

5 THE BODY AS ENACTMENT

I suggest that to think the body in relation to the senses is to: (1) encourage a thinking of the body in movement; (2) engage with the possibility that bodies are not limited to their organs; (3) shift the question of 'what the body *is*' to 'what can a body *do*'.

Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus upon approaches to bodies that start from the position that bodies are never singular. Bodies are considered open systems that connect to others, human and non-human, so that they are always unfinished and in a process of *becoming*. We have explored the concept of becoming, which is a concept that moves beyond seeing bodies as fixed and closed to explore how they are produced and performed in specific ways, in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter will focus particularly on the usefulness of the concepts of *multiplicity*, *movement*, *articulation*, *process* and *enactment* for understanding the production of bodies across different sites, locations and practices. None of the perspectives reviewed in this chapter ask what bodies are but rather focus attention on what bodies can *do*, and particularly on how they are *done*. The focus on *doing* rather than *having* or *being* a body is related to the concept of *enactment* which has been developed in body theory by anthropologists, sociologists, critical psychologists and cultural theorists who are working across the borders of their respective disciplines. The idea of border or boundary crossing is central to much of this work, which takes objects that are often the province of the natural, biological and life sciences and offer accounts of materiality, corporeality and the somatic (see Chapter 1) that are groundbreaking and challenging. They undo in different ways many of the assumptions that surround the myth of the natural body that has been a central focus of body studies more generally. Some of this work also moves beyond the human body in its focus and looks at the coupling of the human body with technology, nature, machines, animals and spirits, for example, producing new concepts for thinking the *doing* and even *undoing* of bodies.

PROCESS

The key concept elaborated in this section is *process*, which is distinguished from the body as *substance* or singular, bounded entity. In Chapter 4 we explored the way in which a French sociologist, Bruno Latour (2004), approached the sense of smell by considering the way in which the body of the perfumer becomes connected to various artefacts and techniques which allow him or her to finely discriminate smells. One of the techniques that Latour explores is the 'odour kit', which, he argues, allows or enables the body to become more and more aware of subtle nuances in smell. Latour draws on the concept of *articulation*, which he takes from the writings of the nineteenth-century American philosopher and psychologist William James (1902). William James did not see 'the self' as a fixed or self-enclosed bounded entity and explored the potential universe of becoming a self through his work on the 'subliminal self'. The term 'subliminal' refers to experiences that tend to exist outside of our conscious perception, much like the Aha experience that we explored in the Introduction. This is when we work through a problem without being consciously aware we are doing so (perhaps even whilst sleeping), and the solution might suddenly come to us 'in a flash'. The 'subliminal self' for James was the horizon of possibilities that could be actualized but exist in the background of our thought processes. Some possibilities are realized and others remain as an excess. This was captured by James with his notion of a 'stream of consciousness'. This describes the continual flow of ideas, affects, feelings, beliefs, memories and perceptions through our consciousness even though we might not be aware of, explicitly focus on or attend to this stream. This notion of a continual 'stream of consciousness' recognizes the multiple possibilities of *becoming* a self, or possible selves that potentially could be actualized or realized. The self for James was a self that was connected and permeable to this 'outside' of possibilities meaning that it could never be thought of as interior and closed (in contrast to the individualized, autonomous self, for example). Thus, to be *articulated* is to be open to connection, thus increasing the potential of bodies to be moved and to learn to be affected. In this formulation, learning is not a cognitive skill developed and undertaken by a brain or mind, but rather denotes the capacity of bodies to acquire more and more connections to artefacts, techniques and practices. It is the conjoining or coupling of bodies with practices and techniques that allow for what we might understand in this context to be their cognitive development.

The focus in this work on bodies-in-process rather than the body as a stable entity points towards the *multiplicity* and *movement* that characterizes materiality or corporeality. Maxine Sheets-Johnston argues that the corporeal turn across the humanities (that is, the turn to the body and body theory) should be comprised of a

particular kind of corporeal turn: that we should 'be mindful of movement' (1999: xviii). For Sheets-Johnston, consciousness is always a corporeal or kinesthetic (see Chapter 3) consciousness that is created through the movements of singular and multiple bodies through space and time. Therefore, to 'think the body' requires a 'thinking in movement'. As she suggests, 'thinking and movement are not separate happenings but are aspects of a kinetic bodily logos attuned to an evolving dynamic situation' (Sheets-Johnston 1999: xxxi). Bodies do not remain fixed or static but are mediated by processes and practices that produce dynamic points of intersection and connection. The emphasis of work on bodies-in-process is *not* the body composed of particular parts, organs or entities. This is what Nikolas Rose (2007) terms a *molar* view of the body. The use of the term *molar* refers to some of the conventional ways we might refer to our own bodies, as being composed or made up of tissues, bones, limbs, blood, hormones and so on. We might then attempt to modify aspects of these entities through diet and exercise, for example. The focus on process is on *composing* rather than *composed*, *pre-formed entities*. The focus on composing looks at how bodies become assembled in particular ways through their coupling or conjoining with particular objects, practices, techniques and artefacts such that they are always bodies in the making rather than being ready-made. Let us take another example of this processual view of the body by considering a particular body/technology assemblage, that is, the body as it might be enacted or performed through dance. The following section will consider how we might approach dance through a focus on bodies-in-process, or what I have also called the *composing* rather than *composed* body. We will consider recent work that has engaged with the dance known as Argentine Tango through this model.

THE BODY-IN-MOVEMENT

Tango is evoked through a politics of touch that resides in the intent listening to(ward) an other. This attention to a gesture carried within the movements of the body is a listening that carves space in time with our sensing bodies in movement. In the best cases, there is not one dance to be danced, but a myriad of possibilities generated by two bodies, often foreign to one another, touching one another. I lead, you follow, yet even as I lead, I follow your response, intrigued by the manner in which we interpret one another, surprised at the intentness with which our bodies respond to each other. (Manning 2007: 17)

We might think of learning to dance as a kind of apprenticeship, much like becoming a perfumer, that demands a particular kind of knowledge and learning. We might be prepared to think of the body as a malleable entity in the sense that we are open to seeing changes through our learning to dance, perhaps in our posture,

breathing, musculature and body language, for example. We might also be prepared to accept that *learning* to dance is not about the isolated, singular, molar body but requires a *conjoining* with others, human and non-human. This might be a partner, a specific pair of shoes, a designated dance space, a music system, a space to change and use the toilet and so on. Some forms of dance, like ballet, require the dancer to develop the capacity to ignore pain, hunger and exhaustion (Aalten 2007). Thus some forms of dance might be marked by the association of particular states of being, such as exhaustion and hunger, with particular aesthetic shapes and body forms, such as the light, slender, body of the female ballet dancer. This might involve developing a relationship or orientation to the body in which one views the body as an instrumental machine that can be denied food or where pain and injury can be overridden. As Aalten argues, 'the ability to control one's appetite and to go without food in order to reach the ideal of the disembodied woman was all part of the socialization of the dancer' (2007: 118). This approach to dance, characteristic of work within the sociology of the body which we explored in Chapter 1, focuses upon the cultural practices and body techniques that allow particular kinds of corporeal transformation. As Nick Crossley, argues, 'the concept of body techniques poses the question of the evolution of particular uses of the body' (2007: 92). That is, dance as a particular set of body techniques and practices can tell us about how bodies can be modified, altered and transformed.

However, a focus solely on body techniques and practices, Crossley suggests, misses out an important component of the composing body or bodies-in-process. That is, the more sensual and felt components of learning to be affected and *becoming*, in this context, a dancer. This might involve developing a bodily sensitivity or openness to connection that cannot be found in manuals or taught by instruction, command or even example. This is the focus of a recent book by Erin Manning (2007), *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, that considers what the body *does* when it learns Argentine Tango. The book focuses on how bodies change, alter and transform not just through acting upon their physicality through body techniques, but how they are modified and transformed 'as a result of touch' (Manning 2007: xi). The conception of touch that Manning develops does not view touch as a physical sense, but is closer to the reformulations of touch that we explored in Chapter 4, through the idea of skin knowledge. This is, a concept that refers to a different kind of bodily knowing or awareness that moves beyond seeing touch as a literal, brute, physical sense (Howes 2005; see Chapter 4). The version of touch that Manning develops relates to a 'sensing body' that is always in movement. Touch, Manning holds, is a *relational* sense. Touch connects us to others and is also a register through which we are articulated with others. Manning uses the concept of articulation, in a similar way to Bruno Latour, to refer to all those possible relational connections that exist

and which change and alter bodies as they move and sense in the world. It is through this openness to possible relational connections that worlds are created and bodies become. In this view, we are not talking about the coupling of a stable, preformed body with another, human or non-human, but rather the body as a process that is continually in the making. The body is always co-constituted through its relations with others, human and non-human.

Manning draws on a range of concepts found in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Simondon (1992) and Brian Massumi (2002a and 2002b) to develop Argentine Tango as a figuration for thinking through the *processual body*. The concept of *figuration* comes from the writings of the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2002) and the feminist science studies writer Donna Haraway (2004). A figuration is the act of forming something into a particular shape and is usually used to refer to the pattern, form or outline that occurs as the endpoint of this process. Haraway uses the concept of figuration as a heuristic device or thinking tool for drawing attention to some of the patterns and repetitions that characterize what she terms our inherited thinking on particular subjects. These might be the idea that we are separate, bounded individuals who can be clearly delineated from others: machine and animal, for example. For this, Haraway (1991) mobilized the *cyborg* as a figuration for moving beyond the idea of separation between human and machine. The cyborg is part machine, part human, a strangle coupling in which neither human nor machine can be differentiated or finally settled. Manning uses the concept of Argentine Tango as a figuration for *making visible* some of our inherited assumptions about the body and the senses, which the dance challenges in the way it is taught and experienced. These are that the senses can be located within a singular, molar, bounded body, and that bodies are static, pre-formed entities. She argues that Argentine Tango discloses the ways in which bodies are always in excess of themselves, and therefore *multiple*. As she says, 'there is more than one way for a body to become' (Manning 2007: xx). Touch discloses these potentialities for multiple body-assemblages and Argentine Tango provides an interesting figuration because it is based upon improvisation and, arguably, can only be learnt through sensing the other and the profound relational connection that ties you together in the dance.

BODIES WITHOUT ORGANS

One of the concepts central to Manning's work, and to that of many other scholars interested in the processual body, is the concept of BwOs (Bodies without Organs) derived from the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987). This section will explain this important concept and relate it to the concept of