

THE BODY AS OBJECT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

AN INTRODUCTION

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Much has been written about the educated body, the marketable body in commercial enterprise, the body as primary site of medical discourse, the gendered body, docile body, body politic and social body, body as experiential site of enquiry, and so on. This issue of *ACCESS* addresses the theme, *The Body as Object of Social and Political Analysis* through diverse alignments. The call for papers sought critical approaches to body theories and discourses on the body with implications for cultural, pedagogical, philosophical and educational enquiry. For philosophers, artists, writers, educators, historians and cultural commentators the question of the body and its social and political emplacements has proven to be a significant site of investigation and analysis through the last fifty or more years. *Body politics* has arisen through struggle, regulation and resistance of social control of the body through political and social practices. As locus of civilising forces, relations of power are at play in and through the body. The body becomes the site of identity and cultural issues centred around categorisations, normalisations and marginalisation, order and control, deviation and resistance, marketisation and mobilisation.

Of particular interest here in cultural and educational settings is the diverse ways the body reflects norms and expectations of specific times and places, at the same time accommodating principles of social regulation through aspects of modernity, postmodernity and globalised conditions. The 1970s saw the struggle of control over the gendered body as a politic of resistance largely evidenced in feminist discourses. Struggles surfaced around violence against women, objectification of women and the overt censoring of female histories and experiences, at the same time focusing attention on the abject, and gay and racial politics. Here were sites of critical enquiry, and energy for social and political action for change. Today, the body remains a locus for control through policies and practices of biotechnology and genetic engineering, alternative healing sciences and ideals of wellbeing. Included in this are diverse trans-cultural, political and educational practices, body decoration and display, cosmetic modification and mediated alterations. Altogether they exemplify the way body politics extend into discourses beyond those of the 1970s, including medical and health industries, pedagogy and research politics, and economies of both the media and the marketplace.

The first writer in this collection, Nesta Devine, from AUT University in New Zealand, interrogates the subject of research and the researcher as subject. She considers 'experience' in educational research from a range of well-theorised perspectives where the embodied subject is at the centre. Her discussion ranges through atomised and individualised sensation and perception; the primacy of the body as an agent of understanding in phenomenological discourse; the construction of experience both through and outside of cultural and linguistic elements; Nietzsche's position on remembering and forgetting as a way of making sense out of experience; to a Deleuzian process of becoming. Devine's paper, *Changing The Subject: Questioning the nature*

of 'experience' in empirical research asks how useful to the empirical model is the notion of the subject's experience in educational research. She places the subject of research firmly in the frame, and with it the subject's body as a site of consciousness and experience. This, the body/self/experience, is a site that is already problematised in the way experience is perceived and the subject is assumed before the research starts. Through Dewey, Deleuze, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, Devine brings to our recognition that research narratives are always partial and selective as she seeks to go beyond the "one-way street of conventional research".

In *The Body Also Has A History: A critical aesthetics for art education*, Michael Peters, Professor at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and Adjunct Professor of RMIT University Melbourne, traces a genealogy from Michel Foucault's orientation towards 'the body' as a category of social and political analysis and an object of historical analysis, to the phenomenological tradition of French thought on the body, through Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. His narrative shows the trajectory from phenomenological accounts to Foucault's position regarding the body as a site of power in the development of Western institutions. Having outlined this genealogy Peters then discusses feminist interrogations and appropriations of Foucault's work on the political technology of the body and relations between aesthetics and the body. Finally Peters draws from these positions to envisage and outline a possible approach to body theory in art education as a way of bringing together philosophical and theoretical perspectives on art and art history as a critical aesthetics of the body.

Kim Senior of RMIT University, Melbourne, and Mary Dixon, Deakin University, Melbourne address embodiment in learning processes in their paper, *Reading With The Ancients: Embodied learning and teaching to an embodied pedagogy*. They draw from a three-year research project undertaken with 280 pre-service teachers that, in their words, "sought to explore the nature and quality of the learning experience in teacher education". Their work is informed by van Manen's (1991) assertion that, "the word pedagogy brings something into being", and an acknowledgement that pedagogy is highly contextual and often chaotic. Thus in moving to relational encounters they position embodied pedagogy as a challenge to reductionist discourses evident in the emphasis on instructional education today. They seek to capture and articulate embodied ways of knowing as pedagogical processes. Through their case studies they show how engaged and embodied learners can open the normalising gaze of the teacher as an observer to a more generative way of engaging, thus moving to a greater awareness and a "reading beyond language". The authors seek to identify how arts-based research can be generative as an approach to teaching in teacher education. This paper is valuable reading for pre-service teachers and teacher educators in its engagement with the epistemological and ontological complexities of learning in this field.

In *National Service: The politicisation of the body in Singapore*, Chris Hudson from RMIT University, Melbourne, interrogates the politicised body as a symbol of cultural crisis in post-colonial Singapore. In her examination of the discursive constructions of gendered bodies, Hudson's attention is on the contested sphere of "national service" as a political requirement for men in the public domain, and in a different guise, an assumed socio-cultural role for women in domestic space. In this respect the body is cast as the "embodiment of social processes and power differentials". Tracing through her discussion is a recognition that the female body was constructed as a site of threat and anxiety in the nation building process in Singapore, with its reliance on orderly reproduction at the level of family, while the male body was securely located in the discourses of social order and national security. Thus the body acts as a principle of socio-political organisation and this in turn becomes an identifying feature of the nation state. Hudson

works through Michel Foucault's thesis of the way the individual body and the population act as a site of the deployment of power, and Judith Butler's argument that bodies reflect the materialising effects of regulatory power and signification. The body is thus implicated in the development of nationalism, which, argues Hudson, is a continuing preoccupation throughout Western modernity and well demonstrated in the narratives of gendered inscription in Lee Kuan Yew's 1966 vision of Singapore as a "rugged, resolute, highly trained, highly-disciplined community". Hudson problematises the intersections between the nation and individuals, and between gendered norms and sites of resistance, as she presents the body as a signifier of regulatory power in the national quest for political and social cohesion.

The next paper is by Glen Donnar, RMIT University, Melbourne. *Passive Engagement And 'The Face': The possibility of witnessing, recognising and re-covering mediated bodies in suffering* excavates the viewer's role and responsibility to 'the Other' conveyed as mediated bodies in televisual violence, and the Other's co-responsibility to the viewer. Working through the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, the transaction of witnessing can be seen as a way of problematising and obfuscating knowing, and in a way it is putting the viewer into a position of impossibility in that the Other can never be fully known. In the act of viewing and being viewed, alterity survives. Donnar's approach to 'the face' is to elucidate Levinas's theory of the face-to-face encounter through the apparatus of technological mediation. As a way of bearing witness to, and building social connection with mediated bodies in suffering, Donnar brings viewer and viewed into a relationship where each one bears witness to the other. Levinas's ethics of the face cannot disclose the way one should bear witness to an-other's distress. There is a distant suffering, yet through the televisual image suffering comes into close relation in the act of witnessing. With the transcending of victim status a recovery of their status as subjects is at work.

The above writers work in fields of education, communications, philosophy, cultural and policy studies in New Zealand, Australia and USA. Together they offer much to think about in the ways they address the politics of the body through the economies of research, pedagogy, socio-political constructions of nationhood, and technological mediations. The writers draw from well-theorised positions and empirical case studies to interrogate and problematise discourses of the body and challenge the impositions of socio-political and educational scenarios, thus adding to the research in cultural fields of policy and practice.

ACCESS thanks the generosity of international reviewers whose responses to these papers have provided insightful suggestions for revision. To meet the aim of *ACCESS* journal to engage critically with the terrain of knowledge in educational and cultural spheres, the time put into the protocols of the refereeing process is much appreciated. Thanks are due to those diverse contributors, subscribers and readers who continue to support the critical and philosophical approaches of *ACCESS*.

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