reconceive how to write that "real" meaning. Such reconceptions or reconfigurations of bodies overly-coded by social determination are especially welcome when writing about female bodies – bodies that are always already coded with "lack" or as "other." As Susan Wendell notes in *The Rejected Body*, architectural designs that make it difficult for people who are ill or disabled also "cause problems for pregnant women, parents with strollers, and young children. This," she says, "is no coincidence" (40). As buildings are planned for "young adult, non-disabled male paradigms of humanity," so, too, is the world split into a public (male and abled) one, and a private (female, children, ill, disabled), neglected, world. The women who write in the following pages textualize and recontextualize the female body against and within such socializing restrictions. And Lennard Davis, in an essay arguing that literary and other cultural productions are "virtually the only permanent records of a society's ideological structure" (248), adds that "texts are not simple affairs; they are complex productions." They have to be complex because "they do double and triple duty as entertainment, enforcing, normalizing mechanisms, and finally – and importantly – as sites of transgression and resistance" (250). The writing that engages me the most, is that writing which challenges, resists, and transgresses an interpellated norm, whether that norm be aesthetic, physical, cultural or social.

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